

**ACCESS DENIED? THE HOLISTIC LIVED
EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED STUDENTS AT
STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY: 1986 – 2007**

by
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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the holistic lived experience of physically disabled students who studied at Stellenbosch University (SU) between 1986, the national year of the disabled and 2007, when the first dedicated disability unit was established at SU. Although this period reflects a generally transitional phase in wider South African history, with an increased emphasis on social equality, the consideration of the position of disabled individuals in this narrative is largely under-represented. The institutional and social elements of university life are explored as both constitute an integrated student life, while the specific position of disabled students is considered from a variety of angles. Official archival material provides insight into institutional responses to the question of disability. Societal narratives concerning disability are explored through an investigation of the disability-related articles which appeared in the Stellenbosch University publications *Matieland* and *Die Matie* between 1986 and 2007. Individual elements are also incorporated through a small-scale qualitative study consisting of 11 individual semi-structured interviews with physically disabled SU alumni.

A non-linear narrative emerges throughout this period, in the sense that improvements and developments did not follow in any particular chronological order. The reasons for this are varied and cannot be limited to any single element. The institutional environment makes provision for disabled students in various ways, but a gap in the dissemination of information is evident, indicating that students were not always aware of available accommodations and services. Stellenbosch University was revealed to have a particularly long history of accommodating blind and partially sighted students as well as disability sport. A total of 83 articles from *Matieland* and *Die Matie* were explored. These also indicate a non-linear portrayal of disability issues and often vacillate between depictions of disabled students as ‘superheroes’ or ‘sub-humans.’ Interview data revealed that disabled individuals were frequently encouraged to pursue a university education, although access to information and the built environment remained an issue. The independent initiative on the part of disabled students and individual involvement of various staff members were key factors in facilitating success in the institutional environment. Disabled students were revealed to have vastly diverse social experiences which were linked to neither type of disability nor period of study. They participated in the social environment through a variety of networks while at university and encountered various public responses to their disability. Ultimately, this study indicates

that physically disabled students navigated the university experience at SU between 1986 and 2007 with various levels of institutional and social support.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek die holistiese geleefde ervaring van fisiese gestremde studente aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch (US) tussen 1986, wat die nasionale jaar van die gestremde was, en 2007, toe die eerste toegewyde eenheid vir gestremdhede aan die US gestig is. Hierdie tydperk weerspieël ook 'n oorgangsfase in die wyer Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis wat normaalweg gepaardgaan met 'n klem op sosiale gelykheid. Die posisie van gestremde individue binne hierdie narratief is egter grootliks afwesig. Die institusionele en sosiale elemente van die universiteitslewe word ondersoek, aangesien albei 'n geïntegreerde studentelewe uitmaak, terwyl die spesifieke posisie van gestremde studente vanuit verskillende oogpunte beskou word. Amptelike argiefmateriaal bied insig in institusionele reaksies op die kwessie van gestremdheid. Samelewings narratiewe rakende gestremdheid word ondersoek deur 'n beskouing van die gestremdheidsverwante artikels wat tussen 1986 en 2007 in die US-publikasies *Matieland* en *Die Matie* verskyn het. Individuele elemente word ook bygebring deur 'n kleinskaalse kwalitatiewe studie wat bestaan uit 11 semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met fisies gestremde US-alumni.

'n Nie-liniêre narratief is herkenbaar dwarsdeur hierdie tydperk, in die sin dat verbeteringe en ontwikkelings nie in enige spesifieke chronologiese volgorde verloop het nie. Die redes hiervoor is uiteenlopend en kan nie beperk word tot enige enkele element nie. Die institusionele omgewing maak voorsiening vir gestremde studente op verskillende maniere, maar 'n gaping in die verspreiding van inligting is duidelik, wat aandui dat studente nie altyd bewus was van beskikbare akkommodasie en dienste nie. Die Universiteit Stellenbosch is bewys om 'n besonder lang geskiedenis te hê van die akkommodering van blinde en swaksienende studente, sowel as gestremdheds-sport. 'n Totaal van 83 artikels uit *Matieland* en *Die Matie* is ondersoek. Dit dui ook op 'n nie-liniêre uitbeelding van gestremdheidskwessies en wissel dikwels tussen uitbeeldings van gestremde studente as objekte van 'inspirasie' of 'bejammering.' Onderhoudsdata het aangetoon dat gestremde individue gereeld aangemoedig was om 'n universiteitsopleiding na te streef, alhoewel toegang tot inligting en die fisiese omgewing deurentyd 'n probleem gebly het. Die onafhanklike inisiatief van gestremde studente en individuele betrokkenheid van verskeie personeellede was belangrike faktore wat sukses in die institusionele omgewing fasiliteer het. Dit het aan die lig gekom dat gestremde studente uiteenlopende sosiale ervarings beleef het wat nie aan die tipe gestremdheid of studieperiode as sodanig gekoppel kan word nie. Hulle het deelgeneem aan die sosiale

omgewing op universiteit deur middel van verskeie netwerke en verskeie openbare reaksies op hul gestremdheid ondervind. Uiteindelik dui hierdie studie aan dat fisiese gestremde studente tussen 1986 en 2007 gedurende hul universiteitservaring aan die US met verskillende vlakke van institusionele en sosiale ondersteuning funksioneer het.

DEDICATION

For Rynhardt, Sydney, Willem and Deané
Because you saw me and embraced what you saw
Thereby enabling me to do the same

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TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Prof Andreas van Wyk, -----	65
Figure 2: The Department Physical Education Building -----	67
Figure 3: The G. G. Cilliers (Education) Building -----	73
Figure 4: The Residence Huis de Villiers -----	74
Figure 5: Matieland and Die Matie Comparison -----	87
Figure 6: Matieland Summary -----	97
Figure 7: The R. W. Wilcocks Building -----	101
Figure 8: The Old Main Building -----	102
Figure 9: Die Matie Summary -----	112
Figure 10: Participants' Data -----	115

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION-----	ii
ABSTRACT -----	iii
OPSOMMING-----	v
DEDICATION-----	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS-----	viii
TABLE OF FIGURES-----	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS -----	x
GENERAL INTRODUCTION-----	11
CHAPTER 1: -----	23
THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ‘DISABILITY’-----	23
CHAPTER 2: -----	48
INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES TO DISABILITY – FORMALISED WAYS OF INCREASING INCLUSION AND ADDRESSING CONCERNS -----	48
CHAPTER 3: -----	80
SOCIAL NARRATIVES AROUND DISABILITY – PERSPECTIVES FROM <i>MATIELAND</i> AND <i>DIE MATIE</i> -----	80
CHAPTER 4: -----	114
THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DISABILITY – A COMPLEX KALEIDOSCOPE -	114
CONCLUSION-----	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY-----	147

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This study investigates the lived experience of physically disabled students at Stellenbosch University (SU), between 1986 and 2007. The year 1986 bears significance since it was declared the national year of the disabled. This publicised disability within South African society and increased government focus on disability-related matters. Furthermore, 1986 saw the establishment of a dedicated disability unit at WITS University. This was the first such unit at a higher education (HE) institution in South Africa. Despite a long history of disabled students' enrolment¹, an official disability unit² was only established at SU in 2007. That year also marks the most recent update of the university's official policy on disability. The African Network of Evidence to Action on Disability (AfriNead), was also founded in 2007. This network regularly brings together researchers, activists and other role-players in developing and supporting disability-related research in Africa.³ The year 2007 therefore marks not only the establishment of SU's Disability Unit, but also an increased focus on disability issues on the continent.

The latter years of Apartheid and the democratic transition during the early to mid-1990s heralded sweeping constitutional and societal changes within wider South African society. These changes placed a premium on redressing inequality and past discrimination. At least theoretically, this included the plight of the disabled. Therefore, the period under investigation also book-ends a progressive phase in the dialogue on individual rights in South Africa. This study thus provides a historical account of how disabled students navigated various aspects of university life during this transitional period, as well as how SU as an institution responded to the evolving dialogue on disability in the wider South African context.

Any study dealing with disability must acknowledge that disability itself is complex, multi-faceted and deeply personal for many people. Various attempts at defining disability, whether broad or narrow, each pose their own challenges and limitations. Moreover, there is

¹ The first blind student to study at a South African university obtained her masters degree in Afrikaans and Dutch from SU in 1950.

² Officially known as The Unit for Students with Special Learning Needs / Disabilities.

³ L. Swartz: "Five challenges for disability-related research in sub-Saharan Africa," *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014. p. 1.

no consensus on a single all-encompassing definition of disability and the definitions employed are often purpose specific.⁴ As is common with group labels, the term ‘disability’ is socially constructed and often ambiguous, influenced by a range of factors, including historical and cultural biases, preconceived ideas and popular notions at any given time. Likewise, social and cultural contexts play a dominant role in making meaning of disability. This highlights the importance of understanding disability not only as a term, but also within the context that it functions for a particular population group and within a specific time period. Dolmage remarks that “disability is often used rhetorically as a flexible form of stigma to be freely applied to any abnormal, threatening or devalued group.”⁵ In this context ‘normal’ becomes that which is perfect and species-typical and therefore considered essential and fully human. Consequently, disability is considered a diminished state of being human.⁶ Indeed, people with disabilities may at times be seen as representing something other than themselves, thereby becoming a single homogenous category of people thought to embody the negative aspects of the human character and experience.⁷

Therefore, it is essential that the term ‘disability’ itself is clearly defined at the outset of any study seeking to engage with disability matters. However, it is recognised that no single definition will be able to embody the diversity of people’s experiences, even when those experiences are set within a definite time-period and geographic location as is the case with the current study. Du Plessis emphasises that the complex intersections between disability and several other identity markers, such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation and nationality, necessarily mean that any definition will still fall short of disabled people’s actual experiences and consequently, variation will remain.⁸ ‘Disability’ within this study then is limited to meaning an observable physical disability. Issues concerning cognitive and learning disabilities, as well as serious health issues that may affect or complicate movement, mobility, or daily functioning thus falls outside the scope of the current research, and wherever the term disability is used, solely physical disability is implied.

Furthermore, the terms ‘individuals with disabilities’ and ‘disabled individuals’ are used interchangeably within this study as no general consensus of preference exists. Some

⁴ M. Schneider: “The difference a word makes: responding to questions on ‘disability’ and ‘difficulty’ in South Africa,” *Disability & Rehabilitation* (31), (1), 2009, pp. 42–43.

⁵ J. T. Dolmage: *Disability Rhetoric*. p. 4.

⁶ J. Slanter: *Youth and disability, a challenge to Mr Reasonable*. p. 5.

⁷ H. Lourens, and L. Swartz: “It’s better if someone can see me for who I am’: stories of (in)visibility for students with a visual impairment within South African Universities,” *Disability & Society* (31), (2), 2016, p. 211.

⁸ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 27.

disability scholars, particularly within the American tradition, have argued for ‘individuals with disabilities’ since this indicates that the identity of the individual is not limited to or defined by their disability. Others, primarily supporters of the social model of disability have explained how the phrase ‘individuals with disabilities’ can obscure the distinction between disability and impairment.⁹ Seeing as these debates continue within the field of disability studies and supporters of both preferences offer valuable insights this study will not favour one preference over another in this regard.

2. Background

Disability and academic research endeavours have a complex relationship. Historically, disabled people have been excluded from mainstream society in numerous ways.¹⁰ A report from the South African Coordination Committee (1986) recognised that many disabled people were confined to institutions “their condition [did] not justify.”¹¹ As a result, discourses of disability were constructed without any engagement with individuals with disabilities themselves. Disability research predominantly remained the domain of disciplines related to medicine and social work. This resulted in a medical model focus in relation to both the types of research being conducted and the ways in which research was done. Thus, traditions of disability research exist which have led to the exclusion or even abuse of disabled people.¹² In this context, the historic distrust concerning academic research on the part of disabled individuals and their hesitancy to involve themselves in research conducted by able-bodied society within ableist discourse is understandable.

This has, however, begun to shift in the last three decades. Mehrotra maintains that the voices of disabled individuals as: “subjects, citizens and stakeholders in the democratic socio-political process [are] gradually but clearly emerging.”¹³ Consequently, contemporary disability research increasingly emphasises the importance of placing insider accounts at the centre of how disability issues are understood.¹⁴ Such accounts have played an important role

⁹ For more on this see, for example, B. J. Gleeson: “Disability Studies: A historical materialist view,” *Disability & Society* (12), (2), 1997, pp. 179-202.

¹⁰ Chapter 1 provides a detailed historical account of the position of disabled individuals within western civilisation.

¹¹ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 24.

¹² J. Goode: “‘Managing’ disability: Early experiences of university students with disabilities,” *Disability & Society* (22), (1), 2007, pp. 35–36.

¹³ N. Mehrotra: “Methodological Issues in Disability Research: An Introduction,” *Indian Anthropologist* (42), (1), 2012, pp. 1, 3.

¹⁴ Alan Hurst, among others, have done extensive work in this regard, for example: *Higher education and disabilities: international approaches*. and “Reflecting on researching disability and higher education.”

in changing both what is known about disability and how it came to be known. Indeed, this shift remains a significant legacy of the social model of disability. As Swartz notes: “first person accounts of experiences of disability and social exclusion are now common and thought important for any full understanding of disability.”¹⁵ Thus, for several important reasons, insider experiences have gained prominence in understanding and thinking about disability issues.

The status of disabled people has long been regarded as an area of special concern in education since they are recognised as having been historically disadvantaged in the educational context.¹⁶ This study focuses specifically on university students, since they find themselves on the brink of adult life and the possibility of full participation in society. Historically, higher education (HE) was not regarded as a suitable place for disabled people and few were expected to pursue further education or be admitted to university.¹⁷ Moreover, there is currently limited evidence of sustained work being done to involve young people with disabilities in shaping the decisions and institutions that have a profound effect on their life choices.¹⁸ Yet, coming to university constitutes a significant step in the process of forming an independent personal and social identity for young people. Furthermore, contemporary research has identified a wide range of potential benefits in participation in the HE environment for disabled students. Specifically, university has the potential to help disabled students challenge negative perceptions of their impairment and alter their self-concept, particularly in relation to their confidence, wellbeing, empowerment and through social capital formation.¹⁹

In the context of anti-discrimination legislation, as well as policies and practices embracing diversity, HE institutions are currently expected to implement a policy of supporting disabled students.²⁰ Yet despite a growth of interest in including disabled people in research on the one hand and increasing commitment to an inclusive HE environment on

¹⁵ L. Swartz: “Five challenges for disability-related research in sub-Saharan Africa,” *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014, p. 2.

¹⁶ B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. pp. 149, 164.

¹⁷ S. Ntombela: “Inclusive education and training in South African higher education: Mapping the experiences of a student with physical disability at university,” *Africa Education Review* (10), (3), p. 484.

¹⁸ M. Shevlin, M. Kenny, and E. McNeela: “Access routes to higher education for young people with disabilities: A question of chance?,” *Irish Educational Studies* (23), (2), 2004, p. 39.

¹⁹ M. Papatirou, and J. Windle: “The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students,” *Disability & Society* (27), (7), 2012, pp. 935-936.

²⁰ K. R. Matshediso: “Access to higher education for disabled students in South Africa: A contradictory conjuncture of benevolence, rights and the social model of disability,” *Disability & Society* (22), (7), 2007, p. 685.

the other, Fuller, Healey, and Bradley maintain that the voices of disabled students themselves remain limited in this context.²¹ Importantly, changing this situation involves far more than merely increasing access to HE for individuals with disabilities. While this is important, students with disabilities must also be given the opportunity to participate effectively in their HE experience and have opportunities to attain the same academic standards as their able-bodied peers, thereby having a fair chance of success within higher education. Various studies have found that much remains to be done, not only in increasing students with disabilities' access to HE, but also in levelling their experiences with those of their able-bodied peers.²² Therefore, access to higher education cannot be separated from the experience of higher education.²³

It is essential that the experience of HE in this context is understood to mean more than simply the teaching and learning environment. As Papatotiriou and Windle point out: "Research on the university experience of disabled students has focused on barriers in learning and teaching, while the social world of university has as yet gained little attention as a distinctive object of study." Nevertheless, social and educational experiences cannot be completely separated and categorised individually, since the experiences of negotiating university learning will certainly affect social experiences and vice-versa.²⁴ In line with this argument, the current study focuses on the holistic student life experience, rather than strictly the learning and teaching experience. Although providing an education and / or specific skills remains the primary purpose of any HE institution, receiving such an education is certainly not the only important aspect of any individual's time as a student.

Vickerman and Blundell argue that hearing the voices of disabled students should be a central tenet of successfully understanding and responding to their needs. Consequently, they should be proactively consulted and empowered to advocate their views.²⁵ Howell and Lazarus also point out that lack of participation by people with disabilities in decision-making processes and structures within HE institutions has marginalised disability-related

²¹ M. Fuller, M. Healey, and A. Bradley: "Incorporating disabled students within an inclusive higher education environment," *Disability & Society* (19), (5), 2004, p. 455.

²² P. Vickerman, and M. Blundell: "Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education," *Disability & Society* (25), (1), 2010, p. 21.

²³ C. Howell and S. Lazarus.: "Access and participation of students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities," *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 60-61.

²⁴ M. Papatotiriou, and J. Windle: "The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students," *Disability & Society* (27), (7), 2012, pp. 935-936.

²⁵ P. Vickerman and M. Blundell: "Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education," *Disability & Society* (25), (1), 2010, p. 21.

issues in institutional planning and resource allocation.²⁶ Moreover, personal stories can reveal inaccessible and oppressive societal structures and ideologies in the HE setting.²⁷ Additional participatory research among students with disabilities is also recommended in the South African context since their stories thus far tell of “continuing exclusion on tertiary grounds.”²⁸

Contemporary disability-related participatory research in the HE context includes considerations of the access constraints encountered by physically disabled students,²⁹ current support provisions in South African universities,³⁰ the institutional challenges presented by increasing access and participation for disabled students,³¹ considerations of access and legislation,³² and reflections on disability specific challenges³³ to name a few. Thus, it is evident that the existing research focuses primarily on the current institutional situation regarding disabled students in HE. Papatiriu and Windle argue that a more complete understanding of how disabled students experience university needs to be developed in order to provide guidance to university policies aimed at responding to their social needs.³⁴

Furthermore, historical investigations of the disability situation have mainly centered on the ‘othering’ elements of disability,³⁵ the history of disability rights movements³⁶ and

²⁶ C. Howell, and S. Lazarus: “Access and participation of students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities,” *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 64-65.

²⁷ H. Lourens: “Driving in unheard silence: Disability and the politics of shutting up,” *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2016, p. 2.

²⁸ H. Lourens and L. Swartz: “‘It's better if someone can see me for who I am': stories of (in)visibility for students with a visual impairment within South African Universities,” *Disability & Society* (31), (2), 2016, p. 210.

²⁹ L. Engelbrecht, and J. J. de Beer: “Access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution,” *Africa Education Review* (11), (4), 2014, pp. 544-562.

³⁰ K. R. Matshediso: “Access to higher education for disabled students in South Africa: A contradictory conjuncture of benevolence, rights and the social model of disability,” *Disability & Society* (22), (7), 2007, pp. 685-699.

³¹ C. Howell, and S. Lazarus.: “Access and participation of students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities,” *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 59-74.

³² K. R. Matshediso: “The challenge of real rights for disabled students in South Africa,” *South African Journal of Higher Education SAJHE* (21), (4), 2007, pp. 706-716.

³³ H. Lourens, and L. Swartz: “Experiences of visually impaired students in higher education: bodily perspectives on inclusive education,” *Disability & Society* (31), (2), 2016, pp. 240-251.

³⁴ M. Papatiriu, and J. Windle: “The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students,” *Disability & Society* (27), (7), 2012, pp. 935-936.

³⁵ Clapton, J. and Fitzgerald J.: “The History of Disability: A History of 'Otherness': How disable people have been marginalized through the ages and their present struggle for their human rights,” *New Renaissance*. Available Online: <http://www.ru.org/human-rights/the-history-of-disability-a-history-of-otherness.html#author> [Accessed 05 October 2018]

³⁶ C. Howell, S. Chalklen, and T. Alberts: “A history of the disability rights movement in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. pp. 46-84.

activism³⁷ and disability in the distant past.³⁸ Thus, engagement with the history of disabled students in HE as well as the social world of HE for those with disabilities remains limited. The current study contributes to existing research by considering these two key elements. Firstly, the current literature on disabled students in HE is expanded through an examination of the holistic student life experience; including both institutional and social elements. Secondly, the historical understanding of disability is broadened by considering the experiences of disabled students within a specific historical context; Stellenbosch University (SU) between 1986 and 2007.

3. Research Approach and Methods

This study considers not only the experiences of physically disabled students themselves, but also investigates the relationship between the HE environment and disability. The international increase in emphasis on the inclusion of disabled individuals within the HE context throughout the last three decades is considered alongside specific South African legislation which focusses on the rights of disabled students in HE. At SU specifically the institutional environment and its cognisance of disabled students is explored through a discussion of relevant policy structures and institutional support available to disabled students between 1986 and 2007 as reflected in official archival material.

In order to appreciate the holistic student experiences of physically disabled individuals in context, the historical development of the western understanding of disability is outlined and the history of the disabled people's movement in South Africa is discussed. In addition, government legislation concerning disability and higher education and its changes over time are considered.

Importantly, as mentioned above, this investigation is not limited to the institutional or teaching and learning environment. The holistic student experience - including institutional and social aspects - at SU is examined. Social and societal aspects of disability at SU are explored through a discussion of disability-related articles that appeared in the SU publications *Matieland* (the periodical for Stellenbosch alumni) and *Die Matie* (the student newspaper for current students) between 1986 and 2007. The ways in which these

³⁷ L. Patterson: "Points of Access: Rehabilitation Centres, Summer Camps, and Student Life in the Making of Disability Activism, 1960-1973," *Journal of Social History* (46), (2), 2012, pp. 473-499.

³⁸ C. Barnes: "A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture," in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.:) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 3-24.

publications discuss disability issues and disabled individuals on campus are explored as a window into wider societal views concerning disability.

Individual perspectives are also incorporated through a small-scale qualitative study consisting of 11 semi-structured individual interviews with physically disabled SU alumni. Participants were mainly identified through the snowball sampling method. Since the current research is focused on the individual experience, an individual interview process was deemed most effective. This provided the necessary time with each individual and avoided the dominance of a single experience that can sometimes emerge in the group setting. Individual interviews also ensured that participants were not influenced by external views or experiences in answering interview questions. This is important since the disabled community at any university within any given time period tends to be quite small. Consequently, disabled individuals are often acquainted with one another even when close friendships do not develop. Additionally, it is vital for the integrity of the study that all participants feel free to answer questions honestly and without outside influence.

Interviews were conducted entirely on a voluntary basis and participants received no payment or reward for their participation. Interviews consisted of questions briefly considering the participant's background and the nature of their disability, but the focus was on their learning and social experiences while at university. Each interview consisted of a total of 27 questions and participants remained free to leave any question unanswered. On average, the duration of interviews remained between 60 and 90 minutes.

4. Methodological Challenges and Limitations

As already noted, this study is limited to considering the university experiences of physically disabled students. However, the study is not limited to considering one specific type of physical disability. Instead, interviews were conducted with SU alumni who had a variety of physical disabilities. This approach makes it possible to note common concerns and problem areas across various disabilities. This can serve to highlight important focus areas within the HE environment for students with disabilities.

For a study of this nature, a number of limitations are inherent in the research process. The picture that emerges can only reflect the experiences and understandings of the small sample of people interviewed and the documents analysed. There are a number of people who could not be consulted, as a result of time or resource constraints – reasons that are inevitable

in a study of this nature. As a result, no attempts at generalisation can be made from a study of this nature.

Furthermore, research involving first-person narratives present a number of potential pitfalls. One of the chief challenges in considering primary interview data relates to the fact that it is virtually impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusion when attempting to access individuals' views, opinions and experiences. Experiences and contexts are diverse and available provision as well as delivery systems to allow students access to these provisions vary. Therefore, it is often difficult to judge whether students' experiences are in fact similar (thus highlighting common areas of concern that deserve attention) or entirely different. Nevertheless, the alternative of not comparing or discussing available provision and social interactions at university from personal experiences discounts the rich sources of data that can be gleaned from the students themselves, who are fundamentally at the heart of the provision that is being delivered.³⁹

Several complications may arise from over-emphasising or over-valuing personal insider accounts. Insider knowledge cannot be regarded as representative of the views of all people of a certain group. This is particularly important where disability issues are concerned because societal ignorance has historically resulted in a situation where diverse disabled groups are placed under a single umbrella and assumed to be similar on the basis of a 'shared disability.' Moreover, insider accounts cannot be assumed to reflect the 'truth' about those whose accounts are portrayed merely on the basis of being first-person narratives. Although an individual may view the information that he / she provides as accurate, it may not be the 'full truth' of his / her experience. Swartz explains that "the reality is that every story anybody tells is profoundly affected by conventions, forms and tropes of stories." All experiences are necessarily filtered through a series of conscious and subconscious lenses. These are shaped by numerous factors including subsequent experiences, current circumstances and the passing of time. In summary then, research using personal experiences in relation to disability in HE is both useful and vital, nevertheless personal experiences in isolation remain insufficient in exploring all aspects of disability in HE.⁴⁰

Lastly, I find it relevant to disclose here that I am a full-time wheelchair user as a result of cerebral palsy since birth. As such, I acknowledge my position as an embedded researcher

³⁹ P. Vickerman and M. Blundell: "Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education," *Disability & Society* (25), (1), 2010, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁰ L. Swartz: "Five challenges for disability-related research in sub-Saharan Africa," *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014, pp. 2-3.

with a personal stake and interest in the situation under consideration. Indeed, many of the thoughts and ideas which underpin this study initially emerged in conversations I had with fellow disabled students and friends. However, this is by no means unusual in the case of disability-related research. In fact, many respected researchers in the field are disabled individuals themselves and studies emphasise the importance of this trend in light of the historic exclusion of disabled individuals. In the South African context, the work of Heidi Lourens and Brian Watermeyer serves as examples in this regard.

5. Research Aims and Objectives

The aims of the current research include demonstrating how physically disabled students at SU experienced the holistic HE environment through a medium which allows their voices to be heard, thereby increasing understanding of the lived experience of students with physical disabilities within the South African higher education context. A concerted effort is made to understand and portray students with disabilities as individuals. No attempt is made to paint a national picture of disabled students' experiences or provide any 'one-size-fits-all' solutions to current issues. On the contrary, various issues have arisen from viewing the disabled community as a homogenous group and if individual experiences of higher education are to be understood and improved, individuality must be reclaimed. It is also essential that this individuality be brought to the attention of HE institutions, since it highlights the need for continued flexibility within the system. Particularly in the case of an issue as complex as disability it should be recognised that what works for one student may not work for another.⁴¹

Through this research, a clearer picture can be gained of the ways in which students with disabilities see themselves and their institutional and social experiences at university. Furthermore, this research can provide personal qualitative data that could be useful in similar studies and in universities' decision-making and policy processes regarding students with physical disabilities in future. The willingness to engage with the disabled student community and the knowledge gained through them can, in turn, lead to individuals and higher education institutions becoming more equipped to deal with relevant issues on academic and social levels and thus ultimately increase the integration of those living with disabilities into the university environment and wider society.

⁴¹ P. Vickerman and M. Blundell: "Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education," *Disability & Society* (25), (1), 2010, p. 27.

This study aims to communicate the institutional and social experiences of physically disabled SU students in the South African context between 1986 and 2007. The primary focus does not fall on laws or government policy, although its changes over time (with respect to how these changes influence and affect individuals' lives) will be considered. It makes no pretence at representing the experiences of the entire South African disabled student community, but rather recognises each individual's identity and their unique experience. Furthermore, it is not intended to produce a mass list of 'do's and don'ts' for educational institutions or the general public when dealing with those living with disabilities. Indeed, the fact that society often considers 'disability' to be one homogenous category into which all those living with disabilities can be placed creates serious barriers to understanding the individual's experiences. Therefore, this study recognises the value of an individual's life and story. It sets out to tell these stories within their specific context in the hope that they might further the current understanding of those living with disabilities in all spheres of society.

6. Structure

This study is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 provides background, centring on the question 'how the current understanding of disability developed.' Contextual information is provided concerning the historical evolution of the term disability and key disability legislation is briefly discussed. The situation in Africa concerning disability is outlined and a brief overview of the South African Disability Rights Movement is provided.

Chapter 2 focuses specifically on HE and the institutional environment at Stellenbosch University, tackling the question 'how the institutional environment at SU handled disabled students.' The position of disabled students within HE globally and nationally during the past decades is considered in terms of both policy and practice. Specifically, SU's methods of addressing the concerns of disabled students between 1986 and 2007 are discussed through an investigation of archival data.

Chapter 3 examines the ways in which individuals with disabilities were portrayed in the SU publications, *Matieland* and *Die Matie* from 1986 to 2007 considering the question 'how does society view disability and disabled individuals.' General trends concerning the media and disability are considered followed by an in-depth discussion of 83 disability-related articles that were published in *Matieland* and *Die Matie* between 1986 and 2007.

Chapter 4 deals with the data obtained from a small-scale qualitative study consisting of 11 individual semi-structured interviews with SU alumni. A discussion of the results considers the question ‘how did physically disabled students experience holistic student life at SU between 1986 and 2007.’ Here, the lived experiences of physically disabled students as conveyed in the interviews are central. Several key factors are identified as shaping these experiences. Within the institutional context this includes access and encouragement into HE, the physical environment, access to information and disability awareness among staff. Central social elements are regarded to be the welcoming period, social engagement while at university and general public attitudes concerning disability.

Finally, concluding remarks as well as recommendations for possible future research in this area are offered.

Although strictly speaking, this study’s focus ends in 2007, the salient themes discussed here are still very relevant today. The challenges disabled students faced during the period under investigation have not been ‘solved’ and are still experienced by students today. Conversely, the period under investigation does embody a time of ‘growth’ in disability awareness, which warrants closer scrutiny. Specifically, the question of whether or not such an increase in disability awareness developed in a linear fashion parallel to greater societal changes and what / who the agents of change in this process were demands attention.

CHAPTER 1:

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ‘DISABILITY’

Disability is a life lived before a looking glass that is cracked and distorted by the vandalism of normality.⁴²

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a broad background for the general societal view of disability. The historical development of various perceptions of disability is discussed; primarily on the basis of two, seemingly contradictory, models of understanding disability: the medical model and the social model. Thereafter, the development of some significant disability legislation from the 1970s onward is investigated. Finally, the situation regarding disability on the African continent in general, and in South Africa specifically, is outlined. Here, attention is paid to both historical developments as well as understanding the current state of affairs. The history of the Disabled People’s Movement in South Africa and its influence on disability-related matters and societal views concerning disability during the 1980s and 1990s is also examined.

The current investigation of historical understandings of disability favours western society, particularly Britain, due to its relatively long tradition of disability-related research and its historical links with South Africa. This is not intended to affirm the British historical or cultural perspective or esteem it as the only one. It only serves to illustrate how South Africa, with its colonial ties to Britain, has been influenced by developments in Britain. Thus, the following historical discussion is not intended to be comprehensive, critical or prescriptive, rather, it highlights how disabled people’s current position in society have been shaped by historical processes.

2. Historical Perceptions concerning Disability

This section deals with historical understandings of disability by considering historical developments in western civilisation and specifically Britain which led to the development of the medical model and the social model of disability. Certainly, these are only two of many

⁴² B. Hughes: “Fear, pity and disgust: Emotions and the nondisabled imaginary,” in N. Watson, A. Roulstone and C. Thomas, (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*. p. 67.

models developed in attempts at understanding disability. Their inclusion here does not imply that either of them are entirely complete, correct or incorrect in and of themselves. However, they warrant discussion due to the ways they have consistently influenced understandings of disability and disability-related research.

2.1 Historical Developments in Western Civilisation

Barnes argues that an understanding of history, its relationship to western culture and the resulting central value system is essential to fully appreciating the current position of disabled people in society. He illustrates how disabled people have existed throughout recorded history and that a consistent cultural bias against them long predates the emergence of industrial capitalism. Indeed, Barnes maintains it was already present in Ancient Greece and Rome which could be regarded as the foundation of modern western civilisation. Infanticide in the form of exposure to the elements for infants in any way perceived as weak or sickly was common in both Greek and Roman culture. In some cases, it was even mandated by law.⁴³ An infant considered ‘deformed’ was regarded as a punishment from the gods.⁴⁴ Moreover, anyone whose disability was not visible at birth was treated harshly by society and such individuals often became objects of ridicule or amusement. Particularly people of short stature and deaf people were considered ‘curiosities.’ Furthermore, dwarfs and blind men fought women and animals in the infamous Roman games for the amusement of the mob.⁴⁵

Notwithstanding such treatment, some variation in responses to atypical bodies was also evident in Greco-Roman culture. This depended on various factors, including the reasons provided for such occurrences, their frequency and the extent of the deviation from the norm. Less severe cases appear to have been tolerated, if not celebrated. Notably, the Greek god of fire, Hephaestus, was mobility-impaired, but was portrayed as having extraordinary magical powers.⁴⁶ Yet, Hephaestus was banished from heaven by his father Zeus, and although Aphrodite, the goddess of love, later married him, she also took an able-bodied lover, Ares, because her husband was a ‘cripple.’ Similar treatment is apparent in the case of the famously disabled Roman Emperor Claudius. He had a limp and a speech impairment which modern

⁴³ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 12-14.

⁴⁴ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 17.

⁴⁵ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 12-14.

⁴⁶ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 17.

scholars generally regard as resulting from Cerebral Palsy.⁴⁷ He probably escaped death at birth due to his position within the highest rank of Roman society, but he was nonetheless subjected to abuse from both the Roman nobility and Roman guards prior to his ascendancy to the imperial throne. Even his mother, Antonia, treated him with contempt.⁴⁸ Thus it is apparent that, although disabled people were not entirely excluded from society in the Greco-Roman world, and material factors as well as class standing could offer some protection, the general view of any form of deviance from the norm was negative.

In Britain, until the seventeenth century, people rejected by their families and without resources relied exclusively on the tradition of Christian charity for subsistence. People with severe impairments were often admitted to one of the very small medieval hospitals in which were gathered “the poor, the sick and the bedridden.”⁴⁹ Members of the clergy were prominently involved in providing medical care for those considered to be ill and the spiritual rewards which could be gained from showing charity to the ‘less fortunate’ were emphasised. A growing fear of the poor resulted in such ‘risky’ persons increasingly being confined to alms houses. The status of disabled people (often themselves poor) also became more entrenched as being “the cared-for and marginalised.”⁵⁰

The Poor Law of 1601 can be regarded as the British government’s first official recognition that state intervention is required in, amongst others, the lives of disabled people. Thereby, the Tudor monarchs made economic provision for those hitherto dependent upon the Church. However, a general suspicion of people dependent on charity had already been established at this point, notably by the statute of 1388 which mandated that local officials discriminate between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ poor. Additionally, disabled people remained targets of amusement and ridicule as evident in the joke books of Tudor and Stuart England.⁵¹

The Enlightenment with its emphasis on individuality, the value of reason and science and commitment to social progress provided the basis for the systematic individualisation and

⁴⁷ T. W. Potter: “Claudius, Tiberius Claudius Nero Germanicus (10BC-AD54), Roman emperor,” <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref.odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-48281#odnb-9780198614128-e-48281-div1-d1726198e759> [Accessed 12 October 2018]

⁴⁸ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 13-14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 16.

⁵⁰ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 18.

