

**Gender, sexuality and risk in young women's narratives of university life:  
A study of selected black African women at Edgewood Campus, University  
of KwaZulu-Natal**

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**A research study submitted as the full dissertation component in the  
fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Education Degree in the  
Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.**

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**December 2013**

## **Abstract**

This qualitative study is an exploration of the sexuality of ten black African female undergraduate students aged 18-24. These women emerge from mixed class backgrounds found within different or same areas located in KwaZulu-Natal. The study focused on understanding what these women regarded as sexual risk taking behaviour and what meanings they attach to gender and sexual risk and how they negotiate or practise agency within sexual or intimate relationships.

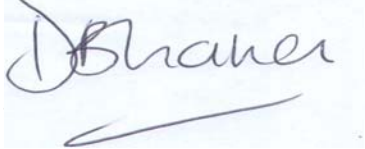
This study presents a framework that closely examines gender ideals and beliefs that may potentially influence sexual risks. Theories of gender power relations and sexuality were used to substantiate how gender and power were implicated in sexual risk taking. Individual interviewing technique allowed for participants to express their opinions regarding sexuality and relationships on campus and how gender based violence occurs on campus.

The findings reveal sexual risk taking amongst female students are exacerbated by their constructions of campus freedoms, love, trust, power, boyfriends as well as prevalence of 'sugar daddy' relationships. Findings reveal how the participants are able to exert sexual agency and or conform to male power and dominance. Findings also discuss how participants are not ignorant about HIV and are not in denial about the possibility of contracting the virus but some do engage in unprotected sex because they are influenced by traditional and cultural norms regarding gender.

The findings of this study contribute to an enhanced consideration of the possible issues that surround sexuality, including financial pressures, leading to female students, especially black

female undergraduate students engaging in sexual risk taking behaviours. Possible initiatives that should be designed or implemented, in university such as a curriculum that focuses on the other possible sexual vulnerabilities and gender inequalities faced by female students on campus in an attempt to reduce them, are discussed.

**‘As the candidate’s supervisor I agree / do not agree to the submission of this dissertation’.**

**Signed** .....  .....

**Name**        **Professor D. Bhana**

**Date**        **16 September 2013**

## DECLARATION

I, **Janet Pillay** declare that:

- (i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- (ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- (iii) This dissertation does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
- (iv) This dissertation does not contain other person's writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted; then:
  - a) Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
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**Signed** .....

**Date** .....

## **Acknowledgements**

To my personal saviour Jesus Christ – You will forever be my Hero. Thank you Lord for saving me, giving me added and renewed strength each day and for making so much possible in my life. Without you I am nothing BUT with you I can accomplish great and marvellous things. Thank you Lord.

To my supervisor Prof. Bhana- I couldn't have completed this work without you. Your unwavering support to your students deserves tremendous praise. In your former life you may have been a regal queen, in this life time a walking, talking, thinking academic encyclopaedia, so smart, so fanatical about your work and so great, in your next life time you will surely be the President of the USA since you exude much power and wit. You are the first women to have absolutely blown my mind and inspire me so greatly. You have impacted my life profoundly. Thank you.

To the one who has engraved his name on my soul – my husband SHANE. Thank you for supporting me, loving me, believing in me and always bringing out the best of me. In my seven years of studying you have taken care of our daughter even when she was sick, stayed up late with me as I studied, washed piles of dishes and made sure we always had something to eat even though you have a hectic schedule. A man like you is rare to find, I appreciate you and I know that even if I used combinations of all 26 letters of the alphabet to say how much I adore you it wouldn't be enough. I will love you always, forever and into eternity. Thank you my gender activist.

To my heart beat – MJP. You are the best part of me. Every achievement, success, promotion, tear, struggle, joy is for you. I only wish to be the type of woman you can always look up to and find remarkable. You are the most fascinating human being I have ever met and I know you are going to continue to astound me with your sense of humour, intelligence and kindest soul. I love you my Spring baby. You are every motivation for me to succeed. Thank you.

To the most beautiful women in my life – my mum and two sisters. When we had nothing we still had everything because we had each other. Thank you for your unconditional love and

support. Strong women- may we be them and may we raise them. To my dad and my little man Kellen – I love you both dearly. Thank you family.

To all my friends in our gender cohort especially Sherri and Shaaista thank you for your support and time. Sherri you are a rising star in the academic world and I never forget how you patiently helped me. God bless you all!

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction to the study**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This study entitled: **Gender, sexuality and risk in young women's narratives of university life: A study of selected black African women at Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal** explores the sexualities of ten black African female undergraduate students, aged 18-24, at Edgewood campus.

#### **1.2 Background and focus of this study**

In this study I wanted to understand how a selected group of black African undergraduate female students gave meaning to sexuality. In the context of HIV and AIDS, gender inequalities, and sexual risk, the examination of undergraduate female remains important. It remains important because young women who are between the ages of 15-24 face persistent risk in relation to disproportionate vulnerability to HIV and AIDS (Gilbert and Selikow, 2011). Gender relations and gender inequalities have been found to be the key to understanding patterns of sexual risk and vulnerability (Jewkes, Morrell, Sikweyiya, Dunkie and Penn-Kekana, 2012).

There is limited research focused on how gender relations and risky sexual practices amongst female students in higher education institutions in South Africa, may impact on the HIV and AIDS epidemic and other sexual vulnerabilities faced by women such as unwanted or pre-marital pregnancy, sexual coercion, economic exploitation and transactional sex (Shefer, Strebel and Jacobs, 2012).

This project was essentially focused on understanding gender and sexual risk among higher education undergraduate female students since young women make up a higher proportion of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in South Africa. More importantly this research project focused on black African females since it is estimated that in Kwa-Zulu Natal "15.64 per cent of black African females were likely to be HIV positive" within the age group 15-19 compared to females of other race groups in that age group and infections were greater than males of the same and other race groups (Gilbert and Selikow, 2012).

According to UNAIDS (2010) of the rough estimate of 40 million people living with HIV and AIDS globally, nearly one third are between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Shisana, Rice, Zungu and Zama (2010) attain that the HIV and AIDS epidemic in South Africa is regarded as complicated by gender inequalities. Harrison, Xaba and Kunene (2001) claim that gender inequalities in South Africa regarding risk for HIV infection among women have been associated with unprotected sex. According to Hallman (2005, p.37), “a national population-based survey of youth HIV prevalence and risk behaviours in South Africa found that 10.2% of young people are living with HIV, and that for every 15- to 24-year-old male there are more than three females the same age” living with HIV. The AIDS’s epidemic has had a worse impact on women, particularly on women from marginalised and or previously disadvantaged societies in South Africa.

Furthermore a study conducted by Shefer, Strebel and Foster (2006) asserts that South African students in higher education institutions assumed that “violence, coercion and male control” especially in the context of sex were part of a normal heterosexual relationship. Moreover, Shefer, *et al.*, (2006) reveals that more than one-third of all unplanned pregnancies of college students are attributed to unmarried women in their early 20s. Most commonly entry age into higher education institutions in South Africa begin at age 18, therefore young women in higher education institutions may make up part of the above percentage.

According to Mantell (2009, p.141) a firm push for gender equality is maintained by South Africa but “not all women are benefiting equally from structural revolutions in gender equality”. Many South African women are faced with the stress of social, cultural and even religious responsibilities; as gender is “socially” constructed and consequently expectations of how males and females should behave are structured by cultures, societies and religions and may influence the way in which sexual interactions are negotiated (Mantell, 2009, p.141).

This is not to insinuate that women are rendered powerless in sexual relationships or are voiceless in expressing their sexuality because research also shows that with “new economic freedom and increased autonomy” (Mantell, 2009, p.142) women can positively negotiate sexual protection from partners. However women may still be expected to “subscribe” to traditional gender-role hierarchies or, as Bodibe (2010) argues that female students in universities may find relations that can “support their material needs” which however can

expose them to high- risk sexual relationships or sexual behaviours with partners where they do not have much ability to be adamant about condom use.

In the context of risky sexual behaviour that may contribute to HIV and AIDS and unwanted pregnancy much effort has been placed on preventative measures but little has been done to draw attention to the gendered factors contributing to risky sexual practices. My intention in conducting this research project is not to cast judgements on black female students who have unprotected sex or who are falling pregnant on campus out of wedlock but rather to possibly illuminate the possible vulnerabilities of black female students to HIV and AIDS and other risky sexual practices in higher education institutions. This research could help to extend and enhance the body of knowledge regarding necessary aspects of the curriculum higher educational institutions in South Africa need to address or include, for example positive gender relations and prevention of risky sexual practises especially those engaged in for economic reasons.

### **1.3 Aims and Objectives of this study**

Exploration pertaining to how understandings of gender and sexual risk among female students in tertiary education institutions in South Africa may impact on the HIV and AIDS epidemic, and other sexual vulnerabilities faced by women is limited. The research aims of this study focused mainly on an exploration of how young women's understandings of their own sexuality and sexual practice are important and might be decisive in the spread or limitation of HIV and AIDS and safer sexual practices that reduce female student's possible vulnerabilities to the virus. The research objectives included an exploration of how female students' in particular black African female students, gave meanings to gender and sexual risks from a purposive sample at the University of KwaZulu-Natal – Edgewood campus. I aimed to show how an imbalance of power in relationships between men and women may affect young black African female students regarding sexual risks and what dominant gender discussions these young women draw on for evaluating and understanding these possible sexual risks. Below are the research questions that I have used in order to meet the objectives of this study.

## **1.4 Key Research Questions**

Research information that was produced in this qualitative study was used to provide answers and guide this research process by a main research question as well as four sub questions guiding the focus of this study. :

What do black African female undergraduate students at the UKZN Edgewood campus regard as risky sexual behaviour?

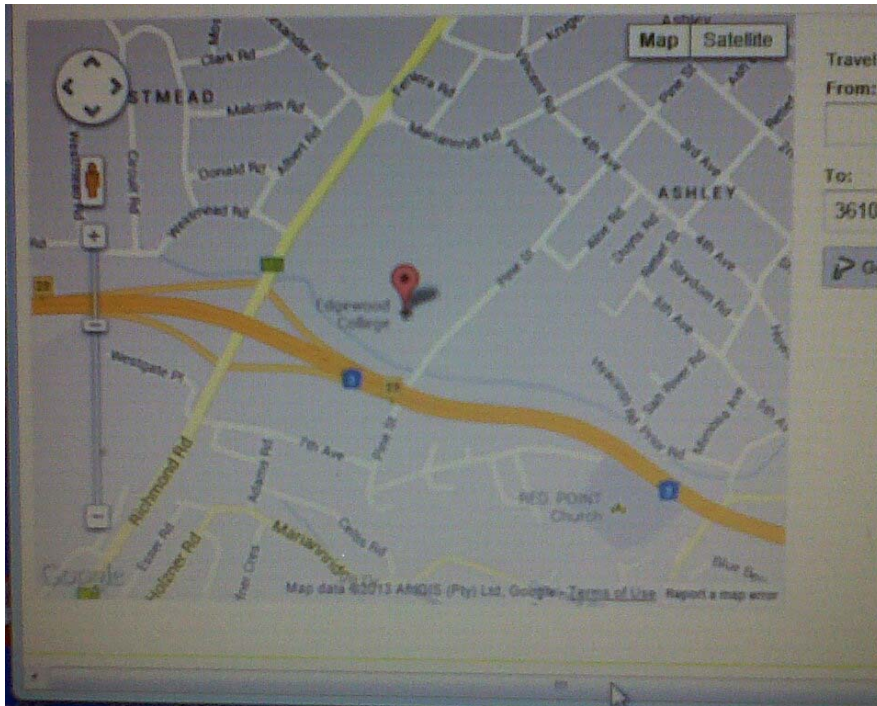
### **Sub Questions**

- What meanings do black African female undergraduate students' attach to gender and sexual risk at the UKZN Edgewood campus?
- How do black African female undergraduate students' negotiate gender and sexual risks?
- How and why do power relations influence the meanings of gender and sexual risks of black African female undergraduate students' at the UKZN Edgewood campus?
- How is gender implicated in the meanings of sexual risk by female undergraduate students' at the UKZN Edgewood campus?

## **1.5 Research site of this study: University of KwaZulu – Natal: Edgewood campus**

Edgewood campus is located in the busy Central Business District area within Pinetown, east of Durban. Edgewood campus is the main faculty of the University of KwaZulu-Natal offering teaching as a degree and post graduate degrees in education. The campus is primarily situated in an area that is easily accessible to most students since it is on bus and taxi route. All modules or courses are offered and conducted in English and students come from different socio-economic communities and backgrounds and from all parts of South Africa,

but mainly from KwaZulu- Natal. Below is a map showing the location of Edgewood campus:



(Retrieved from [www.onlinebusinesslist.co.za](http://www.onlinebusinesslist.co.za))

### **1.6 My justification for focusing on black African female undergraduate students and my personal interest in this research study:**

This research study focused on black African females since it is estimated that in Kwa-Zulu Natal “15.64 per cent of black African females were likely to be HIV positive” within the age group 15-24 compared to females of other race groups in that age group and infections were greater than males of the same and other race groups (Gilbert and Selikow, 2012). It is important to gain knowledge on what students who are perceived to be educated and ‘modern’ feel about issues pertaining to sex in relation to HIV and AIDS because implications for intervening in reducing risk, addressing and promoting safer sexualities within higher education institutions in South Africa is important and significant.

My research involved young black African undergraduate students who make up a high percentage of students enrolled at the campus (shown later in a table found in chapter 3) and served the purpose of this study which was to understand how black African female undergraduate students give meaning to sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS on the

implication of gender, sexuality and the HIV and AIDS epidemic in higher education institutions in South Africa are significant concerns of this study.

My personal interest in this research project was motivated by my own experience as a student at university where I often asked myself what makes a woman powerful – is it her academic worth or economic independence or merely the ability to be sexually attractive to the opposite sex and more so why I and many of my peers became pregnant while knowing the consequences of risky sexual behaviour. During secondary school we received many talks and much information regarding sex and the consequences of unsafe sex; my mother also spoke openly about sex to my sisters and me, however as a 19- year old I threw all caution to the wind and sometimes had unprotected sex with my boyfriend who I deeply loved. The intimacy we shared was a form of solace and escape from the troubled childhood we shared.

Perhaps one of the several reasons for my troubled childhood resulted from having an irresponsible father. I was raised in Chatsworth, an area in Durban designated by the apartheid government for Indian families. Certain areas in this community became a breeding ground for poverty, drugs and violence, such as area was Croftdene or Unit 5 as it was commonly known during apartheid. My father grew up in this drug infested environment; he dropped out of school while he was in primary school because his family was extremely poor. When I was born my father tried to provide for my mother and me by selling newspapers. However he succumbed to his need to give me the best and he started selling drugs. A short while after doing so, my father got an eagerly awaited job in Durban Corporation. However by then although my father was no longer selling drugs, he was using drugs and by the time I was five years old he was a drug addict. This affected his work tremendously and after several warnings my father lost his job when I was 11 years old.

From then onwards life became increasingly harder. My mother struggled to provide for three children on her own. My father was in and out of jail or work. He was the best father when he was sober- he cooked, cleaned and took care of my sisters and I while my mum worked long hours and weekends but when he was under the influence of drugs he was almost like a monster and a terrible burden. He sometimes beat my mother and stole her money or anything of value he could find in our home. We moved around from place to place because my mother was always looking for a cheaper place to rent. I resented my father, because my

mother blamed him for every setback and more because I compared him to other fathers, and being the eldest, I felt I had to take his place as protector and provider when I finish school.

My mother put tremendous pressures on me to succeed and she was very controlling of me. She was a loving mother who tried her best and smothered us with love but she was always unhappy and miserable with my father. On my fifteenth birthday my mother divorced my father but he continued living with us because he refused to leave. I sometimes judged my mother as weak and I vowed never to be like her. I couldn't understand my parents, I loved them so much but at times I couldn't wait to get away from my father.

I started dating my boyfriend, who is my husband, from grade ten. I defied my father who did not want my sisters or me to date while we were at school. I felt that he couldn't stop me from doing what I wanted because I was always a good child and that was something he didn't deserve. I felt happy, wanted and special as the relationship progressed into my twelfth grade. My boyfriend bought me beautiful gifts and I felt appreciated and even more loved. I suddenly felt important and popular because all the other girls would wait to see what I received for Valentine's Day or my birthday more than to see what their own boyfriends bought them. The gifts were not the reason I stayed in the relationship it was just a part of the beauty and excitement of it to me at that time (for up until today thankfully my husband still showers me with the most thoughtful and beautiful gifts which I appreciate ever more because I can buy them myself but he still remains unselfish to me).

Then my experience of being a young women having just finished school was one of freedom. At eighteen years old I was living independently away from home and was earning a steady salary. I had to find employment so that I could assist my parents and pay for my own studies. There was a feeling of inadequacy within me because I felt that I wanted to be appreciated for who I was rather than for what I could offer. I felt very misunderstood and I wanted someone who could spend time with me and value me as a person. I was disillusioned by my own selfish need to get away from all the family responsibilities and endless dissatisfaction I felt toward my father.

I used that deep saturating feeling of happiness love provides to forget all my troubles; I did not identify how I was freely exuding sexual agency in a harmful or risky manner both to me and my partner. When I became pregnant my mother blamed my father because she felt that he wasn't a leader in our home who we could look up to or fear as she hoped.



I learnt from an early age and also by indoctrination by my mother that as a woman you are nothing in this world unless you are educated and financially independent. I could see that my mother could not easily leave my father because she had three children to care for and she did not have a well paying job. I always kept that in my mind and so I never planned to have any more children because deep down inside me I felt that if things didn't work out between my husband and myself, I could easily leave with one child rather than two or three. Power, in my own relationship, suddenly meant financial independence and having my own career in my own relationship especially when I had a child, and whilst at university, I wondered if it was that same for other female students. My husband showed me that I could trust him and that whatever was his was mine; and I had to have a reciprocal attitude, not only materially: he was a good father who would share the duties of having more children so I wouldn't have to carry any fears of having more children. I dealt with many issues both within me and with others and I have overcome many insecurities and obstacles but I still do not have a desire to have any more children, not because I do not love kids but because I never want to feel inadequate, or vulnerable and alone as my mother did with three children. Perhaps this means I still perform agency as a wife. Some things remain deeply imbedded within me.

For many years I also blamed my father for everything that did not go right in my life until I really reflected deeply and decided to forgive him and move on because I needed to be happy for myself and my family. Today my dad is completely changed and I believe he did because although my mother, sisters and I battled with personal afflictions we had unwavering faith in our personal saviour. This change impacted positively on my family. I know that if my mother didn't push education onto my sisters and I we wouldn't be where we are today so I am ever so thankful to her for that. This research study prompted self reflection; for me for I never thought deeply about my actions as a youth and even adult until engaging with this project and studying Gender Education itself.

This opportunity to reflect deeply within myself enhances my ongoing vow to be a good mother and teacher because I can understand how some young women may feel in relationships or the challenges they may face in their upbringing and possibly provide advice or encouragement to them. With my own daughter I strive to give her the best life and opportunities she deserves while trying to be an excellent example to her as a mother and woman. At some times I could identify with my participants in a meaningful way especially

when they identify reasons female students have intimate relationships. In sharing my own personal story I remain and show commitment to my study and my participants.

Thus, the personal is political as many feminists would argue. My study is thus not judging undergraduate female students but trying to understand what meanings they give to sexuality, how it is embedded within gender relations and gender inequalities and how we might begin to interrupt the processes that lead to sexual vulnerabilities including unwanted pregnancy and risk to HIV.

### **1.7 Theory underpinning this study: Gender power relations and Sexuality**

This study was drawn from the theoretical framework of two theorists who focus on gender, sexuality and feminism:

Gender power relations theories are the “approach that gives a central place to the patterned relations between women and men (and among women and among men)” (Connell, 2012, p.1967) that composes gender as a social structure. This theory usually understands gender as operating concurrently at personal, interpersonal, and society-wide levels multi-dimensionally and influenced by economic relations, power relations, and affective relations (Connell, 2012, p.1967).

According to Butler (1990) sexuality is an area in our lives where the meanings we have created are often permeated with value. The meanings attached are “moral meanings” which then tell us how we ought to think and behave deriving from within the social and economic structure of the society we live in. Butler (1990) argues that society is one divided by several power inequalities that undermine sexuality. According to Butler (1990) sexuality is an area in our lives where the meanings we have created are often permeated with value. The meanings attached are “moral meanings” which then tell us how we ought to think and behave deriving from within the social and economic structure of the society we live in.

There are many perspectives deriving from feminism but according to Villanueva (1997) the feminist perspective documents inequalities and powerlessness of women but also goes

beyond to discuss the “contradicting messages about women's roles, the ways in which oppression is hidden, and how women fight, conform, or even collude with their oppression”.

## **1.8 Brief outline of Chapters**

In chapter one – (this introductory chapter), an outline of the background, focus, aims and objectives of this study were provided. I listed the key research questions framing this study and provide an in-depth discussion examining why I chose African female students as my sample and my own personal interest in this research study was given as well and, finally, the theories underpinning this study were provided.

Chapter two presents relevant review and discussions on literature from scholarly works on young women's sexualities, gender and HIV and AIDS and the diverse university cultures found at higher education institutions both nationally and globally. This chapter identifies and is presented in the form of broad themes which are derived from issues on gender, sexuality, HIV and university cultures in South Africa. Within this chapter a discussion on the theoretical frameworks will also be provided. The theoretical frameworks were used as lenses through which I analysed and interpreted the data produced in this study.

Chapter three provides an in-depth discussion and description of the research design suitable for this study. A qualitative research approach, interpretivist paradigm, research site, purposive sampling method as well interviewing technique (semi-structured individual interview) is explored in this chapter. A brief description of each participant, obtained before each interview is provided; and the data collection and actual interview process are also described. Limitations of this research, issues of validity and reliability, ethical considerations and the data analysis process are also presented and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents an in-depth discussion of the main focus of this research derived from didactic dialogues of the participants. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the understandings, meanings, knowledge and attitudes of the selected group of black African female undergraduate university students with regard to sexualities and risk taking in the context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa.

Chapter 5 is the concluding chapter of this dissertation. This concluding chapter presents a summary of the content of each chapter mentioned above. It then goes on to provide a summing up of the main findings of this research and makes tentative recommendations based on the findings of this study, in an attempt to raise greater awareness on issues regarding gender inequalities, vulnerabilities and risk taking amongst female students at higher education institutions in South Africa.

The next chapter is Chapter two which presents literature and the two theories that are used as a framework for this study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

How do a selected group of undergraduate female students in the School of Education give meaning to sexuality and what are the implications thereof? This is the central question in this study. The study seeks to understand how black African female undergraduate students give meaning to sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS and the implications for intervening in reducing risk and addressing safer sexualities within higher education institutions in South Africa. In the context of HIV and AIDS, unintended pregnancy and sexual coercion the examination of undergraduate female students remains important.

