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**AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENTS' GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS AND RAPE  
CULTURE IN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

by

**Ntokozo Nkosi**

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**Supervisor: Prof. Maretha Visser**

**Co-Supervisor: Pierre Brouard**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively determine whether gender constructions influence gender relations in residences and the role these views have in the perpetuation of rape culture on campus, with a particular interest in how residence traditions contribute to these views.

The social constructionist paradigm was used to co-construct the gender perceptions of residence students through a qualitative research approach. The study was aimed at participants who were familiar with the university's residences and their traditions (residence students and leaders).

This study was conducted among students at the University of Pretoria, who were familiar with the University's residences, their traditions and the student protests which have taken place in the University in response to practices that fostered rape culture in the university and its residences, primarily focusing on students staying in campus residences. The study targeted two sets of groups: residence students and key informants. Current undergraduate resident students were the primary target population, regardless of the residence they reside in, their course or year of study. A focus group discussion was held with a group of male and a group of female students. Key informants for this study included residence house committee members, student activist group members and student representative council members.

The researcher was aware of potential conflicts and made efforts to show good judgment and sensitivity to allow students to express their opinions and respect each other's opinions. The study adhered to the University of Pretoria's Code of Ethics for Research. The researcher

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applied the principles of respect for personal autonomy, benevolence, and justice, which do not work in isolation from one another.

The quality, trustworthiness and rigor of the findings were ensured by triangulation of data sources (key informants and students) and data collection methods (focus groups and semi-structured interviews). By using a co-researcher to interpret the data independently, the credibility of the interpretation was enhanced.

These findings show that there is evidence that some residences hold attitudes or beliefs which may perpetuate traditional views of gender, which are made apparent through their traditions and activities. As a result of this, residences can become a breeding ground for the perpetuation of rape culture and the enforcement of harmful gender stereotypes. It is also worth noting that it is not solely the formal traditions which play a role in the perpetuation of rape culture, but informal ones as well. Another key concern is how management of residences manages reported incidences of sexual assault or harassment. It is worth noting however, that residence students feel that there have been changes which resulted in a noticeable difference, particularly in incidences of rape culture. In spite of the highlighted challenges, students feel that there are positives to living in on campus residences.

**Key terms:** rape culture, gender, gender constructions, gender-based violence, South African University, student protests

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**DECLARATION OF OWN WORK**

I, Ntokozo Nkosi, declare that this dissertation – **an exploration of students’ gender constructions and rape culture in a South African University**– is my original work apart from where I made use of or quoted another source, which has been acknowledged by means of complete references.

I also declare that the work I am submitting has never been submitted before for another degree to any other tertiary institution for examination.

Signature:



Date: October 2020

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

### **Background of the Study**

Over the last number of years, following the 2015 #feesmustfall student protests, the country has been confronted with evidence of the prevalence of rape and sexual misconduct faced by South African university students, through similar student protests. In April of 2016, the #RURReferenceList hashtag began circulating on social media platforms and consequently ushered in the uprisings to come. This campaign, started by Rhodes University students, was aimed at exposing alleged rapists and was a response from students who felt that the university was not doing enough to bring the accused to justice (Seddon, 2016). Thereafter, female students held naked and silent protests with the intention of bringing these issues to public attention. Following the stand taken by the students at Rhodes University, other students from universities across the country such as the University of the Witwatersrand, University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, and Nelson Mandela University, also recounted their experiences of rape and rape culture that they felt was perpetuated on their campuses. Students protested not only against alleged perpetrators of sexual misconduct, but also against the supposed mismanagement of reported cases by university management (Jacobs Y. , 2017; Johnston, 2016; Jordaan, 2016; Pillay, 2017; Seddon, 2016; Tembo, 2016). Students demanded that universities do something to address their concerns. As such, these protests, though not new, have garnered a greater following and are held on an annual basis in some institutions.

The University of Pretoria has not been exempted from protests of this nature. On the 17th of May 2017, one hundred female students protested against the alleged mismanagement of rape and sexual misconduct on campus and in campus residences (Chauke & Keppler, 2017; Uys, 2017). The protest was incited by seven alleged rape cases which were allegedly not addressed, nine months after an “Are We Safe?” symposium was held where University

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management agreed to sign a memorandum and redraft their sexual harassment and rape policy (Chauke & Kepler, 2017). However, University of Pretoria spokesperson Rikus Delpont refuted this, saying that no memorandum was handed over to University management. He did, however, add that the University would continue to look for ways to raise awareness and support abuse survivors.

Nearly one year later to the day, on the 8th of May 2018, another protest and speak out mass meeting was held by student organisations House Humanities and SpeakOutUP (Mkhithi, 2018). The organisers of the protest stipulated that the protests were addressing violence perpetuated on women by men, which has been normalised by society to the extent that people are becoming desensitized to it (Mkhithi, 2018). The aim of the protest was to raise awareness about femicide, the killing of women, and the lack of education about the dangers of some masculinities, misogyny and patriarchy and their toxicity (Mkhithi, 2018). Various mass meetings were held, both on and off campus, where victims shared their experiences of student assault. Organisers of the speak out session stated that there were multiple events which influenced them to hold these mass meetings, particularly the dangers faced by women in an environment like Hatfield, which is a student epicentre, and the national growth of femicide, which they feel is disregarded across the country (Mkhithi, 2018). The speak out sessions also focused on the frequency at which young women's drinks were spiked around social spaces in Hatfield and the events that unfold thereafter. In response to this, the organisations House Humanities, and SpeakOutUP planned to launch an office that would address the rise of rape culture within and around the University. SpeakOutUP is a centralized office for students to go to in instances of sexual violence. They can talk to a volunteer or "befriender," who are student volunteers who were trained by the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender (CSA & G) so that they are sensitised to issues around sexual violence (Mkhithi, 2018).

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In 2019, protests against gender-based violence were again held in the University of Pretoria in September (Mitchley, University of Pretoria suspends classes following protest against GBV, 2019; Mukwamu & Thomas, 2019). Students took to the streets and marched to the Brooklyn Police Station and thereafter, to an off-campus student accommodation following an alleged influx of incidences of gender-based violence, directly targeting the accused (Mukwamu & Thomas, 2019). This resulted in the University temporarily suspending classes (Mitchley, 2019). This protest coincided with and became part of the larger #AmINext? campaign after the murder of a female first-year student from the University of Cape Town, Uyinene Mrwetyana. This resulted in protest action by students and the suspension of academic activities in the country for a week (Somdyala, 2019). The #AmINext social media campaign also brought to light other recent instances of gender-based violence, including the murder of University of the Western Cape student, Jesse Hesse, and the murder of female boxer, Leighandre Jegels, to name a few (Carolus, 2019). These protests and testimonies from students highlight the extent of the frustrations that students have against what may be described as “rape culture” in society, our country, and universities.

According to Professor Amanda Gouws of the Department of Political Science in Stellenbosch University, rape culture refers to circumstances that support the normalisation of rape, which on university campuses is about attitudes, beliefs, and practices where women are treated with disrespect or humiliated or their human dignity violated. These circumstances normalise rape culture because sexism is a patriarchal norm (which rape culture is a product of). As a result, victims are often blamed, which makes it more difficult for women to report rape and other incidences (Gouws, 2016).

While rape culture is not unique to universities, students fittingly feel that it is enabled by universities’ culture and climate. In the University of Pretoria, for instance, this issue was first made publicly apparent by the cancellation of the 2017 Serrie Concert finals, which

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became a major catalyst for a number of student movements related to rape culture and gender-based violence in the University. Serrie is an annual singing and dancing competition in residences cultural activities calendar, which entails students performing and being rated by residences of the opposite gender (Mitchley, 2017). Following social and mainstream media outcry, the University decided to cancel the event finals after some student spectators held up offensive and derogatory placards and posters during the preliminaries. As reported in the student newspaper *Perdeby*, male residence students held up derogatory and sexist posters during performances by female residence students such as “nice thigh gap, can I fill it?”, “I’m not Asian but I’ll eat your cat”, “Spit or swallow?” and “Show us your tits” (Svivevic, 2017). Some students insist that the posters were just part of residence culture and are merely an attempt to distract those performing. Others expressed that, in spite of public outcry and calls for the male students who held up these posters to face disciplinary consequences, this behaviour is part of the residence tradition, and nothing will be done about it (Mitchley, 2017). Some students reportedly described the incident as the “epitome of the perpetuation of toxic masculinity and misogyny” and that the problem is about “normalising the idea that such remarks can be made in the name of humour.” Other students reported that female residence students also make similar remarks towards male residence students though not as degrading. To this a house committee member from a male residence remarked at the fact that female residences did the same does not create the promotion of rape culture (Svivevic, 2017). Political student organisations also shared their views on this, with the political student organisation, EFFSC (Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command) expressing that this incident was part of a larger problem in the University surrounding Afrikaans culture, which perpetuates patriarchy (Mitchley, 2017), while members of the political organisation Afriforum expressed that the cancellation of the finals merely punished

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those students who have worked hard to participate in a constructive student tradition, instead of a few individuals who cannot behave themselves (Keppler, 2017).

The incidents mentioned above highlight the polarised views about what may be described as the normalisation of rape culture in the University space, the dynamics between the genders in campus residences and the potential role residence traditions have on foster a climate that may enable rape culture. A former residence house-committee member was quoted by Perdeby as saying; “unless they [the University authorities] actually engage and sit down and we embark on some level of discourse to explain why these signs [posters and placards held up during Serrie] are so problematic to people who do not see them as problematic, nothing is actually going to change” (Svicevic, 2017).

Following this incident, a statement by the University of Pretoria’s Department of University Relation’s Rikus Delport was issued that the Serrie Concert will be cancelled after “deliberation and consultation with various stakeholders” (Serrie 2017 Statement, 2017).

Since the incident in 2017, Serrie has been rebranded as Step It UP, a sing and dance competition that promotes diversity and multiculturalism in theme and music (University of Pretoria , 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

Serrie, being a residence cultural event and tradition has shed some light on how residence culture may be enabling rape culture, which students report to be the case. The cancellation of the 2017 Serrie finals and the student protests mentioned above, seemingly support students from the University of Pretoria’s assertion that rape culture is enabled by the University’s culture and climate and that the University allegedly mismanages incidences of rape and sexual misconduct on campus and in campus residences. As such, it is worth exploring and gaining greater insight into residence culture and the role it plays in student’s experience of rape culture in the University.

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In 2016, a transformation report was conducted for the University's Residence Affairs and Accommodation Department (TuksRes) based on the University's Vision 2025 strategy. This report presented challenges and concerns in residences and offered solutions for transformation. A number of challenges were outlined, including language (using English in formal communication as a language everyone understands), religion (the inclusion of prayer during meetings and asking those who are not Christian to leave during the prayer), and the use of divisive historical symbols (Michaels, 2016). This report identified residence traditions as the largest concern. According to the report, some residence traditions included initiation practices and seniors and student leaders using coercion to force students to partake in certain activities. Gender stereotyping was also listed as a concern that needs attention in residences. The report emphasised that some residence traditions and activities perpetuate problematic gender stereotypes, which form part and parcel of all the activities conducted by residences (Michaels, 2016). Gender stereotypes are associations and generalizations about men and women based on perceptions of masculinity and femininity (Hentschel, Heilman, & Peus, 2019). Masculinity is associated with strength and power while femininity is associated with dependence and fragility (Black & McCloskey, 2013) which results in creating bias of how one is expected to behave based solely on their gender. Gender stereotyping can cause individuals to face discrimination or unequal and unfair treatment based on their gender, or if they do not conform to stereotypical associations. The concern in residences, according to this report is that students are happy to conform to gender stereotypes (Michaels, 2016) With these points in mind, in order to explore rape culture and whether it is perpetuated on campus, it is worth exploring how male and female students view themselves and one another in residences. Additionally, it is important to explore the extent that their constructions of gender and their experiences in campus residences and with residence traditions influence the



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supposed normalisation of rape culture and alleged sexual harassment and sexual misconduct on campus.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively determine whether gender constructions influence gender relations in residences and the role these views have in the perpetuation of rape culture on campus, with a particular interest in how residence traditions contribute to these views. Qualitative research as a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2012, p. 294) is most appropriate for this study, which is explorative in nature. This study aims to open discussion on gender construction and make people aware of the current constructions and stereotypes amongst students. It aims to encourage students and University management to think about the topic, which may be the starting point for change to happen. University management will be informed about the results for future planning related to student gender relationships.

### **Research Question**

The research question for this study is: how do residence students’ constructions of gender influence their beliefs about rape culture at a university in South Africa? The researcher will take a social constructionist approach (which asserts that people’s understanding of the world is a product of social interaction) to explore the research question.

### **Aims and objectives**

The aim of the study is to explore how students’ construction of gender influences beliefs about rape culture. This study has four (4) objectives:

1. to explore how students who reside on campus construct gender.
2. to explore how residence traditions, contribute to personal gender constructions.
3. to explore whether students believe that rape culture is prevalent in the University’s residences and how it is perpetuated.

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4. to explore the relationship between students' construction of gender and their opinion of rape culture in residences (if it is prevalent)

### **Significance of the Study**

Literature (which will be expounded on in chapter 2), has found that culture and tradition are often cited in the justification of gender-based oppression and victimisation. Various studies have shown that both men and women who believe in more traditional gender roles have similar attitudes towards victims of rape and are more likely to ascribe to rape myths, which are attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women (Anderson, 2007; Angelone, Mitchell, & Grossi, 2015; Baloyi, 2010; Black & McCloskey, 2013; Hammond, Berry, & Rodriguez, 2011; Lev-Wiesel, 2004; Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre, & Morrison, 2005; Yamawaki, Ostenson, & Brown, 2009). Such research indicates that people's construction of gender, be it their own or the opposite gender, greatly influences their perceptions towards rape and violent sexual acts. Therefore, the manner in which gender is constructed is a variable that is worth investigating on university campuses in an effort to contribute to change.

While the topic of rape culture has experienced a wave of recent attention in the media, it is not a new construct. First coined by feminist activists in the 1970s (Phipps, Ringrose, Renold, & Jackson, 2017), its resurgence in the media, particularly in countries like South Africa, India, Australia and the United States of America has largely been due to high profile cases involving politicians, celebrities, sportspeople and campus universities (Phipps, et al., 2017). Scholarly articles on the topic, including rape culture on university campuses, have been abundant even earlier (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Herman, 1984; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Lorber, 1994; Lorber & Farrell, 1991). While research exists on the social and cultural construction of rape (Berkowitz, Manohar, & Tinkler, 2010; Burnett, et al., 2009;

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Lorber, 1994; Ryan, 2011), it is worth further investigation in order to gain deeper insight of this perspective, through the investigation of the construction of gender, in a recent context, in order to contribute to addressing the deeper mechanisms at work in the perpetuation of rape and gender-based violence in South Africa.

