



College of Humanities, School of Social Sciences

**Normalization of Misogyny:  
Sexist Humour in a Higher Education Context  
at Great Zimbabwe University**

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award  
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Anthropology  
at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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**November 2018**

## **DECLARATION**

This work is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD in Anthropology in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College, Durban, South Africa.

I, Roselyn Kanyemba, declare that the entire body of work contained in this research assignment is my own, original work; that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted this work for obtaining any qualification.

Date:           22 November 2018

## **SUPERVISOR'S AGREEMENT**

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree/do not agree to the submission of this thesis.

Name:           Maheshvari Naidu

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my son, Anashe Luthando, the apple of my eye.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In achieving this milestone in my life, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the following people who helped me along the way:

To God the Almighty, who made heaven and earth. All Glory and honour is yours.

Professor Maheshvari Naidu, my mentor and research supervisor who believed in me first. The journey was tough but you were there for me always. It is your support that kept me focused in my studies. Thank you for your wisdom, advice, guidance and encouragement. Without you, this would not have been possible.

I acknowledge and salute a number of colleagues who provided moral support, private communications and recommendations in the right direction. Your help is appreciated.

To my husband, Vumiso Nyamazana. You supported me all the way. Thank you for your patience and kindness. Love you always.

I would like to thank my parents and siblings for having confidence in me always and for the continual support. You believed in me and supported me all the way. Special mention goes to my sister Vimbai who took over from me and became a mother to my son. *Mwari vakuitirei zvakakanaka Malulu.*

I would also like to thank the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Campus for covering my tuition fees, books and all study material used during my studies. I couldn't have made it in three years without this kind of support from the institution.

To all my friends, colleagues and classmates, thank you so much for the encouragement and support. Special mention goes to Marcia Mutambara and Josiah Taru. This is for us guys. *Tasvika tasvika.*

## **ABSTRACT**

This research focuses on sexist humour and its contribution to the creation of hostile campuses for women, affecting their equal access and enjoyment of higher education. This research addresses an element that has been neglected in the field of sexism and higher education as previous studies tended to focus on overt expressions of sexual harassment. The study investigated the nature and perceptions of students at Great Zimbabwe University with regard to sexist humour. The study grounds its analysis on a logical conceptual framework using structural violence theory, sexual objectification and social identity theories to discuss the perceptions, experiences, processes and outcomes of sexist humour in higher education settings. It also uses data collected from survey questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and observations to bring out the voices and experiences of women with regard to sexist humour in higher education, an element which has been missing in literature.

Sexual harassment is a growing epidemic in universities around the world and this has consequences especially for female students who are the targets. Latent linguistic factors such as sexually violent humour, rape jokes and sexist humour normalizes violence and rape in society. Ambiguous definitions of what constitutes violence as well as the burden of proof makes it difficult for students to decide whether they should report sexist humour or not. In addition, humour is not listed as violence in the available statutes which only cater for overt expressions of violence that are presented with glaring proof of assault. Victims are thus often silenced and dismissed as frivolous.

The study established that sexist joking, which has been socialized in cultures for centuries, normalizes rape culture and hostile campuses and needs to be addressed with the same seriousness as other overt expressions of violence occurring on university campuses. The ambiguity in defining sexist humour as harassment means there is little communication and discourse on campus, thereby normalizing violence.

**Keywords:** sexist humour, higher education, misogyny, normalization, harassment

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## **Acronyms**

AA	Affirmative Action
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women
GAA	Gender Affirmative Action
GoZ	Government of Zimbabwe
GZU	Great Zimbabwe University
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NGP	National Gender Policy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection

## **Definition of Terms**

**GENDER:** As used here, it encompasses not only sex but also the cultural meaning attributed to being male or female

**MASCULINITY:** Possession of the qualities traditionally associated with men

**MISOGYNY:** Dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudices against women

**PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY:** Society dominated by men in both public and private affairs

**SEXIST HUMOUR:** Amusement based on the target's gender

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT:** Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which is persistent

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction to the study

Feminist scholars influenced by post-structuralism locate privilege and oppression within the structure of patriarchy which views women as the subordinates of males (see Baxter, 2003; Butler, 2007). Verbal behaviour in societies is key to understanding power relations, especially the position of women in society as it reveals attitudes and evaluations that may not be explicitly expressed. Attitude refers to a predisposition or tendency to respond either positively or negatively towards an object, person or situation. Language reinforces assumptions about male domination and is used to fortify subjective identities about women (see Baxter, 2008; Butler, 2007; Weedon, 1997). These assumptions are based on misogyny which is prejudice against women and sometimes manifests in language characterised by verbal violence, social exclusion, sexual objectification and discrimination of women (see Faluyi, 2016; Rubin, 2016). Misogynists view women according to either how they desire women to be or how they fear women to be (ibid.). According to Rubin (2016) and Faluyi (2016), verbal harassment of female students through sexist humour at university campuses has become one of the ways in which misogyny is expressed. It is rife and has become embedded and naturalized in popular thought such that it has become normalized. This heightens concern for female students' welfare as this kind of language props up violence and represents not only how men subdue women, but also how women may be complicit in perpetuating an idea of a particular kind of woman (ibid.). Normalization of verbal harassment by both sexes contributes to muting victimized women, thus perpetuating a culture in which violence against women becomes part of the social milieu. Silence by women therefore contributes to the avoidance of the labelling of verbal harassment through humour as violence or by outright denial.

Verbal harassment through humour can be used as an outlet for showing behaviours that are sanctioned by society such as racism and sexism. Over the years, a widening body of research has shown how sexism has evolved from being blatantly expressed to being hidden in humorous verbal cues which are more subtle but equally harmful (see Ayres, Friedman and Leaper, 2009, 452; Samantroy, 2010, 27; Barretto and Ellemers, 2013, 292). For the purpose of this research, these supposedly humorous verbal cues will be referred to as sexist humour. Sexist humour can be defined as humour that demeans, insults, stereotypes, victimizes and/or objectifies a person on the basis of his or her gender (Attenborough, 2014, 139). The term

‘gender’ refers to the concept of masculinity and femininity which is socially constructed. Most modern societies sanction expressions of blatant prejudice and discrimination so this may justify the expression of violence and discrimination through humour because common definitions of humour emphasize amusement and laughter. By making light of sexism, sexist humour diminishes women and trivializes that diminishment because humour communicates that its content is to be interpreted playfully rather than critically (ibid.).

While one may consider higher education institutions in Africa as safer spaces for women, these are highly contested terrains as misogyny through sexist humour, among other hindrances, has created an obstacle for women’s equal participation in higher education (ibid.). Feminist scholars have documented experiences which contribute to campus climate being described as prohibitive or “chilly” for women (see Mama and Barnes, 2007, 9; Gaidzanwa, 2010, 16; Masvawure, 2010, 860; Muasya, 2014, 75). The term “chilly climate” in universities refers to the freezing out of those groups who are unwelcome because of their group membership. A chilly climate exists where members of a particular group are systematically relegated to the sidelines and are deprived of opportunity. The prohibitive environment may be as a result of sexism and manifests through sexual violence and harassment resulting from sexist humour. Sexist humour existing in higher education contexts has potential to escalate into serious violence because it is couched in the language of rough treatment, aggression and subjugation (Mungwini and Matereke, 2010, 1). As such, women in higher education face a serious threat. Recent protests in South African universities have testified to the presence of sexual harassment in higher education settings and how it can degenerate into violent actions such as rape thereby compromising the position of female students (Mogotlane, 2016, 4).

Scholars such as Du Toit (2005, 258) and Ray (2013, 29) have asserted that verbal violence exists because it is legitimated, naturalized and normalized through the valorisation of a hegemonic masculinity of which violence is an intrinsic part. It appears that masculinity exists in contrast to femininity, thus it involves social constructions of what is expected of men in relation to women. Patriarchy celebrates masculinities that dominate women and this might influence men’s behaviour towards women. For the purpose of this research, hegemonic masculinity is defined as a “culturally idealized form of masculine character” although this may not be the “usual” form of masculinity (Donaldson, 1993, 646-7). When society normalizes language encapsulated in violent verbal cues, it accepts and creates a culture where both men and women accept that sexual violence is a fact of life and therefore

inevitable (see Hussein, 2009, 59; De Klerk, 2013, 88; Ray, 2013, 19; Mogotlane, 2016, 4). Aside from the valorisation of violent masculinities, the institutionalization of silence has legitimized verbal violence (ibid.). In the institutionalization of silence, there is an unspoken consensus with no acknowledgement that women are disadvantaged in higher education and complainants are dismissed as being ‘too sensitive’ and lacking in a ‘sense of humour’. Thus, victims suffer in silence which has a negative impact on their academic life.

Morley (2005) as cited in Adusah-Karikari (2008, 36) labelled the university (higher education settings) as “*institutions of contradictions*” which refers to an environment that is complicit with social divisions yet at the same time offers chances of upward mobility and escape for some sectors in society. This reveals how higher education has come to be viewed as crucial for the realization of a just society and as a gateway to a good life. Effectively this means that universities are viewed as liberal institutions. However, it has been noted that certain groups such as female students face discrimination within higher education. Therefore males and females have different experiences of university life. It can be noted that universities have traditionally been recognized as male institutions into which women have been grudgingly accepted. Before the interventions on female empowerment that allowed for increased female participation in higher education, universities were seen as ivory towers complete with gendered male power and control expertly woven into the university structures. The gendered nature of the universities implied that control, meaning and identity were tailored to manifest in distinctions between men and females. Therefore, it appears that gender inequality is indeed a manifestation and reflection of the broader society.

While both parties have the capacity to be harassed and hurt by the prejudice, the feminist paradigm asserts that it is women who are more at risk than men because men have systems to support their supposed superiority such as biology and tradition and, in some cases, scientific evidence that portrays them as superior over women and supports their harassment of women (Bates, 2012, 6). As such, feminists reject the notion that women can be sexist towards men. However, cases of males being harassed by females are emerging in the media though reporting is low as men do not want to portray themselves as victims (Davies, 2002, 210). Despite their harassment, African women continue to display their commitment to education and continue to regard it as the route to personal and collective liberation and empowerment. Thus, the study aims to explore the interplay between gender, sexist humour and power in relation to how these (re)construct, (re)produce and maintain the current social reality and thus deny women an equal opportunity in education. This study continues other

studies done at other universities on sexual harassment but differs with those studies in that it focuses on a particular and different aspect of harassment which is sexism couched in humour. This kind of humour is subtle yet dangerous. In addition, the study prioritizes the voices of women in higher education because in order for meaningful participation to be realised in higher education, it is important to hear the challenges and obstacles of these women expressed in their own words.

### *1.1.1 Towards a feminist anthropological approach to sexist humour*

The issue of sexism and sexual harassment in workplaces and educational settings has gained much attention from the world in previous decades (see Oloka-Onyango, 1997, 17; Tamale and Gaidzanwa, 2001, 22; Bennet, 2002a, 27; Patton, 2004, 65). This increased attention can be seen mostly in the field of law through the ratification of international statutes such as the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 as well as the Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against women in 1993, among others. These treaties sought to prohibit and criminalize the targeting of women with violence and discrimination based on their gender (United Nations Treaty Series (1979, 13). Countries worldwide have ratified these treaties and have shown support through the introduction of country specific programmes that mirror and aim to support the vision of these treaties. The government of Zimbabwe, in particular, has continuously shown commitment to fulfilling the aims of these treaties. The adoption of the Gender Affirmative Action Policy of 1992, the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) and the National Gender Policy of 1992 are illustrative (see Chabaya, Rembe and Wadesango, 2009, 2). These policies were meant to investigate and advance gender equality in education. In addition to these treaties, there are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are a continuation of the Millennium Development Goals; in particular, SDG 4 emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education opportunities for all sexes. All these appear to pave the way for female empowerment in education which was previously regarded as a male domain (see Bennet, 2002, 2; Tamale and Oloka-Onyango, 1997, 17). Furthermore, the majority of African universities were a reflection of the colonial ideas that formed them which emphasized female submission to male power and control, thus reflecting the need to include women in higher education (ibid.). Yet, despite all these interventions women appear to have little access and equality in education due to harassment and violence existing in the settings. As part of the interventions to protect women from harassment, most legal contexts have criminalized and made illegal sexual harassment. However, there appears to be another more

subtle form of harassment which has been dismissed as not being serious and allowed to flourish which is known as sexist humour. The definition of humour emphasizes laughter and amusement which might have contributed to this type of harassment being overlooked by statutes. The interventions that have been affected target explicit forms of sexual harassment and have neglected subtle forms of sexual harassment such as sexist humour.

Most studies on sexist humour are in the field of psychology and have revealed how potent sexist humour is as a tool for harassment, as much as the overt forms of harassment (see Ryan and Kanjorski, 1998, 9-10; Ford, Wentzel and Lorion, 2001, 680; Viki et al 2007, 128; Thomae and Pina, 2015, 13). These studies have mostly discussed the effects of sexist humour such as increased rape tendencies in men, increased tolerance of violence, the role of sexist humour in men's in-group-cohesion as well as victim blame, among others (ibid.). These studies seem to focus more on how interactions with sexist humour impact individual as well as group behaviour. In this way, they have neglected the experiences and lived realities of women in society and structures where sexist humour is rife. In addition, these studies have focused on Europe and have neglected the experiences of women within the African context and how they perceive and experience sexist humour. As such, this study draws from African Feminism in exploring the issue of sexist humour in higher education settings.

African Feminism is a type of feminism innovated by African women that specifically addresses and conditions the need of continental African women (Nkealah, 2016, 61). This is in contrast to Western feminism which was not familiar with African women's specific experiences. As such, African feminism addresses cultural issues and experiences those women of different cultures in Africa face. Although women are not a homogenous group, African feminism recognizes patriarchy as one thing African women have in common, despite their differences in religion, politics and others. African Feminist scholars, in the field of sociology and anthropology, have expressed how African women's needs, reality, oppression and empowerment are best addressed by having a comprehensive understanding of the broad attitudes that define women in specifically African settings (see Namuddu, 1992, 22; Mama, 2003, 17; Bunyi, 2004, 36; Barnes, 2007, 19; Adusah-Karikari, 2008, 15; Kayuni, 2009, 88). This is because the struggles that African women face are also related to the way they have internalized patriarchy and how they endorse the system (ibid.). In addition, Ahikire (2014, 14) argued that the struggles African women face are as a result of structures that place males at the top of social stratification thereby implying their superiority

over women. Thus, the study borrows the concept of 'stiwanism' where African women's experiences and realities are at the centre of discourse because stiwanism is deeply rooted in the experiences and realities that African women face (Nkealah, 2016, 68). Analysis of the findings from this research draws actively from African feminist perspectives. The voices of female students in relation to their experiences and lived realities with sexist humour are prioritized in this study.

This study seeks to situate the study of gender and culture in the context of the African university. The study explores how institutionalized cultures in African societies influence access and equality of female students in higher education settings in the context of sexist humour. The influence of pre-existing structures that discriminate against women and how they influence female participation in higher education has been acknowledged by scholars both in anthropology and in sociology (see Tamale, 1997; Gaidzanwa, 2001; Mama, 2003; Butler, 2007; Muasya, 2014).

However, the subject of gender and institutional culture in African higher education remains largely under-studied, especially in the field of anthropology thus making it a fruitful target of enquiry. Thus, this study investigates how pre-existing structures influence and affect female students in higher education settings through sexist humour. In addition, the study investigates how the female body intersects with culture and influences the lived realities of female students in higher education contexts by critiquing, deconstructing and challenging perceptions of patriarchy on the female body.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

Human society has always been characterised by female marginalization; this is reflected in the teachings of famous philosophers as far back as Aristotle who remarked that being female by virtue means lacking some qualities that men have (Asen, 2017, 32). This view emphasizes female inferiority in comparison to males and has encouraged the marginalization of women since they are perceived to lack the finer qualities of men. This female marginalization is evident even in modern societies where women's rights activists have become active (ibid.). Women have been advocating for a change in attitude and recognition that they have the same potential for development as men and are advocating for equity in all sectors.

It appears that female marginalization has been as a result of the power that men have over women. This is reflected in the works of feminists such as Kate Millet who as far back as



1970 argued that the relationship between the sexes has been based on men's power over women (see Bryanson, 1999; Millet, 2000). This power has been evident in nearly all sectors of life manifesting as unequal life opportunities and this has been articulated by many more recent scholars (see Gaidzanwa, 2007; Barnes and Mama, 2007; Muparamoto, 2012; Bates, 2012; Muasya, 2014). African feminists as well as activists have attempted to ensure women's full participation and recognition in all sectors including tertiary education which was considered a male preserve (ibid.). According to Mama and Barnes (2007), higher education in Africa has always had a gendered element as African universities began as extensions of elite institutions that recruited only the best and outstanding young men from the colonial classes to train them to serve the colonial governments. Similarly, higher education in Zimbabwe can be said to have its roots in a masculine design. Historically it was reserved for males because the few black secondary schools that existed in colonial times favoured men (Gaidzanwa 2013). After independence, women tended to enrol in schools that focused on home economics subjects like sewing and cooking because universities required higher passes and most women could not attain these due to the presumed unequal burden of unpaid work in comparison to males. Thus, universities remained dominated by males (ibid.). However, this changed when the Zimbabwean government introduced the affirmative action policy in 1992 that allowed female applicants into tertiary institutions with slightly lower admission qualifications than their male counterparts. Affirmative action includes a wide range of voluntary and mandatory activities in the area of education and employment which seek to promote women or other minorities in education and the workplace. It appears affirmative action might have been a direct threat for males who considered higher education their own unique space. Although the admission of women is still low, women are now making strides into a space that was previously reserved for men. Verbal violence through sexist humour in higher education contexts can, however, be described as a reflection of the struggle men are going through in accepting women as equals (see Muparamoto, 2012; Nayef and Nashar, 2015). When masculinity is threatened, men are likely to respond negatively by using sexual violence (see Maas, Cadinu, Guarnieri and Grasselli, 2003; Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford and Watsi, 2009). Therefore, the existence of sexist humour in the higher education sector may be a reaction and response from men to the perceived challenge by women.

The use of proverbs in Africa and in particular Zimbabwe may explain how language has always been used to subdue women. Shona proverbs in Zimbabwe render the female body a

subject of male dominance. Female thoughts and efforts are dismissed as vanity; trivialized and sexualized (see Zondi, 2005; Chitauro Mawema, 2006; Du Toit, 2009; Bondai, Gora and Muchenje, 2012; Mandova and Chingombe, 2013). A good example is the proverb that says, *Mukadzi muchero, adimura anonhongawo*. Literally translated, it means ‘a woman is a fruit, whoever passes by can pick’ (Bondai, Gora and Muchenje, 2012, 513). This portrays women as weak and appears to legitimize men to exercise their sexual power over women to sustain the latter’s subordination and marginalization. It can be argued that language use is related to a particular kind of hegemonic masculinity that condones violence. Hegemonic masculinity is the practice that promotes the dominant social position of men and the subordinate position of women (Hearn and Morrel, 2012). Hegemonic masculinity emphasizes typical masculine traits such as rationality, risk taking and aggression for males whereas feminine traits include nurturance, emotional expressiveness and self- subordination (Nayef and El-Nashar, 2015,). These attitudes appear to result in stereotypical beliefs that men have the right to initiate sexual behaviour of any kind and have the right to use pressure and violence to achieve this. This tendency to view male aggression as an acceptable masculine trait and as a normal experience is not only evident in society but also permeates campus life (Muasya, 2014). Male students who harass and violate female students are typically seen as justified and are seen as exercising their rights as males to discipline errant females (Gaidzanwa, 2007). These elements of male domination are evident in sexist humour which is characterised by language that infantilizes women and relegates them to the position of the insignificant other. As such, sexist humour is tolerated, normalized and accepted as natural behaviour from men.

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

Gender equality is a concept societies the world over have been trying to achieve over the past few decades. Interventions to address the gender disparities have been adopted. These include legislation, gender mainstreaming and affirmative action policies, among others. Despite all these efforts, gender equality is yet to be achieved, especially in higher education settings. There is a paucity of literature on the experiences of female students in accessing higher education in Africa, thus the need to conduct a qualitative study to obtain a rich description of women and their lived experiences within higher education and, in particular, sexist humour. Previous studies have focused on European universities but there are contextual differences between European and African campuses (see Namuddu, 1992; Mama, 2003; Bunyi, 2004; Barnes, 2007; Adusah-Karikari, 2008; Kayuni, 2009). These differences include economic, institutional, and cultural circumstances (ibid.). Thus, this study focuses on

Africa, in particular Zimbabwe. Scholars such as Nammudu (1992), Asie-Lumumba (2005) and Morley (2005) have focused on structures that constrain women in higher education such as patriarchy. They have, however, tended to neglect other elements that affect women's unlimited access and enjoyment to higher education, such as subtle forms of harassment though deeper exploration of these subtle elements appear to point directly at patriarchy and its power over women. Findings from this study could improve the lives of women in higher education. Women have made significant strides towards achieving equality since obtaining the right to vote but it appears men see this as a direct challenge and a threat to destabilize masculinity. In response, men seem to be expressing their fears through the exhibition of behaviours that may be as a result in the need to protect their perceived rightful place in society; this is often through sexism though modern society prohibits its blatant expression (Barretto and Ellemers, 2013). Women are now included in areas where there were previously excluded. However, it appears that inclusion does not entail equality. Sexual harassment has been a hindrance towards the achievement of this equality. Past research has examined the overt expressions of sexual harassment but has not examined it in the context of humour. This study continues a trend in Zimbabwe begun by researchers such as Zindi (1994) who investigated the prevalence of sexual harassment in higher education and Mlambo (2014) who investigated the linguistic characteristics of the language that underlies sexual harassment.

It appears the term 'sexist humour' is not familiar to Zimbabwean society and therefore sexist humour has not been recognized as harassment. The study of sexist humour and its effects on female students, especially in university settings, is crucial because it appears that it is one of the most difficult challenges facing women in higher education and has consequences on issues of access and equality. However, it is important to note that African universities are not an exception to sexism as evidence also points to sexist humour in other contexts outside Africa (see Morris, 2006; Lee and Lang, 2010; Sue and Golash-Boza, 2013). Despite the fact that these institutions have a mandate of transforming societies through positive change and development, they have proved to be hotbeds of discrimination rooted in sexism. Higher or tertiary education is widely respected as an important pillar of the social system serving to put out new knowledge, interrogate the status quo, and engage with long-held ideas in society, therefore supporting the need for a study into how female students navigate their way in university spaces.

This research is critical in analysing female student interactions with sexist humour and how it impacts on issues of quality of access in higher education settings. There is a need to reveal the politics governing female students' inclusion in higher education because the general assumption is that only intelligent citizens who are disciplined enter university, hence they must be responsible and enlightened (see Tamale, 1997; Bennet, 2002; Asie-Lumumba, 2010). This study aims to explore how and why universities have become hostile spaces, especially for female students through the normalisation of misogynistic humour. Zindi (1994) revealed that 99 percent of women students feel unsafe in colleges as a result of sexism and its consequent violence and Gouws et al. (2005) expressed their concern for female students in higher education. This can be taken as confirmation that sexual harassment is indeed a problem in higher education and it may be concluded that there is an ongoing battle with harassment in society and its structures.

People tend to think of prejudice and violence as being characterised by blatant displays of hostility. What makes sexist humour important in higher education settings as well as anthropological studies is its applicability and capability in providing clues to what really matters in society and culture (Maphosa, 2012). Humour mirrors deeper cultural perceptions and offers a device to understanding culturally shaped ways of thinking and feeling. This study aims to explore how sexist humour is not simply a form of benign amusement but a serious expression of sexism with potential for serious consequences. There is need to explore patterns of individual and institutional behaviours that affect women's chances for attaining academic qualifications; therefore, it is critical to understand the consequences of sexist humour.

University spaces are often spaces of sexual exploration (Maphosa, 2012). The expectation, especially in the Zimbabwean cultural context, is for females to be sexually inexperienced and play hard to get and for males to pursue the women. Such perceptions may work to silence women in relation to their experiences of sexism and gender inequality, thus verbal harassment becomes normalized. Female students who do not conform to expected gender identities are therefore targeted. This silences female sexual desires and exposes them to unsafe sexual practices. It has been noted that "the provision of a safe and inclusive environment is the responsibility of the university in order to allow all stakeholders to achieve their potential" (FAWE, 1998, 6). It is thus necessary to examine how universities adhere to this principle.

#### **1.4 Statement of the problem**

It would appear that verbal harassment of female students at university campuses has become so embedded and naturalized in popular thought that it has become normalized. Universities around the world have adopted policies to combat this challenge. While these efforts mainly deter manifest harassment, latent harassment still continues disguised as violence in humour. There is thus a need to explore the interplay between misogyny, sexist humour and violence against women on campus given that university spaces are potentially problematic for many women. Higher education is not the sole space where sexist humour occurs but it is without any doubt central to the acquisition and production of knowledge that shapes the contemporary world, thereby justifying the study.

#### **1.5 Key questions**

1. What is sexist humour and how is it recognized?
2. In what context does sexist humour occur?
3. Can sexist humour be related to sexual aggression on campus?
4. What normalizes and justifies sexist humour on campus?
5. Are there channels that deal with awareness and complaints against sexual harassment? If they exist, how do students access these channels?

#### **1.6 Broader issues to be discussed**

In order to address the specific research questions listed above, the study seeks to explore female students' experiences and lived realities with sexist humour in higher education settings. Issues of how sexist humour impacts on issues of equal access and quality of education for female emancipation and empowerment will also be discussed. In addition, the study will explore the extent to which female students can be said to be freely exercising their academic rights in a context that appears to be a replication of the socio-cultural, political and religious systems that shape and determine gender roles that define women. Furthermore, the study will examine how women can be described as being free to access and utilize education when the structures in education appear to be pervaded with prejudices that derive power from patriarchal institutions that appear to be traditionally authoritarian. The study therefore explores how women's substantive voice is suppressed in an environment which is perceived to be equal and all-inclusive by looking beyond women's presence and the number of women participating to address the politics of influence in higher education settings. It has been noted that "the provision of a safe and inclusive environment is the responsibility of the

university in order to allow all to achieve their potential” (FAWE, 1998, 6). This study therefore also explores how universities deal with complaints regarding sexist humour.

### **1.7 Conceptual framework**

The study draws on structural violence theory, sexual objectification and social identity theories. These theories have been chosen not only because each theory offers critical insights regarding violence and social reality, but because together they provide the most comprehensive understanding of violence through a merged analysis of discourse and gender. Their methodological approaches also mean they work together well. Each theory builds and adds value to the others in different ways and they work towards a common goal which is to explain how and why sexual violence may be normalized and accepted as inevitable. Bhattacharjee (2012) defined a theory as a set of accepted beliefs or organized principles that explain and guide analysis. Theories have been repeatedly tested by experiments and can be used to make predictions about natural phenomena. The theories used in this study will be discussed further in the methodology and theory section of Chapter 3.

### **1.8 Research design and research method**

Research methodology refers to the means required to execute certain stages (methods of definition, sampling, measurement, data collection and data analysis) in the research process. In other words, research design and methods describe the strategies used to carry out a study in order to achieve set objectives (Kothari, 2004). The purpose of a research design is to provide a strategy of study that permits precise assessment of cause and effect relationships between variables. Research methodology includes research design, target population, sample size and sampling procedures, data collection instruments and data analysis procedure.

The purpose of this study is to explore the interplay between misogyny, sexist humour and violence against women on campus given that university spaces are potentially problematic for many women. As such, the methodology of this study draws on a sequential mixed method design. This implies collecting and analysing quantitative and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within one study (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006). The reason behind mixing both kinds of data within one study is grounded in the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods when used individually are enough to explain phenomena; they are more valuable when combined. The qualitative stage builds on the findings from the quantitative stage (*ibid.*). This design provides additional insight into the study and results in reliable conclusions. Research design helps to guarantee that the

confirmation obtained enables us to answer the initial questions as unambiguously as possible and in order to accomplish this purpose, exploratory, descriptive and analytical designs were used with the methods of survey questionnaire, individual interviews, and observation and focus group discussions.

Quantitative data was collected through survey questionnaires, whereas qualitative data was collected through observation, in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions. A survey questionnaire was designed to investigate the pervasiveness of students' experiences of, reaction to and beliefs about sexist humour. A survey questionnaire is defined as a measure of opinions or experiences of a group of people through the asking of questions (Fink, 2013). This study examined both the collective attitudes and experiences of sexist humour and perceptions of campus climate. Focus group discussions were used to probe further into the phenomena and to consider individual opinions in a group setting. There is much debate in social research about whether qualitative and quantitative approaches can, or should be, combined (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The purpose of bringing the different approaches together in this study is to yield different types of intelligence about the study subject rather than to simply fuse the outputs from qualitative and quantitative enquiry.

Survey questionnaires targeted 200 students (150 female and 50 male). Purposive sampling was used to determine the areas to distribute the questionnaires. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique where a researcher relies on their own judgement when choosing members of population to participate in study (ibid.). The sample was identified through flow population. This term is used where samples are generated by approaching people in a particular setting (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Potential respondents were approached at sports grounds, common rooms and open spaces where students socialize. In selecting the sample size, the researcher did not use any particular formula because the study used a mixed methodology with an emphasis on the qualitative side. According to Morse (1994, 44), qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. At saturation point, adding more participants to the study will not add more perceptions or value to the study, therefore a larger sample will not be desirable (ibid.).

Furthermore, in sequential mixed method research, while the weight of each phase may be equal, it is more common that one phase is emphasized over the other and in this case, the qualitative method was emphasized. Vaccaro (2010), cited in Muasya (2014), asserted that numerical representations reveal little about women's lived experiences. Numerical values tell us nothing about the gender relations between males and females; thus, qualitative

enquiry was necessary. Responses from the survey questionnaire informed the areas where observation was conducted and informed the in-depth interview questions. Thirty students were interviewed, 10 male and 20 female. The reason for choosing 10 males only was because the study was aimed at examining how female students experienced sexist humour and male students' responses were only for validity purposes and their responses were used in probing further into the phenomena. The male students were thus not the primary participants. Unstructured interviews were used as they proved suitable for probing delicate phenomena and the researcher used responses from these as the basis for further enquiry. Two focus groups discussions of female students only were conducted (ten students in each group) so as to gather perceptions around sexist humour on campus. A third focus group discussion was held with ten males only and the questions in this group were formulated from information that arose from the two females-only discussions so as to test validity of the information that had been collected.). Focus group discussions impart to social research the component of multi-vocality because respondents are encouraged to talk to each other. Of importance is that in-depth interviews' power is centralized around the dominant researcher but group discussions dissolve the power in favour of the group (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Snowballing which is a type of non-probability sampling technique was employed (ibid.). This is when initial respondents referred and introduced the researcher to other students who may also be of significance to the study.

Thematic analysis, descriptive statistical analysis and discourse analysis were used to analyse data. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

## **1.9 Structure of dissertation**

### *Chapter 1: Introduction/Background to the study*

This is the introductory chapter of the thesis and it outlines the background and the study's problem statement, context, significance and the study setting. Research aims, questions, the value of the study, and a brief theoretical framework and research methodology were given although the latter will be more fully discussed in Chapter 3. The history on the possible origins of sexism and sexist humour in higher education were briefly outlined. The chapter introduced the study setting and gave a detailed background to the research.

### *Chapter 2: Literature Review*

This chapter reviews relevant literature, locally, regionally and globally. This literature outlines definitions of sexism, sexist humour and misogyny, its impact on the communities



and the women in institutional settings. Issues of culture, masculinity and language and their contribution to sexist humour are also discussed. Studies of related literature are reviewed and critically analysed to gain a better understanding of why and how sexism has been institutionalized and normalized within higher education settings as well as responses to sexism by women.

### *Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework*

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework as well as the methodologies that inform the research. The chapter also presents the reasoning behind the choice of methodology and its contribution to the data collection and analysis of the study. This includes an analysis of data gathering techniques adopted for this study, data analysis, sampling techniques, the sample size as well as discussing the site in which the study was carried out. In addition, because this study involved people, there was a need to clearly state how I handled the ethical issues linked to this research. Issues such as protecting respondents from harm, privacy, as well as informed consent are discussed. Principal theories, models and frameworks upon which the research is based are discussed in relation to how they apply to the study. Lastly, the chapter discusses my field experiences (that is challenges and triumphs).

The following Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present a discussion of findings. Topics include the nature and perception of sexist humour, how sexist humour becomes accepted and normalized as well as linking these findings to theories that inform the study. Of importance in these chapters is an analysis of sexual student interactions with reference to how sexist humour, gender inequality and power weave into the production of sexual harassment.

### *Chapter 4: Presentation and discussion of research findings*

In this chapter the nature and perception of sexist humour is discussed. The views on how students on campus perceive sexist humour are crucial for understanding how they respond to it and offer a clear understanding of the origins of sexist humour and what justifies and normalizes it. This chapter also analyses how the use of language can be connected to sexism and violence. The chapter attempts to link language and patriarchy, sexual violence, misogyny and sexism as well as chronicle the overall pattern of exclusion and marginalization of women in higher education settings. In addition, the chapter presents evidence that the institutional and intellectual cultures of African institutions are, in fact, permeated with sexual and gender dynamics.

### *Chapter 5: Normalization of misogyny and violence at GZU*

This chapter discusses how institutions appear to normalize and endorse sexist humour such that it becomes institutionalized. This is determined by how institutions respond to complaints and the policies in place to combat issues of harassment as well as how they create a general awareness of reporting structures on campus. It was crucial for the researcher to understand what influences patterns of normalization and to determine the level of commitment from the institution to fight sexism and harassment. This chapter evaluates the various policies at hand and what leads to the systemic normalization and acceptance of sexist humour which has the potential to be violent. The chapter goes on to discuss how the understanding of sexual harassment exists within patriarchal power relations and how language is ‘softened’ when describing sexual harassment and sexism as well as how the seriousness of sexual harassment is minimized.

#### *Chapter 6: Female complicity and sexist humour*

This chapter discusses how female students can be said to be vulnerable to sexist humour and the associated violence. The chapter discusses the extent to which females can be said to be complicit in issues of sexist humour. Various techniques are discussed of how female students have adopted to deal with issues of sexist humour on campus so as to make their lives on campus tolerable. The chapter explores ways in which women have been forced to accept, resist or adapt to violence. The chapter also discusses what influences the type of response as well as how the type of response impacts the perpetration of sexist humour. Finally, the chapter reveals the struggles that female students go through in trying to find effective ways to deal with violence.

#### *Chapter 7: Summary, conclusion and recommendations*

The concluding chapter of the study presents a general overview of the whole study. It outlines the key findings and explains them in the context of sexist humour. In addition, the researcher discusses challenges that were faced during the study, potential future studies and recommendations, as well as provides a conclusion regarding the research findings and implications of the study. The researcher then presents a conclusive view towards the findings based on their possible contribution to the understanding of knowledge on the interplay between sexist humour and misogyny in higher education settings in Zimbabwe.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an introduction and background to the study as well as the significance of the study. The chapter also provided a brief literature review on the topic,

situating the study within sexist humour in higher education in particular. The research problem, research questions as well as objectives of the study have been discussed. The theoretical framework and research methodology and design have been briefly discussed. The chapter concludes with an outline of the chapters to follow.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the existing literature relevant to the research. Key terms referring to the study are explained as well as several views regarding sexism, including the post-feminist view and the power struggle underlying sexist humour in higher education. Response to sexism in previous studies is also highlighted. The chapter exposes the gaps in literature that have necessitated this study and gives the way forward with regard to sexism in higher learning institutions.

### 2.2 Survey of existing research

#### 2.2.1 *Discussion of key terms*

As far back as 1989, Graddol and Swan (1989, 96) defined sexism as any discrimination against women or men based on their sex. Recently, showing the continuation of sexism, Bearman, Korobov and Thorne (2009, 11) narrowed down the definition and defined sexism as the systematic inequitable treatment of women by men and the society as a whole. Sexism is founded on the conception that biological sex divides men and women into distinct, isolated and hierarchically-ordered groups (Artkinson, 1993, 403). It appears that this hierarchical social arrangement promotes the superiority of men and everything that is considered masculine. The result can be belittling, hatred and disparagement of anything that can be considered feminine which is also known as misogyny. The feminist school of thought asserts that sexism against women is highly demeaning, degrading and personal since it involves attacks about something that cannot be changed, in this case being a woman. Sometimes labelled 'gender harassment' by scholars such as Hall, Christerson and Cunningham (2010) sexism includes generalized sexual and sexist comments that degrade, embarrass or insult women (Harris, 2007). This is verbal sexism; when certain elements in a language express bias in favour of one sex over the other (ibid). These elements act as determinants in the way language expresses gender balance. Artkinson (1993, 403) defined verbal sexism as a wide range of verbal practices, including how women are labelled and referred to in society and how language strategies in mixed interactions may serve to silence or depreciate women. Unequal power relations between male and females manifests in various forms of male dominance such as sexual assault, sexual harassment and violence against women. These filter through society's institutions and cascade down to interactions between men and women. From these definitions, it can be argued that sexism is both

discrimination based on gender and the attitudes, stereotypes and the cultural elements that promote this discrimination.

Humour appears to be a complex phenomenon which is multifaceted. Humour can be described as jokes, stories, banter, ridicules, irony, laughter and imagery that elicit laughter (see Lee and Lang, 2010; Sue and Golash-Boza, 2013 and Morris, 2006). It is necessary to investigate how humour can be a reflection of hidden beliefs and ideas and how gender and humour can be intertwined through the deconstruction of female images that is proposed through humour. Humour can be presented either verbally or non-verbally. For the purpose of this study, humour is presented as something that is aimed at making people laugh though there may also be humour without laughter. The classification of humour in English culture may differ in terms of perception from how humour is viewed in Zimbabwean society. Humour in Zimbabwean society appears to be functional and reflects elements of the society that gave rise to it (Masowa, 2016).

Misogyny is defined by Hayes (2014, 15) as contempt or prejudice against women and manifests in numerous ways including social exclusion, hostility and violence against women. It appears that misogyny is not only about male hostility or hatred towards women, but also about controlling and punishing women who challenge male dominance. According to sociologist Johnson (2000, 15), “misogyny is a cultural attitude of hatred for females because they are female”. Manne (2017, 41) added that misogyny goes beyond sexism as it involves violence. Misogyny appears to thrive in historical patriarchy settings and can be said to be as a result of the moral manifestation of sexist ideology. However, according to Worrel et al. (1999) there is a difference between misogyny and sexism. Sexism is the ideology that supports patriarchal social relations, but misogyny enforces it when there is a threat to the patriarchal system and it involves violence (ibid.). In addition, it appears misogyny is internalized in the customs and social mores that define culture, thus these social beliefs and regulations normalize it. Given the arguments and definitions discussed with reference to misogyny, it can be argued that misogynists often think they are taking the moral high ground by preserving a status quo that feels right to them. They want to be socially and morally superior to the women they target. Thus, it can be argued that most misogynistic behaviour is about hostility towards women who violate patriarchal norms and expectations, those who are not serving male interests in the ways they are expected to.

Misogyny, gender and sexism appear to be two sides of the same coin, thus it is necessary to explore the link between these variables. As a concept, gender denotes the perceived

differences between males and females that are constructed and endorsed by society also known as gender roles (Butler, 2007). This view of gender implies that gender roles are changeable over time and have wide variations within and between cultures. Gender, unlike sex which is biologically determined, speaks behaviours that are learned and internalized over time with the view to fulfil one's image of being male or female (ibid.). The fact that gender is learned implies that it can also be unlearned and expectations can also be modified. According to De Beauvoir's notion "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one" (cited in Butler, 2007, 180). This implies that gender roles are learnt and internalized over time and reflect the context in which they were formed. Thus, it can be argued that gender can also be a socio-economic and political variable which can be adopted in analysing people's roles, responsibilities, constraints and opportunities in everyday life, especially in higher education settings where there is need to explore how gender roles influence issues of access and equal opportunities. Sexism appears to enforce adherence to gender roles as dictated by society and misogynists appear to punish those who do not adhere to the set principles. As such, gender, sexism and misogyny can be said to be related.

In relation to the interplay between sexism, gender and misogyny which appears to be hinged on violence, over the years, a widened body of research has shown that sexism resulting from this relationship has evolved from being blatantly expressed to being hidden in humorous verbal cues which are more subtle yet equally harmful (see Ayres, Friedman and Leaper, 2009; Samantroy 2010; Barretto and Ellemers, 2013). Sexism has not disappeared but appears to have grown new sprouts connected to the systemic roots of inequality. For the purpose of this research, these humorous verbal cues will be referred to as sexist humour. Drawing from Woodzika and Ford (2010), sexist humour is an aggressive form of humour that contains sexist beliefs, stereotypes and attitudes used to create comical effects through a perspective that goes against polite humour. While being regarded as amusing and harmless, scholars such as Hussein (2009) have maintained that sexist jokes are always riddled with undertones of ways certain categories in society perceive women because these jokes focus on women's attributes or lack thereof and are linked to sex, intelligence and women's assumed place in society. Some of the jokes have an extremely violent streak and can even include threats of raping them to put them in their place and as a disciplinary measure (ibid.). The distinction between a sexist and a gendered joke is subtle but once a joke elevates one gender at the expense of the other, it has crossed over into sexism (Attenborough, 2014). If the joke merely compares and contrasts generalized gendered behaviours, it is not sexist. It

becomes sexist when it disparages, belittles, discredits, demeans, ridicules or in any way communicates contempt for one gender because of those differences (ibid.).

Sue (2010, 29) proposes a theory of micro-aggression and defines micro-aggressions as the casual degradation of any marginalized group. Some examples of sexist micro-aggressions include sexist humour. Sexist micro-aggressions remind women of the lesser place they are supposed to occupy in society (ibid.). However, some scholars believe that micro-aggressions are necessary to prepare students for life outside the campus (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2015). They argue that the environment of secureness of which micro-aggression charges are a part, prepares students poorly for professional life, which often demands intellectual engagement with people and ideas one might find unwelcoming or wrong (ibid.). On the other hand, some scholars assert that sexist micro-aggressions is a manifestation of bullying that employs micro-linguistic power interactions in order to marginalize the target group by subtle references that denote intolerance (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015; Gendron et al, 2016). For women in higher education, university represents a time of hopefulness and opportunities and gendered incidences questioning their academic merit pose a serious setback (ibid.). It appears that sexist micro-aggressions communicate a message that females are irrelevant and insignificant, a message which has potential to traumatize and degrade females.

On the other hand, scholars such as Glick and Fiske (1996) and Barreto and Ellemers (2005) have noted that sexism is not only always hostile but can also be expressed as benevolence. Glick and Fiske (1996) proposed that sexism does not only imply singular aggression towards women. Rather, sexist approaches are projected to portray mixed meanings, consisting of both hostile and compassionate feelings. Hostile sexism (HS) is inclusive of the negative feelings and implications that are usually associated with sexist attitudes. In contrast, benevolent sexism (BS) is defined by Glick and Fiske (1996) as “a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone”. This might explain why humour can be described as sexist and offending because of the underlying attitudes that are put cross through sexist humour. Studies on hostile sexism have revealed that it is related to undesirable and damaging perceptions of women who are presumed to be violating traditional gender role norms (Masser and Abrams, 1999; Glick et al., 2000). In addition, hostile sexism is associated with negative and sometimes violent behavioural propensities against women. This study aims at evaluating the effects of both benevolent and hostile sexism expressed through humour.

This study explores the interplay of sexist humour and its effects on women in higher education who are presumed to be challenging the traditional gender norms of women as home-makers. According to Kayuni (2009), sexism appears to thrive in higher education settings. One may assume that in higher education settings interactions between males and females is transparent and mature which appears not to be the case. Students who are in constant interaction may not interpret behaviour as sexist unless the behaviour is of an extreme nature (ibid.). In this case, some behaviour may be labelled as benevolent and not sexist. Naturally, it appears that sexist humour is not then viewed as harassment because the notions of humour denote laughter and carefree attitudes. Therefore, studies have shown how peer sexual harassment has great potential for creating a 'chilly' environment for female students such that they can be seriously affected both socially and academically (Kayuni, 2009; Muasya, 2014). Language shapes words, perceptions and stereotypes of society therefore influencing engagements, behaviour and opportunities (ibid.)

Studies have revealed that it is males who are sexist who enjoy episodes of sexist humour (France and Woodzicka, 1998; Abrams et al., 2006). This implies that beliefs and feelings of sexism need to be already internalized within an individual before they exhibit their sexist tendencies through sexist humour. Furthermore, research has shown that it is the feelings of opposition rather than amusement brought about by sexist humour that increases the rape proclivity as a result of sexist humour especially among university students (ibid.). However, these studies neglected to explore what contributed to individuals (males) having such high levels of sexism. The current study aims to provide evidence for this missing link in the published literature and to suggest that the norms established by sexist jokes create an outlet for men who are already high in hostile sexism to present a propensity to commit acts of sexual aggression that are highly socially condemned. Therefore, this study aims to explore the various contributions that enforce feelings of sexism within individuals resulting in them internalizing deep hatred for the opposite sex.

### *2.2.2 Nexus between sexist humour and sexual harassment*

It appears that an integrated definition of what sexual harassment is and the behaviours that constitute sexual harassment has long been problematic (Pina, Gannon and Saunders, 2008; Phipps et al, 2017). Similarly, definitions of sexist humour are also problematic. Sexist humour typically falls under the banner of hostile environment harassment. Hostile environment harassment refers to a situation in which females are indiscriminately targeted with aggressive, gender-related or sexual comments, and unrequited sexually suggestive



behaviours which may not be pertinent to the business of that particular locality (e.g. Fitzgerald, 1993, 1072). Many present-day researchers now include verbal remarks, demands, and non-verbal behaviours as sexual harassment (ibid.). This is in direct contrast to past studies where actions such as gawking, ogling, whistling, sexual and sexist jokes, and sexual innuendoes were perceived as natural and commonplace in interactions between the sexes. This acts as a strong reference and insight into the underhand nature of particular genres of sexual harassment which encompass behaviours that have a component of ambiguity in terms of how the target should interpret and react to them (ibid.). As a result, perpetrators take advantage of this ambiguity to engage in sexually harassing acts (such as sexist joke telling) and targets are left at a disadvantage to perceive whether this behaviour qualifies as harassment or not (Fiske and Glicke, 1996).