⁵¹ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 16-17.

medicalisation of the body and mind. This resulted in the gradual removal of disabled people from mainstream society into institutional settings. Moreover, the later emergence of Social Darwinism and the Eugenics Movement provided pseudo-scientific ratification for the already established unconscious belief that people with any perceived imperfection in significant ways threatened western society and its central values. Simultaneously, an increase of Christian charity and humanitarian values was evident among the middle and upper classes. Accordingly, several charities for disabled people, controlled and run by able-bodied society, were founded during the nineteenth century. One example is the British and Foreign Association for Promoting the Education of the Blind,⁵² which was set up in 1863. Therefore, the nineteenth century can be regarded as the advent of an understanding of ‘disability’ in its modern form.⁵³

Du Plessis points out two key elements to understanding the experiences of those regarded as atypical during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Firstly, as is common throughout history, the availability of material resources made a considerable impact. Thus, “economic means mediated the consequences of atypical behaviour or appearance” and the experiences of any type of impairment was markedly different for the upper and lower classes.⁵⁴ Secondly, it needs be considered that industrialisation saw the beginning of mass production. The resulting standardisation of working environments were based on general notions concerning what the average person ought to be able to do in given circumstances. This functioned both to further exclude people with impairments from the main work force and advance already held beliefs on the appearance and capabilities of ‘the average person.’ Consequently, atypical activity, appearance, and experience were linked with assumed productivity and ‘contribution’ limitations. This view subsequently became an important legitimiser for modern notions of disability.⁵⁵

2.2 Disability Models

The recent history of disability in the West has been characterised by the development of several models of disability, among them, the religious model, the medical / genetic model, and the rights-based social model. These models, or constructions of disability, have attempted to define the parameters for society’s response to people with disabilities. These

⁵² Now known as the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB).

⁵³ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. p. 18.

⁵⁴ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. pp. 20-21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 21.

models have subsequently become more sophisticated, and various sub-models combining differing ways of thinking about disability have developed. Nevertheless, the essence has remained, and remains, constant: disabled people are fundamentally different, and separate from the rest of the population, and methods must be developed to address the various issues arising from this fact.⁵⁶

Prior to considering particular models, some further preliminary remarks concerning models and theories need be noted. Firstly, it is useful to remember that any model is intended merely as an aid to understanding. “A good model can enable us to see something which we do not understand because in the model it can be seen from different viewpoints. [...] It is this multi-dimensional replica of reality that can trigger insights that we might not otherwise develop.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, models are not intended to explain any phenomenon. In this sense they are distinct from social theories since such theories attempt to “explain how and why specific relationships lead to specific events.”⁵⁸

Ultimately, the point is not to hold one model up as the all-encompassing ‘correct’ view of disability but rather to gain further insights into the complexity of the disability situation and lived experience by considering it from a variety of angles. Understandings of disability may be informed by a variety of models originating from diverse disciplines. Moreover, a specific model might prove exceptionally useful for one set of circumstances while being completely unsuitable for another.⁵⁹ Within this background, the historical development of the medical and social models of understanding disability will subsequently be discussed.

2.2.1 The Medical Model

In the post-industrial and post-enlightenment era, disability came to be regarded in western society as an individual affliction predominantly cast within scientific and medical discourses. ‘Disability’ was defined as an objectively observable attribute or characteristic of an ‘afflicted’ person. It became, by definition, an individual affliction, and different interventions aimed at providing the individual with the appropriate skills to rehabilitate or

⁵⁶ J. Clapton and J. Fitzgerald: “The History of Disability: A History of ‘Otherness’: How disable people have been marginalized through the ages and their present struggle for their human rights,” *New Renaissance*.

⁵⁷ V. Finkelstein quoted by C. Barnes: “Disability Studies: what’s the point?” Notes for a verbal presentation at the ‘Disability Studies: Theory. Policy and Practice’ Conference; University of Lancaster, 4 September 2003.

⁵⁸ C. Barnes: “Disability Studies: what’s the point?” Notes for a verbal presentation at the ‘Disability Studies: Theory. Policy and Practice’ Conference; University of Lancaster, 4 September 2003.

⁵⁹ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. pp. 27-28.

manage his / her ‘affliction’ within society.⁶⁰ Indeed, the label of disability often “carries with it such a powerful assertion of inability to perform any adult social function that no other descriptor is required by the public.”⁶¹ The resulting discourse depicts disabled people as personally tragic objects of pity, or dependent and eternal children.

It is, in essence, a discourse of the benevolent tolerance of and care for those who cannot care for themselves. On the whole, those who cannot control their bodies or movements ‘normally’ are deemed failures from the perspective of a culture supported by modern western medicine, which idealises the idea that the body can be objectified and controlled.⁶² Interestingly, disabled people deemed to have achieved some form of success within mainstream society do not necessarily challenge this paradigm as might be expected. Instead, ‘successful disabled people’ seem to have their disability effectively erased by their success since society tends to regard high-profile people with recognised disabilities as having either ‘overcome’ their disability or utilised it in some remarkable way.⁶³ Lourens aptly explains the central message communicated to disabled people through this discourse:

The message from an anxious world is clear: only when disability becomes invisible, when it is neither seen nor spoken about, will the disabled person have some hope of being considered part of the world.⁶⁴

Watermeyer elaborates on the price disabled people must pay for this belonging. From society’s perspective it is almost instinctively ‘not okay’ to not be fully able to see, hear, speak, walk or otherwise function. Against this backdrop, it becomes an immense challenge for disabled people to honestly share their experiences with the world.⁶⁵

This situation is further complicated when considering that the already precarious belonging disabled people experience is at least partially contingent on their agreement to “protect the able-bodied world” from the sometimes messy and complicated fluctuations of practical disabled life.⁶⁶ Disabled people may therefore learn to hide parts of themselves and may experience shame or ugliness in connection with their experiences of impairment and disability. However, when hiding becomes necessary, they are also deprived of the

⁶⁰ J. Clapton and J. Fitzgerald: “The History of Disability: A History of ‘Otherness’: How disable people have been marginalized through the ages and their present struggle for their human rights,” *New Renaissance*.

⁶¹ L. J. Davis: *Enforcing Normalcy, disability, deafness and the body*. p. 9.

⁶² J. Clapton and J. Fitzgerald: “The History of Disability: A History of ‘Otherness’: How disable people have been marginalized through the ages and their present struggle for their human rights,” *New Renaissance*.

⁶³ L. J. Davis: *Enforcing Normalcy, disability, deafness and the body*. p. 9.

⁶⁴ H. Lourens: “Driving in unheard silence: Disability and the politics of shutting up,” *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2016, p. 7.

⁶⁵ B. Watermeyer: *Towards a contextual psychology of disability*. p. 184.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 184-185.

experience of being fully known or accepted, a vital emotional need.⁶⁷ On a practical day-to-day level, disabled individuals may further deny their limitations and needs in order to spare able-bodied individuals the discomfort of their impairment. Thereby, they not only suppress a part of themselves, but also make it more difficult for themselves to achieve success in the specific situation, since they do not have access to the necessary resources and support.⁶⁸ Thus, both material and emotional needs are threatened in this process of hiding. As Watermeyer explains, “we need to be seen in order to see ourselves more clearly, so that we may make ourselves more seen.”⁶⁹

Furthermore, such individuals may be at risk of suffering self-alienation because they are forced to live in a perpetual “mode of being and belonging” which is, in reality, focussed on “not being.”⁷⁰ Essentially, disabled people may become alienated from that part of their identity that is their impairment (whatever it means for them and whatever their feelings about it are) since they are in essence forced, in many small, subconscious ways to present a ‘capable, able-bodied’ exterior to society at large in order to facilitate social belonging. Swartz elaborates on this dichotomy when he explains what disabled people must contend with in order to be regarded as individuals in their own right beyond stereotypes. He illustrates how being regarded in a certain way (as embodying or lacking a specific quality or characteristic) functions psychologically to both cause individuals to rebel vehemently against that particular construct of themselves and to desire that others whom they regard as similar to themselves act likewise.⁷¹ The following quote fittingly captures this situation:

I believe that all of us, including all disabled people, have parts of ourselves that we believe to be weak, ugly, malformed, hysterical, devious, smelly, lazy or stupid, to name just a few. But when these are the names we are called (or silently whispered), these are the names we fight against and may want others like us to fight against.⁷²

The discourse of benevolence discussed above became commonly known as the medical model of disability. This view is based on, among others, the work of American sociologist Talcott Parsons in the 1940s and 1950s. Particularly his discussion of sickness and its link to

⁶⁷ H. Lourens: “Driving in unheard silence: Disability and the politics of shutting up,” *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2016, p. 7.

⁶⁸ H. Lourens, and L. Swartz: “‘It’s better if someone can see me for who I am’: stories of (in)visibility for students with a visual impairment within South African Universities,” *Disability & Society* (31), (2), 2016, p. 217.

⁶⁹ B. Watermeyer: *Towards a contextual psychology of disability*. p. 185.

⁷⁰ B. Watermeyer: “Claiming loss in disability,” *Disability & Society* (24), (1), 2009, p. 91.

⁷¹ L. Swartz: *Able-Bodied scenes from a curious life*. pp.37-38.

⁷² *Ibid.* pp.37-38.

abnormality subsequently led to disability also being regarded as a type of sickness.⁷³ The medical model is generally individualistic, and solution-focussed, primarily through providing individuals with medical and rehabilitation options for fitting into an existing system considered to be functional. It is underpinned by the idea that disability is caused by illness and entails suffering and some social disadvantage for individuals affected by it.⁷⁴ This ‘personal tragedy’ theory of disability leaves little room for meaningful explanations for society’s responses to, and treatment of, people with impairments, whether such impairments are real or ascribed and later labelled as disability.⁷⁵ Its historical development contributed to the increasing removal of disabled individuals from mainstream society and their placement in institutional medical settings such as hospitals, care homes and the like.⁷⁶

2.2.2 The Social Model

The social model of disability was formulated in opposition to this view. It shifts the emphasis within the disability situation away from an isolated individual experience to a broader societal situation. Davis explains:

Disability is not a minor issue that relates to a relatively small number of unfortunates. It is part of a historically constructed discourse, an ideology of thinking about the body under certain historical circumstances. Thus, disability is not limited to the individual, (the woman in a wheelchair or blind man.) Rather, it is a social process, which intimately involves everyone who has a body.⁷⁷

In this view, issues concerning disability must be understood to influence the entire population as a fundamental element of the human experience. Thus, “disablement” concerns far more than disabled people, it is about challenging oppression in all its forms.⁷⁸ Furthermore, society’s ways of thinking about the body and what is ‘normal’ are historically constructed. As such, the traditional narrative of history has also favoured the ‘normal’ body.⁷⁹ Swartz explains how disability theorists began to illustrate that disablist oppression is

⁷³ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. p. 4.

⁷⁴ C. Thomas: “How is disability understood? An examination of sociological approaches,” *Disability & Society* (19), (6), 2004, p. 570.

⁷⁵ C. Barnes: “Disability Studies: what’s the point?” Notes for a verbal presentation at the ‘Disability Studies: Theory. Policy and Practice’ Conference; University of Lancaster, 4 September 2003.

⁷⁶ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. p. 18.

⁷⁷ L. J. Davis: *Enforcing Normalcy, disability, deafness and the body*. p. 2.

⁷⁸ C. Barnes: “Disability Studies: what’s the point?” Notes for a verbal presentation at the ‘Disability Studies: Theory. Policy and Practice’ Conference; University of Lancaster, 4 September 2003.

⁷⁹ J. T. Dolmage: *Disability Rhetoric*. p. 9.

neither separate from nor qualitatively different than other forms of oppression. Indeed, in their view, it could be considered a racism against disabled people; a patriarchy of a kind.⁸⁰

Following Davis' and similar schools of thought, the notion of 'disability' has, in recent decades, come to be conceptualised as a socio-political construct within a rights-based discourse.⁸¹ This view is broadly known as the social model of disability. The following quote articulates the perspective of Victor Finkelstein, known as a pioneer of the social model:

It is society that disables us. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society.⁸²

This understanding of disability as a socio/political rather than an individual/medical problem has its roots in Britain in the work of disabled people themselves in the early 1960s and is informed by the idea that disability is centrally structured by social oppression, inequality and exclusion.⁸³ Importantly, this model also emphasises self-representation. It allowed disabled people to begin defining themselves and articulating and exploring their own experiences and took the primary authority for doing so away from medical professionals where it had previously resided.⁸⁴

Thus, disability became distinct from impairment and both terms gained further nuances of meaning. Within the social model, impairment, meaning here the physical condition that causes a person to be regarded as 'different,' is no longer regarded as sufficient for disablement to occur. An individual may have an impairment but be fundamentally disabled by societal factors as opposed to the actual functioning of the body. The key to disablement thus lies not in whatever impairment a person may have, but in the social conditions which oppress people with impairments, and the barriers that exist in society which restrict full participation by disabled people.⁸⁵ Disability is defined as "the outcome of social barriers that restrict the activities of people with impairments,"⁸⁶ or, in greater detail: "disadvantage or

⁸⁰ L. Swartz: *Able-Bodied scenes from a curious life*. P. 19.

⁸¹ J. Clapton and J. Fitzgerald: "The History of Disability: A History of 'Otherness': How disable people have been marginalized through the ages and their present struggle for their human rights," *New Renaissance*.

⁸² C. Thomas: "How is disability understood? An examination of sociological approaches," *Disability & Society* (19), (6), 2004, p. 572.

⁸³ C. Barnes: "A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture," in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 4-5.

⁸⁴ L. Swartz: *Able-Bodied scenes from a curious life*. p. 17.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ C. Thomas: "How is disability understood? An examination of sociological approaches," *Disability & Society* (19), (6), 2004, pp. 570-571.

restriction of activity caused by contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities.”⁸⁷

The primary objective of the activists who first employed the social model was to debunk the overwhelmingly accepted starting point that disability is a personal tragedy and that sufferers have to either be fixed or exist as perpetual objects of charity. The primary message of the social model was simple: “society should look in the mirror when seeking the causes of disability, instead of evaluating individuals with impairment against seemingly objective and medical standards developed by mainstream society.”⁸⁸

The early social model authors within both the British and American traditions regarded the problem of ‘disability’ as the outcome of the evolution of western industrial society. The more radical among these argued that people with impairments are disabled primarily through material discrimination. In their view, people with impairments were considered to pose a direct challenge to commonly held western values since they were seen as ‘unfortunate, useless, different and sick.’ They were deemed ‘unfortunate’ for being unable to enjoy the benefits of modern society and regarded as ‘useless’ for being incapable of contributing to the economic good of the community. Their atypical appearance and its established link with illness also seemed to oppose modern western medicine. As a consequence of these factors, they encountered “prejudice which expresses itself in discrimination and oppression.”⁸⁹ This view suggests a deliberate shift in emphasis from the individual to the societal and from dependence to independence, as people with disabilities sought a political voice and became politically active against social forces of disablism. Disability activists, in engaging in identity politics, adopted the strategies used by other social movements lobbying for human and civil rights; and although they remain limited, these strategies have brought gains to the global disabled community.⁹⁰

Impairment and disability are not dichotomous, but describe different places on a continuum, or different aspects of a single experience. It is difficult to determine where impairment ends, and disability starts, but

⁸⁷ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.:) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 7-8.

⁸⁸ M. C. Du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 29.

⁸⁹ P. Hunt, quoted in C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.:) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 7, 10.

⁹⁰ J. Clapton and J. Fitzgerald: “The History of Disability: A History of ‘Otherness’: How disable people have been marginalized through the ages and their present struggle for their human rights,” *New Renaissance*.

such vagueness need not be debilitating. Disability is a complex dialectic of biological, psychological, cultural and socio-political factors, which cannot be extricated except with imprecision.⁹¹

From the 1990s onward, opposition began to be voiced against the social model of disability in Britain. It was most notably critiqued for being both overly simplistic and overly optimistic as well as for its apparent neglect of the individual experiences of disabled people, specifically with reference to gender, minority ethnic status and impairment.⁹² The above quote articulates the perspective of Tom Shakespeare, one of the main critical voices opposed to the social model of disability. By this time the social model had gained some renown, particularly in Britain and had come to be regarded as a principle reference point in disability studies. Shakespeare sharply criticises the social model and proposes its abandonment, claiming that it has outlived its usefulness. Specifically, he maintains that impairment cannot be strictly restricted to the biological and that the social model fails to capture the complexity of disabled people's lives.⁹³ He further asserts that people with impairments are disabled not only by material discrimination but also by cultural prejudice and that the cultural roots of disabled people's oppression in western society pre-dates the emergence of capitalism.⁹⁴

Moreover, Shakespeare points out the dangers of defining disability as oppression as this rests on numerous assumptions. He explains:

Many disabled people face oppression much of the time. But disability cannot be defined as oppression, because to do so creates a dangerous circularity. After all, some disabled people may not be oppressed, or may not always be oppressed. Does that mean that they are not disabled? Are there then two groups, 'disabled people' and 'people with impairment?' What about the ways in which disabled people are disadvantaged by factors which cannot be reduced to oppression?⁹⁵

Barnes conversely argues that the social model in its current form is not limited to material discrimination but is also concerned with the struggle for a cultural environment free from prejudice, stigma and the discrimination associated with impairment or difference. As such, it is a holistic approach that explains specific problems experienced by disabled people in terms of the totality of disabling environments and cultures. He describes the social model of disability as "a tool with which to gain an insight into the disabling tendencies of modern

⁹¹ T. Shakespeare and N. Watson: "The social model of disability: an outdated ideology?" *Research in Social Science and Disability* (2), 2002, p. 24.

⁹² C. Barnes: "A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture," in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. p. 10.

⁹³ Thomas, C.: "How is disability understood? An examination of sociological approaches," *Disability & Society* (19), (6), 2004, pp.

⁹⁴ C. Barnes: "A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture," in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 10-11.

⁹⁵ T. Shakespeare: "Debating Disability," *Journal of Medical Ethics* (34), (1), 2008, pp. 11-12.

society in order to generate policies and practices to facilitate their eradication.”⁹⁶ Moreover, he admits that impairments have clear implications for everyday life and maintains that the social model ought not be considered a denial of such implications. He also recognises that knowledge of impairment-related needs is essential to addressing the various barriers disabled people face. A social model framework makes a conceptual distinction between the biological and the social. However, it does not contend that barrier removal on various levels will eliminate all the problems associated with impairment. Barnes does maintain though that addressing social factors which lead to disablement has the potential to influence, or perhaps even mitigate an individual’s experience of their impairment, particularly where such changes include an effort towards the new cultural environment mentioned above.⁹⁷

In considering the need for societal changes, Swartz explains how social or cultural beliefs about what an activity is are constructed around and through those who have historically had access to the specific activity. These characteristics consequently become regarded as the requirements for that particular activity. Thus, impairment may come to be regarded as a ‘disqualifier’ in certain circumstances since people with impairments have not historically had access to the specific activity. Importantly, this is then unconsciously conceptualised as the ‘fault’ of the impairment rather than the way in which society, or that particular activity is organised. In this context the value of the social model, despite its acknowledged imperfections can be found in the fact that it compels a society to “see discrimination for what it is.”⁹⁸ In summary then, the social model focuses on all things that restrict disabled persons, “ranging from individual prejudice to institutional discrimination, from inaccessible buildings to unusable transport systems, from segregated education to excluding work arrangements, and so on.” Ultimately, although the consequences of these restrictions may be experienced in individual ways they impact disabled persons as a group.⁹⁹

2.2.3 The Relationship between Disability and Impairment

It is evident that current social understandings of disability differentiate between disability and impairment and vary in the measure to which disability is attributed to social and environmental factors. The view that regards disability as entirely social is perhaps the

⁹⁶ C. Barnes: “Disability Studies: what’s the point?” Notes for a verbal presentation at the ‘Disability Studies: Theory, Policy and Practice’ Conference; University of Lancaster, 4 September 2003.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ L. Swartz: *Able-Bodied scenes from a curious life*. pp. 21, 23.

⁹⁹ M. Oliver quoted in M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 28.

most extreme in this continuum. Nevertheless, as explained earlier, several scholars who support the social model did not propagate it as a denial of the individual experience of impairment or a solution for the effects and difficulties of impairment on the daily lives of individuals. A theoretical explanation which neglects the disabling role of society or ignores socio-economic structures, has been described as ‘a mere fantasy.’ Yet mono-linear explanations reducing everything to economic factors equally fail to capture the current situation. Clearly, disability is a complex process involving numerous components.¹⁰⁰ How then is the relationship between impairment and disability to be understood and how can such an understanding influence engagement with disability-related research?

Firstly, it must be recognised that impairment is indeed an element of this narrative, and a focus on societal barriers should not cause impairment to be overlooked. Indeed, experiences of impairment and experiences of disability are of equal importance in the lives of people influenced by them. Acknowledging this is particularly important within the South African context, because the diverse cultural and social backgrounds of individuals will lead to distinct differences in experience while the economic position of the country also means that certain environmental and societal barriers will impact all disabled and impaired people regardless of cultural or social background.

Several scholars have demonstrated the importance of moving away from an entirely disembodied view of disability. Particularly research conducted by Hughes and Paterson reveals how a disembodied perspective on disability has resulted in a skewed relationship between history, culture and the body. This has particular significance for people with disabilities, since the disability experience includes historical, cultural and bodily elements. Moreover, the general formulation of the social model, with limited consideration of the impaired body, has allowed impairment to be considered solely in medical terms since medical discourses are used to name bodily dysfunction. Therefore, reclaiming bodily experiences of impairment has a central role to play in furthering understanding of the holistic lived realities of impairment and disability.¹⁰¹

Similarly, Swartz argues that the good intentions of able-bodied people towards those with impairments are not necessarily helpful. The well-mannered and socially acceptable

¹⁰⁰ T. Shakespeare: “Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?” *Disability & Society* (9), (3), 1994, p. 289.

¹⁰¹ B. Hughes and K. Paterson: “The social model of disability and the disappearing body: Towards a sociology of impairment,” *Disability & Society* (12), (3), 1997, pp. 326, 333. See also: B. Hughes and K. Paterson: “Disability Studies and Phenomenology: The carnal politics of everyday life,” *Disability & Society* (14), (5), 1999, pp. 597-610.

determinations ‘not to notice,’ or ‘look beyond’ impairment at times amounts to an almost laughable attempt at denial of realities all parties concerned know to be true. Thus, recognising the effects of impairment is equally essential for the able-bodied population.¹⁰² Swartz illustrates this when reflecting on his own experiences with impaired people:

Pretending, along with so many other people, that it’s possible ‘not to notice’ and not to react to an impairment feels to me to be like a kind of conspiracy against a reality that disabled people must live with. I know I react to impairment – I notice it. And I don’t want to align myself with [a] kind of denial of the lived experience of disability. [This] to me is very similar to a denial implicit in comments of well-meaning white people who say of their interactions with black people, “I don’t see colour.”¹⁰³

Naturally, finding a balance between disregarding and over-emphasising impairment is a particular challenge in disability studies given the historical development of disability perceptions discussed above. In exploring the relationship between disability and loss Watermeyer engages with the difficulties implicit in the balance between over-emphasis and disregard. He explains how, in trying to combat preconceptions and well-established ideas around disability and loss, disabled people are left with little opportunity to engage with elements of loss they might in fact be experiencing:

A range of self-fulfilling prophecies about the experience of being disabled are often waiting to be confirmed. At both a conscious and unconscious level the position which disabled people may find themselves in is one of defending against negative attributions as a preparatory default. The vision of the disabled person for whom loss is ‘all’ that he or she is or could be is never far away and slips neatly into place unbidden, even unnoticed. Disabled people may consequently be left in a paradoxical and invisible borderland, carrying attributions of ‘losses’ which are not theirs and living with the invisibility or concealment of experiences of loss which are real, unique and human aspects of identity. A constructed mystique of loss is everywhere around disabled people, whilst the flesh and blood reality of disabled life-worlds often remains unarticulated, disguised, dampened down or drowned out beneath the din of stereotypes.¹⁰⁴

As the above discussion illustrates, much the same can be said for the relationship between impairment and disability. Yet, an accurate understanding of individuals’ reality remains at stake in the ways in which society engages with this complex balance between impairment and disability. Thus, remaining silent in the face of such complexity has potentially far reaching consequences. It remains true of disability, as with other minority identities, that "if one does not muster a means to define oneself and one’s experience from

¹⁰² L. Swartz: *Able-Bodied scenes from a curious life*. p. 26.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ B. Watermeyer: “Claiming loss in disability,” *Disability & Society* (24), (1), 2009, pp. 99, 101.

within such a definition will be inflicted from without.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it is critical that people with impairments and disabilities reclaim a means of defining themselves and their experiences on their own terms.

2.2.4 The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

It is evident that global discourses from both medical and societal perspectives have not been silent on conceptions of impairment and disability, and the complex relationship between these two elements. Lourens explains this relationship as a chain reaction, noting that the individual is disabled because of the body, but the body is disabled due to contextual factors such as physical inaccessibility and social exclusion. As such, the body, its context and psychological effects cannot be separated in talking about disability.¹⁰⁶ Du Plessis discusses how the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) of the World Health Organisation (WHO) has also gained influence as a middle ground between the individual and social models of disability in recent years.¹⁰⁷ The ICF was officially endorsed by all 191 member states of the WHO on 22 May 2001.¹⁰⁸ The adoption of its policies followed sharp criticism against the earlier International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH), which the WHO had adopted in 1980. Much of this criticism came from within disability studies.¹⁰⁹

The ICF regards disability as the variation of human functioning caused by a combination of impairment, activity limitations and participation restrictions. These three dimensions are considered co-equals in significance as different facets of disablement. The ICF also recognises that variations in human functioning (i.e. disabilities) are influenced by contextual factors, including environmental factors or aspects of the external world such as social systems and services, and personal factors, such as age, ethnicity, gender, social status, etc.¹¹⁰ Subsequently, the ICF has not been without its own critics, which have made some valuable contributions to this debate.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the ICF “seeks to locate an understanding of disability at the intersection between the biological body and the social and

¹⁰⁵ B. Watermeyer: “Claiming loss in disability,” *Disability & Society* (24), (1), 2009, p. 99.

¹⁰⁶ H. Lourens: “Driving in unheard silence: Disability and the politics of shutting up,” *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2016, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. pp. 32-37.

¹⁰⁸ WHO “International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health,” 2001, <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/> [Accessed 08 October 2018]

¹⁰⁹ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. pp. 33-34.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 34.

¹¹¹ For example: H. Hemmingsson and H. Jonsson: “An occupational perspective on the concept of participation in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health – Some critical remarks,” *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* (59), (5), 2005, pp. 569-576.

institutional structures.”¹¹² Disability thereby becomes a “compound phenomenon in which social and individual elements are both integral.”¹¹³ An ICF framework “recognises both the nature of impairment and the importance of environmental factors.” Therefore it has been considered as a means of beginning to bridge the gap between the medical and social models which had previously been regarded as dichotomies.¹¹⁴

Taken together, how do these arguments impact attempts at understanding disability and articulating such an understanding in the context of the current study? Certainly, a shift from functional definitions of disability that focus on the individual to relative or environmental definitions that regard disability as the result of interactions between a person said to have an impairment and his or her environment is evident.¹¹⁵ When considering the historical development of disability perceptions discussed above, the importance of this shift becomes apparent. It remains equally vital to recognise the development of the social model of disability throughout the past decades. There currently exists numerous variations in emphasis in explanations of disability which can all reasonably be regarded as social explanations or non-individual models of disability, and each of these is useful within certain contexts while posing challenges in others.¹¹⁶ Moreover, it has become clear that the relationship between impairment and disability is both significant and complex. The interactions of the impaired body with social, institutional and cultural factors have the potential to change the meaning and consequences of that impairment. Therefore, it is crucial that experiences of impairment remain an element of understanding the lived realities of impaired people, and that these realities are articulated by the individuals themselves. The ICF adopted by the WHO provides one possible articulation of the relationship between impairment and disability. The current study engages with personal, institutional and societal / cultural elements of impairment and disability as they found expression at Stellenbosch University between 1986 and 2007. As such, the understanding of disability put forward in the ICF is considered a useful starting point for engaging with the interlinked nature of these elements. Thus, the ICF understanding of disability underpins this study.

¹¹² H. Hemmingsson and H. Jonsson: “An occupational perspective on the concept of participation in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health – Some critical remarks,” *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* (59), (5), 2005, p. 570.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ J. McKenzie, G. Mji, and S. Gcaza: “With or without us? An audit of disability research in the southern African region,” *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014. p. 2.

¹¹⁵ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 27.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 29.

3. International Disability Legislation

This section notes some key developments in international legislation as they relate to disabled people. The primary focus is on significant pieces of legislation passed in the last two decades which contributed to an increasingly social model, rights-based legal framework for disability. The historical development of the Disability Rights Movement in South Africa and the important legislative shifts this brought about are discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter. Likewise, legislation related specifically to higher education and disability is dealt with in Chapter 2.

From the 1970s onward, some western countries have enacted legislation that embraces a rights-based discourse and seeks to address issues of social justice and discrimination specifically as they relate to disability. Such legislation also embraces an important conceptual shift from regarding disability as an individualised ‘medical problem’ to considering it rather as revolving around community membership, participation, and access to ordinary societal activities such as employment, education and recreation. Where access was inadequate, difficult or its importance ignored, advocacy processes were initiated to address such situations and promote disabled people's rights, rather than focusing on their ‘otherness.’ Yet, rights-based discourse, although employed as a political strategy, has also become a way of constructing disability in a manner that locks people with disabilities into an identity based upon membership of a minority group. Entitlements thus become contingent upon being able to define oneself as a person with a disability.¹¹⁷ Naturally, this is in itself problematic.

Two important international events occurred in the early 1980s which gave vital momentum to disabled people's struggle for equality in a social model framework. Firstly, the United Nations declared 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons and various conferences and initiatives aimed at drawing attention to disability issues were organised throughout the year. Disabled People International (DPI), the world's first successful cross-disability endeavour led by disabled people themselves was also established in 1981. DPI remains in existence today, with a presence in 139 countries and the main goals of “achieving full participation of all persons with disabilities in the mainstream of life and converting the talk about full and equal participation of persons with disabilities into action.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ J. Clapton and J. Fitzgerald: “The History of Disability: A History of 'Otherness': How disable people have been marginalized through the ages and their present struggle for their human rights,” *New Renaissance*.

¹¹⁸ Disabled People's International website <http://www.disabledpeoplesinternational.org/> [Accessed 08 October 2018]

In line with this shift in the prevailing understanding of disability, various laws have been enacted internationally which aim to pay attention to issues surrounding disability. Disability is also increasingly being recognised as an area which requires attention if international development goals are to be realised. In this regard, James Wolfensohn, (President of the World Bank, 1995-2005) argued that, “if development is about bringing excluded people into society, then disabled people belong in schools, in legislatures, at work, on buses, at the theatre and everywhere else that those who are not disabled take for granted.”¹¹⁹ In fact, he maintained that achieving the Millennium Development Goal of cutting poverty in half by 2015 will be impossible if disabled people are not brought into the mainstream in discourses concerning development and poverty.¹²⁰ This represents an important shift, since disability had previously been seldom, if at all, considered in the field of international development. Indeed, Harris-White argued that “disability is taboo in development, if measured by the quantity of resources committed, or by the quality of analysis and information.”¹²¹

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, (UNCRPD), which entered into international law on 3 May 2008, is another significant step forward in increasing international consciousness of disability matters. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol was adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and was opened for signature on 30 March 2007. There were 82 signatories to the Convention and 44 signatories to the Optional Protocol. This is the highest number of signatories in history to a UN Convention on its opening day.¹²²

The Convention seeks to address discrimination, change perceptions and combat stereotypes and prejudices. It also places an obligation on governments to ensure that they assist people with disabilities in achieving a state of equality in each of their countries.¹²³ Particularly, article 32 of the Convention states that “countries are to provide development

¹¹⁹ G. Mji, M. MacLachlan, N. Melling-Williams and S. Gcaza: “Realising the rights of disabled people in Africa: an introduction to the special issue,” *Disability and Rehabilitation* (31), (1), 2009, p. 2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Harris-White quoted in G. Mji, M. MacLachlan, N. Melling-Williams and S. Gcaza: “Realising the rights of disabled people in Africa: an introduction to the special issue,” *Disability and Rehabilitation* (31), (1), 2009, p. 2.

¹²² Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) United Nations – Disability <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html> [Accessed 08 October 2018]

¹²³ J. McKenzie, G. Mji, and S. Gcaza: “With or without us? An audit of disability research in the southern African region,” *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014. p. 1.

assistance in efforts by developing countries to put into practice the Convention.”¹²⁴ This article places an obligation on people in high income countries to both put the Convention into practice in their own country and ensure that their country assists in it being put into action in low income countries. The Convention has been described as “perhaps the most significant – moral and practical – step toward realising the rights of people with disabilities.”¹²⁵

4. **Disability in Africa**

Among the yardsticks by which to measure a society's respect for human rights, to evaluate the level of its maturity and its generosity of spirit, is by looking at the status that it accords to those members of society who are most vulnerable, disabled people, the senior citizens and its children.¹²⁶

Disability is a vital issue on the African continent, since it is estimated that only between 1 and 2% of the disabled population have access to rehabilitation, care, and education services.¹²⁷ However, in the company of complex and deep-rooted historical issues such as racism, classism and sexism, literature concerning disability remains minimal, if not entirely absent.¹²⁸ As the above quote from the Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997) indicates, attention given to disability matters can also be useful in gaging wider societal developments. Although the global literature on disability remains limited when compared to the amount of attention given to other minority groups, it is even more alarming to note African research's lag in paying attention to this area when compared to disability studies in other countries. The importance of addressing this situation becomes clear when considering that by far the majority of disabled people in the world live in low and middle-income countries, although most of what we know about disability issues across the board comes from wealthier countries.¹²⁹ Furthermore, current disability research in the southern African context is criticised as not being sufficiently solution-focused and not providing material for advocacy because it is pitched at a level that is too generic.¹³⁰ This study situates itself within

¹²⁴ G. Mji, M. MacLachlan, N. Melling-Williams and S. Gcaza: “Realising the rights of disabled people in Africa: an introduction to the special issue,” *Disability and Rehabilitation* (31), (1), 2009, p. 2.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ The Integrated National Disability Strategy White Paper (1997) Preface

¹²⁷ L. Engelbrecht and J. J. de Beer: “Access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution,” *Africa Education Review* (11), (4), 2014, p. 549.

¹²⁸ L. J. Davis: *Enforcing Normalcy, disability, deafness and the body*. pp. 4-5.

¹²⁹ L. Swartz: “Five challenges for disability-related research in sub-Saharan Africa,” *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014. p. 2.

¹³⁰ J. McKenzie, G. Mji, and S. Gcaza: “With or without us? An audit of disability research in the southern African region,” *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014. p. 2.

a specific historical situation and geographic location with the aim of avoiding such generic generalisations.

