

**An Exploration of the Diversity of Student Relationships in a University Context**

Fathima Badat

(201672665)

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science  
(Educational Psychology) at the School of Applied Human Sciences, College of Humanities.

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal: Pietermaritzburg Campus

Supervisor: Dr Nontobeko Buthelezi

September 2020

## Contents Page

<b>Declaration</b> .....	4
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	5
<b>Abstract</b> .....	6
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>1.1 Background of the study</b> .....	7
1.2. Statement of the problem .....	9
1.3 Purpose of the study .....	9
1.4 Objectives of the study.....	9
The objectives of this study are the following:.....	9
1.5 Research questions .....	10
1.6 Significance of the study .....	11
1.7 Assumptions of the study .....	12
1.8 Scope and limitations of the study.....	12
1.9 The operational definition of terms .....	13
1.10 Summary and overview of the study .....	13
<b>Chapter 2: Review of related literature</b> .....	14
2.1. Introduction.....	14
2.2. Theoretical review.....	14
2.3. Review of international empirical studies .....	17
2.4. Review of local empirical studies.....	18
2.5. Social integration .....	20
2.6. Diverse relationships.....	23
2.7. Summary.....	26
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b> .....	29
3.1. Introduction.....	29
3.2. Paradigm of the Study .....	29
3.3. Study setting .....	29
3.4. Study Population .....	30
3.5. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size .....	31
3.6. Descriptive Analysis of the distribution of respondents .....	32
3.7. Research Instrument.....	32
3.8. Validity and Reliability .....	33
3.9. Research design .....	34
3.10. Data Analysis .....	34
3.11. Ethical Considerations.....	36

3.12.	Reflexivity.....	38
3.13.	Summary .....	38
<b>Chapter 4: Results of the Study</b>	.....	<b>39</b>
4.1.	Introduction.....	39
4.2.	Participant details.....	40
<b>Table 1</b>	.....	<b>40</b>
<i>Participant Details</i>	.....	<b>40</b>
4.3.	Main themes.....	42
4.3.1.	Research question 1: How are social relationships formed and maintained? .....	43
4.3.1.1.	Familiarity and similar backgrounds .....	43
4.3.1.2.	Personality preferences.....	44
4.3.2.	Research question 2: What type of university settings cultivate these relationships? .....	44
4.3.2.1.	Food and entertainment .....	45
4.3.2.2.	Working together .....	45
4.3.3.	Research question 3: How do these relationships contribute to students' academic experiences?.....	46
4.3.3.1.	Workload.....	46
4.3.3.2.	Emotional support .....	47
4.3.3.3.	Romantic Relationships.....	47
4.3.4.	Research question 4: What are the most popular social relationships? .....	48
4.3.4.1.	Fashion and entertainment.....	48
4.3.4.2.	Familiarity .....	49
4.4.	Summary of findings.....	49
4.5.	Summary .....	50
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion</b>	.....	<b>51</b>
5.1.	Introduction.....	51
5.2.	Discussion of Results .....	52
1.2.1.	Research question 1: How are social relationships formed and maintained?.....	52
1.2.3.	Research question 3: How do these relationships contribute to students' academic experiences?.....	57
1.2.4.	Research question 4: What are the most popular social relationships? .....	60
5.3.	Implications of the study.....	62
5.4.	Limitations of the study.....	62
5.5.	Summary of the Study.....	63
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion</b>	.....	<b>65</b>
6.1.	Conclusion of the study.....	65

6.2. Recommendations for policy and practice .....	69
6.3. Recommendations for further research .....	70
<b>Appendices</b> .....	76
Appendix 1: Turnitin Originality Report.....	76
Appendix 2: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Gatekeepers Permission .....	80
.....	80
Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance Certificate .....	81
.....	81
Appendix 4: Consent Form .....	82
.....	82
Appendix 5: Data Collection Instrument.....	83

**List of Figures**

2.2. Tinto’s Institutional Departure Model.....	17
---	----

**List of Tables**

4.2. Participant Details.....	43
-------------------------------	----

## **Declaration**

I, Fathima Badat, declare that the research findings reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or any examination and any other university. This dissertation does not contain any data from other persons', unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

## Acknowledgements

All praise is due to The Almighty.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following individuals, for making this dissertation possible:

- My supervisor, Dr Nontobeko Buthelezi, for her ongoing guidance and help, ensuring that I submit quality work.
- My parents, Imran and Zarina, for their constant reminders and prayers, nudging me in the right direction.
- My siblings, Moosa and Aaminah, for their support and motivation.
- The undergraduate students at UKZN, Pietermaritzburg campus, for their willingness to participate in the study and discuss their social situations openly.

I thank you all.

## **Abstract**

The university environment for undergraduate students is a transitional phase, filled with new experiences and autonomy, it can also be a lonely and stressful stage with students having to navigate between academic and social demands. This qualitative research study explored social diversity in a tertiary context. Six volunteer undergraduate students, between the ages of 18 and 25, underwent an interview process guided by open-ended questions targeted at answering the research questions. The responses were analysed using thematic analysis and various common themes were discovered, contributing to the discussion of findings. These findings revealed that the students had mixed feelings towards their social environment. Many participants hesitated to form diverse relationships, preferring a conservative approach, maintaining social bonds with those they were familiar with, others revealed that they would like to form diverse social relationships, but feel as though they are perceived negatively. It was found that student socialisation is important in helping manage the demands of a new environment; they assist each other academically and recreationally, creating a positive university experience. These research findings may assist students in realising that their perceptions of their environment are not foreign and that other students feel similarly. It can be used to recommend that universities create more conducive environments that will facilitate positive social experiences and prioritize diverse socialising.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the study**

Different social interactions provide an influential role in the overall well-being of a university student, especially at an undergraduate level. Research reveals that there is a significant correlation between the quality of new friendships and student adjustment to university (Buote et al., 2007), implying that the role of attachments, in particular, is important in how students perceive and adapt to their tertiary environment. Hence, student social support is a good predictor of retention in a university, particularly in the early years of study. Global satisfaction with university life is often dependent on the satisfaction students experience with the academic and social aspects of their university, which in turn are determined by the satisfaction they have with university facilities and services (Sirgy et al., 2007).