It therefore appears crucial to explore more about sexist humour by probing if the description of sexist humour as a joke makes sexism more acceptable. Mallet (2016) revealed that sexist humour is one of the common ways for men to express sexism because their thoughts and beliefs regarding sexism will be cloaked in humour and presented as playful and unserious banter yet they are motivated by a demeaning view of women that despises women and their achievements. Harris (2008) argued that sexism can be described as sexual harassment in that sexual harassment is an unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature while sexism is the attitude and belief of a person of one sex that their sex is superior. Once one sex believes that they are superior, there will be gender inequalities and sexism in society (ibid, 131). Based on this, sexism is also sexual harassment. As such, sexist humour is a subtle form of modern sexism that masks a demeaning view of women in what appears to be socially acceptable terms (Mallet, 2017).

A relationship between sexism (both overt and benevolent) and rape tendency has been established by previous studies (Abrams et al, 2003; Viki, Chiroro, and Abrams et al., 2006). This may be because benevolent sexism involves misconstruing sex signals and being coerced into having sexual intercourse thinking that the perpetrator wants to help. These studies (ibid.) used an African sample and they established that the rape situations is brought about by the belief that the victim wanted to have sex but exhibited token resistance in order to appear innocent as well as to adhere to patriarchy's expectations of admirable models of women as not initiating sexual relations or giving in easily to sexual demands. These results are useful for this research for exploring how sexism or racism present perpetrators with an opportunity to create local norms that support prejudice and discrimination against women.

As such, it appears reasonable to argue that sexist humour may provide a justifiable setting that legitimizes male sexual aggression towards women.

A rape culture appears to be a part of sexist humour. Sexist humour seems to be accompanied by distinctive characteristics within a culture that facilitates rape and hold victims responsible. A rape culture is a culture in which principal ideas, social practices and societal institutions implicitly or directly accept and regularise sexual assault by normalizing or trivializing sexual violence and by blaming survivors for their own abuse (Phipps et al, 2017). These malignant social standards reflect deep-seated sexism and promote as well as trivialize sexual violence. Thus, the indicators of rape culture are made visible most predominantly by thoroughly questioning the truth of the victims' claims, holding victims accountable for the violence they have suffered, causing those offended to feel guilty by making them bear the weight of the negative impact of reporting the alleged aggressor and his or her entourage, as well as the trivialization or eroticization of sexual violence by society. At universities, exhibitions of rape culture are particularly visible during orientation activities or celebrations where alcohol, drugs and sexist language create a fertile environment for sexual violence.

### *2.2.3 History of female marginalization in education in Zimbabwe*

Zimbabwe has shown commitment to achieve gender equality and reduce inequality since gaining political independence in 1980 (Chabaya, Rembe and Wadesango, 2009). The country's continued commitment to improve gender issues through the elimination of all forms of sex discrimination in the society is evidenced in the government's commitment to several national and international gender declarations and conventions. These include the 1965 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (National Gender Policy, 2004, 1). In addition to, and through these, many policies were adopted to advance gender equality including the Gender Affirmative Action policy of 1992, the 1999 Nziramasanga Commission and the National Gender Policy of 2004.

Zimbabwean society traditionally has shown preference towards educating the boy child over the female child. The male child was favoured because it was believed that the girl child would get married and therefore benefit the family she married into as opposed to the male child who will always be in the family. This mind-set reflected the lack of parental awareness on the need to educate all children regardless of gender. In 1999, the Nziramasanga

Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training in Zimbabwe presented its findings noting, among other things, that gender disparities persisted at all levels of education (Nziramasa Commission, 1999). The commission of inquiry observed the predicament of the female child in accessing education in Zimbabwe (ibid.). The study focused on primary and secondary schooling for the girl child in Zimbabwe and how the female child has been excluded. The study indicated that the female child lagged behind the boy child both in enrolment and participation due to the gendered cultural codes existing in the Zimbabwean cultural setting that prioritize the boy child over the girl child. According to post-colonial feminist theory, women were doubly colonized by imperial and patriarchal ideologies. The gendered cultural codes had an impact on the quality of access to education of the girl child. Women were socialized to be humble and nurturing and to accept and not question the status quo. In other words, the gendered cultural codes glorified masculinity. The cultural codes allocated females space as home-keepers as suggested by the Shona proverb *Mushamukadzi*. Literally translated, the proverb means that a woman is the essence of the home thereby effectively allocating women space different from males who are portrayed as providers. The assumption was that females were slow and not quick to grasp concepts at school. (Manwa; 2014). This is consistent with the dictates of patriarchy which, through the socialization process, have instilled roles and expectations for each gender that were not questioned but accepted in their entirety. In addition, child marriages were very common. The majority of girls dropped out of school to get married and the number of girls in education narrowed as they progressed in education. In view of all this, the numbers of females in education was very low. The study went on to discuss the disparities existing in enrolment and participation in both primary and secondary education, but neglected to conduct a follow-up on the experiences of those who had succeeded in reaching in secondary and higher education respectively. It was apparent that gendered inequality was already normalized and accepted by the family which is a very important structure that is re-enacted in other structures in society. Both socio-political realities such as choosing who to or who not to send to school and the biological sex became interwoven and rationalized explanations for women's lack of education (Muasya, 2013). In response to the findings of the Nziramasa commission of enquiry, the Zimbabwean government launched the National Gender Policy in March 2004 which aimed, among other things "to eliminate all negative economic, social and political policies, cultural and religious practices that impede equality and equity of sexes" (National Gender Policy, 2004, 3). One of the objectives of the policy was "to promote equal opportunities for women and men in decision making in all areas and all levels" (National

Gender Policy, 2004, 3). However, it appears that all these interventions focused on improving numbers of women participants in education but neglected issues to do with quality of access to education and whether including women in education meant equal access to facilities in the education sector. It appears that the Government of Zimbabwe thought that they had done everything in their power to help marginalize women and assumed that everything was smooth sailing from these days onwards. The question of gender disparities in the education structures of schools and colleges with regard to quality of access and participation has received little attention, despite the fact that there is acknowledgement in education sectors of both the importance of equal opportunity and quality access for both sexes (Chabaya, Rembe and Wadesango, 2009). In many countries, anxieties concerning gender inequalities in education have explored issues to do with student performance, such as the under-achievement of female students, disparities in access at several tiers of schooling, dropout rates in subjects taken and these have called for a range of interventions in the form of statutory laws and policies around gender gaps in educational settings. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of literature to this effect in the case of Zimbabwe. This research therefore aims at addressing this gap by examining the quality of access to education by females by considering the everyday realities of women in education.

The United Nations education circular (2003, 143) noted that females are targets of intolerance, chauvinism and violence in the education system which hinders their equal access to participation in higher education. Equal education for all is provided for by laws and statutes such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), among others. It appears that the problems faced by a few women who have managed to progress up to higher education are much more pronounced and sophisticated than the problems they faced while still in high school. Given that patriarchy allocates the education space to the male child, the violence being faced by the female child in higher education may be because they had dared to venture out of their confined spaces and penetrate spaces allocated to males.

It should be noted, however, that equity is not the same as equality. Equity and equality are two strategies that can be combined in an effort to produce fairness. Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful and equality is treating everyone the same. Equality has fairness at its core and it appears it only works if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help. Unfortunately, it appears males and females do not have the same starting line. It appears males begin the race halfway to the finishing line and it becomes

difficult for females to catch up. Equity appears unfair but it actively moves everyone closer to success by levelling the playing field. Therefore, simply ensuring the equal participation of the girl-child in education to progress through to the next level in the same manner as the boy-child might not be enough (Subrahmanian, 2005, 397). It appears inclusion and participation does not entail equal access as there are so many constraining factors that need to be taken into consideration such as the quality of access and the several environmental factors and culture existing in the education system. This entails ensuring the quality of experience in education for men as well as women (ibid.). Quality of experience includes dismantling social norms that construct males and females as unequal partners in value, both in terms of their inputs and privileges.

However, it appears that the various statutes already in place have addressed numerical gaps of women in education but neglected to monitor the quality of access. According to Subrahmanian (2005), an intensive investigation into gender in education requires acknowledgment of the vigorous process by which gender inequalities are established across different arenas of human life. It appears gender inequalities arise from the unequal power relations existing between men and women. Therefore, investigations into gender equality need to consider several dimensions of gender inequality other than the numerical gaps of female participation in education. Previous research has focused on the ratios of women to men in education and the need to increase the number of females in education, thereby neglecting factors impeding equal participation of women and factors that constrain this increase. Interventions to address gender gaps in higher education appear to have focused on quantity not quality. Thus, this study aims to cover this gap in research.

#### *2.2.4 Gender socialization and sexism*

Zimbabwe is a country that has evolved into a modern society in which traditional social and cultural values still exist and are still valued by the majority of the population (Arnfred, 2005). Gender socialization refers to the way in which gender appropriate behaviour is taught and internalized by the younger generation thus allowing individuals to fit into the society (ibid.). Gender socialization begins from birth through norms, values, taboos and expectations of a society and continues throughout one's life. According to Phipps (2014, 7), within culture, the self is socially and culturally positioned and formed. This means that cultural practices form identities and shape behaviour. This holds true especially among the cultures in Zimbabwe where infants are assigned roles according to gender. Females are assigned housekeeping roles and submission is emphasized whereas males are expected to

fend for the family and bring food to the table and masculinity is emphasized. It appears that by the time they reach adulthood, women are expected to be gentle, submissive, to serve men and not to venture into male territory (Mungwini and Matereke, 2010). These patriarchal attitudes appear to promote male domination by reducing female agency. It appears that patriarchy glorifies hegemonic masculinities where some men emphasize their authority over those who are considered to be weak. Hegemonic masculinity includes exhibiting traits such as physicality, muscularity, aggression, violence, misogyny and homophobia (ibid.). However, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been criticized by scholars such as Connell (2005) for being deterministic as in reality masculinities are not unanimous. Rather, masculinities must be seen as “complex and multiple and the term hegemonic masculinity only allows us to understand a certain pocket of men who have power over others” (ibid, 835). In addition, since masculinities are defined on a social basis, any conversation with relevance to the concept should consider the social contexts in which particular behaviours and gender roles are situated.

Furthermore, the structure of Zimbabwean education during the colonial era also perpetuated these patriarchal attitudes to education (Arnfred, 2005, 14). Education in Zimbabwe during the colonial era was controlled by missionaries who also emphasized female submission and male superiority (ibid.). As such, the female child was disadvantaged in all structures of society because “tradition” glorified male superiority. As such, it can be argued that the idea of women venturing into territory previously marked as a reserve for males is taken as rebellion against tradition; punishment might be rendered in the form of sexism to remind women of the lesser role they should be occupying in society.

Sexism continues to haunt the world because it appears to be a gateway to other forms of discrimination and oppression. As such, it is necessary to explore how sexism manifests and affects everyday life by contributing to marginalization, powerlessness and the exploitation of women.

### *2.2.5 Post-feminism and sexism within higher education*

Generally, in many parts of the world, women’s access to higher education has improved. Women now constitute a significant proportion of the student population. This could be taken as a sign that gender is no longer an issue (Pomerantz et al, 2013). This is reflected by the post-feminist discourse that assumes that women are now free to reap the benefits of their gender struggle. Post-feminism asserts that the war against inequality has already been won

thereby making it difficult to still talk of sexism and gender harassment in this day and age (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2016). However, it appears improved enrolment of women in higher education does not entail a simple clean transition for females. It appears men are resentful of what they view as the ‘feminization of higher education’, through policies such as affirmative action that allows women access to university courses with lesser points than their male counterparts, as asserted by Leathwood and Read (2008). This resentment is expressed through sexism and harassment of females (see Nayef and El Nashar, 2015). In addition, it appears post-feminism has made it difficult to identify sexism or even discuss it as attempts to do this are simply dismissed as ‘male bashing’ and those who champion the cause are labelled as ‘bitter feminists pursuing trivialities’ (ibid.). As such, it may be argued female students often find themselves in a situation where they are compelled to act out their femininity in institutions of higher learning, yet this femininity is received with ambiguity and degradation and they are resented for it. Because post-feminism denies the existence of sexism, an environment where micro-aggressions are allowed to grow and fester becomes normal. Sue’s (2010) theory of micro-aggression discusses how female oppression become normalized and explores the consequences of these experiences to women (Suarez-Orozco et al, 2015). Therefore it can be argued that sexist humour proceeds in a gradual and subtle way but with very harmful effects due to this casual approach being peddled by post-feminism.

### *2.2.6 Power dynamics within sexism*

Scholars such as Assie-Lumumba (2006) have argued that the major problem in academia in most African countries is related to power. Power is a societal concept, so is gender. The division of roles amongst both the sexes appears to be determined on the basis of power possessed by each. Power is reflected in patriarchy which emphasizes control over women with males cementing their role and portraying women as weak. Therefore, based on these assertions, it can be argued that inequality in academia cannot be gender-free. In most African traditional societies, maleness and masculinity confer power and status such that it is an advantage to be a man (Zindi, 1994). As such, men have automatic unearned privileges by virtue of their gender. These privileges accorded to men because of their biological sex give men advantage over women and increase their opportunities. This male privilege is made visible through the manner in which men are awarded greater opportunities than women in all aspects of life. Male power is enhanced by physical attributes and control over access to education, jobs and money (Bourque, 1990) in Mungwini and Matereke (2010). Decision-making powers and high social status are also part of the privileges awarded to men. This

privilege reinforces and perpetuates the power imbalances between men and women. These privileges may come to be seen as 'normal' thereby reinforcing beliefs in male superiority. Women are left powerless and are subdued by society. Several feminist approaches examine sexism within the positioning of women in the operation of power or knowledge. Critical feminism locates sexism in patriarchal and expansive practices where both men and women participate in the construction and support systems of domination; cultural feminism focuses on the patriarchal domination of women; and liberal feminism locates the position of women in knowledge roles and behaviours as well as championing equality and equal access to resources between men and women (Eyre, 2000). The focal point of all these approaches comes down to power and control which appears to be the basis for domination. Power as a resource that is unequally and unjustly distributed between men and women explains why sexism occurs (ibid.). These feminist paradigms appear to reject the notion that women can be sexist towards men because women lack the institutional power that men have (Bates, 2012). Men have the advantage of history, traditions, and assumptions and in some cases, scientific evidence that supports their purported superiority (ibid.). Therefore, it appears that males are the perpetrators of sexism because of the patriarchal nature of African societies that celebrates masculinities that dominate women (Kambarami, 2006; Ratele, 2008; Ray, 2013; McKay et al., 2014). Mederos (1987), cited by Pease (2011), asserted that sexism is rooted in patriarchy and states that because all men are socialized within patriarchy they believe to some extent that they have a right to make normative claims upon women. Most communities believe in male supremacy, hence there is sexual harassment. It appears that patriarchy has granted men the right to police women and to impose sanctions on those who do not adhere to the norm. However, men will differ in relation to what claims they make and how they enforce them but this sense of entitlement can manifest into serious violence against women as a sign of domination and may also justify the perpetration of sexism in the wider society (Woodzicka and Ford, 2010). However, Stalker (2001, 292) disagreed with this notion that views women as lacking in human agency. She argued that women are able to actively shape their environments, act against misogynistic practices and thus help to destabilize and alter them. It is also important to note that women can be sexist towards men too although this may be under-reported for various reasons (Michniewicz and Vandello, 2015). However, the hegemonic nature of sexist humour against women seems to be subtle, yet more dangerous as it has potential to be naturalised and embedded in popular thought, such that violence against women becomes normative. As such, sexist humour communicates messages of inferiority and irrelevance to women.



To further illustrate how sexist humour appears to be a contest for power between males and females, according to the Social Identity theory, in-groups derive confirmation of their power by disparaging the out-group. Out-groups gain social cohesion if their group emerges as superior to the other. In this case, it is the males who want to appear as superior to females. Hunt and Gonsalkorale (2014) investigated whether men's gender harassment is driven by the determination to endorse male in-group connections resulting from a perceived threat to masculinity. Masculinity threat here was put in motion through a false feedback system, which informed male participants at random that they had scored either above or below the mean on a scale that purportedly measured 'a collection of thoughts, behaviours and emotions that are more commonly associated with men than with women' (Hunt and Gonsalkorale 2014, 19). In-group norms were communicated through a male colleague either encouraging or discouraging the sending of sexist jokes to a non-existent female colleague. The results from the study indicated that men who interacted with an in-group member who supported sexist harassment were more likely to send sexist jokes to a female colleague after this perceived masculinity threat. In view of these results, it can be argued that sexist humour is as a result of the need to prove masculinity which would have been threatened. This lends weight to the idea that in-group norms can impact on the initiation of sexist humour, making sexist humour an outcome of in-group cohesion.

It appears the unequal power structures existing in sexism manifest in other structures such as education settings. Chamberlain et al. (2008), cited in Kayuni (2009, 85), endorsed the idea that men are mainly the perpetrators of sexism on university campuses. He argued that because of the nature of the power structures and cultural biases existing in institutions such as universities, women are mainly the targets of sexual harassment and he stated that although a profile to support this assertion has not been empirically established, so far nearly all harassers are male. He further asserted that women students are subjected to violence, discrimination and more subtle forms of control by men, including sexist humour (ibid.). As such, he appears to portray that men rarely suffer from sexism issues such as sexist humour and if they do, it tends to be less severe than that suffered by women.

Gender, like other socially determined categories, has often been at the centre of the long-running debate on whether social behaviour is influenced by inherited genetic make-up or the socio-political and economic conditions that exist, also known as the 'nature' or 'nurture' debate (see Eagly and Wood, 2013). The first contribution to the understanding of sexual and thus gender-related behaviour comes from anthropologist Margaret Mead (1935, 1949) who

conducted studies on the processes of gender with relation to masculinity and femininity within specific cultures. Mead revealed that the notion of being a man and being a woman was dependent on the culture one belonged to and differed between different cultures, and therefore concluded that gender and the associated responsibilities and roles are dependent on enculturation. Mead specified that the rules, rituals and customs of each particular culture and subculture are permeated with specific hopes and necessities for male and female behaviour and what it means to be male and female (see Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 2004). In the same vein, sociologists emphasize gender roles and how these influence how men and women experience gender and the differences in men and women's behaviour. It appears that men and women are provided with certain 'scripts' which they must internalise and which guide them to perform accepted and gender-appropriate behaviour. Therefore, the concept of role is seen as '... socially encouraged patterns of behaviour that people are expected to perform in specific situations' (ibid. , 41). Therefore, it can be argued that sex is determined by biology, whereas gender is a social construct. The 'nature-nurture' debate, which centres on the importance of either the environment or biological factors in explaining social behaviour, can be used to understand views of the university community in so far as the issue of sexist humour is concerned (see Eagly and Wood, 2013). The latter is increasingly viewed as having more influence on the way in which individuals imagine and construct gender roles and gender ideology and consequently sexism (ibid.). On the other hand, Bourdieu's anthropological theory of practice posits that visible and outwardly expressed culture is a result of complex internal processes which are played out in what he described as the theory of practice (Bourdieu (1990). Bourdieu spoke of 'habitus' which is a set of acquired dispositions, projected onto the social field, influencing 'practice' as well as manifesting itself in various forms of interaction. Actors are not aware and assume they are acting 'naturally', a condition which Bourdieu summed up in the concept of *doxa* (see Davey, 2012, 515). The concept of *doxa* denotes what is taken for granted in any society. These include basic views on gender, relationships, attitudes, gender stereotyping of female students and sexual harassment. These general sentiments portray the existing social arrangements as given, unquestionable as well as acceptable, something which augurs well with sexist humour.

Gender inequalities existing in higher education appear to be a reflection of broader societal structural inequality. Society is where issues of inclusion and exclusion originate. It appears that issues on how women are to be treated have their roots in traditional societal culture.

Universities have favoured the male population due to the prevailing cultural and social attitudes in society (Lumumba, 2006, 14). Therefore Mama (2003) and Lumumba (2006, 9) asserted that as long as women are still identified as 'women' through cultural lenses, they will always remain as outcasts in higher education because their exclusion from higher education was as a result of cultural constructs which views women as lesser beings. It seems overrated to expect a system that associates being female with triviality, weakness and vanity to define women in different favourable terms simply because they are penetrating 'male territory'. Inclusion does not entail equality. In addition, interventions to do with gender harassment are usually ignored by university officials (largely male) because they lack enthusiasm for addressing these issues (Bunyi, 2003; Bakari and Leach, 2007). The study by Bakari and Leach (2007) illustrated how men in a Nigerian college of education were able to sabotage policies and procedures aimed at availing women equal access and opportunities in education in order to serve their own interest. As such, women's inclusion in higher education can be said to be nominal. It does not necessarily follow that newfound access automatically translates into deep citizenry (ibid.). Therefore, there is need for further enquiry to establish factors that prohibit equal participation of women in higher education.

It appears that sexism has always been embedded and naturalised in popular language in most African cultures (see Zindi, 1994; Muparamoto, 2012; Wekwete and Manyeruke, 2012; Muasya, 2014; Mapuranga, Musodza and Tom, 2015) As evidenced by these studies, the positioning of women in dominant discourses exemplifies particular assumptions about them and these are the grounds which naturalize relations. A good example is the use of proverbs in African language which show how society has mechanisms that naturalize, legitimize, cloud and deny sexism, sexual abuse and sexual harassment as forms of violence against women. Proverbs used as part of speech in Africa demonstrate how language has been used to subdue women since historical times (Zondi, 2005; Chitauro-Mawema, 2006; Mungwini and Matereke, 2010; Bondai, Gora and Muchenje, 2012, 17; McKay et al, 2014). It might be argued that proverbs trivialize, sexualize, eroticize, infantilize and dismiss issues to do with women. These proverbs reduce women to sexual objects. This kind of language creates gaps which leave women visible/invisible. It appears that if women are made visible, the visibility is of an asymmetrical nature revealing her deviation from the norm. Women are viewed as being naturally fragile, reliant on male protection and requiring surveillance and control of their behaviour. This kind of language that subdues women can be found in contemporary everyday language such as jokes used in everyday interaction (see Chagonda, 2001; Mama

and Barnes, 2007; Gaidzanwa and Manyeruke, 2011; Muparamoto, 2012; Nayef and Nashar, 2015). This supports how language renders the female body a subject of male dominance and how this can be an incubator of emotions that result in violence.

It appears that sexist humour may be used by men to claim spaces they deem to be exclusively reserved for men and which they feel women have gradually entered into (see *ibid.*). Nayef and Nashar (2015) investigated the stereotyping and the representations of women in Egyptian jokes. These jokes supported the stereotyped images of women occupying the private sphere whereas the public space was reserved for men. The study exposed how women were mocked for coming out in numbers to vote because this was seen as a direct challenge to men and the existing social structure, as previously voting was reserved for men (*ibid.*). Jokes were made on the need to remind women that voting was different from taking a pregnancy test implying that women were only good at giving birth. Thus, sexist jokes appear to reflect men's struggle to deal with their anxiety about the changing role of women.

The changing role of women can be witnessed in the increased enrolment of women in higher education in Zimbabwe which can be described as a space that women are gradually navigating towards. Scholars like Gaidzanwa (2001), Mama and Barnes, (2007) have noted how education in Africa has always had a gendered element. Higher education in Zimbabwe historically was reserved for males because the few black secondary schools that existed in colonial times favoured men (Gaidzanwa 2013). According to the afore-mentioned authors, the dominant colonial (British) gender-ideology was essentially grounded in the Victorian ideology whose fundamental gender premise bordered on restricting women to the domestic sphere (also referred to as the 'domesticity of women thesis'). After independence, women tended to enrol in schools that focused on home economics subjects such as sewing and cooking because universities required higher passes for one to qualify and most women could not attain these, due to their presumed unequal burden of unpaid work and as such, universities remained dominated by males (*ibid.*). However, this changed when the Zimbabwean government introduced the Affirmative Action policy in 1992 that allowed female applicants to tertiary institutions slightly lower admission qualifications than their male counterparts. Although the admission of women is still low, it appears that the Affirmative Action Policy was a direct challenge to patriarchy as well as historical masculinities and thus was viewed as an attempt by women to encroach on space reserved for men. However, Zimbabwe still lags behind in female university enrolment which stands at

36% as compared to Namibia which is at 58%, South Africa at 52%, Botswana 51% and Swaziland 48% (Shizha, 2013, 250). The low numbers of female enrolment are worrying and appear to present a problem for women emancipation. Although higher education is not the sole space available that may be necessary for female empowerment, it is central for the acquisition of knowledge and development of critical thinking that shapes the modern-day world. As such, higher education is considered critical for development.

As mentioned above, the fact that higher education in Zimbabwe is a space that women are gradually navigating into and that men are fighting this supposed challenge, may explain the prevalence of sexist humour at institutions of higher learning. Several studies have discussed the harassment of women in higher education in Africa and Zimbabwe but unfortunately, the majority of these have focused on blatant expressions of harassment and have neglected to look at the subtle yet equally harmful version of harassment which is sexism veiled in humour (Zindi, 1994; Muparamoto, 2012; Wekwete and Manyeruke, 2012; Muasya, 2014; Mapuranga, Musodza and Tom, 2015; De Klerk, 2016; Mogotlane, 2016). Most of these studies focused on linguistic analysis or characterization and employed discourse analysis thereby ignoring the brutal experiences on the ground (see Zindi, 1994; Mlambo, 2014). Robinson (2000) cited by Mapuranga, Musodza and Tom (2015) offered evidence from studies done in Australia over a ten-year period. The studies revealed that the relationship between masculinity and sexual harassment in secondary schooling still stems from the perception that men, collectively have power over women (ibid, 27). Therefore, it appears that sexism through humour is a real threat for college women as it reflects issues of power and ownership of women as reflected by patriarchal values that often play out in learning institutions. According to Gramsci's (1990)'s ideology of normalization, the beliefs that the dominant culture supports, such as patriarchy, are so powerful and get hold of people when they are so young that alternative ways of envisioning reality are very hard to imagine. This is how hegemony is created and maintained (see Seidman and Alexander 1990). Thus, social identity theory, by viewing sexist humour as a form of intergroup discrimination, helps to explain the relationship between feelings of threat, sexist attitudes and the use of sexist humour.

### *2.2.7 Humour and its implications in everyday life*

It appears that humour is a multifaceted phenomenon due to the various, often contradictory constructions attached to it. It can be argued that there are both positive sides to humour and negative sides. McGraw and Warren (2010) argued that all humour arises from defilements of

social norms. That is to say, humorous material challenges or violates a given notion of how the world ought to be, but does so in a manner that falls short of offensiveness. Humour plays an important role in conversations besides making people laugh which is known as the duality of humour (Maphosa, 2015). This duality highlights the need to critically focus on humour since it plays a significant part in everyday life (Gradinaru, 2015). Humour presents with a kind of pleasure that can threaten individual reason and social interactions. Researchers such as Hay (2000), Billig (2005), Gradinaru (2015) and Maphosa (2015), among others, have focused both on the positive and on the negative aspects of humour. According to these scholars, humour serves the purpose of social cohesion and encourages a sense of kinship at the same time threatening the target group (ibid.). The fact that humour plays a part in social cohesion implies that humour plays a functional role in social interactions. A sense of kinship is created due to the shared values implied by sharing and finding joy in a particular kind of humour. It appears sexist humour fosters kinship and cements ties between those who share the same sentiments as those implied by the joke and threatens the well-being of those who are considered to be the ‘other’”. Plato (2000), cited in Gradinaru (2015), expressed concern on the risks of laughing since it has an effect on the human character because humour involves feelings and attitudes of both the joke teller and the audience. Thus, humour can be beneficial but it has potential to be hurtful. Therefore, humour and its effects should never be underestimated.

It appears humour is complemented by discriminative inuendos, which seem to communicate that what is happening or going to happen, should not be taken seriously but as a joke. Therefore, the ways in which individuals usually react and respond to any utterance in the absence of these cues is rendered inappropriate and must be withheld (ibid.). This implies that humour need not come to a logical conclusion. Humour is therefore taken as a form of perceptive play and thus people are encouraged to not look too deeply into the content of the jokes. This is crucial in understanding how people perceive and react to sexist humour in their daily interactions. As such, humour guides the way into which people perceive and view sexist humour incidences. Thus, the violence implied in cases such as sexist humour is observed and therefore classified as unreal and the audience are forced to dismiss further thoughts of violation.

Ndlovu and Ngwenya (2012) investigated how stickers on public transport in Zimbabwe depict images that marginalize women. This research noted how women were presented in more derogatory ways as opposed to males. The research highlighted the negative ideas and

images of women that are portrayed by these stickers as well as the negative consequences on how women are viewed as a result of this. However, this study only reviewed the depiction of women in Shona humour but neglected to discuss the lived realities and experiences of women who are portrayed in such a derogatory manner.

Linstead (1985) as well as Hay (2000) have noted how humour can be used to marginalize groups. These scholars have noted how humour can be used to reinforce the norms and values of a particular group as well as to clarify group belonging. This can be true especially in interactions where sexist humour is used. Clarification of group belonging is reinforced through disparaging the 'other' group which is considered to be outsiders. Hay (2000) examined humour interactions among 18 friendship groups in New Zealand. Results indicated that humour functions as a social tool that fosters social cohesion and reinforces camaraderie between groups while imposing a social borderline between them and other participants. Therefore, it can be said that humour is an expression of superiority and dominance towards the target. Fobbes (2011) cited by Gradinaru (2015) further supported the notion that humour is an expression of superiority. Based on this, it can be argued that superiority and power dynamics are evident in sexist humour interactions where laughter is elicited at the expense of the targeted group. Through sexist humour, one group overestimates itself by laughing at the supposed defects of the other. The search for the weaknesses of the supposedly weak group makes the perpetrators emerge as victorious and superior over the other and helps to boost the perpetrator's self-esteem. Therefore, it can be argued that sexist jokes serve the purpose of aggression through the unnecessary exposure of the targeted group (DiCioccio, 2012; Hungwe, 2012; Gradinaru, 2015).

It appears humour is another way to express femininity and masculinity, therefore it can be argued that humour plays an important role in the constructions of gender (ibid.). This is true especially in patriarchal societies where women are expected to submit to men. It appears humour reveals the symbolic power between gendered hierarchies. In addition, humour can be used to control the audience or the targets through censorship (Hay, 2000). The perceived weaker group is chastised and disciplined through humour. Such kinds of humour play a regulatory function in society. Power and control is crucial to instil discipline and is used against another to account for that individual's position in the social hierarchy. Therefore, it can be argued that symbolic power is more powerful than physical violence because it is embedded in the structures of cognition and imposes legitimacy on the social order. Humour can also be used to challenge existing boundaries by establishing new ones (ibid, 724). This

is usually done through criticizing the existing order as is evidenced by patriarchy attacking females who do not adhere to its expectations. This may serve to explain how and why sexist humour appears to attack the personal nature of individuals.

In addition, it can be argued that humour expresses hidden aggression by the joke teller and has ability to foster conflict. The aggression is made acceptable through the masking of prejudice in a joke. A joke, through its common definitions, is something that elicits joy and laughter. However, if this laughter is at the expense of others and hurts them at the same time, then it ceases to be a joke but becomes aggression and harassment. In this sense, sexist humour appears to remind its targets of who is in charge. Therefore, a close relationship between humour, malice, aggressiveness and hostility can be noted. As such, it is important to note that sexist humour is a complex and puzzling phenomenon as it may produce pleasure and pain as well as laughter and tears. Maphosa (2013) highlighted the concept of *ho lahla mohlo* ('throwing fire') which is popular at the National University of Lesotho. The term refers to a form of joking popular at the University and literally translated it means 'to throw fire'. The fact that the joking is equated to throwing fire at someone clearly reveals the violent nature of the kind of humour that the students have popularised. Romero-Sanchez et al. (2010) and Thomae and Viki (2013) extended this line of research by showing that disparagement humour pushes the boundaries of polite humour to include mild subtle expressions of violence and also increases the inclination to commit violence against the target. In total, the research on sexist humour reveals how sexist humour trivializes discrimination of its target and justifies the release of prejudice.

Research has noted how sexual humour supports male domination through its expressions of appearing innocent in intent (see Brunner and Costelo, 2002). Although this study examined sexual humour in the context of the workplace, this study examines sexist humour in the context of educational institutions. The current study explores how the seemingly innocent qualities of sexist humour are violent against women and prevents them from meeting their basic needs through its manifestation as unequal chances to resources. This indicates the stereotyping images of women presented through sexist humour and how they marginalize women. Bemiller and Schneider (2010, 470) emphasize how what is termed as a joke is not really a joke but a reflection of the deep-seated expressions of power as well as misogyny. As such, it can be argued that jokes can have implications in real life that are violent to women.



Bemiller and Schneider (2010)'s study acts as a springboard for this study as they also focused on sexist humour and how it affects women both at institutional and individual level. However, they focused on Internet humour as their main data supply while this research focuses on face-to face-s and experiences of sexist humour.

Humour may also be used as a coping strategy where the victim willingly points out their pitfalls before anyone else does (ibid.). Placing a comical spin on hurtful situations that are outside one's control appears to be a coping mechanism. Coping humour may therefore be perceived as sign of self-protecting with the hope of passing through that particular phase and reflects the resilience of those distressed and pained by sexist humour.

Another function of humour is its ability to reduce social distance in social interactions (Hampes, 1992). In this case humour serves as the 'ice-breaker' where there appears to be tension. This implies that humour disregards hierarchy and brings people to the same level (ibid.). In addition, humour can also be used to enhance group solidarity and group cohesion and may be used for entertainment's sake.

#### *2.2.8 Cultural constructions of sexist humour*

Culture refers to the beliefs and practices of a society which include the norms, values, beliefs and codes of behaviour accepted by a specific group. According to Ortner (1972, 7) culture is perceived to be the "level of human consciousness in relation to systems, thought and technology". In addition, Rosman et al. (2009) defined culture as a set of ideas and meanings that people pass on from generation to generation which shapes and influences their present lives. From these definitions, it can be argued that the symbols and beliefs that define a particular culture take control and influence the way individuals communicate, develop and disseminate their feelings of, or attitudes towards, life. However, it should be noted that culture is not monolithic (ibid., 7). This seems to imply that culture is composed of a collection of values and there may be a range of subcultures and subunits. Thus, culture can be shared only among the members of a sub-unit but not between different sub-units, although there is also a dominant culture. This seems to imply that sexist humour is a result of the beliefs and attitudes that are internalized through dominant cultural exposure. Sexism pervades institutions of higher learning through local culture, informal rules and institutional memories that individuals are exposed to. Therefore, it can be argued sexist humour is deeply rooted and embedded in culture such that contesting its hold on individuals and society seems impossible as the whole community, including women, uphold cultural ideas. A gender-

aware approach to equality needs to take into cognisance the fact that inequalities between men and women have been legitimized, normalized and accepted by societies in ways that require careful analysis (Submahrnian, 2015). Normalization means that these inequalities are accepted by the whole of society as essential to uphold and over time became the basis of dominant social norms that define behaviours. It appears that sexist humour falls into this category of behaviours and attitudes that became accepted as culture and is strongly defended as traditional and absolute. This gives insight into why and how sexist humour has become intertwined in institutions that govern daily life such as the education sector and manifests as deeper structural inequality.

Also, there has been an introduction of new sub-sets to culture known as the dignity culture, honour culture and the victimhood cultures (Manning and Campbell, 2018). In dignity culture, there is low sensitivity to slight and people are more tolerant of insults and discouragement. Taking the law into your own hands is frowned upon in dignity culture and people are urged to report to the authorities. A dignity culture emphasizes that all people have self-worth and as such, any slights such as sexist humour will not take anything from a respondent. Over-reacting to a slight is frowned upon in dignity culture as the proponents believe that an insult will not take away anything from your self-worth (ibid.). According to proponents of this culture, virtue is not being bold, touchy and aggressive, but prudent and quietly self-assured. On the other hand, there is honour culture where tolerating slights is shameful because it assumes that the victim would have allowed people to put them down without defending their reputation. For the proponents of this theory, virtue means being bold and forceful by aggressively defending one's reputation. The victimhood culture is always vigilant for offenses and complaining is the norm. It appears that the combination of high sensitivity and dependence on the opinion of others leads to the over emphasis on the degree of slight. Grievances are likely to be attributed to disadvantage, marginality and oppression. Manifestations of victimhood culture include complaining about and punishing micro-aggressions, demanding and creating safe space etc. In victimhood culture, it is the identity as a victim that gives status. All these cultures appear to explain responses to sexist humour. They appear to explain behaviours that determine the occurrence of sexist humour on educational campuses.

### *2.2.9 Responses to sexist humour*

Several studies have testified to the presence of harassment in higher education settings and have noted the different responses not only from the victims, but also from the supporting

institutions. However, most of these studies have glossed over what influences these reactions and the associated implications (see Ayres et al., 2009; Mama, 2009; Manyeruke and Wekwete, 2012; Maphosa, 2013; Muasya, 2014). One of the reasons given as explanation on what influences sexist humour is that masculine domains continue to be hostile environments for women. Consistent with this observation, studies have shown that when masculinity is threatened, men are likely to respond negatively by using sexual violence (Maas, Cadinu, Guarnieri and Grasselli, 2003; Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford and Watsi, 2009). Fear of sexual harassment affects how women navigate their spaces on campus and their freedom to access certain areas on campus (ibid.). It appears sexist humour controls space, energy and mobility of the female student. Muasya (2014) noted how female students avoided lecture and residence halls and sports grounds for fear of harassment. Manyeruke and Wekwete (2012) revealed how students at the University of Zimbabwe avoided an open area which they named 'Facebook' because this was the area where verbal harassment was concentrated. This has negative impact on their academic performance as some of the areas they avoid might be vital in their studies.

Barreto and Ellemers (2015) contended that confrontation usually is not an option for the victims as it has negative social implications such as being blamed for lacking a sense of humour. Confronters can also be denigrated by members of their own group and as such, the fear of social costs affects confrontation (ibid.). In addition, most females choose to remain silent because most approaches to dealing with sexual harassment on university campuses take an individualistic and legalistic perspective by isolating the behaviour of the accused and taking it as separate from its social surrounding, that is the campus climate (Eyre, 2000). Attention is not given to the climate where that behaviour originated. In this manner, it becomes the duty of the aggrieved to prove the abuse which some often see as non-abuse. Through their silence, victims and institutions appear to be complicit in condoning harassment. However, it appears that an institution with a sexual harassment policy in place does not guarantee protection from harassment. Johnston (2016) noted how Rhodes University students protested against the reluctance of the institution to deal with sexual offenders on campus thereby implying institutional normalization of harassment.

On the other hand, some distressed parties to sexist humour remain silent because they are afraid of being accused of promoting the thriving of a victimhood culture where the disturbed and pained individuals emphasize their oppression and marginalization instead of their strength or inner worth (Cook and Jones, 2007; Baker, 2010). Within victimhood culture, the

aggrieved are intolerant of insults, even unintentional and react by bringing them to the attention of the authorities or the public at large (ibid.). This silence automatically forces those distressed to accept the status quo rather than challenge it. However, it seems rather difficult to measure intent from the person who delivered the joke as the term 'joke' implies that the utterances are not to be taken seriously.

Some female students prefer to ignore sexist micro aggressions because it takes much time and effort to challenge practices deeply entrenched in institutional culture (Yosso et al., 2009). These may be referred to as institutional micro aggressions. These assaults appear to be collectively approved and promoted by the university's power structures (ibid.). Men in these reporting structures are often reluctant to deal with these issues since dealing with them implies acknowledgement of their existence (Bunyi, 2003). Institutional micro aggression is evidenced in structures, practices and discourses that endorse a climate of sexism. Some examples among others are 'brulling' which is part of the student resident culture at Pretoria University where female students are made to serenade for male students as part of welcoming them to university life and the 'gold-rush' at University of Zimbabwe where first-year female students are targeted by senior male students for dating because it is believed they are still innocent (Gaidzanwa, 2007; Muparamoto, 2012; Mogotlane, 2016). As such, it is difficult to challenge what is believed to be the university culture that everyone has to experience (ibid.). It appears culture is among the obstacles that constrain the full enjoyment of human rights by the disadvantaged groups such as women.

In addition, Barthelemy, McComick and Henderson (2016) asserted that women remain silent so as to abide to the gendered stereotype that stipulates female silence as part of proper female communication. Therefore, when confronted with sexist behaviour, women tend to silence themselves instead of responding to the sexist behaviour directed towards them (ibid.). This self-silencing in the face of sexist events appears to cause additional psychological distress and impacts negatively on feminine sexuality because often culture is invoked to justify male violence against women (Masvawure, 2010). The university community offers a rich site for the analysis of gender issues and discourses since it is a cornerstone of knowledge production in society and also can be a miniature representation of the wider society, although there are number of factors which may affect the comparison between university and the wider society.

Titus (2000) cited in Morrison et al. (2005) noted that some female students are of the opinion that relations between males and females have been reformed for the better post-

feminism). Females in this situation are on the defense towards issues that portray male abuse such that they become like caretakers of their male counterparts' emotions and well-being. It appears that this resistance can be a form of coping strategy or a post-feminist strategy that gender issues are no longer an issue. This deliberate attempt by women to dissociate themselves from women's issues hampers attempts to address issues that affect women in institutional settings such as higher education because how can matters of gender inequality be discussed while some of the people affected deny its very existence (ibid.). Discussions of issues of inequality in the face of denial by those affected appear to be an imposition or to force women to acknowledge a problem that simply does not exist. In addition, sexist humour appears not to be a purely neutral occurrence because it is based on an individual's perception of another's behaviour that may be affected by situational context (Kayuni, 2009). What one perceives to be sexist might be different for another. This has a direct impact on research findings as researchers may impose a definition of sexism on the estimates of incidences which might be entirely different from the respondents' definition to qualify the issue as sexist. This presents a situation where the definition of sexism becomes not only academic, but political as well.

However, many studies, particularly on sexist humours, are in the psychological field and have used experiments as the research instrument. They are concerned with the effects of sexist humour particularly on men ranging from increased rape proclivity to violence against women (see Romero-Sanchez et al, 2010; Shifman and Lemish, 2010; Woodzika and Ford, 2010; Ford and Gray, 2013; Thomae and Viki, 2013; Barreto and Ellemers, 2015; Ford et al., 2015; Thomae and Pina, 2015; Mallet et al, 2016). Although these studies tend to disagree on how exposure to sexist humour fosters prejudice, they all tend to agree that sexist humour affects how women are viewed by men. As Ford et al. (2015) hypothesized that sexist humour, instead of acting as an initiator of prejudice, functions as a releaser of the existing prejudice. This implies that prejudice already exists in an individual and sexist humour only provides a legitimate outlet for the prejudice to be released.

The problem of women's representation in higher education has been analysed by many scholars but they have neglected other elements that affect women such as institutional/campus culture. Campus climate has often been described using terms such as warm, welcoming, inclusive and negative. However, higher education has been described as 'chilly' for women (Lumumba, 2006; Vaccaro, 2010; Muasya, 2014). University spaces have been described as unfriendly and hostile environments for women (ibid.). This observation

calls for further observance and scrutiny into higher education spaces. Research suggests that institutional climate influences issues of campus culture and can be observed from the institution's mission history, physical spaces, student life and critical incidences (Gaidzanwa, 2007; Muparamoto, 2012; Muasya, 2014). It appears that institutions of higher learning can have more than one climate also known as microclimates. Students can experience different climates based on race, gender and sexuality, among others (Vaccaro, 2010). Women in tertiary institutions appear to be experiencing their own microclimate due to differently perceived notions about their gender. The experiences of both male and female students in higher education settings can best be described as similar in exposure yet different in experience (Lumumba, 2006). Despite all this, African women continue to view education as the way towards their emancipation. Campus climate therefore is an important feature in ensuring inclusivity, freedom and equality in education settings. This said, there is a need to examine the institutional and organisational structures which perpetuate and reproduce gendered inequality in African universities. On the other hand, scholars have warned against treating women as being uniformly affected by sexism in higher education as women are not a homogenous group. Women are differentially impacted by forces of gender harassment.

It seems the question that now begs to be answered is on the way forward when collective patriarchal power appears to be so hard to denaturalize. Lumumba (2006) suggested that there is a need to critically examine hindrances in African culture that prohibit equal participation of women in higher education. There is also a need to envision educational spaces that embrace women as equal partners. There is need to acknowledge that inclusion in higher education for women does not translate into equal access and participation and that more needs to be done.

Most research on sexism in Southern Africa has taken an activist stance and has led to introduction of policies against gender harassment, new programmes for the inclusion of women and disciplinary procedures (Mama and Barnes, 2007). Examples of policies ratified by governments at international level include the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW). Article 10 specifically outlines that:

parties shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure rights on a basis of equality of men and women.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompass elements of gender equality including in education. At local level, universities have adopted affirmative action policies to allow women equal access in education. However, the fact that past research adopted an activist stance meant that interrogation of the lived experiences of women on the ground was neglected. While legislation and policies exist to deal with the issue of sexual harassment, none exist to deal with sexist humour because these are seen as harmless and part of the accepted social interaction between the sexes.

The studies discussed in this review have exposed how misogynistic humour has not been analysed as seriously as other types of harassment. One reason might be because the term sexist humour is not familiar with Zimbabwean societies. It remains the least understood, documented and focused on all forms of violence against women. Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society and therefore communities believe in male supremacy hence sexual harassment. Studies done on sexism in Africa so far have focused on overt expressions of sexism and have neglected to explore the nature of the hostile jokes and humour, what justifies them and what makes them acceptable as normal utterances. In contrast, my study will adopt in-depth observation and use mixed methodologies to capture the experiences and lived realities of women on the ground. Studies that have analysed sexist humour have failed to look at it through an anthropological perspective. Missing is the study of covert violence against women, a form of violence that is invisible and often unrecognized. Thus, this research aims at addressing this gap.

#### *2.2.10 Theories of Humour*

There are many theories of humour that attempt to explain what humour is, what function it serves and what would be considered humorous and what is considered as offensive. Although various theories of humour can be found, only three theories of humour appear repeatedly, making them appear worthy of exploration in this study. These theories of humour are divided into three branches: theories of incongruity, theories of superiority and disparagement, as well as theories of relief and relaxation. Most of the existing humour theories are mixed theories and some scholars are of the opinion that humour in its entirety is too huge and complicated to be embraced through a single theory. Thus, humour arises in human thought through perceptions of incongruity, superiority and relief (Meyer, 2000). The following paragraphs aim to explain the components of each theory and attempt to explain it in the context of sexist humour occurring at institutions of higher learning.