In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of disability and its importance at various levels on the African continent. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) adopted the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (1999 – 2009) in 1999 to highlight disability matters on the continent. In 2002, the African Union (AU) adopted the Continental Plan of Action for the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities. It sought to formulate and implement national policies, advance legislation and programmes promoting equal participation for persons with disabilities and advocated for inclusive planning and implementation of disability programmes at regional and continental levels.¹³¹

Furthermore, disability-related research in sub-Saharan Africa has also celebrated some successes over the past two decades. These include the founding of the African Network of Evidence to Action on Disability (AfriNead), a network established in 2007, which regularly brings together researchers, activists and other role-players in attempting to develop and support disability-related research in Africa. The *African Journal of Disability* (an AfriNead project) has also gained official status as a recognised journal from the South African Department of Higher Education and Training. Furthermore, the Disability Studies Programme at the University of Cape Town has recently celebrated 20 years of postgraduate training in the field and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana established a centre devoted to disability research, CEDRES. The Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation Studies at Stellenbosch University has also been involved in several research initiatives in a range of African countries.¹³²

4.1 Disability in South Africa

In South Africa specifically, disabled individuals were historically provided for initially by the church, and later by government, primarily in the form of cash transfers or grants. As early as 1665, the church and the Dutch East India Company partnered to provide cash benefits, food, clothes and housing to people in need, including disabled individuals. The Cape Province subsequently enacted the Masters and Servants Act 60 in 1856. This Act,

¹³¹ G. Mji, M. MacLachlan, N. Melling-Williams and S. Gcaza: “Realising the rights of disabled people in Africa: an introduction to the special issue,” *Disability and Rehabilitation* (31), (1), 2009, p. 2.

¹³² L. Swartz: “Five challenges for disability-related research in sub-Saharan Africa,” *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014. p. 1.

alongside related legislation, provided for the care of destitute children, physically-disabled people and the poor.¹³³

The church remained involved in social welfare and, around 1880, assisted in establishing several institutions for disabled people. In the Boer Republics the emphasis was on establishing interventions which would provide poor relief for whites, this included public works programmes for short-term employment.¹³⁴ When the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, social welfare was regarded as a provincial matter, but the national government took over this function from the provinces in 1940, with the exception of Natal. It was made clear that government assistance was to be made as unattractive as possible, though government funded assistance to physically-disabled individuals persisted. In 1946, notably shortly after the end of the Second World War, the first Disability Grants Act was passed.¹³⁵

Within the contemporary South African context, the efforts employed by disabled people to be recognised and gain full participation in society can be traced back through several decades. Under Apartheid, the lived experiences of black and white disabled citizens were vastly different and reflected the general inequalities of the period. Howell et al explain: “The experience of disability for white disabled people was largely about discrimination on the basis of disability (and) the experience of disability for the majority of black disabled people was strongly influenced by the inequalities and oppression of the apartheid system.”¹³⁶

Nevertheless, it remains important to recognise that all disabled people were marginalised due to their disability, and access to fundamental socio-economic rights such as employment, education and appropriate health and welfare services was limited. They were often removed from mainstream society into care homes and lacked economic independence due to unemployment. Additionally, they were afforded little opportunity for self-representation, and thus remained at the mercy of others’ opinions concerning their circumstances. This discrimination and marginalisation is, at least partly, related to the fact that disabled people were often regarded as sick individuals in need of care, rather than as equal citizens with equal rights and responsibilities.¹³⁷

¹³³ M. C. du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 23.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ C. Howell, S. Chalklen, and T. Alberts: “A history of the disability rights movement in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. p. 50.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 48.

Prior to the mid-1880s some smaller organisations and initiatives for disability inclusion existed through the work of disabled people themselves. Among them was the Self-Help Association of Paraplegics in Soweto (SHAP) Through the establishment of SHAP and similar smaller initiatives, disabled activists began to recognise the need to develop a central organisation of disabled people in South Africa. Regardless of their diverse life experiences, these activists “complemented each other (and) were bound together [...] by the fundamental principles of self-representation and the need for dignity.”¹³⁸ This recognition of shared experiences and common needs ultimately led to the establishment of Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) in 1984. As the largest cross-disability organisation in the country led by disabled people, it has played a central role in shaping the endeavours of disabled people in South Africa over the last thirty years.¹³⁹

DPSA as an organisation had both international influences and national roots. The disability activists who were responsible for the formation of DPSA were significantly affected by international developments, but the programme of action DPSA would take up was shaped by the experience of being disabled in South Africa. They felt strongly that overcoming the oppression of the Apartheid system was central to the liberation of disabled people. Furthermore, in order to achieve such liberation, it was necessary to reject a way of understanding disability that disempowered all disabled people by keeping them in positions of dependency and preventing them from being able to express their own needs and rights. Consequently, the struggle of disabled people had to be both a struggle against Apartheid and against how society understood and responded to disability. Their central aims were thus maintaining a resistance against Apartheid, creating a voice for disabled people through self-advocacy and establishing an economic base to provide disabled individuals with a means of employment and, thereby, empowerment.¹⁴⁰

The relationship between DPSA and the Apartheid government was tenuous at best. Due to the international climate, the National Party government did not recognise the United Nation’s 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons. Instead, it declared 1986 the National Year of the Disabled and established the Interdepartmental Co-ordinating Committee on

¹³⁸ Nkeli quoted by C. Howell, S. Chalklen, and T. Alberts: “A history of the disability rights movement in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.:) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. pp. 50-51.

¹³⁹ C. Howell, S. Chalklen, and T. Alberts: “A history of the disability rights movement in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.:) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. p. 48.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 48-49, 54.

Disability (ICCD). The task of the ICCD was to advise the government on policy reform in response to the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (1982). Although DPSA vocalised their opposition to Apartheid and frequently pointed out the links between violence and disability, they also recognised that some engagement with the government was necessary in order to ensure that government programmes were made accessible to all. Thus, following discussions among their members they agreed in principle to participate in the government planned activities for the 1986 National Year of the Disabled.¹⁴¹

However, at a 1986 government organised conference on disability in Bloemfontein, the relationship between DPSA and the National Party only deteriorated. When it became clear that government representatives would not engage around the contradictions inherent in simultaneously promising positive change for disabled people and supporting the Apartheid system, DPSA delegates withdrew en masse. They returned only after government representatives agreed to give them the platform to read a public statement. In this statement they attacked government policy, citing the links between poor health conditions, poverty and disability. The statement is regarded as “capturing on the first real occasion what was wrong.”¹⁴²

Since they deemed addressing general oppression as significant to disability-related oppression, DPSA also built relationships with many other civil society organisations. As early as 1990, DPSA met with the African National Congress (ANC) as the government-in-waiting and encouraged the inclusion of disability issues in the party’s position papers and other documents which would be the foundation of their legislative and policy framework.¹⁴³ This collaboration is apparent from the ANC’s draft Bill of Rights of 1993, which specifically mentions the role of DPSA in framing disabled people’s rights.¹⁴⁴

One of the milestones for the Disability Rights Movement was the adoption of a Disability Rights Charter in 1992.¹⁴⁵ The Charter was the result of a human rights advocacy campaign throughout the country driven by Lawyers for Human Rights and DPSA in partnership. The primary purpose of this campaign was “to mobilise opinion from disabled people themselves, based on their life experiences, to shape national policy and thinking on

¹⁴¹ C. Howell, S. Chalklen, and T. Alberts: “A history of the disability rights movement in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. pp. 54-55.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* p. 55.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 56.

¹⁴⁴ M. C. Du Plessis: *Access to work for disabled persons in South Africa: A rights critique*. p. 30.

¹⁴⁵ The Charter was officially adopted at DPSA’s congress in September 1992.

disability.”¹⁴⁶ The campaign was so successful that it spawned a protest march by disabled persons against the marginalisation and discrimination they experienced. The march was held in Durban and ultimately brought Durban’s traffic system to a complete standstill. An eyewitness involved in the march notes:

The message of disabled people demanding their rights and rejecting charity was carried through the streets and offices. As onlookers gazed in amazement, the Charter of the Rights of Disabled People of South Africa was adopted in the streets of Durban.¹⁴⁷

The Charter was regarded as a living document embodying the “experiences of many disabled people from different sectors of society.” It had the ultimate objective of building a society in which people with disabilities would have their basic needs met and thereby be enabled to live independently in a society free from discrimination, exploitation and abuse.¹⁴⁸

Thus, during the 1980s and early 1990s, the shared experience of disability appears to have broken down some barriers intrinsic in South African society as disability activists from diverse ethnic, racial and social backgrounds came together to share experience and discuss ways of combating a commonly oppressive system. This was achieved through promoting self-advocacy, supporting employment of disabled people and influencing legislation to include disability matters and articulate the importance of disability within a rights-based legal framework.

Furthermore, the post-Apartheid constitution, adopted on 8 May 1996 by the first democratically elected government marked a crucial breakthrough in the efforts of disabled people. The constitution’s recognition that disabled people have been, and continue to be, discriminated against because of their disability, indicates that disability has become an important consideration in new legislation and policy documents that make up South Africa’s legal and policy framework. As a historical moment in the history of the Disability Rights Movement in South Africa, this recognition reflects disabled people’s struggle for equality.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Masutha quoted by C. Howell, S. Chalklen, and T. Alberts: “A history of the disability rights movement in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.>) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. p. 57.

¹⁴⁷ Eyewitness account quoted by quoted by C. Howell, S. Chalklen, and T. Alberts: “A history of the disability rights movement in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.>) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. p. 57.

¹⁴⁸ C. Howell, S. Chalklen, and T. Alberts: “A history of the disability rights movement in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.>) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. p. 58.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 46-47.

Various policies and laws have subsequently come into being that aim to ensure the equality and inclusion of South African citizens with disabilities. Organisations are legally obliged to take active steps to address the disadvantages experienced by people with disabilities and to provide access to services and facilities.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the extent of meaningful change in the actual quality of life of people with disability in Africa remains limited. Even South Africa, despite relative wealth and established national strategies and policies, such as the Integrated National Disability Strategy White Paper (1997), and the Employment Equity Act (1998), has yet to achieve ‘equal rights and dignity’ for disabled people. Although a favourable policy environment and a limited, but supportive, research evidence base has begun to be established, the historical exclusion of people with disabilities from society still persists.¹⁵¹

5. Conclusion

In summary, then, the historical development of contemporary notions of disability and the position of disabled people can be traced back through various processes and ideas in western civilisation. A bias against disability was already evident in Greco-Roman culture, although a limited variety of responses to disability were apparent based on material factors and position in society. More recently, the disability phenomenon has been primarily articulated through the medical and social models of disability. These were initially regarded as dichotomous, but an ICF framework can be considered one attempt at bridging the gap between these models and articulating the complex relationship between impairment and disability as more than an either-or situation. In contemporary research, the importance of considering the body, its societal context and the consequent psychological effects in talking about disability has gradually come to the forefront. Legislation, both internationally and locally, has begun to take increasing cognisance of the disability situation. This can be regarded as a positive first step in widening access and participation for disabled individuals. In South Africa specifically, the history of the Disability Rights Movement is tied to the wider anti-Apartheid struggle during the 1980s and 1990s. Particularly the work of DPSA has been vital in contending for the rights and independence of individuals with disabilities as well as increasing disability awareness within wider society.

¹⁵⁰ L. Engelbrecht and J. J. de Beer: “Access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution,” *Africa Education Review* (11), (4), 2014, p. 545.

¹⁵¹ G. Mji, M. MacLachlan, N. Melling-Williams and S. Gcaza: “Realising the rights of disabled people in Africa: an introduction to the special issue,” *Disability and Rehabilitation* (31), (1), 2009, p. 3.

CHAPTER 2:

INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES TO DISABILITY – FORMALISED WAYS OF INCREASING INCLUSION AND ADDRESSING CONCERNS

One can understand that it is very difficult for an educational institution to refuse a disabled individual's application for admission. But the question arises as to what the university's responsibility is if such a student is admitted. Does it go so far as to mean that it should be made possible for a blind individual, insofar as humanly possible, to compete on equal footing with sighted individuals? The university is certainly not a welfare organisation, yet neither can it be indifferent to the needs of the disabled. I am indeed glad that I do not have to compile a well-formulated policy concerning this issue!¹⁵²

1. Introduction

Howell and Lazarus point out that institutional inclusion for disabled students in higher education (HE) ultimately means the opportunity to pursue and achieve outcomes equivalent to those of their able-bodied peers. This includes the opportunity for equal entry into HE as well as equal participation in all aspects of the teaching and learning environment.¹⁵³ Indeed, it has been argued that the inclusion of young people with disabilities at all levels within education must be treated as a cultural shift.¹⁵⁴ Importantly, this equal participation should not be a question of providing an outlier with the tools to fit into the existing system, but rather an attempt at broadening the system, thereby making it suitable for a wider range of its users.¹⁵⁵ It has also been noted within the international context that “the emphasis on provision for disabled students remains too much on providing students with individual support to access an otherwise inaccessible ‘mainstream’ system, which remains largely unchanged.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Korrespondensie tussen die Direkteur van die Eenheid vir Studentevoorigting en die Registrateur, 23 -31 Julie 1991, in 5/4: Eenheid vir Studentevoorigting Deel 1: 1988-1993, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

¹⁵³ C. Howell and S. Lazarus.: “Access and participation for students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities,” *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 60, 65.

¹⁵⁴ M. Shevlin, M. Kenny, and E. McNeela: “Access routes to higher education for young people with disabilities: A question of chance?,” *Irish Educational Studies* (23), (2), 2004, p. 51.

¹⁵⁵ C. Howell and S. Lazarus.: “Access and participation for students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities,” *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 60, 65.

¹⁵⁶ T. Tinklin, S. Riddell, and A. Wilson: “Policy and provision for disabled students in higher education in Scotland and England: The current state of play,” *Studies in Higher Education* (29), (5), 2004, p. 649.

This chapter discusses this ‘broadening of the system’ within South African HE generally as well as on institutional level at Stellenbosch University (SU) during the period 1986 to 2007 in two main areas, namely policy and institutional support, and service provision. Firstly, the historical development of the South African HE system is considered through an investigation of some relevant legislation, keeping the position of disabled students within this system as the primary focal point. Subsequently, the situation at SU specifically regarding disabled students between 1986 and 2007 is thoroughly examined. This approach recognises that these two elements are intrinsically linked. National trends inform activities on institutional level and institutions in turn also operate within a specific national environment and consequent national constraints. Acknowledgement is given to the complexity of physical disabilities and the consequent variation in the needs of disabled individuals within the context of HE.

In terms of policy, official documents from the SU council and senate are considered alongside national legislation. Materials from the official university archive are also used to examine institutional support and service provision available during this period. A concerted effort was made to obtain statistical evidence regarding disabled student numbers during the period under consideration, but such information proved not to be forthcoming.¹⁵⁷ It should be noted that, as dealing specifically with the institutional approach, social factors that relate to disabled students in HE, such as attitudes towards their capabilities (institutional or otherwise, perceived or real) and the effects of such attitudes on the actual achievements of disabled students fall outside the scope here. These will be dealt with in a Chapter 4, which considers the lived experience of physically disabled students through a small-scale qualitative study.

2. Institutional Support- Higher Education In South Africa: Historical Development, Legislation and Disability

Contemporary South Africa has a large and diverse HE sector. It comprises 21 universities, 17 technicons and more than 100 teacher training colleges. From 2000 onward, some colleges have also merged with universities. The complex and fragmented nature of the HE sector is largely a legacy of Apartheid era educational policy. As with society in general, HE under Apartheid was racially segregated and exclusionary, resulting in different

¹⁵⁷ Inquiries concerning this were made of several members of the administrative staff in various departments, but records appear to be consistently available only from the mid-2000s onward.

universities and colleges for the various ethnic groups. Contemporary HE research generally divides HE institutions into historically advantaged institutions (HAI) and historically disadvantaged institutions (HDI). HAIs were generally reserved for whites only, were well-resourced and offered a wide range of programs. In contrast, HDIs were often located in remote areas, lacked resources and generally focussed heavily on the arts and humanities.¹⁵⁸

The conventional view was that students were young, full-time, academically equipped and able-bodied. Consequently, the HE system, both HAIs and HDIs historically provided minimal opportunities for participation and support to students who failed to fit this mould. Indeed, internal structures of HE institutions could not adequately respond to diverse learning needs and provide equal opportunities for such students. Particularly the accommodation of disabled individuals was not prioritised. Moreover, a major form of educational exclusion under Apartheid revolved around who had access to what kinds of knowledge. Thus, HDIs focussed on the ‘soft’ sciences and black women, for example, were encouraged to pursue disciplines such as home economics.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, disabled students are recognised as having been historically disadvantaged and are currently regarded as an important target group to reach in broadening the social base of the HE system.¹⁶⁰ The notion that HE is not a place for disabled individuals is a long-held belief, and the legacy of this way of thinking is still subtly noticeable. Historically, disabled individuals were either not welcomed in HE or, in the event that they were admitted, were expected to adapt and fit into the existing system.¹⁶¹ Accordingly, the status of disabled people has long been regarded as an area of special concern in education.¹⁶²

Higher education offers a range of advantages, and for many young people going to university constitutes a big step in the process of forming an independent personal and social identity.¹⁶³ For disabled students, participation in HE is a matter of equal opportunity and empowerment. When disabled people enter HE, they are taking up an opportunity to increase

¹⁵⁸ Y. Sayed: “Educational Exclusion and Inclusion in Higher Education in South Africa: Creating a new National Framework/Consensus,” in M. Tight: (ed.) *International Perspectives on Higher Education Research Vol 2: Access and Exclusion*, pp. 86-87.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 87.

¹⁶⁰ C. Howell: “Disabled students and higher education in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. p. 164.

¹⁶¹ S. Ntombela: “Inclusive education and training in South African higher education: Mapping the experiences of a student with physical disability at university,” *Africa Education Review* (10), (3), 2013, p. 484.

¹⁶² C. Howell: “Disabled students and higher education in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider and M. Priestly (eds.) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*. p. 149.

¹⁶³ J. Goode: “‘Managing’ disability: Early experiences of university students with disabilities,” *Disability & Society* (22), (1), 2007, p. 41.

their knowledge, develop their social skills, obtain good qualifications and expose themselves to debate and discussion.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, a university education has the potential to aid students with disabilities in eradicating past exclusions and gaining full participation in society through increasing knowledge and skills as well as broadening access to information. University also has the ability to help students “challenge negative perceptions of their impairment and alter their self-concept, particularly in relation to their confidence, wellbeing, and empowerment and through social capital formation.”¹⁶⁵ Therefore, the relative importance of not only getting a tertiary qualification, but also having the life experience of being a student at university, reflects a need to scrutinise how HE fares in making this possible for disabled students.

The South African HE system underwent a significant series of policy changes following the advent of democracy. This began with the publication of the National Commission for Higher Education Report in 1996. The Ministry of Education responded to this report in the Green and White Papers. This, in turn, resulted in the Bill on Higher Education and the Higher Education Act (1997) along with several subsequent policy documents. These policy developments reflect an attempt to create a unified national system and were underpinned by a commitment to overcome the previous exclusion of the majority of the population from full participation in HE.¹⁶⁶

Particularly the “Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education” (1997) and the Higher Education Act (1997) forced HE institutions to address various sites of disadvantage that prevented a number of students from full participation and make the inclusion of such previously excluded students a deliberate priority.¹⁶⁷ “Education White Paper 3” views the transformation of HE as part of the national

¹⁶⁴ M. Fuller, M. Healey, A. Bradley and T. Hall: “Barriers to learning: a systematic study of the experience of disabled students in one university,” *Studies in Higher Education* (29), (3), 2004, p. 303.

¹⁶⁵ M. Papisotiriou, and J. Windle: “The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students,” *Disability & Society* (27), (7), 2012, pp. 935-936.

¹⁶⁶ Y. Sayed: “Educational Exclusion and Inclusion in Higher Education in South Africa: Creating a new National Framework/Consensus,” in M. Tight (ed.): *International Perspectives on Higher Education Research Vol 2: Access and Exclusion*, pp. 83,88-89.

¹⁶⁷ S. Ntombela: “Inclusive education and training in South African higher education: Mapping the experiences of a student with physical disability at university,” *Africa Education Review* (10), (3), p. 484.

process of economic, political and social changes that seek to bring about equity in democratic South Africa.¹⁶⁸

In terms of national policy, institutions of higher education are currently expected to implement a policy of supporting disabled students. General national anti-discrimination legislation and policy inform the formulation of specific policies that protect disabled students. The standards underlying such policies include human rights, respect for diversity, equal opportunity and fair advantage for people who qualify for HE courses and programmes.¹⁶⁹ “White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System” (2001) further states that all HE institutions “will be required to ensure that there is appropriate physical access for physically disabled learners.”¹⁷⁰

Perhaps one of the most significant impacts of increased attention to disability issues in the HE environment is that institutions are recognising that disability “cannot remain closed within a student services arena but must become part of the mainstream learning and teaching debate.”¹⁷¹ Disability issues are increasingly appearing not only in institutional teaching and learning policies, but also in discussions at departmental and course level. This is vital, since the progress of students with disabilities in HE is, to a large degree, affected by the attitudes and willingness of staff on various levels.¹⁷²

Matshedisho points out that most countries which currently provide disability support view disability discrimination as a rights issue. In such countries, disabled students are protected by laws and policies that outlaw discrimination on the basis of disability.¹⁷³ South Africa in particular has a strong, rights-based, anti-discrimination legal framework in place to prevent unfair discrimination. The South African Constitution’s prohibition of discrimination

¹⁶⁸ Y. Sayed: “Educational Exclusion and Inclusion in Higher Education in South Africa: Creating a new National Framework/Consensus,” in M. Tight (ed.): *International Perspectives on Higher Education Research Vol 2: Access and Exclusion*, p. 83.

¹⁶⁹ K. R. Matshedisho: “Access to higher education for disabled students in South Africa: A contradictory conjuncture of benevolence, rights and the social model of disability,” *Disability & Society* (22), (7), 2007, p. 685.

¹⁷⁰ C. Howell and S. Lazarus.: “Access and participation for students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities,” *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 68-69.

¹⁷¹ M. Adams and P. Brown quoted in M. Fuller, M. Healey, A. Bradley and T. Hall: “Barriers to learning: a systematic study of the experience of disabled students in one university,” *Studies in Higher Education* (29), (3), 2004, p. 305.

¹⁷² M. Fuller, M. Healey, A. Bradley and T. Hall: “Barriers to learning: a systematic study of the experience of disabled students in one university,” *Studies in Higher Education* (29), (3), 2004, pp. 305-306.

¹⁷³ K. R. Matshedisho: “Experiences of disabled students in South Africa: Extending the thinking behind disability support,” *South African Journal of Higher Education SAJHE* (24), (5), 2010, p. 734.

on the basis of disability means that institutions cannot refuse a student entry merely due to the existence of an impairment.¹⁷⁴

While this is positive, some problems arise with the political, rights-based paradigm. Firstly, such legal protections are difficult to implement and monitor.¹⁷⁵ Anecdotal evidence suggests that despite the South African Constitution's prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability, institutions continue to influence the level and scope of participation by disabled students, especially at the programme level. However, care is taken to ensure that this is regarded not as discrimination, but rather the result of the institution's 'reasonable assessment' of an individual's perceived capabilities and limitations.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, although official legislation provides support for disabled students within the diversity rights framework, these support structures are not yet an integrated national effort.¹⁷⁷ All in all, contemporary disabled individuals remain less likely to pursue HE when compared with their able-bodied peers.¹⁷⁸ Nationally, about 30% of South Africans with disabilities still have no education at all, while a mere 2.8% seem to have access to HE.¹⁷⁹

An example of the above-mentioned lack of an integrated national effort can be found in "White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System" (2001). Where it mentions the education of disabled students in HE it repeats and summarises the National Plan for Higher Education (2001). It reads: "The National Plan for Higher Education [. . .] commits our higher education institutions to increasing the access of learners with special education needs." This indicates that the ministry expects institutions themselves to indicate the strategies and steps, with the relevant time-frames, they intend to implement to increase enrolment of disabled individuals in their individual institutional plans.¹⁸⁰ Thus, academic institutions have primarily been providing support services for

¹⁷⁴ C. Howell: "Disabled students and higher education in South Africa," in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider, and M. Priestly (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, p. 167.

¹⁷⁵ K. R. Matshediso: "Experiences of disabled students in South Africa: Extending the thinking behind disability support," *South African Journal of Higher Education SAJHE* (24), (5), 2010, p. 734.

¹⁷⁶ C. Howell: "Disabled students and higher education in South Africa," in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider, and M. Priestly (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, p. 167.

¹⁷⁷ K. R. Matshediso: "Access to higher education for disabled students in South Africa: A contradictory conjuncture of benevolence, rights and the social model of disability," *Disability & Society* (22), (7), 2007, p. 686.

¹⁷⁸ E. E. Getzel and C. A. Thoma: "Experiences of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings," *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals* (31), (2), 2008, p. 77.

¹⁷⁹ L. Engelbrecht and J. J. de Beer: "Access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution," *Africa Education Review* (11), (4), 2014, pp. 544-545.

¹⁸⁰ K. R. Matshediso: "Experiences of disabled students in South Africa: Extending the thinking behind disability support," *South African Journal of Higher Education SAJHE* (24), (5), 2010, p. 735.

disabled students at the institutions' discretion and within limited means.¹⁸¹ This leaves room for a wide margin of interpretation and consequent differentiation between institutions or even among various faculties and departments within the same institution. The lack of a clear and precise code of practice to assist HE institutions in widening access and participation for students with disabilities has also been regarded as a key reason why HE institutions have remained reactive rather than anticipatory with regards to the needs of these students.¹⁸²

Engelbrecht and de Beer further emphasise this differentiation in stating that levels of awareness regarding disability vary considerably, even between departments in the same university. They maintain that this reflects a lack of embedded institutional support for students with disabilities.¹⁸³ Importantly, this is by no means a phenomenon limited to South Africa or the developing world. In a study conducted at one higher education institution in the UK, Vickerman and Blundell also noted that institutional policies and provisions regarding disability varied greatly between academic departments at the same institution.¹⁸⁴

Internationally, the needs and rights of disabled students as learners in HE have officially been recognised through legislation concerning the deliberate integration of disabled individuals in a number of countries, including Australia, the USA and Israel. Nevertheless, legislation at times appears to be poorly constructed and inadequate in and of itself. For example, while the Australian government's Disability Discrimination Act (1992) "makes it unlawful to exclude people with a disability," it does not provide detailed information on practices for supporting disabled students in achieving positive provision from the university community. It also fails to specify what the 'reasonable support' to be provided for disabled students might entail.¹⁸⁵

These factors illustrate that even within a strong, rights-based paradigm some distance remains between 'formal' rights and 'real' rights. Therefore, regarding formal rights as an automatic safeguard against discrimination and exclusion disregards the difficulties in

¹⁸¹ K. R. Matshediso: "Access to higher education for disabled students in South Africa: A contradictory conjuncture of benevolence, rights and the social model of disability," *Disability & Society* (22), (7), 2007, pp. 685-686.

¹⁸² E. Moswela, and S. Mukhopadhyay: "Asking for too much? The voices of students with disabilities in Botswana," *Disability & Society* (26), (3), 2011, p. 309.

¹⁸³ L. Engelbrecht and J. J. de Beer: "Access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution," *Africa Education Review* (11), (4), 2014, p. 548.

¹⁸⁴ P. Vickerman and M. Blundell: "Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education," *Disability & Society* (25), (1), 2010, p. 29.

¹⁸⁵ M. Fuller, M. Healey, A. Bradley and T. Hall: "Barriers to learning: a systematic study of the experience of disabled students in one university," *Studies in Higher Education* (29), (3), 2004, p. 304.

ensuring that such rights are upheld.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, an accurate understanding of disability and the capabilities of disabled students generally remains lacking within HE institutions. This results in inadequate practice when dealing with relevant issues, which often persists beneath seemingly inclusive policies.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, as Clapton and Fitzgerald point out, legislation alone also leaves the conceptual barrier between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ unchallenged. Thus, while one may have recognised rights, such as inclusion in education legislatively guaranteed, ‘community,’ which cannot be legislated for, remains elusive.¹⁸⁸

Considering these facts, one might question the legitimacy of the contribution of ‘formal’ rights, especially in areas like disability, where the process of translating them into ‘real’ rights is difficult and slow. In understanding the seeming contradiction between recognising existing changes to policy while simultaneously acknowledging its limitations and the remaining distance between ‘formal’ and ‘real’ rights it is essential to remember how relatively recent a worldwide focus on disability issues is.

In the UK prior to 1993, higher education was largely inaccessible to disabled people with significant impairments, and any adjustments made were at the good will of staff and students. Although a few institutions had limited provision for disabled students, such initiatives were the exception rather than the rule, and the general assumption was that university was not the place for disabled people.¹⁸⁹ In South Africa, the situation regarding disabled individuals within HE is further historically complicated by the Apartheid era education policy discussed above.¹⁹⁰

Although the historical racial segregation of education is not directly related to disability, it may account in part for the delay in giving attention specifically to disability matters. With South Africa’s democratic transition, disability-related affairs seem to have remained largely secondary to more pressing and large-scale concerns surrounding issues of race and class. As recently as 1997, HE largely remained out of reach for the majority of

¹⁸⁶ K. R. Matshediso: “Experiences of disabled students in South Africa: Extending the thinking behind disability support,” *South African Journal of Higher Education SAJHE* (24), (5), 2010, p. 734.

¹⁸⁷ M. Shevlin, M. Kenny, and E. McNeela: “Access routes to higher education for young people with disabilities: A question of chance?,” *Irish Educational Studies* (23), (2), 2004, pp. 38-39.

¹⁸⁸ J. Clapton and J. Fitzgerald: “The History of Disability: A History of ‘Otherness’: How disable people have been marginalized through the ages and their present struggle for their human rights,” *New Renaissance*.

¹⁸⁹ S. Riddell, T. Tinklin, and A. Wilson: “New Labour, Social Justice and Disabled Students in Higher Education,” *British Educational Research Journal* (31), (5), Education Policy and Social Justice, 2005, p. 626.

¹⁹⁰ For more detail regarding HE under the Apartheid System see: Bunting, I.: “The Higher Education Landscape Under Apartheid,” pp.35-52. in Cloete, N. et al (eds.): *Transformation in Higher Education, Global Pressures and Local Realities*.

disabled South Africans.¹⁹¹ Even the Higher Education Act of 1997 makes no specific mention of disabled students in HE, despite dealing with several historical sites of disadvantage. Disability is only mentioned in relation to the establishment of the Council of Higher Education (CHE). The Act states that in selection of members of the CHE, as far as possible, attention will be given to the representation of race and disability. Although the general anti-discrimination focus of the Act could also be applied to disability, it is not specifically addressed in any other, more detailed manner.¹⁹² Furthermore, disabled students in South Africa, particularly black disabled students, have historically been – and continue to be – vulnerable to exclusion from the education system, including HE. Students with disabilities remain similarly under-represented internationally.¹⁹³ Thus, raising the profile of disability issues and developing strategies to address them through partnerships between government, HE and civil society is a process largely in its infancy.¹⁹⁴

In summary then, the historical development of the South African HE sector was profoundly influenced by Apartheid era educational policy. Following the advent of democracy, national legislation has attempted to address several sites of historical disadvantage, including disability. Nevertheless, disabled students remain a relatively new phenomenon within HE both nationally and internationally. Legislation provides a starting point in the process of change yet proves insufficient in and of itself for ensuring equity, increased access, support and inclusion. Moswela and Mukhopadhyay argue that policy and legislation alone remains insufficient to effect change, since, on national scale, South Africa's legislative strategy on disability since 1997 has not significantly improved access and participation in HE for students with disabilities. They maintain that it ought to be matched by several other interventions, including the education and training of staff to respond proactively to the diverse needs of the disabled students they support.¹⁹⁵ Howell and Lazarus summarise the historical and contemporary institutional barriers faced by disabled students in

¹⁹¹ C. Howell and S. Lazarus.: "Access and participation for students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities," *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, p. 62.

¹⁹² Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, p. 10.

¹⁹³ See for example: M. Shevlin, M. Kenny, and E. McNeela: "Access routes to higher education for young people with disabilities: A question of chance?," *Irish Educational Studies* (23), (2), 2004, pp. 37-53. and P. Vickerman, and M. Blundell: "Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education," *Disability & Society* (25), (1), 2010, pp. 21-32.

¹⁹⁴ T. Lorenzo, M. Toni and M. Priestly: "Developing a Disability Studies programme: engaging activism and academia for social change," in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider, and M. Priestly (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, pp. 179-180.

¹⁹⁵ E. Moswela and S. Mukhopadhyay: "Asking for too much? The voices of students with disabilities in Botswana," *Disability & Society* (26), (3), 2011, p. 309.

HE as primarily related to academic curricula, the physical and organisational environment, the provision of teaching and learning support and the lack of general curriculum flexibility within HE.¹⁹⁶ According to Vickerman and Blundell, addressing these concerns requires a complex strategy of reviewing practices and procedures as well as actively consulting disabled people in working towards a HE system which is more inclusive and accessible as a whole.¹⁹⁷

In this context, gaining access to HE remains merely the first step. Legislation supporting disabled students and promises of non-discriminatory admission (along with the necessary policies and practices to ensure this) is an important initial step, but such promises fall flat when not followed through with the types of support which allows equal participation, both on a national and an institutional level.¹⁹⁸ The historic responses of HE institutions have largely remained rooted in a paradigm which places disabled students as ‘educational problems’ outside the orbit of responsibility of the central teaching and learning structures. In a sense, this separation of disability support from general student support highlights the necessity and complexity thereof. However, this approach also tends to ignore the possibility for the interrogation of teaching and learning methods to enable the inclusion of learners with diverse needs. Disability support could thus be viewed as a voluntary and non-core activity of the general faculty in South African universities. Furthermore, it is argued that adequate service provision for the disabled community necessitates that such services be viewed as the policy and budgetary responsibility of the structures managing the entire curricular base.¹⁹⁹

Consequently, the question arises as to which types of institutional support and services were available to disabled students at SU to facilitate equal participation, specifically during the years 1986-2007. These support structures and services will now be discussed in detail. It should be noted that the institutional approach, as reflected through primarily archival material, is discussed here. Disabled students’ experiences of the institutional support

¹⁹⁶ C. Howell and S. Lazarus.: “Access and participation for students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities,” *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, p. 62.

¹⁹⁷ P. Vickerman and M. Blundell: “Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education,” *Disability & Society* (25), (1), 2010, p. 26.

¹⁹⁸ C. Howell and S. Lazarus.: “Access and participation for students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities,” *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 60, 65.

¹⁹⁹ K. R. Matshediso: “Experiences of disabled students in South Africa: Extending the thinking behind disability support,” *South African Journal of Higher Education SAJHE* (24), (5), 2010, p. 736-737.

environment as reflected through a small-scale qualitative study will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3. Institutional Support- Stellenbosch University:

Policy, Support and Service Provision

This section considers the situation regarding disabled students specifically at Stellenbosch University (SU), a historically advantaged institution, during the years 1986-2007. In an investigation of archival material, it quickly becomes apparent that there was no single designated unit or department responsible for addressing disability matters during this period. Concerns and requests were primarily addressed on an individual and case by case basis. Nevertheless, a gradual yet discernible move towards increased formalisation, standardisation and centralisation is evident in disability support provision.

The period of 1986-2007 can be subdivided into three chronological phases according to the ways in which disability-related concerns were addressed and the nature of support provision. The first of these, 1986-1993, is marked by a more informal approach to support provision. Thereafter, between 1994 and 1997, the situation surrounding disabled students on campus was formally investigated and some policies and standardised approaches were put in place. Finally, from 1998 to 2007 a number of structures and systems were organised which aided the formalisation of support provision and processes leading up to the ultimate establishment of the Disability Unit (also known as the Unit for Students with Special Learning Needs / Disabilities) in 2007.