This is a topic that could benefit from local research. This research study seeks to demonstrate that there is much improvement that needs to be made targeting university facilities and enabling them to become areas that are more conducive to social diversity. As Kuh (2009), reports that it is dependent on the learning institution to create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable to engage in diverse and positive social behaviour, without this emphasis a key aspect of student well-being will not be afforded due priority.

The study intended to demonstrate the usefulness of diverse social interactions in combatting students' negative perceptions toward their new tertiary environment.

Research-based on the impact of social integration in higher education institutions is scarce. This is problematic as successful social integration into the university environment is an important factor in the lives of first-year students, a lack of which can be a reason for students to feel isolated in their new environment (Wilcox et al., 2005).



When a student enters the tertiary academic world, it can be an exciting and overwhelming experience. The tertiary environment in a South African context is vibrant, with students from different backgrounds, with different perceptions, coming together to achieve similar objectives, to utilize their diverse socialising patterns, and to interact with limited restriction.

This study intended to examine whether social interaction, behaviour and diversity are important aspects of tertiary education, and whether they are conducive to an undergraduate student's academic lifestyle. This point is significant from the perspective of a postgraduate student, I have experienced the value of a well-established social base on-campus, proving beneficial in coping with academic demands, and finding a mutual ground with peers was a buffer against stress. It has also been noticed that students who often interact with their peers and admire them, are more than likely to be influenced by them. Additionally, by exploring different social relationships at an undergraduate level has determined whether these relationships are important in assisting a new student to adjust and/or thrive.

This research study was conducted at a local university. The value and purpose of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of the nature of undergraduate student interactions, and whether they hold value for the student in their new environment.

This research topic was generated by the idea that social behaviour is a key aspect in the life of university students, considering the interactive nature of the university environment. Focusing on this topic was important, as tertiary education in South Africa is constantly evolving, and has seen great changes over the years. Uncovering socialisation in a university environment help gauged whether it is an area that still holds prominence in the lives of students. It was also worth of discovering the types of relationships that students are inclined to form and the purposes that these relationships serve.

Exploring previous research (e.g. Bojuwoye, 2002), on social behaviour in a tertiary context, and the impact it has on the lifestyle and academia of students, led to the realisation

that there is a gap in a local context. Although there are currently different mediums students use to communicate with each other, for example, social media or distant learning, we should also not underestimate the value of face-to-face interactions and what these mean for students (Madge et al., 2009). Social interactions can be useful for learning, informal purposes, recreation, and for students to make friends in a new and often challenging environment, as first-year students often find that making new friends is a difficult and stressful experience (Bojuwoye, 2002).

## 1.2. Statement of the problem

The impact of the importance of creating and maintaining diverse social relationships in the university environment is underestimated.

## 1.3 Purpose of the study

This study intended to examine the social behaviour of students at a tertiary institution, specifically, how students at an undergraduate level create and maintain their social relationships in order to be successful at university. The researcher intended to gather relevant information to understand and explore how students socialise and the different types of relationships that exist within a university environment.

## 1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are the following:

- This research study serves a role in completing the dissertation component for a master's degree, which is often the requisite in order to obtain a post-graduate qualification (Khumalo & Klerk, 2018), and as such, this study is motivated by the discipline of psychology and social sciences.

- The objective of this research study was to obtain a better understanding on how different social relationships are created and maintained within a university environment
- To determine if there are certain university settings or facilities that are conducive to promoting social interactions.
- To uncover whether these relationships significantly contribute to a student's academic experience and performance.
- To explore the dynamics underpinning the most popular relationships amongst students.
- To understand the relationship between student social behaviour and their university experience.

### 1.5 Research questions

The questions asked in this study are derived from addressing the research problem.

- (1) How are relationships amongst students formed, and what are the different types of relationships evident in the university setting?
- (2) What kind of social settings, facilities or activities promote the creation and maintaining of these relationships?
- (3) How do these relationships contribute to an undergraduate student's academic experience?
- (4) What are the most popular relationships amongst students?

## 1.6 Significance of the study

As a basic research study, this research aimed to facilitate a better understanding of the tertiary social environment. By using the local context as the location of the study, we improve our local research capacity and explore social dynamics which will eventually improve the research needs of the developing world (Edejer, 1999 in Wagner et al., 2012). Previous international studies (e.g. Ramsay et al., 2007), have discussed the influential link between student adjustment to university life and the types of social support they receive during the first years of their university experience. Research shows that the initial years of tertiary study can be overwhelming for some (Bojuwoye, 2002), this is important as recent years have shown that tertiary educational environments in South Africa are dynamic, ever-changing and even turbulent. This research is relevant to show that social patterns amongst students can either assist against stressors or could even trigger stressful situations amongst students. Hence, there is a wide range of relationships that students are inclined to form.

Exploring social diversity in a university environment is significant as, undergraduate students in particular, have the freedom to interact without restriction and direct parental supervision (Imaledo et al., 2012). They are now exposed to a diverse range of individuals, as opposed to their presumably limited high-school interactions. It must also be considered that students are now outside of their familiar high-school or home environment and are left on their own to make sense of the different people and personalities that they encounter.

Discussing university facilities and trends could be significant in demonstrating to institutions the value of improved social on-campus facilities, and how to encourage social diversity. It will assist in bringing awareness to the types of perceptions new students have towards others, and the emotions that are coupled with their social experiences. This information could be used to encourage the development of improved facilities that enhance

interaction amongst a diverse range of students, and thereby promote the creation of conducive relationships.