### *2.2.10.1 Theories of incongruity, or inconsistency, or contradiction, or bisociation*

According to the incongruity theory, this type of humour is where the punch-line or heart of the joke is inconsistent or inappropriate for the set-up. In this case, humour is observed at the moment of awareness of oddness between a concept involved in a certain situation and the real objects thought to be in some relation to the concept. With this type of theory, surprise is the main element and absurdity, nonsense and surprise are common themes. According to Scwartz (2010), this kind of humour results from the fact that there exist differences between what is proposed to be the norm as is the case with sexist humour where masculinity is the archetype. Sexist humour disparages those who are considered to fall short of the expected archetype such as women. The incongruity theory may explain why sexist humour may be considered inappropriate especially in an educational setting given where civility and equality between the sexes is expected. Incongruity humour as well as sexist humour arises when things that do not normally go together replace logic and familiarity and becomes reason for laughter. The incongruity theory was not adopted as a theoretical framework in analyzing the findings of this study because it appears to be too broad to be very meaningful and it does not make a distinction between non-humorous incongruity and simple incongruity. In addition, it does not fully explain why some things, rather than others, are funny.

### *2.2.10.2 Theories of superiority, or disparagement or criticism*

The superiority theory focuses on the negative attitudes of the perpetrator and the resultant laughter. The theory proposes that a person laughs about the misfortunes of others because these misfortunes assert the person's superiority based on other people's shortcomings. Aristotle used the example of when people laugh at someone they consider ugly. This explains how with sexist humour one sex makes fun of the opposite sex because of the qualities they possess that are considered inferior. He argued that people laugh at ugly people because they feel joy at feeling superior to them. This kind of humour is aimed at individuals or groups and is based on political, ethnic or gender grounds. From this theory, superiority arises from the disparagement of another person. This theory reveals how humour thrives on making fun of those considered weak and less fortunate or those who deviate from the norm. It appears this is an aggressive form of humour that takes pleasure in some weaker group's failings or difficulties. This reveals one of the primary functions of humour where laughter and mirth as well as feelings of superiority are emphasized through the suffering of others (ibid.). Being laughed at, threatens the identity and space of the weaker group, making it awkward and unpleasant for the targets of superiority humour (Jane and Olson, 2015; Meyer,



2000). It appears the major purpose of this kind of humour is to emphasize that one gender is superior over the other. The main weakness for the superiority theory is that it appears to be deterministic because it only suggests a possible source of humor or what humor can be and how it might function and leaves out other avenues for exploring why laughter occurs. As such, the researcher did not include the superiority theory in the main theoretical framework for this study.

#### *2.2.10.3 Theories of relief, release or relaxation*

This kind of humour focuses on the target of humour and the resultant effects from that humour or more specifically, the psychological effects of that humour. According to Freud, this type of humour translates offensive and aggressive impulses to acceptable ones through the use of humour. Relief theory stipulates that laughter acts as a self-regulating tool by which psychological tension is reduced. This appears to imply that humour may serve to facilitate the relief of the tension caused by one's anxieties. Laughter and myth, according to the relief theory, therefore result from this relief of nervous energy. As such, it can be argued that humour acts as a prejudice relief factor and reveals suppressed desires in an individual. This theory assumes that humour is an energy releasing factor. This appears to be the case with sexist humour where nervous energy is released through disparaging the opposite sex considered to be a threat. Laughter serves as an outlet for nervous energy. Again, the relief theory appears to be deterministic in its explanations of why humour occurs because it leaves out other possible causes for the occurrence of sexist humour. Therefore, the researcher did not include this theory in the main theoretical framework for this study.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

The chapter has reviewed relevant literature with regard to sexist humour in higher education settings. Literature available has revealed how sexism and violence against women can be normalized and become accepted as inevitable. Culture, though not monolithic, has been shown to influence sexist humour as well as normalize it. Sexist humour becomes normalized and accepted because culture is rarely questioned but accepted as it is. Issues on how women respond to sexism, as well as the reasons behind their decision, have also been alluded to. Theories of humour have been discussed so as to gain a better understanding of the general concept of humour. The chapter has, in addition, explored the available literature on sexism and has clearly shown the gap this research attempts to cover. The review has discussed how

sexist humour can be a reflection of the power struggles existing between those who are presumed to be the advantaged and those who are disadvantaged.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology used to carry out this research. A brief background of the research site and the study population is given as well as data collection techniques and methods of data analysis used. The chapter outlines the sampling procedures and looks at how data was analysed. It outlines theories which were used, namely structural violence theory, sexual objectification and social identity theories. It further discusses ethical considerations observed during the research, including informed consent and the rights of the participants and protection of their identities. The study used a mixed methodology and explored real life experiences of the participants, allowing them to speak for themselves (Kuper et al. 2008). Data was gathered through observation, survey questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions.

### **3.2 Description of the research site – Great Zimbabwe University (GZU)**

Great Zimbabwe University is one of the state-owned tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. It is located in the Masvingo province. The University was established in 1995 as a recommendation of the Chetsanga report that proposed the devolution of teachers' and technical colleges into degree awarding institutions that would become universities in their own right. The University was launched in June 1999 as an affiliate of the University of Zimbabwe and gained independent status in 2002. The University has eight campuses around Masvingo and is comprised of six faculties (Shizha, 2012). It can be assumed that the GZU has a diversified group for sampling procedures because it has faculties covering all disciplines as opposed to other small universities which have fewer faculties that are subject based.

The University has a population of approximately 12 600 students spread over the eight campuses with 87% of them full-time students. Of the population, 6259 students at the GZU are females who have registered for the 2017 academic year. This translates into half of the population being females. This is in direct contrast to other Universities, such as the University of Zimbabwe, where only 36% of the total population are females (Shizha, 2012). This is one of the major reasons why GZU was chosen as the study site. The growing population of female students at this University, as opposed to other universities in

Zimbabwe, makes it an important site for research and might influence the production of quality results that might not have manifested elsewhere.

Although not the primary reason, the University was also chosen because researchers often prefer the University of Zimbabwe as most groundwork research has focused on this institution and the foundation for research in many fields has thus already been laid down at this University. It would be interesting to consider dynamics at other institutions somewhat neglected for research, such as the Great Zimbabwe University.

Gender issues at GZU have been granted a respected position with the establishment of a separate Centre for Gender Studies. The University established the Mbuya Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies in January 2015 which offers a post-graduate MSc degree in Gender and Cultural Studies. The school derives its inspiration from Mbuya Nehanda, the first Zimbabwean woman to join the liberation struggle. Naming the school after a female liberation struggle icon implies that the University acknowledges the struggle for gender equity that women are currently engaged in. According to the Centre's vision statement, it endeavours to transform unequal gender relations that are prevalent in society today. Both males and females are empowered with knowledge and skills they utilize in social transformation. In addition, the Centre is poised to foster the establishment of gender just societies through the teaching and learning of development, gender mainstreaming, inclusiveness and empowerment issues. All these qualities contributed to the researcher choosing the Great Zimbabwe University as a study site. It was deemed necessary to explore issues that may derail progress made so far in empowering and recognizing women, such as sexist humour.

Apart from offering programmes on gender, the Centre has also been the hub for tackling gender issues at the institution. The creation of a gender studies centre is an indicator of the recognition allocated to gender issues. Some of its recent projects include the development of a gender and sexual harassment policy which is still under consultation. The Centre is also in the process of establishing a gender mainstreaming unit which will spearhead the gender equality principle. A significant amount of work and resources have been channeled towards addressing gender issues affecting all members of the university community. Thus, issues that threaten to derail progress made so far need to be examined.

The Office of the Dean and Deputy Dean of students is in charge of dealing with issues affecting students and must create a conducive learning environment for all students,

regardless of gender. The services offered by the Office of the Dean include special student advisor, students' organizations and clubs as well as issues of placement, discipline as well and gender awareness issues. These services are crucial to the well-being of students on campus because they afford both male and female students an opportunity to talk over their problems and find a legitimate way forward. Willingness to address gender issues at the University by higher offices such as that of the Dean's is important since this could lead to the introduction of gender-focused policies, structures and establishments that promote gender equality. It was difficult to establish the extent to which the Dean's office adheres to their mandate to promote gender equality. However, it was clear that the Office of the Dean was very responsive to issues concerning blatant sexual harassment, such as assault and threatening behaviour. It was not clear, however, how they responded to issues of subtle harassment. This necessitated the conducting of this research in order to highlight how issues of subtle harassment can be as potent as issues of overt violence.

### **3.3 Sampling and sample selection techniques**

To recruit initial respondents, purposive sampling was utilized. The reason for purposive sampling was to achieve symbolic representation and diversity. The researcher adopted purposive sampling because it awarded the researcher a greater chance of obtaining valuable data (see Barrat and Lenton, 2010; Barratt, 2012). With this type of sampling, the sample is chosen because of particular features or characteristic that enables detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes (Babbie, 2014). In this case, the desired characteristic was being a university student and the majority needed to be female. The sample was identified through flow population. This term is used where samples are generated by approaching people in a particular setting (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Potential respondents were approached at sports grounds, common rooms and open spaces where students socialize. In selecting the sample size, the researcher did not use any particular formula because the study used a mixed methodology with an emphasis on the qualitative data collection. According to Morse (1994, 46), qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. Obtaining most or all perceptions leads to saturation point where adding more participants to the study will not add more perceptions or value to the study; therefore a larger sample is not be desirable (ibid.).

The study employed a sequential exploratory design of mixed methodology where qualitative data collection and analysis is followed by quantitative data collection and analysis

(Creswell, 2003, 55). Survey questionnaires were distributed first to gather perceptions on the prevalence and occurrence of sexist humour on campus as well as gathering information on the nature and experiences of sexist humour on campus. This was followed by individual in-depth interviews to gather data on the extent of the generalizability of experiences of sexist humour as well as to measure the magnitude of the effect. Both qualitative and quantitative data were then integrated into the study to explain the occurrence of sexist humour on campus with regard to its nature and magnitude on campus. Berman (2017, 4) supported this integration by asserting that it is not simply the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in research that qualifies it as mixed methodology, but the integration of these approaches into the research that makes it a mixed methodology study. Quantitative data was used to substantiate the interpretation of the qualitative findings. According to Barnes (2012, 465), mixed methodology provides better quality data in a single approach. It appears that using a single research paradigm gives researchers a false sense of certainty where it is assumed that authenticity is guaranteed. Thus, investigating sexist humour from multiple perspectives is preferred. However, it should be noted that mixed methods are not used simply for the sake of using them but to enable fuller exploration of a complex phenomenon such as sexist humour.

Furthermore, in sequential mixed method research, while the weight of each phase may be equal, it is more common that one phase is emphasized over the other and in this case, qualitative methods were emphasized. The study sampled 200 students (122 females and 78 males) for survey questionnaires to gather perceptions around sexist humour. The selection technique for selecting more females over males was intentional as research aimed at examining the perceptions and experiences of female students with regard to sexist humour. Thus the study prioritized the female voice. Voice refers both to the act of making known one's preferences, demands, views and interests and to the capabilities this requires (O'Neil Plank and Domingo, 2015). These capabilities include self-confidence and belief in the worth of one's opinions and the legitimacy of expressing them. They also include the ability to make informed choices based on critical awareness, education and information. This contributed positively to the research findings because the researcher was able to justify that findings were generalizable to populations of similar characteristics, in this case females who were the main targets of the research. This is in line with Dickinson, Adelson and Owen (2012) who emphasized the necessity of choosing the correct representative sample that has the right qualities that the research seeks to observe.

Responses from the survey questionnaires informed observation (i.e. areas to observe the behaviour under study, points to emphasize and seek further clarification on in interviews and focus group discussions that were to come). In-depth interviews were a follow-up to survey questionnaires and the researcher recruited 30 students (20 female, 10 male) for the interviews. These were students who had indicated an interest after completing the survey questionnaire. The same respondents from the individual interviews participated in the three focus group discussions (two groups comprised of ten females each and one group consisted of ten males only). Male students were only chosen to bring diversity and balance to the study and to test validity of the responses given by the female students. Mason (2002) in Muasya (2013) noted the importance of acquiring data from different perceptions so as to get authentic and reliable results. By sampling diversified gendered experiences with sexist humour, the researcher has potential to get valuable insights into a wide range of social situations, experiences as well as relations to sexist humour and their interconnections. The assumption here by the researcher was that the gendered knowledge obtained from the personal life experiences by respondents would shed light on the nature, perception and experiences of sexist humour on campus. Such valuable insights would be helpful in determining policy that may transform the unjust gender relations in society.

Another reason for targeting female students was because women are considered to be the socially silenced group and hearing their voices enhanced understanding of the hidden gender realities of the university culture (Muasya, 2013). Voice and decision-making are understood as elements of women's empowerment as they represent women having the power to express their preferences, demands, views and interests, to gain access to positions of decision-making that affect public or private power and resource allocation, and to exercise influence in leadership positions (see UNIFEM, 2005 and Tadros, 2014). To further justify why female students were chosen as targets over men, Brookes (2007) in Muasya (2013) noted how men are considered to be unreliable respondents since they are considered to be in a position of power. Men, through patriarchy, are considered to be in a position of power and it is assumed that those in power will not give credible accounts on reality as they seek to maintain hegemony. The privileged group appear to be satisfied with the status quo and possess a distorted view of reality. In addition, the assumption was that women have better, distinct and rich perceptions of their social world, thus constructing female students' experiences through their voices improved the researcher's understanding of the research questions. The Marxist school of thought contends that women are in a better position than men to understand gender

inequalities because women have always occupied a marginalized social world thereby qualifying them to comment on gender relations which have been silenced for a long time by patriarchy.

Snowball sampling was also employed as students referred the researcher to students who they thought could answer the research questions better than themselves. These students included students who were in a whatsapp study group that had experienced sexist humour first hand. Snowball sampling is one of the most useful techniques when trying to get data that is sensitive.

### **3.4 Data collection procedure**

Data collection was mainly in two phases. The first stage involved obtaining official clearance from the relevant authorities. Permission was sought from the University ethical clearance board as a sign of goodwill and cooperation – clearance was granted. This allowed the researcher to present legitimate requests as a serious researcher at the study site. Permission in written format was then sought and granted from the study site (GZU). These formal letters of authorisation helped to build trust and confidence between the researcher and respondents as they provided evidence that the researcher was serious and was indeed allowed to conduct research within the campus grounds. The second phase involved actual data collection which included distribution of the research instruments.

In order to understand the nature, perceptions and experiences of sexist humour in higher education settings, the researcher utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data. Use of more than one method to obtain data enhances triangulation (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002; Creswell and Stick, 2006; Fink, 2013). Triangulation strengthens and enhances validity and reliability of the data collected (ibid.). Cohen et al. (2000) in Muasya (2013) attested to the strengths of triangulation asserting that it is an attempt to explain better the intricacies in human nature by studying it from more than one standpoint. One method covers the weaknesses of the other which improves the credibility of the data presented. The reason behind mixing both kinds of data within one study was grounded in the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods when used individually are enough to explain phenomena but are more valuable when combined (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006). The qualitative stage built on the findings from the quantitative stage. This design provided additional insight into the study and resulted in reliable conclusions. In addition, the use of qualitative methods stimulated relations between the researcher and the respondents and



allowed them to create ethical partnerships which led to generation of insights and profound understanding of the research phenomenon. The researcher found the qualitative part of the research to be more interesting because it allowed for deeper and richer exploration of the respondents' experiences, perceptions, behaviours and unique voices that are well hidden within their personal worlds (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Muasya, 2013). Besides answering questions about how and why people make sense of the social world, qualitative methods address facets of human action and behaviour through interaction, thereby contributing to its strength. The participants were able to seek clarification, identify, describe and question the researcher on the aims of the research and its proposed benefits. The researcher worked with the help of two research assistants. Both had experience in data collection since they were also PhD students and had published in peer reviewed journals.

The lead researcher visited GZU on several occasions in 2017. On the first visit, the researcher paid a courtesy call to the University registrar as a reminder of the intended research and the already-granted permission. She also asked for permission to use University tutorial rooms to address respondents. The researcher then approached groups of students and informed them about the research. Approaching students was very easy since they were about to write exams and many were having study discussions so the researcher approached potential respondents in these study groups. The researcher then informed these potential respondents of the research aims and objectives as well as the importance of their participation. Those who were willing to participate were informed that they would be required to answer a self-administered questionnaire and hand it back to the researcher or her assistants. Before they could answer the questionnaire, participants were asked to read and sign the consent form so as to give individual consent. The consent form informed participants of their rights such as willing participation, the right to privacy and the right to withdraw from the study, among others. In addition, sexist humour was explained as participants showed a tendency to confuse it with humour that was characterised with sexual connotations. The research targeted students rather than staff members because, according to feminist standpoint theorists, staff members are in a privileged position of power so they might not experience the behaviour under study (Westmarland, 2001). Those who are considered to be in positions of power can thus only produce partial knowledge justifying why the researcher targeted students.

In order to obtain rich data and a contextual understanding of sexist humour, the researcher made use of survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and focus group

discussions. The researcher observed the behaviours and activities of the students during the research process. These techniques helped in the exploration of behaviour, attitudes and experiences of the students at Great Zimbabwe University. The techniques complemented each other as some of the disadvantages of one technique were an advantage in another. A brief description follows of the data gathering techniques and how they were utilised in this study.

### *3.4.1 Survey questionnaire*

A survey questionnaire (see Appendix A) was designed to investigate the pervasiveness of students' experiences of, reaction to and beliefs about sexist humour. A survey questionnaire is defined as a measure of opinions or experiences of a group of people through the asking of questions (Fink, 2013). The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section solicited bio-data (sex, age, level of study at college) of each respondent. The second part sought data on experiences of sexist humour. The survey questionnaire was designed in a way that sought to determine rate of incidences of sexist humour on campus, prevalence and pervasiveness of students' experiences of, reaction to and beliefs about sexist humour. The questionnaire then asked about the type of harassment, place where it happened and the nature of the reaction from those harassed. The study examined both the collective attitudes and experiences of sexist humour and perceptions of campus climate. The questionnaire was used because of the large number of respondents to be surveyed. It was an appropriate instrument as questionnaires could be distributed at different sites to gain different perceptions on sexist humour and it was economical in terms of time. The questionnaire had both open-ended and closed questions. Closed questions were used in order to solicit specific responses about sexist humour. Responses from closed questions are easy to tabulate and allow more items to be explored than would open-ended questions. The open-ended questions allow respondents to elaborate. They enable the researcher to generate unpredictable, less structured information. Responses from the survey questionnaire enabled the researcher to pick out trends, beliefs and views on sexist humour on campus. The survey questionnaire with instructions on how to complete it was handed out to 50 male students and 150 female students on campus grounds with instructions to return to researcher after completion. Although the survey questionnaire was in English, respondents scribbled explanations in Shona on the questionnaire margins as further explanation for their answers. Thus, the researcher presents this information in Shona translated verbatim into English. The researcher was able to translate from Shona to English because Shona is her native language and she can

read and write in that language. The areas where these questionnaires were distributed were determined by purposive sampling. Areas such as the campus cafeteria, sports grounds and sidewalks were considered. Questions for the questionnaire were aligned with the research questions that were posed. During the interviews the researcher asked first about areas and topics of greatest priority and the interview schedule was used to guide the interview process.

### *3.4.2 Focus group discussion*

The researcher utilized Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gather data. These are interviews in which groups of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions and attitudes towards a certain phenomenon (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). The researcher conducted three FGDs, two were female only with 15 students each and one was for males only. Some scholars such as Ulin et al. (2002) in Muasya (2013) have asserted that a FGD with few members allows the participants to express their norms, values in a way that can be traced by the facilitator rather than a large group where the facilitator is at risk of losing control of the group and risk losing the flow of the conversation. FGDs were conducted as follow-ups to individual in-depth interviews to solicit collective attitudes that arose from individual interviews and observation. The purpose of FGDs is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings and experiences in a way which would not be feasible using other methods. Focus group discussions allowed the researcher to establish ethical partnerships with the students, which led to generation of deeper insights and understandings of their experiences with sexist humour. In FGDs discussants had plenty of time to ask questions related to the study and why their participation was of importance. This sparked their interest and they gave more information than anticipated. FGDs also enabled the student community to become more familiar with the nature and complexity of sexist humour. The researcher and her assistants took notes and recorded the discussions and debriefed immediately following each focus group to discuss observations, responses and contents of the discussion. The researcher used both English and Shona in the discussions since she was fluent in both languages. Shona was preferred by the discussants since they felt they could express themselves better in their native language. Thus, data gathered from FGDs is presented in Shona and translated verbatim into English. During these discussions, sexist humour situations were discussed, how students cope with these experiences and the impact these experiences had on them as students. The FGDs followed a set of guiding open-ended questions that allowed room for further discussions. Sample questions included: 1. What is sexist humour? 2. What factors normalize sexist humour? 3. Who are the targets and why? Discussion length varied from 45 minutes to one

hour with some participants wanting to express in detail their feelings regarding sexist humour. See Appendix B for the FGD question guide.

Focus group discussions helped the researcher to gather information on dominant themes of the research. The researcher worked as the moderator, guiding the research and the research assistants worked as enumerators. The researcher was as neutral as possible when leading discussions and encouraged responses from all participants. Use of FGDs allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the gendered realities at play at the University through sexist humour. FGDs also provided the researcher with a podium for magnifying the silenced voices of women to the reserved world of academia through social interactions. The use of FGDs, together with in-depth interviews, offered a multitude of experience and insight into the world of sexist humour which would not have been achieved by using only one of the instruments. Women and male students were treated separately to allow the researcher to get valuable insights into the worlds of each one of the sexes independent of the other. This allowed the researcher to attribute emotions, behaviour and feelings to the correct gender rather than generalizations.

### *3.4.3 In-depth interviews*

In conducting both FGDs and in-depth interviews, the researcher began with informal introduction and small talk conversation about the weather and social life. The small talk was meant to create natural, relaxed and informal atmosphere. This was because a rigid atmosphere threatens responses. After this, the researcher did a formal introduction and commenced the interview session. The researcher explained the purpose of the research and respondents were allowed to seek clarification.

Interviews are one of the most commonly used qualitative research techniques. Their apparent use to research is their openness as they allow the interviewer uninterrupted prospects and potential to get information from the interview. Another reason for utilizing in-depth interviews was because they allowed the researcher to follow a set list of questions making for easier standardised comparison across all interviews, while also enabling the researcher to remain casual and open to diversions. The researcher can thus deviate from the questions so as to explore information that may not have been anticipated or covered by the set questions. According to Muasya (2013), in-depth interviews allow the researcher to directly observe the preferences, emotions and level of knowledge of the respondent. In-depth interviews allowed the researcher to gain a deeper perception into the worldview of the

respondents by getting a face-to-face account of their perceptions and experiences regarding sexist humour. In-depth interviewing involved conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular phenomenon (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

Thirty students were interviewed, ten male and 20 female. This was because the study aimed to examine how female students' experienced sexist humour and male students' responses were only for validity purposes as their responses were used in probing phenomena further. In-depth interviews provided the researcher the opportunity of probing the muzzled voices of females through social interactions. Muasya (2014) noted that voice in feminist literature helps to bring to light the ambiguities, fragmentations, struggles and inflexibilities presented in students' experiences. The interviews were conversational in form and questions followed a set of guidelines to ensure uniformity in questions being asked (see Appendix C). The questions were open ended to enable probing. In-depth interviews allowed the researcher to expand on thoughts and perceptions of the respondents and to seek clarification on responses given. As such, the researcher was able to capture exact words, concepts and the emotions. Use of materials from in-depth interviews and FGDs was crucial especially for a study of this nature which dealt with a sensitive topic. Sample questions included: *1. What in your opinion is sexism? 2. How do you recognize sexist humour? 3. Can you give narratives of the incidences you have encountered?* These questions were designed to allow respondents to open up on their own about their experiences without leading them on a particular path. In-depth interviews allowed respondents to tell their stories uninterrupted without worrying about what their peers might think and presented the researcher with personal perspectives regarding sexist humour. Data was collected by use of a digital recorder. The researcher was conscious of the creation of multiple realities through words and where reality was dependent on subject positioning and meanings. As such, probing was necessary for answers to be clear at times.

#### *3.4.4 Observation*

Observation involves examining people in their natural setting (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Observation is more than noticing something but is a technique that involves systematically selecting, watching and recording behaviour characteristics of living beings, objects or occurrences. Observation was also important during in-depth interviews and FDGs. Sometimes verbal responses were too incoherent or vague to interpret. In such cases, the researcher tried to decipher the meaning through tone or gestures. The researcher thus

recorded the utterances of the respondents but at the same time added marginal notes giving both an interpretation and explanations for arriving at this. The researcher visited the GZU campus grounds and cafeteria and sat in on several study group discussions to ascertain how students interacted with each other with regard to sexist humour. As a result, the researcher developed an understanding of how male and female students interacted. Areas to observe behaviour from were determined by the responses from the survey questionnaire which identified areas in which sexist humour was common such as sports grounds and the cafeteria. Observation allowed the researcher the opportunity to record and analyse behaviours as they occurred. The advantage with observation is that it provides the researcher the opportunity to witness what people actually do in a natural setting rather than what they claim they do.

Students' views and experiences were diverse but all attested to the fact that sexist humour was rife on campus. They were very helpful in offering insights into the nature and experiences with sexist humour. They were also helpful in opening up a world where silence, intimidation and violence was the norm as well as stigma surrounding experiences with sexist humour. Throughout the interview process, the researcher was aware of the sensitivity and pain surrounding issues to do with harassment. As such, the researcher kept assuring the respondents of their right to privacy. Assurance of privacy allowed the respondents to open up to the researcher without fear.

The researcher ended the FGD's and in-depth interviews by expressing her gratitude to the respondents for selflessly giving their valuable time to the researcher.

### **3.5 Data management, analysis and presentation**

The fact that the research aimed at analyzing female experiences with sexist humour meant sorting and analysing data based on specific gender (women). The varied gendered realities evident in the accounts of respondents (both men and women) proved important in this study. Use of gender as a category for data analysis proved useful in showing the unique experiences of each gender and offered insight into the complicated nature of sexist humour. After data collection, all the data from electronic recordings were transcribed. This was usually done immediately after an interview or an FDG to make sure that all the necessary and relevant data was put down into writing. Transcribing each interview and FDG verbatim meant word for word without anything left out, even the pauses and laughter. All the notes

taken down during interviews, observation, FDGs and transcripts were read several times to familiarize myself with the data and further notes were made in the process.

Data analysis was both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative methods answered questions about how and why people make sense of the social world. Qualitative data from individual interviews, focus group discussions as well as observations followed a thematic approach in its description and interpretation as well as discourse analysis. Themes were identified from the participants' narratives for data analysis. Thematic analysis involved categorising and sorting materials by grouping them into meaningful clusters as supported by Patton (2002) cited in Musya (2013). Sorting data into clusters makes analysis of large data easier and accuracy is assured. Furthermore, coding of data into categories allows the researcher to acquire logical overviews of the data which encompass theoretical, conceptual and analytical thinking. Participants' narratives and quotations were utilised in the process.

A thematic approach helped in clarifying the topics on which the problem was based. Discourse analysis was also utilised in the analysis of data. This involved analysis of vocal or sign language use and any semiotic events related to sexist humour. This type of data was presented as narratives. Use of discourse analysis is important as the researcher would 'hear' the voices of both men and women as a way of transforming their voices to be heard in the public domain. Thus, discourse allowed the researcher to construct and interconnect a comprehensible analysis of social reality on campus. Discourse conveyed important messages about the gendered nature of sexist humour interactions on campus. Discourse reflected the norms, values, attitudes, emotions and presented the worldview of different actors on campus and what is used to maintain this hegemony. In addition, the use of discourse was relevant to this study given that the study aimed to explore female students' perception and experiences with sexist humour as part of their gendered daily experiences. The prioritization of gender as a category for analysis allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of both sexes based on their personal accounts and experiences through their narratives. The researcher noted how each gender talked about themselves and others which revealed a "them versus us" mentality that existed on campus. Therefore, the use of the gender approach presented the researcher with an opportunity to critically review and understand the complex nature of sexist humour.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe the basic features of quantitative data in the study. Descriptive statistics are brief descriptive figures that summarize a given data set. The quantitative data was analysed and presented in tables and pie charts showing

frequencies of responses and corresponding percentages. In addition, data from FDGs and interviews was presented verbatim and directly translated to English. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the respondents instead of their real names so as to protect them from possible victimisation.

### **3.6 Reliability and validity**

Reliability involves the extent to which results are consistent over time and entails that results can be replicated. Validity determines whether the research set out to measure what it intended to measure or how truthful the research results are (Creswell, 2000). In order for the researcher to maintain reliability and validity, the researcher tried to minimize bias by reflecting on true observations of the descriptions of the research participants. The researcher repeatedly revisited the data that was collected to represent accurate accounts of the participants, thus ensuring validity of the study. The researcher adopted triangulation in data gathering. The researcher conducted a male-only focus group discussion to balance and test the responses from the female only focus group discussions. She observed the participants in their natural settings to observe their natural behaviour and used the interviews and focus group discussions (in gathering the information from the female participants) and another focus group discussion (male only) as a follow up to observation data. The researcher convinced people to participate and not to hide information, to maintain consistency in and dependability of information gathered. The researcher made sure that all the participants contributed (voluntarily), especially in the focus group discussions.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

To promote autonomy of this study, the proposal for this study was first submitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal's research office for ethical scrutiny to ensure that the research was within the appropriate and accepted guidelines of the University (see Appendix D for full approval granted by the University). Ethical issues are concerned with moral questions of what is right or wrong regarding the research process. Ethical issues make the researcher liable for the knowledge produced in their study since research is all about impartiality, respect and promoting the good of others. Consent in written format was sought and granted by the gatekeepers of Great Zimbabwe University (see Appendix E for permission granted). This was crucial as the researcher was generating public or academic knowledge using aspects of the private stories of students. Sexual harassment is a sensitive area and is surrounded by embarrassment, victimization, violence, secrecy, stigma, ignorance, silence,



threats and discrimination (Muasya and Gatumu, 2013). Such research is likely to intrude into deeply personal experiences. Therefore, this research was informed by several ethical considerations to deal with these dilemmas to generate ethical meaningful data that allows respondents to develop and express their own realities.

Informed consent was crucial in the collection of data. McCormick (2013) emphasised the importance of informed consent before embarking on research. Informed consent entails respect for autonomy, protection of vulnerable persons and the participant's choice to participate. The potential participants were furnished with information about the purpose of the study, what participation in the study required of them, the time it would take and how data would be used. In this case, information was to be used for research purposes only. Once respondents granted consent to be part of the research, they were asked to sign a consent form to formalise the agreement (see Appendix F for study description and informed consent forms). The researcher was aware that consent was not absolute and therefore kept in mind the need to renegotiate consent in cases when the respondent appeared to be uncomfortable and not answering questions. In all interactions, the researcher encouraged respondents to participate by showing them that their responses were valuable to the present study. After having created relationships with the respondents and having explained and answered questions about the present study, the researcher requested permission to use the digital recorder in order to be able to follow up on the conversations. The majority of the students declined citing the current political situation in Zimbabwe at the time which was not stable. They feared that their responses might be misused for political reasons like what other previous researchers had done. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005) seeking permission to record interviews in research was key to the successful collection of quality data since the researcher is then able to get all information verbatim. As a result, given that the majority of respondents refused to be recorded the researcher resorted to taking down notes and asking for clarifications where she did not understand.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, voluntary participation was the guiding principle. Respondents were advised that participation was voluntary and they could refuse to answer certain questions or withdraw their participation at any time and at any point of the study without any penalties or consequences. Flory and Emmanuel (2004) argued that informed consent becomes meaningful when respondents voluntarily agree to share their understanding of the issue under investigation. However, the researcher reserved the right to terminate the

participation of respondents who appeared to be drunk or visibly sick without any prior notice.

The respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected. Any study dealing with issues of harassment requires the researcher to maintain the privacy of the participants. Privacy entails allowing the participants to determine how their responses, emotions, doubts and fears are to be communicated or withheld from others. Questionnaires were given numbers from 1 going up which were used to refer to them for example student 1 or student 2. For FGDs, numbers were accorded for each one which made identification and referencing easier. For example FGD1, FGD2 and FGD3. Participants' identification was based on gender, for example, 1 stood for female and 2 stood for male. Use of letters, numbers or pseudonyms is for protecting the privacy of the participants. Privacy assured the participants that no data would be traced directly back to them. Information collected would be for research purposes only and pseudonyms instead of their names were used for the report. Identity of those who will have taken part will not be known outside the research team. Consent was sought before using tape recorders and transcripts were not labelled in ways that could compromise anonymity.

Any social research that involves sensitive issues and emotional topics can create risk or harm. Therefore there was need to guard against harming the participants. The researcher was alert to any signs of discomfort and if these were evident, the researcher offered to stop the interview and in extreme cases, referred the respondent to the campus counsellor who was available at the University clinic. Details to contact the counsellor were made available to all respondents. However, none of the respondents showed discomfort or the need to be referred to the counsellor.

### **3.8 Reflexivity and the research process**

It was difficult to record some of the interviews since during the time of the data collection there was a coup in Zimbabwe so students were afraid of the uncertain political situation. Students were sceptical of the use of a recorder as they were afraid their responses might be used for politics. This compromised the quality of the research as the researcher had to rely on jotting down notes and listening only. Some students cited incidences where they had been duped into believing that their participation was purely academic only to realise that their contributions had been used to gain political mileage. In addition, it was not conducive to be seen handing out batches of papers (questionnaires) to a group of youths given the political

situation because it is alleged that Zimbabwe has a history of political violence against those who are assumed to be the opposition. As a result, some students did not want to participate in a group setting. Thus, the researcher had to find ways around these challenges such as using lecture rooms for interviews and FDGs so as not to raise suspicion.

In addition, it was difficult to recruit male students to participate in the research. Generally, the male students were more responsive when asked to participate in the research by the researcher's male research assistants. The majority of those approached by the researcher for possible participation either flatly refused saying the research topic was aimed at male bashing and they saw no reason to participate in what they termed a "losing battle". Some asked if the researcher was interested in romantic connections. Thus, the researcher left the task of male recruiting to the male research assistants.

Hesse-Biber (2006, 130) pointed out that reflexivity is "a process whereby the researcher is sensitive to the important 'situational' dynamics that exist between the researcher and the researched that can affect the creation of knowledge". Being a married woman studying to achieve what might be the highest level of education made the respondents view the researcher in an interesting light. For the female student, it was an eye opener and evidence that indeed women could reach such levels of education in a patriarchal society. Female students tended to place the researcher at the apex of high achievers and wanted to know more about how the researcher managed to balance academic work and domestic life. Male students, however, viewed the researcher as a rebel since they believed that a married woman should not be researching issues that appeared to challenge male masculinity. They believed the researcher's husband was not firm enough to enforce respect for masculinity in the researcher. Nonetheless, this raised questions of how I could play with different positionalities to build rapport with different people, while being attentive to the ethics and politics involved in such processes of 'fitting in' and the power relations that are involved. As such, the researcher had to carefully negotiate the power relations between her and the respondents so as not to compromise the quality of data collected. She tried to appear to be on the same level as the females and not to appear a rebel with the males, at the same time as observing the ethics of the research. Often the researcher had to listen respectfully to the female questions and expressions of awe as well as listening to male displeasure at her topic of research and steer the conversation back to the research topic.

In addition, the researcher was also 'othered' by those who were observing and studying her in the field. This was perhaps particularly true of the majority of men approached for possible

participation. Such scepticism is valid, and the researcher had to work within and through such perceptions. The refusal to participate in the research also demonstrated the exercise of power and agency of (potential) research participants in the field. One male respondent scoffed, while walking away from the researcher's attempts to speak with him, "Not another one of you feminist people with more questions again". The reverse power relations were obvious in the many rejections of meetings, disregarding appointments granted, guarded responses and rushed interviews, and a generally condescending attitude towards my work and me. In this manner, fieldwork was an intensely personal experience for me. It felt like being part of a larger family where people felt free to prod, pry, and pontificate.

It can be argued whether reflexivity always leads to "legitimacy" in the research process, but the experiences of the researcher at GZU demonstrated that "reflexivity" was central to understanding the construction of knowledge and therefore cannot be ignored or disregarded as it is central in revealing how meaning is constructed in qualitative studies. Thus, according to Bondi (2003), it is critical to pay attention to issues of positionality, reflexivity, and the power relations that are inherent in research processes in order to undertake ethical research.

### **3.9 Delimitations**

The focus of this study was limited to the Great Zimbabwe University. The results are applicable only to the Great Zimbabwe University and therefore broad generalizations cannot be made. However, since an in-depth understanding of women's experiences in higher education settings especially with regard to sexist humour will be gained, it will be informative for researchers and practitioners interested in gaining insight into the status of women in higher education.

### **3.10 Theoretical framework**

The study draws on structural violence, sexual objectification and social identity theories. According to Babbie (2014), theories help to make sense of observed patterns in research. A researcher should be able to describe research's possible contributions to knowledge by describing how the study fits, in terms of the theoretical underpinnings, in social science or applied fields in ways that will be new, insightful and creative. The theories in this research have been chosen not simply because individually they offer critical insights regarding violence and social reality, but because together they provide the most comprehensive understanding of violence through a merged analysis of discourse and gender. Their methodological approaches make it easier for the theories to go well. Each theory builds and

adds value to the other in their different ways, yet they reach for a common goal which is to explain how and why sexual violence may be normalized and accepted as inevitable. Although the researcher has mentioned the feminist post-structural theory, it will not be used as the main theoretical framework but will be incorporated into the analysis and explanations of the findings where necessary and stiwanism will be incorporated in the research approach by looking at African women in their specific locality ie African women in higher education.

### *3.10.1 Structural violence theory*

Structural violence is a broad framework that describes the mechanisms through which social forces embedded in social structures such as poverty, racism and gender inequity manifest as individual experiences and health outcomes. Structural violence is a term ascribed to Johan Galtung and refers to a form of violence wherein some social structures or institutions may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs (Galtung, 1993). According to this theory, the violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power relations and manifests as unequal life chances. The term ‘structural violence’ refers to institutionalized social structures, such as poverty, racism and gender inequity, that hinder people from meeting their basic needs and rights. Adopting this definition of violence as espoused by the structural violence theory, the study aims at revealing how gender inequity manifesting as sexist humour at GZU, affects individuals as well as groups and how it affects female students and their experience of education. Issues of equal access to educational resources for female students as compared to male students will be explained in the context of this theory by revealing how sexist humour prejudices female students by denying them access to what is their right to education. In addition, the theory helps to explore how sexist humour and the associated violence has become embedded in the structures of GZU.

According to Mazurana and McKay (2001), the structural violence framework acknowledges and critiques intersecting inequities in the subjugation of individual potential. This is especially relevant for women in higher education settings whose potential is stifled by sexist humour as it appears that sexist humour emphasizes male domination over women. Structural violence theory may be a useful tool in configuring an intersectional analysis of gender and educational inequities in the educational sector and how they relate to misogyny. Adopting structural violence theory for this study means locating and analysing the violence that is embedded in the use of language such as sexist humour that prevents women from accessing quality and equal education opportunities together with their male colleagues. Structural violence has exploitation as the core determinant and for structural violence theorists,

distribution of power through structures is at the expense of others which can be classified as either violence or exploitation. According to Samantroy (2010, 27), structural violence is almost invisible, firmly rooted and ever-present in social structures and normalized by stable institutions and regular experiences. Structural violence is believed to emerge from lack of access to power to protect oneself from the social order and as a result, people are harmed because of these existing inequalities rather than through overt expressions of violence. This is especially useful in this study as sexist humour appears to be a manifestation of the unequal power relations between males and females.

In addition, structural violence discusses cultural violence which refers to aspects of a culture that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence, and may be exemplified by religion and ideology as well as language. According to Galtung (1969, 180), cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look or feel "right", or at least not wrong. The study of cultural violence highlights the ways the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus made acceptable in society. This reflects how incidences of sexist humour and the associated violence become acceptable normal behaviour simply because culture sanctions it. This makes this theory relevant for this study as it explains how culture (both institutional and traditional) can be linked to sexist humour.

Furthermore, this theory is relevant to this study in that sexist humour is hidden and expressed as humour because common courtesy forbids outright expressions of prejudice. According to this theory, violence is invisible and embedded in social structures and is normalized by regular experience. As Shannon et al. (2017, 46) hypothesized, Galtung defined violence as "the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is", thus violence is defined as harm caused to individuals and is espoused as the preventable damage and denial of essential human needs. However, this violence is indirect, as it manifests through normalized social structures. As such, it can be said that structural violence is any institutionalized practice or procedure that adversely impacts on disadvantaged individuals or groups and in this case, female students.

Theories of structural violence explore how political, economic and cultural structures result in the occurrence of avoidable violence (Farmer, 2004, 6). This theory is especially useful in this study because it identifies structural forces behind sexism and explains how and why these forces promote sexism through normalization and acceptance of sexist humour which has potential to be violent and prevents women from meeting their educational needs. It is useful in explaining how structures influence violence in a higher education setting. The

theory is especially useful in that it recognizes the existence of invisible and underlying threats to violence such as structural composition. However, it is limited in that it does not recognize immediate visible threats such as individual human characteristics or individual internal emotions as an influence to violence. As such, the subsequent theories were intended to complement the shortfalls of this theory. The structural violence theory focuses only on the structural causes of violence and is silent on other causes that are not related to structure. Therefore, the sexual objectification theory and the social identity theory were used to highlight other issues related to violence in higher education settings.

### *3.10.2 Sexual objectification theory*

To augment structural violence theory, sexual objectification theory by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) also formed part of the basis of the conceptual framework. Objectification theory postulates that women are sexually objectified and treated as objects to be valued for their use by males. With sexual objectification, greater emphasis is placed on one's appearance rather than competence based attitudes. Sexist humour can be classified as a form of sexual objectification which reduces women (as targets of the joke) to an object. This is especially useful in this study as objectification of females in higher education diverts attention from female potential and presents women as sexual objects. The theory provides a framework for understanding the experiences of being female in a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body and the consequences of female objectification as well as how women manage, cope with and resist this objectification. This theory is useful in explaining the sense of entitlement and ownership men appear to have on women and how men allegedly treat females as objects whose value is related to appearance. This objectification of female students at university appears to have an influence on issues of sexual violence in education settings. The sexual objectification theory is also useful for this study because it explains broader sexist ideologies that justify male domination in higher education settings. However, sexual objectification fails to explain other variables that justify sexist humour besides objectification therefore social identity theory was useful for filling this gap.

The use of the sexual objectification theory for this research aided with clarifying understanding of how contextual factors such as objectification influence the lives of women in higher education as well as how they manage, cope and resist sexual objectification encounters. Furthermore, sexual objectification theory helps in understanding how women may come to self-objectify themselves as they internalize the sexually objectifying

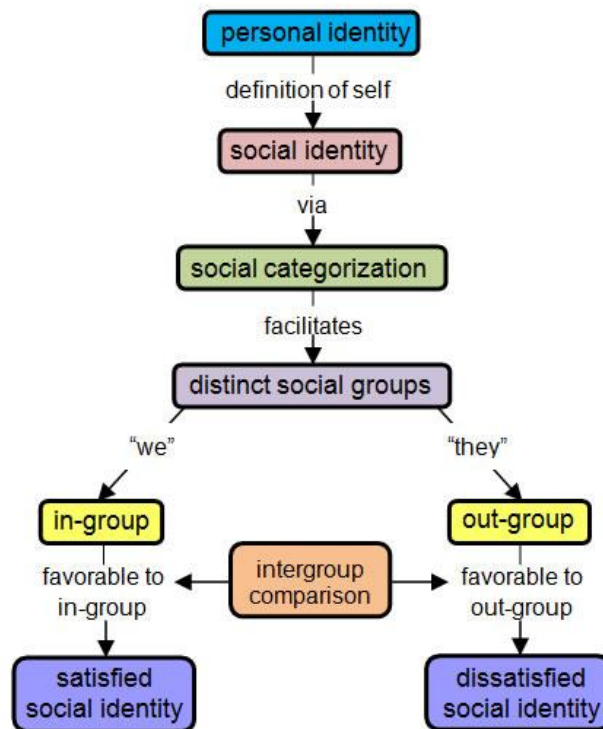
behaviours they are continually exposed to. In addition, sexual objectification theory is relevant for this study because it encourages examination of issues of diversity and oppression under patriarchy at institutional levels. Sexual objectification theory also is necessary for this research because it affords a way to understand the power structures existing in education. Objectifying behaviour appears to reflect the power relations present in educational settings because patriarchy supports domination of women in all areas including sex. So it may be argued that sexually objectifying behaviour is a reflection of the power struggles existing in education settings. However, this theory looks at violence from a perspective of sexual relations only. Therefore, it complements the social identity theory and the structural violence theory in explaining the experiences of female students with sexist humour at Great Zimbabwe University.

### 3.10.3 *Social identity theory*

Proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1978), social identity theory proposes that a person's identity changes gradually between personal identity and social identity. The diagram (Figure 3.1) that follows illustrates the proponents and the inter-connectedness of social identity theory.

Social identity theory posits that group formation goes through three stages. The first is social *categorisation* where individuals see themselves as part of a group as well as having a personal identity. Social identity may encompass how individuals identify with groups based on gender, social class, religion, school or friends. The second stage is social *identification* which purports that once individuals have a social identity, they automatically perceive everyone else they meet as either part of their in-group (the ones who share the same social identity as them) or the out-group. Particular attention is paid to in-group members and individuals adopt group values, attitudes, appearance and behaviour. Social *comparison* is the third stage where individuals espouse their social identity to be superior to others. This comes from regarding the behaviours of the in-group as better than the products of an out-group. This leads to prejudice as well as discrimination.





**Figure 3.1: Social identity theory**  
 Source: *age-of-the-sage.com* (2018)

Social identity is based on social group membership and depends on context and can lead to behaviour that disadvantages out-group members. This theory is especially useful in this study because it explains the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality that fuels sexist humour. According to this theory, members of an in-group disparage members of an out-group because they are perceived to possess inferior qualities to those of the disparaging group. In this perspective, social groups compete for social recognition and material resources. Social recognition gives a feeling of superiority to members of a group on dimensions relevant to their group. However, if an in-group performs poorly in an intergroup comparison, social identity becomes threatened and members will try to restore positive distinctiveness. Social identity theory posits that individuals maintain not only a positive personal identity but also a positive collective identity.

Ellemers et al. (1999, 59) explained the concept of different aspects of social identification. They proposed that three components contribute to one’s social identity: “a cognitive component (a cognitive awareness of one’s membership in a social group self-categorization), an evaluative component (a positive or negative value connotation attached

to this group membership group self-esteem), and an emotional component (a sense of emotional involvement with the group and active commitment)”. This perspective explains why individuals may be forced to engage in sexist humour simply because they want to identify with their group principles. One way to achieve this is through engaging in disparagement humour (Thomae and Pina, 2015). By allowing for social comparisons to relevant out-groups, disparagement humour can provide positive distinctiveness to the in-group. In turn, re-establishing positive distinctiveness will allow the formerly threatened in-group member to perceive disparagement humour as funny and to enjoy it (Ferguson and Ford, 2008).

