



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**Male Students' Construction of their Identities and
Academic Excellence: *A Case of SAVE University-Maxixe***

By

Salvador Armando Macule

210554310

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Academic Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Higher Education Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban (Edgewood Campus), South Africa.


Supervisor:

Prof. Sarasvathie Reddy

December 2024

Supervisor's authorization

As the Candidate's supervisor, I agree with the Submission of this Thesis:

Sign:  _____

Date: 03 February 2025

Sign: _____

Date: _____

Sign: _____

Date: _____

Declaration

I, Macule, Salvador Armando, declare that,

I. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

II. This Thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other University.

III. This Thesis does not contain other person's data, picture, graphs, or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

IV. This Thesis does not contain other person's writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:

a. Their words have been rewritten, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.

b. Where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in italicized and inside quotation marks, and referenced.

c. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the reference section.

Salvador Armando Macule

Student name

Date

Prof. Sarasvathie Reddy

Name of Supervisor

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my wife

Esmênia Macule

and my Children

Marvel, Melanie, Kaylen, and Wagner Macule

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, to God. Without Gods' love and mercy, this Ph.D. project would not have been possible.

To my supervisor, Professor Sarasvathie Reddy, for embracing me after all the difficulties and challenges I have experienced at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics (SRPC), University of Kwazulu-Natal. You actually believed that a move from the SRPC into the School of Education would add value to my life, and studies. This journey has, indeed, opened my eyes to see the world from a different perspective. Thank you so much for believing in me, I have learned a lot from you throughout the development of this project.

A thank you to Professor Michael Samuel of the School of Education, UKZN, and all the COHORT team for organizing Ph.D. seminars meant for students' accompaniment. The Cohort team has left an indelible mark in my Ph.D. project. May God bless you so abundantly.

Professor Crisalita Armando Djeco Funes, the Dean of Save University-Maxixe. Thank you for allowing me to undertake this study under your leadership. I will always remember your provocative, and inspiring smile when asking "Macule, when are you finishing your Ph.D.? Hum, it is taking longer than expected". I finally made it, Prof, thank you very much!

To Save University-Maxixe, for allowing me to pursue my Doctoral studies, and supporting me with grants. Even if these could not actually cover all my expenses, but have made a difference, especially at the beginning stage of the project. Without your support this project would not have been possible.

To Mr. Shown Bisset, for introducing me to the YEES –Project, Germany, and for arranging funds which have granted me a Research Stay at the University of Vechta, Germany. This has provided me with time and space to develop my research project in a quiet and safe place far from friends, work and family commitments. Thank you very much.

To the entire YEES-Project team, for your support, and for funding my Research Stay in Vechta, Germany. I confess this project would have taken longer than it did, had it not been for your support.

To my wife, Esmênia Macule, for your love and patience. You have always been there for me. I am sorry for any financial constraints this project might have caused you, and to the entire family. Whenever I ran short of money for fee payment, I felt forced to touch resources which had not been planned for the project. I feel like this has disorganized the entire family in the house.

To my little boy, Marvel, you sometimes needed my hug, but I could not be there for you. I love you so much. To my only daughter Melanie, I love your smile. Whenever I look on your face, a sadden image of my sister, Monica, whom you did not know, pops into my mind. Unfortunately, she departed earlier, before you came into existence.

To my sons Kaylan and Wagner. Kaylan, your face reminds me of my late dad. You were always asking inquisitive questions that needed me to think deeper, but I always ran short of time. I love you.

Wagner, I sometimes feel bad that I have not spent enough time with you. Forgive me for any inconvenience caused by the distance which separated us. I hope this has not affected your personal development. I love you.

To the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), for paving the terrain for me to pursue post-graduate studies in South Africa. I much appreciate your initiative. May God continue giving vision to the Church leadership. Thank you very much.

To the participants of this study, I much appreciate your willingness and openness to share real life experiences with me. A special thank you to Simão, Fulco, Nassir, Bento, Francisco, Edilson, Adriano, Harrani, Alex, Abenigno, Elton, Nildo, Titos, Saidi, Guilherme, Adilson, and Vusso. Without you this project would not have been possible. Your stories have enriched this project, as it expands the literature on masculinity in Higher Education in Lusophone Africa, and in Mozambique in particular.

To my late dad and mom, both of you departed earlier than you should have. Mom, you left me when I was 12, and still needed to learn a lot from you. Although you had not schooled, you knew the worth of Education. May your souls rest in peace.

To my two sisters Monica and Rosa, both of you left a void in my heart, and in our entire family. Monica, you passed on while we were staying together. I quite remember how you struggled for your life, which you could not make it, leaving behind a young baby who is now late too. I am indebted to both of you, my sisters, and this will be so for the rest of my life.

To my brothers, Zefanias, Paulo and Castigo Armando. Each of you have contributed to my development as a man. I would need more than fifty pages to trace the long journey of struggles and success, which I have experienced in your hands, since I left Janje to Maxixe, and then to Beira in the early 80s. I love you all.

To Raimundo Zunguze, your struggles, success, and experiences could easily be confused with mine. You have been both a brother and a friend to me. I Love you so much.

To my mother, and father-in-law, Amelia and Mario Mabalene, thank you for allowing me to be part of your family. May my father-in-law's soul rest in peace.

To all my extended family, friends, and colleagues, who might not have known anything about the focus of my study but kept encouraging me whenever I presented an excuse for not attending a family function. Without you this study would not have come to an end.

A special thank you to Rev. Kudzani Ndebele, the Secretary General of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) during the time this study was being developed, for pleading on my behalf whenever I missed a church meeting during the time I was the UCCSA Mission Council Convenor. You have been so kind to me.

A heartfelt thank you to the Reverend Dr. Prince Deebela, the former Secretary General of the UCCSA, for whetting my appetite for post-graduate studies. you put together resources which allowed me to pursue post-graduate studies in South Africa. I am so grateful for making me a doctor.

I would like to express my wholehearted gratitude to the late Reverend and Professor Steve de Gruchy. Your early departure from this world, and from the School of Religion, and Theology, just two months upon my arrival at UKZN, in 2010, has affected me so much. Your face and smile have been recorded in my heart forever. May your soul rest in peace, Prof.!

A thank you to Dr Carlos Helder Mapanzene, you helped me through the course of my study, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without your support I could not have made it. Thank you very much.

To the Reverend Justino Simpueque, I like your determination and consistence when it comes to making decisions. We have come a long way together. Thank you very much.

To my colleagues at the Academic Registry, Save University-Maxixe, Àurea Nhantumbo, Elsa Macamo, Lopes Guiliche, and Osvaldo Bata. Thank you very much for journeying with me during the time this Ph.D. project was being developed. Àurea, you always stepped in on my behalf when I could not make it for work due to my academic trips to South Africa, or when I was busy with my academic stuff. May God reward you so greatly!

To the Tinga-Tinga Congregational church members, who could not find me when they needed me. I much appreciate your patience. Since this project has come to an end, I believe I will be there for you, I promise.

To the Mozambique Synod Ministerial Committee, and the Central Inhambane Region. Thank you for believing in me. I am indebted to you all. I have turned up several appointments and candidacies/applications during the time this Ph.D. project was being developed. From today on you may count on me!

To my colleagues, the teaching and non-teaching staff, at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the Save University. Thank you for your patience and love, especially for believing that one day I was going to make it. Thank you to Cécilia Cardoso, Maimuna Bengala, Mr. Benedito Cristina, you have all played a role on my studies. A warm thank you to Dr. Isabel Vilanculos, Dr. Manuel Cochol. A special thank you to teacher Paulo Guilundo, Teacher Simião Sumbane, Antonio Filipe, and Alcido Nhumaio. The list goes on and on. I much appreciate your support.

To Glória Mutola, Chair-person elect at the Electoral Commission –Maxixe (2022-2025), you have been so kind to me. You have never denied me any single request whenever I asked to get to school during the development of this project. Thank you very much for understanding me.

To the Reverend Mateus Roberto (Electoral Commission Chair-person-Maxixe). I have learned a lot from you, sir! Thank you very much.

Thank you to Vasco for assisting me with ITCs. You have made my work easier. God bless you so much!

Last, but not least, a thank you to Mário Rufino, Dércio Pedro, and Nelsa da Graça, and all who have supported me throughout the development of this project.

Abstract

The prevailing discourse on academic excellence in higher education institutions (HEIs) is often limited to quantitative measures, such as Grade Point Averages (GPA), test scores, and academic awards. In higher education, the academic experiences of diverse student populations are shaped by intersecting social identities, which influence how students navigate learning environments. This qualitative, exploratory study investigated how undergraduate male students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at SAVE University, Mozambique constructed their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence. Drawing on Social Construction Theory as the primary framework, supplemented by the adapted Theory of Masculinity Academic Excellence, Masculine Identity Development Theory, and the Multiple Dimensions of Identity framework, the study examined male students' experiences and worldviews to understand how masculinity intersects with their academic practices and achievements. A case study design was employed, with data generated through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving 17 undergraduate male students. Data were coded and analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and themes related to masculinity and academic excellence. The findings reveal a shift from traditional perceptions of masculinity, often associated with disengagement and poor academic commitment, toward more nuanced and context-specific understandings. While some participants navigated tensions between masculinity norms and academic expectations, others strategically leveraged aspects of masculinity, such as competitiveness, responsibility, and leadership, to enhance their academic performance. Furthermore, the study highlights the absence of universally accepted definitions for both masculinity and academic excellence, suggesting that these constructs are fluid and shaped by cultural, social, and institutional contexts.

The study challenges the monolithic views of male students' engagement in higher education and calls for a more inclusive understanding of academic excellence that acknowledges diverse gendered experiences. By recognizing the complex ways in which masculinities are constructed and negotiated, higher education institutions can better support male students' academic success and personal development. The study provides an original conceptual contribution to the study of masculinity in higher education from a Lusophone African perspective, challenging global narratives that often homogenize male students' experiences.

Keywords: *Higher education, masculinity, masculine identity, undergraduate males, academic excellence, high achievers.*

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ATR (African Traditional Religions)

CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women)

GBV (Gender-Based Violence)

CNAQ (National Quality Assurance Agency)

GPA (Grade Point Average)

HEIs (Higher Education Institutions)

MINED (Mozambican Ministry of Education)

PEES (Plano Estratégico de Ensino Superior) [Higher Education Strategic Plan]

U NDP (United Nations Development Program)

UN (United Nations)

UP (Universidade Pedagógica) [The Pedagogic University]

SADC (Southern African Development Community)

SDG (Sustainable Development Goals)

SINAQES (Mozambican National System of Evaluation, Accreditation, and Quality Assurance in Higher Education)

UniLicungo (Universidade Licungo) [Licungo University]

UniPungue (Universidade Pungue) [Pungue University]

UniRovuma (Universidade Rovuma) [Rovuma University]

UniSave (Universidade Save) [Save University]

Table of Contents

Supervisor’s authorization	i
Declaration.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abstract.....	ix
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	xi
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY	1
1.0. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Study background	1
1.2. Defining Masculinity	3
1.3. Academic Excellence in Higher Education.....	4
1.4. A Gendered Overview of the Higher Education Sector in Southern Africa	5
1.4.1. The Higher Education sector in Lusophone Africa.....	8
1.4.2. The Higher Education Landscape in Mozambique.....	9
1.4.3. Gender and Higher Education in Mozambique.....	12
1.5. The Socio-political Context of Save University	14
1.6. Save University’s Policy on Gender	15
1.7. Students’ Access, Retention and Completion at Save University.....	16
1.8. Research context	19
1.8.1. The Transformation on Gender Relations.....	20
1.8.2. Patriarchal Dominance.....	22
1.9. Significance of the study.....	24
1.10. Main Research Question:.....	25
1.10.1. Sub-research questions.....	25
1.10.2. Study objectives	25
1.11. Methodology overview	26
1.12. Positionality of the researcher.....	27
1.13. Definition of key Concepts and terms.....	28
1.14. Study Overview	29
1.15. Conclusion	31

CHAPTER TWO	32
LITERATURE REVIEW	32
2.0. Introduction.....	32
2.1. College and University Male Gender Identity Construction.....	33
2.2. The Social Construction of College and University Men’s Gender Identity	35
2.3. Identity Construction of Undergraduate Male Students in Leadership Positions	36
2.4. Male Students’ Conceptions of Academic Excellence	38
2.5. Factors Contributing to Students’ Academic Excellence.....	40
2.6. Masculinity and Higher Education Pedagogies	41
2.7. Gender and Academic Performance	43
2.8. Masculinity and academic excellence.....	45
2.9. The Role of Religion on Academic Excellence	46
2.10. Construction of Masculinities among Mozambican Males.....	47
2.11. Hegemonic Masculinities.....	49
2.12. The Masculine ideology.....	51
2.13. Peer Influence	53
2.14. Family support	54
2.15. Comprehensive Sexuality Education and the Formal Curriculum in Mozambique.....	55
2.16. Masculinities and Critical Pedagogies	57
2.17. Religion and Critical Pedagogies.....	58
2.18. Conclusion	60
CHAPTER THREE	62
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	62
3.0. Introduction.....	62
3.1. Social Construction of Masculinity.....	63
3.2. Academic Excellence.....	65
3.2.1. Hotchkins and Dancy’s Model of Academic Excellence.....	66
3.2.2. Harper’s Perspective on High Achievers	67
3.2.3. Bukoski and Hatch on Identity and Academic Excellence	67
3.2.4. Linking Theories to the PhD Study.....	67
3.3. Masculine Identity Development Theory	67
3.4. Multiple Dimensions of Identity	70

3.5. Critique to the theories underpinning the theoretical framework	71
3.6. Conclusion	71
CHAPTER FOUR.....	73
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN	73
4.0. Introduction.....	73
4.1. Research Design.....	74
4.2. The Interpretive Paradigm	75
4.3. Participant Selection and sampling Techniques.....	76
4.4. Data Production Tools and Storage	79
4.5. In-depth Interviews	79
4.6. Focus Group Discussions.....	80
4.7. Coding.....	81
4.8. Data Transcription and Analysis.....	81
4.9. Language Translation.....	82
4.10. Ethical Issues	83
4.11. Trustworthiness.....	84
4.11.1 Credibility	84
4.11.2. Transferability.....	85
4.11.3. Dependability	86
4.11.4. Confirmability.....	86
4.11.5. Participants' Profiles	87
Source: The study researcher	88
4.12. Conclusion	88
CHAPTER FIVE	90
UNDERGRADUATE MALE STUDENTS' CONSTRUCTION OF THEIR MASCULINE IDENTITIES	90
5.0. Introduction.....	90
5.1. Being an <i>Academic High Achiever</i> as a Marker of Masculinity	91
5.2. Physical Appearance as an Expression of Masculinity.....	93
5.3. Heteronormative Expectations of Masculinity.....	95
5.4. Non-Violence as a Marker of Masculinity.....	97
5.5. Perseverance as a Marker of Masculinity	99

5.6. Male Headship and Family Provision as Central Aspects of Masculinity	101
5.7. Positive Relationships with Teachers and Peers as Markers of Masculinity	103
5.8. Being a Positive Role Model as a Marker of Masculinity	106
5.9. Lack of Awareness About Masculine Identity Itself.....	108
5.10. Conclusion	109
CHAPTER SIX	110
MALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE	110
6.0. Introduction.....	110
6.1. Participants' Academic Achievement Background	110
6.2. Synopsis of the Participants' Perceptions of Academic Excellence	112
6.3. Participation in Extracurricular Activities	112
6.3.1. Holding Leadership Positions	113
6.3.2. Presenting at Student Scientific Fairs	114
6.3.3. Being Part of the University Choir.....	115
6.4. Transforming Theoretical Knowledge into Everyday Practice.....	116
6.5. Attending Classes on a Regular Basis.....	118
6.6. Getting a Good Job After University	120
6.7. Possessing Problem Solving Skills	121
6.8. Academic Excellence and Citizenship and Social Responsibility	123
6.9. Academic Excellence and Students' Behavior	125
6.10. Academic Excellence and Intergenerational Fulfilment	126
6.11. The Class WhatsApp Groups.....	128
6.12. Supportive Learning Environments	129
6.13. Conclusion	131
CHAPTER SEVEN	133
INFLUENCERS ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH ACHIEVING MALES	133
7.0. Introduction.....	133
7.1. Religious Teachings and Messages on Masculinity.....	133
7.2. Classes on Gender.....	137
7.3. Classes on Religion.....	138
7.4. Positive Masculinity.....	140
7.5. Obsession with Achievement and Fear of Failure	142

7.6. Competition for Grades.....	144
7.7. Religious Leaders as Role Models.....	145
7.8. Public Recognition of High Achievers	146
7.9. Traditional Masculinities not Tolerated on Campus.....	147
7.10. Parental Involvement	148
7.11. The Role of the University in Student Development.....	150
7.12. Internationalization of the University	152
7.13. Barriers to Student Success.....	153
7.13.1. Insecurity Regarding Teacher Competence	153
7.13.2. Inadequate Infrastructure	154
7.13.3. Large Class Sizes	155
7.13.4. Poor Library Facilities	155
7.13.5. The COVID -19 Pandemic.....	157
7.14. Conclusion	158
CHAPTER EIGHT	159
THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	159
8.0. Introduction.....	159
8.1. Theoretical Significance of the Study.....	160
8.2. Research Questions and Findings	162
8.3. Research question 1:.....	162
8.4. Homophobic Fear of Femininity.....	164
8.5. Integrating the Findings with the Theoretical Framework.....	165
8.6. Research question 2:	166
8.7. Theoretical Context and Emerging Perspectives	167
8.8. Key Findings.....	167
8.9. Employability.....	168
8.10 Academic Resilience and Motivation	168
8.11. Giving Back and Community Responsibility	169
8.12. Implications for Higher Education.....	169
8.13. Research question 3:	170
8.14. Research question 4:.....	173
8.14.1. Identity as a Multidimensional Construct	173

8.14.2. Masculinity and Academic Engagement.....	174
8.15. Extracurricular Activities and Cultural Identity.....	174
8.16. Structural Barriers and Masculine Identity	175
8.17. Intersectionality in Lusophone Africa.....	176
CHAPTER NINE.....	178
STUDY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	178
9.0. Overview of the Study	178
9.1. Key Findings and Contributions	178
9.2. Summary of the findings per Research Question.....	179
9.3. Study Limitation/delimitation	180
9.4. Original Contributions	182
9.5. Implications for Research	182
9.6. Implications for University and Faculty Administrators	182
9.7. Implications for Students	183
9.8. Personal Reflections.....	183
9.9. Final Remarks	184
REFERENCE LIST	185
APPENDIXES	212
Appendix A.....	213
Individual interview Protocol.....	213
Appendix B	215
Focus group interview protocol.....	215
Appendix C	216
Informed consent form (Portuguese version).....	216
Appendix D.....	218
Appendix E	219
Appendix F: Geographical location of the study site.....	220
Appendix G.....	221
Appendix H.....	221

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.0. Introduction

This study, entitled *Male Students' Construction of their Identities and Academic Excellence: A Case of Save University*, aimed to explore how undergraduate male students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences construct their masculine identities and how this construction relates to their academic excellence at Save University in Mozambique. The study sought to understand male students' experiences, worldviews, and self-constructed notions of masculinity, shedding light on how these influence their perceptions and attainment of academic excellence.

The research focused on two key elements: the construction and performance of masculine identities and the conceptualization of academic excellence. In doing so, the study contributes to the ongoing debates about gender and higher education by examining how masculinity norms intersect with academic achievement within a specific cultural and institutional context.

1.1. Study background

Globally, issues of male students' underachievement, sexual harassment, misconduct, and overrepresentation in disciplinary cases on campuses have garnered significant scholarly attention (Harper, Karini, Bridges & Hayek, 2004; Dancy, 2014; Coughlin, 2015; Potts, 2017; Yu, Glanzer & Johnson, 2017). Within Mozambique, similar concerns are reflected in studies highlighting gender-based inequalities, institutional cultures, and the challenges faced by higher education institutions (Coughlin, 2015; Da Maia, 2008; Zavale et al., 2016; Giva & Santos, 2019; Zimbico, 2022).

Research suggests that gender inequalities are largely driven by socially and culturally constructed notions of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1996; Morrell & Richter, 2006). While significant scholarly attention has been directed at understanding the general social construction of masculinities (Lynch, 2009), there remains a gap in research exploring how masculinities are constructed and performed in higher education contexts, particularly in non-Western, industrialized settings such as Mozambique (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Ouzgane & Morrell, 2005).

The prevailing discourse on academic excellence in higher education institutions (HEIs) is often limited to quantitative measures, such as Grade Point Averages (GPA), test scores, and academic awards (Jayanthi, Balakrishnan, Ching, Latiff & Nasirdeen, 2014; York, Gibson & Rankin, 2015). However, academic excellence is a broader, multidimensional concept that varies across cultural and institutional contexts (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Arnot, 1998). Qualitative measures, such as leadership, research involvement, and participation in extracurricular activities, are equally critical in defining academic success (Save University Awards and Distinction Regulation, 2023).

At Save University, the *Awards and Distinction Regulation* highlights criteria for recognizing high-achieving students, including a GPA of 14 or above (on a 20-point scale) and additional achievements, such as research presentations, extracurricular participation, and ethical conduct. While these criteria attempt to broaden the definition of excellence, they remain largely secondary to GPA, reinforcing the dominance of quantitative measures.

In Mozambique, the persistence of patriarchal norms and traditional conceptions of masculinity has contributed to gender inequalities across educational contexts (Da Maia, 2008; Wheeler, 2014). Masculinity is often associated with power, dominance, and disengagement from academic pursuits, which can influence male students' academic behaviours and outcomes. Despite efforts by the government and civil society to address gender-based violence (GBV) and promote gender equity, gendered practices remain deeply embedded in institutional cultures, including HEIs.

Research exploring the intersections of masculinity and academic performance is limited, particularly in Mozambique's higher education sector. Existing studies have primarily focused on issues of female underrepresentation, gender-based violence, and cultural barriers affecting women's educational access (Gender Profile Report, 2015; Zavale et al., 2016). However, there is a growing recognition that traditional norms of masculinity also negatively impact male students, shaping their identities and experiences in higher education.

This study addresses a critical research gap by exploring how male students construct and perform their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence. By situating the study within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Save University, it provides insights into how

localized gender norms and institutional cultures influence students' definitions of masculinity and success. Dominant narratives on male university students often portrays them as academically disengaged, and or discipline brokers. Furthermore, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences hosts the largest number of courses in Maxixe, thus the focus on this particular group of students. The findings aim to contribute to broader debates on gender and education, particularly within the Mozambican and African higher education landscapes.

The study sought to move beyond traditional, quantitative measures of academic excellence and critically examines how male undergraduate students construct their identities within the socio-cultural and institutional contexts of Save University. By amplifying students' voices and experiences, the research highlights the complexities of gender, identity, and achievement in higher education.

1.2. Defining Masculinity

The term *masculinity* has been widely used by researchers to examine the social construction of male gender identity and men's position within gender relations (Connell, 2005). One of the central debates in gender theory concerns whether masculinity is a biological product. Connell (1996), a seminal gender theorist, argues that masculinity is not a pre-existing biological entity but rather a social interpretation of the male body. According to Connell, there is no singular biological basis for masculinity because no universal, biologically determined pattern of masculinity exists. While bodily differences play a role in gender formation—given their connection to reproductive relationships, these differences are insufficient to justify a biological basis for gender construction (Connell, 1996).

Masculinity, therefore, is fluid and context-dependent, varying across cultures, generations, and social settings. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) identify four categories of masculinity: **hegemonic**, **subordinate**, **complicit**, and **marginalized**. A common feature among these masculinities is their capacity for change. Hegemonic masculinity, the most dominant and influential form, is characterized by authority, physical strength, emotional restraint, rationality, and sexual dominance (Connell, 1996, 2005). Originally, *hegemony* was defined as “leadership or dominance, especially by one State or social group over others” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003, p. 805). Connell adapted this concept to describe gender power dynamics, where

hegemonic masculinity legitimates and reinforces male dominance while subordinating other forms of masculinity.

In educational contexts, hegemonic masculinity often manifests in school peer groups and classroom dynamics, influencing behaviour, relationships, and gendered experiences (Connell, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This concept has been used to analyse curriculum practices, classroom interactions, and challenges in creating gender-neutral pedagogies (Connell, 2005). While the role of schools in shaping masculinities has been well-documented, the extent to which higher education institutions (HEIs) influence the construction of masculinities remains underexplored, particularly in developing countries (Connell, 1996).

Connell's ground-breaking work largely focuses on masculinity construction within industrialized contexts (Connell, 1996, p. 208), leaving a gap in understanding how HEIs shape masculine identities among academically successful male students in non-Western settings. This gap is particularly relevant in countries like Mozambique, where socio-cultural norms and institutional contexts significantly impact gender identity formation. Steinfeldt, Foltz, Speight, and Mungro (2010) highlight the importance of examining how masculinities are shaped across different social groups, arguing that gender role socialization varies across cultures and contexts. The relationship between masculinities and academic excellence has been a difficult one to reconcile. However, emerging trends have shown alternative ways of becoming men that are compatible with academics.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring the types of masculinity performed by high-achieving male students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at SAVE University in Mozambique. By situating masculinity within the context of academic excellence, the study explores how dominant notions of masculinity intersect with students' academic identities and success.

1.3. Academic Excellence in Higher Education

The meaning of *academic excellence* in higher education has been the subject of ongoing debate. Traditionally, universities have conceptualized academic excellence in technical and quantitative terms, often measured by indicators such as Grade Point Average (GPA) (York et al., 2015).

This narrow, metric-driven approach reflects the absence of a critical discourse on what truly constitutes academic excellence within higher education (York et al., 2015).

However, research highlights that academic excellence also encompasses qualitative dimensions. For instance, Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) found that students' perceptions of academic excellence include:

1. **Commitment to one's academic major**, demonstrating exceptional performance and dedication within a chosen discipline;
2. **Male acceptance**, resisting negative stereotypes about masculinity and countering them by leading with intellectual achievements; and
3. **A desire for education as liberation**, using education as a tool to empower future Black communities locally and globally.

Recent scholarship underscores that academic excellence is a dynamic, context-dependent concept that can be deconstructed and reconstructed to suit specific needs and environments (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Additionally, researchers often use the terms *excellence* and *success* interchangeably. For example, York et al. (2015) define academic excellence as encompassing “academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and post-college performance” (p. 5).

In teaching and learning contexts, academic excellence extends beyond achievement metrics to include engaged learning, deep reflection, and critical thinking (Nadaf & Sidiqui, 2016). Within classroom environments, it has been associated with students' experiences and learning outcomes, particularly in terms of resilience, persistence, and the capacity to produce meaningful work through study and research.

1.4. A Gendered Overview of the Higher Education Sector in Southern Africa

According to Butcher, Wilson-Strydom, Hoosen, MacDonald, Moore, and Barnes (2008), the history of higher education in Southern Africa is “rooted in colonialism, independence movements, post-independence development efforts and, in many instances, conflicts, followed by reconstruction efforts” (2008, p.69). In the 1960s, most universities in Africa were established

with the aim of supporting the newly independent nations to “build their capacity to develop and manage resources, address poverty, and take over the administrative apparatus of the country” (Butcher et al., 2008, p.69).

Since then, African higher education institutions have largely become the mouthpiece of their European forebears. Universities in Southern Africa continue to reproduce and represent the interests of the colonial empire, thus perpetuating European cultural domination in African societies (Butcher et al., 2008, p.69). The pervasive colonial agenda in African higher education institutions has made it difficult for universities to support and cultivate authentic African identities. Despite the role played by higher education institutions in the development of the region, the sector experiences a significant shortage of resources. The higher education sector is funded by the government. In many public universities, students either do not pay fees or pay only a minimal amount. The ongoing global economic recession has forced African governments to adjust their budgets to respond to the financial crisis facing the sector.

The higher education sector is characterized by the rapid expansion of private institutions, with a few exceptions (such as Malawi and Zimbabwe). However, higher education in the SADC region remains predominantly reliant on face-to-face instruction (Butcher et al., 2008). The focus of higher education in the region has primarily been on teaching and learning, while research and community engagement have been relegated to secondary importance. The sector is male-dominated, with male students outnumbering their female counterparts in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Butcher et al., 2008). Socio-cultural and economic factors have limited women’s access to higher education. Despite governmental efforts to tackle gender imbalances, a strong masculine culture continues to undermine progress. These inequalities are reflected in higher enrolment rates for boys, particularly in rural areas (SADC, SARDC, 2016). In the long run, these disparities will perpetuate social inequities, resulting in the continued marginalization of women in society. Borrowing from the SADC, SARDC (2016) report, “persistent gaps in opportunities to access education between boys and girls from rich and poor households, majority and minority groups still perpetuate the vicious intergenerational cycles of deprivation and disadvantages and deepen rifts in society that are detrimental” (p.34). The report further warns that unless gender inequalities are addressed, the SADC region will not be able to achieve

the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in education. Gender imbalances also pose a significant threat to women's participation as scientists and researchers.

However, gender inequality is not the only challenge affecting the higher education sector in the SADC region. Drug abuse, gang violence, excessive alcohol consumption, and gender-based violence are among the critical issues hindering the sector's development (SADC, SARDC, 2016).

Of equal concern is the underrepresentation of women in political decision-making. Women constitute more than half of the population and electorate in all SADC member states; however, they remain underrepresented in political and public decision-making. According to SADC, SARDC (2016), "women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making in the region, and achieving parity in political life is far off" (p.3).

Corruption is another challenge facing the sector in Southern Africa. According to D'Orsi (2022), "falsified academic records, payment for grades with gifts, money or sexual favours, intimidating examiners, and assaulting invigilators" (p.105) are among the most prevalent forms of corruption affecting the sector. D'Orsi urges African countries to reform their education systems to incorporate moral and ethical teachings, particularly at the primary and secondary levels (D'Orsi, 2022, p.105). He advocates for an ethics of Ubuntu, an African philosophy that emphasizes communalism and interconnectedness, in which corruption should have no place. This view is supported by Cathogo (2008), who calls for a re-examination of the ethics of Ubuntu to recover any lost moral principles that form the spiritual foundation of African societies (Cathogo, 2008). However, while Ubuntu emphasizes solidarity and communal life, it has struggled to address gender-based violence, corruption, and poor governance, which continue to affect African societies.

By focusing on undergraduate male students in Mozambique, a country in Southern Africa, this study aims to broaden our understanding of the higher education sector and its impact on the construction of gender identities in the region.

1.4.1. The Higher Education sector in Lusophone Africa

As previously discussed, universities established in Africa were largely designed to perpetuate the ideologies of the colonial powers. One of the defining characteristics of higher education in Lusophone Africa is its delayed expansion. The establishment of the first universities in Lusophone Africa during the 1960s highlights the Portuguese government's slower and less active approach to developing the higher education sector compared to its colonial counterparts Britain, France, and Spain (Langa, 2006). The sector continues to be marked by low enrolment rates, gender imbalances, outdated curricula, and a weak alignment between academic offerings and labour market demands.

Higher education institutions in Lusophone Africa were founded with the mandate of developing a skilled human capital base to drive regional development. However, this objective remains largely unmet. The majority of academic programs are predominantly undergraduate-focused, with an emphasis on the humanities and social sciences (Rolim, 2020). The sector struggles to produce graduates equipped with the necessary skills to contribute meaningfully to national development (Rolim, 2020). Furthermore, the higher education sector in Lusophone Africa has not yet fully implemented the third mission of universities, which emphasizes community engagement and knowledge transfer beyond teaching and research (Rolim, 2020; UniSave Strategic Planning, 2023).

A critical challenge facing the sector is the shortage of qualified academic staff. In some countries, the sector is heavily dependent on part-time and unqualified lecturers, often appointed based on political or financial motivations rather than academic merit (Resende-Santos, 2021). The persistent underpayment of lecturers has led to a significant brain drain, with many academics leaving public institutions for better-paying opportunities in the private sector. Moreover, political interference remains a key factor affecting the quality of academic staff and research output in the region. State control over knowledge production, curricula, and even faculty appointments limit academic freedom and hinders the development of a robust research culture (Resende-Santos, 2021). Such interference determines who is eligible to teach, what can be taught, and where teaching can take place, often prioritizing political agendas over academic excellence. This significantly restricts educators' ability to operate in a democratic and intellectually open environment.

Like other parts of Africa, higher education institutions in Lusophone Africa face serious infrastructural deficits. Many universities lack essential facilities, including libraries, laboratories, and lecture halls, with some institutions operating out of borrowed or repurposed buildings (Gaspar, 2022). The inadequacies in physical infrastructure are compounded by a curriculum that is often outdated and disconnected from contemporary socio-economic needs.

Gender disparities remain a persistent issue across Lusophone Africa, particularly in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. However, available literature suggests that Cape Verde has made notable progress in addressing gender inequality in higher education (Rolim, 2020). Due to ongoing political instability, reliable data on Guinea-Bissau's higher education sector remains scarce. What is known is that the country's first public university was only established in 2003, which underscores the relatively recent development of the sector in that context (Rolim, 2020).

This section has provided an overview of the challenges and characteristics of higher education in Lusophone Africa. Given the scope of this study, the subsequent discussion will focus specifically on Mozambique, which serves as the primary context for this research.

1.4.2. The Higher Education Landscape in Mozambique

Higher education in Mozambique is relatively new compared to other African countries. The first higher education institution was established in 1962, with the founding of *General University Studies*, which was renamed the *University of Lourenço Marques* in 1968 (Mario, Fry, Levey & Chilundo, 2003). Following independence in 1975, higher education in Mozambique began with a single institution: *Eduardo Mondlane University* (formerly the University of Lourenço Marques) which remains the oldest and largest higher education institution in the country.

While the higher education sector in Mozambique has expanded significantly, this growth has been accompanied by a decline in overall quality. Der Berg, Da Maia, and Burgers (2017) argue that “the average quality of education has deteriorated” (p. 23). Student participation across fields of study is highly uneven, with approximately 80% of university students concentrated in the humanities and social sciences (Relatório do Estudo sobre Género no Ensino Superior, 2014). Although higher education is recognized as a pathway to poverty reduction (World Development Report, 2012), it remains accessible to only “a tiny, disproportionately male section of the

wealthier population, with facilities clustered in a few major urban areas” (Der Berg et al., 2017, p. 24).

The gender imbalance within Mozambican higher education is a persistent challenge. Customary laws, pervasive masculinity cultures, and gender discrimination continue to disadvantage women (Der Berg et al., 2017; Wheeler, 2014). According to Der Berg et al. (2017), “higher levels of female education lead to fewer children, delayed marriages, and postponed first births” (p. 23), yet such advancements remain largely overlooked. The *Report on Higher Education* (2014) further highlights gender inequality as a systemic issue dating back to 1975.

The *Higher Education Strategic Plan* (2012–2020) identifies higher education as a critical instrument for fostering economic development. Despite various government reforms, the sector’s contribution to national development remains limited. Uetela (2015) suggests that Mozambique could benefit from learning “from successful experiences of both newly industrialized and Asian economies that grew rapidly through investment in knowledge generation” (p. 278). However, the rapid proliferation of higher education institutions has failed to address the mismatch between demand and institutional capacity. According to Uetela (2015), higher education institutions in Mozambique are still unable to “respond to the challenges of demand or provide sufficient spaces to accommodate all higher education-aged students” (p. 280).

The discussion of academic excellence within Mozambican higher education remains nascent. The approval of the *Institutionalization of the National System of Evaluation and Accreditation* (SINAQES) in 2007 and the establishment of the *National Council for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (NCQGHE-CNAQ) signify initial efforts toward improving quality (Uetela, 2015). These legal instruments aim to:

1. **Ensure** that academic excellence is measured and operationalized by various stakeholders.
2. **Set norms and procedures** for higher education institutions to assess their own performance through self-evaluation.

3. **Establish mechanisms** for external entities to evaluate institutional performance through external assessment processes.
4. **Guide internal accreditation** of higher education institutions

However, significant challenges persist, particularly concerning gender imbalances in research and innovation. Maslen (2023) highlights the dominance of male researchers despite donor efforts to promote female participation. Similarly, Walter and Zipfel (2019) report that only about 20% of tertiary education teachers in Mozambique are women. Corruption further undermines academic excellence, with issues such as “political manipulation of university affairs, mismanagement of research grant funds, a lack of independence in quality assurance bodies, bribery, plagiarism, and sextortion for grades” (Maslen, 2023, p. 4).

A notable characteristic of Mozambican higher education institutions is the underpayment of academic staff. Full professors earn less than USD 1,000 per month (Zavale, n.d.), leading to the phenomenon of *professores turbos*, lecturers who move between universities to teach multiple courses. This situation limits faculty availability for research and administrative duties critical to institutional development.

The *Higher Education Strategic Plan* (2012–2020) aimed for all Mozambican universities to rank among the top 10 in the SADC region. However, this goal has not been realized due to the quantitative expansion of the sector without corresponding improvements in quality (PEES, 2012–2020). Many universities lack adequate infrastructure, such as furnished libraries, computer labs, and conducive learning spaces (PEES, 2012–2020). As a result, the recommendation that all higher education institutions have sufficient infrastructure to facilitate internationalization and socio-economic development by 2020 was not implemented.

The plan further emphasized that higher education should be driven by academic excellence, freedom of speech, institutional autonomy, internationalization, equality, and equity. However, the persistent lack of academic freedom has hindered these goals (Zavale, n.d.).

This discussion on the challenges and developments within Mozambique's higher education sector, including issues of access, gender imbalances, infrastructure deficits, and academic excellence, provides a contextual foundation for this PhD study, which sought to critically

explore how these systemic factors influence how male students construct and perform their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence within the Mozambican higher education landscape.

1.4.3. Gender and Higher Education in Mozambique

Gender equality is inherently linked to the development of sustainable societies. However, in the context of pervasive gender inequalities, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those focused on gender, remains elusive. Education is widely regarded as a key tool for addressing gender inequality (Report on the Gender Initiative, 2011; World Development Report, 2012), and many governments have committed to developing gender-sensitive policies, fostering inclusive learning environments, mainstreaming gender in teacher training and curricula, and eliminating gender-based discrimination and violence in schools (Pathania, 2017, p. 78).

The government of Mozambique recognizes higher education as a vital platform for conducting research that contributes to national development. The role of higher education institutions in this regard is underscored by the following statement: “A large part of the scientific research that supports the government and the private sector in solving their problems is conducted in universities and research centers...” (MINED, 2014, p. 114).

Gender equality has long been a key focus of the Mozambican government, and the Higher Education Strategic Plan for 2020-2029 continues to emphasize gender parity and equity in access and retention within higher education as a primary objective (Plano Estratégico de Educação, 2020-2029). Mozambique was a signatory to the Dakar Framework for Action, which aimed for gender parity in education by 2015 (Da Maia, 2008). The World Development Report also highlights the role of higher education institutions in fostering a culture of democracy and transparency, as well as promoting gender equality (World Development Report, 2012). Mozambique has ratified key international and regional protocols, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Since 2002, the government has been revising laws related to gender, including the National Action

Plans for the Advancement of Women and various mechanisms to ensure gender equality across all sectors (Gender Profile, 2015).

Despite the increase in female student enrolment in higher education institutions in Mozambique (Zavale et al., 2017; Mandlate & Nivagara, 2019), public and governmental universities remain predominantly male-dominated, with the increase in female student enrolment not necessarily translating into higher graduation rates. Researchers have noted the persistence of a “hegemonic patriarchal” culture that complicates the implementation of gender equality policies (World Development Report, 2012). Furthermore, existing protocols often focus on gender in relation to women, overlooking the role of masculinities (King, 2005). Reports indicate that Mozambique ranks among the countries with the highest levels of gender inequality in Africa (Gender Profile, 2015; UNDP, 2013). This trend is not unique to Mozambique, as higher education across many African countries remains predominantly male-dominated (Otieno & Ndayambaje, 2015).

Gender and education is an emerging field in Mozambique, yet it has not yet been established as an autonomous discipline in the curriculum. While there have been some reports and publications on gender and education, gender is often treated as a cross-curricular theme rather than as a focused area of study (Minzo, 2011). Discriminatory customary laws and patriarchal norms contribute significantly to gender inequalities in Mozambique's education system, particularly in rural communities where many parents prioritize the education of young men over girls. In some areas, parents may not consider sending their daughters to school, viewing the presence of a girl in the home as more valuable than her education (Wheeler, 2014).

This PhD study sought to examine how male students in Mozambique's higher education institutions construct their masculinities within the context of these prevailing gender dynamics. Given the persistent patriarchal cultures in higher education and the limited focus on masculinities in existing gender policies, this research aims to fill a critical gap in understanding how male students' gender identities are shaped by institutional and societal norms. By exploring how these constructions of masculinity intersect with the broader goals of gender equality in education, the study contributes to the growing body of work on gender and higher education in Mozambique, with implications for policy and practice.

1.5. The Socio-political Context of Save University

Education is a fundamental human right that must be accessible to all citizens without discrimination, a principle enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique (Constituição da República de Moçambique, 2004). Save University (UniSave), located in the southern region of the Save River, was established in 2019 under Decree 3/2019 of February 14, in response to the restructuring of the former Pedagogical University. Officially commencing its activities on March 28, 2019, UniSave operates across two provinces: Gaza (Chongoene) and Inhambane (Maxixe and Massinga) (UniSave Strategic Plan, 2023-2030).

The rapid expansion of the Pedagogical University posed significant administrative and financial challenges, leading to its fragmentation into five universities: UniRovuma, UniLicungo, UniPungue, UniSave, and UP Maputo (UniSave Strategic Plan, 2023-2030). The first higher education institution in Mozambique, Universidade de Lourenço Marques, was founded in 1962 to serve the interests of the colonial powers.

To meet the needs of the communities it serves and provide high-quality services, Save University has embraced excellence in research, teaching, and learning as its core values (UniSave Strategic Plan, 2023-2030). The university is committed to fostering student development by promoting soft skills, encouraging participation in research, and supporting social, cultural, and sporting activities. It also emphasizes student mobility, both locally and internationally (UniSave Strategic Plan, 2023-2030).

Despite the political and economic progress Mozambique has experienced in the past two decades, higher education institutions remain undemocratic (PEES, 2012-2020; Zavale, n.d.). At the time of writing this Ph.D. thesis, university chancellors are not elected by their peers (PEES, 2012-2020). The PEES (2012-2020) advocates for a culture of democracy in higher education, recommending that by 2020, all management boards of higher education institutions be democratically elected (PEES, 2012-2020, p.36). The UniSave Chancellor was democratically elected in May 2024, but more needs to be done in this regard.

Although the Save University Strategic Plan (2023-2030) does not explicitly address democracy, it calls for the observance of democratic principles in university management to ensure the successful implementation of its mission. The heavy reliance of higher education institutions on

state funding makes them susceptible to political influence, often undermining their pedagogical, scientific, and financial autonomy (UniSave Strategic Plan, 2023-2030).

While Save University is committed to making a significant contribution to its communities through graduate employability, training, and research excellence, some critiques suggest that higher education institutions in Mozambique have focused more on undergraduate teaching than on research (Zavale, n.d.). This presents challenges to achieving the third pillar of Save University's mission, as outlined in its Strategic Plan (2023-2030).

The socio-political context of Save University provides a critical backdrop for exploring the dynamics of gender and higher education in Mozambique. Given the university's commitment to fostering research, excellence, and student development, this study aimed to examine how gender, particularly masculinities, is constructed within the higher education environment. Understanding how institutional structures, including the lack of democratic processes and the dependence on state funding, influence gendered experiences among male students at Save University will offer valuable insights into the broader issues of gender equality in higher education in Mozambique. This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on gender in higher education, particularly focusing on the role of masculinities in shaping academic and social experiences.

1.6. Save University's Policy on Gender

The Save University Strategic Plan (2023-2030) highlights the institution's mandate to address the social, economic, and cultural needs of both the broader society and the communities in which it operates. Nevertheless, in the context of widespread gender inequalities within higher education, the plan remains notably vague on gender-specific issues (UniSave Strategic Plan 2023-2030). While it emphasizes the importance of responding to societal needs, it fails to outline concrete strategies or initiatives that directly address gender disparities in the university's policies and practices.

The Mozambique Higher Education Strategic Plan 2012-2020 identifies persistent gender imbalances, with only 38.3% of higher education students being female (p. 12). These imbalances are further exacerbated by disparities in the composition of teaching staff at all educational levels. For instance, the Ministry of Education and Human Development Strategic

Plan 2020-2029 indicates that although the percentage of female teachers is relatively high in Primary Education (45.5%), it drops significantly in upper Primary School (29%) and Secondary School (22.8%), and even more in higher education. UNESCO is cognizant of this reality, and raises concern over the failure of many public education systems to prevent stratification and segregation (UNESCO, 2021/2022).

Although the number of women enrolling in universities, and at Save University in particular, has increased in the second decade of the 21st century, concerns remain regarding graduation rates. The absence of rigorous measurement instruments on graduation rates by gender poses a challenge to the higher education sector in Sub-Saharan Africa, and in Mozambique in particular (Zavale et al., 2017). As Deb (2019) argues, enrolment and graduation statistics can be misleading if not understood within their broader contextual factors, distorting our comprehension of the actual situation.

This background forms the context for examining how male undergraduate students at Save University construct their masculinity in relation to academic excellence. According to Connell (1996), schools are key sites for gender identity construction. While literature often focuses on the problematic behaviour of male college students, including campus misconduct such as rape and sexual assault (Harper, 2010; Capraro, 2010), there is a need for further investigation into the role of universities in shaping gender identities. Despite the documented role of educational institutions in constructing gender identities, Save University's policy on gender remains under-explored, particularly regarding how it addresses the persistent gender inequalities within its own educational environment.