### 1.7 Assumptions of the study

Highlighting assumptions are important in order to make the study relevant. It will be noteworthy to inform or disregard previous assumptions, i.e. that personal backgrounds influence the types of relationships one is inclined to form, or that more often than not, certain relationships serve particular functions in a person's life. These and other related matters will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Social interactions amongst university students will continue to be an important facet of university life. This study assumes that social support is important for student's in higher education, and this assumption is supported by empirical studies (e.g. Sirgy et al., 2006).

The sample chosen for this study was selected on the assumption that they will be a suitable representation of the population that the researcher wishes to make inferences to.

### 1.8 Scope and limitations of the study

The location of the study and the types of students that were interviewed, are the main critically set restrictions to enable a more focused research study. The location was restricted to one local university and the group of participants were undergraduate students. This was motivated by previous literature, which will be discussed further in chapter two, that showed that social interaction was more prominent during the initial years of tertiary education. The researcher may have been restricted to her subjective reasoning abilities and this will be explained further in chapter three.

## 1.9 The operational definition of terms

The word ‘diversity’ is broad, but for the purposes of this research, the term will reflect the differences between the types of socialising at a tertiary level and the different social bonds between university students. Tertiary education is used as a broad term to refer to university, and the words environment and climate can be used interchangeably, the former specifically relating to the observable university facilities and the latter referring more to the atmosphere within these facilities.

## 1.10 Summary and overview of the study

Following from one chapter to another, this research study will follow a coherent structure; it will elaborate on the existing and relevant literature pertaining to the topic, provide a rationale and objective for the topic, address the research questions, explain the research methodology employed, discuss the findings after data collection, and conclude with a better understanding of the topic. Moreover, the study will identify the common trends and patterns in student interactions, whether these interactions are sufficient to develop relationships between students, and if so, elaborate on the nature of these relationships.

Data analysis followed a qualitative method, and a review of current local and international literature. Data collection involved taking notes on observations of students interacting in informal university settings (i.e. the cafeteria), and interviews with six undergraduate psychology students. This information was then analysed, and thereafter followed a discussion to explore the themes and trends related to this topic. Literature sources and previous research have been consulted to gauge the importance of this topic and was consulted to inform the rationale of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Review of related literature**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Research shows that the first year of university is crucial in terms of social relationships, as it exposes students to diverse people, differentiating between their home and high school environment (Gurin et al., 2002). Therefore, first-year students enter the tertiary environment with apprehension, anxiety and levels of uncertainty (Gibney et al., 2011 in Hagenauer, 2014), and it is during this time that most decisions to drop-out are made (Christie, Munroe & Fisher, 2004 in Hagenauer, 2014). Integrating oneself into the learning environment and forming supportive relationships is an important task for students at the beginning of their studies (Zander et al., 2018). A review of international and local literature demonstrates that socialising amongst university students is a globally relevant topic that requires exploration.

### **2.2. Theoretical review**

Qualitative research is determined by a particular research paradigm (Wagner et al., 2012), for the purpose of this research a social constructivism paradigm will be used, which focuses on the construction and application of knowledge in socially mediated contexts (Thomas et al., 2014), i.e. a university context. By using this as a framework, we can assume that learning is not independent of an individual's interaction with their environment, that the social environment is crucial and that students can learn through their social interactions which will provide them with new knowledge, of people and places, that may challenge their existing knowledge (Thomas et al., 2014). Two relevant theories will be reviewed here.

. Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958) theorises that students are likely to adopt behaviours that allow them to socialise with those with whom they hold similar values to and

where they perceive they will encounter a positive outcome. Tinto's Institutional Departure Model complements this, relaying that successful social integration is an influential factor that helps students maintain commitment to their institution.

In accordance with the paradigm, Kelman's Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958) will be applied; it is based around the idea that a student's attitude is influenced by the three social actions of, compliance, identification, and internalization. These three processes are viewed as agents of social power. Expanding on this, i.e. Kelman's theory, Simpson et al. (2015), explains that diverse social relationships hold different kinds of social power. The source of power in a relationship resides in the value and attractiveness of that relationship in the life of a student (Kelman, 1958). This power can be exerted when a person or a group of people utilise overt and/or covert methods to convince others to produce desirable behaviours; they may imply or directly offer them the promise of rewards. This power of influence or the tactics people use to induce behaviours produces logical and reasonable arguments to generally appeal to the personal belief system of others (Orina et al., 2002). Thus, a person complies and is inclined to adjust according to their social surroundings to produce overt or covert rewarding behaviours or avoid punishing circumstances. Adopting these subtle behaviours can help sustain constructive or even destructive relationships. The three processes as delineated by Kelman (Kelman, 1958), function depending on the relationship between: (a) the value of the expected effect, (b) the power of the influencing individual/s, and (c) the predominance of the induced response. It is important to note, that each of the processes, i.e. compliance, identification, and internalization, is characterised by particular antecedents, and each of these are determined by particular thoughts and feelings that an individual experiences when adopting a social behaviour (Kelman, 1958).



An appropriate model that explains student success in a university environment is Tinto's model of student retention and persistence (Schreiber et al., 2014). This model emphasises the fact that there is a positive relationship between a student's social integration and academic integration. These factors influence the extent to which a student is committed to the social and academic aspects of their university. More importantly, student characteristics, such as pre-university experiences, cultural background, and values, contribute to their social and academic involvement (Schreiber et al., 2014).