This theory is relevant to the study because it explains why and how group dynamics influence how prejudice becomes embedded in societal structures. This is useful in this study because it explains how sexist humour strengthens in-group bonds through stereotyping. It further explains how individuals strive to improve their self-esteem, based on either personal identity or social identity. However, the theory has been criticized because social comparison to make the in-group superior does not change personal identity (ibid.). However, it is important for this study because it attempts to explain perceptions and actions with the help of group processes.

In addition, this theory can be useful in explaining disparagement humour in issues like why it elicits amusement and the nature of this kind of humour. Social identity theory involves judging one’s own group as superior to other groups and promotes positive social identity that can be achieved through disparaging the out-group. By engaging in disparagement humour, it appears the intention is to enhance one’s image relative to others in the group or organization. Self-enhancing humour such as sexist humour may be used as a coping mechanism to deal with stress and the perceived challenges to the superior image. Aggressive humour is used to belittle and disparage others. Making jokes about the out-group bonds the group members thereby enhancing cohesion. The sexualized way in which women’s bodies are evaluated within sexist humour contexts, especially in higher education settings has both personal and political implications for women’s lives which are highlighted by this theory thereby supporting its relevance for this study.

These three theories are appropriate for the research because they complement each other by taking over from where one theory has failed to explain. They all explain how social structures and social behaviours as well as social practices construct female experiences that have strong connections to the culture of misogyny in higher education settings. While

structural violence theory focuses on structural factors that constrain female participation in higher education, the social identity theory and sexual objectification theory focus on the social constraints. Sexist humour espouses the sexualized way in which women's bodies are evaluated within educational contexts which has both personal and political implications for women's lives. When used in conjunction with each other, the theories reveal that sexist humour does not occur in a vacuum but is a reflection of the broader social structures that influence and legitimize expressions of sexist humour as well as the individual and group dynamics that push people to disparage members who are considered to be 'other'. By using the three theories together in analysis, the researcher reveals that sexist humour might be activated by broader environmental antecedents that convey information about culturally prescribed gender roles and behaviours thereby normalizing female harassment in education settings.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the methodology and methods for the research study. The process that guided the researcher in developing the most appropriate research design for the study is presented. The research used a mixed methodology and the tools that were used for data gathering (i.e. observation, individual interview, survey questionnaire and the focus group discussion guide) have been discussed. Ethical considerations have also been discussed in this chapter. These include confidentiality, debriefing, avoiding harm among the participants and informed consent. The chapter discussed data collection methods and techniques, data presentation and analysis procedures as well as study limitations. The chapter also outlined the theoretical frameworks used in the research in probing issues linked to the research topic.

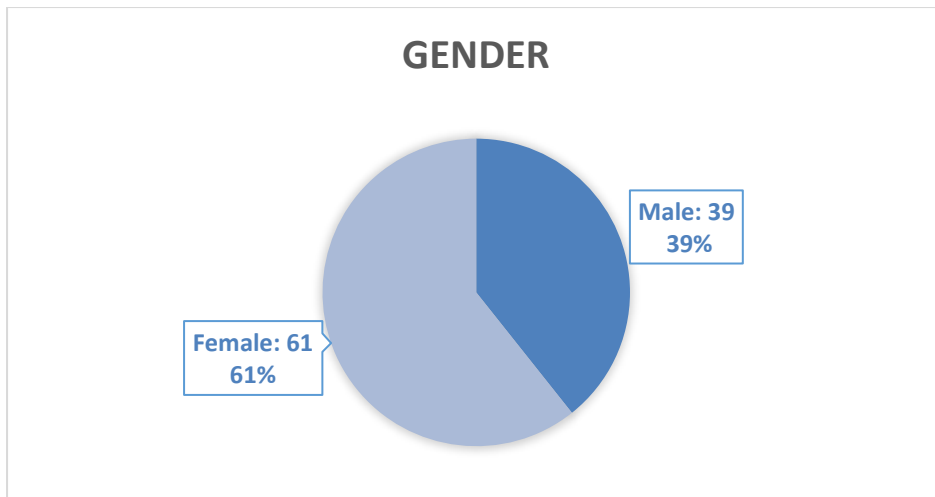
## **CHAPTER 4: NATURE AND PERCEPTION OF SEXIST HUMOUR**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter is a prelude to the chapters that discuss the study findings. This chapter specifically describes the population demographics as well as the nature, perception and identification of sexist humour in college campus settings by focusing on questions such as who are the targets of sexist humour and why are they targeted, as well as the power structures that influence sexist humour. The conceptualization of sexist humour among college students is also discussed in this chapter as well as inferences made with regard to the nature and experience of sexist humour in higher education settings. There is a discussion based on statistical findings of the data from the representative sample as well as qualitative data from focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews and observation. The chapter concludes by examining the locations and channels through which sexist humour is disseminated.

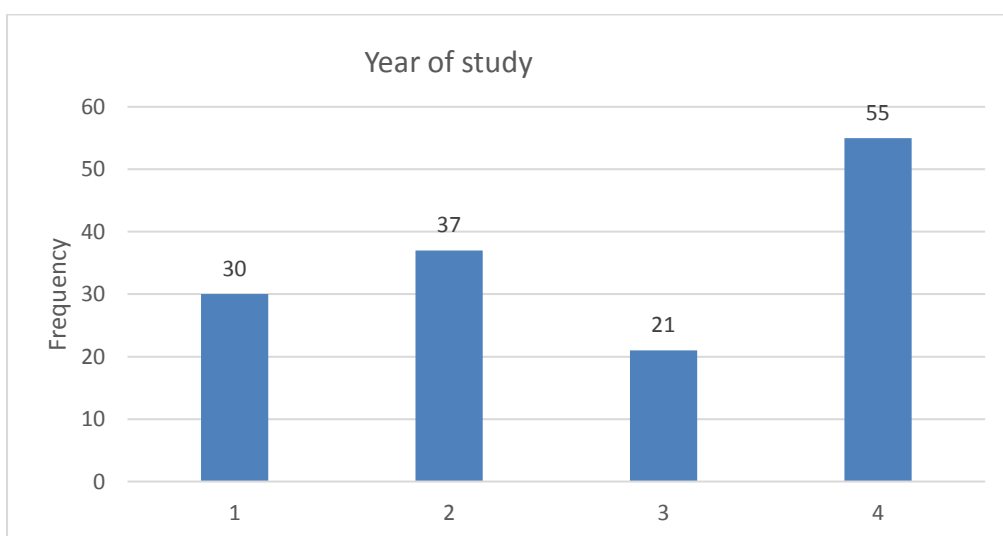
### **4.2 Characteristics of study sample and response rate**

From a total of 200 questionnaires distributed, 148 questionnaires were returned translating into a response rate of 74 percent. Of the 148 questionnaires returned, 145 respondents indicated their gender (98 percent) and 3 respondents did not (2 percent). Therefore, in terms of gender, 61 percent of the valid responses were female and 39 percent were male. From these responses, the average age for the participants was 26, the minimum age being 19 and the maximum age being 55. The standard deviation for the age variable was 6.3. This is in line with Zimbabwean University regulations where the minimum age for enrolling for university education is 19. Because of various adult education programmes available, there are also students as old as 55 studying at universities. Of the respondents, 75.4 percent were full-time students, 17.6 percent part-time students with 7 percent of respondents indicating 'other' (block-release). Thirty respondents were in the first year of study, 37 in the second year, 21 and 55 students in the third and fourth year of study respectively. Figure 4.1 below indicates counts of population by sex and Figure 4.2 illustrates respondents' year of study on campus.



**Figure 4.1: Sex of respondents**

According to Figure 4.1, females consisted of 61 percent of the research population thereby making the majority of respondents. This validated the research objectives which aimed at analysing female responses. Males constituted 39 percent of the study population. This was appropriate as male responses were only chosen to bring diversity and balance to the study and to test validity of the responses given by the female students. Hartsock (1983) cited in Muasya (2013) asserted that women are in a better position to understand gender relations due to their underprivileged position in society as opposed to males who aim to protect their privileged positions through silence, therefore validating the research aim for choosing more females than males. In addition, there is evidence that female students have more comprehensive insights of sexual harassment as compared to male students (ibid.).



**Figure 4.2: Year of study on campus**

According to the graph in Figure 4.2, there were thirty first-year students, 37 second-year students, 21 third-year students and 55 fourth-year students. Five respondents did not indicate their year of study. Therefore, the majority of the respondents were fourth-year/final year students. Although this was not planned, it worked extremely well in the favour of the researcher and contributed positively to the research outcomes because it was assumed that the longer one has been at university, the greater the experiences of campus life (Kelly and Parsons, 2000). First-year students are considered to be too new on campus and still trying to navigate their way around campus. It is assumed they still have not had time to interact well with other students therefore there are not in a good position to comment on behaviours they have been exposed to for only a short period (DeSouza and Fansler, 2003 in Muasya, 2013). Second-year students may have been busy with preparing their attachments while third-year students were on attachment and possibly did not have time to participate in the study. Students with longer experience of campus life meant that the results were likely to be more authentic. Fourth-year students are considered senior students as they have been on campus for the longest. This was noted by some fourth-year students who said;

*Ahhh...murikutsvagei kuvana uko...Havana zvavanoziva vane mukaka pamhuno...*  
(laughing). *Tisu zvibaba baba zvacho zvepano tinoziva zvikona zvacho pano*

ahhh why are you interviewing those children (referring to first-year students). We are the godfathers of this campus...laughing...we know every corner and what happens on campus.

The sentiments above indicate how seniority on campus is considered as a qualifier to knowing what exactly happens on campus. The respondent referred to first-year students as “children” illustrating how inexperienced they were and unlikely to provide the researcher with authentic information. There appeared to be a sense of competition between the junior and the senior students. This can be best explained through the social identity theory which posits that individuals seek to enhance social identity through competition (Crocker, 1992). Thus, it can be concluded that experience of campus life was necessary and crucial to the collection of authentic data. It can be said that by highlighting that seniority was crucial for authentic knowledge and discussions of sexist humour, the respondents seems to allude to how lengthy exposure to campus life translated into more experience with sexist humour and associated violence. This served as confirmation that indeed sexist humour was present on campus. This afforded the researcher a glimpse of the power struggles at play at the

University with senior students dismissing the contributions of the junior students. The senior student dismissing the contributions of the junior students by infantilizing them can be explored and understood using social identity theory, especially the concept of positive distinctiveness and group cohesion. The senior students identified themselves as the knowledgeable group and their information as authentic as opposed to the junior students and by this, positive group distinctiveness was achieved as well as group cohesion. Senior students took pride in their experiences with campus affairs by virtue of having been on campus for longer and used this as an advantage to disparage the junior students by referring to them as children. The belittling of junior students may be a reflection of how the University has a culture of belittling those who are considered to be “other” which could include women and can explain sexist humour incidences at the campus though this is inconclusive. Sexist humour infantilizes and dismisses the contributions of women. This might explain the operations of sexist humour on campus since it appears that sexist humour is a result of the power struggles between those who have power and those who do not. This revealed some of the characteristics of the academic structure at GZU that can be said to be ‘violent’ to the students by exposing them to the violent nature of sexist humour. This seems to suggest that sexist humour and violence is embedded in the University structures which one had to experience for them to be qualified to discuss issues of sexist humour. According to structural violence theory, violence is embedded in structures that prevent people from meeting their basic needs and in this case, sexist humour appears to be embedded in the academic structures and has an impact on how students experience academic life. This may result in unequal access to educational resources thereby preventing the marginalized groups from meeting their basic needs.

### **4.3 Reflections on sexist humour**

#### *4.3.1 Identification of sexism*

The researcher sought to establish the nature, perceptions and identification of sexist humour between both sexes on campus. As such, the researcher sought to assess perceptions regarding sexism in general before considering sexist humour. This was crucial for the research because it was noted that the ability to identify and name sexism was important in shaping perceptions and responses to sexist encounters as the elimination of discrimination is dependent on this. This was necessary for understanding how and why sexist humour thrived in higher education settings. Sexism has been and continues to be identified by feminist researchers as one of the most common forms of discrimination facing female students at

universities and preventing them from realising their full potential. Ability to identify sexism therefore became an important marker in shaping the discussion, recommendations and conclusions of the study. A Likert scale was used to measure respondents' ability to identify statements that they could say were sexist and based on misogyny. Responses ranged from 'very sexist', 'sexist', 'somehow sexist', 'not sexist' to 'no opinion'. Table 4.1 below presents questionnaire responses to the question that asked students to identify sexism in given vignettes.

**Table 4.1: Responses to 'Can you label these statements as sexist and based on misogyny?'**

	<b>Sexist</b>	<b>Very sexist</b>	<b>Somehow sexist</b>	<b>Not sexist</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Deviation</b>
(a) a woman's place is in the home	54.3%	26.8%	5.8%	10.9%	2.2%	1.8	1.095
(b) a woman's job is to give birth & let the husband take care of her & the kids	35.7%	41.4%	9.3%	9.3%	4.3%	2.05	1.102
(c) women are bad drivers	25.9%	23%	23%	23.7%	4.3%	2.58	1.228
(d) women's rights are there to challenge men	15.8%	15.8%	17.3%	43.2%	7.9%	3.12	1.240
(e) women are not as intelligent as men	22.1%	42.9%	13.6%	15%	6.4%	2.41	1.175
(f) women should not enrol at university but go to teachers colleges						2.18	1.199
(g) women are good enough for sex only						2.31	1.227
(h) women are like children and therefore need a man for guidance	18.4%	48.5%	14%	14%	5.1%	2.39	1.097

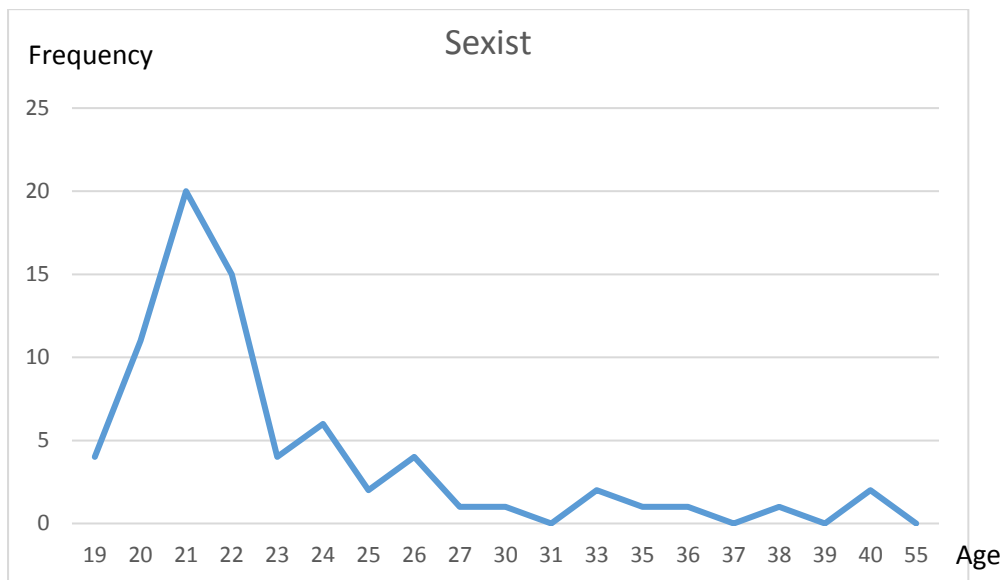
From the responses it was clear that the majority of respondents could identify sexism. For example in Table 4.1 vignette (a) asked if respondents perceived it as sexist to say that a woman's place was in the home. From a total of 148 respondents, 138 responded to that question. Of the respondents, 54.3 percent (n=75) said this was sexist, 26.8 percent (n=37) said it was very sexist, 5.8 percent (n=8) said it was somehow sexist, 10.9 percent (n=15) said



it was not sexist and 2.2 percent (n=3) had no opinion. The standard deviation was 1.095. Of these responses, 47 percent of the population were males who indicated that it was sexist to say a woman's place was in the home and 59 percent were females who said the same, indicating that there was general consensus in identifying sexism. The researcher compared sexist humour perceptions from both males and female students so as to understand sexist humour in a gender distinctive way. The high percentage result (54, 3) of respondents who identified the vignette as sexist represents the respondents' ability to recognize and name sexism meaning that students could identify sexist intentions in the vignette and acknowledge that it was indeed discriminatory. In addition to the questionnaire responses, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) participants showed that they understood what sexist humour was and displayed general consensus that sexism objectifies and trivializes women and consequently contributes to a tiered position that makes women subordinate to men in society.

The fact that students from both sexes agreed with the notion that sexist humour sexually objectifies and trivializes women is solidified by the sexual objectification theory where women are identified with their bodies' sexual function. The vignette that claimed that women are only good for sex is representative of the extent to which sexual objectification can go in relegating women to the private sphere. This might pose problems for female students as their contributions in academia might be dismissed and trivialized as a result of this objectification. It can be noted how the sexist vignettes glorified male power and relegated women to the private sphere. Social identity theory validates this power hierarchy by stating that in order to increase self-image, people enhance the status of the group to which they belong. By relegating women to private spaces, males appear to be enhancing the status of their group by monopolising public spaces such as education sectors. Structural violence theory takes this further explaining how public space such as higher education spaces become hostile to women who are moving into these spaces. This manifests as hostile environments in academia due to sexist humour views that emphasize the marginalization of women in what is considered male space. This highlights how sexist humour works to disparage and forbid women from venturing into higher education spaces and highlights men's frantic efforts to maintain the status quo. As such, through analysis using these three theories, it can be concluded that sexist humour embedded in education structures is aimed at fighting off what might be termed the feminisation of higher education spaces through the increased participation of women.

It was interesting to note how perceptions of sexism seemed to taper off as respondents got older. Figure 4.3 that follows illustrates the age variables and frequency for those who indicated that the statement that a woman’s place is in the home is sexist. The question was in the form of a Likert scale and responses ranged from very sexist to not sexist as described previously.



**Figure 4.3: Frequency of responses according to age for ‘A women’s place is in the home’**

The scale above indicates a sea-tide like behaviour where sexism awareness was strong among the younger age group but tapered off as people aged. Of the 75 respondents who indicated that it was sexist to say that a woman’s place was in the home, 88 percent (n=66) were aged 26 and below. There is a positive relationship between age and sexism which is statistically significant at 1 percent. The results imply that people begin to accept sexism by virtue of living longer. This might indicate how sexism has become so internalized in the older age group such that they have become to accept and view sexism as normal. The assumption was that with age comes experience of what was considered as sexist and offensive leading to feelings of empathy for others rather than the opposite. The fact that the older age group displayed tolerance and acceptance of sexism may be explained by structures such as patriarchy that take hold of people from the formative years in childhood such that by the time they become adults, sexist ideas are fully entrenched in their beliefs and they see nothing wrong with this. Structural violence theory illustrates how violence embedded in structures is seen as normal and commonplace such that individuals see nothing wrong with it. It is assumed that patriarchy and culture are at their strongest during the formative years of

these now older respondents thus they have been socialized into a culture that did not see anything wrong with treating women as subordinates. Patriarchy emphasizes gender roles by allocating women their own unique space in the domestic arena. As espoused by social identity theory, men categorize themselves into a ‘special’ group which possesses ‘special’ qualities where group cohesion and esteem is achieved through highlighting female weaknesses. By highlighting and making visible female weakness, males as a group achieve social distinctiveness where their group as males is made to appear more positive and valued.

#### 4.3.2 *What is sexist humour?*

The research findings indicated that there was general consensus among both male and female respondents on what sexist humour was except for a few isolated cases where respondents thought sexist humour was joking in a sexually suggestive way only. These kind of responses indicated lack of a clear understanding of sexist humour as sexist humour is not limited to joking in a sexual way only but also encompasses jokes that humiliate and make fun of the opposite gender, whether in a sexual way or not. The researcher took time to explain and reach consensus with the group who were not sure what sexist humour was so that students operated from the same understanding during discussions. The main theme that emerged from responses in focus group discussions, individual interviews and survey questionnaires was that sexist humour was joking that targeted the opposite sex and made inferences about their supposed weaknesses and trivialized their contributions to society. This reflects how men as the privileged group seek to build and maintain group positive distinctiveness as illustrated by social identity theory. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to define sexist humour. Mary (female) defined sexist humour as:

*Kutaura kunogodora vamwe kunoitwa nevanhu vakasiyana siyana zvichinanganawo nevanhu vakasiyana siyana. Kazhinji kutaura uku kunogumbura vamwe vanenge vafungidzira kuti zvakanganawo navo...*

(Offensive comments intended as humour but offending a certain group of people.)

Paul (male) said:

*kuseka kunotaridza kudzvinyirira vakadzi...kunoitwa nemhaka yekuti uri murume here kana kuti uri mukadzi. Kunogona kuva kusinei nenyaya dzepabonde chete...asi kungoti uri murume here kana mukadzi...kuseka uku kunokonzerwa neruvengo ruri mumoyo pamusoro pevanenge vakanangwa nekuseka uku zvisinei kuti varume here*

*kana kuti vakadzi. Kana uri munhukadzi unotonzwa sekunge urikunzi imi amai murikudei pano inzvimbo yevarume chete...*

It is humour that has sexist undertones ... harassment that happens because of one's particular gender. It may not be sexual per se ... but is motivated by animosity towards the opposite sex. A joke ... if you are a woman ... that makes you feel like you don't belong ... it shouts to you like ... hey woman this is a men's place ... how dare you ...

Patience (female) said:

*Kuseka kwakadai kunoshora vakadzi zvese nekuvadzikisira pamwechete nekuvadenha...*

Sexist humour has to do with a person being humorous at the same time trivializing another gender ... humour ... but in a way that provokes others.

The responses above indicate respondents' clear understanding of sexist humour and highlights sexist humour's ability to be offensive and hurtful thereby validating the assertion that sexist humour is misogyny that is presented as humour. The responses also reveal the nature of sexist humour to exclude and discriminate against the target group as espoused by social identity theory where members of the in-group discriminate against members of the out-group. This is in line with Bicknell (2007), Thomae and Pina (2015) and Ferguson and Ford's (2008) findings that sexist humour is characterised by malice, negative attitudes and chauvinism that is communicated in a hidden way. Chauvinism appears to validate and enhance personal identity in which perpetrators feel superior to their targets which is a key concept of social identity theory.

However, there were arguments amongst respondents in identifying sexist humour as harassment. Students showed disparities in defining whether sexism was harassment. Bla Kodza (male) had this to say:

*kuti tibva tati kumanikidzwa zvinoti netsei. Tinenge tinenge tati mhanyei nekuti aya matambiro anoitwa mukuseka. Ngatibva tangozvitorera mukuseka imomo zvichigumira imomo...*

For us to define sexist humour as harassment is taking it too far. Isn't it that this type of banter is one in a playful manner? So let's just take it as it is and stop over analysing it.

This clearly shows how expressions of sexism are not taken seriously and are pardoned when they are uttered in a joking manner. This might be because jokes by their nature emphasize laughter and amusement. Although from the discussions, respondents displayed a good understanding of sexism, they excused and tolerated blatant expressions of sexism and were viewed from another angle if there were uttered in a joking manner. Sexist humour was less likely to be defined as sexual harassment depending on how it was said. Thus, context had an impact on whether some remarks were taken as offensive and hurtful or not.

The questionnaire asked respondents who had encountered sexist humour either as witnesses or as targets who they had told about the encounter. Responses included those who told their room-mate, friend, family member, counsellor, campus security and those who did not tell anyone. Of the respondents, 18, 3 percent indicated that they had told a room-mate, 37.3 percent told a friend, 4.8 percent told a family member, 3.2 percent told a counsellor, 35.7 percent did not tell anyone. It was interesting to note that no one reported to the authorities. The questionnaire probed further the reason for not telling anyone among those who had indicated that option. Thirty-one males and 37 females indicated that they had not told anyone and they cited different reasons for taking this particular decision. However, of the total population of those who did not tell anyone, 46 percent indicated that they did not tell anyone because they did not feel that it was serious enough to talk about. In other words, they did not feel that the behaviour was harassing enough to mention to whomever they would tell in cases when they would feel they had been seriously aggrieved. This effectively indicates that nearly half of the entire population of those who answered this question dismissed sexist humour as trivial. It can therefore be concluded that sexist humour was not viewed as harassment as compared to blatant sexist episodes. The confusion in the discernment of sexist humour as violence is illustrated through structural violence theory where the violence embedded in structures is perceived as being normal and commonplace. The researcher took the subjective discernment and identification of sexist humour as sexual harassment as indicative of the reality on campus where definitions of harassment were not universal but dependent on context. Selective definition of sexist humour as harassment may also symbolize how students had internalized the violence associated with sexist humour to an extent that they saw it as a normal part of everyday life. Therefore, the researcher sought to

establish the reasons for the difference in perception in the identification of sexist humour as harassment. The question was posed in focus group discussions as a follow-up question to questionnaire responses.

The researcher sought to find out why respondents labelled blatant expressions of sexism as offensive as opposed to sexism expressed in a joking form. The reasons for this subjective discernment were varied. Six of ten female respondents in FGD1 cited ambiguity as one reason why sexist humour was perceived as less offensive when compared to blatant expressions of sexism. Ambiguous definitions of what characterises sexist humour and violence makes it difficult for respondents to find the offensive in jokes because the meaning of humorous sexist remarks and the intentions of their owners are often unclear. Interpreting ambiguity makes it difficult to label behaviour as harassing. As a result, recipients are often uncertain, even oblivious of the fact that they have been harassed. John, a male respondent from FGD3 (male only) had this to say:

*Hakasi kanyaya kadiki here aka...ndinoreva iyo nyaya yekutsvaga kuti chii chinogumbura panhau yekuti vanhu vaseke. Takatarisana nezvinhu zvakaita senzara, hondo...imi motarisa divi motsvaga henyu nyaya dzekutamba dizinofanira kungotorwa sezvazviri usingafunganye zvakawanda nekuti wakaaro unorasika.*

Is it not trivial ... I mean trying to find what is offensive about jokes...? (laugh) Given the problems that the world faces like war, hunger... (laugh) and you focus on jokes and their ability to be offensive. Jokes should be taken at face value ... nothing more.

The response above indicates how utterances of sexist humour are often thoughtless and dismissed as just fun. The respondent dismissed sexist humour as a simple and insignificant issue when compared to other issues facing the world. John highlighted obvious examples of structural violence such as war, hunger and diseases and dismissed sexist humour as part of the structural forces that affect women but are taken for granted. This seems to imply that sexist humour does not warrant the attention which it was being given through research. However, the dismissal of sexist humour as trivial and the thoughtlessness emphasized and brought to light the attitude behind sexist humour as well as the casual approach people have to sexism. In addition, questionnaire responses indicated that the majority of students dismissed sexist humour as mere joking without any consequences. When asked why sexist humour occurs, 41 percent of the 148 questionnaire respondents attributed sexist humour to joking indicating that it should not be taken seriously. Of this number, 42 were males and 19

were females. This effectively means that nearly half of the population (quite a significant number) which constituted males as the majority believed that sexist humour was simply harmless fun. As illustrated by structural violence theory, this acceptance may be due to culture (both institutional and traditional) that sanctions expressions of prejudice through humour and makes it feel right. Given that sexist humour included sexual joking, trivializing it meant that the sexual objectification of women was seen as normal. According to sexual objectification theory, the sexual objectification of women had the potential of transforming into sexual violence. To support this further, the respondent mentioning that the harm inflicted by humour was miniscule when compared to harm resulting from actions such as war, domestic beatings, lynching and enslaving thus appearing to legitimize sexist humour incidences. This communicates a message that sexist humour is a non-event and not qualified to be called violence. These narratives suggest that since common definitions of humour emphasize amusement and laughter, jokes have no real consequence and the associated thoughts should be dismissed as just joking.

Sexist structures in higher education subject women to public sexual harassment through sexist humour which at most times is excused as flirtation or as a compliment, body shaming as well as sexual objectification viewed as ‘boys being boys’ and ‘men being men’. The belief that sexist humour was natural behaviour expected of boys and men illustrates how men appear to be legitimized in their violent acts against women. This is epitomized through the structural violence theory where a legitimate power system embedded in the social structures or institutions causes harm to people in a way that results in poor development or deprivation for the targeted group. In addition, various forms of physical abuse are seen to be ‘natural’ and justified by dubious appeals to culture and tradition. Therefore, it can be concluded that by using humour, perpetrators deny responsibility and intent of violence and use humour as justification for the ensuing violence. This is in line with Mallet et al.’s (2016) assertion that people express their bias (in this case sexism), if it can be justified in a particular social context. Sexist humour expresses sexism in an understated and vague way causing targets to question the stereotype confirming behaviour. Victims are not sure whether to feel offended or not.

To explain further how context has an impact on the classification of sexism, Leana (female) respondent from FGD2 had this to say:

*Mmm ... inini ndakazvimirira hangu handione chakaipa pakuseka kwakadai. ...  
ndinotozvifarira ... mumwe mukomana panguva yatayiita zvechikoro akatonditi*

*angafare chaizvo ndikaita mai vevana vake ... anoti iye anorwadziwa kundiona  
ndichitambudzika nechikoro...ndakanzwa kufara zvisingaite ...  
Zvinongoenderananekuti wazvigamuchirawo sei ... zvinotondiwedzera zvibodzwa  
mumutambo.*

Mmm ... that kind of humour is welcome ... not offensive at all (laughs). It depends on how and where it is said. This guy from my class said to me while we were in a group discussion ... babe you know what...I would be honoured if you can be the mother of my children any day. *Ndinogumbuka* (I get angry) when I see a beautiful woman like you torturing herself trying to study for exams. I felt very special hey ... it raises my graph as a desirable woman (laughs) ... eish ... (hugging herself).

The fact that Leana felt special and not offended reflects how expressions of sexism expressed as a joke are pardoned as opposed to blatant expressions of sexism. This might also imply how women self-objectify themselves to adhere to the male version of femininity as espoused by the sexual objectification theory. Leana has come to view herself as a sexual object necessary for men's pleasure and appears to embrace private space as her rightful place rather than the public sphere. It can also be argued that Leana identified her rightful place with the institution of marriage which was her source of pride and booster for self-esteem. This echoes social identity theory's ideas on personal identity where self-esteem is achieved through association with a group (in this case institution) which was considered to embody desirable qualities. For females like Leana, it appears being popular and being perceived as attractive by boys is critical to their performance of femininity so they will tolerate sexual harassment in certain 'contexts' since according to the sexual objectification theory, women, like all gendered subjects, learn to accept sexual harassment as 'normal' and 'natural'; they might temporarily 'gain' from being sexually harassed because it reaffirms their place as desired heterosexual subjects existing in the heterosexual matrix (see Butler, 1992; Robinson, 2012).

This confirms how people tend to think of prejudice as being characterised by intentional displays of hostility that members of the perceived advantaged groups direct towards members of the perceived disadvantaged groups thereby ignoring subtle expressions of sexism. In this case, the violence is rooted in structure and is invisible as supported by structural violence theory. This proves how humour changes perception of prejudicial behaviour by making it acceptable and less offending. The response above suggests that



women are suitable and only good at occupying the private space (home, children) and strengthens the stereotypical image of women belonging to the private space. This implies that women would feel more at home in a space other than the current one they are occupying. This was in line with Nayef and Nashar's (2015) findings where it was discovered that Egyptian society viewed public space as a male domain as well as Mallet et al. (2016) where humour hid the real intentions of the remarks. In the response above, the female respondent failed to recognize the sexist insinuations in the joke thus validating the assertion that humour creates diffusion of the offensive nature of the joke. Humour disguises the biased nature of the remarks and makes them more acceptable. Thus, women may believe that they are being complimented rather than being harassed.

The researcher found reluctance among some of the respondents in all of the FGDs to recognize or articulate sexist humour as harassment. Of the female students that participated in FGD2, half indicated this. This was indicative of the post-feminist discourse that believes gender is no longer an issue and appears to encourage the dismissal of sexist humour as just joking. The post-feminist discourse has left few openings for naming and challenging sexism. In other words, women cannot speak out against sexism or even fight against it as it is considered to be a hurdle that has since been jumped over. This made sexist humour issues in FGDs difficult to address and the researcher took this as indicative of the situation at the university under study.

Maita, a female student had this to say:

*Ooop... ndaneta nevanhu vanongochema nezvenyaya dzevakadzi semi...hakusi kukudenhai kungotaurawo zvangu ... pamwe munokurumidza kubatikana nezvinhu zvidiki diki hameno...*

Ooops (laughs). What era are you living in??? Sexism no longer exists. I am tired of people who still cling to the past ... oh I mean no offense hey ... just saying. Perhaps you are far too sensitive.

Maita's response singled out and 'othered' the researcher and other people who reflected the sentiments that sexist humour was offensive. It may be argued that this denoted Maita's disdain and anger towards individuals that held different views from hers. This might be indicative of shifting personal identity in which Maita validates her identity as a woman who did not see anything wrong with sexist humour. This reveals how identities are forged for individuals like Maita who have strength to go against popular flow. Tee, one of the male

students, was of the opinion that the females with too much opinion were being awarded too much attention. He remarked:

*Munhu wese arikungochema nenyaya dzevakadzi kuti vadvanyirirwa. Zvakawanda zvirikungoitirwa vakadzi. Hamusi mave kuzvinyanya here? Ko mwanakomana murikumuitirawo zvipi?Haachatoziva zvekuita nepekugumira.*

Everybody is fighting for the rights of the girl-child. So much is being done for the girl-child such that the boy-child is now confused because of all these boundaries.

Tee's one statement is clearly a denial of sexism and the associated violence that is communicated through sexist humour. It appears that the respondent wishes that the phenomenon under study continues to reify hegemony by denying the existence of prejudice, not challenging and exposing it. This protection of the status quo is better explained in the context of structural violence theory where the powerful groups seek to protect male dominance. Tee, through his statement, appeared to imply that male power was being destabilized through the recognition of women's rights. The respondent felt that the emphasis on females today (and 'girl-children') threatens male power as attention is now being given to the females only. The response also reveals how sexist humour is feminized. From the question asked, there was no reference to females as the ones that were affected by sexist humour but the respondent assumed that the issue had to do with females. This reflects how sexist humour has a female face rather than being neutral. As such, it can be argued that the labelling of sexist humour as violence is problematic since it is based on an individual's perception of another's behaviour which may be affected by any of a number of factors that make up a situational context. In this case, behaviour one might see as violence, another might see as innocent. In view of all this denial of labelling sexist humour as violence, the researcher saw it necessary to pose a follow-up question on when and how jokes turn into being offensive and consequently when they are considered as considered harassment.

#### *4.3.3 When does joking turn into harassment?*

Often humour quickly turns into being offensive. Therefore, it was important to discuss the markers for when sexist humour can be described as being harassment. Given that nearly half of the respondents indicated that sexist humour was 'just joking', it was necessary to probe the respondents of the remaining half who believed the opposite. Eight of the ten females in FGD1 were of the opinion that sexist humour from the onset was harassment. According to them, sexist humour was offensive and becomes harassment because of the ideas and beliefs

being displayed through sexist humour. This has implications on structure and how sexism is embedded in the structure. According to structural violence theory, structures that tolerate sexism are violent and prevent people from meeting their basic needs. It appears that sexist humour made fun of things people had no control over and therefore constantly pointing out and talking about these, qualified sexist humour as harassment. When asked when they acknowledge that joking has turned into being harassment, Tsitsi a female student had this to say:

*Unotoziva kuti apa ndashorwa apa nekuti pazvinotoitika unonzwa kusagadzikana mumoyo, unonzwa kusvotwa nekuzvisema ... hameno kana manzwisisa zvandiri kedza kutaura ... kunzwa kakubatikana ... hazvireve chete kuti zvinofanira kuva pachena kuti pano ndatukwa...*

You know... a joke is offensive when you feel it to be disturbing ... I mean if a joke arouses your moral hackles... when you feel disgusted or slighted ... you know what I mean ... then that's sufficient enough to justify the joke as harassment. It doesn't have to be blatant ... like so in the face for it to be offensive.

The comment above suggests that respondents who identified sexist jokes as harassment felt that they were entirely within their rights to feel harassed based on their feelings. Pearl, a female student stated:

*Kuseka kunozoita kuti unzwe kuti ndashorwa kana kwave kukonzeresa marwadzo maune nechinangwa chekuti vanhu vangowana kuseka chete...*

A joke becomes harassment when it intentionally or unintentionally exploits vulnerability... either perceived or real for the sake of humour.

In addition to Pearl's sentiments, Tsitsi (female) said:

*Unozoziva kuti apa ndashorwa nekumanikidzwa kana kuseka uku kwavo kuitikira panzimbo inofanira kuva nemunhu wese asi zvozonzi apa panodiwa verudzi urwu chete (vakadzi/ varume) ... unoziva kuti kushungurudzwa kana zvave kukanganisa magariro nemararamiro munzvimbo inonzi ndeye munhu wese ... zvekuti muri muclass mukudzidza munhu obva aita kuti vanhu vaseke nekushora huvepo hwako ipapo. Unotozonzwa usisade zvekugara panzvimbo iyoyo.*

You know its harassment when it claims sole occupation of a particular space or makes occupation of common space intolerable or interferes with one's purpose for being in that particular space...when you are in class and you cannot stand being there because of some sexist behaviour or joking by others.

The responses above indicate that sexist humour is characterised by exploitation of the target group and hinges its power on communication that relegates the out-group and treats them as outsiders. It can be argued that what is wrong with telling jokes at the expense of the ostracized groups is not simply that these jokes constitute harm or that such joking may cause further harm (consequentialism), the harm is in the decision to exploit such vulnerability for the sake of humour. The fact that sexist humour communicates messages that disparage female students and imply that females do not belong in universities clearly illustrates the power structures at play in sexist humour encounters. The symbolic power of a gender structure, which consigns women to separate spaces and enforces their submission, obliges men to reinforce their superior position by fulfilling their primary masculine obligation of providing for and protecting the family. This can be located in the context of the structural violence theory which states that structural violence is a result of the power structures embedded in social structures or institutions which cause harm to people in a way that results in deprivation (Gamlin and Hawkes, 2017). Its general formula is power and inequality and, according to anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004), forms of structural and indirect violence often begin with "assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth, or value of the victim". In this case, deprivation is through structural inequalities that prevent women from experiencing and accessing quality education for empowerment. Pearl mentioned that sexist humour made her feel like she did not belong in university. This feeling of being unwanted restricts her from free access to campus resources as she feels a bit as if she is an imposter. Structural violence aimed at women in education is maintained through gender stereotyping and a constant message of irrelevance as well as the threat of violence, all of which insidiously identify women as inferior, influencing their actions at all levels. Structural violence manifesting as sexist humour in this context results in social exploitation and unequal power (and consequently, unequal life chances), which become part of the social order. With regard to sexist humour and the associated violence against women, structural inequality and the imbalance of power create the conditions for the social subordination of women. Therefore, it can be concluded that sexist humour creates a context that justifies the

expression of prejudice against women such that becoming offended by a joke requires convincing justification.

In addition, communications of female irrelevancy through sexist humour suggest the existence of an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ mentality which can better be explained in the context of social identity theory. Through social categorization, male students appear to distinguish themselves from female students thus reaching a point where they perceive their group as superior over the females. This explains and contextualizes sexist humour and the associated violence within the social identity theory.

However, it was interesting to note how respondents had difficulty in explaining the seemingly harassing component of sexist humour. The struggle in naming the violent nature of sexist humour is closely associated with the difficulty in identifying violence within the context of the social identity theory because it is violence without a clear actor. Chipu, a female student in FGD1, said:

*Pandakabvunzwa kuti nditaure kuti chii chaizvo mumasekero akaita seiwaya chaikonzera kuti munhu agumbuke awone seaamanikidzwa mukodzero dzake ndakatadza kudaira mubvunzo uyu asi ndakatanga kufungisisa kuti ndingapindure sei kuti zvinzwisisike ... ndkatanga kuzvibvunza kuti asi ndaive ndoendesa nyaya kure..moyo wangu wainditaurira kuti kuseka kwakadai kwaigumbura ... uyezve kwaida kugadziriswa pachiri pedyo. Moyo wangu wainditaurira kuti zvakaipa asi kuti ndizvitsanangure zvakaramba. Ndakanzwa kunyara nekuti ndaive ndagumbuka nekutaura kwaive kwaitwa mukufara. Ndaifanira kungoona nyaya iyi sekuseka chete kwete kudenha.*

When I was asked to explain why this kind of joke is harmful and violent I couldn't but question and overanalyse everything I wanted to say... My gut feeling was telling me that sexist humour is wrong and violent and need to be addressed properly... but I was struggling with another feeling inside my heart ... a feeling I can best describe as embarrassment. I was embarrassed that this type of humour offended me. I couldn't help but ask myself if I was the odd one out, the one not laughing when obviously the humour meant no harm?

In addition, Chipu's response reflects the dilemma that exists in distinguishing a joke from harassment. Mallet, Ford and Woodzika (2016) in their research described how humour decreased perceptions that the speaker was sexist. The messages communicated by sexist

humour are subtle yet powerful as they have ability to harm both physically and emotionally. This is in agreement with structural violence theory where violence is hidden in structures which harm individuals and groups in the lower strata. Therefore, it can be argued that sexist humour belittles women at the same time trivializing sex discrimination under the veil of gentle laughter. Due to this subtlety, attempts to discuss the offensiveness of sexist humour can be met with resistance as the harm from sexist humour is perceived to be minimal.

Reflecting on how the respondent indicated that she felt embarrassed for feeling offended and harassed by sexist humour may reflect the presence of a bigger issue in the conceptualization of sexist humour. It appears that feeling offended or vocalizing discomfort is sanctioned by a stronger force which prohibits these expressions and demands that everyone 'goes with the flow'. In support of this assertion, another female respondent remarked:

*Ndakatya kutaridzika semunhu akaganhira kana kutaridza semunhu asingatane kugumbuka nezvinhu zvisina kana basa. Pamwe kana kuti vanhu vaizoratidza kushaiwa hanya nezvandinenge ndataura. Zvakadaro ndakangoona kunyarara kuriiko kunotoita kunyangwe zvazvo moyo wangu waibatikana nazvo.*

I was afraid of coming off as over the top, being thought of as being over-sensitive or being dismissed and not having my opinion on the matter be valued. So I remained silent but deep down I was deeply troubled.

The responses above indicates how female students were disturbed and hurt by sexist humour but decided to remain quiet because of the fear of being ridiculed or being dismissed. This is an example of how too often when an injustice is perpetrated, the burden of shame falls on the victim not the perpetrator. Victims are unsure of whether they are justified in being offended when everyone else is laughing. The decision to appear not offended by sexist humour might reflect the desire to belong to a group at the expense of personal freedom. This is validated by social identity theory where individuals give up their personal freedom in favour of gaining social cohesion (Hogg, 2016).

One recurring theme from the FGDs was that sexist humour made fun of things that targets could not change and used those differences as a basis to disparage women as a group and emphasize women's inferiority thereby qualifying it as harassment. This is in line with social identity theory and its concept of inter-group competition where groups compete for recognition with other groups to emerge as the superior group through highlighting the perceived shortcomings of the othered group. For example, jokes about natural attributes such

as breasts, sexual organs and some traits that are particular to women that men perceive to be inferior, are taken as the basis for sexist humour. Nancy, a female respondent, said:

*Chinoshungurudza mumutambiro wakadai dzimwe nguva inyaya yekuti hauna kwekutizira uchinotaurawo nyaya yako, kutogara ipapo kusvika zvanaka. Pafunge kuti ini ndinoita zvevitambo... vanhu voimba nezvemuviri wangu ... kuimba zvakaita makumbo angu zvidya zvangu, mumhanyiro wandinoita ... apa ndakapfeka hembe dzipfupi. Ndinodii chokwadi panyaya dzakadai? Chinorwadza harisi joke racho haro, asi pfungwa dzirikubuditswa nekuseka kwakadaro.*

You know what is harassing about these jokes is that sometimes you just cannot excuse yourself from the situation and you have to endure it. Imagine I am a professional athlete and when I am competing for the athletics team, people begin to sing ... *Mwana ane dako kudarika amai vake uyu* (this girl's butt is bigger than her mother's) ... they are singing about my thighs, my bum and the way I run ... and I am wearing very short shorts ... what can I do in this situation ... what is offensive is not the joke itself but the underlying beliefs of those singing and how they belittle women.

Nancy's response implies that sexist humour becomes harassment if one cannot freely excuse oneself from the situation and instead one is supposed to endure the aggression associated with sexist humour. This echoed the sentiments of the majority of female students who lamented how men talked about their bodies as if to put them in their place, to prove that they don't take women seriously. Rutendo, another female respondent, said:

*Vanoda kutamba vachitaura zvinhu zvavanoziva kuti haukwanise kuzvigadzirisa, zvinhu zvekuti wakasikwa utori nazvo. Senyaya ye PMS kana vachida havo kusvota vanhukadzi unonzwa voti muregererei uyo ane PMS vobva vaseka havo. Asi chinhu chekuti munhukadzi akazvarwa akatodaro haaakwanise kuzvigadzirisawo...ndizvo zvinorwadza panyaya iyi. Vamwe unonzwa vachiti mazamu ako aya akafitira kubua mukaka wakawana chaizvo kana uka actor porn zvinobva zvanyatsobuda.*

They joke about certain things that a woman cannot change ... such as PMS (pre-menstrual stress) ... whenever they (men) want to discredit a female they just attribute PMS as the reason for her behaviour and they laugh. But it's something that women cannot escape from or change ... that is what makes sexist humour offensive. Typical

of other comments encountered are these: “a chest like that must produce a lot of milk and you would be even better in a porn movie”.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that sexist humour derives its humour from characteristics that women cannot change and takes advantage of those characteristics to make fun of women, thereby qualifying sexist humour as harassment. The responses indicate that a joke becomes offensive and turns into harassment when it ridicules, belittles, discredits and demeans or in any way communicates contempt for one gender because of those differences. Coarse and misogynistic remarks about women’s bodies and their appearance undermine their sense of legitimacy and competence. Many disparaging situations that women face every day are as a result of men not appreciating the differences between sexes, especially with regard to the female anatomy and taking this as fair grounds for generating fun. Sexist humour puts women down by turning them into objects of scorn and contempt. These findings are in line with Muasya’s (2013) findings where she describes the campus climate as being ‘chilly’ for women. The phrase refers to the unfriendly and often threatening environment that surrounds female students at universities.

In addition, Rutendo and Nancy’s responses are riddled with sexist innuendos regarding female bodies which is a core tenet of sexual objectification theory. The male students referred to by the respondents sexually objectified the female body and equated a woman’s worth with her body’s appearance and sexual functions thereby trivializing her contributions to sport at the university (Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr, 2011, 19). The phrases of the song contained body shaming lyrics which made the ladies feel ashamed of themselves. This represents sexist humour’s ability to shame and trivialize female student achievements because of the way their bodies were made.