There is a profound growth in the amount of research being produced on risky sexual behaviours and implications of sexuality of young women and its impact HIV and AIDS both globally and throughout Africa in higher education institutions (Ergen, Cok, Turner and Unal, 2005; Gukurume, 2011; Masvawure, 2010; Wamoyi, Wight, Plummer, Mashana and Ross, 2010; McManus and Dhar, 2008; Hoque, 2011; Adefye, Abiona, Balogun and Durrell, 2009; Regassa and Kedir, 2011). However there is a dearth in the amount of research being produced on the how young women in South African higher education institutions give meaning to sexuality and why they may engage in risky sexual behaviour and the implications thereof (Mutinta, Govender, Gow and George, 2012).

This section explores literature related to the topic of this study. The rationale of this literature review is to present an overview of noteworthy literature published on the topic being explored which provides a framework to establish the importance of this study (Mattern, 2008). The first part of this chapter focuses on literature and the next section on theories. I have categorised relevant literature under several broad headings/themes on which include:

- Gender, HIV and South Africa
- Gender, sexuality and university cultures in South Africa

- Gender and risky sexual vulnerabilities faced by young women
- Gendered power relations and inequalities.

The above broad headings may be divided into further sub headings to include other relevant literature. This chapter also provides a discussion on the theoretical framework that will be used as lenses through which I analysed and interpreted the data produced in this study.

## **2.2 Gender, HIV and South Africa**

According to Gupta, Ogden and Warner (2011, p.370) “gender refers to the” commonly shared assumptions “and norms within a society about appropriate male and female behaviour, characteristics, and stereotypical roles”. In any given society, gender is often one of the foundations upon which power, privilege and status are bestowed, “engendering inexorable “and insidious inequalities between women and men” (Gupta, *et al.*, 2011, p.370). Furthermore Dowsett (2003, p.20) claims that “in most societies, gender relations are characterized by an unequal balance of power”, for example when men have a greater amount of access than women to education or possessions such as land and credit. The unequal balance of power between men and women regarding gender and sexuality is thereby reinforced by disproportions in their economic and social areas of life.

According to Gupta, *et al.*, (2011, p.371) it is commonly established that gender inequalities play a pivotal role in HIV epidemics in some settings notably in parts of southern and eastern Africa and parts of Asia, including India as they “reduce women’s ability to decide the outcomes and positions of sexual encounters and relationships”. According to Dowsett (2003, p.21) gender has become a key “conceptual tool for understanding the evolving HIV pandemic globally”. As such, it has offered a powerful way to see the constructions of relations between men and women as fundamental to various epidemics. As a consequence, it is more likely that more men are able “to initiate and control sexual interactions and decision making, than women which has implications for women’s vulnerability to HIV infection” (Dowsett, 2003, p.21).

HIV and AIDS has been devastating individuals and families with the misfortune of medical, financial and social burdens as well as untimely death resulting in the creation of more orphans for nearly three decades (UNICEF, 2010). A changing pattern of male and female

infections across the world has been occurring (UNICEF, 2010). Previously rigorous focus in earlier cases in many countries were concerned with male homosexuals and intravenous drug users, but as the epidemic has increased there has been a gradual shift towards increasing infection rates among women (Matlin and Spence, 2000).

Today, worldwide, the reality that is created is that more women than men are now dying of HIV and AIDS. Young women in sub-Saharan Africa are at very high risk of HIV infection. According to Pettifor, MacPhail, Anderson and Maman (2012, p.477) “young women aged 15–24 years are 2–3 times more likely to be infected with HIV compared to their male counterparts”. Hallman (2008, p.36) claims that in sub-Saharan Africa “75 per cent of young people living with HIV are female” and in a populace based focus study “from seven countries in this region indicated that young females are 2.7 times more likely to be living with HIV than their same – age male peers”.

South Africa is among the highest HIV prevalence in the world. According to Harrison, Smit, Hoffman, Nzama, Leu, Mantell, Stein and Exner (2012) some of the highest HIV infection levels internationally are experienced by young South Africans “with young women” to a great extent affected. According to Hallman (2005, p.37), a national population-based survey of youth HIV occurrence and risk behaviours in South Africa found that “10% of young people are living with HIV, and that for every 15- to 24-year-old male there are more than three females the same age living with HIV”. Moreover of the five million people roughly estimated to be infected with HIV in South Africa, over half this amount become infected before the age of 25 years (HSRC, 2009). There are prominent age and gender discrepancies, as guesstimates in a population-based household surveys suggest that HIV prevalence remains “disproportionately high” for females in comparison to males (HSRC, 2009). According to Luseno and Wechsberg (2009, p.178) the HIV and AIDS epidemic continues to increase in South Africa “where between 4.9 and 6.1 million people are infected. HIV prevalence among pregnant women is 30% and prevalence rates among young females of childbearing age are up to four times higher than among their male counterparts”. Moreover according to Dowsett (2003, p.22) women are becoming infected at faster rates than men in many countries and regions which may be due to “biology in part” because women can become more easily infected during vaginal intercourse than men.

Since the onset of South Africa's severe HIV epidemic in the 1990s, Harrison, *et al.*, 2012 assert that KwaZulu-Natal has frequently been acknowledged as the country's uppermost "HIV prevalence, with 15.3% of youth aged 15–24 HIV infected, and over 40% of pregnant women aged 20–24". As well as women making up the higher infection rate of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in South Africa statistically black African females make up a higher percentage of women living with HIV in South Africa. Therefore this research project will focus on black African females from Kwa-Zulu Natal since it is estimated that in Kwa-Zulu Natal "15.64 per cent of black African females were likely to be HIV positive" within the age group 15-19 compared to females of "other race groups in that age group and infections were greater than males of the same and other race groups" (Gilbert and Selikow, 2012). According to Statistics South Africa (2012) Kwa-Zulu Natal has the "second highest provincial population and is one of the poorest in the country". Hunter (2007) indicates that HIV prevalence in informal settlements in South Africa is almost twice as high as estimated levels of prevalence in urban and rural areas. According to Kikuchi, Wakasugi, Poudel, Sakisaka and Jimba (2011, p.225) where admission to learning and information is often insufficient, levels of "literacy inferiority, and poverty" is more widespread, young women living in poverty, or facing the threat of poverty, may be particularly vulnerable to "sexual exploitation through the need to trade or sell sex in order to survive".

Scholars have argued that gender inequalities, "pervasive poverty" and other forms of structural disparities intensify risk of disease infection. Dowsett (2003, p.23) also maintains that infection rates among women are higher than men due to "structural causes" in society whereby in particular instances women's almost unequal access to economic and social power. Dowsett (2003) argues that these "structural analyses" of gender are decisive in understanding the growing epidemic. The AIDS's epidemic has had a unique impact on women particularly on women from marginalised and or previously disadvantaged societies in South Africa. According to Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna and Shai, (2010) a longitudinal study of young black women in rural South Africa found that those young women with low relationship power equity such as education and financial independence were "1.5 times more likely to" become infected with HIV compared to young black females "with a higher equitable balance" in their relationship.

Shisana, *et al.*, (2010) claim that the HIV and AIDS epidemic in South Africa is regarded as being associated by gender inequalities. Gendered power inequalities within sexual



relationships have become recognized as a peril factor for HIV infection among young black women (Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, McIntyre and Harlow, 2004). In South Africa, gender discriminations have been related with unprotected sex and increased risk for HIV infection among women (Shefer, *et al.*, 2012).

Despite high HIV prevalence and high rates of sexual risk behaviours in South Africa and other Sub-Saharan African countries, “young people in these countries often perceive themselves as being impenetrable to the HIV infection” (Anderson, Beutal and Brown, 2007 p.98). One explanation for this as provided by Anderson, *et al.*, (2007, p.98) is that youth may be under the impression that they are invulnerable and so they underestimate the risks of sexual behaviours. Black African university students form an important constituency in interventions against the spread of HIV and AIDS. They can also be “identified as an interesting target group” since many are educated about HIV and AIDS as well as the consequences of unprotected sex yet there is a dearth in research as to why they engage in risky sexual behaviour (Mutinta, *et al.*, 2012, p.353) in particular black African female students thus possibly further exacerbating the HIV and AIDS epidemic in South Africa.

Mutinta, *et al.*, (2012) claim that university students form part of the population of young adults who are at larger risk of acquiring HIV than the general public due to their greater levels of engaging in sexual experimentation and risky practises. In global studies there is a significant amount of college students affected by HIV as according to Younge, Smith, Young, Cole, *et al.*, (2009) one of the leading causes of death among blacks aged 25-44 is from HIV and Aids and it is likely that many of these individuals contracted HIV while they were at college. According to Adefye, *et al.*, (2009) of the 18 million students enrolled in universities in 2006 in the USA, 1 out of every 500 students were infected with HIV and the “HIV and AIDS cases may be higher among African American college students due to the high prevalence of HIV infection among young African Americans in the general population”. Adefye, *et al.*, (2009) claim that there is escalating rates of HIV infection for African American men attending colleges and universities due to the college environment contributing to immense opportunity to freely engaging in high-risk behaviours, including unsafe sex while African American women, “who form the highest rate of new infections”, are likely to be infected while in college.

Shefer, *et al.*, (2012) argues that studies on university students in South Africa regarding their normative sexual practices are essential in changing behavioural patterns contributing to high HIV prevalence in South Africa in particular black African women who are the most at risk population with “32.7 percent HIV prevalence” between the ages 20-34 years old.

### **2.3 Gender, sexuality and university cultures in South Africa**

Although sexuality is a “central aspect of being human and is experienced and expressed” through thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, relationships and behaviours; sexuality is not always “experienced or expressed since sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors” (WHO, 2002). According to Hoque (2011, p.2) university students are at a stage in their lives “characterised by searching, discovery, and experimentation, including sexual experimentation”. They live and interact with large numbers of other young adults, which “encourages sexual activities that are not mutually monogamous” (Hoque, 2011, p.2). Ergen, *et al.*, (2005, p.269) argue that university students are of a higher risk for HIV and AIDS for a number of reasons mainly due to their moving “away from their families and enter a developmental stage where experimentation and risk taking with an assortment of diverse sexual encounters and practices seem appealing” given the freedom they have to express their sexualities.

According to Mulwo, Tomaselli and Dalrymple (2009, p.311) campuses combine together in “physical proximity devoid of systematic supervision a large number of young adults at their peak years of sexual activity and experimentation. Combined with alcohol and drugs” which are easily accessible together with differing levels of economic wealth; “these circumstances create a very high-risk environment from an AIDS perspective” (Mulwo, *et al.*, 2009, p.311). According to Shefer, *et al.*, (2012) campuses are “sexualised spaces where peer pressure to be sexually active” is apparent and reportedly aggravated by “alcohol and other” substances to be sexually active. Peltzer and Ramlagan (2009) claim that there is a link between high levels of drinking amongst university students; in particular among female students; and risky sexual practises on campuses. According to HIV CDC (2012) “approximately 68,600” students between the ages 13-24 years were living with HIV infection in the United States end of 2008; of those nearly “60% did not know they were infected” and mainly provided

casual sex and use of drugs and alcohol for having unprotected sex. Lengwe (2009) found that the desire of some students to experiment with sex and drugs amounts to HIV risk behaviour. According to Marojele, Brook, Millicent and Kachieng (2006) peer influence to use drugs and alcohol were associated to the belief that these substances were important to facilitate sexual arousal.

More over Shefer, *et al.*, (2012) argues that there seems to be an increase in sexual activity in a “linear fashion” with student’s academic succession of studies as well as greater occurrences of unequal coercive and transactional practises amongst female students which play a role in unsafe sexual practises. Mulwo, *et al.*, (2009) found that after arriving at university with little funding female students might engage in transactional sex to meet their requirements for food and clothing. Peer pressure or peer influences is argued as the reason why female students may engage in risky sexual behaviour on campuses. Selikow, Ahmed, Flisher, Mathews and Mukoma (2009, p.109) claim that “girls put pressure on female peers and on boys to be sexually active” noting that their participants revealed that it is “fashionable to be sexually active and in circles of friendship where girls are sexually active the pressure to engage in “sex is intense” (Selikow, *et al.*, (2009, p.109). MacPhail and Campbell (2001, p.1620) assert that “young people tend to internalise the frequently negative attitudes their peers express” about sex and safe sex practises. In a study by Bell (2008) participants complained of the pressure from adults and older boys to be sexually active. In contrast to pressure by peers to be sexually active, Bell (2008, p.292) found that some girls did experience social exclusion from their peers if they were regarded to be sexually active and received much “harsher judgements” for this in relation to men.

However, Breier (2010) argues that students who previously lived with parents or guardians who had traditional attitudes or views regarding sex could be influenced to participate in sexual risk behaviour at university in an attempt to obtain their freedom. In addition, according to Mulwo, *et al.*, (2009, p.311) “residential universities are considered” empirical starting places “of new HIV infections”, due to the environment of “sexual networking that takes place among students” and it can be said that campuses could thus form a “potentially fertile breeding ground” for HIV and AIDS. For these reason, according to Hoque (2011) university students are reportedly taking on “unsafe sex, which places them at ever-increasing risk than the general public to contract STIs, including HIV and AIDS, as well as unplanned pregnancies”.

Mutinta, *et al.*, (2012, p. 353) claim that “it is estimated that more than 300 000 university students in southern Africa are infected with HIV, and that 15%” will experience unwanted pregnancies during their studies while an estimated “60%” of unplanned pregnancies around the world occurs among university students (UNAIDS, 2008). Moreover after evaluating research conducted across seven case studies of African universities and the impact of HIV and AIDS on higher institutions, Wyk and Pieterse (2006) found that there is an ignorance surrounding the presence of the HIV and AIDS in those higher education institutions.

Students in higher education institutions are an important community in interventions against HIV and AIDS. The majority of higher education students are between ages 18 and 30 years which is the age category reported in studies by researchers mentioned above as being at the highest risk of HIV infection. This is consistent with studies of students in universities in South Africa who engage in unsafe sexual behavioural practices providing reasons such sex with unfamiliar persons, inconsistent use of condoms, an increased average number of partners, negative views about condom use, and misuse of various alcohol or drug related substances (Hoque, 2011). Moreover Hoffman, O’Sullivan, Haarison, Dolezal and Monroe-Wise, (2006) state that due to the enormous worldwide growth of heterosexuality transmitted HIV infection among adolescents and young adults, and the overwhelming vulnerability of young women has initiated studies of the way gender relations influence sexual risk in diverse cultural settings.

The prevalence of sexual risk behaviour among students at South African universities was “estimated at 68%” among those reporting to be in heterosexual relationships (HEAIDS, 2010). The sexual risk behaviours identified include having “multiple and concomitant sexual partners, non-use of condoms and casual sex” (Mutinta, *et al.*, 2012, p. 353). HIV infection is widespread and behaviour that makes students vulnerable to HIV takes place on all campuses in South Africa (Mulwo, *et al.*, 2009). Sex education initiatives provided by universities tend to focus on the factual information of sexual risks rather than discussing attitudes and behaviours surrounding sexual risks thereby possibly further increasing HIV prevalence on campuses (Shefer, *et al.*, 2012).

#### **2.4 Gender and risky sexual vulnerabilities faced by young women**

Hoffman *et al.*, (2006, p.52) claim that in South Africa as elsewhere, “sexual risk behaviour is situated in the context of differing degrees of power within relationships and gender –

differentiated norms for sexual behaviour”. There are inconsistent degrees of power within relationships and sexual risk taking may or may not expose women to some vulnerabilities such as sexually transmitted diseases and infections, unintended pregnancies, physical and emotional abuse or trauma, stigmatization or ridicule from society/peers or family.

Sexual risky behaviours maybe defined as sexual activities that may expose an individual to the risk of infection with HIV and other STIs. These include unprotected sex, an early sexual beginning, multiple sexual partners, forced or coerced sexual intercourse for reward and taking alcohol or drugs before sexual intercourse, According to Hoque (2011, p.2) poverty and a lack of knowledge about HIV and AIDS have been recognized as risk factors that increase the chances of young people engaging in risky sexual behaviour. When an individual who does not know his or her HIV status, engages in unprotected sex with a partner whose HIV status is also unknown, “that individual also takes the risk of being infected or infecting the partner” (Hoque, 2011, p.2).

According to Gupta, *et al.*, (2011, p.372) past “research in parts of sub-Saharan Africa show that women’s economic vulnerability and their dependency on men for economic security make it less likely that they will succeed in negotiating condom use or fidelity with a non-monogamous partner”. Furthermore Bodibe (2010) argues that female students in universities find relationships that can “support their material needs” which can incline them to high- risk sexual relationships or sexual behaviours with partners where they do not have “much capacity to insist on condom use”. Hoffman, *et al.*, (2006) claims that the conditions and timing of intercourse are defined by men, who frequently use coercive tactics to maintain “control” thereby could be a result of female students engaging in unprotected sex and engage in risky sexual behaviour.

These inequalities “also make it less likely that women will leave a relationship that they understand to be risky because they lack negotiating power and fear abandonment and impoverishment” (Gupta, *et al.*, 2011, p.372). However a study by Mutinta, *et al.*, (2012, p.354) found that the majority of students engaged in non condom use “because they professed themselves” as not of risk of becoming infected with HIV but instead they “believed that HIV was largely a problem for people” who were not students and living outside the university. Non condom use in sexual relationships may result in unintended pregnancies and abortions.

Unintended pregnancy is a sexual vulnerability faced by students. Unintended pregnancy is an indication of unprotected sex which is a possible means to acquire sexually transmitted diseases. According to Harrison, *et al.*, (2012), about one-third of women experience a first birth by age 19 in South Africa. Most commonly entry age into higher education institutions in South Africa begin at age 18 therefore young women in higher education institutions may make up part of the above percentage. Vermaas (2011) claims that student pregnancies at tertiary institutions are increasing every year despite the assumption that students have adequate knowledge of the risks of unprotected sex. At Tshwane University of Technology Vermaas (2011) claims that the number of students who have sought help as a result of unplanned pregnancies and abortion or post-abortion stress has “amplified by approximately 250% from 2005”. According to Hoque (2011, p.2) young women may be compelled by an unintended pregnancy to face a complex abortion decision and discusses how studies have revealed that “women who undergo induced abortion were below the age of 30 years” and many of them had an above-secondary level education.

Stereotypical roles of gender and sexuality also render young women vulnerable and at a higher risk of HIV infection. Young women in many parts of the developing world have little control over how, when and where sex takes place. There are also strong cultural and religious beliefs in many parts of the world which emphasize the virginity of females. In some contexts, young women still place themselves in a vulnerable position to sexual infection when they “may engage in risky sexual practices, such as anal sex, as means of protecting their virginity” (Reddy and Dunne, 2007).

Maharaj and Cleland (2008) claim “that race, class and gender are intertwined - structural features through which power relations are produced to contour the subordinate status of women”. Mudaly (2012) uses a “cultural lens” to explore what it means to be an black African girl and to shed light on their femininity which she has found to be linked cultural practises such as virginity testing. This is very important as this study focuses on black African females. Leclerc- Madladla (2003) claim that increase in virginity testing among black African women in the last fifteen years is linked to communities beliefs that the ‘moral transgression’ of African girls is evident in teenage pregnancies and HIV prevalence. Mudaly (2012) maintains that virginity of girls is said to bring higher status to a family and that in the black African culture traditionally women are expected to be silent about sexual decision

making and required to respect men of all ages. Virginity testing is said to generate stigmas such as shame if girls are not virgins and subordinations of black African females (Mudaly, 2012). According to Reddy and Dunne (2007) there is also a notion that young women should be innocent about issues regarding their sexuality and sexual matters. Sexually active women are encouraged “to be ignorant” about sex” and should not “openly discuss” sex with their partners for fear that their partners may believe that they are acquiring sexual experiences or ideas from another partner. According to Balmer, Gikundi, Billingsley, Kihuhho, Kimani, Wangandu and Nijoroge (1997) in Kenya a study revealed that young women felt that they did not have control over their sexuality – rather girls realised that sex was something that happened to them. It was not something they could or should initiate or “actively” contribute to.

Moreover, Mudaly (2012, p.229) argues that “prevailing dogma’s” of femininity in black African culture promote lack of knowledge, inexperience and virginity, while in contrast to this black African masculinity involves the encouragement of boys and men to freely express their sexuality. According to Russell, Cupp, Jewkes, Gevers, Mathews, Lefluer- Bellerose and Small (2013) African masculinity is encouraged by dominant versions such as when young men to seek sexual experience with a variety of partners.

However sexualities “are not just about domination, danger and disease, but also about affect and ideals of love” (Vance, 1984) whereby many young women associate sex in a relationship with love while young men may regard sex in a relationship as a women’s way to prove her love to him. Dowsett (2003, p.21) claims that those different views of men and women regarding motivation for sexual relations between men and women are more “profound than we realise” and have consequences for how we understand HIV infection rates. Dowsett (2003, p.21) further attains that gender is a social structure that “dominates the HIV pandemic”. Herein it becomes important to understand how female students in higher education institutions give meanings to gender and sexuality regarding sexual risks such as HIV.

## **2.5 Gendered power relations and inequalities**

According to Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe and Thomson (1990, p.339) “gendered power relations are dynamic in constructing sexual interaction”. Gender is socially constructed and “consequently expectations of how women and men should behave are structured by cultures, societies and religions and may influence the way in which sexual interactions are negotiated” and inequalities are sustained (Mantell, 2009, p. 140). According to Hoffman, *et al.*, (2006, p.52) in South Africa recent investigations “addressing gender, relationship dynamics and behavioural risks for HIV describe a pattern in which male - subjugated constructions of sexuality succeed where men characteristically push for intercourse to occur early in the relationship as proof of a woman’s love”.

Gupta, *et al.*, (2011, p. 372) state that gender inequality is “generated and sustained in part by social norms prescribing culturally appropriate roles and norms for men and women, boys and girls, in any given society”. In some cultural settings gender norms includes tolerance of violence towards women and promotes or condone, multiple sexual partners for men; both constitutes known risk factors for HIV. The limited decision-making power young women experience in their relationships can result in their “inability to use condoms with male partners or to refuse unwanted sexual encounters” (Gupta, *et al.*, 2011, p.373).

According to studies by Pettifor, *et al.*, (2012) “financial independence” was mentioned by many women as something that gives women power and a few women gave examples of African female role models who were financially independent and in positions of power. Women equated working and having their own money with being able to make their own decisions, challenge their partners if they disagree and to leave relationships that were less than desirable and that they might otherwise have felt trapped in due to being financially dependent on a partner (Pettifor, *et al.*, 2012). A number of women also gave examples of being able to say no to unwanted sexual advances and to leave abusive relationships as signs of women having power (Pettifor, *et al.*, 2012).

A study in Haiti likewise showed poverty as strongly correlating with HIV status (Fawzi, Lambert, Boehim, Finkelstein, Singler, Le’andre, Nevil, Bertrand, Claude, Bertrand, Louissaint, Jeannis, Farmer, Yang and Mukherjee , 2010). This study showed that women who spent “most or all of their income on food were more than two times more likely than others to be living with HIV”. Women’s lack of access to and control over economic assets,



such as land and housing, make them “particularly vulnerable” in the AIDS epidemic. It has been known “anecdotally for many years that control over land and housing can give women greater bargaining power within households, which may translate into greater leverage to negotiate HIV prevention behaviours” (Strickland 2004, Fawzi, *et al.*, 2010). Gupta, *et al.*, (2011, p.373) asserts that ownership of “land and housing in some circumstances also may protect women against the risk of domestic violence” thereby indirectly reducing vulnerability to HIV, unplanned pregnancies and sexual coercion.