### **Researcher's stance on the topic**

The nature of the topic I have chosen is controversial but very relevant. I feel that more research is needed to the already existing research on campus culture, rape and rape culture for the purposes of understanding the context of rape on campuses, but to also identify the possible root causes. As a survivor of sexual assault as a child, it is something that still impacts me to this day, and I feel rape survivors are muted, censored and expected to get over their trauma. I feel that this is due to the normalisation of rape culture in our society and the patriarchal nature of the country we live in. While I try to remain objective in the conduction of this study, it has had an impact on me at times. Despite this, I have strived to produce objective, contextual research that adheres to the qualitative standards of trustworthiness and rigor to produce findings that are not biased or influenced by my own experiences.

### **Dissertation Structure**

#### **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

This chapter provides background and contextualises the research topic and problem statement. It provides justification of the relevance of the research problem, describes the problem statement and purpose of the study while also briefly describing the research methods and approaches which will be implemented in the study.

#### **Chapter 2 – Literature Review and conceptual framework**

This chapter provides a synopsis of the literature and thereby establishes the relevance of the problem. The literature provides an overview of what is already known and the types

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of research that has been done. It puts the current study into context of the body of research and how it contributes to what is already known and has been done. The chapter also provides the conceptual approach which the study will follow as a guideline and theoretical viewpoint.

### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

The methodology chapter describes the selected research design and rationale. The sampling procedures, data collection and data analysis methods and the motivation for these selected methods, and how these approaches are relevant to the research problem are described. Ethical considerations are also discussed.

### **Chapter 4 – Findings and discussion**

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented. The themes, and patterns are presented, analysed, and interpreted. Major findings are highlighted and analysed in relation to the conceptual framework and the chosen data analysis methods.

### **Chapter 5 – Conclusion**

The final chapter of the study will be a summary of what the study aimed to do, how it was done and that was found. This chapter also highlights the major findings, possible limitations, the significance of the study and recommendations for what can be done.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study is to open discussion on gender construction and make people aware of the current constructions and stereotypes amongst students as well as highlight any challenges students might be facing during their time living on campus. Hopefully, it may result in students and management thinking about the topic from a different perspective, which may be the starting point for discussion around gender stereotypes, rape culture, residences, and student life on campus.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

### **Literature Review**

Recent student protests against the alleged mismanagement of rape and sexual misconduct among students of the University of Pretoria, and specifically in campus residences, highlight the extent of the frustrations that students have against what they allege is rape culture in the University. Students seemingly feel that rape is enabled by the University's culture and climate. The 2016 TuksRes Report on Transformation in university residences also highlighted that residence traditions and gender stereotyping are some of the biggest challenge to transformation in the University of Pretoria. This report recommended that TuksRes reflect on its approaches to student events and traditions, which are customs and processes passed down to new residents each year (Michaels, 2016).

A traditional literature review approach was used for this study. This approach seeks to contextualise a new study, provide an overview of the research or critique existing research (Li & Wang, 2018). As such, this approach is fitting, as the literature aims to contextualise and provide an overview of the topic.

The literature review will provide a detailed outline of rape culture and where it stems from, which includes an overview of gender and gender roles, patriarchy, rape myths, and a contextualized overview of rape culture in South African universities, stemming from local and international literature.

### **Gender in context**

#### **Sex versus gender.**

The terms "sex" and "gender" are often misused interchangeably. One's sex refers to biologically determined characteristics, determined by the body's sex hormones (oestrogen and testosterone) which guide the body's anatomy and body structure and reproductive behaviour. Gender on the other hand are the male and female behaviours that are attributed by socialisation, dubbed masculinity and femininity (Godman, 2018; Urdy, 1994; WHO,

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2017). In the 1970s, psychologist, John Money, differentiated between the two terms, sex and gender, defining sex as the biological classification of male/ female, and gender as the different behaviours of sexes (Haig, 2004; Urdy, 1994). Feminist scholars and other social scientists adopted this differentiation, emphasising that gender is a social construction (Haig, 2004).

Sexual dimorphism; the biologically distinct differences between the sexes, has been used as the underpinning traits that characterise gender (Godman, 2018), and, historically the two terms were used as synonyms in a grammatical context, particularly in the biological sciences (Haig, 2004). The biological approach was that, in mammals, behaviours were attributed to sexual dimorphism, such as females being more nurturing to children, and males being more aggressive (Urdy, 1994). This view, however, was rejected by social scientists because of the implication that if behaviour is due to biological influences, it cannot be changed (Urdy, 1994). The World Health Organisation Genomic Resources Centre also notes that the biological aspects of sex do not vary substantially between people, cultures and societies and that these differences are important only in the context of health anatomically and physiologically; however, aspects of gender may vary<sup>1</sup> (WHO, 2017).

### **Gender construction, stereotypes, and roles.**

Historically, physical differences and sex-related labour roles played a major role in the emergence of gender roles and social learning over time. In the mid-twentieth century, social scientists used the term “sex roles” to refer to the culturally determined behaviour of men and women. The term “sex status” was used to acknowledge the social rankings of men and women in different cultures (Meyerowitz, 2008). The physical differences between men and women were what merely categorised gender roles: women fall pregnant, and breastfeed,

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that in humans, sexual dimorphism is determined by five biological factors at birth, which present as either all male or all female (sex hormones, internal reproductive anatomy, X and Y chromosomes, reproductive gonads and genitalia), however, sexual ambiguity does occur and an individual is then biologically classified as intersex (Gilbert, 2000)

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men are typically bigger in size and strength, and as such, men would perform tasks that required physical strength while women had and tended to children (Godman, 2018).

John Money, after his classification of the term gender, argued that biological sex did not determine someone's gender role and orientation (Haig, 2004; Meyerowitz, 2008; Money, 1973). Money argued that children learned "gender" in early childhood in the same way they learned language. Today, many social scientists agree. The construction of one's gender identity and thereafter the formulation of gender roles is said to typically begin with the assignment of a sex category at birth based on external genitalia (Lorber & Farrell, 1991). Thereafter, a sex category becomes a gender status through naming, how the child is dressed, and other gender identifiers. Subsequently, one is treated differently according to their given gender identity (Lorber & Farrell, 1991). One's identification of masculine or feminine is therefore internalized during childhood through socialisation (Berkowitz et al., 2010). Perceptions of masculinity are associated with power, independence, protection, strength and aggression, to name a few; while femininity is associated with caring, dependence, weakness, fragility, passivity and helplessness (Black & McCloskey, 2013). From these associations, stereotypes and norms are formed, resulting in gender roles and expectations. Stereotypes serve an adaptive function that allows one to categorise and simplify things they observe and to make predictions about others (Hentschel et al., 2019). However, they can result in one making negative generalizations from beliefs about a group of people. Gender stereotypes are associations and generalizations about men and women, based on the social roles they play in the home and in the workplace (Hentschel et al., 2019). While gender stereotypes are descriptions; for instance, "men enjoy sports more than women," gender roles refer to prescriptions; for instance, "men are supposed to enjoy sports more than women" (Chalabaev, Sarrazin, Fontayne, Boiché, & Clément-Guillotin, 2013).

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Binary sex distinction has also faced criticism for the notion that sex categories can be distinguished as a binary, as sexual ambiguity also occurs naturally (Gilbert, 2000). The notion that sexual distinction determines gender identity has also been challenge because in the case of transgender identity, one's gender identity may differ from the sex they are assigned at birth (Gilbert, 2000; Godman, 2018).

### **Patriarchy and gender inequality.**

The identification of gender roles through one's sex may have inevitably contributed to patriarchy. Patriarchy can be defined as a “form of mental, social, spiritual, economic and political organisation/structuring of society produced by the gradual institutionalization of sex-based political relations created, maintained and reinforced by different institutions linked closely together to achieve consensus on the lesser value of women and their roles” (Facio, 2013). In essence, it is the socially constructed and unjust social system that systematically dominates, discriminates and oppresses women and fixates on the biological differences between the two sexes, whether they are real or perceived (Facio, 2013; Shefer, 2001; Stanistreet, Bambra, & Scott-Samuel, 2005). The historical origins of patriarchy are in the home, where the authority and leadership by the father is projected into social order (Facio, 2013). The word “patriarchy” means the rule of the father and was used to describe a male-dominated household (Sultana, 2010). This concept of male-domination is now found in all institutions of society (Facio, 2013). Patriarchy serves to oppress women based solely on their gender and is founded on the belief that men hold greater power.

### **Gender in a South African context.**

South Africa is ill-reputed for having the highest incidence of gender-based violence (Gordon & Collins, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2010). Once referred to as the “rape capital of the world” (Gordon & Collins, 2013, p. 1), the gender dynamics of the country are marred by gender inequality, patriarchy and the use of tradition to enforce male dominance.



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According to Gobodo-Madikizela, Fish, & Shefer (2014), the most visible expressions of male power in South Africa are rape and other forms of gender-based sexual violence.

Baloyi (2010) contends that in many traditional African societies, due to patriarchy, male superiority and domination and female inferiority and submission are perpetuated. In his paper titled "an African view of women as sexual objects", Baloyi (2010) recounts metaphorically that an "unmarried African woman is a garden without an owner. A man is compared to a gardener, for he claims the garden and sows his seed. Whilst one man can have several gardens, a garden can have only one owner" (Baloyi, 2010, p.3). Such views indicate that women are at times viewed as objects that men own, who serve the primary purpose of receiving and reaping the man's seed (Baloyi, 2010). In South Africa, the act of virginity testing of girls and women is an example of how a woman's worth is measured through sexual objectification and that she is pure for her future husband and will receive only his seed (Baloyi, 2010).

Despite gender-based activism, education and knowledge, gender-based violence is still highly prevalent in South Africa (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2019).

### **Rape culture**

As previously stated, while the term 'rape culture' is not a new wave, in recent years, it has received a resurgence in media attention (Phipps, et al., 2017). Campaigns such as Everyday Sexism Project, #MeToo and #AmINext brought media and social media awareness to the experience of gender-based violence and rape culture and brought to light these experiences in universities.

In 2012, the Everyday Sexism Project was founded in the United Kingdom by activist Laura Bates (Phipps et al., 2017), as a website where survivors of sexual harassment and assault document their experiences, with the aim of documenting examples around the world.

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the website is active to this day and stories are collated through direct entry to the website, by email or by sending messages to the project's Twitter platform (Everyday Sexism Project, 2020).

#MeToo, while catalyzed by the sexual harassment and assault charges laid against film producer Weinstein in 2017, is a movement that was created by a female activist named Tarana Burke in 2006 (Tuerkheimer, 2019). Burke, founded the phrase as part of her work among survivors of sexual harassment and sexual assault. It was in 2017, however that #MeToo began to trend in social media platforms such as Twitter, due to actors and celebrities such as Alyssa Milano, Ashley Judd, Rose McGowan and Taylor Swift, amongst many others, breaking their silence and sharing their experiences using the hashtag, encouraging more people to join and recount their experiences (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Sweetland Edwards, 2017). This movement rallied activism against gender-based violence, not just in the entertainment industry, but across politics, academia, technology, sports, medicine to name a few across the globe and called for policy changes and for sexual harassment to be taken more seriously when reported (Tuerkheimer, 2019).

Similarly, the #INext movement, founded by Holly Jarrett in Canada in 2014 after the disappearance of her cousin, a university student (Taggart, 2015). This movement highlighted the higher likelihood of indigenous women in Canada to be victims of sexual violence, human trafficking and homicide (Saramo, 2016; Taggart, 2015). In 2019, this movement found new life on social media and ultimately international attention after the 2019 murder of South African student Uyinene Mrwetyana, highlighting the high rate of femicide in South Africa (Carolus, 2019; Somdyala, 2019). Following this, #AmINext protests were held in the New York and Amsterdam (Head, 2019).

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These movements have not only inspired social activism and a call for societal change, but have also been used to highlight the high incidence of gender-based violence, sexual harassment and assault and rape culture.

Rape culture is the term used to describe how society fosters and condones rape and other sexual violence and attitudes (Herman, 1984; Nicoletti & Spencer-Thomas, 2009). A rape culture normalises violent sexual acts and is a logical extension of cultural and patriarchal perspectives, which emphasise the notion that men are the possessors of women and women are therefore subordinate (Alsop & Lennon, 2002; Baloyi, 2010; Herman, 1984).

The concept of rape culture challenges the perception that rape is limited to the actions of one, abnormal individual, and suggests that it is connected to and enabled by numerous everyday cultural and social practices (Sills, et al., 2016). Behaviours such as rape humour, general gender inequality, “catcalling”, online harassment, and sexual coercion constitute the normalisation of rape culture (Gruber, 2016; Sills, et al., 2016; Strain, Martens, & Saucier, 2016).

### **Rape myths and attitudes.**

Rape culture goes hand in hand with rape myths or misconceptions, which contribute to the normalisation of the phenomenon. Rape myths are the “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, cited in Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008, p3). According to Ryan (2011), understanding the relationship between rape myths and sex scripts (culturally determined behaviours that inform and influence sexual behaviour), may help understand the social construct of rape.

Examples of rape myths include the following:

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- a woman deserved to be raped because of what she was wearing; where she was or if she was drinking
- if a woman does not fight back against sexual assault, she wanted it
- when a woman says no, she actually means yes
- if a man pays for dinner or drinks, the woman owes him sex
- women lie and cry rape when they regret consensual sex
- if a man is married to or is in an intimate relationship with a woman, she has no right to deny him sex
- rape is not committed by acquaintances or people that the victim knows, but by strangers (Hammond et al., 2011; Hildebrand & Najdowski, 2015; Spengler, 2013; Yamawaki & Tschanz, 2005).

Although attitudes towards sexual expression and gender rights have become less restrictive over the years, there are people who still believe that the role of a woman is to be subservient to a man (Baloyi, 2010; Hammond et al., 2011). Studies have found that both men and women who have these more traditional gender attitudes are more likely to endorse rape myths (Black & McCloskey, 2013; Hammond et al., 2011; Nagel et al., 2005; Yamawaki et al., 2009) and to be more sympathetic to those accused of sexual assault and misconduct (Angelone, et al., 2015). Date rape, domestic violence and acquaintance rape are viewed less severely as rape perpetrated in an attack by an unknown assailant and, in some studies, victims were to blame in some way (Angelone et al., 2015; Yamawaki et al., 2009).

### **Rape culture in South Africa.**

In South Africa, violence has become a social norm and sexual coercion and harassment are viewed as normal male behaviour (Baloyi, 2010; Jewkes, et al., 2009). If sex is not given voluntarily, some men feel that they have the right to take it. Within this context, rape culture is not only naturalised, but also normalised (Baloyi, 2010).

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While gender-based violence is not limited to physical forms and can include psychological and economic forms; physical violence, including rape, can be the most damaging and sometimes fatal (Burn, 2019). Although gender-based violence is endemic in South Africa, its true extent is not known due to under-reporting (Burn, 2019). Under-reporting can be attributed to several factors, including rape myths, victim-blaming and misleading beliefs that a woman should physically resist her perpetrator and that gender-based violence is only perpetrated by unknown assailants (Burn, 2019). Known statistics, however, are still largely overwhelming. In 2017/2018, the South African Police Services (SAPS) reported an increase in sexual offense reports from the previous year of 49660, to 50108 (Burn, 2019). Of these 2017/2018 cases, 80% were rape cases.