In addition, the FGD3 (male) discussants revealed that they despised the Affirmative Action Policy that allowed women with lower passes to enrol into the same programmes as men. Uncle Danny (male) said:

*Vakadzi vanopinda pano pachikoro ne amnesty. Izvi zvinongoratidza kuti Havana kungwara sesu vanhurume.*

Women are here at university because of the amnesty programme. This only shows that they are not as intelligent as men.



The response refers to the Affirmative Action Policy that allowed women with lower passes to enrol into the same programmes as men. The response highlights the perceived differences between male and females and its impact on university enrolment. The fact that women are considered to be less intelligent and inferior to men may explain why sexist humour occurs on campus and why it targets women because they are considered weak. It appears that through affirmative action, resentment towards female students is increased and misogynistic ideas about female inferiority are confirmed. Official policy documents such as affirmative action appear to suggest that woman's intellectual capabilities are inferior to those of men. The fact that male students despise the Affirmative Action Programme might explain why male students resent female students in higher education. It appears that men feel that women in higher education settings are usurping their power and stealing their limelight thus explaining the need to engage in sexist humour as a way to reclaim their glory and to remind women of their supposed shortcomings. As highlighted by social identity theory, male students appear to be protecting the status quo when their masculine identity is perceived to be under threat from females. The response highlights the tension that is caused by the perceived differences between males and females and its impact on university enrolment. The fact that women are considered to be 'usurpers' in a male environment may explain why sexist humour occurs on campus and why it targets women because they are considered to be weak. It appears that through affirmative action, resentment towards female students is increased and misogynistic ideas about female inferiority are confirmed. Official policy documents such as affirmative action policies appear to suggest that woman's intellectual capabilities are inferior to those of men and therefore men feel that women have been unnecessarily favoured at their expense.

#### *4.3.4 Who are the targets of sexist humour and why?*

The researcher sought to identify the targets of sexist humour. This was important in establishing the rationale behind sexist humour episodes. Of the 148 respondents, 140 students answered this question translating into a 94.6 percent response rate. Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that females were the targets of sexist humour; 36 percent indicated males as targets; 35,7 percent indicated both sexes as targets and 0, 7 percent indicated 'other'. The findings indicated that women were the most targeted by sexist humour as compared to men therefore the researcher sought to establish the reasons behind this. Reasons for women being the majority of the targeted group were varied so thematic analysis was utilized in discussing the findings. The findings are in line with previous research that

indicated that women mostly were targets of harassment (Zindi, 1994; Tlou and Letsie, 1997; Chamberlain et al., 2008 and Gaidzanwa, 2012). These scholars suggest that women are still targeted by men with indiscriminate violence, intimidation, hostility and other forms of subtle control in higher education settings.

Patriarchal domination was one theme that emerged in trying to explain why women were the targets of sexist humour. Patriarchal dominance might represent cultural structures that embody and represent culture that prevents women from meeting their basic needs as espoused by structural violence theory. It appears that the fortification of patriarchy and its unrelenting hold in most societies has ensured that victims of gender discrimination have remained largely women (ibid.). Social identity theory's concept of self categorization explains how men have categorized and identified themselves as a group that has superior qualities when compared to women, thereby supporting the assertion that patriarchy also appears to have ensured that culprits of gender discrimination are mostly men. In FGD3 (male only group) there was consensus among the discussants that women have always been objects of humour since time immemorial. Responses from the discussion indicated that women have been victims of gender ideology where women are expected to submit to men because of existing stereotypes that favour men over women. Patriarchy assumes that women lack certain finer qualities that men possess, that are strength, virility and intelligence. As a result, a woman is laughable because she falls short of the desired stereotypes. Parents and grandparents have passed on these stereotypes and the consequent humour through socialization because they grew up in a time where women were subordinate to men. Women were sexually objectified and put down as a subject for jokes. In relation to sexual objectification theory, women are viewed separately from their achievements and are considered to be good for sex only. This has an impact on how men view and relate to women which might result in sexual violence which hinders women from realising their goals. The socialization process which imparts patriarchal practices to the young does not only function within the family but infiltrates into the education sector as well. Owen (male) remarked:

*Handikwanise kuti nditsanangure kuti sei vakadzi variivo vanonangwa nekutamba kwakadai asi kuti zvakangogara zvakadaro... zvinhu zvatangojaira ... kuti vakadzi ndivo vanonzwaro...*

I cannot really explain why women are targets of sexist humour because it has always been like that ... since way back ... men target women with these kinds of jokes.

In addition, Tendai (male) said:

*Inyaya yemagariro edu kwatinobva ... zvakagara zvabvumidza vanhurume kuti vave ivo vanotsvaga nekutanga kukumbira nyaya dzerudo kuvanhukadzi.saka kutamba uku inzira yekuti zvive nyore kusvikira munhukadzi. Hazviite kuti munhu ungotanga nekusvika uchingoti dyoo panyaya yako zvinodawo kumbotenderera muchiseka ... nekudaro zvinhu izvi ndizvo zvinototarisirwa nevanhukadzi kubva kuvanhurume.*

It's because of culture, men pursue women for relationships so such kind of banter paves way for the male and make it easier for them to approach the woman. You cannot be direct when trying to woo a lady, you have to go round in circles usually through humorous language. Such kind of humour is used to test the waters ... (laughs). Somehow, that kind of behaviour is expected from men.

Gina (female) said:

*Ndinoona iri nyaya yekuti varume vagara vachingoona vakadzi sevanhu nhando... pamwe ndiko kusaka vakadzi vari ivo vakawanda vanosangana nazvo.*

I think it's because men view women as the weaker sex or subordinates ... maybe that is why women are the majority targets of sexist humour.

The responses seem to allude to the power structures existing in society as ones that legitimize sexism. This is in line with structural violence theory which holds structures responsible for violating those without power. The responses above reflect how men seem to absolve themselves from blame by mentioning the supposed 'benefits' of sexist humour and how women are expected to be passive recipients. The privilege of male as the initiator and female as recipient is also highlighted. From these responses, it can be concluded that sexist humour which derogates and belittles women as a group is often initiated by men as a reflection of male domination. Similarly, higher education has been and persists in being constructed as a masculine domain that privileges confrontation with the strong (males) dismembering the weak (females) as noted by Barnes (2007). In addition, it can be said that what is classified as being humorous is a reflection of the stance of the powerful in society, in this case patriarchy. In this sense, it can be noted how sexist humour is pervaded with

powerful messages about how society sees women. This is because humour provides clues as to what really matters in society and culture, therefore sexist humour indicate patriarchal beliefs operating within a particular space. The findings indicate that women are vulnerable because of historical attitudes that endorse prejudice against them by highlighting their supposed weaknesses when compared to men. Patriarchy defines women as outsiders and sexist jokes are part of cultural permission to violate women. Patriarchy embraces a dominant language system that emits a message that women are insignificant and irrelevant thereby justifying why women are targeted by sexist humour. Sexist humour reflects and reinforces a binary gender system where men and women are naturally different and men are accorded more value. Patriarchal ideas existing in the wider society are carried over and re-enacted in the university setting. As such, it can be concluded that the position of women in higher education settings is a reflection of the life that women in the wider society face. Empirical evidence from previous studies by Gaidzanwa (2010), Muparamoto (2012) and Muasya, (2013) also revealed that the relationship between masculinity and sexual harassment stems from the perception that men as a group have power over women and the definitions of manhood maintain this notion. As such, sexist humour is an expression of patriarchy and therefore derives power to disparage women from patriarchy's attitudes towards women. Patriarchy manifests in masculine sexuality where the classification of men includes exhibits of power over women. This conceptualization of a 'real' man tends to shape the behaviour of men in campus colleges.

Girl hunting is part of the vision where men are taught to be the hunters and women are the hunted. One male respondent had this to say about sexist humour:

*Zvinoratidza hunyanzvi munyaya dzerudo idzi ... zvinotodzidziswa kuvakomana vese kuti vazotaridzawo hunyanzvi iwowo... In fact vakomana vese vanotodzidziswa masvikiro avanoita pamusikana kuti zvireruke. Zvinoitoita kuti uwone kuti muskana arikud here kana kuti haadi. Wobva waziva kuti wonderera mberi here kana kuti woregera.*

Sexist humour is an art necessary for guaranteed success in approaching women ... (laughs) ... all men are taught to engage in sexist humour to make it easy. In a way sexist humour is helpful in testing the waters. ... It gives you a general outlook ... if you should carry on with asking a girl out or not.

The response above indicates how humour is complicated and has several connotations. This includes testing the levels of interest in relationships and how males take this as a measurement for excellence in asking for dates. In addition, humour often reflects deeper cultural perceptions and offers a powerful method to understanding culturally shaped ways of thinking and feeling. The ideological basis of girl hunting stresses vulnerability, weakness and submissiveness as conventional markers of femininity. This extends to the sexual objectification of women. With objectification theory, all focus is placed on a woman's body in a way that her mind and personality are not adequately acknowledged. The concept of sexual objectification helps in understanding why sexist humour and patriarchy are connected. Sexual objectification contributes significantly to the understanding of gender inequality as it involves viewing a woman as a sex object rather than as a whole person. In essence, women lose their identity and are recognized solely by their body parts. This has implications for how men treat women especially in higher education settings. Similarly, social identity theory puts forward explanations for how members of an in-group disparage members of an out-group. Men (out-group) disparage women (in-group) by engaging in sexist humour that highlights the supposed weaknesses of females. This helps in improving men's self-esteem both as individuals and as groups. This explains why women are the majority of targets in relation to sexist humour because it is a matter of power relations between the sexes where one sex want to emphasize its superiority. Therefore, one can conclude that sexist humour is viewed as normal male behaviour since males are the ones who initiate marriage through proposals. This is explained by Butler's heterosexual matrix which states that male subjects are rewarded when they exist inside the heterosexual matrix which is affirmed by the performance of masculine heterosexuality (Butler, 2004). Culturally, pursuing and 'chasing' females is part of the heterosexual, masculine performance and is therefore essential to constructing the masculine subject. From the responses, it was established that some proposals come in the form of sexist humour. As such, harassment of female students in many institutions of higher learning is fairly rampant partly because baiting female students is seen as acceptable male behaviour, particularly in public situations. Therefore, the maintenance of the heterosexuality matrix operates to naturalize and normalize males' persistence of 'courting' females, so that male power is affirmed through acts of heterosexual performance (ibid., 99).

It can be noted, however, that the responses given above imply that women have a choice as to how they respond to sexist humour. The fact that women have a choice either to accept or

reject male advances brings to light issues of consent and dissent in sexual relationships which is important in understanding issues of sexual violence against women. If a woman responds in a positive way, it means she agrees to pursue a relationship and the man takes it as a sign to continue with sexist humour. It was not clear however what would happen if the woman responds negatively to sexist humour. However, Bourdieu explained how social structures limit agency while at the same time symbolic forms of violence are enacted to deal with this. This system of masculine domination evident in sexist humour encounters has become deeply ingrained, exerting lasting effects on women, that is to say, dominant characteristics of sexist humour have been allowed to dominate naturally without any inhibitions (Bourdieu 2001, 38).

There was general consensus from males in FGD3 that males bond over sexist humour as a powerful means to strengthen culturally dominant relations of gender, class and sexuality thereby explaining why women are targets of sexist humour. Social identity theory illustrates that members of any in-group will hold prejudices and will discriminate against those belonging to the out-group thereby supporting the findings. This gives the group members the sense of enhancing their self-images. The response that sexist humour is employed by men as a way of testing the willingness of a possible partner implies that men discuss and agree to use sexist humour in their social groups. Again, an element of sexual objectification is revealed thus strengthening the assertion that sexist humour is rooted in structures that sexually objectify women. Thus, it can be argued that sexist joking strengthens male group confidence and shared heterosexual behaviour by consolidation of dominant myths about the social roles of men and women. Within patriarchy, men are expected to be dominant and have control over women. Shared laughter requires shared attitudes. As such, men see sexist humour as part of enacting their masculinity and therefore feel justified in their acts. This is in line with social identity theory where individuals identify with a group and adopt the behaviours that identify with that group (in this case, male). According to this theory, some individuals may even resort to violence as a way of maintaining group cohesion as evidenced by the perpetration of sexist humour by males as a way to subdue women and also to relate to other men and prove their masculinity, at the same time reinforcing women's lower status. As a consequence of that recognition, men develop emotional significance to that identification and their self-esteem is dependent on it. After identifying with one group (males), they compare themselves with other groups (females) and perceive their group to be superior over the other which is known as positive distinctiveness according to social identity theory. This

explains how males target women with sexist humour because a group will tend to view members of competing groups negatively to increase self-esteem as well as foster group cohesion.

In addition, it can be argued that sexist humour reflects and reinforces a binary gender system where men and women are naturally different and men are accorded more value. As corroborated by social identity theory's concept of social comparison, members of a group compare themselves to other groups by emphasizing the out-group's differences and glorifying their group as being superior. The group members are unknowingly looking for validation of their self-image. This also explains the prejudice and discrimination that causes tension between groups and justifies gender harassment where differences between males and females are magnified. These prejudices can be said to be the result of negative comparison by certain members of the group. Patriarchal ideas existing in the wider society that emphasize gender differences are carried over and re-enacted in the university setting. Patriarchy therefore appears to be a structure embedded with harmful gendered ideas that embody misogyny and are violent to women as espoused by structural violence theory. As such, it can be concluded that the position of women in higher education settings is a reflection of the life that women in the wider society face.

Empirical evidence from previous studies by Gaidzanwa (2010), Muparamoto (2012) and Muasya (2013) also revealed that the relationship between masculinity and sexual harassment stems from the perception that men as a group have power over women and the definitions of manhood maintain this notion. As such, sexist humour is an expression of patriarchy and therefore derives power to disparage women from patriarchy's attitudes towards women. Patriarchy manifests in masculine sexuality where the classification of men includes exhibits of power over women. This conceptualization of a 'real' man tends to shape the behaviour of men in campus colleges. This can also be explained in the context of misogyny where misogynists treat women in the manner they perceive them to be and punish offenders who do not toe the line or appear to be challenging male dominance. It appears men expect women to cater to their whims and deviants are punished.

Discussions revealed that sexist humour arises from the possibility that the advantaged group feels threatened by the disadvantaged out-group because the former perceives the existing status and power hierarchy as unstable. Social identity theory explains how individuals not only become a part of the group, but also adopt the identity of it. This causes the group to

have an emotional significance on them and may result in negative consequences because people's self-esteem might be entirely dependent on their identity as group members. This might explain how males appeared to be taking the increased participation of women in higher education as an attack on their persona. Fidza from the male-only FGD3 stated:

*Kana vatouya kuno university kuchikoro vanenge vachitofanira kutiratidza kuti vane mabhora... (laughs)... hazvisi zvekubika sadza.*

When women come to university, they must prove that they have steel balls in their pants and be strong as men because this is different from cooking dinner at home.

Fidza's response indicates a sense of men feeling women were competing with them in higher education. The response indicates how Fidza holds men in high regard and reveals how men are thought to be the archetype which women cannot compare themselves to. He seemed to suggest that women should aspire to be like men in higher education settings which, according to him, was not an easy feat. This is confirmation of the existence of the competition between groups as espoused by social identity theory where groups compete with each other for social recognition. It also highlights how violence in structures is deeply rooted in beliefs that emphasize gendered division of labour where women are relegated to the domestic space. As such, men are presented as the rightful participants in higher education, an identity which women should reify and look up to. The response above reflects the high level of sexism internalized by the respondent and reflects how the respondent feels challenged by the female presence at university such that men feel they have to prove they are intelligent. The response appears to imply that sexual harassment through sexist humour is the price women are expected to pay for entering into male spaces. It also reflects how men trivialize women and reflects men's attitudes which are characterized by disdain towards feminine roles. The respondent indicates that women belong to a particular space, different from men where there are expected to attend to domestic chores such that deviation is met with resistance and taken as a challenge. As such, it can be said that sexist humour reflects men's struggle to deal with their anxiety about the changing role of women. It appears that expectations about how women and men should behave are the most fundamental distinctions made between people who are rooted in patriarchy. Therefore, it can be concluded that sexist humour is a defence mechanism to the perceived threat to masculinity.

In addition, it can be claimed that sexist humour is entrenched and sustained by the masculinization of space as evidenced by male students mocking female students at



university. There is a large body of research illustrating how sexism functions to enable men to reclaim power and space where they feel women have challenged them (Maas, Cadinu, Guarnieri and Grasselli, 2003; Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford and Watsi, 2009; Muparamo, 2012; Nayef and Nashar, 2015). Sexist humour appears to be a way to maintain existing social power and hegemony of the dominant groups. By appreciating sexist humour together, men share collective joy in situating women in a dump by turning them into objects of scorn and contempt or into beings not to be taken seriously. The same sentiments are echoed by social identity theory where group cohesion and self-esteem is achieved through disparaging the 'othered' groups. Shared laughter implies agreement on the ideas being portrayed. Misogyny masquerading as banter justifies sexist humour and is seen as an expression of masculinity where men try to protect their space against female domination.

The disparagement of women through humour appears to not only distance and dehumanize the female members but also to strengthen affiliation with the opposite group. This introduces the concept of in-group and out-group, more easily understandable as (us) and (them) according to social identity theory. The same result was noted by Ryan and Kanjorski (1998) where it was discovered that joking about violence against women or others allows the initiator of the joke to emphasize their membership of the advantaged dominant group and to claim the entitlements associated with such membership, while at the same time normalizing hostility toward the subordinate group. In the same vein, social identity theory supports these observations by explaining how group dynamics appear to influence sexist humour. Social identity is based on social group membership and it appears this is the same with sexist humour. Sexist humour hinges on membership to a particular group and is governed by the norms and beliefs of that particular group and what gives them satisfaction. Social recognition through sexist humour improves the feelings of superiority for men as a group based on dimensions relevant to their group. Sexist humour strengthens in-group bonds through stereotyping and explains how individuals strive to improve their self-esteem based on social identity.

In addition, structural violence theory may also serve to explain how patriarchy as an institution is violating women's rights by its acceptance of sexist humour. Patriarchy as a social structure harms female students by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. The violence (in this case, sexist humour) is built into the structure and manifests as unequal power relations between men and women on campus. Structural violence is invisible due to

its subtle nature. Distribution of power is determined by male students at the expense of female students.

Victim blame was also evident from the responses. Male students absolved themselves from any wrong doing and apportioned blame to female students as in their own words “they were simply responding to the female students’s cry for attention”. Of the 148 respondents, 22 percent indicated that women want it (sexist humour) meaning that one in every four respondents was of the opinion that women liked sexist humour. Dylan (male) remarked:

*Vakadzi ava ndivo vanototanga kutidenha ... vanoti hausi murume iwewe saka tinenge tave kutoratidzana zvishandwa ... kutovaratidza kuti ndiri murume pane vamwe varume. Nekuti ukasadaro unenge waratidza kuti uri gwara.*

Women challenge us ... they goad us by saying you are not men enough for me ... so sexist humour is a response to that challenge. We have to respond and show them we are men because letting it pass is a show of cowardice.

Lloyd, another male respondent, said:

*Ahhh vanoziava. Kana muchifunga tirikunyepa vabvunzei varipo apa vasikana vacho. Vakatawona usingatambe navo nenzira iyoyo unotonzi uri chidimbu chemunhu. (laughing)*

These women want it ... infact they expect us to play with them using sexist humour. If you don’t do that, they will say you are not a complete man.

The response from these male respondents might be indicative of how females come to self-objectify themselves by internalizing the objectification targeted at them. Sexual objectification theory illustrates how women internalize the objectifying behaviour and come to expect the behaviour from their male counterparts (Bartky, 1988). The response indicates how sexist humour is taken as a show of masculine strength and appears to act as validation for masculinity. Respondents highlighted how they felt the need to showcase how masculine they were through sexist humour. Some of the female students who were present confirmed that they did not mind sexist humour and it was rare to meet a guy who did not engage in sexist humour. One female respondent said:

*Ahh tinotozvitarisira izvi ... ukatosangana nemunhurume asingatambe newe achidaro chinenge chitori chishamiso.*

Ahh actually we expect it from the men ... we have never met any male who does not engage in sexist humour.

The response indicates that women goad men to prove their masculinity (an element of self-objectification) and this masculinity appears to be proven through behaviours that denigrate and harass females. Thus, this was taken as a scapegoat by male students to engage in sexist humour and reflects how men seem to absolve themselves from being responsible for the perpetration of violence by blaming women. The justification is that it is the females who provoke the males or that the woman was in the wrong place or no men could have resisted or would have behaved differently in that situation. This goading of male students by females appear to fuel episodes of sexual violence on campus because university is a time when the majority of students are beginning to understand their sexuality with sexual attraction at its peak and it appears males would be under pressure to prove their masculinity. In this scenario, women exist as potential sexual objects for males according to sexual objectification theory. Women appear to provide males with sexual validation and men compete with each other for this. As such, sexual harassment is used as a tool to socially, sexually and materially control female students. It can be argued that in this case, the phallus is presented as a disciplinary tool or whip to instil discipline. In a sense, it can be argued that the type of response is ideal in that particular situation.

These justificatory narratives seek to legitimise otherwise offensive behaviour against the targeted weaker group. According to structural violence theory's concept of cultural violence, it is asserted it is the elements of culture which are embedded in a structure that legitimizes and normalizes expressions of violence. The fact that the female students acknowledge goading men because they expect all males to engage in sexist humour reveals how normalized incidences of sexist humour have become. An element of self-objectification by females was noted. This is in line with sexual objectification theory which claims that women self-objectify themselves after continued exposure to sexist humour. Women begin to view themselves in the same manner as their abuser does. Feminist theorists have argued that sexually objectifying experiences encountered by women on a daily basis builds up over time and results in women internalizing the sexual objectification and turning it on themselves (Calogero, 2012). Thus, women begin to evaluate and present themselves in a sexually objectifying manner.

With further probing, the researcher established that in responding to the perceived challenge, the males would use sexist humour which employed imagery of men conquering and punishing women, often through sex. The adoption of sexually violent imagery in banter reflects how men view themselves as being responsible for punishing women and bringing them back 'in check' by showing their inferiority to men and claiming they should therefore be submissive, a viewpoint which is popular in patriarchal societies. This can be explained through the discourse of power struggles that exists between the sexes where sexual harassment is seen within the context of men dominating women through expressions of masculinity such as sexual harassment. Viki et al. (2007) found similar results where males reported the highest level of victim blame after exposure to sexist humour. This highlighted the importance of the discourse of masculinity and heterosexuality in shaping female experiences at higher education institutions. Men saw expressions of sexist humour as a contest of strength; therefore, it can be concluded that sexist humour is a very specific expression of male power and is often employed as a way of disciplining women. In addition, the majority of males in the focus group discussion highlighted that females tempted males through skimpy dressing thus they became targets. Female respondents raised issues such as the perpetrators' lack of self-control, lust, lack of respect and desire to prove manhood as determinants for males to engage in sexist humour, but these were downplayed and females were blamed for the perpetration of sexist humour.

It was also discovered that feelings of inadequacy, where male students felt that they were not good enough to date female students, also fuelled episodes of sexist humour targeted at women. Phillip, a male respondent, indicated that women show off with their sugar daddies making them targets for sexist humour. The fact that female students felt the need to date financially stable males to be able to survive on campus reveals how the educational structures were violent to the students. Poverty was a reality and prevented students from meeting their basic needs. This, according to structural violence theory, asserts that elements of a structure manifesting as poverty were violent and prevented individuals from addressing their basic human rights. This appears to be a thorn in the flesh for male students as the females reject their dating requests in favour of older men who have money and can finance their lifestyles on campus. A culture of incompatibility is revealed as the reason for the tension existing between men and women. In this case, male students cannot co-exist peacefully with females who reject their advances because they cannot afford to maintain

their lifestyles. A culture of incompatibility is revealed as the reason for the tension existing between men and women. Diva, a male respondent, said:

*Kungoda kungovachipisa chete vasikana ava hapana chimwe ... kungovaridza chete kuti hamusi zvinhu sezvavanofunga. Kuita kuvaturunura pamusoro ipapo kuvaisa mumadhaka senguruve ... nekuti vanotiramba vachifunga kuti vakosha stereki...*

Sexist humour is nothing more than a way of putting women in their place by reminding them that they are not that special as they think ... it's just a way of getting them off their high horses and throwing them in the mud like a pig ... because they reject our proposals because they think they are too good for us.

The response indicates how sexist humour acts as a way to remind women that they are nothing compared to men. The metaphor of a pig in the mud reflects how men view the supposed rightful 'women's space' in society as somewhere to be looked down upon. It appears that the reason why female students reject male students' dating proposals is because the male students are not financially stable. This goes hand in hand with findings from studies that suggest that poverty was the reason why female students are targets of sexist humour (Chagonda, 2001; Muparamoto, 2012; Wekwete and Manyeruke, 2012; Mapuranga, Musodza and Tom, 2015). It was established that the majority of male students at state universities known as UBAs (University Bachelors Association) are from peasant backgrounds so they do not have money to spare for spoiling girls and as a result the female students prefer dating working class males outside the university known as NABAs (Non-Academic Bachelors Association), some of whom are much older than them raising the ire of the UBAs. Therefore, UBAs have resorted to alternative forms of masculinities such as engaging in sexist humour as a way of showing their displeasure from being excluded from the dating game. As a result, male students target female students as a whole with indiscriminate violence. The gendered discourse categorised with unfriendly behaviour towards female students is a reflection of an institutional culture that sees discrimination and oppression as a norm. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a class aspect as well as a structural violence aspect to sexist humour where destitute male students (now the majority) are excluded from dating activities and they feel they have to prove their masculinity through violence. The issue of female students dating working class males brings to light the issue of transactional sex exposing female students to a whole range of diseases. The male students mentioned that female students had multiple partners/ boyfriends for financial benefits.

Transactional sex seems to be a factor in shaping female students' vulnerability as they engage in sex for basic needs. Chagonda (2001); Muparamoto (2012); Wekwete and Manyeruke (2012); Muasya (2013); Mapuranga, Musodza and Tom (2015) yielded the same results where students had multiple sex partners for financial benefit. This reflects grounds for future research as the researcher did not probe further into this issue. However, the researcher noted that women were complicit in issues of transactional sex as they believed they needed financial support to be able to survive on campus.

However, some respondents indicate that both sexes were targets of sexist humour. The researcher noted the huge difference between the number of respondents who identified both women and men as targets of sexist humour (36 percent) and those who identified males only as targets (3,6 percent). The difference presents a wide margin and is contradictory. The wide margin seems to imply that men are targets as well as women and on the other hand, the difference seems to imply that men are not targeted at all. This is in direct contrast to Petersen and Hyde (2013) as well as Petersen, Weaver and Crawford (cited in Petersen and Hyde, 2010) where results indicated that more male students were targets of harassment. However, previous research explains the reason why men appear not to be targets of sexism. Existing research proposes that male harassment also exists and the reason why male numbers appear to be low is because of non-reporting by males who want to protect the status quo. This was illustrated when respondents who had experienced sexist humour either as witnesses or as targets were asked whom they had told about their experiences. Nineteen of the 31 male respondents who answered this question indicated that they did not tell anyone because they did not think it was serious enough to talk about. This means that 61 percent of the entire male population who had responded to this question did not tell anyone about their experiences. This shows that men also experience sexist humour but do not report or dismiss it as not serious enough to report. Males also seem to be under pressure to toe the line to various forms of masculinity which in this context included not appearing sensitive or insecure but project a 'macho' strong fearless image. Another reason may be perceptual differences or differences in identifying harassment. What is deemed to be harassment may differ between the sexes or men can view certain behaviour deemed as harassment as less threatening or serious and sometimes even flattering. Therefore, it can be concluded that men are also victims of sexist humour and violence and also face the same barriers as women but it appears they are more powerful factors that enforce their silence and therefore hinder them from reporting.

#### 4.3.5 Justifications for the perpetration of sexist humour

It was necessary to probe what students attributed sexist humour to and what made it a normal part of everyday life. From the questionnaire respondents, 82 percent of the 148 respondents attributed sexist humour to substance use. The high response attributing sexist humour to substance use is reflective of the fact that substance abuse is rife on campus. But it appears that substance use was simply a scapegoat in the perpetration of sexist humour. As one discussant said:

*Munoona, vanhu vanoda kungopomera mhosva doro nekudhakwa asi hazvinei nenyaya idzi. Pada zvirikungopomerwa mhosva nemhaka yekuti kudhakwa ndiko kunokonzeresa mhirizhonga yakati wandei nguva dzese saka apa zvave kungonzi zvakonzerwa nekudhakwa ... asi honzere chaiyo mafungiro emunhu nezvaanotenda kwazviri zvinoita kuti mhirizhonga iyitike...*

People tend to blame alcohol simply because it is known to be the instigator of violence in most unfavourable situations and also drunkenness is part of the campus culture ... so you see, alcohol is not at fault here but the mentality associated with it.

The response shows that alcohol and drug abuse could lead to sexist humour and consequently violence but in this case there was something bigger than substance abuse that led to harassment and violence. Engaging in drug abuse and excessive drinking appeared to be a culture that was common at the university and appeared to strengthen group ties. This is in line with social identity theory where a group adopts behaviour that foster group cohesion and is established as that particular group's identity. Male students forged bonds and camaraderie through these drinking binges and the violence that resulted from being drunk. In this case, it can be concluded that students seem to be abusing alcohol and drugs and they use this as a scapegoat for engaging in sexist humour. However, FGD discussants attributed sexist humour to other factors such as peer pressure and campus culture, among other things. They were of the opinion that alcohol was only being used as a scapegoat.

Ninety-two percent of the respondents attributed sexist humour to peer pressure. Students urged each other on in the perpetration of sexist humour. Pressure and support from their peers to engage in deviant acts influenced sexist humour incidences. This group dynamic can better be explained through the use of social identity theory where individuals become deviant simply to please group members. This is done to prevent being disparaged by members of their own group if they did not adhere to the group principles. In this case,

maybe they feared being labelled as cowards. As such, there was no choice but to be a perpetrator in sexist humour issues.

The majority of students indicated that they thought sexist humour was funny. This echoes Hill and Silva's (2005) findings where it was established that the majority of students who engage in harassing behaviours thought it was funny. This appears to justify their engagement with sexist humour. A third of the respondents thought that the person wanted the sexual attention and the remainder thought that it was part of the school culture and many people did it. As such, it can be argued that perpetrators of sexist humour blamed everyone but themselves for the perpetration of violence and harassment.

#### *4.36 Where on campus do students encounter sexist humour?*

After all these discussions on the nature and perception of sexist humour, it was necessary to establish the areas on campus where sexist humour was experienced. This was necessary to allow the researcher to determine how common sexist humour was on campus. It was established that sexist humour was not confined to any particular location on campus. The number of incidences from any location probably indicated how much time an individual spent in that location. Respondents mentioned sports grounds, campus cafeteria, campus grounds as well as lecture rooms as places where sexist humour was rife. These appeared to be areas where group dynamics were strong. According to social identity theory, group members seem to draw strength and support from each other to engage in sexist humour. The fact that sexist humour was present even in lecture rooms indicates that harassment can even occur in spaces that are deemed safe. It is important to note that sexist humour occurring in classrooms was from fellow classmates not lecturers. One female responded had this to say about the presence of sexist humour in class:

*Pane zvimwe zvekuti wabhadhara kunoona vaye vanoziwikawa kuti vanoita zvekusekesa vanhu, pakadaro kana waona kuti hauwirirane nazvo unongobva panzvimbo iyoyo kuti usanzwe zvinhu zvinokugumbura. Zvino zvinenge zvakaoma kana izvi zvave kuitika munzvimbo yekuti haukwanise kubva ipapo asi kutogarira uchishingirira chero hazvo zvichirwadza...*

If you find the humour of some stand-up comedian offensive you need not subject yourself to their performance ... you see ... the situation is rather different with sexist remarks in class where one is not free to absent themselves.



The response indicates the dilemma female students face as they are forced to endure sexist encounters in spaces where they are not free to excuse themselves. Muasya (2013) yielded the same results in her study of sexual harassment in higher education in Kenya where she highlighted that female students experienced ‘chilly climates’ at university. These climates were ‘chilly’ in the sense that those female students have no choice but to encounter harassment and humiliating scenarios in the name of humour every day since if they excused themselves from some of the areas, they encountered harassment. This is violence in the sense that female students have to endure threatening environments since excusing themselves was simply not an option.

Students identified campus grounds as a space where they felt sexist humour was rife. This was identified as a place of gossip and relaxation where students meet in between breaks from their lectures. This was also identified as a space where the majority of female respondents highlighted that they felt objectified because of the way they were stared at and jokes made at their expense. One female respondent said:

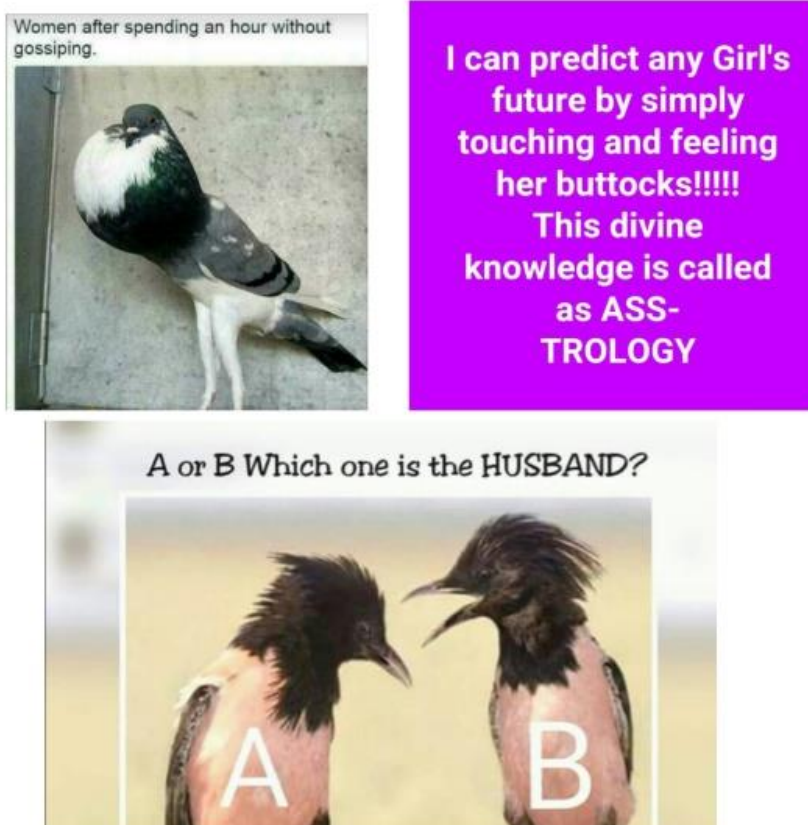
*Urikupfuura zvako nemu ground umo wobva wadamburira nepakagara vanhurume vakazorora zvavo. Mumwe wavo obva ataura nekutanga kuimba nezvemuviri wako.*

You are passing through an area and the guys are all over the place ... I was passing through the campus grounds and these guys who were relaxing on the grass started singing ... hey ... *amai munodonhedza musika* and they laughed (colloquial language that refers to women with a huge buttocks).

The response indicates how female bodies are objectified and reduced to mere objects for male pleasure. The response highlights the issue of rating where individuals are awarded marks for how they look and their sexual appeal. Rating is part of sexist humour. From the questionnaire responses, all the respondents indicated that they had been rated indicating how widespread sexist humour was. This is in line with studies by Gaidzanwa (2010), Muparamoto (2012) and Mapuranga, Musodza and Tom (2015) which reveal how male students exhibited their masculinity through rating females students.

Informal social interactions whether face-to-face or through social media were also mentioned as one context where sexist humour was rife. This study revealed that social media has become the number one place in which violence – particularly in the form of sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, blocking, intimidation and threats as well as humiliating gender stereotypes – are perpetrated against female students. Whatsapp message

exchanges among classmates are one medium mentioned by the majority of students where sexist jokes were exchanged. Respondents mentioned a case where two male students were suspended for sexual harassment after they had exchanged messages that denigrated a female classmate on a class whatsapp group detailing how they would sexually assault her. On the bus to and from sports trips, at sports camps and on the sports grounds were other areas that were mentioned as areas where sexist humour was common. Sexist humour was communicated through lewd jokes and comments on sex lives and demeaning language humiliating female athletes during coaching sessions with covert jokes as well as edited pictures showing and glorifying female stereotypes. A male choir was mentioned that sang sexist songs at sports events by changing lyrics of popular gospel songs into songs that made fun of female body parts by sexually objectifying women. The researcher also established that the behaviour of the choir members was accepted and dismissed as mere fun without any real consequences.



**Figure 4.4: Examples of sexist humour being circulated on social media at GZU**

Figure 4.4 above exhibits some of the pictures denoting sexist humour being circulated on social media at GZU. The pictures reflect how women are made fun of and how men perceive women in society and show how stereotypes develop in institutions such as higher education

sectors. Note how one of the images denotes sexual violence while the rest reflect stereotypes such as being talkative and gossiping as female traits.

The fact that a male choir existed that sang songs portraying female stereotypes reveal how male students appeared to bond over group behaviour that can best be described as deviant. As espoused by social identity theory, in-group cohesion is enhanced through group interactions. A sense of camaraderie of campus life is forged and cemented through sexist humour.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted perceptions of sexist humour and revealed the targets of sexist humour. Discussion has revealed how sexism embedded in structures such as patriarchy may be held responsible for sexist humour and associated violence. Respondents indicated good understandings of sexism but exhibited reservations in describing sexist humour as harassment depending on the context and manner in which it was put across. This was due to the fact that harassment is conveyed in a joking manner, tempering the sting of the discrimination. Differences in perception of sexist humour reflected the complex nature in dealing with sexism in higher education settings. It was discovered that women were the majority of the targets and the reasons for this varied but all centred around patriarchy and men's desire to control women. This can be seen in the established culture influenced by patriarchy that views women and their contributions as trivial. The culture of patriarchy pushes males to adopt alternative forms of masculinity that are violent to women for them to prove their masculinity and try to reclaim spaces where they feel challenged by women. As such, the interplay between sexist humour and misogyny in relation to three theories, namely structural violence, sexual objectification as well as social identity theories has revealed the violent nature of sexist humour and how it results from stereotypes that appear to be embedded in the education structures.

## **CHAPTER 5: NORMALIZATION OF MISOGYNY AND VIOLENCE AT GZU**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the normalization of violence and misogyny at GZU campus in the context of sexist humour. Normalization implies accepting the behaviour as inevitable and as part of everyday life. Normalization of violence has implications on female experience in education in terms of quality of access to educational resources as well as general well-being. The chapter discusses the various day-to-day occurrences and experiences which lead to or may contribute to the normalization and acceptance of sexist humour. The chapter discusses how normalization may be individual, group or institutional. Normalization refers to social processes through which thoughts and actions come to be seen as ‘normal’ everyday occurrences that are not questioned but become internalized as they are and are taken for granted or as natural. Normalization also highlights how those who deviate from the norm are disciplined and punished. This concept of ‘punishing’ so called deviants will be discussed further in this chapter to reveal the violent nature of sexist humour

### **5.2 Contributions to the normalization of sexist humour**

It was established that the circle of sexism in wider society was normalized and reinforced by the family, the first powerful institution that shapes individual behaviour and has influence on adult behaviour. According to Sharma (2013, 208), the family is important for its role as a factor influencing and affecting the development, behaviour, and well-being of the individual. As such, family is a structure inherent with beliefs and expectations unique to them that govern the behaviour of its members. Through socialization, children are taught the expected behaviour, roles and space for both male and females. Gendered roles and expectations are instilled in family members as part of the formative years and manifest through different means. It appears that tolerance and acceptance of gender difference is frowned upon and gender differences are magnified and used as a tool to oppress the perceived weaker group. Over time, this oppression and violence targeted at the weaker gender becomes normalized and accepted as part of everyday life. Often it is language and behaviours that denigrates one sex over the other and makes light of violent acts and trivializes aggression which leads to the normalization and acceptance of sexist humour and consequently sexist violence. Besides language that glorifies sexism and sexist violence, the normalization of sexist humour also involves acts and experiences that are allowed to take shape and establish themselves over

time and are permitted to determine daily life. This reveals how the family as a structure is embedded with violence targeted at women who are considered to be the ‘weaker’ sex as espoused by structural violence theory. According to this theory, this type of violence cannot be traced to anyone in particular but manifests as unequal life chances for women in society. This marginalization of females appears to be sanctioned by the structure of patriarchy and prevents women from meeting their basic needs as evidenced in the proposals of structural violence theory. This normalizes sexist humour and makes it an acceptable part of daily life to such an extent that violence becomes institutionalized. Processes of institutionalization account for how patterns of domination and oppression like sexism become normalized. In all three FGDs it was unanimous that patriarchy as a structure, among other reasons for normalization, was the chief culprit in the normalization of sexist humour. Bianca (female), when asked what made sexist humour normal, said:

*Ahhh zvakangogara zvakangodaro izvi ... tisati tatozvarwa zvaingovepo.*

It has always been like that ... even before we were born.

Bianca’s response also indicates how structures exert violence on people simply because they are longstanding structural inequities which are seen to be ordinary, the way things are and always have been, therefore are not subject for change. Similarly, structural violence theory echoes the same sentiments. Rather than being focused on direct, brutal acts, structural violence is the result of societal systems, such as social stratification, that have been in place for years. These systems create situations where people do not have access to the things required to fulfill their basic human needs. The response implies that sexism is rooted in society, normalized and accepted as a norm since way back. It also implies that sexism was learnt through assimilation and may be taken to assume that sexism in Shona society is culturally sanctioned as members do not question how society views and treats women. The response indicates that the respondent grew up in a society that allowed sexism to flourish and become firmly rooted in daily life. This translates into blind unquestionable faith and acceptance of societal structures and reveals resignation and surrender by the respondent to a system that has flourished for years. The majority of female respondents in both FGDs displayed reluctance in questioning a system that had already established itself even before they were born. Christine, one of the female discussants, remarked:

*Tinongoteverawo zvakagara zviriko. Ko ndingazvipikisa ndakamira saani munyika ine vanhu vese ava. Sei ivo vakuru vedu vakare vakasiya zvakaita mamiriro iwayo?*

*Zvichida pane chinangwa. Saka tinongotamba irikurira iyoyo. Pakazouyawo vamwe vane mumwe muonero urinani kuda zvingachinje asi zvinenge zvisiri nyore.*

We just go along with the flow. Who am I to fight against system that even our elders failed to change? Maybe there is a valid reason for patriarchal domination that we don't understand as yet. The current structure of domination might change if there is a convincing alternative to the way things are but change will not be easy to adopt.

Christine's response is indicative of how structures resist change as evidenced by structural violence theory. This is because structural violence is invisible and difficult to challenge. Addressing structural violence typically requires large structural changes in society and such changes happen slowly in part because it is difficult to recognize structural violence as violence. In addition, Christine communicated the hopelessness of attempts that seek to destabilize the violence embedded in the patriarchal structure. It is such reflections of resignation and acceptance that allow sexist humour embedded in patriarchal structures to thrive, normalizes sexism and other ills that disadvantage women, and where the roots of rape take shape. According to structural violence theory, the violence which is embedded in structures may often result in rape thereby validating the above sentiments.

Peter from FGD3 (male only) had this to say:

*Ko zvinhu zvinogochinjirwei kana pasina chanetsa? Mushonga haiswe pasina chironda. Kuda kungorongwa ronga kwevakadzi nekuda kuzviita vanhu vanoziwa ndizvo zvinokonzeresa matambudziko. Zvinhu zvakatonaka zvakadaro izvi.*

Why do we need to change the order of things if they are perfect and working well? You cannot put salve on healthy flesh. It's only these women who meddle in these affairs who are creating problems. Things are okay as they are. No need for change.

Peter's response is indicative of how he was satisfied with the status quo. His response may be representative of the majority of male students and their belief that things were better as they were. His response reflects male bias by blaming women who challenge patriarchal structures and views them as "meddling" in male affairs. By classifying women as the 'other', Peter confirms the 'us' versus 'them' mentality' that is proposed by social identity theory. Peter categorized himself as part of the privileged group that exploits the lower strata group and it appears his self-esteem is boosted in relation to his connection to the privileged group. It can be said that respondents have simply allowed patriarchy to determine the

worldview and what goes without any challenge because there is no other way to conceptualize daily behaviour other than that which has already been established. Patriarchy stresses that power lies in the males who oversee, control and discipline women as well as children. In other words, it can be argued that sexist humour is part of cultural permission to oversee, control and discipline female members of society as evidenced by the cultural violence element proposed by structural violence theory. Therefore, it can be argued that patriarchy is the simple justificatory narrative structure that has been internalized and used to legitimize and normalize sexist humour and violence. If an idea becomes normalized and becomes viewed as routine, people are less likely to critically analyse a statement that has been legitimized and fits comfortably into their worldview. Indications from the discussions were that once people have a satisfactory narrative over why things happen as they do, they are unlikely to question the basic assumptions of the narrative. Patriarchy as a justificatory narrative seeks to legitimize and embrace the violence of the dominant (male students) against the disadvantaged (female students) and consequently they do not question its basic assumptions. It appears the most challenging aspect of addressing structural violence lies in how difficult it can be to bring attention to its violent nature. When social inequities prevail, attempts to rationalize and understand them seem to be futile and unfortunately the outcome of this process is to assume that victims must in some way deserve their plight as evidenced by Peter blaming female students for challenging patriarchy. Furthermore, it appears that the constant presence of structural violence is desensitizing; the structures that maintain the violence become normalized and seen as 'the way things are'. Because of this, it can be difficult to convince those with the ability to create change that there is a problem or that it can be addressed.

Furthermore, the institutionalization and normalization of sexist humour manifests when an institution, such as a university, adopts traditions (both overt and implied) that condone sexist humour and its associated violence. This is as a result of societal culture which is duplicated and played out at university. Universities have their own cultures and traditions that reflect elements of societal culture. It was established that there were traditions on campus that contributed to the normalization of sexist humour and violence such as the 'gold-rush' where senior male students targeted junior female students as potentials for relationships because it was assumed they were still innocent sexually. From a theoretical point of view, the 'gold-rush' can be firmly located in sexual objectification theory which proposes that women are objectified and viewed as objects separate from their achievements which are only desired for

their sexual functions. The 'gold-rush' was seen as part of initiation into campus culture and appeared to be handed down from the senior level students to the junior level students who carried forward the traditions. The effects of such traditions can become subtle and invisible yet are deeply woven into the pattern of everyday campus culture. This reflects the basic tenets of structural violence theory where violence is deeply entrenched in structures and the patterns of everyday life and has become invisible. The researcher noted that the campus population was multi-cultural and multi-ethnic and students from different social classes and ethnic backgrounds met here in pursuit of learning. Cultural contexts favour what is legally accepted as gender violence and what is not. In this regard, patriarchal beliefs were handed down from society and replayed at institutions of higher learning and manifested as campus culture. Patriarchal sexist beliefs were strongly reflected in the campus culture.