The next theme intersects with the vulnerabilities that young women are faced with.

### **2.5.1 Gendered power relations and inequalities - Sexual Coercion**

Hallman (2005, p.39) claims that there is substantial evidence that of a “large proportion of first female sexual encounters that are unwanted or forced”. Furthermore studies in South Africa found that “12% of 15–19 year-old women and 14% of 20–24 year-old women reported they had been abused by a partner at some point in their lives; about 5% of women in both age groups reported having been raped” (Hallman, 2005, p. 39). In 2007 a female student was raped at a university residence in Kwa- Zulu Natal. According to Tolsi (2007) “although the 21 year old female student was raped this is not the first incident at the campus”. Then this year March 2013 a 24 year old medical student – Xolisile Mabele was raped and murdered in her room on campus residence. According to Makhaye (2013) “the suspect and the victim had dated before. It was not known how the suspect managed to enter Mabele’s room”.

Furthermore according to Hoffman, *et al.*, (2006, p.52) “in the views of both men and women, sexual intercourse is an integral component of romantic relationships, and men typically press for intercourse to occur early in the relationship as proof of the woman’s love”. Hoffman, *et al.*, (2006, p.52) claim that “young men endorse a right to unrestricted access to their partners’ bodies”. There has found to be a lesser amount in the communication about sexual activity within relationships and the conditions and of intercourse which are defined by men, who frequently use coercive tactics to maintain control (Hoffman, *et al.*, 2006, p.52).

Furthermore according to Jewkes, Sekweyiya, Morrell and Dunkle (2011) many young women had been coerced into sex after making verbal resistance and some have also reported to have felt intimidation and submitted to the demands when assault was threatened or carried out. Wood, Maforah and Jewkes (1998, p. 236) assert that young women who lacked knowledge about sex and experienced lack of input on sexual matters from experienced female peers created a “creation of space where male definitions could have been challenged” and thereby reinforced male dominations in the area of sex and sexuality.

South Africa has one of the highest rates of rape reported to the police in the world and the largest number of people living with HIV and the rate of rape perpetration is not known because only a small proportion of rapes are reported to the police. (Jewkes, *et al.*, 2011). There is considerable concern about the links between these two problems (Jewkes, *et al.*, 2011). HIV can be transmitted by the occurrence of rape and this complex the “human rights violation of the rape”. According to Jewkes, *et al.*, (2011) research has established that men who rape and are physically violent towards their partners are at likely to engage in sexual risk taking than other men and this has raised a concern that they are “more likely” to be infected with HIV.

South Africa also has one of the “highest rates of violence against women globally, with over 53 008 cases of rape reported to police in 2000 and 123 women reporting rape” (Strebel, Crawford, Shefer, Cloete, Henda, Kaufman, Simbayi, Magome and Kalichmans (2006, p.516). Culturally endorsed “gender roles are closely connected with both gender-based violence and HIV risk and in some instances virtually all cultures allocate more power and higher status to men” (Strebel, *et al.*, 2006, p. 516). According to Hoque (2011, p.3) in South Africa, “1.5% of adult women reported to have been raped before the age of 15, and another study reported in 2003 that 15% of South African rape victims were less than 12 years old”. Similarly, a study conducted in Thailand, indicated that Thai male adolescents felt that girls’ refusal to have sex was an expression of “playing ‘hard to get’, and not that they did not want sex and almost half of Thai adolescents reported engaging in some form of sexual violence, and 5% had raped their girlfriends and performed anal sex” (Hoque, 2011, p.3).

A national survey of young South African women aged 15–24 also found that those with less decision making power in their relationships, or those who have been forced to have sex by a partner, were considerably “less likely to use condoms” time after time in comparison to

young who had not experienced forced sex (Pettifor, *et al.*, 2004, p.478). Investigations in South Africa addressing “gender, relationship dynamics, and behavioural risks for HIV; describe a pattern in which male-dominated constructions of sexuality prevail” (Hoffman, *et al.*, 2006). In student relationships the use of condoms is sometimes denied or limited because it is believed to “imply infidelity and lack of trust in a relationship, constrain male prerogatives, and prevent desired pregnancies” (Shefer, *et al.*, 2012, p.439). Whereas some young women may express a desire for their partners to use condoms, they view this behaviour as lying within “men’s control, not as one that they could request or negotiate” therefore the “ubiquity of sexual coercion within their own relationships and those of their peers appears to reinforce women’s views that these practices reflect accepted norms” (Hoffman, 2006, p.53).

Mutinta, *et al.*, (2012) assert that the HIV and AIDS epidemic is further entrenched by gender inequalities faced by young women when older men seek partners who are less likely to be sexually experienced in their eyes and when young women enter into these sexual relationships for example to pay for university fees or books. Young women in relationships with older partners are risky because the latter often have a history of several relationships (Mutinta, *et al.*, 2012). Negotiating safe sex practices has weakened, and exchanging money or gifts for sex further amplifies the possibility of more coercive sex. In South Africa, girls “aged 15–19 years reported that they have had five partners” and some of these partners were 10 years or older than the girls (Hoque, 2011, p.3).

In contrast, research also indicates that females are not always passive participants in seemingly unequal sexual relationships but in fact exercise agency (Bell, 2012; Bhana & Pattman, 2011; Mudaly, 2012). According to Petesch, Smulovitz and Walton (2005), agency refers to a process whereby individuals are able to predict different paths of action decide among them and take action along a chosen route. In a study conducted by Mudaly (2012) young black African females expressed sexual agency by revealing that they enjoyed having multiple partners and engaged in sex with or without condoms for the “fun” of it. Some studies reveal how many young women and girls “often use sexual relationships to improve their own financial situations by engaging in transactional sex with older men or ‘sugar daddies’” thereby exercising their own sexual agency (Bell, 2012; Lerclerc-Madlala, 2003).

### **2.5.2 Gendered power relations and inequalities - Transactional Sex**

Transactional sex is open to multiple definitions, and many authors fail to specifically define it. A definition provided by Jewkes, *et al.*, (2012) is sex that is “predicated on actual or anticipated material gain (instrumental support such as transportation or a place to sleep, material goods or cash)”. Transactional sex and relationships are often cited to demonstrate that the “commodification and instrumental use of sex which is becoming culturally accepted in modern day South Africa” in comparison to some European and higher earning countries (Jewkes, *et al.*, 2012).

According to Jewkes, *et al.*, (2012) in “high income countries”, there are traditionally sexual encounters in which sex is exchanged for material reward while recent research from the United States suggests that materially “motivated relationships and transactional sex are in fact common and reported by one in three unmarried US women” but the “social stigma surrounding disclosure of such relationships is much more pronounced than in Southern Africa” (Jewkes, *et al.*, 2012). For example transactional sex according to Bandali (2011, p.5) or the exchange of sex for resources by students, has become a “tolerated practice” in Northern Mozambique.

According to Bandali, (2011, p.5) women in Mozambique and other sub-Saharan Africa countries use transactional sex as a “survival strategy therefore transactional sex is the underlying determinants of gender inequalities and poverty”. Transactional sex has also been viewed as a “product of dependency relationships prevalent throughout much of Africa” (Bandali, 2011, p.5). In Mozambique and elsewhere, transactional sex maybe used by some students as an “opportunity to finish their education, gain freedom and economic independence or achieve greater social status” (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003). According to Hallman (2008, p.37) poverty and the need for cash increase “young women” and mother’s “to turn to” transactional sex and claims that “transactional sex is the most crucial and poorly understood factor fuelling the spread of HIV and that gendered material inequalities provide the basis for such transactions”.

Regardless of the “rationale for engaging in the practice, transactional sex is viewed as a means through which economic dependency” and control over women are sustained” and the prerequisite of resources provided to women is often used by men to “signify their power and

wealth which they also perceive as necessary in attracting the sexual partners” they desire (Bandali, 2011 p.575).

In South Africa, there is an inconsistency regarding the views on commoditisation of sex. Some see ‘*ilobolo*’ (bride price) and cultural practices of widow inheritance as “normalising the commoditisation of sex”, but this interpretation of black African tradition is often challenged as normative cultural and traditional practices (Jewkes, *et al.*, 2012, p.325). It is “also at conflict with a common discourse rooted in Christian-influenced morality which emphasises” committed non sexual relationships before marriage (Jewkes, *et al.*, 2012, p.327). However South Africa is a multi-racial, complex, and multi-cultural country so there are many differing views of what is transactional sex but commodity in exchange for sex is practised in South Africa.

According to Dunkle, *et al.*, (2004, p.1416) evidence shows that transactional sex is linked to undesirable sexual and reproductive health with outcomes such as “unintended pregnancy, abortion, violence, and HIV and STIs”. Transactional sex has been reported as “encouraging partner change since the amount given in the transaction tends to vary at different stages of a relationship, being highest at the start” (Wamoyi, 2011 p.5). For many poor people in developing countries especially women exchanging sex for money, goods and other services “is a way of life and survival” (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003).

According to Bodibe (2010) students who engage in sexual behaviours to support their material needs engage in what is known as “transactional sex” which is significantly becoming part of “campus culture”. Some female students may have funding for their studies and residence fees but with no other income can have very little funding remaining for food and clothing or other material needs and therefore may engage in transactional sex in return for their material needs being met. The ideas of masculinities are linked with the perception that the ‘man’ is the provider which can be reinforced by young women through transactional sex. There is also the concept of the “sugar daddy” phenomenon which is associated to transactional sex where young women develop and maintain relationships with older men who are married to gain material needs (Shefer, Clowes, and Vergani, 2012).

Masvawure (2010) provides detailed accounts of how consequences of socio-political and economic quandary “impacted on the livelihood of University of Zimbabwe (UZ) students”. Masvawure (2010) “noted that such stances ushered in a plethora of challenges to the UZ students to such an extent that most of the students either dropped out of school or were “reduced to lives of paupers and vagabonds on University campus”. According to Masvawure (2010) as a response to innumerable problems and “educational limitations, students adopted strategies that range from orthodox to unorthodox dealings” for them to deal with such livelihood misfortunes and in light of the above argument, transactional sex relationships have received a great momentum. Thus, due to such hardships transactional sex has emerged as an alternative livelihood to these university students and thus universities been labelled as ‘hotspots’ “for transactional sex and for the spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe” (Masvawure, 2010). According to Lerclerc- Madladla (2003) the role of money and material gifts in sexual relationships exchanges may pressure young women, in particular, into sexual relationships with risky partners and into having sex without condoms.

However, according to Masvawure (2011) young women and the men they date may use these relationships primarily to compete for “social status in their peer groups as well as to fashion themselves as high-status, successful modern subjects”. An ethnographic study by Leclerc-Medlala (2003) on the meanings and nature of transaction in sexual relationships among young women in urban South Africa, for example, “found that far from being a means for exploiting women, transactional sex can be an expression of empowerment for women” (Leclerc-Medlala, 2003). Receiving money or gifts from men in exchange for sex was expected by the women of this study as- “it was a symbol of a woman’s worth and/or an expression of a man’s love and appreciation”. These women felt that “because sex is valued by men, women should not give it away for free; men should express their appreciation by sharing their material resources” (Leclerc-Medlala, 2003). Money or gifts in exchange for sex are also a means of “acquiring status among their peers” (Gukurume, 2011). An “unfortunate irony” is that sometimes when women and girls believe themselves to empowered in such relationships they are, in fact placing themselves at greater risk of unplanned pregnancy other sexual infections therefore are disempowered (Gupta, *et al.*, 2012, p.376).

My literature review and theoretical framework found below will be used as a guide and lenses to analyse and interpret data gathered for the purpose of this study.

## 2.6 Theoretical framework/Conceptual framework

A theoretical framework is a “collection of interrelated concepts which guides in terms of determining what you will look for in your research study” Borgatti (1996, no page number). According to Borgatti (1996, no page number) it is impossible to for a human being not to have preconceived ideas or remain totally unbiased in a situation. Using different theories as my theoretical framework will help guide and be the lens in which my data can be interpreted. This study will draw from the theoretical framework of two theorists who focus on gender power relations and gender and sexuality:

### Gender relational power theories

I chose to use this Connell’s theory in an attempt to demonstrate and understand how accepted gender role norms encourage and privilege young men’s sexuality over young women’s. Gender relational power theories are the approach that gives a “central place to the patterned relations between women and men (and among women and among men)” (Connell, 2012, p.1967) that composes gender as a social structure. Gender relational theory usually understands gender as “*multidimensional: embracing at the same time economic relations, power relations, affective relations and symbolic relations; and operating simultaneously at intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional and society-wide levels*” (Connell, 2012, p.1967).

The construction of individual identity is “complex, fluid and changing” (Connell 2002). However, “there are undeniably dominant cultural constructions of what constitutes appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour, and these exert a strong influence on most young people” (Gilchrist and Sullivan, 2006, p. 196). According to Connell (2002), gender categories, “while not fixed by nature, are based on the patterns enacted in the politics, economics and mass-culture of contemporary society— what he refers to as the gender order”. Traditionally in this gender order women are expected to be “sexually passive and submissive in contrast to the ideal masculine role of independence, activity and sexual desire” (Gilchrist and Sullivan, 2006, p. 196). Connell (2012) categorises gender power relations by the following themes:

#### ❖ Social Power

According to Connell (1987, p.107) social power can be described as “the ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality and to assert hegemony”. Much of critical work has been devoted to contesting social power deriving from cultural powers for e.g. cultural definitions of women as being subservient to man.

### ❖ **Gender and Power Relations**

The social and economic developments creating world society “have been from the start gendered” (Connell, 2012, p.1679). In the past the work place was almost exclusively men and according to Connell (2012, p.1679) “colonialism in all parts of the world involved sexual exploitation of colonized women”. Colonial and post colonial societies produced new gender orders including new divisions of labour. According to Connell (2012, p.1966) “tension and turbulence is produced when economic and legal equality of men and women outstrips cultural constructions of masculinity” which for example can be the reason for sexual violence and abuse in relationships.

### ❖ **Social embodiment**

According to Connell (2012, p.1677) at the “centre of patriarchal gender orders, is the institutionalized control of women’s reproductive capacities by men”. Attempts by groups of women to break this control have led to some struggles in global development, over abortion rights, contraception, and “technocratic” policymaking regarding women’s rights to freely negotiate condom use. There are many perspectives deriving from feminism but according to Villanueva (1997) the feminist perspective documents inequalities and powerlessness of women but also goes beyond to discuss the “contradicting messages about women’s roles, the ways in which oppression is hidden, and how women fight, conform, or even collude with their oppression”.

### **Gender and Sexuality**

I chose to use Judith Butler’s theory (1990) in order to show how the young women in my own study construct their sexual identities . According to Butler (1990) sexuality is an area



in our lives were the meanings we have created are often permeated with value. The meanings attached are “moral meanings” which then tell us how we ought to think and behave deriving from within the social and economic structure of the society we live in. Burr (2003) also asserts that sexuality is not a “stable phenomenon” but rather changes as societies and the ideals of men and women in the world changes. Butler (1990) mentions that society is one divided by several power inequalities which are widely sanctioned play therefore role in maintaining those power relations and subverting sexuality. According to Butler (1990) sexuality is an area in our lives were the meanings we have created are often permeated with value. The meanings attached are “moral meanings” which then tell us how we ought to think and behave deriving from within the social and economic structure of the society we live in.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Thus far I have discussed gender, sexuality, sexual vulnerabilities, gender inequalities and power relations in the context of HIV/AIDS and women. Women make up a higher proportion of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa and in particular South Africa and more so among young African women in South Africa. Gender inequalities play a crucial role in HIV epidemics and power relations between men and women have implications for women’s vulnerability to the HIV/AIDS infection. Female students in higher education institutions are between the ages of 18-24 – the age grouping with the highest infection rates of HIV and studies show that students in higher education institutions are affected by sexual coercion and transactional sex thereby reducing negotiations in safe sex practices creating further gender inequalities in the context of HIV and risky sexual practices.

The theoretical framework discussed above will be used to analyse data produced which will be discussed in chapter 4. The next chapter to follow will be chapter 3- Methodology chapter which contains information on how data was produced.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a description of the research design, paradigm; research site; data collection method and rationale for methodology; validity, reliability and ethics aspects of this study and finally limitations of this study. The essential purpose of the research design and methodology should be able to deliver data findings that reflect “the research question and suit the research purpose” (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004, p.36). The purpose of this study is to understand how African female undergraduate students give meaning to sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS. The implications thereof for gender, sexuality and HIV and AIDS epidemic in higher education institutions in South Africa is raised as a significant concern in this study.

#### **3.2 Research design and paradigm**

This study is located within a qualitative research design and interpretive paradigm. Qualitative methods are better suited than quantitative methods to “explore” and learn meanings, understandings and “processes in people’s lives” (Shank, 2002, p.5). Therefore, the research design and methodology of this study is qualitative. Bertram (2010, p.36) classifies qualitative data as textual or verbal data where “depth” is required to answer questions and is concerned with gaining “rich descriptions” of the experiences of the participants. Shank (2002, p.5) defines qualitative research as “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning”. By *systematic* he means “planned, ordered and public, following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community” (Ospira, 2004). By *empirical*, he means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the “world of experience” (Ospira, 2004). “*Inquiry into meaning* says researchers try to understand how others make sense of their experience” (Bertram, 2010, p.36). Therefore qualitative research is a systematic inquiry grounded by a world of experience.

In contrast quantitative data are numerical data or data which can be counted and is used when researchers want to establish “correlations or casual relationships”. Quantitative data is

achieved through numerical data and produced by a scientific or mathematical method such as counting. Quantitative “research allows the researcher to familiarize him/herself with the problem or concept to be studied, and perhaps generate hypotheses to be tested” (Golafshani, 2003, p.597). According to Ospira (2004), the rewards of doing qualitative research instead of quantitative research includes: “flexibility to follow unexpected ideas during research and explore” developments successfully; “sensitivity to contextual factors; capacity to study social meaning and increased opportunities” for in-depth explorations of the topic. The methods of my data collection had to fit the purpose of my research design and match up to the kind of data that I wanted to produce: being dialogue and textual in- depth experiences of my participants in this study. Therefore qualitative data better suited the nature of my study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.3) claim that “qualitative research involves an *interpretive and naturalistic* approach: this means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. The interpretive paradigm is an approach used by qualitative researchers and fits the purpose of my study. In the interpretive approach the description of the “unquantifiable, the personal, in depth and social aspects of the world” are reflected through the participants and the role of the researcher is said to be one where the researcher is concerned with the research process and their subjectivity is acknowledged and any account is acknowledged as a “representation of reality” (Bertram, 2010, p.49).

In the interpretivist approach the researcher aims to understand the nature of social reality, whereby knowledge is created through dialogue for examples through interviews, results are created not found since dialogic and in depth explorations are favoured methods (Christiansen, 2010, p.23). In general, “interpretivists share the following beliefs about the nature of knowing and reality: *relativist ontology* - assumes that reality as we know it is “constructed inter-subjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially; *transactional or subjectivist epistemology* - assumes that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know” (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006, no page number). The researcher and the participant/s are linked such that “who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others and the world” (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006, no page number). The interpretivist approach therefore allows the researcher to use in depth methods of acquiring data as I have chosen interviews and also the participants to express their own realities and what they know from their own gained

experiences. The researcher is also linked to the participant in that they may share similar realities and how they understand each other and the world.

According to Cohen and Crabtree (2004, no page number) by “positing a reality that cannot be” disconnected from your “knowledge of it (no separation of subject and object), the interpretivist paradigm posits that researchers' values are inherent” in all phases of the research process”. Truth is negotiated through dialogue since it reflects the “lived” experiences of the participant/s. Therefore interpretivist paradigm fits the purpose of my study well in that as the researcher using dialogic methods interpretations, understandings and meanings can be derived socially and experientially since the focus of my study is on young African female students and their meanings of sexuality in the contexts of HIV and Aids in higher education institutions in South Africa as a significant concern since young black African women make up the highest proportion of the HIV pandemic in South Africa.

### **3.3 Research Site:**

My research is part of a group project and my research had to be based at a higher education institution while my peers could conduct their research at a school. I chose Edgewood campus therefore the research site is a campus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)-Edgewood campus. I chose this particular campus as my research site since this campus is easily accessible to me as I am a student on this campus and as a teacher I also wanted to know how future teachers, who may have to discuss topics such as HIV and sexual risks to students, respond to questions about such issues. My research involved young Black African women who make up a high percentage of students enrolled at the campus (see table below) and served the purpose of this study which was to understand how Black African female undergraduate students gave meaning to sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS.

UKZN is primarily made up of five campuses and Edgewood campus falls part of this. Edgewood campus is the University's primary site for students aspiring to become teachers and future academics and is the home of the University's School of Education. Edgewood campus is located in Pinetown with “easy access to the N3 highway and approximately 20 minutes' drive from Durban” (UKZN homepage), the campus offers remarkable and attractive facilities to a growing number of Education students and is close to all major

amenities. The School provides “initial and in-service teacher education” and offers university higher degrees in a wide range of specialisations in education as well as “carrying out research and consultancy” (UKZN homepage). The School is actively engaged with policy-making in education in South Africa.

The campus is made up of a multi- racial, multi-cultural and diverse set of students and faculty members (see table below). All modules or courses are offered and conducted in the English language and students come from different socio-economic communities and backgrounds and from all parts of South Africa, mainly from KwaZulu- Natal.

This research study focused on black African female undergraduate students since it is estimated that in KwaZulu Natal “15.64 per cent of black African females were likely” to be HIV positive within the age group 15-24 compared to females of other race groups in that age group and infections were greater than males of the same and other race groups (Gilbert and Selikow, 2012). It is important to gain knowledge on what students who are perceived to be educated and ‘modern’ feel about issues pertaining to sex in relation to HIV and AIDS because implications for intervening in reducing risk and addressing safer sexualities within higher education institutions in South Africa is important and significant.

**UNDERGRADUATE ENROLMENT AT EDGEWOOD CAMPUS  
(DMI 2013)**

Yr	2012
UGPG	UG

Count of Student Number		RACE					
Age Group	Gender	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Other	Grand Total
Under 24	F	719	39	478	45	2	1283
	M	486	9	93	15		603
Under 24 Total		1205	48	571	60	2	1886
24+	F	1641	21	90	14		1766
	M	720	9	35	9		773
24+ Total		2361	30	125	23		2539
Grand Total		3566	78	696	83	2	4425

### **3.4 Sample:**

For this research study I chose purposive sampling. Sampling involves “making decisions about which people, settings, events or behaviours to observe” (Bertram, 2010, p.41). Sampling in the interpretivist paradigm is not concerned with statistical accuracy but rather with in depth detailed descriptions and analysis which forms part of qualitative research. Since the focus is on collecting rich in- depth qualitative data the sample size my sample size was made up of 10 black African female undergraduate students.

I used purposive sampling to select my participants. Purposive sampling is a “specific choice” about which people to include in the sample and is a “non-representative subset” constructed to serve a need or specific purpose of some larger population. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) explain purposive sampling as selection of those participants who acquiesces the most relevant information about the topic under study. To go about this I began observations (period of two days) where I sought out female students’ who were in their social groups. The criterion that I used was simple – black African female undergraduate students since my research was focused on young black African female undergraduate students. I conducted 10 individual in-depth semi-structured interviews with black African female undergraduate students.