Before discussing each of these phases in detail two key points must be considered. Firstly, these periods are not completely clear-cut. It would be erroneous to conclude from this discussion that absolutely no support was available prior to the implementation of the structures and processes discussed here. These divisions only serve to illustrate how the process became more formalised over time, but it should be kept in mind that some disabled students, although few in number, succeeded in HE at SU and other HE institutions even prior to the period currently under consideration. Secondly, the institutional support and service provision discussed in this section refers to the general campus-wide situation regarding disabled students, bearing in mind that there likely could have been special individual cases with different circumstances.

3.1 1986-1993: Informal and case-by-case service provision

During this first phase, information on institutional support provision for disabled students is scarce. Initially, there are no official policies or procedures in place. Additionally, disability matters do not seem to form part of any particular unit or department's official job description. Students with disabilities and their possible concerns or needs are also not addressed at all in the official university yearbook. The topic remained entirely unmentioned in both the yearbook sections on admission and examination regulations. Furthermore, promotional material generally distributed to prospective first-year students containing campus information such as a map and details about campus services for students, among these campus health, counselling and security services seemingly included little to no information on disability or related concerns. This indicates a clear disconnect in the dissemination of information about disability matters during this first phase, both to prospective and current disabled students, and to the campus community at large concerning accessibility matters. International research on disabled students within the HE environment reported a similar gap in the availability of information regarding current services the institution made available.²⁰⁰

However, the aforementioned facts should not be taken to mean, as might first be assumed, that no support whatsoever was available. Archival material indicates that disability matters were primarily addressed by the Centre for Psychological Services and Training, although dealing with students with disabilities is never mentioned as forming a part of their official mandate. The centre was officially established in 1987 through a process of restructuring and consolidation of other already existing units / departments at SU. At the time of its establishment, the centre consisted of four cooperative but independent units, 1) Unit for Student Counselling, 2) Unit for Counselling Psychology, 3) Unit for Educational Psychology and 4) Unit for Clinical Psychology. The centre as a whole functioned as an independent entity with academic status within the larger university structure. It operated under the leadership of the vice-rector of academics at SU.²⁰¹ The Unit for Student Counselling was first founded in 1965 as the Bureau for Student Counselling. The Unit for Counselling Psychology had previously been known as the Centre for Psychological Services

²⁰⁰ See, for example: J. Goode: "Managing' disability: Early experiences of university students with disabilities," *Disability & Society* (22), (1), 2007, pp. 35–37.

²⁰¹ Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1988, Deel1: Algemeen, pp. 144-145. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

and was established on 1 January 1982.²⁰² The Unit for Educational Psychology was originally launched as the Clinic for Child and Parent Guidance which began functioning autonomously as part of SU on 1 July 1982.²⁰³ Finally, the Unit for Clinical Psychology came into existence in April 1987 along with the establishment of the Centre for Psychological Services and Training itself. Their main functions included further training, service delivery and research development in the fields of clinical, educational and counselling psychology. As already mentioned disability did not officially form part of their mandate.²⁰⁴

Nevertheless, it is evident that they were involved in arranging accommodations and increasing awareness regarding disability at SU. This was primarily related to blind and partially sighted students. SU has a particularly long history of accommodating students with blindness and various levels of visual impairment. They are by far the most discussed group in disability-related documentation. This is possibly due to both the number of blind and visually impaired students at SU, relative to other types of disability, as well as the fact that blindness and visual impairment have specific consequences in terms of access to information in the HE environment. During this first phase, predominantly the Unit for Student Counselling attempted to shed light on the challenges these students experienced at SU and suggested processes the university could implement to address the situation. For example, in September 1988, the Unit for Student Counselling discussed the difficulties of one partially sighted student with the Registrar, specifically pointing out how these obstacles negatively affected the student's academic progress. The Registrar, in turn, brought this situation before the Executive Committee of the SU Council. This ultimately led to changes concerning the readmission procedure for all visually impaired students. It was decided that should such students fail to meet the readmission requirements after their first year of study due to factors related to struggles encountered as a result of their disability rather than their personal academic performance, they would not merely be disqualified from further study. Instead, a separate motivation letter, supported by the Unit for Student Counselling, could be submitted to the readmission committee before a final decision regarding their academic future was

²⁰² Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1983, Deel1: Algemeen, p. 89. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁰³ Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1986, Deel1: Algemeen, p. 102. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁰⁴ Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1988, Deel1: Algemeen, pp.142-145. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

made. This concession was approved by the executive committee of the SU council on 4 October 1988.²⁰⁵

Similarly, in July 1991, the Unit for Student Counselling discussed specific needs of blind and partially sighted students with the registrar. These issues were brought under the unit's attention by the students themselves. A number of important focal points arose from this discussion. Firstly, the need for the university to develop official policy regarding disability matters going forward was emphasised. Particularly the extent of the university's responsibility towards disabled students needed to be clearly defined. Notwithstanding a general willingness on the part of both university administration and academic staff to assist such students, several specific problems persisted.²⁰⁶

These were related to the receiving and processing of academic material as well as getting around on campus. Seven central suggestions were put forward for improving the situation. In terms of academic material, few official services appear to be available at this point. Blind and partially sighted students objected to regularly receiving essential academic materials for the first time late in the academic year. Moreover, a connection between lecturers, blind students and the various braille libraries in the country was lacking, and no braille printing or processing facilities were available at the university. Accessing information in the library also proved a continuous challenge, especially considering that this was prior to the modern computerised era. Besides acquiring equipment, establishing a central contact person and a volunteer reading project involving reading material onto tape at short notice for blind and partially sighted students was suggested as methods of addressing these concerns.²⁰⁷

In terms of acquiring equipment some requests could not be satisfied immediately due to resource constraints. However, this changed largely thanks to a donation from the EJ Lombardi Trust. This enabled the university to install the EJ Lombardi Braille Work Station for blind and partially sighted students in 1992 as part of the university's Computer-Aided Education Centre in the Chamber of Mines Building. The work station was open 24/7 and housed both computer and printing facilities that were accessible to visually impaired and

²⁰⁵ Korrespondensie tussen die Direkteur van die Eenheid vir Studentevoorigting en die Registrateur, September – Oktober 1988, in 5/4: Eenheid vir Studentevoorigting Deel 1: 1988-1993, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁰⁶ Korrespondensie tussen die Direkteur van die Eenheid vir Studentevoorigting en die Registrateur, 23 -31 Julie 1991, in 5/4: Eenheid vir Studentevoorigting Deel 1: 1988-1993, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

blind students. These facilities allowed such students to convert their academic materials into braille and large print independently, as well as print in braille themselves, while in the past such materials had to be sent to external organisations, making the entire process far more time-consuming.²⁰⁸ At the inauguration of the EJ Lombardi Braille Work Station in 1993, it was reported that “the university now has the best post-school computer-based teaching facilities for blind and visually impaired students in the Western Cape.”²⁰⁹ Already in September 1992, SU management received inquiries regarding the possibility that these facilities could be made available for use to blind and partially sighted individuals within the wider community. The matter was subsequently investigated further, but the conclusion remains unclear.²¹⁰

In later years the work station was expanded, following the increased number of students at SU who required such services. In 2001, these facilities moved to HUMARGA, the computer user area in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences building and became known as the Lombardi Braille Centre, employing several full-time staff members primarily responsible for the academic material of blind and partially sighted students. An increased number of computers with accessibility software like screen readers and magnification programs were also made available. This service is currently known as the Braille Office and is still partially funded by the Lombardi Trust as well as the Carl & Emily Fuchs Foundation. It currently functions under the direction of the Disability Unit.²¹¹

Regarding a volunteer reading project, USKOR (Universiteit van Stellenbosch se Klinieke Organisasie or Stellenbosch University Clinical Organisation)²¹² already provided such a service in the early 1990s. USKOR was established in 1964 as a volunteer student organisation. The original driving force behind the organisation was to provide affordable medical care and other community services to the poorer districts of Stellenbosch, thus the name USKOR. In 1974, USKOR became the first registered welfare organisation at an

²⁰⁸ “Braille facility for visually impaired Maties,” *Matieland* 3, 1993, p. 11.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Notule van die Rektorsvergadering, 21 September 1992. in 12R/1/4: Rektorsvergadering, 1991 – 1993, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²¹¹ Disability Unit Information Document, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, Available Online: <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/learning-teaching/student-affairs/cscd/Documents/Disability%20Unit/US%20Disability%20Unit-FINAL-09FEB2016.pdf> (Accessed: 30 July 2018)

²¹² Known today as Maties Community Service

Afrikaans University.²¹³ Their operations gradually expanded to include other needs on and around campus. It remains unclear exactly when they became involved in helping organise information provision in the form of tape readings for the blind, but this service appears to have been available at least from 1990 onwards.²¹⁴ By all indications, USKOR was prominently involved in service provision to disabled students during this period. Indeed, following a discussion of the above-mentioned concerns from blind and partially sighted students, the Executive Committee of the Senate suggested that USKOR undertake the role of coordinating such specific services for the visually impaired community. Whether or not they ultimately took up this larger role is uncertain. Nevertheless, as the complaints discussed above indicate, few disabled students seemed to be aware of USKOR's reading service at the time. Indeed, the organiser of the project indicated that volunteers felt unutilised by the student community and questioned the contribution of the entire program.²¹⁵ Thereby, a clear disconnect in the dissemination of information once more becomes apparent.

Concerning issues outside the classroom, the Unit for Student Counselling emphasised the importance of blind and partially sighted students having single rooms as a necessity. This was primarily due to the noise generated by their braille typewriters and voice recorders while studying. University accommodation coordinators appear to have taken this concern to heart and students were subsequently offered the choice of a single room or shared accommodation.²¹⁶

The accessibility of the physical campus environment also received some attention during this first phase. Partially sighted students, for instance, requested that some physical barriers be painted a brighter colour so that they become easier to avoid.²¹⁷ Environmental changes were primarily addressed by Facilities Management.²¹⁸ They undertook several projects to increase accessibility. A report from 10 August 1988 indicates, for example, that the sum of R8, 100 was allocated from the subsidiary fund for fixed assets to construct ramps at various campus buildings and specifically to improve the accessibility of the G.G. Cilliers

²¹³ Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1983, Deel1: Algemeen, p. 92. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²¹⁴ Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1993, Deel1: Algemeen, p. 191. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²¹⁵ Korrespondensie tussen die Direkteur van die Eenheid vir Studentevoorigting en die Registrateur, 23 -31 Julie 1991. in 5/4: Eenheid vir Studentevoorigting Deel 1: 1988-1993, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Also known as the Physical Planning Committee.

Building.²¹⁹ Between 1994 and 1997, facilities management also had some representatives on a committee appointed by the rector to investigate the accommodation of persons with disabilities on campus and worked closely together with them to further improve the accessibility of facilities on campus.

3.2 1994-1997: The rector's investigation committee

In July 1994, SU appointed an *ad hoc* committee to investigate the accommodation of persons with disabilities on campus. This can be regarded as a first official step to understanding and formalising the provisions and services for disabled students. The situation concerning disabled students grew to be an increasing focus point for SU management from November 1993 onward. This is due to both an increase in enrolment of disabled students and students with increasingly severe disabilities seeking admission. At the beginning of this investigation, a total of 42 students were recorded as having some form of disability, including blindness, deafness, and varying degrees of cerebral palsy and partial sight.²²⁰

Establishing a committee to explore the situation surrounding disabled students was first proposed on 13 June 1994 at a meeting of the rector's daily management team. At this time, Prof Andreas van Wyk was Rector and Vice-Chancellor at SU. The committee originally had the task of investigating the problems experienced by paraplegic and quadriplegic students on campus.²²¹ However, at their first meeting on 1 September 1994 the investigation was expanded to considering the position of disabled students on campus in general.

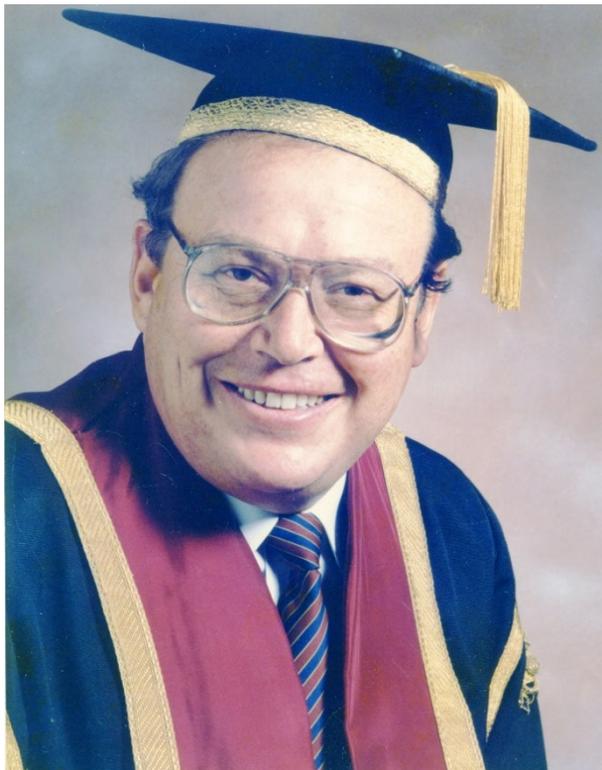
The committee was compiled by the rector's daily management team and consisted of a total of 17 people. Each individual was specifically selected to share their expertise and experience in relation to disability with SU management structures. The committee was comprised of representatives from a variety of SU departments interested or involved in the accommodations of disabled students in various ways up until this point. This included, among others, USKOR, the finance department, facilities management, student affairs, campus accommodation and sport. Advice concerning the handling of disability matters was

²¹⁹ Also known as the Education Building, housing the Faculty of Education
Aanbevelingsrapport van die Fisiese Beplanningskomitee. in 4/88a+: Notule van die gewone vergadering van die Universiteitsraad, 10 Augustus 1988, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²²⁰ Akkomodering van Gestremdes op die Kampus: Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 1 September 1994. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²²¹ Notule van die Rektor se Dagbestuur Vergadering, 13 Junie 1994. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

also sought from other universities and disability experts from outside the HE environment were consulted. This included representatives from the Centre for Disability Care and Rehabilitation.²²² The centre was established under the Medical Faculty as an interdisciplinary unit with the aim of improving disabled individuals' quality of life through rehabilitation, education and training, and preparation for the job market.²²³ The committee concerning the accommodation of persons with disabilities on campus met regularly between 1994 and 1997, discussing the then current situation concerning disabled students and measures for improvement that could be put into practice.



*Figure 1: Prof Andreas van Wyk,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor at SU, 1993-2001*

For the purposes of the committee's inquiry, disability was defined as: "a condition through which a person is restricted or prevented from realising their full potential as a result of limiting factors like sight or hearing problems or physical factors that limit their mobility." This definition was proposed by a group of students in April 1994. It is unclear whether this group included disabled individuals and what their exact connection to the investigation committee was. Nevertheless, the committee subsequently accepted the suggested

²²² Akkommodering van Gestremdes op die Kampus: Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 1 September 1994. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²²³ Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1997, Deel 12: Fakulteit Geneeskunde, p. 53. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

definition.²²⁴ The dominant medical model discourse and a related focus on individual impairment is evident in this definition and it aligns with general disability trends in SA during the early 1990s. The social model of disability had not yet received much attention within South African academic circles at this point. However, the operations of the committee as a whole gave significant attention to environmental and social factors which needed to be addressed in order to facilitate disabled student success at SU. Thus, although their definition of disability was clearly influenced by the medical model, the committee's operations reflected at least a partial understanding of the social dimensions of disability as well.

It was agreed from the start of the committee's functioning that although some provisions for disabled students were already in place, these were at times insufficient and ineffective. Furthermore, the committee concurred that it would be beneficial if their operations resulted in the creation of a permanent forum aimed at addressing all aspects of the student experience for disabled students, specifically focussing on problems they encounter. Thus, the long-term aim was to provide a permanent, central, campus-wide committee / forum for disability matters, and, ultimately, formalise the support disabled students received.²²⁵ To this end, the 1994 committee was involved in various disability-related projects throughout their existence and reported their progress to university management structures on a weekly basis. These projects were primarily focussed on both providing information and addressing practical accessibility concerns.

3.2.1 Information Provision

In terms of information provision, the committee firstly set out to gather information for SU management on already operational initiatives providing services to disabled students on various levels. These included, among others, various accommodating practices in terms of tests and examinations,²²⁶ an already well-established tradition of disability sport on campus, as well as the volunteer reading project for the blind ran by USKOR discussed

²²⁴ Akkommodering van Gestremdes op die Kampus: Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 1 September 1994. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²²⁵ Akkommodering van Gestremdes op die Kampus: Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 1 September 1994. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²²⁶ This included extra writing time, provision of question papers in large print or braille, and the option of typing exams as opposed to writing by hand or completing exams orally.

above.²²⁷ In terms of sport, a few early programmes and sporting activities should be noted. In 1983, the Department Human Movement Study at SU²²⁸ initiated the first specialisation study program for sport, physical education and recreation for individuals with disabilities. This disability focussed study program was a first in SA. The first national championships for the disabled were also held in Stellenbosch in the early 1980s and SU was host to the athletics championships of the Western Province Sports Union for the Physically Disabled several times during the late 1980s and early 1990s.²²⁹ Lastly, the Institute for Sport and Movement Study was established in 1987 to study, among other things, physical disability and rehabilitation.²³⁰ The importance of increased cooperation and coordination in relation to all existing initiatives was emphasised, since they were, up until this point, primarily run in an isolated manner.²³¹



Figure 2: The Department Physical Education Building

Where many of the sporting activities and events for disabled students took place.

²²⁷ Akkommodering van Gestremdes op die Kampus: Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 1 September 1994 in 12R/1/5-Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²²⁸ Also known as the Department Physical Education, today the Department Sport Science.

²²⁹ Universiteit van Stellenbosch Coetzenburg Sportkompleks Inligtingstuk: Studeute met Gestremdhede. in Studeute met Gestremdhede, US Eenheid vir Studeute met Spesiale Leerbehoefte / Gestremdhede Bronne Sentrum, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²³⁰ For further details on sport during this time see, for example, "Sport en beweging word bestudeer," *Matieland 2*, 1987, p. 8.

²³¹ Akkommodering van Gestremdes op die Kampus: Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 1 September 1994. in 12R/1/5-Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

Thereafter some vital needs were identified. Firstly, it was essential that students, including prospective students, be better informed of the available channels through which their concerns could be addressed. The formation of support groups as well as increased exposure in university publications were suggested as methods of raising awareness in this regard. An awareness-raising campaign known as ‘a week of disability’ was also organised in 1996. The campaign was arranged in cooperation with the Student Affairs Council and was aimed at pointing out the typical problems experienced by disabled students on campus. Additionally, the organisation of a comprehensive accessibility guide for disabled students was proposed as a means of ensuring that current and prospective disabled students had all the necessary information at their disposal. This would include details about policies and services currently available from the various departments, as well as relevant plans concerning services envisioned for the future. The compilation of a complete list of all accessible buildings and facilities on campus, which could be made available to disabled students and central planning structures, was also suggested.²³² A sub-committee solely responsible for collecting all relevant information and compiling such an accessibility guide was subsequently appointed on 2 August 1995. The committee met on a monthly basis between August and November 1995, compiled relevant information from SU as well as other universities and ultimately completed and distributed the accessibility guide in 1997.²³³

The first official policy dealing specifically with disabled students at SU dates back to 1995. It represents another important step in terms of information provision taken by the rector’s committee investigating the accommodation of persons with disabilities on campus. Naturally, SU’s official stance on disability matters had to be formulated before service provision for disabled students could be formalised. To achieve this, the committee originally proposed an official mission statement in relation to disability for SU. This was subsequently

²³² Finale Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur insake die Akkommodering van Persone met Gestremdhede op die Kampus, 14 April 1997. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, April-Mei 1997, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²³³ Akkommodering van Persone met Gestremdhede: Opstel van Gebruikershandleiding: Verslag van die sub-komitee van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 14 November 1996, in *Studente met Gestremdhede*, US Eenheid vir Studente met Spesiale Leerbehoefes / Gestremdhede Bronne Sentrum, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

expanded to the first complete disability policy of the university. This committee was primarily responsible for drafting the policy. Interestingly, the university also has a separate policy from 2004 dealing with employees with disabilities. Discussing this in detail falls outside the current scope, but it is noteworthy that the university's first paraplegic employee was already appointed in October 1994.²³⁴

On 18 September 1995, SU's first official policy on the accommodation of students with disabilities was approved by the University Council. The executive committee of the council recommended that the policy be accepted on 29 August 1995. This acceptance followed an extensive process of consultation and review with various role-players. The policy defined 'disability' as including "muscle-skeletal, neurological, visual, auditory, psychological learning and medical disabilities." Within the policy, SU as an institution committed itself to "integrating disabled students who satisfy the necessary academic requirements into the student community as full members" and to "providing for the needs of such students where necessary and financially possible, without disadvantaging other students." It was also resolved that certain practices, related to supporting disabled students in terms of admission and registration, accommodation, physical facilities and planning, support services and university societies and clubs would be standardised. Additionally, this policy expressed SU's intention to coordinate the interests of students with disabilities through a specific person or department. Thereby it marked the beginning of a more formal approach to accommodating disabled students and providing for their needs.²³⁵

The entire policy evidenced a consistent commitment to non-discrimination on the basis of disability. Where they met the general requirements, students with disabilities would not be refused admission to university, university housing or any university societies or clubs. This was further supported by a clear commitment to increasing the accessibility of physical spaces and the specific consideration of accessibility concerns in the planning and construction of new facilities. Thus, there existed both an assurance of the willingness to provide for the needs of disabled students, inside and outside the classroom and a specific plan to do so. For example, the policy specifically mentioned that in cases where a disabled student required a caregiver, the accommodation of this individual would be considered along

²³⁴ See: "Kwadruplegiese sportster 'n toonbeeld van vasbyt," *Matieland* 3, 1994, p. 19. for full details in this regard.

²³⁵ Rapport van die Uitvoerende Komitee van die Raad. in 4/95: Notule van die gewone vergadering van die Universiteitsraad, 29 Augustus 1995, Bylae B: Beleid ten opsigte van Studente met Gestremdhede, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

with that of the student at university housing locations designed for this purpose.²³⁶ In terms of service provision, the policy specified that the specific needs of disabled individuals on all other terrains would be addressed with the help of the relevant coordinating individual or department. There was thus no mention of a specific unit or staff members to address exclusively disabled students' concerns, but service provision appeared to be moving towards this goal.²³⁷

These commitments were qualified by two factors. Firstly, the responsibility of the prospective student in communicating with the university as well as relevant faculties and departments regarding their specific needs was emphasised. Moreover, considerations of feasibility and affordability also played a role. These were continually stressed and applied in all areas in relation to disabled students. Thus, for example, accessibility of the physical environment was improved gradually and where financially viable and the accommodation of a caregiver would be considered only if the units made available for this purpose were not already filled. The committee ultimately made three locations accessible for this purpose, namely the residences Huis de Villiers and Hombre, as well as the university house Sweetheart.²³⁸ This process is discussed in detail in the subsequent section dealing with practical accessibility concerns.

These criteria had particular implications regarding admission and registration. Here, the policy ensured admission to university and consideration for the course of choice. Thus, no disabled student that met the admission requirements would be refused access to the university on the grounds of their disability. With regard to course of study though, it was noted that all relevant parties would consider the implications of the applicant's admittance with the applicant and a decision regarding the applicant's admission to their chosen course would be made "in the light of these implications and within the bounds of reasonable feasibility and affordability."²³⁹ This supports current anecdotal evidence that HE institutions

²³⁶ See more on accessible university housing in the following section of this chapter.

²³⁷ Rapport van die Uitvoerende Komitee van die Raad. in 4/95: Notule van die gewone vergadering van die Universiteitsraad, 29 Augustus 1995, Bylae B: Beleid ten opsigte van Studente met Gestremdhede, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²³⁸ Rapport van die Uitvoerende Komitee van die Raad. in 4/95: Notule van die gewone vergadering van die Universiteitsraad, 29 Augustus 1995, Bylae B: Beleid ten opsigte van Studente met Gestremdhede, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

continue to influence the scope of disabled students' participation on the program level, partly due to their own perceptions of the individual's capabilities.²⁴⁰

Subsequently, in November 1995, an in-depth inquiry was launched into the accessibility of all campus facilities for the proposed accessibility guide. Various departments as well as disabled students themselves were involved in assessing the accessibility of the physical campus environment. This resulted in a comprehensive report on campus facilities that became available both to prospective and enrolled disabled students, as well as the various support structures. This information was also included in the central venue booking system on campus enabling locations of events, classes and practical tutorials to be easily booked or changed if, for example, a disabled student wished to attend a semester tutorial which had previously been booked in an inaccessible venue.²⁴¹

All accessibility related information was ultimately compiled into the planned accessibility guide at the beginning of 1997. This document summarised all current data on the campus-wide situation concerning disability. It included the full disability policy, information on accessible locations on campus, various available services with contact details as well as emergency procedures and other relevant details.²⁴² This comprehensive accessibility guide was a first of its kind at SU.

In 1997, the official university yearbook refers to disabled students as a separate category for the first time. This is chiefly as a result of these information-focussed processes of the investigation committee. The yearbook summarises the official disability policy and the university binds itself to: "integrating such students, who satisfy the necessary academic requirements, as fully-fledged members of the student community." The yearbook further states that, within reason, provision will be made for the needs of such students and recommends that disabled students report to the Unit for Student Counselling or USKOR to discuss their individual needs after gaining admission to the university.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ See: B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider, and M. Priestly (eds.:) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, pp. 166-167. for further detail in this regard.

²⁴¹ Finale Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur insake die Akkommodering van Persone met Gestremdhede op die Kampus, 14 April 1997. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, April-Mei 1997, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁴² Finale Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur insake die Akkommodering van Persone met Gestremdhede op die Kampus, 14 April 1997. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, April-Mei 1997, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁴³ Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1997, Deel1: Algemeen, p. 133. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

3.2.2 Practical Accessibility Concerns

Along with information provision, the rector's committee for the investigation of the accommodation of persons with disabilities on campus was primarily concerned with the accessibility of the physical environment. This remained a pressing concern throughout their entire investigation. It was already noted in their first meeting that:

Practical problems in relation to accessibility of existing buildings are still overlooked. [This is] due to inadequate knowledge in this regard, since the general building and health regulations require that all new buildings, and existing buildings being renovated, be made more accessible for disabled individuals.²⁴⁴

The following is a detailed discussion of some specific measures taken to address physical accessibility matters. After compiling the aforementioned comprehensive report on campus facilities, the committee set in motion a first phase of facility improvements aimed at increasing accessibility. These included improving pavements, lifts and ramps, as well as increasing the accessibility of several bathrooms and lecture halls on campus. This first phase of improvements was implemented at an estimated cost of R220,000.²⁴⁵ During this period the facilities management division also launched various projects to improve accessibility. This included expenditure of roughly R55,000 in 1996 to address the most urgent changes necessary to improve accessibility for wheelchair users on campus.²⁴⁶ The G. G. Cilliers building seems to have been a focus point in this regard. This is interesting since improvements to the G. G. Cilliers are also specifically mentioned in 1988.²⁴⁷ It is unclear whether or not the presence of a student requiring wheelchair access in the education faculty played a role in the decision to focus specifically on this particular building.²⁴⁸ The choice could also have been based on the most severe accessibility problems among campus buildings, or those requiring most urgent renovation. In either case, this nonetheless indicates an increased focus on the importance of accessibility improvements, possibly brought on by the committee's comprehensive report on the accessibility situation on campus. Accessibility

²⁴⁴ Akkommodering van Gestremdes op die Kampus: Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 1 September 1994. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁴⁵ Finale Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur insake die Akkommodering van Persone met Gestremdhede op die Kampus, 14 April 1997. in 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, April-Mei 1997, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁴⁶ Mededelingsrapport van die Fisiese Beplanningskomitee. in: 3/96M: Notule van die gewone vergadering van die Universiteitsraad, 22 Mei 1996, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁴⁷ Aanbevelingsrapport van die Fisiese Beplanningskomitee. in: 4/88a+: Notule van die gewone vergadering van die Universiteitsraad, 10 Augustus 1988, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁴⁸ Mededelingsrapport van die Fisiese Beplanningskomitee. in: 1/96M+: Notule van die gewone vergadering van die Universiteitsraad, 18 Maart 1996, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

improvements of several campus buildings are also mentioned in the university's Annual Report of 1997.²⁴⁹



Figure 3: The G. G. Cilliers (Education) Building

The committee itself gave particular attention to concerns related to accommodation. Some of the first fully accessible residences seem to have been under renovation during this period, and as such, the committee could provide insight into the necessary changes. Two important factors were continually emphasised with regard to accommodation. Firstly, the social dimension of accommodation was stressed. The committee repeatedly called attention to the fact that disabled students neither wanted to be nor should be isolated from the student population as a whole. Rather, integration into the student community on all levels was necessary and arranging separate accessible accommodation would not foster this connection. Therefore, the mainstream student accommodation needed adaptation to be made more accessible.²⁵⁰ Secondly, acknowledgement was given to the fact that provision for various degrees of accessibility was necessary. Practically this meant that at least some accommodation needed to be established to accommodate cases of severe disability and the possibility of a caregiver who may require accommodation along with the student. As

²⁴⁹ Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarverslag, 1997, p. 29. Universiteit van Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, Elektronies Beskikbaar: <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/Documents/About/YearReport/Before%202006/US%20Jaarverslag%201997.pdf> [Afgelaai 10 September 2018]

²⁵⁰ Akkommodering van Gestremdes op die Kampus: Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 1 September 1994. in: 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

mentioned earlier, the residences Huis de Villiers and Hombre, and the university house Sweetheart were renovated to provide for such accommodation requirements.²⁵¹



*Figure 4: The Residence Huis de Villiers
Following its renovation in 1996*

It should be noted that the Centre for Psychological Services and Training, which had primarily handled accessibility concerns previously, underwent an extensive process of evaluation and restructuring during the early 1990s. These changes could partially account for the fact that their involvement seems to fade slightly to the background at this stage as well as during the final period under discussion. On 16 September 1996, the university council officially accepted a recommendation by which the four separate units would be restructured to form a new Centre for Student Counselling which would be operational from 1997 onward. This process of restructuring was preceded by an external evaluation in June 1996 and linked to a far wider process of strategic planning within the university involving several academic and service delivery departments.²⁵² Hence, the university yearbook of 1998 makes no mention of the Centre for Psychological Services and Training, instead only referring to the Centre for Student Counselling. The yearbook explains that the Centre for Student Counselling came into existence on 1 September 1997 through a merging of the previously independent units. Students with disabilities are not mentioned as part of the new centre's mandate.²⁵³ In principle, the Centre for Student Counselling appears to be fulfilling much the same functions as the earlier Centre for Psychological Services and Training, the

²⁵¹ Finale Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur insake die Akkommodering van Persone met Gestremdhede op die Kampus, 14 April 1997. in: 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, April-Mei 1997, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁵² Die Nuwe Sentrum vir Studentevoorigting. in: 5/4: Eenheid vir Studentevoorigting Deel 5: Julie-Desember 1996, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁵³ Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1998, Deel1: Algemeen, p. 152. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

restructuring process mainly having management, structural and financial implications, rather than functional consequences.²⁵⁴

The *ad hoc* committee of the rector's daily management team regarding the accommodation of persons with disabilities on campus delivered their final feedback to SU management on 5 May 1997 and was disbanded shortly thereafter. In its final recommendations the committee emphasised the importance of appointing a central coordinating person for disability matters on campus. Indeed, they suggested the establishment of a Service Unit for Persons with Disabilities which would function under the direction of the Student Affairs Division.²⁵⁵ Although the formation of a unit as such was not realised until 2007, SU management did recognise the importance of maintaining a central service point / person for disability concerns. This is also reflected in the 1995 Disability Policy discussed above. Moreover, *Die Matie* reported on 10 September 1997 that a contact person for disabled students was appointed under the Student Affairs Division. Although their responsibilities were not limited to disabled students and related concerns, this appointment nevertheless reflected recognition from SU management of an existing gap in service provision and the beginnings of attempts to fill it.²⁵⁶ The committee further recommended that a smaller advice committee be appointed for the sake of continuity, including some members from the original investigation committee as well as representatives from the Unit for Student Counselling. Thus, the Advice Forum for Students with Disabilities together with the Student Affairs Division functioned as the immediate precursor to the 2007 Disability Unit.²⁵⁷

In summary then, the *ad hoc* committee of the rector's daily management team regarding the accommodation of persons with disabilities on campus functioned between 1994 and 1997 as an attempt to begin formalising service provision to the disabled student community. They focussed mainly on information provision and increased accessibility of physical facilities. The committee's understanding of the university's responsibilities in terms

²⁵⁴ Die Nuwe Sentrum vir Studentevoorligting. in: 5/4: Eenheid vir Studentevoorligting Deel 5: Julie-Desember 1996, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁵⁵ Finale Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur insake die Akkommodering van Persone met Gestremdhede op die Kampus, 14 April 1997. in: 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, April-Mei 1997, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁵⁶ "Anne by Admin aangestel," *Die Matie*, 10 September 1997, p. 4.

²⁵⁷ Finale Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur insake die Akkommodering van Persone met Gestremdhede op die Kampus, 14 April 1997. in: 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, April-Mei 1997, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

of disability matters can perhaps be best summarised by the following quote from one member at their first meeting:

The role of the university in relation to the disabled student is not to carry him / her, but to create a user-friendly environment in which the student can function independently and effectively with freedom of choice on personal, academic and social terrains.²⁵⁸

3.3 1998-2007: The Advice Forum for Students with Disabilities

Following the disbandment of the *ad hoc* committee of the rector's daily management team regarding the accommodation of persons with disabilities on campus disability matters became the primary responsibility of the Student Affairs Division in accordance with their recommendation.²⁵⁹ An official contact person was appointed at student affairs, who was responsible for disability matters along with other student activities.²⁶⁰ The Advice Forum for Students with Disabilities was officially instituted in 1999 as a subdivision of student affairs and an outflow of the investigation committee's operations.²⁶¹ Also from 1999 onwards, the official university yearbook directs students with disabilities to the student affairs division to address their concerns.²⁶²

The Advice Forum for Students with Disabilities undertook several projects throughout its existence. This involved primarily serving as a liaison between disabled students and staff, as well as continually increasing awareness and monitoring the accessibility situation on campus. As a link between students and staff they provided information, such as the accessibility of different degree programs within the various faculties and helped disabled students procure necessary funding, among other activities. In terms of monitoring the accessibility situation, they ensured that alternative arrangements were made should venues be inaccessible and continually cooperated with both the SU facilities management division and the local municipality to improve the situation on and

²⁵⁸ Akkommodering van Gestremdes op die Kampus: Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur, 1 September 1994. in: 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, Junie-November 1994, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁵⁹ Finale Verslag van die Ad Hoc-Komitee van die Rektor se Dagbestuur insake die Akkommodering van Persone met Gestremdhede op die Kampus, 14 April 1997. in: 12R/1/5 Rektor se Dagbestuur, April-Mei 1997, US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁶⁰ "Anne by Admin aangestel," *Die Matie*, 10 September 1997, p. 4.

²⁶¹ "Adviesforum vir mense met gestremthede," *KampUSnuus*, 1999, (11), (4), p. 3.