By exploring the intersection of masculinity and academic excellence at Save University, this study sought to identify gaps in the university's gender policies and propose strategies for promoting gender inclusivity and equity within the institution.

1.7. Students' Access, Retention and Completion at Save University

The government of Mozambique has sought to promote female teachers as role models in the education sector to encourage female student participation. However, these efforts have been largely ineffective due to entrenched patriarchal cultural norms. At Save University, teaching remains a male-dominated profession. As of the time of this study, the university employs 120

academic staff members, of whom only 17 are female (UniSave Human Resources Department). This gender disparity is also reflected in student enrolment patterns, particularly in Science and Technology disciplines, where male students significantly outnumber their female counterparts. The *Save University Strategic Plan (2023–2030)* emphasizes the importance of Science and Technology for national development. However, it does not provide concrete measures to address gender disparities within these fields. While the Government of Mozambique acknowledges these enrolment disparities and has expressed a commitment to narrowing the gender gap in Science and Technology (Walter & Zipfel, 2022), progress remains uneven.

The World Bank (2014) has also highlighted challenges related to the relevance and equity of higher education in Mozambique. It has urged the country to ensure that students acquire skills aligned with the evolving global economic landscape. Furthermore, the World Bank reaffirms its commitment to addressing critical issues in higher education, namely access, quality, relevance, equity, and sustainability, asserting that “maintaining this momentum is fundamental for Mozambique to prepare students for employment in an emerging economy” (World Bank, 2014, p. 4).

The *Save University Strategic Plan (2023–2030)* outlines the institution’s role in enhancing the educational levels of surrounding communities and contributing to local and regional development in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). However, it lacks explicit references to strategies for improving student access, retention, and completion, critical indicators of student success in higher education. Additionally, there is limited data on student dropout rates at Save University. The university must prioritize investigating and addressing student attrition to foster better educational outcomes.

Research underscores the significance of access, retention, and completion in advancing gender equity in higher education (Zimbico, 2022; Tambe, Da Costa, & De Lima, 2024). Scholars have attributed persistent gender disparities to weak regulatory oversight in Mozambique’s higher education sector (Miguel, Andissene, & Gomane, 2024), which hinders systematic monitoring of women’s and girls’ access to university education. The sector also faces structural challenges, including “diversification and fragmentation of public and private higher education institutions” (Miguel et al., 2024, p. 113). Expanding institutional diversity is crucial for improving student access and retention. Since quality and equity are interconnected, addressing disparities requires

a community-driven approach that actively involves grassroots stakeholders in higher education reform (Miguel et al., 2024; *Save University Strategic Plan 2023–2030*).

The barriers to student retention and completion are particularly pronounced for rural women in Mozambican higher education institutions (Tambe et al., 2024). Many rural female students face compounded challenges such as poverty, inequality, and gender-based violence upon entering university. The financial burden of tuition fees, accommodation, transportation, and food often forces them to discontinue their studies, especially in the absence of adequate bursary support (Tambe et al., 2024). Studies have consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between family economic background and student success in higher education, with financial stability playing a pivotal role in determining academic outcomes (Adeyeye & Dasoo, 2023; Wojciechowska, 2022).

Beyond financial constraints, the learning environment significantly impacts student retention and completion. De Carvalho, Geschwind, Weurlander, and Mendonça (2024) identified a range of obstacles that hinder student persistence, including poor in-class interactions, limited engagement between students and faculty, and gender-based violence. Similarly, Chapagai (2024) emphasizes the influence of teaching and learning environments, including instructional methods, faculty-student relationships, campus facilities, and access to resources such as libraries, infrastructure, and technology, on student retention. A conducive learning environment is a key predictor of student success, and hostile classroom conditions that discourage student participation often contribute to attrition (De Carvalho et al., 2024). Additionally, faculty favouritism, large class sizes, and the absence of safe learning spaces for female students exacerbate dropout rates (De Carvalho et al., 2024). At Save University, these factors have been linked to student attrition, underscoring the need for institutional interventions to create more inclusive and supportive academic environments.

Zimbico's (2022) longitudinal study on gender equality trends in Mozambican higher education between 2000 and 2020 provides valuable insights into student access, retention, and completion at Save University. A significant proportion of students fail to complete their *Licenciatura* or *Bachelor of Honours* degrees within the standard four-year period. Although precise statistical data on dropout rates is unavailable, records from the Academic Registry indicate that most students leave during their first or second year. Female students are particularly vulnerable to

discontinuation due to economic and socio-cultural pressures. Many women rely on male partners for financial support, and the prevalence of patriarchal norms within higher education institutions further limits their ability to sustain their studies independently. In cases of domestic instability, such as divorce or familial conflict, women often find it difficult to continue their education.

Despite these challenges, Save University has historically lacked a clear institutional focus on gender equity. However, in an effort to align its objectives with UN Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5, and 16, the university launched its *Gender Policy* in April 2024. This policy aims to establish internal mechanisms for monitoring and promoting gender equity within the institution. The introduction of the *Gender Policy (2024)* is a step toward transforming Save University into an institution that actively promotes gender equality, access, and retention. It aligns with Mozambique's *National Gender Policy and Implementation Strategy* (approved on 14 March 2006) as well as the government's five-year strategic objectives, which prioritize human capital development, social justice, and equitable access to education.

This study explored how male undergraduate students in the Arts and Social Sciences construct their masculinities and the factors that contribute to their academic success. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing gender disparities and enhancing student retention and completion at Save University.

1.8. Research context

This study explores how undergraduate male students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Save University-Maxixe construct their male identities in relation to their academic performance. Save University is a public higher education institution located in the Municipality of Maxixe, in the southern part of Inhambane Province. According to the 2017 population census, Maxixe District has a population of 147,260 inhabitants spread across an area of 282 km² (see Appendix D). Save University-Maxixe, also known as UniSave-Maxixe, functions as an extension of Save University-Mozambique, with its main campus headquartered in Chongoene, Gaza Province. At the time this study was being undertaken (2020), the UniSave-Maxixe had a population of 3464 students, of which 1654 were males and 1810 females (UniSave Academic

Registry, 2020). By the end of 2024, when this study was coming to an end, the student population was 1756 males and 2009 females (UniSave Academic Registry, 2024).

While the University's Mission Statement indicates that the University is committed to training quality workforce, who can creatively contribute to sustainable economic and socio-cultural development of the country, its objective is to becoming an excellent and quality higher education institution in teaching and learning, as well as in research and extension at national, regional and international level (UniSave's Strategic Plan 2023-2030).

Understanding students' gendered experiences is essential, as these experiences shape their perceptions of masculinity and influence their academic engagement. Individuals are social beings whose identities are constructed within specific socio-cultural contexts. In the case of undergraduate male students at Save University, two key socio-cultural dynamics frame their academic and personal experiences: (i) the transformation of gender relations and (ii) the persistence of patriarchal dominance. The following sections provide a critical analysis of these dynamics and their implications for students' academic trajectories.

1.8.1. The Transformation on Gender Relations

Emerging social norms surrounding gender roles are reshaping gender relations in Mozambique. The traditional gender-based division of labour and the patriarchal hierarchy that characterizes patrilineal societies in southern Mozambique are being challenged, particularly in urban settings (Abomin, 2012; Agadjanian, 2002; Groes-Green, 2011). Increased educational and employment opportunities for women have contributed to this transformation, leading to shifts in both male and female roles. Men are increasingly entering professions traditionally associated with women, while women are accessing positions previously dominated by men. These shifts necessitate a reconfiguration of male identity, as well as a relinquishing of certain aspects of male dominance historically associated with masculinity (Agadjanian, 2002).

These transformations have significantly impacted social interactions between men and women in Mozambican society. According to the Mozambique Gender Equality Profile (UN Women, 2022), girls now have greater agency in negotiating their academic commitments, delaying marriage, and postponing pregnancy until they complete their education. These changes

represent a move towards more equitable gender relations, fostering a social environment that is less misogynistic and more affirming of women's rights.

Groes-Green (2011) introduces the concept of *philogynous masculinities*, a term originally derived from the Greek philosopher Cicero, meaning a "fondness for women." Inspired by Whitehead, Groes-Green applies this term in his study of men in Maputo to describe male narratives and gender configurations that deviate from misogynistic masculinities. Instead, these masculinities support women's rights to agency, security, respect, and well-being in gender-equitable ways (Groes-Green, 2011). However, Groes-Green cautions that *philogynous masculinities* must be analyzed within local socio-cultural contexts, where they coexist with deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies. While patriarchal values continue to shape social norms across the continent, there is space for alternative masculinities to emerge, creating new possibilities for reconfiguring gender roles (Groes-Green, 2011).

In his research with secondary school male students in Maputo, Groes-Green (2011) found that, despite a prevailing belief in male superiority, young men also expressed respect for women and encouraged their participation in academic discussions. In Maputo, masculinity has traditionally been defined by economic provision rather than violence. Groes-Green (2009) argues for a reassessment of the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, emphasizing that in Mozambique, hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily equate to violence against women. Instead, in much of sub-Saharan Africa, hegemonic masculinity is closely linked to the *breadwinner ideal*, the expectation that men must provide for their families (Abomin, 2012; Groes-Green, 2011). Within this framework, men who lack financial stability or employment may experience a diminished sense of masculinity, leading to frustration and anxiety over their perceived loss of patriarchal privilege.

Education and employment play a crucial role in shaping male identity in Mozambique. Some men use their academic qualifications to gain social and romantic status, while others face deep frustration due to limited access to education and high unemployment rates (Groes-Green, 2009). Socialized to believe that they are the rightful heads of households and intellectually superior to women, men who are unable to fulfil these expectations due to unemployment or financial instability may resort to excessive alcohol consumption as a coping mechanism (Abomin, 2012; Groes-Green, 2009). In Mozambique, as elsewhere, access to education and economic

opportunities is a key determinant of whether men attain *socially recognized manhood* (Abomin, 2012, p. 27).

Groes-Green (2009, 2011) further argues that men's violent behaviour towards women should be interpreted as a function of power and dominance rather than as an inherent component of hegemonic masculinity. He suggests that hegemonic masculinity should be understood as a cultural ideal recognized by both men and women, and that its definition should be expanded to include both employed and unemployed men. The concept of hegemonic masculinity in southern Mozambique is historically rooted in the colonial era, when Portuguese colonial authorities sought to restructure society through forced labour (Abomin, 2012; Agadjanian, 2002; Groes-Green, 2009). Under colonial rule, men were expected to support their families through low-wage labour, reinforcing the notion that economic provision was central to male identity.

In contemporary Mozambique, particularly among young men in Maputo, hegemonic masculinity is shaped by a combination of the colonial-era breadwinner ideal and modern consumerist expectations. As the following section will explore, these factors influence the ways in which men construct their gender identities and navigate changing gender dynamics. This study sought to explore how undergraduate male students at Save University construct their masculinities in response to these evolving gender relations.

1.8.2. Patriarchal Dominance

Despite increasing women's access to education and their participation in political decision-making at both local and national levels, patriarchy remains a significant impediment to achieving gender equality (Ugaz-Simonsen, 2020). The socio-economic position of women in Mozambique continues to be precarious (Inge, 2012). Historically, the Bantu culture, both in the matrilineal north and in the patrilineal south and central Mozambique, has been dominated by men (Inge, 2012). The arrival of Muslim immigrants and Portuguese colonizers did not significantly alter these gender relations (Abomin, 2012; Inge, 2012). Moreover, both Islam and Christianity have contributed to shaping contemporary gender dynamics in Mozambique in ways that reinforce patriarchal norms (Inge, 2012).

Hambira (1999) illustrates how colonial-era missionaries reinforced patriarchal dominance, noting that:

The early missionaries came as men; they lived and died as men. Their wives were meant for working with children as a schoolteacher, nurse, Sunday school teacher, or instructor. They were never to speak in church or lead public worship. The missionaries would write back to the fathers in London, creating a male-dominated network. The mission, which came from a patriarchal society, did not recognize male dominance in Africa as a challenge (p. 224).

As a result, women's status, voices, and rights, both within households and at the community level are frequently marginalized (Country Gender Profile, 2015). Women are disproportionately engaged in domestic labour, the informal sector, and subsistence agriculture. Additionally, there are significant disparities in literacy rates between men and women, with men outnumbering women at nearly all educational levels. While girls' enrolment in primary education has improved, completion rates remain lower for girls, and dropout rates are higher due to entrenched patriarchal norms, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy, particularly in rural areas (Country Gender Profile, 2015).

Patriarchal structures also perpetuate gender-based violence (GBV) in Mozambique. Floriza, Harris-Sapp, Simmons, and Messner (2016) report that over 37% of women aged 15–49 have experienced some form of GBV, including emotional, physical, or sexual violence. Recognizing GBV as a major challenge to gender equality, the Mozambican government has introduced several legal instruments, including Law No. 29/2009, which explicitly prohibits violence against women. However, patriarchal norms continue to undermine these efforts.

The Inhambane Province Strategic Plan Against Gender-Based Violence (2017) highlights the role of patriarchy in perpetuating GBV and critiques mass media for portraying women as sexual objects. Such representations normalize and reinforce gender-based violence. Similarly, the *Global Monitoring Report* (2015) describes school-related GBV as "one of the worst manifestations of gender discrimination, which seriously undermines attempts to achieve gender equality in education" (p. 179).

Moreover, scholars have recognized HIV as a gendered epidemic (Dube, 2003; Chitando, 2010). Gender inequalities, particularly in patriarchal societies, exacerbate the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) by limiting women's ability to negotiate safe sexual

practices (Chitando & Chiringoma, 2012). A report by PEPFAR (2017) indicates that HIV prevalence is higher among women in Mozambique, a consequence of economic dependence on men and limited decision-making power within households. In many patriarchal societies, communication between spouses regarding sexual health is inadequate, further restricting women's ability to insist on condom use (Verma & Mahendra, 2004). Additionally, prevailing notions of masculinity discourage men from seeking healthcare services, perpetuating risky sexual behaviors (Courtenay, 2000; Mathewson, 2009). Studies on hegemonic masculinity have established a link between culturally sanctioned male behaviour and high-risk sexual practices, which further exacerbates gender disparities in health outcomes (Courtenay, 2000; Mathewson, 2009).

Overall, patriarchal dominance in Mozambique continues to shape gender relations in ways that sustain socio-economic and educational inequalities, perpetuate gender-based violence, and contribute to adverse health outcomes for women. Addressing these deeply entrenched norms requires multifaceted interventions, including legal reforms, educational initiatives, and shifts in cultural perceptions of gender roles.

1.9. Significance of the study

This PhD study is grounded in the proposition that new forms of academic excellence in Higher Education should be considered beyond traditional quantitative metrics, such as Grade Point Average (GPA). The study critically examines the concept of academic excellence and advocates for its expansion to include qualitative dimensions, such as culturally informed worldviews. By considering students' personal experiences, worldviews, and constructed identities, the study explores what academic excellence means to them. Drawing on the work of Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) and York (2015), I argue that male students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences exhibit diverse forms of excellence, and that academic excellence should not be solely defined by GPA.

There is a paucity of research on masculinities in Higher Education within Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly from the perspective of Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) countries. This study thus holds significant potential for expanding the understanding of masculinity within Higher Education in Lusophone Africa. While previous studies have highlighted the underperformance

of male students in higher education, this research aimed to explore how male students perceive their academic excellence and how this perception is intertwined with the construction of their masculine identities. Through a qualitative approach, this study used interviews, and focus group discussions, to analyse the ways in which male university students construct their identities in relation to academic excellence.

1.10. Main Research Question:

How does the construction of masculine identities among undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences male students at Save University relate to their academic excellence

1.10.1. Sub-research questions

1. What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of how they construct their masculine identities at Save University?
2. What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Science students' conceptions of academic excellence at Save University?
3. What factors have contributed to male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences' students' construction of masculine identities and academic excellence at Save University?
4. Why do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students relate their construction of masculine identities to their academic excellence at Save University in the way that they do?

1.10.2. Study objectives

The objectives of this study were:

1. To explore male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of how they construct their masculine identities at Save University.
2. To investigate male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of academic excellence at Save University.

3. To analyze how do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences' students relate their construction of masculine identities to their academic excellence at Save University.
4. To investigate why do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences' students relate their construction of masculine identities to their academic excellence at Save University in the way they do.

1.11. Methodology overview

This empirical study employed a qualitative research methodology within an interpretive research paradigm. Qualitative research is commonly associated with the social constructivist paradigm, which underscores the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Given that this study is situated within an interpretive paradigm, a qualitative approach was appropriate as it sought to explore the lived experiences and worldviews of undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students regarding their construction of masculine identity and academic excellence (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

The interpretive research paradigm asserts that researchers should make meaning of the school curriculum and teaching practices to assess how knowledge is constructed. Qualitative research consists of various material interpretations that can be adapted to the specific context in which the study is conducted. It involves recording, analysing, and uncovering the deeper meanings and significance of human behaviour and experience, including contradictory beliefs, behaviours, and emotions. In this study, data were collected through one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions, and the analysis of bibliographical materials related to gender studies and higher education.

Qualitative research typically employs small sample sizes, as the primary objective is not to generalize findings but to gain in-depth insights. Accordingly, data were generated through individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a purposive sample of 17 male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated adaptations in data collection methods due to social distancing regulations worldwide. Mozambique entered lockdown at a later stage compared to neighbouring countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe. However, the one-on-one

interviews and focus group discussions were conducted before the national lockdown was implemented. Strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols was maintained throughout the data collection process. Once participants returned their signed consent forms, an agreement was established regarding suitable interview schedules. All interviews and discussions were conducted during the student vacation period (June/July), allowing participants to select convenient dates and times.

Interviews were conducted in a large classroom (6m x 5m), chosen for its ample space to facilitate social distancing. During one-on-one interviews, a distance of approximately 2.5 meters was maintained between the researcher and each participant, exceeding the recommended minimum of 1.5 meters. The research venue was sanitized before and after each interview to ensure a safe environment.

Focus group discussions were held in a conference room, arranged to enable participants to maintain physical distance from one another. Participants were required to wear face masks before and throughout the discussions. Each focus group session was limited to a maximum duration of one hour to align with COVID-19 safety protocols. These measures ensured that data collection adhered to health and safety guidelines while maintaining the integrity of the research process.

1.12. Positionality of the researcher

The term *positionality* “describes both an individual’s worldview and the position they adopt in relation to a research task and its social and political context” (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). According to Bourke (2014), “we have to acknowledge who we are as individuals, as members of a group, and as resting in and moving within social positions” (p. 3). My positionality as a man, an educator, and a staff member in the Academic Registry at Save University who is deeply committed to issues of gender, has significantly influenced the development of this study. However, there was no conflict of interest, and being academic and staff member at the site where this study was developed had no significant impact on the data generation and analysis. Various steps have been taken to avoid the researcher’s conflict of interest such as confirmability and triangulation (see pages 87-91 of this study).

On one hand, my role in the UniSave Academic Registry has provided me with opportunities to interact with both male and female students, listen to their concerns, and gain insights into their academic and social experiences. On the other hand, my decade-long teaching experience in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Save University, where I have incorporated gender as a cross-cutting theme in my courses, has heightened my interest in issues of gender justice.

These interactions with students have sparked my interest in exploring how male undergraduate students in the Arts and Social Sciences navigate and optimize their university experiences both on and off campus. Many students have expressed concerns that their extracurricular activities and broader university experiences are often overlooked by the institution. These reflections prompted me to undertake this study to examine how male students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences engage with their undergraduate experiences and how Save University supports or constrains their developmental opportunities beyond the classroom.

Building trust with participants was crucial in ensuring the credibility of this research. My initial engagements with participants before conducting interviews played a key role in establishing rapport. Throughout the research process, I remained conscious of my potential influence on participants' responses and took deliberate steps to minimize bias, both during data collection and analysis. As Bourke (2020) cautions, researchers must actively avoid bias, as qualitative research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of a phenomenon through individual's lived experiences (Bourke, 2004).

Despite my senior staff position, I was able to establish trust with the participants, fostering an environment where they felt safe and comfortable sharing their experiences. This trust was essential in eliciting candid and meaningful insights into their university experiences.

1.13. Definition of key Concepts and terms

Masculinity/Masculinities is a socially and culturally constructed notion of being a man in contrast to being a woman or any other gender within gender relations (Connell, 2005). There is no single way of being a man, different cultures have constructed their own men. Therefore, the term *masculinities* (*plural*) has been employed in recognition of that. The terms masculinity/masculinities have been used interchangeably throughout the study.

Researchers have employed the term **Masculine identity construction** to study the social construction of male gender identity and of men's position in gender relations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this study, the term masculine identity construction was used to denote the way male students have constructed their masculinities at Save University.

In this study, **Higher education** refers to “organized tertiary learning and training activities and institutions that include conventional universities with arts, humanities, and sciences faculties, as well as specialized institutions in agriculture, engineering, science, and technology” (Alemu, 2018, p. 211).

Academic Excellence is defined as a holistic process that not only includes student success measures (Grade Points Average), but also considers how students choose to use institutional resources toward bettering their own lives and those of other people locally and globally (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

The concept of "**high achiever**" denotes individuals who excel academically and are recognized for their superior performance and abilities (Jeremy & Fisher, 2012). In this study, high achievers are described as students who had received awards for outstanding research project presentations at scientific fairs, or had participated in extra-curricular activities, attended classes regularly or had a cumulative GPA of 14 plus.

1.14. Study Overview

Chapter one introduces the study, providing the background, research problem, objectives, and research questions.

Chapter two reviews the relevant literature that underpins this study. The literature examined in this chapter facilitates an understanding of how undergraduate male students in the Arts and Social Sciences construct their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence. The chapter presents an overview of literature on the construction of masculinity and academic excellence among college and university men, as well as different perspectives on the perceptions of academic excellence.

Chapter three outlines the theoretical frameworks that guided the production of data as well as the analysis of the study. Four key theories informed the analysis: (i) The Social Construction of Masculinity theory; (ii) The Theory of Masculine Academic Excellence; (iii) The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity theory; and (iv) The Theory of Masculine Identity Development.

Chapter four details the research design and methodology employed in this study. This chapter explains the research approach adopted, including the data generation strategies and ethical considerations relevant to the study.

Chapter five presents the voices and experiences of the participants regarding the construction of masculine identity in relation to academic excellence. The themes that emerged from the data are explored, with the Theory of Masculine Identity Development serving as the analytical lens for this chapter.

Chapter six presents the findings related to undergraduate male students' conceptions of academic excellence. The Theory of Masculine Academic Excellence guides the analysis of the data in this chapter.

Chapter seven examines the findings related to the experiences of undergraduate male students as males. The Social Construction of Masculinity theory informs the analysis of data in this chapter.

Chapter eight synthesizes the entire thesis. This chapter synthesizes the findings of the study and highlights the contributions this PhD research makes to the body of knowledge in the field. By integrating the four theoretical frameworks, this chapter provides a nuanced understanding of how the construction of masculinity influences academic excellence among male undergraduate students in the Arts and Social Sciences. The study expands existing theories of masculinity and academic excellence by incorporating perspectives from Lusophone Africa, offering new insights into the intersection of gender, identity, and educational outcomes. Additionally, it contributes to the literature on higher education by proposing strategies for enhancing gender inclusivity and equity in university settings.

1.15. Conclusion

Chapter One introduced the background of the study, outlining the key themes and concepts, including definitions of masculinity and academic excellence within the context of higher education. The chapter provided an overview of the higher education landscape in Southern Africa, with a specific focus on Lusophone Africa, and Mozambique. Additionally, it highlighted the current state of gender issues within Mozambique's higher education sector.

The chapter also explored the socio-political context and the University's gender policies, which have influenced male students' construction of their masculine identities. Furthermore, the research context and the significance of the study were discussed, alongside the study's primary research question and objectives. An overview of the methodology employed in this study was also provided. Finally, the chapter concluded with a summary of the study's structure.

The next chapter reviews the relevant literature that underpins this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literature that informs the study, which explores how undergraduate male Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University in Mozambique construct their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence. Situated within a context where limited research exists on masculinity and academic performance in higher education, particularly in Lusophone Africa, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature. By critically engaging with prior studies, this chapter establishes the theoretical and empirical foundation for examining the intersections of gender identity, masculinity, and academic excellence.

The chapter is organized into several thematic sections. First, it examines the broader discourse on gender identity construction among college and university male students, emphasizing the role of higher education as a site for gender performance and identity negotiation. The second section delves into the social construction of masculinity in educational contexts, highlighting the interplay between cultural norms and institutional practices. Subsequent sections focus on male students' conceptions of academic excellence, the factors contributing to their academic success, and the pedagogical approaches that influence their learning experiences. Additionally, the chapter reviews literature on the intersections of gender and academic performance, the influence of religion on academic identity, and the specific dynamics of masculinity in Mozambique. Finally, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is explored as a critical framework for understanding male students' experiences and behaviours.

By synthesizing these diverse yet interconnected themes, the chapter provides a comprehensive foundation for situating this study within the broader scholarly discourse. It identifies key gaps in the literature and highlights the theoretical frameworks that guide the analysis, setting the stage for a nuanced exploration of the construction of masculine identities and academic excellence at Save University.

2.1. College and University Male Gender Identity Construction

The construction and conceptualization of masculinity among male undergraduate students in higher education has received considerable attention in scholarly research (Davis, 2002; Harper, 2008, 2009, 2010; Harris & Harper, 2008; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Sáenz et al., 2013; Ullah & Ali, 2012). While the majority of these studies focus on contexts in the Global North, a smaller body of research has explored similar themes in the Global South (Morrell & Richter, 2006; Munro, 2014; Singh, 2022; Phewa, 2016). The literature consistently portrays male identity construction during this formative period as multifaceted, shaped by social, cultural, and institutional factors.

Early studies suggest that male identity in higher education is often associated with behaviours such as excessive alcohol consumption (Capraro, 2010; Singh, 2022), promiscuity to affirm virility (Harper, 2010), and leading in statistics of judicial offenses (Harper, 2008). Additionally, portrayals of male students as anti-school, emotionally detached, and disconnected from family and social spheres are pervasive in the literature (Harper, 2012; Kissilica & Englo-Carlson, 2010; Morrell, 2010).

However, more recent scholarship highlights a shift toward reconceptualizing masculinities as complex, fluid, and contextually constructed. This aligns with Kimmel's (2010) assertion that masculinity is not innate but actively constructed within specific social and historical contexts. For example, Harper (2010) found that high-achieving male students emphasized preparation for familial responsibilities and devoted significant time to purposeful extracurricular activities, academic engagement, and interactions with university administrators. These participants associated academic success with masculinity, viewing failure as undermining their masculine identity.

Other studies also reflect the emergence of alternative masculinities. Givens et al. (2016) revealed that male students redefined masculinity to include emotional expression, relational engagement, and academic achievement. Participants in this study demonstrated caring relationships with peers, embraced fatherhood, and connected their achievements to societal contributions. Similarly, Davis (2002) highlighted how male students resisted being perceived as

“feminine” or “gay” while valuing relational connections often neglected by institutional support structures.

Studies focused on specific social groups, such as college athletes, offer further insight into masculine identity. Stewart (2008) examined football players' perspectives, finding that they associated masculinity with responsibility, agency, and goal-oriented behavior both "on the field" (e.g., persistence and confidence) and "off the field" (e.g., academic focus and avoiding distractions). These findings resonate with Steinfeldt et al. (2010), who explored masculinity messaging among football coaches, revealing a strong emphasis on hard work, accountability, and academic commitment as markers of masculinity.

Class-based distinctions in masculine identity construction have also been documented. Whitehead (2003) contrasted middle-class masculinity, which often values academic success as central to identity, with working-class masculinity, where manual labour is praised over intellectual endeavours. Working-class men often view academic achievement as irrelevant, associating it with femininity and rejecting mental labour in favour of physical work. However, Whitehead (2003) also noted that men with more liberal and egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles tended to excel academically.

Connell (1996) provides further nuance, describing how British working-class schoolboys negotiated different forms of masculinity. While some viewed education as a pathway to career success, others dismissed academic engagement in favour of physical labour. These distinctions underscore how factors such as class, ethnicity, and cultural context shape the intersection of masculinity and education.

The interplay between masculinity and academic achievement extends beyond student populations. For instance, Salminen-Karlsson et al. (2018) argue that academic institutions often reinforce a stereotypical "academic masculinity," which valorises complete devotion to scholarship and competitiveness, often at the expense of other responsibilities. This stereotype perpetuates male dominance in academia, as evidenced by studies showing men's overrepresentation in senior academic roles (Harzing et al., 2018).

In response to these trends, scholars have called for a critical examination of academic masculinities as socially constructed and contextually reproduced. Berg et al. (2015) caution

against generalizations that masculinities are inherently anti-education, emphasizing the diversity of masculine identities and their geographic and temporal specificities. The persistence of male privilege within higher education institutions further underscores the need for systemic change, as noted by O'Connor et al. (2015).

This review demonstrates the evolving nature of male identity construction in higher education, revealing a tension between traditional stereotypes and emerging definitions of masculinity that prioritize academic achievement, emotional expression, and relational engagement. The persistence of underlying systems of male privilege in higher education remains a significant area for further exploration. Thus, the relevance of this PhD study.

2.2. The Social Construction of College and University Men's Gender Identity

Galbin (2014) argues that identity formation and maintenance are deeply embedded in social structures and processes. He emphasizes that “the way we understand the world is a product of a historical process of interaction and negotiation between groups of people” (Galbin, 2014, p. 83). This perspective underscores the socially constructed nature of identity, shaped through historical and cultural exchanges.

Jessup-Anger, Johnson, and Wawrzynski (2012) examined undergraduate male students' experiences within living-learning community environments. Their findings challenge traditional notions of rigid gender roles often reported in similar studies. Instead, the participants in their study expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage with like-minded peers, fostering a supportive environment for identity exploration (Jessup-Anger et al., 2012, p. 170).

Research conducted in Mozambique provides further insights into the construction of masculine identities. Morreira (2016) highlights that many young Mozambican men view fatherhood as a marker of authentic manhood. Langa (2014) adds that sexual conquest and performance are central to Mozambican masculine identity, with concerning implications, including the normalization of harmful behaviours such as rape and sexual violence towards young women in educational contexts.

In the United States, Stewart's (2008) doctoral research explored the construction of masculine identity among college football players. His findings reveal that these athletes perceive

themselves as responsible men who embrace agency, face challenges, take risks, and provide for others. This narrative aligns masculinity with resilience and achievement within the context of athleticism.

Similarly, Burcar, Åkerström, and Wästerfors (2011) investigated young Swedish men's experiences with violence. Their study demonstrates how societal expectations of masculinity compel men to endure and resist violence to affirm their masculine identity. Participants reported that failing to resist or retaliate against violence would undermine their sense of masculinity, often leading to severe physical consequences.

Building on this body of literature, my study provides male Humanities students with a platform to reflect on the factors shaping their masculinities on campus. Furthermore, it explores the extent to which these constructions intersect with their conceptions of and approaches to academic excellence.

2.3. Identity Construction of Undergraduate Male Students in Leadership Positions

The identity construction of male college students in leadership positions has garnered significant attention, particularly in research from the Global North (Harper, 2012; Smythe, 2014; Zernechel & Perry, 2017; Harper & Harris, 2010). However, there is a notable gap in the literature concerning how undergraduate male students in leadership positions construct their masculine identities within African higher education contexts. This study sought to address this gap by exploring the construction of masculinity among undergraduate male leaders at a Mozambican higher learning institution.

Carlson's (2017) doctoral research, *Take the Lead: A Phenomenological Explanation of Male College Student Leadership and Masculinity*, explored the motivations behind male students' involvement in co-curricular leadership activities and the influence of masculinity perceptions on their leadership experiences within a Christian higher education institution. Carlson's findings suggest that leadership experiences significantly shape participants' perceptions of masculinity. The male students in his study associated masculinity with "fighting for more equality, working in residence halls with other men, and striving for success," a process Carlson (2017, p. 28) described as a "restructuring of masculinity." Participants were motivated by factors such as a vision for leadership, learning more about leadership, and elements of servant leadership.

Additionally, they credited mentors, fathers, and a love for their communities as key influences in their pursuit of leadership roles (Carlson, 2017).

Bandura's (1989) social learning theory underscores the role of external influences in identity formation, arguing that individuals model their behaviours and attributes based on observed success in others. He explains that individuals "form a conception of the attributes that typify masculinity and femininity and the behavior appropriate for their own sex" (Bandura, 1989, p. 36).

Taylor's (2016) research further highlights the link between masculinity and leadership. One participant in Taylor's study explicitly stated, "I think my identity as a leader is in some way tied to my masculine identity" (Taylor, 2016, p. 27). Masculinity, as constructed by Taylor's participants, encompassed attributes such as success, striving for equality, hard work, and providing for others. Notably, Taylor's participants advocated for a leadership style that transcended traditional notions of masculinity, engaging in critical conversations about male privilege. This perspective contrasts with dominant narratives in the literature, such as Zernechel and Perry's (2017) findings, which present a negative portrayal of masculinity in leadership contexts, particularly within fraternity organizations. Their study linked fraternity membership to higher rates of sexual violence and revealed that men in fraternities were three times more likely to commit acts of sexual assault.

In contrast, Harper (2012) found a positive association between leadership engagement and academic success. Male students who actively participated in leadership activities reported higher levels of motivation to excel academically, driven by a desire to impress and engage with academically focused peers. Similarly, a report from Ohio State University (2017) revealed that student leaders had significantly higher GPAs than their non-leader counterparts.

Streeter (2011) examined the role of involvement in promoting persistence towards graduation among Black males in higher education. His findings indicated that participation in academic and extracurricular activities such as serving on campus activity boards, acting as resident assistants, or attending cultural and athletic events fostered persistence and facilitated navigation through college.

This review highlights the ways in which masculinity is constructed among male student leaders in higher education institutions globally. However, it underscores the lack of focus on African contexts. Consequently, this study aimed to explore how male students in leadership positions construct their masculinities at Save University, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon within an African higher education setting.

2.4. Male Students' Conceptions of Academic Excellence

The terms *academic excellence*, *academic performance*, *academic achievement*, and *academic success* are often used interchangeably in scholarly discourse. These concepts have been applied in the classroom context to describe students' experiences and outputs from study and research (Brusoni et al., 2014). A theoretically grounded definition of academic success proposed by York, Gibson, and Rankin (2015) identifies six components: academic achievement, satisfaction, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning objectives, and career success. They argue that academic excellence entails both degree attainment and moral development, reflecting a holistic approach to understanding student success.

Kuh, Kinzie, and Buckley (2006) assert that the demands of a postmodern, inclusive educational landscape have necessitated novel definitions of student excellence. They emphasize that academic excellence should encompass an appreciation for human differences, commitment to democratic values, the ability to work effectively across diverse backgrounds, information literacy, and a well-developed sense of identity. Rea (1991) similarly advocates for a multifaceted understanding of student excellence, highlighting the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as pride, environmental influences, satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment beyond high grades alone. Supporting this perspective, Kromydas (2017) underscores the role of intrinsic motivation in driving better performance in higher education and later in the labour market.

Research on specific demographic groups provides additional insights. Johnson's (2020) study of Black male college students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) identifies critical factors contributing to persistence and success, including academic and non-academic extracurricular activities, supportive campus environments, mentorship, and navigation skills within the college system. Johnson emphasizes the importance of networks and relationships

fostered within student organizations, both academic and social, which promote a sense of belonging and mutual accountability.

Similarly, Leptz (2018) examines the factors influencing Black male professionals' educational and career success. Participants attributed their achievements to mentors, parents, and teachers, with mentorship providing crucial guidance at pivotal moments. Richardson, Jones-Fosu, and Lewis (2019) explore the enrolment patterns of Black males in education degree programs, noting how negative educational experiences, such as racial segregation and micro-aggressions, have affected their representation. Harper (2006) also highlights the significance of peer support among African American undergraduate men, revealing that peers foster a strong sense of identity, goal orientation, and mutual accountability.

Broader studies reinforce these findings. Williams (2010) defines academic excellence as a culmination of socially valued achievements enabled by beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that optimize individual potential. Participants in Williams' study associated academic excellence with outstanding grades, motivation, curiosity, critical thinking, leadership, and self-confidence. In contrast, Archer (2008) notes that academic excellence for some students is tied to self-fulfilment through hard work, ethics, collaboration, and a commitment to scholarship rather than achieving positions or recognition.

Brusoni et al. (2014) argue that academic excellence is culturally constructed and should reflect the values and principles of the community. They advocate for qualitative and quantitative parameters to assess excellence, emphasizing intellectual abilities, practical competencies, self-motivation, and the ability to integrate theory with practice.

While the literature offers comprehensive insights into the general conception of academic excellence, there is limited focus on how male undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences perceive this concept. Scholars like Picardi (2019), Salminen-Karlsson (2017), and Berg et al. (n.d.) caution that academic excellence is a social construct, shaped by cultural contexts. This necessitates a localized understanding of how students in specific environments, such as Save University, conceptualize academic excellence.

This review provides a foundation for exploring Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences undergraduate students' conceptions of academic excellence, with attention to the unique cultural and institutional contexts at Save University. The following section examines factors contributing to students' academic excellence.

2.5. Factors Contributing to Students' Academic Excellence

The academic excellence of male students is shaped by various factors, including familial support, mentoring programs, teacher expectations, and positive relationship-building within educational settings (Swanson, 2013). Specifically, the influence of family and friends has been identified as pivotal to the academic success of African American boys, with research highlighting that students who strongly identify with academics are more motivated to excel because their self-esteem is intertwined with their academic achievements (Swanson, 2013). Rolland (2011) further underscores this, noting that supportive parents, caring teachers, a positive school environment, peer support, and community initiatives collectively foster academic success among African American high school males. Parents who value education and actively support extracurricular activities not only encourage hard work but also instil persistence in their children.

However, challenges such as a lack of community resources, negative stereotypes, low self-initiative, and diminished self-belief were also reported (Rolland, 2011). Students proposed self-motivation, mentorship, and the presence of role models as viable solutions, emphasizing the transformative impact of mentors on student behaviour, attendance, self-esteem, and academic performance.

Academic excellence is especially critical for Black male students due to the advanced skills required for 21st-century technological careers, which enhance employability and economic productivity (Rolland, 2011). Nonetheless, negative stereotypes about Black male students, such as perceptions of incompetence or laziness, often hinder their academic potential. Conversely, teacher preparedness, parental involvement, teacher expectations, student-teacher relationships, school climate, and school culture have been found to positively influence academic outcomes (Rolland, 2011).

Twumasi (2019) explored African American undergraduate males' perceptions of factors supporting their academic success, highlighting the importance of support systems, mentorship, and positive role models in overcoming barriers. Similarly, Williams (2017) emphasized the need for research to shift from deficit-oriented perspectives to recognizing factors that promote academic growth. Williams identified key contributors to success, including family support, community involvement, intrinsic motivation, positive peer influence, and financial assistance. Notably, participants in Williams' study reported that high expectations and positive interactions with teachers had a significant impact on their academic journeys.

In higher education, the academic experiences of diverse student populations are shaped by intersecting social identities, which influence how students navigate learning environments (Pérez, Karikari, Ashlee, & Sim, 2017). The notion that academic success is solely the result of individual effort has been challenged, with researchers emphasizing the importance of recognizing the cultural knowledge and forms of capital that marginalized students bring to higher education. Dominant narratives of academic success, often focused on grades and graduation rates, may overlook broader outcomes such as cognitive development, a sense of belonging, and civic engagement (Pérez et al., 2017).

This shift in focus is mirrored in recent South African studies. Phewa (2016) found that students define success as a combination of academic and career achievements, including passing modules, understanding content, obtaining qualifications, and securing meaningful employment. This perspective aligns with global trends that prioritize persistence and holistic measures of success over traditional metrics such as degree attainment alone (Perguer & Takács, 2016).

The above literature reviewed underscores the multifaceted nature of academic excellence and its intersection with cultural, institutional, and individual factors. By engaging with this body of literature, this study aimed to explore undergraduate male students' conceptions of academic excellence within the South African higher education context, providing insights into the supports and challenges that shape their academic experiences.

2.6. Masculinity and Higher Education Pedagogies

Research underscores the intricate intersections of masculinity, femininity, and other social and cultural dimensions that significantly shape students' learning experiences in higher education

(Burke et al., 2013; Collins, 1998a). Burke et al. (2013) highlight that gender plays a pivotal role in shaping undergraduate experiences, with male students often dominating classroom discussions and physical spaces. This aligns with broader findings that higher education pedagogies frequently reflect and reinforce male dominance (Burke et al., 2013; Collins, 2012), creating environments where hegemonic masculinity perpetuates the marginalization of women and non-dominant identities.

Pedagogical practices are not neutral but deeply embedded within identity formations. Burke et al. (2013) argue that competitive and authoritative practices, historically linked to masculinity, continue to influence educational spaces. They further suggest that global neoliberal discourses valorise an idealized masculine academic culture, positioning the “ideal academic” as a high-achieving, competitive man. Berg, Gahman, and Nunn (2014) extend this critique, asserting that neoliberalism promotes masculinized academic norms that prioritize authority and prestige, thereby shaping both institutional cultures and individual aspirations.

Globally, higher education institutions have been critiqued as sites where social inequalities are reproduced (Mario et al., 2003). In Mozambique, Mario and colleagues (2003) observe that access to higher education remains stratified, with students predominantly from affluent families occupying these spaces. This inequity raises critical questions about the role of pedagogies in perpetuating or challenging systemic inequalities. Strayhorn (2008) suggests that the goals of higher education, advancing economic development, fostering global competitiveness, and nurturing democratic participation require pedagogical approaches that engage meaningfully with issues of gender and inequality. Yet, to date, there is limited evidence of pedagogical interventions addressing gender dynamics within Mozambican higher education.

Kromydas (2017) situates higher education as a space where labour market competencies, personal talents, and civic values converge. However, Kromydas also contends that the expansion of higher education, often framed as a driver of equity, paradoxically exacerbates social inequalities, including those related to race, gender, and class. The neoliberal prioritization of performance and market-oriented outcomes often side-lines critical considerations of justice, equity, and identity formation. This study sought to explore how the curriculum and pedagogies at Save University shape masculinities among male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students, with particular attention to the implications for their academic success.

The role of teaching and learning materials in constructing male identities has received significant attention, though primarily in primary and secondary education (Chiponda, 2012; Kobia, 2009). In higher education, Harper et al. (2004) found that pervasive masculine cultures position male students as more competitive, empowered, and engaged in campus activities compared to their female peers. Crombie et al. (2003) further illustrate male dominance in classroom discussions, particularly in the Humanities and Social Sciences, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies.

Burke et al. (2013) explore the impact of gendered pedagogical practices on student experiences and argue that higher education often fails to challenge gendered, classed, and racialized antagonisms. While students may articulate discourses of equality, their lived experiences frequently reflect entrenched perceptions of gendered behaviour within academic contexts. Burke and colleagues conceptualize pedagogy as “lived, relational, and embodied practices” (2013, p. 9), emphasizing its role in shaping identity formations, epistemological frameworks, and notions of belonging in higher education.

The privileging of traits associated with hegemonic masculinity such as assertiveness in communication and competitiveness in academic practices further illustrates the embedded power dynamics within pedagogical spaces (Burke et al., 2013; Mora, 2017; Murphy, 1996). However, there are examples of transformative pedagogical practices. For instance, Potts (2017) describes how a gender studies module enabled students to critically engage with and challenge traditional gender norms through dialogue and debate.

This study critically examines whether the pedagogies at Save University contribute to the construction of masculinities among male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students and explores how these constructions intersect with their academic success. By interrogating the interplay between curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and identity formation, this research aimed to illuminate the ways in which higher education can either perpetuate or disrupt hegemonic masculinities.

2.7. Gender and Academic Performance

Research consistently highlights gender as a significant determinant of academic performance across the globe (Arnolt, 1998; Dayioglu & Turut-Asik, 2004; Sparks-Wallace, 2007; Reddock,

2009; Diana, 2014; Goni, Ali, & Bularafa, 2015; Koffler, 2017; Ushie & Edinyang, 2018). However, studies conducted within the African context reveal more nuanced patterns. For example, Eshetu (2015) conducted a quantitative analysis on gender disparities in academic achievement at Higher Education Preparatory Schools in Ethiopia, finding that while female students performed similarly to their male counterparts, male students generally outperformed females in all fields of study. A similar study by Tasisa and Tafesse (2013) on gender disparity in Ethiopian Colleges of Teacher Education further corroborates this, showing that although female students were well-represented in these institutions, their academic performance lagged behind their male peers in disciplines such as Languages, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences.

In contrast, a study by Faisal et al. (2017) identifies a range of factors impacting students' academic performance, including individual characteristics, household support, environmental factors, and the quality of secondary education. These findings suggest that academic success is influenced not only by gender but also by broader socio-economic and institutional factors.

The relationship between gender and academic engagement has also been explored in different contexts. Harper et al. (2004) studied gender differences in student engagement among African American undergraduates at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Their study found no significant gender differences in overall engagement levels, challenging the assertion that female students outperform their male counterparts. Interestingly, despite women reporting higher engagement, male students at HBCUs were found to have more frequent interactions with faculty than their female peers. This finding suggests that male students in certain contexts might receive more academic and social support, which could influence their academic outcomes.

The gendered dynamics of participation in higher education were further explored by Crombie et al. (2003), who found that male students tend to dominate classroom discussions in both Humanities and Social Sciences. Female students, on the other hand, were more likely to be influenced by the emotional climate of the classroom and their levels of confidence, which affected their participation. This challenges the conventional view that masculinity in higher education is synonymous with academic failure. Instead, the research highlights the complex interplay between gender, confidence, and classroom dynamics.