### **3.5 Data Collection:**

Research is based on “empirical” information. Data is the information collected by the researcher. There are a variety of methods of data collection in qualitative research including visual or textual analysis (from books or videos), observations and interviews. As mentioned above individual in- depth interviews was used to collect data. An interview is a conversation between the researcher and the participant. However it is different from everyday conversation since the researcher is the “person who sets the agenda and asks the questions” (Bertram, 2010, p.65).

There are three types of interview used in qualitative research such as structured interviews, semi- structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are essentially “verbally administered questionnaires” in which a list of predetermined questions are asked

with little or no variation and with “no scope for follow up questions to responses that warrant further elaboration” (Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008, p.291). Structured interviews are fast and easy to manage and clarification on a question can easily be given to a participant. The researcher by structure the questions as being open ended and or closed responses. Open ended questions require the participant’s opinions and explanations while closed questions merely require yes, or no or one word brief answers.

Unstructured interview do not reflect any “preconceived” theories or ideas and are preformed with little or no organisation. According to Gill, *et al.*, (2008, p.291) unstructured interviews provide little guidance on what to talk about while semi-structured interviews consist of key questions that helps to shape the study being explored and allows the interviewer to be “pursue or prompt an idea or response in more detail” (Gill, *et al.*, 2008, p.291). Within this type of interview there is room for discovery, flexibility and or elaboration of information and information that was not previously thought of before the interview could be explored. The researcher or interviewer allows the participant to respond to a topic in a way which the participant would like to and may speak freely about the topic.

For the purpose of this study the method of data collection I used was semi-structured interviews (see appendix 3) which are individual in depth interviews. In interpretivist approach the interview method is most suited since in working towards its aims of exploring and describing peoples’ understanding that maybe unique to them, interviewing is a most suited method.

However when researchers interview people about their experiences, views and beliefs it is generally “recognized that the responses are partially constructed through conversation” (Bertram, 2010, p.67) because people may unconsciously adapt their answers to suit the interviewer also a friendly interviewer who makes participant comfortable may get participant to share thought more freely than an interviewer who is more formal. Given there are disadvantages to the interview process, the interview process is advantageous in that it allows the researcher to be present with the participant and clarify or expand on questions and detailed in depth data can be collected from a small number of people.

There are a number of preparations to be considered before and during the interview process such as the interview schedules which contain questions that should be purposeful to the

study, allow for flexibility in the interview process and should not contain any “loaded or leading” questions for example- Do you think that there are female students who are falling pregnant because of careless unprotected sex? Rather than – Why do you think female students on campus are falling pregnant?

According to Gill, *et al.*, (2008, p292) it is “prudent for the interviewer to familiarise themselves with the interview schedule to seem natural and less rehearsed” and other advice offered by Gill, *et al.*, (2010, p. 291) is: listen attentively to the participant without any unnecessary interruptions; have a “neutral” body language whereby you smile, nod and look interested in what the participant is saying for more information and conversation can be attained from the participant that feels comfortable or that you are interested in what they have to say. This allows the interviewer to also get the participant to speak more freely and elaborate or clarify a particular response; at the end of an interview thank the participant for their time and ask them if there is anything they would like to add. This gives the participant an opportunity to expand on anything they want to share more on or they have had other thoughts relating to the study that the interviewer did not ask which can be very important and insightful.

During the interviewing process, the interviews were recorded (with participants permission) in order to transcribe the data in detail later. Data was transcribed from recordings of interviews. I decided to record each interview as I would not be able to write every word spoken by participant as fast as they would speak and I wanted the participant to feel that I am listening to the conversation. Recording the interview process also allowed me the opportunity to observe the participant as they answered the questions or responded to a question and made note of these reactions.

Data was transcribed by me. I also made use of note taking that I undertook during the interview process which I felt where necessary for data analysis. Transcribing of data was time consuming and, over whelming but the interview results in “self-data” where the interviewee is “reflecting on their own behaviour or beliefs and reporting this to the interviewer” (Bertram, 2010, p.68). Data was be analysed by themes derived from the transcripts. Data was analysed using a theoretical framework most suited to this study. A theoretical framework was used to help make sense of the data and the theoretical framework clearly linked with the research purpose and the research questions.



Before each interview could begin participants had to complete a questionnaire with their biographical details (for the sake of time in some instances I filled the form for the participant) such as their name and surname, race, year of study, age, religion, where they live, who do they live with, what type of work their parents do, brief description of home life and community which they live in (see Appendix 3). The purpose of this was so that I could gather some information about their background and some knowledge about the participant other than that gained from the interviews. This allowed me to provide some descriptions about each participant as an individual. Most of the participants live or were raised in places close to the city while a few in rural areas far from the city and most come from working class homes. Participants also first signed a letter of informed consent (Appendix 2) and were told in advance that all responses during the interview would be recorded. This was used to create a more in depth detail and picture about each participant. The true identities of each participant remain anonymous and pseudonyms are used instead. All information collected about and from participants form part of the data collection process.

Pseudonyms have been used to protect the ten participants. I named them as Boniswa, Thembi, Thandeka, Nxolo, Happiness, Thobeka, Mbali, Promise, Hlengiwe, and Zama. These women are described below:

#### Participant 1: Boniswa

*Boniswa is twenty two years old and in her second year of study. She is a Christian and lives in Pinetown with her parents, a brother and two sisters. Her mother is a domestic worker and her father works in a factory. She describes her family and home life as being a hard life where her parents work very hard and are very strict parents but they are a close family.*

#### Participant 2: Thembi

*Thembi is twenty one years old and is in her first year of study. She lives in Marianhill with her grandmother who is a pensioner and sells home grown fruits and vegetables. Thembi helps her with that business. Thembi described her home environment as clean and neat. Her grandmother is very religious and she gets along well with her grandmother, aunts and*

*cousins. She describes her community as filled with crime, unsafe at night but lots of people that she knows and gets along with- everyone knows the other.*

#### Participant 3: Thandeka

*Thandeka is nineteen years old and is in her first year of study. She lives on campus residence but is from the South Coast where she lives with her grandmother. Her mother is a domestic worker living in Johannesburg. Thandeka described her home environment as one where they all love and respect each other. She gets to see her mother only during school holidays. She describes her community at home as very safe, quiet and peaceful. Her surroundings are beautiful and everyone is close to the other.*

#### Participant 4: Nxolo

*Nxolo is twenty years old and is in her second year of study. She comes from Durban with her mother. Her mother is a teacher and although is very strict they get along well. They communicate well with the other. She described her home as okay, safe but crime is everywhere. Her community back at her grandparents' farm is one where everyone knows one another and is very traditional. In the city everyone is for themselves and get along by themselves. She lives at Edgewood campus residence during semesters.*

#### Participant 5: Happiness

*Happiness is twenty four years old and is in her second year of study. She lives in Marianhill with her boyfriend because her parents are deceased. Her boyfriend is a teacher and she describes her family life as difficult at first without parents but she has a good partner so things are now okay for her. She described her community has having crime and lots of poverty but at the same time there are hardworking people and wealthy people who seem to be doing okay. Happiness says that she doesn't really communicate with her neighbours; she prefers to keep to herself.*

#### Participant 6: Thobeka

*Thobeka is nineteen years old and is in her first year of study. She is a Christian and lives in Bedford Hall- Durban campus residence. She lives with her friend and her mother is a*

*teacher. She comes from a family of four members and she was raised by a single mother. She described her community as being dominated mostly by the African race group where the level of crime is very high and is in working class average area.*

**Participant 7: Mbali**

*Mbali is a first year student and is twenty years old and lives in Pinetown. She presently lives alone but has a sister who is a teacher. She is an orphan but says she is guided by a sister who is employed as a teacher but not permanently. She described her community as a farm area that is safe and is a big developing area because they have resources such as electricity, water and better schools.*

**Participant 8: Promise**

*Promise is 21 years old and is in her second year of study. She comes from Kwandengezi Township with her sister, nephew and her son. She is self employed and describes her family as very close and get along well. She says that she lives in a big community and has lived there all her life and although there is crime it is a good place to live in. She lives at Edgewood campus residence during semesters.*

**Participant 9: Hlengiwe**

*Hlengiwe is twenty four years old and is in her fourth year of study. She proudly says she came from the Limpopo but her family now lives in Durban. She lives with her husband and kids. Her husband is involved in construction work. She has a close family where they have a good, strong relationship with each other and she has strong support and loves each other. She says that she lives in a small community that is a crime free zone with average people. She lives at the residence on Edgewood campus during semesters.*

**Participant 10: Zama**

*Zama is 24 years old and is in her first year of study. She is a Christian and comes from a location with her three sisters and a brother who is self employed. She describes her family as close and get along well although they do not have parents. She described her community*

*as big, safe and a community that fights against crime. She resides at Edgewood campus during semesters.*

The girls' bio-graphical details shown above reveal that most of the girls live on campus residence either on Edgewood or elsewhere. Most of them describe their home communities as unsafe or as Thobeka describes her community: *being dominated mostly by the African race group where the level of crime is very high and is in working class average area.* Therefore while some may come from good home environments other participants live in communities exposed to crime and know the repercussions that crime produces to make women vulnerable. More so some of the participants have boyfriends and some even share how being in a relationship means that they are not on equal par with their partner for example Hlengiwe says : *Mostly as a woman we don't not have power in a relationship because mostly men dominate our lives so it like that in a relationship. I'm married and my husband dominates my life and even boyfriends are like that.* Male domination in a relationship is one way that makes a female student vulnerable to engage in sexual risky behaviour as further discussed in chapter 4.

### **3.6 Actual interview process**

The interviews conducted were long usually 45 minutes to an hour. The participants were different and each unique in their own way. Some participants were easy to converse with and were able to express themselves confidently and freely while other participants were shy and reluctant to speak or share their opinions at first. There were a few participants who did feel that they could not speak the English language very proficiently and felt intimidated by me as an English speaker but I kept reassuring them throughout the conversation that they were doing well and what they had to share was important to me. I was also positively surprised that the students were very interested in my study and hoped one day they could pursue their Masters degree.

There were some instances where the campus area was extremely noisy and the participant and I had to move away to a quiet area. Conducting interviews were time consuming and students were in the process of studying and I sometimes had to move quickly through the

interview as they did inform me at the beginning of the interview they will engage in the interview but I cannot take up a lot of their time. I also found that during the interview process I became exhausted and tired after walking around the campus looking for participants and then conducting long interviews as well.

The first day that I conducted interviews went by smoothly and every participant I approached was willing to be interviewed but the second time around I was faced with many challenges. Some participants readily agreed to do an interview but as soon as I informed them that the interview would be recorded they quickly said no and hurried away or refused to say another word to me. Another time I felt that I was doing hopelessly because students refused to be interviewed because they were busy with studying or just too tired to speak to me.

However I had to brush off those instances and gather positive energy and look for other students who would be willing to be interviewed. Then there were also instances where I could sense that the participant did want to freely share their own experiences with me but rather answered the question in a general approach but I do realise that some of the participants stemmed from a Zulu cultural background where conversations about sex may not be freely shared and I was a stranger to them since after all it was the first time they had met me.

There were also instances where a group of boys thought that I was interesting and tried to be observers of the interview so the participant and I had to move away to another area as they were soon becoming distracting to the participant and me. Then there was a participant who was so excited to be interviewed and readily shared her views but then I noticed during the interview that students were coming up to her for change or to buy packets of chips. This was hugely annoying and disappointing for me but the participant wanted to continue the interview so she got a friend to help her.

There were also participants who giggled profusely during interviews but this made us more comfortable with one another and at ease. I have to admit that conducting interviews were not as straight forward and as easy as I thought especially when there were instances where participants would use vulgar swear words to illustrate their point or as a substitute for other

words. I would cringe inside but outwardly I would accept the participants' vocabulary as adding `colour` to my study!

The actual interviews were exciting as well as a challenging experience for me but I was relieved that students were able to communicate freely with me and at almost all times I found the interview process to be an enlightening eye opening experience. I do wish that I was a proficient speaker in IsiZulu language because I felt this would have allowed me the opportunity to get to know my participants better and I think allow them to converse more freely and comfortably with me.

### **3.7 Validity, Reliability and Ethics**

In order to ensure internal validity and reliability transcripts were read by my supervisor and possibly other members in my cohort to maintain that the themes derived from transcripts were free of biasness in the outcome of the research and add value to the body of knowledge that this research study can extend in such that I could have missed something that could be picked up by my peers. In the interpretive paradigm any conclusions drawn must be backed up by the data and the researcher cannot make claims that cannot be substantiated and to a large extent should reflect the participants' reality of lived experiences. Data recordings had to be carefully transcribed and re-reading of data were essential to provide clear and sufficient details of findings.

Reliability and validity are conceptualized and as according to Golafshani (2003, p.604) validity and reliability refers to something that is: "trustworthiness, rigor and quality" in qualitative paradigm. The research in essence should be valid or trustable. Many qualitative researchers argue that the term validity is not relevant to qualitative research and yet there is a need for some qualifying of work so the term *trustworthiness* is also used. According to Golafshani (2003, p. 604) *trustworthiness* depends on concepts of "credibility, dependability and confirmability" for example as I have chosen to use a mechanical form to record data.

The structuring of research and interview questions required careful consideration so that the research inquiry was carried out in a respectful manner and that questions provided participants with an opportunity to share adequate or more than adequate information.

A written letter of consent (Appendix 2) for participation in this project was presented to participants before interviews could be conducted and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any point from the research study and that they were under no obligation. Participants were informed that they did not need to answer any question that may cause them to feel sensitivity or make them feel uncomfortable even though that was not my intention and I explained any question they did not understand. Participants were informed of their confidentiality.

The use of pseudonyms was used to maintain confidentiality. During the interview process participants could have expressed personal experiences such as rape or even being HIV positive therefore my duty as a researcher was to remain respectful and understanding, and if the participant was comfortable enough to disclose something personal and sensitive to me I had to be sensitive. If the participant was willing I would have offered to refer her for counselling to youth counsellors that I know of and social workers who offer counselling services to the students. I had spoken in advance to a social worker in my family who would also be of assistance to me if the need arose.

This leads to ethics in qualitative research. It is important for all research studies to follow ethical principles. This study is located within a broader study but the same ethics are applied. Bertram (2010, p. 50) classifies ethical principles as “autonomy, nonmaleficence and beneficence”. “Autonomy” refers to the participants involved in the study that had to give signed consent, accepted voluntarily part of the study and were given the freedom to withdraw at any time. “Nonmaleficence” refers to no harm coming to another person as part of the study whether physical, emotional and social. All inquiry was carried out in a respectful manner. “Beneficence” means that the study should be of benefit to the participants and to other researchers or society at large. Careful consideration was taken by me as the researcher as to how I have benefited from this study and a close examination of what I have learnt from this study was critically considered for researchers should self reflect to understand their own transformation in the research process.

### **3.8 Limitations experienced during this study**

The limitations of this research were mainly contributing from time as an essential factor. Conducting interviews were challenging. Finding students to conduct interviews especially when reluctant took up useful time. Working out time to do interviews before students went on holiday, teaching practise or study leave was a setback. Many areas within the campus was noisy and distracting which had a disadvantage to the voice recordings – sometimes distorting or making it difficult for me to hear what the participant was saying.

I also had to put aside all my own opinions and maybe minor misjudgements I previously held about black African women as promiscuous, always more sexually active as other race groups and ignorant about the consequences of sexual risks. In the past, sometimes I did feel black African women were having far too many children than they could afford because I have one child out of choice so I could provide her with everything. Sometimes I saw this as a selfish flaw in other people who have many children they cannot afford but what I realised from these interviews that women in all race groups are exposed to similar challenges in relationships whether we like to believe differently but women in intimate relationships face many similar vulnerabilities regardless of race or culture.

Converting verbal data from voice recordings into transcripts were time consuming. The transcribing from verbal data into written data took me hours. It was exhausting as I first wrote every spoken word and then typed it out. However it was very interesting to capture the views expressed by the students.

There were instances where the participants expressed their lack of self confidence when speaking in the English language with me – they felt shy towards me and felt that perhaps I would laugh at them. This was overcome by me assuring them that I respect them and their opinions were important to me. Participants that were shy and lacked confidence to share their own experiences with me were reassured that everything they said was in confidence. I also felt that I could have perhaps probed more about the participant's views about virginity. I was disheartened that I lacked in gathering information about that as I know it would have added more depth to my study. That was my own short coming well as my own inadequacy in speaking fluent Zulu for I know I could have gained more data from the participants if I could converse with some of them in their first language.



As a mother, wife and teacher I found that balancing my personal life and academic life quite difficult. I moved into a new house that's bigger and I found that finding time to commit to studies proved quite difficult at first but I eventually found ways to manage my time efficiently. I had some short comings during the year such as illness of myself, my daughter or other family member. I had many family commitments many of which I had to decline so that I try to work diligently and with more focus. I have learnt to say no to family members and pursued my work because I was determined to succeed and complete my masters.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

When the interview process was complete and all interviews were transcribed into writing, I then typed data out word for word. I did that because I wanted to be sure that I captured every word spoken by the participant rather than listening to the voice recordings and typing. The transcripts produced rich, detailed and both thought provoking opinions and descriptions of the participant's life experiences, sexual beliefs, attitudes and sometimes sexual encounters. These interviews also contained moments of the participants silence, reluctance to answer questions, shy laughter and nervous giggles. To analyse the data I had to read and reread transcripts many times and I drew mind maps to try and map out themes that developed as I read each transcript. Transcripts were also shared and discussed with my supervisor and peers to help me develop themes I may have over looked. Then I used two theoretical positions by Connell (1987) which includes Connell's theory of gender and power and Butler (1990) which includes her theory of gender and sexuality as well as relevant literature to analyse the data which formed chapter four of this study.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined and discussed the research design, paradigm; research site; data collection method and rationale for methodology; validity, reliability and ethics aspects of this study and data analysis of this study. I did this to provide answers to the key research questions framing this study. This chapter also highlighted several limitations I encountered during the research process as well as the ways that I adopted to help me overcome some of the challenges I faced as well as to change the way I previously thought about certain aspects

in life. I believe the challenges and limitations I overcame helped to strengthen and deepen my understanding of my research. The chapter that follows is the data analysis chapter that will draw on two theoretical frameworks (Connell's gender power theory and Butler's gender and sexuality theory); scholarly discussions and arguments which were integrated into the analysis and discussion of the data which was framed by themes.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the understandings, meanings, knowledge and attitudes of a selected group of black African female university students with regard to sexualities and risk taking in the context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. An eclectic approach is used by drawing on more than one theoretical perspective. This approach is useful in explaining how these female students construct sexuality and sexual risk taking in a society where HIV and AIDS infection rates amongst Black African females are at its highest.

Gender power relations (Connell, 1987) and theory of gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990), the theoretical perspectives framing this study assert how social power can be described as the ability to impose dominating definitions and ideals to assert masculine hegemony (Connell, 1987, p.107) and Butler (1990) asserts that sexuality is an area of our lives derived from the meanings we have created. Butler (1990) mentions that society is one divided by several power inequalities which are widely sanctioned play therefore role in maintaining power relations associated to sexuality. Other researchers, (e.g. Okonkwo, 2010; Dowsett, 2003), who have used Connell (1987) and Butler (1990) gender perspective theories for their research and practise have underscored its usefulness as a theoretical framework for understanding and exploring sexual behaviours, attitudes and knowledge of women in their studies.

Scholarly works on young women's sexualities, gender and HIV and AIDS have been integrated into the analysis and discussion of data. Thematic analysis was used in this study generated from individual interviews. In this chapter themes derived from individual semi structured interviews are discussed as follows:

- Female students, campus life and peer pressure
- Gender-based violence: “...it happens here on campus. You can hear screams in the night but during the day everything is quiet.”

- Love, sex and gifts
- Relationship dynamics, student femininities and sexual risks
- Resisting sexual domination- agency in female students
- Sex education

#### 4.8 Conclusion

#### 4.2 Female students, campus life and peer pressure

Some participants in this study articulated campus life as freedom resulting from adulthood and lack of parental supervision. These participants shape how free campus life is due to the absence of parental supervision and regulations from teachers for the ‘things they do’ such as alcohol use, partying and freedom to have relationships as revealed in previous studies (Mutinta, Govender, Gow and George, 2012; Shefer, Strebel and Jacobs, 2012; Maharaj and Cleland, 2008; Masvawure, 2010; Masvawure, 2011). According to Mulwo, *et al.*, (2009, p.311) campuses combine together in “physical proximity devoid of systematic supervision a large number of young adults at their pinnacle years of sexual experimentation”.

*Thembi..... here its different from school because we are over the age of eighteen so whatever we do is our business because campus gives you that freedom and variety to a personal life ....because of residence where no parental supervision unlike at home here they do things their parents don't approve of...*

It seems as if Thembi is happy to have freedom and privacy that she has on residence unlike at home where she could have lived under the possible strict watch of her parent/s. She mentions being over the age of eighteen which could have some significance attached to this age perhaps adulthood. She clearly states that what they do is their business so this indicates a kind of personal freedom. The main idea here is that offering of resistance to parental supervision and the freedom to do things that parents would not approve of. This resistance to parental supervision and the excitement of freedom campus life offers is further articulated by Hlengiwe:

*They just want to enjoy themselves because when most of them are at school they live with parents but when they come here to university they need freedom so they want to date, most couldn't have boyfriends back at home. Here you can drink, you can party and you can have boyfriends because you are free to do whatever you want to.*

This participant expresses students as needing freedom at university to date since she feels most students could not have relationships back at home while living with their parents as well as the freedom to indulge in alcohol and parties. Hlengiwe points out an important freedom which is to consume alcohol as a possible freedom. Shefer, *et al.*, (2012, p.118) argue that campuses are constructed as “sexualised spaces of exploration where peer pressure to be sexually active” is rampant and reported aggravated “by alcohol use”. Therefore freedom to consume alcohol could also create possible freedoms or opportunities to engage freely with the opposite sex in relationships that could lead to physical or sexual activities. Hlengiwe draws a comparison between some girls’ home lives and campus life where many pressures or expectations could be placed upon them at home, for example not to date boys while here campus seems to be some sort of an escape resulting in their possible freedom. Campus life becomes an important place to realise freedoms including freedoms in relationships with the opposite sex. When participants were asked why black female students have relationships on campus they provided the following reasons:

*Thandeka: Here we are free, they think that they own themselves and because we are living away from our parents, away from our parents households where no one can see what we are doing or worry about who we are with. Also we are young and want to experience life and relationships with the opposite sex.*

*Thembi: ..... I think at school you are protected by parents and teachers but at campus we don't have a teacher who walks around with a stick and says no hugging or kissing. Here lecturers walk by and it's nothing and while I'm here my parents cannot see what I am doing so all the freedom here causes it.*

While at school and living at home participants may have felt the pressure to hide their personal activities from their parents and teachers but whilst at campus it would seem that the campus offers a space for these young women to experience freedom in relationships and to

be autonomous unlike at many South African schools and within many families where intimate relationships with the opposite sex is prohibited. Although these participants do not mention sexual relationships specifically *hugging and kissing* could be an association to sex or physical acts. Given this new freedom the black African female students are given the opportunity to engage in behaviours that they may not have done whilst living at home such as consuming alcohol or having a boyfriend. Breier (2010) argues that living with parents or guardians with traditional sexual attitudes could influence students to engage in sexual risk behaviour once they relocate to university and obtain their freedom. The prevalence of sexual risk behaviour on campuses at South African universities may put many students' in particular female students at risk for HIV infection. The "peer pressure to be sexual, the drinking culture on campuses and insecurities amongst students who live away from home facilitate higher risk sexual practises and gender normative behaviours" (Shefer, *et al.*, 2012). Zama expresses how at campus the students may perceive themselves as being identified by just a student number because no one watches out for your well being personally "*here you just a student number no one watches out for you specifically*". Therefore students may engage in unsafe activity freely and without interventions from other adults as a parent would.