²⁶² Die Universiteit van Stellenbosch Jaarboek 1999, Deel1: Algemeen, p. 136. US Argief, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

around campus. The forum was also involved in updating the official disability policy of the university.²⁶³

The 1995 policy was extensively rewritten, revised and updated in 2005. The 2005 policy, with some amendments in 2006 and 2007, forms the basis of the current disability policy at SU. Although many aspects of the original policy were maintained, the newer policy also demonstrates changes in national and international ways of thinking about disability matters. Concerning similarities, the newer policy discusses comparable aspects (admission, accommodation, physical facilities, support services and university societies) in relation to disability. The commitment to non-discrimination and increased access to physical spaces, within reason, also remains much the same, along with a clear setting out of the student's responsibilities. The distinction between admission to the university and admission to the chosen degree programme is also maintained.²⁶⁴

Nevertheless, definite development and change is evident in several ways. Firstly, the policy itself is known as the "Policy regarding Students with Special Learning Needs/Disabilities," rather than the previous and simpler "Policy regarding Students with Disabilities." The terms 'special learning needs' and 'disabilities' are also used interchangeably within the document, possibly as a means of indicating how disability can influence a student's requirements from the teaching / learning environment. Along these lines the definition of disability itself is also expanded, meaning here: "a person with a verifiable physical, non-visible, and/or psychological limitation/s which negatively affects his/her daily activities in a specific way." Furthermore, the policy clearly aligns itself with the social model of disability and explains national and institutional trends in terms of widening access to HE for students with disabilities. The policy refers to SU planning documents (the vision 2012 as well as the Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond) as documentation exemplifying SU's commitment to welcoming disabled individuals as part of the student community and reinforcing increased enrolment and support for such students. Therewith the rights of students with disabilities are also clearly defined and the various role-players in the integration of disabled students into campus life (i.e. sport, accommodation, academics, campus awareness etc.) are plainly set-out. A brief overview of SU's institutional

²⁶³ Advies Forum vir Studente met Gestremdhede en Studente met Gestremthede, Ongesorteerde Dokumente, US Eenheid vir Studente met Spesiale Leerbehoefes / Gestremdhede Bronne Sentrum, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁶⁴ Policy regarding Students with Special Learning Needs / Disabilities, Stellenbosch University, Available at the Disability Unit Resource Centre, Stellenbosch.

response to disability is also given. This acknowledges that historically, “the two problems that have created a void in service delivery to students with special learning needs/disabilities [at SU] are the decentralised nature of service delivery and the fact that the theoretical basis for this service delivery is not based on current information or approaches to the topic.”²⁶⁵ In summary then, the 2005 policy is more well-defined and extensive, with greater recognition of the national and institutional climates in which disabled students in HE find themselves, although many aspects of the earlier policy are also maintained in a somewhat unchanged manner.²⁶⁶

The Centre for Student Counselling²⁶⁷ was renamed the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD, as it is still currently known) on 7 September 1999. Thereafter, it operated under the broader umbrella of Academic Support Services, which was, in turn, supervised by the vice-rector of academics. SU’s Office for Students with Special Learning Needs (Disabilities) was officially inaugurated as part of the CSCD on 19 March 2007.²⁶⁸

The Advice Forum for Students with disabilities exerted continued pressure on SU management structures to establish a central disability unit. In 2002 they proposed a survey be conducted on the necessity of such a unit.²⁶⁹ An operational plan and proposed budget were also subsequently submitted. In 2005 however, the decision was made that such a service would operate as a service point under the CSCD for a two-year probational period before establishment of a fully-fledged unit would be considered.²⁷⁰ With the establishment of the new office in 2007, the CSCD took over the primary responsibility for campus-wide disability matters from the Student Affairs Division, although they maintained a level of cooperation with various other role-players. Thereby the current situation surrounding disability support at SU was established. At this time, roughly 140 SU students had indicated

²⁶⁵ Policy regarding Students with Special Learning Needs / Disabilities, Stellenbosch University, Available at the Disability Unit Resource Centre, Stellenbosch.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ The history of the Centre for Student Counselling and their involvement with disabled students is discussed in the previous sections of this chapter.

²⁶⁸ P. F. Theron: “US Fokus al meer op Gestemdes,” *Die Matie*, 21 Maart 2007, p. 3.

²⁶⁹ Projek Voorstelling van die SR-Gemeeskapsbou vir 2002. in: *Studente met Gestremdhede*, US Eenheid vir Studente met Spesiale Leerbehoefes / Gestremdhede Bronne Sentrum, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

²⁷⁰ Notule van die Adviesforum vir Studente met Gestremdhede, 17 Oktober 2005. in: *Studente met Gestremdhede*, US Eenheid vir Studente met Spesiale Leerbehoefes / Gestremdhede Bronne Sentrum, Universiteit Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.

some form of disability. This however, encompasses disability in the broadest sense of the word and is not limited to physical disability.²⁷¹

4. Conclusion

The historical development of the South African HE sector was profoundly influenced by Apartheid era educational policy. Following the advent of democracy, national legislation has attempted to address several sites of historical disadvantage, including disability.

At SU specifically, a gradual but definite move towards increased formalisation, standardisation and centralisation is evident in disability support provisions between 1986 and 2007. The provision of certain types of support, such as accommodating practices in terms of tests and examinations as well as provisions for disability sport had been established prior to the period under discussion and appeared to be functioning effectively. Between 1986 and 1993 services were provided informally primarily by the Centre for Psychological Services and Training. Thereafter, between 1994 and 1997, the situation surrounding disabled students on campus was formally investigated and some policies and standardised approaches were put in place specifically regarding information provision and increased accessibility of physical facilities. Finally, from 1998 to 2007 a number of structures and systems were organised which aided the formalisation of support provision and processes leading up to the ultimate establishment of the Disability Unit in 2007.

²⁷¹ P. F. Theron: "US Fokus al meer op Gestemdes," *Die Matie*, 21 Maart 2007, p. 3.

CHAPTER 3:

SOCIAL NARRATIVES AROUND DISABILITY – PERSPECTIVES FROM *MATIELAND AND DIE MATIE*

Media representations of disabled lives nearly always – and often spectacularly – miss the opportunity to present accounts and images of disabled people simply going about the business of life, full, as it is, of the universal ups and downs of muddling through. Instead, the spectre of ‘tragic’ numbing loss is never far away, regardless of whether the account is overtly concerned with deficits and dependency or the ‘courageous’ and ‘inspiring’ overcoming of ‘adversity.’²⁷²

1. Introduction

This chapter considers public narratives and cultural perceptions of disability at Stellenbosch University (SU) as they found expression in articles related to disability that appeared in the SU publications *Matieland* and *Die Matie* during the period 1986 – 2007. All pieces that mention disability in any way are included in the discussion. This encompasses both longer articles and shorter snippets of information. In terms of content, these pieces consist of articles featuring disabled students and alumni, or able-bodied individuals involved in disability activism. They also deal with the university’s approach to disability and disability sports, as well as the general accessibility of the campus.

2. Disability and The Media: Sub-Humans or Superheroes

Before taking an in-depth look at these articles, it is necessary to focus on the process of representation in the media and specifically, its significance where disability is concerned. All forms of media have become incredibly powerful cultural tools in contemporary society. Mkhize explains how the media has become a crucial agent for cultural presentation, since it has the potential to not only commercialise, but also reinforce or resist cultural norms. As such, the media, in all its forms, remains a major mechanism of cultural influence.²⁷³ As the opening quote of this chapter illustrates though, it often fails to present disabled individuals in their daily lives.

²⁷² B. Watermeyer: “Claiming loss in disability,” *Disability & Society* (24), (1), 2009, p. 92.

²⁷³ G. Mkhize: “Problematising rhetorical representations of individuals with disability – disabled or living with disability?” *Agenda* (29), (2), 2015, p. 133.

General media portrayals of disability-related matters illustrate how individuals involved in media-making processes bring to bear not only their personal experiences and perspectives, but also a range of preconceived ideas and stereotypes society still unconsciously has regarding disability in general.²⁷⁴ As the focus on issues like human rights, equality and liberalism has increased in western society in general throughout the past decades, and in South Africa particularly post 1994, society has become quick to espouse generally ‘acceptable’ rhetoric in terms of diversity, accessibility and inclusion. Nevertheless, an investigation into the general portrayal of disability in the media reveals that many unconscious preconceptions regarding disability persist underneath ostensibly ‘correct’ rhetoric. Indeed, Barnes argues that the biggest obstacle to disabled people's meaningful inclusion into mainstream community life is the negativity of public attitudes. These range from “overt prejudice and hostility, condescension and pity to ignorance and indifference.”²⁷⁵ He explains:

Disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people abound in books, films, on television, and in the press. They form the bedrock on which the attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations of disabled people are based. They are fundamental to the discrimination and exploitation which disabled people encounter daily and contribute significantly to their systematic exclusion from mainstream community life.²⁷⁶

The above quote illustrates how fundamentally societal portrayals of disability impact the lives of disabled individuals. Interestingly, these preconceptions can be both positive and negative. In both cases though, the damaging effect of such biased portrayals of disabled lives is the same. McDougall discusses this phenomenon in connection with a recent Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and South African Broadcasting Commission (SABC) study on disability and the media in South Africa. In this study, respondents from the South African disability sector were asked to identify and discuss stereotypes of disability that they are aware of or have encountered through personal experience. Although this is related to television media and not print media, which is under examination in this chapter, some general comparable trends are evident.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ For a more detailed discussion of historical perceptions of disability see Chapter 1

²⁷⁵ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 3-4.

²⁷⁶ C. Barnes quoted in T. Shakespeare: “Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?” *Disability & Society* (9), (3), 1994, p. 286.

²⁷⁷ K. McDougall: “‘Ag shame’ and superheroes: stereotype and the signification of disability,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Schneider, and M. Priestley, (eds.) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*,

A significant number of respondents in the study commented with frustration on the extremes of being reduced to signs of either tragedy or heroism. In this scenario, disabled people become to the public either superheroes or pitiable non-entities. The fundamental problem with this type of thinking lies in the fact that it ultimately results in disregard. As McDougall explains, being perceived as either tragic and pitiable on the one hand, or as heroic in the face of tragedy on the other, is in either case a kind of disregard, because “being perceived in mythic proportions is not really to be perceived.”²⁷⁸

2.1 Disabled Individuals: Signs of Tragedy

Shakespeare illustrates how negative cultural representations of disabled people deprive them of the opportunity to create or define themselves as they are consistently regarded as purely ‘other’ or used as vehicles and objects to address broader themes. Therefore, representations of disabled people are not primarily concerned with the realities of disabled life. Instead, they employ disability rather as a flexible metaphor for a myriad of other situations. Specifically, Shakespeare argues that disabled people are connected with situations which able-bodied society finds difficult to confront, such as weakness, illness, dependency or death. In this situation, the role of culture and meaning becomes “crucial, autonomous and inescapable” in the process of disablement.²⁷⁹ This phenomenon of being culturally mis-known has a profound impact on the lives of disabled people and their interactions with able bodied society. Morris explains:

It is not only physical limitations that restrict us to our homes and those whom we know. It is the knowledge that each entry into the public world will be dominated by stares, by condescension, by pity and by hostility.²⁸⁰

Moreover, cultural narratives positioning disabled people as ‘tragic victims’ to a range of circumstances lead to a subsequent set of assumptions. If an individual is perceived as ‘pitiable’ and ‘incapable,’ for instance, society would likely not expect him or her to want to pursue higher education or live independently. In this way, such narratives attempt to define and confine the activities of disabled people. Thus, individuals with disabilities are not portrayed as being meaningful, active and integrated contributors in society because they are

²⁷⁸ K. McDougall: “‘Ag shame’ and superheroes: stereotype and the signification of disability,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Schneider, and M. Priestley, (eds.) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, p. 388.

²⁷⁹ T. Shakespeare: “Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?” *Disability & Society* (9), (3), 1994, pp. 285-286, 289.

²⁸⁰ J. Morris quoted in T. Shakespeare: “Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?” *Disability & Society* (9), (3), 1994, p. 288.

regarded as incapable of making such contributions. This places disabled people under an ‘umbrella of dependency,’ and even calls into question their humanity by regarding them as less than human. Under this ‘umbrella of dependency,’ disabled individuals are regarded as being in need of support and aid. However, they are not entitled to such support as a human right. Instead, it is given to them as a charitable gift since, as ‘disadvantaged individuals’ they are entitled only to pity and ‘help’ from those ‘more fortunate,’ in this case able-bodied society.²⁸¹ Against this backdrop, Watermeyer illustrates how public discourses about and media representations of disabled people remain “firmly attached to the construct of disabled life as incomplete and lacking, with a constant awareness of what has been lost or was never had.” In light of this, he argues that: “disabled people in contemporary culture have become the personifications of loss.”²⁸²

2.2 Disabled Individuals: Signs of Heroism

The ‘superhero’ or ‘inspiration’ narrative appears in opposition to the ‘dependency’ and ‘pity’ narrative. Although this seems to focus on more positive aspects of disability it does not lead to a more thorough understanding of disability. Here, people with disabilities are considered to be remarkable or extraordinary. They are often seen as an inspiration or role model for the rest of society. Greg Walloch, an American disabled comedian, explains why such an attitude is demeaning:

They’re not saying that about who I am or what I’ve accomplished in my life. They’re just saying that based on how I look when they walk by.²⁸³

It is thus not based on concrete knowledge of the individual involved. Rather, similarly to the ‘dependency’ narrative, it relies on a set of preconceptions based on appearances. This attitude further diminishes actual accomplishments by disabled people since they do not receive acknowledgement primarily for their actual achievements. Instead, they receive praise, first and foremost for having accomplished something as a disabled person, and secondly for having accomplished it well. Herein lies a measure of awe, because it was not expected that a disabled person would be able to accomplish the given task so well.

²⁸¹ K. McDougall: “‘Ag shame’ and superheroes: stereotype and the signification of disability,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Schneider, and M. Priestley, (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, pp. 388-389.

²⁸² B. Watermeyer: “Claiming loss in disability,” *Disability & Society* (24), (1), 2009, p. 92.

²⁸³ K. McDougall: “‘Ag shame’ and superheroes: stereotype and the signification of disability,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Schneider, and M. Priestley, (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, p. 391.

As such, the degree of excellence evident in the task itself is secondary to the fact that it was completed by a disabled individual.

Paradoxically this attitude can also be regarded as a type of denial of disability since it celebrates those who have ‘overcome’ their disability in order to achieve success against the odds. Davis explains that the label of disability often carries with it a powerful assertion of inability to perform adult social functions. As a result, successful disabled people have their disability ‘erased’ by their success. Society tends to see high profile, successful people with disabilities as having overcome their disabilities or used them in remarkable ways.²⁸⁴

Moreover, the ‘success against the odds’ narrative also implies that those disabled individuals who do not achieve these ‘superhero proportions of success’ have somehow failed in all they are capable of as disabled people, and are lazy, stupid or otherwise inadequate as human beings. Naturally this line of thinking disregards a whole set of contributing factors that play a significant role in any situation, such as availability of support, services and finances. In a context where such support and services are not available, a seemingly small success may actually be very large, but such factors are overlooked in a quest for ‘superheroes.’²⁸⁵

The dependency and inspiration narratives represent two extremes in terms of viewing people with disabilities. However, both demonstrate a lack of accurate and thorough understanding of disability. Within these narratives a disabled person signifies predominantly a ‘disability’ instead of a person with a specific and unique history and outlook. Swartz explains how even benign portrayals of disability in the media such as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Phantom of the Opera* may serve to reinforce disability stereotypes. Such depictions presuppose a link between physical impairment or disfigurement and morality or happiness. Thereby, the myth that disabled or ugly people are somehow ‘better than’ or ‘happier than’ the rest of society is perpetuated.²⁸⁶ Furthermore, neither the dependency nor the inspiration narratives require society to address the lack of access disabled people experience due to environmental barriers or lacking service provision. Engagement around social and societal responsibility is thus absent. Reconsideration of the

²⁸⁴ L. J. Davis: *Enforcing Normalcy, disability, deafness and the body*. p. 9.

²⁸⁵ K. McDougall: “‘Ag shame’ and superheroes: stereotype and the signification of disability,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Schneider, and M. Priestley, (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, p. 392.

²⁸⁶ L. Swartz: *Able-Bodied scenes from a curious life*. p. 50.

ways in which bodily and intellectual perfection is traditionally defined is also not encouraged.²⁸⁷

2.3 Disabled Individuals: Unpacking Media Portrayals

In the context of the ‘pitiable’ and ‘heroic’ narratives, several challenges emerge for investigating media portrayals of disabled individuals. This lies partly in a general truth regarding stories of individual lives and lived experiences: the notion that it is more likely for particularly interesting and unusual stories to make their way into print or television media, simply because ‘ordinary’ stories are not as fascinating. This fact must be recognised when dealing with any form of media. In light of this, the available sources, in this case, newspaper articles, cannot be regarded as representative of all the stories or people present at a particular place and time.²⁸⁸

Furthermore, these sources alone cannot be depended upon to provide a complete and representative account of events. Narratives of the ‘inspiration’ variety may emphasise the strengths of disabled people and may minimise the need for accommodations and services, while accounts which stress ‘dependency’ may fail to give appropriate recognition of how services may be changing in a positive direction.²⁸⁹ Almost certainly then, there remains a vast number of stories of individual lives or specific situations that will be excluded from this discussion simply because they were not considered worthy news sources at the time.

Naturally, this also holds true for able-bodied individuals. ‘Normal’ able-bodied people rarely feature in publications, precisely because they are not considered worthy news stories. However, the chief distinction is that disabled people, when featured in publications, tend to appear primarily as examples of one of the two narratives described above. They are either cast as ‘superheroes’, or ‘pitiable, non-entities,’ and rarely featured as embodying other identities. Able-bodied individuals, by contrast, are featured on a range of bases which reflect their ability to adopt and function within numerous identities in different circumstances. As the above discussion illustrates, the narrow or confined nature of narratives around disability is a major contributing element in disabled people’s experiences of being culturally mis-known. General narratives concerning human identity are boundless, yet when the focus is on

²⁸⁷ K. McDougall: “‘Ag shame’ and superheroes: stereotype and the signification of disability,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Schneider, and M. Priestley, (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, p. 393.

²⁸⁸ L. Swartz: “Five challenges for disability-related research in sub-Saharan Africa,” *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014, pp.2-3.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 3.

disabled people, the physical disability carries an inordinate weight in the outside observer's perspective of that person's identity. With these facts in mind, the discussion now turns to a detailed analysis of articles concerning disability that appeared in the SU publications *Matieland* and *Die Matie* for the period 1986-2007.

3. *Matieland* and *Die Matie*: A Brief Comparison

It must be noted that *Matieland* and *Die Matie*, although both SU publications, differ significantly in their role, readership, style and contributors. This has an important impact on both the frequency of their disability-related reporting and the types of disability situations they consider to be important and interesting within their publication and for their readers. *Matieland* is a publication primarily for SU alumni. It is distributed to business leaders, donors and foundations focusing on higher education funding. As such, *Matieland* can perhaps be regarded as a marketing tool of the university. This sentiment is supported by the prevalence of articles relating to research and innovation that appear in the publication. Furthermore, several articles focus on well-known SU alumni performing well after graduation. Moreover, individual authors are usually not named in *Matieland*,²⁹⁰ possibly suggesting that the articles were written either by the publication's editorial team as a whole, or by the university's marketing and public relations departments. In terms of publication frequency, *Matieland* appeared three times per year between 1986 and 2000, and since 2001, it is published only twice per year.

In contrast, *Die Matie* is a publication primarily for current SU students. Throughout its existence, it has been published weekly. *Die Matie* generally deals with current affairs on campus and the editorial team consists of students, often from the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Journalism Department. As a result, *Die Matie* has a far more informal style, including among other things funny campus quotes, lists of bars or pubs for a night out on the town and forthcoming arts and music events in Stellenbosch. Authors of individual articles are usually named, and the newspaper has a 'student forum' section where any student can express their views on a certain topic. The following table represents the main differences between these publications:

²⁹⁰ This tendency gradually began to change in the 2000s, with authors of articles being named more frequently.

<i>Matieland</i>	<i>Die Matie</i>
Readers: Alumni	Readers: Students
Focus: Marketing	Focus: Current Affairs on Campus
Authors: Unnamed	Authors: Students
Style: Formal	Style: Informal
Publication: 2 / 3 Yearly	Publication: Weekly

Figure 5: *Matieland* and *Die Matie* Comparison

4. **Methodology**

For the period 1986-2007, a total of 37 articles related to disability were published in *Matieland*, while *Die Matie* contained 46 articles. This indicates that, although a greater number of articles dealing with disability appeared in *Die Matie* due to its frequent publication rate, statistically speaking, *Matieland* covered disability more frequently than *Die Matie*. These articles have been broadly divided into five categories. They include: 1) personal profiles of individuals, 2) articles concerning the accessibility of campus or awareness-raising initiatives on campus, 3) the development of disability-related technology, 4) involvement with welfare work or skills development programmes with the disabled, and 5) disability and sport. These categories are not easily defined and were further sub-divided in some instances. At times, an article could be placed in one or more categories, or it might not fit exactly into any category and therefore was classified as ‘other.’ Though categorisation was not always simple or readily apparent, considering the articles systematically according to these categories provides a method for scrutiny of the portrayal of disability issues in these publications that would not be possible if examining each article in isolation. Subsequently, examples that can be regarded as representative of each category and sub-category are analysed. These categories are discussed in descending order of the frequency of their appearance beginning with *Matieland*, and then moving on to *Die Matie*.

5. **Matieland Articles**

5.1 Sport and Disability

Twelve of the 37 articles related to disability in *Matieland* deal with sport and disability. This includes articles about professional athletes with disabilities who studied at

SU, as well as articles concerning the facilities available at SU for practicing sports with a disability. The majority of these articles are focussed on the achievements of professional disabled sports personalities, many of whom became part of the national Paralympic Team for one or more Paralympic Games. As a whole, these articles take a positive approach to disability, since they aim to highlight the achievements of SU students and alumni with disabilities, and how SU as an institution facilitated such achievements.

Two distinct narratives, differing in their focus, emerge within the sport category. The first of these centres on individuals involved in disability sports, while the second emphasises the role of SU as an institution. Individual narratives include both news snippets which focus primarily on achievement, and more detailed articles in which disability features prominently, arguably more so than the sport under discussion. Within the second kind of narrative the focus shifts away from individual achievement and disability. Instead, the role of SU as an institution enabling sport for disabled individuals is highlighted.

5.1.1 Individual Focus

In terms of individual focus, many pieces are only short news snippets. Generally, they occupy less than half a page and simply provide details regarding an individual's sports career. Mention is made of competitions participated in and medals or awards won. At times, the general trajectory of their sports career is briefly discussed and their current or past connection to SU is also highlighted. These pieces usually appear at a time when the individual concerned won a new award or broke a record in their chosen field, and as such celebrate their latest accomplishment. Thus, the focus here is on achievement, with disability being merely a background feature that receives no more attention than one or two sentences. Short pieces of this nature are predominantly found in the *Matieland* during the 2000s.²⁹¹

The inverse type of article, in which the disability appears to carry more weight than the sporting career or achievement of the individual concerned can also be found. These articles are typically longer and more detailed. They include specifics about the nature of the disability and its effect on the individual's daily life. The descriptions here seem focussed on 'overcoming against the odds' and form the typical triumph over adversity narrative. Noteworthy here is the fact that disability is not regarded as a part of the success being discussed. Individuals are not merely celebrated as disabled sports personalities but are

²⁹¹ Examples in this category include: "Gestremde sportlui presteer," *Matieland* 3, 1992, p. 6. "Gestremde atleet weer sportman van die jaar," *Matieland* 3, 1998, p. 31. "Ernst wen X 3!" *Matieland* 1, 2003, p. 38. "Prestigious award for Ernst," *Matieland* 1, 2006, p. 9. "Sport," *Matieland* 1, 2007, p. 36.

celebrated as having ‘overcome’ their disability. As such, it is no longer regarded as a part of themselves. They are regarded as having achieved success despite their disability, rather than with it. An example of this is illustrated in an article titled “From Water Fear to World Crown,” which recounts:

A Matie who couldn’t keep her head underwater due to a fear of suffocation is now a world champion. She was 11 years old when she fell from a horse and spent seven weeks in a coma [...] A long road of rehabilitation followed. She had to relearn writing with her left hand. It took several years before she could even tie her own shoelaces. While receiving swimming therapy she couldn’t hold her head under water. ‘I think it’s from a fear of being without oxygen since I was in a coma.’ Treatment with a sports psychologist helped her control this fear [...] She started swimming competitively about five years ago. Although she’s learned to control her fear of water, she’s still afraid of a swimming pool without lines.²⁹²

This article is a helpful example for exploring the ‘conquering of disability’ phenomenon. It discusses an honours student who had recently won two gold medals in an international swimming competition and became a world champion in her category. As the quote demonstrates, significant attention is paid to her recovery process. The article further mentions details about her school and tertiary education. Although exact words like ‘overcome’ or ‘against the odds’ are not used, the tone and approach seem to suggest that the student in question ought to be congratulated for her swimming achievements in light of her accident and consequent recovery, rather than for the achievements themselves.²⁹³ This becomes problematic, since a question arises as to what information the readers remember after coming across such an article. Are they left with an impression of her achievement or merely the details of her disability and her ‘triumphant spirit?’ Is she remembered as a world champion swimmer or a ‘courageous’ disabled individual? It must be noted though, that this type of article appears less frequently than the shorter narrative discussed above.

5.1.2 Institutional Focus

The second type of narrative in the sports category has an entirely different approach. Here, the individual’s disability is acknowledged, and accomplishments are celebrated. However, the emphasis shifts to the sport facilities that SU had available for disabled students and how these assisted the individual’s sporting career during his / her studies, thereby contributing to accomplishments in later life. It is of vital importance for any disabled individual to be aware of the availability of accessible equipment and facilities, especially in

²⁹² “Van watervrees tot wêreldkroon,” *Matieland* 2, 2001, p. 32.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

the South African context where this is perhaps not as readily available. Furthermore, such facilities do indeed aid success, since they provide possibilities that might not be available otherwise. However, it becomes problematic when an overly-large portion of an individual's success is attributed to the equipment or facilities. Thereby, the disabled individual's own agency and efforts to achieve success may subtly and possibly unintentionally, be diminished. Within these articles, it is also clearly implied that SU has the best or most facilities of this nature.²⁹⁴

When considering the emphasis on the available facilities it is vital to bear in mind both the purpose and the audience of *Matieland* as a whole. It is primarily directed at alumni and donors. It can therefore be assumed that at least some of its readers are accomplished professionals and that they might make some financial donations to SU when thinking back on their own time at university with the nostalgia often associated with the past. It is therefore understandable that SU would want to present itself in as positive a light as possible. This is apparent in an article titled "Sport centre for the disabled opened," which recounts:

The university, which has almost established itself as the benchmark for sport for the disabled can now also brag with a sport centre for the disabled... The sport centre offers students with disabilities currently at SU the opportunity to participate in organised sporting activities like any other student. These students can now represent the university, earn university sporting colours and participate in sporting activities as members of a SU sport club.²⁹⁵

Articles solely showcasing facilities or programs available at SU, without linking these to any individual achievements, can also be counted among this group, since mention is made of the benefit these facilities hold for disabled individuals. The article quoted above is a telling example in this regard. It goes on to explain that the centre concentrates on research, training, exercise programs and partnerships with other interest groups. Through this centre, SU can also promote sport for the disabled in the province.²⁹⁶

5.2 Individual Personal Profiles

Several articles²⁹⁷ are dedicated to profiles of disabled individuals or those involved with disability activism on campus. Such articles often appear in celebration of a significant achievement. In these cases, individuals with disabilities; current students, SU alumni and staff members are featured. In terms of disability activism on campus, articles often focus on

²⁹⁴ See, for example: "Maties was Paralimpiese Span se geheime wapen," *Matieland* 2, 2004, pp. 26-27.

²⁹⁵ "Sportsentrum vir gestremdes geopen," *Matieland*, 2006, p. 37.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Nine of the 37 in *Matieland*.

prominent personalities who can be regarded as figureheads of such actions, though they are often not disabled themselves.

5.2.1 Individuals with Disabilities

In the case of disabled students, either graduation or the granting of a bursary²⁹⁸ leads to a brief mention of the individual and their time at SU. Particularly the Rector's Awards for achievement against the odds, introduced in 2003 to "give acknowledgement to students who achieved academic excellence relative to the contexts in which their academic careers started or developed"²⁹⁹ at times focused on disabled students. The recipients of this award have been described as "role models, and an inspiration for each of us."³⁰⁰ This type of language use is common in the 'superhero' success narrative described earlier. However, although a disabled student received this award on a number of occasions, not all recipients were disabled. This indicates that various criteria were considered for the granting of the award, and that it was not merely awarded to disabled students who 'overcame' their disability.

More detailed articles often provide an overview of an individual's life and career. This includes both disabled individuals and able-bodied disability activists. Both the personal accomplishments of those under discussion and firsts for SU in terms of accessibility development are mentioned here. For instance, details are provided of the first full-time blind student who studied at a South African university, gaining a Masters degree from SU in 1950.³⁰¹ The first quadriplegic employee to be appointed at SU in 1994 is also mentioned.³⁰² The focus here is positive, and these articles may read as an elaborate list of accomplishments. Nonetheless, the language use avoids cliché phrases associated with the 'superhero' narrative such as 'overcoming' and 'against all odds.' These articles thus mention accomplishments without deliberate attempts at exaggeration.

The article entitled "Maties' paralysed 'Superman' keeps believing, hoping and dreaming" proves an exception in this regard. It is a two-page spread, including photos, and relates the story of how a SU student was injured during a rugby match in his first year and returned to the university to resume his studies three years later. It is unclear how much of the content is based on direct quotations, thereby reflecting the views of the disabled individual

²⁹⁸ See, for example, "Universiteit huldig drie vasbyters," *Matieland 1*, 2004, pp. 24-25.

²⁹⁹ "Uitstygweners is rolmoedelle," *Matieland 1*, 2008, p. 6.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ "Fokus op Connie Aucamp," *Matieland 3*, 1991, p. 3.

³⁰² "Kwadruplegiese sportster 'n toonbeeld van vasbyt," *Matieland 3*, 1994, p. 19.

himself, and how much of the presentation is the interpretation of the author. Regardless, some dominant notions regarding disability are evident. The article states:

A rugby injury seven years ago completely changed the life of a talented young sportsman and bright student. But Maties' paralysed 'Superman' keeps believing, hoping and dreaming. He dreams of a career and is planning his wedding at the end of the year with the girl who stole his heart. Like the 'superman' actor Christopher Reeves a Maties honours student lives in a paralysed body, but he doesn't allow this to get him down. He lives for the future [...] He returned to Stellenbosch to try and resume his life where it derailed three years ago, to fulfil his dream of being a Matie and graduating [...] As quadriplegic, being a student is extremely difficult, but he has perseverance [...] Despite his disability he lives with thankfulness and cheerfulness[...]³⁰³

As the above quote demonstrates, this article forms part of the 'overcoming disability' narrative. It provides details regarding rehabilitation after the accident, daily life, accomplishing basic tasks, interests and hobbies. Disability is regarded here as a tragedy that interfered with a young man's life. His disability is directly referred to as "the tragedy that struck him."³⁰⁴ A period of adjustment is expected when dealing with disability, possibly more so in the case of an acquired disability. However, this article seems to celebrate an individual, not for any of his achievements, but merely for having both a disability and an active lifestyle within mainstream society.

This view demonstrates a number of preconceptions. Firstly, it illustrates the low expectations society has for disabled individuals and it seems to view 'success' and 'disability' as mutually exclusive terms. It implies that the rare disabled individual who achieves success; success, in this case being defined merely as an integrated life within society, ought to be celebrated. Within this narrative, disability is regarded as the deviant that cannot be reconciled with success. Those who do succeed in such situations are consequently elevated to the status of a 'superhero.' Interestingly, very little is mentioned regarding the general accessibility of campus for a wheelchair user, apart from the fact that friends and lecturers have been helpful and accommodating regarding his studies. SU's adaptation of a student house to serve as suitable accommodation "especially for him"³⁰⁵ is also stated. Thus, a lack of critical engagement with society regarding social responsibility and their role in the

³⁰³ "Maties se verlamde 'superman' bly glo, hoop en droom," *Matieland 2*, 1999, pp. 26-27.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

environmental obstacles that disabled individuals encounter, which McDougall critiques, is also evident here.³⁰⁶

In the closing paragraph of the article, banking details are also provided should anyone wish to make donations to the disabled individual in question. This detail departs from the superhero narrative and focuses the reader's attention on the dependency or 'special needs' of disabled people. Such an add-on presents a number of challenges. It places the disabled individual in a dependant position, requiring aid from able-bodied society, or at least indicates that such aid, would be welcomed if offered.

5.2.2 Individuals involved in Disability Activism

These individuals are mostly alumni students who currently serve as staff members. Frequently, mention is made of recognition achieved within their fields and contributions they made to accessibility on campus or disability awareness in South Africa. The primary focus is on improvement and progress. Nevertheless, some vital issues are also recognised within these articles. One states:

'Disabled people should get equal opportunities. The disabled student's life lies ahead, they don't have time to fight [for equal opportunities] now.' That's why she's doing it. Corné Rossouw, lecturer in Human Movement Studies, who initiated many of the changes to make the SU campus more accessible for the disabled. She literally steamrolled over everyone and achieved the nearly impossible: A national event for 500 disabled participants of all ethnic groups on a (then) relatively conservative campus not yet equipped with proper facilities for the disabled. She saw the need and had the drive to find a solution – and awaken an awareness at SU and among the general public – to look at the disabled people's problems with new understanding and insight. One of her dreams is to establish a disability unit on campus, where a disabled staff member, lecturer, student or prospective student can get help and advice at one place.³⁰⁷

As demonstrated in the above quote, the past inaccessibility of campus in general is admitted and the vital role played by individual efforts in bringing about change is acknowledged. This is significant, since it demonstrates a willingness to engage not only with SU's successes, but also with the areas where improvements are required. It is interesting to consider the process of implementing such improvements. This 1998 article, for instance, discusses the possible benefit of a disability unit. Archival material indicates that some

³⁰⁶ K. McDougall: "'Ag shame' and superheroes: stereotype and the signification of disability," in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Schneider, and M. Priestley (eds.) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, p. 393.

³⁰⁷ I. Hugo: "Veggees vir gestremdes se regte," *Matieland* 3, 1998, p. 27.

assistance for disabled students was available at this time through the Advice Forum for Students with Disabilities, but a Disability Unit as such was not established until 2007.³⁰⁸

This category also includes interviews with individuals regarding their personal or career profiles, which do not place the primary focus on disability. These are similar to those discussed above. The main difference, however is that the discussion does not revolve around careers primarily dedicated to disability. Rather, disability is only briefly mentioned. Typically, a list of the individuals' interests, or issues they wish to give attention to would include disability, but no details regarding their plans to improve accessibility or examples demonstrating their knowledge of the current situation surrounding disability are provided. Speculations regarding the sincerity of their intent to address disability issues cannot be made. It is equally possible that such individuals had a sincere interest in the well-being of the disabled community on campus, or that they just included the disabled in the discussion for the sake of thoroughness. The articles do not provide sufficient details for a definitive answer either way.³⁰⁹

5.3 Accessibility on Campus

There are nine articles dealing with the accessibility of campus and the facilities available for disabled students during this time. They can be divided into two categories: 1) Articles dealing with available services for the disabled and 2) articles concerning the accessibility of physical spaces. In terms of services, articles mostly deal with new things available on campus, such as braille facilities and a scale model of the university with a braille map to help new blind and visually impaired students orientate themselves on campus.³¹⁰ A new specialisation course in sign-language linguistics in 1995³¹¹ as well as the opening of the disability unit in 2007³¹² is also mentioned.