The questionnaire asked respondents what they attributed sexist humour to. A number of responses were given and respondents were allowed to circle one or more responses. Of the responses, 34 percent attributed sexist humour to campus culture and the rest to 'other' (joking, peer pressure, influence of drugs). Culture is constant, locally influenced and intimately connected to history and politics as well as economics and as such campus culture is a reflection of all these factors. Therefore, it can be claimed that sexist humour in higher education settings is a reflection of the general society and the prejudiced which is deeply woven into everyday life. On further probing, the researcher established that campus culture originated from societal cultures thereby supporting the aforementioned assertion. Participants from all three FGDs agreed that campus culture ruled every aspect of their lives and influenced their behaviour. Campus culture enables the university to function without the need to renegotiate meaning at every turn. In other words, everything that happens is a signifier of a socially constructed local, social and moral world. As such, it can be concluded that culture (both societal and campus) contributes to the institutional normalization of sexism and violence because of its expectations on how women should behave. In any society this belief will have developed over time and is rooted in history, both ancient and recent. Therefore, male students who engage in sexist humour are seen as justified and as exercising their rights to discipline women as stated by patriarchy. In addition, the fact that culture is complex, dynamic and resistant to change makes it a formidable and obstinate force to be dealt with in cases of gender violence thereby resulting in normalization.

The researcher noted that university culture shaped and promoted male tolerant cultures which endured and glorified sexism. This appeared to be a culture in which misogyny and



sexism is seen as the norm, and much of it presented as humour with sexual connotations. Participants from FGD3 (male only) offered to sing a song that was quite popular at the university. The lyrics of the song were:

*Svigaro svakadai ... netumwe twakadai ... nemamwe akadai ... nezvimwe zvakadai...*

Very small buttocks ... smaller buttocks ... normal buttocks and very huge buttocks...

The lyrics from the song reflect how campus culture contributed to the normalization of misogyny. The song mocked female body parts by describing different types of buttocks in a degrading way. The prefixes *svi*, *tu* and *zva* in Shona reveal the highest level of scorn and contempt for the referred body parts. These prefixes depict the size of the buttocks by making them appear funny and at the same time unappealing. The song depicts how female students are sexually objectified and subject to male scrutiny. Female students are seen as entities that exist for men's sexual gratification (specific sexual scripting). This dehumanized perspective of women may then be used to inform attitudes regarding sexual violence against women (abstract sexual scripting). The question that was left hanging in the researcher's mind was to whom should women's buttocks aim to please? Males appear to feel entitled to pleasure from females and their general body appearance. It is this expectation of *entitlement* that men feel, I contend, that can lead to sexual assault and rapes. As such, it can be concluded that irony and humour is used to mask the severity of misogyny thereby normalizing it. It is important to draw attention to the song lyrics and the jovial response to the song from both sexes, even the targeted sex, that points to the systematic normalization of assault on women's sense of self-worth and dignity which is allowed to go unchallenged simply because it is part of the university culture to sing such songs at university social gatherings. As Diana, a female respondent, mentioned:

*Kwatinobva nemagariro edu zvine chekuita nemufungiro nemararamiro  
atinoita..tinongogamuchira zvinhu semudzidzisirwo watakazviita ...*

Culture conditions us to think in particular ways and not be able to think in particular ways. ... We just accept things as they are.

The response indicates the level of normalization and acceptance of sexist humour as part of university daily life. The song objectified the female anatomy and rendered the female body as an object only for the desire of the male body. The tendency of rating individuals based on

sexual appeal is also revealed. When respondents were asked to indicate if they had been rated out of ten for sex appeal, all 148 respondents (100 percent) both males and females indicated that they had been rated for sex appeal. This indicates the level of normalization and acceptance of sexually objectifying the female body within the confines of the university.

The so called 'culture' of rating female body parts and giving marks according to sexual appeal reflects the insidious nature of sexist humour and reveals issues of female body ownership and the male gaze. Women throughout history have been subjected to the male gaze leading to the question of who owns a female's body. It appears men control female bodies as well as female sexuality. The way patriarchy gives right of ownership of the female body to males appears to communicate to the males that they are entitled to the female body. As such, it appears to be an impossible task to achieve equality for women if they cannot control their own bodies and sexuality. The struggle for women's autonomy therefore can be said to be hinged on freedom from the grasp of patriarchy. The issue of women being constantly under the male gaze resonates with the sexual objectification theory where women are viewed as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer. It is cultures such as these that rate female bodies that normalize and accept sexist humour in higher education settings.

From the preceding discussion, the majority of male students were of the opinion that sexist humour is employed as a courting strategy for securing a potential partner. It can be argued that male students take pride in engaging in sexist humour since it appears to be the backbone of the process of seeking a partner. The success of a male student in asking for a date reflects great skill and art in manipulating the girl using sexist humour. It can be concluded that it is for this reason that when a woman says no to male advances, the male does not take this seriously, as within a patriarchal system, a woman is expected to take her time before she says yes. In this scenario, the suitors (male) do not see themselves as rejected but view themselves, in their own words, "as misunderstood comedians". 'No' is taken to be a 'yes' in disguise. Sexist humour creates a specific context where men seek to conquer and show women that they are not as strong as men. Therefore, males will keep on pestering the female for a date. This reflects how men feel entitled to female attention through dates. This also is indicative of how men have internalized and normalized female sexual objectification such that when they are rejected, they keep on pestering the female so as to validate their masculinity. Social categorization is also evident through how men conceive women as the pursued and themselves as the pursuer indicating the power structures inherent in sexist humour. This behaviour of continued pestering even if the female has declined the advances

mimics patriarchy which expects respectable woman to be chased for a relationship. The behaviour is best explained by the sexual objectification theory where women are routinely treated as objects of pleasure for males. Their bodies are depicted as wild, insatiable and deviant and males are depicted as the pacifiers to this women's insatiable need. This has implications on issues of sexual consent and it is here one can detect the roots for rape and sexual aggression. Continued pestering of the female and eventually getting a date implies that the male has succeeded in conquering the female and conquering implies subjugation of the female and surrender to male power which are attributes of patriarchy. Therefore, sexist humour represents the virility and agility of male sexuality which are viewed as attributes worth emulating. It was not established what would happen if the pursued female continued to decline the advances. Thus, rape can be seen as an assertion of male masculinity as encapsulated in the violent imagery of conquering and surrendering to male dominance that is proposed by patriarchy. The sentiments above show how sexist humour is deeply woven into aggression, brutality and conquest.

Violent phrases disseminated as humour were also identified as contributing to the normalization of sexist humour and associated violence. During discussion, male students would often say to female students:

*Ndinokuendera kujeri iwe, ramba uchiwonererwa kudaro. Ndinoswera ndakurova nayo.*

I would not mind going to jail for you if you just continue to challenge me as you are doing and I will hit you with it (referring to penis).

This was often followed by action where the male would try to touch the female student inappropriately. The words “*kurova nayo*” loosely translated as “hitting you with it” (with reference to the male penis) is Shona slang which has connotation for fixing and subduing women sexually. Although this was said as a joke, mentioning going to jail indicates that the student is fully aware that they are engaging in criminal behaviour and this warrants a jail sentence but because they want to appear as heroes to their male counterparts, they claim they would not mind a jail sentence after committing a crime. The whole scenario of enacting rape through humour is explained in sexual objectification theory where issues of sexual violence are ridiculed. Sexually violent humour with references to rape normalizes sexism as well as rape within its context. In addition to sexist and rape jokes, traditional songs and chants were common with lyrics about sexism and often including sexual violence detailing how to target

women. There seems to be a certain state of masculinity that marks women as sexual prey and available to men. It was not clear, however, what would happen if women rejected male advances. Mathe (2012) and Gaidzanwa (2010) revealed how male students often became violent in the face of rejection by female students. Maphosa (2015) in his study of the University of Lesotho students revealed a similar concept called “*ho lahla molo*” where male students would verbally abuse females who rejected their advances. The words “*ho lahla mollo*” means throwing fire at someone. This violent imagery represents the violent nature of sexist humour.

In addition, the researcher established that there is a tradition on campus known as the “gold rush” where male students rush to secure dates with first-year female students. The term “gold” is used to refer to first-year students who are considered to be sexually pure and more valuable as compared to other students who have been on campus for years, hence the term ‘gold’. This is in terms of social identity theory’s concept of self-categorization where people categorize themselves in groups. Those who have been on campus a long time are considered undesirable as their sexual purity is considered to have diminished. Gold is expensive and precious. Female students are grouped into categories of precious metals in descending order depending on the time they have spent on campus –after gold comes silver then bronze. The ‘gold rush’ is a largely sexist concept that is derogatory towards women. Gaidzanwa (2010) as well as Muasya (2010) noted the same phenomenon of ‘gold rush’ in her study of the University of Zimbabwe and the University of Nairobi. The fact that the same phenomenon of a ‘gold rush’ exists at two different universities in Zimbabwe and one outside Zimbabwe indicates the probability of the same phenomenon existing at other universities too. This implies that many universities might have the same culture and traditions that undermine and disparage female students making it safe to generalize that universities in Zimbabwe have the same culture that objectifies and denigrates women. It appears that students who have survived the tradition feel they are now in a privileged position and pass the tradition on to those who come after them by justifying that it is good for them and everyone has to experience it as initiation (justificatory narrative). It then becomes a sort of formal initiation into university life. The effects of such traditions can become insidious and deeply woven into the pattern of ‘normal’ campus culture thereby normalizing violence. Therefore, it can be concluded that the whole idea of a ‘gold rush’ is a control mechanism employed by senior university students to subdue young innocent female students thereby limiting their challenge

to men. The 'gold rush' represents a culture of patriarchy which encourages female subjugation.

One of the behaviours encountered was the image amongst young, immature and frustrated young men on campus of the 'harasser' as the role model with behaviour worth emulating. The reason might be because the harasser may appear to be popular because of their deviant behaviour. This was reflected by Thabani in FGD3 who had this to say about a student named Ray who was popular for engaging in sexist humour:

*Ray murume chaiye. Kunyangwe zvake achishora vakadzi achivatarisira pasi  
zvavanonyatsoziva vanongomuda zvakadaro... pese pauri anenge achingodaidzwa  
zita rake. Dai ndichizivikanwawo zvakadaro.*

Ray is so cool, he is a real man. Even though he is always saying bad things about women ... the funny thing is that the women know that he has a low opinion of them but they still adore him ... everywhere on campus they call his name. I wish I can be that popular ...

From Thabani's narrative, it was clear that harassers were venerated at the University as heroes. Glorifying a harasser both normalizes sexist humour and violence and encourages other students to emulate the same behaviour. Gaidzanwa (2010) produced the same results in her study of the University of Zimbabwe where students intentionally defied University authorities and usually got arrested or suspended from college thereby earning themselves hero status. It can be argued that sexist humour goes beyond mere deviance by students but is a mirror of a society that tolerates and encourages sexist humour and consequently sexual violence. This can be linked to in-group cohesion as postulated by social identity theory. Male students identifying with patriarchal beliefs on how women are viewed and treated in society are compelled to act in a way that conforms to patriarchal expectations. In this regard, males are competing with women, not for material resources, but for social recognition also referred to as positive distinctiveness. When males are recognized as superior to women (out-group), they have achieved positive distinctiveness.

Sexist humour offers insight into the culture of heterosexuality in higher education that has become institutionalized and normalized. Patriarchy presents the males as stronger than women thereby ascribing the active role to the male and the passive role to the female. Patriarchy emphasizes that power lies in the males who manage, control and are given power to discipline women in a manner they deem fit. This infantilizes women by placing them at

the same level as children; no wonder males resent women in higher education because they see them as children ‘playing house’ in an adult world. In this light, sex is employed as a disciplinary tool to subdue women and reduces them to the level of children. This reflects the existence of a structure that censors and unleashes violence on women who appear to be challenging patriarchy. Women are forced to stay in their spaces or else risk the consequences that might include sexual violence and assault. It is within this context of patriarchy that sexism and misogyny existing in higher education settings is explained away (justificatory narrative). Gramsci’s analysis of ideology explains well how certain ideas become hegemonic common sense over time. Once an idea becomes common sense, it is no longer questioned. It appears sexist humour has become hegemonic common sense over time and has been institutionally normalized by becoming a way of thinking about and treating women unequally as if these ideas are normal and natural. Therefore, it can be argued that sexist humour has been routinized in everyday university life. It has become common sense and thus not open to interrogation. This way of doing things keeps certain beings and groups in dominant and minor positions, thereby maintaining structural inequalities in the education system.

To determine the level to which sexist humour had been normalized at the University, it was necessary to interrogate perceptions on how students responded to sexist humour. The assumption was that the manner in which students responded to sexist humour would be indicative of the level of normalization. As such, to determine the exact experiences respondents had encountered on campus with regard to issues of sexism, the questionnaire asked respondents to circle given responses in terms of what they had experienced in relation to sexist humour. Respondents were allowed to circle one or more of the experiences listed as optional responses. Of the 148 respondents, 54 percent indicated that someone had made a joke that made them feel targeted because of their gender, 52 percent indicated that someone referred jokingly to people of their gender in belittling and insulting terms while all of them (100 percent) indicated that someone had repeatedly told sexual jokes that were offensive to them. More than half of each of the responses were from females. The fact that more than half of the female respondents indicated that they had been targets of sexism and violence at the University revealed sexism trends at the University which can be said to be targeted at women. This was also indicative of a structure which was violent towards women by targeting them with indiscriminate violence. This illustrates how common and natural sexist humour and misogyny is at the University.

A follow-up question on the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate whether they had experienced sexist humour since the beginning of the academic year. Respondents were asked to indicate if it had happened to them, to someone they know or if they had witnessed it. Again, respondents were allowed to circle more than one response. Of the 148 respondents, 69 percent indicated that it had happened to them, 66 percent indicated it had happened to someone they know and 65 percent indicated that they had witnessed it. Again, more than half of the respondents in each category represented females. The very high statistics of incidences points to how common sexist humour is at the campus. Among the 69 percent of the respondents who indicated that it had happened to them, 58 percent were females. This reveals a trend for sexist humour which targets females. If gender discrimination happens this frequently then it could be argued that gender discrimination in higher education settings is institutionalised and rooted in structures that tolerate sexism. This resonates with structural violence theory where violence is rooted in structure. In other words, it has become part of the daily lives of students at Great Zimbabwe University. The statistics indicate the reality of the presence of sexist humour on campus. Respondents not only knew about the occurrence of sexual violence in the University but have also been victims and knew friends who have been victims of violence yet sexist humour and its associated violence continued to flourish. This brings to light the issues of institutionalization of silence: there seems to be a silent agreement that members should not challenge violence. It appears as if there are unwritten rules for university students where sexual harassment does not carry any consequences unless it leads to rape or visible assault.

In terms of how individuals responded to sexist humour incidences, respondents were asked to circle on the questionnaire action/actions they had taken when faced with sexist humour. Respondents were allowed to circle one or more responses. Almost all (98 percent) of the respondents (85 percent female and 13 percent male) indicated that they had laughed at a sexist joke at the same time as despising themselves. Again 98 percent of the 148 respondents indicated that they retaliated by throwing a joke with a similar taste. This reflects how it might be a habit to laugh at jokes even those that are hurtful. Laughter is contagious and audiences of a joke may default to laughter before they really think about the messages behind a joke.

The diffusion of responsibility by witnesses was identified as a catalyst that normalizes sexist humour. This involves witnesses waiting to intervene in violent cases in the hope that someone else will come to the victim's rescue (Senn and Forrest, 2016). A common response

from those who had witnessed violence and stood back was: “I didn't want to get involved”. Careful analysis usually reveals a sense of fear behind this statement, fears of physical harm, public embarrassment, involvement with police procedures, lost work days and jobs, and other unknown effects. People were afraid of being made witnesses in case complaints followed the legal route which they considered to be a tedious process. Respondents mentioned that being made a witness meant one had to miss classes when called to give evidence. According to Mary (female respondent), the problem was not in giving evidence to the disciplinary panel but the way that these matters tended to drag and claim a huge chunk of the student’s time. In these circumstances, the willingness to support intervention may be weakened, thereby leading bystanders to choose non-intervention.

Another of the circumstances that leads to non-intervention may be the presence of other onlookers. The ‘bystander effect’ (Fisher and Greitemeyer, 2006, 61) occurs because there is diffusion of responsibility when others are present. People all feel that someone will intervene and at in the end, no one intervenes. Another reason for the so-called bystander effect is social influence (ibid, 72). Bystanders observe others’ behaviour to determine the correct behaviour. If no one intervenes then that is taken as the correct behaviour. This can also project an image that behaviour is condoned by the observers contributing to acceptance and normalization. Of respondents, 65 percent indicated that they had witnessed sexist humour but did not take any action besides talking about it to either their peers or family. Some even laughed at the jokes while despising themselves for doing so. The assumption was that victims of sexist humour would present their displeasure in a way they chose and protect those whom they witnessed being harassed. The fact that they did not tend to respond is known as the bystander effect. The bystander effect states that observers are less likely to help a victim when others are also present.

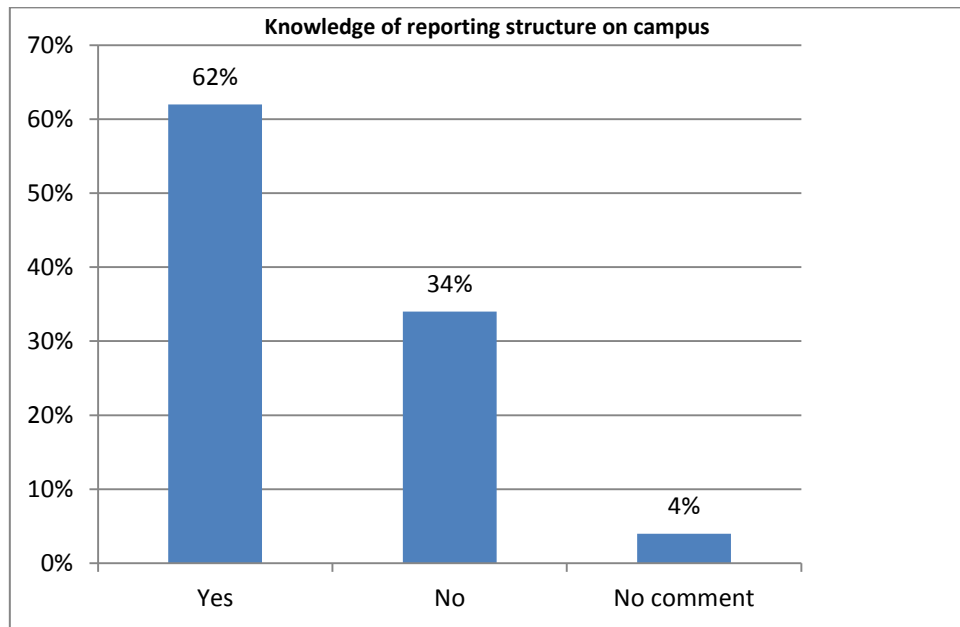
Given the preceding discussion on how and why sexist humour became normalized as part of everyday life, it was necessary to interrogate if there were structures that supported complaints related to sexist humour and its inherent violence. This was necessary to establish if the normalization of sexist humour, misogyny and violence was because of a lack of supporting structures or if it was intentional. The following discussion addresses this issue.

### **5.3 Awareness of reporting structure**

The researcher sought to find out if respondents knew of reporting structures on campus. This was necessary for explaining the behaviours on campus in relation to sexist humour and is



important for understanding if students sought refuge from these structures. Respondents were asked to indicate if they were aware of any reporting structures on campus. The bar graph below represents responses given in percentages.



**Figure 5.1: Students' knowledge of reporting structures on campus**

Of the 141 respondents who answered this question, 62 percent (77 females, 11 males) of the population indicated that they knew of the reporting structure on campus, while 34 percent (5 females, 43 males) indicated the opposite. The fact that more females as opposed to males indicated knowledge of the existence of structures that dealt with sexist humour complaints may be indicative of the fact that it is mainly women who are targeted by sexist humour therefore they are more aware of the structures that allow them to lodge their complaints. In the same vein, the fact that more males indicated that they were not aware of the structures that dealt with complaints related to sexist humour and the associated violence may indicate that men do not see the need to familiarize themselves with structures that deal with sexist humour since they are usually the perpetrators. It might also indicate men's desire to protect the status quo by denying the existence of violence. As espoused by social identity theory, group dynamics emphasize the protection of the interests of the group so as to achieve positive distinction within the group setting; by denying knowledge of these structures, males appear to be protecting their group.

In addition, the collective 34 percent who indicated they had no knowledge of the existence of such structures is a huge number to be unaware of the reporting structure, especially in

terms of critical issues to do with sexual violence. The majority of those who indicated that they did not know lamented the fact that such structures had not been discussed during orientation. It is important for students to be aware of the presence of such structures. Not knowing where to present grievances has implications for how such issues are dealt with at institutional level. Cases of violations are often simply ignored and not reported thereby normalizing violence.

#### **5.4 Reporting procedure- Who did you tell?**

Given that a majority of respondents (62 percent) had indicated knowledge on the existence of the reporting structure, the researcher sought to find out through the questionnaire whether respondents sought refuge from these structures. When asked about who they told of their/witnessed harassment, 18 percent of the 148 respondents indicated that they told their room-mates, 37 percent told a friend, 5 percent told a family member, 3 percent spoke to a counsellor, 36 percent did not tell anyone, 1 percent indicated 'other' and no one told campus security. Victims did often tell another person about the incident and usually this person was a friend. Reporting was of a private nature with the highest frequency of respondents telling their friends and none telling campus security. These findings are in line with Hill and Silva's (2005) findings in which it was established that nearly two-thirds of college students experience some type of sexual harassment yet less than 10 percent of these tell a college or university employee. Some students cited that the reporting process needed to be demystified as one had to go through so many people to lodge a formal complaint when the issue of sexism was too sensitive to involve many people. The burden of proof was also cited as a contributory factor to the non-reporting of sexism. The high percentages of non-reporting may be explained in the context of structural violence theory which states that violence existing in structures is invisible and not easily noticeable thereby contributing to non-reporting. The onus was on the victim to prove the abuse. Nyasha, a female student, said:

*Vanonetsa ...vanoda proof yezvaitika asi zvinonetsa kuti unyatsotsanangura kuti ndepapi chaipo pakubata. Pasina izvozvo unongotenderedzwa.*

It is difficult because they need tangible proof and it's difficult to prove what offended you in a joke ... without proof they will dismiss you

This indicates the difficulty in the presentation of proof of violence in sexist humour. The communication system is insufficient to articulate the experiences. The requirement of proof

made the reporting process tedious making the justice system slow with the victim's trauma escalating rather than being relieved. In a way it shows how sexist humour and the violence it entails is not taken as seriously as other forms of violence. The fact that discrimination is not blatantly expressed but is subtle makes it difficult to produce proof. As a result of this ambiguity, discrimination claims are easily questioned.

Respondents offered a range of reasons for why they did not report. The reasons included fear of embarrassment, guilt and scepticism that anyone can help. The absence of a policy to address sexual harassment has perpetuated the victimisation of female students as perpetrators take advantage of the loopholes while the victims in some cases do not know where to seek redress. It was noted that the creation of a sexual harassment policy was in the pipeline but was still at the consultation stage. Posters around the University testified to efforts by the University at awareness of sexual harassment. Although it was only awareness of blatant harassment, it was a positive move in the right direction. A number of reasons were given for not reporting ranging from the fact that the incident didn't seem serious or important enough to bring the authorities. Reporting is low which may hamper the control mechanisms of sexual harassment. Lack of reporting may also be attributed to the culture and conspiracy of silence that surrounds issues to do with gender and sexuality where no effort is made to systematically deal with issues of sexual harassment.

### **5.5 University response on reported cases**

In view of the discussions on what normalized sexist humour and the structures in place to deal with complaints, it was necessary to investigate how the University responded to complaints brought to their attention. This was crucial in understanding issues of normalization and acceptance of violence at GZU. The university community must show willingness to prevent sexual harassment and has a responsibility to cooperate in the design and establishment of a structure in which sexual harassment does not occur. At GZU, as much as reporting was low, respondents displayed great faith in the University's ability to deal with reported cases. A Likert scale with responses ranging from 'very likely' to 'not likely at all' was used to ascertain the level of confidence students had in the University in dealing with reported cases. Of respondents, 68 percent indicated that it was very likely that the university would take it seriously while 41 percent indicated that it was moderately likely that the University would ensure the safety of the person reporting and 40 percent indicated that it was not likely that the person reporting would lose the privileges they are otherwise

entitled to. These statistics indicate the high level of faith the students have in their University's ability to deal with issues of harassment. Obviously, faith in the University's structures did not translate into high incidences of reporting. A notable case was when the University reacted to sexual harassment was of two male students who were suspended for two years after they had been found guilty of jokingly planning to sexually assault a female student in their social media group. This shows commitment and willingness from the institution to address issues of gender violence.

In addition, to display further how students had faith in their University's ability to deal with harassment issues, the students did not hold the University responsible for sexist humour and the consequent violence. When asked to indicate the part played by the University in several issues that led to the normalization and acceptance of sexist humour, 25 percent of the 148 respondents indicated that they felt the University had played a role in the promotion of sexist humour by not taking a proactive stance in preventing and addressing the experiences; 32 percent indicated that they felt that the University had created an environment where sexist humour seemed normal; 21 percent felt that the University was responsible for making it difficult for the distressed and pained to report and 5 percent thought that the University's response was inadequate. All these statistics are way below half; making them close to insignificant in holding the University responsible. It puzzled the researcher why there was low/no reporting, given the amount of faith in the University that students indicated they had. This seems to suggest the existence of a more powerful force, greater than University authorities that enforced the silence of the distressed and pained. Students seem to normalize the culture of silence as part of university life. Therefore, it can be concluded that having faith in the University's ability to deal with cases of harassment had no impact on the frequency of reporting.

## **5.6 Violence and misogyny in sexist humour**

Non-reporting might also be linked to the fact that students did not perceive sexist humour as qualifying as violence. This section of the discussion will attempt to highlight the violence and misogynistic element of sexist humour. The ability of sexist humour to degenerate into violence has been articulated in the ongoing discussion. It was noted that there was a stronger link between continued exposure to violent humour and it increased the chances for people to engage in violence. This was noted through confessions by respondents where they agreed

that they adopted sexist behaviour in order to appear as heroes or to identify with a particular group. Jerry, a male respondent, confirmed this hypothesis when he said:

*Inini ndinenge ndisingadewo kuzviita, asi vamwe vangu vandinenge ndinavo vanenge vachiita hunhu iwowo. Saka kuti ndizoramba ndichitaridza kusazvifarira ndinozonzi ndirigwara ... kazhinji ndinzongoita zvinhu zvandinozofunga ndava ndega kuti asi paye ndaitei? Ndashungurudza munhu kaini. Ndave kutoona kuti zvatove mandiri ndatojaira hunhu iwoyo.*

*Most of the time I am forced to engage in violent acts normalized under humour simply because my friends will be doing the same each and everyday and if I don't follow suit, they will think I am a coward ... so I cannot show my displeasure that I don't like what we are doing. When I am alone now that is when I begin to regret what I have done. But now I have gotten used to it. It no longer bothers me as it did before.*

This response reflects how group dynamics and the need to belong may explain how individuals are pressurized into engaging in violent sexist humour so that they can identify with their group. This can be situated in the context of social identity theory where individuals sacrifice personal identity so as to identify with a group. The group acts as a supporting structure to legitimize the perpetration of violence.

The response also indicates how sexist humour and the associated violence become naturalized in individuals through continued exposure. Thomae and Pina (2015) and Ford (2000) yielded the same result when they established a link between continued exposure to sexist humour and self-reported rape proclivity. The fact that the respondents engaged in sexist humour in the presence of their peers but felt guilty about this when they were alone may be explained through social identity theory. Individuals may have multiple identities and may act differently according to the groups they belong to and act in the same way as members of their chosen group. This enhances their self-esteem which hinges on group identity.

In addition, sexist humour creates an 'us versus them' mentality which then fosters prejudice and violence against the out-group as put forward by social identity theory. This may be because jokes create reality because they negatively influence people's cultures that foster rape. The theory states that in-group members find group cohesion through highlighting the shortcomings of the out-group and how they should be treated. As such, since sexist humour

paints a violent picture of how women should be treated, there is danger of creating and enacting the violence as portrayed. Sexist humour creates a context that justifies prejudice against women. What is a laughing matter for one student may be offensive and traumatic to another. Therefore, it can be argued that sexist humour increases tolerance of discrimination and violence against women.

Tania, a female student discussing the violent nature of sexist humour, said:

*Kuseka kwakadai kuorwadzisa. Kunyangwe hazvo kurwadzisa kwacho kusingazowonekwa panyama zvekuti pamwe ungaratidza vanhu kuti pandakuvra ndeapa. Asi chokwadi chiripo ndechekuti kuseka kwacho pachezvako kunotoratidza pfungwa dzekurwazisa nekukuvadza.*

Sexist humour hurts the victims even if it is not accompanied by overt violence ... what is implied by the jokes is violence in itself.

This comment indicates how expressions of sexist humour are riddled with violent innuendos. This suggests that the effects of sexist humour not only go beyond the immediate context but have far reaching consequences because of what is implied. Sexist humour sets back the progress of female groups in trying to achieve emancipation, gender equality and respect for women in society. This can be contextualized through structural violence theory where individuals are prevented from meeting their basic needs through a structure that is violent. Thus, sexist humour is violence because the sexism implied has negative influence on the lives of victims. A study by Muasya (2013) yielded the same results: it was noted that students began to avoid spaces where sexist humour was common yet some of these spaces are necessary for their education. Lilly, a female student, remarked:

*Ndinotozeza kufamba famba pachikoro... unotonzwa kusviba moyo. Kana zvichiita ndinoto avoider nzvimbo idzodzo asi pamwe pachopachona hapana zvaungaite kutozvishingisa.*

I dread walking around alone on campus ... it's even scary ... whenever possible I avoid walking around. But there are moments when you cannot avoid it so you just have to be strong. But given a choice I won't do it.

This response indicates how the student fears encounters of violence as a result of sexist humour encounters yet the campus is a place where students are supposed to feel safe and be able to access resources free of constraints. The respondents described their uncertainties,

fears, threats, intimidation and risky behaviour expressed through sexist humour which creates a hostile and risky environment thus heightening their feelings of insecurity. Therefore, it can be argued that sexist humour restricts women's space both in terms of condition and in terms of position. As evidenced by structural violence theory, students' encounters with hostile environments due to sexist humour and the associated violence affects quality of access to university facilities and hinders students from participating in university programmes. As such, sexist humour is violating students' right to be free on campus and enjoy the facilities that are supposed to be available to all. Most (97 percent) of the respondents indicated that they or someone they knew were now avoiding certain areas on campus because of sexist humour, 98 percent indicated they/someone they knew had stopped participating in activities such as sports, 83 percent indicated suffering from/ knowing someone who had suffered from anxiety, 86 percent knew/had suffered from reduced concentration and 83 percent had become withdrawn. These very high numbers of respondents who suffer because of the violence encapsulated in sexist humour testifies to the fact that the effects of sexist humour are felt both physically and psychologically. Beauty, a female student, testified:

*Zvinodzikisira mweya wemunhu zvekuti unonzwa sewakasviba ... asi kusviba kwacho hakusi kwepanyama kwete ... kungonzwa rima pauri nekuzvisema kuti pano ndambunyikidzwa ndaitwa zvandisingade ... sekuti hunhu hwako wtosvibiswa hwabviswa pauri.*

It lowers self-esteem and makes you feel dirty ... like you can't shake off the feeling that you have been violated in a way ... you feel cheap ... like you have been stripped of your dignity.

Martha, another female student, highlighted:

*Hazvigoni kuti ushande zvinogutsa iwe une kutya nekumanikidzwa kuri paauri. Naizvozvo basa rangu rechikoro rataridza kudzikira kukuru pane zvandaimboita. Saka unotozoona kuti hazvibatsire kuti munhu auye kuchikoro awane dzidzo senzira yekuzviwanisa basa muhupenyu.*

It is impossible to perform well under conditions of abuse and fear. As a result my academic work has suffered. It therefore becomes pointless to come to university as a form of empowerment.

The health problems suffered by the female students as a result of the violent nature of sexist humour can perhaps be explained through structural violence theory as well as social identity theory. According to the theory of structural violence, inequality manifests as health problems which can be directly linked to the inequalities in access of resources (Farmer, 2014). Sexual objectification theory cites health problems such as fear, anxiety and low self-esteem as being related to the burden of being objectified. As such, these two theories complement each other by explaining how sexist humour has an impact on health.

In addition, the responses indicate lost hope and weariness of the respondents in dealing with issues of sexist humour. They also highlight how sexist humour interferes with how people work and conduct day-to-day business. The respondent has lost hope and faith in the education sector because it appears they are being constantly abused. The responses highlight how sexist humour can become very personal and affect individuals as well as groups to the extent of their losing hope in gaining a good education as a form of emancipation. Similar results were revealed in a study by Shumba and Matina (2002) where it emerged that students exposed to sexual harassment suffered from confusion, anxiety and stress as well as irritability, low self-esteem, vulnerability and alienation. These results are a clear indication that sexist humour impacts on the quality of learning due to its characteristics which are unfavourable and hostile. In addition, the complex nature of sexist humour is also revealed; seemingly innocent banter has far-reaching consequences which go as far as threatening an individual's mental well-being.

In view of the above arguments, sexist humour creates a context where sexist attitudes are adopted to enforce the gender status quo that disadvantages women. It is therefore safe to conclude that sexist humour provides a 'safe climate' for expressing misogynistic beliefs to protect and safeguard patriarchy. Through sexist humour, males widen the perceived boundaries between males and females by exaggerating their common qualities as the in-group and the way women, as the out-group, deviate from them. This is in line with social identity theory where the in-group takes pleasure in distinguishing themselves from the out-group which is considered inferior. Males (in-group) tell sexist jokes as a way of excluding and isolating women and in the process create a broader social structure that asserts their dominance and power.

When asked how sexist humour made them feel, female respondents indicated that it made them feel uncomfortable and threatened. One female respondent from FGD1 said:



*Ndinonzwa kudzikisirwa chaiko ... kubva ndaita kunge nyama iripamusika yekuti vanhu vanonongedzera nechimuti kuti ndinoda iyo ... pamwe ndiwo hupenyu nemararamiro epa college handizive hangu.*

It makes me feel pretty cheap ... like a piece of meat ... but I guess that's the kind of behaviour you expect at college.

Another female respondent added:

*Zvinokanganisa pakushanda nekuti pfungwa dzinenge dzisina kugadzikana. Unongoita kapfungwa kekutya.*

Sexist humour distracts from the working environment and makes it harder to concentrate because you become paranoid.

The common theme to emerge from these responses is that sexist humour communicates fear and violence and communicates messages that reiterate that women are inferior and should submit to male power.

However, sexist humour also had potential to hurt even the perpetrators. Given that male students acknowledged that they felt pressure to conform to various forms of masculinity, including engaging in sexist humour on campus, this made them equally as vulnerable as women. Males from the current research indicated during FGDs that they were compelled to act in certain ways because of their gender. This implies reluctance in adopting certain masculinities which they only adopt because it feels as if this is what was expected of them. Men, therefore, are subject of violence through the self-harm inherent in achieving masculine identity. Male students were afraid of losing their dignity. Not conforming to the hegemonic ideal led to feelings of inadequacy: not being seen as a proper man, a sense of failure, and humiliation. The violence of patriarchal dominance over men is made visible through the symbolic power of hegemonic masculinity which symbolizes a structure that exerts violence on males. An element of force is revealed and it is this reluctance that makes men feel guilty after engaging in sexist humour. Their conscience, their sense of right or wrong is compromised which can have serious consequences, both mentally and physically. Therefore, it can be concluded that sexist humour is violent to both the perpetrator and the targets.

## 5.7 Sexist humour and rape culture

In addition to the forms of violence mentioned above, sexist humour may even result in rape through the promotion of attitudes and expressions that appear to justify sexual violence. A ‘rape culture’ is an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence is normalized and excused by popular culture. By focusing on humour and its connection to rape, the researcher aimed to draw attention to how everyday behaviours and attitudes that seem trivial and harmless tolerate the marginalization of women and continue to protect the conditions that make violence towards women possible. From the preceding discussion, it is clear that sexist humour objectifies women and their bodies. Given that rape is related to how men conceptualize the female body, it can be concluded that sexist humour fuels rape. It appears that sexist humour has the ability to degenerate into rape. This was revealed through a group of female students who said:

*Kana wakatoregerera varume ava vachitamba newe vachitaura zvinyadzi izvi vachiti ndizvo zvinoda vakadzi unotobatwa chibharo. Mumwe akatozonditi vakadzi imi munonyepera kunge musiri kutida imi muchida zvenyu saka hatimbozviteerera pamunenge muchiramba paye ... kutoita zvatawona zvakakodzera. Saka ndipo pandakatoona kuti yowe varume ava vanogona kutokumanikidza kurara navo.*

If you let the men engage in sexist humour with you or appear to be liking it they will rape you because they believe women like sexist humour. One day this guy scolded me saying why women appear to not want sexist humour and the consequent behaviours such as engaging in sexual intercourse yet they like it. He said that is why men ignore women when they say no because men know that women do not mean it. That is when I realised the dangers of engaging in sexist humour because men think women want it and they can rape you if you let it go overboard.

The response clearly illustrates how sexual assault can be trivialized through sexist humour and sexually explicit jokes. Issues of consent are compromised as they are dismissed with the belief that a ‘no’ from a woman is a ‘yes’ in disguise. In addition, the response is indicative of how rape culture is embedded in sexist language, gender structures and gender stereotypes, which legitimize, regularize and justify systematic violence towards women and girls. The legitimization, normalization and rationalization of violence towards women and girls is sustained and engrained by dominant attitudes and behaviours about gender and upheld systematically by institutions such as schools. From the discussions with the students, it was

mentioned that sexist humour objectified the female body. This implies that the perpetrators view their targets in a sexual way and this may have resulted in perpetrators negotiating for sex from their targets. Cahill (2001) in Mungwini and Matereke (2010) concluded that the body is not only an expression of individual or internal forces at work but represents the dominant social discourses that surround a person.

The fact that female students were sexually objectified has consequences for how males viewed women as responsible for 'quenching their sexual thirst'. Some men thus viewed themselves as rightful claimants to women's bodies. This idea of entitlement may result in attitudes that condone and trivialize rape. Evans, a male student, remarked:

*Mu bhaibheri chaimo zvakanyorwa kuti hazvina kunaka kuti murume agare ari ega. Pakazonzizve zvirinani kuroora pane kugara uchitsva nerudo. Saka vakadzi vanorambireiko nyaya dzakagara dzanyorwa pasi kuti ndiro basa ravo?*

In the Bible it is written that it is not right for a man to be on his own. This implies that he has to get a woman. Another chapter from the same Bible says it is better to marry than be aflame with passion.

This kind of imagery that sexualizes females and where women are depicted as objects of male desire is justified by this student because the Bible proposes it as expected behaviour from females. It appears a woman's worth is dependent on her ability to please a man sexually. This implies that a woman should fulfil the male fantasy and it appears that deviation from the norm is not an option. It is such imagery that justifies the researcher in asserting that females are viewed as mere sex objects, a view that supports and legitimizes rape especially in higher education settings.

Bla Tindo had this to say:

*Vaskana vakafanana ne mangoe, iwewe paurikumirira kuti dziibve vamwe vanhu varikutodya ne salt vamwe vachitogadzira Atchar iye yema India inoshandiswa mango mbishi.*

Girls are like mangoes, while you are waiting for them to ripen someone is eating them raw with salt or busy making Atchar bottles like the Indians who use raw mangoes.

Bla Tindo likens girls to mangoes, an African delicacy. The fact that he mentions that some people eat them before they even ripen indicates a sense of competition to engage sexually with the girls who are likened to a delicacy. This represents the level to which women are sexually objectified; these attitudes can easily translate into rape. Women are likened to mangoes which can be consumed even if they are raw may be indicative of the justification of rape: men do not have to wait for their girlfriends to be ready for sex but can indulge themselves forcefully. Bemiller and Shneider (2010, 473) asserted that if a woman is a 'thing' she is considered to be a nobody with no feelings, also known as the 'other'. Her identity is stripped from her and she is left at the mercy of men. This implies that a man can play her like a puppet to his own satisfaction. This implies violence and justifies rape.

It appears male students feel the females are to blame for the abuse when in reality, abuse is a conscious choice made by the abuser. It was not clear how perpetrators responded if the target refused to be intimate with them. Continued pestering may result in rape all in the name of humour because through humour, issues of consent appear to be blurred. Rape culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of female bodies and the normalization and glamorization of sexist ideas. This consequently creates a society that disregards women's rights and safety as some women may not report the rape for fear of being labelled 'cold'.

It was noted how phallic power was celebrated at the University with the woman expected to serve the man's phallic desires. Phallic power referred to power awarded to the penis, power to discipline and shape behaviour for women students. The researcher was often asked:

*Mune murume here nhai mainini? Nekuti kana makaroorwa nyaya idzi munobva manyatsonzwisisa kwazviri kubva nekwazviri kuenda.*

Are you married? If you get married you will be in a better position to understand these issues.

The reference to asking the researcher if she was married may indicate how the institution of marriage was seen as necessary for making women passive and holding them back from challenging patriarchy. The statement above implies men's power to discipline women. It appears that the type of 'discipline' for a woman is determined by the male with the purpose of silencing the female and stopping her from questioning patriarchy. As such, even if the males resort to violence as a way of 'discipline', it appears they are already justified by society which has legitimized the role of the males as responsible for whipping women into

line. This explains how aggressive behaviour and possibly rape can be explained as a normal manifestation of a man acting in line with his identity as defined by patriarchy. To better appreciate the magnitude of how the phallus wields power in Zimbabwe society, especially the Shona culture, the names given to women who are considered deviant, define the women as morally loose. This echoes Mungwini and Matereke's (2010) findings where it was revealed that Shona men desire to subdue women in all aspects of everyday life by taking the role of the disciplinarian using the phallus usually resulting in rape. Therefore, it can be concluded that women who are active in the public sphere such as higher education settings are considered to be those who are sexually frustrated and the public sphere is an outlet for them. As such, the phallus is used as a whip to instil discipline.

Sexist humour and glorification of phallic power leading to rape is evident in a song detailing how ugly women should be suffocated with a pillow while raping them since the face would be offputting and males were only interested in the lower body where the female sexual organ is located. The song lyrics were:

*Bhebhi rinemuto iri asi rinotyisa kutarisa ... amaihwe ndochema ... usacheme  
mwana ... tora pillow uvhare meso ... haiwa haungatambudzike mwanangu ...*

This woman is ugly mummy ... but I want her ... what shall I do ... please don't cry  
my child, just take a pillow and hide her face, then you have your way with her...

The lyrics of the song portray how a son wants to take a woman to bed but the dilemma is that the woman is ugly and he sees no way around this. The answer is provided by his mother who advises him to cover the ugly woman's face with a pillow and have his way with her. This seems to reflect how women seem to be in collusion with men in perpetrating violence against their own gender. The mother is giving a green light to the son to rape the woman and this trivializes and normalizes rape which comes to be seen as alternative if one cannot have one's way with women. The fact that the son just wants sex and nothing more from the woman is reflected by in sexual objectification theory where women are valued for their sexual function and nothing more. This imagery of suffocating someone, at the same time as raping them, reflects the violence encompassed in sexist joking. Joking in this vein appeared to be popular on campus but this violent imagery encompassed in a sexist joke was excused simply because it was said in a joking manner thereby normalizing violence. The idea of the woman fighting off the man appears to signify male superiority and is consistent with the idea of female submission. Thus, a closer look at normalization and acceptance of sexist

humour revealed the potential for sexist humour to quickly progress into sexual assault and consequently rape. Therefore, one can conclude that sexist humour is embedded in the language of violence, cruelty and subjugation.

Respondents indicated that they did not know of rape cases at the campus. One female respondent said:

*Handingade kuti ndinyepe zvangu kuti pane wandakambonzwa kuti abatwa chibharo ... mmm ... hameno vamwewo pamwe vangazive.*

I have never heard of anyone who was raped on campus ... mmm ... honestly I would not want to lie to you. Maybe some students would know but that would be the first time I would be hearing that.

The response conveys good news in that it appears no-one has been raped on campus. It is important to note that this might indicate that rape cases are not being reported to the relevant authorities for a number of reasons. It might be indicative of the presence of victim-blaming attitudes that marginalize the survivors and make it harder to come forward and report cases of rape. Victim-blaming reinforces what perpetrators have been saying all along – that women want it but are afraid to say yes.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

The chapter highlighted factors that contributed to the normalization of sexist humour. Silence and non-reporting were highlighted as contributory factors to the normalization of sexist humour. Ignorance on the existence of policies that deal with sexual violence was also noted. Patriarchy manifesting in campus culture was shown to be contributing to the acceptance of violence. However, it was shown that students had faith in the University's ability to deal with issues of sexual harassment, as evidenced by students who had been suspended for sexually harassing a female student through social media. Issues such as fear of retaliation and fear of being labelled as over-sensitive and bitter, led to female students not reporting incidences thereby leading to the normalization of violence. The ability for sexist humour to degenerate into violence has also been alluded to. Rape appears to be sanctioned and normalized by sexist humour through expressions that objectify females and view them as objects for male pleasure.

## **CHAPTER 6: FEMALE AGENCY, COMPLICITY AND SEXIST HUMOUR**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the strategies that female students have adopted in coping with sexist humour and its consequent violence and how these strategies appear to reflect female complicity and collusion to the perpetuation of sexist humour. Complicity and collusion by female students were also revealed as determinants for the normalization of sexism. Complicity arises out of the failure to question sexist humour because it is considered normal and commonplace. Sexist humour evokes emotion and emotions are associated with various actions ranging from expressions of anger, confrontation, silence and avoidance. The chapter also discusses how respondents have learnt to navigate the reality on the ground to overcome sexist humour and the implied structural barriers associated with it through either speaking out against sexist humour or adapting to the campus environment. The chapter discusses implied consequences for each of the choices taken by the female students. Results from the focus group discussions revealed several coping strategies and discussion on how females used a combination of coping strategies dependent on contextual factors will be alluded to. Previous research (see Watts, 2007; Diaconu-Muresan and Stewart, 2009) have testified as to how coping strategies can serve a protective function against the negative effects of sexism. The results indicate how sexist humour stresses individuals and can lead to a variety of negative psychological and physical health consequences thereby testifying to the need for coping strategies.

