THE CONSTRUCTION OF ADOLESCENT MASCULINITY BY VISUALLY IMPAIRED ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract.
This study investigates the intersection of gender and disability in adolescent males with visual impairments. Connell's seminal work on masculinity which gives particular attention to the notion of hegemonic masculinity, particularly informs this study. The study uses a combined method based on social constructionism and psychoanalysis to investigate visually impaired boys construction of masculinity, how they position themselves in relation to these constructions, and the challenges they experience and strategies they use to maintain a viable masculine identity. The findings show that the construction of masculinity largely reflects that by non-disabled boys. While most of the narratives of these boys show an attempt to align themselves with hegemonic standards of masculinity, there is also evidence of considerable anxiety due to their awareness of their difficulty in performing masculinity according to these expectations. Various discursive strategies to cope with this difficulty are identified. The study reflects some of the limitations of Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity.

The study of masculinity is a growing area of gender research, especially within the South African context, and plays an increasing role in the explanation of complex social problems such as HIV/AIDS, crime, domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse. However, masculinity does not exist in isolation. Feminist and pro-feminist writers have located "the complex intersections of gender with race, disability, sexuality, class and age in the practices of men" (Pease & Pringle, 2001:1). Disability could be considered as an important site for the performance of masculinity, but one which has received little research attention to date. Assuming the centrality of identity construction in adolescence, this study explores the intersection of masculinity and disability in adolescent boys. The study examines how visually impaired boys construct masculinities, the subjectivity of these boys in relation to these constructions, and how they position themselves in relation to these masculinities. The study also identifies the strategies, especially discursive strategies, used by these boys in establishing and maintaining viable masculine identities.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES.

While theorizing around masculinity has been highly contested, social constructionism has provided much of the theoretical literature on masculinity. Connell (2002) is probably the best known social constructionist writing on masculinity and masculine identity, describing gender, not as innate and biological, but as a constructive process in which individuals, as active subjects, negotiate positions in relation to social processes. Individuals position themselves in this process and their identity is simultaneously constructed by it. For social constructionists, masculinity is not unitary and universal (as biological determinists might argue) but is instead constructed in specific social and cultural contexts, creating multiple versions of masculinity. Hence Connell (2000) speaks of "masculinities" rather than masculinity.

Much of Connell's work on masculinity borrows Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which referred to the maintenance of social power by particular groups in society over others, based on persuasion and consent rather than force or coercion (Steer, 2001). Pivotal to the concept of hegemony is its taken for granted nature, in that it becomes natural, normal and a part of the lived experience of large sectors of society. Hegemonic masculinities exist through the intersection of race, class, gender and sexual orientation and, we might add, disability. The function of hegemonic forms of masculinity in any society, according to Connell, is to provide support and legitimacy for patriarchy's role in sustaining men's power and position over subordinated others, which includes women/femininity as well as other men (Connell, 1987). Rather than necessarily being an empirical reality, hegemonic masculinity may, for the most part, only exist in the minds of people subject to it. This is not to say that there are not men who appear to embody the standards of hegemonic masculinity, but it should rather be seen as "an ideal or set of prescriptive social norms, symbolically represented, (and) a crucial part of the texture of many routine, mundane, social and disciplinary activities" (Wetherell & Edley, 1998:336). The strivings of many boys and men, both consciously and unconsciously, to align themselves with these hegemonic standards, even if unattainable, results in the perpetuation and maintenance of hegemonic forms of masculinity (Edley & Wetherell, 1997).

Despite the pervasive power of hegemonic masculinity and its success in defining and policing the norms, standards and boundaries of masculinity, this power may be challenged, and other forms of masculinity negotiated. Therefore, there is a need to "be attentive to the ways, contexts and times in which boys inhabit alternative (not necessarily subordinate) masculinities and the attraction of these to them" (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002:73).

Wetherell and Edley (1998) dispute Connell's notion that, in positioning themselves in relation to hegemonic standards of masculinity, boys/men either comply with or resist hegemonic versions of masculinity. They suggest that it is both likely and possible that boys/men will adopt both positions in parallel, rather than choosing one position. Frosh et al. (2002) also argue that masculine identities may be produced without having to comply with or resist hegemonic forms of masculinity and may exist independently of them. Seidler (2006) also argues that Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity only addresses the

social power bestowed on hegemonic men, failing to address the subjectivity of men, for example, the anxiety and distress involved in hegemonic attainments.

This paper addresses the intersection of disability and the construction of masculinity, examining whether and how visually impaired boys position themselves in relation to hegemonic forms of masculinity. It also examines the unique subjectivities of these boys, in line with Seidler's critique of Connell.

ADOLESCENT MASCULINITY.

Adolescence is often depicted as a period of biological upheaval. But arguing from a social constructionist position, Epstein and Johnson (1998) take issue with biologically based, essentialist ideas of adolescence, arguing that the notion of adolescence is a cultural construction that does not exist separately from social practices and discourses. Social constructionist accounts of adolescence are, therefore, especially interested in the meanings attributed to it, including gender related meanings. Connell (2002) has suggested that experiences of bodies, especially during adolescence, need to be understood as part of an interactive 'circuit of production' that makes some sense of the interconnectedness of the biological and the social. It is possible that the storm and crisis discourse of adolescence may have a gendered aspect, with girls constructed as emotionally volatile and boys as driven by a stormy and persistent sex-drive, constructed as states over which they have very little control.