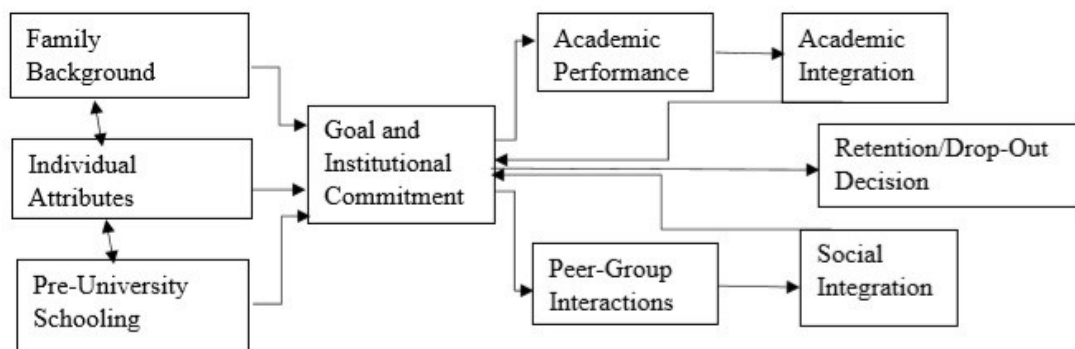


Figure 2.2. Tinto's Institutional Departure Model (Burke, 2019)

As illustrated by Tinto's model, adequate and positive social integration is a predictor of goal and institutional commitment, contributing to student satisfaction. (Burke, 2019). Family and school background, as well as individual preferences influence a student's commitment to their university. This contributes to their social and academic performance, which determine their integration and subsequent likelihood to remain at the university.

Vincent Tinto introduced the concept of retention in 1975 (as cited in Stratton, 2015), theorizing that students who socially integrate into the campus community increase their commitment to the institution and are more likely to graduate. In his framework, Tinto (1993) also highlights that amongst the main reasons for student departure include their failure to

become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and the social life of the institution (Kuh et al., 2006).

### 2.3. Review of international empirical studies

A study in the United Kingdom revealed that social interaction is an essential part of student retention, as peers and friends can provide each other with, much needed, emotional support (Wilcox et al., 2005). This links to findings by Kuh (2009), which examined the concept of 'learning community experiences', based on a similar idea, where two or more students that take the same classes together and relate well to each other are more actively engaged in their academic tasks and took these positive experiences into their graduate years of study.

Diversity is not solely in reference to racial diversity, international studies make significant inferences that race is influential to how people socialise (e.g. Meeuwisse, Severiens & Born, 2010), suggesting that many student racial groups correlate with the formality of their socialisation patterns. Students from minority races displayed a greater sense of belonging to their universities, and increased academic success, when they had satisfactory formal relationships with other students, limiting their interactions to the tertiary environment and studying context (Meeuwisse, Severiens & Born, 2010). However, students from majority racial groups showed a similar sense of belonging when they maintained informal relationships with fellow students, extending their interactions beyond obligatory hours (Meeuwisse, Severiens & Born, 2010). To assert the importance of developing social skills in the learning process, internationally, many universities encourage their students to study in different locations for a period of time. These universities have found that these student exchange programs, which are targeted to allow students with the opportunity to

develop cultural and social competencies are important for learning and interacting in a global and local market (Smith & McCabe, 2008).

In saying this, technology and social networking must also be taken into account. In this digital age of social networking and online information sharing, technology is playing an increasingly important role in social relations in educational settings. Facebook, for instance, continues to be influential, as students are inclined to link up with other students via Facebook, prior to registration, as it is viewed as the popular thing to do (Madge et al., 2009), Facebook is seen as a social tool, to keep in touch with old friends, plan social events, connect with new friends, and maintain an online and trendy image that contributes to the type of social groups one will be likely to associate in a new environment. Moreover, there is increased participation in web-enhanced student interaction, specifically for academic purposes. However, the success of this is highly dependent on the consistency of such interaction, and the presence of students in the online discussion can often be less overwhelming than face-to-face interactions (Picciano, 2002).

#### 2.4. Review of local empirical studies

Considering the everchanging local tertiary environment, South African universities have considerably increased their enrolment of first-year students. However, they often present less success in maintaining their graduate output (Peterson et al., 2009).

Disadvantaged students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds have increased difficulty adjusting to university and are likely to experience alienation from others, which can result in feelings of anxiety. An on-site university facility that could be conducive to socialising is student housing, or residences. Buote *et al.* (2007), discovered that 84% of on-campus residence student networks were found to be comprised of other students, and in contrast, students that commute to and from university were still able to maintain networks

that involved other individuals besides other students. Living away from home can be difficult, moving away from supportive families and into isolating student residences can contribute to increased psychological difficulties and reduced adjustment (Sennet et al. 2003). Whether or not a student chooses to stay at an on-campus residence plays a role in the nature of the relationships that they develop, this connects with the development of their spatial identities, a concept that implies that if students frequently socialise in the same university areas, they begin to develop an identity relating to these areas (Schrieff, et al., 2005).

Most tertiary students in South Africa come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, and the highest drop-out rates are amongst first-year students, especially those of low socioeconomic status (Peterson et al., 2009), hence, research shows that psychosocial factors play an important role in determining academic success amongst these students.

Adjustment to university is viewed as a multi-faceted process that involves the interaction between the student and their environment. The majority of South African students find adjusting from high school to university, particularly difficult (Peterson et al., 2009).

Help-seeking is one of the factors that play a role in better adjustment, it refers to students using informal interactions amongst themselves and the faculty, in order to ask for assistance and learn institutional values and expectations, especially when the academic workload appears overwhelming (Peterson et al., 2009). When students come to the realisation that others are facing similar difficulties or situations as them, they become more willing to associate with said others, thus normalising the university experience (Buote et al., 2007).

We can therefore deduce that there is consensus in both local and international literature regarding the prominent roles that socialising and social behaviour play amongst tertiary students. It highlights the efforts that universities undertake to encourage social interactions. Additionally, there are common themes present in both categories of literature, such as racial dynamics and its influence on social patterns. Both categories of literature feature Tinto's

model of retention (e.g. Stratton, 2015). That social engagement and student social support are the common factors that impact a student's decision to remain at a tertiary institution (Tinto, 2005, in Crosling et al., 2009).

## 2.5.Social integration

Previous research on the topic demonstrates that social relationships are broad area of study, and for us to work with it with more focus we need to define it clearly. In general, social support is defined as “support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups and the larger community” (Ozbay et al., 2007).