In further analysing responses elicited by the question:

*Researcher: Why do you think students have relationships?* Participants further elaborated:

*Thobeka: Well I can say to interact with one another in a different way, peer pressure one of them and different backgrounds. You know you come here you wana meet new people and you wana engage...*

*Mbali: Well they have relationships because they are adults now and they also give into peer pressures where everyone around here has a girlfriend or boyfriend and it's only natural to want to have a relationship with a guy or a girl.*

Two participants, Mbali and Thobeka stated that peer pressure is one of the reasons female students engage in relationships with boys and this is attributed from the freedoms that campus life offers them. Mbali stated that they are adults therefore they can have relationships even more interesting is her view that on campus everyone has a boyfriend so it

can be assumed that for some female students social acceptance on campus by peers is gained by her having a boyfriend. This could also be a mark an indication of adulthood - separating the university student from a child governed by parents or a learner restricted by teachers who possibly disallowed relationships with boys. This indicates that there is also pressure on girls to have a partner and begin dating. Mutinta, *et al.*, (2012) claims that peer pressure resulted on students as a means to gain experience in relationships with the opposite sex and having fun with different people by engaging in risk taking sexual behaviour. Being in a relationship also signifies normalcy but if you are not in a relationship than you do not live up to peer cultures of normalcy as constructed by Zama:

*They have relationships to convince themselves that they are at the right age and they cannot be alone because if you are alone then something is wrong with you and because you are of an age to have relationships or maybe one serious one if you want to*

Again here above we see the significance attached to age whereby the participant's regards age as an important factor in deciding the freedom to have a relationship. Furthermore peer pressure faced by female students form restrictions to freedom because the student's lives are enmeshed within gender and sexuality oozing with power relations as Thobeka asserts:

*I think this whole varsity life allows a lot of freedom, you can do whatever you want to with whoever you want to and you meet the wrong friends, there's peer pressure and I feel the first years are most gullible and most men take advantage of that.*

Selikow, *et al.*, (2009) state that girls give into peer pressure to be accepted and to avoid being ridiculed and friends are vindictive in influencing them into wrongful decisions regarding relationships. According to Thobeka there is peer pressure and it is possible to meet wrong friends and it appears as though she believes or implies that men take advantage of first year students. Students come to campus as gendered and sexual beings and campus relations are played out in relation to broader gendered and sexual environments in South Africa (Jewkes, *et al.*, 2012). Connell (1987) states that gender norms are derived from gender and power relations where society from the start is said to be gendered imposing societal pressures on women while Butler (1990) argues that several power inequalities maintain a role in maintaining power relations. However, that is not to say that the female students are victims or ignorant about power relations. In the excerpt above Thobeka states

that the first year students are gullible. I probed the participant further by pointing out that she herself was a first year thereby being gullible as well. Thobeka quickly replies:

*No, no (laughs). I am not stupid, and I don't give into men easily.*

In the statement above it is clear that Thobeka makes a distinction between herself and the other Black African first year students. She believes that first year female students are foolish or *gullible* and easily fooled by men or taken advantage of but SHE is not and this is indicative above. She clearly disapproves of male (sexual) domination or dominating male practices and in this way she offers resistance. She is an active agent. The understanding that *Thobeka* associates to sexuality is one of gullibility and stupidity. Furthermore it is interesting that she mentions first year students as being “gullible” and “most men taking advantage of that”. First year students could be easily influenced by a member of the opposite sex. It is for this reason that gendered power inequities within sexual relationships have “been identified as a risk factor for HIV infection among young women” (Dunkle, *et al.*, 2004). Mutinta *et al.*, (2012) assert that the HIV and AIDS epidemic is further entrenched by gender inequalities faced by young women when older men seek partners who are “less likely to be sexually experienced in their eyes” this could be another reason that first year students could be vulnerable to risky sexual behaviours.

Connell (1987) argues that in a given setting one ideal of masculinity is “hegemonic” where male superiority is reinforced in the subordination of women’s through inferiority. Sexually inexperienced young woman are desired by older men as studies by Tyndale and Kyeremeh (2010) show that young women typically first year students are exploited with material possessions in exchange for sex because these men believe that sex with virgins are most enjoyable and safe since the vagina is ‘tight’ and they assume that younger woman are “sexually innocent” so they are free of any sexually transmitted diseases therefore sex without condoms were safer with younger woman.

However studies discussed by Shefer, *et al.*, (2012, p.113) show that campuses are places “where peer pressure to be sexually active” on university campuses progress “with students academic year of study” could be a contrast to the statement made above by *Thobeka* that first years are “gullible”, possibly signifying that female students are sexually active during their first year of studies rather than sexual activity progressing with students academic progression.



In this section I have discussed how campus life provides a degree of freedom unlike the restrictions of school. I also examined how there are two sides to this phenomenon of freedom whereby the black African female students in this study might appear to have greater freedom than they did at school but there are also indications that their freedoms are limited and constrained by peer pressures, gender power inequalities, male power in intimate partner relations. From the answers that were elicited from the participants regarding campus life and freedoms it can be deduced that there appear to be some sort of contradictory practice or inconsistency in that on one hand campus offers female students more freedom as compared to school or living with parents however some of them are still subjected to dominant pressures from their peers which may hinder young women from being agentic.

#### **4.3 Gender-based violence: “...it happens here on campus. You can hear screams in the night but during the day everything is quiet.”**

Much literature has argued that campus life is a place and space of different freedoms (Mutinta, *et al.*, 2012; Shefer, *et al.*, 2012; Maharaj and Cleland, 2008; Masvawure, 2010; Masvawure, 2011), and confirmed by the participants in this study as well. In this section I examine how campus life is a place which may produce freedoms where intimate partner dynamics are acted out invoking violent gender relations as discussed by participants in the following excerpts when asked whether they know of black African female students who could be in abusive relationships:

*Boniswa: I don't know a lot not physically but verbally like the guys swear them bring them down or restrict them from being themselves so I know a lot like that.*

*Researcher: What do you mean by restrict them from being their selves?*

*Boniswa: ...Like from partying or clubbing or like wearing certain clothes or going out with other guy friends and some even want you to change your personality like if you a loud person they want you quiet and be more like them maybe.*

From the above excerpts we can deduce that participants know of students who are abused verbally by their partners. Interestingly Boniswa says that she knows many students involved

in verbally abusive relationships or where female students have partners who exercise a form of dominance over them by restricting them from being themselves. This indicates that there are restrictions placed upon the female students by males (students). The participant could be referring to male domination whereby the female students are expected to be submissive and they are treated like subordinates in relations to males. Jewkes, *et al.*, (2011) argue that research in South Africa show that male dominance and excessive need for control over women where any expressions or interpretations of assertiveness by a woman is regarded as hostile any in many instances are the reasons for physical or sexual violence on young women in South Africa by their partners. Connell (1987) describes this need for control as deriving from particular understandings of masculinity underpinned by a complex process of dominance positioned over woman. The participants in this study reinforced instances of physical violence inflicted on black African female students as Zama asserts:

*Yes I know of a girl who was scared to go home after campus because her boyfriend is violent and domestic violence occurs in most communities and homes and people think if they are in a relationship like marriage they must tolerate it and work through it so the next generation learns from that and then they actually think that no this man really loves me and because so many women accept it the younger women think it's okay.*

Zama indicates how a black African student is in fear to go home as she has a boyfriend who is abusive to her and more importantly how she believes that people in a relationship begin to treat abuse as normalcy or accepted by one generation and passed on to the next. Zama also indicates that female students may stay in an abusive relationship because they associate abuse with love. There is a strong indication of gender power inequalities from the above excerpt. More importantly Zama points out that young women are more susceptible to accepting male inflicted violence as okay. Jewkes, *et al.*, (2011) argue that male performance is predicted on the ability to control women and physical or sexual violence may be used as a means to achieve and assert this control. Gupta *et al.*, (2011) claim that it is “less likely that women will leave a relationship that they understand to be risky or violent because they” fear abandonment. Thembi provides evidence of female student’s fear of abandonment and more reasons as to why female students may remain in abusive relationships:

*.....I think if they are then they stay because some girls feel there's no one else for them even though they in that relationship they stay so maybe today they will stay for the good days so maybe today he is bad but tomorrow he treats her good but they will stay for the good days*

*and also the upbringing and background of a person is important to think of because some girls come from homes where abuse was allowed and should happen in their home so they think it's normal.*

Thembi in the preceding extract attempts to explain why she thinks women and girls remain in abusive relationships as she highlights factors such as upbringing and culture and perhaps being brought up in an abusive home as a contribution which could potentially influence or impact on a young woman's decision to remain in violent partnerships. Clowes, Shefer, Fouten, Vergani and Jacobs (2009) assert that the vulnerabilities of young female students on campus are mainly derived from inequitable relationships between these students and their partners which make them increasingly at risk of unsafe, coercive and abusive heterosexual relationships and reveal that most of these young students remain in gender violent relationships to avoid being labelled as "used" or because of their devotion to their partner. Again here the issue of abuse is associated to the woman's background. Participants Thembi and Zama claim that some women accept abuse as normal or okay depending on the type of background they come from. Wood (2005) claims that violence against women is widely perceived as being tolerated and has come to be "normative rather than challenged" due to its wide spread occurrence and complacency. Russell, *et al.* (2013) claim that the "key determinants" of intimate partner violence result from "gender inequalities and social normalcy" whereby certain communities accept violence in conflicts. Wood (2005) asserts that the home, community settings and other contexts such as the school, faith communities and youth groups are important especially the home where gender socialisations and inequalities are enacted.

Participants also discuss how students remain in abusive relationships because of the financial support as suggested below:

*Researcher: Do you know of Black female students who are physically or verbally abused by their partners?*

*Nxolo: Yes, Hey I know of some but I use to see one boy who was drunk on campus hit his girlfriend till some other guy came and took him away. Hey they stay because of FUNZA (laughing) their boyfriends have it so it means some for them otherwise I don't know.*

*Researcher: Why do you think they remain in these relationships?*

*Hlengiwe: Hmmm I don't know maybe if I don't have money and I have kids to see to then I would also if I'm married to this man for a long time maybe I would but I would want to escape that relationship because I wouldn't deserve that treatment.*

Nxolo claims that black African female students remain in abusive relationships because a possible reason could be financial gain or dependence. She laughs at this possibility maybe to her it is absurd that they could possibly do that. She exerts her own agency in her disapproval of it as she further says she doesn't know what would keep them in an abusive relationship. Nxolo could perhaps be expressing that there should be some way that the female student is benefiting from the relationship in order to keep her in it. According to Russell, *et al.*, (2013) young women may find themselves coerced into sexual relationships, sexual behaviours stemming from violent relationships to provide for their material needs or maintain their material needs. Hlengiwe asserts that if she wasn't financially dependent on her partner with kids to take care of then she would leave the relationships but she would want to eventually leave the relationship for her own happiness. According to Pettifor, *et al.*, (2012) women equated working and having their own money with being able to "make their own decisions, challenge and to leave relationships that were less than desirable" instead of remaining in that relationship because they are not financially dependent on their partner. *Hlengiwe*, above, mentions lack of money and having kids to take care of would be a reason for her staying in an abusive relationship further perpetuating gender inequalities although she knows she deserves to be treated better when she concedes to possibly finding a way of escapement. Students both in and out of residence confront the challenge of gender-based violence as participants earlier and above state some are afraid to go home to abusive partners while others have abusive partners on campus.

Participants also describe how campus and residences are places where they feel unsafe or fear being alone at night. According to Mulwo, *et al.*, (2009, p.311) campuses combine together in “physical proximity devoid of systematic supervision” this could relate to the fact that female students are exposed to interactions with older males or male students that are not supervised and could be harmful to their safety it is for this reasons that the following participants provide for feeling unsafe on campus and/or campus residences:

*Thembi: No this place is not very safe for females who are alone. I have a friend on Res who tells me stories that makes this place unsafe especially at night after six this place is so dark and scary and there are people who try to cross boundaries and you feel I am in a group of people so I am ok but imagine if I am alone, you do feel these things but treat it as normal. They pass remarks that are not only sexual but also negative from male and female students”.*

Thembi claims that campus residence is not safe for females who are alone. She makes reference to information she has gathered from her friend about the residence being unsafe at night. Perhaps Thembi feels intimidated to be by herself alone on campus due to her feelings that people attempt to cross boundaries therefore feels safer in a group. Thembi further goes on to explain that she has heard remarks from other students that are not only sexual but also negative. She possibly signifies feelings of intimidation from both male and even female students and importantly articulates her view as campus being unsafe at night. Participants also mention fear when they are unaccompanied and further blame campus security as being inadequate:

*Thandeka: Because the security is not tight. People you don't know or who don't live in your Res enter for instance my residence people enter and some allow someone in at night and if its mid night and you wana go to the toilet you can meet someone in the passage you don't know and if they are drunk they can do something harmful to you. Recently a girl was raped at our residence and no one had anything to say about it, they tried to blame unplanned security. The securities have no guns or anything and certain doors don't lock. Anyone can just push my door open which is not safe without strong locks; anyone can just push it open and come in while I am asleep.*

*Mbali: no because the security does not always check student cards at the gate and then anybody can get in and the residence is not safe cos sometimes you see two different genders in the same place.*

Both Thandeka and Mbali make reference to their fears that campus security is not adequate enough to keep them protected. Both Thandeka and Mbali articulate dissatisfaction they felt towards inadequacy in campus security. It is evident that my participants are concerned about this issue and they appear fearful and uncomfortable or unsafe in their environment. They feel fear that anyone more importantly males can freely walk into their residence especially at night and therefore inhibit their potential to feel safe at night. Male violence against women is widespread in South Africa and globally and the broader inequality between men and women is deeply implicated therefore constituting a primary site for violence against women (Shefer, Strebel and Foster, 2006). Thandeka seems to express great fear of anyone entering her room with force and she makes mention of a rape incidence at her residence. Perhaps that incidence has heightened her fear of rape as she says that no one said anything about it. The claim of silence she makes about this incident and her dissatisfaction about campus security are pertinent issues of gender inequalities and gender based violence on campus. In the previous section we see how within the wider spaces campus life is seen as free but as we see it is not as free as it is made out with gender power relational dynamics oozing amongst students.

In 2007 a female student was raped at a university residence in Kwa- Zulu Natal. According to Tolsi (2007) “although the 21 year old female student was raped this is not the first incident at the campus”. Then this year March 2013 a 24 year old medical student – Xolisile Mabele was raped and murdered in her room on campus residence. According to Makhaye (2013) “the suspect and the victim had dated before”. In many empirical studies such as Holland, *et al.*, (1990) show how male dominance in heterosexual relationships are regarded as normal in terms of male satisfaction which can turn sexual encounters into potential power struggles jeopardising women’s safety in society. According to studies by Jewkes, *et al.*, (2011) rape perpetrators in South Africa have “cynical, adversial and hostile ideas of male/female intimate relations and may have feelings of inadequacy”, for example due to financial constraints and/or the need to control women by inflicting male dominated imbalance of power . In a context where a power imbalance favours males, it is easier for males to dominate. This could then cause women to be pulled into different directions and face social pressures of fearing for their safety and mistrusting strangers (Morrell and Dunkle, 2011).

Studies by Hallman (2005, p.39) show “that South Africa has highest statistics of violence against women sexually and physically where twelve percentage of 15–19 year-old women and fourteen percentage of 20–24 year-old women reported they had been abused by a partner at some point in their lives”. HIV can be transmitted through rape further complicating a human rights violation.

When asked why black female students may remain in abusive relationships Hlengiwe elaborates why she believes they remain in such relationships (above) and then turns the conversation on none reporting of abuse: *Most things we don't report so no one knows we are being abused. So even the statistics of South Africa of women being abused is incorrect because the women keep quiet and don't report it whereas more women are being abused and sexually harassed every day.*

Hlengiwe highlights the important issue of not reporting abuse. According to Makhaye (2013) the student (Xolisile Mabele) who was raped recently knew her rapist and killer as she had dated him before. It is quite possible that he was an abusive boyfriend and she may not have reported his abusive nature. Hlengiwe highlights that many black female students on campus often fail to report instances of abuse therefore she indicates that the instances of abuse against women in this country could be statistically wrong or inaccurate as many fail to report abuse. Hlengiwe perhaps seems to also disapprove of this none reporting since she cares enough to mention it. According to Russell, *et al.*, (2013) only one in twenty five women in South Africa who have been raped for example actually report it to the police. Wood (2005) claims that due to the possible complacency and inaction people are faced with when reporting rape and assault cases to police serves as a deterrent to many women in particular African women from reporting it in the first place. Ramsoomar and Marojoele (2012) assert that alcohol abuse by both males and females and an increase in more females consuming alcohol have been associated to gender based violence. Participants in this study have previously mentioned their freedom to consume alcohol therefore abuse female students may be encountering could be related or linked to alcohol abuse.

However there are participants who did feel safe on campus despite the unsupervised mixture of male and female students on campus and believe that the students are responsible for keeping residence areas safe:

*Promise: Erh for me it looks safe but I don't know anything can happen but sometimes not, the residence is safe because one has to swipe herself in only then it is safe but when they swipe other people in its unsafe.*

*Hlengiwe: Yes it is safe sometimes when it is quiet and all the students going home then maybe but I have never heard of anyone getting raped on this campus even if you walk late from the LAN to the residence at night it is safe.*

These students oppose the views of Mbali, Thandeka and Thembi. Promise indicates that although anything can happen at any time she does feel the campus is safe as long as students swipe only themselves into the residence. Perhaps Promise is signalling that the safety of females at residence depends on the responsibility of students to consciously be aware of who they allow or swipe into the residence while Hlengiwe feels the campus is safe even at night and has never heard of anyone being raped on campus.

This section highlights the important issue of gender based violence that occurs to female students both on and off campus. Participants provide instances when they have heard or witnessed abuse of other students. Even more profound are participants' accounts which show acceptance for what is abnormal to be treated as normal. This is illustrated when some of the participants above discussed how students remain in abusive relationships because the abuse is given to alter or change who they are to suit their partner's need for who he wants her to be and some stay in relationships because of the financial support. Participants also claim that campus security is blamed for violence that may occur on campus or because of participants feel security is inadequate therefore they are fearful or feel unsafe while other participants feel safe on campus.

#### **4.4 Love, sex and gifts**

Bhana and Pattman, (2011) argue that girls ideals of love are tied to their aspirations toward middle class attainments and "love is produced by particular sets of economic and social circumstances through which gender inequalities" are reproduced impacting on HIV risk.



According to Shefer, *et al.*, (2012) “young people’s ideas, beliefs, perceptions and feelings influence their risk taking behaviour”. As young adults, university students may lack experience in assessing influences on their risk taking behaviour. The question asked about why Black female students may have relationships elicited the following responses from participants:

*Zama... because men like the attention and they like to have sex with a girl so the best way is to have a girl friend and with women it’s because they also like sex and they like to have romance and make their friends fell bad cos of the gifts and nice things boyfriends give you.*

*Promise: Hey I just don’t know I think it’s just for the fun and to impress their friends with a nice looking guy who buys you the good stuff and off course people fall hard in love.*

*Nxolo: They have relationships maybe because of fun of it and maybe because they are attracted to that person and fall in love.*

All three participants provide evidence that students both male and females have relationships for the fun of it. Zama states that for the males and female students it’s all about sex while with female students romance is also an important part of the relationship. According to Mutinta, *et al.*, (2012) “students engage in sexual risk behaviour as they try to gain sexual experience and have fun with different people” and material rewards also produce risky sexual behaviour. Some of the female students come from strict parenting homes where dating boys were out of the question and now they are suddenly disposed to a variety and vast number of boys without anyone refraining or limiting their interactions with other male or female students. The “fun” part of that relationship could also be the ‘gift giving and nice things’ provided by the male partner. Zama and Promise mention how the gift giving is a central reasons female students have relationships as they want to impress their friends with what they are acquiring from a relationship with a male. Dowsett (2003, p.21) claims that the different views of women regarding motivation for sexual relations between men are more profound than we realise and have consequences for how we understand HIV infection rates.

Participants further provided responses regarding relationships as arising from their first time in the city coming from rural areas:

*Nxolo: yes because some of us come from rural areas and when we come here were we have never seen so many young guys and I think I have never seen a guy who looks like this and when he talks to you hmm hmm you will do anything, you forget everything he says and if he says he loves you, you forget everything and say yes, yes , yes when he asks for sex you think its love and when you are here you think you are old enough and do whatever you want.*

*Thobeka: ..... For some females it's their first time in the city away from home and they just wana have fun and go on dates with the first guy they meet and they often mistake those relationships with love and feel they must have sex but they fall pregnant.....*

For some of these participants such as Nxolo and Thobeka it was their first time living away from parents and more significantly living in the city and how as a result of this they are exposed to males in a new way. Nxolo expresses how they are free to engage with male students and become caught up in the excitement of being approached by a male student and instantly fall in love with them. Nxolo expresses a sense of excitement she felt at meeting so many guys for the first time and how she has freedom on campus to do whatever she wants because she is old enough and there is an image she creates of throwing caution to the wind here. It seems that the freedom she has obtained on campus also allows her to have sex as she feels that they person must love her. Thobeka feels that students want to have fun and therefore go on dates however she feels students meet a guy for the first time and mistake that relationship with love. Thobeka seems to be much wiser in recognising that a first date does not mean love.

Possibly, living in the city after growing up in rural areas for some students may increase their possibility of engaging in risk taking behaviour both sexually and physically by using drugs, alcohol or enjoying nights out “on the town” possibly under the influence of those substances. The move away from the rural area or just to live on campus and enjoy the freedoms they may never experience at home may decrease their ability to refrain from engaging in risk taking behaviours. According to Bhana and Pattman (2011, p.968) “farm girls are elevated as virgins” who are disinterested in material wealth so boys choose to engage in sexual relationships with farm girls or girls coming from rural areas as a means to resurrect their power “underwritten by an understanding of their own chronic poverty and

inability to live up to the provider masculinity as” they believe are defined by township girls who are more interested in material gain from them; so female students coming from rural areas could be attracted to male students as a way of having fun while for the male students having a relationship with a student from a rural area maybe better suited to their economic positions. Participants also mention girls are falling pregnant at campus. Pregnancy is a possible indication of unprotected sex which is the most prominent way of receiving HIV infection. Female students who participate in sexual behaviour without protection thus engage in risky sexual behaviour:

*Researcher: Do you think that they are aware of the sexual risks before sex?*

*Boniswa: They know, they know it but are ignorant and have a don't care attitude and you know we get bursaries here and so when some of them fall pregnant they say they don't care they can leave the baby with grandmother or mother to look after it and continue studying here there's like no consequence you not gona get kicked out because it's not like school where you have to drop out and come back after the baby is born here you can continue studying and it's not the end of the world that's what I think maybe going on.*

Boniswa explains how she believes that black female students are aware of sexual risks such as unintended pregnancies but remain unbothered because they receive bursaries and can continue studying. Boniswa refers to female students as ignorant and have a do not care attitude when they do such things. In this way she perhaps expresses a negative view of such female students. Boniswa also articulates how there are no consequences at university to falling pregnant in comparison to school. She makes this distinction here to possibly show another freedom campus life allows. According to Mutinta, *et al.*, (2012) despite HIV and AIDS interventions targeted at university students to reduce sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies continue to be a serious health issue at campuses. According to WHO (2007) fifteen percent of university students in South Africa will experience unplanned pregnancy during their studies while globally according to UNAIDS (2008) an estimation of sixty percent of unplanned pregnancy occur among university students.

