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Unseen? A qualitative study on how mothers and fathers living with a visual impairment experience parenthood

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Abstract

It is barely taken into account that a visually impaired child might one day become a parent. Research on the insider perspectives of parents on parenting with a visual impairment is scarce. This exploratory study reports on how six mothers and seven fathers living with a visual impairment experience parenthood. An individual or paired open interview, followed by qualitative content analysis, captured their multi-layered and personal lived experiences on parenting. Analysis of the collected data reveals three themes: the actual practices of daily parenting as an exploration of a personal and unique toolbox for each parent; a parental urge to prove themselves to overcome extra doubts, pressure and othering; and the relational work of parents with their partner and child(ren).

Keywords

Disability studies, Parenting, Partial sightedness or blindness, Lived experiences

Introduction

This research offers visibility to mothers and fathers living with visual impairment and their lived experiences with parenting— a group and particular mode of child-rearing generally overlooked in literature on parenting. Instead of their visual impairment as such, their position as parents and their parenting is the primary focus of this study. Consequently, this exploratory research employs a person-centred approach based on lived experiences to comprehensively make sense of the existing practices of visually impaired parenting and expand existing societal views on the subject.

The person-centred perspective is motivated by the fact that parents living with a visual impairment are unperceived or unidentified (Kilkey & Clarke, 2010; Ramaekers & Suissa, 2013; Van der Pas, 2008). The prevalence of visually impaired parents is unclear; only estimations of the number of visually impaired people in general are available (Blindenzorg Licht en Liefde, 2014; Pascolini & Mariotti, 2012; World Health Organization, 2018). While the number of parents among these visually impaired is unknown, the group is large enough to draw some attention (Peta, 2017; Soyez et al., 2009). The present research highlights the insider position of parents living with a visual impairment and elucidates experiential subjectivity in qualitative research (Ashby, 2011) – which remains largely unrecognized. The scarce to begin with, existing research often comes across as reductionist, ocular-normative and ocular-centric (Bolt, 2005; Bolt, 2013). A homogenizing focus on visual impairment effaces the plurality of parental lived experiences in the literature. Moreover, its instrumental approach displays differentiating, simple and problematic views on visually impaired parenting – leading Bolt (2015), Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2016) and Titchkosky and Michalko (2012) to call for a destabilization of such considerations of visually impaired parenting.

Consequently, this research brings the marginalized and silenced perspectives of parents living with a visual impairment to the forefront by reporting on their multi-layered representations (Ashby, 2011). It aims to answer the question: ‘How do mothers and fathers living with a visual impairment experience parenthood in Flanders (Belgium)?’ The study is based on open dialogues with six mothers and seven fathers living with a visual impairment to explore the lived experiences of visually impaired parents—as parents, and in their own words. It examines how they deal with their parenting, and explores a complex, bottom-up understanding of the personal lived experiences of visually impaired parents (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2016).

Parents living with a visual impairment: Insights from previous research

The existing literature about visually impaired parenting elaborates on a range of different, highly specific topics, such as transport, daily parenting practices and techniques, socio-emotional challenges, external resources and use of senses. The following overview of previous research demonstrates how these topics affect the parenthood of men and women labelled as visually disabled.

As noted by multiple sources, transport is the predominant challenge for visually impaired parents. Their mobility struggle additionally impacts the child in terms of transport limitations impacting leisure time outside the home environment (De Visscher, 2014; Molden, 2014; Vancoillie, n.d.). Throughout their life, all activities must be sufficiently anticipated and carefully planned (Rosenblum, et al., 2009), and all materials or means of transport are applied and adapted to reduced mobility possibilities (Van den Abbeel & Balfort, 2016; Kent, 2002). Concretely, visually impaired parents use strollers, baby slings and other equipment that can be utilized while moving by train, a passenger in a car/taxi and/or on foot.

Daily practices, nutrition, health and homework also feature in existing literature. For example, it is observed that breastfeeding makes blind mothers insecure (Cezario, et al., 2017); notwithstanding their ability to do so autonomously (De Visscher, 2014; Vancoillie, n.d.) and it negotiates practical issues such as measuring bottle nutrition or aiming spoons.