Some recent studies have especially focussed on the subjectivity of adolescents and their emerging masculine identities and the ways in which these are discursively constructed. One such study was that conducted by Frosh et al (2002), which provides an interpretive framework within which a deeper understanding of adolescent masculinities can be achieved. These authors describe adolescence as "a period ... in which boys are becoming acculturated (or acculturating themselves) into increasingly salient masculine identities" (Frosh, et al, 2002:1). This is a view of adolescence as culturally, subjectively and discursively defined, and provides a theoretical framework within which to explore adolescent masculinity.

Some of the most important work on adolescent masculinity has been done in the context of schools, which are seen as critical sites for the production of gendered identities (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Morrell, 1998; Frosh et al, 2002). While it has frequently been shown that girls are marginalized, disempowered and not given equal access to opportunities in schools, Connell (2000) has also shown that in boys in schools who do not conform to, or who threaten or challenge, hegemonic notions of masculinity are also marginalized or discriminated against disadvantaged.

While the construction of identity in adolescence has been shown to intersect with gender, class, race and social context (e.g. schools), there has been little work on the intersection with disability. It is likely that disability is a particular context for the construction of adolescent masculinity, but one which has received little or no attention to date. This study addresses the way in which disability influences, and is influenced by, the construction of adolescent, masculine identity.

MASCULINITY AND DISABILITY.

Like the literature on masculinity, research and theorizing around disability has been characterized by diverse and highly contested theoretical perspectives. Much of the theorizing around disability has been dominated by the biomedical model, which locates disability in the damaged body of the disabled person, giving no attention to the effects of discrimination against disabled people, reflecting a "pattern of oppressive and pathologizing ideas surrounding disability which have served to reproduce the image of persons with disabilities as broken, damaged, defective, vulnerable, helpless, incapable and the like" (Watermeyer, 2002:86). Unlike the biomedical model, the social model locates disability externally to the individual, existing in the broader social, political and economic environment. The focus is more on discriminatory practices and how they set the disabled individual apart from 'able bodied' individuals, through a process of othering.

Psychoanalysis has been a useful framework for understanding the experience of disabled people, especially through its descriptions of projection and othering, explaining the discrimination against disabled people as a function of the difficult, anxiety-provoking experiences that they evoke in non-disabled people, such as fears of imperfection and dependency (Marks, 1999). Watermeyer has the following to say about the identity construction of disabled people: "The nature of disabled identity in societies such as ours is argued to be strongly mediated by the process of othering. This refers to a process by which we identify a devalued other in society, in order that we may then attribute to members of that group those parts of our own experience and selfhood which we wish to disown. By constructing and regarding disabled people as broken, damaged, defective and dysfunctional, members of the broader non-disabled society are able to reaffirm and reinforce an identity of being the opposite of these unwanted characteristics" (Watermeyer, 2001:33). Watermeyer goes on to argue that as a result of such projections, disabled people are seldom seen as people in their own right, but rather as "psychic dustbins into whom are projected those parts of human experience which are felt universally to be difficult to tolerate and manage" (Watermeyer, 2002:92).

It has been argued above that the construction of masculinity takes place at the intersection of gender with race, sexuality and social class. While little attention has been given to the impact of disability on the construction of masculinity, and vice versa, it is likely that both disability and masculinity impact on the construction of one another. It was also argued above that the establishment and maintenance of hegemonic forms of masculinity takes place partly in opposition to, or through the subjugation of, other forms of masculinity, e.g. gay masculinity. Insofar as disability is seen as representing imperfection and fragility, disabled men are likely to be seen as seldom attaining the desirable standards of hegemonic masculinity, rather being othered as a subordinated or subjugated group of failed men or boys, much like gay boys/men. Watermeyer describes the pressure on disabled people to overcome disability in heroic ways, "disabled people are thus denied the possibility of being viewed and constituted in a manner which reflects the complexity and diverse aspects of a unique human life, including strengths and vulnerabilities, hopes and losses, competence and inadequacy" (Watermeyer, 2001:38). This is likely to especially be the case for men or boys struggling for acceptance by normative standards of hegemonic masculinity.

Masculinity researchers have to a large extent overlooked the intersection of disability and masculinity especially in adolescence, although there has been some acknowledgement of the impact of disability on the development of masculine identity. Mac an Ghaill (1994) claims that masculinities in schools are dynamically constructed, differentiated and privileged on the basis of a matrix of social divisions such as age, social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, but also disability. He claims that bullying in schools serves to police dominant gender meanings and is linked with perceptions of 'normality', based on social criteria of perceived physical difference, physical size and appearance. On this basis, he argues that disability itself can be used to regulate masculinity – anything that is othered is framed as deficit or disability.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY.
This research has two primary aims. The first is to explore visually impaired boys' construction of masculinity, with particular attention to the hegemonic versions of masculinity. The second is to explore the subjective position of these boys in relation to these hegemonic constructions, and the challenges they have to negotiate in the process of constructing a personal masculine identity. Related to the second aim, the study examines the discursive strategies these boys employ in order to maintain a sense of acceptable masculinity in relation to these hegemonic standards, especially where they may experience themselves as other.