While the South African constitution is progressive in its protection of women's human rights, the high prevalence of gender-based violence and the manifestation of state patriarchy, evidenced in how sexual assault cases involving men in power positions are concealed, is a testament to how male power over women is perpetuated (Gobodo-Madikizela et al., 2014). The most infamous case is the 2005 Jacob Zuma rape trial prior to him being elected as president (Gobodo-Madikizela et al., 2014). Jacob Zuma was accused of raping the daughter of his former comrade in the anti-apartheid movement, while she was visiting in his home. In his defence, he insisted that the victim was dressed seductively in a traditional cloth wraparound, which he claimed was an explicit sexual message, and, from a cultural perspective, failure to respond to such a message would have been an insult to the woman. Jacob Zuma was found not guilty of this crime, and this did not affect his becoming president (Gobodo-Madikizela, Fish, & Shefer, 2014).

Another, more recent, example is the 2018 rape case against the well-known pastor, Tim Omotoso, who faces numerous charges including rape, human trafficking and racketeering (Manona, 2019). The trial, which was televised, resulted in some witnesses

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receiving backlash for their testimony and even death threats. During her testimony, Cheryl Zondi was subjected to aggressive and intimate cross-examination from the accused's lawyer and screams from the crowd, accusing her of lying, being "prepared to let him rape" her and to consenting to her rape (Harding, 2018). The defendant's lawyer went as far as to ask her how big the pastor's penis is after she testified that he partially penetrated her at the age of 14 (Harding, 2018). While many were outraged by this, unwavering support for the pastor from his followers, the verbal accusations and the cross-examination from his lawyer, paint a picture of the victim being blamed and belittled, and how rape myths are prevalent in society.

It is evident that the patriarchal nature of the South African society and gender inequality contribute to the scourge of gender-based violence and rape culture. This is arguably mirrored in South African universities as well.

### **Rape culture in universities.**

Research has long found that rape culture in university campuses is highly prevalent and that the university space fosters the occurrence of sexual harassment and assault. In 1996, Boswell and Spade (1996) found that rape is likely to occur in university campuses and that students are more likely to accept rape myths and be more sexually aggressive. The authors also identified that social interactions in fraternities and sororities (social organizations and houses, which form a brotherhood or sisterhood respectively, based on common themes and goals) as places with a high risk for date rape, acquaintance rape and rape culture (Boswell & Spade, 1996).

Burnett, et al. (2009) argued that university campuses demonstrate the continuous prevalence of rape culture and rape myths. In universities, attitudes and perspectives about rape are expressed through behaviours preceding potential incidences of rape, rape itself and in response to rape after the fact, and female students were muted, which potentially contributed to the perpetuation of rape on campus (Burnett, et al., 2009).

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Through the media attention brought on by campaigns such as the Everyday Sexism Project, research on “lad culture” and ultimately rape culture in universities gained traction (Phipps, et al., 2017). Lad culture (defined as the group mentality demonstrated through activities such as sports, heavy drinking and characterised by sexist and homophobic banter), ultimately results in open verbal and physical sexual harassment and assault, particularly aimed at first year female students (Phipps, et al., 2017).

Studies focusing on gender relationships at universities in South Africa show that the university climate mirrors that of the male-centric, patriarchal culture of the country. Traditional gender role attitudes along with the acceptance of rape myths are common and form the basis of some interaction amongst residence students, a fact recognised by several scholars (Clowes, Shefer, Fouten, Vergnani, & Jacobs, 2009; Gordon & Collins, 2013; Shefer, Clowes, & Vergnani, 2016). Major findings from these scholars are noted below across the University of the Western Cape (Clowes et al., 2009; Shefer et al., 2012); and a major university in Kwa Zulu Natal (Gordon & Collins, 2013).

Female university students in South Africa, particularly first years, are vulnerable and are increasingly at risk of unsafe and abusive practices from men (Clowes et al., 2009; Gordon & Collins, 2013). Double standards surrounding male and female sexuality are often attributed to “culture” and “our roots” (Clowes et al., 2009 p28). This indicates that male students typically hold on to traditional and patriarchal views of sex and gender, namely that women are submissive to men. Clowes et al. (2009) found that students living on campus feel a greater pressure to have sex than those off campus and view campus as a highly sexualised space. It is easier to engage in sex because “you know where to get it” (p. 25).

Rape myths are also prevalent among residence students. Some prevalent beliefs in residences: that a male student expects to take a female student home with him for sex after buying her a drink, or that if a woman “breaks the rules” and drinks with men or goes out, she

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is responsible for provoking her own attack (Gordon & Collins, 2013; Shefer et al., 2012).

Studies also show that in residences age, class, gender and culture create a climate that puts males at a higher risk of being perpetrators of sexual violence and females at risk of being victims (Clowes et al., 2009; Shefer et al., 2012).

Gordon and Collins (2013) found in their study in a major metropolitan university in Kwa Zulu Natal, that some female students in residences live in fear and do not feel safe in residences, awaiting sexual violence to “inevitably” happen to them. The study also highlighted that some female students feel it is normal for men to be physically or sexually abusive; and it is the responsibility of women to ensure that they do not bring violence to themselves, by policing themselves on a daily basis. These acts include staying at home and trying to avoid attracting attention to themselves at the risk of being attacked (Gordon & Collins, 2013).

While these studies highlight experiences related to rape culture, the university space, like society, is also a space where sexual relationships can occur appropriately amongst consenting adults.

The extent of the phenomenon of rape in universities was recently brought to the public eye when a Rhodes University student committed suicide after being raped on campus (Carlisle, 2018). This incident mirrors the experiences at other universities, including Nelson Mandela University, University of Cape Town, University of the Witwatersrand, and the University of the Western Cape (see chapter 1, Background). Many of these may go unreported or dismissed, therefore, the full extent may go unnoticed.

The research findings above therefore highlight the importance of further investigating student life and rape culture in the University of Pretoria and if students share similar experiences. In order to do so, it is imperative to investigate the role that residence traditions, orientation and initiation might play in student’s experiences.



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### **Residence traditions and orientation.**

In the beginning of each year, universities tend to host an orientation programme for their new students. For those who will be living in an on-campus residence, this orientation may include initiation into their chosen residence. For some students, residence traditions create inclusiveness and a bond with fellow students and to the residence; for others it can be an alienating and humiliating experience and some students can be isolated because of their refusal to participate. Universities have been criticised for initiation and hazing that is often propagated during first-year orientation or throughout one's time as resident (Abrahams, 2018). Orientation, which is a form of induction into university life, tends to focus on academic induction and introduction to social activities on campus to encourage students to balance their academic and social life (de Klerk, 2013). Initiation may be defined as a process that typically involves a ceremony or a rite of passage that symbolises acceptance into a group of some kind, which has clearly defined objectives that serves the purpose of introducing and acclimating an individual to a foreign or new environment (de Klerk, 2013). While initiation may apply to harmless induction ceremonies including baptisms, graduations or starting at a new school, grade or university; in the campus setting, initiation may also involve harmless pranks or activities, however, it has also become associated with activities which are humiliating or degrading and likely to cause physical harm (this can also be described as hazing) (de Klerk, 2013). Research has found that while some initiation processes were questionable, most students dismissed it as an expected and unavoidable part of campus culture (de Klerk, 2013). Initiation also reinforces seniority and power hierarchies as older students or students in leadership positions will dominate and intimidate newer or first-year students, as was done to them when they were in the same situation (Michaels, 2016).

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During orientation to on campus residences, initiation activities may be conducted to induct the students to the residence and familiarise them with the residence's rules, norms, expectations, and traditions.

The University of Pretoria is one of the universities that is known for being steeped in tradition (Abrahams, 2018). Its residences pride themselves in their traditions, which are imparted upon a student's arrival. These traditions are customs that are passed down over time to new residents (Graburn, 2008) and include residence rules and behavioural expectations in representing their residence. Each residence has its own traditions, and activities which students are expected to participate in. Traditions in University of Pretoria residences stem from the identity of each residence (Jizana, 2013). Some examples of residence identities include the following (Table 1).

*Table 1: University of Pretoria female undergraduate residence identities*

### Female residences

Residence	Identity
Asterhof	“Trou vrou” (marriage material ladies).
Erika	Ladies that pride themselves for being a residence with class and style. They are known as the Purple Ladies.
Jasmyn	A place for girls with personality, charisma, and charm.
Katjeepering	Their motto is <i>carpe diem</i> meaning “seize the day”. They value individuality and everyone is respected for their ideologies.
Klaradyn	The ladies value passion, spirit, and pride. They believe their power comes from within and that mental strength is key.
Madelief	“The ladies of Tuks” known for their elegance and charisma.
Magrietjie	Mascot: Young girl known as Maer Grietjie who stands for femininity, balance, beauty, and strength.
Nerina	Nerina emphasises the role of ladies in modern society and the power to make a positive difference in the lives of fellow sisters.
Inca	Inca is characterised by the colour blue. Inca is the name of a delicate lily and the Inca ladies believe that residents reflect this.

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Lilium	Lillium is known by the colour green. These ladies' pride themselves on being able to work and play hard.
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Note: adapted from: Jizana, Z. (2013). *Know your residences*. Retrieved July 07, 2020, from Perdeby: <https://pdby.co.za/know-your-residences/>

From these residence identities it is clear that some residences hold very traditional and gendered norms. For instance, the female residence Asterhof prides itself in nurturing marriage material ladies, Erika, Madelief and Magrietjie focus on producing girls with class and style; elegance and charisma; and femininity, balance, beauty, and strength, respectively. It is worth noting that some residences foster individuality and respect for each one's differences and ideologies (Katjiepiering); the role of women and empowering ladies to make a positive difference (Nerina).

Similarly, male residences have specific identities (Table 2).

Table 2: University of Pretoria male undergraduate residence identities

### Male residences

Residence	Identity
Boekenhout	The men of Boekenhout value pride, brotherhood, respect, and tradition.
The Republic of Kollegetehuis	The Kollege boys are famous for their "party animal" status and their crazy socials.
Maroela	Maroela believes that its residents should see their place in Maroela as a privilege and not as a right. This house has lots of heart and likes to see itself as a united residence.
Mopanie	Mopanie men believe in brotherhood and friendship.
The Republic of Olienhout	Olienhout strives for excellence, growth, friendship, integration, and unity.
Taaibos	Taaibos prides itself on being a residence of gentlemen. The residence is characterised by the colour red and can be easily identified on Proefplaas (on Sport campus) by their famous water tower.
Sonop	Sonop first years stand out on campus as they are required to wear a formal suit and tie every day. It is said some members keep their car's petrol tanks full and will chase you if you hoot outside their res.

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Kiaat	Kiaat is said to be the ideal residence for young men who are committed to their personal growth and development.
Olympus	Prinshof campus's male residence, Olympus is home to health science students. The men of Olympus are known as Olympians.

Note: adapted from: Jizana, Z. (2013). *Know your residences*. Retrieved July 07, 2020, from Perdeby: <https://pdby.co.za/know-your-residences/>

The male residences, as indicated in the table above, focus on pride, brotherhood, friendship, and tradition (Boekenhout, Mopanie and Olienhout). Residences such as Taaibos and Sonop focus on nurturing gentlemen. Maroela, where being accepted is a privilege, not a right, has the potential of fostering the expectation of one proving their worth. Kollegetehuis is known as a party residence that hosts a variety of socials which involve alcohol and may be a breeding ground for harmful and inappropriate behaviour.

As indicated by the Tables above, the residences of the University of Pretoria are gendered in nature. This is apparent in some of the residence traditions and initiation processes, where some residences pride themselves in teaching students how to behave as a man or a lady (Michaels, 2016). While formal initiation activities to these residences will be conducted based on their identity and outlined in a residence's orientation programme, some activities and expectations are informal and are passed on from seniors through word of mouth. Examples include having to greet statues, wake up in the morning to greet residence leaders and in some male residences, students are being expected to drink urine mixed with eggs (Ngoepe, 2016). In some male residences, those residents who can prove that they have slept with the highest number of girls are said to be rewarded. This was reportedly conducted in the University's residence; Kollegetehuis, which is known for its parties and socials, as indicated in the table above. Males are reportedly also expected not to be seen with the same girl for more than two months (Ngoepe, 2016)

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In the 2016 TuksRes Report on Transformation which highlighted challenges and concerns on TuksRes residence culture, formal (and informal) residence traditions and orientation activities were identified to be the biggest challenge to transformation. Examples include some male and female residences “marrying” each other during orientation, male residents being forced to display machismo and prove their masculinity and failing to do so resulting in repercussions (Michaels, 2016). Another concern that highlighted by the report is gender stereotyping. The report states that gender stereotyping is prevalent within the University community. Men and women’s residences, according to the report, seem happy to conform to gender stereotypical roles. The report recommended that TuksRes reflect on its approaches to student events and traditions (Michaels, 2016). Some students (male and female) have reported that they have moved out of residences because of the “degrading nature of residence culture and tradition” (Ngoepe, 2016).

In subsequent years and in alignment with its Vision 2025 strategy, the University has made efforts centred on transformation, with the aim of providing more multilingual, multicultural and an inclusive living environment for students (Ndlazi, 2018). For residences, this reportedly included the aim to “move from an orientation that is characterised by obsolete practices and based on many questionable assumptions about the needs of first-year students to a welcoming process that is applied as a strategy for the development of first-year students” (Department of Residence Affairs and Accommodation, University of Pretoria, 2018). As indicated by the TuksRes student guide, three principles formed the guide for transformation:

- The welcoming is fully reconcilable with the principles as expressed in the Bill of Student Rights.
- Each residence management that participates voluntarily in the program bears responsibility for the welcoming.

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- The welcoming is applied as a mechanism for constructive group interaction.

One of the major changes that came with the application of these transformation processes has included some residences being renamed to promote inclusivity and diversity (Ndlazi, 2018). While each residence is responsible for determining its own processes, residences are also expected to adhere to the rules and regulations outlined by TuksRes (Department of Residence Affairs and Accommodation, University of Pretoria, 2018).

Because this study's purpose is to determine whether gender constructions influence gender relations in residences and the role these views have on the perpetuation of rape culture on campus, a social constructionist approach to gender is the conceptual framework will be used to provide guidance towards our venture into understanding these concepts, both theoretically and in application.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The key tenet of social constructionism is that people's understanding of the world and their understanding as human beings are constructed; it is a product of human thought, as opposed to observable, external reality; in that reality is not an objective reality of the natural world but is rather one's subjective experience of everyday life (Andrews, 2012; Burr, 2015).

Because social constructionism places emphasis on the socially constructed nature of reality, this theory is often employed in research about issues such as race, class, sexual orientation and gender (Given, 2008), because these concepts are largely socially constructed, and society attaches certain norms and behaviour to people associated with these concepts. As such, it is an apt approach as a conceptual framework for this research.

The key assumptions of social constructionism are as follows (Burr, 2015);

- A critical stance is taken toward knowledge that is taken for granted.
- The categories and concepts we use to understand the world are culturally and historically specific.

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- Knowledge of the world is not derived from the nature of the world as it really is; but is sustained by social process.
- Knowledge and social action go together. Therefore, the way we act is determined by what we know.

The key assumptions above make the social constructionist approach appropriate for this study. The researcher subscribes to the notion that social processes that we are taught and learn and those we see and do are what determine knowledge and action. This is also true in one's formation and understanding of one's own gender and that of other gender conceptualisations.