For the purposes of this study, we will use the term social relationships to refer to the bonds or connections that students have with other individuals while pursuing an undergraduate study at a university. This context is a suitable example of the integration between socializing and academia. This will allow us to explore the differences between the absence and the presence of diverse social relationships, and the quality or the strain that these relationships have on an undergraduate student's academic and overall lifestyle.

Whether undergraduate students maintain a commitment to their studies is often related to their satisfactory transition into university life. Over and above the other developmental transitions a student might face, the transition from a high school environment to a tertiary environment is a not an easy one and often involves many changes and challenges (Buote et al, 2007). To reiterate, first-year students are faced with a considerable amount of change due to the transition from high school to tertiary education, and the development from adolescence to young adulthood.

Transitions expose individuals to new situations, and the early stage of any transition is especially important as individuals are required to seek relevant information in order to make sense of their unique situation (Gurin et al., 2002). Brown (2004), aptly describes student's

resistance to change as being a natural feature of being human, this is especially important considering that this research involves undergraduate students that are faced with a great deal of change, specifically regarding their environment. Emerging adults, such as undergraduate students are often exposed to new environments, and the quality of interactions in these environments often facilitate satisfactory and positive transition into university life (Buote et al., 2007).

Accompanying the general change that follows entering a tertiary environment, students can suffer from other conditions such as homesickness, a sense of isolation, depression or different types of psychological disturbances, interpersonal conflict, and even a decrease in academic grades (Buote et al., 2007). Social relationships can play a role in emotionally supporting a student, and Umberson and Montez (2010) state that adults who are more socially connected have increased longevity and a healthier life compared to their isolated peers.

The word retention can have multiple meanings, but most commonly it can be defined as pursuing something until the end goal has been achieved. In terms of university retention, it refers to student persistence until program completion or until personal academic goals have been achieved (Wild & Ebbers, 2010).

Retention does not necessarily imply academic success and degree completion. Literature shows a link between academic retention and social engagement: Lizzo and Wilson (2009) explain that a student's perception of their academic success has underlying factors that include whether they felt a sense of purpose and a feeling of connectedness to others. In addition, students with social phobia are at a higher risk of having academic difficulties and dropping out of their educational program than others (Bella & Omigbodun, 2009)

Studies show that there is a significant correlation between a student's self-esteem, their relationship status and satisfaction with their academic lives (McLaughlin, 2010). Therefore,

by highlighting the fact that connections with others can influence how a student feels about themselves, will demonstrate that social behaviour impacts student integration. For this study and its link to social behaviour, “Self- esteem is defined as a person’s self-worth and is closely associated with well-being, it can originate from both the personal self and the social self” (Du, King & Chi, 2017, p. 1). Self-esteem is viewed as a person’s asset that is necessary to help them cope psychologically to stressful life transitions (Peterson et al., 2009).

To narrow it down, the focus will be on the social self. Social self-esteem is then divided further into two groups, firstly describing people’s perceptions of their self-worth based on their interpersonal attachments with others (i.e. relational self-esteem) and secondly on their identification with social groups (i.e. collective self-esteem) (Du, King & Chi, 2017). The amount of satisfaction individuals experience in a relationship and the behaviours of the partners in that relationship contributes to their self-esteem (McLaughlin, 2010). When studying social practices, literature such as Brown (2004) mentions two important themes and related theories, the social identity theory and the optimal identity theory. The social identity theory asserts that students require in-group identification to create a social identity for themselves, and the optimal identity theory states their need for the difference to feel a sense of uniqueness and distinction. This demonstrates their need for relating to their peers through similarities and differences.

Socialisation patterns are often dependent on internal factors, such as an individual’s perceptions, personality and or even their beliefs. Some students are more likely to completely immerse themselves academically when they feel more integrated into the university’s social activities, in other words, when they feel accepted and welcomed in various student-body organisations, or casual interactive associations (Zander et al., 2018). Personal traits, such as academic self-efficacy and growth mindsets also play a role in the way a student wishes to socialise. As discussed by Zander et al. (2018), academic self-

efficacy refers to whether an individual believes they have the ability to succeed academically, and growth mindsets refer to how students will react to challenging situations and whether they could improve or grow. It is vital to give these two constructs a mention, as they can be linked to a student's social behaviour.

In an educational setting, students that are perceived to have greater academic self-efficacy and a growth mindset are more likely to be candidates for social popularity (Zander et al., 2018). An academically self-efficacious student believes in their own abilities in overcoming barriers in educational settings and reach their academic goals (Zander et al., 2018). Academic self-efficacy is essential in this context, as those students with higher academic self-efficacy will perceive themselves as being a source of academic support for others, this then will increase their integration with their peers (Zander et al., 2018).

An additional concept worthy of mention is the concept of social phobia. Studies conducted in Africa (e.g. Bella & Obigbodun, 2009), describe social phobia as a fear of situations that involve the interaction with others, with a high prevalence amongst adolescence and university students. Criticism from others, an uncomfortable studying environment, being female, coming from rural areas, being first-year students, and poor social support are amongst the risk factors that can lead to social phobia (Desalegn et al., 2019).

The above discussion emphasises the relationship between self-esteem, self-efficacy and social networks. The perception that one has of their capacity to perform in a socially and academically demanding environment determines the perception they have of themselves and their inclination to behaviour in a particular manner.

## 2.6. Diverse relationships

Schrieff (2005) makes mention of social groups, and that students are inclined to group themselves and socialise accordingly. We need to ask the question, what does it mean for



students to be a part of a group? Although many students might perceive themselves as being part of a group, this does not necessarily mean that they have had a positive university experience, it could be the contrary, as some groups still experience a less than satisfactory university experience (Brown, 2004). Over time, group members indirectly learn which areas they feel comfortable in and in which areas they feel out of place (Schrieff, 2005). This is often determined by whether they can identify with those around them. It would be assumed that there would be a shift in social patterns from a high school to a tertiary environment; however, dominant groups maintain their sense of status by limiting their interactions with others and controlling the use of their social space to their advantage (Schrieff et al, 2007). Group conflict can exist between and within groups and refer to particular attitudes that display the nature of competitiveness, and a perceived threat to group position (Brown, 2004). Students present a preference for the members of their group and are thus more inclined to share valuable, academic, and other resources within themselves (Brown, 2004).