According to Hill and Silva (2005), female students are more likely to be upset by sexist humour and its implied harassment – they reported feeling embarrassed, angry, less confident or disappointed in their college experience. Women may respond to being sexually objectified in different ways and reactions include confronting the perpetrator, ignoring the action, blaming oneself or considering the action as flattering. Sexist humour appears to be harmless, but those everyday expressions of misogyny appear to be seriously impacting on women's mental health as well as equal access to resources. It can be argued that reaction is subject to interpretation of the seriousness of the behaviour. Violence causes trauma, and people who are bullied and harassed are more likely to be depressed throughout their lives. In addition, female students are more likely to change their behaviours in some way as a result of their experiences.

## 6.2 Laughter at sexist humour encounters

When females were asked in the questionnaires how they had reacted when faced with sexist humour, 98 percent indicated that they had responded by telling a joke in the same taste. This implies tolerance and agreement with the stereotypes that are communicated by sexist humour. Therefore, it can be argued that female students are complicit in issues of sexist humour because they appear to be in support of expressions of sexist humour through adopting the behaviours associated with it. Telling a joke in the same taste may represent how women have internalized the objectifying behaviors of sexist humour such that they see nothing wrong with it. According to sexual objectification theory, targets of sexual objectification internalize and come to accept this behaviour as commonplace and view themselves in the same manner as the stereotypes implied by sexist humour.

However, it can be argued that telling a joke in the same taste represented female agency as female students showed their strength by challenging prevalent gender norms. Telling a joke in the same taste may represent how female students are taking a stand against harassment by showing that sexist humour does not define them. In other words, they are letting the joke roll over them. This represents strength and might intimidate the harasser through showing that women represent more than what sexist humour implies. This reflects Subrahmanian (2005)'s assertion where the idea of women as passive recipients of violence is rejected. Women have the capacity to fight harassment and determine the course for change.

Throughout the research and mostly through observation, the researcher noticed that sexist humour was often a subject of boisterous laughter, especially when a rape joke is part of the sexist joke. From FGD1 (female only), when asked what made females laugh at sexist humour encounters given that majority of women had highlighted that sexist humour was violent, Sylvia said:

*Zvinongoitikawo zvega kuti kana munhu akataura zvekudzikisira vanhukadzi sewe kuti ungoita kunge usina basa nazvo hako ... kunyanya zvichinge zvaitika uriwega. Kazhinji unda uine shamwari yechikadzi yakaita sewe wekuti unotobvunzawo kuti ndanzwa zvakanaka here kuti tashorwa apa. Iye otowirirana newe kuti hongu ndizvozvo shamwari tashorwa chaizvo. Saka kana zvadaro unotongonyepera kuseka nyaya yacho isati yadzika midzi ... hakusi kuseka kwekufara asi kungotiwo zvikipfuure.*



There is an impulse after someone has expressed prejudice to people of your gender to tone down the insult and make it look like you are okay with it ... especially when you are alone, you won't have someone to confirm with that indeed you have been violated. It's like you need someone of the same sex as you to legitimize and confirm that you are indeed justified to feel slighted. So before it gets deeper and dangerous you have to minimize it through laughter, play along with the joke so it does not escalate ... it's more like a hollow laugh really.

Sylvia's reactions to being slighted through sexist humour appear to reflect collusion as well as complicity to the normalization of sexist humour. She laughed at communication that conveyed misogyny and dismissed women as insignificant. Laughter encourages the perpetrator to continue with the violence. By laughing with the harasser, it can be argued that Sylvia is identifying with the harasser's perception of female worthlessness. This is illustrated by social identity theory where group members may compromise personal identity so as to achieve group distinctiveness and social cohesion.

In addition, female complicity and collusion was evident in interaction between female students and male students on campus. The researcher observed a group of friends who were relaxing on campus grounds and joking among themselves. Amelia (female) remarked:

*Ndirikuda hangu kungobatwa chibharo zuva ranhasi nekuti ndakaneta zvisingaite.*

I just want to go and get raped because I am so tired today.

And one of the male group members would reply:

*Fanike iwewe unotoda kurohwa nayo iwe ... wakanyanyisa kungwarisa.*

Yes ... especially you need to be hit with it. You are too forward.

This type of joking was accompanied by 'physical play' (emulating the rape scene) from one of the male group member simulating sexually threatening situations to exaggerate the effect of appearing to be raping Amelia. This was indicative of how joking between friends included threats to rape each other as a way of disciplining one another which reflects how patriarchy expects males to use sex as punishment or as a disciplinary measure. The use of the words "hit with it" in reference to how the guy would use his penis to have sex with Amelia indicate the violent nature of the act (as implied by the use of the word 'hit'). This represents how men view themselves as 'disciplinarians' for women who appear to be

forward because they go against patriarchy's ideals of a "real woman" who are expected to be docile. This is in line with sexual objectification theory which views women as sex objects that exists to serve men's sexual needs. Foucault also alludes to how males exercise their disciplinary power on female bodies through constant surveillance and control of the female body as a way to foster docility (King, 2004). As a result, the perpetual surveillance of the female body becomes internalized and becomes accepted as everyday life. This paints a picture of a condemned woman who needs to be controlled by men. Thus, it can be argued that an analysis of power relations is crucial to feminist contributions in understanding the nature and causes of women's subordination. By focusing on the traditional model of power as repression, feminist theory agrees that the oppression of women can be explained by patriarchal social structures which secure the power of men over women.

In addition, such play reinforces, legitimizes and normalizes discourses of sexism and rape by portraying rape as funny. Amelia, as a female, by expressing desire to be raped, appears to be complicit and in collusion with sexist humour that legitimizes rape as a form of female subjugation. Amelia's statement is also indicative of how patriarchy regulates sexual issues. Patriarchy purports that it is the men who are supposed to initiate sexual relationships and the ideal kind of woman does not initiate sex. According to Shona society, respectable women do not initiate sex. Therefore, Amelia seemingly wished for some men to come and rape her. A probable though insubstantial explanation might be because rape denies women the agency so they can easily pass off the blame that they did not initiate the sex. This is wide off the mark because nothing can justify rape which is a violent invasion of personal space. The fact that Shona culture forbids women to freely express their desires may be representative of how structures are violent to people as according to structural violence theory. The structure of patriarchy mutes female expressions of desire thereby suppressing the fair expressions of sexuality which is a human right. However, it can be argued that sexist humour operates at an unconscious level for the perpetrator of these incidences because rape is a serious issue that cannot be made fun of. Perpetrators appear to be blind to the violence in humour so victims negate their own experiences based on the traditional definitions of 'rape' where rape is portrayed as forceful penetration with the woman kicking and screaming. Therefore, it can be concluded that female students have normalized rape (violence) through their acts of complicity and collusion that legitimize rape.

Collusion and complicity to sexist humour by female students was also revealed on the sports grounds where a choir (both sexes) sang songs denigrating the female body by portraying

female body parts in a sexually objective manner. The ease in which songs that denote violence can be sung in public gatherings represents the depth to which sexism is embedded in culture at the GZU. Structural violence theory expresses how violence rooted in structures appears to be invisible, therefore it is taken as normal behaviour. What puzzled the researcher was that there were female choir members, despite the fact that females were objects of ridicule in the songs they sang. Female choir members participated and danced heartily to the song despite the content of the songs. On being questioned by the researcher if they were in agreement with what the songs said about the female body, Jane said:

*Haa kungoriwo kufara hedu. Havana kana chakaipa chavakanangana nacho havo.  
Saka kuti mutambo unakidze totodzana nekuimba tese.*

*Haa we are just having fun ... nothing more. These guys do not mean what they sing about. It's just that to make the match more interesting we have to sing and dance and appear to be having fun. Otherwise its just pure joking.*

It seemed that female students felt they needed to participate in the singing despite the lyrics. Female complicity and collusion to sexism and misogyny largely stems from denial or lack of understanding on the subject. The female students interviewed displayed desensitization to sexist humour in the song. They insisted it was a normal part of conversation and social behaviours rather than a violent violation of boundaries and rights. Denial of sexist humour may be indicative of how female students had internalized the sexually objectifying behaviours displayed by their perpetrators to the extent that they adopted self-objectifying behaviours to validate how their harassers viewed them. Regardless of narrating direct experiences of discrimination or sexism, most of the students interviewed indicated that they did not perceive the University as a place where gender inequalities exist and many emphasized that female students were treated equally at the University. Denial, collusion and complicity leads to normalization. Furthermore, devising and implementing effective policy and procedures to address the issues becomes a difficult if not impossible task without female cooperation. Female students participating in the choir may be as a result of self-objectifying emotions resulting from self-objectifying behaviour where individuals identify with the stereotypes communicated by the harasser.

In addition, according to sexual objectification theory, following an instance of sexual objectification, females may feel ashamed when they consider that perhaps their actions may have justified the males viewing them in that context. They may feel shame when they think

this action reflects a specific self-defect such as inferiority and a sense of rejection when they believe they are likely to be judged negatively by others. As such, females may want to appear as if they were in agreement with the behaviours that took place thereby leading them to be classified as being in collusion with sexist humour perpetrators. This is evident in the way females defended the choir by claiming that the males meant no harm and it was just a way of having fun. In addition, it appears to be a humiliating experience to acknowledge sexist humour publicly. Women who collude appear to be in a dilemma and often seem to feel as if they should have defended themselves. Linda (female respondent) acknowledged that it is not easy to admit that “you have been rendered helpless by another person”. As such, women may appear to be complicit and in collusion with issues of sexist humour. In addition to not questioning sexist humour, a tendency to deny sexist humour as harassment by female students was noted. Dudu, a female student said:

*Ahhh ... kunenge kuri kutamba kani ... ungabva wada kuti handinzwaro ... zvimwe regai zviende. Ukada kuwongorora zvese zvese unofa ne stress.*

It's just joking ... they do not mean it ... you cannot be too rigid. Some things you just let them go. If you scrutinize everything you will be stressed.

The response indicates denial of sexism for the sake of peace. In addition, female students played a caretaking role at the University by becoming protective of the feelings and emotional well-being of their male colleagues in order to maintain harmonious relationships. Jackie, a female respondent, remarked:

*Ahh zvinhu zvakaoma kunze uko ... ko akadzvingwa chikoro anozodii ... vamwe vanozoti ndakadzvingisa mumwe chikoro.*

Things are tough if you are not educated ... what if he gets expelled from school after I report him ... people will blame me so it's better I remain quiet.

The response indicates deep consideration and pity for the welfare of the harasser to such an extent that victims resort to not reporting at all. Victims therefore denied the existence of harassment. This was problematic in that acknowledging and recognizing sexism for what it is matters because it is critical for the formation of a strong policy structure that addresses harassment. If women deny the existence of harassment, it becomes difficult to even speak about the issue. It will seem as if the policy makers are trying to create a problem that does not exist. Male students reported that they were also affected and felt pressure to fit in to

various forms of masculinity which in this context included not giving the impression of being sensitive or insecure. Males reported feeling obligated to act in certain ways because of their gender. Denial might also be a reflection of the post-feminist stance that women had already achieved equality so there was nothing to complain about. As a result, women suffer in silence as they are afraid of being labelled as bitter feminists. This in turn manifests as institutional normalization of sexism and misogyny. In addition, it appears as if women were avoiding being labelled as victims. As Vee remarked:

*Ah wakada kungotsamwa tsamwa unotozowonekwa se victim panyaya idzi. Kana zvatodaro hausisina samba nehupenyu hwako unenge wave kungonzwirwa tsitsi. Naizvozvo kutoratidza kuti aiwa ndiri kuziva zvirikuitika uye ndine simba pamusoro pazvo ndiyo nzira chaiyo.*

Ah you should not appear to be a victim of sexist humour. If you portray yourself as a victim, people will pity you which is not a good feeling. Better to show them that you are in control of the situation.

Vee's response indicates her reluctance to be associated with the identity of a victim which has connotations of powerlessness and shows how she prefers to express how she is in control of what happens to her. Vee's show of power can be located within social identity theory where individuals identify with a group that is considered more powerful. Given that the research findings have indicated that female students are mostly the targets of sexist humour, it can be concluded that female students played along with harassment because they did not want to be alienated from the high status group (men). Men are presented as having high status and women as lower status due to perceived gender differences. The questionnaire asked respondents who had been targets of sexist humour how they had reacted in response to being targeted by sexist humour. Of the female respondents, 98 percent indicated that they had responded by telling a joke in the same taste. On further probing in FGDs, it was revealed that females adopted the same behaviours as men such as telling jokes in the same taste as men so as to fit in. This made women appear to be complicit and in collusion with issues of sexist humour.

Women's identification with their harassers reveals how women internalized the objectifying behaviour that was part of their everyday lives. This is in line with sexual objectification theory's concept of self-objectification where females adopt and internalize the stereotypes of their harassers such that they view themselves in the same light as the harasser. Again the

way that females appear to give up their identities to associate with male identity is represented by the social identity theory which proposes that individuals give up their identities to identify themselves with a group that is believed to be stronger than their personal identity. This is ironic in a sense that women ignore sexist humour/harassment to gain favour and to protect male feelings while men are adopting sexist humour to keep women out of what is considered male space. Although downplaying sexism can have short-term benefits, it can have serious consequences as some perpetrators take advantage of the normalization and might take the implied acceptance as a green light to rape and violence. As structural violence theory denotes, violence embedded in structures has potential to manifest as rape against those who are powerless. Women identifying with men represent how violence becomes normalized and accepted as commonplace. In this case, social identity theory, structural violence theory and sexual objectification theory all reveal how the violence embedded in structures becomes normalized and accepted in higher education settings thereby perpetuating violence.

In the same vein as the above argument, objectification theory offers an explanation as to why women appear to be complicit in issues that violate them. The theory posits that in a society in which women are frequently objectified and seen as bodies for sexual pleasure rather than people with their independent achievements, women begin to self-objectify or see themselves as objects for others' viewing. In other words, they internalize an outsider's perspective of their bodies. This is a valid explanation as to why female students downplayed the existence of sexist humour. These findings echo findings by Nikodym (2013) where it was established that women self-objectify themselves after being exposed to objectifying behaviour. This self-objectifying behaviour contributed to the normalization of sexism in higher education settings where female students view themselves according to how male students view them. In this particular case, female students are seen as impostors in the education sector and they are targeted with sexist humour which mocks their achievements. It appears as if female students, by internalizing the sexually objectifying behaviour to which they are continually exposed, are trying to compensate for their participation in higher education by appearing to be apologetic. Brownmiller (1975) cited in Thomae and Viki (2013) remarked that "women are inhabitants of a male-dominated culture, which is supportive of rape myths and restrictive beliefs about women's roles, which may encourage women to accept their role as 'gatekeepers' of sexual interaction, rendering them responsible

for their own victimization”. This illustrates how women internalize abuse and come to think of it as deserving thereby perpetuating sexist humour.

It appeared masculine culture also influenced reporting issues. This can be situated within structural violence theory where the violence existing in the structures is seen as normal. Patriarchy as a structure enforced female silence in issues of sexist humour and the associated violence. In masculine cultures women may find it difficult to report because men would not ‘understand’ the seemingly offensive nature of sexist humour which they see as a natural way of enacting their gendered roles according to patriarchal structures. In the same vein, men would not report sexist humour targeted at them for fear of being laughed at by other men. This was due to the nature of sexist humour which glorified heterosexuality. Men who exhibited qualities attributed to women (such as compassion and kindness) were targeted with sexist humour and were made fun of. The prevalence of cultural taboos influenced non-reporting as sexist humour is considered less traumatizing considering issues such as hunger, illness and death that surround African societies.

Interviews and FGDs revealed several reasons why it was difficult to speak of or report sexist humour (sexual harassment). The majority of the population of women interviewed said they did not report harassment either towards themselves or towards others because they feared retaliation both from the perpetrator and from their peers. They feared that people would label them as over-sensitive bitter feminists or as having taken things too far. The researcher experienced this labelling first-hand when she was constantly questioned on whether she was married. The assumption was that she was not married otherwise she would not have chosen this topic for research because it reflected bitterness often exhibited by unmarried people. This implies how the institution of marriage located within the structure of patriarchy appears to subdue women by muting their voices. This represents how structures are violent to women and prevents them from meeting their basic needs through rendering women voiceless. Of the 148 respondents, 48 percent indicated that it was very likely that students would label those who would have reported as trouble makers and being overly sensitive. Therefore, students remained silent in the face of harassment. Sexual objectification theory is also useful in explaining female silence as it reflects an idea that Bernard, a male student, proposed: “women are supposed to be seen not to be heard”. This represents how women are valued for sex and not their contributions to society.

Female silence also reflected complicity and collusion with sexist humour. Silence is a powerful form of communication that also contributed to the institutional normalization of

sexism. Silence can signal many things, such as fear, lack of energy to confront or it can signal acceptance. In this situation, silence has allowed sexism to continue. Sexist humour usually becomes normalized through communication and action. One respondent remarked:

*Aiwa zvinonetesa kani kugara uchingoti nhaiwe zvakawataura handizvide regeera hunhu iwoyo. Apa zvinenge zvichiitwa nevanhu vasina kukwana. Dzimwe nguva kutozongoona kuti regai ndisiyane nazvo...*

It is exhausting to refute every idiotic claim aimed at my gender, sometimes you have to let some things pass.

The responses indicate agency and choice of action in how those who are disturbed by sexist humour choose to respond by carefully considering the manner of response warranted by each situation. Such decisions often lead to non-reporting as reporting is viewed as not making any difference. If there is a difference, it is considered to be too extreme such as being expelled. In view of this, it can be argued that there is both explicit and implicit tolerance and resignation to male dominance at the University. This is in line with Banyard et al. (2009) and Calogero (2012) who established that victims of harassment made decisions not to report due to various reasons.

### **6.3 Picking and choosing one's battles**

Female respondents highlighted that they had perfected the art of picking and choosing battles. This process involves making decisions on whether to respond or not based on the context of the situation. A good example comes from Tino, a female student who relayed a situation where she chose her battle:

*Ndakangoona kuti haiwa izvi zvinondipedzera nguva nekundisveta simba. Ndine zvekuita zvinenge zvirinani pane kunetsera zvinhu zvinova zvisingazochinje uyezve ndakada kuti ndibvunze munhu kuti wanditadzira nyaya yacho inotozovika kure. Ndakaona zviri nyore kuti ndimbonyarar ndimbofunga nezvazvondo zomuudza paakanditadzira anenge avewo ega...*

I just decided that this was not worth my strength. I had better things to attend to because I can see if I try to address it I will get all riled up and appear crazy. Also why should I spend my time addressing issues that will not change ... so I don't know. I will confront him when I am calm and when he is alone.



Although it appeared that Tino was in control of the situation by deciding how and when to respond, this might reflect as complicity. Silence in the face of harassment may be taken as a sign of weakness and harassers will continue with their behaviour. Tino, by her decision not to respond to the harassment, separated her identity from that which was being proposed by the harasser and her self-esteem was not compromised. The process of choosing one's identity by comparing oneself to other groups is well explained by social identity theory. This implies that she had power over the situation by deciding to address the situation in her own time and by her own terms. However, she revealed her fear of confronting the perpetrator in the presence of his peers because the existing power differentials might work against her. Therefore, Tino's silence can be said to be a self-protective strategy to decrease her feelings of anger. Most (92 percent) respondents indicated they had simply walked away from sexist humour attacks while 80 percent pretended it did not matter. This may be a reflection of individuals choosing and picking their battles and deciding to fight another day. Female respondents remarked that they could not afford to spend their precious time refuting every allegation against their gender. Picking and choosing one's battles reflects how women are playing it safe in that they deliberately choose not to respond to aggression that can be toxic thereby appearing to be complicit in issues of sexual harassment. Jackie, another female respondent remarked:

*Handina kuziva kuti ndopindura here kana kwete ... ukapindura nehasha nyaya yako inozongonzi haiwa inaya yetuhasha tusina basa kana kunditi handizive kuseka nevamwe. Kunyarara hangu ndichiziva kuti ndarwadziswa ...*

I didn't know whether I should respond or not... if I responded angrily, meaning would be lost in the anger and people would laugh at me or say I was too sensitive and lacked a sense of humour ... at the same time I knew the joke had offended me...

The response highlights the struggles faced in trying to decide whether to respond or not. The struggle reveals some of the underhand effects of sexist humour as shown by the respondent's reaction where she was rendered silent because she was concerned that speaking out might attract additional attack. This represents how some of the coping strategies are not so effective as they could leave the victim wondering if she should have responded in a different way. By deciding to let go of the situation females appear to be complicit and in collusion with sexist humour perpetrators.

#### 6.4 Reliance on support networks

Female respondents indicated making use of support networks, for example, telling a friend and thereby receiving social support. It was noted that female students formed support groups on campus to try and lessen the stress of violence.

*Ndinozvitenderedza nevanhu vakaitawo seni ... dzimwe dzenguva zvinongodiwa  
kubva panzvimbo nepane vanhu vanokushungurudza ...*

I surround myself with people like me ... escaping from people who harass you is necessary sometimes.

Female respondents discussed the importance of having friends with whom they share something in common and can rely on for social support. A female student known as Auntie Glo on campus was famous for her role in these support groups as someone who gave sound and practical advice. Auntie Glo was a senior student who had a place at university through mature entry. In her own words, she said other female students respected her as an older student who had children the age of her classmates. She decided to form a female-only support group after realising that female students from her class saw her as a mother figure and kept asking her for advice on several issues including general life skills. Thus, it can be concluded that women supported each other through grievances with regard to experiences of sexist humour. This can be located in evidence within the social network theory. The theory focuses on the role of social relationships in supporting group members as they interact within their group. These groups presented a way for females to vent their frustrations and negative emotions elicited by sexist humour. These social support networks awarded females the opportunities to receive validation for their experiences and afforded them space where they could be themselves, experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, away from the male gaze that appeared to be judging them all the time. In addition, the concept of a support group to help members in dealing with issues of sexist humour is explained by the social identity theory's concept of social categorization where individuals categorize themselves into groups with similar interests. In this case, females categorized themselves into groups with similar sexist humour grievances. However, it was noted that these groups did not challenge sexist humour outright but only supported their members by talking through grievances and advising how to deal with them. It appears these groups only existed to comfort those females distressed by sexist humour by offering support and members felt comforted knowing that they were not alone in feeling harassed by sexist humour. Therefore, it can be argued that

these groups served a purpose of communicating a message that there was strength and comfort in knowing that there were others who were victims of sexist humour and the associated violence. This can be labelled as unintentional female collusion and complicity in issues of sexist humour.

Respondents generally avoided spaces or situations where they felt sexist humour was rife. Spaces avoided included the sports ground as well as the campus cafeteria. This coping strategy involved trying to minimize exposure to situations of sexist humour. Most (92 percent) of the 148 respondents indicated that they avoided certain areas where sexist humour was rife. Nicole, a female student, remarked:

*Handitozvinetsa hangu nekutopindura nekuti ndiwo mugariro wazvo mazuva ose. Ukada kuti uzvibvunze vanhu vanotokuti saka nyaya yako iripai chaizvo havatowone pawatadzirwa. Zvakadaro ndakangoregedza kuenda kumitambo yepano pachikoro. Handidi kupa vakomana ava mukana wekuti vandidenhe vachitaura nezvemuviri wangu. Ndicho chikonzero chikuru chavanoendera ikoko. Zvinotonyadzisa kuti urambe uchiwonekwa panzvimbo dzinozivikanwa kuti kuoshorwa vakadzi. Unotozonzi ndiwe wazvitsvaga waenderei ikoko.*

I have not even bothered to react to the sexist remarks made to me. It is the norm. If you react, everyone says ‘so what’s the big deal, you are just over-reacting!’ So I just don’t go to the sports arena anymore ... or participate in sport. I don’t want to give those boys a chance to joke and sing about my body ... how my hips looks like when you run ... that’s the main reason they go there. It’s so embarrassing. People will blame you for going there and say that you wanted it.

In this case, avoidance was the coping strategy. The respondent indicated discomfort through withdrawal and silence which might be mistakenly taken as collusion and complicity on the female part. Avoidance as a coping strategy affected students’ access to campus space and crucial resources. Avoidance may also be explained in the context of the structural violence theory where the violence in structures prevents females from meeting their basic rights. In this case female students are giving up their right to participate in university events because they fear violence associated with sexist humour. These findings are in line with Muasya’s (2010) findings of how sexual harassment had an impact on how female students accessed campus space.

The fact that Nicole highlighted that females get blamed for being present in situations where they get harassed for sexist humour may be one reason why females do not report these situations, thereby appearing to be complicit and in collusion to the perpetration of sexist humour. Blaming the victim for being in a space where she was harassed results in feelings of shame for the victim. Shame results when females believe that they have brought the harassment upon themselves. According to sexual objectification theory, targets of sexual objectification blame themselves as being responsible for the harassment because of their personal characteristics.

### **6.5 Speaking out**

The labels associated with those who appeared to be resisting sexist humour intimidated into silence those who thought resistance was the way forward. Actively speaking up against sexist humour was not an option. This appeared to imply that females were complicit and in collusion with issues of sexist humour. This may reflect a way respondents could reclaim their power from perpetrators by showing resistance. Ten percent of the respondents indicated that they had confronted the perpetrator while 15 percent had expressed their discomfort. Julie, who had shown resistance in some incidences, remarked:

*Vakauya kwandiri nedzungu tinopedzerana (laughing) ... handidzikisirwe ndakangotuzura maziso. Vanotonditi ndinopenga. (laughs)*

When people come to me the wrong way I quickly straighten them out ... (laughs) it's not fair on me to passively receive blows ... I don't accept being made to feel less ... they have labelled me as crazy.

The respondent indicates an active form of resistance related to insults to her gender. However, this quote highlights how resistance comes at a cost of being labelled crazy and angry for daring to fight hegemony. Speaking out against harassment was a way of claiming back power from the dominant males. Respondents indicated that using their voices was a way of liberating themselves from the institution of silence and they often felt silenced in the dominant culture (patriarchy) operating on campus. Thus, those who choose to fight back were aware that shows of resistance may invite further stereotyping from the perpetrators. However, statistics attested to the fact that only a few choose to speak out against harassment. Tamara, another female student, noted:

*Ahhh kutotaura nezvazvo hakuite. Hauzive zvinozoitika mberi. Vamwe vanhu vanotozokushora nekuti wataurirei. Saka unotoona kutonyarara kuriko kutozvipedza chero zvichikubata pamoyo. Vese vaunofunga kuti varikudivi rako vanowirirana nezvawaita unoshamisika vachikupandukira (laughing). Kutsva dumbu nekumusana ... hausundi nyaya yacho.*

Ahhh, speaking out against sexist humour is impossible. You never know what will happen ... people's reactions and judgements. No it's better to remain silent even though it is hurting you. You will be surprised all these people you think are on your side will turn against you ... (laughs) ... it's a double bind ... you cannot win.

The response indicates how Tamara felt that speaking out was not an option for fear of being blamed and at the risk of being an outcast. Social identity theory explains how individuals sacrifice their individual identities so as to be identified with a group which is considered to be more powerful. In addition, the violent nature of the structure of patriarchy as espoused by structural violence theory is revealed. Baker (2010) as well as Cook and Jones (2007) indicated the same results where targets chose to remain quiet because they were afraid of being accused of promoting the 'victimhood culture'. In victimhood culture, people have a high sensitivity to slight and are always on the lookout for offenses. There is a tendency to emphasize one's degree of victimization, vulnerability to harm and the need for assistance and protection in a victimhood culture. Due to this fear, people take the harassment in their strides. This can be best explained using social identity theory where members seek favour from their in-group by maintaining cohesion. Fear of social costs influenced confrontation. Speaking out against harassment will bring dissonance within a group that maintains that sexist humour is normal and those who speak out against it viewed as being over-sensitive and dramatic. Thus, it can be concluded that those who choose to speak up are in a double bind situation where silence is not an option and speaking out invites further stereotyping.

Respondents also spoke about incidences where they had voiced their concerns but were dismissed by the perpetrator. One female respondent remarked:

*Takaona kuti mukomana uyu matambiro ake nezvaaitaura nesu kwaiva kushora uye aifanira kuti azvizive kuti hatina kufara...saka takataura kuti mukomana iwe zvauri kuseka nazvo hazvisekese. Yanga isiri nyaya yekuti angaseke nayo ... asi taisada kutaura kunge tamutuka kana kutaura zvisina hunhu ... vakatotiseka zvedu Havana kumbozviisa mupfungwa...*

We felt that this boy needed to know that what he was joking about was not a joking matter ... we did not want to sound rude but he had to know ... so we said something and they laughed. They brushed it off...

The response indicates how attempts at speaking out against harassment are not taken seriously. Dismissing complaints indicates perpetrators feel justified in saying whatever they are saying and feel that they are within their rights in doing so. The same sentiments are echoed in the operations of the structural violence theory where violence is seen as normal and part of everyday life. This highlights some of the responses testifying to the futility of trying to speak out against harassment that may contribute to those harassed remaining silent as a coping strategy because they see no reason for speaking out if it only leads to further ridicule. Remaining silent is a self-protecting strategy and may be seen as collusion as silence may be misconstrued as acceptance of the status quo.

### **6.6 The ‘super-woman’ student**

The majority of female students resorted to adding more time to concentrating on their books as a coping mechanism. This coping strategy involves spending more time on academic work as a way to escape from harassment. The strategy signifies strength and resilience by showing the dominant society that they (women) can prosper in the face of adversity. On the other hand, the strategy can also represent collusion on the part of the female students because they seem to be endorsing the competition forced on them by the male students. It seems as if female students are trying to prove their worth by working hard to become like the male students. Female remarked that they would not waste their time and energy on something that was not clearly their purpose for being on campus. As a result, they become workaholics in order to prove that they deserved their place at the University. This represents how women feel the need to manage their performance for them to be taken seriously or to be viewed as intelligent and to be received as equal partners by male students. A group of female friends described how they had resorted to excelling in their studies and showing men that there were indeed ‘better’ than them. Sis Grace, a female student, remarked:

*Tinorova chikoro sisi ... zvinotovarwadza vakomana ava asi ndiyo yega nzira yekuvarwisa yakangwara. Hatirwe nemaoko... asi nepfungwa (laughing).*

We have resorted to beating the boys in class ... we make sure we are the best ... this is what we call intelligent fighting. We don't engage in physical fights. The boys always get angry when we excel over them... (laughs).

Sis Grae's colleague, Tambu said:

*Dzimwe dzenguva ndinoita pungwe ndichiverenga hangu ... ndinozorara kana 2 hours rimwe zuva rototanga. Zvinotofamba zvakadaro.*

At times I pull all-nighters and sleep maybe for two hours and another day begins. Life goes on like that.

The statement highlights how women push themselves beyond reasonable limits to excel over men. This indicates how female students have chosen to adopt the 'super-woman' route at the expense of their health and well-being. Social identity theory alludes to how women who are sexually objectified suffer from health consequences such as anxiety, fear and exhaustion. By 'pulling all-nighters' to excel in academia, female students are putting their health at risk. Asked why she has to study through the night, compromising her health, Tambu replied that she was married and she had to take care of her two children as well as attend to her husband's conjugal rights and make sure children's uniforms and lunch boxes were ready for the next day. The only time available for study was throughout the night before another day begins. This represents how women often shoulder the burden of the household and family chores and yet are still expected to perform as well as men in academics. It also represents the unequal sharing of gender roles where women were expected to take care of the husband as well as the kids. Therefore, it can be argued that the patriarchal nature of gendered roles is a burden to females. As such, females in higher education deliberately chose to work hard and excel over the males. This indicates agency and rebellion to set rules by the females.

However, some women reported feeling pressure to balance their 'super-woman' role and other responsibilities aside from academia. Chiedza, a female student remarked:

*Pane nguva yekuti nyaya idzi dzinosvika pakubhowa ekuti zvinoramba zvichingodzokorora zuva nezuva. Unenge usisade kunzwa nezvazvo kutobva pazviri chaipo...*

Over time the harassment becomes tedious, repetitive and boring. Even fighting back or the silence can lead to mental fatigue, emotional and physical strain ... You just want to escape from it all.

The response indicates how sexist humour communicates a message that the targets are insignificant and irrelevant such that they feel the need to prove the perpetrators wrong. It appears also that the aggression is repeated over and over again because the perpetrators spend most of their time with the targets. This continued exposure of targets to perpetrators is a cause for concern because it adds to the targets' stress being a constant reminder of the harassment and pain they suffer at the hands of the perpetrator. Therefore, it can be concluded that sexist humour controls space, time, drive and freedom of movement at the same time generating emotions of humiliation as well as erosion of self-confidence as well as self-image.

As a result, females adopt passive strategies such as subtly rebuking the perpetrator or rebuking the perpetrator in private to deal with sexist humour and by this act of withdrawing from active resistance, they appear to be complicit in issues of sexist humour and harassment. During FGDs, respondents indicated that becoming desensitized as a way of escaping might be taken as a sign of retreat and bowing down to pressure of male violence. It appears desensitizing limits the severity of the experiences and makes the stress more bearable. In this sense, respondents indicate that they no longer get offended by sexist humour. Coping with sexist humour by avoiding thinking about it may not be effective in dealing with sexist humour and could appear to represent complicity and collusion by female students to issues of sexist humour.

Surrendering and accepting sexist humour as inevitable was another way female students portrayed their complicity and collusion to sexist humour. Carol, a female student in FGD1 remarked:

*Zvese izvo tave kungotarisa isu ... hatichabatikana zvekumhanya.ndave kutongoseka ndotopfuura zvangu...*

*All the taunts roll off me now ... I don't allow it to get to me. I just laugh and move on ... no big deal.*

The respondent felt that responding and thinking about the aggression would take too much time and mental energy and prevent them from living their lives therefore decided to let it go.



This represents how individuals have come to view the structure of patriarchy as unchallengeable and unshakeable, thus the decision to simply allow patriarchy to rule over them. This kind of silence is rooted in apathy and cynicism that even if they speak up, nothing will change. Students who have tried to participate by speaking up in the past with no resultant acknowledgement or change have decided determined that speaking up makes no difference and that their voice has no merit.

Other female respondents resorted to protecting the feelings of their perpetrators for the sake of peace. This represents active collusion and complicity with issues of harassment. One female in FGD2 said:

*Kutongoseka wosiyana nazvo. Nzira iyi munhu anenge ataura zvinonyangadza izvi haazonyarawo pane kuti ubva wamutsiura ipapo. Naizvozvo munogadzirisana mega zvenyu ... nekuti chero ukataura munhu anongokumbira ruregerero nemoyo usingade.*

You just laugh and move on. This way the person telling the joke is able to save face rather than if you tell them that their joke is not really a joke and not funny ... there is need for the joker not to feel uncomfortable or to hurt his ego ... after all you will only get a half-hearted apology or silly defensiveness.

This type of silence hinges on protectionism, which is the desire to maintain close peer relationships. Students may look the other way if they see a colleague doing something wrong, even if it represents risk to the university. This is illustrated by social identity theory where group members protect the interests of the group at whatever cost. Some will try to find a softer way of communicating their displeasure so that they remain in good relations with the perpetrator. This reflects careful calculation on the respondents' part and shows how respondents have internalized violence and harassment and learnt how to navigate their way around it so that relations are preserved.

It was interesting to note how some women were in collusion with sexist humour targeted at members of their own sex, using phrases such as "they deserve it", "it's just a joke, they don't mean it" and "just ignore it". This represents how women can be said to be complicit in issues to do with sexist humour thereby leading to normalization and acceptance of it as an everyday occurrence. Galtung's structural violence theory explains well how normalization and acceptance of sexism and violence occurs and may be used to explain the nature and characteristics of sexist humour in education settings. Galtung noted that structural violence

exists when some groups are assumed to have or actually do have more access to goods, resources and opportunities by others, such as the situation is with sexist humour. In this case, men are the ones who are assumed to hold more power and control over women. Women are denied equal opportunities, objectified and sexualized and their potential is limited by restrictive gender roles and expectations. Janine, a female student said:

*Tinogara tizere kutya. Zvinonetsa kutsanangura kuti pfungwa dzako dzinokanganisika sei nekugara uchitya kubatwa chibharo kana zvimwewo zvinokumanikidza. Kugara uchiudzwa mashoko anoita kuti unzwe kudzikisirwa kunokanganisa pfungwa dzako zvisingagone kuti uzvitsanangure. Kuti uyedze kunzwisisa kuti vanhu vakawanda sei varikurarama nemutoo iwoyo asi vachingonyarara havo nekuti havachawona kuipa kwazvo sezvinhu zvinoitika zuva rega rega. Zinonetsa kunzwisisa nekupisa tsitsi kuti ufunge kuti chii chakanyatsoitika muhupenyu hwavo kuti vasvike pakuona kumanikidzwa uku sechinhu chisina basa chinongowanikwawo muhupenyu.*

We live in constant fear. It is difficult to explain how and what does living with the fear of violence and possible rape do to your mental well-being over time. What diagnosis do you give to the shaking hands you can't stop after fellow student whispers words in your ear that makes you feel cheap and objectified? It's hard to imagine the numbers of those who endure the daily harassment and discriminations and threats of gendered violence without really feeling anything because it's part of everyday life. You can't imagine what they went through to get to this acceptance of violence as commonplace and you wonder if it is really normal not to be anxious and brush off sexist humour.

The response reflects the levels of endurance that females go through in trying to navigate their way in higher education settings. This illustrates how vulnerable female students are as sexist humour constrains their movements on campus and affects their access to education.

After all has been said and done with reference to issues of female complicity and collusion to sexist humour, it appears that women appear to be the weaker group and are therefore vulnerable to issues of sexist humour. However, male responses to this vulnerability also need to be discussed so as to gain a balanced understanding of sexist humour at universities. Male allegations that women are 'just playing the victim card' as well as the female response to these allegations will be discussed.

## **6.7 Female harassment in relation to victimhood culture**

This section discusses arguments on whether sexist humour is justified in being described as violence or if it is simply the attempts of women to appear relevant or if they are taking things too far. The researcher found it necessary to follow up on this question since the existence of sexism was sometimes expressly denied and there was non-reporting by the almost all the students who had been targets of sexist humour. In addition, during individual interviews and FGDs there were accusations and allegations that feminism was turning women into victims by making them feel offended by even the slightest of things. Thus, it was necessary to investigate respondents' perceptions on sexist humour as violence complaints and given the rise of the victimhood culture.

## **6.8 Perceptions on victimhood culture**

'Victimhood mentality' is an acquired personality trait in which a person tends to recognize themselves as a victim of the negative actions of others and to behave as if this were the case in the face of contrary evidence of such circumstances. It was noted that male students differed in perceptions on whether women were justified in portraying themselves as 'victims' of sexism, in this case sexist humour, in higher education settings. Findings revealed that male students were of the opinion that females were taking 'victimhood' too far and according to their view, this was not necessary. Nearly all (97 percent) males indicated on the questionnaire that sexist humour was 'just joking'. They were of the opinion that the negative experiences of women due to sexist humour were minor and did not justify the "noise women were making about such a petty issue". In their own words, it appeared as if being a woman means to constantly view the physical self as endangered. Moses, a male student, had this to say:

*Haiwa vakadzi Havana kukwana. Pese pese vave kungoona kunge varikunangwa nenyaya dzekushungurudzwa kunyangwe zvisiri izvo. Vave kurotomoka manje.*

Women are delusional. They always think they are being targeted for some sinister motive. They are being paranoid now.

Moses' response dismisses female fears as paranoia and therefore not justified to be examined as a serious manner. This implies that females are categorizing themselves as being targeted by misogyny. According to self categorization theory, individuals organize

themselves into groups that share a common theme. In this case, what women have as a common factor is male harassment thereby portraying themselves as victims of male power.

However, female respondents presented close to unanimous agreement that women were indeed justified in portraying themselves as victims although they preferred the term 'targets'. According to some female students, the term 'victim' had connotations of hopelessness without any prospects of rising up. Melissa, a female student, remarked:

*Ndirikuona vakadzi vari pachinzvimbo chakanaka kurwisana nemhirizhonga iyi nekuti kazhinji ndivo vakanangwa nekushungurudzwa kwemhando yakadai. Uyezve munhu ane mvumo yekuzviti ashungurudzwa kana vaine chikonzero chakakwana chekudaro uye kana vachiona kunge hupenyu hwavo uri padambudziko nekuda kwekushungurudzwa uku kana kuti vachiona kuti kodzero dzavo dzamanikidzwa. Tinoona kuti zvese izvi zvinopinda panyaya yatiri kutaura nezvayo... saka hatingashore vakadzi nematanho avangatore kuedza kurwisana nedambudziko iri?*

I feel women are justified in taking action against sexist humour because they are the targets of sexist humour mainly. Individuals may identify as the distressed if they have sufficient cause to believe they were harmed, they are under threat and the harm constituted an injustice that violated their rights. All these traits can be linked to sexist humour ... so can we blame women for fighting back?

Delma, a female respondent in FGD2, had this to say:

*Kuramba kucherechedza kurwadziwa kurikuitwa vakadzi kunotaridza kusaziva. Kuisa michikwata mhando yezvinoda kugadziriswa haisi nyaya yekuda kuzviratidza kunge unoziva kana kuda kuzivikanwa asi inyaya yechokwadi iri kushungurudza madzimai. Matinogara umu vanhu vanokoshesa nyaya idzi zvakasimba. Kushora nyaya idzi pamwe imhaka yekuti munharaunda matinogara umu vanorumbiza vanhu vanotaridza simba vanova varume kudarika ndonda vanova vakadzi...*

Denying the victimization and violence directed at women through sexist humour is simply wrong. Accurately classifying sexist humour as violence is not a matter of politics but of truth ... maybe it's because society values strength and ignores those who appear to be weak...

The statements appear to validate feelings of women who feel violated by sexist humour and appear to justify women in their endeavours to challenge issues of sexist humour that make

them vulnerable to violence. It also alludes to the fact that those who feel violated are often dismissed as being too sensitive by males as well as by other females who sympathise and act in collusion with males in the perpetration of sexist humour. This attests to how sexist humour grievances are slighted. If society is unwilling to accept women's status as the aggrieved, then it makes it difficult for society to reprimand perpetrators of violence because they are not recognized as violators of women's rights. Chichi, a female student, said:

*Kududzira kuti apa paita nyaya yekumanikidzwa kunotaridza kuti vakadzi vasimba zvino. Vawana chivindi chekutura nyaya dzavasisade. Saka kuti muti vakadzi varikuzvinyanya itori nzira yekuvadzvanyirira pachayo yakazvimirira.*

Identifying and naming violence ... highlighting how women are being targeted is not weakness. It takes strength to tell uncomfortable truths. Saying women are overdoing it in denouncing sexist humour is in itself sexism”.

In addition, Ade, a female respondent, when asked if she thought that women were taking the fact that there were being targeted with sexist humour and violence had this to say:

*Kubvira makare kare nyaya dzekushungudzwa dzaingonangana nevakadzi, zvichiteverawo pfungwa iyoyo nyaya dzekuedza kudzivirira kushungurudzwa nekushorwa uku dzakangogara dagadzirwa dzakanangana nevakadzi ... imwewo inyaya yekuti varume vanonzi vakasimba havashungurudzwe saka vanozonyarara havabvume kuti nesuwo tirikushungurudzwa...*

Traditionally the aspect of gender discrimination has always been associated with females and as a result most campaigns and interventions against gender discrimination have been targeted at women. In addition, because of the belief that men are stronger than women, they are also less likely to be open with information and acknowledge that they have been victims of gender discrimination.

Ade appears to be denying the allegations that women are playing the victim card and acknowledges that women are indeed targets of violence since way back. The responses seem to suggest that women are indeed justified in describing sexist humour and the potential for violence associated with it as harassment.

Some of the female discussants in FGD2 were of the opinion that women should not be portrayed as victims as this further contributed to their marginalization. Abby had this to say:

*Mumararamiro edu kuonekwa kunoitwa vakadzi sevanhu vasina simba rekuzvidzivirira kunoita kuti nyaya dzekushungurudzwa kwavo dzibva dzadzika midzi. Izvi zvinobva zvaita kuti vanhukadzi vawonekwe sevanhu vari nyore kurwadzisa uye vasina chavanogona kuita kurwisa vanovashungurudza. Nerimwewo divi varume vanenge vachitaridzwa sevanhu vakasimba kwazvo kudarika vakadzi. Zvinobva zvaita kuti vanhukadzi vajairirwe.*

The conceptualization of femininity as a condition of vulnerability in popular culture, educational and social life undermines women's ability to protect themselves by portraying them as victims. This encourages sexist violence by emphasizing vulnerability of the females. In this way, female bodies are portrayed as breakable and takeble bodies while men are presented as solid, unbreakable beings.

From this response, it appears as if women are taught to fear violence and to understand themselves as victims in need of protection whereas this is not the case. This is reflective of the self-objectification theory where it is argued women targeted with sexist humour self-objectify and come to view themselves in the same way as the harasser. This is evidenced by female students viewing themselves as weak and needing men for support as espoused by sexist humour. It can be argued that women have the potential to determine the course of change and therefore portraying them as passive victims is wrong. They have the agency to determine what happens to them and can deal with this very well. So to portray them as victims is not fair. However, negative energy and constant harassment can make women weary and internalize the negative self-perceptions and doubt their own abilities. This is an effect of self-objectification where women lose their self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. The same sentiments were echoed by Subrahmanian (2005). Thus it is important to observe how the quality of education enables women to challenge harassment that hinders their full participation in education. In the same vein, according to a social constructionist framework, individuals (women) are not passive recipients of the messages to which they are exposed or messages implied by sexist humour (ibid.). Women can either reinforce or challenge the views transmitted by sexist humour, through their own responses.

Even where women are able to determine the course of change by fighting sexist humour, it appears to be impossible to participate fully in higher education because gender inequalities manifesting as harassment are often institutionalized in the norms, processes and structures of institutions and present barriers to equitable outcomes. As is explained by structural violence

theory, violence is embedded in structures and prevents individuals from meeting their basic needs.