When considering the accessibility of physical spaces, provisions for the disabled community seem to have been regarded with a measure of inconsistency. Some articles commenting on the planned renovations of campus buildings give detailed descriptions of general improvements that will be undertaken and how they will improve the study

³⁰⁸ Further examples in this category include: "Fokus op Corné Rossouw," *Matieland 3*, 1992, p. 3. and "Gestremdes se vegter kry medalje van Mbeki," *Matieland 1*, 2001, p. 32.

³⁰⁹ L. Rippenaar: "'n passie vir maties maak 'dok' dag en nag 'n mentor," *Matieland 2*, 2005, pp. 12-13. and M. Viljoen: "A life of significance," *Matieland 1*, 2005, pp. 16-17.

³¹⁰ "Blinde Maties gehelp met hul oriëntering," *Matieland 1*, 1989, p. 40. and "Braille facility for visually impaired Maties," *Matieland 3*, 1993, p. 11.

³¹¹ "First in SA: specialization in Sign Language Linguistics," *Matieland 2*, 1995, p. 8.

³¹² "Beter diens vir studente met spesiale leerbehoefes," *Matieland 1*, 2007, p. 7.

experience for all students yet make no mention of accessibility or lack thereof.³¹³ The reason for this is difficult to ascertain, especially since this is not consistently the case. Other articles dealing with renovations do make mention of improved accessibility along with other changes.³¹⁴ Interestingly though, even in cases where accessibility was improved it may not be directly mentioned in the article.³¹⁵ Improving accessibility thus seems to have been a consideration in some cases when planning changes. Ultimately, a consistent awareness of accessibility or lack thereof throughout campus appears to have remained absent.

5.4 Assistive Technology

Five articles deal with innovation and the development of assistive technology that can be useful to individuals with disabilities. Students, alumni and staff members from SU are typically involved in the development process of these technologies. As can be expected, such developments are connected to the advancement of modern technology in general and the increased use of computers from the 1980s onward. For example, in 1987, the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering developed a braille notepad. The portable unit could store and retrieve braille text, allowing the blind to use a personal computer. It included a braille keyboard, an electronic memory and a mouse. The mouse consisted of a movement sensor and a number of pins which were raised electronically to form braille characters, allowing the blind user to read what is being displayed on the screen.³¹⁶ Similarly, in 1988 senior lecturers from the Engineering and Linguistics Departments developed a sophisticated text-to-speech synthesiser for Afrikaans. This was achieved by connecting a synthesiser and an ordinary telephone to a computer.³¹⁷

These projects generally arose both from a community service perspective and in response to the needs of a particular disabled individual or disability group. The community service perspective offers an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, such portrayals may unintentionally increase the emphasis on the disabled as dependent individuals reliant on the aid of able-bodied society. However, in opposition to this viewpoint, the technologies

³¹³ I. Hugo: "Neelsie nou 'n groot sukses," *Matieland 2*, 1998, p. 19. and D. Davis: "Hoofkampus kry 2 nuwe geboue," *Matieland 2*, 1998, p. 20.

³¹⁴ "Deeltydse studie spog met nuwe gebou op Belvillepark," *Matieland 2*, 1996, p. 15. and D. Davis: "verligting vir die nypende verblyftekort," *Matieland 2*, 1998, p. 21.

³¹⁵ See, in this regard, I. Hugo: "Neelsie nou 'n groot sukses," *Matieland 2*, 1998, p. 19. Other sources indicate that the new Neelsie was indeed more accessible than its predecessor, but no mention of it is made in this article.

³¹⁶ "Engineers help the blind to operate computers," *Matieland 1*, 1987, p. 14.

³¹⁷ "Taalkundiges, ingenieurs werk saam, die rekenaar leer Afrikaans praat," *Matieland 2*, 1988, pp. 12-13.

developed aim to increase independence and employment opportunities for the disabled, indicating a belief that they can live as independent, contributing members of society.³¹⁸

Articles in this category also illustrate how South Africa's socio-economic position as a developing country plays a role in the development of assistive technologies. South Africa offers a unique set of challenges to its disabled population, since many of these individuals also experience some level of poverty. As a result, the technologies developed are often cheaper variations of products available elsewhere, using locally available raw materials rather than importing raw materials or the finished product.³¹⁹ This approach results in a product that is not only more affordable, but also more widely available and easier to repair and service. In the relevant articles, the development of cheaper technologies is often the result of personal contact with disabled individuals.³²⁰

5.5 Welfare Work

The final category of articles, of which only two were found between 1986 and 2007, is SU's involvement with welfare work or skills development programmes with the disabled. These articles display a more direct community service approach than those discussed above. They also highlight disability as an inconvenience and an obstacle to be overcome. At a short course offered by SU staff in Zimbabwe, for instance, SU is credited with offering "a special service by using a computer program to convert all the reading material into braille text for the sake of one blind student." Portraying services for the disabled in this way, as a 'special favour' rather than a right in effect strengthens the notion of the disabled individual as 'the problem' in an otherwise functioning system.³²¹

A subsequent article, published six years later, also discusses community service work involving the local disabled community. However, a distinctly different approach is taken here.³²² The article discusses a course in entrepreneurship and business skills for wheelchair users offered at a local hospital, but the focus is not exclusively on the support disabled individuals receive from able-bodied society. Instead, attention is given to the amount of independence and integration disabled people have achieved. Thereby, the aid and skill development offered is not portrayed as an external enterprise aimed at 'helping those

³¹⁸ "Student se geduld lei tot deurbraak," *Matieland 1*, 1987, p. 22.

³¹⁹ Breytenbach, M.: "Breakthrough with cheap, simple, wheelchair," *Matieland 2*, 1991, p. 9.

³²⁰ "The irony of a surgeon's death," *Matieland 1*, 2002, p. 31. and Breytenbach, M.: "Breakthrough with cheap, simple, wheelchair," *Matieland 2*, 1991, p. 9.

³²¹ "Kweekskool bied kursus in Zimbabwe aan," *Matieland 1*, 1995, p. 7.

³²² S. Sedres: "Kursus bied 'n toekoms vir gestremdes," *Matieland 1*, 2001, pp. 20-21.

who cannot help themselves,’ but rather as the continuation of a process that started and grew from other sources, particularly from within the disabled community itself.

The article goes on to provide details regarding several of the course participants, including their daily lives, disabilities, challenges and independent support structures. Overemphasising positive aspects could lead to the ‘heroic’ narrative discussed earlier. Although parts of this article could be regarded as celebratory in this sense, one aspect which guards against this is the integration of direct quotes from the disabled individuals involved, which describe disability in a manner that is not stereotypical. For instance, one participant is quoted as saying: “we have our own support group for people with disabilities [...] and are permanently busy with the task of educating the community that, although we have disabilities, we are also just people; people with dreams and ideals.”³²³ Through the use of quotes like these, which reflect a shared humanity, this article provides a more nuanced view of disability. Furthermore, the emphasis is not on the disability itself or ways to improve or cure it, but rather on ways in which disabled people can be increasingly integrated into mainstream society through skills development. Thereby, this portrayal goes beyond both the traditional ‘heroic’ and ‘dependency’ narratives.

5.6 *Matieland*: Summary

The following table provides an overview of the disability-related articles published in *Matieland*, according to their various themes, between 1986 and 2007:

***Matieland*: Disability Related Articles**

Total	37
Sport and Disability	12
Individual Personal Profiles	9
Accessibility on Campus	9
Assistive Technology	5
Welfare Work	2

Figure 6: Matieland Summary

³²³ S. Sedres: “Kursus bied 'n toekoms vir gestremdes,” *Matieland 1*, 2001, pp. 20-21.

When considering the disability-related material published in *Matieland* for the period 1986-2007 as a whole, some general observations must be made. It is evident that SU has a particularly long tradition of accepting blind and visually impaired students. This is made clear through the services available on campus to facilitate their studies, the technologies developed to aid them in a specific manner and the sheer number of blind or visually impaired students that are mentioned in these articles. By comparison, deafness and the needs of deaf students in the HE context is encountered relatively rarely, while different types of mobility impairment seem to fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. This is in accordance with the findings of Chapter 2 on the institutional environment. The data collected from the small-scale qualitative study conducted among SU alumni in Chapter 4 also seems to support this.

Moreover, it is made clear that, at least in the case of the articles found here, the necessary momentum for change, increased access and awareness is often provided by individuals with personal knowledge and experience. These individuals seem interested in the current situation and its possible improvement of their own accord, and appear to take up extra tasks in an attempt to bring about improvements in addition to their official job descriptions and responsibilities. This appears to be undertaken mostly without the prompting of outside sources. It could perhaps be argued that such individuals and their efforts were initially responsible for bringing issues in this area more firmly under management's attention. The significance of the work of key individuals is also highlighted in the discussion of the institutional environment in Chapter 4.

Throughout the period under consideration, a clear and continuous focus on marketing and the maintaining of a positive image can also be observed. This is in line with the general purpose of the *Matieland* as an official periodical and can, to some degree, be expected of any higher education publication in respect to itself. The fact that this focus on a positive image does not lead to a complete denial of problem areas is significant in demonstrating commitment to ensuring the full integration of disabled students in all aspects of student life.

Possibly most telling is the fact that these narratives do not appear to indicate a linear progression towards improvement as time passes. It cannot be stated that all the portrayals of disabled individuals from the 2000s illustrate a more nuanced understanding than those from the 1980s, for example. In fact, an article from the 1980s may even engage with the complexities surrounding disability in a more sophisticated manner than an article from the 2000s. The reasons for this are complex and varied. It may be related to the particular

individuals at university during a certain period, the personal experiences of the author of a certain article, or an entire range of other factors. Regardless of the reasons though, non-linear progression illustrates an important principle in terms of historical understanding. It is undeniable that, society, the media and government have placed an ever-increasing emphasis on the understanding and valuing of diversity in the South African context particularly post 1994. Nonetheless, the non-linear nature of these narratives indicates that the situation surrounding disability is more complex than a valuing or understanding of diversity.

6. Die Matie Articles

A discussion of articles related to disability found in *Die Matie* between 1986-2007 follows. The same categorisation of themes is maintained, and articles are again discussed according to the frequency of their occurrence in descending order. Five of the articles do not fit into any established category and will be discussed last.

6.1 Accessibility on Campus

The majority of the articles in *Die Matie*, 19 of 46, deal with the accessibility of campus and facilities. These articles can be further divided into three sub-categories: 1) the built environment, 2) available services and 3) awareness-raising on campus. Articles concerned with the built environment include details about ramps, lifts, planned upgrades to buildings etc. These indicate both the need for improvements on campus and reports where progress had been made. Articles detailing services available to students with disabilities include both the current situation and future plans. Individuals specifically hired to address accessibility matters on campus are also indicated. Articles related to awareness raising campaigns on campus by definition, have the aim of increasing awareness and facilities for the disabled community and as such, are included in this category.

6.1.1 The Built Environment

Particularly between 1990 and 2000, *Die Matie* seems to have reported regularly on the accessibility of campus facilities. Articles such as: “Disabled get no hearing,”³²⁴ “Fate of the disabled at SU under the spotlight,”³²⁵ and “Campus still not very wheelchair friendly”³²⁶ are good examples in this regard. They highlight the progress that SU still needed to make to

³²⁴ A. Van Wyk, en B. Kruger: “Gestremdes voor dooiemansdeur,” *Die Matie*, 20 Maart 1991, p. 10.

³²⁵ N. Schoeman en C. Brink: “Lot van gestremdes by US onder soeklig,” *Die Matie*, 23 September 1993, p. 7.

³²⁶ M. Brink: “Kampus steeds nie baie rolstoel “vriendelik” nie,” *Die Matie*, 6 September 2000, p. 13.

become a truly inclusive institution in terms of disability. The focus falls specifically on the lack of accessibility in the built environment, with problems such as completely inaccessible buildings and sidewalks as well as extremely steep ramps pointed out as some of the main concerns. When highlighting these problems, the articles explore the experiences of disabled students on campus during that time. This is vital, since it positions the accessibility issues closer to the readers and emphasises that it affects fellow students that are encountered daily on campus, as opposed to a far-off, unknown percentage of the population.

It is revealing that these articles do not seem to argue that solely the built environment requires improving for equal access to be realised for disabled individuals. “Disabled get no hearing” for example, points out that the lack of a central organisation to carry the interests of the disabled community on campus forward makes progress towards positive change significantly more challenging.³²⁷ “Fate of the disabled at SU under the spotlight” also discusses disability in the context of wider society, stating that 12.7 percent of the national population have some form of disability, but fewer than one percent of these form part of the workforce, revealing that accessibility and inclusion are issues that also deserve attention on a national level.³²⁸

It is part of human nature to be helpful, but disabled people need more than that. They need acceptance, compassion and friendship (and students who don't steal their parking spaces!). Now that the buildings have been changed, perhaps it is time for us as students to change our attitudes as well.³²⁹

The above quote from an article titled “It would never happen to me. But if it did, would you cope?” challenges individuals to examine their thinking on disability matters. After detailing progress SU has made towards making the built environment more accessible, it concludes that this should be paralleled with changes in people’s mind-set. In “Disabled students adjust well,” a partially sighted student also notes the importance of people’s attitudes, stating that “willingness to help is worth a lot more than any facilities or technology.”³³⁰ These examples clearly recognise that a welcoming environment towards individuals with disabilities at SU involves more than the adaptation of inaccessible spaces. This is significant, since it indicates that the aim is not simply to improve accessibility, but rather to enable full integration of disabled students in every aspect of university life, both formal and informal.

³²⁷ A. Van Wyk, en B. Kruger: “Gestremdes voor dooiemansdeur,” *Die Matie*, 20 Maart 1991, p. 10.

³²⁸ N. Schoeman en C. Brink: “Lot van gestremdes by US onder soeklig,” *Die Matie*, 23 September 1993, p. 7.

³²⁹ H. Buys and L. Dafert: “It would never happen to me. But if it did, would you cope?” *Die Matie*, 12 Maart 1997, p. 5.

³³⁰ O. Barrow en T. Vorster: “Gestremde studente pas goed aan,” *Die Matie*, 11 Maart 1998, p. 11.

Although accessibility issues that require attention are prominent in these articles, in most cases no action plan or concrete steps are put forward towards improving the situation. However, a level of continuity is present through the fact that *Die Matie* returns to previously mentioned issues several editions later to investigate progress. For instance, “It would never happen to me. But if it did, would you cope?”³³¹ appears as a follow-up on “Fate of the disabled at SU under the spotlight,”³³² reporting that progress had been made in addressing issues mentioned previously. This involved increased accessibility of several newer university buildings such as the Neelsie, the BJ Voster Building³³³ and the R. W. Wilcocks Building. In addition, an Awareness and Student Committee³³⁴ had been established to “investigate accommodation for disabled students and improve facilities, access to buildings and services for the disabled.”³³⁵



Figure 7: The R. W. Wilcocks Building

Importantly, this report on progress in *Die Matie* does not imply that campus is subsequently fully accessible, and all necessary work thus completed. On the contrary, it

³³¹ H. Buys and L. Dafert: “It would never happen to me. But if it did, would you cope?” *Die Matie*, 12 Maart 1997, p. 5.

³³² N. Schoeman en C. Brink: “Lot van gestremdes by US onder soeklig,” *Die Matie*, 23 September 1993, p. 7.

³³³ Currently known as the Arts and Social Sciences Building

³³⁴ The exact nature, composition and operations of this committee could not be determined. However, it is possible that *Die Matie* is referring here to the *ad hoc* committee of the rector’s daily management team discussed in Chapter 2. As they operated 1993-1997, this article would have been published at the end of their investigation, whether this was indeed the case could not be definitively determined though.

³³⁵ H. Buys and L. Dafert: “It would never happen to me. But if it did, would you cope?” *Die Matie*, 12 Maart 1997, p. 5.

explicitly states that the inaccessibility of older buildings such as the Ou Hoofgebou³³⁶ (Old Main Building) remains an issue. It also highlights new challenges the campus community recently encountered in terms of accessibility such as the arrival of the first deaf students on campus.³³⁷ A recurring focus on improvement is a clear trend within this category. According to “Fate of the disabled at SU under the spotlight,” in terms of a disability friendly environment “SU already compares better than most other universities.”³³⁸ But this is not intended to suggest that no need for improvement remains as the same article also notes several lingering issues.



Figure 8: *The Old Main Building*

An article concerning wheelchair accessibility on campus recounts:

For Brian, the prospect of a library visit is overshadowed by the undeniable length and gradient of the library ramp... The issue of wheelchair accessibility on campus receives increasing attention from the university authorities. Various attempts are made at making the experience of student life more comfortable for wheelchair users and individuals with disabilities. According to the university’s official policy on disabled students, efforts are made ‘to meet the needs of disabled individuals in the context of teaching and research facilities within the bounds of feasibility and affordability.’ Despite the high priority these issues hold, various practical stumbling blocks remain, which complicate the execution of the official policy. According to Brian, problems persist despite numerous changes made to make his

³³⁶ Currently housing the Law Faculty.

³³⁷ H. Buys and L. Dafert: “It would never happen to me. But if it did, would you cope?” *Die Matie*, 12 Maart 1997, p. 5.

³³⁸ N. Schoeman en C. Brink: “Lot van gestremdes by US onder soeklig,” *Die Matie*, 23 September 1993, p. 7.

course more accessible. He is dependant on friends and fellow students to carry him upstairs in order to attend his practicals. Some adaptations made on campus also remain impractical and are, in fact, not wheelchair friendly.³³⁹

This article explores the experiences of Brian, a fourth year BSc student and wheelchair user as a window into the wheelchair accessibility on campus. It also maintains a general balance between recognising changes and improvements implemented on the one hand, and highlighting remaining challenges on the other. A shortage of funds is repeatedly mentioned as a hampering factor in the university's plans for the continued improvement of the built environment in terms of accessibility.³⁴⁰

Although the focus on improvement is prevalent, it does not appear to follow a linear progression. For example, a 2003 article has an overwhelmingly positive view of the facilities and services at SU. It claims that “[...] although it’s not always easy, SU appears to excel quite well when it comes to the integration of physically disabled students as equal members of the student community.”³⁴¹ The article further elaborates on disabled students’ experiences through direct quotes. One student “is very impressed with the services the university offers,” while another describes facilities as “adequate.” Furthermore, although ignorance among the student population remains a problem the disabled students interviewed here do not consider themselves socially isolated. The article provides further information on services available to students with disabilities. An employee at student affairs notes: “the university is doing everything possible within the framework of equity and affordability to accommodate students with disabilities.” A detailed account of available services follows, and the article concludes that “it is clear that SU puts a lot of effort into making all people a part of the Maties community and in this way contributes to the broadening of diversity.”³⁴²

After such an overwhelmingly positive reaction from disabled students themselves the subsequent narrative is likely to be more of the same. It could even be expected that facilities and accessibility continually increase as the university is ever-modernising throughout the 2000s. Yet some subsequent articles (that fall outside the direct scope of this study) indicate that this does not always appear to be the case. One 2008 article titled “Students with disabilities feel campus infrastructure leaves much to be desired,” recounts:

³³⁹ M. Brink: “Kampus steeds nie baie rolstoel “vriendelik” nie,” *Die Matie*, 6 September 2000, p. 13.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ L. van der Watt, en J. Volschenk: “US baie toeganklik vir gestremdes,” *Die Matie*, 26 Februarie 2003, p. 13

³⁴² *Ibid.*

The university often makes statements about the institution being accessible... but how disability friendly is our campus really? ... Her chosen residence was declared accessible, but the only perceivable change was a ramp at the front entrance, while the shower taps remained unreachably high and the space in the dining room is inadequate for her wheelchair... Upon inquiry prior to arrival she was assured that her chosen field of study and the relevant buildings were accessible... [But] at the start of her classes she was advised to change her field of study because the relevant building did not satisfy her accessibility requirements... She had to extend her studies with a year... The university is open to ideas on improving accessibility... It is the task of disabled individuals to inform the university on how campus can be improved to increase universal access...³⁴³

In 2008, five years after the previous ‘success story,’ this article appears in *Die Matie*, challenging readers to re-evaluate the frequent statements regarding SU’s ‘disability friendliness’ in light of the surprising experience of one disabled student. The final paragraph emphasises that certain lecturers do make an effort to accommodate disabled students. Interestingly, it goes on to mention the Disability Unit (established in 2007) specifically, noting that the office is there to “help students with disabilities.” Yet, nowhere does the article mention any actions taken by either university management or the office of students with disabilities to help this specific student. Naturally, this does not necessarily mean that nothing was done. Nevertheless, the final sentence reading “students can contact [the head of the office for students with special learning needs / disabilities] for any information on how students can help ‘walk the extra mile’ for a fellow Matie”³⁴⁴ does seem to imply that the success of a disabled student facing obstacles is partially the responsibility of his / her peers.

6.1.2 Available Services

In terms of services available to students with disabilities, several articles note an increase in such services. “Better help for the blind,”³⁴⁵ “SU now more accessible for students with disabilities,”³⁴⁶ and “Disabled students adjust well”³⁴⁷ are examples in this regard. Once again, the focus is primarily on increased access to the built environment or specific facilities. A specific donation is often credited with making such changes possible and a lack of funds is mentioned on several occasions as a main hampering factor to further increasing provisions for the disabled.

³⁴³ E. Potgieter: “Studente met gestremdhede voel kampusinfrastruktuur laat veel te wense oor, US-kampus nog nie volkome rolstoelvriendelik nie,” *Die Matie*, 7 August 2008, p. 7.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ G. Marx: “Beter hulp vir blindes,” *Die Matie*, 14 Oktober 1993, p.2.

³⁴⁶ L. Bakkes: “US Nou meer toeganklik vir studente met gestremthede,” *Die Matie*, 24 Maart 1999, p. 13.

³⁴⁷ Barrow en T. Vorster: “Gestremde studente pas goed aan,” *Die Matie*, 11 Maart 1998, p. 11.

Although university processes are slow, some articles indicate that an attempt to address concerns was made. For instance, as already noted, the article “Disabled get no hearing” expresses concern due to the lack of a central organisation or contact person for disability matters.³⁴⁸ Some brief articles in the late 1990s and early 2000s provide details regarding specific appointments in the division of student affairs for disability and accessibility matters on campus.³⁴⁹ Although addressing accessibility concerns remained only one of these individuals’ portfolios, and therefore was not their sole responsibility, it nonetheless meant that disabled students had a specific designated contact person for their concerns.

6.1.3 Raising Awareness

A focus on creating awareness concerning disabled students in extracurricular aspects of university life is evident in this category. Awareness campaigns were usually planned by several role players on campus in collaboration with each other. For instance, in 1998, the student council and the campus radio station MFM launched a disability awareness campaign. This included, among other activities, live interviews with disabled students and staff working with disability from the division student affairs.³⁵⁰ Later that same year, the chairperson and vice-chairperson of the student council, along with the editor of *Die Matie*, spent a day in a wheelchair to raise awareness about disabilities on campus as part of the launch week of Maties Community Service.³⁵¹

Campus-wide campaigns to raise awareness usually included several activities hosted in residence or faculty context, talks concerning current disability matters, information sessions and informal fun activities like attempting an obstacle-course while blindfolded, or performing certain tasks in a wheelchair. Although such campaigns are generally deemed worthwhile, disappointment is also expressed in the limited number of participants from the wider campus community.³⁵² Disabled students also began to be increasingly included in student societies. For example, in 2003, the Maties Dance Society began offering dance

³⁴⁸ A. Van Wyk, en B. Kruger: “Gestremdes voor dooiemansdeur,” *Die Matie*, 20 Maart 1991, p. 10.

³⁴⁹ See in this regard: “Anne by Admin aangestel,” *Die Matie*, 10 September 1997, p. 4. and News Editorial, “Nog ‘n oud SR-lid by studentesake aangestel,” *Die Matie*, 16 Februarie, 2000, p. 5.

³⁵⁰ L. Schoeman: “SR-gestremdeheidsweek moes begrip by studente vestig,” *Die Matie*, 27 Mei 1998, p. 2.

³⁵¹ M. Noble: “Bekendstellingsweek deur MGD Gehou,” *Die Matie*, 14 October 1998, p. 3.

³⁵² E. Sheriff en T. Du Randt: “Dis-Maties dryf losliddagprojek,” *Die Matie*, 29 August 2007, p. 5. 7

classes specifically for disabled individuals.³⁵³ Dis-Maties, the student society for accessibility matters mentioned previously was also first established in 2006.³⁵⁴

6.2 Sport and Disability

The second-largest number of articles in *Die Matie*³⁵⁵ deal with sports and disability. This includes firstly articles detailing the sporting facilities available at SU for disabled students and disabled sporting events that had been hosted at SU. Secondly, articles about disabled students at SU who excel in their chosen sport were also prevalent. Thus, these articles can be subdivided into institutionally focused and individually focussed narratives, similar to sports related articles in *Matieland*. When considering articles related to sports, it quickly becomes apparent that SU has a long tradition of focussing on sports and disability and has consequently become well-known specifically for their support regarding sport for the disabled. Already in 1983, the first South African sports championships for the physically disabled were held in Stellenbosch with cooperation from the university.³⁵⁶ This event was hosted at SU for quite a number of years and several SU students proved to be leading participants, with one new world record being set in 1991.³⁵⁷ Furthermore, SU had been involved in the Paralympics for quite some time, preparing and organising Paralympic squads going to the Games in Barcelona, (1992) Atlanta (1996) and Sydney (2000).³⁵⁸ This supports the findings in Chapter 2 related to sports and disability.

6.2.1 Institutional Focus

The focus on sporting activities for the disabled appears to have remained constant throughout the period under investigation. In 2006, SU launched a disability sports club for the first time, thereby giving disabled Maties the opportunity to participate in organised sporting activities without having to join another club first. The club had a twofold purpose: supporting disabled athletes at SU and raising awareness regarding disability sport more generally. Corné Rossouw of the Department of Sport Science at SU defined the club as a “big awareness project.” She explained:

³⁵³ A. Chapman: “Maties dance society now presents classes for the disabled, *Die Matie*, 7 Mei 2003, p. 8.

³⁵⁴ G. Schreuder: “Dis-Maties binnekort op kampus, gestremdes kry vereniging,” *Die Matie*, 3 Mei 2006, p. 2. It is noteworthy that despite some setbacks and changes this society is still currently active on campus.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is rare for a single, student-driven disability society to remain active for such a long period, especially given the fact that the majority of students remain on campus only three to four years.

³⁵⁵ Nine of the 46 in *Die Matie*

³⁵⁶ The provisions for disability sport at SU are also discussed in chapter 2.

³⁵⁷ “Gestremdes puik op bos,” *Die Matie*, 19 April 1991, p. 19.

³⁵⁸ C. Wulff: “Disability sport club a first for South Africa, SU launches club for disabled,” *Die Matie*, 8 Maart 2006, p. 19.

We want this project to benefit not only our disabled students but also non-disabled students and the local community. We can do that by making everybody in Stellenbosch aware of disability sport and working towards the optimal inclusion of disabled athletes into other clubs.³⁵⁹

Die Matie articles also focus on increasing awareness around disability sports on several occasions. “Sports no stumbling-block for the disabled,” for instance, elaborates on a disability sporting day that was organised by the student council. The event showcased different sports that were available for disabled students with the aim of “increasing awareness among students that disabled individuals can be equal participants in sports and need not be relegated to the side-lines.”³⁶⁰ Subsequent articles also provide details related to specific disability sports such as goalball, designed for visually impaired individuals.³⁶¹

6.2.2 Individual Focus

The longer articles concerning sport and disability generally centre on a single individual, covering the progression of their sporting career over time. As a whole, they are factual and discuss sporting careers and achievements similarly to any article dealing with an able-bodied athlete, noting their interest in sport, the medals or records they hold, their sporting career and plans for the future. Though these individuals are usually SU students, the institution as such or its support structures are not credited with their accomplishments. Furthermore, the relevant individuals’ disabilities do not receive undue attention, instead featuring merely as another fact about their lives. The articles “Krige performs excellently at SA games for disabled,”³⁶² “Profile, Neels Troskie: blindness doesn’t stop Matie,”³⁶³ and “Stellenbosch’s Paralympic achiever”³⁶⁴ illustrates this balance well. At times, disability does come to the forefront more prominently. One athlete openly admits that “it’s not always easy,” acknowledging: “sometimes I get frustrated and obstinate when I’m hampered by practical things.”³⁶⁵ Nevertheless, even in such instances, disability does not go on to dominate the entire article, receiving no more attention than some other interesting fact might. However, problematic attitudes do surface in some articles. The one titled “Ernst aims for Paralympic Gold” states:

³⁵⁹ C. Wulff: “Disability sport club a first for South Africa, SU launches club for disabled,” *Die Matie*, 8 Maart 2006, p. 19.

³⁶⁰ J. Rossouw: “Sport nie struikelblok vir gestremdes,” *Die Matie*, 8 Augustus 1996, p. 15.

³⁶¹ C. Rossouw: “Doelbal, spansport vir visueel gestremdes,” *Die Matie*, 22 Maart 2006.

³⁶² J. Grobelaar: “Krige presteer puik by SA Spele vir gestremdes,” *Die Matie*, 27 April 1989, p. 18.

³⁶³ “Profiel Neels Troskie: Blindheid keer Matie nie,” *Die Matie*, 26 Oktober 1989, p. 15.

³⁶⁴ E. Nolte: “Stellenbosch se paralimpiese presteerder,” *Die Matie*, 30 October 1996, p. 15.

³⁶⁵ A. De Vos: “Sport help Krige volhard,” *Die Matie*, 11 Mei 1989, p. 7.

His parents raised him like any other child and so he never saw himself as ‘different’. The first time he came to a turning point and realised he had to make a choice about whether or not to adapt was at the beginning of his first year as student at SU [...] I asked if one ever really accepts a deficiency. ‘What makes you a success is how full your life’s going to be, how you handle it, process it and make peace with it. If you don’t make peace with it you’ll never have a full life, you’ll live a life of regrets[...]’³⁶⁶

This illustrates the problematic ways in which people unconsciously talk, and by extension think, about disability. The article discusses the life, disability and sporting career of athlete Ernst van Dyk rather extensively. The above quote and others in the article demonstrate how van Dyk views and accepts his disability. Yet, the author’s use of the term ‘deficiency’ to describe the disability indicates a view that, probably unconsciously, considers disability a lack, as opposed to a fact of life that simply requires some adaptations. It is doubtful that the author deliberately formulated views linking disability with deficiency. Quite possibly the author mistakenly used the term deficiency when meaning only the more neutral term disability. Nevertheless, the ill-considered use of the term could be considered indicative of the unconscious ways in which society at times views disability.

6.3 Welfare Work

Among the 46 disability-related articles found in *Die Matie* between 1986 and 2007, five deal with welfare work linked to disability. These include outreach programs aimed at uplifting the wider disabled community in the area, as well as donations to specific organisations doing disability-related work. In terms of community work primarily small-scale projects were undertaken. These included a carnival for the disabled, aimed at increasing social interaction among disabled individuals and the wider community, involving games and other activities³⁶⁷ as well as an educational workshop on physical activities for disabled children.³⁶⁸

In terms of financial support, specific mention is made of the Stellenbosch Work Centre for Adults with Disabilities. For example, Miss Matieland visited them to determine their needs.³⁶⁹ Some years later, Die Neelsie also made a donation to them from the money they received in fines when able-bodied individuals parked on the disabled bays in the Neelsie parking lot.³⁷⁰ Additionally, mention is made of a donation to the Pioneer School for

³⁶⁶ R. Vollgraaf: “Ernst mik vir paralimpiese goud,” *Die Matie*, 26 September 2007, p. 13.

³⁶⁷ I. Cilliers: “Gestremdheid keer nie karnaval,” *Die Matie*, 30 Maart 1988, p. 7

³⁶⁸ “Workshop for disabled,” *Die Matie*, 23 April 1997, p. 10.

³⁶⁹ “Me Matieland besoek sentrum vir gestremdes,” *Die Matie*, 12 Mei 1999, p. 9.

³⁷⁰ J. Roodt: “Neelsie beskerm, befonds en beywer, Studentesentrum gaan tot aksie oor,” *Die Matie*, 8 Februarie 2006, p. 4.

the blind in Worcester in 1996. These donations seem to be primarily motivated by PR and media concerns. This assertion is supported by the fact that in the piece dealing with the Pioneer School donation, the photo capturing the hand-over of the donation is larger than the corresponding text itself, and no information is provided on the school as such or their work within the blind and partially sighted communities.³⁷¹ Though the article detailing Die Neelsie's donation also includes other details about the centre, such as a new logo and involvement in new projects, a prominent photo of the donation is again visible.

6.4 Individual Personal Profiles

Five disability-related articles can be regarded as profiles of current students with disabilities at SU. These articles differ vastly in their portrayal of disabled individuals and disability in general. They also exemplify how differently disabled individuals view themselves, their experiences and their disabilities. This serves as a stark reminder that disability can be intensely personal, as it intimately affects the body.

Several articles note how individuals with disabilities feel that life doesn't owe them any favours. Instead, they regard it as their own responsibility to adjust to the world around them. An independent 'Life is what you make it' mentality is observable here. The articles "Life doesn't owe me anything,"³⁷² "Neels gets to know the inner person"³⁷³ and "Life of the blind"³⁷⁴ are good examples in this regard. Importantly, these articles do not focus solely on the relevant individual's disability as such. Information is also provided concerning their interests and hobbies, serving to point out that as individuals, their lives comprise more than simply a disability. Moreover, they do not necessarily regard themselves as disabled,³⁷⁵ or their disability seems to be relegated to the background as they engage in academic and social activities typical of students.³⁷⁶ These articles also indicate how differently able-bodied individuals view disability. The following quote notes the experiences of one wheelchair user on campus. He considers the pitying attitude of others to be a main non-structural hindrance.

He essentially encounters two types of people: those who accept him and those who say 'ah, shame.'

He comments: 'when I see people are blinded by my wheelchair and don't notice me at all it infuriates

³⁷¹ Skenking aan Pionierskool, slegs foto met kort beskrywing, geen opskrif of skrywer word genoem nie, *Die Matie*, 10 October 1996, p. 16.

³⁷² M. Leyden: "Die lewe skuld my niks," *Die Matie*, 13 March 2002, p. 10.

³⁷³ V. Brand: "Neels leer ken die mens binne die mens," *Die Matie*, 30 Maart 1988, p. 7.

³⁷⁴ J. Verster: "Lewe van 'n blinde," *Die Matie*, 1 September 2004, p. 6.

³⁷⁵ See: V. Brand: "Neels leer ken die mens binne die mens," *Die Matie*, 30 Maart 1988, p. 7.

³⁷⁶ See: M. Leyden: "Die lewe skuld my niks," *Die Matie*, 13 March 2002, p. 10. and J. Verster: "Lewe van 'n blinde," *Die Matie*, 1 September 2004, p. 6.

me to the extent that I could wring someone's neck. I encounter this every day.' He adapted easily to student life in Stellenbosch. He doesn't talk about himself and his disability much. 'I reckon I would have been the way I am even if I didn't sit in a wheelchair.' He's already turned down two radio interviews and a television interview because he doesn't like the publicity. He feels 'people get too sentimental.' Being confronted with the many physical obstacles on campus makes his blood boil. 'But in a while, I'm fine again, I get angry quickly, but don't stay angry long. If I see I can't get up a flight of stairs I ask someone for help, and if I can't find anyone I take my things and go.' Aside from physical obstacles pity is the biggest obstacle on campus. 'You find people who want to be friends with you just because you're sitting in a wheelchair. I can get along without that.'³⁷⁷

The inverse perception, of disabled people being regarded as 'remarkable' or 'inspirational,' as opposed to being pitied is prevalent in other articles within this category. For example, in an interview with a disabled student, one author notes: "he serves as an inspiration." Further stating that: "the world would simply be poorer without him."³⁷⁸ Another article, titled "This is what true friends are for" seems to walk the line between pitying the disabled person and extolling them as an object of inspiration. The article describes the close friendship between a disabled student and his roommate. Their friendship seems to be based on genuine shared interests and coincidentally studying the same degree and they deny that disability played a role in them forming a friendship. However, hints that the able-bodied individual to some degree took on a 'carer' role for his friend are present in statements like: "he couldn't just do anything or go anywhere, he had to think about (his disabled roommate) and whether or not he would be able to get around on his own."³⁷⁹ This also serves as an indication that some areas remained inaccessible to disabled individuals and this limited their independence.