Informed by Frosh et al's (2002) study of adolescent masculinity, the theoretical framework employed in this study used a combination of social constructionism and psychoanalysis. The former is especially informed by Edley and Wetherell's (1997) interactive discourse approach. While social constructionism has been widely used to examine the constructions of masculinity, psychoanalytically informed methods provide a means to explore the subjectivities of individuals in relation to these constructions, and especially to explore why subjects invest in, select and occupy particular subject positions over others. In this study, we were especially interested in the countertransference experienced by the researchers in interaction with participants and/or the interview transcripts, and in the subtle contradictions and inconsistencies in the conversations of the boys, as expressions of less conscious, subjective experience.

Sample.
The first author is himself blind, and therefore well positioned to conduct this study, but was limited in his mobility to access subjects for the study. Owing to the difficulty in accessing visually impaired adolescent boys in the province in which this study was conducted, a convenience sample was employed. The sample, focussing on boys in the 14-18 year old group, was drawn from a school for the visually impaired, which was selected due to its proximity and accessibility. The sample finally consisted of 12 boys, all of whom were black, mainly isiZulu speaking.

Procedure.
After obtaining the consent of the headmaster to conduct the study in the school, students were invited to participate in the study. The study was explained to them, together with necessary ethical protections e.g. availability of counselling should they be distressed by any of the matters discussed in the interviews. Boys willing to participate signed an

informed consent form, as well as consent to the interview being recorded. Following this, a consent form was also sent to parents/guardians for signing. Each participant was invited to be interviewed twice. The first interview was semi-structured, and the guidelines for the interview schedule were loosely based on the Frosh et al (2002) study. The second interview followed up issues arising from the first interview, as well as issues that the boys wished to discuss, and was therefore more open-ended. Only eight boys took up the offer of the second interview for practical reasons related to time constraints and difficulties with other commitments. The duration of each interview was approximately one hour. Each interview was tape recorded and later transcribed.

DATA ANALYSIS.
Once interviews were transcribed, each interview was initially read a number of times, with each of the main aims and questions of the study in mind: how is masculinity constructed?; are there patterns of hegemonic masculinities?; how does each boy position himself in relation to hegemonic norms and standards?; what discursive strategies does each boy employ in constructing a masculine identity, especially in the face of sense of being othered as disabled?

The data analysis was then approached in two steps. First, the qualitative data analysis package NVivo 2.0 was used to code the interviews for each of these major aims and questions. Codes were developed from the preliminary reading of each interview, generating a comprehensive list of codes. Each interview was independently coded by the first author using this code list, and then coded by the second author and/or a research assistant. Following the coding of each interview, codes were organized into broad themes. Then, similarities and differences in themes and codes across interviews were examined, focusing on how the participants socially constructed masculinity with specific emphasis on hegemonic masculinities. In line with Frosh et al's (2002) integrated approach, the second stage of analysis used a psychoanalytically informed approach to examine where and how each individual boy subjectively positioned himself in relation to these constructions of masculinity, and what their subjective experiences and challenges (including anxieties and conflicts) were in this positioning process. This was partly based on the researchers' countertransference in response to each boy's conversation and the two researchers' reflections on the transcribed narrative. As used by Frosh et al., this referred to the "reaction on the part of the interviewer to the specific unconscious thoughts and feelings projected into him by any particular boy" (2002:17).

REFLEXIVITY.
The first author is himself visually impaired, which played an important role in this study, having both disadvantages and advantages. It was anticipated that as the interviewer, his own visual impairment would make the participants more comfortable in talking about their own experience, creating a unique context for constructing a particular version of visually impaired masculinity, as well as for reflecting on their anxieties and challenges, as well as providing him with a unique entré to the subjectivity of these boys. However, the interactions with the boys posed a number of subjective challenges to the first author. The boys' accounts had a profound impact in evoking his personal experience of visual disability, with the risk of projecting his own experience into the participants, biasing the analysis of the data. Ongoing discussion with the second author about this experience,

together with a joint reading of the transcripts, was used to protect against this possibility. As reported above, each interview was independently coded by a second coder, and comparisons made across coders. Where there were differences in coding, we returned to a collaborative recoding of the text in question.

FINDINGS.

The findings of this study will be presented in three parts, with the most detailed attention given to the third part. *First*, we will briefly report on the boys' construction of masculinity. *Second*, and as an extension of the first section, we will briefly report specifically on relational and oppositional aspects of the construction of masculinity in relation to girls/women. *Third*, we will give a fuller account of the subjective positioning of these boys in relation to their constructions of masculinity, the challenges they faced and negotiated in the process of constructing a personal masculine identity, and the discursive strategies they employed in order to maintain a sense of acceptable masculinity in relation to hegemonic standards.

Constructions of masculinity.