### **The social construction of gender**

The challenge faced by social constructionism is that many people's perception of the world is still that it is an objective reality as opposed to a product of human interaction, that is institutionalized and transformed over time (Berkowitz et al., 2010). Although gender, like other social phenomenon is a social construction, many people still view gender as the physical and biological characteristics one is born with. From a social constructionist perspective gender refers to social characteristics attached to masculinity and femininity, which, unlike one's sex, are variable (liable to change) and therefore culturally defined (Alsop et al., 2002; Magnusson & Marecek, 2012). Gender is one of the ways that human beings organise and classify their lives and is a process of creating discernible and unequal social statuses from which rights and responsibilities are assigned (Lorber & Farrell, 1991).

### **Theoretical and conceptual approaches to the social construction of gender**

Burr (2015) groups social constructionist approaches to gender into two main categories: micro and macro social constructionism. Micro social constructionism approaches focus on social constructions that take place within everyday discourse between personal identities and people's interaction (Burr, 2015). These approaches are less concerned with

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power and focus on the person and the everyday discourses and interaction. An example of a micro social constructionist approach is discursive psychology. Macro social constructionist approaches focus on the constructive force of discourses derived from material or social structures, social relations and institutionalized practices and the power relations embedded within these (Burr, 2015). Macro approaches focus mainly on power relations and social positioning, power, and ideology. An example of such approaches is feminist discourse analysis. While macro constructionist approaches are typically applied in the analysis of various forms of social inequality such as race, class and gender, Burr (2015) emphasises that micro and macro approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive and may be brought together in synthesis. This is because people are simultaneously influenced by their everyday interactions and the social structures, they find themselves in. Therefore, both approaches can be applied in the analysis of the construction of gender.

Another perspective in the social construction of gender is intersectionality. Intersectionality focuses on the interlocking systems of oppression and the need to make changes to promote social justice and equity (Rosenthal, 2016). According to Cole (2009), intersectionality looks at diversity within social categories to determine how they depend on one another for meaning; the role of inequality amongst social categories; and the similarities between social categories. This concept is common in feminist theories as an approach to reflect on the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, such as gender, race and class simultaneously (Cole, 2009).

Berkowits et al. (2010) emphasise multiple dimensions of gender. The scholars view gender as a process, a structure and as a system of stratification, and assert that theorizing the social construction of gender brings together an interplay of identities, interactions and institutions in shaping the gendered distribution of power, privilege and resources among men and women (Berkowits et al., 2010). This view was initially conceived by Lorber



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(1994), who describes the processing of gender as beginning from birth when one's gender is assigned on the basis of their sex. Thereafter, gender (as with other social statuses), is constructed through the processes of learning, teaching, imitation, and enforcement (Lorber, 1994). As a structure, gender is used to divide work in economic production and in the home; it validates those in authority, and it organises emotional life and sexuality (Connell, 1987; cited in Lorber, 1994). As a component of structured inequality, gender can be used to discriminate, and one gender can have less power, prestige, and economic reward. Through the process of the differentiation of gender roles and structure, gender becomes part of a stratification system (Lorber, 1994). Most often, this stratification results in men being ranked above women and thus having more advantages (Berkowitz et al., 2010; Lorber, 1994).

Due to the nature of the topic this study will view the social construction of gender according to the approach described by Lorber (1994) and Berkowitz et al. (2010), which views the construction of gender as a process, structure, and stratification.

### **Conclusion**

As shown in the above literature review, rape culture, the normalisation of rape and other sexual attitudes, particularly against women, stem from patriarchal beliefs and ascribing to rape myths. These beliefs are endorsed by both males and females and result in justifying rape and other forms of sexual misconduct as normal or at the fault of the victims themselves. In South Africa, these views are apparent in the scourge of cases of gender-based violence. Although many cases of gender-based violence go unreported, the high number of rape statistics show the alarming prevalence of gender-based sexual violence in South Africa. Research shows that this is mirrored in South African universities. Double standards in what is acceptable for men and women are being attributed to "culture" and "roots."

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To further investigate the topic of gender constructions and rape culture, social constructionism and social construction of gender has been adopted as a conceptual framework. Based on this framework, gender is a social construction which originates from socialisation and social processes. This study will approach gender construction as a process, structure and stratification, dimensions which were originally put forward by Lorber (1994).

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### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter the research methodology that was used in this research will be outlined. The overall goal of this study is to determine how residence students' constructions of gender influence their beliefs about rape culture.

#### **Research paradigm and approach**

A constructionist epistemological research paradigm and qualitative approach was used for this study, in alignment with its aims and conceptual framework. Epistemology, which is the science of the method and ground of knowledge (Given, 2008) is used to describe how we come to know the truth or reality. Epistemology is concerned with the bases of knowledge; its nature, and forms, how we know the truth or reality, and how we acquire, comprehend and communicate it to others (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Krauss, 2005). The constructionist epistemological stance is that an individual's experience is an active process of their interpretation and process of making meaning, as opposed to a passive material understanding of the external physical world; that is, reality is socially constructed, rather than objectively determined. (Jacobs & Manzi, 2000; Refai, Klapper, & Thompson, 2015).

Qualitative research is designed to explore the human elements of a given topic. It examines how individuals experience the world (Given, 2008). Where quantitative research focuses on exploring and measuring relationships among variables, producing statistical data, qualitative research is a means for exploring the meanings individuals attach to situations or problems and making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research methods are used in this research because it is based on the fundamental idea that reality is subjective and that people can construct various versions of the reality (Cropley, 2019). Therefore, qualitative research, as a "means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2012, p. 294) is most appropriate in this research. Qualitative research facilitates the process how

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people make meaning and has to do with how that meaning is constructed and the factors that influence it (Krauss, 2005) and as such is aligned with the chosen research paradigm.

### **Research Design**

The social constructionist framework was used to co-construct the gender perceptions of residence students through a qualitative research approach

This study is exploratory in nature, and uses inductive reasoning, which entails the pursuit of understanding and knowledge, establishing a relationship between observations and theory (Given, 2008). Exploratory research is the intentional, systematic method of data collection designed to maximise generalizations based on description and the direct understanding of a phenomenon (Given, 2008). Exploratory research does not aim to test hypotheses, instead its focus is on how meaningful a theory can explain a phenomenon, and is characterized by inductively reformulating and adapting explanations, theories and hypotheses (Reiter, 2017). This design is applicable for the social constructionism point of departure because its focus is on where knowledge emerges from and its significance in society as well as about people's experiences (Walker, 2015).

According to Reiter (2017), inductive, exploratory research is based on the recognition that reality is partly a social construction; that researchers are part of the reality they analyse; and that the words and categories we use to explain reality arise from our own minds and not from reality. In other words, "what we perceive and how we perceive it has more to do with us than with the reality we observe." Inductive reasoning in exploratory research entails a researcher basing their reasoning within their theoretical framework rather than within an established theory and focuses on confirmations that emerge, as opposed to confirming postulated predictions, as is the case in deductive reasoning (Stebbins, 2011). According to Stebbins (2017), the benefit of inductive exploration in science is that deductive reasoning alone cannot uncover new ideas and observations.

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### **Sampling Method**

This study was conducted among students at the University of Pretoria, primarily focusing on students staying in campus residences. Non-probability, purposive sampling was used as the sampling procedure for this study. Purposive sampling primarily aims to approach individuals who are contextually familiar with the phenomenon being studied (Given, 2008). The benefits of applying the purposive sampling technique are that it provides information-rich participants by identifying and selecting individuals that are well informed about the phenomenon of interest due to knowledge and experience (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Therefore, the study aimed to recruit participants who were familiar with the University's residences, their traditions and the student protests which have taken place in the University in response to practices that allegedly fostered rape culture in the university and its residences. This is mainly because they can provide the insight to the study's questions by virtue of knowledge or experience.

### **Target Population**

The study targeted two sets of groups: residence students and key informants from the University of Pretoria. Current undergraduate resident students were the primary target population, regardless of the residence they reside in or their course and year of study. Both males and females were part of the target group, Postgraduate students and students who have not resided on campus were excluded from the study.

Key informants for this study are individuals who can provide contextual insight on life in campus residences, residence traditions, and the rationale behind some of the student protests within the University. As such, the targeted population included residence house committee members, student activist group members and Student Representative Council members.

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### **Recruitment**

The CSA&G was key to the completion of this research. The CSA and G, as a centre in the University, was initially established to help the University's response to HIV, its engagement with the communities that students and staff are drawn and implement both service and research programmes (CSA & G, 2020). Its focus includes themes of gender-based justice, institutional and social transformation, sexual diversity and sexual citizenship, challenges and dynamics of gender, identity, race and class and is comprised of representatives from most University faculties, support services and staff. Their work on these topics and a range of others includes research publications, seminars and workshops and leadership programmes (CSA & G, 2020). As such, through its prominence in working with students and the broader community, the recruitment of key informants occurred through the centre.

With assistance from the centre, key individuals worth asking to participate were identified. The benefit of this is that because the Centre is at the forefront of gender-based justice and the challenges and dynamics of gender in the university, it is a known safe-space to students. Five key informants were suggested for the study, who were then contacted and recruited by the researcher.

Due to the limitations brought on by the unexpected COVID-19 worldwide pandemic and subsequent lockdown of the country, including universities, the intended plan to promote the focus groups of the study through posters at the CSA&G and electronic means had to be abandoned. As such, the assistance from the already identified key informants was sought to recommend students who meet the criteria for the study. These students were asked if they were interested in participating in the focus group discussions. Willing students were then asked to identify other students who were willing to participate. As a result, participants were recruited through a snowball recruitment strategy (Noy, 2008). As a result, five participants

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per group were recruited. The recommended number of participants in a focus group varies from source to source. However, most scholars agree that smaller focus groups can provide more depth and meaningful discussion, and these are suitable for more complex and controversial topics (Dilshard & Latif, 2013; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

### Sample Description

The study comprised of two homogenous focus groups and five individual interviews with key informants (to be expounded on in Data Collection). One focus group consisted of five male participants and the other consisted of five female participants. The table below provides a breakdown of the composition of participants of the focus groups per residence.

*Table 3: Focus group sample distribution*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Residence</b>	<b>Count</b>
Female	Asterhof	1
Female	Madelief	3
Female	House Mags (Formerly Magrietjie)	1
Male	College (formerly Kollegetehuis)	2
Male	House Tau (Formerly Boekenhout)	2
Male	Mopane	1

Five key informants were interviewed. The key informants consisted of:

- One former SRC member who served between 2017 and 2018.
- One student activist who was one of the leaders who propagated the 2017 “rape culture must fall” student movement and called for the cancellation of the Serrie Concert.
- One former House Mags (Magrietjie) house committee member 2017 to 2018.
- One former House Mags (Magrietjie) house committee member 2018 to 2019.
- One former first-year guardian for Taaibos 2017 (first-year guardians are residents who are appointed primarily for ensuring that the orientation

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programme is completed without incident and is responsible for the wellbeing of first years throughout the year).

### **Data Collection**

The selected data collection method comprised of semi-structured focus group discussions and semi-structured individual interviews.

Focus group discussions entail data collection through group interaction that can last between one and a half and two hours (Given, 2008; Willig, 2013). Two focus group discussions were conducted, one for males and one for females. The main advantage of focus group discussions is the rich data that participants can provide from the interaction and discussions among participants. Participants can contribute or challenge each other's perceptions (Cropley, 2019; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). The benefit of focus group discussions is that they can be modified in a variety of ways to suit various purposes. As such, they can be used in exploratory research as participants can freely discuss a topic as they see fit (Given, 2008).

Homogenous focus group discussions were conducted to mitigate against provocation and un-comfortability amongst respondents of opposite genders, particularly due to the nature of this enquiry. For the male focus groups, a male researcher facilitated the group discussion in order to avoid the possibility of male participants feeling uncomfortable or unable to open up honestly to a female researcher. The female focus group was conducted by the primary research, who is female. According to Nduna (2020), conducting focus groups matched to the facilitator is ideal to achieve maximum participation, control dominance and create a safe space for both the group and the facilitator. This gender-power dynamic is of particular importance in this study, as experiences with the topics that this study may touch on, such as rape, may be different for males and females. Differences in opinions, experiences and positionality may affect facilitation and participation (Nduna, 2020). The role of the



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facilitators was to steer and encourage the discussion while making sure that all participants are comfortable to speak and are respectful to others.

The male researcher who volunteered for this task is a post-graduate Psychology student from the University of Pretoria. He was trained to understand the focus of the study, its purpose and how to probe and facilitate the discussion while still remaining in control of the group. This male researcher was selected to facilitate the male focus group due to his understanding of psychological concepts, his research understanding from a social behavioural standpoint and his understanding of data collection techniques. The male researcher also signed an informed consent form, agreeing to his roles and responsibilities as a facilitator.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants. The purpose of these interviews is primarily to ensure trustworthiness and increase the rigor of the data collected in the focus groups by adding background to the issues raised in the focus groups. An interview guide with a few open-ended questions was used, though the interviews were open and allowed for new ideas to be brought up during the interview based on what the participants said (Cropley, 2019). The advantage of this is that it allows the interviewer to probe further to gain deeper insight. It was also used for triangulation; the use of multiple and different methods and sources to obtain corroborating evidence (Anney, 2014). All five interviews were conducted by the primary researcher.

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic brought about many challenges and limitations to completing this research endeavour. First identified in 2019, the virus soon spread internationally, and inevitably reached South Africa in March of 2020. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, a national state of disaster was declared, and a national lockdown went into effect from the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, which meant measures such as the closure of schools, universities and travel bans were implemented (Department of Health; Republic of South Africa, 2020). The

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major challenge was that, due to the national lockdown and restrictions put in place in an attempt to limit the spread of the virus, universities were forced to close and conduct their academic activities online. As such, the focus group discussions as well as the individual interviews could not be conducted face to face. However, to address this challenge, data collection was conducted using an online platform called Zoom, a video conferencing software application. Zoom allows one to interact with other users virtually when in-person meetings are impossible by video and audio (Tillman & Willings, 2020). Zoom's core features include one on meetings, video group conferencing and screen sharing (Tillman & Willings, 2020). Both focus group discussions and individual interviews were conducted using the Zoom application.

### Data collection tool

In order to meet the aims and objectives as outlined in the first chapter, an interview guide was created with the aims and objectives in mind. For the purposes of this enquiry, participants were asked their gender; and whether they resided on campus or not. This data, however, will not be associated with specific persons or their opinions. Key informants were also asked their position or role within campus or in residences. Table 4 provides a breakdown of the interview questions and the objectives they addressed.

*Table 4: Research objectives and interview questions*

<b>Research objective</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>
To explore whether students believe that rape culture is prevalent in the University's residences and how it is perpetuated	There is a lot of talk in general and on campus about so-called "rape culture". What does rape culture mean to you? How do you think rape culture has affected you?
To explore how students who reside on campus construct gender	From your experience how are males/females viewed on campus? Do you think rape culture is perpetuated in universities? In your opinion, how are males/females viewed in residences? What is your opinion of how males/females are expected to think and act in society/university/residences? What do you think about how males/females are expected to think and act in society/university/residences?