6.5 Assistive Technology

In terms of innovation and the development of assistive technology only three articles were found in *Die Matie*. All these articles detail the development of assistive technology devices within the Faculty of Engineering. Two articles focus on the development of a new Braille notepad aimed at assisting blind individuals,³⁸⁰ while the third discusses the development of a specific computer mouse for use by a quadriplegic.³⁸¹ These projects are completed with the cooperation of both lecturers and students. While the PR element of

³⁷⁷ J. Wolmarans: "Jammerte kry hom onder, trappe nie!" *Die Matie*, 20 Augustus 1987, p. 7.

³⁷⁸ M. Leyden: "Die lewe skuld my niks," *Die Matie*, 13 March 2002, p. 10.

³⁷⁹ R. De Almeida: "This is what true friends are for," *Die Matie*, 3 September 2003, p. 13.

³⁸⁰ "Stellebossers ontwikkel nuwe braille toestelle," *Die Matie*, 18 Augustus 1988, p. 4. and J. Viljoen: "Technopark a breakthrough," *Die Matie*, 16 Maart 1989, p. 5.

³⁸¹ N. Boshoff: "Ingenieurswese ontwerp rekenaarmuis, muis tot redding," *Die Matie*, 31 Julie 2002, p. 15.

developing technology for the disabled should not be ignored completely, it does not seem to be the primary motivation in these cases. Instead, the prospect of winning prizes served as incentive. Similar to the discussion in *Matieland*, the large expense of imported technology also seems to have been a motivating factor for development here, since all the articles specifically mention how the new locally manufactured technology would be much more affordable in comparison to the previous import.

6.6 Other Articles mentioning Disability

Five articles appeared in *Die Matie* between 1986 and 2007 in which disability was mentioned in such a way as not to fit into any of the identified categories. They include surprisingly funny and unexpected narratives and will subsequently be discussed as separate instances. In 1988 for example, *Die Matie* reported that student accommodation had become so limited that a female Goldfields resident was forced to temporarily reside in the accessible bathroom as no other accommodation was available. A desk, cupboard and other necessities were brought into the bathroom until a more permanent solution could be found.³⁸² In 2003, a similarly unexpected article saw the presses. Most students would probably agree that losing something while enjoying a night out on the town is not so foreign an experience. However, it was probably somewhat different for one wheelchair user when he exited a local pub one night to find his wheelchair, which he had left outside due to the stairs, missing. He regards the incident as likely being a student joke and asks that his wheelchair be returned if this was indeed the case.³⁸³

Several more serious matters are also discussed. These include provisions for the disabled at UCT³⁸⁴ and the training process of guide dogs.³⁸⁵ From the brief article discussing provisions for disabled students at UCT these can be regarded as comparable to what was available at SU. The article pays particular attention to the academic requirements of blind students and notes a volunteer reading project and a braille service which facilitate their academic success, both of which were also available at SU. Similar challenges were also identified.³⁸⁶

In one letter to *Die Matie*, a student questions SU's decision to award scholarships to blind masters' students, apparently solely on the basis of their disability, arguing that this is

³⁸² A. Marincowitz: "Student woon in badkamer," *Die Matie*, 15 September 1988, p. 2.

³⁸³ R. Vollgraaf: "Rolstoel skoonveld voor Bohemia," *Die Matie*, 21 Mei 2003, p. 3.

³⁸⁴ S. Meyering: "Hard work keeps disabled at UCT," *Die Matie*, 26 May 1999, p. 18.

³⁸⁵ L. Diphaha: "Guide dogs loyal to the end," *Die Matie*, 23 April 2008, p. 4.

³⁸⁶ S. Meyering: "Hard work keeps disabled at UCT," *Die Matie*, 26 May 1999, p. 18.

not in line with popular ‘treat disabled people the same as anyone else’ rhetoric. No comment or rebuttal to this letter was published. The full context of the incident therefore remains unknown.³⁸⁷ Lastly, a column discussing the human tendency of ‘othering’ that which is foreign or unfamiliar includes physical and cognitive disabilities among a list of assumptions and stereotypes people hold regarding the ‘other.’ This is one of the few articles that situates disability within the wider conversation about discrimination and stereotyping, as opposed to discussing it in isolation.³⁸⁸

6.7 *Die Matie*: Summary

The following table provides an overview of the disability-related articles published in *Die Matie*, according to their various themes, between 1986 and 2007:

***Die Matie*: Disability Related Articles**

Total	46
Accessibility on Campus	19
Sport and Disability	9
Welfare Work	5
Individual Personal Profiles	5
Assistive Technology	3
Other	5

Figure 9: Die Matie Summary

When considering the 46 articles directly related to disability that appeared in *Die Matie* between 1986 and 2007, some general trends deserve consideration. Firstly, *Die Matie* seems to pay a significant amount of attention to disability and accessibility matters. Moreover, this attention does not merely serve the purpose of promoting SU as an accessible institution, since several articles point out problems and can be considered critical towards the university and their handling or ignoring of accessibility issues. Furthermore, as was also noted in the *Matieland* section, both the provision of services for disabled individuals as well as the general portrayal of disability within *Die Matie* does not appear to follow a linear

³⁸⁷ C. Boonzaaier: “Briewe – Alle gestremdhede is nie fisies,” *Die Matie*, 4 Februarie 2009, p. 16.

³⁸⁸ “The Oracle, the ever-present other,” *Die Matie*, 28 Julie 2004, p. 13.

progression from poor to excellent. This illustrates that, although the general focus on inclusion, non-discrimination and diversity steadily increased both nationally and within the SU institutional context throughout these decades, disability and inclusion does not yet automatically form part of this discourse. In fact, several articles in *Die Matie* directly dealing with diversity and related matters did not include disability. This exemplifies that, at least to some degree, disability and related matters remain linked to the knowledge of the particular people involved, rather than an institutional or national focus; meaning people who have personal experience or knowledge remain more likely to be conscious of certain subtleties than the general public. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that a significant effort was made, both in terms of levelling the playing field for disabled individuals with regards to practical barriers to access and challenging the general public's thinking and predispositions regarding disability.

CHAPTER 4:

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DISABILITY – A COMPLEX KALEIDOSCOPE

1. Introduction

This chapter considers the lived experience of physically disabled students who studied at Stellenbosch University (SU), between 1986-2007, through an investigation of qualitative interview data collected from 11 physically disabled SU alumni. The discussion is divided into two central themes, namely the institutional environment and the social environment. In terms of the institutional environment four main themes arose from interviews as crucial to disabled students' success. These were 1) access and encouragement into HE, 2) the physical environment, 3) access to information, and 4) disability awareness among staff. Within the social context, three themes were identified as key factors influencing disabled students' social life at university, namely, 1) the welcoming period, 2) social engagement and support and 3) general public attitudes regarding disability. Each of these themes is subsequently discussed in detail with direct quotes from participants included to illustrate their personal perspectives. When quoting participants all names used are fictitious. Along with each quote the relevant individual's first year at university will be provided in brackets to give context to the statement.

2. Research Methodology

This research employed a small-scale qualitative research design. Data was collected through individual in-depth semi-structured interviews with SU alumni with physical disabilities who studied between 1986 and 2007. The possibility of constructing a questionnaire to be circulated among students with disabilities was briefly considered as a less time-consuming approach. However, this was rejected since the more structured nature of a questionnaire limits the scope of the candidate's participation. Moreover, questionnaires do not provide methods to gain information from non-verbal communications such as body language, tone of voice and rate of speech that can be observed in an interview. Overall then, it was concluded that individual interviews would offer the richest source of data.

Some participants returned after 2007 to pursue postgraduate studies, but all completed at least undergraduate courses during the period under consideration. Participants varied with respect to age, gender, field of study and type of physical disability. Disabilities included both congenital and early onset conditions, as well as physical disabilities acquired in later life through some form of accident / trauma. Disability types among participants included blindness, various levels of visual impairment, amputation / absence of limb(s), cerebral palsy and mobility impairment / wheelchair use. A total of 11 participants, seven women and four men, were interviewed between November 2016 and June 2018. Each candidate was provided with comprehensive information concerning the study and uses of the interview data and subsequently voluntarily signed a consent form. Interviews were conducted in person wherever possible, but practical considerations often rendered this impractical. Therefore, telephonic and video conference interviews were also conducted. Key themes which emerged are identified and discussed in the following section through a consideration of central quotes from participants. Participants' data are represented in the following table:

Name	Sex	Year of Entry	Disability
Jake	M	1985	Loss of limb(s)
Derek	M	1990	Blind
Emma	F	1993	Cerebral Palsy
Amy	F	1998	Loss of limb(s) (Wheelchair User)
Bianca	F	1998	Mobility Impairment (Wheelchair User)
David	M	1998	Blind
Fred	M	2002	Blind
Greta	F	2003	Partially Sighted
Lea	F	2004	Blind
Beth	F	2004	Partially Sighted (Later Blind)
Nicole	F	2005	Blind

Figure 10: Participants' Data

Primarily snowball sampling was used as a means of identifying potential interview candidates and expanding the sample size. In its simplest form, snowball sampling involves identifying respondents and subsequently utilising them as a reference point for reaching

other respondents. Thus, a link exists between the initial sample and others in the target population. Snowball sampling has been used to examine a wide variety of specific populations and is recognised as a valuable method in overcoming challenges associated with researching isolated, marginalised or hidden population groups which remain difficult to locate through conventional means.³⁸⁹

Snowball sampling can also aid in building trust. Since new candidates know that they were referred to the researcher by someone they know, they are more likely to cooperate and demonstrate general trust in the research endeavour. Thereby, the researcher may become an insider by proxy within populations that would otherwise remain hostile, or at least suspicious towards outsiders. Indeed, the main value adding elements of the snowball sampling method lies in the possibility of obtaining respondents in cases where candidates are already few in number and a degree of trust is required. Additionally, snowball sampling has been described as an ascending methodology. It is regarded as a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach. Thus, the focus is on locating those individuals on the ground who are necessary to fill existing knowledge gaps in a variety of social contexts.³⁹⁰ Considering the historic misrepresentation of disability issues and the past exclusion of disabled individuals from the HE environment these elements are essential within contemporary disability-related studies. Finally, snowball sampling may also be used to examine changes over time and can produce in-depth results relatively quickly.³⁹¹

However, distinct limitations are also inherent in this sampling technique. This is primarily linked to representativity. Since candidates are not selected randomly but are directly connected to the willingness and connections of other candidates the potential for biases must be recognised. Moreover, relying on referrals may also result in the exclusion of individuals who do not belong to the specific network being accessed.³⁹² Thus, in the context of this study snowball sampling may for instance result in the unintentional exclusion of individuals with impairments who do not readily identify as disabled and as such do not seek out friendships or connections within the broader disability community. Furthermore, snowball sampling can result in respondents with relatively similar views and associations

³⁸⁹ N. Cohen, and T. Arieli: "Field research in conflict environments: Methodological challenges and snowball sampling," *Journal of Peace Research* (48), (4), 2011, pp. 427-428.

³⁹⁰ R. Atkinson and J. Flint: "Sampling, snowball: accessing hidden and hard-to-reach populations," in R. L. Miller, and J. Brewer, (eds.:) *The A-Z of Social Research*, pp. 276-277.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² T. Crouse and P. A. Lowe: "Snowball Sampling," in B. B. Frey (eds.:) *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*, p. 1532.

which may not be representative of the wider target population.³⁹³ In an attempt to combat these limitations this study also considered disabled alumni whose details were discovered through the investigation of SU publications *Matieland* and *Die Matie*³⁹⁴ as potential interview candidates. Some participants were located in this way; however, the response rate was lower in the case of these participants. As such, the majority of the final participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

In summary then, snowball sampling has specific limitations which have potentially negative consequences for the validity and scope of research conclusions. However, specific measures were put in place in this study with the aim of managing and mitigating such consequences. Snowball sampling thus remains a valuable research method within the current context since the sample population is both small and hard to reach and a level of mutual trust between the researcher and participants is essential due to the personal nature of the experiences discussed.

Semi-structured interview questions were prepared to ensure comprehensive coverage of institutional and social experiences. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree argue that the interviewee is an active participant in the meaning making process within the semi-structured interview setting and thus becomes more than a “conduit from which information is retrieved.”³⁹⁵ This shift from passive conduit to active participant is essential given the nature and history of disability-related research. After initial questions were set up, two pilot test type interviews were held to gauge the required time and the effectiveness of the proposed questions. The final list of questions was set-up following this process.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews are the most widely used interviewing format for qualitative research. Key features of the semi-structured interview include scheduling in advance, organisation around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, and a duration between 30 minutes and several hours. Additional questions also often arise from the discussion between the interviewer and participant. As such the semi structured approach requires flexibility and openness on the part of the interviewer as participants have the freedom to share personal experiences in their own unique way.³⁹⁶ Thus, although organised

³⁹³ T. Crouse and P. A. Lowe: "Snowball Sampling," in B. B. Frey (eds.>) *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*, p. 1532.

³⁹⁴ Discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

³⁹⁵ B. DiCicco-Bloom, and B. Crabtree, “The qualitative research interview,” *Medical Education* (40), (4), 2006, p. 314.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 315-316.

according to broad outlines, no two semi structured interviews follow exactly the same pattern.

Semi-structured interviews are commonly conducted either individually or within focus groups. Several benefits have been noted in using the small focus group interview process rather than individual interviews. Focus groups are reported to be an effective way to obtain results from a small group of individuals and they also provide an atmosphere for collecting information that is more relaxed and natural. Focus groups are also more socially oriented.³⁹⁷ However, this study opted for the individual interview approach due to the personal nature of the experiences discussed. Moreover, the nature of disability and the relatively small number of disabled students at any HE institution results in a scenario where disabled students often have some vague general awareness of each other even when close friendships are not established. As such, the presence of other disabled individuals, as would be the case in focus groups, could profoundly influence what individuals choose to disclose.

Interviews consisted of a total of 27 questions and were conducted in a single session with an average duration of between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Afrikaans or English as determined by the participant's preference. Interviews included questions briefly considering the individual's background and the nature of their disability, but the focus was their learning and social experiences while at SU. In selecting this emphasis, the current research maintains that although providing an education and / or specific skills remains the primary purpose of any HE institution, receiving such an education is certainly not the only important aspect of any individual's time as a student. As such, this research aims to focus on the entire student life experience, including both the learning and social environments. This is important, since as Papanotiou and Windle illustrate, "the social world of university [for disabled students] has as yet gained little attention as a distinctive object of study."³⁹⁸

3. Discussion: The Institutional Environment

In their study on the experiences of disabled students in Scotland, Tinklin and Hall argue that disabled students confront barriers within the institutional environment related to

³⁹⁷ E. E. Getzel and C. A. Thoma: "Experiences of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings," *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals* (31), (2), 2008, p. 79.

³⁹⁸ M. Papanotiou, and J. Windle: "The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students," *Disability & Society* (27), (7), 2012, p. 935.

entrance into HE, the physical environment, access to information and a diversity in levels of disability awareness among university staff.³⁹⁹ Similar challenges are also reported elsewhere in relation to disabled students in HE.⁴⁰⁰ This indicates that these areas deserve further examination. Consequently, this study considered these four areas a starting point in the examination of the experiences of physically disabled students at SU between 1986 and 2007 in relation to the institutional environment. The institutional experiences of the 11 participants are subsequently discussed in relation to these four themes.

3.1 Institutional Theme 1: Access and Encouragement into HE

In terms of understanding access into the HE environment it is important to recognise two factors which shape this context before considering individual experiences. Firstly, disabled people have been historically excluded from opportunities to develop expertise in a range of areas (including academic pursuits) due to prejudices concerning the kinds of work and thinking they are assumed to be capable of doing.⁴⁰¹ In the South African context, such preconceptions found expression in the segregation of the schooling system into ‘mainstream’ and ‘special needs’ schools, where schooling was often inadequate and not academically focussed in ‘special needs’ settings. While discussing this in detail falls outside the scope of the current research, in attempting to understand access to HE it must be acknowledged at the outset that an inadequate schooling environment and insufficient preparation for HE necessarily negatively impacts this situation, effectively ‘disqualifying’ many disabled individuals before they have the opportunity to apply to university.⁴⁰²

Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the dominant discourse of disability and special needs and the medical model thinking it underpins has placed the emphasis on the nature of the student’s impairment and the extent to which the impairment is perceived to limit particular capabilities, including academic pursuits. As such disabled students’ participation in HE is significantly influenced by perceptions of their capabilities. Criteria for ineligibility are seen to arise from the learner’s own circumstances (i.e. the existence of an impairment)

³⁹⁹ T. Tinklin, and J. Hall: “Getting round obstacles: Disabled students' experiences in higher education in Scotland,” *Studies in Higher Education* (24), (2), 1999, pp. 183-194.

⁴⁰⁰ See, for example: P. Vickerman, and M. Blundell: “Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education,” *Disability & Society* (25), (1), 2010, pp. 21–32. and E. Moswela, and S. Mukhopadhyay: “Asking for too much? The voices of students with disabilities in Botswana,” *Disability & Society* (26), (3), 2011, pp. 307-319.

⁴⁰¹ L. Swartz: “Five challenges for disability-related research in sub-Saharan Africa,” *African Journal of Disability* (3), (2), 2014, p. 3.

⁴⁰² For further details on this, see: C. Howell: “Disabled students and higher education in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider, and M. Priestly (eds.) *Disability and social change, a South African agenda*, pp. 165-167.

rather than institutional practices. This results in various limitations at the programme level. In cases where disabled students are accepted into an institution they may still encounter challenges and negative attitudes related to participation in their programme of choice if their impairment is regarded as limiting their potential to successfully complete the course and enter the working environment in their chosen field. This is particularly evident, for example in courses involving practical field work, environments considered to be dangerous, or careers involving extensive interaction with the public.⁴⁰³ Thus, a distinction exists between admittance to the institution and admittance to the specific program of choice.⁴⁰⁴

In terms of access to HE and encouragement to pursue HE the participants in this study primarily responded positively. Many had the support of family⁴⁰⁵ or their school⁴⁰⁶ encouraging them to take up further studies. For some, it seemed to be a foregone conclusion. Derek⁴⁰⁷ (1990) explained: “I was raised with the idea that I could do it, there really was no question; I would always go study.”⁴⁰⁸ Even in cases where not all role-players were in favour of a disabled individual’s entry into HE, one specific individual usually provided support. Lea (2004) noted for instance that she experienced the general school environment as quite negative towards pursuing HE, but one specific school staff member helped and encouraged her in the process.⁴⁰⁹ Thus, it seems that, for these participants, the question revolved more dominantly around what would be studied rather than whether or not tertiary studies would be undertaken. This was somewhat surprising as other studies have found that disabled individuals often had to contend with low expectations concerning their achievement potential and be forceful about their desire to enter HE as attempts were often made to dissuade them from pursuing HE in a mainstream environment.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰³ C. Howell: “Disabled students and higher education in South Africa,” in B. Watermeyer, L. Swartz, T. Lorenzo, M. Scheneider, and M. Priestly (eds.): *Disability and social change, a South African agenda* pp. 166-167. See also: C. Howell, and S. Lazarus: “Access and participation of students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities,” *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 62-63.

⁴⁰⁴ This phenomenon is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

⁴⁰⁵ Bianca (1998), Amy (1998) and Emma (1993) identified their families’ support as particularly significant in their decision to enter HE

⁴⁰⁶ Derek (1990), Beth (2004) and Greta (2003) noted that they found their school’s attitude towards HE positive and were encouraged by the school to pursue HE.

⁴⁰⁷ All names used in this chapter are fictitious

⁴⁰⁸ Derek (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 31 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁰⁹ Lea (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 3 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴¹⁰ See, for example: M. Shevlin, M. Kenny, and E. McNeela: “Access routes to higher education for young people with disabilities: A question of chance?” *Irish Educational Studies* (23), (2), 2004, pp. 37-53.

Interestingly, no participants noted that they chose SU due to a particular reputation in providing services for disabled students. Rather the choice was based on considerations often evident in students' reflections regarding choice of university. Several selected the university based on location⁴¹¹ or family ties.⁴¹² Others noted that they had established friendships with individuals already at SU and thus chose to come here for that reason.⁴¹³ For some the predominant use of Afrikaans⁴¹⁴ or involvement in the SU culture⁴¹⁵ was the deciding factor. Thus, it is evident that none chose SU because of their personal disability or accessibility related requirements or the types of services SU could offer. Earlier research also indicates that the disability-related services available at a university is not the most important factor that disabled students consider when choosing a university.⁴¹⁶

The extent to which disabled students explored available provision and engaged with university structures concerning their disability and related needs varied greatly. Bianca (1998) noted:

I didn't really consider the accessibility much, actually you want to accept that such an institution is fully accessible. It's almost like... I almost want to say it's not even something you make inquiries about. It's supposed to be accessible. But that's not always the case. Then you get there then you see there are some challenges.⁴¹⁷

Other individuals didn't necessarily engage with central university structures but received a great deal of practical initial support through their residences⁴¹⁸ or encountered a positive and helpful attitude when engaging specifically with their department⁴¹⁹ about their chosen program and what their specific needs would be. David (1998) reflected on this with a level of surprise:

⁴¹¹ Nicole (2005) noted that SU was the closest university to her home, so location influenced her choice of institution.

⁴¹² Bianca (1998) mentioned that her father had also studied at SU which was a motivating factor for her, while Emma (1993) noted that she had family in town, which influenced her decision.

⁴¹³ Beth (2004) and Derek (1990) identified the existence of an already established friendship group at SU as a central motivation for selecting the institution.

⁴¹⁴ Fred (2002) noted the fact that SU was an Afrikaans medium institution as his only consideration in selecting an institution, as his English language skills were poor at that point.

⁴¹⁵ David (1998) explained that he chose SU because he liked the idea of Afrikaans culture and felt SU would provide an experience that he could relate to more in comparison with other universities. Amy (1998) also chose SU because she considered it a smaller community in relation to other institutions.

⁴¹⁶ J. Goode: "'Managing' disability: Early experiences of university students with disabilities," *Disability & Society* (22), (1), 2007, pp. 44-45.

⁴¹⁷ Bianca (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 9 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴¹⁸ Fred (2002) noted that a large part of the support he received was through the head of residence in the university residence where he lived.

⁴¹⁹ Derek, (1990), Nicole (2005) and David (1998) noted that specific departmental support contributed to their success.

We had a meeting with the head of the department and the message that they gave me is yes we will support you. And that was very nice because I thought maybe these people might be a little bit hesitant but they weren't. In terms of the practical support I did not really know what it would entail at that stage... but they sort of said we have got things in place... they could not really give me massive details but they [assured me] you know 'we will get something organised.'⁴²⁰

Other participants experienced a high level of engagement with central university structures prior to and directly after arrival with positive and encouraging results. Amy (1998) shared:

They connected me to a lady... she took such a personal interest in my case and she really was critical to me going to Stellenbosch. So she did research in what is going to be the best residence for me to go to... where my classes would be, introducing me to some of the lecturers and looking at each part of my day, how I would manage. So she was like a disability unit on her own. I don't know whether it was really her job, but she did an excellent job.⁴²¹

Interestingly, even in cases where engagement was sought prior to arrival, assumptions regarding disability at times led to humorous instances. Jake (1985) recalled with amusement how several individuals were surprised upon his arrival at his university residence to discover he wasn't a wheelchair user. "For me the interesting thing was that when I applied, they decided that if you were a disabled sports person, you have to be in a wheelchair and because of that I had to be in that residence."⁴²² This demonstrates how vital providing detailed information and asking questions is, even in cases where the basic parameters had already been covered.

It should be noted that the process of coming to university in itself held a range of meanings for participants. For some, it cast their disability in stark relief, since it was the first time that they'd engaged fully with an environment which, for the most part, appeared to take little or no cognisance of their disability. Greta (2003) described this moment:

I remember when I went to university the first day it was awful, because I suddenly felt like I was surrounded with the cream of the crop and here I am the only one struggling, you know? In my school I knew everyone had something that they struggled with, so that immediately made you feel better. It was

⁴²⁰ David (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴²¹ Amy (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 19 May 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴²² Jake (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

the first time in my life that I had to stand up for myself... I had to fight for myself and say look, this is what I can do, and this is what I can't do. You must help me in this way.⁴²³

In her analytical autoethnography on the politics of silence within the disability experience Lourens fittingly captures this experience when reflecting on the beginning of her own university career in South Africa:

One of my very first and most violent realisations of an inaccessible and even hostile world was when I transitioned from school to higher education. At the age of 18, I enrolled for a BA Humanities degree at the mainstream environment of a university. Suddenly, I was surrounded by an environment that was built for people who could see; I was surrounded by people who could see.⁴²⁴

Similarly, in her study of HE and disability in the UK, Goode reflects on the meanings of entering HE for disabled individuals and observes that the process of going to university has the potential to reveal new challenges for disabled students in relation to their impairment.⁴²⁵

When considering these narratives, it is important to note their non-linear nature, those who experienced a high level of central university engagement did not necessarily arrive at university later than those who did not. It was evident however, as could be expected, that individuals who had already realised throughout their schooling that their impairment has specific consequences for functioning within the academic environment made more extensive inquiries prior to registration when compared with others who have seemingly less severe impairments or were less certain at the time of the types of challenges their impairment would present in the HE environment.

3.2 Institutional Theme 2: The Physical Environment

The inaccessibility of the environment caused by architectural barriers remains one of the most prevalent challenges physically disabled people encounter universally. Howell and Lazarus acknowledge that the inaccessibility of the physical environment also remains a major barrier to equity for disabled students in HE.⁴²⁶ In the long-term, this inaccessibility limits disabled students' educational opportunities and thereby the development of their

⁴²³ Greta (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 28 June 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴²⁴ H. Lourens: "Driving in unheard silence: Disability and the politics of shutting up." *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2016, pp.6-7.

⁴²⁵ J. Goode: "'Managing' disability: Early experiences of university students with disabilities," *Disability & Society* (22), (1), 2007, pp. 40-41.

⁴²⁶ C. Howell, and S. Lazarus.: "Access and participation of students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities," *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, p. 62.

employment potential. Thus, this scenario in effect reaches far beyond the momentary annoyance caused by not being able to access a building on a particular day and consequently having to change your plans.⁴²⁷

In the current study, several participants made positive observations regarding the physical environment. Some experienced no problems whatsoever,⁴²⁸ while others noted several changes that were undertaken to improve accessibility, particularly in terms of accommodation and pavements. Particularly Amy (1998) recollected extensive accessibility improvements at her residence and main lecture halls, including changes to her room, the bathroom and the food hall as well as the tables in the lecture hall.⁴²⁹ Nevertheless, certain changes were also undertaken without consultation with disabled individuals, at times resulting in changes that were already made having to be redone, as for example ramps were built but the gradient was too steep for a wheelchair user to manage. This trend of making changes to the environment without consultation with the people actively involved in using such facilities practically results in a ‘one step forward but two steps back’ situation with respect to accessibility.⁴³⁰ This trend has also been identified in similar studies.⁴³¹

Furthermore, even in cases where accessibility was available, accessing it often held further invisible obstacles. Bianca (1998) explained:

You could get to where you had to be... but the wheelchair always has to enter at the back door. You always have to go in search of someone to open up if the door is locked, struggle for toilettes, those types of things were a terrible frustration.⁴³²

This illustrates that in cases where basic accessibility is available, the process of gaining access isn’t necessarily simple or easily discernible. Furthermore, several participants also noted how temporary circumstances (such as construction work) added additional barriers which interfered with their established daily routine. Such circumstances proved a particular

⁴²⁷ L. Engelbrecht, and J. J. de Beer: “Access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution,” *Africa Education Review* (11), (4), 2014, pp. 550-551.

⁴²⁸ Jake, (1985) Greta (2003) and Emma (1993) reported experiencing no specific difficulties in relation to the physical environment.

⁴²⁹ Amy (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 19 May 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴³⁰ Particularly Bianca (1998) and Amy (1998) shared extensively about how well-intended adaptations to the physical environment are often undertaken without resulting in improved accessibility due to inadequate knowledge and consultation with disabled people.

⁴³¹ See, for example: L. Engelbrecht, and J. J. de Beer: “Access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution,” *Africa Education Review* (11), (4), 2014, pp. 544-562.

⁴³² Bianca (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 9 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

annoyance since students were often not given notice of planned construction in advance and therefore could not plan accordingly.⁴³³ Similar research has also identified this as a concern.⁴³⁴

Blind participants also reported some challenges related to the physical environment. These were primarily related to unfamiliar terrain, open spaces, unanticipated changes of venue or situations where physical reading and writing were required. For several participants such situations led to a somewhat uncomfortable reliance on the help of friends or strangers. Derek (1990) explained:

It was quite difficult because I came from an environment where I was familiar with everything and then I came to university and I knew nothing and you have to pluck up your courage to ask for help which was never necessary before, and that was difficult for me, especially if I didn't know the people well... like every year with registration you had to go to strange buildings and fill in forms... or each semester when you got new venues... It takes courage to swallow your pride and make things happen, in spite of yourself⁴³⁵

Nicole shared a similar sentiment:

I find new environments alarming. Not necessarily the thought that I don't know where to go, but the fact that I will have to be dependent on some or other person. I'll have to rely on them.⁴³⁶

Such difficulties do however appear to lessen as individuals become more familiar with the campus throughout the course of their studies.⁴³⁷

According to Bianca (1998) the only way to improve the situation with regards to the accessibility of physical spaces is for disabled people to enter inaccessible spaces. She explained:

You shouldn't make inquiries asking 'is it accessible? Can I apply to be part of this committee?' Just apply to the committee and ignore the fact that their offices are inaccessible. Then you stand there and say 'here I

⁴³³ Lea (2004) and Nicole (2005) specifically pointed this out and elaborated on the inconvenience and possible danger this poses for disabled students.

⁴³⁴ L. Engelbrecht, and J. J. de Beer: "Access constraints experienced by physically disabled students at a South African higher education institution," *Africa Education Review* (11), (4), 2014, p. 556.

⁴³⁵ Derek (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 31 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴³⁶ Nicole (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, personal interview: Stellenbosch, 14 March 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴³⁷ Fred (2002) similarly recalled that he was initially heavily dependent on a fellow classmate to help him get around and orientate himself on campus, but he later became more independent. He didn't see this initial reliance as a negative experience though, because they ultimately became close friends.

am, what are you going to do now?' It will cause you discomfort, but it's the only way to force the system to move forward.⁴³⁸

3.3 Institutional Theme 3: Access to Information

Several studies have identified access to information as a key factor for disabled students in HE, particularly blind and partially sighted students.⁴³⁹ The current study corroborated this trend. Several participants noted making extensive use of the USKOR reading project as well as the Lombardi Braille Centre.⁴⁴⁰ The responsibility for accessing such services rested entirely on the student and several participants commented on how this required a significant amount of initiative and planning. Derek (1990) explained:

You had to do many things on your own, it wouldn't happen for you. You really had to plan carefully in advance and think about what you were going to need. You'd suffer if you didn't plan properly, because you'd end up without a book, so you really had to plan and start making enquiries timeously.⁴⁴¹

Furthermore, David (1998) emphasised how it was up to the student to request different types of support and notes that the need to put material into an accessible format at times resulted in delays:

For me the main problems that I approached people about was getting my reading material transcribed. The issue really was that lecturers only often decided what they wanted to include in their readings at the last minute.... It remained an on-going battle.⁴⁴²

Accessing information in the library also repeatedly came up in the conversation, particularly in the pre-computerised era. Both Fred (2002)⁴⁴³ and David (1998)⁴⁴⁴ mentioned that the USKOR service provided volunteers to help blind students locate appropriate and usable sources in the library. Despite the existence of this service though, Derek (1990) explained how this process required significant amounts of additional time and effort

⁴³⁸ Bianca (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 9 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴³⁹ See, for example: C. Howell, and S. Lazarus: "Access and participation of students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities," *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 64-65. T. Tinklin, and J. Hall: "Getting round obstacles: Disabled students' experiences in higher education in Scotland," *Studies in Higher Education* (24), (2), 1999, pp. 183-194.

⁴⁴⁰ The development of these services at SU are discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴⁴¹ Derek (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 31 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁴² David (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁴³ Fred (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 07 April 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁴⁴ David (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

resulting in a situation where disabled students had to work harder just to be on equal footing with other students, which naturally also caused additional stress. He described this process as follows:

I had to go to the library and ask someone to help me find articles. I couldn't do research independently. Especially for political science, it was incredibly difficult for me to do that. I had to get the printouts [of the sources] take them to USKOR and then wait 2/3 days for the material to be read. It caused some [academic and time] pressure. For me, that was the main reason why I didn't continue on to honours in political science. I didn't feel up to having to work even harder just to have the same sources as my fellow students... to be able to do assignments properly. It wasn't like now where you can search on Google Scholar for articles relevant to your topic. You really had to physically go look in the books or journals and I couldn't do that, someone had to do it for me. The practical way of doing research took a lot longer than it does now. So, I just decided if political science was going to be so much work, then I don't feel up to an additional struggle.⁴⁴⁵

As the above quote illustrates, the extra effort required from disabled students to succeed academically can have significant implications for decisions regarding their future pursuits. Earlier research found accessing library information similarly challenging and labour intensive for blind students in HE.⁴⁴⁶

In terms of access to information, several participants also noted accommodating practices in terms of tests and examinations. This included extra writing time, provision of question papers in large print or braille, as well as the option of typing exams as opposed to writing by hand or completing exams orally. These measures appear to have been organised through central university structures and seem to have been fairly standard practice in relation to disabled students. Amy (1998) specifically mentioned how much easier completing exams within the allotted time became in her second year when she started writing papers electronically.⁴⁴⁷ Similarly, Emma (1993) completed exams orally from second year onwards and found this method much more manageable due to her writing difficulty and the more detailed and longer nature of the questions being asked from second year onward.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ Derek (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 31 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁴⁶ C. Howell, and S. Lazarus: "Access and participation of students with disabilities in South African higher education: Challenging accepted truths and recognizing new responsibilities," *Perspectives in Education* (2), (3), 2003, pp. 64-65. and H. Lourens: "Driving in unheard silence: Disability and the politics of shutting up." *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2016, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁴⁷ Amy (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 19 May 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁴⁸ Emma (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, personal interview: Stellenbosch, 11 June 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

3.4 Institutional Theme 4: Disability Awareness among Staff

A final aspect that warrants consideration is levels of disability awareness among university staff members since students' experiences of the institutional environment – whether positive or negative – are dominantly shaped by the attitudes, awareness and willingness among the staff they encounter. Comparable research reveals that levels of awareness regarding disability vary considerably between departments even at the same university. Moreover, positive staff attitudes regarding disability were reflected primarily due to a personal interest in disability issues rather than because of institutional training or policies.⁴⁴⁹ In the South African context, disabled students have also identified the strongest supportive structures in HE to be those which take account of the development of interpersonal relationships.⁴⁵⁰

Participants in the current research had vastly divergent experiences in terms of their interactions with staff. These ranged from entirely positive and encouraging to disinterested, unhelpful and rigid. Some participants experienced staff as entirely approachable and felt that all their academic needs were being met. Fred (2002) recounted his experience as follows:

What was quite great at that time was we went to see the dean and he made everyone aware in the different departments. So, when the first classes started, they usually sought me out... If I had a problem, whatever it was... I could go talk to someone in my department and they were always prepared to listen. We could come to a solution together, and I was asked 'what do you want? How should we do this?' So, they didn't just follow their own way, which was nice for me.⁴⁵¹

Similarly, Greta (2003) shared:

I never felt from the university's side that they didn't notice me. I didn't feel I needed something more. I could go to my lecturers, to get my notes and get large print. They never treated me strangely.⁴⁵²

Several participants understood such support to be primarily a result of individual relationships they'd established with staff members. Derek (1990) explained:

It was really actually individual relationships, so you would be dependant on the goodwill of lecturers. But I never had a problem. Their attitude was actually good. It was mostly on an individual basis where

⁴⁴⁹ M. Shevlin, M. Kenny, and E. McNeela: "Participation in higher education for students with disabilities: An Irish perspective," *Disability & Society* (19), (1), 2004, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁵⁰ K. R. Matshediso: "Experiences of disabled students in South Africa: Extending the thinking behind disability support," *South African Journal of Higher Education SAJHE* (24), (5), 2010, p. 740.