One of the most distinctive features of their accounts of masculinity was the way in which the boys constructed masculinity primarily in terms of power and control, reflected also in the importance given to independence, self sufficiency and agency. This power and control was constructed as an innate component of masculinity and at times appeared to be based on assumptions of male physical superiority.

"*A boy I can describe it as a person that likes to rule people always wants to be the own boss of the people. Every step of the way they want to grab every opportunity that he gets and one that doesn't want to move to another line to give people opportunity.*" (Michael 14 years old).

While revealing the centrality of power/control in the construction of masculinity, Michael does show a subtle awareness that this aspect of masculinity operates by subordinating others. While boys are constructed as being assertive, confident and able to lead others, there is a subtle acknowledgement in the quote that this may be experienced as being domineering, selfish and having the power to exploit others.

The strength and power of men is also reflected in the frequent reference to "having" children and families. This is taken as such a given that one boy says,

"*Being a man. Having your own family. A man has a family.*" (Bongani, 16 years old).

The necessity of men to "have" a family draws on the discourse of male biological potency, in that men are expected to have a number of children. Masculinity is therefore not only defined by the possession of a family, as is suggested by *"having"* and *"has"* a family, but is also an expression of a man's reproductive power. The presence of a family, especially children, provides evidence of attained masculinity, and is a visible sign that a man has fulfilled some of the fundamental requirements of being a real man, based on biological power.

For all of these boys masculinity involved a performative dimension - *"you show your manhood"* - through physical performance, strength, toughness and the ability to fight and defend oneself. The ability to fight and to stand up for oneself is vital to the performance of real men.

"Ja, from (my) side it is important, because you have to show what you are, what you can do for yourself, how do you defend yourself, in maybe certain things. To show your manhood." (Mandla, 18 years old).

During the interviews, questions were asked about what makes boys popular. Popular boys were mainly described as those boys who most closely adhered to the hegemonic standards just described. The boys revealed that sport is pivotal in the establishment, maintenance and perpetuation of hegemonic forms of masculinity, serving two main functions. *First*, sport is a means to enact masculinity through performances of toughness and strength, as the following quote reveals.

"Boys like to play too much, sporting events or sports like soccer. That is the most popular sport that you can play, soccer and rugby. Ja, those rough games especially rugby because they are, you know, very strong, so they know they can do that certain type of sport. They will feel fine." (Bongani, 16 years old).

Second, sport is used as a means to regulate and maintain hegemonic versions of masculinity. One boy describes gym as a sport expressing masculinity, *"Some boys that exercise and go to gym are tough. Those boys that don't go to gym are weak." (*Sibonelo, 14 years old*).*

Oppositional and relational aspects of masculinity.
The above section has shown the ways in which masculinity is constructed as strong, tough, independent, and powerful. Throughout the interviews it was apparent that masculinity is also constructed in opposition to femininity.. For example, reference was frequently made to humour in the differentiation of boys from girls. Boys were constructed as being naturally more relaxed, funny and unruffled by life's difficulties, while girls were constructed as being more serious, and even able to unsettle boys with their thoughts.

*"Boys they are always joking and talking things that are funny and sometimes the girls, eish, the girls talking makes you think. They talk things that make you think." (*Sibonelo, 14 years old*).*

In addition, the construction of masculinity in terms of independence and agency was in opposition to the construction of girls, who were described as being dependent on men, not able to make decisions on their own and needing men's protection and guidance.

"Um, girls are very dependent, than men. Girls don't trust themselves enough, because when something happens to them, a woman doesn't solve that problem just by herself, she has to get somebody to help her along to solve that kind of problem. She also needs a strong man, that can help her along, the man that she knows, this man is very strong and keen on something." (Mandla, 18 years old).

"Boys can be without girls but girls cannot be without boys." (Armstrong, 17 years old).

While masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity, there was acknowledgement that masculinity is also enacted in relation to girls. Much as masculinity is about independence, in the boys' accounts having girlfriends is a signifier of being a real boy. This is most evident in the constructions of popular boys, who are able to accomplish this by "having" girlfriends.

"Maybe how many girlfriends, like they had, they have. Those are the things that make you popular." (Themba, 17 years old).

The interviews constantly revealed that constructions of masculinity emphasize heterosexuality, as only boys who are attracted to girls and desirable to girls are constructed as being real boys. While there was not much discussion of homosexuality in the interviews, one boy made it clear that gay boys/men are othered, and excluded from the group of real men:

"I say those ones I cannot call them boys … I don't know where they come from, those attracted to men." (Michael, 14 years old).

Girls and women also play important reciprocal roles in affirming masculinity, through submitting to the control of men and by admiring men. In the following extract we see this expressed through reference to the male voice, which is used in a literal as well as symbolic sense.

"Um, yes there are differences, but men, in terms of men, they believe in their voices, you know, some sorts of men they have deep voices, so they believe that when they are talking to a woman, men expect a woman to hear him properly. It shows that, you know, that a man is speaking, try and listen to the man." (Armstrong, 17 years old).

In the extract above, the power contained in hegemonic forms of masculinity is strongly emphasised, especially in relation to women. Women are expected to occupy a subordinate position, in which their "voices" are drowned out by that of men, and are expected to "*listen to the man"* as a reciprocal confirmation of the power of men.