Harper et al. (2004) argue that a pervasive masculine culture in higher education encourages male students to be more competitive, more empowered, and more engaged in campus life than their female counterparts. This culture also shapes career aspirations, with male students more likely to express an intention to pursue graduate and professional school, while female students often aspire to lower-prestige careers such as teaching or nursing. These findings underscore the gendered nature of academic engagement and performance, pointing to the need for further research into how these dynamics play out in diverse institutional contexts.

This study sought to explore the influence of gender on academic excellence among male undergraduate students in the Arts and Social Sciences at Save University, exploring how gendered expectations and classroom dynamics contribute to academic success or challenges. Through this exploration, the study aims to deepen understanding of how gendered practices in higher education impact male students' academic experiences, participation, and achievement.

2.8. Masculinity and academic excellence

The relationship between masculinity and academic excellence has received significant attention (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Salminen-Karlsson, 2017; Yankey, 2014). Researchers argue that academic excellence is a gendered social construction, which has historically been tied to the male gender (den Brink & Benschop; Picardi, 2019; Salminen-Karlsson, 2017). Berg, Gahman & Nunn (2015), make the same claim, and caution us not to assume that masculinities are anti-school, because there are varying ways of being a man. These researchers have suggested a thorough analysis of the geography of academic masculinities, and the way these are reproduced in specific contexts. Academic masculinities stereotypically depict men as the ideal academic. In higher education institutions, these stereotypes are manifest in research, recruitment and selection processes (Herschberg, 2016; Herschberg & Van den Brink, 2015).

Similar descriptions are found in Hardy's novel, where education is perceived as the only path through which a true male identity is formed (Langland, 2013). In this novel, the protagonists Stephen Smith and Jude Fawley "aspire to higher education to overcome a perceived social inferiority and achieve a manhood founded on the basis of intellectual rather than physical prowess" (Langland, 2013, p. 76). Salminen-Karlsson (2018) portrays the academic man as one who is committed to science with no other responsibilities outside academia.

Concerns have been raised over the underrepresentation of women in senior academic positions (Harzing, Vinkenbunrg & Eugen, 2018) resulting from the societal expectations of the role of men and women. The predominant societal expectation is that men are more assertive and competent than women. As such, the stereotypical successful academic is competitive and assertive (Harzing et al., 2018; Picardi, 2019).

This section lays the foundation for exploring undergraduate male students' construction of masculinities and academic excellence at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Save University.

2.9. The Role of Religion on Academic Excellence

Research has increasingly recognized the role of religion and spirituality in supporting male students' persistence and success in higher education. For many students, particularly those from marginalized or minority backgrounds, religious beliefs and practices provide a critical source of resilience, coping mechanisms, and a sense of purpose that facilitates academic success. Harper (2012) found that for many Black male students, religion is seen as a driving force in their academic lives. His participants believed that their success was “god-driven,” attributing their achievements to divine intervention or guidance (Harper, 2012, p. 12). This perspective aligns with the findings of Jackson et al. (2013), who identified religion and spirituality as significant factors in improving retention rates among African American college students. These students often rely on spiritual practices such as prayer, Bible study, and church communities to support their psychological and mental well-being, especially in the face of academic and social challenges.

In a similar vein, Leptz (2018) explored the role of faith in the academic lives of students, noting that many participants emphasized how their religious upbringing, particularly within Christian communities, provided a sense of purpose and motivation during their college years. One student, for example, discussed how his active involvement in the church and his faith in God gave him the strength to overcome barriers related to his race and socioeconomic status, allowing him to open opportunities for others who faced similar challenges (Leptz, 2018, p. 94). This finding underscores the importance of faith as a stabilizing force that contributes not only to personal academic success but also to a broader sense of social responsibility and empowerment.

The influence of religion on academic success is particularly relevant in the context of African higher education institutions, where religious traditions often intertwine with students' personal identities. Save University, located in Maxixe and established by the Roman Catholic Church, is one such institution where religion may play a significant role in shaping students' academic experiences and attitudes. The Catholic tradition, with its emphasis on moral values, community, and discipline, may contribute to the formation of gendered identities and academic excellence among male students in the Arts and Social Sciences.

Previous studies have shown that religious values can influence academic outcomes by promoting qualities such as perseverance, discipline, and a strong ethical framework (King, 2003; Smart, 2014). At Save University, where Catholic teachings permeate both academic and social environments, male students may internalize specific notions of masculinity, success, and personal responsibility that align with religious ideals. This interplay between religion, masculinity, and academic achievement warrants further exploration, particularly in understanding how religious beliefs influence male students' engagement with their studies and their ability to navigate the challenges of higher education.

Thus, this study sought to examine the role of religion in shaping the construction of masculinity and academic excellence among male students in the Arts and Social Sciences at Save University. By investigating how religious influences intersect with students' academic experiences, this research aimed to shed light on the ways in which faith contributes to or complicates the pursuit of academic success in a religiously-affiliated institution. This exploration is essential for understanding the broader social, cultural, and institutional factors that affect academic performance and persistence among male students in higher education, particularly in African contexts.

2.10. Construction of Masculinities among Mozambican Males

The construction of masculinities in Mozambique is a complex and multifaceted process that is deeply influenced by cultural, socio-economic, and political contexts. Slegh, Mariano, and Barker (2017), in their article “Being a Man in Maputo: Masculinities, Poverty, and Violence in Mozambique,” explore how cultural norms and societal expectations shape the performance of masculinities in both domestic and public spheres. Their study reveals that the cultural

construction of masculinities in Mozambique is closely tied to issues of power, poverty, and violence, with men often expressing their masculinity through aggressive behaviours, particularly in contexts where they feel economically or socially disempowered.

This notion of masculinity as both culturally constructed and context-dependent is further emphasized by Groes-Green (2009) in his study “Hegemonic and Subordinated Masculinities: Class, Violence, and Sexual Performance Among Young Mozambican Men.” Groes-Green stresses the importance of considering the specific context in which masculinities are enacted, noting that they cannot be understood as a monolithic concept. Instead, masculinities are shaped by various factors such as class, ethnicity, religion, and geography. Groes-Green observes that in environments where economic power is limited, men may resort to violence, including sexual violence, as a way to assert their dominance and maintain authority, particularly in their interactions with women (Groes-Green, 2009). This pattern of male violence, he argues, is intricately tied to the pressure men face to live up to cultural ideals of masculinity.

The intersections of culture and masculinity in Mozambique are also explored by Langa (2014), who points out that sexual conquest is often viewed as a key marker of masculinity in the country. In many Mozambican cultures, sexual prowess is highly valued, and young men frequently engage in harmful practices, such as sexual violence or the use of performance-enhancing drugs, to prove their masculinity. This pursuit of "superior" sexual performance is not only driven by individual desire but is also shaped by societal expectations that penalize young men for failing to meet culturally prescribed standards of sexual stamina (Morreira, 2016). Early ejaculation, for example, is often ridiculed, pushing young men to take extreme measures to enhance their sexual endurance and conform to the local conception of masculinity. These behaviours are symptomatic of a broader cultural pattern in which masculinity is equated with sexual dominance, and men who fail to meet these expectations may feel emasculated.

Moreover, the anthropological research conducted by Morreira (2016) suggests that for many young men in Mozambique, fatherhood is central to their identity as "complete men." Becoming a father is not only a personal milestone but also a social imperative, as it symbolizes maturity, responsibility, and permanence. The desire to leave a legacy through children is deeply embedded in the local cultural practices, including the practice of lobola, which is seen as a means of reinforcing traditional gender roles and the subordination of women (Morreira, 2016).

This eschatological dimension of masculinity, where having children ensures that one is remembered after death, reflects the profound cultural significance of masculinity in Mozambican society.

The prevailing masculinity culture in Mozambique, as described by Wheller (2014), underscores the centrality of economic responsibilities in the performance of masculinity. To be recognized as a “real man,” an individual must not only demonstrate sexual prowess and fatherhood but also fulfil economic obligations. This emphasis on economic success as a marker of masculinity often places additional pressure on men to conform to rigid societal norms, which can perpetuate cycles of poverty and violence.

The construction of masculinities among Mozambican males is deeply influenced by cultural expectations, economic realities, and social pressures. The performance of masculinity is not simply an individual act but is shaped by a complex web of cultural, social, and economic factors that guide male behaviour. This research has important implications for understanding how masculinity is constructed in higher education settings, particularly at Save University, where traditional gender norms and religious influences intersect. By exploring how Mozambican male students negotiate these various influences in their academic lives, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which masculinity is performed and its impact on academic excellence. Specifically, it explores how these cultural constructions of masculinity may shape male students' experiences and outcomes in the Arts and Social Sciences at Save University.

2.11. Hegemonic Masculinities

Hegemonic masculinity, a concept that has been widely studied in gender studies and social research, is understood as a dominant form of masculinity that enforces certain ideals, roles, and behaviours expected from men in a given society. The term “hegemony,” derived from the Greek word *hegemon* (meaning leadership or dominance), has historically been used to describe power relations within political and social structures (The Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003). In gender studies, particularly within masculinities research, it has been adapted to explain how certain forms of masculinity come to dominate others, shaping gender dynamics and reinforcing inequalities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Scholars have long acknowledged that the concept of hegemonic masculinity must be understood within specific cultural, social, and economic contexts, particularly in African societies where constructions of masculinity are complex and diverse (Ratele, 2018). This complexity means that studies of masculinities must account for local variations in how hegemonic masculinity is constructed and performed (Groes-Green, 2009). In this regard, hegemonic masculinities are not universal; rather, they are context-dependent and shaped by various societal norms, including religious, economic, and political influences. Each community develops its own model of hegemonic masculinity, against which men measure their behaviour and identity (Slegh, Mariano & Barker, 2017). This understanding highlights the need for research that explores how hegemonic masculinity is constructed and enacted in particular communities or institutions, such as Save University in Mozambique.

In African contexts, hegemonic masculinity often involves a set of behaviours that emphasize male dominance over women and other men who do not conform to the dominant gender norms. These behaviours include economic control, sexual conquest, physical dominance, and the exercise of political, judicial, and cultural authority (Groes-Green, 2009). Specifically, hegemonic masculinity is characterized by aggression, sexual dominance, and multiple sexual partnerships, often with an underlying emphasis on controlling women. This construction of masculinity is often oppressive, not only toward women but also toward men who fail to embody these dominant ideals (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The intersection of hegemonic masculinity and religion has been explored in gender and religious studies, particularly regarding how religio-cultural teachings shape aggressive and patriarchal forms of masculinity. In many African societies, religious doctrines and practices are integral to the formation of gender identities, reinforcing the traditional power dynamics between men and women (Groes-Green, 2009). This is evident in the ways religious teachings often normalize male dominance and control, which are key aspects of hegemonic masculinity. For example, in Mozambique, cultural and religious narratives promote male authority in both the public and private spheres, positioning men as the heads of households and society, and subjugating women to subordinate roles (Morreira, 2016).

In the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the harmful aspects of hegemonic masculinity such as sexual violence and promiscuity become even more problematic. Sigh (2022) argues that while

certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity, such as heterosexuality, competitiveness, and dominance, are common across various contexts, these ideals may have particularly destructive implications in the African context, where the intersection of masculinity and sexual health is of critical concern. The emphasis on sexual conquest and male control over women's bodies can perpetuate unsafe sexual practices, contributing to the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. These hegemonic ideals are, therefore, not only socially damaging but also pose significant public health risks.

Research on hegemonic masculinities has increasingly focused on how young men, particularly in educational settings, construct and perform these dominant ideals. For example, the study by Groes-Green (2009) on young Mozambican men reveals how economic and social disempowerment can lead men to assert their masculinity through violent or coercive behaviours. This dynamic is crucial in understanding how masculinity is enacted by male students at Save University, where issues of power, dominance, and masculinity intersect with academic performance and social engagement.

Given the influence of cultural, religious, and economic factors on the construction of hegemonic masculinity in Mozambique, this study aimed to explore how male undergraduate students at Save University construct and perform hegemonic masculinity within the context of their academic lives. It examines the ways in which these students navigate the dominant ideals of masculinity and how these constructions affect their academic engagement, relationships with peers and faculty, and overall academic success. This research envisages contributing to the broader understanding of how masculinity is not only a personal identity but also a powerful social construct that shapes experiences in higher education.

2.12. The Masculine ideology

Gender ideology emphasizes the importance of socially constructed gender norms and defines gender as a social construct (Luyt, 2005). Various frameworks have been developed to operationalize the concept of masculine ideology. Masculine ideology refers to "beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards of male behaviour" (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993, p. 12). It suggests that masculinities are reproduced in multiple ways, with no singular path to manhood; consequently, ideals of masculinity may vary across

individuals and cultures. Masculine ideology incorporates cultural norms that define masculinity, expected male behaviour, and the individual internalization of these norms and expectations (Luyt, 2005, Ratele, 2018). As Levant in his early work (1996) asserts, "it is not the biological differences of sex that make for masculinity and femininity" (p. 260). In most cultures, masculinities have relied on traditional ideology. The traditional ideology of masculinity has prevented the development of other masculinities, especially if these do not identify with heterosexuality (Ratele, 2013).

In the context of Mozambique, the cultural norms that constitute masculine ideology portray men as breadwinners, family heads, and protectors (Abomin, 2012; Groes-Green, 2011). This view aligns with the social constructionist approach to gender, which regards gender as a cultural construction rather than a biologically determined characteristic (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993). Masculine ideology thus encompasses beliefs and expectations about what men should or should not do.

Previous research has highlighted that adherence to traditional masculine ideals is often linked to lower academic performance. For instance, Musser, Pierre, Wilson, and Schwartz (2017) found that male students' academic underachievement was influenced by a "disconnect between high school and university academic expectations, adherence to rigid male gender roles, and an inability to prioritize and engage with faculty and staff" (p. 87). Traditional masculine ideology views academic engagement as effeminate and something to be avoided by a "real man." Gender-role conflict, particularly the tension between success, status, and power, can induce a strong fear of failure in men. According to Whitehead (2003), men who are unable to meet the stereotypical cultural expectation that "a real man must never fail" may experience intense anxiety, which can lead them to avoid situations where failure is publicly visible, such as in a college or university setting.

O'Neil (1981) defines gender role conflict and strain as "psychological states where masculine, feminine, or androgynous roles have negative consequences for a person resulting from discrepancies between the real self and the ideal self-concept that is culturally associated with gender" (p. 204, italics in original). In college or university settings, many students may be motivated to avoid failure by maintaining high marks or a strong GPA. When this is not achievable, dropping out may serve as a coping mechanism. Conversely, as noted elsewhere in

this study, many male students have leveraged traditional masculine norms as tools for academic success (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Edwards & Jones, 2009).

This study on the construction of masculinity and academic excellence aims to deepen understanding of the types of masculinities constructed by undergraduate male students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

2.13. Peer Influence

Numerous studies have linked peer influence to negative academic outcomes (Merdasse, 2023), positing that peers may lead students to engage in risky behaviors that are incompatible with academic success. For instance, Swartout (2012) found that individuals who adhered to tightly-knit peer networks were more likely to engage in violent behaviours and develop hostile attitudes toward women. While the relationship between peer influence and academic underachievement is well-documented, researchers caution against overgeneralizing these findings. It is essential to distinguish between negative and positive peer influences.

Several studies have also highlighted the positive impact of peer influence on academic outcomes. For example, Kala (2024) explored the role of peers in promoting academic engagement and found that interactions with peers can significantly shape students' socio-emotional development, cognitive growth, and overall educational experiences. According to Kala (2024), when students feel valued by their peers, they are more likely to engage actively in classroom activities, participate in discussions, and share their ideas and opinions (p. 266-267). Peers provide an environment where students feel safe and connected, fostering academic and social engagement.

Aydin (2017) asserts that learning is often facilitated through peer interactions, with peer relationships playing a crucial role in academic success. Aydin notes that maintaining positive relationships with both peers and faculty members is positively correlated with academic achievement (p. 102). Similarly, Kharba and Chahal (2024) examined the role of positive and negative peer influence in shaping students' personal development and character traits in a boarding school setting in India. They found that positive peer influence could foster healthy competition, motivation, and support for academic pursuits, encouraging students to strive for excellence. Kharba and Chahal (2024) further observed that positive peer influence could inspire

students to study harder, engage in productive discussions, and collaborate on projects, ultimately improving academic outcomes (p. 1228).

This section is particularly relevant to my study, as boys and men have been socialized to conform to societal expectations of masculinity. Peer influence plays a central role in this socialization process, as peers are responsible for transmitting, reinforcing, monitoring, and sanctioning societal messages about what it means to be a "real man" and how one should behave. Berg and Luckmann (1966) describe this process as "secondary socialization," through which individuals interpret the world around them. Male students, in particular, learn from their peers what behaviours are expected of them to be considered "real men." This study aims to explore how undergraduate male students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Save University construct their masculinity.

2.14. Family support

Research has emphasized the importance of students' pre-college experiences, particularly the role of family members and peers in shaping students' identities and aspirations for higher education (Davis, 2002; Harper, 2012). Harper (2012) developed an anti-deficit achievement framework to better understand male students' success in college. His framework posits that familial factors, such as family interest in schooling and the active involvement of family members in shaping their sons' aspirations, play a critical role in the identity development of high-achieving males.

Harper (2012) found that family support, particularly eagerness for sons to enter college, combined with positive interactions with peers and faculty who held favourable views of academics, contributed to better academic outcomes. Furthermore, the teaching and learning environments were identified as significant in constructing a success-oriented masculinity. Similarly, Chapagai (2024) identified that factors such as family income, parental guidance, and the economic and cultural capital invested by parents in their sons' education influenced their academic performance.

In Harper's (2012) study, high-achieving males developed defensive mechanisms to counteract the traditional gender roles that might otherwise have hindered their academic pursuits. These students did not define their masculinity according to the traditional masculine ideology,

characterized by material possession and sexual conquest, but rather embraced a more progressive and positive view of masculinity, including a willingness to assume responsibilities both on and off campus. The findings revealed that higher-achieving participants cultivated meaningful relationships with women through study groups and collaborative campus activities.

While my study explored how undergraduate male students construct their masculinities, the role of family support is pivotal in understanding the broader context in which these masculinities are formed.

2.15. Comprehensive Sexuality Education and the Formal Curriculum in Mozambique

Sexuality education was first introduced into Mozambique's National Education System curriculum in 1986 by the Instituto Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação (INDE) with the primary aim of addressing the increasing rates of unwanted pregnancies among teenagers in schools (INDE/MINED, 2003; Zawangani, 2007). Initially, the focus of sexuality education was primarily on the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The integration of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) into the national curriculum also reflects global efforts to combat gender-based violence (GBV) and HIV/AIDS in schools (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2015).

CSE is grounded in a holistic vision that provides students with opportunities to develop positive values and attitudes towards health and gender equality, while also fostering critical thinking skills. The curriculum emphasizes the prevention of sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and discrimination (SIDA, 2016; Parkes & Heslop, 2016; UNESCO, 2009; Vilaça et al., 2013). This aspect of the curriculum is unique, as it is the only space where students are encouraged to build their moral character and adapt to an ever-changing society (Fenhane, 2012). It aims to produce students with sound moral character, which can be reflected in values such as justice, integrity, and respect for oneself and others.

Previous studies have underscored the importance of sexuality education as a critical component of the curriculum for promoting gender parity in education (UNESCO, 2009; SIDA, 2016). Despite the government's efforts to address sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS in Mozambican schools, significant gaps remain in the sexuality education curriculum, particularly in relation to gender equality and gender-based violence (UNESCO, 2015). The lack of

comprehensive content on gender parity within the CSE curriculum poses a significant challenge to formal education in Mozambique, especially considering the vulnerability of many girls to abuse by older male students and teachers in the learning environment (Parkes & Heslop, 2011).

The high rates of HIV and STIs among secondary school students, coupled with high dropout rates among girls due to early marriage and pregnancy, have prompted the Ministry of Education to integrate sexuality education as a cross-curricular theme in both primary and secondary schools in Mozambique (Vilaça et al., 2013; ASCD Panel on Education, 1988). Research on hegemonic masculinities and health has shown that men's health problems are often linked to culturally accepted notions of masculinity, with high-risk sexual behaviour being a significant consequence of these gender expectations (Courtenay, 2000; Mathewson, 2009).

Amaral et al. (2024) highlight that there is a cultural belief that both young men and women lack the "cognitive and emotional maturity to recognize and address violence," which perpetuates a cycle of victimization among students. Sexuality education plays a key role in teaching students about appropriate gendered behaviour and the responsibilities associated with various social roles within the community. The primary goal of sexuality education is to equip young people with the information and skills they need to make informed, healthy, and safe decisions about their lives and futures.

Abomin (2012) examined the central role of sexuality and bodily expression in the assertion of masculinity and found that sex and sexuality are crucial for understanding men's power and the enactment of masculinity. According to Abomin, "sex and the body have become key factors in disentangling the changes in gender relations" (2012, p. 69). However, the CSE curriculum largely remains silent on the relationship between gender construction (masculinities and femininities) and the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Exploring how the CSE curriculum influences the construction of masculinities in schools and communities is crucial, as existing literature has emphasized the need to evaluate the role of school-based programs in the development of gender roles (Verma & Mahendra, 2004). Additionally, there have been calls for a greater focus on targeting men in sexuality education, not only because sexuality affects everyone, but also because men have a responsibility for reproductive health and can act as agents of change (Chitando & Chiringoma, 2012). This issue will be addressed in Chapter Five of this study.

The absence of a specific module dedicated to CSE as a compulsory subject in teacher training colleges, coupled with the lack of gender-focused content in these institutions, has hindered the effective integration of comprehensive sexuality education into the formal curriculum in Mozambique. Without addressing gender inequalities in the CSE curriculum, students' perspectives will inevitably reflect the cultural and religious influences from which they come.

This exploratory study aimed to investigate the impact of the early school curriculum on the construction of masculinity among undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University.

2.16. Masculinities and Critical Pedagogies

Religio-cultural norms and practices, coupled with an inadequate and biased school curriculum, have contributed to gender imbalances and discrimination in schools. Scholars have increasingly recognized the interconnections between the construction of masculinities and various religio-cultural factors that shape the experiences of teaching and learning. Critical pedagogies are particularly useful in examining how masculinities are constructed in schools, especially within religious and cultural contexts, as they acknowledge that men's behaviours differ across societies. Masculinities, as "lived experiences," are shaped by specific cultural contexts (Kaunda, 2014, p. 5). Different communities hold distinct expectations of men. For instance, a religious community might emphasize values such as mutual respect, love, and care, whereas a school community might associate masculinity with violence, dominance, and risk-taking behavior.

A core tenet of critical pedagogy is the transformation of society toward gender justice. The Global Monitoring Report highlights the role that curricula play in shaping students' gender perceptions, stating, "Curricula can encourage students to question gender stereotypes and promote equitable behavior" (Global Monitoring Report, 2015). Furthermore, the report asserts that "gender-responsive teaching is guided not only by pedagogic approaches but also by curriculum content, textbooks, and other learning materials, which serve as vehicles for socialization" (Global Monitoring Report, 2015, p. 178).

Critical pedagogues have identified certain academic practices, such as boldness, competitiveness, and assertive speaking, as being closely associated with hegemonic masculinities (Francis, Read, & Melling, 2003; Leathwood & Read, 2009). Analysing how

masculinities are constructed and performed in educational settings, as well as in religious and cultural contexts, is crucial, as literature has established a concerning link between culturally and religiously constructed masculinities and high-risk sexual behaviour (Chitando, 2007; Courtenay, 2000). Research has shown that in many societies, key characteristics of "a real man" include being sexually assertive, willing to take risks, and displaying courage (Chitando, 2007, p. 115). Macia et al. (2011) found that in Mozambique, traditional views of men as primary providers and figures of authority continue to exert a significant influence on male attitudes and behaviours (Macia et al., 2011, p. 6).

Within academic settings, it is essential to raise awareness about the need to deconstruct cultural and traditional views of masculinities, as these norms can be harmful to men themselves and to society at large. Critical and feminist pedagogues raise important questions: What do male students say about their identities? Do learning materials promote gender equality? (Woodlock, 1995; Briskin & Coulter, 1992). The Mozambique Ministry of Education and Human Development has introduced night classes to address the educational needs of out-of-school youth, as well as boys, girls, and adults whose access to day schools is limited due to factors such as poverty, unemployment, and gender discrimination. The Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report states that young men from poorer households are at high risk of dropping out of school, as families often respond to economic crises by withdrawing boys from school to engage in manual labour or cattle herding (Global Monitoring Report, 2015, p. 173).

This study sought to explore how masculinities have been constructed in academic spaces, particularly within the curriculum, and how these constructions impact the educational experience.

2.17. Religion and Critical Pedagogies

In his work *A Potential Theological Pedagogy for Reconstructing Life-Giving Masculinities in African Context: The Case of the Pilot Program on Gender, Religion, and Health*, Kaunda (2014) emphasizes the importance of fostering critical consciousness in students. He asserts that this critical awareness is essential for "deepening students' understanding of masculinities, patriarchy, and their connections with other forces of oppression, as well as political, socioeconomic, cultural, and religious structures" (Kaunda, 2014, p. 7). This link between

religion and critical pedagogies is underscored by the recognition that both are concerned with transforming individuals and society as a whole. In this context, the lived experiences and the surrounding environment of individuals are vital considerations in religious inquiry.

A growing body of research has shown that religious beliefs and practices play a significant role in shaping human behaviour, particularly in the transformation of masculinities for the betterment of society (Van Klinken, 2011; Chitando, 2010). For instance, upon realizing the pervasive nature of hegemonic masculinities among young adult men in a Zimbabwean church community, one Christian church sought to transform these men into "new creations." This transformation involved shifting from aggressive masculinities to what they called "accommodative masculinities," which involved abandoning hostile attitudes towards women, children, and other men, and instead embracing a new identity characterized by joy, self-love, and love for others (Chitando, 2007, p. 117).

Scholars have long recognized the interconnections between the formation of masculinities and religious, cultural, and social factors that influence students' attitudes toward and experiences in learning environments. Certain school practices, such as those associated with traditionally masculine traits, namely communication skills, assertiveness, boldness, and competitiveness, have prompted researchers to consider students' social, religious, and cultural backgrounds when examining pedagogical practices. This is because knowledge is deeply rooted in one's personal experiences, culture, and religion (Kaunda, 2014). Consequently, religion and culture provide a rich terrain for critical pedagogies to explore how the school environment, religious practices, and cultural norms collectively shape the construction of masculinities in specific contexts.

Culture and religion have long been recognized as influential institutions in the construction of gender roles (Dube, 2003). Van Klinken (2011) illustrates how religious teachings, particularly those derived from sacred Christian texts, contribute to gender inequalities that are crucial to understanding unsafe sexual behaviour and HIV transmission. Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping gender identities and roles. Research by Greenfield and Marks (2007) demonstrates that individuals who frequently participate in religious groups tend to exhibit a stronger religious social identity. Harper's (2012) study further highlights how many men use their religious identities to cope with racism and other challenges faced in academic settings. Several men

persist in their academic courses, believing that God is guiding their lives and academic achievements.

Chitando and Biri (2013), in their investigation of how masculine identity and sexuality are shaped by cultural and religious factors within Pentecostal churches, highlight the role of informal religious and cultural teachings in perpetuating gender imbalances in both church and society. Despite the church's teachings on the development of young men's character, such as promoting hard work and faithfulness to partners, Chitando and Biri (2013) found that masculinities continue to be defined by an insatiable drive for sex, with men expected to pursue sex at any cost, as this is perceived as a social obligation of masculinity. Moreover, the research shows that young women, particularly those seeking marriage, are taught to be sexually available to men whenever needed, based on the belief that "men have a higher sex drive" and that women's role is simply to accommodate and be "more patient," as men are viewed as "weak in the area of sexuality" (Chitando & Biri, 2013, p. 43).

From the literature above, it is evident that both culture and religion play critical roles in reinforcing patriarchal masculinities. However, emerging literature on masculinity and religion in Africa has recognised that over the few past decades men have navigated fundamental changes, which have forced them to reconfiguring their identities and positions in gender hierarchies (Kirby & van Klinken, 2022; Manyonganise et al., 2025).

Therefore, my study aimed to explore how religio-cultural messages about masculinity, which male students carry with them into academic spaces, influenced the construction of their masculine identities at Save University.

2.18. Conclusion

This literature review has explored the construction of masculine identities among undergraduate male students and how these identities relate to their perceptions and experiences of academic excellence in higher education. The review highlighted the ongoing debates surrounding the definition and criteria of academic excellence, acknowledging that these understandings are constantly evolving. It examined various theoretical perspectives on masculinity and its intersection with academic success, showing how factors such as religion, culture, and social norms influence the ways in which male students define and perform academic excellence.

The literature also highlighted the complexity of masculinity, particularly in African contexts, where it is shaped by cultural, economic, and religious influences. Despite the growing body of research in this area, there remains a need for further investigation into how masculinities are constructed both culturally and academically within higher education institutions, particularly in the context of Mozambican universities like Save University. This gap in the literature calls for more research into the role of gendered identity formation in shaping academic outcomes and the lived experiences of male students.

The following chapter will outline the theoretical framework that informs this study, providing the conceptual foundation for exploring the relationship between masculinity and academic excellence in higher education.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that underpinned the study, offering a conceptual lens to understand how male undergraduate students in the Arts and Social Sciences at Save University construct their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence. To achieve this, the study draws on four interconnected theories:

1. **The Social Construction of Masculinity Theory** (Kimmel & Messner, 2010), which explores how masculinities are shaped through social interactions and cultural norms.
2. **The Theory of Masculinity and Academic Excellence** (adapted from Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Harper, 2008), which examines how notions of masculinity intersect with perceptions and performances of academic success.
3. **The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity** (Jones & McEwen, 2000), which provides a framework for understanding how various aspects of identity (e.g., gender, race, and culture) intersect to influence individual experiences.
4. **The Theory of Masculine Identity Development** (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009), which offers insights into the processes through which male students construct and negotiate their gender identities.

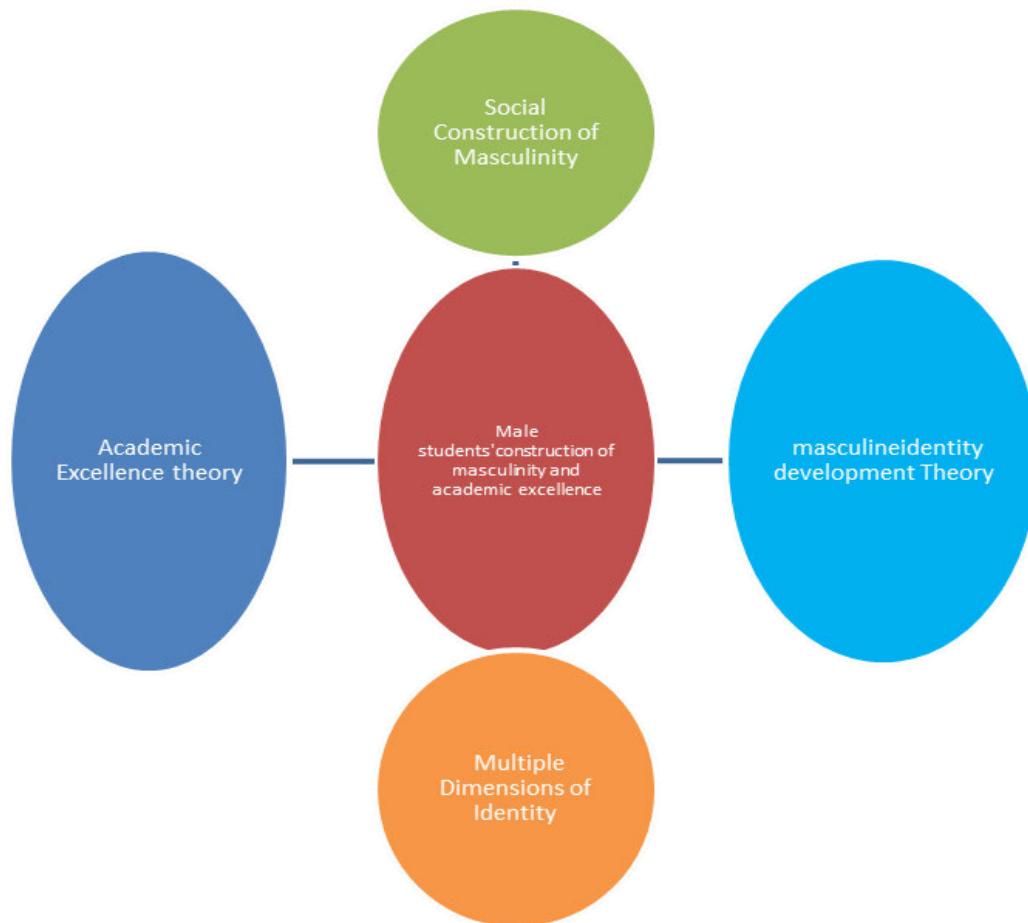
These theories collectively offer a robust framework for analysing the complex interplay between masculinity, identity formation, and academic achievement. They enable an examination of the dynamic and multifaceted ways in which male students navigate their gendered identities in the context of higher education.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the literature underpinning each theory, illustrating their relevance to the study. It then synthesizes the interconnections between these theoretical perspectives, culminating in a conceptual model that informs the research. The relationships among these theories are visually summarized in the figure below, offering a clear representation of their interrelated contributions to the study.

This framework not only guided the interpretation of the findings but also provided a foundation for understanding the broader sociocultural and institutional factors that influence male students' experiences in higher education.

The relationship between the four theories outlined above has been summarized by the figure below:

Figure 2 (Adapted): Relationship between the four theories and how these interconnect to form the lens through which this study was analyzed.



3.1. Social Construction of Masculinity

The Social Construction of Masculinity theory (Kimmel & Messner, 2010) provides a foundational lens for examining how male gender identity is developed through socialization within various social structures such as educational institutions, religious communities, families, and sports. The Social Construction of Masculinity theory emphasizes that masculinity is not a

biological given but a socially performed identity shaped by interactions and expectations within specific cultural contexts. Kimmel and Messner (2010) articulate that "our sex may be male, but our identity as men is developed through a complex process of interactions with the culture in which we learn the gendered scripts appropriate to our culture" (p. xvii). This conceptualization underscores the diversity of masculine experiences and rejects any universal notion of masculinity, affirming that the social construction of masculinity varies across cultures, social groups, and historical periods.

Within the higher education context, particularly at Save University, the theory highlights the influence of students' diverse backgrounds in shaping their experiences of masculinity. Male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students navigate these constructions in relation to academic excellence, negotiating societal pressures and institutional norms. As Davis and Laker (2004) argue, understanding the social construction of masculinity is critical to addressing the unique developmental trajectories of male college students, who often face pressures to conform to traditional masculine ideals.

Social constructionists propose three key tenets relevant to this study: (i) masculinity is a performed identity rather than an innate trait; (ii) masculinities are experienced differently across social and cultural groups; and (iii) these constructions evolve over time as individuals mature and engage with new contexts (Kimmel & Messner, 2010). For male students at Save University, this suggests that their understanding of academic excellence is intertwined with their evolving masculine identities, shaped by interactions with peers, faculty, and institutional norms.

Language plays a critical role in the construction of masculinity. Burr (2015) argues that language provides the conceptual framework through which individuals construct and negotiate their identities. For example, academically successful male students may describe themselves or others using adjectives tied to traditional or alternative notions of masculinity, such as heroism, strength, or vulnerability (Walling, 2019). These linguistic practices illuminate how gender identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed through social interactions within the university setting.

Further, O'Neil and colleagues' (1986) concept of **Gender Role Conflict and Strain** highlights the psychological pressures men face when trying to conform to societal gender norms. These include restrictive emotionality, obsession with achievement, and competition, all of which can intersect with the academic context. Male students may associate their academic success with traditional masculine traits such as ambition, power, and competition, reinforcing societal expectations (O'Neil, 1981). However, this can also lead to internal conflicts, as Davis (2002) found that many college men struggle to reconcile traditional masculine ideals with their personal experiences and aspirations.

Recent studies have advanced this perspective by exploring how male students challenge and redefine traditional masculinity within supportive academic environments. For instance, André (2019) observed that male student-athletes transcended rigid expectations of masculinity by forming genuine relationships and seeking support from peers, faculty, and campus organizations. This allowed them to develop new, individualized conceptions of masculinity that celebrated their uniqueness rather than societal norms. These findings resonate with the experiences of male Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University, who construct their masculine identities through similar processes of interaction, reflection, and support.

In the context of this PhD study, the Social Construction of Masculinity theory helps answer the first research question: *How do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University construct their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence?* By examining their interactions within the university's social and academic structures, this framework illuminates the complex and dynamic processes through which these students negotiate their identities and aspirations.

3.2. Academic Excellence

This study explores male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of academic excellence at Save University. While research on academic excellence in higher education is evolving, there remains a lack of consensus on what constitutes an "excellent student." However, emerging scholarship has begun to illuminate the multifaceted experiences of high-achieving college and university students, especially from underrepresented groups.

The theoretical framework for this study draws on the work of Hotchkins and Dancy (2015), Harper (2008, 2010), and Bukoski and Hatch (2016), who conceptualize academic excellence as a complex and dynamic construct that transcends traditional metrics such as grade point averages (GPAs) and test scores. The theories above were employed to understand the factors shaping male undergraduate students' conceptions of academic excellence at Save University.

3.2.1. Hotchkins and Dancy's Model of Academic Excellence

Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) define academic excellence as a holistic process encompassing cognitive abilities and the effective utilization of institutional resources for personal and community advancement. Their framework includes three key dimensions:

1. **Major Focus:** This dimension emphasizes students' commitment to their academic disciplines and their active engagement with academic and professional opportunities. Hotchkins and Dancy argue that students who exhibit academic excellence are deeply involved in activities related to their majors, such as attending job fairs and conferences, engaging with faculty, and collaborating with peers. These behaviours demonstrate a proactive approach to academic success and career readiness (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).
2. **Black Male Identity:** Academic excellence, particularly for Black male students, involves resisting negative cultural stereotypes associated with masculinity. Hotchkins and Dancy (2015) highlight the importance of challenging societal narratives that depict men as disengaged from education. Academic excellence in this context includes attending classes regularly, completing assignments diligently, and rejecting conformist gender norms that undermine educational achievement.
3. **Intergenerational Fulfilment:** This dimension reflects students' aspirations to meet familial and community expectations through educational success. For many students, academic excellence is tied to a sense of responsibility to uplift their communities. Activities such as taking on leadership roles and participating in community service underscore the role of education as a vehicle for personal and collective advancement (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015).

3.2.2. Harper's Perspective on High Achievers

Harper (2008, 2010) expands on the notion of academic excellence by emphasizing the behaviours and attributes of high-achieving students. He identifies academic excellence as earning a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale, engaging in leadership roles across multiple campus organizations, forming meaningful relationships with faculty and senior administrators, and participating in enriching educational experiences. Harper's model underscores the integration of academic success with co-curricular and social achievements, highlighting the multifaceted nature of student excellence.

3.2.3. Bukoski and Hatch on Identity and Academic Excellence

Bukoski and Hatch (2016) explored the intersection of identity and academic success, particularly for Black and Latino male students. Their findings reveal that students often leverage constructions of masculinity to remain focused on their academic goals. For these students, academic excellence is tied to resilience, a sense of pride, and an ability to navigate normative (hegemonic) constructions of masculinity. Rather than viewing masculinity as inherently problematic, Bukoski and Hatch argue that it can serve as a motivating factor for academic success, fostering confidence and a commitment to educational aspirations.

3.2.4. Linking Theories to the PhD Study

The theoretical perspectives above collectively informed the exploration of how male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University conceive of academic excellence. By examining how students navigate institutional expectations, challenge stereotypes, and engage with their academic and social environments, this study addresses critical gaps in understanding the diverse and nuanced ways in which academic excellence is experienced and expressed. This theoretical grounding also aligns with the study's aim of highlighting the interplay between personal identity, institutional resources, and community aspirations in shaping academic success.

3.3. Masculine Identity Development Theory

This study's third and fourth objectives were to explore how and why male undergraduate Humanities students at Save University construct their masculine identities in relation to their

academic excellence. Masculine Identity Development Theory (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009) provided a valuable theoretical lens for understanding the interplay between gender identity and academic performance among these students.

Davis and Laker (2004) were among the first theorists to examine the identity development of college and university male students as gendered beings. They argue that traditional theories of masculinity often fail to account for the nuanced and contextualized ways in which masculinities operate across different temporal and spatial contexts. Recognizing that men do not develop uniformly prevents reliance on stereotypical assumptions about masculinity and encourages an exploration of the diverse developmental experiences of men. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding how male students at Save University construct and perform their masculine identities within an academic environment.

Building on this foundation, Edwards and Jones (2009) developed a theory of college men's gender identity development based on participants' lived experiences. Their study highlighted how societal expectations impose rigid, narrow conceptions of masculinity, compelling male students to perform their gender identity through what was metaphorically described as "wearing a mask." This performative masculinity often resulted in consequences such as the degradation of women, shallow interpersonal relationships, and internal conflicts between authentic self-expression and societal conformity. Participants expressed feelings of regret, shame, and disappointment, ultimately leading to a critical reflection on societal influences and the eventual removal of the metaphorical mask. These findings underscore the importance of examining external influences such as personal and academic experiences in shaping gender identity, which this study addresses within the context of Save University.

Rogers and Mitchell (2022) devised a theory of college and university black male identity development known as black male identity development theory (Rogers & Mitchell, 2022). This theory comprises four important phases (acknowledgement of black male identity, understating of differences among black males, creation of professional identities, and transition into black male role model). According to these authors, **acknowledgement of black male identity**, which is the first phase, implies the appreciation of being a black male. This included exploring questions about one's origin, as one prepares to enroll at college or university. The second phase, **understanding of differences among black males**, means that as students enter college, they

have to consider the fact that not all men are the same. With this in mind, students are challenged to explore, and formulate their own identities. **The creation of professional identity** refers to students' exposure to professional male leadership, whereby students learn to connect with meaningful people irrespective of their gender. The final phase, **transition into role model**, is the students' desire for the coming generations to learn the history of black men (Rogers & Mitchell, 2022).

Yank (2014) further expanded the discourse on masculine identity development by exploring the experiences of college men in a Study Abroad Program. Her phenomenological study revealed that male students often expressed their masculinity through competitiveness, particularly in academics and sports, and through their definitions of personal success. This competitiveness was evident in their prioritization of academic achievement and active engagement in extracurricular activities. Yank's study also identified physical strength and self-determined definitions of success as benchmarks of masculinity.

Both Rogers and Mitchell's (2022), and Yank's (2014) insights resonate with the current study's exploration of how male students relate their constructions of masculinity to academic excellence, particularly the ways they use academic achievement to express and affirm their masculine identity.

In applying Masculine Identity Development Theory to the male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University, this study sought to understand how students negotiate and perform their masculinities within the context of academic excellence. By examining their experiences, the study investigated the extent to which societal expectations, institutional influences, and personal aspirations shape their constructions of masculinity. Furthermore, the study integrates Astin's (1999) Student Involvement Theory and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Student Development Theory to situate masculinity within broader frameworks of student engagement and identity development in higher education.

Astin's (1999) focus on the behavioural processes that facilitate student development, such as active involvement in academics and campus life, aligns with the findings of Yank (2014) regarding competitiveness in academic contexts. Similarly, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of student identity development, particularly those addressing competence, autonomy,

and integrity, provide a comprehensive framework for analysing how male students balance their academic goals with their evolving conceptions of masculinity. These theoretical contributions offer an integrated approach to exploring the dynamic interplay between masculine identity and academic excellence, thereby enriching the understanding of male students' experiences at Save University.

Masculine Identity Development Theory underscores the complexity of masculine identity construction and its implications for academic performance. It provided a robust foundation for exploring how male students at Save University navigate societal pressures, institutional expectations, and personal goals to define their masculinity in relation to academic excellence.

3.4. Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Jones and McEwen (2000) developed the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI), which represents the dynamic construction of identity and the influence of evolving contexts on identity development among a diverse group of college women. This model conceptualizes identity as multidimensional and fluid, acknowledging that various identity dimensions such as social class, religious affiliation, geographic or regional background, and professional orientation interact to shape an individual's self-perception and lived experiences. Central to the MMDI is the notion that identity dimensions, including sexual orientation, race, culture, class, religion, and gender, orbit around a core identity. This core represents an individual's innermost sense of self, while the salience of specific dimensions is shaped by contextual factors such as "family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, career planning, and life goals" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 408).

Jones and McEwen's (2000) model also introduces a distinction between the "inside self" and the "outside identity," which illuminates the divergence between an individual's internal self-concept and externally imposed definitions of identity. Their findings emphasize that external descriptions of identity often fail to capture the essence of an individual's core identity. Participants in their study frequently described their core identities using intrinsic qualities such as "intelligence, kindness, compassion, and independence" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 409). Furthermore, the model identifies significant contextual influences on identity development, including race, culture, family dynamics, education, interpersonal relationships, and religion.

The MMDI provided a valuable lens for examining the interplay between contextual influences and identity dimensions. In this PhD study, the model was applied to explore how male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students at Save students construct their masculine identities in relation to their conceptions of academic excellence. By situating the study within the framework of the MMDI, it became possible to interrogate how intersecting dimensions such as race, class, and cultural background informed these students' gendered self-perceptions and academic behaviours. This approach not only deepens understanding of their experiences but also offers insights into the broader sociocultural factors influencing their academic identity development.