Using a spoken scale, self-made markers and practicing is helpful, and may mediate practical challenges (Van den Abbeel & Balfourt, 2016; Cezario, et al., 2017; De Visscher, 2014; Vancoillie, n.d.). Ensuring safety by preventing and resolving unsafe situations—when changing a nappy (Knighton, 2010), for example, or when giving correct medication (Vancoillie, n.d.)—ultimately become automatism by developing personal tricks, like reading the braille on packages (Pagliuca, et al., 2009; Rosenblum, et al., 2009). Assisting with their child’s homework can be practically challenging when books or the diary are unreadable for visually impaired parents (Rosenblum, et al., 2009). Even when children present something, such as at school events, parents lack visual input, which hinders them from fully acknowledging their child’s achievements and causes emotional distress (De Visscher, 2014).

In general, adults with a visual impairment experience social beliefs including judgmental, curious, worried, admiring and anxious reactions as harmful (Van den Abbeel & Balfourt, 2016; De Visscher, 2014; Kent, 2002; Molden, 2014), and societal responses tend to betray ignorance and incomprehension (Rosenblum, et al., 2009). Progress and acceptance of disability, barriers in daily living, or (in)dependence of them as a parent are socially and emotionally challenging (Molden, 2014; Rosenblum et al., 2009). Popular narratives on the pursuit of parenthood generally do not consider a place for visual impairment (Kent, 2002), leading visually impaired parents to experience stigmatization – even when this is not intended (Van den Abbeel & Balfourt, 2016; De Visscher, 2014; Kent, 2002).

The external information sources of parents (Cezario, et al., 2017; Pagliuca, et al., 2009; Rosenblum, et al., 2009) are multiple (e.g. exchanges with companions and non-disabled parents), personal and disability-specific (Kent, 2002). Like others, disabled parents receive support from their social network, such as for babysitting (Cezario, et al., 2017; Pagliuca, et al., 2009; Rosenblum, et al., 2009), but sometimes visually impaired parents require psychological help too. Eight of the nine interviewed mothers in Molden’s (2014) study would have liked the chance to have had access to some form of emotional support to assist them in their trajectory.

Visually impaired parents also attempt to compensate for sensory difficulties (Molden, 2014). Where possible, partially sighted parents use high contrast (De Visscher, 2014; Vancoillie, n.d.) and all visually impaired parents develop alternative strategies based on other senses (Cezario, et al., 2017; Pagliuca et al., 2009). For instance, they touch or listen more intensively to acquire the information they need. But vision loss may nevertheless create specific child-rearing issues for visually impaired parents, because sight, out of all the five senses, is considered the most important in the function of attachment (Molden, 2014).

While valuable, existing literature continues to be dominated by a technical and top-down perspective on visually impaired parenting. The practical, socio-emotional and communicative impact of visual impairment on the parent and their parenthood provides an instrumental focus on (impairment-specific) deficits or problems and the effects on child outcomes (Kilkey & Clarke, 2010). In this research, we want to present personable meanings of parents living with a visual impairment and their parenting by focusing on their position as parents and parental experiences in daily living.

Method

This qualitative descriptive research (Snape & Spencer, 2003) used only two selection criteria: the participants must be a parent of at least one child and must be visually impaired (i.e. describe themselves as partially sighted or blind). The selected participants were acquaintances of the first author, candidates of a Facebook group or selected by snowball sampling (Ritchie, et al., 2003). Candidates were recruited and interviewed, with sampling coming to an end when different parental experiences were repeated.

The sample consisted of individual parents and (visually impaired) pairs (Ritchie, et al., 2003). Interviews 1–6 and 9 were individual, and Interviews 7, 8 and 10 were paired. All parents had a partner at the time the interview was conducted. In total, thirteen parents—

six mothers and seven fathers, living in Flanders (Belgium)—were included in the study. At the time of the interview, five parents were partially sighted (Father 2, Father 3, Father 4, Father 5 and Mother 6), five parents were severely visually impaired (Mother 1, Mother 2, Mother 3, Mother 5 and Father 6) and three parents were blind (Father 1, Mother 4 and Father 7). In three of ten families (Interview 6, 7 and 10), one or more children were visually impaired too.