Interestingly, the narratives also reveal that girls play an important role by positioning boys as desirable and by being their admirers, as popular boys were often described as those who are most desirable to girls. This important reciprocal role of girls in the confirmation and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity is clearly seen in the following quote:

"I think you feel, most probably, you feel like you are the king, or something you see, around girls, you feel that you are that important, and what girls think about you , you ask yourself , what they think about you as they are talking to you. What wrong they see, what wrong do they see in you, what right they see in you, what they admire in you, whether they admire you or not. All those issues appear in your mind when they are talking to you." (Armstrong, 17 years old).

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In this quote Lucas reveals that the construction of masculinity is reciprocally dependent on the admiration of girls, who, while they are subjugated to the position of admirers, also wield subtle power over boys in their ability to position them as admirable and desirable or neither. This quote is an interesting demonstration of a marked contrast and even contradiction in conversation, as it moves from a confident masculinity reflected in the sense of *"you are the king"* in the eyes of girls, to the rapid anxiety about what they think of you, and "*what wrong do they see in you".* This connects with a common anxiety expressed by some boys about "*girls dumping them",* revealing the subtle power of girls/women to undermine the masculine identity of boys/men, despite their subjugated position. We see this as a manifestation of a strong, but less conscious, anxiety/vulnerability of boys in relation to girls.

Intersection of disability and masculinity.
During the follow up interviews, the interviewer attempted to specifically address issues relating to the boys' visual impairment and sense of masculinity. Where boys had spontaneously described the experience of their disability and its intersection with their sense of masculinity, this was explored further in the second interview.

All of the boys in this study strongly positioned themselves as identifying with various hegemonic constructions of masculinity in terms of physical performance, strength, toughness and the ability to fight and defend oneself, as well as being in control of and admired by women. However, a number of the boys suggested an awareness of their inability to meet these hegemonic standards because of their visual impairments, or showed an anxiety about their ability to attain these hegemonic standards. For example, some boys expressed concern about their ability to participate in rough sport, an important site for the performance of masculinity, impacting on their masculine identity. In many of the interviews, the boys spontaneously described expected standards of masculinity, without questioning whether or how these standards apply to visually impaired boys. But as the interviews unfolded, another voice gradually entered their accounts, especially in the follow up interviews, acknowledging that, because of their impairments, they could not meet these hegemonic standards of masculinity. In addition, at frequent points during the interviews the interviewer became aware of the boys' anxieties through his own emotional responses to moving stories told about their ability or inability to attain hegemonic standards, even though the boys may not have directly described these anxieties themselves. The boys then appeared to defend themselves against these anxieties and to preserve a sense of adequate masculinity in relation to these hegemonic standards by offering explanations or rationalizations for their failure to meet the hegemonic standard.

One of the most moving parts of the interviews was the way that visually impaired boys described themselves as being positioned by girls and non-disabled boys as lacking, deficient and as not as desirable to girls as sighted boys. The level of distress evoked in these boys especially by girls who see them as undesirable is exemplified in the quote below from Themba, a 17year old, who up until grade three was in a mainstream school. It was during this time that Themba's vision was tested and it was discovered that he was partially sighted. Themba was then sent to a school for the visually impaired. In the extract that follows Themba is imagining a conversation with girls:

"But I am proud of myself, I won't say, I won't go to them and tell them, no, whatever you are doing is fine, only God knows, maybe you will get a child that will be worser than me…… That will be, maybe you get a child that will be more, maybe you will get a child that will be more, maybe you will get a child that will be cripple or that will be paralysed. That way, what I am trying to say, I am trying to tell them, that the way I am, I appreciate myself, and I will tell them that I am not ashamed of myself."

This quote expresses the tormented struggle of Themba to cope with the feeling of being relegated to a subordinated and less desirable person/boy, while simultaneously denying any sense of shame. There is an interesting juxtaposition of pride and shame. While it is not explicit, it is clearly apparent that Themba was both hurt and enraged at this experience of othering, "*I won't go to them and tell them",* especially in the wish that this girl one day has a more disabled child as a way of bringing her to a realization of the distress that arises from this discrimination and marginalization of him as a disabled boy. During Themba's interview and the subsequent data analysis a number of feelings were evoked in the researchers. These included feelings of loss, sadness and a profound sense of being helpless, as well as feelings of being inferior and inadequate and not being able to measure up to hegemonic standards of masculinity. Themba's story evoked a strong desire in the interviewer to protect him from his torment.

Against the backdrop of the hegemonic positioning of men as the heads of and providers for families, some boys expressed anxiety about their ability to acquire work because of their disability, and therefore about their ability to perform this aspect of masculinity. These boys feared that their visual impairment may hamper their attempts to align themselves with one of the hegemonic standards of masculinity as their access to employment may be curtailed by their disability. Some of the boys emphasized the importance of education and the need for them to work hard as compensation.

Throughout the interviews there was evidence of a variety of strategies employed by these boys to cope with the anxiety evoked by directly acknowledging, or subtly realizing, their inability to fully conform to hegemonic norms of masculinity. Through using a variety of discursive strategies they attempted to reduce possible feelings of inadequacy/failure, and maintain a sense of adequate masculinity.