3.5. Critique to the theories underpinning the theoretical framework

Despite the adaptability of the four theories (the Social Construction of Masculine theory, the theory of Masculinity and Academic Excellence, the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, and the Theory of Masculine Identity Development) to the Mozambican higher education context, as evidenced in this study, these theories were originally developed to understanding college and university black male students' experiences in contexts marked by racial segregation in higher education institutions. Additionally, these theories are all domiciled in developed countries. The dearth of theories with an African face, may seduce researchers to assume that all [black] men perceive and experience masculinity the same way. These theories have not taken into consideration the intersecting identities and context specific factors, which have deeply influenced student identity development like the legacy of colonialism, unemployment, the legacy of war, post COVID-19 effects, and post-election violence, among many other factors and influencers that have shaped the Mozambican higher education landscape. Thus, the need for more nuanced theories coined in Africa for Africans.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the four theoretical frameworks that underpin this study, each serving as a lens through which the research questions were addressed. The first framework was used to examine the primary research question, which investigated how male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students construct their masculine identities at Save University. The second framework was employed to explore the students' conceptions of academic excellence

within this context. The third framework illuminated the complexities of how male undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences relate their construction of masculine identities to their understanding of academic excellence at Save University. Lastly, the fourth framework was applied to analyze the ways in which the construction of masculine identities among these students influences their perceptions of academic excellence. Together; these theories offer a robust foundation for interpreting the data and understanding the multifaceted ways in which male undergraduate Humanities and Social Sciences students construct their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence.

A key theme emerging from this chapter is the interconnectedness of theoretical insights and their application to the study's focus on identity construction. By adopting these complementary frameworks, the study aimed to provide a nuanced analysis of how intersecting factors such as gender, cultural background, and academic expectations shape students' experiences and perceptions of academic excellence.

This chapter laid the theoretical groundwork for the study by introducing and elaborating on four key frameworks. Each theory was contextualized in relation to a specific research question, demonstrating how the theoretical constructs inform the study's focus on male undergraduate students' conceptions of academic excellence. The discussion highlighted the relevance of these frameworks in exploring identity as a multifaceted and context-dependent construct, particularly in the context of male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University. This theoretical synthesis establishes the foundation for the subsequent chapters, which will translate these insights into methodological and analytical practices.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN

4.0. Introduction

This study aimed to explore how undergraduate male students in the Arts and Social Sciences construct and perform their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence at Save University. This chapter provides a detailed account of the research methodology and design employed to investigate this phenomenon. It outlines the qualitative approach adopted, emphasizing its suitability for exploring the complexities of identity construction and academic experiences within a specific socio-cultural and institutional context.

The chapter begins by discussing the principles of qualitative research, including its focus on understanding participants' lived experiences and its alignment with the interpretivist paradigm that underpins this study. The methods of sampling and recruitment are then outlined, explaining the processes through which participants were selected to ensure a diverse and representative sample. This is followed by a comprehensive description of the data generation and analysis processes, detailing the steps taken to generate, organize, and interpret the data.

Additionally, the chapter addresses critical considerations related to research ethics, trustworthiness, and the handling of language translation in the context of the study. These elements are crucial for ensuring the credibility and rigor of the research. The primary research question was: **How does the construction and performance of masculine identities among undergraduate male students in the Arts and Social Sciences at Save University relate to their academic excellence?**

To address this overarching question, the study explored the following sub-research questions:

1. What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of how they construct and perform their masculine identities at SAVE University?
2. What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of academic excellence at SAVE University?

3. How do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students relate their construction and performance of masculine identities to their academic excellence at SAVE University?
4. Why do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students relate their construction and performance of masculine identities to their academic excellence at SAVE University in the way that they do?

Through these research questions, the study sought to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the interplay between gender identity and academic achievement, shedding light on the unique experiences of male undergraduate students in the Arts and Social Sciences.

4.1. Research Design

This study examined the relationship between the construction and performance of masculine identities and academic excellence among undergraduate male students in the Arts and Social Sciences at SAVE University. A qualitative research design, situated within an interpretive research paradigm, was adopted to achieve this aim. This approach aligns with the study's objective of exploring participants' worldviews and understanding their lived experiences of constructing and performing masculine identities within the context of their academic journeys (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

The interpretive research paradigm emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality and prioritizes the subjective meanings participants ascribe to their experiences. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research enables researchers to focus on the meanings that participants attribute to the issues under study, making it particularly suited for understanding complex phenomena such as identity construction and academic excellence. Similarly, Coyle and Tickoo (2007) note that the purpose of qualitative research is to uncover themes that emerge from participants' narratives rather than deriving significance from numerical data. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how gender identities intersect with academic achievement, addressing gaps in existing research.

In this study, 17 undergraduate male students from the Arts and Social Sciences at Save University participated. The choice of participants reflects the study's focus on capturing a

diverse range of perspectives within this demographic group. Qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis were employed to gather rich, detailed data that illuminate the interplay between masculinity and academic excellence. These methods are appropriate for exploring human behaviour, emotions, and the contradictions that often arise in identity construction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). Additionally, bibliographic materials and theoretical insights from the fields of gender studies and higher education informed the analysis, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.

The study is grounded in the premise that qualitative research is particularly useful for developing new theoretical insights when existing frameworks fail to capture the complexity of the research problem (Creswell, 2013). There is a notable paucity of research exploring students' constructed identities, voices, and perceptions of academic excellence, particularly within the Mozambican higher education context. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how undergraduate male students construct and perform their masculinity in ways that intersect with their academic identities.

The chosen methodology is well-suited to the study's goals, as it prioritizes the exploration, description, and interpretation of human behaviour and the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences. This approach aligns with the study's aim of uncovering the nuanced and contextualized ways in which masculinity and academic excellence are interrelated for male undergraduate students at Save University.

4.2. The Interpretive Paradigm

This study is grounded in the qualitative interpretive paradigm, which provides the conceptual framework for examining the methodological choices and analytical strategies used. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), a research paradigm serves as the "conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that will be used and how the data will be analysed" (p. 26). It reflects the researcher's underlying beliefs and principles, shaping how they perceive, interpret, and engage with the world.

A paradigm encompasses four fundamental components: **ontology**, which pertains to the nature of reality; **epistemology**, which relates to the nature and scope of knowledge; **axiology**, which

considers the role of values in the research process; and **methodology**, which focuses on the approaches and techniques employed in conducting the study (Creswell, 2013). These components collectively influence the design and execution of qualitative research, ensuring coherence between the researcher's philosophical stance and their methodological choices.

The interpretive paradigm is particularly suitable for this study as it aligns with the goal of understanding how undergraduate male students in the Arts and Social Sciences construct and perform their masculine identities in relation to academic excellence. Interpretive research emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality, allowing the researcher to explore participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they ascribe to their identities and academic practices.

In the interpretive paradigm, the researcher plays an active role in making meaning of the data through cognitive processing and reflection, informed by their interactions with participants. This paradigm is particularly well-suited for studies that seek to explore the nuanced, lived experiences of participants. Its emphasis on depth and context aligns with this study's aim to examine how undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences male students construct and perform their masculinities in relation to academic excellence.

This qualitative study draws on interviews, and focus group discussions to explore students' identity construction processes and their relationship to academic achievement. As Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) note, "there is a relationship between a paradigm and methodology because the methodological implications of paradigm choice permeate the research questions, participants selection, data collection instruments, and data collection procedures" (p. 36). Accordingly, the interpretive paradigm informs every aspect of this study's design, ensuring coherence between the research framework, methods, and objectives.

4.3. Participant Selection and sampling Techniques

The participant selection for this study was carried out using purposeful sampling, and snowballing sampling as a supplementary technique, involving 18 undergraduate male students from five disciplines within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences: English, Portuguese, History, Law, and Philosophy. These students were contacted through their respective Course

Directors to participate in the study. However, one participant chose not to attend, reducing the final sample to 17 participants.

Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases that are likely to provide valuable insights into the research problem (Palinkas et al., 2013; Suri, 2011). This sampling approach is particularly appropriate for qualitative studies, as it allows for the selection of participants who can offer deep, meaningful contributions to the central phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007). According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling involves selecting individuals based on their unique perspectives and experiences related to the core issues of the study.

One of the key elements of purposeful sampling is that participants must be willing to share their experiences. As Tongo (2007) notes, it is essential that participants are willing to provide information by virtue of their knowledge or lived experiences. The researcher plays a critical role in identifying individuals who can offer rich, relevant data that will contribute meaningfully to the research inquiry.

Snowballing sampling is particularly recommended for qualitative research as it “offers a practical solution for accessing hard-to-reach respondents” (Ting, Memon, Thurasany, & Cheach, 2025). The course Directors suggested names of the potential participants who met the criteria of the study, based on student academic performance.

In qualitative research, it is important for the sample to remain manageable to avoid overwhelming data collection processes. Moreover, the researcher must ensure that data saturation is not reached prematurely within a group of participants before the full sample is explored. Maxwell (2005) suggests that the goals of purposeful sampling include: (i) achieving representativeness within the sample, (ii) capturing the diversity of perspectives (heterogeneity), (iii) deliberately selecting cases that are critical for theory development, and (iv) establishing specific comparisons to highlight differences between participants.

This study's purposeful sampling strategy was designed to ensure that the selected participants, undergraduate male students at Save University, were able to offer unique insights into how they construct and perform their masculinity in relation to academic excellence. The sample was

selected with these key considerations in mind, ensuring that the research findings would be both meaningful and reflective of the diverse student experiences in the context of higher education.

According to Creswell (2013), the research process in qualitative studies is emergent, meaning that the research design and plans may evolve as the researcher enters the field and collects data. This flexibility allows for adjustments to be made based on the dynamics of the research process.

Following the approval of ethical clearance by the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethical Committee (see Appendix E), I submitted a request to the Directorate of Save University in Maxixe to conduct the study with the proposed sample of students. Upon receiving approval (see Appendix C), I arranged meetings with the Course Directors. During these meetings, I discussed the purpose and scope of the study. After gaining their support, I sent a brief description of the study to the Course Directors, who assisted in identifying students who met the criteria for participation.

The selection criteria for the 17 undergraduate male students were as follows: (1) male, (2) senior students (in their 3rd or 4th year), (3) a cumulative GPA of 14 (70%) or higher, and (4) active involvement in at least one campus leadership role. The Course Directors provided the necessary documentation, including standardized test scores, school transcripts, and GPA information, to verify the academic achievements of the participants. This step negated the need to collect such information directly from the students themselves.

Additionally, a letter was sent to the Student Association to solicit male undergraduate students who were interested in taking part in the study. Subsequently, a follow-up letter was distributed to potential participants, which included a consent form outlining the study's objectives, the research methods, and the assurance that the data collected would be used exclusively for the purposes of this study (see Appendix 5).

Airtime vouchers from the three networks companies which operate in Mozambique were provided to participants, and transportation fees were reimbursed for those who commuted from distant locations to attend the interviews. Additionally, refreshments were served after each focus group discussion. Hennink (2007) notes that offering refreshments during interviews or focus group discussions is a "social gesture that helps to create a relaxed, informal atmosphere" (p. 31), which was intended to facilitate open and comfortable participation.

4.4. Data Production Tools and Storage

For this study, data was produced through a combination of individual in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. All interviews, and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. To ensure the protection of participants' identities, no personally identifiable information was included in the transcriptions, with the exception of the study site.

Creswell (2013) recommends that qualitative researchers use high-quality audio recorders to capture data accurately during interviews and discussions. Additionally, the use of a data collection matrix is advised to organize and track the data systematically. In line with these recommendations, the audio recordings were stored securely on my personal computer in a password-protected file. This file was accessible only to myself and my research supervisor, ensuring that participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013).

Below, I provide a detailed description of how each data production tool was employed during the data generation process.

4.5. In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were the primary data generation method used to explore the participants' perceptions of how they construct their masculinity in relation to academic excellence. All 17 participants responded to semi-structured, open-ended questions during the interviews. Boyce and Neale (2006) describe in-depth interviews as a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a smaller number of respondents to gain an in-depth understanding of their perspectives on a specific idea, program, or situation (p. 3). The purpose of in-depth interviews is to obtain detailed information that illuminates participants' individual experiences, perspectives, emotions, and meanings related to a particular topic.

Open-ended questions were employed to enable participants to share their thoughts in detail, including their personal feelings, emotions, and ideas, with minimal censorship (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022, p. 1). According to Zull (2016), the use of open-ended questions is

particularly useful when the subject of inquiry is not fully delimited or when new topics are expected to emerge during the interview process (p. 2).

The duration of the one-on-one interviews varied between 60 minutes for less talkative participants and 90 minutes for more talkative ones. These interviews took place in July 2022, and there was no need for a second round of interviews as data saturation was achieved during the first round. All participants were asked the same semi-structured, open-ended questions to ensure consistency in data generation. The interviews were designed to capture the social realities of the participants, providing a deeper understanding of how they navigate their identities and perceptions in relation to academic excellence.

Conducting the interviews on the same campus where I worked at the Academic Registry helped mitigate potential power imbalances between me and the participants. My familiarity with the campus environment and recognition by some participants fostered a sense of trust and confidence, which contributed to a more open and candid discussion.

4.6. Focus Group Discussions

A focus group is a "carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Hennink, 2007, p. 6). The primary aim of focus group research is to identify a range of perspectives on a given topic and gain an understanding of the issues from the participants' viewpoints (Hennink, 2007). According to Hennink (2007), small groups are particularly beneficial as they "provide more time for each participant to contribute to the discussion" (p. 130). These groups typically focus on a specific topic and explore a limited number of issues, allowing sufficient time for participants to delve into the topic in detail.

Two focus group discussions were conducted for this study, with one group consisting of 8 participants and the other of 9 participants. These discussions took place in September 2022.

The participants in the focus groups were already familiar to me, as they had previously participated in the individual in-depth interviews. This familiarity helped facilitate the focus group discussions, as the participants shared similar characteristics and experiences, as noted by

Creswell (2013). This prior relationship helped to create a more comfortable environment where participants felt at ease sharing their views without fear of judgment or ridicule (Hennink, 2007).

The purpose of the focus group discussions was to stimulate and encourage dialogue among participants regarding the construction of masculinity in higher education settings. Given that a voice recorder was used, there was no need for a separate note-taker. I personally took notes while moderating the discussions. This decision was made for ethical reasons, as I believed the presence of a third party might hinder the participants from fully expressing their thoughts and emotions during the discussion.

4.7. Coding

Coding is an interpretative strategy aimed at linking data to the idea (Saldinā, 2013). In Vivo coding was applied for this study. In an in vivo coding the “codes are developed from the data by using phrases or terms used by the participants” (Linnerberg & Korsgaard, 2019). According to Saldinā (2013). In Vivo coding is appropriate for “beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honor the participants’ voice” (2013, p. 91). This study was based on participants’ experiences and views about how they construct and perform their masculinity in a higher education institution. Coding participants voices and experiences have deepened my understanding about the participants’ experiences and worldviews about masculinity and academic excellence.

4.8. Data Transcription and Analysis

Following transcription, the data were analysed using both first and second-cycle coding techniques to identify both common and divergent themes across the data set. Due to limited expertise in computer-assisted coding, I opted to print the transcripts and manually highlight key responses, using colour coding to organize data based on various themes and scenarios (Saldinā, 2013). Creswell (2013) asserts that "the process used for qualitative data analysis is the same for hand coding or using a computer... the researcher, not the computer program, does the coding and categorizing" (p. 201). This manual coding process enabled me to engage deeply with the data, identifying patterns and themes that were directly relevant to the research questions.

The data were analysed thematically, a qualitative method recommended for systematically organizing and analysing complex data sets (Brown & Clark, 2006). The six-phase approach of thematic analysis (familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report) has been taken into consideration during the analysis process (Brawn & Clark, 2006).

Thematic analysis, conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, aims to "theorize the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that enable the individual accounts provided" (Brown & Clark, 2006, p. 15). This approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm by allowing for the identification and understanding of participants' experiences, meanings, and realities in relation to the research topic.

Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for analysing participants' lived experiences, as it provides a flexible and valuable research tool for producing a rich and detailed account of data (Creswell, 2007). This approach helped uncover underlying patterns in the data, allowing me to draw meaningful conclusions about how the participants construct and perform their masculinity in relation to academic excellence.

4.9. Language Translation

Following approval from the Ethics Committee of the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the interview and focus group discussion protocols were translated from English into Portuguese, the official language of the Republic of Mozambique. These translated protocols were then communicated to the participants in Portuguese. As the primary researcher, I conducted all interviews personally.

To align with the requirements of the study, the data were subsequently translated from Portuguese into English. My previous experience with Portuguese-English translation during my BA-Honours studies facilitated this process, eliminating the need to hire an external translator. Ensuring the credibility of the study findings was a priority, and to maintain accuracy and reduce potential bias, I regularly consulted with the participants throughout the translation process. This step was crucial for ensuring that the meaning of the responses was faithfully captured. Upon completion of the translation, both the original and translated versions of the findings were reviewed by a sworn translator to identify and correct any discrepancies or inaccuracies.

Elhami and Khoshnevisan (2022) emphasize the importance of considering the language of interviews in qualitative research. They recommend using participants' mother tongue during interviews, as it enables them to express themselves more comprehensively and produces higher-quality data (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022, p. 3). In this study, the interviews were conducted in Portuguese, which facilitated richer responses and a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences.

The translation process primarily focused on accurately conveying the concepts and meanings embedded in the discussion questions. Once the interview and focus group guides were translated, they were tested by consulting with bilingual individuals fluent in both Portuguese and English. These individuals were asked to interpret the questions to ensure that the intended meaning was preserved in the translated versions. This validation step was designed to verify the accuracy and clarity of the translation.

Thus, for this study, qualitative interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated between Portuguese and English to ensure the integrity and consistency of the data.

4.10. Ethical Issues

As Creswell (2013) asserts, prior to conducting any research, it is essential to obtain approval from the relevant institutional review board to ensure ethical standards are met for data collection. Approval for this study was obtained from both the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Save University before the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with the selected participants. All participants were required to complete an informed consent form from the University of KwaZulu-Natal before participating in the interviews and focus group discussions (see Appendix D). This form, distributed to participants in advance, outlined the purpose of the study and provided detailed information about the research.

The participants were assured of confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity throughout the study, including during the interviews and focus group discussions. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to the 17 undergraduate male students. Permission was also sought from the course directors of the selected disciplines or courses, serving as gatekeepers for access to the participants.

Prior to data collection, participants were provided with an overview of the study, which included the research objectives, purposes, potential benefits, and any risks involved. They were given the opportunity to ask questions and were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Consent was obtained from all participants before any data were collected, and no participant chose to withdraw or raised concerns about their involvement.

To further protect participants' confidentiality, I ensured that only I had access to the interview responses and related materials. All data were stored securely on my personal, password-protected computer. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to maintain anonymity, which is crucial for ensuring participants feel comfortable and honest in their responses. As noted by Elhami and Khoshnevisan (2022), revealing participants' identities may discourage them from providing truthful responses, which is why protecting their anonymity was a priority.

4.11. Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to assure the trustworthiness of the findings of the study. Such strategies included credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness was further maintained through member checking, a process whereby participants reviewed their interview transcripts and focus group discussion notes to verify that their responses accurately reflected their intended meaning (Carlson, 2010; Shenton, 2004). This allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of the data and correct any misunderstandings. Additionally, at the data analysis stage, I ensured that no claims or inferences were made beyond what the data supported.

4.11.1 Credibility

In qualitative research within the interpretive paradigm, credibility refers to the extent to which the data and data analysis accurately represent the perspectives and experiences of the research participants. Kivunga and Kayini (2017) define credibility as relating to the researcher's ability to answer the question: "How do the findings align with the reality as constructed by both the researcher and the participants?" (p. 34).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize that credibility is a fundamental criterion for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. To ensure credibility, prolonged engagement between the

researcher and participants is essential, allowing a relationship of trust to develop and enabling the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the research context, while minimizing the potential for bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). My role as both a lecturer and staff member at the Academic Registry at the campus where this study was conducted facilitated such prolonged engagement. This positioned me to build rapport with the participants before the interviews and focus group discussions, fostering trust and allowing for meaningful interactions.

To further enhance credibility, I facilitated a round-table discussion with participants to reflect on the accuracy of the findings and ensure the study's conclusions were valid and representative of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). This process involves sharing the interview transcripts with participants to confirm that their responses accurately reflect their intended meanings (Shenton, 2004). This step allows participants to review, clarify, or correct any discrepancies in their statements. Additionally, credibility was strengthened by comparing the findings of this study with those from previous research to assess the consistency of the results across similar studies.

4.11.2. Transferability

Qualitative research aims not to generalize findings but to provide in-depth insights into specific contexts and phenomena, as Creswell (2013) notes, "the intent is to elucidate the particular, the specific" (p. 157). **Transferability** refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts or situations. According to Shenton (2004), the results of a qualitative study must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the geographic area where the research was conducted. He further argues that although qualitative research findings are typically specific to a small number of environments or individuals, each case can also serve as "an example within a broader group" (Shenton, 2004, p. 69).

In this study, I have provided a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation, which enables readers to compare the findings with those from other contexts or studies. This descriptive approach helps to clarify the specificities of the context while allowing for potential transferability to other settings. Furthermore, I have offered comprehensive information on several key aspects of the research: (i) the study participants and their academic majors, (ii) the

data collection methods employed, (iii) the length of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and (iv) the time frame during which data was collected.

To further enhance the transferability of the findings, I have incorporated **rich, thick descriptions** of the study context and participants. This approach allows readers to assess whether the findings can be transferred to similar settings or groups based on shared characteristics (Creswell, 2013). By providing a thorough and transparent account of the study, I aim to offer sufficient contextual information for readers to make informed judgments about the applicability of the findings to their own contexts.

4.11.3. Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of research findings, particularly in the context of a study's ability to produce similar results if repeated under the same conditions, with the same methods and participants (Shenton, 2004). In this study, dependability was ensured through the use of **triangulation of data collection methods** and the maintenance of a thorough **audit trail**.

To enhance the dependability of the findings, multiple data collection techniques were employed, including observation, individual in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with a selected sample of 17 undergraduate male students from the Arts and Social Sciences. **Triangulation** was achieved by incorporating diverse methods to corroborate the validity and reliability of the research outcomes. By using multiple methods to gather data, the study strengthened the consistency of the findings and reduced the potential for bias, thus enhancing the robustness of the research results.

4.11.4. Confirmability

Confirmability was prioritized to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. The findings of this research reflect the experiences and perspectives expressed by the participants, with minimal researcher bias influencing the data collection and analysis processes. In order to maintain objectivity, I consciously worked to prevent any personal biases from contaminating the data. Throughout the study, I have clearly outlined the rationale behind the decisions made, including the selection and exclusion of particular approaches, as well as the strengths and weaknesses

associated with these choices (Creswell, 2013). This transparency ensures that the research process and its outcomes are traceable, allowing others to assess the validity and neutrality of the findings.

4.11.5. Participants’ Profiles

The study included 17 participants, all of whom were first-generation university students. The sample was diverse in terms of age (ranging from 21 to 29 years), academic majors, religious affiliations, and socio-economic backgrounds. Of the 17 participants, 11 identified as Christians, 3 as adherents of African Traditional Religions (ATR) who did not attend church, 1 as Muslim, 1 as an Adventist, and 1 as a Jehovah's Witness.

At the time of the interviews, two participants were members of the Student Association. Most of the participants reported active involvement in research activities organized by the university. Three participants received awards for excellent research project presentations at the university’s scientific fairs. Additionally, five participants were recognized at the 2022 and 2023 graduation ceremonies for their academic achievements. All participants graduated within the prescribed time frame, with 15 graduating with a grade point average of 70% or higher, and two with 65%.

The participants were enrolled in various disciplines: five in Philosophy, three in Law, three in Portuguese, four in English, and two in History. A summary of the participants' profiles is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Study Participants’ Profile

Name	Age	Year of study	Sexual orientation	Major	Religion
Charles	24	3 rd	Heterosexual	Philosophy	Christian
Robert	24	4 th	Heterosexual	Philosophy	Christian
Michael	23	3 rd	Heterosexual	Law	Christian
Kito	22	4 th	Heterosexual	Portuguese	Christian

Tiago	23	2 nd	Heterosexual	Philosophy	Christian
Solomon	22	3 rd	Heterosexual	Philosophy	Christian
Armando	23	4 th	Heterosexual	Law	Christian
Gerson	29	4 th	Heterosexual	Portuguese	ATR
Hugo	21	3 rd	Heterosexual	History	Christian
Dinho	25	4 th	Heterosexual	History	ATR
José	25	4 th	Heterosexual	Philosophy	Christian
Samuel	22	4 th	Heterosexual	Portuguese	ATR
Jackson	24	4 th	Heterosexual	English	Christian
Fernando	26	3 rd	Heterosexual	Law	Muslim
Pedro	27	4 th	Heterosexual	English	Christian
Mano	23	4 th	Heterosexual	English	Christian
Nito	23	4 th	Heterosexual	English	Christian

Source: The study researcher

4.12. Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology and design employed in this study, which aimed to explore the lived experiences of 17 undergraduate male students from Save University, majoring in Portuguese, History, English, Philosophy, and Law. All participants were first-generation students. A qualitative research approach was chosen as the most suitable

for this study, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of how these students construct their masculinity in relation to academic excellence. As Creswell (2013) asserts, qualitative methodologies prioritize participants' voices and lived experiences, which is central to understanding the personal and contextual factors that shape their educational journeys.

This study diverges from much of the existing literature on undergraduate male students, which often adopts a deficit perspective, focusing on challenges and perceived underachievement within this demographic. Instead, this research sought to highlight the experiences of high-achieving male students at Save University, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their academic success. The participants in this study, who engaged in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, demonstrated that their experiences of masculinity and academic excellence are complex and multifaceted, shaped by various personal, cultural, and institutional factors.

By employing a qualitative methodology, this study provides valuable insights into how these students negotiate and navigate their academic and social identities. The findings reflect the dynamic interplay between their gender identity, academic aspirations, and broader socio-cultural influences. Overall, the research methodology and design enabled the collection of rich, detailed data that offers a deeper understanding of the experiences of male students in higher education, particularly within the Humanities disciplines at Save University.

CHAPTER FIVE

UNDERGRADUATE MALE STUDENTS' CONSTRUCTION OF THEIR MASCULINE IDENTITIES

5.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis from interviews and focus group discussions with the participants. The data that was produced was transcribed verbatim, and translated from Portuguese into English. This chapter explores how male undergraduate students in the Arts and Social Sciences at Save University construct and perceive their masculine identities, focusing on the relationship between masculinity and academic performance. The study addresses the first research question: *What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of how they construct their masculine identities at Save University?* By drawing on the lived experiences and voices of the participants, the study highlights the complex ways in which masculinity is understood and enacted in a higher education context.

The analysis of the data revealed several interconnected themes that provide insight into participants' conceptions of masculinity. **Being an Academic High Achiever as a Marker of Masculinity** emerged as a key theme, with participants emphasizing the significance of academic excellence as a demonstration of their capability and strength. This identity is further shaped by **Body Image and Masculinity**, where physical appearance and athleticism were acknowledged as influential, though secondary to intellectual accomplishments. Another theme, **Heteronormative Expectations of Masculinity**, underscores the pressure participants felt to conform to traditional gender roles, including heterosexual norms, which often dictated their interactions and perceptions of success. However, a progressive perspective also surfaced in the theme **Non-Violence as a Marker of Masculinity**, where participants associated self-control and peaceful behaviour with maturity and strength.

Participants frequently described **Perseverance as a Marker of Masculinity**, highlighting their ability to overcome adversity as a defining characteristic. Similarly, themes such as **Male Headship and Family Provision as Central Aspects of Masculinity** reflected the cultural

expectation that men serve as providers and protectors within their families, even as students. The importance of interpersonal relationships was evident in the theme **Positive Relationships with Teachers and Peers as Markers of Masculinity**, where supportive networks were seen as crucial to personal and academic success. Participants also identified **Being a Positive Role Model as a Marker of Masculinity**, aspiring to inspire others through their achievements and conduct. Interestingly, some participants demonstrated a **Lack of Awareness About Masculine Identity Itself**, suggesting that masculinity for them was an implicit construct rather than an actively interrogated concept.

These findings emerged as a result of data that were analysed through the lens of Masculine Identity Development theories (Davis, 2002; Edwards & Jones, 2009), which provided a framework for understanding how participants navigate societal expectations and personal ambitions. By situating the participants' experiences within these theoretical perspectives, this chapter sheds light on the dynamic and context-specific processes shaping masculine identity in the university setting.

5.1. Being an *Academic High Achiever* as a Marker of Masculinity

The concept of a "high achiever" typically refers to individuals who excel academically and are recognized for their superior performance and abilities (Jeremy & Fisher, 2012). According to Jeremy and Fisher (2012), high academic achievement is often associated with positive attributes such as elevated self-esteem, increased support from teachers, and a proactive approach to problem-solving. Similarly, Harper's (2008) research highlights that academic excellence is often accompanied by recognition, such as awards or exemptions from certain academic requirements, which was echoed by participants in this study. At Save University, the participants described their academic achievements, such as maintaining cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) of 14 or above on a 20-point scale and receiving accolades for their performance, as integral to their self-conception of masculinity.

Participants shared diverse experiences illustrating the intersection of masculinity and academic success. For instance, high-achieving students were often nicknamed "mazers," a term denoting exceptional academic ability. Charles, one of the participants, explained how he embraced such nicknames as markers of respect among peers. He noted:

"I actually do not know what a mazer is, but my peers always call me mazer or robot, or they just name me after a prominent philosopher. Some call me Plato... I do not mind being called a mazer or a robot or being nicknamed after Plato if they are calling me for a good reason."

This highlights how peer acknowledgment of academic excellence reinforces a sense of masculinity for male students. Many participants viewed academic success as a core aspect of their masculine identity. Achieving high grades was perceived as a culturally endorsed measure of manhood, where failing to perform well academically risked being associated with femininity. This association served as a motivational strategy within peer groups, fostering competition to achieve higher grades. Charles described the competitive atmosphere:

"We were made to compete for grades. Unfortunately, some had to cheat during tests and were severely penalized. We used to bet for marks... those of us who got the lowest marks were supposed to pay for drinks or bring sweets for the rest of the group the next day. Everyone wanted to work hard for good marks. It was fun, and we enjoyed it."

Recognition of academic excellence extended beyond peer validation to institutional acknowledgment. Participants recounted receiving recommendation letters for scholarships or internships, being invited to academic excursions, and presenting at student conferences. These opportunities enhanced their academic profiles and were often linked to maintaining strong GPAs. Dinho highlighted his involvement in academic excursions, while Charles underscored the long-term importance of maintaining a high GPA:

"By keeping a good GPA, you make yourself known to professors and peers. Additionally, upon finishing university, we will actually need to apply for jobs. I guess most of us will be applying for teaching or so in the public sector. We are told that things have changed now. We hear that for some time now one's records may determine whether you qualify for a particular job or not."

The pursuit of academic excellence was not limited to those with the highest GPAs. Some participants, like Nito, demonstrated their commitment to intellectual growth by engaging in extensive reading beyond course requirements. Nito shared:

"I read a lot. I sometimes wake up early in the morning when everybody else in the house is still sleeping to read books that have not even been recommended by lecturers. I do not read just to pass the test or exam, but for information."

Recognition through awards and achievements was a source of pride and a marker of masculinity for participants. Fernando reflected on winning an award for a group research project, emphasizing its impact on his sense of responsibility and visibility within the university:

"Yes, I have participated in scientific fairs with other students. We had to work in a group presentation. It was great; we did very well. My group got an award for excellent research work. I guess our names are in the university board reports, and everyone will be able to know about us!"

Awards also symbolized an opportunity to give back to their communities, as highlighted by Armando, who reflected on the significance of his award:

"I won a notebook. Not many students have won a notebook at this university, and not every student can afford to buy one. This award actually makes me very humble. Let me see how I can contribute to the advancement of my community."

The participants' narratives demonstrate that academic achievement serves not only as a marker of masculinity but also as a source of motivation for personal and community advancement. The intersection of academic excellence and masculine identity highlights how recognition and achievement contribute to shaping a sense of purpose and responsibility among male students at Save University.

5.2. Physical Appearance as an Expression of Masculinity

Physical appearance plays a significant role in the societal construction and negotiation of masculinity. As Plug and Collins (2012) argue, "social and cultural constructions of the male and female bodies and the way in which specific individuals perceive their own bodies have come to represent a fundamental way in which individuals negotiate their identities, view their relationships with others, and determine their societal roles" (p. 272). This theme examines how participants' perceptions of body size and appearance inform their self-esteem and reinforce societal expectations of masculinity.

Participants consistently identified a "real man" as one who embodies physical strength and fitness, reflecting broader cultural ideals that differentiate men from women. These norms were particularly evident in contexts like sports, where physicality plays a pivotal role. Roberto, shared:

"You must have an acceptable body for that matter...if your body size does not appeal for football, that is, if you have a small body, you can hardly make it for football."

Such perceptions extended beyond sports to everyday interactions, including romantic relationships. Many participants expressed that societal validation of their masculinity was closely tied to their physical appearance. Roberto remarked:

"Girls like fit and tough guys. Just listen to their preferences when chatting about romantic relationships. I think I will start to dedicate enough time for my body upon finishing school."

This aligns with prior research (Groes-Green, 2011; Plug & Collins, 2012), which highlights the growing concern among young men regarding their body image. Several participants reported engaging in sports or gym activities as strategies to align with societal ideals of masculinity. For instance, Samuel described how he coped with ridicule from peers by adopting a gym routine:

"Before I started to gym, I was actually a victim of ridicule...Although gym is time-consuming, I would risk saying that gym is resulting...I see the difference between now and before."

In addition to physical fitness, participants discussed material strategies to compensate for perceived deficiencies in their appearance, such as investing in clothing to enhance attractiveness.

José, for example, noted:

"Dressing means a lot to me. I know I have a small body, so I would not risk wearing slim-fitting clothes...I want to look attractive to women."

Participants also connected masculinity to sexual performance, an area fraught with anxieties. For some, the ability to impregnate a partner or maintain physical attributes associated with sexual prowess was deemed essential to manhood. This link between physicality and sexual

performance highlights the pressures faced by men to conform to rigid societal ideals. Robert shared his struggles:

“I am now practicing a lot of sports, jogging, and lifting weights...this will actually enhance my performance on bed. People say sports are a booster for a health sexual activity... it is too early to say whether it is working well or not.”

The study's findings resonate with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) concept of identity development, particularly the significance of achieving comfort with one's body in establishing self-identity. However, they also underscore the pressures young men face to meet these expectations, often at great personal cost.

This theme illustrates the complex interplay between societal ideals of masculinity and physical appearance. While efforts to conform to these norms may bolster self-esteem and social acceptance, they also highlight the challenges and vulnerabilities men experience in navigating these expectations. These findings suggest the need for broader cultural discussions that promote diverse representations of masculinity, reducing the pressure to conform to restrictive and often unattainable ideals.

5.3. Heteronormative Expectations of Masculinity

Heteronormative norms and traditional constructs of masculinity often position sexual prowess, heterosexuality, and reproductive capabilities as central markers of manhood (Chimanze, 2016; Groes-Green, 2011; Ronald, 2007; Singh, 2022). These constructs link a man's value to his sexual experiences, particularly the ability to engage with multiple female partners and father children (Harper, 2010). This evolution of sexuality as a tool for not only reproduction but also pleasure, recognition, and self-esteem has been widely documented (Groes-Green, 2009).

Participants in this study reflected these norms, emphasizing sexual strength, romantic conquests, and procreation as essential components of masculinity. Peer groups emerged as critical spaces for shaping and reinforcing these perceptions. Hugo, for instance, acknowledged the significant role of his peers in constructing his understanding of masculinity:

“I think that mixing with peers has given me a sense about what being a man means. I think I had more to learn from peers than to offer...I am actually indebted to my peers.”

Such peer interactions often centered on discussions of sexual and romantic experiences, which participants regarded as integral to their masculine identities. Armando described how some men within these peer groups adopted authoritative roles by sharing their perceived expertise on satisfying women:

"At break time, you will find them chatting about their love experiences... They talk about how best they can sexually satisfy a woman."

Despite these dominant narratives, not all participants conformed to these expectations. Some expressed discomfort with the peer focus on sexual conquest, perceiving it as a distraction from academic priorities. Charles, for example, voiced internal conflict over his involvement in such discussions:

"I just find it very difficult to tell you what happens in those peer groupings... We basically talk about beautiful and attractive girls... I personally do not like it... But there is no way I can stop being part of the group."

This tension reflects Edwards and Jones' (2009) findings that young men often adopt performative behaviours to align with societal expectations of masculinity, even when these behaviours contradict personal values. Participants noted the pressure to adhere to such norms to avoid social alienation, despite the potential conflict with familial expectations or personal discomfort.

Cultural norms also played a significant role in shaping participants' conceptions of masculinity, particularly through the emphasis on heterosexuality and procreation. Participants consistently associated being a "real man" with heterosexual relationships and the ability to father children. For example, Jackson highlighted the cultural stigma attached to deviations from heterosexuality:

"In my culture, to be a man means not being gay or female... A real man must like girls... If you like other men, you are not a real man."

Similarly, Pedro and Roberto emphasized the cultural expectation of marriage and family continuation. Pedro stated:

"According to my culture, a man is not supposed to marry another man...I do not remember hearing about same-sex marriage during my boyhood."

Roberto added:

"A man is supposed to guarantee the continuation of the family... If a man is not married, he is regarded as a child."

This theme illustrates how heteronormative and cultural expectations continue to define masculinity, reinforcing traditional ideals that shape men's behaviors, self-perceptions, and social interactions. While some participants navigated these expectations uncritically, others grappled with the dissonance between societal pressures and their personal values. These findings underscore the complex interplay between cultural norms, peer influences, and individual identity in the construction of masculinity.

5.4. Non-Violence as a Marker of Masculinity

Contemporary understandings of masculinity increasingly reject violence, emphasizing respect, responsibility, and integrity as central markers of manhood. Research indicates that educational practices and environments that promote gender equality contribute to more progressive views of masculinity, which often involve the rejection of violent behaviour (Groes-Green, 2011). In Mozambique, for example, young men associate violence against women with a failure to embody the ideals of manhood. This aligns with the concept of a *bom pico*, a man who provides sexual satisfaction, treats women with dignity, and refrains from violence (Groes-Green, 2011).

Participants in this study reflected similar perspectives, underscoring the role of cultural and religious teachings in discouraging violence and promoting respectful relationships with women. For instance, Charles emphasized the importance of religious teachings:

"I learned not to be violent to one another and to our female partners as well. I learned to treat women with dignity... Men cannot abuse this God-given responsibility to ill-treat those surrounding him."

Participants frequently linked these teachings to the idea of men's protective roles over women, though this was often framed within a patriarchal context. Tiago noted:

"The Bible says that God first created a man and later on He created a woman out of man's ribs. This means a lot to me. This gives me a certain authority over women... men's protective role over women."

Similarly, José expressed the incongruity between religious teachings and violent behaviour:

"The Bible explains how we [men] should behave. It clearly indicates that a man's responsibility is to take care of his wife and children. I fail to understand how some men come to be violent before their wives and children. A man is not expected to be violent."

While participants acknowledged traditional roles of men as heads of households, they stressed that this authority does not justify the mistreatment of women. As Armando explained:

"At church, I learned to treat women with respect and never treat them with cruelty. A man cannot just own a woman as if he was owning property. The fact that man has been given headship over women does not give him autonomy to mistreat them. That is a God-given responsibility."

Concerns about societal issues such as gender-based violence were also prevalent. Participants identified factors like alcohol abuse as contributing to the perpetuation of violence. Charles remarked:

"People do not expect men to be drinking and raping women all the time! Men are expected to be defending the community from any aggressor. It is sad to hear that a female student has been raped by fellow male students or a woman has been beaten to death by her husband or sexually assaulted by unknown men in their communities."

The role of non-violence in fostering community respect was highlighted by Fernando, who contrasted his past and present behaviours:

"As I was growing up, I learned that men have many responsibilities to fulfill at family and community levels. That is why the few men I knew when I was growing up were respected in the community. But I do not think today's men still deserve the same respect, because most men are drunkards, they smoke, and are violent!"

Participants also emphasized the connection between non-violence and personal integrity. Solomon articulated this link:

"I think that we have borrowed so many teachings from our cultures or faith traditions. For instance, we have learned that one must be loyal first to himself and then to others. How can a man run a family if he is not loyal to himself and to others? How can a man be loyal to his wife, children, and to the wider society if he is not loyal to himself? No... he cannot be; it is impossible."

This theme underscores a rejection of violence as a marker of masculinity, reinforced by cultural and religious teachings that emphasize respect, responsibility, and personal integrity. These findings align with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) *development of integrity vector*, which highlights the integration of personal values and behaviors as essential for personal and social development. The evolving concept of non-violent masculinity reflects broader societal shifts towards progressive gender norms and underscores the role of education, culture, and faith in shaping modern definitions of manhood.

The findings presented in this section corroborate Kirby and van Klinken's (2022) research, which suggests that the crisis of masculinity as postulated in most current research varies from context to context as it is informed by specific cultural, economic, historical, social religious, and political conditions (Kirby & van Klinken, 2022).

5.5. Perseverance as a Marker of Masculinity

Participants consistently associated masculinity with the ability to persevere through adversities encountered during their academic journey at Save University. Perseverance or resilience as defined by Radhamani & Kalaivani (2021), is "the heightened probability of emerging out as a winner in various life undertakings" (Radhamani & Kalaivani, 2021, p.361). students who are academically resilient have shown improved performance even after being confronted with stressful conditions (Radhamani & Kalaivani, 2021).

Participants described various challenges, such as teachers' absenteeism, disruptive behaviour from peers, and inadequate student housing, which could have undermined their self-esteem and

academic progress. Despite these obstacles, participants demonstrated resilience, framing perseverance as a critical aspect of masculine identity.

Teachers' absenteeism was identified as a significant barrier to academic success. Participants reported that frequent class cancellations and lack of engagement from lecturers disrupted their learning and could have led to a sense of frustration or failure. For example, Dinho expressed concerns about lecturers' lack of motivation, suggesting that their disinterest affected students' perceptions of their own academic journey:

“I sometimes think that our lecturers are demotivated, I do not think they enjoy their job. Their faces can tell that they are not motivated...I do not understand why. Perhaps they are not well paid. When they are in the classroom they do not show their professional side..”

Furthermore, students experienced frustration when their efforts were disregarded. Mano highlighted the demoralizing effect of unappreciated hard work as follows:

“You invest a lot in reading, and you prepare your assignment very well, only to find out that the teacher has not given themselves enough time to go through your work. By the end of the day, you are treated the same way as those who wrote nothing. It is demotivating.”

Despite these setbacks, participants unanimously maintained their commitment to their studies, viewing perseverance as essential to overcoming these hurdles.

Hugo exemplified this commitment by emphasizing his responsibility to his supporters as follows:

“I do not see any motivation from our lecturers as such, but there are people I have left behind, and those are the same people who pay my school fees. Whenever I am in class, I have that in mind. I am indebted to my parents I have to give them satisfaction. They are investing in me, they expect something good from me when I finish school. This makes me tolerant so I can stand my ground”

Similarly, Samuel described perseverance as a fundamental trait of masculinity:

“A real man would never give up from going to class, and when he experiences difficulties, he remains firm and focused instead, because the path that leads into success is full of trips, and

obstacles are just part of life. A friend of mine with outstanding academic potential has just dropped out, it hurts me!.”

The lack of role models was also cited as a challenge. Kito suggested that the absence of inspirational figures contributed to students' struggles, offering advice on perseverance, he said:

“I guess if there were role models none of that would have happened... But there are tips a student should take into consideration in order for him to persevere: (i) prevent people from telling you that you will never make it; (ii) don't let people influence you negatively, and (iii) never give up. If you keep to these tips, you will make it.”

In addition, inadequate student housing emerged as a significant issue, leading some students to withdraw from their studies. Charles shared his experience of the difficulties caused by the lack of campus housing:

“When I arrived here, I learned that there was no student residence in campus. I felt very embarrassed, and I just hired somewhere to stay. But again, that was not safe, because a female student who was living alone had been reported to have been found dead in her room. It was fearful, and to be honest I could not concentrate....”

In summary, perseverance is framed as a core aspect of masculinity, with participants demonstrating resilience in the face of institutional and personal challenges. Their experiences underscore the importance of enduring difficulties to maintain academic and personal integrity.

Participants' description of the strategies they have applied to persevere and stay their course corroborate Chickering and Reisser's (1993) managing emotions vector.

5.6. Male Headship and Family Provision as Central Aspects of Masculinity

According to Van Klinken (2011), "male headship is a defining notion of masculinities" in many African cultures (p. 104). In this study, participants identified male headship and the role of family provider as fundamental elements of masculinity. They expressed that these roles, traditionally viewed as divine responsibilities, are critical to their identity as men.

Participants reflected on their upbringing, noting that cultural and religious teachings emphasized that men are expected to be heads of their families and primary providers. This expectation has

significantly influenced their academic and career aspirations. The participants indicated that their educational pursuits were motivated by the desire to fulfil these roles effectively. They perceived a university degree as essential for securing a well-paying job, which in turn would enable them to meet their responsibilities as family heads and providers. Fernando illustrated this perspective:

“I really consider finishing school and finding a good job. There are so many people who look forward to the completion of my studies. I am from a poor family, and I have many responsibilities ahead of me. It has been a long time since I came here, I want to leave with something.”

Participants also highlighted the pressures imposed by current economic conditions, which necessitate securing a stable and well-remunerated job to meet familial obligations. Samuel noted that cultural norms dictate that a man must be a breadwinner:

“In my culture a man is expected to be a breadwinner. My culture says a man must make things happen. He must have a job... just any job, as long as he can provide for his family. Having a job is mandatory, not an option.”

Despite the importance placed on headship and provision, participants acknowledged that these roles do not confer superiority but instead require humility and commitment. Mano remarked:

“To be a family head and provider is demanding. It is such a huge responsibility that without being humble you cannot stand for it. I hoped all men to be very humble before other people...most men have taken advantage of this God-given authority to ill-treat those who are under their responsibility. It is not fair.”