Table 1: Information on the sample

Interview	Parent	Age	Work	Child(ren)
1	Mother 1	n/a	Part-time	Daughter (24y) Son (20y) Son (16y)
2	Father 1	n/a	Four-fifths	Son (8y)
3	Father 2	34y	Part-time	Daughter (8m)
4	Father 3	33y	At home	Daughter (6y) Daughter (3y)
5	Mother 2	32y	Four-fifths	Daughter (4y) Son (18m)
6	Mother 3	n/a	At home	Stepdaughter (11y) Stepdaughter (8y) Daughter (5y) Daughter (14m) Son (5m)
7	Father 4	61y	Retired	Son (39y)
	Mother 4	60y	Retired	Son (35y)
8	Father 5	35y	Fulltime	Daughter (4y)
	Mother 5	40y	At home	
9	Father 6	57y	Fulltime	Daughter (29y) Son (28y)
10	Mother 6	n/a	Four-fifths	Daughter (9m)
	Father 7	38y	Fulltime	

Concerning data collection, the first author organized oral interviews. Only Interview 3 used computer-mediated communication (Shepherd, 2003), as preferred by the participant. At the start of each interview, the participants were asked for informed consent (Lewis, 2003). All participants agreed to audio recording of the interviews to facilitate the generation of complete and coherent transcripts. Subsequently, parental narratives were revealed through open, unstructured interviews (Baarda, et al., 2013). To collect situational representations and meaning-making through a naturalistic and interpretative approach, the starting question was: ‘This research is about how visually impaired parents experience parenthood; what does it mean to you?’ The interviews then followed the spontaneous flow of the parents’ stories. Participants pinpointed their own topics very naturally, without much researcher intervention. Additional questions were formulated organically and were therefore specific to each interview. Interviews were conducted between January and September 2018 and lasted two hours on average. With the permission of the participants, observations and interviews were transcribed in full. All interview transcripts were also validated through named member checking (Glesne, 2014).

Each transcript was carefully read through several times and subjected to qualitative content analysis. This process of analysis followed inductive and conceptual mapping procedures, as suggested by Clarke (2005) and Charmaz (2006). Upon coding the interviews, the first author identified reoccurring themes, common patterns and key points (Boeije, 2012; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The themes were examined for consistent patterns and

exceptions. The group of analysers discussed the inter-relationships between the most important variables, and searched for a possible causality between variables of a higher and lower level of abstraction.

The first author is young, female, Flemish and not a parent at the time of interviewing. She is also visually impaired herself, which provides a subjective insider position that constitutes a significant source of expert knowledge (Tregaskis & Goodley, 2005). She was conscious of accessible documents (e.g. informed consent or transcripts). Her existential experiences with visual impairment provided sensitive access to participants and entailed a close understanding of participants' daily lived experiences. This position made it possible to capture unwritten assumptions or subtle cues concerning visual impairment. This unique meta-perspective enriched the process and output of the research. At the same time, the first author negotiated visual issues (e.g., how participants and the first author deal with non-verbal cues) to one of the co-authors. To preserve distance from the content, she also collaborated with three sighted pedagogues to look at the data and the patterns in the analysis. During analysis, for the consistency of the themes and in writing up the results, there was a continuous dialogue and discussion with the two co-authors about interpreting the narratives.

Results

Analysis of the narratives of the six mothers and seven fathers living with a visual impairment resulted in three themes: daily practical burdens and solutions; the urge to provide 'good enough' parenting; and relational parenting concerning partnership and connection with their children.

Daily parenting practices

Concerning quotidian parenting activities, visual impairment did cause practical challenges. The interviewed parents gave multiple examples of how they manage practical burdens and their parenting with a personal, unique 'box of tricks', that accommodates and supports them in their daily living environments.

The interviewed parents discussed mobility very explicitly. They were less flexible and more dependent in relation to going out with the children; specifically, taking the children to day-care, school, the shops or the doctor. Father 2 identified not being able to drive a car as more difficult than living with a disability. Father 1 mentioned taxis and public transport as viable alternatives, but nevertheless perceived mobility as a particularly delicate point. The interviewed parents had to walk with their children, even in bad weather. It was also painful for Mother 1, Mother 2 and Mother 3 to no longer be able to drive a car by themselves and to have lost autonomous transport options because of the progressivity of their impairment. This was confrontational for the parent and their family. They needed time to accept and explore alternative options:

Mother 2: I think that's actually the hardest adjustment now, the fact that I can't drive the car anymore. I'm really struggling with that, still. This is also very difficult for the family; my husband now has to bring the children and me everywhere.