Intergroup contact can be facilitated by reducing prejudice, increasing equal group status within an institution, and allowing students to acknowledge that they often have common goals (Pettigrew, 1998). All of this can be implemented with the support of university authorities. When students perceive that they have common factors that bring them together, interaction is more readily accepted, and thus social relationships thrive (Pettigrew, 1998).

McCabe (2016) discusses important research findings regarding the type of networks students usually tend to develop, and this commonly relates to the reason that these networks serve a purpose for students and facilitate their academic lifestyle, as well as influence their satisfaction pertaining to their academic and social lives. Students usually cluster, and this clustering can be termed and defined, as either the 'tight-knitters', 'compartmentalizers' and 'samplers' (McCabe, 2016, p.24). As the name suggests, the tight knitters are a group of students that have close relationships with each other and have mutual friends, these groups

usually comprise of racially marginalised groups, they provide academic support, social support and motivation for each other. In contrast, the compartmentalizers often have clusters of a few peers, serving different purposes, one cluster mainly for social support or friendship and another for academic support, and then the samplers, on the other hand, socialise with a diverse range of individuals, but these individuals typically remain unconnected to each other, they can succeed irrespective of their social patterns (McCabe, 2016).

Peers are important for the student's well-being and academic achievement (McCabe, 2016). When discussing peers specifically, students link them to academic support. However, the word friendship often denotes something different. As McCabe (2016) states that nearly all students said that their friends distracted them from their studies, and in university, they often required peers that served a different role. When it comes to cross-sex relationships, there is a predominant connotation that the bond is based on physical or sexual attraction (Reeder, 2000). Cross-sex friendships have become more common, and four types of attraction that occur in these friendships. These include subjective physical attraction, objective physical attraction, romantic attraction, and friendship attraction.

Subjective physical attraction implies sexual attraction to the other, objective physical attraction occurs when one believes that the other is attractive in general, romantic attraction is the desire to turn a friendship into a romantic relationship, and friendship attraction is having mutual platonic feelings (Reeder, 2000).

Social interactions play an influential role in the lives of students; some interactions play a greater impact than others (Orina et al., 2002). For example, it was found that dating couples and spouses were significantly more influential to each other and that there is an understanding that people who are committed to a relationship have the opportunity and power to change each other's attitudes and beliefs, contributing to the area of social influence (Orina et al., 2002).

## 2.7. Summary

When attending a learning environment, it can often be underemphasised that education involves more than the mere accumulation of facts, and that many types of indirect learning can occur (Brown, 2004). Accordingly, “if you have classmates who are...much like you, you will not learn nearly as much as you will if you have classmates who are very different from you.” (Bowen et al., 1999, p.140), when students incorporate themselves into the social environment without inhibition, they can not only learn socialisation skills but also demonstrate an appreciation for the differences that reside within groups of people.

Students that provide each other with important information and those that are willing to form new relationships are more likely to feel less isolated and are more likely to provide each other with useful advice on how to utilise their environment; they are offering each other a sense of ease (Buote et al., 2007).

A student’s perception of their overall university experience is mediated by factors such as their group membership and social participation (Brown, 2004). These factors contribute to a range of different experiences for each student. Hence, making each student’s university experience unique and similar.

A means of informing this study was done by acknowledging the trends expressed in the relevant literature, and by identifying the consistency between such trends and the current patterns in a recent South African context (Wagner et al., 2012).

By using the concept of structural diversity, universities have some power in determining a student’s social identity. Universities can either encourage or discourage students from different backgrounds from developing a wide variety of relationships; this will be conducive to learning and development as it allows students with the opportunity to engage in active thinking, discourse and motivation (Gurin et al., 2002).

Recent literature, such as Brown (2004) suggests that diversity has become a central concern for tertiary institutions, and with such matters come the focus towards institutions observing and understanding socialisation patterns amongst their university students. When tertiary institutions have the objective of increasing diversity and thereby promoting effective social patterns, they often implement two broad strategies, firstly, by increasing the representation of diverse populations, and secondly, by creating a conducive climate that will sustain beneficial and diverse student interactions (Brown, 2004). Assisting and encouraging student interaction in undergraduate years has shown to contribute to students persisting with their studies and degree completion (Crosling et al., 2009).

Difficulty adjusting to university demands during the first year has been one of the main reasons for high drop-out rates (Buote et al., 2007). Considering that the first years of university can be a new and stressful experience for students, social relationships and friendships, in particular, can be seen as a buffer against the stress and allow students to support each other (Buote et al., 2007). Friendships offered students a sense of belonging and companionship, and the quality of friendships was dependant on the proximity of students to each other, a willingness to open up, and having similar interests and complementary personalities to each other.

Prior to their current tertiary environment, student's social interactions may have been restricted. Thus, many of their experiences may have been mediated by factors of familiarity, such as race, culture, and/or gender (Brown, 2004). Now, they are presented with an opportunity to exert their characteristics and social skills with limited restriction.

Bearing in mind that socialisation is an interdependent effort (Pettigrew, 1998), socialisation practices often encompass a student's social identity, their sense of distinctiveness from others and even their social dominance or lack thereof, as well as group and peer conflict (Brown, 2004).