One way in which this was done was through using their disability as a site to enact aspects of hegemonic masculinity that could not be enacted elsewhere because of their disability. For example, the adversity arising from their disability was often constructed as an opportunity to further "show your manhood", an important feature of hegemonic masculinity.

"To be a young man, it means you have to face different challenges that will make you to be a man. The first challenges, is like, you have to fight, you know, it is hard to fight when you are partially sighted, visually impaired. So those are challenges that sometimes have to face when you are an albino. Like in my community, you see, they say, to be a man, you have to fight and won the fight. That's tomorrow, they will say, ja, when they are telling you, maybe you are my brother, or your brother is a man who can being in a fight for such a

long time. It is challenges like that. Now, I know that, it is hard for me to fight. It is not that I am scared of them, but I am thinking for my future. I am thinking for my eyes, that they won't get affected, you see." (Themba, 17 years old).

Themba starts by describing what he sees as essential aspects in the construction of masculinity in his community, *"you have to fight and won the fight"*. Boys and men who are able and willing to fight are real men, whilst those who don't are seen as *"scared"* and less than real boys. But the extract quickly shows Themba's awareness of an inconsistency, insofar as he acknowledges that *"it is hard for me to fight"* because of his visual impairment, revealing his awareness of his inability to perform according to this hegemonic masculine norm. This is highlighted by his implicitly othering himself through the use of the category *"an albino"*. However, he immediately denies any idea, in his own mind or that of the interviewer, that he is scared, *"It is not that I am scared"*. He rather reframes his behaviour as a function of one of the *"different challenges"* he referred to, viz. *" I am looking after my future, I am thinking for my eyes, that they don't get affected"*. Not only does this enable him to maintain an acceptable position relative to the hegemonic standard of masculinity, but he also argues that protecting his eyes is a major challenge for him, and after all facing challenges is a distinguishing feature of masculinity. In this way he manages to preserve a sense of acceptable masculinity.

These strategies were seen with regard to the anxiety arising from the construction of masculinity as independent and self-sufficient. The interviews reveal that for visually impaired boys conformity to this standard is especially difficult, as visual impairment by its very nature implies a measure of dependency. Therefore, in some respects these boys fail to meet this standard of masculinity, as they are at times unable to perform activities that would signify independent masculinity. Given these limitations, they have to negotiate and master a personal sense of vulnerability, subjective distress and anxiety. This distress is especially exacerbated when they experienced discrimination and prejudice and othering from non-disabled boys, because of their inability to attain these hegemonic standards of masculinity.

"Some of them, eish, they can't understand but some of them do. It depends now on which friends. The best friend, they won't say anything, they will assist you when you need assistances but those who don't understand, they will start to tease you and laugh at you, say funny things about you. All of that stuff and that makes me feel bad. Sometimes I don't even want to go around. It is not that my sight is bad, it is not about that, but eish, at night it is giving me a problem so, because [laugh] I can also drive, but now I don't want to now." (Sipho, 16 years old).

This quote reveals Sipho's struggle around independence and his attempt to position himself in relation to this hegemonic standard. In this extract he seems to oscillate between distress at his dependence, and therefore his apparently failed masculinity, and his attempts to save face by rationalizing his behaviour as a personal choice and function of his agency. With the assistance of *"best friends"*, Sipho is able to maintain a sense of being masculine, as they *"won't say anything"*, perhaps through their silence colluding in the illusion that he is able to be independent and therefore masculine. This is, however, in tension with his experience of others, the standard bearers of hegemonic masculinity, who

are teasing and othering him, reminding him of his failed and subjugated masculinity, so bringing his personal vulnerability to the fore, to the point where *"sometimes I don't even want to go around"*. This may in part be a means to avoid confronting his lack or failure in meeting the desirable masculine standard of independence. Moreover, we see the subjective struggle that Sipho is engaged in, as he alternates between the distressed realisation of his failure to meet this standard and his attempts to discursively defend his sense of being masculine and having agency. The last two sentences of the extract reveal his conflict, as he oscillates between these two positions. Having just acknowledged "*…that makes me feel bad"* and that "*Sometimes, I don't even want to go around"* , he hastens to add that "*It is not that my sight is bad"* - for after all if this was the case then his disability would place an absolute limitation on his independence, and therefore his masculinity. The statement that "*I can also drive"* is an important one, as the ability to drive must be an important marker of his capacity for masculine independence, and is therefore an attempt to alleviate his anxiety about his failed masculinity. He admits, "*but eish, at night it is giving me a problem",* but again employs his sense of agency by adding "*I don't want to (go out, drive etc) now"* . This allows him to demonstrate a sense of control over his life, as he constructs this as being a choice, as he could go out, drive etc, if he wanted to. This can be seen as a powerful attempt at asserting his agency and convincing himself as well as others that he is a real boy capable of acting independently.

DISCUSSION.
This study focussed specifically on visually impaired boys, but the findings in many respects replicate studies of non-disabled adolescent boys, especially regarding constructions of masculinity, for example, Frosh et al (2002) and Mac an Ghaill (1994).