Rehabilitation of the person (e.g. mobility training, help with administration and learning to use certain software) to maximally maintain their independence was considered important by Mother 1, Father 3, Mother 2, Mother 3 and Father 6. Only one of the thirteen interviewed parents reported a need for psychological support. Father 1 and Mother 2 criticized the absence and redundancy of professional support for parents and their parenting: rehabilitators never negotiated their visually impaired parenting. Moreover, Mother 3, Mother 5 and Father

7 found that the baby training course of the Brailleliga¹ was not helpful because it needed to be more practical or did not work for them.

Each interviewed parent possessed a highly personal set of tools tailored to their own general needs, including an (extendable) cane, computer software, labels or a talking scale – the uses of which extend to parenting. Additionally, they used common materials, such as a baby sling instead of a stroller (to remain handsfree) or using email instead of a school diary to address their parental responsibilities in their own way. These reasonable accommodations were important for the participants and their children because they create safety, structure and peace of mind. The interviewed parents found that an anticipatory and solution-oriented attitude is satisfying and necessary. They are creative, proactive and resourceful to plan and think ‘outside the box’:

Father 7: There will probably be other things, but you’ll just have to try to find a solution most of the time, and sometimes the circumstances will just force you to. In the beginning, things seem impossible, but then you try or simply can’t find anyone else and end up doing it yourself.

The interviewed parents found a pleasant role division and smooth organizational structure in their family. They were proud when their parenting ran uncomplicatedly, without chaos or problems. Their parenting became a habit over time: the interviewed parents live their daily lives with a visual impairment, and as a parent, they were no longer constantly aware of both these characteristics. The context habituated, and the parent gained trust and fell back on recurrent experiences. Their parenting became less awkward or strange to themselves and their social network.

A parental urge to prove themselves

The interviewed parents experienced internal and external pressures about their parenting being ‘good enough’. They had some extra doubts and felt scrutiny about their parenting. The definition of a parent is specific, and all of the participants doubted whether their parenting was ‘good enough’. Indeed, visual impairment can result in additional concerns or pressures to become a good parent. The participants had feelings of uncertainties, questions of doubt and experienced guilt. Mother 1 questioned herself and her parenting regularly and profoundly; whether it was valuable enough to each of her children:

Mother 1: As a mother, you always feel like ‘I love all three of my children equally, and I should do the same for all three of them’, but because of that visual impairment it is different.

The participants pointed out that parenting with a visual impairment does not occur regularly, making it exceptional and unfamiliar. The visual impairment was often wrongly understood or made an issue by others. Father 1 was asked indiscrete questions about his impairment while waiting for an underground, and a café owner did not understand why Father 4 guided Mother 4 to the toilet. These excluding and differentiating stigmas were experienced as annoying and dealing with them was difficult for the participants. Mostly, it focused more on visual impairment than parenting. The outsiders’ thoughts, prejudices and opinions about parenting by mothers and fathers with a visual impairment often remained unspoken. The interviewed parents felt marginalized and excluded—not necessarily in an explicit and physical way, but more in an indirect and emotional way:

¹ Brailleliga is a Belgian Foundation for the Blind with several missions: to help blind and visually impaired people through financial and material support, to support scientific research and to raise public awareness through information campaigns.

Father 7: I think there are a lot of people who do a double-take when you pass by with a white cane and a stroller ... You already attract attention so add a stroller and it's completely ... Not something you see every day in any case.

Participants in Interviews 7 and 10 showed self-conscious disobedience to overcome extra doubts, practical and emotional burdens, and well-intended discouragement from family and doctors:

Father 7: Once, we had to go to the hospital, and they wanted to do psychological tests and more that I didn't know. Mother 6: That professor examined us. She asked questions about our capacities to raise children, whether we are responsible ... With us, she dared not, but we know others that consulted her, a blind couple ... They had to forward her letters from friends stating they would be supported. (Interview 10)

All interviewed parents demonstrated their parenting as a personal choice, a strong belief based on personality and the right to become a parent:

Mother 5: If you really want children, you should just go for it. Don't think 'I am partially sighted, I can't do it', that's not true.