⁴⁵¹ Fred (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 07 April 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁵² Greta (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 28 June 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

lecturers copied their transparencies for me. I think it really was individuals rather than a system that jumped in. There wasn't a process of how things happen. You would take the initiative and talk to your classmates or lecturers and sort things out.⁴⁵³

Other participants expressed a similar valuing of individual relationships.⁴⁵⁴ Acknowledgement of established practices of reasonable accommodation for disabled students as expressed in measures like accommodating test and exam practices and the ability to get an individual tutor where necessary was given.⁴⁵⁵ Nevertheless, participants primarily reflected on their success in relation to individual relationships.

Not all participants had positive experiences in their interactions with staff though, Lea (2004) commented:

I remember once I had a problem with a lecturer. He said he couldn't give me notes and things in advance before the other students received them. I explained to him I still had to have it converted into braille and such, but he just couldn't see the point and said sorry he can't help me in advance. That's the only problem I really remember having, but I went to nobody about it.⁴⁵⁶

Disabled students' difficulties in acquiring lecture notes has also been reported as a crucial issue in international HE related research.⁴⁵⁷

Bianca (1998) recounted a similarly difficult incident involving herself and another disabled student attempting to find a solution for an inaccessible venue:

The building didn't have a lift and class was on the top floor. So we went to the head of department and asked if they could just swop classes [with the subject offered downstairs]... it's actually very simple. But they refused, and we missed three months of class. They said we should just get notes from our classmates and refused to swop the classes. It was a very difficult year. That's also the reason why I didn't continue with that subject because I refused to continue studying it with people who had that kind of attitude.⁴⁵⁸

She experienced a similar situation involving a different subject the following year where staff remained equally unwilling to change the venue. Fortunately, in this second case

⁴⁵³ Derek (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 31 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁵⁴ Nicole, (2005) Fred (2002) and Amy (1998) specifically identified key individuals they considered vital contributors to their success as students.

⁴⁵⁵ Derek, (1990) Amy (1998) and Emma (1993) mentioned that such practices contributed to their student success.

⁴⁵⁶ Lea (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 3 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁵⁷ See, for example: M. Shevlin, M. Kenny, and E. McNeela: "Participation in higher education for students with disabilities: An Irish perspective," *Disability & Society* (19), (1), 2004, p. 26.

⁴⁵⁸ Bianca (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 9 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

the university apparently insisted that the necessary changes be made to enable her to attend the class.

Some participants described how they encountered inaccessibility or discriminatory attitudes similar to those described above. However, they would not necessarily have complained or taken the matter further because they feared the consequences this might entail for them. Lea (2004) explained: “You’re anxious, if you go and complain the person you complained about might retaliate, and you stand to lose what little you’ve got.”⁴⁵⁹ Amy (1998) added that such retaliation may also result in future complications:

I asked the department to consider moving the classroom downstairs but was given the input that it wasn’t possible. I didn’t make a fuss about it because I wanted to get into masters and I felt that if I said I can’t manage the stairs I’d be prejudiced. At that stage I could manage, but it wasn’t easy. But I made the choice to keep quiet about it because I was afraid that I wouldn’t get into masters if I made a fuss.⁴⁶⁰

This fear of “making a fuss” and consequently experiencing negative attitudes or practical consequences has also been identified as a trend in earlier research.⁴⁶¹

The vast range of divergent experiences described above indicate that a definite individual and personal element existed in the attitudes of staff concerning disabled students in these cases. This correlates with the work of Tinklin and Hall who also found that disabled students’ experiences with staff varied greatly between academic departments and positive experiences were largely dependent on the personal experience and interest of the individual concerned.⁴⁶² Similar research has also identified institutional and professional attitudes towards and awareness of disabilities as key factors blocking students with disabilities from achieving their goals and performing to their best capacity⁴⁶³ and recommends practical guidelines for departmental staff in terms of disability.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁹ Lea (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 3 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁶⁰ Amy (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 19 May 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁶¹ J. Goode: “‘Managing’ disability: Early experiences of university students with disabilities,” *Disability & Society* (22), (1), 2007, pp. 42-44.

⁴⁶² T. Tinklin, and J. Hall: “Getting round obstacles: Disabled students’ experiences in higher education in Scotland,” *Studies in Higher Education* (24), (2), 1999, pp. 190-191.

⁴⁶³ M. Shevlin, M. Kenny, and E. McNeela: “Participation in higher education for students with disabilities: An Irish perspective,” *Disability & Society* (19), (1), 2004, p. 26.

⁴⁶⁴ J. Goode: “‘Managing’ disability: Early experiences of university students with disabilities,” *Disability & Society* (22), (1), 2007, p. 36.

As the above discussion illustrates disabled students' experiences of the institutional environment were diverse and influenced by a myriad of factors. Such factors included personal circumstances, attitudes of particular individuals, established institutional practices and elements that had nothing to do with disability. Nevertheless, even in cases where significant and perhaps unnecessary difficulties were encountered, the general institutional experience can still be considered an important shaping period in the lives of disabled students. Lea (2004) captured this sentiment:

It's very bitter-sweet, because the thing is sometimes it is more difficult for you to get to class, but you also feel very confident and good about yourself if you've mastered it at the end of the day.⁴⁶⁵

Furthermore, when attempting to make judgements on individual's views, opinions and experiences of inclusion in institutional HE settings it needs be recognised that "evaluating the effectiveness of inclusion is virtually impossible." This is due to the vast diversity of contexts and variety of services being provided. Therefore, it is difficult to judge whether general trends can be observed in students' experiences of the institutional environment and isolate the reasons for such trends should they be identified. Nevertheless, the alternative of not comparing or discussing inclusive provision discounts the rich sources of data that can be gleaned from the subjects themselves, who are fundamentally at the heart of the provision being delivered.⁴⁶⁶

4. Discussion: The Social Environment

As has already been noted, the social world of university life for disabled students has encountered far less academic scrutiny in comparison with the academic environment and teaching and learning provisions.⁴⁶⁷ This is at least partly due to the fact that this area of university life remains both more difficult to access objectively and more challenging to influence through policy developments or central institutional measures. As Clapton and Fitzgerald point out, legislation is capable of ensuring, at least theoretically, certain central rights for disabled students, but community and social integration cannot be legislated for.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁵ Lea (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 3 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁶⁶ P. Vickerman, and M. Blundell: "Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education," *Disability & Society* (25), (1), 2010, pp. 24–25.

⁴⁶⁷ M. Papisotiriou, and J. Windle: "The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students," *Disability & Society* (27), (7), 2012, p. 935.

⁴⁶⁸ J. Clapton, and J. Fitzgerald: "The History of Disability: A History of 'Otherness': How disable people have been marginalized through the ages and their present struggle for their human rights," *New Renaissance*.

There are innumerable factors which potentially influence social experiences in the HE environment. These include individual personality traits, disability, socio-economic circumstances, personal experiences, state of health, family relations and circumstances beyond individual control to name a few. It is beyond the scope of the current research to consider all these factors. Therefore, three elements which proved key in shaping disabled students' social experiences at university have been selected for discussion. These themes were prevalent within the interview data and have also received consideration within comparable research. They are 1) the orientation or welcoming period for new students, 2) social engagement and support at university and 3) general public attitudes concerning disability.

4.1 Social Theme 1: The Welcoming Period

Matshedisho considers orientation and adjustment to be crucial for every undergraduate or new student. Moreover, integration into the residential and social environment has been identified as a prominent factor influencing student retention and ultimate success.⁴⁶⁹ The first few weeks at university is a period of adjustment and uncertainty for most new students. However, this situation can be exacerbated in the case of disabled students, as they might encounter additional challenges related to inaccessibility or other disability-related matters. Nevertheless, these first few weeks also present a unique opportunity to form new friendships and social connections at the beginning of university life as most first year students are new to their environment and the shared experience of navigating an unfamiliar setting can be regarded as an equalising factor. Therefore, in an investigation of the social experiences of disabled students, considering their first few weeks – a period generally known as welcoming or orientation – provides a useful starting point.

Among all questions asked of participants during the interview process, the discussion of the welcoming period perhaps led to the most dissimilar responses. Some participants responded overwhelmingly positively, noting that they were considered and included, making it easy for them to become a part of the larger group. For others, this period proved to be among the most challenging of their entire period at university. Such individuals reported feeling extremely conscious of their disability throughout this time and being aware of themselves as the 'other' excluded from the mainstream. Interestingly, positive or negative

Available Online: <http://www.ru.org/human-rights/the-history-of-disability-a-history-of-otherness.html#author>
[Accessed 29 October 2018]

⁴⁶⁹ K. R. Matshedisho: "Experiences of disabled students in South Africa: Extending the thinking behind disability support," *South African Journal of Higher Education SAJHE* (24), (5), 2010, p. 738.

experiences appeared not to be linked to disability type as even participants with the same disability reported having vastly differing experiences. Furthermore, it also appeared not to be related to the time-period, since students who entered SU in the early 2000s did not necessarily feel more included in comparison with those who studied in the early 1990s.

The fact that disability type and time period appear not to be the deciding factor in experiences of the welcoming period is demonstrated by the experiences of Derek and Lea. Derek, a blind participant, entered SU in 1990 and reported a positive, inclusive and equal atmosphere during the welcoming week. He noted:

The seniors treated everyone equally, and that was the best thing they could do for me because before we could think about how socially awkward it is to deal with someone who has a disability... basically after two weeks we all knew each other... so if you're too busy to think you actually accomplish many things[...] Other people rather side-line the disabled person, because it's too complicated [to deal with him / her], but in my case they just said 'he's joining in, work it out...' and it worked.⁴⁷⁰

Emma, (1993) had a similarly positive experience:

I remember I enjoyed it tremendously. We participated in everything, float building... and we had great fun. I remember we had to 'catch fish' in the water ditches along the road. The girls would make these 'fish' and then the guys had to come and catch them. It was great fun!⁴⁷¹

On the other hand, Lea, also a blind participant, entered SU in 2004 and shared a negative experience of the welcoming week. She explained how she felt very aware of her disability and 'in the way' of the other students:

It was horrible, horrible! Because they tell you that if you don't participate you'll never be a part of the culture and such. I remember they always told us at school 'just remember there won't always be someone to help you.' I realised that very definitely and clearly during that first week. Everyone's excited because it's their first week at university then they all storm in a direction and you just feel in the way. Thinking back now honestly I don't think I would have participated, because it's just not practical or accessible. You want to experience everything, but I think in the long run it would've done no harm to my general experience whether I participated or not. Around the second week I just decided now I'm locking my door and having tea in my room.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷⁰ Derek (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 31 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁷¹ Emma (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, personal interview: Stellenbosch, 11 June 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁷² Lea (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 3 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

Other participants located themselves in the middle of this spectrum, considering their experiences as neither entirely positive nor completely negative. They pertinently noted their disability as a factor in the experience though, particularly in terms of causing them additional anxiety. David (1998) explained:

I felt that I was reasonably well catered for in the welcoming period... I was part of all of it and made sure that there was always something that I could do. I made it clear to people that I wanted to do things [we were just] creative about it. I think there was definitely anxiety as well [because] suddenly it all seems so big after school and how do you fit in with everything. It is a big change and I suppose having a disability for me did make it a little more anxiety provoking than what it might be for other students but all-in-all I think it was a mostly positive experience.⁴⁷³

Greta (2003) shared similar moments of anxiety:

[I participated normally] but in the back of my mind there was always that thing: ‘will I be put on the spot? Will there be something I have to read, or someone I just met and maybe I won’t notice them later?’ But that’s general life things I have to deal with every day.⁴⁷⁴

4.2 Social Theme 2: Social Engagement and Support

Recent research on the social experiences of physically disabled students highlights the importance of social support systems for disabled individuals and their academic success. Papatiriu and Windle emphasise the importance of peer interaction and point out that without it, disabled students “could fail to develop appropriate social skills.” They reported that disabled students had fairly limited social interactions at university. Subtle forms of exclusion related to attitudes towards disability and consequent social awkwardness emerged as one contributing factor to this situation. Another element was restrictions imposed by the physical environment which limited the practical locations at which disabled students could socialise.⁴⁷⁵

As can be expected, the level to which disabled students chose to engage socially at university varied. For some, social engagement was difficult and carried with it the possibility of being stigmatised. According to Green, disabled people are expected by students both with and without experience of disability to experience social awkwardness,

⁴⁷³ David (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁷⁴ Greta (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 28 June 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁷⁵ M. Papatiriu, and J. Windle: “The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students,” *Disability & Society* (27), (7), 2012, pp. 938-940.

Both Amy (1998) and Bianca (1998) specifically noted challenges regarding an inaccessible social environment.

discomfort and stigma.⁴⁷⁶ When she reflected on her social experiences Amy (1998) recalled experiencing such stigma. She explained how moving into her residence proved a particular trauma since her roommate to-be was initially quite distraught when she learned she'd been paired with a disabled student and requested a different roommate. Amy suspected this was perhaps because she was afraid she might have to assist Amy with her daily routine. Ultimately, they did end up as roommates, but Amy recalled the incident as very traumatic both for herself and her roommate. She maintained that this might have been avoided through a better social liaison which would have enabled them to connect prior to coming to university so that they could establish whether they would be compatible roommates. She explained:

On a physical and practical level everything was thought of but I feel that a lot could have been done a for my social interaction. I actually had a very difficult first year and I feel that it could have been prevented if there had been some kind of liaison. I think I could have been in danger of even giving up on university but I didn't. Fortunately, I've got a very resilient personality.⁴⁷⁷

In terms of social difficulties, Nicole (2005) noted that entering established groups was a particular challenge:

When I came to university, that first year was terribly difficult for me. Because then I was in the world where I so badly wanted to be, but I struggled socially. I don't know where the problem lay really. I think everyone tries to find their way in first year. But the thing is then you have those kids who all come from the same school, so their friendship group is already established or kids who all sang in the Western Cape Children's Choir...⁴⁷⁸

Greta (2003) shared a similar experience, though she recalled how this changed as time progressed:

As soon as I made friends and knew that some people accepted me I was fine. But those first few days [were difficult.] You're alone and I really felt like I was surrounded with the best of the best. And here I am. I didn't make the A netball team, I didn't sing in the choir. I didn't this and I couldn't that... so you know, what did I have to offer? But it's a process and you realise later that everyone is actually normal. As

⁴⁷⁶ S. E. Green: "Components of perceived stigma and perceptions of well-being among university students with and without disability experience," *Health Sociology Review* (16), 2007, pp.328–340.

⁴⁷⁷ Amy (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 19 May 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁷⁸ Nicole (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, personal interview: Stellenbosch, 14 March 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

the year progresses you make friends again and they're just like you. In the beginning it's overwhelming for everyone whether or not you have a disability.⁴⁷⁹

Emma (1993) considered the uncertainty of able-bodied students concerning her disability as a factor that complicated her formation of friendships. She recalled:

I thought other students didn't really want to talk to me, because they didn't know where I'm coming from. I actually found that quite sad... They were uncertain, but I also got the feeling people didn't feel like extra schlep and things. Everyone was just there to do their thing and get it done.⁴⁸⁰

Jake (1985) insightfully noted that even in difficult social circumstances a choice remains:

I could sit in the corner and say life owes me something, or roll up your sleeves, do what you can do... maybe not becoming a motorcycle driver, but find the things that you can do and do it to the best of your abilities.⁴⁸¹

Lea (2004) similarly noted that finding one's social place amidst both inclusive and inaccessible activities may take some time. She commented:

Generally, I think you learn which activities help you fit in and which activities absolutely only make you feel excluded.⁴⁸²

Other participants adjusted well socially.⁴⁸³ Fred (2002) recalled:

I was a legend in my residence. Initially it was probably for most people a case of 'we don't know how to handle this.' [But] I identified a few guys and we formed a click and I taught them I'm an ordinary normal person, I just can't see. The rest of the residence learned as well... The guys understood me.⁴⁸⁴

In contrast, others did not consider their residence the nucleus of their social life but found social support in numerous other ways. For some, participation in sport⁴⁸⁵ or a support

⁴⁷⁹ Greta (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 28 June 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁸⁰ Emma (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, personal interview: Stellenbosch, 11 June 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁸¹ Jake (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁸² Lea (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 3 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁸³ Amy (1998) noted that she adjusted well socially and formed part of several friendship groups.

⁴⁸⁴ Fred (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 07 April 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁸⁵ Jake (1985) and Emma (1993) noted that they found participation in sport and the social opportunities this offered vital.

network of fellow disabled students⁴⁸⁶ was crucial, while others noted that they found it difficult to identify with other disabled students.⁴⁸⁷ Naturally, these groupings are not mutually exclusive. David (1998) explained that he belonged to and negotiated several social networks simultaneously:

I had a friend from school and we became part of the same friendship group [at SU] but then there were other networks that I had a foot in the door with. For example, my res network, I could dip into it a little bit but [there] I was a little bit more on the side-line or my church network, which I could dip into sometimes.⁴⁸⁸

Importantly, the decision of students to focus their social energies in a variety of areas must be respected and not understood merely as a deficit in the HE environment since several factors influence this choice.⁴⁸⁹

4.3 Social Theme 3: General Public Attitudes regarding Disability

Barnes argues that the biggest obstacle to disabled people's meaningful inclusion into mainstream community life is negative public attitudes. These range from “overt prejudice and hostility, condescension and pity to ignorance and indifference.”⁴⁹⁰ A number of studies have reported that disabled students are engaged in actively managing how others perceive them.⁴⁹¹ Goode describes this as “emotional work” undertaken by disabled people on behalf of able-bodied society as disabled individuals attempt to assist the general public in managing their discomfort concerning disability in a variety of ways.⁴⁹² Jake (1985) provided a humorous and telling example of disabled people’s attempts to put the public at ease regarding their disability. He recalled:

⁴⁸⁶ Lea (2004) considered the social support offered by fellow disabled students and friends as a significant factor which shaped her social interactions.

⁴⁸⁷ Emma (1993), Amy (1998) and Bianca (1998) noted that they did not necessarily seek out disabled friends or identify with the disabled community.

⁴⁸⁸ David (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁸⁹ M. Papatirou, and J. Windle: “The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students,” *Disability & Society* (27), (7), 2012, pp. 944-946.

⁴⁹⁰ C. Barnes: “A Legacy of Oppression: A History of Disability in Western Culture,” in L. Barton, and M. Oliver, (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past Present and Future*. pp. 3-4.

⁴⁹¹ M. Papatirou and J. Windle: “The social experience of physically disabled Australian university students,” *Disability & Society* (27), (7), 2012, p. 938.

⁴⁹² J. Goode: “‘Managing’ disability: Early experiences of university students with disabilities,” *Disability & Society* (22), (1), 2007, p. 43.

At one stage I told my mom I want to have a business card printed ‘I was born this way, any further questions?’ I am completely comfortable talking about it and content with my disability, so I usually make lots of jokes and put in extra effort to break the ice so that people will start talking to me.⁴⁹³

Amy (1998) noted that she has become accustomed to the fact that her disability results in a level of public discomfort and fascination expressed in stares:

My disability is very unique, and I mean and I do stand out to the crowd a lot, so I’ve always learned to accept that people will stare and people will make assumptions about me and that you are the only one that can change those perceptions.⁴⁹⁴

General societal perceptions and attitudes are acknowledged as at times serving to undermine efforts towards full integration.⁴⁹⁵ This was reflected in these participants’ experiences in a number of ways. Jake (1985) noted:

The biggest part of discrimination that I experience in my entire life is people thinking that I’m not disabled. I can understand that, because I don’t act like a disabled person. I don’t ask for help all the time.⁴⁹⁶

This quote demonstrates the public’s reluctance to ‘think outside the box’ regarding what disability entails on an individual level, since they dismiss Jake’s disability because he does not act in accordance with their preconceptions. Emma (1993) also commented on public attitudes being quite boxed-in and inflexible. This results in a disregard similar to Jake’s experience. She maintained:

People’s perceptions, I know we’re fighting to change that, but we’re still going to be fighting for a long time... because people live in boxes and if it doesn’t fall into their box, then they ignore it. People talk the talk, but they don’t walk the walk, that’s why it’s still going to take long. People say the nice things, but they don’t carry it out and that’s problematic.⁴⁹⁷

Lea (2004) explained how fear of public perception at times kept her from accessing support services:

⁴⁹³ Jake (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁹⁴ Amy (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 19 May 2017, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁹⁵ K. R. Matshediso: “Experiences of disabled students in South Africa: Extending the thinking behind disability support,” *South African Journal of Higher Education SAJHE* (24), (5), 2010, p. 734.

⁴⁹⁶ Jake (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁹⁷ Emma (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, personal interview: Stellenbosch, 11 June 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

[Even if you had a valid reason for struggling] you were so anxious that people would think you're pretending. They'll say 'yes, but she's playing the disability card.' So, you tried to manage as far as possible you know? Even if you had to cram the day before.⁴⁹⁸

This further reveals rigid and established ideas regarding disability and the provision disabled people are allowed to access in the HE environment. In this context such rigid notions hold a particular danger. Goode points out that without the support of an inclusive and accepting social culture students may remain reluctant to define and identify themselves as 'disabled' due to the risk the negative societal connotations. As such, they might not receive all the available support to facilitate their success in HE.⁴⁹⁹

Several participants described public attitudes as generally well-meaning with a desire to help, if somewhat uninformed.⁵⁰⁰ Participants' responses further revealed that the 'inspirational' and 'pitiable' narrative dichotomies in societal representation of disability⁵⁰¹ were also evident in these students' experiences of public attitudes. In terms of being considered an inspiration Emma (1993) identified with this experience.⁵⁰² Jake (1985)⁵⁰³ and Fred (2002)⁵⁰⁴ on the other hand reported experiences of being subtly pitied and not addressed personally. Nicole (2005) noted living in a state of constant flux in this regard. She would be pitied and patronised one moment and be regarded an inspiration the next.⁵⁰⁵ The participants appeared to accept such instances in stride, seeming neither surprised nor particularly upset by such incidents.

David (1998) considered it an advantage that all forms of non-verbal communication from the public pass him by. He explained:

⁴⁹⁸ Lea (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 3 November 2016, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁴⁹⁹ J. Goode: "'Managing' disability: Early experiences of university students with disabilities," *Disability & Society* (22), (1), 2007, pp. 36–37.

⁵⁰⁰ Fred (2002) and Greta (2003) particularly described the public as generally well-intentioned and helpful.

⁵⁰¹ Discussed in detail in Chapter 3

⁵⁰² Emma (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, personal interview: Stellenbosch, 11 June 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁵⁰³ Jake (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁵⁰⁴ Fred (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 07 April 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

⁵⁰⁵ Nicole (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, personal interview: Stellenbosch, 14 March 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

Any kind of non-verbal reaction I get from people, I don't know [about it] and that might be very good because it means I can go through life not picking up on a lot of negativity. Like people ignoring me, people looking at me in a funny way or whatever I just don't pick up on that which is great.⁵⁰⁶

This sentiment of relief at being partly cut-off from interactions with the public illustrates just how entrenched negative public perceptions regarding disability have become.

5. Conclusion

In summary then, the institutional and social worlds of physically disabled students at SU between 1986 and 2007 were diverse and complex. Within the institutional environment participants in the current study seem to have gained access to HE more easily and been encouraged to pursue HE to a greater degree than that which is reported elsewhere. The physical environment and access to information remained a central issue as similar research has also identified. Changes to the physical environment were often undertaken without engagement with disabled individuals resulting in a scenario where additional changes to facilitate full accessibility were still necessary. Accommodating practices concerning tests and examinations were reported and students made use of the available services to facilitate access to information. Nevertheless, navigating the library remained a particular challenge for blind and partially sighted students. Attitudes among staff varied widely, ranging from understanding and encouraging to indifferent and inflexible. The current research reinforced the vital importance of individual relationships between disabled students and staff to facilitate academic success.

The social world of university was considered through the welcoming period, social engagement and support and general public attitudes. These elements proved challenging to access and influence. Disabled students had vastly diverse experiences in these areas ranging from positive and inclusive to negative and inaccessible. Interestingly, the data has shown that it is not a case of different disability types necessarily having different experiences or those more recently at SU having more positive experiences. Thus, it is not a question of disability type or an increase in awareness among the general public with the passage of time. At present the reasons for these differences are not entirely clear. In social contexts participants were found to value various networks. For some integration into their residence's

⁵⁰⁶ David (Stellenbosch University Alumnus), interviewed by Karien Joubert, video conference interview, 30 May 2018, Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

social activities played a key role, while others found the support of fellow disabled students crucial or found themselves included on a social basis primarily in terms of sport.

Participants reported public attitudes to be generally well-meaning but uninformed. Various attempts at putting the public at ease concerning their disability also came to light. This was navigated particularly through the use of humour. General societal perceptions and attitudes were also identified as at times serving to undermine efforts towards full integration. This was reflected in these participants' experiences in a number of ways. Some noted an awareness that society expected them to act in a certain way as disabled people while others felt reluctant to access available services for fear of public reaction or social retaliation. The presence of the 'inspirational' or 'dependant' dichotomies were also noted in relation to disabled students' interactions with the public.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study has been to examine the holistic lived experience of physically disabled students who studied at Stellenbosch University between 1986 and 2007 through a medium which allows their voices to be heard. While numerous studies have begun to pay attention to the challenges currently confronted by physically disabled students in the higher education environment the historical investigation of this phenomenon is limited. Academic attention has also primarily been concerned with the institutional environment and its provisions for disabled students while engagement with social aspects of university life remains largely neglected. Therefore, this study considered both institutional and social aspects of university life, maintaining that although providing an education and / or specific skills remains the primary purpose of any higher education institution, receiving such an education is certainly not the only important aspect of any individual's time as a student.

The nature of this study allowed for a large degree of interdisciplinary engagement and reliance on a wide variety of data sources. These included archival material detailing institutional approaches to disability between 1986 and 2007, SU publications *Matieland* and *Die Matie* which provided a window into social narratives around disability at SU, and a small-scale qualitative study consisting of 11 individual semi-structured interviews with physically disabled SU alumni.

Chapter 1 provided background, centring on the question of ‘how disability came to be understood in its current form.’ The historical evolution of the current understanding of ‘disability’ in western society was discussed through an investigation of several disability models. In this regard, the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) of the World Health Organisation (WHO) proved useful in illustrating how disability can be conceptualised as an intersection between the biological body and social and institutional structures.

Key pieces of international legislation and their contribution to the inclusion of disabled people in mainstream society were briefly discussed as a starting point in increasing access and participation for disabled individuals. Disability research in Africa was identified as a vital area of inquiry due to the large percentage of disabled individuals on the continent. A brief overview of history of disability in South African revealed that the operations of Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) was central to the wider Disability Rights Movement, which contended for equal access, increased independence and self-representation in the context of the wider anti-Apartheid struggle during the 1980s and 1990s.

Chapter 2 focused specifically on HE and the institutional environment at Stellenbosch University, tackling the question of ‘how the institutional environment at SU handled disabled students.’ The position of disabled students within HE globally and nationally during the past decades was considered in terms of both policy and practice. It was evident that higher education legislation and policy has recently begun to take increasing note of the position of disabled students in HE. However, providing equal opportunities for disabled students was shown to entail far more than official institutional recognition of the situation.

Specifically, SU’s institutional methods of addressing the concerns of disabled students between 1986 and 2007 were discussed. Here a gradual yet discernible move towards the increased formalisation and standardisation of provisions for disabled students was evident. The provision of certain types of support, such as accommodating practices in terms of tests and examinations as well as provisions for disability sport was shown to be established prior to the period under discussion and appeared to be functioning effectively.

Between 1986 and 1993 institutional services for disabled students were provided informally primarily by the Centre for Psychological Services and Training. Thereafter, between 1994 and 1997, the situation surrounding disabled students on campus was formally investigated and some policies and standardised approaches were put in place specifically

regarding information provision and increased accessibility of physical facilities. Finally, from 1998 to 2007 a number of structures and systems were organised which aided the formalisation of support provision and processes leading up to the ultimate establishment of the Disability Unit in 2007.

Two key issues identified as frequent challenges for disabled students in the institutional environment at SU were access to information and practical considerations concerning the accessibility of the built environment. A clear gap in the dissemination of information was also evident, resulting in a situation where several kinds of supports and services were available, but the students who could benefit from them were not always aware of their existence. Resource constraints were identified as a primary hampering factor to the increased accessibility of the institutional environment. Furthermore, it was evident that SU has a particularly long history of accommodating blind and partially sighted students.

Chapters 3 examined the ways in which individuals with disabilities were portrayed in the SU publications, *Matieland* and *Die Matie* from 1986 to 2007 considering the question ‘how does society view disability and disabled individuals.’ General trends concerning the media and disability were considered, noting that media portrayals of disability tend to focus on either the ‘superhero’ overcoming narrative or the ‘sub-human’ dependant and pitiable narrative. Importantly, it was revealed that both narratives lead to a situation in which disabled people become culturally mis-known within wider society. Perceptions of disability in mythical terms indicate that the disability situation is in reality not accurately perceived. Furthermore, neither the dependency nor the inspiration narratives require society to address the lack of access disabled people experience due to environmental barriers or lacking service provision. Engagement around social and societal responsibility is thus absent. Reconsideration of the ways in which bodily and intellectual perfection is traditionally defined is also not encouraged in this context.

This was followed by an in-depth discussion of disability-related articles that were published in *Matieland* and *Die Matie* between 1986 and 2007. For this period, a total of 37 articles related to disability were published in *Matieland*, while *Die Matie* contained 46 articles. This indicates that, although a greater number of articles dealing with disability appeared in *Die Matie* due to its frequent publication rate, statistically speaking, *Matieland* covered disability more frequently than *Die Matie*. These articles were divided into five categories. They included: 1) personal profiles of individuals, 2) articles concerning the

accessibility of campus or awareness raising initiatives on campus, 3) the development of disability-related technology, 4) involvement with welfare work or skills development programmes with the disabled, and 5) disability and sport. The majority of the *Matieland* articles focussed on disability and sport, while the greatest number of *Die Matie* articles were concerned with accessibility on campus.

These articles often vacillated in their portrayal of disabled individuals as either ‘heroic’ or ‘pitiable.’ Stellenbosch University’s long tradition of accepting blind and visually impaired students was again evident. This was made clear through the services available on campus to facilitate their studies, the technologies developed to aid them in a specific manner and the sheer number of blind or visually impaired students that were mentioned in these articles. Moreover, it was apparent that, at least in the case of the articles found here, the necessary momentum for change, increased access and awareness was often provided by individuals with personal knowledge and experience. These individuals seem interested in the current situation and its possible improvement of their own accord and appear to take up extra tasks in an attempt to bring about improvements in addition to their official responsibilities.

Importantly, it was also revealed that these narratives do not necessarily follow a linear progression. It cannot be stated that all the portrayals of disabled individuals from the 2000s illustrate a more nuanced understanding than those from the 1980s, for example. In fact, an article from the 1980s may even engage with the complexities surrounding disability in a more sophisticated manner than an article from the 2000s. The reasons for this are complex and varied. Nevertheless, it illustrates that, although the general focus on inclusion, non-discrimination and diversity steadily increased both nationally and within the SU institutional context throughout this period, disability does not yet automatically form part of this discourse. The non-linear nature of these narratives does indicate though that the situation surrounding disability is more complex than a valuing or understanding of diversity. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that a significant effort was made, both in terms of levelling the playing field for disabled individuals with regards to practical barriers to access and challenging the general public’s thinking and predispositions regarding disability.

Chapter 4 dealt with the data obtained from a small-scale qualitative study consisting of 11 individual semi-structured interviews with SU alumni. A discussion of the results considered the question ‘how did physically disabled students experience holistic student life at SU between 1986 and 2007.’ Here, the lived experiences of physically disabled students as

conveyed in the interviews were central. Both institutional and social settings were discussed. Several key factors were identified as shaping these experiences.

Within the institutional context this includes access and encouragement into HE, the physical environment, access to information and disability awareness among staff. In terms of access to HE these findings differ from similar studies in that the majority of participants were encouraged and supported in pursuing further education. Improvements in the accessibility of the physical environment were also reported by several participants, although this was often done without engagement with the students themselves. This resulted in the situation remaining in need of further changes in future. Regarding access to information, several participants noted accommodating practices in tests and examinations, but accessing information in the library was revealed to be a challenge. Participants reported encountering a wide variety of responses from staff members, ranging from helpful and accommodating to unresponsive and rigid, even within the same faculty. Individual relationships were identified as a key factor that facilitated disabled students' success in the institutional environment.

Central social elements were identified as the welcoming period, social engagement while at university and general public attitudes concerning disability. The non-linear nature of developments was again evident here as individuals who came to university later did not necessarily feel more included. It was also clear that the type of disability was not the main factor in determining experiences as even individuals with exactly the same disability reported vastly different experiences. Disabled students were found to engage socially in a number of ways including within their residence, in sporting activities and with fellow disabled students.

The public was generally experienced as being well-meaning but uninformed. Discussions of social experiences revealed that subtle aspects of the disability experience cannot necessarily be taught in the traditional sense. Sensitivity to disability issues only increases as the general public's interaction with disabled individuals increases. Disabled students were found to be managing public perceptions in a number of ways. Participants noted feeling a general expectation to act a certain way as disabled people. A reluctance to admit difficulty and access available services due to fear of public perception or social retaliation was also identified.

The current study investigated the lived experience of physically disabled students within a specific geographical context and historical period. Recommendations for further

research include a comparative study considering the experiences of physically disabled students at various South African HE institutions. Much could also be learned from an international comparative study. For instance, the position of disabled students at one university in a developing country and one university in a first world country could be examined. Such a study could provide a starting point for considering to what extent the struggles that students with disabilities face are either linked to economic factors or culturally intrinsic. Furthermore, the current research was limited to physical, observable disabilities. As such, future research concerning the similarities and differences among student experiences of individuals having both visible and invisible disabilities could prove enlightening. In-depth research concerned with how students with invisible disabilities navigate the social world of university could also highlight unconscious prejudices about what society regards as ‘ability’ and ‘disability.’

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1.4 Figures

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