It is important to note that studies have shown that socialisation at universities may have both a positive and negative impact on academic performance, depending on the nature of the socialising (Peterson et al., 2009). For example, interactions during lectures can be beneficial, but participation in social clubs can be less advantageous. Another important interaction that students are inclined to benefit from is with their lecturers or mentors - this helps them gain a sense of loyalty and a sense belonging to their institution and further assists in alleviating stress (Hagenauer, 2014). Accordingly, McLaughlin (2010) confirms that social interactions created and maintained in an academic environment may be influential to academic success, and beneficial to students.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This research study adopted a qualitative approach. As stated by Anderson (2010), qualitative research can provide an understanding of the nature of educational matters and can provide insights into both teaching and learning in a variety of contexts. Qualitative research, collects, interprets, and analyses data that cannot be easily reduceable statistically (Anderson, 2010). For this study, interviews were conducted, open-ended questions were used as a guide. This allowed for an in-depth exploration of a topic; however, it did require more time and effort from the respondent (Wagner et al., 2012).

### **3.2. Paradigm of the Study**

This study is a qualitative design, which involves understanding non-numerical data, and should operate from a particular research paradigm (Wagner et al., 2012), for this study a social constructivism paradigm is most appropriate, since it focuses on the development and utilization of knowledge in socially determined contexts (Thomas et al., 2014), such as the university context.

### **3.3. Study setting**

Data collection and other related pursuits for this study was conducted at a local university, the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. The researcher was based at the university, assessing the feasibility of the study, obtaining guidance and supervision, accessing suitable participants, conducting interviews and observations, and ensuring that ethical guidelines were observed.

As previously mentioned, the term diversity is not limited to racial and cultural characteristics, however it is important to note particular attributes of the university and the city. The statistical census population, taken in 2011, revealed that the city of Pietermaritzburg has an estimate of 475000 residents (City Population, 2001), of which there is a majority of Black African individuals that predominantly speak IsiZulu, this is of value when trying to create an understanding of the context. In the year 2016, the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal had 46520 registered students, of which 33456 were undergraduate students, and 19101 were registered in the faculty of humanities, with 6745 more female students than males, and the largest racial group being African (University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, 2017).

#### 3.4. Study Population

Robinson (2014), emphasized that the process of sampling is a crucial component of any qualitative research study, and that sourcing a sample is a hands-on process that requires practical, organizational, and ethical skills. In this case, the researcher sourced students, on the Pietermaritzburg campus, using a relevant advertisement, stating the nature of the study and emphasizing that participation is voluntary. Prior to selecting a sample, ethical clearance was obtained, and a sample type and size was clearly defined.

The group of participants or sample for this study were local, undergraduate psychology students, residing in Pietermaritzburg.

Robinson (2014), emphasized the importance of using an appropriate method when selecting a sample, there are four important considerations to make; these are: defining the sample population and the inclusion and exclusion criteria; allocating a practical sample size; implementing a suitable sample strategy and exploring ethical methods in sourcing the sample or participants (Robinson, 2014). Defining the sample population or the target group created a clear useful and practical boundary, and provided a theoretical role by guiding the

researcher as to what the sample is, i.e. who and what the study is about, to enable better exploration of the literature on the subject.

The inclusion criteria determined which students could participate in the study, whereas the exclusion criteria determined which students could not (Robinson, 2014).

To increase the equivalence in the sample, inclusion criteria has been determined, this includes creating geographical and educational homogeneity. Hence, the students were located on one campus, studying similar subjects. It is interesting to note that psychology students are a good example of a convenience sample, as they can be easy to access and are frequently used by academics in psychological research (Wagner et al., 2012). Moreover, previous research (e.g. Robinson, 2014), asserts that psychology students are suitable for practical reasons, often demonstrating their willingness to participate, and since the researcher is a student of psychology, psychology students seemed convenient to locate.

Undergraduate students were specifically selected as the target group so that the researcher could explore the important transitional phase of entry into university.

### 3.5. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used, this sampling technique is known for its cost-effective and convenient nature, as well as being the most practical or expedient form of sampling, as the researcher was able to use individuals that are readily available (Warner et al., 2012). However, this sampling technique does not come without limitations, and can exclude certain types of students, thereby not being representative of the wider student population.

The size of the sample population was determined by both practical and theoretical reasons (Robinson, 2014). Thus, the sample size selected for this study took practical considerations into account - the reality was that the size had to be determined at the initial



research proposal stage, at which point a time frame and plan for the study needed to be established. This research study has a relatively small number of participants; it follows guidelines by Robinson (2014), stating that the sample size should be relatively small if an interviewer wants to give each participant a voice within the study, and conduct an in-depth analysis of each interview. Hence, six participants were used.

### 3.6.Descriptive Analysis of the distribution of respondents

From the outset, it is important to note that each participant volunteered for the study, and objectively it was noticed that they were students that valued their tertiary experience and had a desire to inculcate themselves into academically inclined activities, such as this study. Each of the participants were undergraduate psychology students, studying at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. Due to the fact that convenience sampling was used, there was no equality in the division of the types of participants. However, it is pleasing to note that both males and females were interviewed, from different cultural and racial backgrounds.

### 3.7. Research Instrument

Research was gathered using an interview guided by open-ended questions (attached in Appendix 5). Following guidelines by Wagner et al. (2012), the questions are targeted to generate useful information for the study and can obtain a discussion for answering the research questions. This was an attempt to explain a particular construct, in this case a psychosocial construct. It is important to note that the construct of socialisation is the main concern, and the research instrument was set to determine what consequences more or less of this construct would mean. The questions were designed to enable measuring the same construct for different participants.