However, the parental belief of being or becoming a 'good enough' parent was dominant in all participants' narratives. It was important for them to connect with role models and significant others. Knowing other people who have been through it before gave them the confidence to become an able parent. Consulting those with similar experiences was valuable to the interviewed parents for inspiration, exchanges and consultation. These (visually impaired) people were a resource to overcome parental issues. The interviewed parents were not feeling isolated and could share experiences:

Father 3: I ask them many questions about children and how to do certain things, public transport, walking in the dark with a stroller. There is not a lot of information available about this; everything is very personalised. But I like the contact with these people; it makes you feel like you are not alone.

All interviewed parents also wanted to be maximally independent, for themselves and their children. Being as independent as possible was experienced as a balancing act that encouraged overcoming anxieties, uncertainties or difficult situations; reinforced their drive; facilitated achieving goals; and boosted self-esteem:

Mother 1: I will not sit on the couch all day. I didn't want that for my children either. I did not want later, when they remember their childhood, they say 'my mum always sat at home on the couch because she was partially sighted and she couldn't do anything'. So I did not want that. I want them to say 'my mum still does [sport], my mum plays the [instrument], and ...'

Mother 3: That, despite my sight, I can say at the end of the day that I have managed to do it all, that I have washed them, that I have put the clothes in the bins, that my laundry is done, that they have sandwiches, that the schoolbags are okay ... I can always say, 'it's been a good day, everything's fine'. I'm proud of that.

The interviewed parents desired to be seen as equal to non-disabled parents. They emphasized that what they do is 'normal' from their perspective and cannot be considered different, extraordinary or problematic. Mother 5 compared herself and their skills as visually impaired parents to non-disabled parents. Father 3 and Father 7 stated that there are non-

disabled parents who also use a baby sling or do not have a driving license. This urge to prove themselves as equally good parents recurred throughout the interviews:

Father 5: Like I used to hear my mother say, 'you need to have eyes in the back of your head'. Well, my normal eyes may function less, but the eyes on my back work as well as anyone else's.

The environment got used to the impairment over time, according to the participants. The visual impairment was no longer an ever-present topic, it did not have to be mentioned anymore, and people knew how they could interact:

Mother 5: The first time I went to pick her up, everyone was staring like 'hey, what's she doing here?' Yes, I still had the stroller and the white cane; but after a while, they don't even notice anymore, and you need to look twice when entering the playground. Meanwhile, they're all so used to it.

Relational parenting: Connections with partner and children

Connections with their partner and children were characteristic of parenting for the participants. In this case, a visual impairment could increase relational and personal pressures:

Mother 1: In the beginning, I found that very difficult ... always have to ask. Also, [feeling like] a burden to your partner, the feeling that he always has to provide everything. I have to solve all that and do it all on my own, and then again on weekends, on Sundays, constantly asking for help for the children, for home help, for the groceries, for everything.

Father 6: I had the advantage ... that I could still help them there for the first twelve, thirteen, fourteen years and that I could give them that security ... [Partner] has been doing a lot of work for me in the garden for the last two years, and I want to avoid that as much as possible.

The sighted partner was expected to spend considerable time doing the shopping and activities related to children, such as transport to hobbies and school, and homework. They compensated for certain visual issues: going outside with a young child, paying attention to medical symptoms, following up on the school diary, styling the children and working. Partners, as parents, were searching for modes of cooperation that suited their personal and relational preferences and capacities. Even for the visually impaired parents, role patterns became different or changed because of the impairment. Father 1 and Father 2 were doing more homemaking to compensate for the inequality of doing child-related tasks. Mother 1 shifted her lifestyle because of her acquired visual impairment, which affects their family bond and family life. The participants often talked about the advantage of time and not needing to rush:

Mother 1: So I have a different relationship with my children, and automatically with my partner. Because ... he comes home from work and the food is ready. We didn't used to, we came home and 'what are we going to do tonight?' because both of us didn't have time to go shopping. Yeah, so always that rush, that's a lot less. And for him it is also more pleasant now, it all goes more smoothly at home because I have more time and because you yourself are quieter and less rushed.