The strong emphasis on hegemonic forms of masculinity by these visually impaired boys, came as something of a surprise to the authors. With the inevitable physical constraints on many of these boys to be as competent at sport and fighting as non-disabled boys, we might have expected some or all of these boys to resist and subvert prevailing forms of hegemonic masculinity or attempt to construct a version of masculinity more accessible to visually impaired boys, another version of the "multiple masculinities" described by Connell, but this was not the case. Further, given that the interviewer was also visually impaired, we expected that the interview would have created a unique site for the construction of an alternate, less-hegemonic masculinity. But again this was not so. This provides compelling evidence of the great pressure to "do boy" in hegemonic ways.

Discussing hegemonic masculinity, Renold (2004:248) says that hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity is "constructed and defined in relation to and in opposition against an Other". Throughout their narratives these boys construct masculinity in opposition to girls/women who are seen as other. For example, boys and men are tough and independent, girls are weak and needy. Boys are also humorous and "jokey", while girls are serious and therefore difficult to communicate with. But masculinity is also constructed in relation to girls. In many places the findings show boys being dependent on recognition and confirmation by girls to affirm their identity, and their anxiety when this is not forthcoming.

In examining the boys' masculine identity the narratives reveal that positioning plays an important role. Davies and Harré (1991) describe the dual role of positioning: reflexive

positioning, the process by which active agents positions themselves, and interactive positioning, the process of being positioned by others through social interaction. Throughout the interviews, the boys appeared at pains to consciously position themselves in alignment with hegemonic norms, although they do show awareness that this does not always succeed. But the narratives also reveal many instances where boys are aware of being interactively positioned by others, boys and girls, as failed boys/men, through a process of discrimination and othering. There were even some hints of a subtle or unconscious positioning of themselves as subordinated boys, especially where they were positioned as undesirable to girls. They are then left to face the double distress of othering, as both visually impaired and as un-masculine boys. In Watermeyer's terms these boys were aware that they are "psychic dustbins into whom are projected those parts of human experience which are felt universally to be difficult to tolerate and manage" (Watermeyer, 2002:92).

Throughout the interviews boys also employ the othering process themselves in relation to girls, and occasionally to "weak" boys. In one sense these boys share a subjugated position with girls, vis-à-vis hegemonic masculinity, so that we might have expected less othering of girls. However, Renold (2004) describes a very similar process in schools with non-disabled boys, and makes the interesting observation that non-hegemonic boys seem to exaggerate their opposition to and dissociation from the feminine, probably as a strategy to confirm their masculine identity.

It is the insight into their subjectivity, and especially their anxiety, that provides the clue to the investment of these visually impaired boys in the strong, but somewhat surprising, attachment to various aspects of hegemonic masculinity. In the face of this othering process which constructs them as "broken, damaged, defective, vulnerable, helpless, incapable and the like" (Watermeyer, 2002:86), and worst of all as undesirable, they are faced with three choices: helplessly submitting to this othering process, repositioning themselves as hegemonic males in a determined fashion, or constructing an alternate non-hegemonic masculinity. The findings suggest that it is only the second option which these boys really embrace.

One of the main aims of this study was to investigate the subjective experiences and challenges of visually impaired boys' with regard to their masculine identity, and the strategies that they use in order to construct an acceptable masculine identity, especially in the face of the likely limitations on their being able to meet the ideal standards of hegemonic masculinity. The overriding feature of these boys' accounts was their constant attempt to align themselves with the prevailing standards of hegemonic masculinity that they described. They showed no evidence of constructing any alternate form of masculinity with separate norms and rules for governing the masculine practices and behaviours of visually impaired boys. This suggests that, in Connell's terms, these boys are complicit in reproducing hegemonic masculinity. Connell (2000) argues that the masculine ideal espoused in hegemonic forms of masculinity is beyond the reach of most men, but they are still complicit in reproducing it, as their investment in, and endorsement of hegemonic masculinity, has great benefits for them. Seidler (2006) takes issue with Connell on this matter, arguing that this idea fails to take account of the subjectivity of boys attempting to live according to these hegemonic standards. This subjectivity is revealed at various points

in the findings, both in subtle aspects of the boys' narratives and in the countertransference of the researchers.

The boys in this study are caught between the benefits described by Connell and the distress described by Seidler. The findings reveal that they are faced with considerable challenges and distress, as they often fail to meet the hegemonic standards for masculine behaviour because of the limitations that result from their disability, but they still continue to endorse these standards in unmodulated form, and attempt to align with these hegemonic standards as part of the construction of a personal masculine identity. This anxiety and defence was well articulated in the words of Robert Scott (1969) writing about services for blind people in the USA: "A major component in the experience of being a blind man is defending the self from imputations of moral, psychological and social inferiority. For some this defence succeeds and for others it fails but for all blind men it is a fact of life" (in Watermeyer, 2001:165). This is what Watermeyer (2001:165) describes as "the need to defend against the primitive and threatening emotional evocations associated with blindness through its cultural attachment to notions of vulnerability, dependency and loss". Again this explains the strong investment of these boys in the position they take up in relation to hegemonic masculinity.