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<p>To explore the relationship between students' construction of gender and their opinion of rape culture in residences (if it is prevalent)</p> <p>To explore how residence traditions, contribute to personal gender constructions</p>	<p>Is rape culture perpetuated in campus residences?</p> <p>If you could change a stereotype about how (your gender) should be, what would you change?</p> <p>What role do residence traditions play in perpetuating rape culture?</p> <p>What interventions would you recommend to the University/residences in dealing with gender stereotypes and rape culture</p>
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Where necessary, the researcher probed and asked further questions, including elaboration on some responses and specific examples. In closing, participants were asked what intervention they would recommend to the University (and/or residences) in dealing with gender stereotypes and rape culture.

### Data collection process

Prior to each discussion and interview, participants were emailed the information sheet and consent form to sign. Prior to each session the project was described in detail and the consent form was read and made sure all participants agreed to participate. Each focus group lasted for 90 minutes while the individual interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. All participants were willing to connect to the online platform using their own internet and mobile data, likely due to the provision of data by the University for online lectures and assignment submission for the continuation of academic activities during lockdown restrictions.

All interviews were conducted in English. Challenges that emanated from the data collection process were due to internet and network connectivity resulting in some lag in responses. During the interviews and focus group discussions the discussions were recorded with the permission of the participants. The discussions were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

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### Data Analysis

The chosen data analysis method is thematic analysis because this method allows the researcher to recognise and organise patterns and themes in content and meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2013). From a social constructionist perspective, this method will examine the way participants attach meaning to experiences produced through the effects of discourse and their social context by identifying themes and patterns in participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this instance, the respondents' views on rape culture and gender construction will be linked to their experiences with residence traditions.

A theme represents a specific pattern of meaning (Joffe, 2015), and can be described as an attribute, descriptor, element or concept (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Themes can refer to something that is directly observable, or manifest content, or something that implicitly mentioned, latent content (Joffe, 2015; Vaismoradi, et al. 2015). Themes can be deductive; that is drawn from theory, or inductive; stemming from the raw data itself (Joffe, 2015). These stances can be both applied as themes stemming from theory or a point of departure allow the researcher to replicate, extend or refute existing research, while themes emerging from naturally occurring observations is the primary aim and these should therefore be highlighted (Joffe, 2015). Each theme may have subthemes to attain an all-inclusive view of data and uncovers a pattern of a participant's experiences (Vaismoradi, et al. 2015).

### Data analysis procedure

Data analysis followed the six-step analysis procedure as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) (Table 5).

*Table 5: Data analysis procedure*

<b>Step</b>	<b>Activity to be conducted by researcher</b>
Familiarising oneself with the data	Transcribing all recorded interviews

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Generating initial codes	Identifying and highlighting codes throughout the transcript
Searching for the themes	Collating all codes into potential themes
Involved reviewing of themes	Generating a thematic map or diagram
Defining and naming themes	Refining themes and generating clear names for the themes
Producing the report	Final discussion of themes

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In conducting the data analysis, the researcher followed the above procedure as a guide. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed. Thereafter transcripts were coded, whereby key words and phrases were highlighted from the transcripts. The codes identified from the transcripts were used to identify themes. The final process of refining and generating themes was conducted through the use of a thematic mind map.

### **Quality, trustworthiness, and rigor**

The quality, trustworthiness and rigor of the findings were enhanced by using Guba and Lincoln's criteria for trustworthiness (Anney, 2014; Shenton, 2004).

- Triangulation of data sources (key informants and students) and data collection methods (focus groups and semi-structured interviews) were used to enhance the credibility of the data (Shenton, 2004). By using a co-researcher to interpret the data independently, the credibility of the interpretation was enhanced.
- Confirmability was ensured by triangulation and keeping a data audit trail, detailing the process of data collection and interpretation step by step.
- Dependability was ensured by describing all that was planned in the research design and implementing it (Shenton, 2004).
- Transferability was determined through the use of purposive sampling (which this study employs) which provides greater insight as the researcher is able to decide why they want to use a specific category of informants for the study (Anney, 2014; Shenton,

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2004). As in all research using qualitative data, transferability may be limited because of using a small sample that may not necessarily represent all possible constructions. But in similar samples the same constructions may be present.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to the University of Pretoria's Code of Ethics for Research. The researcher applied the principles of respect for personal autonomy, benevolence, and justice, which do not work in isolation from one another. This study deals with a sensitive topic, which can potentially cause conflicts due to conflicting views. The researcher was aware of potential conflicts and made efforts to show good judgment and sensitivity to allow students to express their opinions and respect each other's opinions (UP Research Ethics Committee).

The proposed research underwent the ethical process, obtaining clearance from the faculty research committee, permitting the proposed study to be reviewed by the University's Research Ethics Committee, which provided the final clearance and permission to conduct the study. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the Office of the Dean of Students and results will be shared with the Office of the Dean of Students. The researcher abided by the following principles as outlined by the UP-Research Ethics Committee.

- The researcher recognised the possibility that participating individuals may be ostracized for questioning the traditions of their residence and the utmost care was taken to ensure that confidentiality was upheld (UP Research Ethics Committee, n.d.). The researcher took the utmost care in ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of participants in the data analysis and reporting; hence this information will only be used to make research inferences amongst themes and patterns (UP Research Ethics Committee, n.d.). Personal identity was not attached to any results or conclusions of the research.

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- A volunteer male researcher was used in the study who received sufficient information about the purpose and methods of the study and that participation is voluntary. The male researcher was also given a consent form to sign an agreement of being part of the study voluntarily, and their responsibility to respect the right of the participants and the importance of not sharing any information of the participants and of the discussions conducted during the focus group discussion.
- Prior to the commencement of the interviews and discussions, informed consent indemnity forms were explained to participants and their agreement to participate voluntarily was obtained. All participants emailed back their signed consent forms (UP Research Ethics Committee, n.d.).
- Data has been reported for all participants collectively. No personal information has been attached to any data or in reports on the findings of the study.
- Participants were informed that their information will be stored confidentially for 15 years in the archive of the Department of Psychology as required by institutional processes and requirements. Thereafter it will be disposed.
- The researcher, in remaining cognizant of the sensitivity of the topic, also arranged for follow-up sessions for debriefing available to participants, to be provided by the CSA&G office.
- University management will be informed about the results for future planning related to student relationships. The University management may decide how to disseminate the research results and if any restrictions will be placed on the publication of the results. If approved, an academic paper will be published as well as conference presentations, without linking the research results to the specific university.

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### **Reflexivity**

Due to the nature of this topic and the chosen approach and design, reflexivity is an important element to bear in mind while conducting this study. According to Reiter (2017) “We need to include ourselves in our investigation and introduce a strong self-reflexivity into the core of the research process. For inductive and exploratory research, this means, first, to lay open, and question, one’s research interest.” Reflexivity entails a researcher’s engagement, continuous examination and explanation of how they influenced a study (Given, 2008). Particularly, in this type of research, researchers and participants become “partners” in the endeavour, and the researcher uses their own experiences and reflections to illuminate important meanings (Given, 2008).

As previously mentioned, having survived sexual assault, this topic is somewhat personal to me. As such, I have endeavoured to approach it with the importance and urgency it warrants. Throughout the process of data collection, my approach was to probe participants with the intention of encouraging them to expand on their experiences. During data analysis, I endeavoured to remain cognizant that the findings must confirm the research questions of this study, and not any biases or expectations I may have had in the results.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter provided a detailed description of how the research process was conducted, from the selected research design, sampling method and process, data collection, data analysis and the ethical considerations which were maintained throughout.

The challenges that the research process faced were also identified and the way in which they were overcome. The major challenges that were encountered during the implementation of this study were mainly due to the international COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown. The first challenge encountered was the promotion and recruitment of participants to the



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study. This obstacle was overcome through the assistance of the CSA&G in identifying key informants and using them to identify potential focus group participants for recruitment.

Face to face and group discussions could also not be held. As a result, data collection had to be conducted virtually. While this was not the initial intention, virtual data collection still meant that participants could interact, hear each other's responses, thus still promoting rich discussion.

Despite these challenges, data collection was successful and fruitful. Findings and interpretations of the data follow in the upcoming chapters.

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**Chapter 4. Data Analysis and Results**

In this chapter, themes arising from focus group discussion with male and female residence; and individual interviews with key informants, will be described. The themes are grouped according to gender construction themes and rape culture themes. Thereafter, recommended interventions from participants will be presented.

**Description of the participants**

The Tables below provide a breakdown of focus group participants and key informants and how they will be referenced in the results.

**Focus group participants**

*Table 6: Description of focus group participants*

<b>Female focus group participants</b>		<b>Male focus group participants</b>	
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Residence</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Residence</b>
Female participant 1	Asterhoff	Male participant 1	Mopane
Female participant 2	Madelief	Male participant 2	House Tau
Female participant 3	Madelief	Male participant 3	Boekenhout
Female participant 4	Madelief	Male participant 4	College
Female participant 5	Magrietjie	Male participant 5	College

**Key informants**

*Table 7: Description of key informants*

<b>Informant</b>	<b>Role description</b>
Key informant 1	House Committee member; Magrietjie (2017-2018)
Key informant 2	House Committee member; Magrietjie (2017-2018)
Key informant 3	Student activist 2017
Key informant 4	First-year guardian; Taaibos 2017
Key informant 5	SRC member (2017-2018)

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### Research Results

#### Gender constructions

Participants expressed that there were differences in female and male norms and expectations. These, according to participants are rooted in traditional views of gender. Participants shared the view that these traditional gender norms and expectations which they have learned through how they were raised, are mirrored in residences. As such, when sharing their views on gender, they often referred to life in residences.

Figure 1 is a summary of the themes which arise from participant's responses with regards to gender constructions and will be expounded on below.

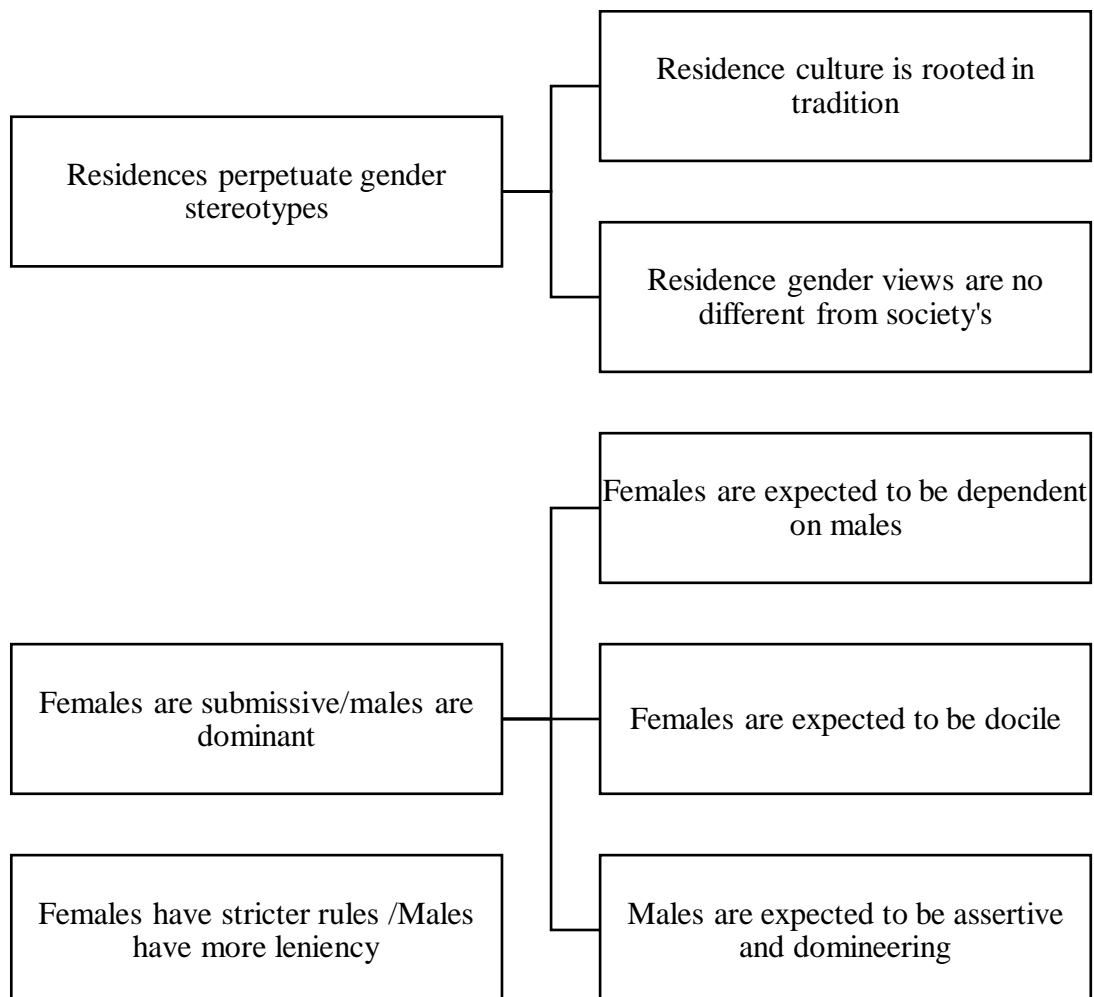


Figure 1: Gender construction themes

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### **Theme 1: Residences perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes**

Participants identified that in society, norms and expectations differ for each gender and are still very traditional (male dominance and female submission). This is a view that is expressed in the literature that in many traditional African societies, due to patriarchy, male superiority and domination and female inferiority and submission are perpetuated. The students' views confirm that this view is dominant in the communities of the participants. Participants expressed that these traditional views are mirrored in residences. Two subthemes can be identified that describe this theme.

#### ***Theme 1.1. Residence gender views are no different from society's***

Female participants generally felt that in residences, as in society, they are expected to conform to traditional gender norms and rules, such as those which will be discussed below.

*As a female, does not matter where you are, in general you are expected to conform to social norms and rules (Female focus group participant 2).*

*To be honest, I think this is how society sees the different gender roles anyway. Not to say that this is correct but that is just the way it is (Female focus group participant 3).*

One female participant pointed out that males are being expected to be protective over women (safety from potential harassment or harm from other males) as is a norm in residence culture. Females expressed that this could be dangerous because “*you do not know if they are going to ask for something in return or do something worse.*” (Female focus group participant 2).

Female participants differentiated their feeling of vulnerability between that of being in residence and being on the campus. In residence they feel more vulnerable while on campus they feel more independent.

*I definitely think that the environment is much more independent in class, or on campus on a normal day. In my personal experience when I went from O-Week (Orientation*

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week) *to going to actual classes and school, I felt a difference in the way that guys are not necessarily pushing to speak to you or to get your attention, they are just going about their own business* (Female focus group participant 1).

One male participant pointed out these traditions and rules in the residences are changing over time.

*more and more and more what I've seen is that from my first year until now, they've moved away from that* (gendered expectations and norms, such as males being expected to display their masculinity by being able to approach girls). *So, in my first year, my house committee talked like that* (encouraging males to display masculinity) *and as time went on there was less of that belief and whether you get a girl or not it does not matter as long as you guys enjoy yourselves with whatever socials you have* (Male focus group participant 5).