The Biblical perspective on male headship was also significant for participants. Pedro interpreted this responsibility as encompassing not only financial provision but also protection and respect for family members. He said:

“The Bible explains how a man should behave. It says a man should take responsibility of his family, because he is the family head. This means securing shelter, putting bread on the table, and protecting the family. I fail to understand how some men come to be violent before their wives and children. Men are not authorized to disrespect those with whom he heads.”

These findings align with Klinken's (2011) assertion that popular notions of masculinity often include problematic behaviours such as alcoholism, domestic violence, and sexual misconduct (p. 112). Participants in this study emphasized that genuine headship and provision should be characterized by loyalty, both to oneself and to others. They viewed loyalty as integral to fulfilling the roles of family head and provider. Mano further elaborated on this point:

“Men are not expected to be drunkards and raping women all the time. The few men I knew in my community when I was growing up were much respected, but I doubt whether men would still deserve the same respected nowadays, because most men are drunkards, they smoke heavy drugs and are violent before their wives, children and to the community at large.”

In summary, the study participants linked masculinity to the roles of family head and provider, which they viewed as critical responsibilities requiring both practical and moral commitment. They underscored the need for humility, respect, and loyalty in fulfilling these roles, challenging the negative behaviours sometimes associated with male headship. These insights reflect Van Klinken's (2011) view that discourses on male headship can influence and transform notions of masculinity (p. 105).

5.7. Positive Relationships with Teachers and Peers as Markers of Masculinity

Participants in this study identified maintaining strong relationships with teachers and fellow students as a critical factor in their academic success. They reported that engaging actively in class discussions and being well-prepared for lectures were effective strategies for gaining the attention and respect of their instructors. This preparation often involved extensive reading prior to class to familiarize themselves with upcoming topics. Building positive social relationships within the academic environment is linked to improved student success and well-being (Perguer & Takacs, 2016). Participants noted that a student's academic performance is influenced by their ability to foster good relationships, which includes how they present themselves and interact with others both in and out of the classroom.

The participants emphasized that a real man should maintain good relationships with those around him, including teachers and peers, irrespective of gender. They asserted that academic achievement is compromised if one maintains strained relationships with others in the university community. For example, Nito highlighted the benefits of strong relationships:

“If you are leading sound relationships with other people..., there is always that quest of getting to meet people, who one day may open up doors for you should you be in need. Again, it is in this stage of life that you can start building relationships that will last forever, even after you have left school.”

Participants described the ultimate objective of cultivating these relationships as fostering a "spirit of solidarity." This concept involves mutual support among classmates, which participants believed was crucial for navigating the uncertainties of the future. Samuel illustrated this notion as follows:

“What I appreciate most about my classmates is our spirit of solidarity. You cannot fail a subject if you are open to learning from others. We have created a supportive team that helps us all advance. If you think you know everything and isolate yourself, you risk becoming a laughingstock and underperforming.”

Nito further elaborated on the benefits of a supportive network:

“One of the greatest benefits of my time here has been the network of students we have formed. This network supports us through any challenges we face. Being part of a motivating group that believes in each other's potential helps us overcome obstacles more effectively.”

Participants noted that regular engagement with teachers helped alleviate fears and clarified academic expectations. For instance, Dinho remarked:

“Previously, I avoided interacting with the Director because I thought he was inaccessible. Now, I regularly check if he is in his office and seek his assistance when needed. This improved communication has been beneficial, although I wish all teachers were as approachable.”

Several participants actively engaged in class by frequently raising their hands and volunteering to answer questions, which helped them establish a presence with their teachers. Tiago commented:

“I strive to participate actively in class discussions to attract my teacher's attention and demonstrate my engagement.”

The participants expressed ease in seeking help from both peers and teachers, attributing this to their openness and positive relationships. Nito emphasized:

“A real man should maintain good relationships with those around him, including lecturers and fellow students, regardless of gender. Successful academic performance is challenging without strong interpersonal connections.”

Nito also highlighted the importance of building long-term relationships:

“Maintaining sound relationships is crucial, as they can open doors in the future. This is the stage of life where we establish connections that can last a lifetime, even after we leave the university.”

Participants underscored the value of fostering a "spirit of solidarity" within their academic community. Samuel explained:

“The solidarity among my classmates is invaluable. We support each other, and this mutual aid prevents failure. If you are open to learning from others, you are less likely to struggle academically. A lack of cooperation can lead to isolation and underperformance.”

Pedro added:

“The network of support we’ve created over the past six semesters has been crucial. Being part of a motivated group that believes in each other’s potential helps us overcome challenges more effectively.”

These findings align with Perger and Takács’ (2016) research, which demonstrated that students who interact frequently with faculty members are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships. This highlights the significance of positive interactions with both teachers and peers in enhancing overall student experience and success.

The Participants description of themselves as having good relationships with peers, women and Faculty members in Campus, aligns with the Development of mature interpersonal relationships, and interdependency vectors as described by Chickering and Reisser (1993).

5.8. Being a Positive Role Model as a Marker of Masculinity

Rogers and Mitchell's (2022) four-phase theory of Black male Identity Development describes role modelling as the phase in which undergraduate students "take lessons they have learned throughout their life and begin to share with the next generation of black males (Rogers & Mitchell, 2022).

Participants in this study described their role as men in influencing the academic success of their peers by emphasizing their commitment to their studies and acting as positive role models. They noted that past experiences of peers who left university due to financial mismanagement and personal issues prompted them to reflect on their own behaviour and academic goals. Participants observed that some students misused funds intended for educational expenses, which led to financial difficulties and ultimately forced them to drop out. Armando highlighted this issue:

"It had a significant impact on me because the student in question was very close to me. I was unaware of his financial troubles, and it was disheartening to see his potential wasted due to distractions like alcohol and personal issues."

Participants distinguished themselves from their peers by portraying themselves as mature and responsible students with a clear sense of purpose. They recognized a need to challenge negative stereotypes associated with male undergraduates and aspired to project a positive image of masculinity. Pedro articulated this aspiration:

"By reclaiming a positive image of men, we aim to differentiate ourselves from the typical male students who are often associated with disruptive behavior."

To maintain focus on their studies, participants adopted several strategies. For example, Jackson noted that distancing himself from home-related distractions positively impacted his academic performance. He stated the following:

"Staying away from home helped me avoid numerous family commitments that could have interfered with my studies."

Participants also emphasized the importance of selective friendship in maintaining academic focus. They critiqued peers who engaged in excessive partying and substance abuse, which they believed detracted from academic success. Gerson remarked:

“I have turned down numerous invitations to parties because I know that they can be time-consuming and counterproductive to my academic goals. Parties will always be there, but my education is a priority.”

Participants described the benefits of associating with academically focused peers as a "win-win" situation, where mutual support and exchange of ideas contribute to personal development. Dinho reflected on his approach:

“I prefer to associate with hardworking students and avoid those who are not serious about their studies. This environment challenges me and helps me grow.”

The university environment was seen as a platform for students from diverse backgrounds to engage with and learn from each other. Participants valued the opportunities for role modelling and mentorship offered by the university. Jose expressed his view on his influence on others:

“I believe I set a good example for others by taking my academic responsibilities seriously. My dedication to school and good grades have demonstrated to others the importance of hard work.”

Gerson also took pride in his role as a mentor, noting that he provided guidance to younger students facing academic challenges:

“I have enjoyed helping first and second-year students who seek assistance with their studies. Some lecturers even refer students to me for help.”

These findings align with Bukoski and Hatch's (2016) study, which found that male students who associated their academic success with their identity as men developed confidence, self-esteem, and resilience, contributing to their continued academic aspirations (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016, p.112).

5.9. Lack of Awareness About Masculine Identity Itself

Participants expressed varying levels of awareness regarding their own masculine identity when asked to define what it means to be a man. Many struggled to articulate a clear understanding of masculinity, with some participants acknowledging that they had not given the concept much thought. This lack of clarity was so pronounced that several participants admitted to being uncertain about when or how they began to perceive themselves as men.

Tiago, for instance, recounted that his awareness of his masculine identity began to develop during Secondary school. He contrasted his early experiences with those in secondary education, noting a marked shift in how gender roles were perceived. He stated the following:

“It was when I got to Secondary school that I started to realize that I was no longer a girl. At junior primary, the school environment did not provide clear distinctions between boys and girls. We all used the same facilities, like peeing behind the same tree. But in Secondary school, things changed significantly. We had separate facilities for boys and girls, and there were clear gender-specific expectations, which made me more aware of my identity as a man.”

Participants also highlighted that their home environments played a dual role in shaping their understanding of masculinity. Solomon, for example, felt that his home environment delayed his awareness of his masculine identity:

“At home, boys and girls were treated equally. We all had to perform the same chores like washing dishes, doing laundry, and cooking. My mother emphasized that I should not struggle when she or my sisters were not around, which meant I had to become self-sufficient. This equal approach at home made it harder for me to develop a distinct sense of what it means to be a man.”

In contrast, Charles described how his church significantly influenced his understanding of masculinity:

“My Sunday school teacher was very clear about the differences between boys and girls. We were seated separately, and the church had distinct areas for men, often in the front rows. This taught me from a young age that there were clear distinctions between male and female roles, which contributed to my sense of being a man.”

These findings underscore the role of social institutions—such as schools and churches—in shaping gender identities. This aligns with previous research that has explored how such institutions contribute to the formation of gender roles and identities (Connell, 1996).

5.10. Conclusion

Through their responses to questions about masculine identity and its relation to academic excellence, ten distinct themes emerged. These themes reflect diverse ways in which the participants construct their masculinity, including Being an *academic high achiever* as a Marker of Masculinity, Physical appearance, Heteronormative Expectations of Masculinity, Non-Violence as a Marker of Masculinity, Perseverance as a Marker of Masculinity, Male Headship and Family Provision as Central Aspects of Masculinity, Positive Relationships with Teachers and Peers as Markers of Masculinity, Being a Positive Role Model as a Marker of Masculinity, and Lack of Awareness About Masculine Identity Itself.

The findings from this chapter highlight the multifaceted nature of masculinity among male students and its influence on their academic performance. The subsequent chapter delves into how male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students conceptualize academic excellence, further exploring the intersections between their perceptions of masculinity and their academic aspirations.

CHAPTER SIX

MALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

6.0. Introduction

The previous chapter explored how male undergraduate students at Save University construct their masculinity and how this construction influences their academic performance. This exploration revealed that students' masculinities were constructed in various ways, contributing to their academic achievements.

The current chapter addresses the second research question: "What are male undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of academic excellence at Save University?" Academic excellence theory adapted from Hotchkins and Dancy (2016), and Harper (2008) was applied to explore the factors influencing male undergraduate students' conceptions of academic excellence at Save University.

Traditional metrics of academic excellence, such as student retention, graduation rates, GPA, and test scores, often overlook the nuanced experiences of minority students in higher education. Critics have argued for a broader understanding of student excellence, one that encompasses more than mere technical achievements (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Harper, 2008).

In this study, academic excellence is defined not only by achieving a cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) of 14, but also by factors such as: (i) participation in extracurricular activities, (ii) application of theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, (iii) regular class attendance, (iv) securing meaningful employment, (v) effective problem-solving skills, (vi) responsible citizenship, (vii) exemplary behavior, and (viii) commitment to self-care and care for others.

The study identified and selected participants based on these criteria, with nominations requested from the university to identify high-achieving male students for inclusion in the research

6.1. Participants' Academic Achievement Background

At the time of the interviews, several participants held notable positions and achievements at the university. Two students, Kito and Pedro, held leadership roles within the Student Association.

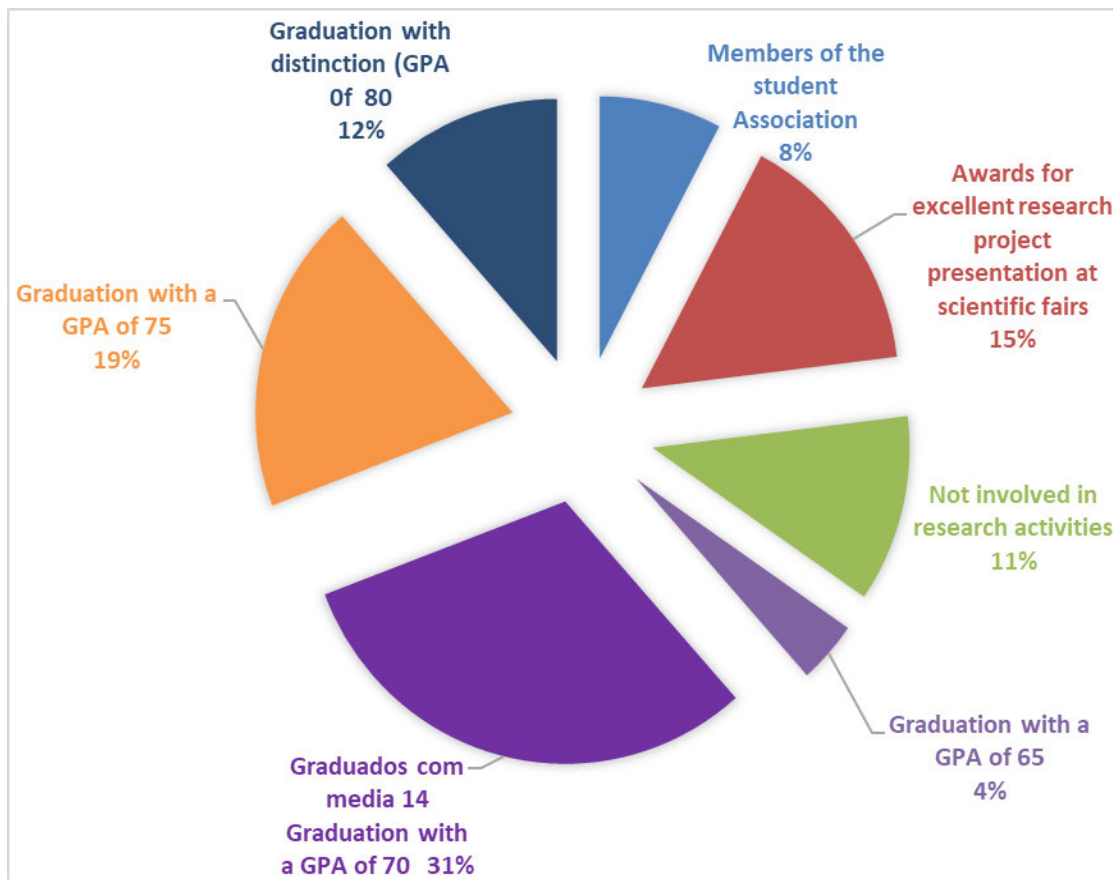
Most participants had engaged in research activities organized by the University, though a few namely Charles, Gerson, and Jackson were exceptions.

Three students received awards for outstanding research project presentations at scientific fairs: Michael, Kito, and Armando. Additionally, three participants graduated with distinction: Armando, Nito, and Mano.

Regarding GPA, five participants graduated with a GPA of 15 (75%): Kito, Solomon, Charles, Jose, and Jackson. Four participants graduated with a GPA of 14 (70%): Fernando, Gerson, Dinho, and Michael. One participant, Robert, graduated with a GPA of 13 (65%), and one student, Tiago, had not yet graduated.

The figure below summarizes the participants' achievements:

Figure 2: Students' academic achievement



6.2. Synopsis of the Participants' Perceptions of Academic Excellence

In this section, I present a summary of the participants' conceptions of academic excellence as captured during a focus group discussion. When asked to discuss their perceptions of academic excellence, participants offered various definitions, highlighting that Grade Point Average (GPA) should be considered but not be the sole criterion.

Several participants, including Nito, Kito, and Gerson, emphasized that "academic excellence is not only about higher marks but also about the student's ability to achieve your goals as a student." Similarly, Armando remarked,

"Good grades are indeed important determiners of academic excellence, but how you get those grades is of great importance... I mean that hard work and being focused on your major is fundamental."

Robert, speaking from his own experience, defined academic excellence as:

"The ability a student has to navigate college in spite of all obstacles he encounters in his academic journey."

Participants also identified additional criteria for academic excellence, such as attending classes regularly, establishing good relationships, and showing respect for oneself and others.

Below is a detailed account of the participants' conceptions of academic excellence based on their experiences at Save University.

6.3. Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Participation in extracurricular activities has been correlated with students' academic excellence. For example, as far back as 1999, Astin (1999) found that students who "participate in extracurricular activities of almost any type are less likely to drop out" (p.523). According to Christison (2013), students who participate frequently in extracurricular activities tend to have higher grades, and more positive educational experiences in general. Participants in this study were involved in various extracurricular activities such as holding leadership positions,

presenting at student scientific fairs, receiving awards, and being members of the University student choir. The following sections describe the participants' experiences with these activities.

6.3.1. Holding Leadership Positions

In this study, leadership has been defined as holding a position in the university Student Association. Numerous studies suggest that leadership development is a critical component of a students' campus experience (Astin, 1999; Saunders, 2017). Participants linked academic excellence to holding leadership positions on campus. They reported that besides affirming their masculinity, holding leadership positions on campus provided numerous advantages. These included gaining recognition among students both within their institution and from other surrounding institutions. Leadership positions offered opportunities to meet and engage with influential individuals within the University. Pedro highlighted this by saying,

"It has always been a privilege sitting side by side with people whom you admire. I have been invited to attend very important meetings on campus. In those meetings you learn a lot."

Participants noted that leadership roles facilitated easier interactions with University staff and provided early access to information about programs, scholarships, and upcoming events. One participant shared,

"Before a scholarship is advertised, I already know about it... before a student is expelled from the University for misconduct, I already know about it."

Despite the privileges, participants acknowledged the challenges associated with leadership responsibilities. Kito reflected:

"You actually need to have a big heart to keep all you see to yourself. There is no space to be celebrating all the time because there are also very sensitive issues to be dealt with."

Pedro and Kito described the respect and increased self-esteem they gained from holding leadership positions. Pedro stated:

"Being part of the Student Association is a huge responsibility... that has made me become a real man."

Kito added:

"Sitting at the board on behalf of all the University students has increased my self-esteem as a man."

Participants also valued the exposure to diverse perspectives and the development of communication skills, particularly with female students. Kito noted the following:

"Being in a leadership position at the SA contributed to my self-esteem, but above all, it made me become more sensitive and friendly towards women."

Occupying leadership roles in campus is also associated with identity development. For instance, Kito indicated that he had developed a sense of self-confidence upon his appointment as member of the Student Association:

"I couldn't stand before a large number of students, and talk... but now I am getting used to...I think it is actually a good experience sitting in there!"

These findings align with Astin's (1999) claim that "students who become actively involved in student government interact frequently with their peers" (p.525).

6.3.2. Presenting at Student Scientific Fairs

At Save University, scientific fairs provide students with opportunities to present their research projects, works in progress, or findings from their disciplines. These fairs, held annually September and October, foster interactions among students from various disciplines and the broader academic and local community.

Participants associated academic excellence with their involvement in scientific fairs. They viewed these fairs as platforms where they could showcase their masculinity through academic prowess. Michael commented as follows:

"This is the only space I have to meet other students whom I admire...! I have met brilliant students who have passed with good grades, and we ended up creating a network to help each other."

Participants advocated for increased participation in scientific fairs, citing their motivational and educational benefits. Kito shared his experience as follows:

"I have participated in scientific fairs with other students... we did very well and received an award for excellent research work. It was a great experience."

Participants also expressed a need for more opportunities to engage in research activities. Hugo lamented,

"There are many students who graduate from this University without being initiated into research... that is ridiculous, and the University cannot allow that to happen."

Robert emphasized the importance of research involvement by stating:

"We would like to share with the University wider community what we have learned and how we can contribute to community development."

Participants appreciated the role of some lecturers in initiating students into research projects but noted that more needs to be done. José mentioned:

"I only know a few lecturers who do research and publish... those are the only lecturers that have inspired students to carry on research activities."

Hugo described his positive experience as part of a research team as follows:

"Being part of that research group was a wow for me! I could meet other students whom I admire a lot... we ended up creating a network."

These findings support previous studies that found participation in professor's undergraduate research projects enhances students' retention (Perger & Takács, 2016; Xulu-gama, 2019).

6.3.3. Being Part of the University Choir

Participants linked academic excellence to their involvement in the University choir, viewing it as a pragmatic aspect of their academic experience. Singing in the choir significantly contributed to their self-esteem and provided a means to connect with a diverse group of students. Bento noted that singing in the choir *"connected him to people he would not have met in his life."*

Despite facing ridicule from some male peers who viewed choir participation as unmasculine, participants like Kito valued their involvement. Kito stated:

"Being part of the choir has also improved my relationships with women students, and with other men students, particularly those who are in the choir. Singing is what I enjoy most, I cannot do without it."

Participants believed that the University should give the choir the same importance as other recreational activities like football and basketball. They argued that singing helps in stress relief and enhances overall well-being. Kito elaborated:

"Joining the choir was such a brilliant idea... each time I sing I feel like my spirit and mind have been renovated."

Participants also highlighted the choir's role in University ceremonies and its impact on both students and the University community. Kito indicated:

"If you are a member of the University choir and you are performing well, everyone will look for you in private so you can maybe go and perform in a ceremony."

Kito described singing as intellectually demanding and emphasized its role in advocacy and community engagement as follows:

"We do not just sing for the sake of singing... we sing to both teach and entertain... During singing, we raise our concerns, voice our needs, denounce, and fight against all kinds of maladies facing students at University."

These findings are consistent with studies on choir singing, which found that choir singing "provided a feeling of unity, brought about relaxation and energy, and generated intense feelings" (Tonneijcr & Kinebanian, 2008, p.177).

6.4. Transforming Theoretical Knowledge into Everyday Practice

Academic excellence was linked by nearly all participants to the transformation of theoretical knowledge learned at university into the practice of everyday real life. Participants emphasized that engaging theory with practice offers students a unique opportunity to demonstrate their

ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. They suggested that one of the University's responsibilities is to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application, ensuring that students do not remain purely theoretical beings unable to perform practical tasks.

José expressed this view succinctly:

"I am of the opinion that the University shouldn't be teaching theories only in such a time as this. I think it is time to move from theories into praxis. It is important to apply what we learn in our real lives... indeed, we need to be equipped with skills that can connect us to praxis."

Participants further explained that applying classroom learning to real-life situations is crucial for developing the ability to respond effectively to challenges. Fernando commented:

"If only I could learn something in class and be able to transform it into practice... If I could translate theories into praxis for the benefit of my community, because that is the only way I could test what I know within my community."

Gerson echoed Fernando's sentiments, highlighting the importance of practical application: *"It is not enough to be theoretical and just end there... What I mean is that reading books alone is not enough. You should be able to apply what you have learned for the benefit of society. Yes, just apply your mind to be practical. I think that is what every student should be trying to do."*

Some participants expressed dissatisfaction with learning theories they perceived as irrelevant to contemporary issues. They argued that parts of the Humanities curriculum, particularly in disciplines such as Philosophy, History, and Law, are outdated and disconnected from today's world. During a focus group discussion, Armando stated:

"The contents of History textbooks as they present today need to be re-adjusted, re-counted, and re-written because they are detached from reality. The youth cannot just remain in the past; they would like to know who the actual heroes of today are. There is the impression that our history does not produce heroes any longer."

Similarly, Tiago, a Philosophy major, explained:

"Philosophy as a field of study needs to be reconstructed and readjusted according to the demands of present society. It is the University's role to consult with the students on what changes should be introduced into their curricula to make it very attractive and close to the needs of the community in which the University is located."

Nearly all participants criticized the University for treating students as passive recipients of a curriculum that does not meet their needs and expectations. They argued that students should be treated as active subjects in the development of the University curriculum. Participants suggested that if students were consulted about the relevance and necessity of certain curricular contents, their voices would be better represented in the curriculum development process. Solomon articulated this concern:

"In my opinion, the University should be democratic enough. It should be open to receiving criticism from students whenever necessary. The University board should be able to listen to students' concerns and meet their worries. If this can happen, students will be motivated because they know they participate in policymaking at the University; they are not going to be seen as outsiders all the time."

The participants' perspectives underscore the importance of integrating practical experience with theoretical knowledge and fostering a more inclusive approach to curriculum development. This alignment between theory and practice is essential for achieving academic excellence and preparing students to effectively navigate real-world challenges.

6.5. Attending Classes on a Regular Basis

When discussing strategies one would need to excel, participants highlighted that attending classes regularly was highly beneficial as it fostered peer connections and facilitated in-class interactions. Regular attendance provided more opportunities for face-to-face engagement with lecturers, which was crucial for understanding their disciplinary knowledge and maintaining academic progress. Dinho illustrated the benefits of this approach, stating:

"We have created a study group...in this group we assist each other with school-related business. It is a group of people with the same mindset. Whenever we come across a difficulty, a

teacher will be there to assist us. Our study group members have reported progress in their studies. We are proud of ourselves. It is all about reading; you will see the outcomes."

Participants also noted that regular class attendance allowed them to receive timely feedback from lecturers, which was essential for staying on track with their studies. Michael shared that by the end of the second semester of his first year, he had passed eighty percent of his major subjects with grades above 75 percent, attributing his success to regular attendance:

"Attending classes on a regular basis prevented me from hanging around with people who do not share the same interests as me. I think the classroom is a safe space to discuss anything with teachers and other students. Yeah, I think it is rewarding; my grades can tell, they have improved hugely."

This observation aligns with the findings of Jeremy and Fisher (2012), who noted that "higher-achieving students received more positive feedback and instruction from teachers, as well as more opportunities for further development from teachers" (p. 477). Conversely, participants described missing classes as detrimental to academic development. Solomon explained the negative consequences of absenteeism:

"Some students don't show up in class or they just skip classes. They leave their homes just to stay in the street with peers. Some end up learning to smoke or drink. By the end of the day, they fail and put the blame on the teachers. They end up becoming a shame to their parents and a laughingstock to society."

Participants emphasized that regular attendance was key to excelling in their majors, as it facilitated hard work and consistent study habits. They mentioned that in-class discussions allowed them to review each other's work and engage in meaningful discussions on specific topics. Students who did not attend classes regularly risked falling behind and potentially failing to complete their studies. Mano commented on the risks associated with absenteeism:

"I know how painful it is missing classes. I like it when we are having a discussion about a particular topic and everyone comes in with their views. I actually don't understand why some people would just skip classes to go hang around with friends... Whenever I miss classes, I feel sick because the feeling is that I have messed up with everything, my life, my dreams."

The participants' perspectives on academic achievement are supported by Astin's (1999) findings, which state that "students who interact frequently with friends and faculty members are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience" (p. 525). Regular class attendance not only enhanced academic performance but also contributed to a more fulfilling and satisfying university experience.

6.6. Getting a Good Job After University

Phewa (2016) found that students often define academic excellence as "a combination of academic success and finding employment upon graduation" (p.43). Similarly, Bukoski and Hatch (2016) revealed that students "often framed their sense of success through the gaining of a future materialistic lifestyle" (p.113). When asked about their perceptions of academic excellence, the participants in this study similarly emphasized employability. Securing a well-paid job was universally described as the primary motivation for pursuing a university degree.

Participants from economically disadvantaged backgrounds recounted difficult family situations, which further motivated them to study diligently in hopes of securing employment that would enable them to improve their circumstances. The struggles experienced in their communities fuelled their determination to excel academically as a pathway to a better future. Participants viewed academic excellence as a journey beginning with education and culminating in the job market. Tiago remarked:

"If you do well in school, you are likely to do well in the employment market. All you have to do now is to concentrate on your studies. If you don't, the future is likely to be bleak, and life will become more difficult. I always warn others to focus on their work."

Schroeder (2011) found that students' primary goal in pursuing a university degree is "to get a job that pays reasonably well and is satisfying" (p.4). Participants also discussed the role of the university in enhancing their employability. They acknowledged that the university signs numerous memoranda and partnership agreements with local government and NGOs to offer job and internship opportunities to graduates. However, participants expressed skepticism about the practical impact of these agreements. Mano noted:

"We often hear that the university has signed this or that memorandum, but I don't know what impact those signed memoranda have. I think it is more political than we realize. That is where the university misses its role in society."

Despite the limited internship opportunities, particularly in banks, participants reported that these experiences were valuable, often leading to part-time or full-time employment. While these opportunities have positively contributed to student development, participants felt that more needs to be done. They expressed confidence in their majors and optimism about their future job prospects, highlighting the holistic nature of their education. Jackson explained:

"We have all been initiated into a holistic kind of education. I have taken religion and gender classes, which have changed my worldview completely."

Despite the challenges the university faces in ensuring employment for graduates, participants commended the institution for its openness to new initiatives. Michael observed:

"The university has never denied us the opportunity to grow academically. We have been given time and space to organize events for our advancement as students. If you walk around, you will see adverts from different organizations looking for students for internship projects. We are allowed to apply, and some of us have participated in those internship programs before. It has been a great experience!"

These findings align with Perger and Takács (2016), who found that students perceive success as acquiring a job upon leaving university. Participants underscored the critical role of the university in facilitating their transition from academic life to the workforce, emphasizing the importance of practical experiences and real-world applications of their studies.

6.7. Possessing Problem Solving Skills

When asked to describe anything correlated to academic excellence in campus, participants explained that Problem-solving was a critical cognitive competency that not everyone had. They describe it as the ability of an individual to address and resolve issues, which is often measured by "standardized achievement tests, college admission requirements, and seen as a direct result of a student's cognitive competencies" (Hotchkins and Dancy (2015, p.76). In this context,

participants in this study perceived academic excellence as the ability to understand and apply learned knowledge to solve real-world problems for the betterment of society.

Participants expressed enthusiasm for challenges that required them to solve problems, viewing such challenges as opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities and maleness. They believed that excelling academically provided them with the skills necessary to address and remedy various issues in their communities. Participants emphasized that high grades alone were insufficient if not accompanied by a commitment to problem-solving. As Hugo noted:

"Higher grades are just numbers, and some students get higher grades because they cheat. Alongside good marks, there should be a critical mind, because it is of no importance to have a high GPA with a blank brain. You would not call yourself a real man!"

Echoing Hugo's sentiments, Charles stated:

"For you to excel, you need to work hard and have a good command of your major. You need to apply yourself in your studies so that you can analyze any situation before you and find accurate solutions. Don't worry too much about scores, because scores won't make you a real man; just worry about what you can or cannot do with what you have learned."

Participants highlighted that a university education should transform minds and enable individuals to make a difference in how they respond to everyday problems. They believed that a university degree should not leave students unchanged but should enhance their ability to engage with and address real-world issues. According to the participants, problem-solving requires extensive reading and engagement with like-minded individuals. Hugo emphasized the importance of personal transformation through education:

"You must leave this place transformed. One tip for that is to humble yourself, read a lot, and stick to your goals. In addition, be concerned about the problems affecting your community and ask yourself questions about how to go about it."

In summary, the participants articulated that academic excellence extends beyond high grades to encompass the practical application of knowledge to solve societal problems. They underscored the necessity of a critical mind, ongoing engagement with current issues, and a transformative

educational experience that prepares students to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

6.8. Academic Excellence and Citizenship and Social Responsibility

Participants identified a strong relationship between academic excellence and social responsibility. They described higher education as a space where students are expected to develop skills that contribute to social development. Participants indicated that it is the University's responsibility to nurture students into responsible citizens who can contribute to their communities and society at large. By pursuing a university degree, participants believed they would be equipped to effect change and respond to various societal challenges.

In a focus group discussion, one participant argued that if the University is meant to equip students with skills to become agents of societal change, GPA should not be the sole criterion for determining student excellence. Jackson noted:

"Citizenship should be considered also... It is not enough reading books all the time, and perhaps getting higher marks, if you do not develop the sense of being a responsible citizen, because how you live with people around you matters. You should demonstrate good citizenship in your relationship with one another. Yes, you gotta live responsibly!"

Armando added:

"I think the University has deeply influenced the way I look at myself as a student, but basically as a man... From my point of view, a university degree should not be about how many books you have read or how many marks you have scored, it should be about how you exercise your citizenship. It is about you making positive change in society."

Participants conceived of academic excellence as encompassing more than just reading books and conducting research. According to Nito:

"For me, academic excellence goes beyond reading books and doing research. If you cannot apply that research to develop a sense of being a responsible citizen, that is helpless. There is nothing fun about being an undergraduate if you cannot learn how to lead a responsible life. I think it is all about good citizenship... it is about responsibility."

Participants also expressed concerns about the University potentially becoming a place where inequalities are reproduced, which contradicts its intended purpose. Gerson expressed his dismay, stating:

"I am at odds with those who try to transform the University into a space of social inequalities, rivalries, and anger. From my point of view, the University is supposed to be a place where students come together, socialize, and exercise their citizenship. The University is supposed to be home for all."

Gerson further noted that the University is becoming a closed space where the idea of otherness is more visible. Fernando added:

"The University is moving into an antisocial space. There are some students who are jealous or perhaps selfish, who do not want to catch up with one another. When they are in trouble, they hide themselves and never seek assistance. Some students never show up when we are given a group task to do."

These findings align with Archer's (2008) view that academia is a contested territory involving constant struggles. Archer posits that "becoming an academic is not smooth, straightforward, linear, or automatic, but can also involve conflict and instances of inauthenticity, marginalization, and exclusion" (p. 387).

Several participants expressed concern over how their studies would contribute to the development of their communities, especially given the current economic hardships in Mozambique. Participants praised Save University for the freedom with which they can speak their minds without intimidation, describing it as an exemplary unpartisan higher education institution with no political interference. Gerson commented:

"At universities where there is political interference, one's political colour matters when enjoying benefits as students, not at Save University, because all of us are treated the same... we are at liberty to speak our minds and thoughts, there is no political interference."

Overall, these findings corroborate the view that academic environments are both the object and product of rivalry and conflict, as noted by Archer (2008). Participants highlighted the

importance of a university education in fostering responsible citizenship and contributing to societal development.

6.9. Academic Excellence and Students' Behavior

When discussing potential strategies to enhance academic excellence on campus, participants emphasized the critical role of students' behaviour. Almost all participants agreed that alongside test scores, behaviour significantly impacts academic achievement, either positively or negatively. They stressed the necessity of leading an exemplary life to stay connected to their studies and described forming small study groups to support each other, complete homework in a comfortable and friendly environment, and build meaningful relationships. Nito explained this decision, stating:

"It is in this stage of life that you can start building relationships that will last forever, even after you have left school. How you present yourself in class, the quality of relationships that you make on and off campus, how you relate to the staff and other students can determine how you achieve."

Samuel echoed these sentiments, emphasizing the importance of respect and hard work:

"For me, one's behaviour in class, being respectful to oneself and to others, and hard work are crucial to academic excellence. Good grades alone are not important; how you behave is."

Several participants linked good behaviour to their spirituality, noting that religious affiliations contributed to their academic success. They commented on the benefits of attending fraternal gatherings, which provided social interaction, mutual support, and a conducive environment for learning. Nito remarked:

"Fraternal gatherings are indeed a good thing, because in those gatherings we socialize, interact, and learn from one another. It would be very difficult to learn everything on your own, but when we come together with other students, it then makes things easier for all of us."

Gerson provided a comprehensive view of academic excellence, stating:

"Academic excellence has to do with students' transformation and productivity. It involves one's character. Good grades are part of it, but not necessarily the only indicator of academic

excellence. It extends to how a student cultivates a good study environment on campus... it is about being morally mature and well-behaved."

José indicated that many students deviate from their spirituality, which he viewed negatively:

"One cannot talk about self-respect or respect for others if he misses those religious teachings. Religion does, indeed, play a role in my academics, and I would say that my success comes from God."

Hugo suggested that the University should monitor students' behavior:

"The University should be able to train students who are unique in terms of their behaviour so that wherever they are, anyone can just tell these students are from SAVE University."

Participants also emphasized the importance of staying connected to religious communities. Dinho shared his experience, saying:

"Had it not been for my brothers and sisters in Christ, I was about to quit school. But they kept insisting that I should not quit because quitting would imply returning to my village empty-handed. They frequently insisted that it would be a disappointment to my parents, friends who believed in me, and to God who had a plan for me. I then decided to stay."

Astin (1999) posits that joining social fraternities or sororities helps prevent students from dropping out of college. He asserts, "Students who are deeply involved academically are less likely than average students to show increases in liberalism, hedonism, artistic interests, and religious apostasy" (p. 523).

6.10. Academic Excellence and Intergenerational Fulfilment

Intergenerational fulfilment, as described by Hotchkins and Dancy (2015), is the desire to "meet elders' and parents' expectations of being excellent for the betterment of their communities both locally and globally" (p. 15). Participants believed that their education would not only advance their personal goals but also benefit their families and communities. The participants were acutely aware of their responsibilities and expressed feelings of compassion and guilt towards the living conditions of their parents and communities. They felt a strong obligation to complete their studies to compensate those who had supported their education and socialization.

Participants articulated their expectations for positive change in their communities. Michael explained:

"My motivation for studying comes from the people of my community. There are people I left behind, and those are the same people who pay my school fees. Whenever I am in class, I have that in mind... I owe satisfaction to my parents. They are investing a lot in me; they expect a reward... something good when I finish school."

Michael expressed a desire to visibly contribute to their communities as a way of acknowledging the support they received. Robert noted the role his uncle and community played in his upbringing:

"Firstly, I would like to say that my uncle, who I admire so much, is the source of my inspiration towards success. Again, when I look back, I realize that behind my family is also my community and the younger generations... I feel indebted to them... I got the feeling that I must do something to help them."

Participants commented that in many African cultures, an individual's success or failure is seen as the success or failure of the entire community. This cultural expectation propelled them to strive for academic excellence. Nito emphasized this assumption:

"When I meet other male students, I always remind them about what our parents and community expect of us. They have the expectation that their future lies in our hands. This reminds me that we should work hard, we should have brilliant results, and indeed we are the future of our parents and communities."

Participants believed that they are not just consumers of education but also integral contributors to the education process. They felt that their future, and the future of their communities, lay in their hands. Samuel concluded:

"If we do not work hard, we will never make it. We are the ones who should trace our own destination. The destinations of future generations lie within our hands. We gotta be firm and work hard. We just need to remain focused on our studies; the future is always uncertain."

The above findings on intergenerational fulfillment underscores the participants' sense of duty to meet the expectations of their parents and communities, driving them to complete their studies and contribute positively to societal development. This to them exemplifies what it means to be academically excellent.

6.11. The Class WhatsApp Groups

According to Den Berg and Mudau (2022), there is a paucity of research on the role of WhatsApp as a communication tool in supporting teaching and learning. Participants in this study described the importance of their class WhatsApp groups, noting that their functionality extended beyond simply sharing course content and class-related announcements. These groups were also used to share internship and part-time job advertisements, as well as other valuable information. One participant explained,

"WhatsApp groups keep us in touch. They keep us informed about a number of adverts and opportunities both on and off campus."

The participants further emphasized that WhatsApp groups were not limited to sharing opportunities; they also served as solidarity spaces where students could exchange information about significant life events, both positive and negative.

"When one of our brothers experiences a loss, or when there is a loss in the class, we are quickly informed," said Pedro.

The WhatsApp groups played an essential role in disseminating important information about potential opportunities within and outside the university. Many participants shared that they had gained access to relevant information on campus through these groups. José recounted how being disconnected from a WhatsApp group once affected him:

"When I learned about that bursary application, it was too late to apply... I didn't have the opportunity because I didn't know about it... I just missed it... A lot of information did not reach those of us who were not in those WhatsApp groups. I then couldn't apply; who knows, I might have gotten it."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, WhatsApp, along with other communication tools, became a crucial platform for supporting teaching and learning at Save University. Mano explained:

"I nearly missed the deadline for submitting my assignment because many announcements were shared in the class WhatsApp group... Any information related to the class was posted there... If you're not connected, you miss it."

WhatsApp groups thus became an important platform for students to exchange information, contact one another, or reach out to instructors. José shared his experience:

"I still enjoyed the warmth of the class from the comfort of my home. I didn't miss my classmates that much. I could contact my teachers on WhatsApp, ask questions, and receive feedback as if I were in class. I find WhatsApp incredibly helpful!"

Solomon also noted that WhatsApp groups allowed students to stay connected even after they had graduated.

"This group allows graduates from each year and discipline to stay in touch... Members are free to exit the group if they wish, but as far as I'm concerned, these groups never disappear... They keep us connected even after we finish school."

6.12. Supportive Learning Environments

Stanton-Salazar (2004) suggested that connections with significant individuals, such as school administrators, faculty, and peers, help foster pro-academic identities, which in turn lead to desirable academic outcomes. The relationships participants formed with faculty staff, administrators, and course directors positively influenced their academic experiences on campus. For instance, Kito, a final-year student in Portuguese and a member of the Student Association, had received several recommendation letters from his course directors, lecturers, and staff, which he could use to apply for various opportunities. Tiago similarly reported requesting a letter of recommendation from his course director to apply for funding for his project in his final year of studies.

At UniSave, all students are traditionally given opportunities for internships, whether in public or private institutions. The university, through the Department of Communication and Marketing,

actively seeks internships for students by contacting key employers on their behalf. These internships, often paid, are available to new graduates through local companies and organizations, such as Olhos do Mundo, as well as banks like the Investment and Commercial Bank (BCI) and Millennium International Bank (BIM), among others. In addition to internships, these institutions offer job opportunities for graduates seeking their first career roles.

Providing students with both informational and emotional support can contribute significantly to positive academic outcomes. According to Moschetti and Hudley (2008), "differences in academic engagement and persistence in college may be explained by differences in the quality of social networks that students are able to access." Several networks and connections with significant others were mentioned as playing a crucial role in participants' academic lives. The university community was praised for its strong ethical values of solidarity and religiosity, which many students perceived as binding students, staff, and faculty together.

Speckman (2007) highlights the African proverb, *umntu ngumntu ngabantu*, which underscores the deep interconnectedness in African societies. It reminds individuals that they are not complete in isolation but are responsible for others and accountable to them. This philosophy resonates with Save University's ethical framework, which is rooted in African worldviews. As Oduyoye (2001) states, "whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual." According to Mbiti (1969), the importance of collective identity is captured in his notion that, "when an African suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbors, and his relatives, whether living or deceased" (p. 78). The individual's identity is intrinsically linked to the group, as expressed in the saying, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969, p. 78).

Participants also expressed appreciation for the way lecturers at UniSave deliver their classes. *"Teachers deliver classes in a more simplistic way... they use inclusive and positive language,"* said Gerson. Participants noted that, at the beginning of each semester, lecturers share the course outline with the class, so students are aware of what to expect throughout the term.

Supportive friendship groups, oriented towards academic goals, were also highlighted. These groups differed from those described in other higher education institutions, where students might

engage in negative behaviours, such as substance abuse (Singh, 2022). The campus environment was described as safe and conducive to learning. Mano remarked, *"We hear that on other campuses, students experience a lot of violence and drug addiction. There is no violence here; I have never encountered a student who is a drug abuser or addicted to drugs."*

Charles commented on the freedom of thought and expression at Save University: *"Students are free to speak their minds. There is indeed freedom of thinking and freedom of speech at Save University. That should be the mandate of a university: freedom of speech. Students should be at liberty to think and speak their minds. They must have the freedom to think critically and independently so they can decide what they want and what they do not."*

It is noteworthy that participants described their lecturers' classroom delivery as safe and inclusive, particularly in a male-dominated society marked by political instability, where many teachers are active in the country's political scene. Dinho added, *"Teachers have avoided politicizing the classroom environment; no student feels discriminated against on the basis of their gender or political affiliation. This makes the teaching and learning environment a safe space for all, regardless of one's political views."*

Participants also noted that faculty administrators and other staff members made concerted efforts to create conducive teaching and learning environments. Fernando remarked, *"They treat all students with due respect and dignity."*

Furthermore, some participants, particularly those from low-income families, described the supportive relationships they received from university staff and administrators as vital to their academic success. Charles shared, *"Without a scholarship, I don't know what would have happened to me... my uncle would not have been able to pay for my studies."*

According to Moschetti and Hudley (2008), social networks on campus provide students with valuable information about internships and employment opportunities, further supporting their academic and professional growth.

6.13. Conclusion

This chapter explored how high-achieving male undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Save University construct and experience academic excellence in relation

to their masculine identities. The participating students' experiences highlight a multifaceted understanding of academic excellence in higher education, extending beyond GPAs. Key dimensions of this broader perspective include involvement in extracurricular activities, the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, securing meaningful employment post-graduation, effective problem-solving skills, demonstrating good citizenship, maintaining commendable behaviour, and showing a commitment to family and community welfare.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INFLUENCERS ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH ACHIEVING MALES

7.0. Introduction

This chapter explores the social and educational environments impact on the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences undergraduate male students at Save University. The chapter addresses the third research question: *How do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences' students relate their construction of masculine identities to their academic excellence at Save University?* Jones and McEwen's (2000) Multiple Identity Dimensions theory provided the framework to understanding how the Save University's social and learning environments have influenced Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences undergraduate male students' identity development.

In exploring how the social and educational environments at the University have impacted participants' identity development, various influencers emerged: (i) **Religious teachings and messages on masculinity**, (ii) **Classes on gender**, (iii) **Classes on religion**, (iv) **Positive masculinity** (v) **Obsession with achievement and fear of failure** , (vi) **Competition for grades** (vii) **Religious leaders as role models** (viii) **Public recognition of high achievers**, (ix) **Traditional masculinity not tolerated on campus** (x) **Parental involvement** (xi) **The role of the university in student Development** (xii) **Internationalization of the university**, and (xiii) **Impediments to student success**.

7.1. Religious Teachings and Messages on Masculinity

Covrig et al. (2013) define religion as a “socially shared experience where members of a group affiliate around similar spiritual experiences and beliefs” (p. 105). Religion and spirituality overlap and have been used interchangeably in this section. Research has indicated a correlation between spiritual beliefs, religious participation, and achievement motivation (Imron & Mawardi, 2023). Spirituality has been described as playing a significant role in students' resilience, as it encourages them to “enhance their ability to overcome challenges and motivates them to achieve academically” (Imron & Mawardi, 2023, p. 316).