The sighted partner was also personally significant for the visually impaired parents. They help them by giving a hand outside or reflecting about the impairment: explaining it to

children, prompting when people want to give something, encouraging to overcome challenges or to consider using a cane. Activities as partners were changed; for example, watching a film together became exhausting, so alternative connectedness needed to be found:

Mother 1: I missed that so much at first. I'm often there for fun, but then I feel so silly ... He's watching a movie and I'm like this ... If that's the news, I can still listen in, but there are certain films; I'm not with him, and I don't feel like making an effort if you don't see any of them. And then I just lay there on the couch staring at the ceiling. Ten minutes I can keep that up, and then I stand up. Then all of a sudden [partner] says, and that's why I think he's really sorry, 'what are you gonna do?' And then sometimes I say, 'ah, just going to the bathroom'.

Parenting was also experienced as being connected with their children: the interviewed mothers and fathers experienced warm relationships with their children. They used all of their senses often and in many ways while parenting. Where possible, their residual vision and contrasts were used. Interviewed parents who have/had visual perceptions appreciated participating visually at key developmental milestones for their children, such as their baby's first steps. In addition, touch, hearing and being alert with all senses were actively used in daily interactions. Communication and physical contact with their children became very valuable in a multisensorial way:

Mother 3: I thought to myself, from now on I have to see if I can feel it too, then I held him against me, and I could really feel him grimacing. Then I thought to myself, it's fine, if I don't see him anymore, I can still feel him laughing.

The (progression of) impairment could provoke uncertainties and some existential or painful conversations for the participants. The interviewed parents were honest with their children when they asked questions, but these conversations could make parents feel very vulnerable. Such conversations were not singular; they recurred over and over again. However, even in these situations, the interviewed parents and their children fell back on their strong, loving relationships:

Mother 2: Very often, in the weeks and months after, came the questions: 'Are your eyes already better? Have you already been to the doctor? Can't the doctor help your eyes? Can't you take pills?' The logic of a child. So yes, we actually kept repeating that 'the doctor can't make the eyes better'. Because we also felt she had a right to know honestly.

The participants experienced that the children got used to their parent or parents' visual impairment. The interviewed parents thought their children did not regard the family situation, parenthood and parent as being exceptional over time. The children did not notice it anymore:

Mother 1: Sometimes they even say it, like 'hey mum, at home we don't even notice it anymore', but I've never really noticed that they had a problem with it.

Moreover, the interviewed participants reported that visual impairment might have added value to their parental interactions. First, the visual impairment resulted in an enrichment of parent-child interactions: the relationship felt more open, existential or emotional subjects were more negotiable, and the psychological and physical proximity closer. Second, visual impairment was experienced as a possible enrichment for the child. The visual impairment of their parent(s) was part of their daily life and felt normal (possibly except when they are

in puberty), giving the children a more open and positive view of diversity. Despite the visual impairment, parents could still function as parents for their children; for example, in teaching them independence. Third, according to the interviewed parents, when a child lives with a visual impairment, their experiences could be an added value when dealing with the child's disability. The interviewed parents were already familiar with the impairment and could act accordingly. Other parents might lack the knowledge and experience to respond quickly. Their self-experienced accuracy felt like an added value to the development of children. Their experiential knowledge gave the interviewed parents basic confidence in their own abilities:

Mother 1: We are much closer, I think, than we would have been otherwise, because we say everything and speak certainly more about feelings than we would have done before (...) And yes, a hug, because you don't see their laugh or facial expression. So being more physical ... That is also different. Yes, I think we have really come closer together and how my children are now towards other people: I am really proud of them.