It is worth noting that this change appears to be less about respect for women, but more so due to pressure being alleviated as male's seniority increased.

### ***Theme 1.2. Residence culture is rooted in tradition***

All participants agreed that residence culture and the University perpetuate gender stereotypes, which they feel are traditional and male-centric.

*Res culture perpetuates this notion that female students need to be nurtured and protected and male residences are in charge. Stereotypical views are enforced* (Key informant 5).

Participants highlighted that residence traditions and activities foster traditional and patriarchal norms.

*Like in O-Week (Orientation week), it is like they put it on our minds that we have to make friends with guys so they can "protect us." I have never seen that as a bad thing per se because it is just a res tradition.* (Female focus group participant 4).

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*It also goes down to a lot of in-built things within res traditions, things like res marriages and how it has to be female res and a male res. And how in O-Week you have to want to have lunches, dinners and socials with male and female reses because you want to partner then together, and you want to foster friendships with opposite genders because it's like a companionship tool of sorts. And it is usually always the girls coming to the guy's reses and never the opposite. Which makes sense obviously because the University rules do not allow the guys to go to girls reses, unless it is like a sports day, sometimes it does happen (Male focus group participant 1).*

*In residence, you expect guys to go for girls. Like your first years have games or competitions or they look at how you are able to go out and pull girls and things like that, as guys are expected to have that ability to go out and get girls and there is that expectation from your residence (Male focus group participant 1).*

Male participants, along with key informants, identified that the University is rooted in patriarchal traditional Afrikaans culture. As such, males are viewed as superior, they are “*more privileged and catered for in the University space.*” (Male focus group participant 4).

*Traditionally Afrikaans culture is embedded in their (residence) traditions and results in that being a res culture (Key informant 4).*

A male participant acknowledged that, although female students make up the majority, the “*needs and agency of males will be advocated for, before they can address the majority's needs (females)*” by the University and residences (Male focus group participant 4). Statistics from the Department of Higher Education support that notion that there are more females than males by highlighting that 56% of students in the University of Pretoria are female, in contrast to 44% of males (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020).

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**Theme 2: Females are submissive/Males are dominant**

All participants expressed that they experience that females and males must live up to different expectations and norms. Female resident students are expected to be subordinate and docile, and have stricter rules enforced on them, resulting in females sometimes feeling objectified. In contrast, males are expected to be domineering and are expected to be protective of females. This power dynamic is enforced by residences views and expectations

***Theme 2.1. Females are expected to be dependent on males***

Female participants feel they are expected to be dependent on males and for males to take the lead. As a result, males use the females to prove their manhood and masculinity.

*When we go for the socials or whatever, as someone from a girl's res you are sort of expecting guys to choose you. You are expecting them to take control of the narrative.*

*Once you give a guy your attention, it is sort of like a checklist like "I've been with one person from this res." And then they want a person from each res. (Female focus group participant 1).*

*Like in O-week, it is like they put it on our minds that we have to make friends with guys so they can "protect us." (Female focus group participant 3).*

Male participants agree that this is the case and as a result, males use this to assert their manhood by proving that they can be with many girls.

*When I look at how the residences are structured, you find that only the male residences have clubhouses and the female ones do not which creates the sense that if the girls want to drink, they will have to go to the boys' clubhouse, it creates a sense of dependency on the side of the females and makes the females vulnerable in that sense. This fuels the idea that men are superior in a way (Male focus group participant 4).*

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### *Theme 2.2. Males are expected to be assertive and domineering*

Participants all agreed that, while society is becoming more progressive, males are still expected to be dominant, protective, and viewed as superior and as leaders. This also rings true in the University space and in residences.

Participants feel that males are taught from home to be superior and to be the provider:

*Generally, in society men are viewed as superior, it's something they teach you at home when they always say the boy child is the provider and should marry a wife that will clean and cook for them (Male focus group participant 2).*

In society, according to participants, males are expected to be assertive and be the leader:

*They should take the initiative on everything, group projects leaders, they are ones that are looked to for authority, they are put on a higher pedestal in a lot of fields (Key informant 1).*

As in society, the University and residences also encompass these views:

*Males are viewed as they are in society, more employable, the leader, makes the rules. Females are also viewed the same as in society, with a little more acknowledgement, because they are in University, which, in spite of this the patriarchal views still come to light that although they are seen a little bit better, they are lesser to their male counterparts (Key informant 3).*

Males are expected to take charge, be protectors (of fragile, damsels in distress). In group socials, and sports socials, males are looked at for strategy (during co-educational activities where males and females are in one team).



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*Males are expected to be “gentlemen” and take care of the ladies while females are expected to be dependent on the males for a lot of social activities (Male focus group participant 3).*

*Females are told to make friends with males, “get them to walk you to class, get them to buy drinks at socials.” The females are therefore seen as people who need to be taken care of (Female focus group participant 3).*

### ***Theme 2.3. Females are expected to be docile/Males must be virile***

Participants feel that residence culture fosters typically traditional ideals for its residents. Female residents are seemingly expected to be *kind, responsible, flirty, and put together*. Participants feel that as a female you are expected to be “*proper*” and to “*know your place*.” In contrast, males are expected to display overly masculine behaviours (*super strong and resilient, drinkers, protectors.*)

Key informants, who have experienced residence life from the perspective of a resident and as a leader in residence also point out females are expected to be *prim and proper* while males are expected to be masculine and assertive.

*Res girls are supposed to look cute, be poppies, they are almost there as entertainment for the males, nothing of substance. As a male, you must prove and show off your power, masculinity (Key informant 5).*

*As a female, you should be docile, you are not encouraged to be passionate, and most often you are dismissed, and your opinions ignored (Key informant 2).*

As a result, female students become aware of how they look as well as those around them:

*Yes, we look at each other’s outfits, but we do not necessarily judge each other because of what we are wearing.” (Female focus group participant 3).*

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Females are also seemingly judged based on their looks, and less so on their intellect, as one male participant added that females are perceived to be more attractive when they do not study challenging courses of study, instead if they opt for simpler courses. Male perceptions on the contrary, are based on their intelligence and ability. This contributes to the perceived views that females are docile and submissive while men are virile and dominant.

*In certain areas and degrees there are perceptions. So, you have, with the perception of women in engineering, you do not have good-looking girls in engineering. Like very good-looking girls usually do like BAs, law, and humanities. At most they will do BSc. But after that they will not do anything more gruelling. There are not really any perceptions of men in the University, like with engineering and the like, because men do anything. But the general perception is that people (men) who are not smart or not hard working will opt for easier degrees (Male focus group participant 1).*

### **Theme 3: Females have stricter rules /Males have more leniency**

Female residents have to comply to stricter residence rules while males have more freedom and leniency. Male participants acknowledge that in residences, males have more benefits, such as more lenient rules, having access to clubhouses where they can have socials.

Participants do acknowledge that the treatment of men is biased.

*When I look at how the residences are structured, you find that only the male residences have clubhouses and the female ones do not, which creates the sense that if the girls want to drink, they would have to go to the boys' clubhouse. It creates a sense of dependency on the side of the females and makes the females vulnerable in that sense. This fuels the idea that men are superior in a way (Male focus group participant 2).*

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*If you (as a female) do something “out of line” it has made this huge deal but if a guy had to do the same thing, it would not be that big of a deal. - Female focus group participant 2*

*Females do not have a lot of range. The same rules that male residences, we do not have them. While some residences encourage girls to be independent and powerful, female residents have more restrictions – Key informant 2*

*There is no power relation debate there. Only males can host events because it is only male residences who have clubhouses and choose which female residents can come. Should the boys break the rules, it is just “boys will be boys”. - Key informant 3*

It is apparent from the themes above that residences foster an environment that endorses gender perceptions in which males are dominant and females are submissive, where females are seemingly valued more superficially for their looks and males are valued for their ability to display masculine traits. The next section will explore participants' views and experiences on rape culture as well as identify whether the gender norms and expectations in residences play a role in the views and experiences of rape culture.

### **Rape culture**

All participants were of the opinion that rape culture is or has been prevalent in the University. Participants connected the role of gender norms and expectations and residence traditions to their perceptions of rape culture in the University.

#### **What is rape culture?**

When asked what rape culture is, participants provided similar responses, referring to a culture that normalises rape and other sexually inappropriate acts.

*From my understanding rape culture is a concept set by the society we live that makes the act of rape/sexual assault okay. It puts in place structures for society to normalise rape (Female focus group participant 3).*

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*An environment and beliefs that a guy can get what he wants from a girl sexually regardless of her wanting or not wanting. And a guy needs to do anything he can in order to get what he wants. More often than not these are any acts that are sexually related, but not only related to intercourse. Things like touching, kissing and the like. And doing what is necessary to get them because there will be the belief that women are viewed as objects to please men (Male focus group participant 5).*

*How we normalise and speak about rape in a casual, nonchalant manner. We become so normalised to them that we do not take them as important as they are. This happens on an everyday basis; red flags that we shove under the rug (Key informant 2).*

When asked to provide examples of actions that could be considered as referring to rape culture, participants provided similar insights, highlighted in the table 8 below.

*Table 8: Actions that constitute rape culture*

<b>What actions constitute rape culture?</b>
Catcalling
Sexualising women and what they wear
Revenge porn
Drugging
Rape in itself
Coercion and manipulating people to sexual acts
Slut shaming
Victim-blaming and silencing victims
Sexual objectification
Trivialising rape
Non-consensual sexual advances (e.g., touching or groping)

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Taking advantage of women when they are drunk (even in the queer sphere)

Groping people in clubs

Forced sex in a relationship

Abuse of power

The following themes arouse from the responses of participants regarding rape culture

(Figure 2). These will be elaborated on below.

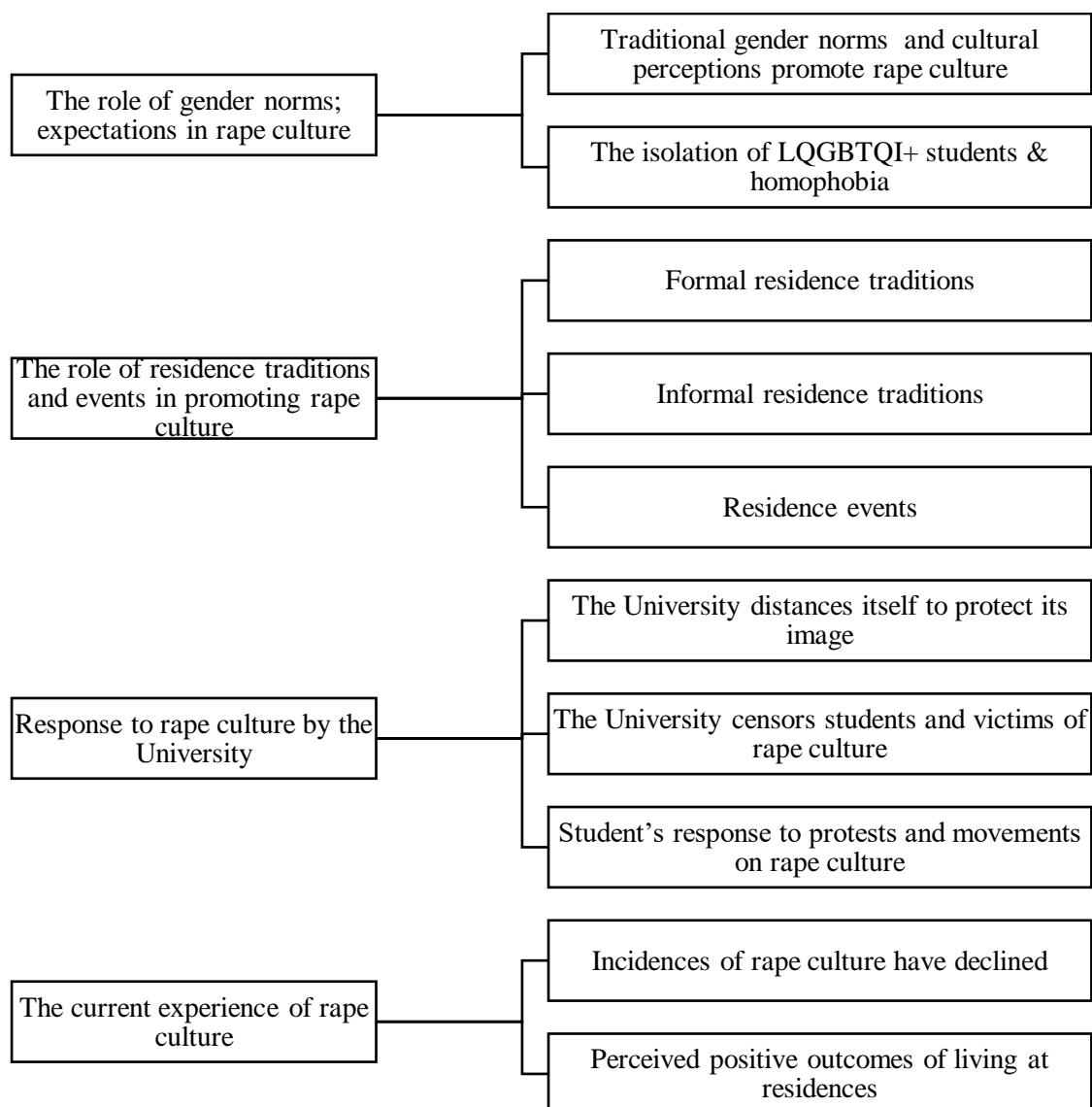


Figure 2: Rape culture themes

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### **Theme 1: The role of gender norms and expectations in rape culture**

From the experience of participants, the gender norms and expectations that are promoted in residences, residence traditions, and not conforming to traditional heteronormative norms, played a major role in the perpetuation and promotion of rape culture.

#### ***Theme 1.1. Traditional gender norms and cultural perceptions promote rape culture***

The traditional gender expectations of residences were identified as one of the major contributors to rape culture in the University. Participants suggested that the expectation of females to be demure and attractive and males to be masculine and to focus on getting girls contributes to actions that may be deemed as rape culture, such as males groping girls during residence socials. As a result, males have perceptions about female residents based on their residence identity.

*Males will even talk about which res girls are easiest to get (Madelief, Magrietjie, Asterhof, known as trou meisies, Erika) the residences on Prospect Street, and are therefore referred to as Milky Lane (in reference to the dessert shops, implying that these residences are where one can go to get girls they want sexually) (Key informant 2).*

*From my point of view, yes, res has influenced my views on gender, especially how first-years are taught how to approach girls and talk to girls from other res' and stuff like that. Most of the time they feel entitled to a lady talking to them or showing interest in them and if they do not, they get mad and stuff (Male focus group participant 2).*

The traditional norms stemming from the conservative Afrikaans culture that forms the foundation of residence culture as well as similar norms stemming from traditional

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African cultures, which are becoming more and more represented in residences, contribute to the perpetuation of rape culture. These cultures share one major commonality, traditional and patriarchal gender views.