Jones and McEwen (2000) argue that culture, religion, and gender are identity dimensions that shape one's core identity. Numerous studies have highlighted that culture and religion are key

institutions influencing the construction of gender in Africa (Dube, 2003; Chitando, 2007; Van Klinken, 2011). When asked, “How has your religion (or faith) influenced the way you live as a male student?” participants unanimously responded that religion has indeed played a pivotal role in their academic lives. Several participants described their spirituality as a driving force behind their studies. They reflected on the challenges and adversities they have faced on campus, with many attributing their perseverance to their trust in God. One participant, Michael, expressed:

“Without God’s love and mercy, I wouldn’t be here. Sometimes I run out of food and money; staying away from family is actually a burden, but the brothers and sisters that God has given me are very supportive. I say thanks to God.”

Participants also emphasized the role of fellowship in bridging gender and ethnic barriers on campus. Tiago shared:

“We come together for fellowship as a group of sisters and brothers. One’s provenance, gender, political affiliation, or church denomination does not matter. We pray for ourselves, we pray for those brothers and sisters who are sick before the exams, so they can recover and catch up before it’s too late. Yeah, it works, I am telling you, it works.”

Jackson further described the importance of fellowship in their group:

“We actually look after one another. Chances are slim that you’ll sleep without eating anything because you do not have sugar or cooking oil... there will always be someone to assist you.”

An important lesson that participants learned from their respective faith traditions is to live peacefully with others and to lead an honest life. For example, José explained that his spirituality prevented him from cheating on his girlfriend:

“I have learned a lot about relationships... I have learned to be loyal to other people, so I do not imagine myself cheating on my girlfriend... It is shameful.”

Jackson also attributed his refusal to cheat during tests to his spirituality:

“I personally hate cheating because I know it is a sin. When you cheat and get higher marks that you don’t deserve, it’s like putting on a false mask to deceive yourself and your God. I’ve never cheated, from primary school through to university.”

Charles added:

“I want to concur with the previous speakers who related cheating to sin... Personally, I hate cheating because honestly, how could you get higher marks that you don’t even deserve? It’s like putting on a false mask to deceive yourself and your God. I’ve never cheated, from primary school through to university.”

Fernando stated:

“The Quran is very strict when it comes to issues of loyalty. It teaches that you work hard for what you want, no shortcuts.”

Roberto commented:

“Our religious beliefs teach us to work hard for what we want to accomplish in life. We have learned self-respect and to respect one another. To earn respect from others, I must respect them as well, irrespective of their ages or gender.”

Participants indicated that the concepts of justice, peace, and love, which have characterized their faith traditions, are rooted in various religions, particularly Christianity and Islam. Pedro said:

“For those of us doing Law, religion plays an influential role in our training as lawyers. There is a lot that Law has borrowed from religious sacred texts and codes. For instance, the principles of justice, peace, love, and democracy are all enshrined in our religious texts.”

José shared how religion influenced his academic path, particularly in relation to translation:

“I ended up embracing translation as my minor because when people from my church learned that I was doing English at university, they wanted me to interpret sermons whenever they received a guest from an English-speaking country. That actually whetted my appetite for translation, which I ended up taking as a minor at university. To be honest, I am doing fine in interpretation/translation. I am considering starting a business in interpretation/translation after leaving university.”

José also reflected on the role of religion in graduation ceremonies:

“The graduation service, which is offered to students one or two hours before the ceremony starts, proves the relevance of religion in our everyday lives. For me, that is the most important moment when you surrender to the almighty and say thank you for making it. Above all, that service is the ultimate encounter between students and God to say thank you for providing for us, protecting, and nourishing us as students at this university.”

Most participants described religion as being compatible with academics. To support their views, participants referenced the role of the Roman Catholic Church in founding Save University. Michael commented:

“Most religions would like to see people receiving a holistic education. They want people to articulate their faith in light of science. The Roman Catholic priests started this university. This has been the case with other religious organizations that have established schools and universities.”

Mano added:

“Most of our parents and grandparents who studied in missionary schools have thrived throughout their lives. Many are still contributing to the development of our country. It does play a role in my academics, and I would say that my success is thanks to God.”

Dinho remarked:

“You know why there is a chapel on campus? I think that is the utmost expression of the relationship between religion and academics. I know this may discomfort those who are not Christians, but I do not think it is a problem because attending services there is not compulsory.”

Participants also shared that they have been exposed to teachings that encourage adherence to hegemonic masculine norms. Many religious teachings and messages depict men as being created to be superior to, and dominant over, women. José noted:

“We are culturally restricted from seeking help from women... Seeking help from a woman is a sign of weakness. We do not want to be labelled as feminine.”

Charles cited a Bible verse that, according to him, supports the submission of women to men:

“Wives, submit to your husbands, for that is what you should do as Christians. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (Colossians 3:18-19).

Jackson argued that sacred texts contribute to women’s oppression. He quoted:

“The women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak; as the Jewish law says, they must not be in charge. If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home. It is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in church” (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

In contrast to the findings of Taylor (2016), who found that some students became less religious during their time in college, the participants in this study exhibited an increased religiosity while at university. Participants expressed a stronger commitment to their faith during their university years, perhaps more so than during their secondary school years. Similarly, participants in Dancy's (2007) study constructed their masculine identity through spirituality and religion.

7.2. Classes on Gender

Participants reported that classes on gender significantly influenced their identity development. These classes fostered discussions on gender justice, prompting students to reassess their views on gender equality. Such classes provided a platform for students to engage with and reflect on their perceptions of gender dynamics.

For instance, Gerson noted a profound personal transformation:

“I view myself as a better man now. Engaging with gender issues has made me more aware of gender inequalities that I previously overlooked. This awareness has helped me to respect women and women students more and to approach gender issues with a more informed perspective.”

Dinho similarly described how gender classes facilitated better interactions with women:

“Before these classes, I didn’t listen much to women’s concerns or advice. Now, I’ve learned to value their perspectives and it has helped me improve my personal grooming and hygiene. For

instance, I started using roll-on after a female peer suggested it, which has enhanced my confidence and appearance.”

Armando commented on the positive changes in his self-image:

“My interactions with women students have transformed me. For example, I learned to use perfume at the university, which has improved how I view myself and how others perceive me.”

The influence of gender classes extended beyond campus interactions, affecting relationships at home. Nito shared his improved relationship with his sister:

“I no longer shout at my sister or dismiss her. After taking gender classes, I find myself more respectful and open to discussing important matters with her. This change has strengthened our bond and facilitated mutual learning.”

Participants indicated that their experiences in gender classes led them to rethink traditional notions of masculinity. Bento, for example, described his reaction to witnessing gender-based mistreatment:

“Seeing a man mistreat a woman based on gender made me reflect deeply on my own values. These experiences have reshaped my understanding of what it means to be a man.”

Pedro reflected on the transformative impact of gender classes on his masculine identity:

“Classes on gender have significantly influenced me. I now appreciate gender differences more deeply and approach relationships with a newfound respect and care that I did not have before.”

These findings illustrate that gender classes at the University have played a crucial role in reshaping participants' views on masculinity and their interactions with others, fostering a more respectful and equitable approach to gender relations.

7.3. Classes on Religion

Participants in this study reported a notable increase in religiosity during their university experiences, attributing this change to their exposure to classes on religion. These classes provided a structured and open academic environment for discussing religious matters, which, in turn, has bolstered the self-esteem of those who are inclined to discuss their spiritual lives. Prior

to their studies at Save University, many participants had not had the opportunity to explore or question their religious beliefs in such an academic setting.

Several participants noted that their involvement in religion classes facilitated their engagement with individuals from diverse faith traditions. They found that these classes equipped them with skills for meaningful interfaith dialogue. However, some participants voiced concerns about the predominance of Christianity in the curriculum. For instance, Gerson expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived focus on Christianity:

“While I am comfortable discussing topics related to God, Jesus, and Church Fathers, I feel that the classes predominantly reflect a Christian perspective. Despite the university’s Roman Catholic background, it is a public institution. I am concerned about students from non-Christian backgrounds who may feel marginalized. The university should strive for a more balanced representation of various religions.”

On the other hand, participants who had taken the History of Religions course reported a more inclusive approach. They described this course as fostering a welcoming environment for students of all religious backgrounds. Tiago, for example, remarked:

“I enjoyed the History of Religions course because it introduced me to various faith traditions and their beliefs. This exposure has improved my understanding and respect for other religions, enhancing my relationships with students from diverse faith backgrounds. The course was highly enlightening.”

Some participants experienced feelings of discomfort and guilt upon discovering that figures like Jesus Christ and the apostles are not as central in other religions as they are in Christianity. Adriano shared his reaction:

“I was surprised to learn that there are people who are not familiar with Jesus Christ or who do not prioritize him as we do in Christianity. I had assumed that religious differences were merely about names, like Allah or Jehovah. It was eye-opening to realize that religions function similarly to political parties in their distinctiveness.”

Overall, classes on religion at Save University have had a significant impact on participants' understanding of and engagement with various faith traditions, contributing to their personal

growth and interfaith relationships. Based on the above findings, it is clear that the exposure to gender and religion classes has significantly heightened participants' awareness of how their evolving understanding of gender justice and interfaith dynamics intersects with and reshapes their constructions of masculinity, leading them to adopt more nuanced and empathetic perspectives on their roles as men.

7.4. Positive Masculinity

This study builds upon Badaszewski's (2014) definition of Positive Masculinity, which emphasizes "men understanding and challenging gender norms and developing their own healthy sense of self and masculinity with the support of significant people in their lives" (p. 55). While existing literature predominantly focuses on how colleges and universities reinforce hegemonic masculinity (Singh, 2022; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Harper, 2008), there is less attention to how men develop positively. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that hegemonic masculinity does not preclude positive behaviour; rather, it can encompass positive actions such as fulfilling familial roles and achieving professional success (p. 840). Additionally, evidence exists of men collaborating with both other men and women to advance gender justice, as exemplified by Morrel's (1998) characterization of the "New Man," who is described as introspective, caring, and domestically responsible (Morrel, 1998, p. 7).

Numerous studies have explored how men utilize their masculinity to promote academic success and contribute to community advancement (Givens, 2016; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015). Bukoski and Hatch (2016) argue against viewing masculinity solely as negative or problematic. They assert that many men leverage hegemonic masculinity to foster academic achievement, gaining confidence and resilience in the process (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016).

In this study, participants demonstrated how they employed both hegemonic and positive masculinities in their identity formation. For instance, participants recognized the benefits of seeking academic help, contradicting traditional masculine norms that discourage vulnerability.

Robert remarked:

"To excel, you need to work hard; there's no easy way. If you don't work hard, things won't get easier. That's why I'm not hesitant to seek help from peers who understand certain topics better than I do. I believe in helping others once you've received help yourself."

Participants also valued non-violent, caring behaviours and maintained supportive networks with peers, which they found beneficial for academic and personal growth. Kito noted:

“A key to my success has been the network of students who support each other through obstacles. Being part of a motivating network and having inspiring lecturers have greatly contributed to my success.”

When discussing how masculinity influences academic excellence, participants differentiated themselves from peers who lacked commitment, reflecting on the negative impacts of student dropout and mismanagement. Armando shared:

“It affected me deeply because a close friend never disclosed his financial troubles or his struggles. He had the potential to be a brilliant student, but his issues with alcohol led to his downfall.”

Participants expressed a commitment to reclaiming a positive image of male students, contrasting themselves with those who engage in disruptive behaviours. They aspired to embody a different form of masculinity that emphasizes responsibility and dedication. Gerson commented:

“I have declined numerous party invitations when I had a test because I prioritize my studies. Partying will always be there, but academic success requires focus.”

José described his dedication to academics, distinguishing himself from less motivated peers:

“I prefer surrounding myself with hardworking students. I dislike hanging out with those who are not serious about their studies. I believe that’s where I fit best.”

Participants valued the university environment for its opportunities to engage with role models and participate in enriching activities. Solomon highlighted his influence on others:

“I consider myself a role model because I approach my studies with utmost respect. My dedication and good grades serve as an example for others.”

Charles also took pride in mentoring fellow students, particularly those in their early years:

“I have guided many younger students, especially those in their first and second years, and have been referred to by lecturers for assistance in challenging subjects.”

These findings demonstrate how participants integrate positive masculinity into their academic and personal lives, illustrating a broader conception of masculinity that supports their educational and community-oriented goals.

7.5. Obsession with Achievement and Fear of Failure

According to O'Neil (1981), many men associate masculinity with traits such as competition, achievement, ambition, success, status, wealth, power, and influence, while femininity is often linked with cooperation, lack of achievement, and absence of power, influence, or wealth. In an effort to avoid being perceived as feminine, men feel compelled to embody characteristics such as power, control, competitiveness, aggression, achievement orientation, and success (O'Neil, 1981, p. 208). One of the primary ways in which men seek to define and affirm their masculinity is through competition with other men, the exertion of power and control, and the demonstration of competence. This drive for success is often accompanied by a fear of failure, which can manifest as compulsive workaholic behavior, as men attempt to avoid failure at all costs.

Participants in this study exhibited a fear of failure that aligns with fear of femininity. When queried about the relationship between masculinity and academic excellence, participants expressed that underperforming academically was culturally perceived as unmanly, particularly when female students excelled. They anticipated that female students might struggle academically, but did not extend this expectation to themselves. For instance, Gerson remarked:

“It is noteworthy to see other students seeking assistance for academic work. This aligns with what is expected from a 'real man,' who should possess a sharp mind. Personally, I take pride in helping female students with issues like internet connectivity or computer problems.”

José explained his avoidance of failure as a means to meet his parents' expectations:

“I strive to avoid failing in my major to prevent being labelled as lazy. My parents have high expectations for my success, and they are investing significantly in my education. My goal is to make them proud and justify their investment through my academic achievements.”

The participants explained that competition was a significant aspect of their identity as men. José stated:

“Academically, a man must lead the class in terms of performance. Even female students expect a man to perform well, or he is not considered a real man. When lecturers ask a question, male students should be the first to answer. If female students struggle with technical issues, they should seek help from a man.”

Jackson added:

“When I meet other male students, I always emphasize the importance of hard work. There is no easy way to success. If you want a well-paid job in the future, you have to work hard now. Our current efforts will determine our future outcomes.”

Participants universally expressed a strong desire to excel academically, viewing this as an essential aspect of their masculine identity. They noted that cultural expectations place significant responsibility on men to succeed and provide, in contrast to women, who are often culturally expected to rely on men for support. Nito commented:

“I like to compete with brilliant students to push myself and surpass those who are struggling with their majors.”

This observation is consistent with O’Neill’s assertion that “success attempts are sometimes accompanied by obsessive fears of failure or compulsive workaholic behaviour to avoid failure” (O’Neill, 1981, p. 208). When asked about how masculinity influences the academic performance of other male students, participants indicated that they preferred associating with peers who took their studies seriously. Mano highlighted the benefits of being in a motivated academic environment:

“I avoid associating with students who are not serious about their studies. I prefer being with students who care about their education. It’s a ‘win-win’ situation, as I also gain from being around them and engaging with new ideas.”

This finding supports O’Neill’s observation that among college men, “the primary means of achieving success involves competing with other men, exercising power and control, and demonstrating competence” (O’Neill, 1981, p. 208).

7.6. Competition for Grades

Despite the claims that grade points averages should not be the only measurement of students’ excellence, participants of this study perceived academic excellence in terms of students’ outstanding grade point averages (GPA). For example, Samuel described his perception:

“Get good grades, and distinguish yourself for good grades...however, this should be done in relation to good command of your major. You just need to work hard, yes, just push it, read and read and read”.

Mano commented:

“For you to get a high GPA just need to read...just commit yourself to reading, just read, do not drop! Commitment to studying hard, and applying yourself are the only tips for you to get a good GPA. Just try to search for quality sources of information, this is to say that I read the right stuff”.

When asked whether there was a relationship between being a man and being an excellent student, Nito responded to be a relationship because:

"If you are a man you should know from the beginning that people look at you with the hope that you do well in any school related business. A man is not expected to fail, if that happens it can be embarrassing."

Several participants linked being a man to being an academically successful person. According to participants the reason why male students find themselves pressurized to perform is because we belong to a sexist society whereby men are loaded with so many expectations and roles to fulfil. Dinho stated that:

“Our cultures force us to do well because we are men, and they raise so many expectations about us. That is the reason why most men want to excel at all cost. I mean, we feel like responding to our cultural expectations of masculinity. We sometimes have to act according to what our cultures expect of us. I think we certainly do not only live for ourselves, but for the rest of the community”.

Hugo added,

“There is indeed a lot of cultural pressure on us... this sometimes force us to develop too different faces. One face which is ours, I mean which is real, and the other face which is not real, which is unauthentic. The unreal face is meant to respond to the community demands, even when we see the world with different eyes”.

Tiago commented on the difficulties they experience when trying to be unauthentic.

“It really sucks me to live according to other people’s expectations. I sometimes have to fabricate an image of a man I have never been. Whenever a question is thrown on me about how am doing at university, I always have the challenge of committing myself to reading with the aim of wanting to do well”.

Michael described how he feels after a good test result:

“I feel great. It makes me feel different, I mean, you feel like you are being lifted from where you are into a higher place in life. It gives you the pleasure of making yourself known to everybody. You feel uplifted. You hear everyone in class say it is him...it is this guy... so there is that feeling that yah, I am actually the man... a real man”.

7.7. Religious Leaders as Role Models

According to Zuhri et al. (2021), religious leaders are highly regarded individuals within the community due to their knowledge, influence, and respect. In this study, religious leaders are defined as religious authorities or any individuals who occupy or exercise a leadership role within a religious institution, such as a church or mosque.

When asked to describe the people, figures, or mentors who have contributed to their formation as men, participants in this study emphasized the significant role of religious leaders in shaping their masculinity. Mano recalled:

"I remember my family pastor's sermons on the dos and don'ts of being a God-fearing man. He used to caution men against alcohol and heavy drugs. I confess that his sermons have marked my entire life—from home, to school, and now at university."

Another participant reflected on the influence of his Sunday school teacher during his childhood, an influence that left an indelible mark on his conception of masculinity. Michael shared:

"My Sunday school teacher once told us that boys should not share the same space with girls, because boys are boys and girls are girls. He always tried to have a boys' group seated separately from the girls."

For many participants, the church was not only a place where they learned about what it meant to be a man, but also a space for the development of femininity. One participant stated:

"It was my pastor... I do not know where he is now, but he always explained what it meant to be a man and/or a woman. He used to explain what a good man or woman is—someone who knows their place in the home."

Other participants described their pastors as role models for the kind of men they aspired to become as they matured into adulthood. Fernando noted:

"My pastor has been my mentor in how a man should be and how he should behave... He leads a very simple life, and he loves his family."

These findings support the notion that religion plays a central role in the socialization of men in Africa, as suggested by Klinken (2012).

7.8. Public Recognition of High Achievers

Participants in this study identified the public recognition of high-achieving students during graduation ceremonies as a significant motivator among undergraduate students. Save University typically recognizes high achievers during the graduation ceremony, where the top students from

each discipline or major are acknowledged. These students are publicly presented and awarded various incentives, such as monetary prizes from a bank, internships in organizations, employment opportunities with governmental or non-governmental organizations, or other forms of recognition for their academic accomplishments.

Gerson commented:

“I really liked when [X] and [X] were called upon and given a token of appreciation for their hard work. That was motivating... I just imagine myself standing before a thousand people to receive a prize from the hands of the Faculty administrator. It would be an incredible experience!”

Dinho also shared his thoughts on the significance of such recognition:

“In one graduation ceremony, a high-achieving student received a plot of land from the City Mayor to build his residence. Just imagine how inspiring that is... that is the kind of recognition we all hope for on our graduation day.”

Samuel reflected on the importance of public recognition for high achievers:

“You know, it’s actually impressive to be publicly recognized as a high achiever... Have you noticed how high achievers are treated at graduation ceremonies? I wish I could also receive an award from the hands of the City Mayor, or have the chance to sit and eat lunch with him, or with the university chancellor or faculty administrators. That would be truly memorable.”

7.9. Traditional Masculinities not Tolerated on Campus

Participants were unanimous in reporting that most of their views which had brought from home about masculinities had been crushed on Campus. This was due to the university environment which they described to be not conducive for the development of their traditional beliefs on masculinities. When asked if there was any difference between being a man at home and being a man at university, participants felt that the university community has set the same expectations for men and women, which has not been the case in their homes. Armando, for example, that:

"there is typical men's job that men do when they find themselves in a home environment. This is commonplace and that is what everyone could expect of a man in my community. The on campus environment is quite different, in an on campus setting I end up doing what I do not do when I am at home".

Solomon, commented:

"I guess there is a difference being a man within my community and being a man on campus. In my community when a man cooks for himself, he falls victim of ridicule...but here [on Campus] it makes no difference at all. We cook and wash dishes for ourselves. The university community have the same expectations for both male and female students".

Participants shared that the university has tried its best to make the class environment a safe space for all. Charles, added:

"The university leadership and all the staff have tried to create a safe and conducive teaching and learning space for all students irrespective of their genders. They treat everyone with respect and dignity..."

Nito, commented,

"Our study groups reflect companionship, togetherness and warmth. In my study group we believe in the potential of each other. Our gender differences are not the most important, but what each of us can contribute for the benefit of the entire group. This is basically what keeps us on the going"

The findings above disregard the literature which depicts men as being harsh, who by all means avoid associating themselves with women.

7.10. Parental Involvement

Participants identified parental involvement as a critical factor in maintaining their connection to academia and excelling in their studies. Several participants noted that their parents were highly invested in their educational success, which they found highly motivating. They reported that having parents who place a high value on education significantly contributed to their academic progress.

When asked to describe influential figures in their upbringing, participants frequently highlighted their parents, particularly their fathers, as key role models. They expressed a desire to emulate their fathers' behaviours, believing that by doing so, they would embody different qualities of masculinity as they transitioned into adulthood. Participants described their fathers as embodying a form of masculinity that transcended traditional cultural expectations. For instance, Kito recounted:

"I grew up aspiring to be like my father. Although he did not have extensive formal education, he understood the importance of schooling. He was very adamant about ensuring all his children were educated, often expressing his frustration when we were reluctant to attend school."

Fernando similarly praised his father for his exceptional family management skills, saying:

"My father was the epitome of a good family manager. He created a nurturing environment at home and his presence was felt even in his absence. His sudden death was a significant loss, and I still miss him deeply."

In a related vein, Kito described his mother using terms traditionally associated with masculinity. He argued that qualities such as courage and determination define manhood and observed these attributes in his mother, even though she did not conform to traditional gender norms. Kito observed:

"My mother displayed the qualities I associate with being a man, such as resilience and determination. After my father's death, she took on his role, supporting the family as a street vendor. She managed to provide for us and ensure we had school supplies despite our financial struggles."

Kito further elaborated that his mother guided him on what he should focus on to achieve self-sufficiency, contrasting this with the traditional gender roles of his sisters. He reflected:

"Following my father's death, my mother advised me to start thinking and acting like a man. She emphasized that a real man makes things happen rather than waiting for things to be done. Her words deeply impacted me."

Participants also acknowledged the influence of their grandparents. Charles, for instance, noted that his grandmother played a pivotal role after the death of his parents, providing him with much-needed support:

"Had it not been for my grandmother, I might have left school. She has always been eager to see my academic achievements and has been a pillar of strength following the loss of my parents."

These findings align with the research of Harris and Harper (2008), which highlights the significant role fathers play in shaping their sons' concepts of masculinity during their formative years. The above findings on parental involvement where traditional gender norms are transcended and attributes like courage and determination are redefined, profoundly influenced the participants' construction of their masculine identities and, consequently, their approach to academic excellence.

7.11. The Role of the University in Student Development

When asked about specific aspects of the University that influence academic excellence, participants described Save University as a supportive and secure environment conducive to student focus and motivation. They expressed appreciation for the university's open atmosphere, which fosters freedom of expression and a straightforward approach to teaching. This is particularly noteworthy in a context where democratic principles are still developing. Gerson remarked:

"The teaching and learning environment is highly conducive. No faculty member engages in active politics during class, creating a safe space for all students regardless of their political beliefs. This environment allows students to think critically and independently, which is essential for their academic growth."

Participants also reflected on the challenges they faced during their initial years at Save University. Charles highlighted the vital support he received:

"Without the University's support when I first arrived, I might have had to leave. I reached out to the University board, explaining my situation of losing my parents and lacking financial support. They responded by providing a bursary, which was crucial for me. I always remind myself and others that I am here because of their support."

However, some participants reported difficulties with certain faculty members who they felt impeded their academic progress. Michael shared his frustration:

"Some teachers have treated us as if we were still in primary school, limiting our potential and discouraging independent thinking. Their approach sometimes undermines our academic development and makes me question if I am in a university or a secondary school."

Conversely, participants praised the University leadership, particularly Professor Crisalita Funes, the Dean of UniSave-Maxixe, for their commitment to student welfare. They valued the openness and responsiveness of the University's leadership and believed that maintaining a close relationship with them helped overcome various challenges. Participants also highlighted the importance of bursaries for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Adriano noted:

"I am able to study here thanks to the bursary I received. Without it, continuing my studies would have been impossible because my grandmother lacks the financial means to support my education."

Samuel echoed this sentiment, appreciating the University's efforts to create a supportive environment while noting areas for improvement:

"The University has made significant efforts to create a conducive environment, including support for recreational sports. However, there are areas needing enhancement, such as internet facilities and library resources, which are insufficient for the growing student population."

Participants commended the University for facilitating a range of recreational activities, which helped them stay engaged and avoid distractions that could lead them off-campus. They found the transition from high school to university life to be transformative. Kito described his growth:

"I have met many influential people in academia and learned to formulate and ask insightful questions. Before coming to this University, I lacked confidence and was unable to engage in meaningful academic discourse. Now, I feel more mature and capable."

Overall, participants acknowledged that Save University has played a crucial role in their academic and personal development, providing a supportive and stimulating environment that has significantly shaped their university experience.

7.12. Internationalization of the University

Ndaipa and colleagues (2022) describe internationalization as the process through which individuals integrate into the global academic community through mobility and the recognition of academic qualifications across borders (Ndaipa et al., 2022). This process encompasses “teaching practices, research, and the exchange of undergraduate programs.” When asked about strategies for enhancing academic excellence on campus, participants highlighted the importance of the University’s internationalization efforts.

Participants expressed a strong desire for increased student exchange programs, both incoming and outgoing, as a means to broaden their academic and cultural horizons. They argued that such programs would provide exposure to global perspectives and practices, thereby enriching their educational experience. Pedro emphasized the need for international interaction, stating:

“We feel like we are enclosed in a vacuum with no contact with students from other parts of the world. We would like to see students from other countries or universities participating in exchange programs here. We are unsure of what is happening globally and feel insecure about our limited exposure.”

The participants also noted that visits from foreign professors have highlighted the potential benefits of such exchange programs. Samuel observed:

“When we host guest speakers from international universities, their lectures provide valuable insights. This exposure helps us become more competent. We need to face new challenges, ideas, and environments to enhance our learning.”

Armando articulated the advantages of exchange programs, stating:

“Only by stepping outside our familiar environment can we realize that we are neither the worst nor the best students. Exchange programs offer new challenges and perspectives. I would personally apply for such an opportunity if it were available.”

Despite recognizing the potential benefits, participants expressed frustration that the University’s commitment to internationalization—listed as its foremost principle—has not yet been fully realized. Dinho remarked:

“If the University aims to produce quality graduates, it must implement its principle of internationalization. Organizing exchange programs would significantly enhance our educational experience.”

These findings align with Wihlborg and Robson’s (2017) research, which underscores the positive impact of university internationalization on student and staff exchange, contributing to overall academic excellence.

Participants identified the lack of academic mobility as a significant barrier to their educational advancement. Pedro highlighted this limitation, stating:

“I see a limitation in terms of academic expeditions. It would be beneficial to have students visiting historical sites or other universities. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these mobility issues.”

Encouragingly, SAVE University has recently initiated a partnership with the University of Limpopo, South Africa. In September 2023, 28 students from SAVE University visited the University of Limpopo, and it is anticipated that next year will bring reciprocal visits, further advancing the University's internationalization goals. Further, the findings reveal that the pursuit of university internationalization not only enhances participants' academic excellence through exposure to global perspectives and practices but also significantly influences their construction of masculine identities, as it broadens their understanding of diverse cultural and gender norms.

7.13. Barriers to Student Success

Participants identified several significant barriers to academic success at Save University, alongside the factors contributing to their achievements. The reported impediments include: (i) insecurity regarding teacher competence, (ii) inadequate infrastructure, (iii) large class sizes, (iv) poor library facilities, and (iv) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

7.13.1. Insecurity Regarding Teacher Competence

Participants expressed concerns about the perceived lack of competence among some teachers. They noted that several instructors appeared uncomfortable and insufficiently knowledgeable about their subjects, which undermined their credibility and effectiveness. Gerson remarked:

"I can imagine it is actually a nightmare teaching a subject with which one is not familiar. This situation can lead to significant stress and a lack of job satisfaction. If an institution lacks qualified teaching staff, students may not receive the necessary educational materials. We urge the University to address this issue promptly."

Participants suggested that improving teaching quality could involve offering professional development opportunities, such as internships and exchange programs at prestigious institutions. They also noted that some teachers regard their roles as secondary jobs, which contributes to a lack of dedication and preparation. Fernando added:

"If teachers were given more time for research and to develop their pedagogical skills, it would positively impact our learning outcomes. Many teachers seem to lack credibility and dedication, leading to a sense of frustration that warrants investigation."

This finding aligns with previous research indicating that inadequately trained teachers can adversely affect students' learning experiences (Harris & Harper, 2008). Despite these challenges, participants acknowledged that some departments, such as the Department of Science of Education and Portuguese, have highly qualified staff. Kito emphasized:

"We hear that the Department of Science of Education and Portuguese has highly qualified and motivated teachers. However, there are reports of other departments lacking appropriate teaching staff. It is crucial for the University to recruit qualified educators."

To address these issues, Fernando and Solomon suggested that enhancing teacher training and making teaching a more attractive profession are essential steps for improving academic excellence.

7.13.2. Inadequate Infrastructure

Participants criticized the University's infrastructure, noting that it resembles that of a secondary school rather than a higher education institution. They recommended restructuring the facilities to better meet the needs of a university setting. José observed:

"Upon visiting the main campus for the first time, one might struggle to recognize it as a university due to its secondary school-like infrastructure. The classrooms and desks are not conducive to a higher education environment."

Gerson added:

"The current infrastructure is inadequate for both students and lecturers. The so-called 'teachers' room' is particularly unsuitable for concentration. The University should consider improvements to enhance its standards and provide a more suitable environment."

Participants' narratives are consistent with studies suggesting that environmental factors significantly impact students' academic performance and overall satisfaction (Mapuranga, Musingafi, & Zebron, 2015).

7.13.3. Large Class Sizes

Participants also reported that large class sizes hindered their academic performance by affecting concentration and engagement. Over-enrolment has resulted in classroom sizes that are too small to accommodate the number of students effectively. José commented:

"The classrooms, especially on Campus 1, are too small for the large number of students. Designed for fewer occupants, they are now overcrowded, and the lack of air conditioning worsens the discomfort."

Previous research supports the notion that large class sizes can negatively impact students' academic outcomes (Schroeder, 2011).

7.13.4. Poor Library Facilities

Participants reported that the library facilities at Save University are insufficient for effective research and study. They noted that the library is too small to accommodate the large student population, with outdated literature and limited resources. Participants expressed the need for a library upgrade to include current and relevant materials across all campuses, faculties, and disciplines.

The current library infrastructure was described as inadequate for serving nearly 4,000 students. Concerns were raised about the limited access to books and the overall condition of the library, which they believe diminishes the University's image. Fernando commented:

"The University should invest in its library, internet resources, and overall infrastructure. As it stands, we face severe restrictions on borrowing books and are treated as if we were in secondary school. This lack of proper facilities undermines our academic experience. A more suitable reading environment is necessary."

Kito added:

"The library is poorly equipped with books, and borrowing privileges are restricted, forcing us to read on-site. The lack of comfortable and well-equipped study spaces presents a significant challenge."

Participants also criticized the relevance of the available literature, noting that many textbooks, such as those on history and philosophy, are not aligned with their current academic needs or the local context. Dinho remarked:

"There is a noticeable shortage of relevant literature in the library, which hampers our academic progress. Some of the available books, such as history textbooks, are outdated and not suitable for our present context. The University should invest in acquiring up-to-date and relevant materials."

Moreover, participants reported issues with limited access to university computers and weak internet service. They highlighted that not all students can afford personal computers or smart phones, and suggested that the University establish a computer lab with reliable internet access to support their academic needs.

These findings are consistent with Mapuranga et al.'s (2015) study, which identified that inadequate university resources, including poor internet service and outdated books, can adversely affect students' academic performance and lead to extended program completion times. Further, addressing the deficiencies in library facilities and technological resources is essential not only for improving academic performance but also for supporting the participants' construction of their masculine identities, as access to adequate resources is integral to their

ability to engage meaningfully with their studies and achieve their academic and personal development goals.

7.13.5. The COVID -19 Pandemic

Participants reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had significant adverse effects on their academic experiences and personal lives. They described enduring heightened levels of fear and trauma due to the pandemic, which has created lasting psychological impacts. Many participants experienced the loss of parents or other crucial caregivers, while others faced economic hardships due to job losses or retrenchments within their families. These circumstances exacerbated existing challenges and contributed to a profound sense of instability.

Participants criticized the University administration for its perceived lack of responsiveness during the pandemic. For instance, Charles observed;

"The board was unable to mitigate the situation, resulting in unchanged enrolment fees despite the financial strain on students."

Tiago similarly noted the burden of continued fee increases, saying:

"The University persisted in charging high fees, which was incompatible with the economic hardships imposed by the pandemic. Many students' parents lost their jobs, and financial constraints became even more severe. I urge the University to reconsider fee adjustments."

The pandemic further highlighted the pre-existing struggles of students from low-income backgrounds, intensifying their financial difficulties. Participants expressed frustration with the Student Association, questioning its relevance and effectiveness during this crisis. They felt abandoned by an organization that seemed largely inactive and invisible in addressing their needs. Nito remarked:

"I am unfamiliar with how the Association's board is formed or its activities, and I only hear about it during elections."

Participants suggested that the University should enhance collaboration with the Student Association to ensure it better supports students and remains actively engaged with their concerns. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on participants' academic performance and

personal circumstances underscored how challenges such as financial strain and institutional support issues intersect with their construction of masculine identity, revealing how resilience and adaptability are crucial in navigating both their educational goals and evolving notions of masculinity.

7.14. Conclusion

Chapter Seven delved into the socialization and development of the participants, highlighting key influences on their masculine identity formation and academic performance. The findings identified several significant factors impacting the participants' development. These included the role of the university environment, parental involvement, cultural and religious messages, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants reported that the university played a dual role in shaping their experiences. Positive aspects included a supportive environment conducive to academic success, while challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, large class sizes, and limited library resources were noted. Parental involvement emerged as a crucial factor, with participants often emulating their fathers' behaviours and values, which shaped their masculine identities and academic motivations. Additionally, the pandemic exacerbated existing challenges, including financial strain and institutional inadequacies, further complicating students' academic and personal lives.

The subsequent chapter will contextualize these findings within broader theories of masculinity identity construction in higher education, examining how these factors align with or challenge existing theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

8.0. Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical discussion of the study findings as they relate to the four sub-research questions. It examines how these findings align with existing literature and are interpreted through the lens of the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter Three. These frameworks provide critical insights into the ways male undergraduate students in the Arts and Social Sciences at Save University construct their masculine identities and relate these constructions to their academic experiences.

The findings chapters were structured around three thematic sections, each addressing a core aspect of the main research question:

- 1. Undergraduate male students' construction of their masculine identities:** Responding to the sub-research question, *What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of how they construct their masculine identity at Save University?* The findings illuminated how participants negotiate societal and institutional norms of masculinity, offering rich insights into the social construction of masculinity. Kimmel and Messner's (2010) **Social Construction of Masculinity Theory** framed this analysis, revealing how participants' gender identities are shaped by peer interactions, cultural expectations, and the university context.
- 2. Male undergraduate students' conceptions of academic excellence:** The chapter addressed the sub-research question, *What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of academic excellence at Save University?* Participants' notions of academic success are intertwined with their constructions of masculinity, with perseverance emerging as a dominant theme. The **Theory of Masculinity and Academic Excellence** (adapted from Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Harper, 2008) underpinned this discussion, highlighting the ways participants reconcile traditional masculine norms with their pursuit of academic achievement.

3. Undergraduate male students as men: This chapter responded to the sub-research question, *How do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students relate their construction of masculine identities to their academic excellence at Save University?* The findings illustrate how participants' socio-cultural contexts and personal experiences influence their masculine identity development and academic behaviors. The **Theory of Masculine Identity Development** (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009) provided a lens to analyse the dynamic and iterative process of identity construction, particularly in response to the challenges and expectations they face as male students.

Across these thematic analysis chapters, the **Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity** (Jones & McEwen, 2000) served as an overarching framework to explore the intersectionality of participants' identities. The findings reveal how aspects such as race, socio-economic status, and cultural background intersect with gender, shaping their experiences of both masculinity and academic life. This model underscores the complexity of identity construction, emphasizing that masculinity cannot be understood in isolation but rather as part of a broader matrix of intersecting identities.

By integrating these theoretical frameworks into the analysis, this chapter illuminates the nuanced ways in which participants construct their masculinities and navigate academic spaces. It demonstrates how institutional structures, cultural norms, and individual agency interact to shape the lived experiences of male undergraduate students, offering a holistic understanding of the interplay between masculinity and academic excellence at Save University.

8.1. Theoretical Significance of the Study

This study holds significance as it explored how male undergraduate students in the Arts and Social Sciences at Save University construct their masculinity in relation to academic excellence. By examining this relationship, the study not only challenges prevailing discourses of academic achievement but also contributes to broadening the understanding of what constitutes academic success. Traditional measures of academic excellence, such as GPA and test scores, are often the dominant benchmarks in higher education, both locally and internationally. However, this study challenges these narrow definitions by highlighting the diverse and lived experiences of male students, particularly in how their constructions of masculinity intersect with their perceptions of

academic excellence. Through this lens, academic excellence is shown to be multi-dimensional, informed by resilience, perseverance, and the ability to navigate socio-cultural expectations, thus providing an alternative view to the often narrow portrayal of male students as underachievers.

This shift in understanding academic excellence can be situated within broader emerging trends in higher education that recognize a more holistic view of student achievement. While institutions like Save University continue to emphasize quantitative measures such as GPA and standardized testing, this study unearths different conceptualizations of academic success based on the lived experiences of participants. In particular, the findings underscore how male students navigate their academic journeys, demonstrating perseverance and resilience, qualities tied to their masculine identities, as central to their sense of academic achievement. This perspective draws on **The Theory of Masculinity and Academic Excellence** (adapted from Hotchkins & Dancy, 2015; Harper, 2008), which highlights how masculinity and academic performance intersect, offering a framework for understanding how these students reconcile personal and academic identities in the face of adversity.

The study also contributes to the academic discourse by addressing a gap in the literature that predominantly focuses on male students in Western industrialized, Anglophone countries (Harper, 2008; Harper, 2010; Harper, 2012; Sáenz et al., 2013; Yank, 2014; York et al., 2015). This research is particularly relevant because it expands the scope of masculinity studies by focusing on male undergraduate students in Mozambique, a Lusophone country in Sub-Saharan Africa, thus offering a unique regional perspective. The study involved seventeen male students, who participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions. These interviews were audio-recorded, translated, and transcribed, ensuring an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences.

By linking these findings to the **Social Construction of Masculinity Theory** (Kimmel & Messner, 2010), it becomes evident that participants' conceptions of masculinity are influenced by both their social environment and the broader cultural and institutional expectations they encounter. These constructions of masculinity, in turn, shape their understanding of academic excellence, which is seen not just through performance metrics, but through personal perseverance, responsibility, and resilience.

This study thus provides valuable insights into how male students construct their masculinity in relation to academic excellence, offering a critique of traditional academic success metrics and proposing a more nuanced understanding that considers the intersectionality of gender, identity, and achievement.

8.2. Research Questions and Findings

This section discusses the relationship between the study's findings and its guiding research questions, linking the findings to the theoretical frameworks and relevant literature. The analysis of the data draws from the masculine identity development theory (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009) and integrates key concepts to provide a nuanced understanding of male undergraduate students' conceptions of masculinity and academic excellence at SAVE University.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of how they construct their masculine identities at SAVE University?
2. What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of academic excellence at SAVE University?
3. How do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students relate their construction of masculine identities to their academic excellence at SAVE University?
4. Why do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students relate their construction of masculine identities to their academic excellence at SAVE University in the way that they do?

8.3. Research question 1:

What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of how they construct their masculine identities at Save University?

The first research question examined how male undergraduate students at Save University conceive and construct their masculine identities. The findings align closely with the masculine

identity development framework (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009), which emphasizes the socio-cultural contexts influencing identity formation and the pressures men face to conform to traditional ideals of masculinity. Davis and Laker (2004) caution that male identity development cannot be fully understood through past theories of human development alone, as it requires a contextual examination of societal expectations and pressures.

Participants' narratives revealed that the construction of masculinity at Save University was intertwined with academic achievement, physical appearance, and heteronormative ideals. For example, participants described being high achievers as central to their identity, associating success with normative masculine ideals of competence and competitiveness (O'Neil et al., 1986; Harper, 2010). One participant, José, highlighted this link:

“The only thing that can prove I am here [on campus] is through good grades... There are no excuses for not doing well, or you are not a real man.”

This reflects the normative masculine ideology described by Edwards and Jones (2009), which emphasizes characteristics such as competitiveness, success, and control. The participants' reluctance to associate with underperforming students further underscores the alignment between masculinity and academic excellence, reinforcing Harper's (2010) assertion that achievement concerns are central to masculine identity development.

Physical appearance also emerged as a key marker of masculinity. Participants expressed concerns about body image, reflecting broader societal standards of strength and physicality. This finding aligns with Groes-Green's (2009) and Melzer's (2018) studies, which identify body strength, appearance, and sexual performance as significant components of male identity in African and global contexts. As Melzer (2018) notes, when men fail to meet these ideals, they often compensate through alternative means, such as exaggerated displays of toughness or dominance. Participants' discussions of their insecurities around body size resonate with Butler's (1990) theory of the culturally constructed body, which is shaped by societal conventions and expectations.

8.4. Homophobic Fear of Femininity

Homophobia is defined as a belief system that perpetuates negative myths and stereotypes about homosexual individuals. It often manifests as an expression of men's fear of their own femininity or emotional closeness with other men (O'Neil, 1981). This homophobic behaviour, which stems from the devaluation of femininity, suggests that young men are encouraged to fear their femininity by emphasizing and proving their masculine traits. According to Pascoe (2010), gay individuals are often ostracized, scorned, and subjected to ridicule across many cultures.

From an early age, boys are socialized to "hide their feelings and appear tough and in control." They are told to be aggressive, to avoid making mistakes, to take charge, to have numerous sexual encounters, to accumulate wealth, and to assume responsibility. These expectations have been referred to as the "act-like-a-man box" (Kivel, 2010, p. 83). Deviating from these norms results in one's masculinity being questioned and may lead to labels such as "feminine" or "faggot."

O'Neil (1981) hypothesized that "men's gender role socialization and the value of the masculine mystique produce a devaluation of feminine values and a fear of femininity in men's lives" (p. 205). He further suggested that the fear of femininity leads to six patterns of gender role conflict and strain, including: (a) restrictive emotionality, (b) social control, power, and competition, (c) homophobia, (d) obsession with achievement and success, (e) health care problems. The masculine mystique, learned early in life, asserts that (i) men are biologically superior to women, thereby granting them greater potential; (ii) masculinity, rather than femininity, is the dominant and more valued gender identity; (iii) masculine traits such as power, dominance, and competition are central to proving one's masculinity; (iv) vulnerability, emotions, and feelings in men's lives are seen as signs of femininity and should be avoided; and (v) men's work and career success serve as key indicators of their masculinity. The masculine mystique "violates men by denying them the opportunity to express their femininity, thereby suppressing important aspects of themselves" (O'Neil, 1981, p. 204).

O'Neil and colleagues (1986) defined the fear of femininity as "showing negative emotions associated with stereotypical feminine values, attitudes, and behaviours" (p. 337). These negative reactions are part of a boy's socialization process, during which gender identity is shaped by

parents, peers, and other influential figures. Undergraduate men, in particular, strive to avoid behaviours or attitudes that could compromise their masculinity or result in being labeled as feminine. Researchers have suggested that many men link academic disengagement with the preservation of masculinity, as academic engagement may be perceived as a trait associated with femininity (Kimmel, 2008).

Participants in this study expressed their homophobic behavior and fear of femininity through the use of derogatory language and the objectification of women. Pedro remarked:

“They use derogatory language to talk about women; if you are a religious person, you cannot feel comfortable here”.

Charles also shared his disapproval of students who objectify women:

“I really hate it, but there is nowhere I can go. Since I’ve been here, all my religious values have been affected. I just have to pretend to be with them, but I’m not”.

Heteronormative ideals played a critical role in participants’ constructions of masculinity. Many equated being a “real man” with heterosexuality, procreation, and familial roles. Tiago’s statement captures this sentiment:

“To be a man means not being gay or female... A real man likes girls, marries a woman, and has children.”