Many of their narratives subtly reveal the struggle of these boys in the face of notions of the undesirability and deficiency projected onto them, especially by girls, and the anxiety, distress and rage that this evokes. The boys' struggle is most powerfully revealed in their attempts to fulfil the heterosexual requirement of hegemonic masculinity that insists that boys have girlfriends. In the face of their determination to inhabit these hegemonic versions of masculinity, various strategies, mainly discursive, were employed by the boys to defend against feelings of inadequacy and anxiety evoked by their potential failure to meet the standards for being considered a real boy/man, and to maintain the illusion of being as masculine as sighted boys, whose definitions of masculinity are at times beyond the reach of these boys.

Understandable as these survival strategies are, this does seem to entrap them in the process of fighting for inclusion in the hegemonic group, leaving them no personal choice in the construction of a masculine identity, and no room to really confront and engage with their own subjective distress that is incurred through this process. The risk, of course, is reading this as suggesting a polarization of disabled and non-disabled masculinity based on the reification of disability, and the assumption that visually impaired boys are all the same and are inevitably relegated to lesser form of masculinity, which are the direct result of their disability. However, the authors are rather suggesting that the greatest difficulty for these boys arises from their interactional positioning by others which renders them as either failed in their masculinity, or needing to undertake a heroic task of proving their masculinity in the face of their disability. We are suggesting that there is the need for the creation of a psychological space (physical and emotional) within which it is possible for disabled boys to consider, choose and negotiate the construction of a personal masculine identity, including a less hegemonic masculinity, through alternate discourses of masculinity. We are not suggesting the establishment of some kind of homogenous, disabled, masculine identity. In fact, we would argue that many of the anxieties of these boys mirror those of most boys/men in their attempt to construct and maintain an

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acceptable masculine identity. Neither are we suggesting a kind of inward-looking version of masculinity, characteristic of much of the contemporary men's movement, which serves to endorse and maintain hegemonic masculinities.

Seidler (2006:26) argues that many young men grow up taking their masculine superiority for granted, but then "they continually have to defend, be on guard to prove their male identities", while at the same time being "trapped into the feeling that they are 'not man enough' " and are faced with the challenge to "affirm their masculinity". This anxiety is likely to be even greater for disabled boys, as they are more likely to be at the receiving end of projections based on stereotypes of visually impaired people by sighted people, exacerbating the need to defend and prove their masculinity. While the process of negotiating a personal masculine identity may initially involve the awareness of the anxiety associated with a non-attainment of hegemonic forms of masculinity, and the distress associated with the negative projections of sighted people, in the long run this process may free these boys to be less trapped in the cycle of projection and resistance of projections, and freer of the constant struggle of having to prove (or fail in their attempts to prove) their own masculinity. Seidler (2006:48) in writing about masculinity in general, rather than in disabled boys/men, and exploring how to "open up ways for men to transform their lives", says that "it is often through honouring the point of weakness that transformations have a chance to take place".

While the findings of this study lend support to Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity and the way boys/men are complicit in it, the findings also point to the limitations of Connell's work. Seidler (2006:52) says of Connell's work, "This theoretical framework (Connell's) has tended to render invisible both the tensions men feel when obliged to live up to prevailing masculinities and their actual lived experience and emotional lives". In fact, he argues that Connell sees these emotional conflicts as "personal issues that have little to do with prevailing definitions of masculinity". The findings of this study suggest that alongside their attempt to live up to these prevailing norms, boys experience considerable personal anxiety, but are not easily able to acknowledge and deal with the anxiety arising from the pressure to conform to hegemonic masculinity. We are also not suggesting that all visually impaired boys should or would necessarily opt for or accept a non-hegemonic masculinity, but rather that there needs to be a greater zone of possibility opened up to choose and decide where and how to position themselves in relation to hegemonic forms of masculinity, and to acknowledge the anxiety that they experience in this process.

CONCLUSION.
In setting out to explore the construction of masculinity by visually impaired boys, and the intersection of gender and disability, it had been the expectation of the authors that we might find evidence of alternate discourses and constructions of masculinity, given the inevitable limitations on their attainment of the standards of prevailing hegemonic masculinities. Even talking of mainstream schooling, Renold (2004:255) showed that "emerging counter-hegemonic discourses for change were possible and alternative gender/sexual performances were being opened up and regimes of hegemonic masculinity disrupted". But the findings of our study, surprisingly show a strong affiliation with hegemonic standards of masculinity. The findings also reveal novel strategies used by visually impaired boys to deal with the distress arising from an awareness of the difficulty in

attaining these standards. While the findings of this study provide clues as to the motivation for these boys taking up subject positions which are strongly aligned with many prevailing hegemonic norms, it is also likely that this comes at considerable personal cost to these boys who are caught into the trap of constantly having to conceal their vulnerability and prove their masculinity. Little is known about the conditions under which it is possible to construct and inhabit an alternate form of non-hegemonic masculinity, but ongoing research at the intersection of disability and masculinity may begin to provide some answers, and these answers may make an important contributions to enabling boys/men, both disabled and non-disabled, to protect themselves and women from the risks associated with having to be complicit with hegemonic forms of masculinity.

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