*A large part of rape culture is due to how these actions are normalised. “In my culture, its normal.” The very Afrikaans, traditionalist vibe has moved from dominant expression to the expression of other cultures “Pedi, Sotho, etc” however, in spite of this shift, cultural expression has not changed, but has gotten worse. Lack of respect for women has not changed but may have become innately more pronounced because of more traditional cultural African beliefs (Key informant 5).*

### ***Theme 1.2. The isolation of students who are non-conforming or LGBTQ+ and Homophobia***

Participants expressed that students that do not fit into the traditional, heteronormative gender norms of overt femininity and masculinity, or students who identify with the LGBTQI+ grouping, feel excluded from the student activities.

*That’s something that’s definitely still in our res culture, and it differs from society because we are moving into an age where everyone is supposed to be themselves in whatever way that comes across or however they feel to express it, but if it goes against what the res stands for, you sort of stand out as an anomaly and if you are not traditionally feminine, you are placed at the back (Female focus group participant 1).*

*(My experiences at residence are different) because the culture created in the residence is for straight men and not for us in the LGBT community. I am not treated differently from everyone else but obviously I have to exclude myself in participating (Male focus group participant 2).*

A result of this climate is often bullying and even sexual assault of non-conforming and LGBTQI+ students.

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*If you are queer and non-heteronormative, you do not fit the mould and are bullied and forced into submission (Key informant 3).*

*100% the biggest problem, reason I left res (because I come from the queer community). I have had to deal with students in the queer community who have been sexually abused. Straight boys and gay boys get subjected to sexual misconduct from senior boys (Key informant 5).*

### **Theme 2: The role of residence traditions and events in promoting rape culture**

Certain residence traditions, activities and events were identified as contributors to the promotion or perpetuation of rape culture. These included formal traditions, which are part of the residence identity, orientation activities and norms and rules of the residence; informal traditions, which are enforced as a form of initiation; and residence events such as RAG and socials. These traditions also highlight residence hierarchy, and the role senior students play in promoting power-plays amongst seniors' indifference to and participation in enforcing rape and rape culture.

#### ***Theme 2.1. Formal residence traditions***

Formal traditions usually enforced during orientation were identified by participants as centred around promoting submissiveness and sexual attraction of females, such as being taught songs (called sleep songs) and dances which males judge. Participants shared the view that these formal traditions and events centred around females displaying their availability and that they are wife material (which encompasses the traditional views of what makes a good woman such as a woman who is submissive, cooks and cleans and is a good homemaker, who maintains her looks and is faithful to her husband (Sikuku, 2017)).

*...it is carried out in the traditions and the little songs we sing (Female focus group participant 1).*



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*Females are not allowed to look senior males in the eyes during O-Week. In O-Week, we are taught to dance in male residences by our seniors and house coms. House com then get reviewed by male residents. There's also where girls are taught a song (each residence has their own 'sleep' songs), which they sing to serenade guys from male residences. Another tradition was Serrie (which has been cancelled as of 2017), a sexist and misogynist event, carried on every year. Knowing there are preliminaries, males would get drunk and make barbaric and sexist placards (Key informant 3). Traditions are about finding your wife and getting the hook ups. Traditions like learning sleep songs, having to find someone to walk someone to class and singing outside residences, after hours (Key informant 4).*

These activities seemingly encouraged females to make themselves appealing to males, who were encouraged to approach females and to make sexual advances at the encouragement of senior males (see informal traditions below).

Participants also pointed out that formal residence activities promote traditional gender norms, such as marriages between male and female residences during RAG. RAG is a student-driven, non-profitable fundraising and community service organisation dedicated towards developing students through their active participation in community engagement activities both theoretically and practically (University of Pretoria, 2020). RAG is not limited to residence students but is incorporated into residence culture and residence form RAG partnerships.

*As a girl's res (during activities such RAG) you always want to be paired with male res (Female focus group participant 3).*

*In my first year we were paired with Kiaat (male residence in Groenkloof campus) for RAG partnerships - we did the wedding and the vows and all of that stuff. And then*

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*my second year we were with Olympus (Male residence in Prinshof campus), and then we did the wedding and the vows and everything (Female focus group participant 1).*

These marriages seemingly make females feel that they need to be paired with males, enforcing that as females, they are limited in what they can do without males. This can normalise the view that women are weak without men, who are the leaders, thus creating a power dynamic and lay the foundation for an environment where rape culture can be fostered.

### ***Theme 2.2. Informal residence traditions***

Informal residence traditions – particularly conducted in male residences as female residences have stricter rules – that were identified were said to be informally enforced as initiation by senior students. These often put males in positions where they have to be perpetrators of acts of rape culture, such as being expected to grope girls, take inappropriate photos of them without consent, make sexual advances based on informal residence games in an attempt to have sex with females.

*There are traditions that did perpetuate rape culture. And I think there were some things like, you would have games where you have to come back with girls and take pictures of their breasts and things like that. We would also have things like bachelors' bench, and they would require you to drink during one of the events on Friday and hook up with a couple of girls. And I think it stepped out, in my res it stepped out, it is not something we do anymore, so your res traditions did play a big part in perpetuating rape culture. But I think now as those traditions have been phased out, those things do not necessarily happen as much. (Male focus group participant 5).*

*Certain residences are notoriously known for that behaviour (e.g., College res number one, Marula res). Guys would make bets on how many phone numbers a first year can get from female residences. One person would be told to act like that*

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*“American pie (Movie)” character, Stifler (a character that displays overtly macho behaviour by drinking excessively, pulling pranks, boasting about his sexual encounters, and often making aggressive and unwanted sexual advances towards women in an attempt to have sex with them) or they will get in trouble, which they cannot talk about (Key informant 1).*

### ***Theme 2.3. Residence events play a role in promoting rape culture***

As pointed out previously, only male residences have clubhouses, and they are the ones who host socials. Participants expressed that this gives male residences power and control and results in males taking advantage of females during socials.

*Only males can host events, because only male residences have clubhouses and choose which female residents can come. Males are allowed to buy alcohol in their residences and get more funding for events (Key informant 3).*

*Females need to come to us for the University social experience because of clubhouses (Male focus group participant 1).*

*Going to University club houses, you get ready, someone offers you a drink, what you see behind walls inside toilets in the clubhouses, where females are clearly intoxicated, and not in her right state of mind, but males continue touching and groping and you see men outside female bathrooms waiting for drunk girls. No one really says anything because it is normal (Key informant 2).*

### **Theme 3. Response to rape culture by the University**

Participants pointed out that, in addressing major issues surrounding rape culture and gender stereotypes, the University distances itself and censors’ students who report their negative experiences. They also pointed out that, even amongst the student body as a whole, the response to protests is short-lived behavioural changes.

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***Theme 3.1. The University distances itself from issues surrounding rape culture to protect its image***

Participants expressed that the University is not quick in addressing issues related to sexual assault and rape culture as they are focused on protecting their image. As such, they do the best they can to distance themselves from issues surrounding rape culture.

*UP is about its image. They are very good at distancing themselves from such issues and focus on saving face (Key informant 3).*

*The University distances from any talk of inappropriate sexual behaviour. The University does the bare minimum. They deal with the symptoms, but do not focus on the cure (Key informant 5).*

*The University space, from my experience is a little bit behind in enforcing certain things that we have constructively dealt with in society because I think in society, we live in times whereby things are called out constantly u know, we live in times where things are being addressed when they happen. We do not wait for things to pile up, we live in times where things are just quickly addressed, and it is very different within the University space because you have so much more to do. And you can complain, but the thing you are calling out is not deemed as important by TuksRes or the University management, that it gets swept under the rug (Male focus group participant 3).*

***Theme 3.2. The University censors' students and victims of rape culture***

Participants expressed that they felt the University do not appropriately address reports of sexual assault and rape culture, instead they censor those students who report their experiences. TuksRes allegedly minimizes the experiences of victims by switching the blame on them.

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*I do not believe they are making sure that there are checks and balances or consequences for individuals; they will say “boys are being boys” or “I do not think it’s that serious” (Key informant 5).*

*I think the varsity does not want to be part of “scandals” and always puts itself first above the students. I feel like they only share things like this with the students when the situations get out of hand. And they try to censor us in regard to situations like this (Female focus group participant 3).*

*Also its this thing of like, in the incidence of sexual assault or rape are brought to their attention, ...the house mothers and all of those people will ask the girls “why were you dressed like that?” or “why did you get too drunk?” and they’ll always lay the blame on the victim because they feel like something had to cause it, they’ll actually just get to a point where they say to victims “we need to try to control your behaviours to make sure this does not happen again.” (Key informant 5).*

One key informant alleged that the management at TuksRes are “*part and parcel*” of rape culture. As such they do not deal with rape culture and sexual harassment allegations when students report their experiences because they “*do the exact same thing.*”

Students who aim to bring these issues to light, such as members of residence house committees and student movements are allegedly avoided and the recommendations or calls for change are often ignored.

*Progressive students ask too many questions. It is easier to use previous programmes and deal with things on the surface (Key informant 4).*

### ***Theme 3.3. Student’s response to protests and movements on rape culture***

Participants, particularly key informants expressed that student protests greatly impacted the discourse around rape culture in the University. After protests ended, awareness of rape culture increases and for a while, such behaviours die down. However, according to

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participants, things go back to normal not long after a protest and rape culture behaviours continue.

*Sometimes protests that happened highlight this, and only once this happens, these things related to rape culture calm down, but as the hype of the protest dies down, things go back to normal (Key informant 1).*

*What I noticed (after student protests) is the difference in how men acted afterwards, saying they did not realize their actions are seen as rape culture. But then they go back to their normal ways (Key informant 3).*

### **Theme 4: The current experience of residence culture**

Focus group participants, who are all current residents of the University's residences and who have been most recently exposed to residence culture, acknowledged the challenges listed above with regards to gender constructions and rape culture. They also expressed that they believe that residence traditions and the experiences described are changing.

#### ***Theme 4.1. Incidences of rape culture actions have declined***

Focus group participants felt that house committee members and heads of residences have put in much effort to improve the residence space and culture. Any experiences of rape culture are seen as related to individual behaviour, not the culture of the residences.

*In a sense yes but is slowly dying down as TuksRes has eliminated a lot of inappropriate things in res (Male focus group participant 2).*

*Honestly, I think the house committees and the heads of res put in a lot of effort to make the environment safer and more respectful. The rape culture, I feel, comes from the actual people in res allowing certain behaviours to go unchallenged (Female focus group participant 1).*

*No, I do not think it is perpetuated in res anymore. I think it was before, very visibly, very blatantly but I do not think it is now. The house comms we have now are people*

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*who are more progressive...and I do think that does not happen and we do not teach first years to treat women as objects as would happen in previous years (Male focus group participant 5).*

*It is the individuals living in the res not res culture/res rules that promote it (Female focus group participant 1).*

*I think it depends on the students of the res. I do not think any res actively perpetuates rape culture; it is all about the people living in the res (Female focus group participant 3).*

*I acknowledge the change or the toning down of res culture, let us not forget that misogyny is not always loud or disruptive, sometimes it comes in a politically correct package (Male focus group participant 3).*

### ***Theme 4.2. Perceived positive outcomes of living at residences***

Female focus group participants expressed that they feel much safer residing in residences and that residences have become a safe-space and comfort zone for them.

*In a sense, because res is such a controlled environment – things are controlled, and we are watched over. Obviously, from a first-years' perspective, I do feel it is slightly safer (Female focus group participant 1).*

*I think most people's conduct in res is different compared to the outside world because during the course of the year res becomes our comfort zones, we become familiar with a lot of the people in there, so when we step out our guards automatically go up because we are stepping outside our comfort zones/safe space (Female focus group participant 5).*

This feeling of safety that is expressed by female residents is a concern as it likely reinforces the idea that female residents are vulnerable and weak and need protection from

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men or institutions (like the residences themselves), and therefore it is in their best interest to follow residence rules and expectations.

Male focus group participants felt that the general message they are taught during orientation is to be respectful and to be gentlemen, which is a positive influence they may not receive if they were not residing in residences.

*Generally, what the residence have taught us, especially from orientation week, is to respect women, they really emphasise this. And I think this is as a result of the things that has happened in the past like you said about the Serrie incident. So now they really emphasise the importance of being a gentleman which really influences the male child positively. Now if these males were not in res and maybe private accommodation, they would not get this constant reminder to respect females because generally in society men are viewed as superior (Male focus group participant 1).*

### **Interventions participants recommended**

#### **Stereotypes participants would change about their gender**

Focus group participants were asked if they could change one stereotype about their respective gender, which stereotype would they change. Female participants expressed that they would change the notion that women are dependent, to being independent people who are capable of making their own decisions and have the right to make decisions about their bodies and lives. They also want to change the way women are sexualised for what they wear.

*Basically, more respect put on woman in that we have complete capacity and capability of deciding what we want to do to with ourselves, our bodies, our lives, and consciously to make ourselves happy, not for anyone else or any other party (Female focus group participant 1).*



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*I guess the freedom for women to dress however they want and not to be sexualised in terms of what they wear (Female focus group participant 3).*

Males stated they would change the stereotype that men are superior and that they need to be leaders in all they do. Participants also expressed that men should be encouraged to express their emotions more.

*I would change the stereotype of men having to be the superior ones. I feel like the men in male res' need to be taught how to respect females (Male focus group participant 2).*

*One stereotype I would change about how a man should be is the view that a man should not cry and talk about his feelings, a man should not be emotional and as such they bottle up all these bad experiences they have had, without really dealing with them head on. And to some extent these "bottled up" emotions then might lead to certain violent acts (Male focus group participant 1).*

### **Interventions to address gender stereotypes and rape culture in the University**

All participants were asked what intervention they would recommend to address gender stereotypes and rape culture. Efforts that have been made by the CSA&G were identified by one participant, particularly a play that was held in some residences on consent.

*CSA had a play talking about consent, and they were encouraged that they do it for all residences (Key informant 1).*

Participants also felt that interactive workshops and more discussions surrounding rape culture and stereotypes are needed.

*Definitely a workshop so everyone gets an opportunity to engage in the conversation.*

*I do not think sitting and listening to someone is an effective way of getting people engaged in a topic (Female focus group participant 1).*

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*Sit downs, really have the men and women of different residences sit together and discuss their viewpoints, concerns, perceptions on one another instead of trying to pass a message through house committees and other administrative members (Male focus group participant 4).*

*More sessions and meetings that talk about rape culture and gender stereotypes, have open and honest conversations instead of having them in closed doors (Key informant 2).*

Key informants also shared the efforts they have made to address major concerns surrounding residence traditions, including discussion forums with TuksRes, and advocating for female residences to have their own clubhouses to host socials, as well as having interactive discussions with residence students.

*Taaibos residence had an intervention, they had a guy talk to the residences about gender stereotypes, which was good (Key informant 2).*

*Monday evenings we would have a Think Pink session for first years, where we talk about lifestyle, and focus on wellbeing (Key informant 1).*

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this research provide insight into the challenges faced by residence students with regards to gender norms and expectations. These findings show that there's evidence that some residences hold attitudes or beliefs which may perpetuate traditional views of gender, which are made apparent through their traditions and activities. As a result of this, residences can become a breeding ground for the perpetuation of rape culture and the enforcement of harmful gender stereotypes. It is also worth noting that it is not solely the formal traditions which play a role in the perpetuation of rape culture, but informal ones as well. Another key concern is how management of residences manages reported incidences of sexual assault or harassment. It is worth noting however, that residence students feel that

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there have been changes which resulted in a noticeable difference, particularly in incidences of rape culture. Despite the highlighted challenges, students feel that there are positives to living in on campus residences.