While Groes-Green (2009) suggests that contemporary masculinities in Africa increasingly emphasize sexual satisfaction and self-esteem over reproductive purposes, participants in this study highlighted the enduring importance of procreation and male headship within their cultural contexts. This divergence highlights the intersection of traditional and modern influences on masculine identity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

8.5. Integrating the Findings with the Theoretical Framework

The findings of this study extend the theoretical frameworks of Davis and Laker (2004) and Edwards and Jones (2009) by illustrating how the socio-cultural context of Save University shapes male students’ constructions of masculinity. The participants’ emphasis on academic achievement, physical appearance, and heterosexual norms reflects the pervasive influence of

societal expectations on identity development. Moreover, their resilience in navigating institutional challenges such as teacher absenteeism and inadequate facilities demonstrates the internalization of normative masculine traits, such as perseverance and independence (Yank, 2014).

Participants' descriptions of "all-male zones" on campus further illuminate the performative aspect of masculinity. These spaces, characterized by competitive and often derogatory language, serve as sites where traditional masculine ideals are reinforced and contested. The performative dynamics in these zones align with Butler's (1990) notion of gender as a socially enacted performance, shaped by discourse and interaction.

Ultimately, the findings of this study underscore the complex interplay between societal norms, cultural values, and institutional contexts in shaping male students' masculine identities. By situating these findings within the theoretical frameworks of masculine identity development, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how male students navigate and negotiate their identities within the higher education landscape.

8.6. Research question 2:

What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of academic excellence at Save University?

The second research question explored male undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Save University and their conceptions of academic excellence. The analysis of findings was guided by the Academic Excellence theory, particularly as articulated by Harper (2008, 2010) and Hotchkins and Dancy (2016). These frameworks emphasize the multiplicity of ways in which students achieve and express academic success beyond traditional quantitative metrics such as grade point averages (GPA).

The findings underscore the limitations of higher education institutions in defining academic excellence comprehensively. Harper (2010) and other scholars have critiqued universities for their reliance on traditional academic indicators, which often overlook the broader spectrum of student achievements. These include leadership roles, resilience in overcoming challenges, fostering meaningful relationships, and community engagement (Harper, 2009; Hotchkins &

Dancy, 2016). The need for more inclusive and nuanced definitions of academic excellence aligns with the evolving complexities of the postmodern world and increasingly diverse student populations (Harper, 2008).

8.7. Theoretical Context and Emerging Perspectives

The theoretical framework situates academic excellence within a multidimensional lens, challenging institutions to move beyond conventional measures. Harper (2010) advocates for the inclusion of qualities such as critical thinking, commitment to democratic values, cultural competence, and identity development as core components of academic excellence. These elements provide a foundation for understanding the diverse experiences and aspirations of male students at Save University, where traditional conceptions of success intersect with personal, social, and cultural dimensions.

8.8. Key Findings

Participants described academic excellence as multifaceted, encompassing both academic performance and engagement in campus life. They rejected materialistic notions of success, as observed in Harper's (2010) study, instead highlighting leadership roles, mentorship, and active participation in academic and extracurricular activities. For example, Charles emphasized the importance of classroom engagement and participation in university events, contrasting it with peers who solely focused on academics without broader involvement. This aligns with Hotchkins and Dancy's (2016) findings that leadership roles and community engagement contribute significantly to students' holistic development and perceived success.

Leadership positions were particularly valued by participants, who noted that these roles enhanced their visibility among faculty and administrators. As Kito explained, engaging with senior university staff through leadership activities provided a sense of achievement and a platform to influence institutional decision-making. These interactions echo Hotchkins and Dancy's (2016) concept of "professional development opportunities," which arise from campus leadership roles.

8.9. Employability

Students' employability can significantly enhance the reputation of an institution. According to Haverila, Haverila, and McLaughlin (2020), employability is a key factor that can influence an institution's image. Burke (2009) urges higher education institutions to prioritize employability in their curricula and programs. Universities are tasked with producing graduates who possess the skills and competencies necessary to enter the workforce and "meet the requirements of a changing employment market" (Burke, 2009, p. 89), while also contributing to the development of the regions in which they are located.

Participants in this study identified employability as a crucial element of their masculine identity. Jackson shared the following:

"I hope that upon completion of my studies, I can find something to keep me busy. You know, it's been years of investment; I just need something to occupy me while I search for a rewarding job. I know it's a challenge, but I cannot see myself sitting idly after all these years... I need to set a good example for other men in my community, or else they will never consider going to college."

This finding aligns with the study conducted by Santos and Jones (2018), which revealed that "both the education choices and employment expectations of final-year students in Mozambique reflect gender imbalances in favour of men" (p. 1).

8.10 Academic Resilience and Motivation

The participants' narratives revealed strong ties between academic resilience, motivation, and their perceptions of success. Several students described their educational journeys as a means of overcoming socioeconomic challenges. For instance, Michael and Charles shared deeply personal accounts of financial struggles and familial hardships, highlighting education as a pathway to liberation and social mobility. These accounts align with Kimmell's (2010) stages of male adulthood, which link education and employment as pivotal markers of maturity and success.

In addition, participants emphasized the importance of attendance and engagement in academic success. Literature supports these observations, with studies by Karnik et al. (2020) and Tetteh (2018) highlighting the positive correlation between regular class attendance and academic

performance. Beyond mere attendance, the participants described their active participation in discussions and extracurricular activities as critical to their development.

8.11. Giving Back and Community Responsibility

A significant finding was the participants' commitment to community upliftment. Many expressed a desire to use their education to benefit their communities, reflecting the concept of "intergenerational fulfilment" described by Hotchkins and Dancy (2016). Jackson articulated this commitment by framing his academic pursuits as a means of giving back to the community that shaped him. Similarly, José envisioned leveraging his skills to mentor younger students and promote artistic expression.

This notion of giving back highlights the interconnectedness of individual achievements and communal well-being, reinforcing the idea that academic excellence extends beyond personal accomplishments to include broader social responsibilities.

8.12. Implications for Higher Education

The findings challenge higher education institutions to adopt more inclusive definitions of academic excellence that reflect the diverse pathways through which students navigate their academic and social environments. Recognizing leadership, resilience, and community engagement as integral components of excellence can foster a more equitable and supportive academic culture. Moreover, incorporating praxis-based learning approaches, as advocated by Burke and Farshawy (2021), can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, further enriching students' educational experiences.

In summary, the study expands on existing literature by demonstrating how male undergraduate students conceptualize academic excellence as a holistic construct, intertwined with personal growth, leadership, and community engagement. By aligning with the Academic Excellence theory, this research underscores the need for a paradigm shift in higher education that values diverse achievements and promotes inclusive measures of success.

8.13. Research question 3:

How do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences' students relate their construction of masculine identities to their academic excellence at SAVE University?

The third research question examined how male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University relate their constructions of masculine identities to their academic excellence. The findings reveal complex interactions between students' masculine identities, their academic experiences, and the institutional environment, with both enabling and constraining factors emerging from the data.

Participants highlighted the supportive role of the University leadership and faculty members in their academic success. Many described the leadership as sensitive to student concerns, fostering a sense of care and belonging. Charles' statement encapsulates this sentiment:

“Thank you very much to Dr. Isabel and Dr. Chabai; they have been more than just teachers, they have been everything to us, loving, and sensitive to our concerns. I mean, they have played an influential role in our lives.”

From a **social constructionist perspective on masculinity** (Kimmel & Messner, 2010), these findings suggest that the institutional ethos at Save University provides an environment that allows students to construct a form of masculinity rooted in relationality and mutual support, countering hegemonic norms that often valorize competition and emotional detachment. Faculty-student interactions that emphasize care and mentorship appear to challenge traditional notions of masculinity, enabling male students to engage more holistically with their academic journeys. This aligns with Perger and Takács (2016), who note that positive faculty-student relationships promote self-confidence and academic self-concept, critical components of student success.

However, participants also reported concerns about some faculty members' professional competencies, which they felt negatively impacted their learning experiences. Mano described this as follows:

“We hear that a teacher who has limitations in what they teach would avoid students knowing that they lack proper credentials. This makes them inaccessible or rude, interfering with the teacher-student relationship.”

This finding highlights the potential tensions between institutional expectations and individual faculty capacity, with implications for the students' construction of academic masculinity. Incompetent or unapproachable faculty may reinforce traditional, defensive masculine identities rooted in self-reliance and avoidance of vulnerability (Connell, 1996), thereby limiting students' ability to seek help or engage meaningfully.

Participants also expressed satisfaction with their relationships with female peers, emphasizing sound interactions with both male and female students. This finding contradicts Davis' (2022) study, which found that men often feel more comfortable communicating with women than with other men. Kito commented:

"I have no problems relating to both male and female students; it does not affect my identity as a man. But I see some folks struggling to relate to women. I think men need to change their mentality."

These narratives reflect a shift in traditional gender dynamics, suggesting that some male students at Save University are constructing masculinities that embrace inclusivity and adaptability, in line with the evolving cultural expectations around gender relations. This supports the social constructionist view that masculinity is not fixed but varies across contexts and relationships (Kimmel & Messner, 2010).

The influence of familial support emerged as another critical factor in shaping the students' academic and masculine identities. Participants described their parents, particularly fathers, as instrumental in nurturing their university experiences. Mano shared:

"My parents had not studied much, but they knew how important school was. I honestly confess that I got the necessary support to navigate university."

This finding aligns with Harper and Harris' (2008) assertion that father-son relationships are pivotal in gender socialization, shaping masculine identities through the father's conceptualization of gender. For many participants, their fathers' emphasis on education and resilience reinforced a version of masculinity that values perseverance and academic achievement, consistent with Sáenz et al.'s (2013) notion of "machismo" as both a motivator and a barrier in academic contexts.

Despite institutional and familial support, participants raised concerns about the inadequate infrastructure and outdated resources at SAVE University, particularly in the library. One participant remarked:

“The library is not stocked; the few existing manuals remain unused as they are outdated. The shelves are vacant...I think there is a need to recruit knowledgeable personnel who could assist with the management of the university library.”

These findings resonate with Usman and Madudili’s (2019) research, which underscores the critical role of adequate facilities in student motivation and performance. From a social constructionist lens, such inadequacies can shape masculine identities in contradictory ways: while some students may internalize a narrative of resilience and self-reliance, others may experience frustration and disengagement, particularly if they perceive systemic barriers as insurmountable.

Participants’ reflections on the impact of COVID-19 further illustrate the intersection of structural challenges and gendered expectations. The pandemic exacerbated economic hardships, which many participants linked to increased stress and anxiety. This aligns with Birmingham’s (2021) findings that financial insecurity during COVID-19 created significant barriers to academic success. For male students, these challenges may intensify pressures to conform to traditional notions of masculinity, such as financial independence and emotional stoicism, as theorized by Connell (1996).

Finally, the participants’ calls for the internationalization of Save University highlight their aspirations for global competitiveness and academic excellence. As Chan (2008) notes, internationalization enhances the quality of teaching and research, fostering a learning environment that supports diverse and inclusive constructions of masculinity.

In summary, the findings underscore the dynamic interplay between institutional, relational, and cultural factors in shaping male students’ constructions of masculinity and academic excellence. Through the lens of social constructionism, it becomes evident that these constructions are fluid, context-dependent, and influenced by both enabling and constraining forces within the university environment.

8.14. Research question 4:

Why do male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students relate their construction of masculine identities to their academic excellence at SAVE University in the way that they do?

The fourth research question examined why male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students at Save University construct their masculine identities in ways that intersect with their academic excellence. Although no overarching theme explicitly encapsulated their responses, the participants' narratives illuminated several factors influencing this relationship. These findings reflect the dynamic interplay between gender identity, cultural expectations, and academic achievement.

8.14.1. Identity as a Multidimensional Construct

Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity posits that identity dimensions such as gender, religion, and culture revolve around a core self, influencing how individuals perceive and perform their identities. Chickering and Reisser (1993) argue that students' identities are shaped by pre-university experiences and are further developed in college. Participants in this study articulated how their religious beliefs, cultural values, and social expectations informed their constructions of masculinity and its connection to academic excellence.

For instance, Solomon described his academic identity as deeply intertwined with his faith:

“My belief in God has made me a different man. I describe myself as a God-fearing man. So, I see God operating in my academics. I think a real man must put God first in his studies because without God, life loses its test, and nothing will go well.”

Similarly, Fernando expressed gratitude for his success, attributing it to divine intervention:

“Without God, none of this [success] would be possible. I actually feel indebted to God for care and mercy shown to me so far.”

These perspectives align with Waggoner's (2011) findings that college environments often foster spiritual growth by encouraging students to engage with diverse viewpoints and reflect on

questions of meaning. Kamau (2012) and Van Klinken (2012) further emphasize that cultural and religious norms significantly shape African masculinities, framing them as responsible, family-oriented, and spiritually grounded. The participants' narratives challenge stereotypical depictions of African masculinity as violent or irresponsible (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021) and instead present an alternative vision rooted in moral and academic integrity.

8.14.2. Masculinity and Academic Engagement

The participants' construction of masculinity reflects elements of hegemonic masculinity, yet with distinct variations informed by their context. Unlike the hegemonic ideals often associated with dominance or aggression (Connell, 1995), the men in this study emphasized responsibility, self-discipline, and a commitment to education. Charles explained:

“I think I am actually a different man. I care about myself, about school, about my future, and the future of my extended family.”

This perspective aligns with the argument by Ammann and Staudacher (2021) that African masculinities often prioritize family care and provision. Similarly, Harper and Harris (2008) highlight that some men resist normative ideals of manhood, opting instead for values that enhance their personal and academic development.

The relationship between masculinity and religion in this study also corroborates Ward and Cook's (2011) findings, which suggest that adherence to traditional masculine norms may intersect positively with religious commitment, fostering non-violent and responsible behaviours.

8.15. Extracurricular Activities and Cultural Identity

Participation in extracurricular activities emerged as a significant factor in the participants' academic and social experiences. Save University's Strategic Plan (2023–2030) underscores the importance of balancing academic pursuits with cultural and sports activities as part of holistic education. Dinho shared his enthusiasm for sports, stating:

“I am actually a sports guy. I like football. I mean, I think most men like sports, depending on the type...I am a football man, lol.”

Kito expressed a similar passion for cultural activities, particularly singing in a local choir:

“I don’t think I can make it without singing...I feel like I am already in heaven, especially when I am surrounded by those nice and lovely voices.”

These findings support the literature suggesting that engagement in sports and cultural activities can enhance students’ overall university experience, contributing to their identity construction and academic success (Morrell, 1998; Harper, 2008).

8.16. Structural Barriers and Masculine Identity

Participants also highlighted structural challenges, such as the lack of student residences and unreliable public transport, as obstacles to their academic success. Nito remarked:

“By the time I get here, I am already tired and need a rest when classes are in progress; especially during summer...it is actually hectic.”

Similarly, José pointed to the scarcity of transport options in Maxixe City:

“Most of us often run late to class. It ends up compromising the learning process. It does not help at all.”

Xulu-Gama (2019) notes that students living in residences benefit from social and academic support systems that enhance their learning experiences. The absence of such facilities at Save University highlights systemic inequities that disproportionately affect male students who strive to balance their academic ambitions with external demands.

The findings suggest that male undergraduate students at Save University construct their masculine identities in ways deeply intertwined with cultural, religious, and institutional factors. Their emphasis on responsibility, moral integrity, and academic excellence challenges dominant stereotypes of African masculinities and underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how these identities evolve in higher education contexts. Theoretical perspectives on identity, masculinity, and educational engagement offer a valuable lens to interpret these findings, demonstrating the complex interplay between individual agency and structural influences in shaping the participants’ experiences.

The findings of this PhD study contribute significantly to the theoretical, contextual, and conceptual understanding of male undergraduate Humanities students' constructions of academic

excellence and identity at Save University. By employing a multidimensional theoretical framework that incorporates Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of identity development, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) psychosocial development theory, and Connell's (1995) theory of masculinities, this study offers a nuanced exploration of how masculine identities are negotiated in academic settings. It challenges prevailing narratives of masculinity in African contexts by highlighting the agency and diverse experiences of male students who navigate academic excellence within complex sociocultural, religious, and institutional contexts.

Theoretically, this study expands on Connell's (1995) framework of hegemonic masculinity by showcasing how alternative forms of masculinity can align with positive academic engagement and ethical development. Participants in this study rejected dominant depictions of African masculinities as inherently criminal or disengaged, instead constructing identities rooted in responsibility, spirituality, and community care. These findings provide an important counter-narrative that broadens the conceptualization of masculinities in higher education, suggesting that masculinity can serve as a resource for academic and personal growth rather than a hindrance.

Contextually, the research situates these constructions of masculinity within the unique environment of Save University, which, through its Strategic Plan 2023–2030, emphasizes a holistic student experience integrating academic, cultural, and extracurricular activities. The participants' engagement with sports, religious groups, and cultural activities illustrates how institutional frameworks and local sociocultural values shape their identity and academic pursuits. These findings underscore the importance of understanding how institutional policies and practices intersect with students' lived experiences to create environments that support diverse pathways to success.

8.17. Intersectionality in Lusophone Africa

Intersectionality posits that it is the intersection of multiple identities that influence individual worldviews (Meer & Muller, 2017). Gender inequalities in the higher education sector remain a persistent issue across Lusophone Africa, particularly in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. The intersection of rapid socio-economic changes, the legacy of colonialism, civil wars, and post-election conflicts, which characterize Lusophone Africa have influenced the

construction of gender relations in this region. Borrowing Manuel's words, the intersection of the afore mentioned phenomena has resulted in gender identities that are plural, hybrid and dynamic (Manuel, 2014).

Conceptually, this study makes an important contribution by linking male students' spiritual and cultural identities to their academic excellence. The findings show that participants view spirituality as a source of motivation, ethical guidance, and resilience in their academic journeys, challenging the often secular focus of existing higher education literature. Additionally, the study emphasizes the intersectionality of identities, illustrating how race, culture, and socio-economic status inform male students' navigation of academic spaces. By foregrounding these intersections, this research enriches conceptual discussions on identity development, masculinity, and academic success.

In summary, this PhD study advances theoretical discussions on masculinities, contextualizes male students' academic experiences within African higher education, and contributes conceptually by foregrounding the interplay between spirituality, culture, and academic excellence. These contributions provide a robust foundation for future research and practical interventions aimed at fostering inclusive and supportive academic environments for diverse student populations.

CHAPTER NINE

STUDY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.0. Overview of the Study

This study explored the constructions of masculinity and academic excellence among Arts and Social Sciences undergraduate male students at Save University in Mozambique. The research focused on understanding how these students perceive and navigate their identities as men while striving for academic success. By examining the lived experiences of these students, the study provides valuable insights into the intersections of gender, culture, and academic achievement within the higher education context of Lusophone Africa.

This chapter synthesizes the key findings, discusses the limitations and delimitations, highlights the study's original contributions, and offers implications for research, university administrators, and students.

9.1. Key Findings and Contributions

The study revealed several critical insights into the ways undergraduate male students construct their identities in relation to academic excellence. The findings underscore the complexities of masculinity within higher education spaces, challenging dominant narratives that often portray male students as disengaged and underperforming. Instead, the study highlights the agency and resilience of high-achieving male students who actively negotiate their identities in ways that align with both cultural expectations and academic goals. These findings contribute to the evolving body of literature on masculinities and academic achievement, particularly within the under-researched context of Lusophone Africa.

The research extends existing theories of masculinity by demonstrating how cultural and institutional contexts shape the academic experiences of male students. Unlike the prevailing focus on Afro-American men or men of color in Western contexts, this study provides a nuanced understanding of black heterosexual men's experiences in Mozambique, thus offering a conceptual contribution to the global discourse on masculinity in higher education. Moreover, the findings emphasize the importance of considering diverse constructions of academic excellence beyond conventional metrics such as GPA and test scores

9.2. Summary of the findings per Research Question

A summary of the findings per research question is provided, with the exception of the research question four (4), for reasons explained earlier in this study (see chapter 8, section 8.14).

Research Question 1:

What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of how they construct their masculine identities at Save University?

Participants' narratives revealed that the construction of masculinity among undergraduate males at Save University is multifaceted. Socio-religious and institutional factors have informed undergraduate males' construction of masculinity. Findings suggest that participants have defined masculinities in ways that contradicted the traditional expectations of college and university males as disengaged. Participants' self-motivation, and their inability to accommodate societal expectations of masculinity have played a critical role in their definition of what it means to be a man at Save University. Participants' description of themselves as academically engaged or high achievers was outside the boundaries of traditional expectations of masculinity as portrayed in much of the literature reviewed earlier in this study (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Kissilica & Englo-Carlson, 2010; Salminen-Karlsson et al., 2018).

Research question 2:

What are male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences students' conceptions of academic excellence at Save University?

Findings suggest that while GPA are the most used measurements of academic success in most higher education institutions, other measurements should be considered. Academic excellence incorporates a range of other educational outcomes (students' employability, extra-curricular activities, persistence and participation in activities meant for community advancement, among others) (Harper, 2008; Harper, 2010). Findings also revealed that students' experiences are of paramount importance when it comes to define academic excellence. Universities are, therefore, challenged not to rely on past institutional definitions and theories about academic excellence as new theories on academic excellence have been evolving.

Research question 3:

What factors have contributed to male undergraduate Arts and Social Sciences' students' construction of masculine identities and academic excellence at Save University?

The findings reveal that Save University has created a conducive environment which facilitates both students' physical and intellectual growth. As captured by the findings, Save University has set a good example of an institution concerned about social justice. The University has taken practical steps in fostering a spirit of solidarity and inclusivity among students irrespective of their gender. Healthy relationships with faculty members, and peers have made male students construct a type of masculinity beyond the boundaries of traditional hegemonic masculinities. These findings advance the literature revised earlier in this study (Carlson, 2017, Harzing et al., 2018; Salminen-Karlsson et al., 2018).

9.3. Study Limitation/delimitation

This study had several limitations and delimitations that must be acknowledged. One limitation involved the sample size, which was intended to include 18 participants, but ultimately consisted of 17. While this minor discrepancy does not significantly affect the overall validity of the study, it is important to note.

A key delimitation was the fact that the study was conducted with a sample of only male undergraduate students from the Humanities disciplines at two campuses in Maxixe City. Save University operates across three campuses (Chongoene, Maxixe, and Massinga), and the study's findings may not be fully representative of all Humanities undergraduate male students across the entire institution. Thus, the study's scope was geographically limited, and it does not capture the experiences of students from other campuses.

Additionally, the participants were all first-generation Black heterosexual men who held leadership positions within the Student Association or had achieved a GPA of 14 or higher after completing their first four semesters. The participants were predominantly from five disciplines within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Law, Philosophy, History, English, and Portuguese). This focus excluded other disciplines and populations that might have provided

richer, more diverse perspectives. However, through transferability, the findings of this study can be extended to other disciplines in the University.

This selection criterion meant that the sample represented a specific group of students, which limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of Humanities students. Students from other academic disciplines or those who did not meet these academic and leadership criteria might have provided different insights, thus adding a layer of depth that was not captured by the current sample. Additionally, the fact that homosexuality is still disdained in the Republic of Mozambique opens room to suspect that under-reporting of non-heterosexual identities might have posed a limitation to participants to share their insights when data collection was taking place.

These aspects could have influenced their experiences of higher education and their constructions of masculinity. As Davis (2002) notes, “sexual orientation, race, culture, class, religion, and gender are identity dimensions that circulate around one’s core identity” (p. 509). Ignoring these dimensions poses a limitation, as different cultural, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds may shape participants' experiences in unique ways.

Furthermore, the fact that the researcher was also a faculty member at the university where the study took place could have influenced the data collection process. Although every effort was made to maintain a neutral stance, participants might have felt uncomfortable discussing certain sensitive topics, such as concerns regarding the competence of their instructors. For example, during interviews, participants seemed hesitant to provide detailed information on this issue, which may have been affected by the researcher’s position within the university.

Despite these limitations and delimitations, the study provides valuable insights into the experiences of male undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Save University. The findings contribute meaningfully to the discourse on masculinities and higher education, particularly within the context of first-generation students and their academic journeys.

9.4. Original Contributions

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by focusing on undergraduate male students as high achievers rather than academically struggling individuals. It provides an original conceptual contribution to the study of masculinity in higher education from a Lusophone African perspective, challenging global narratives that often homogenize male students' experiences.

By exploring alternative discourses that recognize undergraduate males' diverse experiences, this research advocates for a developmental approach to understanding male students in higher education. It also calls for a broader definition of academic excellence, one that includes achievements in extracurricular activities, leadership roles, and contributions to campus culture.

9.5. Implications for Research

This study should be regarded as a preliminary exploration of Arts and Social Sciences undergraduate heterosexual men's constructions of masculinity and academic excellence at a university in a Lusophone developing country. Future research should expand to include other campuses, faculties, and populations, including students of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Exploring how socio-economic status influences male students' perceptions of their identities could also provide valuable insights.

Further studies should investigate the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on students' academic and personal lives, as well as the effects of large class sizes on teaching and learning experiences. Longitudinal research on post-university experiences of high-achieving male students is necessary to deepen our understanding of their transitions into professional and personal life.

9.6. Implications for University and Faculty Administrators

The findings suggest that universities should adopt broader criteria for measuring academic excellence. Recognition of students' contributions to extracurricular activities, leadership, and community engagement during graduation ceremonies and other institutional events can foster a more inclusive understanding of achievement. Administrators should also address logistical challenges such as the lack of on-campus residences and the adverse effects of large class sizes,

which hinder both student development and lecturer-student interactions. Additionally, the study highlights the need for university administrators to treat male students' development holistically. This involves creating spaces for open dialogue about masculinity and identity, as well as offering support systems that cater to the diverse needs of male students.

9.7. Implications for Students

The study has important implications for undergraduate male students. It encourages them to engage more deeply with their identities as men and to foster collaborative relationships with peers across academic performance levels. High-achieving male students should work to bridge the gap between themselves and their underachieving counterparts, fostering a culture of mutual support rather than perpetuating divisive stereotypes.

Courses that address gender and identity can play a transformative role in improving male students' relationships with their peers and broader communities. These courses should be prioritized in the curriculum to help students navigate the complexities of identity and interpersonal relationships in diverse contexts.

9.8. Personal Reflections

My interest in masculinity builds upon my Master's research, which focused on masculinity and religion. Prior to being accepted into the School of Education, I had been admitted to the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where I had begun a PhD in the Gender and Religion program. I must admit that transitioning from the SRPC to the School of Education has been a significant gain for me, as it has provided opportunities to interact with new colleagues and learn from them.

Throughout my studies as a PhD candidate, I have faced numerous challenges. Before registering with the School of Education, I discovered that I was no longer eligible for fee remission, which had a significant negative impact on me. This realization left me feeling as though I should quit my studies, especially after all the challenges I faced at the SRPC. However, when it became clear that I had to choose between quitting and persevering, I decided to continue. This decision changed the course of my life, as I had to contact banks and apply for loans to meet the registration requirements.

Working in the Academic Registry allowed me to establish myself within the university community, with particular emphasis on interacting with students. After approximately four years of engaging with and listening to undergraduate students' stories and experiences on campus, I began to question how tertiary education institutions utilized students' involvement in various extracurricular activities. This led me to undertake a research project exploring how students' voices and experiences could enhance the undergraduate experience at Save University. Given the gendered challenges within higher education, I chose to focus specifically on male students' construction of their identities in relation to academic success. The rationale for focusing on male students stems from the increasing concern raised by literature that male students, rather than female students, are disappearing from higher education institutions.

I also believed that the discussion surrounding masculinity and academic excellence would resonate with both students and university administrators. Participants in the study described the interview questions as both challenging and thought-provoking. Many had not previously reflected on what it means to be a man. For most participants, this study served as an eye-opener to their own gender identities, prompting them to examine themselves as men and to question their academic performance through the lens of their masculinity.

As both a lecturer and a staff member in the Academic Registry, my intent is to use the findings of this study to encourage Course Directors and Faculty Administrators to critically re-examine their selection criteria when choosing academically successful students. I also plan to share the findings not only with Course Directors and Faculty Administrators but also by presenting them at academic conferences and disseminating them through article publications.

9.9. Final Remarks

This study has provided a valuable contribution to the understanding of masculinity and academic excellence among male undergraduate students in Mozambique. While acknowledging its limitations, the research offers original insights that challenge deficit-based narratives and advocate for a more inclusive and developmental approach to higher education. By expanding the discourse on masculinities in academic spaces, this study lays the groundwork for future research and policy interventions aimed at fostering equity and excellence in higher education.

REFERENCE LIST

- Abel, J.R., & Deitz, R. (n/d). The Role of Colleges and Universities in Building Local Human Capital, *Current Issues in Economics and Finance*, 17(6), 1-18.
- Aboim, S (2008). Men between Worlds: Changing Masculinities in Urban Maputo, xx (x). <https://doi.org/10.1177/10977184x07313360>.
- _____. (2012). Sexualized Bodies: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Mozambique, *Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies*, 7(1), 67-90, 67-90.
- Abonyi, U.K. (2016). Universities Role in Regional Development: A Case Study of University for Development Studies, Ghana, *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7 (26), 11-20.
- Adeyeye, G. M., & Dasoo, N. (2023 April). Social Capital and its impact in Promoting Academic Achievement. *Journal of Science and Research*, 79 (4/1),10-20. <https://doi.org/10.21506/j.ponte.2023.4.2>
- Alemu, S. K (2018). The meaning, idea, and History of University/Higher Education in Africa: A brief Literature Review. 4(3). 210-227.
- Alhosani, Y., Riyami, R.A.; Alarabi, K.& Ayasrah, F.T.M. (2023). Academic Excellence: Key factors and review of World-Class Institutions, *Journal of Kurdish Studies*. 11(2). 2023-2035. <https://doi.org/10.58262/ks.v11i02.143>
- Ammann, C., & Staudacher, S. (2021). Masculinities in Africa beyond crisis: complexity, fluidity, and intersectionality, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 28 (6) 759-768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2020.1846019>
- Andre, P.H. (2019). Transcending Societal Expectations of masculinities in collegiate male student Athletics: A Phenomenological Inquiry [Doctoral Dissertation, Central Michigan University]. <https://scholarly.cmich.edu/?a=d&d=CMUGR2019-138.1.237&een-10--1--txt-txIN%7CtxtAU%7CtxtI>
- Archer, L. (2008): Younger Academics' Construction of 'Authenticity', Success' and Professional Identity, *Studies in Higher Education*, 33 (4), 385-403.
- Astin, A.W. (1999). Student Involvement Theory: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40 (5).
- Aydin, G. (2017). Personal Factors Predicting College Student Success, *Eurasian Journal of Education Research*, 69, 93-112. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2017.69.6>

- Badaszewski, P. D. (2014). Beyond the Binary: How College men construct positive Masculinity. [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia].
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/badaszewski_philip_d_201405_phd.pdf
- Berg, L. D., Gahman, L., & Nunn, N. (2014). Neoliberalism, Masculinities and academic Knowledge Production: Towards a theory of ‘Academic Masculinities. Centre for social, spatial and Economic Justice. University of British Columbia, Canada.
<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315594118-5/neoliberalism-masculinities-academic-knowledge-production-towards-theory-academic-masculinities-lawrence-berg-levi-gahman-neil-nunn>
- Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York: Doubleday and Co.
- Birmingham, W., Wadsorth, L.L., & Lasseter, J. (2021). COVID-19 Lockdown: Impact on College student’s lives. *Journal of American College Health*. 71 (2), 1-15.
- Blackstone, A. (2003).“Gender Roles and Society”. in J.R Miller, RM Lerner, & L.B Schiamberg (Eds). *Human Ecology: An Encyclopedia of Children, Families, Communities, and Environments*. <https://www.researchgate.net/signup.SignUp.html>
- Bonaccorsi, A., Biancardi, D., Sánchez-Barriowengo, M., & Biagi, F. (2019). Study on Higher Education Institutions and Local Development, Publication Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2760/369557,JRC117272>
- Brawn, V. & Clark, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2) 77-101.
- Bukoski, B. E., & Hatch, D. K. (2016). “We’re Still Here...We’re Not Giving UP” Black and Latino Men’s Narratives of Transition to Community College. *Community College Review, Sage Publications Journal*. 44 (2), 99-118.
- Burcar, V., Akerstrom, M., & Wasterfors (2011). Balancing Contradictory Identities: performing Masculinity in Victim Narratives. *Sociological perspectives*, 54(1), 103-124.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/sop.2011.54.1.103>

- Burke, P. J. (2009). Men Assessing Higher Education: Theorizing Continuity and Change in relation to masculine Subjectivities. *Higher Education Policy*, 22 (01), 81-100.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2008.24>
- Burke, P. J., Crozier, G., Read, B., Hall, J., Peat, J., & Francis, B. (2013). Formations of Gender and Higher Education Pedagogies: GaP Final Report. The Higher Education Academy. University of Roehampton, London.
<http://www.mensstudies.com/content/r38234n12u5x/>
- Burke, P.J. (2013). Formation of Masculinity and Higher Education Pedagogies. *Journal of Culture, Society & Masculinity*, 5 (2), 109-126. <https://doi.org/10.3149/CSM.0502.109>
- Burr, V. (1995 March). An Introduction to Social Constructionism. Routledge. *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.5195/jffp.1995.375>
- Burr, V. (2015). Social constructionism. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*, (22), 222-227. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.24049-X>
- Butcher, N., Wilson-Stridom, M., Hoosen, S., MacDonald, E., Moore, A., & Barnes (2008). A Profile of Higher Education in the Region, (8), 46-124.
- Butler, J. (1998). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theater journal* 40 (4), 519-531.
- Capraro, R.L. (2010). Why College men drink: Alcohol, Adventure, and the Paradox of Masculinity. In M.S. Kimmel & M.A. Messner (Eds), *Men's Lives*, (pp. 157-170), 8th Edition, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, USA.
- Carlson, P. H. (2017). Take the Lead: A Phenomenological Exploration of Male College Student Leadership and Masculinity [Masters Dissertation, Taylor University].
<https://pillars.taylor.edu/mahe/80>.
- Castán Broto, V. & Neves Alves, S. (2018) Intersectionality challenges for the coproduction of urban services: notes for a theoretical and methodological agenda. *Environment and Urbanization*, 30 (2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247818790208>
- Cathogo, J. (2008) *African philosophy as expressed in the concept of hospitality and Ubuntu*. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (130), 39-53.

- Chan, W.W.Y., & Dimmock, C. (2018). The internalization of universities: Globalist, Internationalist and translocalist models. *Journal of Research in International Education*. Sage Publication, 7 (2), 185-206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240908091>
- Chapagai, S.D. (2024). Factors Affecting the Academic Achievement of the student in Community Campus, *KMC Journal*, 6 (1), 241-259. <https://doi.org/10.3126/kmcj.v6i1.62344>
- Cheng, A. (2014). Taking Attendance: Teacher Absenteeism Across School Types. EDRE Working Papers, 1-31.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). Education and identity. 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chimanzi, L. (2016). Masculinity construction: Grade 7 Boys' Relationship with Girls at a Township Primary School in Gauting East [Master Dissertation, University of South Africa. <https://umkn-dsp01.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/23394>
- Ching, C. P. (2013). Linking Theories to Practice: A Case-Based Approach in Teacher Education. *Elsevier*, 280-288. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.214>
- Chiponda, A., & Wasserman, J. M (2012). Marginalization of women in the Visual Images contained in Malawian Junior Secondary School History Test books. In J.M. Wasserman & S. Reddy, (Eds). *Surveying Student Research in the Humanities* (pp. 265-271) UKZN.
- Chitando E., & Chiringoma, S. (2012). Redemptive Masculinities, Men, HIV, and Religion. WCC Publications.
- Chitando, E. (2010). Men as Gender Activists: Opportunities and Challenges Within the Religious Sector. In *Journal of Constructive Theology: Gender, Religion and Theology in Africa*. 16 (2), 124-145.
- Christison, C. (2013). The Benefits of Participating in Extracurricular activities. *Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 5 (2). 17-20
- Christison, C. (2013). The Benefits of Participating in Extracurricular activities. *Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 5 (2), 17-20.
- Collins, P. H. (1998b). The Tie That Binds: Race, Gender and U.S. Violence. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21(5), 918-38.

- Collins, P. H. (2012). Looking Back, Moving Ahead: Scholarship in Service to Social Justice. *Journal of Gender & Society*. Sage Publications, 26 (1), 14-22.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities*. 2nd Ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005 a). Gender and Society. *Sage Publications*, 19 (6), 829-859. <http://www.citt.ufl.edu/portfoho/genders/Readers>.
- Connell, R.W. (1996). Teaching the Boys: New Research on Masculinity and Gender Strategies for schools. Columbia University Press. 98 (2), 206-235.
- Connell, R.W., & Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005 b). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society* 19 (6) 829-859.
- Cooper, L.J., Valentin, E., & Laster-Loftus, A. (2020). The role of Spirituality in Academic Achievement. *Journal of Instructional Research*, 9, 1-14.
- Coughlin, P.G. (2015 March). Plágio em Cinco Universidades em Moçambique: Amplitude, técnicas de deteção e medidas de controlo [Plagiarism in five Universities in Mozambique: Preventing measures], *Cadernos IESE*. 15/2015. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279994000>
- Courtenay, W. H. (2000). Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being: a theory of gender and health. *Journal of Social Science & Medicine*, 50 (2000), Soma State University, 1385-1401. www.elsevier.com/locate/socscimed
- Covrig, D., Ledesma, J., & Gifford, G. (2013). Spiritual or Religious Leadership: What do you Practice? What should you Practice? *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*. 7(1), 104-113.
- Coyle, N., & Tickoo, R. (2007 April). Qualitative research: What this Research Paradigms has to offer to the understanding of Pain? Editorial: *Pain Medicine*, 8(3), 205–206, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1526-4637.2007.00303.x>
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 3rd Edition. Sage Publications. LTD, UK.
- Crombie, G., Pyke, S.W., Silverthorn, N., Jones, A., & Piccinin, S. (2003). Students' Perceptions of Their Classroom Participation and Instructor as a Function of Gender and Context. Taylor & Francis. *Journal of Higher Education*, 74, (1), 51-76.

- D'Orsi, C. (2022). Corruption and Merit in the African Higher Education System: Legal, Policy and Sociological Reflections. *Hastings International, Com. L.Rev.*, 45 (2), 97-126.
- Dancy, T. E. (2007). Manhood Constructions among Engaged African American Male Collegians: Influences, Experiences, and Contexts (Publication no. 2740) [Doctoral Dissertation, Louisiana State University]. https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/2740
- Dancy, T. E. (2014). (Un)Doing Hegemony in Education: Disrupting School-to-prison-pipelines for Black males, *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 47(4), 476-493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0665684.2014.959271>
- Das, G., Nag, H., Majihi, P., & Tale, D.S (2023). The impact of COVID-19 on Education, Life, Activities and Mental Health of University students. *The online Journal of Distance Education and e-Learning*, 1 (3), 2963-2973.
- Davis, T. (2002). Voces of Gender Male Conflict: The Social Construction of College men's identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 3 (4), 508-521.
- Davis, T., & Laker, J. A. (2004). Connecting Men to Academic and Student Affairs Programs and Services. *New Directions for Student Services*, 107, 47-57.
- Dayiogh, M. & Turut-Ask (2004). Gender Differences in Academic Performance in a Large Public University in Turkey. *Economic Research Center*, 53(2), 255-277. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-005-2464-6>.
- De Carvalho, F. C. Geschwind, L, Weurlander, M. & Mendonça, M .(2024). Understanding student participation in a Mozambican University: the student perspective. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 48 (9-10), 897-908. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2024.2413886>
- Deb, S. (2019). Reconceptualizing Student Development Theory Through university-school partnerships [Doctoral Dissertation, The State University of New Jersey]. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/61635/PDF/1/play/>
- Den Brink, M. & Benschop, Y. (2012 january). Slaying the Seven Headed Dragon: The Quest for Gender Change in Academia. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 19 (1), 71-92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2011.00566.x>

- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. CA: Thousand Oaks.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y. (2007). Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of qualitative Research.
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2012). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. 4th Edition. Sage Publications, UK
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2012). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. 4th Edition. Sage Publications, UK.
- Der Berg, S. V., Maia, C., & Burger, G. (2017). Educational inequality in Mozambique. United Nations Wider University. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/213101/1/wp2017-212.pdf>
- Dhanapala, R.M. (2021). The Effect of Learning Environment on Academic Performance from Students' perspectives. *Global Scientific Journals*, 9 (3), 1527-1534.
- Diana, P.O. (2014). Effect of Gender on Students Academic Achievement in Secondary School Social Studies. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 5 (21) 78-84.
- Dube, M. W. (2003). Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS: Understanding and Acting on the Issues. In M. W. Dube (Ed), *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*. (pp.84-100) Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Eagly, A. H., Wood, W., & Diekmann, A. B. (2000). *Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal*. In T. Eckes & H. M. Trautner (Eds.), *The developmental social psychology of gender*, 123-174.
- Earthy, S., & Cronin A. (2008). Narrative analysis. In N. Gilbert, N. (Ed.), *Researching Social Life*. 3rd Edition, London. Sage Publications.
- Edwards, K. E., & Jones, S. R. (2009). "Putting the My Face On": A Grounded Theory of College men's Gender Identity Development. *Journal of Student Development*. Project Muse, 50 (2), 211-2.
- EFA (2015). Global Monitoring Report Education For All (2000-2015): Achievements and Challenges. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=h>

<https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/EFA%2520Global%2520Monitoring%2520Report%25202015.pdf>

- Elhami, A., & Khoshnevisan, B. (2022). Conducting an interview in Qualitative Research: *The Modes Operandi*, *Mextesol Journal*. 46 (1). 1-7.
- Faisal, R., Shinwan, L., & Hussain, L.(2017). Academic Performance of Male in Comparison with Female undergraduate medical students in Pharmacology Examinations. *Jornal of the Pakistan Medical Association*, 67(2). 204-208.
- Fenhane, J. B. H. (2004). Educação Moral e Cívica: Ame o Próximo. Maputo, Texto Editores, 7^a Classe.
- Fényes, H. (2014). Gender Role Attitudes among Higher Education Students in a Borderland Central-Eastern European Region called ‘Partium’, *C.E.P.S Journal*, 4 (2), 49-70.
- Ford, E. (2020 March). Tell Me Your Story: Narrative Inquiry in LIS Research. *College & Research Libraries* [Online], 81 (2), 235-247. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.81.2.235>
- Galbin, A. (2014). An introduction to Social Constructionism. *Social research Reports*, 26, 82-92. <https://www.researchreports.ro/an-introduction-to-social-constructionism>,
- Gaspar, A. M.C.S. (2022). Angolan Higher Education Without Quality, teachers, Students and the System Itself, Who will be the main Culprit? *International Journal of Research in Education in Humanities and Commerce*, 3(5), 119-132.
- Gender Profile Final Report JICA (2015). A Mozambique country: Japan International Cooperation Agency. [https://www.google.com/search?q=Gender+Profile+Final+Report+\(2015\)](https://www.google.com/search?q=Gender+Profile+Final+Report+(2015)).
- Giva, N., & Santos, L. (2019). Gender-based Assessment of STI ecosystem in Mozambique. Final Report. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://repository.ruforum.org/sites/default/files/Final%2520Report_Gender%2520STI%2520_Mozambique_19Dec19.pdf
- Givens, J.R., Nasir, N. I., Ross, K., & Royston, M.M. (2016). Modelling Manhood: Reimagining Black Male Identities. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 47 (2), 167-185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12/47>

- Goni, U., B, Y.W.S., Ali, H. K., & Bularafa, M.W. (2015). Gender Difference in Students' Academic Performance in Colleges of Education in Borno State, Nigeria: Implication for counselling. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 6. (32).107-114.
- Good, G.E., & Dell, D.M. (1989). Male Role and Gender Role Conflict: Relations to help seeking in Men. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*. American Psychological Association. 36 (3), 295-300.
- Governo de Inhambane (2017). Plano Estratégico Provincial de Prevenção e Combate à Violência Baseada no Género [Provincial Strategic Plan for Gender Based Violence Prevention].<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://almenafeminista.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Plano-Estrategico-Mocambic.pdf>
- Greenfield, E. A., & Marks, N.F. (2007). Religious Social Identity as an Explanatory Factor for Associations Between more frequent formal *Religious Participation and Psychology of Religion*, 17 (3), 245-259.
- Groes-Green, C. (2009). Hegemonic and subordinated Masculinities: Class, Violence and Sexual performance Among young Mozambican men. *Nordic Journal of African studies*. 18 (4). 286-304.
- Groes-Green, C. (2011). Phylogenies of Masculinities: Contextualizing Alternative Manhood in Mozambique. Sage Publications, 15 (2), 91-111. <https://doi.org/1177//097184x11327021>
- Hagedorn, G. (2019). The Socialization Process of Masculinity, and Its Manifestation at DePauw University: How Race, Media, and Gender Contribute to the Malleability of Masculinity (Publication no. 109) [Honor Scholar Theses, DePauw University]. <https://scholarship.depauw.edu/studentresearch/109>
- Hambira, R. (1999). Reflecting on the Heritage of the London Missionary Society. In S. De Gruchy (Ed), *Changing Frontiers: The Mission Story of the UCCSA (218-226)*, Gaborone: Pula Press.
- Harini, H., & Utami, P.P. (2019). The Effect of Job Satisfaction and Absenteeism on teacher's work Productivity. *Journal of Multicultural Education*. 5 (1). 99-108.