However Zama below asserts that the students although irresponsible are not the only ones to blame but rather the university which she believes should provide the students with some sort of moral obligation that they should adhere to:

*Zama: yes but they are irresponsible because government provides grants for children and pregnancy is accepted at university so the institution is also responsible to provide some morals and values to the students and shouldn't be only academics all the time.*

Mutinta, *et al.*, (2012, p. 359) claim that given the experimental period of young adulthood, students are likely to be vulnerable to contributing factors leading to HIV risk. Therefore South African universities are a fundamental site where the vulnerabilities that expose female students to HIV infection can be highlighted and dealt with by using immediate measures such as HIV and preventative education. Zama echoes her view that more emphasis should be placed on preventing early pregnancies and perhaps even HIV at universities as opposed to focusing on academia and obtaining a degrees.

Another way in which female students expose themselves to the HIV and AIDS infection is through transactional sex. According to Leclerc-Medlala (2003) students who engage in sexual behaviours to support their material needs engage in what is known as transactional sex which is significantly becoming part of “campus culture”. There is also the concept of the “sugar daddy” phenomenon which is associated to transactional sex where young women involve themselves in with older men who are married to gain material needs (Shefer, Clowes, and Vergani, 2012) as *Hlengiwe and Thobeka* explain:

*Hlengiwe... sometimes you find most of the students on Friday they have to go out and come back Saturday morning and what I realised is that they have those men for clothes and food. They don't have enough money and sometimes they like to drink and smoke and don't have enough money and they need the 'sugar daddy'. They know when they go out they will buy them the 'Chicken Licken and Kentucky' and give them money to buy drinks.*

*Thobeka: .....mostly for the money that's the number one reason. Females love to shop so they need the money and with the money your parents give you, you can and need to buy the basics. The sugar daddy relationships allow them to have the luxuries and the good life at university.....*

This extract illustrates one of the ways in which my participants refer to the experiences of other girls rather than themselves and how sex can often be used as an advantageous service in acquiring material possessions. In a study by Chadwick (2010) documentation shows how girls were enthusiastic to be interviewed but also reluctant to talk about their own experiences and almost never spoke about sex in relation to them. Hlengiwe and Thobeka both claim that university students who engage in transactional sex do this out of a need for money or luxuries. These participants feel that students want to have a good time at university and need 'sugar daddy' relationships to acquire a good time which they express as having good food, drinks and clothes.

From the extracts above it seems as though some university students engage in transactional sex and 'sugar daddy' relationships to acquire luxuries and material things rather than out of a lack due to poverty however most of the participants in this study do come from mixed class backgrounds. Gukurume (2011) claims that female students engage in transactional sex relationships as a means to escape poverty and assistance to pay for their studies at university. Masvawure (2010, p. 857) instead contradicts most "perceptions regarding transactional relationships particularly in Africa as resulting from a primary survival strategy" but rather shows how female students may use transactional relationships to "compete for social status amongst their peers as well as to fashion themselves as high-status" trendy individuals. This is illustrated by the participants as they state below:

*Mbali: .....they need money, clothes, and food and even at the gates I see them arrive in big fancy cars driven by older men so it's the fame and getting all the benefits.*

*Thandeka: Yes they do because they are after money and most of them want to have good sex and they want to compete with their friends so if I have a black berry they will go and ask their 'sugar daddy' for a black berry as well.*

*Boniswa: I know they are you- know they go for the money. I don't know anyone personally but the money, clothes, fame, status and you know like. When the girls are dating a guy their age or few years older the things that older guy can give them can't be compared because their rich and have security and he will give you ten times more things than a guy your age. He's mature so he will treat you like a woman so I think these girls like to be treated as a*

*woman rather than a girl and wana impress friends and also because of peer pressure and the status they get from dating older men.*

The participants above indicate the elevation in status they receive from having a relationship with an older man and since they are getting material possessions that others possibly may not have or want. Boniswa also mentions how when young women date older men they are treated better. She also mentions how that kind of relationship may be used to impress friends resulting from peer pressure. Masawure (2011) claims that “female students want to stand out from each other” and a visible attainment of luxury goods enable “female students to fashion themselves as more sophisticated and more successful and even more ‘sexually appealing’ than their peers”. In the excerpts above students also highlight how being in a relationship with an older man, means having “good sex” rather than with men, their own age who are students and as well as not being able to provide them with material possessions the young men cannot give female students the attention they are looking for. In this way female students assert their sexual agency (exert power) as being fuelled by the need to get what they want in exchange for sex most of the time according to their own desires. To exemplify this argument Thembi states:

*..... I make my own observations of some girls... suddenly they have a new image and this self confidence about themselves like they hit the lotto and I see them being picked up and dropped off by older guys. Some girls have these relationships because of all the benefits they can't afford as students such as clothing and good life but they also like the older men and the attention they get from them. You know black older men just love young girls that they call fresh and they do anything the girls want.*

Thembi makes reference to her observations of girls who engage in transactional sex. She claims that these girls benefit from the relationship with a ‘sugar daddy’ not only materially but by getting attention as well. From participants’ accounts from above it seems as if these young women in transactional relationships are in control of their sexuality and they have sexual freedoms whereby they are often of decision making such as choosing who they will date. However sexual risk is attached to this because in most cases condom use is often none negotiable with older men. Masvawure (2011) argues that although female students may exert some form of sexual agency in transactional relationships, the young female students may be dating older men already infected by HIV by possibly having multiple partners over

the years – *“the sugar daddy’s provide cos you know he’s married but the sugar daddy has money and can buy you clothes, he has a business and can provide for you and give you everything you want. They make promises of marriage but will never leave his wife” (Nxolo).*

Nxolo and Thembi make powerful comments about relationships with ‘sugar daddies’. Thembi makes reference to the stereotypes of black men as loving young girls and Nxolo refers to ‘sugar daddy’s’ as being married men or men who are simultaneously also involved in other relationships which puts young female students at risks for sexual implications.

These participants highlight the issue that female students may be aware that the men they have transactional relationships have more than one partner other than them. Transactional sex may limit female student’s ability to enforce condom use increasing their risk for HIV infection. According to Wamoyi, Wight, Plummer, Mshana, Ross (2010) female students may have power negotiating over certain aspects of sexual relationships with older men such as relationship formation but have little control over sexual practices including condom use and violence. Jewkes, Morrell, Sekweyiya, Dunkle and Penn- Kekana (2012) link ideas of how “women’s sexuality is a source of power in African contexts” of economic attainment or status whereby “women use sexual power to make their way” in life to exert her sexual agency while males assert denial of female agency and sexual privilege to the objectifying of young women’s bodies and thereby enforcing their patriarchy.

In this section I have discussed how love, sex and gifts are intertwined. The participants in the above extracts reveal how love can be associated with gift giving and the possible naivety young girls living away from family in the city at campus may experience. Participants also discuss how female students maybe involved in ‘sugar daddy’ relationships and the possible reasons for this. This type of relationship may allow female students to express their sexual agency but may also expose them to consequential sexual risky behaviour.

#### **4.5 Relationship dynamics, student femininities and sexual risks**

According to Jewkes, Vundule, Mofarah and Jordaan (2001) when considering relationship dynamics it is sometimes “difficult to understand why young woman tolerate dysfunctional and abusive relationships” but a part of the answer lies in their need for pleasure derived from sex and ‘islands of love’ and trust. According to Connell (1987) relational constructions of

gender identities are also infiltrated by a “widely held perception among men that success with women is” predicted through means of control and behaving as women expect. From the individual interviews the participants provided the following reasons for why they believe black African students may have sex before marriage and their responses varied. This is what they revealed:

*Thandeka... I think that we are being peer pressured by the guys to do what they say and to listen to them. The guys want to have a good time and some really do love their girl friends so they want a commitment from them in the way of sex.*

*Nxolo: They just feel they can trust a guy and some don't care or don't think they will fall pregnant so they have unprotected sex.*

*Promise: They trust a guy and they feel that sex is not sex with a condom also you feel that the guy knows better because he is more experienced especially when you are a virgin and first time in a relationship you just listen to the guy.*

In the excerpt above Thandeka explains how black female students may be pressured by their partners to do as they say and that is to have sex with them. Males can be dominant sexual beings and some males equate sex with love. According to Hoffman, *et al.*, (2006, p.52) “recent investigations in South Africa addressing gender, relationship dynamics and behavioural risks for HIV describe a pattern” where men characteristically demand for sex to “occur early in the relationship as proof of a woman’s love”. This could place enormous pressure on female students because at times they may be forced to submit to sex out of fear of losing their boyfriends or partners or losing their boyfriends trust or perhaps to gain more trust. Reddy and Dunne (2007) discuss issues of love, trust and sex. These scholars demonstrate that sex often signifies seriousness or trust and love in a relationship.

Nxolo confirms how black female students in trusting a partner do not focus on the consequences such as falling pregnant. Sex, love, trust and risky sexual practices often lead to pregnancy and HIV infection in most cases. According to Dowsett (2003) investigations in South Africa reveal that it is more likely for men “to initiate and control sexual decision making than women which has implications for women’s vulnerability” to sexual risks such as unintended pregnancies and HIV infections. Promise further shows how female student’s



vulnerabilities to sexual risks are perpetuated not only by trust in their partners but also from their own lack of sexual experience and from being in a relationship for the first time. Promise articulates that female students may listen to their partners because he maybe more experienced sexually. She seems to be aware that some males are dominant in sexual relationships based on their experience and some females submit to sex without condoms because some males do not like sex with a condom when she further says *“I think it should be both because it must be a choice and I can say or feel I don’t want sex but the men they don’t always listen they say they don’t wana eat the sweet with the wrapper.”* Promise offers some sort of resistance here by saying that she should have a say about the nature and timing of sex however she points out that in her opinion most men do not listen’ or accommodate the sexual needs and desires of women. Some males prefer to have “flesh to flesh” sex that is without a condom. They often believe that sex with a condom is like “eating a sweet with its wrapper” as Promise articulates thereby this could place female students at greater risk if they are coerced or wrongfully influenced into risky sexual practices. In a study conducted by Selikow, *et al.*, (2009, p.110) male participants expressed how having sex with condoms is avoided with condom related analogies such as “bananas in skins” and claimed that pleasure from sex was gained without condom use. According to Shai, Jewkes, Nduna and Dunkle (2012) some males in their study believe that “condoms may be seen as interruptive agents against trust, intimacy and sexual pleasure experienced”. Those perceptions held by some male partners could explain why Promise perhaps believes that males prefer to have sex without condoms. Furthermore Shai, *et al.*, (2012) claim that “men who share traditional ideas about gender practices and notions that uphold views about superior male status over females” seldom use condoms Promise provides an example of female subordination and perhaps even sexual vulnerability of virgins.

When the participants were asked whether they believe females should have a say in decision making regarding sex the question elicited the following response from the participants:

*Hlengiwe: No why should they? I mean there must be communication but woman are shy and the man dominates. The man takes all the decisions. He will do whatever he wants and he will decide when he wants it whether we like it or not we must agree if we want to have a relationship with them.*

*Boniswa: Hmmm I think some girls don’t want to show how much they know or express themselves in case the guy gets the wrong impression like they are experienced.....*

*Nxolo: Usually it's the guy because you have it in your mind that the guy initiates it because if a girl starts first then she's a slut or likes it or wants it. You can't just tell a guy it's not appreciated and it's a cultural issue that depends on a guy first.*

*Promise: I don't know about that one (laughs). Hey maybe both but your know how it is you have to let the man think you don't know much because you are innocent even if it's not your first time you don't want him to get the wrong impression and think you just sleep around with any guy.*

From the extracts above it is clear that the participants believed to some degree that the decision making regarding sex should be left up to the man and they provide the following reasons for this: they are perhaps greatly concerned to maintain sexual respectability to avoid being labelled as “loose” or promiscuous since to some even mentioning sex can imply that they are sexually experienced and damage their reputation especially if they are still virgins thus they do not want to give off the wrong impression and some participants believe that males dominant the decision making regarding sex. Reddy and Dunn (2007) discuss how young women in relationships want to appear as innocent and unknowing about sex to their partners. Normative gender constructions of female sexuality are theorised as “passive and focused on having relationships” rather than enjoying sex as discussed by Shefer, *et al.*, (2012, p. 117) and discussed as gender relational theory by Connell (1987) who argues that sexuality is not “always experienced or expressed since sexuality is influenced by undeniably dominant cultural constructions of what comprises of appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour”.

Moreover conventional feminine expected behaviour puts women at risk of HIV infection. Young females aged “15–24 years are 2 or 3 times more likely to be infected with HIV compared to their male counterparts” (Pettifor, MacPhail, Anderson, Maman, 2012, p.477) and more importantly young African females in South Africa constitute the “highest percentage of women living with HIV and AIDS in South Africa” more than any female and male race group. HIV can be viewed as an epidemic of desire (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe, Thomson, 1990). The control which female students can exercise over the risks and safety of their sexual practises may be constrained by their notions of sexuality linked to their expectations of love, romance, and intimacy and caring. Women are caught in conventions of

female submission when they do not resist norms of femininity within male relationships meeting males' needs and maintaining male beliefs about sexual encounters (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, Thomson, 1998).

However sexualities "are not just about domination, danger and disease, but also about affect and ideals of love" (Vance, 1984) whereby many young women associate sex in a relationship with love while young men may regard sex in a relationship as a women's way to prove her love to him. Sex for young women is often "linked to romance and of being 'swept of their feet' that they engage in intercourse in a way that is not logical, planned or rational" (Marston and King, 2006, p. 1583) meaning that young women such as some of the female participants engage in unprotected sex because of the notion of being in love and want to feel love as depicted by participants below:

*Researcher: Do you think there are different reasons why male and female students may have sex before marriage?*

*Boniswa: ..... with the females I think it's because they want companionship or they want to feel loved and get attention from a guy. I think that for girls it's because they trust their partner, they feel relaxed with that guy and think that maybe this guy will marry me anyway and wouldn't leave her and then for some guys it's just for pleasure and the experience of having sex while some really love their girlfriends and ready for a sexual relationship with them as well. You know I think that a lot of women give sex for companionship. I can be loved and give love, I can be the only girl for him but with guys they give companionship for sex having sex for reasons are different, girls its more sentimental and precious but you know guys they go through that stage they just want sex for those reasons so I say that's why the reasons are different.*

*Thembi: Hey possibly because you see that guys like to have a girl to show off to their friends and then it's like they feel they are men now and should have a woman and like with the girls they want to experience love and be in a relationship for the romance. Some guys like the romance as well but they may not be as into it as some of the girls*

*Mbali: maybe for pleasure for the guy and they force their girl friends to do it before marriage and the girls don't want him to cheat so they agree or maybe they just love each other so much they can't help it.*

The participants above demonstrate their own distinction in the reasons why female and male students may have sex before marriage. They believe that female students have sex before marriage because they want companionship and to experience love and romance while for male students their reasons maybe related to pleasure and achieving manhood status by having sex. It is also important to note that from the excerpt above Thembi perhaps believes that female students may engage in sexual intercourse as way of keeping her partner from cheating on her while Mbali feels that female students are *forced* by their boyfriends to have sex and Boniswa clearly believes that female students have sex before marriage with their boyfriends as a form of trust that they have with their boyfriends. Social pressure to keep her partner through power relations are produced and reproduced because women may use their sexuality as a means to preserve a relationship although they may not want to engage in sexual behaviours. This point is reinforced by research conducted by Holland, *et al.*, (1990) who found that women used sex as a means to keep their boyfriends happy regardless of their own desires. The issue of trust amongst the participants became quite a crucial point that they were trying to make as the issue of trust came out again predominately when participants were asked to share their opinion as to why female students may engage in unprotected sex:

*Zama: because the guys want to be cool and say to their friends how good it is without condoms and most guys feel if you trust him why not show him and we are not with other people then we don't need condoms.*

*Boniswa... I think it comes back to the trust issue and I'm sure also being irresponsible because I mean why would you want to do that to your body and must be stupidity. But also I can't blame females who have unprotected sex because for some it is their own choice and some woman are also forced to do it without a condom and I know when my friend and I was at school my friend was in a long relationship with her boyfriend and he wanted sex without a condom so she did it to please him and because she trusted him.*

*Happiness: Hey leme think, why did I have unprotected sex. HEY there's so much trust and love that goes on in a relationship. The last thing you think about is babies and so you get caught up in the moment. I don't know.*

Each of the participants above mentions trust as an issue of importance in a relationship and for the non use of protection during sexual intercourse. MacPhail and Campbell (2001, p. 1615) also attribute women engage in “trust relationships” therefore do not use condoms with their partners as a way of expressing their trust in their partners also discussed by Hoffman, (2006) where condom use is denied or limited “because it is thought to imply infidelity and lack of trust in a relationship, constrain male prerogatives”. Zama seems to think that female students are asked by their partners to trust them into having unprotected sex. This could possibly a deciding point in the relationship and if the female student feels she trusts her partner or want to prove her trust and love for him sex is provided as that proof of trust in the relationship rather than a verbal commitment or long term relationship. Female students therefore are possibly subjected to the HIV or other sexually transmitted infections or even unintended pregnancy further putting them in way of sexual risk to prove their trust in a boyfriend. The possible outcome of that action could outweigh more than the relationship itself especially if they decide to end their relationship. In a study by Shefer, *et al.*, (2012) participants revealed how they could not freely negotiate condom use with their boyfriends who wanted them to have sex without condoms as a form of trust and to signify a steady relationship. According to Shefer, *et al.*, (2012) classified female students “difficulties in negotiating condom use as a result of a gendered power” relation.

However Boniswa seems to disapprove of male sexual domination as she points out that although some females are forced to engage in risky sex there are others who willingly participate in these acts as “it is their choice”. This deals with sexual agency of young women, even though some girls do engage in sex for pleasure this can be risky. In a study conducted by Mudaly (2012) results showed that black African girls who do desire sex (as Boniswa points out) engage in risky sexual behaviour but exercise sexual agency because they enjoy sex and have sex for pleasure. This demonstrates that not all female students are passive recipients of male sexual domination and they do resist accepted gender role norms by exercising sexual agency. This is further reinforced by Happiness who echoes her own thoughts of having unprotected sex which she identifies as “being caught up in the moment” which could be an indication of her deriving sexual pleasure from sex with pregnancy only

being an afterthought. *“I can’t blame females who have unprotected sex because for some it is their own choice”* – Boniswa words express sexual agency therefore this participant points out both sides of the coin- on one hand female students are coerced into risky sex stemming from trust in their boyfriends/partners while other female students choose to engage in risky sexual practices – sexual agency in action.

When discussing whether black African female students should be free to express their sexuality, the participants echoed their views by relating it to their culture and background:

*Mbali: In our culture a woman suppose to act like she doesn’t know anything but she knows inside and just wants the guy to think she is innocent.*

*Hlengiwe: Sometimes like females are shy depending on their background and in my culture my parents don’t talk about sex so when I have to express myself I become shy because of my back ground and up bringing which dominates what I am or how I feel.*

*Zama: ..... sometimes depending on culture you can’t express it freely.*

*Promise: As a black woman it’s kinda taboo to express your sexuality.....*

Some of the participants in this study contribute to male dominance and female subordination regarding sexuality through cultural beliefs. The participants above explain how culture or their background prevents them from expressing their sexuality thereby influencing their sexual subjugation. Social and cultural pressures mean that black African female students may not wish to mention sex to their partners or acknowledge sexual desires before their partner particularly early in the relationship. In a study conducted by Gilchrist and Sullivan, (2006, p. 196) results revealed that some cultures uphold “undeniably dominant cultural constructions of what constitutes appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour, and these exert a strong influence on most young people”. Young women are thereby drawn into their own sexual subjugation through their cultural lack of conceptions of what sexuality and sexual encounters are about- *Zama:” in certain cultures the men don’t believe in condoms and some girls are from the rural areas where they are not told about these things”*. A sexual silence is created in this way. In the African culture there also seems to be more value placed on a female if she is a virgin as articulated by Thandeka... *The men they like to prove a point*

*because if they know the girl is a virgin like she is fresh they want to make sure that they get that girl and they can show other students that the girl belongs to them. Therefore this also could also hinder black African female students from freely expressing their sexuality by pretending to be unknowing about sex.*

In contrast a study conducted by Mutinta *et al.*, (2012) the participants reveal their reluctance to remain virgins before marriage as they had no plans of getting married in the future. The participants thus engage in multiple sexual relationships because it was easier than finding a compatible partner for marriage (Mutinta, *et al.*, 2012). Similarly some participants in this study revealed that they were aware that their partner had no intention of marrying them in the future:

*Zama: yes some love each other and some want to experiment, some don't have the patience to wait for marriage because they have no intention or plans to marry.*

*Hlengiwe: ...Men have sex before marriage to enjoy themselves and if you are a woman then you have to give them sex because they want the pleasure and don't want to wait for marriage. Hey most people today don't even want to get married.*

Zama and Hlengiwe seem to think that most black students do not wish to marry in the future so they do not wait to have sex if they have no intention of getting married. Perhaps female students are expressing their sexual agency by refuting traditional gender norms of women being virgins until they marry. This may form contradictions to the importance of “virginity and respect” discourses sustained by women who foresee themselves as future brides (Reddy, Dunne, 2007, p. 163). Intimacy is perceived as a normal part of a relationship even if it is a casual one, since female students may subscribe to social definitions of sexual encounters that are determined by male students who want to have multiple partners whilst in a serious relationship and women may put aside their own feelings on love and romance to feel love and be loved as explained by Nxolo:

*They have sex because they trust their partner or because it's like what young people do nowadays it's like so normal thing to do. Well you know the guys on this campus they write on their face book page how horny they are feeling and comment about what and why they wana have sex and some of them are just here to find a stupid girl who doesn't care if they*

*have steady girlfriends so that's why for the guys and the girls just do as the guys say in some cases.*

The participant above refers to female students who have sexual relations with men who are in long term or *steady* relationships as “*stupid*”. Clearly she disapproves of such relationships however this type of relationship could provide an indication of the extent to which female students are prepared to “assert or compromise” their agency in casual relationships (Reddy and Dunne, 2007, p.162). All the while students engage in multiple sexual relationships they expose themselves to HIV without thought of long term consequences which may impact on their future partners especially if instead they decide to marry as *Happiness* states:

*The issue about AIDS, we all know about AIDS and what happens when you have sex without a condom but people do it anyway and that's being very ignorant and being selfish because what if a person has AIDS and they sleep with another person without using a condom and that's being very selfish because you giving someone a virus while knowing you have a virus that makes you a selfish person.*

Happiness expresses a concern that students may know they are HIV infected but are selfish and continue to have sex with different partners without using protection. She makes mention of these type of people as being selfish several times thereby marking her disapproval of such actions. Happiness has a strong awareness of HIV and AIDS and this is evident in the extract above. She illuminates that there is a disjuncture between policy and practice because she feels that “young people continue to engage in unsafe sexual practices despite a strong awareness about HIV” (Reddy and Dunne, 2007). According to Shefer *et al.*, (2012) students are well aware about HIV and risky sexual practices but chose to have sex without protection.