It was established through the findings that male students felt that educated women were being selfish in painting all women with the same brush by presenting women as one united group. Moses, a male discussant in FGD3 had this to say:

*Asi hamufunge here kuti kwangova kuzvinyanya kwave kuita vakadzi vakadzidza ava? Pese vave kungochema kuti varume vatidzvinyirira. Hameno kuti kudziza here kunoita kuti vadaro. Dai vambatora mukana vafunga kuti zvavarikuchemera ndizvo here zvirikudiwawo nevamwe vakadzi varikudzimwe nzvimbo vasinawo kudzidza ... vanova ndivo vakawanda futi kudarika vakadzidza vacho. Ivo ndivo vave kutozvinyirira vamwe vavo...*

Don't you think that educated women are taking this too far? Everything is now described as abuse ... I don't know maybe it's because they are now educated that they think they now understand better what abuse means. They should take a step back and reflect on whether what they want is what the majority of women want ... those who are also uneducated. It is the educated women who are now abusing their fellow uneducated women by forcing them to accept the new way of life.

According to structural violence theory, the violence embedded in structures is considered legitimate and as such men question the legitimacy of female 'claims' of harassment. Moses's response suggests that women are not a homogenous group and they have different needs. The response appears to suggest that educated women are playing the victim card at the expense of the uneducated females who might be accepting the traditional gender roles that are implied by sexist humour.

The same sentiments were echoed by Jimmy, a male discussant, who said:

*Iyo Beijing yenyu iyi yakatiparira mabasa. Yangova mhere badzi. Aripano achema aripano achema. Imboitai tione kwazvinosvika ... kusatenda huroyi.*

These are the effects of Beijing Conference ... women are complaining everytime ... let's wait and see how it plays out ... women are ungrateful.

The response indicates the respondent's frustration about how women seem to be complaining despite the Beijing Declaration paving the way for gender equality and women

now enjoying benefits and legal protection from harassment. The respondent was of the opinion that women are ungrateful. This reveals the power structures existing in society that are endorsed by patriarchy that expect women to feel indebted to men for the privileges they have. The researcher did not probe whether the legal provisions put in place to protect women were indeed privileges or if they were simply human rights provisions that sought to protect women from being violated. It appears that the respondent felt women are complaining too much and he implied that the complaints are not justified. He attributed their knowledge on gender issues and attempts to address gender disparities to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. The Declaration made it mandatory for CEDAW signatories (including Zimbabwe) to draw up policies that addressed gender inequality in all sectors.

Female respondents denied the accusations that they were taking things too far by advocating against sexist humour. Women pointed out that masculine forces prevailed in education sectors that restricted female participation as espoused by structural violence theory. As Mai, a female student, pointed out:

*Varume vanoziita vanoziwa zvese ... kwenguva refu varume vatitangira hondo, kufa kwevanhu vasina mhosva nekuparara kwezve kutengeserana izvi. Asi vanongoramba vachingoda kudzvanyirira vanhukadzi. Ngavambomira vamboona kumwe kubata kwete kungoramba vari ivo vega...*

Men think they know better ... men have led us to pointless wars, death and economic collapse ... over and over again yet we have allowed them to take the reins. It's now time for them to see another angle of leadership. It's now time for women to shine.

Stacy, another female respondent, said:

*Hakusi kuti tirikungochema nhando kwete asi kuti pfungwa ykuzviriritira inotaura kuti munhu ave anokwanisa kuzvidzivirira kumhirizhonga uyezve munhu anofanira kunzwa kudada nebasa rake. Parizvino hatisi kunzwa sekudaro saka tinotoona kuti tatora matanho kuti zvigadziriswe...*

We are not playing the victim, empowerment implies the ability to prevent violence and includes feelings of value in individual achievement. For now it is the opposite of how we feel so we don't only complain but take steps necessary to address this.

The responses above indicate how women feel justified in defining sexist humour as harassment because they are simply exercising their rights.



A group of female FGD discussants were of the opinion that to describe sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence as 'women's issues' sidelines women and reduces them to mere victims yet it is not only women who are targeted by sexist humour. Painting sexist humour as a female issue neglects male victims and lets perpetrators off the hook. Thus this group of students seemed to be in agreement that sexist humour is a perpetuation of the victimhood culture.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

This chapter explored how students developed coping strategies for dealing with sexist humour and its consequent violence. The chapter uncovered a variety of strategies both individual and collective. Picking and choosing one's battles was discussed as part of the coping processes and the importance of the power dynamics and context in determining responses. Some respondents used their voices to show their displeasure as a way of standing up and fighting back. Using their voices was a form of resistance and a way of claiming back their power in situations where they felt demeaned and harassed by sexist humour. The chapter presented arguments from male students on how they believed that women in higher education were not justified in describing sexist humour as harassment because it was something minor when compared to other forms of harassment. The male students felt females in Zimbabwe enjoy excessive legal protection and benefits against harassment and that it did not make sense for them to be complaining about sexist humour.

## **CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter will summarize the main findings presented from Chapters 4, 5, 6 to develop a deeper understanding of the nature and experiences of sexist humour within higher education settings. The discussion draws on students' perceptions of sexist humour as a way to understand the indications, contradictions and tensions with regard to sexist humour and the reality of the lived experiences of students. The finding revealed how sexist humour objectifies, trivializes and discriminates women on the basis of their gender and keeps them subordinate to men in society. Inferences that have been gathered from the analytical chapters are discussed here. The chapter gives recommendations on what can be done to combat sexist humour for equality and equity in higher education. While some of these recommendations may not be new, they remain relevant considering the persisting violence and marginalization that women encounter in education.

The normalization of sexist humour at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) seems to imply patriarchal domination of the University. University culture borrows from societal culture and translates this into institutional culture. It appears that sexist humour created a context where expressions of prejudice were acceptable and justified as men try to legitimize their continued domination of the education sector. Although not generalizable, it can be argued that cultural norms are accountable for how masculinities and femininities are defined within the education sector. It appears how gender roles are defined and allocated, influences gender discrimination and often manifests as sexual harassment.

### **7.2 Male dominance at the University**

The analysis of the students' opinion of sexist humour points to the issue of male dominance in patriarchal societies being played out in institutions of higher learning. This serves to explain the nature of sexist humour on campus. Male dominance at the University seeks to dominate women by constantly reminding them of their alleged weaknesses and further pushing them into the private space. Although constructed as relative, sexist humour serves to remind women that they are irrelevant, weak and that they belong to the private space. This is supported by the structural violence theory which purports that patriarchy as a structure supports violence against women. Patriarchy as a system legitimizes gender oppression through structures that promote inequalities existing in society. It appeared that the culture of

silence was well established at the University; there was unspoken consensus that students should not report sexual harassment to the relevant authorities. This reflects the heterosexual culture in University daily life. Silence reflects elements of Shona culture where women are taught to adhere to heterosexual expectations (Sibanda, 2011). Shona culture views silence as one of the most admirable traits of a 'real woman' – silence in not challenging patriarchy, silence in accepting abuse and silence even in the face of domestic violence. Deviant women are 'punished' by the male members of society, often through sexual exploits to subdue them (ibid.). Thus, the culture of reifying patriarchy through the phallus exists even in higher education settings. This reflects how men and boys are active agents in the construction/deconstruction of male masculinity. Women internalize the culture of silence and reification of male masculinity since childhood and males use this as an excuse to justify sexist humour and violence in higher education settings. Thus it can be argued that society has shaped male and female behaviours in such a way that deviation is a scary option.

The study findings reveal that sexual harassment, including sexist jokes, is a reaction to perceived male identity hazards and is a response to the threat of masculinity. Males feel that women are encroaching into their own unique space and they feel they need to protect their position. Sexist humour is then taken as a way to re-establish male position in society. Sexist humour and the consequent violence acts as a tool to disparage women and to remind them of men's superior position or the intergroup hierarchy as espoused by social identity theory. These findings are in line with Ferguson and Ford's (2008) assertion that disparaging humour, or in this case sexist humour, serves to reduce feelings of in-group threat. Men feel women are challenging them in a space that is theirs.

Importantly, women emerged as the targets of aggressive humour more than men and therefore it can be argued that sexist humour is embodied by a female face. Female students across the data revealed how sexist humour contributed to a risky environment on campus because it heightened their feelings of insecurity through intimidation, threats and fear that are all communicated by sexist humour. Muasya (2010) and Mama (2009) also revealed that fear affects the mobility and freedom of female students on campus. Such fear is expressed through psychological breakdown, withdrawal from the usual activities and avoidance of certain spaces where harassment is perceived to be concentrated. Feelings of discomfort, diminished confidence, withdrawal and silence are also some of the signs of harassment. It can be concluded that sexist humour denies female students access to opportunities and

facilities on campus which in turn affects negatively on their academic performance. The majority of students affected by sexist humour suffer in silence as the effects are not visible.

The study also revealed how reporting to the relevant authorities or university counsellor was non-existent. Students resorted to telling their friends or brushed it off simply as nothing serious. None of them reported to the authorities. This was partly as a result of low self-esteem – they thought they might be blamed for being too sensitive and or not having a good sense of humour or they feared retaliation from their abusers. Reporting was also seen to not make any difference and if authorities did respond, the response often appeared to be too harsh. It should be noted that non-reporting cannot be equated with the absence of a problem as evidence from the findings validates this. It is clear that the knowledge of the reporting structure does not also result in a significant increase in reported cases. One might mistakenly assume that knowledge of reporting structures would have prevented the occurrence and frequency of sexist humour. The unchanged pattern in non-reporting mirrors continuing hesitancy by students to handle harassment issues publicly. In addition, the silence may result from continued acknowledgment and acceptance of the power at hand and the ensuing fear of reprisals or it may reflect the subjectivity of the definition of sexist humour as harassment.

Silence may also be attributed to gaps in policy that subject cases to rigorous scrutiny to ascertain if they qualify as harassment. There needs to be clarity as to which behaviours constitute harassment and intimidation. Currently, female students must judge their experiences against some unknown standard and feel that their cases might be lost in the mediation process and be thrown out. In this view, serious cases are considered to be those in which vocalization and action of a threat has occurred physically. Many cases fall short of this rigorous standard thus prompting distressed students to remain quiet because they are not sure if their cases will be deemed serious enough.

Evidence from the study findings imply that female students resorted to working hard to excel in their studies as a way of fighting male dominance. The same sentiments were echoed by Bennett (2002) cited in Barnes (2007, 19), who said that “women fight harder for their right to the diplomas, degrees, and job opportunities that offer them the change of a professional future”. This highlights female agency in fighting back rather than simply suffering in silence. Social identity theory explains this well in terms of female individuals as well as group identity. The theory asserts that group belonging enhances self-esteem and influences collective action. Women as a group identified inequalities and oppression within the system and decided to fight back by showing that they were as good as men in academia

which was perceived to be male-dominated. According to the theory, social identity is that part of an individual's self-concept derived from their membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance of that membership (Burn, Aboud and Moyles, 2000). It appears there is strength in numbers and in this case, females gain confidence in questioning patriarchy if there are in a group. The group dynamic implies group consciousness and desire to fight off inequality. This supports the idea that women are not passive recipients of oppression but have the ability to fight back against oppression. The current research corroborates previous research findings that revealed that collective self-esteem is high among disadvantaged groups (see Bemiller and Schneider, 2010; Muasya, 2012). Therefore, it can be concluded that awareness and acceptance of group inequalities acts as a basis and motivation for equality struggles and formation of group activism.

However, it was also discovered that women felt the need to ensure they presented themselves as serious and intelligent to be received as peers by males and avoid discrimination. In other words, women felt considerable pressure in their academic work to appear as equals to men. This reveals the extent to which patriarchy has taken hold of females such that they feel the need to prove their worth. This reflects how women alter their behaviours to adhere to male expectations which is a form of violence in itself. Therefore, it can be concluded that sexist humour is more than personal prejudice. It involves acting out internalized prejudices resulting in discrimination, inequity and or exclusion from communal deeds. Sexism, through sexist humour, can be visible in both personal attacks and insults and in the structure of social institutions. It can be expressed through individual behaviours or members of the university community and in the policies, procedures and practices of the university.

An initial assumption was that group belonging enhanced support for the struggles of that particular gender. This assumption proved incorrect as the majority of women denied the existence of sexist humour, insisting it was just joking and men did not mean it. Denial of sexist humour and violence on campus has an influence on policy formulations as well as intervention strategies to combat sexism. If victims deny the existence of harassment, it becomes difficult or even impossible to formulate interventions. The fact that women denied the existence of sexist humour despite narrating experiences that provided evidence of its existence and reveal how sexist humour has been normalized and made invisible within educational settings. Namuddu (1992) cited in Adusah-Karikari (2008, 17) posited that meaningful transformation of university spaces requires unreserved acknowledgement and

correct definition and identification of problems faced by women in a way that gender inequality acquires substance as a social problem. He further maintained that the correct identification and characterization of a problem was critical for any intervention and has an effect on how it is addressed and solved. As such, selective identification and classification of sexist humour as harassment was a hindrance to meaningful intervention and contributed to the normalization of sexist humour and violence.

It was noted that inclusion in higher education for women did not translate into equal access. The masculine constructs existing in higher education settings appear to be hindering female students from participating fully in higher education since there are elements within higher education that actively prohibit or prevent women from accessing resources that are fundamental and critical for the achievement of quality education. Findings from the study reveal that sexist humour makes women avoid certain spaces on campus for fear of sexual harassment. Some of the female students even missed classes or suffered from anxiety attacks due to exposure to sexist humour. The research findings echo those of Muasya (2010) which revealed that sexual harassment affected female students' access to university facilities, some of which are crucial to their studies. Therefore, it can be concluded that inclusion into higher education does not mean equal access and equal participation. Achieving functional gender equality in education requires careful consideration of gender ideologies that prohibit equal participation and involvement of females in higher education settings. This can be explained through the structural violence theory which describes how social institutions may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. In this case, sexist humour in education structures is preventing females from accessing education which is a fundamental human right. Previous discussion has revealed that sexist humour goes beyond simply feeling offended and may affect the health and well-being of an individual. Similarly, structural violence theory states that structural violence takes its toll on the physical, psychological, sexual and economic life of the female (Sinha, Gupta and Srivastava, 2017). Physical health consequences include injury, low performance rates, diseases (STIs and HIV/AIDS) while the mental health consequences include, but are not limited to, depression, fear and anxiety.

There was subjective perception in labelling behaviours thought to be sexist humour. Sexist humour was less likely to be defined as sexism and harassment because of its presentation as humour. This contributed to non-reporting of events which contributed to the normalization of sexist humour and misogyny. This resonates with structural violence theory where violence embedded in structures is subtle and difficult to challenge.

The belief that the 'gender war' was over contributed to silencing victims for it becomes difficult to continue to talk of gender issues when the battle was considered to have been won. This has also contributed to muting victims and normalization and acceptance of sexist humour. This might also reflect how gender issues have developed worldwide. Interventions for sexist humour have always been about improving numbers rather than improving quality of access.

Much as sexist humour and the consequent violence exists at GZU, a high number of students denied its existence and concealed their victimization. Thus, it can be concluded that students who have experienced sexist humour and violence are more likely to learn to normalize and accept it as they further their university studies. The prevalence of sexist humour at GZU is very high and requires intervention programmes responsive to risk factors and offenders. The study points to the need to increase sensitisation and awareness of sexual violence among students at GZU. This could be achieved through talks during orientation week and through seminars on sexual health throughout the students' studies.

Sexual harassment appears to have been normalized into a gendered culture because this behaviour occurs on a daily basis and escape is not an option. This is in agreement with what Muasya (2015) revealed – that violence occurs even in spaces where everyone is supposed to be welcome. Sexist humour is therefore part of what is considered 'normal' life on campus occurring naturally in public and sometimes private spaces. Therefore it can be concluded that the internalized aspects of campus life appear to make some female students view sexist humour and the consequent violence as justified and they therefore accept it as normal behaviour.

Where students spoke of their experiences with sexist humour, it was gathered that both male and female students at Great Zimbabwe University had internalized sexist humour and now thought of it as normal and part of everyday life. This piece of information reveals how patriarchal society perceives sexual humour and its consequent violence as normal behaviour which is part of the institutional culture.

Another finding was that sexist humour puts women in an awkward position where they can end up as victims of sexual attention. This results in some female students conceptualizing sexual behaviours as deserving; hence they accept it as normal behaviour. This is as a result of the tiered and patriarchal culture of masculinity that generates prospects and opportunities that expose female students to unwanted sexual advances. The vulnerability of female

students appears to result from the contested power relations where males constantly try to reinforce their superiority in any manner possible. Although male and female students give various reasons for this male domination, the reasons can be attributed to the culture of heterosexuality on campus and the question of women belonging in their own private spaces that are different from those of the men. These findings echoes Bennett's (2005a) findings in which it was revealed that gender and the culture of heterosexuality present fertile ground for the abuse of women students. Thus, it can be concluded that sexist humour is an underhand expression of sexism. It is sneaky and hides behind justification of it being 'just a joke' with no serious consequences. Whether through cultivating misery and nervousness for women or aiding tolerance of sexism and discrimination among male members within social structures, sexist humour can have unfavourable consequences.

From the study findings, it was noted that sexist humour heightened feelings of insecurity, threats and danger for female students on campus. This can be situated within social identity theory where sexist humour is used to gain group distinction. Groups disparage the weaker groups so as to enhance group cohesion. Conceptualizing sexist humour as a practice of intergroup discrimination helps to explain the relationship between feelings of threat, sexist attitudes and the use of sexist humour. In the evidence reviewed here, men appear to also use sexist humour to maintain and strengthen cohesion of the male in-group. Therefore, it can be concluded that sexist humour in this context seems to serve as a means of establishing positive distinctiveness from the female out-group as well as reducing threats to male friendship bonds and to masculine norms.

The abuse of drugs seems to be a contributing factor to sexist humour and its consequent violence. Students referred to the culture of drinking excessively on campus which led to students being violent. Alcohol is known to alter judgement and people's behaviours by lowering people's inhibitions thereby contributing to higher levels of violence. Chagonda (2001), Gaidzanwa (2007), Muasya (2010) and Muparamoto (2012) presented similar results on how drinking in excess enhanced the masculinity of male students and contributed to them being violent. Abuse of alcohol appears to be an enactment of institutional culture as it is taken as an indicator of financial ability and masculinity. Given that the campus environment is highly sexualized, the combination of high levels of intoxication and the highly sexualized environment is disastrous, if not fatal. Gouws et al. (2005) noted that 90 percent of sexual harassment cases occurred due to high levels of intoxication. This highlights alcohol as a possible risk factor in educational settings.



Structural violence theory acknowledges different types of violence and explains two types, that is, violence that affects the body (physical) and violence that affects the soul (psychological). The theory simplifies the understanding of sexist humour by acknowledging its insidious effects. Thus, it can be concluded that structural violence manifests through sexist humour and presents itself as inequitable social norms and poor access to educational facilities which eventually influence the quality of access and participation of female students in higher education settings. This exposed how gender-based violence and specifically sexist humour was systemic in nature and required a systemic solution in addressing it.

The majority of female students, although they disapproved of the harassing behaviour, found them unavoidable and took them for granted. Such acceptance fuelled non-reporting of incidences and acceptance of harassment. Some of the female students adopted sexist humour in their talk and became 'one of the boys'. This might reflect how the targets internalize the abuse targeted at them and self-objectify themselves such that they identify with and accept the various stereotypes as espoused by sexual objectification theory. In view of this (targets becoming like their harassers), one can argue that women find identity and dignity around men – why else would they seek to identify with their harassers by adopting the same behaviours that cause them pain? Siding with the harassers derails efforts to fight against sexist humour and its consequent violence as targets will deny the existence of harassment.

It was noted that if the financial situation for both male and female students was poor, this could encourage female students to engage in transactional sex for survival. Economic problems exert stress on students making them violent. Therefore it can be concluded that tertiary institutions are breeding grounds of deviant gender behaviour with female students mostly, but not solely, at the receiving end.

The combination of non-reporting of abuse, ambiguous definitions of what constitutes harassment and violence, sexist humour and the intimidation of women all contribute to the perpetuation of a rape culture.

### **7.3 Female empowerment; reality or myth?**

In view of all the obstacles that women face in higher education settings, it appears that the empowerment of women is only a pipe dream as men continue to dominate. The researcher wanted to investigate how women can be empowered within such a disempowering environment such as campuses fraught with sexual harassment. The findings revealed a toxic

environment festering with sexist humour and painted a bleak picture of female emancipation through education. Whereas the narration of women's struggles for empowerment and the global statement for female empowerment makes it appear as if female empowerment is a one-way street lined with flowers and without controversies as espoused by the post-feminist discourse reality, findings reveal that indeed it is a rocky path with constant struggles for empowerment. So how can meaningful participation for women in higher education setting be achieved? The findings revealed that even women who are the distressed sometimes deny the existence of sexual harassment which makes it difficult to talk about or conceptualize policies to deal with harassment. How can policies be put in place if the people affected deny the existence of violence? Denial of sexism in higher education settings appears to nurture the heterosexual culture in universities and creates hostile spaces for women students rather than making them conducive to all sexes. This appears to operate in a similar way to state capture in South Africa which refers to a type of systemic corruption in which private interests significantly influence a state's decision-making process to their own advantage. Using the same concept, GZU and females who deny the existence of violence appear to be the 'captured' by patriarchy and its ideals such that patriarchal interests prevail at the University.

Judith Butler conceptualized the possibilities for empowerment even under occupation or capture by putting forward the notion of resistance into the empowerment circles (Magnus, 2006). According to Butler, for real empowerment, there is a need to re-appropriate the notion of 'empowerment for emancipation' through education (ibid., 92). This implies that there is need to restore and redefine the complexity of the meaning of empowerment through the definition and realization of meanings of power, agency, class and gender. In addition, it can be argued that there is a need to promote the feminist vision of women that is not so easily reduced to a picture of an 'obedient' woman. Obeying implies subjugation and submission which work against the aims of empowerment.

#### **7.4 Possible interventions to combat sexist humour and the associated violence in higher education settings**

First and foremost, the University needs to speed up the creation of a sexual harassment policy as a matter of urgency. The lack of a sexual harassment policy has reportedly maintained the persecution of female students as perpetrators take advantage of the loopholes and victims sometimes do not know how to seek redress or whether the behaviour they want

to complain about are legally defined as harassment. The policy should clearly define offensive behaviour. The policy should also include subtle forms of harassment in addition to overt expressions of violence. A handbook could be distributed to first-year students during orientation clearly showing what behaviours constitute violence, which behaviours are unacceptable and can be considered as harassment and how to seek redress. The handbook should also clearly state the steps one should take in lodging complaints. A sexual harassment policy could enhance accountability and mutual responsibility in dealing with issues of sexism thereby contributing to the maintenance of a productive learning environment.

Reducing the prevalence of sexist humour in higher education settings requires a multi-pronged approach. Much of the gender discrimination through sexist humour results from the fact that the practice is rooted in societal and cultural beliefs that then filter into other institutions, are re-created and take shape within these institutions. Therefore, there is need to bring about societal and cultural shifts in gender relations and hopefully in the long-run, the gains from such efforts will filter into institutions such as education settings. Ratele (2008) echoed the same sentiments and noted that the global domination of male masculinity and the inherent power needs to be revised as well as the belief that masculinity is fixed and cannot be changed. Advocacy is required to challenge heterosexual masculinity that leads to the insubordination of women in higher education settings. It is this culture of heterosexuality that defines women who do not adhere to traditional gender perceptions as deviants who require discipline. Another way that gender discrimination can be combated at campus level is through the creation and implementation of legislation that ensures discrimination is recorded and dealt with. It is therefore crucial to establish the existence of legislation on gender discrimination as gender discrimination policies will be more effective if they are in line with and have the backing of the law.

There is need for clear definitions of harassment. Devising and implementation of effective policy and procedures to address issues of harassment is difficult without a clear definition. There is need for a separate gender policy which reflects an institution's commitment to addressing issues of gender harassment. The policy needs to be clear on what constitutes harassment. In addition, there is a need to improve access and to simplify the grievance procedure. These procedures need to be communicated to students as well as the campus community – the nature of sexist humour and its prevalence in higher education such that all members of the academic community understand it. Within this process, the importance of

listening to women's voices is paramount. For centuries, women have been silenced through ridicule, dismissal and fear and now their voices need to be heard as well as considered. Often it is women themselves who are best placed to direct useful action to combat gender inequality.

Developing clearer reporting systems as well as de-mystifying the reporting procedure need to be prioritized. Students require systems through which they can report observations and experiences of sexual harassment. There also need to be reliable systems in place that reduce risk of retaliation, protect targets from retaliation and reduce the fear of reporting. There need to be clear definitions of what constitutes harassment in all its forms including examples of prohibited conduct (subtle and blatant). Importantly, all complaints should be treated as confidential.

Universities need to create support structures that address the hidden gender discourses that allow sexism and violence to flourish and fester within education systems. This would transform the university culture into a more hospitable and conducive structure for all who have been fortunate enough to access its facilities. This may be achieved through empowerment programmes that challenge the existing status quo manifesting in attitudes, beliefs and practices that continue to uphold male superiority. In addition, empowerment programmes must aim to address all dimensions of student lives, that is political, social and economic aspects.

Recognizing the existence of the problem, naming it and breaking the silence about it opens the way for effective solutions. Such recognition by the state, and by parliaments, political parties, parliamentarians and citizens, is fundamental. This recognition will spill over into the education sector because people who are at universities are also affiliated to these structures in addition to being university members. Parliaments and politicians, male and female, must say loudly and clearly that such behaviour has no place in political culture and will not be tolerated in parliament. Female and male politicians also have a particular responsibility to denounce such behaviour and reject sexist violence in other contexts. Clearly, it appears that national laws can be effective only if they are properly enforced, made known to women and effectively invoked by them to protect their rights.

The University should constantly assess and improve the University culture. Universities can carry out regular culture surveys to remain abreast of the current situation regarding campus culture. In addition, universities can promote cultures that reduce the risk of sexism such as

teaching male students to stop viewing females as objects for their pleasure. Popular campus cultures that degrade and victimize women such as the 'gold-rush' therefore need to be condemned as they encourage the sexual objectification of women. This is important if students are to learn to negotiate for sexual relations in a dignified manner that does not expose them to violations that can possibly lead to sexual violence.

There is need for the establishment of an institutional culture where both male and female students are acknowledged as equal partners with equal opportunities. This is key in achieving gender parity and improving quality of access to higher education for all sexes, as enshrined in the national and international conventions and declarations as a requisite for human rights observance. University spaces must be gender-friendly and aim at sensitising and empowering students with adequate and relevant life skills that have the potential to destabilize gender imbalances. To achieve this, formative years education must be harnessed as a means of changing attitudes and cultures, fight discrimination and launch a culture of equality and tolerance. Teaching boys and girls from the earliest age about human rights and gender equality will help to establish relations of non-violent and respect between the sexes in all sectors.

Support networks need to be put in place where distressed and pained students get support and advice on how to deal with discrimination and where to get the necessary help. Such structures would assist students to deal with encounters they face on campus for the greater good of all. This will create an environment where the role of education for both sexes is valued and create a community of men and women who realise the value of sharing experiences, knowledge, talent and resources for personal and professional development rather than fighting each other, which is counterproductive. These support structures include the creation of counselling centres that students trust, may help both the perpetrators and victims with healing them and showing errors as well as the importance and value of every human being despite their gender. Counselling structures need to be responsible for dealing with students' emotional well-being, with conflict, drug and alcohol abuse as well as financial difficulties which affects the university environment. Availability and easy access to resources to better understand the issues of sexism and misogyny may create a more socially-conscious generation.

The reality of the existence of sexist humour and violence points to the need to improve security on campus. This could be a positive step in ensuring a violence-free environment. A

secure environment contributes to the success of the implementation of intervention policies to combat harassment. In addition, there is need for suggestion boxes and anonymous postings on campus to assist in the cases where students do not want to be identified for fear of victimization but want to complain about something. The implementation of suggestion boxes may go a long way in combating the culture of silence surrounding sexist humour on campus. A supportive campus environment is necessary for the realization of gender equality and a violence-free environment. A supportive environment on campus encourages cooperation among students and authorities and enhances goodwill and kindness rather than unnecessary conflict, competition and struggles. Inclusion of female students in higher education is evident but there is need to ensure progressive inclusion. Discourses of inclusion must be incorporated to include issues of context as well as meaningful participation.

The increasing awareness of sexist humour and its potential to turn into violence points to the need for further research into the examination of the probable difficult emotional responses that people may have to sexist humour. There is also need for research to explore the broader social consequences of sexist humour to help in understanding how sexist humour impacts on social interaction.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This study has revealed a troubling prevalence of gender-based violence against female students through sexist humour at an institution of higher learning. This includes not only the assumptions put forward by the sexist jokes but also includes psychological violence, as well as other forms of violence – sexual, physical and economic. These findings suggest that such behaviour against women students exists, to varying degrees, in every country, affecting a significant number of female students as evidenced by the existence of common behaviour across universities, even those outside Zimbabwe. Examples include ‘gold-rushing’ which was found to be common across three universities in different localities. Such violence impedes the ability of female students to access quality education, constrains them from doing their work freely and securely and has a dissuading effect on women’s academic engagement in general.

The study revealed that sexist humour has no particular context or space. Episodes of sexist humour were dependent on the time spent in any particular space. Evidence revealed that sexist humour was present even in spaces that were considered to be safe such as classrooms where it is expected that everyone should be awarded equal opportunities of access and

participation in education. It was therefore concluded that access did not translate into equal and meaningful participation. Women were accessing education ‘crumbs’ from a system that can be described as hostile and forbidding.

In addition, the subjective labelling of sexist humour as harassment was noted. Sexist expressions peddled through humour tended to be excused as not serious and not intended to be harmful. Thus humour could lead to expressions of sexism being tolerated and accepted thereby allowing sexism to be routinized in everyday experiences at Great Zimbabwe University. The subjective labelling of humour as harassment led to the systemic normalization of misogyny and violence at Great Zimbabwe University and contributed to institutional silence in reporting and addressing issues to do with sexist humour. It appeared as if there was unspoken consensus on non-reporting and discussion of issues to do with sexist humour. Furthermore, the subjective labelling of sexist humour as harassment stifled the voices of those who felt aggrieved and harassed by sexist humour as they feared dismissal of their cases as petty or even retaliation from the aggressors. As a result, the majority of those who felt sexist humour was harassment but did not have the option for reporting, resorted to avoiding certain spaces on campus such as sports grounds, library and in extreme cases, withdrawal from participation in class and other activities on campus. Silence also resulted in some students suffering psychological stress manifesting as anxiety and withdrawal.

The study also revealed that sexist humour was related to sexual aggression on campus. This was due to the fact that sexist humour glorified violent masculinities and emphasized the subordination of females as espoused by patriarchy. Also, sexist humour was employed as a way of showing displeasure by males in what they considered to be feminization of education. Previously, higher education was reserved for males. The findings revealed that often male students resorted to violence as a form of response to the perceived threat of masculinity posed by female involvement in what is considered to be male territory. Furthermore, findings revealed that sexist humour has a tendency to quickly escalate into violence as evidenced by rape jokes being normalized and the masculine traits evident in sexist humour. Sexist humour involved imagery of violent sexual conquests which depicted rape scenes as a way to subdue women and put them in their place. The rape jokes were excused as simple humour yet the ideas made rape itself appear simple and excusable. Again women were the scapegoats and perpetrators excused their behaviour by portraying women as the ones who wanted and goaded men into behaving in this way.

The study further revealed that sexist humour was normalized by traditional scripts in patriarchy which were translated and replayed in higher education settings. Patriarchy emphasized the subordination of women and allocated women the domestic space where child rearing and housekeeping was portrayed as a female specialty. In this case, deviation from the norm called for punishment from the male members of society. As such, men were portrayed as the rightful disciplinarians of women thereby according men power over women. As such, men felt justified in their harassment of female in higher education settings at Great Zimbabwe University.

In addition, non-reporting of cases normalized sexist humour occurrences on campus. Although students displayed knowledge of the existence of structures to deal with sexual harassment on campus, non-reporting remained high. The absence of a sexual harassment policy on campus also contributed to non-reporting as the disturbed and offended students were not sure of whether the behaviour they wanted to complain about qualified as harassment. There was no clear policy to explain which behaviours qualified as harassment nor a clear grievance procedure. All this contributed to the normalization of sexist humour and consequent harassment and violence.

However, although students displayed confidence with the ability of the University to deal with sexual harassment issues if reported to them, none of the disturbed students reported to the relevant authorities on campus. The majority of aggrieved respondents told their friends about incidents and did not report matters. This points to the existence of a powerful force that intimidates distressed students into silence. This also contributed to the normalization of sexist humour and violence.

The study shows, however, that once the occurrence of sexist humour is made visible and recognized, solutions either exist or can be found or invented. Such behaviour must no longer be viewed as 'just the price to be paid' for academic involvement. It is the duty of political actors, men and women, and of parliaments as institutions as well as those in the education sector to set the right example. They need to map the way forward clearly with regard to subtle forms of violence and shift focus from issues of numerical representations only, if they do not wish to help legitimize discrimination and violence against women in all other spheres of life, public as well as private. The University context needs to be examined as well. The effectiveness of parliament's progress toward gender equality and the vitality of democracy itself all depend on it.



The study findings reveal a dominant masculine culture that constructed femininity as powerless and voiceless. Women in higher education are viewed as imposters in a male world. The prevalence of the masculine culture has allowed men to maintain their hold of higher education settings by exploiting women students through constant reminders of why they did not belong in the perceived men's world thus leading to their marginalization on campus. Sexist humour prevents women from fully participating in higher education settings thus leading to their marginalization on campus.

This study has contributed to a clearer and better understanding of sexist humour in exposing it as a form of violence against women. The study revealed subtle forms of sexism which are equally destructive as the more overt forms of sexism. The ability of sexist humour to prejudice and traumatize women has been demonstrated. Sexist humour affects the equal and quality access of educational resources for both sexes and needs to be addressed if true empowerment of women is to be realised. The study has demonstrated that simply ensuring female access in higher education does not translate into quality and equality in access.

Sexist humour needs to be uprooted in higher education settings since it is detrimental for the growth and progress of women in higher education settings. It is hoped that with the introduction of sexual harassment policy at GZU and other policies that condemn sexist humour and its underlying assumptions, the unspoken experiences of women as a marginalized group can now be attended to so as to promote quality access to education for all stakeholders.

The present research raised pertinent issues with regard to the nature and experiences of sexist humour but the results are only applicable to the Great Zimbabwe University. Any generalizations should be made with caution. Further research needs to explore other universities in Zimbabwe and their experiences with sexist humour. It would be interesting to note how experiences with sexist humour differ or complement each other in the different universities.

Finally, this study draws attention to the need for further research into the experiences of staff (teaching and non-teaching) with sexist humour. Inclusion implies unity of purpose as well as shared responsibility ('a problem shared is a problem solved').

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Survey questionnaire

Appendix B: Focus group discussion question guide

Appendix C: Interview questionnaire guide

Appendix D: Approval from UKZN Ethics Committee

Appendix E: Permission to conduct research at Great Zimbabwe University

Appendix F: Study description letter and informed consent

## Appendix A: Survey questionnaire



### School of Social Sciences

1. What is your gender \_\_\_\_\_ (*circle the appropriate*) male female
  2. Age \_\_\_\_\_.
  3. What is your current status on campus (*e.g. part time, full time etc.*).
    - a. full time
    - b. part-time
    - c. other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_.
  4. In what year of studies are you? \_\_\_\_\_.
  5. In your own words please describe what you think is sexist humour?
  6. Who are the targets of sexist humour at the campus?)
    - a. females
    - b. males
    - c. both
    - d. others (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Why do you think there are targets?
- 
8. Can you label these statements as sexist and based on misogyny? *Please use the numbers from the scale below to show your opinion.*
    1. Sexist
    2. Very Sexist
    3. Somewhat Sexist
    4. Not sexist
    5. No opinion
    - a. A woman's place is in the home.
    - b. A woman's job is to give birth and let the husband take care of her and the kids.
    - c. Women are bad drivers
    - d. Women's rights are there to challenge men
    - e. Women are not as intelligent as men
    - f. Women should not enrol at University but go to teachers' colleges
    - g. Women are good enough for sex only
    - h. Women are like children and therefore they need a man for guidance
  9. Please indicate if you have encountered the following on campus. (*You can circle more than one*).

- a. Someone repeatedly told sexual jokes or stories that were offensive to you
  - b. Someone made a joke targeted at you that made you feel you were targeted because of your gender.
  - c. Has someone expressed contempt and violence to you because of your gender?
  - d. Someone referred jokingly to people of your gender in belittling and insulting terms.
  - e. Someone treated you differently because of your gender (e.g. *Slighted you, mistreated or ignored you*)
  - f. Someone made a sexist joke (e.g. *suggesting that people of your gender are not suited for the type of work that you do*)
  - g. Someone rated you (*being assigned marks out of 10 for how you look*)
10. Since the beginning of this academic year, how many times has this happened
- a. to you \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. someone you know \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. you witnessed it \_\_\_\_\_
11. Who did you tell about the incident?
- a. room-mate
  - b. friend
  - c. family member
  - d. counsellor
  - e. campus security
  - f. no- one
  - g. other \_\_\_\_\_ (*specify*)
12. Why did you choose the option you took above?

13. If you did not tell anyone, please choose the best response from below to explain why
- a. it was embarrassing
  - b. it was a private matter
  - c. did not think it was serious enough to talk about
  - d. people would say I was over-reacting
  - e. did not think people would understand
  - f. did not know the procedure on campus
  - g. other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_
14. Where on campus and in what context does this happen\_\_\_\_\_.
15. Do you know of any reporting structures on campus?
- a. Yes
  - b. no
16. What can you attribute this behaviour to?
- a. substance use
  - b. campus culture
  - c. jokes
  - d. social influence
  - e. peer pressure
  - f. women want it
  - g. other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_

17. In thinking of the above, did the institution play a role in (*circle the appropriate*)
- not taking a proactive stance in preventing and addressing the experiences?
  - creating an environment in which this type of experience seemed common or normal?
  - making it difficult to report the experiences?
  - responding inadequately to the experiences, if reported?
  - mishandling the case, if disciplinary action was requested?
  - covering up the experiences?
  - denying the experience in some way?
  - punishing victims in some way?
18. If someone were to report violence, how likely is it that

Question	Very likely	Moderately likely	Slightly likely	Not likely at all
University would take it seriously				
University will ensure safety of the person reporting				
Students will label the person reporting as a troublemaker				
The person reporting will lose their privileges				

19. Please circle the actions you have taken when faced with sexist humour
- laughed at the joke at the same time despising myself
  - laughed at the joke because was afraid at the consequences of not doing so
  - walked away from the vicinity
  - retaliated by throwing a joke in the same taste
  - confronted the person and told them to stop
  - expressed my discomfort
  - pretended it did not matter
  - reported the matter
20. Did you/anyone suffer from the below as a result of sexist humour
- avoiding certain areas where sexist humour was experienced
  - withdraw from usual activities (e.g. sport, class, academic club)
  - suffer from anxiety, stress or depression
  - suffer from reduced concentration or low marks
  - become withdrawn

## Appendix B: Focus group discussion question guide



1. What is sexist humour?
2. Do you think it is a problem on campus?
3. Who are the targets and why?
4. Is there any link between sexist humour and sexual violence on campus? Explain your answer.
5. Can you say sexist humour is misogyny? Explain your answer.
6. What factors do you think normalizes sexist humour on campus?
7. Do you think sexist humour is justified in being explained as harassment? Explain your answer.
8. What should we ask the next group that has not been we explained here?

## Appendix C: Interview questionnaire guide



### Interview Questionnaire Guide

Profile data of each questionnaire will capture:

- Sex of respondent
- Year of study at University
- Age

1. What in your opinion is sexism?
2. Based on your answer above, what is sexist humour?
3. How do you recognize sexist humour?
4. Where does it occur on campus and in what context?
5. Can you say sexist humour is a problem on campus? Give reasons for your answer.
6. Who are the targets of sexist humour? Give reasons for your answer.
7. Has it ever happened to you or someone you know on campus? How many times and how did you/they react to it?
8. Would you describe sexist humour as harassment? Give reasons for your answer?
9. What can you attribute this kind of behaviour to?
10. To what extent can you attribute this behaviour to patriarchy?
11. Can you give narratives of incidences of sexist humour on campus? How did they make you feel?
12. Can you say that sexist humour is normal on campus? Give reasons for your answer?
13. Are there channels to address complaints with regards to sexism on campus?
14. In what ways do you feel the University is addressing issues to do with harassment? Explain your answer.
15. Do you think sexist humour is an obstacle for women in college to reach their full potential?
16. Have you ever witnessed sexist humour? How did you react?
17. How has sexist humour affected you or someone you know?
18. Is sexist humour justified in being explained as harassment?
19. To what extent can you link sexist humour to sexual violence and aggression on campus?
20. Is sexist humour treated as a serious issue on campus? Explain your answer?

## Appendix D: Approval from UKZN Ethics Committee



24 May 2017

Ms Roselyn Kanyemba 216072988  
School of Social Sciences  
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Kanyemba

**Protocol reference number : HSS/0329/017D**

**Project title:** Normalization of misogyny : Sexist humour in higher education contexts at Great Zimbabwe University.

### **Full Approval – Committee Reviewed Protocol**

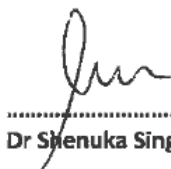
With regards to your response to queries received 23 May 2017 to our letter of 17 May 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the above mentioned application and the protocol has been granted **Full Approval**.

**Any alterations 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. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

**The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.**

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully



.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Prof Maheshvari Naidu  
cc Academic Leader Research:  
cc School Administrator: Mr N Memela & Mr S Ehiane



## Appendix E: Permission to conduct research at Great Zimbabwe University



**Registrar**

*P O Box 1235  
MASVINGO  
Tel: 039-252100  
Fax: 039-252100*

*Off Old Great Zimbabwe Road  
MASVINGO  
E mail: registrar@gzu.ac.zw*

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### GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY

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26 September 2016

Roselyn Kanyemba  
School of Social Science  
Howard College Campus  
Mazisi Kunene Rd  
Glenwood, Durban 404



Dear Roselyn

#### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY**

The above matter refers.

This is to confirm that your request has been approved, but please note that we would request a copy of your findings too.

Wishing you good luck in your studies.

Sincerely

**S. Gwatidzo (Mrs)**

## Appendix F: Study description letter and informed consent



### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Prospective Research Participant: Read this consent form carefully and should you have any questions, feel free to ask before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study or not. Feel free to ask questions at any time before, during or after your participation in this research.

**Dear Sir/Madam**

My name is Roselyn Kanyemba from the University of KwaZulu- Natal, Durban, South Africa. I am studying for a Doctorate in Philosophy in the School of Social Sciences department of Anthropology. My contact numbers are +263 772 487 773; +27 81 765 7353 email: [rkmaroses@gmail.com](mailto:rkmaroses@gmail.com). My supervisor is Professor Maheshvari Naidu email: [naiduu@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:naiduu@ukzn.ac.za). Phone: +27 71 681 9496.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study titled- **Normalization of misogyny: Sexist humour in higher education contexts in Zimbabwe**. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently enrolled at an institution of higher education. The research study designed to explore the interplay between misogyny, sexist humour and violence against women on campus given that University spaces are potentially problematic for many women. Some Universities have adopted policies to fight this but it appears that these efforts mainly deter manifest harassment whereas latent harassment still continues through the disguise of violence in humour. As such, it appears that verbal harassment of female students at university campuses has become embedded and naturalised in popular thought that it has become normalised. The study is focusing on students in higher education.

The study is expected to enrol 200 participants in total. The study participants will be narrowed down to 30 for the focus group discussion and will also involve individual in-depth interviews. You will be asked to take part in an individual in-depth interview (face to face), survey questionnaire and a focus group discussion. The duration of your participation if you choose to enrol and remain in the study is 15 minutes for the survey questionnaire, 1 hour for the focus group discussion as well as the individual in-depth interview.

Given that this study will ask about verbal harassment and violence, you may feel uncomfortable or unable to answer some questions. You may choose not to answer some questions or choose to terminate your participation entirely. Reference to campus clinic councillors will be available for those who feel they need counselling.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSS/0329/017P). In the event of any concerns and or problems/ questions you may contact the researcher at 00 263 772 487 773 or 00277 81 765 7353 or the UKZN Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics  
Research Office, Westville Campus  
Private Bag X54001  
KwaZulu Natal, SOUTH AFRICA  
2604609**

**Administration  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Durban 4000  
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax 27 31  
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za**

Participation is voluntary. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled to if you choose not to participate. You will be provided with any significant new findings developed during the course of this study that may relate to or influence your willingness to continue your participation. In the event you decide to discontinue your participation in the study, these are the potential consequences that may result:

1.Reduction in sample population,

Please notify of your decision so that your participation can be orderly terminated. In addition, your participation in the study may be terminated by the investigator without your consent if the researcher realizes that you cannot continue with the study due to emotional instability, being drunk or falling ill during the interview or unanticipated withdrawal of consent to do research by the University.

Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. The results may be published for scientific purposes but will not mention your name or include any identifiable reference to you. Each questionnaire will be assigned a number and that number will be used to refer to it. However, any data or records obtained as a result of your participation in this study may be inspected by the thesis supervisor or by research assistants in this study, (provided that such individuals are legally obligated to protect any identifiable information from public disclosure, except where disclosure is otherwise required by law or a court of competent jurisdiction). There will be no monetary gain from participating in this research project. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a respondent will be maintained by the School of Social Science, UKZN. These records will be kept private in so far as permitted by law. In order to ensure confidentiality you will not be asked to indicate your names and do not write your name on any of the research material such as the interview guide and/or the consent form. The information derived from surveys, interviews and focus group discussions will be solely used for thesis and nothing else. The interview scripts will be safely kept by the researcher for five years after the publication of the thesis. Thereafter, the scripts would be shredded and cassettes destroyed.

Your participation is extremely valuable because it will provide insight into an area that has been understudied. The results might be helpful in ensuring a safe, healthy and non-discriminatory environment for students. There is no financial compensation for your participation in this research.

Authorization

I have been informed about the study entitled - **Normalization of misogyny: Sexist humour in higher education contexts in Zimbabwe** by Roselyn Kanyemba. I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits am usually entitled to.

I have been informed about the counsellor who is available if there is need for further counselling. If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at telephones 00263 772 487773 or 00277 81 765 7353.If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

**Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics  
Research Office, Westville Campus  
Private Bag X54001  
KwaZulu Natal, SOUTH AFRICA  
2604609**

**Administration  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Durban 4000  
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax 27 31  
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za**

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / Focus group discussion YES/NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES/NO

Participant Signature:

Date:

Principal Investigator Signature

Date