- Harper, S. (2009). Niggers no more: A Critical Race Counternarrative on Black male Student Achievement at Predominantly White colleges and Universities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Routledge, 22 (6), 697-712.
- Harper, S. R. (2006). Peer Support for African American Male College Achievement: Beyond Internalized Racism and the Burden of "Acting White", 14 (3), 337-358.
- Harper, S. R. (2008). Realizing the Intended Outcomes of Brown: High Achieving African American Male Undergraduates and Social Capital. *Journal of American Behavioral Science*, 5 (7), 100-1053.
- Harper, S. R. (2010). The Measurer of a man: Conceptualizations of Masculinity among High-Achieving African American Male College Students. In M.S. Kimmel & M.A. Messner (Eds), *Men's Lives*, (pp. 134-146), 8th Edition, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, USA.
- Harper, S. R., & Kimbrough, W. M. (n/d) Staffing practices, professional preparation trends, and demographics among student affairs administrators at HBCUs: Implications from a national study. *NASAP Journal*, 8(1), 8-25.
- Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S.J. (2007). Student organizations as venue for Black identity Expression and Development among African American Male Students Leaders. The John Hopkins University Press, 48, (2),127-144.
- Harper, S. R., Karini, R. M., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2004). Gender Differences in Student Engagement Among African American Undergraduates at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45 (3), 271-284.
- Harper, S.R. (2012). Black Male Students' Success in Higher Education: A report from the National Black Male Collage Achievement Study. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the study of Race and Equity in Education. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://web-app.usc.edu/web/rossier/publications/231/Harper%2520\(2012\)%2520Black%2520Male%2520Success.pdf](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://web-app.usc.edu/web/rossier/publications/231/Harper%2520(2012)%2520Black%2520Male%2520Success.pdf)
- Harper, S.R. (2018). A Critical Race Case Analysis of Black Undergraduate Students' Success at an Urban University. *Urban Education*, 53 (1), 3-25.

- Harris, F., & Harper, S. R. (2008). Masculinities go to community college: Understanding male identity socialization and gender role conflict. *Wiley InterScience*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.32.25-25>
- Harris, F., & Harper, S.R. (s/d). Matriculating Masculinity: Understanding undergraduate men's precollege Gender Socialization. *Journal of the First year Experience & students in transition*, 27(2), 49-65.
- Harzing, A. W., Vinkenburg, C., & Engen, M.U. (2018). How to Make Career advancement in Economics more Inclusive. *Solutions, GSD*. 103 (47675), 42-48.
- Haverila, M.J., Haverila, K., & McLaughlin, C. (2020). Variables Affecting the Retention intentions of students in Higher Education Institutions: A Comparison Between International and Domestic Students, *Journal of International Students*, 10(2), 358-382.
- Help Seeking in College. *Masculinities and Social Change*, 1(3), 267 -292. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4471/MCS.2012.16>
- Hennink, M. M. (2007). *International Focus Group Research: A hand book for the Health and Social Sciences*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hepworth, D., Littlepage, B., & Hancock, K. (2018). Factors Influencing University Student Academic Success. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 42 (1), 45-61.
- Herschberg, C., Benschop, Y., & den Brink, M.V. (2016). Report on gender practices in the construction of excellence. Garcia. Radboud University. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://genderex.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/GARCIA_working_papers_n.10.pdf
- Holmes, S. L., Roeder, B.S., & Flowers, L.A (2004). Applying Student Development Theory to College Students' Spiritual Beliefs. *The College of Student Affairs Journal*. 130-145.
- Hotchkins, B. K., & Dancy T. E. (2015). Rethinking Excellence: Black Male Success and Academic values in Higher Education. *A Journal on Black Men.*, 4, (1), 73-98.
- Hsieh, H-F., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three Approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15 (9), 1277-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Imron, I., Mawardi, I., & Şen, A. (2023). The influence of spirituality on academic engagement through achievement motivation and resilience. *International Journal of Islamic Educational Psychology*, 4(2), 314-326. <https://doi.org/10.18196/ijiep.v4i2.19428>

- Jackman, W. M., Morrain-Webb, J., & Fuller, C. (2019) Exploring gender differences in achievement through student voice: Critical insights and analyses. *Cogent Education*, 6 (1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1567895>
- Jayanthi, S.V., Balakrishnan, S., Ching, A.L.S., Latiff, N.A.A., & Nasirudeen, A. MA. (2014). Factors Contributing to Academic Performance of Students in a Tertiary Institution in Singapore. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 2, (9), 752-758. <https://doi.org/10.12691/education2-9-8>.
- Jeremy, T.J., & Fisher, P.A. (April, 2012). High achieving students and their experience of the Pursuit of Academic Excellence. *ISEP International Simposium*. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/21992/1/high_achieving_students_lit_review_paper.pdf
- Jessup-Anger, J., Johnson, B. N., & Wawrzynski, M. R. (2012). Exploring Living-Learning Community as a venue for men's identity construction. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*. 39 (1).162-175.
- Johnson, C.A. (2020). Black Male Students' Success in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Publication no. 283). [Doctoral Dissertation, Abilene Christian University]. Digital commons @Acu.
- Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M.K. (2000). A Conceptual Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(4), 405-414).
- Jones, S., Mambo, F., Mazive, E., Paris, Y., Santos, R., & Xirinda, G. (2018). A baseline Survey report on the School-to-work transitions of University Graduates in Mozambique. University of Copenhagen. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://igmo.zambique.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/Publication/report-mozambique-baseline-survey-2020-en.pdf>
- Kala, B (2024). The influence of Peer Relationships on the Learning Environment and Academic Achievement of Higher Secondary Students. *Alochana Journal*, 13 (1), 266-274.
- Kamau, N. (2012). African cultures and gender in the context of HIV and Aids. In B. Haddad, (Ed). *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain*, (pp.257-274), University of Kwazulu-Natal.

- Kaunda, C. (2014). A Potential Theological pedagogy for Reconstructing Life-Giving Masculinities in African Context: The case of the Pilot Programme on Gender, Religion and Health. *Criptura Jornal*. (113). 1-17.
- Kayanan, P J. (2017). Relationship between College Student Identity Development and Readiness for Change. [Doctoral Dissertation]. .
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/W4GM2N>
- Kharb, L., & Chahal, D. (July 2024). Unravelling the influence of Peers- Assessing the impact on students' Behaviour and Academic Performance in Boarding Schools of India., *International Research Journal of Modernazation in Engeneering Technology and Science*, 5 (7), 1229-1231.
- Kimmel, M.S., & Messner, M.A (2010). Introduction. In M.S. Kimmel & M.A. Messner (Eds), *Men's Lives*, (pp. xi-xix), 8th Edition, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, USA.
- Kirby, B. & van Klinken, A. (2022). Religious and Masculinities in Africa: Power, Politics, Performance. White Rose Research. <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/161976>
- Kivel, P. (2010). The Act-Like a man Box. In M.S. Kimmel & M.A. Messner (Eds), *Men's Lives* (pp. 83-85), 8th Edition, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, USA.
- Klinken, A. V. (2012). Transforming Masculinities Towards gender justice in an era of HIV and AIDS: Plotting the pathways. In B. Haddad, B. (Ed.). *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain* (pp.257-272), University of Kwazulu-Natal Press.
- Kobia, I. M. (2009). Femininity and Masculinity in English Primary School Textbooks in Kenya. *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture*. 57-71.
<https://aaref.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/28-6.pdf>
- Koffler, J. A. (2017). Factors Influencing Leadership Efficacy for Traditional-Aged Sophomore Male College Students (Publication no.28) [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Portland]. ProQuest LLC.
- Kromydas, T. (2017). Rethinking Higher Education and its Relationship with Social inequalities: Past knowledge, present State and future potential. Palgrave Communication.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-017-0001-8>
- Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., & Buckley, J. A. (2006). What matters to student success: A Review of the Literature. Commissioned Report from the National Symposium on Post Secondary

- Student Success: Spearheading a dialogue on Student Success. NPEC.
https://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/kuh_team_report.pdf
- Kyvunga, C., & Kuyini, A. (2017). Understanding and Applying Research Paradigms in Educational Contexts. *International journal of Higher Education*. 6 (5)
<https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n5>. <http://Ijh.edu>. Press.com
- Langa, J. (2014). Notions of Sex, Masculinity and Manhood in African cultures. OSISA.
http://www.osisa.org/buwa/regional_notions_sex_masculinity
- Langland, E. (2013). "Hardy and Masculinity". In P. Mallett (Ed.) *Thomas Hardy in Context* (pp.374-383), Cambridge University Press.
- Lashley, M. (2017). Why do Male Students Underachieve in Tertiary Education? [Doctoral Dissertation University of Leicester].
https://figshare.le.ac.uk/articles/thesis/Why_do_male_students_underachieve_in_tertiary_education_A_St_Lucian_case_study/10232957?file=18464297
- Leach, F., Dunne, M., & Salvi, F. (2014). School-related Gender-Based Violence: A global review of current issues and approaches in policy programming and implementation responses to School-related Gender-Based Violence to the Education sector.
<https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/library/documents/school-related-gender-based-violence-global-review-current-issues-and-approaches>.
- Leptz, K.N. (2018). A qualitative study of Black Male professionals' attributions of Education, Career, and Success (Publication no. 29) [Doctoral Dissertation, Southeastern University]. <https://firescholars.seu.edu/coe>.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Linneberg, M.S. & Korsgaard, S. (2019 May). *Coding Qualitative data: a Synthesis guiding the Novice*. *Qualitative Research Journal*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-12-2018-0012>
- Lummis, A.T. (2006). Gender and Religion. In C.J. Saltzman, (Ed.). *Handbook of Sociology of Gender* (pp. 601-618).
- Lynch, I., Brouard, P. W., & Visser, M. (2009). Constructions of masculinity among a group of South African men living with HIV/AIDS: reflections on resistance and change, 12 (1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050903082461>

- Maia, C. (2008). Gender inequality in Mozambican Primary Education: Problems, barriers, and recommendations. Harvard Graduate school of Education: Political Perspectives. 2 (1).1-31.
- Mama, A. (2003). Restore, Reform, but do not transform: The Gender Politics of Higher Education in Africa. JHEA/RESA, 1 (1),101-125).
- Mandlate, E., & Nivagara, D. (2019). Políticas de acesso ao Ensino Superior em Moçambique: Progressos e desafios da sua implementação. *Revista Educa Amazónia*. XXII (1). 7-34.
- Manjulata, K S. (2018). Gender Inequality in Higher Education, 44 (2), 39-45.
- Manuel, S. (2012). Sexuality in Cosmopolitan Maputo: The Aesthetics of gendered Practices through the lens of class. IESE Conference Paper.
- Manyonganise, M., Gunda, M.R., Naickers, L., & Kugler, J (2025). Religion, Gender and African Masculinities: Reflections from the Field (Introduction). In M. Manyonganise, M.R. Gunda, L.Naicker & J. Kugler (Eds). Religion, Gender and Masculinities in Africa: Essay in Honour of Ezra Chitando (pp. 11-31). University of Bamberg Press, Bamberg. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20378/irb-105140>
- Mapuranga, B., Musingafi, M.C.C., & Zabron, S. (2015). Students'Perceptions of Factors that affect their Academic Performance: The Case of Great Zimbabwe University. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 6 (18). 1-5.
- Mário, M., Fry, P., Levey, L., & Chilundo, A. (2003). Higher Education in Mozambique: A case Study. Imprensa Universitária. Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305072390_Higher_Education_in_Mozambique_e_A_Case_Study.
- Marrs, H., Sigler, E. A., & Brammer, R.D. (2012). Gender, Masculinity, Femininity and
- Maslen, C. (2023). Corruption and anticorruption within the research sector in Higher Education System in Mozambique. U4 Help Desk Answer. 1-20.
- Mathewson, S. (2009). Man is the Remedy of Man: Constructions of Masculinity and Health Related Behaviour among Young Men in Dakar, Senegal. London School of Economy and Political Economy, 1-31.
- Mbiti, J. (1969). *African Religion and Philosophy*. London: Heineman Educational Books.

- Meer, T. & Muller, A. (2017). Considering Intersectionality in Africa. *Agenda*, 31(1)3-4.
- Melzer, S. (2018). *Manhood Impossible: Men's Struggles to Control and Transform their bodies and Work*. Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1w8h3vj>
- Miguel, L.L.A.J., Andissene, A.A. T., & Gomane, M.C.P. (December 2024). Assessing the Forms of Integration of the Higher Education System in Mozambique. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 66, 112-131.
- MINED (2012). Plano Estratégico do Ensino Superior [Higher Education Strategic Plan] 2012-2020. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.inhambane.gov.mz/index.php/por/content/download/5532/39794/version/1/file/Plano%2BEstrategico%2Bdo%2BEnsino%2BSuperior%2B2012-2020.pdf>
- MINED (2014). Relatório do Estudo Sobre Género no Ensino Superior em Moçambique [Gender in Higher Education Report]. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.isutc.ac.mz/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Estudo-sobre-Genero-no-Ensino-Superior.pdf>.
- Ministério de Educação e Cultura (2012). Plano Estratégico de Educação [Strategic Plan of Education] 2012-2020
- Ministério de Educacao e Culutura (2020) Plano Estratégico de Educação (Strategic Plano f Education] 2020-2029.
- Mirandé, A. (2010). "Macho": Comtemporary Conceptions ". In M.S. Kimmel & M.A. Messner (Eds), *Men's Lives*, (pp. 26-36, 8th Edition, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, USA.
- Moodly, A., & Toni, N.M. (2017). Acessing Higher Education Ledearship: Towards a Framework for Women's Professional Development. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 31 (3), 138-153. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20853/31-3-917>
- Mora, S. E. (2017) "Mainstreaming vs. Individuating: Incorporating Inclusive Pedagogy into Spanish Language and Culture Courses," *Headwaters*, 30, 98-113. <https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/headwaters/vol30/iss1/11>
- Moreira, A. (2016). Masculinities Negotiations and Image making process among a group of young men in Maputo, Mozambique [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Antwerp]. <https://repository.uantwerpen.be/desktop/irua>

- Morley, L. (May 2005). Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education. *Women Studies International Forum*, 28 (2), 209-221. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2005.04.008>
- Morrell, R. (1998). The New Man? Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equality. 14 (37), 7-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080//10130950.1998.9675683>
- Morrell, R., & Richter, L. (2006). *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*. HSRC Press. Cape Town, South Africa.
- Morris, E.W. (2011). Bridging the Gap: ‘Doing Gender: Hegemonic Masculinity’ and the Educational troubles of Boys. *Sociology Compass*. Black Well publishing, 92-103.
- Moschetti, R., & Hudley, C. (2008). Measuring Social Capital Among First-Generation and non-first-generation, Working –Class, White Males, *Journal of College Admission*, 25-30.
- Munro, N. (2014). Exceptional academic achievement in South African Higher Education [Doctoral Dissertation, School of Education, UKZN]. <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/items/b799ff09-074b-4d5b-8886-fdb26ebdd118>
- Murphy, P. (1996.) Defining Pedagogy’ in P. Murphy, P. and C.V Gipps (Eds), *Equity in the Classroom: Towards Effective Pedagogy for Girls and Boys* (pp28-39). UNESCO.
- Nadaf, Z. A., & Siddiqui, M.H. (2016). Achieving excellence in Higher Education. *Review of Education*, 7 (1), 63-80.
- Ndaipa, C.J., Edstron, K., & Cesswind, L.(2022). National Policy for Internationalization in Higher Education: The Case of Mozambique. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education*. 6 (1) 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.7577/njcic4763>
- O’Connor, P., O’Hagan, C., & Brannen, J. (2015). Exploration of masculinities in academic organization: A tentative typology using career and relationship Commitment. Sage publications. 63 (4), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115574859>
- O’neil, J.M., Helmes, B.J., Gable, R. W., David, L., & Wrightsman, L. (1986). Gender-Role Conflict Scale: College men’s fear of Femininity. *Sex Role*. 14 (5/6).
- Oduyoye, M. (2001). *Introducing African Women’s Theology*. Sheffield: Academic Press.
- O’neil, J. M. (1981). Patterns of gender role conflict and strain: Sexism and fear of femininity in men's lives. *Personnel & Guidance Journal*, 60(4), 203–210. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-4918.1981.tb00282.x>

- Oppong, S.H. (2013 June). Religion and Identity. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 3 (6), 10-16.
- Otieno, M. A., & Ndayambaje, I (2015). Gender and area of specialization vis-à-vis students' enrolments in undergraduate degree programmes by platform in Public Universities in Kenya. *Rwandan Journal of Education*. 3 (1). 1-14.
- Ouzgane, L., & Morrell, R. (2005). African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present. New York/Scottsville: Palgrave Macmillan/University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Owino, K. (2010). "Maleness" and its possible influence on abuse and Domestic Violence in South Africa: A Critique of Some Expressions of Evangelical Theology". In I.A. Phiri & S. Nadar (Eds). *Journal of Constructive Theology: Gender, Religion and Theology in Africa*, 16 (2), 146-168.
- Pace, Z. W. (2015). *Intersecting Identities: Navigating the Relationship Between Masculine Performativity and Feminist Ideology: Educational Administration* (Publication no. 244) [Doctoral Dissertations, University of Nebraska, Lincoln]. DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska – Lincoln.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C.A., Wisdom, J.P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2013). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in Mixed Methods implementation Research. *Journal of admin policy, mental health*. <https://doi.org/0.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Pascoe, C.J (2010). "Dude you're a fag": Adolescent Masculinity and the Faz Discourse. In M.S. Kimmel & M.A. Messner (Eds.), *Men's Lives*, (pp. 70-82), 8th Edition, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, USA.
- Pass, M.G. (2017). *Masculinity and Disproportionate Risk of Contact with the criminal Justice System: Findings from a select sample of low-income Black males in New York City* [Doctoral Dissertation, the City University of New York]. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi%3Farticle%3D2952%26context%3Dgc_etds
- Pérez, D. II., Karikari, S., Ashlee, K., & Sim, C. (2017). Reconceptualizing Student Success in Higher Education: Reflections from Graduate Student Affairs Educators using Anti-

- Deficit Achievement Framework. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 28 (3),5-28.
- Perger, M., & Takscs, I. (2016). Factors Contributing to Students Academic Success Based on the Students' opinion at BME Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences. *Periodica Polytechnica Social and Management Sciences*. <https://doi.or/10.33///ppso.884>
- Pervin, N., & Mokhtar, M. (2022). The Interpretivist Research Paradigm: A Subjective Notion of a Social Context. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 11(2), 419–428.
- Phewa, MCN (2016). Reconceptualizing Student Success. *International Journal of Education and Practice*. 4 (1), 37-46. <https://doi.org/10.18488/Journal.61/2016.4.1/61.137.46>
- Philipps, A. (2016 April). (Re)theorizing laddish masculinities in higher education. in *Gender and Education*. 29 (7), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1171298>
- Picardi, I. (2019). The Glass Door of Academia: Unveiling New Gender Bias in Academic Recruitment. MDPI. *Social Sciences Journal*. 1-17.
- Plug, S.N., & Collins, A. (2012). The male body, another commodity: Discursive constructions of ideal masculine body-images. In J. Wasserman, & S. Reddy, (Eds.) *Surveying Research in the Humanities*, College of Humanities, 12-15 October, 2012, (pp. 272-286), University of Kwazulu-Natal.
- Potts, L.C. (2017). The influence of social media use on male college students' Gender identity and gendered performance [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Minnesota]. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/211345275.pdf>
- Priyashantha, K. G., De Alwais, A. C., & Welmilla, I. (2022). Gender Stereotypes Change and Changing Gender Roles Behaviours: A Theoretical Perspective. *Kelaniya Journal of Management*, 11 (2), 63-80. <http://doi.org/10.4038/kjm.v11i2.76855>
- Radhamani, K. & Kalaivani, D. (2021). Academic Resilience among Students: A Review of Literature. *International Journal of Research and Review*, 8(6), 360-369. <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20210646>
- Ratele, K (2018). Studying men in Africa Critically. CODESRIA Publication. 18-33. <https://publication.codesria.org/index.php/pub/catalog/view/145/1077/3500>

- Ratele, K. (2013). Masculinities without Tradition. *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 40 (1), 133-156. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2013.765680>
- Rehman, A., & Alharthi, K. (2016). An introduction to Research Paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*. 3 (8). 2410-3446.
- Resende-Santos, J. (2021). Education for Development in Africa: Rethinking Higher Education in Cabo-Verde. *Revista Lusofona de Educação*, 55, 183-202. <https://doi.org/10.24140/issn.1645-7250.rle54.11>
- Rogers, T., & Mitchell, D. (2022). Hidden Identity: A Constructivist Grounded Theory of Black Male Identity Development at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(10), 2251-2277. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5718>
- Rolim, C. (2020). A Universidade nos PALOP: Que Espelho Mirar? Uma discussão tomando como exemplo a disciplina Economia Regional e Urbana, *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, 39, 134-160. <https://doi.org/10.4000/cea.4933>
- Rolland, G. (2011). African American Males Student's perceptions of factors that contribute to their Academic Success (Publication no. 386) [Doctoral Dissertation, Georgia Southern University]. Georgia Southern Commons.
- SADC, SARDC. (2016). SADC Gender and Development Monitor. SADC, SARDC. Gaborone. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://genderlive.sardc.net/publications/sadc-gender-and-development-monitor-2016/>
- SADC, SARDC. (2022). SADC Gender and Development Monitor. SADC, Gaborone. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.sadc.int/document/sadc-gender-and-development-monitor-2022-english>
- Sáenz, V. B., Lu, Ch., Bukoski, B., & Rodrigues, S. (2013). Latino Males in Texas Community Colleges: A Phenomenological Study of Masculinity Constructs and their Effect on College Experiences. *Journal of African American males in Education*. 4, (2). 1-21.
- Saldanã, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Sage Publications, 2nd Edition, Lon Edition, London.

- Salminen-Karlsson, M., Wolfram, A., & Almgren, N. (2018). Excellence, Masculinity and Work-Life Balance in Academia: Voices from Researchers in Germany and Sweden. *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, 10 (1). 52-71.
- Santos, R., & Jones, S. (2018). Employment Expectations of University Students in Mozambique-results from a Baseline Survey. [Police Brief]. UNU-WIDER. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://igmo.zambique.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/Policy-brief/PB2018-3-Employment-expectations-of-university-students-in-Mozambique.pdf>
- Saunders, T. (2017). The impact of leadership involvement on college Students' Experience and Well-being (Publication no. 87) [Master Dissertation, Taylor University]. <https://pillars.Taylor.edu/mahe/87>.
- Schroeder, S. (2011a). Exploring Student Attitudes, Aspirations & Barriers to Success. Six focus groups among higher-risk first-and second-year community college and technical college students, and four-year university students. <https://www.aft.org/pdfs/highered/studentfocusgrp0311.pdf>
- Sell, A. J., Naginey, A., & Stanton, C.A. (2018). The impact of Undergraduate Research on Academic Success, 1 (3), 19-29. <https://doi.org/10.18833/spur/1/3/8>
- Sezgin, F., Kosar, S., Kiliç, A. Ç., & Oğdem, Z. (2014). Teacher Absentism in Turkish Primary Schools: A Qualitative Perspective from School Principals. *International online Journal of Educational Sciences*, 6(3), 612-625. <https://doi.org/10.15345/iojes.2014.03.010>
- Sharpe, M. J., & Heppner, P.P. (1991). Gender Role, Gender-Role Conflict and Psychological well-being in Men. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*. American Psychological Association. 38, (3). 323-330.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*. IOS Press, 22, 63-75.
- Silva, A.M.C. (2022). Perspective Chapter: Higher Education Problems in Angola. InTech Open, 1-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.109376>.

- Singh, S. (2022): South African male university students' perspectives on gender norms concerning alcohol and related harmful behaviours towards female drinkers, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 1-13. [https://doi.org/ 10.1080/13691058.2022.2070671](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2022.2070671)
- Slegh, H., Mariano, E., Roque, S., & Barker, G, (2017). Being a man in Maputo: Masculinities, Poverty and Violence in Mozambique-Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Surveys [IMAGES]. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.equimundo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Being-a-Man-in-Maputo-2017-EN.pdf>
- Smithikrai, C., Homklin, T., Pusapanich, P. Wongpinpech, V., & Kreausakon, P. (2018). Factors influencing Students' Academic Success: The Mediating Role of Study Engagement, *International Journal of Behavioral Science*, 13 (1), 1-14.
- Smythe, T.T. (2014). Boys to men: A Phenomenological Study of Men's construction of Masculinity at a Faith-Based University (Publication no.57) [MAHE Dissertation, Taylor University]. <https://pillars.taylor.edu/mahe/57>
- Sparks-Wallace, O. J. (2007). A Study of Gender Differences in Academic Performance in a Rural County in Tennessee. (Publication no. 2101) [Master Dissertation, East Tennessee University. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd>
- Speckman, MT. (2007). A Biblical Vision for Africa's Development? Pietermaritzburg: Cluster publication.
- Steinfeldt, J. A., Foltz, B., Speight, Q.L. M., & Mungro, J. (2010). Masculinity Socialization in Sport: Influence of College Football Coaches. *Journal of Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 12 (3). 247-259. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a002170>
- Stewart, M. C. (2008). Constructing masculine and Athletic Identities: The case of College Football Players [Doctoral Dissertation, Florida State University Libraries]. <https://repository.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:168510>
- Stitt, L. (2018). Black male voice: Cultural Connections, Developing character and Defining manhood in an Urban all-male high school [Doctoral Dissertation, Northeastern University <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/D20289768>

- Strayhorn, T.L (2008.) How College Students' Engagement Affects Personal and Social Learning Outcomes, *Journal of College and Character*. 10 (2), <https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-1639.1071>
- Streeter, M. A. (2011). An Examination of Student Involvement as a Factor Impacting the Graduation of Black Males in Higher Education Opportunity Programs at Four Colleges in Western New York (Publication number 15) [Doctoral Dissertation, St John Fisher University].https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi%3Farticle%3D1016%26context%3Deducation_etd
- Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal*. 11 (2). 63-65.
- Swanson, A. C. (2013). Factors that Contribute to the Academic Success of African American males: Perceptions of African American Male High School Students [Masters Dissertations]. <https://doi.org/doi:1025774/w4-1094-bs35>
- Swartout, K.M. (2012). The Company they Keep: How peer Networks Influence Male Sexual Aggression, Psychology of Violence. *American Psychological Association*, 3 (2), 157-171. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029997>
- Tambe, T. A., Da Costa, C. S., & Lima, J. R.R. (2024 Dezembro). University Students Retention in Mozambique and its Challenges: Meaning of Individual Trajectories. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 29 (12), 61-73.
- Taylor, P. N. (2016). Identity construction at college: the lived experiences of evangelical k-12 school graduates [Doctoral Dissertation, Northeastern University]. <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/D20239458>
- Tetteh, G. A. (2018). Effects of Classroom Attendance and Learning Strategies on the Learning Outcome, *Journal of International Education in Business*, 11 (2), 195-219. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIEB-01-2017-0004>
- The Oxford Dictionary of English. (2003). 2nd Ed. Oxford University Press.
- Tillapaugh, D., & McAuliffe, K. (2019). The Experiences of High-Achieving First-Generation College men from Rural Maine. *Journal of College Student Affairs*. 37 (1), 83-96.

- Ting, H., Memon, M.A., Thurasamy, R., & Cheah, J-H. (2025). Snowballing Sampling: A Review and Guidelines for Survey Research. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 15 (1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.14707/ajbr.250186>
- Tongo, D.C. (2007). Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection. *Journal of plants, people, and applied research*. 147-158.
- Tonneijer, H.I.M., Kinebanian, A., & Josephson, S. (2008). An exploration of choir singing: Achieving wholeness through challenge. *Journal of Occupational Science*. 15 (3), 173-179.
- Twumasi, A.P. (2019). Perceptions of African American Males Regarding Factors that support School Success. [Doctoral Dissertation, Houston Baptist University]. [https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-bd&q=Twumasi%252C+A.P.+\(2019\).+Perceptions+of+African+American+Males+Regarding+Factors+that+support+School+Success](https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-bd&q=Twumasi%252C+A.P.+(2019).+Perceptions+of+African+American+Males+Regarding+Factors+that+support+School+Success).
- Uetela, P. (2015). Higher Education and the Challenges for Economic Growth in Mozambique: Some Evidence. *International Journal of Sociology of Education*, 4(3), 276-294. <https://doi.org/10.17583/rise.2015.1751>
- UNESCO (2009). International Technical Guidance on sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed approach for schools, teachers and Health Education. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000183281>
- UNESCO (2021/2). Global Education Monitoring Report: Non-state Actors in Education-Who Chooses? Who Loses? <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380076>
- Universidade Save (2023). Plano Estratégico da Universidade Save [University Save Strategic Plan] 2023-2030.
- Universidade Save (2023). Regulamento de Premiação e Distinção de Estudantes em Cerimónias de Graduação [Student Awards and Distinction Regulation on Graduation Ceremonies]. Universidade Save.
- Universidade Save (2024). Política de Género da Universidade Save [Save University Gender Policy].
- USAID (2019 June). Gender Assessment for USAID in Mozambique country Development Cooperation Strategy.

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/moz_country_gender_profile_2022_0.pdf

Ushie, T. L., & Edinyangi, S.D. (2018). Gender inequality among Social Studies students in Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa. *Global Journal of Educational Research*,17, 121-125.

Usman, Y. D., & Madudili, C.G. (2019). Evaluation of the Effect of Learning Environment on Students' Academic Performance in Nigeria. 1-9.

Videira, P., & Teixeira, P (2020). Higher Education Systems and Institutions in Mozambique. *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions*, 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9553-1_463-1

Videira, P., & Teixeira, P. (2020). Higher education System and Institutions in Giné Bissau. *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions*, 1-5. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9553-1_454-1

Vilaça, T., Nota, J., & Mabote, C. (2013). The Curricula of Sexuality Education in Mozambique and Portuguese Schools: what are the challenges for teachers and international partnerships? University of Minho. <https://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/handle/1822/24795>

Waggoner, M D. (2017). Spirituality and Contemporary Higher Education. *Journal of College and Character*, 17 (3),147-156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2016.1195752>

Walter, T. F., & Zipfel, C. (2019). Teacher Gender and Gender Gap in Education: The case of Mozambique Primary Schools. [Police Brief]. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.theigc.org/sites/default/files/2020/01/Walter-and-Zipfel-policy-brief-2019-36422.pdf>

Ward, A. Z., & Cook, S. W. (2011). The Complex Associations Between Conforming to Masculine Norms and Religiousness in Men. *Journal of Psychology of men and Masculinity*, 12, (1), 42-54. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020003>

Wheeler, S. (2014). Educating Families in Mozambique: The Significance of maternal literacy [Masters Dissertation, University of Denver]. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44837147_Literacy_in_Mozambique_Education_for_All_Challenges

- Whitehead, J.M. (2003) Masculinity, motivation, and academic success: a paradox, *Teacher Development*, 7 (2), 287-309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530300200191>
- Wihlborg, M. and Robson, S. (2017): Internationalization of higher education: drivers, rationales, priorities, values and impacts, *European Journal of Higher Education*. 1-11 <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2017.1376696>
- Williams, L. M. (2010). Towards Academic Excellence: A qualitative study of students, parents, and teachers [Doctoral Dissertation, Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia]. https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://research-repository.uwa.edu.au/files/3239224/Williams_Lesley_Margaret_2010.pdf
- Wojciechowska, M. (2022). Role of social capital in education. Results of a survey on the individual social capital of school librarians. *Profesional de la información*, 31, (6,) 310605. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2022.nov.05>
- Wolf, J.P. (2014). Losing their way: How First Year College Boys Find Trouble on the way to Becoming men [Doctoral Dissertation, University of California]. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8f72x2fz>
- Wordu, H. & Isiah, C. E. (2020). Teachers' competence for effective teaching and learning for the 21st Century Schools in Nigeria. *International Journal of Applied Research*. 235-237.
- World Bank (2014). Mozambique Sustained Efforts on Higher Education, Science and Technology. [Policy Paper]. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/>
- World Development Report (2012). Mozambique Country Case Study: Gender Equality and Development. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/51c285f6-0200-590c-97d3-95b937be3271>
- Xulu-Gama, N. (2019). The Role of Student Housing in Student Success: An Ethnographic Account. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 7(2), 15-25. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v7i2.3822>.
- Yankey, J. B. (2014). Dude, where's my passport? An exploration of masculine identity of college men who study abroad. [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Iowa, USA]. <https://dr.lib.iastate.edu/bitstreams/33b637a7-56fa-49d8-84c0-3dde75ce8534/download>

- York, T.T., Gibson, C., & Rankin, S. (March, 2015). Defining and Measuring Academic Success: Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 20 (5), 1-20. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1059739.pdf>
- Yu, H., Glanzer, P., & Johnson, B. (2017). A Conceptual Framework of personal, contextual, and situational factors. 1-21.
- Zavale, N. C. (2022). Academic Freedom in Mozambique. 92-118. <https://doi.org/10.4324/78/00330648/-8>
- Zavale, N. C., Santos, L. A., Manuel, L., Dias, M.C.L., Khan, M.A., Tostão, E., & Mondlane, A, M. (2016). Decision-Making in African Universities demands rigorous data: evidence from Graduation rates at Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 52, 122-134.
- Zhao, T. (2023). How Gender Stereotypes Impacts Students Academic Achievement. ASSEHR, 911–918, <https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-45-9> 110
- Zimbico, O, J (2021). Higher Education Strategic Planning in Mozambique. *Educational Planning*. 28 (4), 25-41.
- Zughri, M. M., Rokhman, F., Nuryatin, A., & Raharjo, T.J. (2021). Community Development: The Role of Religious Leaders in Community empowerment. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 26(11).37-41.
- Zull, C. (2016). Open-ended Questions. Gesis Survey Guidelines. Mannheim: Gesis-Leibniz Institute for the social sciences. <https://doi.org/10.154651gesis-sg-en-002>

APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Individual interview Protocol

1. Students demographics and background

1. What is your name
2. What is your age?
3. Where were you born and raised?
4. Tell me about your family.
5. Trace your educational journey through university.
6. What is your religion (Christian, Muslim, African traditional Religion).
7. What is your understanding of the term academic excellence?
8. How do you define masculinity?

2. Construction of academic excellence

1. Indicate how your experiences of being a student has contributed to your understanding of academic excellence?
2. What do you perceive as being crucial to academic excellence?
3. List specific issues in your faculty in relation to academic excellence?
4. What strategies might be taken into consideration in relation to academic excellence in your campus.
5. Looking at your campus life, identify and explain any element that is related to your academic performance/success/excellence.
6. Looking at your university life describe the ways in which the teaching and learning aspects shape your understanding of academic excellence.
7. In what way does your university hinder or help students in their integration into university, transformation, and personal and academic development?

8. Traditionally, students at SAVE University are encouraged to be part of the university governance/leadership. Explain how this influences students academically, psychologically as well as personally and professionally
9. Identify a range of events (ceremonies, activities, and rituals) that characterize academic excellence on Campus?
10. Looking at both the social and learning environments at your university, how do they influence your learning?
11. How often do you participate in extra-curricular activities, could you name them?

3. Construction of masculine identity

1. What do you perceive as being crucial to being a man?
2. Have you ever worked with other students on projects/research projects at your institution? Explain.
3. How has your religion (or faith) influenced the way you live as a male student?
4. What a man should not be according to your religion/culture?
5. In your view, how do other men at your university construct their identity of being a man?
6. In your view how does being a man influence the academic excellence of other male students?
7. When did you first start thinking about what it means to be a man?
8. Describe people, figures, or mentors in your life who have contributed to your formation of being a man
9. What environments or spaces (on and off campus) have you found most conducive to displaying that you are a man (if any)? Describe them.

Appendix B

Focus group interview protocol

Introduction

Good morning, dear students and thank you for availing yourselves to participate in this focus-group discussion. My name is Salvador Macule and will be moderating this focus group discussion, which will probably last for 60 minutes.

Methodology

There will be three groups of six each, and all the three will discuss the same issues in separate. I will record the three in separate.

Participant's information

Name	
Age	
Discipline of study	
Year of study (e.g 1st, 2nd)	
Religion	
Hobbies	
Leadership roles (if any)	

1. Do you think that your religion has a role to play in your academic life as a man? Discuss.
2. Discuss what are some adjectives well-performing male students normally use to describe themselves or others.
3. Discuss whether there is any relationship between being a man and being an excellent student?
4. Comment on your gender and identity. How do you self-identify?
5. Indicate some of the safety, health and behavioural issues that affect your performance? (if any).

Appendix C

Informed consent form (Portuguese version)

Comissão da Ética para Pesquisa em Ciências Humanas e Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN)

Ficha de Consentimento informado para participar de uma pesquisa

Data: Fevereiro de 2021

Caro estudante,

Meu nome é Salvador Macule, sou doutorando em Educação Superior (Higher Education Studies), no Colégio das Humanidades, Universidade de Kwazulu-Natal, África do Sul. Meu endereço electrónico é: armandomacule@gmail.com, gostaria de convidá-lo para participar de uma pesquisa intitulada: *A construção das identidades masculinas e da excelência académica: Caso da Universidade Save*. O objectivo e o propósito desta pesquisa são explorar a forma como os estudantes universitários do sexo masculino constroem as suas masculinidades com relação à excelência académica. Espera-se que o estudo contemple 18 estudantes ao nível da graduação na Faculdade de Letras e Ciências Sociais.

Dos procedimentos, o estudante será solicitado para uma entrevista a realizar-se num local e data por acordar de acordo com a sua disponibilidade. Devido à Pandemia do COVID-19, todas as entrevistas serão realizadas via *WhatsApp, Zoom e/ou Google Class Room*, evitando, desta feita, quaisquer contactos presenciais com os participantes. A duração da entrevista será de cerca de 70 minutos, acompanhada de gravações, previamente informadas e consentidas.

Nos moldes adoptados para esta pesquisa, não se prevê quaisquer riscos, pois abstém-se e isenta-se de enfoque sobre aspectos sensíveis dos participantes. Não haverá nenhum benefício directo pela sua participação nesta pesquisa, pese embora esteja preparado para simbolicamente oferecer uma recarga telefónica de 100Mt. Além disso, espero que ao partilhar as suas ideias nesta

pesquisa esteja a contribuir para a escassa literatura sobre as masculinidades nas Instituições do Ensino Superior em Moçambique.

Esta pesquisa foi eticamente revista e recebeu a aprovação final da Comissão de Ética para Pesquisa do Colégio das Humanidades e Ciências Sociais da UKZN sob o seguinte código de aprovação: HSSREC/00002030/2020.

Caso haja quaisquer problemas ou dúvidas pode contactar o pesquisador no endereço eletrónico acima indicado ou contactar a Orientadora, Professora Dra. Sarasvathie Reddy, na Escola Superior de Educação, Campus de Edgewood, Universidade de KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, no seguinte endereço eletrónico: [reddys15@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:red dys15@ukzn.ac.za), número de telefone (0027) 03126032415.

Agradeço desde já a sua contribuição para esta pesquisa.

Appendix D

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL
For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: February, 2021

Dear student,

My name is Salvador Macule, a PhD candidate in Higher Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. My e-mail address is arandomacule@gmail.com

You are being invited to consider participating in a study entitled *Male students' construction and performance of their identities and academic excellence: A case of SAVE University*. The aim and purpose of this research is to explore how male undergraduate students relate their construction of masculinity to academic excellence. The study is expected to enroll 18 male undergraduate male students in the Humanities. As a participant, you will be required to participate in individual interviews that will be conducted at your convenience. The times and dates of interviews will be at your convenience. Due to the COVID19, all interviews will be held via WhatsApp, zoom and/or Google classroom. There will be no face- to- face contact with participants. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be 70 minutes). Your opinions/response/conversation will be recorded.

I do not anticipate any risks with this study as it will not be conducted for the purpose of revealing traumatic ordeals of participants. There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, airtime vouchers of 200Mts will be given out to participants. In addition, I hope that by sharing your experience in this research you will be contributing to the existing body of knowledge on masculinities in Higher Education.

This study has been ethically reviewed and granted provisional approval by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee under the following approval code number: **HSSREC/00002030/2020**

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at arandomacule@gmail.com or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on the following contact details :

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001

Appendix E



UNIVERSIDADE SAVE
Extensão de Maxixe



Av. Américo Boavida. s/n - CP 12 - Maxixe - Tel. +258 293 30359 - Fax +258 293 30354 -

Office of the Director of UniSave-Maxixe

Dear Salvador Macule
PhD Candidate in Higher Education
School of Education, University of Kwazulu-Natal
South Africa

RE: Permission to conduct Research

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at Save University in Maxixe (UniSave-Maxixe), under the following topic: **Male students' construction and performance of their identities and academic excellence: A case of SAVE University**.

It is noted that your sample comprises 18 undergraduate Humanities male students (aged 18 and above), who have passed their 1st, 2nd and 3rd years with distinction or have shown excellence in research. The sample will be extensive to male students in leadership positions (e.g student association, class leaders, etc.) at UniSave-Maxixe.

The students will voluntarily participate in individual interviews and focus group discussions arranged at their convenience.

Please, note that the data collected from both the interviews and focus group discussions must be treated with confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

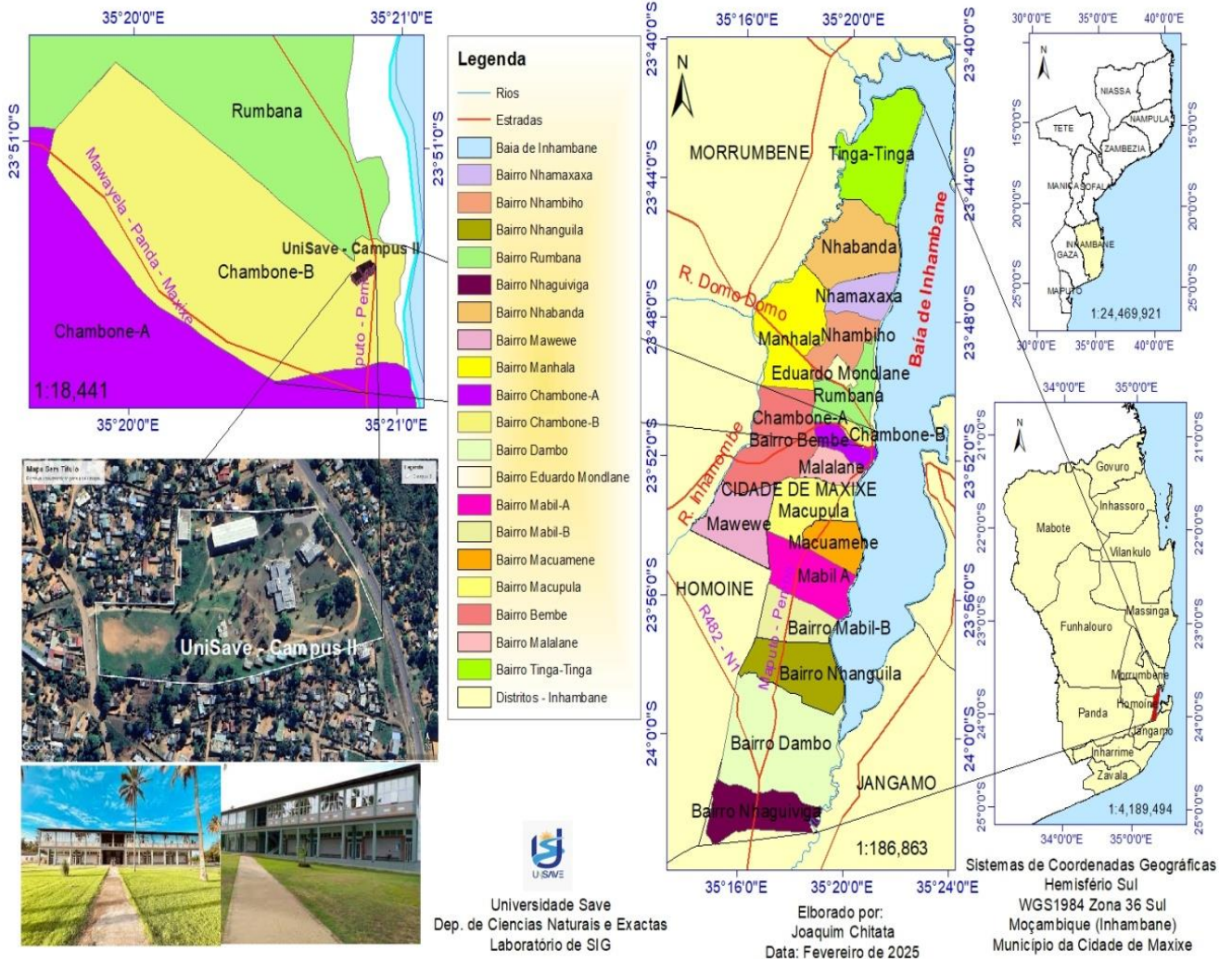
The Dir

Profes

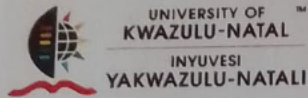


Appendix F: Geographical location of the study site

Enquadramento Geográfico do Campus II da UniSave Extensão de Maxixe - Município da Cidade de Maxixe



Appendix G



11 May 2021

Mr Salvador Armando Macule (210554310)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Macule,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002030/2020

Project title: Male students' construction of their identities and academic excellence: A case of SAVE University
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 23 September 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

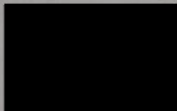
This approval is valid until 11 May 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,








Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix H

Male Students' Construction of their Identities and Academic Excellence: A case of SAVE University-Maxixe

ORIGINALITY REPORT

5% SIMILARITY INDEX	4% INTERNET SOURCES	2% PUBLICATIONS	2% STUDENT PAPERS
-------------------------------	-------------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
2	www.coursehero.com Internet Source	<1%
3	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper	<1%
4	"The Palgrave Handbook of Crisis Leadership in Higher Education", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2024 Publication	<1%
5	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
6	Submitted to South Dakota Board of Regents Student Paper	<1%
7	theses.whiterose.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
8	JAMES M. O'NEIL. "Patterns of Gender Role Conflict and Strain: Sexism and Fear of	<1%