During the individual interviews participants were asked as to how they would feel if they were seen by a peer while taking a condom on campus, some of the participants responded by saying:

*Promise: “Hmm, I think I would feel stupid. I think (laughing) it would be like people saying look she's going to have something but at the same time I'm protecting myself”.*



*Thembi: I would feel embarrassed (laughs) because that is something I wana keep private because if anyone saw me taking one even though its modern but I don't want a bad picture attached to me like having sex and not being married and being so young.*

Promise and Thembi expressed negative reactions if they were seen taking a condom however Promise does say that she would be protecting herself so perhaps to her that would not be totally embarrassing for her. Thembi associates being seen taking a condom as creating a bad self that she may feel will become attached to her. Female students also avoid carrying condoms due to negative labels that are associated with women as actively seeking sex or may not carry condoms as a way of deterring the image that they are experienced. There seems to be a stigma attached to females who take condoms from campus. According to Shefer, *et al.*, (2012) embarrassment at carrying condoms or attaining condoms remains even though they are readily available on campus as each participant in this study did indicate e.g. Boniswa: “Yes in the toilets I have seen them available”.

This may point to the “normative construction of female sexuality” as offered by Connell (1987) where the “gender order of women are expected to be sexually passive and submissive” to assert male hegemony which further implicate the female students subjugation of their sexuality. The female students are also do not want to be seen taking a condom from campus by their peers in fear of what negative impression their peers may have of them, possibly not wanting to be the subject of gossip and if someone saw them taking a condom they would lie saying it's for someone else as Boniswa states:

*Hey I wouldn't wana have sex before marriage so if someone saw me its personal and I don't want anyone to know what I do and maybe I would feel so embarrassed that if someone saw me and if I am sexually active I would say it's for someone else (laughs).*

While participants expressed embarrassment if they were seen by peers taking a condom available on campus there is the misconception by some female students that by using condoms available on campus they would be using a cheap and inferior make of condoms and if they are seen taking condoms then they would be perceived as having too much sex as Nxolo and Thandeka echo their views:

*Nxolo.....I would feel embarrassed because they may say she's having so much sex and I feel it's not good quality and it's not so good so people will think why she wana take free bad stuff.*

*Thandeka: (laughs) they say that if you have sex with the condoms found here on campus it's not as good quality as the ones you buy in the shops and there's a thing that the condoms here are bad and if you using them you are a cheap girl but I believe that the condoms here are the best quality and very strong it will not bust and if they bust you have no one to blame because you can't blame anyone but yourself really.*

Nxolo and Thandeka both seem to express a form of embarrassment attached to using condoms available on campus. Both participants regard the condoms as associated to students thinking they are having lots of sex and seem to think that because the condoms are free they must be of the lowest quality. Thandeka also expresses an opinion that students associate the condoms as to being "bad" and gives a woman a negative image. This forms a contrast to the study by Mudaly (2012) where participants considered a female who carries condoms as being a "playa" thus is experienced with sex. However Thandeka on the other hand does believe that those misconceptions she mentions are inaccurate and students are to blame if the condom "busts". By reluctance to carry free condoms female students may put themselves at risk sexually and if a condom busts they are still at risk. Thandeka seems to be aware of that.

However out of the ten participants used in this study two were willing to take condoms available at campus such as Happiness and she provides the following reason:

*I wouldn't care because I'm protecting myself and I am important, I am responsible for my life so I really don't care what others think.*

Happiness is a sexual agent. She is in control of her body and she is concerned with protecting herself. Some of the other participants said they would carry a condom but would not take one from campus however Happiness does not seem to care what other students think about taking a condom available at campus as she feels that she is important and she lives a responsible life.

The views of participants have been discussed in relation to relationship dynamics, student femininities and sexual risks. While some participants feel free to express their sexuality

there are others who are constrained by traditional gender norms regarding sex. Participants also discuss how love and trust influences female students to have sex with their partners as well as their own reluctance to carry condoms or desire to carry condoms but which are store bought rather than the condom Gilchrist and Sullivan (2006, p. 196) available on campus.

#### **4.6 Resisting sexual domination –agency in female students**

In this section I will examine how black African female students exert agency in their relationships or constructions of gendered relationships by challenging traditional dominant expectations and understandings of a woman's role in heterosexual relationships whereby they act from a position of power. Butler (1990) argues that "through discursive agency" notions of femininity can be potentially reformulated". Burr (2003) asserts that sexuality is not a "stable phenomenon" but rather changes as societies and the ideals of men and women in the world changes.

A study conducted by Shefer, *et al.*, (2012) amongst female students at a South African university amongst female students revealed "students incorporation of messages about safe-sex practices and agency". Participants in this study assert that they would use a condom to protect themselves thereby challenging male decision making regarding the use or none use of sexual protection and by expressing their need to protect themselves and show that they are not ignorant about sexual risks and actively engage in positive femininity:

*Boniswa: I think ya maybe hey because you know with the guys you can be married to but there' always a doubt and also if I'm not ready for babies and stuff.*

*Thembi: Yes I would for protection because I wana go to bed peacefully at night without fear of unplanned pregnancy and diseases.*

Boniswa and Thembi both express the desire to protect themselves both from pregnancy and diseases. By expressing a need to go to bed without the potential fear of sexual risks Thembi expresses her sexual agency in her need to protect herself and feel safe. According to Maxwell and Aggleton (2010) argue that an examination of the concept of power is necessary for developing understandings of agency. By focusing on young women's conceptualisations of power may reflect how they construct and make sense of practices within their sexual and

intimate relationships. The participants below exert power by taking action in protecting themselves against sexual diseases:

*Nxolo: Yes for my own protection and I would tell my partner I am still a student and my family is providing for me and I don't want to take care of a baby, I don't want AIDS because I can die.*

*Happiness: Yes I would carry a condom and yes I do carry. I have to protect myself besides pregnancy, STI's, viruses I have to protect myself. I carry it in my bag.*

In the extracts above students expressed how they would carry or use a condom to protect themselves thereby challenging gender norms and traditional sex roles which stipulate females as passive recipients in sexual matters. They express powerful intentions to practise safe sex in terms of condom use. However there are contradictory messages found amongst participants who although may assert sexual agency allow themselves to behave irresponsibly in sexual risk taking in search of their own female desire and pleasure as shown in the extracts below:

*Thandeka: ..... They say that condoms are harsh, they are bad and it's better to have sex without a condom than with a condom.*

*Researcher: who says condoms are harsh or bad as you say?*

*Thandeka: (laughing) from my own experience.*

*Thandeka: because sex without a condom is the best sex ever. Unprotected sex is the best and it also that we trust our lovers and when we are doing it for the first time you want to experience it without a condom.*

*Promise: I heard that people say (giggles) (very nervous) they enjoy sex more if they don't use condoms, I don't really know the difference. They just wana have pleasure but not bother about the risks involved. Some girls are pressured into it by their boyfriends and the girls are so eager to please their partners. Some guys are forced or tricked into it by their partners because the girls want them to take care of them while they work and they study.*

*Boniswa: Hey I don't know maybe because for the pleasure of having sex without it and also the are ignorant and stupid because some believe the guy or feel that they trust him and also because they just don't care about consequences especially when they drink and party*

In a study by Mudaly (2012) revealed how participants in the study indulged in unprotected sex as a form of 'fun' and how they constructed "their sexuality outside the restrictive frames" of masculine domination". Mudaly (2012) argues that the importance of the 'fun' and sexual pleasure associated by her participants to sex are deeply etched and central to the "components of gender and sexuality that is sex, gender and sexuality are merged in complex assemblage". The participants above demonstrate how female students may be at risk for sexually transmitted infections and these risks could potentially lead to HIV infection and or unintended pregnancy. There may also be female students who are not in the favour of condom use as it appears and it seems as though Thandeka is one of them. Boniswa mentions how female students do not care about the consequences of having sex without protection therefore although female students may freely exert their sexual desires they place themselves at potential risk for HIV and AIDS. The participants above challenge accepted gender role norms when they express their sexual desires which show that not all participants are passive victims of male sexual dominance since female students may also want to have sex for pleasure and it is not just males who reject condom use as Thandeka and Boniswa point out.

Promise and Boniswa also mention how Black female students are either pressured by their boyfriends to have unprotected sex or have unprotected sex under the possible influence of alcohol. According to Shefer, *et al.*, (2012, p.118) campuses are constructed as "sexualised spaces of exploration where peer pressure" to be sexually active is ubiquitous and aggravated "by alcohol and other" substances. Once again we see how campus offers freedom to engage in sexual freedoms however could further perpetuate black female students to engage in risky sexual undertakings. There is also a concerning idea that female students engage in risk taking behaviours on campus because they are in denial about HIV affecting them as students (Shefer, *et al.* 2012). One explanation for this as provided by Anderson, *et al.*, (2007, p.98) is that youth may be under the impression that they are "invulnerable" and so they underestimate the risks of sexual behaviours. Shefer, *et al.* (2012) argue that students have a sense that HIV is largely unreal and invisible to them however in contrast to the researchers

above every participant in this study stated that they could be affected by HIV as a student and were not ignorant on how they could contract the virus:

*Zama: yes I can if I have unprotected sex*

*Promise: Yes I can. Sex is not the only way at the moment I am in a relationship. I don't know the guys past or his status, so we use a condom but what if it busts anything can happen.*

Researcher: Do you know your status?

*Promise: Yes I do.*

*Mbali: yes by having unprotected sex and by having many partners.*

Therefore although black African female students may engage in risky sexual behaviour it cannot always be assumed that they are not aware or in denial of how they can contract sexual diseases. In the interviews that I had conducted with the participants many expressed an awareness of equality in sexual decision making and negotiation and gave for following reasons for this:

*Thembi: Both, woman must protect herself and not rely on a man to do that for her because if he doesn't want use protection then she falls pregnant or has a STI all because she allowed him or herself and didn't use protection so unplanned things happen because of irresponsibility.*

*Nxolo: It should be both but I think especially the female because when you have a child unplanned you have challenges and you have so many things to do and sometimes with the bursary you only have R600 a month and things are hard at home so a baby just adds more challenges to the situation and you have to juggle being a mother and a student. When students become pregnant then girl's side becomes most responsible for the baby and the father doesn't have so many pressures.*

*Happiness: YES (loudly) I mean why because in a relationship between two people you can't be afraid in the relationship, suppose to be friends and suppose to speak about anything and everything. I don't encourage sex before marriage but you know it happens and so it should*

*be in a committed relationship and shouldn't happen in just casual relationships because it's something very intimate and private.*

In the above extracts the female students want to have an equal share in the decision making regarding sexual activity since they acknowledge the implications of unsafe sex as a direct inconvenience to them in terms of raising a child while they are young and bearing the brunt of unprotected sex in comparison to men. Thembi acknowledges that women must also be accountable for their decisions and actions. While Nxolo is clearly aware of the challenges and struggles of many young mothers who are students and this could perhaps act as a deterrent whereby she chooses not to engage in unprotected sex due to a fear of becoming pregnant thereby desires a greater say in the decision making regarding sex. Furthermore Happiness does not encourage sex before marriage thereby subscribing to her own sexual agency of abstinence but not without the reality that sex can occur before marriage even if she does not encourage it and is aware of equality in sexual decision making. In a study by Selikow, *et al.*, (2009, p.109) participants shared views of Happiness when they mentioned that sex before marriage was not “appropriate” and that people should be married and prepared to have sex. Happiness is very assertive about her views regarding sexual decision making. This forms a contrast to cultural perceptions of black African women to be “silent” in sexual decision making (Mudaly, 2012). For Happiness sex is private and intimate and perhaps not a fun filled matter to her but rather one involving much discussion over the matter as she mentions that partners must be friends and be able to speak about anything.

In the interview process the participants also imparted strong messages about what would make them powerful in a relationship as a way of exerting sexual agency:

*Happiness: Oh I speak my mind, my boy friend he knows that I will speak my mind out. I don't keep anything in and in a relationship it must work both ways. If one is dominant than the other it means you have to do something just to make the other person happy and not yourself, it should work both ways and for the benefit of both persons not just one.*

*Thobeka: In a relationship it is mostly being myself and knowing what I want and making it clear this is what I want now. So for me it would be the power to also be a decision maker and be allowed to make my own decisions.*

*Boniswa: for me I think it will be to make decisions that are respected and to be allowed to do what I feel is right for me like study and to also have the security in knowing my partner is faithful to me.*

*Thembi: For me it means to be educated so I can contribute financially and I can make decisions freely and where what I have to say is accepted and appreciated.*

*Nxolo: Power like seriously its money or to be very wealthy because if a woman has money she has independence cos seriously what will she need a man for then, she won't need him even if he leaves her with kids she's fine she can make it without all their shit.*

Happiness and Thobeka reveal that they have the power to have a say in their relationship or to be a decision maker. Thembi declares that education would allow her to contribute more financially equitably in a relationship and for her to make decisions freely. Thembi and Boniswa associate power in a relationship as being appreciated and being respected. Nxolo expresses her views very strongly by using strong language in reference to men and expresses how power to her as a woman is financial freedom and independence which will allow her to have no need for a man even if he leaves her with children. Women's lack of access to and control over economic assets, such as land and housing, make them "particularly vulnerable" in the AIDS epidemic. Pettifor, *et al.*, (2012, pp.480-481) argues that relationship expectations are changing where women want financial decisions to be shared equally and power meant making their own decisions in relationships as well as doing whatever they wanted in a relationship such as "purchasing potential". It seems that participants here to associated power with equal decision making and finance. As further professionals these participants may become more able to exert their sexual agency and possibly resist sexual dominations by men because they would be empowered financially. Participants further expressed their sexual agency when they did not play an active role in constituting and reproducing male dominance but were radical in controlling sexual encounters and expressing their sexuality such as participants when asked if women should express their sexuality or sexual desires:

*Boniswa: .....you must let a guy know what you think and how you feel cos they mustn't think you are stupid and slow and don't know anything because they will try and take advantage and they are the teacher and want to control you.*



*Thembi: You must feel free.... If you keep quiet then a man will feel he must take the lead. A woman must be independent in a relationship and with sex. He must know where to cross the line. There are men who like women to express sex but others are narrow minded and don't appreciate it.*

*Thobeka: Yes they should. It involves both of them and if she's not ready then she's not ready. A female partner must not feel pressured or discouraged from sharing her thoughts regarding sex and should have a say when it happens especially since obviously guys do not fall pregnant and her life can completely change compared to his if she does fall pregnant. I would want to tell my boyfriend when and if we can have sex and it must be safe sex or no sex at all.*

The participants above mention that woman should not pretend that they are ignorant about sex. These participants all offer resistance by challenging accepted gender role norm which proposes that men's sexuality is privileged and often encouraged. These participants are sexual agents and they openly express their sexuality or sexual beliefs which is important for women's empowerment and the fight against HIV. The participants above play an active role in promoting their female desires and value their own sexual pleasure when students do this they can effectively manage their own safer sexual practices and reduce stereotypes surrounding femininities. These participants revoke traditional silences and disembodiments of female desires which traditionally have been effective to the force and ubiquity of male power (Mudaly, 2012). They represent female agency rather than just those who give into female subordination.

#### **4.7 Sex education**

In this section I analyse how the participants interactions with sex education from their family, peers, their partners and health care workers and how each interaction may differ whereby certain silences on issues of sex and risk may further perpetuate female students' risks to health matters such as HIV. According to Leclerc- Madlala (2003, p.28) lack of guidance form dangerous background for the spread of HIV/AIDS and accurate knowledge

about health risks are important to reduce HIV infections. Furthermore I discuss the vital role universities can play in deconstructing traditional gender and cultural norms that support male dominance and notions that may influence sexual risk taking behaviour.

Most participants in this study articulated a negative response when asked about discussing sex with their parents or immediate family members as suggested by *Thandeka*:

*Hey with my family, hey hey, they feel sex is a shame. If you not married it is a shame to tell your family but with my friends they are my age and my friends are also like a family to me. It brings disgrace to them as a family because they feel sex before marriage is a shame and if you ask questions about it before marriage it means you want to have sex with any guy to them.*

The shame attached to sex is clearly emphasised by *Thandeka*. *Thandeka* seems to be led to believe that talk about sex before marriage will be a shame to a family. In a study conducted by Campbell, Foulis, Maimane and Sibaya (2005) female participants disclosed that rather than “teaching them to be” discreet about engaging in sexual activities and to use condoms: adults taught them to “associate sex to shame and danger”. Nine of the participants in this study found it difficult or could not speak to family members about sex because their family were either: not open minded about sex issues; or on asking family members about sexual matters lead to negative conclusions such as they are asking because they wanted to have sex as participants below disclose:

*Boniswa: .... I can ask my friends but not my parents they will just think I wana have sex*

*Nxolo: ..... with my family oh no I can't even speak about it with my older sister..... you know typically African people just yell don't do this and that and don't have sex without telling what will happen and why.*

*Nxolo* explains that she is told not to have sex but not about the implications of having sex which are sexual risks and is a vital component to shape her understandings of sexuality and thereby could possibly help her to refrain from alluding to male domination in sexual relations due to her lack of knowledge. Inadequate knowledge stems from inadequate support and guidance from parents for young people as further discussed by participants:

*Thobeka: No because well you know when parents warn you from the boys and everything its basically they are saying stay away from this and that and now when parents tell you that you don't really understand and you don't learn much from what they tell you besides what they tell you. They don't really give you their own perspective about it. But my mother will say protect yourself but she won't really go into any details.*

*Happiness: No not family because we were brought up to not be open in that way so when you like for example when I should try and ask my mother she should like brush me off so I couldn't ask that. I can do that with my son because I'm more educated than my mother. I can speak with my friends yes. We have more in common; we blab about it, we do it anyway because we are freer with each other*

Thobeka emphasises how she does not learn much from what her parents tell her about sex and the how this does not broaden her knowledge about sex because her parents do not go into details about it nor do they share their own understandings regarding sex which she perhaps requires. Adults could provide more accurate knowledge than peers but they are reluctant to discuss sexual matters such as Happiness mother. Happiness describes how her mother would “brush her off” thereby containing her possible curiosity about safe sex or need for education regarding sex and her mother’s brush off caused her to want to speak to her son about sex thereby reducing ‘sexual silences’ that weakens accurate knowledge about HIV infection. This instead helps to strengthen infection rates and risk taking behaviour amongst young women and breaking a chain of negative cultural attachment towards sex. Like *Happiness* every participant said that they could speak openly and freely with their friends about sex:

*Thembi: Yes I think, well we do they are the closest people to you and if you have conversations about it with your friends you learn more and more and you are more comfortable with them but not with my family (laughs) I can't no but maybe with family my own age otherwise no because they are so strict about all those things.*

*Zama: yes with my friends if they are responsible enough to give me good advice but not with family because we don't ever talk about those issues and I wouldn't feel comfortable, I would be so ashamed to speak about it with my family.*

*Thobeka: I had to learn myself and learn from my friends and I also have older friends that I can speak to so I can only feel like I can talk with my friends about it cos they understand better and are going through the same things.*

For the participants above, speaking about sex with their friends seems easier and more comfortable. Selikow, *et al.*, (2012) found that adolescents were more comfortable with talking about sex with their friends because adults were not available for discussions on sex. There seems to be less pressure and stigma attached to conversations about sex amongst their peers. Since it is most likely that sexuality and intimacy is discussed in an atmosphere of trust and solidarity amongst young people, peer influence is also a determinant of sexual behaviour (Campbell, *et al.*, 2005). However engaging in conversations with peers only could influence risk taking behaviours if an individual is friends with people who possibly engage in risk taking themselves and are also ignorant or do not have accurate knowledge about HIV and AIDS and other sexual risks (Campbell, *et al.*, 2005). Therefore an alternate to this is offered by universities where there are medical nurses available on university campuses so that students can go for assistance. When asked if participants could speak to campus nurses some expressed feelings of pessimism and embarrassment extending from cultural barriers:

*Nxolo: They should cos that's why they are here but their like older women and it's like talking to your mother and in the African culture we don't talk to our elders about sex so it can be uncomfortable.*

*Promise: It's not easy cos some of them the nurses are old, old enough to be your mother and as an African people it's difficult for us to talk to our elders about such things as sex so no it's not easy*

*Thembi: ... I won't feel comfortable because I don't know them but from personal point of view we have a family doctor who I like to speak to and feel comfortable but I think the other students can go to the nurses freely. It's very hard to speak to older person you don't know I would also rather ask my friends.*

The participants demonstrate a reluctance to speak to campus nurses deriving from their discomfort of speaking about sex with an elder. There seems to be a similar discomfort participants may share when talking about sex with their families as they do with the nurses on campus. MacPhail and Campbell (2001) found that young women in Khutsong

experienced discomfort from negative attitudes of older nurses and staff therefore refrained from going to the clinic for condoms. Although participants in this study do not speak of negative attitudes of nurses on campus They make reference to the being an black African and as an black African it is difficult for them to speak to elders about things such as sex or associate the nurses to being like their mothers because they are old enough to be their mothers so they do not feel comfortable. Perhaps this stems from cultural perceptions that black African women should be silent on issues pertaining to sex (Mudaly, 2012). However Thembi would rather speak to her family doctor who she can speak to. However some participants did feel they would be able to speak to a nurse on campus:

*Nxolo: Well actually I will go for advice because some are nice and friendly and they won't judge me because they are quite nice.*

*Happiness: yes they can that's what those people are here for.*

*Thobeka: I think if you have a problem then yes definitely they can but sometimes it depends on the kind of person they are because some students are very reserved and shy and very reserved to talk about things such as sex.*

Nxolo, Happiness and Thobeka seem to be willing to speak to campus nurses because they explain that the nurses can provide them with advise to a problem they may have possibly sexual issues. Perhaps there should be a system of good sex education programmes concerning pregnancy and HIV interventions as offered by participants below when asked if more information should be given regarding sexual risks:

*Mbali: I think there should be for the girls to make them more aware. They should put up posters and charts so that they can read it and have knowledge about it before they have sex.*

*Hlengiwe: Yes there is education for them about HIV and the consequences of not using condoms but I think more should be done. The department of Health should come here and tell us what must do because too many people are falling pregnant here.*

*Boniswa: Yes I feel more information should be given. You know it can help them to be safe and be a better woman, not to just think of themselves as sex objects so that they can tell them what's their purpose here and its not to meet guys and fall pregnant but it's to have an*

*education and have more self esteem like the information can also make them aware that guys can just use you to sleep around and leave you and the information on risk and pregnancy can really reduce many of the number of pregnancy on campus.*

In the above extracts participants discuss the necessity of education that should explain and address sexual risk behaviour. This could possibly address certain messages about condom usage, increase knowledge about sex, decreasing sexual risks such as unintended pregnancy and increase awareness of sexual misinformation that could stem from peers and partners as discussed by the participants above. Mbali, Hlengiwe and Boniswa suggest ways in which education around sex and HIV and AIDS can be improved or more effective amongst university students. Perhaps there is limited information given to students on campuses regarding safe sex which could be why these participants make mention of it. Universities can form an important constituency in interventions against the spread of HIV and AIDS since students at the campuses engage in risky sexual behaviours and the student body are an important sector of our society. Universities should not merely offer academic discourses to students but also focus on education that deconstructs traditional gender norms, male dominance and destabilise cultural notions surrounding gender norms. As part of a “larger HIV and AIDS educational framework” there should be links between “heterosexual practices in light of HIV which should be debated” amongst students as a discourse to destabilise and transform implications of normative gender roles (Shefer, *et al.*, 2012, 119).