In the chapter that follows a detailed discussion of the findings will be presented. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of limitations and a possible way forward.

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### Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine whether gender constructions influence gender relations in residences and whether these constructions perpetuate rape culture on a university campus and residence traditions and the influence these traditions have on gender constructions and rape culture. Using social constructionism as a conceptual framework, the study explored how male and female students construct gender roles and the extent to which these constructions and their experiences in campus residences influence the supposed normalisation of rape culture on campus. The major aim was to encourage students and University management to think about the topic, which may contribute to transformation. The backdrop of this study is the number of student protests across the country, including the University of Pretoria, against gender-based violence, rape culture and femicide. Campaigns such as #MeToo and #AmINext have also brought awareness to the experience of gender-based violence and rape culture and brought to light these experiences in universities.

The research question for this study is: How do residence students' constructions of gender influence their beliefs about rape culture at a University in South Africa? The aim of the study was to explore how students' construction of gender influences beliefs about rape culture. The study had four objectives:

1. to explore how students who reside on campus construct gender.
2. to explore how residence traditions, contribute to personal gender constructions.
3. to explore whether students believe that rape culture is prevalent in the University's residences and how it is perpetuated.
4. to explore the relationship between students' construction of gender and their opinion of rape culture in residences (if it is prevalent).

The findings from the focus group discussions and individual interviews revealed very telling themes in response to the research question. These themes will be discussed below.

### **Discussion and Interpretation of the Results**

The discussion of the results will be presented per objective of the study.

#### **Objective 1: Exploring how students who reside on campus construct gender**

In exploring how residence students construct gender, participants described their perceptions according to their experiences in residences, and their experience in overall society. While participants are cognizant of these gender roles and expectations, they showed through their responses that these traditional views are not what they themselves subscribe to. The views which they share are based on their experiences at a social and community level, as well as through their interpretation and experience of residence life.

According to Berkowitz et al. (2010), one's identification of being masculine or feminine is internalized during childhood through socialisation. Masculinity is associated with power, independence, protection, strength and aggression, to name a few; while femininity is associated with caring, dependence, weakness, fragility, passivity and helplessness (Black & McCloskey, 2013). This reflects in the findings with regard to male and female expectations and associations. Males are expected to be dominant, protective and to display leadership behaviour, while females are expected to be docile and demure while also dependent on males for protection. These expectations, as highlighted in the findings, are taught through socialisation.

It is evident that in residences, the differences between male and female norms and expectations are rooted in traditional views of gender which stem from socialisation. These norms and expectations for the genders are polar opposites of each other. Females are expected to be submissive and demure while males are expected to be dominant and virile. Males are taught from a young age that they are expected to be dominant and to take the lead in many aspects of life. Females are taught to be submissive, and to know their place and even to expect men to be their domineering and assertive counterparts and to look to them for

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leadership and protection. As such, males in residences are treated more leniently while females have much stricter rules enforced on them.

From the constructions of masculinity and femininity, stereotypes and norms are formed, resulting in gender roles and expectations. Gender stereotypes are associations and generalizations about men and women, based on the social roles they play (Hentschel et al., 2019). Participants of the study highlighted that residence culture, being rooted in tradition, endorses traditional gender stereotypes such as the notion that females need to be nurtured and protected by males. Due to these traditional views, rules and expectations differ for males and females and treatment towards them. The prevalent culture that residences are rooted in is the conservative, patriarchal Afrikaans culture and as such emphasises male privilege. Participants also mentioned the mix in of Zulu and Sotho culture in residences, which emphasise male privilege as well.

Female residents have stricter rules enforced onto them, and if they step out of line, there are repercussions. On the other hand, males have more advantages and leniency. Male residences are allowed to have clubhouses and to host socials while females are not.

The findings also show that residences create a shift in the power dynamics between males and females, where males are empowered and females are subdued, made to feel fragile and needing of men. This is evidenced by the expression of feelings of vulnerability and discomfort by female participants in residences but independence on campus, traditions such as the “marrying” of residence, girls needing to befriend males for protection and the expectation of males to be protective of female.

### **Objective 2: Exploring how residence traditions contribute to personal gender constructions.**

The University of Pretoria is steeped in tradition (Abrahams, 2018) and as such, its residences pride themselves in their traditions, which are imparted upon a student’s arrival.

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These traditions are customs that are passed down over time to new residents (Graburn, 2008) and include residence rules and behavioural expectation in representing their residence.

Traditions are tied to each residence's identity - male residences enforce brotherhood and leadership and tradition while female residence identities include being marriage material, beauty, and charm, and being delicate and feminine.

Findings from the study highlighted that certain residence traditions, activities and events were contributors to the promotion or perpetuation of rape culture. These included formal traditions, which are part of the residence identity, such as orientation activities and norms and rules of the residence; informal traditions, which are promoted as a form of initiation; and residence events such as RAG and socials. Participants highlighted that these did contribute to their personal gender constructions, particularly males, who would have perceptions about females based on the residence they live in.

Formal traditions that were identified by participants as contributing to rape culture and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes included females being taught songs and dances which males judge. Participants shared the view that these formal traditions and events are centred around females displaying their availability, femininity and that they have characteristics to be good wives. Other formal traditions include RAG which is incorporated into residence culture where residences form RAG partnerships through "marriages" between male and female residences.

Informal residence traditions – particularly those conducted in male residences, which were said to be informally enforced as part of initiation of first-year students by senior students – put male residents in positions where they had to adopt sexually inappropriate and sometimes aggressive behaviours. Because only male residences have clubhouses and are the ones who host socials, they have power and control, and this results in males taking advantage of females during socials.

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Focus group participants, who are all current residents of the University's residences, acknowledged the challenges listed above with regards to gender constructions and rape culture, but also expressed that the climate in residences has improved. They mentioned positive outcomes they experience from living in residence. This could be attributed to the efforts of student house committee members and student leadership, who have made efforts to ensure that discussions around issues of gender and rape culture, wellness, and an open door to reporting are part of residence programmes and rules. This is largely due to their calls to crack down on and abolish traditions and initiation, which have been increasingly successful.

### **Objective 3: Exploring whether students believe that rape culture is prevalent in the University's residences and how it is perpetuated**

By definition of the term in chapter 2, rape culture is the term used to describe how society fosters and condones rape and other sexual violence and attitudes (Herman, 1984; Nicoletti & Spencer-Thomas, 2009). The concept of rape culture challenges the perception that rape is limited to the actions of one, abnormal individual, and suggests that it is connected to and enabled by numerous everyday cultural and social practices (Sills, et al., 2016). Participants showed their understanding of rape culture and of acts that are deemed as rape culture, describing rape culture that puts structures in place for society to normalise rape, joking about sexual harassment and not only relating to intercourse, but also including groping and touching.

All participants were of the opinion that rape culture is or has been prevalent in the University's residences. Participants connected the role of gender norms and expectations, and residence traditions to the prevalence and experience of rape culture in the University. When asked what rape culture is, participants provided similar responses, referring to a culture that normalises rape and other sexually inappropriate acts. When asked to provide



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examples of actions that could be considered rape culture, participants provided similar insights. They are very aware of what is conceptualized as rape culture.

In addressing major issues surrounding rape culture and gender stereotypes, it was pointed out that University management distances itself from allegations and censors' students who report their negative experiences. Students who aim to bring these issues to light, such as residence house committee members, and student movements are allegedly avoided and the recommendations or calls for change are often ignored. Victims who report their experiences are blamed by being told not to dress or not to behave in a certain way.

It was also pointed out that even amongst the student body as a whole, the response to protests was short-lived behavioural changes. Not long after protests, things go back to normal amongst students and rape culture behaviours continue. This may be due to the lack of further action, censoring and distancing by University management.

### **Objective 4: Exploring the relationship between students' construction of gender and their opinion of rape culture in residences**

Clowes et al. (2009) reported that students living on campus feel a greater pressure to have sex than those off campus and view campus as a highly sexualised space where it is easier to engage in sex because "you know where to get it". Findings from this study also align with these findings as participants expressed that females are objectified by males who often view women as sexual trophies and challenge themselves to have sex with as many girls as possible. This is made easier by males being the ones to hold socials and buy alcohol for females in an attempt to have sex with them. During these socials male students in particular are expected to prove themselves by getting as many girls as possible. It is mentioned that male students attempt to get females intoxicated in order to have their way with them, and sometimes making unwanted sexual advances, touching, and groping.

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From the experience of participants, the construction of heteronormative gender norms and expectations that are endorsed in residences, played a negative role in the perpetuation and promotion of rape culture. The traditional norms stemming from the conservative Afrikaans culture and traditional African cultures, which are becoming more and more represented in residences, contribute to the perpetuation of rape culture because of the patriarchal, male-centric nature of these cultures.

The views expressed by male participants, however, aimed to excuse themselves from acts that constitute rape culture, as that it is not behaviour they engage in or it is no longer behaviour that is expected as seniority increased in the residences. It is notable that these expectations were not because males developed respect for women and their value as independent people, worthy of mutual respect and dignity, but more so because the pressure to engage in these behaviours had diminished or been minimised.

The expectation of females to be demure and attractive and males to be masculine and to focus on “getting” girls (trying to have sex with females) contribute to actions that may be deemed as rape culture, such as males groping girls during residence socials. As a result, males have perceptions about female residents based on their residence identity. Examples of this are Asterhof residents being referred to as “Aster-whores,” (implying that females from this residence are “whores” and therefore sexually available, or less believable if they report sexual crimes); and Madelief residents being viewed as kind girls that one can make friends with, and so forth. Perceptions of male residences are shared by all participants, such as the perception that College residence is full of overtly masculine residents who are expected to assert their dominance through their treatment of females.

Residents who do not fit into the traditional, heteronormative gender norms, or LGBTQI+ students tend to feel left out of residence culture and activities. As such they are often bullied, and even deal with sexual harassment and assault.

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### **Transformation in the University**

The 2016 TuksRes Report on Transformation by Michaels (2016) identified formal (and informal) residence traditions and orientation activities as a major challenge to transformation. The findings from this study corroborate this finding as residence traditions (both formal and informal) perpetuate traditions such as females singing and dancing for males to promote their availability, and inter-residential partnerships through “marriages” for RAG, bets in male residences on getting girls and others, enforce rape culture. Participants expressed that the University was not addressing these adequately and were instead censoring students and distancing themselves from the resulting consequences of acts of rape and rape culture.

Another concern highlighted by the report is gender stereotyping. The report states that gender stereotyping is prevalent within the University community. This research confirms that the University residences are gendered in nature. This is apparent that some of the residence traditions and initiation processes, where some residences pride themselves in teaching students how to behave as a man or a lady (Michaels, 2016).

In subsequent years, the University has made efforts centred on transformation, with the aim of providing more multilingual, multicultural and an inclusive living environment for students (Ndlazi, 2018). For residences, this reportedly included the aim to “move from an orientation that is characterised by obsolete practices and based on many questionable assumptions about the needs of first-year students, to a welcoming process that is applied as a strategy for the development of first-year students” (Department of Residence Affairs and Accommodation, University of Pretoria, 2018). While findings from this study highlighted the gender related challenges and inequalities in the University, and the manifestation and perpetuation of rape culture, the experiences of current resident students were also outlined. Current residents expressed that the house committee student leadership and heads of

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residences put effort into making the resident environment safer and more respectful and believe that first-year males are no longer taught to treat females as objects. Female students also reported feeling safer living in residences.

### **Limitations**

While doing the research there were some processes that could have influenced the results of the study. The international COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown resulted in many challenges in. Face to face group discussions could not be held. As a result, data collection had to be conducted virtually. While virtual data collection still meant that participants could interact, hear each other's responses, thus still promoting rich discussion, for some, it may feel impersonal which could be a limitation.

Due to the qualitative nature of the research design implemented in this study, findings must be viewed contextually, not as generalizable to a larger population.

Another limitation is the use of two different facilitators for the male and female focus group discussion. Focus groups were conducted homogenously to mitigate possible provocation and un-comfortability amongst respondents of opposite genders, particularly due to the nature of this enquiry. As such, a male facilitator was recruited for this, while the primary researcher conducted the female group discussion. The facilitators could have affected the group discussions.

### **Recommendations**

The findings from this study provide great insights into the perceptions of residence students and their experience of life in residences and how it influences their gender constructions. While these results are from a small sample of participants and are therefore not representative of all students or all campus residences, the depth and openness of the discussions and the agreement of results with previous research results, confirm the validity of this study's findings. As such, the findings from this study can be used as the foundation to

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develop interventions that may contribute to transformation in the University of Pretoria.

These include;

- Starting University-wide conversation on gender, rape culture and tradition, and the role these have on rape culture and student life and safety on campus.
- A review of residence life against the backdrop of the new Anti-Discrimination Policy of UP, under the auspices of the registrar and the Head of Transformation. The purpose of the Anti-Discrimination Policy is to promote the achievement of procedural and substantive equality to University staff and students to provide support and remedy against unfair discrimination, hate speech, harassment and violence (Office of the Registrar, University of Pretoria, n.d.)
- Engagement with the Institutional Transformation Committee on matters of gender-based violence, rape culture and gender stereotyping.
- A benchmarking of residence life and gender-based violence against the Department of Higher Education and Training framework to address gender-based violence in tertiary education (Post-School Education and Training System) (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019).
- A review of residence traditions, rules and expectations and the role of house parents in residences.
- A review of gender-based residences and a move away from this to mixed housing.
- An exploration of ways in which new and more productive residence welcoming processes build confidence and skills and support in young people.
- More support from the University for student initiatives which support students around gender-based violence.

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### **Conclusion**

This study has provided insight into the experiences of residence students and how the construction of gender which was accepted/endorsed as part of residence culture influences their own constructions of gender and the prevalence of rape culture in the University. The findings show the bigger challenge lies in the larger society where gender stereotypes and gender-based violence are still prevalent issues. The advantage is that the University can provide a space where these issues can be brought to light and discussed, therefore moulding a new generation that will leave with more than just an academic qualification, but also awareness of the impact that their gender constructions have on gender relationships and the so-called rape culture in South Africa. Therefore, when they exit the University space, they leave with the potential to contribute to challenging the status quo in society as a whole and become part of the generation that breaks the cycle of gender inequality, rape culture and gender-based violence.

It remains for the University to take these findings forward, given their sensitivity, and mindful of the modesty and limitations of this study. Nevertheless, it is hoped that it builds on recent encouraging steps in the right direction and meaningfully addresses gender, rape culture and residence life in a more transformative way. This should not fall into the trap of seeing women as “vulnerable” and in need of “protection”, nor should it simplistically position men as “the problem”; rather it should address the systematic, structural and institutional underpinnings of gender inequality and what appears to be stubborn elements of rape culture, common across many parts of the tertiary sector in South Africa.

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