Mother 6: I knew I had to immediately find someone for early intervention or something for [daughter] to stimulate her. So, in this case, it had helped a lot, to show her things closely or let her touch things that she can take in her hands.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research has provided some valuable insights into how parents experience the upbringing of their children and their position as parents in Flemish (Belgian) society. It directly involved parents living with visual impairment as participants in qualitative research; which was exceptional and offers an alternative to the dominant disability discourse (Ashby, 2011). The study acknowledged both fathers and mothers' insider perspectives by interviewing seven fathers and six mothers. It created a broader understanding or expansive conceptualization of visually impaired parenting (Ashby, 2011). Elucidating experiential subjectivity provided deeper insights into the insider perspectives of visually impaired parents. An exploration of the lived experiences of the visually impaired parents themselves showed that they encounter the assumed exceptionality or unfamiliarity of their parenting. It took time to prove themselves and relationships were highly significant for the parents. Opening up on these personal insights has made visually impaired parenting more visible and negotiable (Soyez, et al., 2009) by giving the parents a voice (Kleege, 2005). Themes such as their parental urge to prove themselves or relationships with family members, were unobserved in theoretical frameworks, which accentuates the novelty of this research in its field. A respectful, honest and open dialogue made the individual parental experiences fully visible. Open communication allowed the expression of an authentic and complete parental perspective: it broadened the vision and revealed what was unseen.

Concerning the actual practice of daily parenting, this was experienced as the exploration of a personal, unique box of tricks. Both the interviewed parents and the existing literature (Van den Abbeel & Balfoort, 2016; De Visscher, 2014; Kent, 2002; Molden, 2014; Rosenblum, et al., 2009; Vancoillie, n.d.) concurred that mobility was the most significant practical issue and emotional burden. Less agreement was found on the need for additional psychological support for the parents themselves (Molden, 2014). However, parents having their own approach involving a personal set of tools and a smooth organizational structure were dominant accommodations to daily parenting. Available studies' claims about nutrition, health, homework and information sources that involve problems and solutions (Van den Abbeel & Balfoort, 2016; Cezario, et al., 2017; De Visscher, 2014; Knighton, 2010; Pagliuca, et al., 2009; Rosenblum, et al., 2009; Vancoillie, n.d.) were supported by the daily examples reported in the interviews. It is therefore necessary to consider the implications of these practical struggles and thresholds in the support that is available for the parents. It is crucial

to safeguard all possible independence but at the same time assume a personal and adaptive approach to the specific needs and uncertainties of each parent labelled as visually disabled.

The findings explicitly questioned socio-emotional challenges (Molden, 2014; Rosenblum, et al., 2009) and harmful societal responses (Van den Abbeel & Balfoort, 2016; De Visscher, 2014; Kent, 2002; Molden, 2014, Rosenblum, et al., 2009). At several moments in their lives, the interviewed parents experienced added doubts, pressures, misunderstandings and othering. But, in addition to the observations made in existing literature about these issues, a powerful internal drive was dominant in all participants' narratives. Throughout the interviews, participants' parental belief of being or becoming a 'good enough' parent, their connection with role models, their motivation to be maximally independent, and their urge to prove themselves as parents were repeatedly stated. This conclusion confirms that disabled parents struggle with a poisonous normativity on ideal mothering or fathering and feel a strong urge to prove themselves as parents: they argue against their parenting's assumed inferiority or try to overcome social assumptions (Malacrida, 2009). Visually impaired parents resist idealized parenthood that threatens each of us every day, while simultaneously doing their utmost to be recognized as such and prove how brave and strong they are without needing extra support for themselves.

The last point we want to address in this conclusion is the emphasis on becoming a parent in a web of warm and supportive relationships with the partner, child(ren) and family. Connectedness with a partner and their children was a primordial experience for the parents and their daily parenting. In this case, the visual impairment and its consequences affected these relationships. In practical terms, participants depended on their partners for issues like mobility. But the significance of partners to visually impaired parents and their relationship is more all-encompassing than those practical considerations alone. Visual impairment is a personal characteristic that is facilitated or considered differently by the environment (Michalko, 2002; Soyeze, et al., 2009) and influences the child (in)directly. This vulnerability is difficult to experience; it is continuously ongoing and has to be negotiated with the children. However, these parents' relationships with their children were also very multisensorial (Cezario, et al., 2017; De Visscher, 2014; Molden, 2014; Pagliuca, et al., 2009; Vancoillie, n.d.). The interviewed parents confirmed that sight influences these interconnections and they use their residual vision and contrasts where possible. They also pointed out that they used their senses often and in many ways: touching, hearing and being alert with all senses actively in daily interactions. They doubted if their impairment discourages their relationships, but intuitively experienced attachable bindings that felt warm, open, close and negotiable. The warm and close bond—including communication and physical contact—with family members was experienced as important and made the parents proud of their strong and deep connections.

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Declaration

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