More questioning and probing into why students do not use condoms should be provided as opposed to merely giving students information about HIV which have created an ‘AIDS fatigue’ Shefer, *et al.*, (2012) whereby students have done assignments and speeches about HIV at school and are bored of the topic or have enough knowledge about sex as articulated by Thandeka:

*I think they are old enough. They are being told these things from childhood but I don’t think it will help because everyone knows about sex, how you get pregnant and how you can get HIV and how to abstain from it keeps you safe, everyone knows that and don’t have an excuse why they don’t.*

Thandeka feels that students are old enough to know enough about sex and the consequences of unsafe sex but believes that students do not have any excuse for why they may be having unsafe sex and feels anymore knowledge pertaining to sex may not help students to engage in

safer practises as they have the knowledge about sex. So while some participants believe the university can offer more information regarding sex and its implications other participants like Thandeka believe it will not help perhaps critical thinking should be fostered into students to really think about the issues surrounding HIV and AIDS and what are their ideas of sexual abstinence, how women and men should be expected to behave in sexual relationships to deconstruct any ignorance students may have surrounding HIV: *Promise: I think ignorance is the most important one, you can give the person information but they may not care.* This section seems to highlight that there is a disjuncture between policy and practice and how effective or ineffective HIV and AIDS initiatives can be.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This analysis discussed the diverse ways in which ten black African female students construct their sexuality against a back drop where HIV infection amongst women in Kwa Zulu-Natal is at its highest. This was done to show how the prevalence of sexual risk behaviour on campuses at South African universities put many students' in particular black African female students at risk for HIV. Firstly, it provided descriptions of campus life and the sexual freedoms black African female students are exposed since they are no longer under the scrutiny of parents and teachers. Secondly, it demonstrated how black African female students construct femininities and sexual subjugation as a way of exposing them to HIV infection. Thirdly, this analysis showed how black African female students resist sexual dominance and exert agency regarding condom use and decision making in sexual relationships. Then this analysis illustrated how sex education that black African female students receive through peers and parents or lack of has implications for risky sexual behaviours. Finally interventions show that participants do recommend or ask for assistance from the university regarding HIV and pregnancy programmes.

A consolidation of the main findings of this research is provided in the conclusion chapter that follows. This chapter also provides tentative recommendations, in understanding how black African female undergraduate students give meaning to sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS and the implications for intervening in reducing risk and addressing safer sexualities within higher education institutions in South Africa.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This concluding chapter presents a summary of the content of the four previous chapters of this dissertation. It then goes on to provide a summary of the main findings of this research and possible recommendations, in an attempt to raise greater awareness on issues regarding gender inequalities, vulnerabilities and risk taking amongst black African female students at higher education institutions which may impact on HIV and AIDS in South Africa.

This qualitative study has emerged from the views of ten female undergraduate black African students between the ages of 18-24. These women emerge from mixed classed backgrounds located within areas located in Durban. This study explored how these women give meanings to gender, sexuality and risk as university students.

In chapter one – the introductory chapter, an outline of the background, focus, aims and objectives of this study were provided. I listed the key research questions framing this study and provide an in-depth discussion examining why I chose black African female students as my sample and my own personal interest in this research study were provided.

Chapter two presented relevant review and discussions on literature from scholarly works on young women's sexualities, gender and HIV and AIDS and the diverse university cultures found at higher education institutions both nationally and globally. The themes identified in this chapter include: Gender, HIV and South Africa; Gender, sexuality and university cultures in South Africa; Gender and risky sexual vulnerabilities faced by young women and Gendered power relations and inequalities. This chapter also provided a discussion on the theoretical frameworks that were used as lenses through which I analysed and interpreted the data produced in this study. The theoretical framework underpinning this study was drawn from theorists who focus on gender, gender power relations and sexuality: Connell (1987) and Butler (1990).

Chapter three provided an in-depth discussion and description of the research design suitable for this study. A qualitative research approach, interpretivist paradigm, research site,



purposive sampling method as well interviewing technique (semi-structured individual interview) was explored in this chapter. A brief description of each participant, obtained before each interview from a questionnaire containing biographical details, was provided; the data collection and actual interview process were also described. Limitations of this research, issues of validity and reliability, ethical considerations and the data analysis process were also outlined and discussed.

Chapter 4 presented an in-depth discussion of the main focus of this research derived from didactic dialogues of the participants. This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the understandings, meanings, knowledge and attitudes of the selected group of black African female undergraduate university students with regard to sexualities and risk taking in the context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa.

The themes that emerged from this study were: Female students, campus life and peer pressure; Gender-based violence: “....it happens here on campus. You can hear screams in the night but during the day everything is quiet”; Love, sex and gifts; Relationship dynamics, student femininities and sexual risks; Resisting sexual domination- agency in female students; Sex education. Scholarly works on young women’s sexualities, gender and HIV and AIDS and the diverse university cultures found at higher education institutions and the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study were also included in the analysis and discussion of these findings.

## **5.2 Main findings**

The main findings of this study begin with how freedom on campus and peer pressure may influence sexual risk taking amongst female students on campus. The participants in this study explained how they have more freedom than they did while living at home but there are also indications that their freedoms are limited or constrained by peer pressures, gender power inequalities and male power in intimate partner relationships. Sexual risk taking on campus may be further exacerbated by freedom to consume alcohol and multiple partner relationships as mentioned by the participants.

The participants in this study laid claims to have witnessed or heard of gender based violence that occurs at campus from the screams they hear at night to the public bashing of a student

by her boyfriend. These views are consistent with previous and recent reports of sexual violence and murder inflicted on black female students at various South African higher education institutions. Some of the participants also revealed how instances of abuse are not reported by students and that strict control of residences should be implemented by campus security.

Some participants also mentioned why female students remain in abusive relationships revealing gender inequalities dynamics in intimate partner relationships. The participants' views were that female students may stay in abusive relationships because they have already invested themselves sexually and emotionally in a relationship while some participants assert that love and trust are the main reasons why they stay and become involved in sexual relationships. Some said how they want to avoid being labelled as "used" by other male students if they leave that relationship. Other participants explained how culture may influence their concepts of love, sexuality and sexual encounters whereby the decision making regarding sex and protection is left entirely in the hands of the male partner while other participants expressed the need to protect their selves sexually and wanted to have an equal part in sexual decision making in their relationships.

The study moved on to discuss how black female students may have engaged in risk taking behaviour out of notions of love, trust and gift taking. For some participants aspirations of love resulted from a need to be in an intimate relationship while other participants believed that female students found themselves in relationships to achieve material wealth associated to middle class status from 'sugar daddies'. The gifts they acquired may be clothes, money, cell phones in exchange for sex. These women may be less likely to assert safe sex negotiations or practices because of the differing power dynamics in relationships. The participants in this study also discussed how many students were falling pregnant on campus which may be a possible indicator of unprotected sex that may render them at risk for STD's and HIV.

At this point it is important to illuminate that the participants in this study are not merely victims of male subordination but most participants do express agency in their relationships and decision making regarding sex. They resisted and challenged traditional dominant expectations and understandings of woman's role in heterosexual relationships. They expressed their agency when they did not conform to the traditional notions of an Black

African woman- 'quiet/ submissive'- when they consumed alcohol and party freely, when they choose to have relationships that allow them to attain material gain, when they resisted male dominance and possible negative stereotypes attached to females who insist on condom use or carry their own protection.

Most participants wanted to have equal share in decision making regarding sex and they resisted conventional femininity which is to appear 'innocent' about knowledge surrounding sexuality. Then there was a participant who revealed how she will not be pressured into having sex before marriage thereby subscribing to her own sexual agency of abstinence. Participants also mention how they can achieve power in a relationship through financial independence and education therefore most participants felt that they would be able to exert more power and feel more powerful through financial independence; therefore they can possibly exert more sexual agency through their own economic power that ultimately results from a university education.

Finally the main findings resulting from this research consisted of a need for or attitudes toward sex education. Here participants described their interactions with family members, peers, their partners and health care workers revolving around issues regarding sex education. Dialogue from participants' showed how each interaction may differ whereby certain silences or misinformation about issues of sex and risk may further perpetuate Black female students' risks to health matters such as HIV and unintended pregnancy.

Most participants in this study articulated a negative response when asked about discussing sex with their parents or immediate family members and positive responses when asked if they could discuss sex with their peers. However engaging in conversations with peers only could influence risk taking behaviours if an individual is friends with people who possibly engage in risk taking themselves and are also ignorant or do not have accurate knowledge about HIV and AIDS and other sexual risks.

There are medical nurses available on university campuses so that students can go for assistance but when asked if participants could speak to campus nurses some expressed feelings of pessimism and embarrassment extending from cultural barriers that prevent them from speaking freely about sex to people they perceive as their elders. Furthermore, some participants discussed the vital role universities play in implementing sex education into

curriculum which could possibly assist in deconstructing traditional gender and cultural norms that support male dominance and notions that may influence sexual risk taking behaviour.

The main findings of this research concluded that sexual risk taking amongst these black female students are exacerbated by the freedoms on campus that they experience, the peer pressures they face from other students both male and female and from boyfriends. This research shows how their constructions of love trust and power influence their use or non use of condoms in sexual relationships. There is a prevalence of ‘sugar daddy’ relationships that may put female students in situations of sexual risk taking behaviours. The participants in this study do articulate sexual agency and decision making regarding sex. They are not ignorant about HIV or other consequences contributing from unsafe sex but some are influenced by traditional and cultural notions surrounding the sexuality of women.

### **5.3 Tentative Recommendations**

It is hoped that the findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of the underlying issues leading to Black female students risk taking behaviour. According to Mutinta, *et. al*, (2012, p.359) universities can be important sites to provide HIV preventative initiatives that comprehensively take into account the perceived peer and “individual influences and their combined effects on students risk- taking behaviour”. Studies by Ergene, Cok, Tümer and Ünal (2005, p. 278) show how ‘youth to youth’ interventions have the potential and are worth examining as a preventative and proactive effort to reduce HIV. The idea is to train young people to foster positive HIV and AIDS awareness at their campuses and communities.

Universities and even public health practitioners should design HIV and sexual health programmes that are informed by the “grounded realities” of young people (Bell, 2011, p. 294) rather than merely providing knowledge and ways of acquiring the virus. Peer group leaders trained by the university can influence change in risk taking behaviours. However to acquire correct information on sex education these peers must be trained, well informed and provide positive norms that challenge high risk behaviour. Peers can play a significant role in challenging misconceptions surrounding sexual issues and should be an important avenue universities should look at for reducing and challenging negative social norms.

Universities should also look at introducing compulsory programs especially during the students first year of study that focuses on how young people can challenge stereotypical norms and beliefs regarding healthy sexual behaviour. As participants mention in this study while at school they are given enough information about HIV and safe sex creating a sense of fatigue surrounding the subject of HIV awareness so rather than making the subject even more dreary to students universities should create knowledge that inspires change, critical thinking and transforms and debates issues of traditional, cultural norms and practices at South African campuses.

Moreover, rather than attending programmes that provide factual information about sexual risk taking and diseases perhaps programs could focus on why students engage in risk taking behaviour and allow students the opportunity to discuss changes they would like others to articulate and changes they would like to see others make in their attitudes and behaviours surrounding not only sexual risks but more importantly issues surrounding gender and sexuality with the cultural and male expectations attached to them. Students should be positively coerced into verbally addressing messages about multiples forms of power found within relationships, the gendered and sexual identities of students as well as the gendered and human rights norms in relationships.

This study also addressed issues of gender based violence on female students. Although the women in this study articulate decision making power in relationships which I believe is a positive trend towards new femininity, there is still the reality in South Africa that many women experience physical, emotional, sexual and verbal violence. A structural change is needed to ensure that women are able to complete high school and obtain degrees in higher education safely and without fear of intimidation or abuse. More safe spaces should be created at South African universities where students do not have to fear that they may be raped. Strict control of access into campus residences should be implemented, and if not already implemented, possible monitoring of areas within the residences should be established through the use of security camera monitoring systems since, for example, some participants expressed fear of walking to the communal toilets or bathrooms at night. Perhaps confidential crisis hotlines or more adequate confidential crisis hotlines should be provided to students so that they can phone in at any time and complain of any crime they have witnessed or been exposed to.

Counselling centres are provided at campuses to students regarding HIV however many of the participants in this study expressed their embarrassment of speaking with campus nurses about sexual issues. A possible recommendation here would be for universities to hire younger medical staff (no discrimination intended) who the students may feel more comfortable speaking to about sexual issues and protection. Interventions for female students should also raise their awareness of their vulnerabilities and vigilance under the influence of alcohol or drug use. It can easily be taken for granted that the students are adults and do not need to be forewarned about the risks involved whilst under the influence of drug or alcohol abuse however many students especially the first year students living away from home for the first time may also be consume alcohol or drugs for the first time as participants in this study articulate due to the freedom they acquire living on campus away from parents therefore awareness may be useful to them.

It is important to identify and understand agency in young women's narratives and the practices they describe. The forms of agency that the participants express begins with their conceptualisations of what power means to them in relationships – for some of the participants in this study it meant economic power and education which can be an indicator of how young women can achieve their own “agentic practise” to achieve gender equitable relationships (Maxwell and Aggleton, 2010, p.342). Transactional sex is a way in which young women on campuses may to some degree express their sexual agency however in which ever manner may we scrutinise transactional sex and no matter how glamorous female students may make it out to be, transactional sex can be viewed as immoral and university initiatives should explore how the nature of transactional relationships facilitate gender inequalities in relationships. The participants in this study were not victims but highlight the complexities of university life that suggests the multiple and diverse forms of resources that maybe exchanged for sexual intimacy.

In giving meanings to love women respond in “gender-specific” ways bringing love into tension with materiality and culture. Love and gender, sex and money are intertwined through which gender inequalities are produced and reproduced so it is important to look at what can be done to disrupt their continued vulnerabilities wherein South African women and internationally women are most vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Programs should be based more securely on knowledge that young women are sexual agents in their own lives. Young

women need support and knowledge before and during sexual relationships therefore programs at universities should also look at how young women can deal with disempowerment that can occur in intimate relationships due to specific reasons and consequences such as poor economic conditions.

This study was based at a higher education institution however as a teacher I believe that while young girls are at school they must be informed of the realities they will encounter once they leave school. Students at school do experience peer pressures and freedoms such as consuming alcohol and drugs and female students at school just as university students may and have unintended pregnancies. Students are exposed to sexual risk taking behaviours and gender inequalities so it also becomes important for schools and teachers to provide social support groups to students. Learners at school are provided with knowledge about HIV, other sexual diseases and safety and precautions that they can take to avoid pregnancy however teachers must listen and advise their students about relationships and consequences of investing themselves sexually and emotionally in relationships at a young age.

It should not be taken for granted that students are still young and unaware about sexual matters or that they know about sexual risk taking. I firmly believe that one person can make a significant difference. I inform my female students that because someone from the opposite sex tells that they love them does not mean that the person actually does truly love and want to marry them. I inform my students about the importance of education and how a university degree can fulfil and open so many dreams for them. I want my female students to know that they do not need to be pressured by anyone to have sex to prove their love and I have discussions with them to gently try and engage them in deconstructing gender inequalities derived from society and from within relationships of the opposite sex.

Discussions of the realities facing young people such as transactional sex and gender based violence are crucial to change the mindsets of some students and to achieve awareness of the issues that perpetuate HIV in this country. The point herein is that I believe female students should not be allowed to go to university or leave school 'gullible' and misinformed nor should they continue to increase the cycle of vulnerabilities young women face in South Africa. I believe education about these matters can begin at school and further established at university level thereby becoming an ongoing inspiring and informative body of imperative and possibly life changing knowledge that extends from school into university.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the main findings of this study and provides tentative recommendations that I do not propose are the ultimate answers to the vulnerabilities female students may or may not experience at South African universities but they provide initiatives that can be undertaken so that female students in particular black African can decrease the sexual inequalities perpetuated by differences in gender and sexuality as articulated by the participants in this study. While we wait optimistically for larger social and economic structural changes that can change the circumstances of the marginalised and poor or disadvantaged women so that they can stake their claim to social and economic stability as well as physical health, universities must promote and support the emerging gender norms that address issues of unintended pregnancy and HIV prevention programs designed for university students in contribution to a better and more gender equitable South Africa.



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# Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical clearance certificates

Appendix 2: Letter of consent

Appendix 3: Biographical details questionnaire of each participant

Appendix 4: Semi-structured interview schedule  
(individual interviews)

Appendix 5: Turn It in Report



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20 April 2012

Mrs Janet Pillay (206523541)  
School of Education

Dear Mrs Pillay

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0115/012**

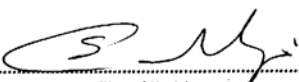
**PROJECT TITLE: Female students' constructions of gender, sexuality and risk at a higher education institution in South Africa.**

In response to your application dated 16 April 2012, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
**Professor Steven Collings (Chair)**  
**Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee**

cc Supervisor Professor Deevia Bhana  
cc Dr D Davids  
cc Mrs S Naicker/Mr N Memela

## APPROVAL OF CHANGE OF TITLE



17 July 2013

Mrs Janet Pillay 206523541  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Protocol Reference Number: HSS/0115/012

New Project Title: Gender, sexuality and risk in young women's narratives of University life: A study of selected African women at Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Dear Mrs Pillay

### **Approval of a change of project title**

I wish to confirm that your application in connection with the above mentioned project has been approved.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
Professor U Bob (Chair) & Dr S Singh (Deputy Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Professor Deevia Bhana  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr D Davids  
cc School Administrators: Ms B Bhengu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Professor Urmilla Bob (Chair) and Dr Shenuka Singh (Deputy Chair)  
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Website: www.ukzn.ac.za  
Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS



**RE: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT FROM STUDENT FOR  
PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH STUDY**

Dear Participant

I, Janet Pillay (Student Number- 206523541) am a full time B Ed (masters) student at the University of KwaZulu Natal. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that I am undertaking. As a participant in this research study you are will be interviewed either as a focus group or on an individual basis. The focus interview is expected to last an hour to an hour and a half. The individual interview will be about an hour to hour and a half long.

A brief description of the study follows:

*Title:* Understanding gender and sexual risk among higher education students: views from African female students at the University of KwaZulu- Natal Edgewood Campus.

*Key features of the project:* In this study I want to understand how a selected group of African undergraduate students give meaning to sexuality. In the context of HIV and AIDS, unwanted pregnancy and risk to gender violence, the examination of undergraduate female remains important. There is limited research focused on how gender relations and risky sexual practices amongst female students in higher education institutions in South Africa may impact on the HIV and AIDS epidemic and other sexual vulnerabilities faced by women such as unwanted or pre-marital pregnancy, sexual coercion, economic exploitation and transactional sex. This project is essentially focused on understanding gender and sexual risk among higher education female students since young women make up a higher proportion of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa.

The interview will be audio-taped for the purposes of the data being transcribed later on. You are welcome to come and read the transcribed interviews once completed. The tapes will be kept in a secure place under lock and key. I will be careful to use the information that you supply in a manner that will ensure your anonymity. In order to protect your identity I will use a pseudonym in my transcripts and my research report. If you are uncomfortable at any time you are at



liberty to stop the interview and withdraw from the study and your decision will not be prejudiced. If you decide to voluntarily participate in the research process then you are free to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research process.

Universal principles such as honesty, justice and respect will direct my research. I hope that this research will make a positive contribution to the constructions of gender, sexuality and risk by female students' in higher education institutions.

My supervisor of this project is Prof Deevia Bhana, who can be contacted by email- [bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:bhanad1@ukzn.ac.za) or on 031 260 2603.

Thank you for your co-operation.

**DECLARATION AND UNDERSTANDING:**

I ..... (full name, surname and student number) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I also acknowledge that the contents discussed in the interviews will remain confidential and will not be discussed outside the context of the interview.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Researchers contact details:**

Name: Janet Pillay

Student Number: 206523541

Email: [206523541@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:206523541@ukzn.ac.za)

Tel: 031 402 0652

## BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.

I need to collect some personal and background information so kindly fill out all the necessary details below.

1. Full name and surname: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Race: \_\_\_\_\_ Year of study: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Where do you live?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Who do you live with?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What type of work do your parents/guardians do?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Describe your family or home life in 2 or 3 sentences.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Describe your community/area in 3 or 4 sentences.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **SEMI – STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:**

1. Why do Black students have relationships? Are there different reasons for males and for females?
2. Why do Black students have sex before marriage? Are there different reasons for males and females?
3. Do you think condoms and other precautionary measures for safe sex are freely available to students on campus?
4. Do you know of Black students or seen students on campus who are pregnant?
5. If yes, why do you think they are falling pregnant?
6. Why do you think Black female students engage in unprotected sex?
7. Whose responsibility should safe sex be – the male partner or the female partner or both partners?
8. depending on above answer, Why?
9. Should Black women be able to express their sexuality or be ignorant about it?
10. Who do you think should initiate conversations about sex in a relationship? Why?
11. Do you think that Black female students engage in 'sugar daddy' relationships? Why?
12. What does power mean to a woman?
13. What makes you powerful in a relationship?
14. Who should initiate conversations about sex in a relationship? Why?
15. Should Black females have a say in decision making regarding sex?
16. Why do some people use condoms and some people do not?
17. Are condoms and other forms of sexual precautions available on campus?

18. How would you feel if someone saw you take a condom?
19. If you were in a sexual relationship would you carry a condom? Why?
20. Do you think Black female students can speak freely to medical staff on campus about sex? Why?
21. Can you speak openly about sex with your friends and family? Why?
22. Who do you think should know more about sex- men or women or both? Why?
23. Why do you think that Black female students on campus engage in unprotected sex?
24. Do you think that they are aware of the sexual risks before sex? Why?
25. Do you know of Black female students who are physically abused by their partners? Why do you think they or some students remain in these relationships?
26. Do you think students can become infected with HIV?
27. Do you think you can become infected with HIV? How?
28. Do you think that the residence on campus and campus areas are safe for females?
29. Do you think more information should be given to female students on campus regarding sexual risks?

## **TURN IT IN REPORT**

### Turnitin Originality Report

Gender, sexuality and risk in young women's narratives of university life: A study of selected African women at Edgewood Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal by Janet Pillay

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