### 3.8. Validity and Reliability

Qualitative research can be criticized for being biased or lacking rigour. However, it can be conducted in a manner that can and should yield valid, reliable, and credible results (Anderson, 2010). When using qualitative analysis, one should acknowledge biases that might occur as part of the process and prepare to actively engage with them as and when they arise (Wagner et al., 2012). To ensure validity and reliability, the interview questions were focused on answering the research questions. As laid out by Noble and Smith (2015), the following strategies were taken into consideration; the researcher acknowledged and did attempt to eliminate personal biases, as far as possible, which may influence findings, and engaged with other researchers and research guidelines for strategies to reduce research bias. The researcher also ensured meticulous record-keeping and ensured that the interpretation of the data is clear and transparent; this was done by including detailed verbatim descriptions of participants' responses to support findings. By not defining the study population, the researcher exposes the study at risk for undermining its credibility and coherence (Robinson, 2014), thus as the section of sampling elaborated above, defining a sample population is important. A comparison of the data from this study with previous data from related or similar studies, guides the researcher in identifying anticipated themes (Anderson, 2010), but this must be viewed with caution, as each study is entitled to a fair and unbiased interpretation of results. Furthermore, an additional number of techniques were employed to maximise the trustworthiness of the results, Anderson (2012), explains that contradictory evidence or deviant cases may be identified and acknowledged during the data analysis to limit any researcher bias that may have influenced the perception of data. Moreover, by allowing participants the opportunity to provide their reflections or feedback relating to how the researcher interpreted their responses, challenges the researcher, and provides a reason to consider alternative interpretations and re-evaluate initial findings.

### 3.9. Research design

Prior to commencing the study, a research proposal was submitted well in advance to university assessors, this enabled the process of testing the suitability of the study, and ensured that the process was appropriate and in line with the expectations of a valuable and relevant dissertation. This is an important step in a project, as it facilitates the process of testing the feasibility of the research study, the realistic nature of recruiting participants, the effectiveness of the research instrument and whether the method of data analysis was suitable. An important factor was to ensure that the interview accurately addressed the research questions in a comprehensible and appropriate manner, and that the questions were well defined, clearly understood and presented appropriately.

### 3.10. Data Analysis

Data analysis, whether qualitative or quantitative, fundamentally works with summarising and describing mass amounts of information, and this is done with the aim of identifying links or discrepancies within and between the collected data (Archer, 2018). Qualitative data analysis requires that the researcher be mindful of the reader and in answering the research questions.

Hence, making an informed decision on how to analyse data will allow for the appropriate deconstruction of the information provided. Most qualitative data analysis methods are based on the principle of identifying prominent concepts. When conducting data analysis, the end goal is two-fold, as understood by the researcher. Firstly, how to present this large amount of information in a manner that will answer the research questions, and secondly to present the information in a way that will be logical and understandable for the reader to read, and structured in a way that allows the reader to make sense of the overall phenomenon under

study. Chenai (2012), aptly states that presentation of the data is a process of generating and managing knowledge; in other words, transforming mere information into something useful, i.e. knowledge or even wisdom.

Due to the overwhelming amount of information gathered during the data collection stage, qualitative analysis can seem like a daunting task, then thematic analysis is a useful tool to help the researcher distinguish between important and unimportant themes that emerge from the data. Thus, it was decided that the most suitable way to analyse data, in this case, will be to use thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a core structural component of qualitative data analysis (Archer, 2018). It facilitates the critical tenet of qualitative analysis, which is to identify common and prominent themes within the collected data, a method which entails simplifying the information collected through the interviews, then breaking them down to regroup them into comprehensible themes. This data analysis technique can be viewed as a way of bringing structure to what would have been chaos or a random stream of information, by identifying sections of importance and grouping them to form meaningful units, known as themes.

Essentially, the researcher recorded the responses from the interviews, in verbatim, and the transcriptions included every phrase and or pause that the student made. Thereafter, this was be read through in detail. The six participants responses were separated into different questions; any similarities between answers were carefully noted and explored. Moreover, any unique or different responses were also noted and discussed.

These discussions follow a systematic pattern, being derived from the participants' answers, and then followed a categorising process according to important headings.

### 3.11. Ethical Considerations

Being ethically compliant, requires an ethically component researcher (Khumalo & Klerk, 2018), one who understands their subject content, know their research approach, and demonstrates efficiency in dealing with participants and data with integrity and sensitivity.

Ethical considerations for this study followed similar guidelines as proposed by Wassenaar and Slack (2016), which highlighted various important points to avoid ethical dilemmas, which is discussed in detail below.

The researcher formed and maintained a collaborative partnership, since the research was conducted under supervision, it was important that the researcher and the supervisor work collectively in ensuring that ethical guidelines were not violated. Considering the nature of the study, building a trusting rapport with the participants was important and enabled truthful and useful discussions related to the topic.

The social value of this study will, ideally, be that it will generate information that contributes to a larger body of knowledge in the social sciences. This research study addresses questions that are of value by gaining a better understanding of the influential nature of social relationships. Participants are given the option of wanting to receive feedback, this is done to provide them with the necessary insight regarding socialising patterns, and the benefits or harms thereof.

A comprehensive summary of the research findings will be emailed to students, albeit whether a student wishes to explore a summary of the research findings is entirely up to them. Moreover, the researcher will not be in the position to make any judgements or recommendations to students regarding this topic.

Taking favourable risk-benefit ratio into account, although there is benefit in this study, as mentioned above, it will be unfair not to consider the possible risks involved. Participants often face harms to dignity in psychosocial studies (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016), and since this

study involves participants discussing the nature of their social relationships, it may cause some discomfort. The interviews were conducted individually, to avoid compromising individual dignity or to prevent controversy between peers. One should not underestimate the impact of invasive qualitative interviews causing distress (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016), considering that the interview questions are intended to probe deeper into the social lives of students, it could thereby be invasive, and therefore a convenient counselling referral service was found and confirmed. Therefore, when providing the informed consent to participants, prior to each interview, it is included, that in the event they experience any psychological distress, they would be referred to the relevant, on-campus, student psychological services.

To ensure fair participant selection, an appropriate and concise advertisement was placed in a variety of locations at the university in an attempt of recruiting participants from diverse backgrounds. This clearly stipulates the requirements for the study, thereby ensuring a sample to which the research questions, and inclusion criteria were applicable. It should be noted that due to the time constraints imposed; a convenience sampling technique was used, the size of the sample also placed restrictions on the diversity of participants.

The researcher was fully aware and cautious of the fact that data collection cannot commence until approval has been given from the relevant gatekeepers and research ethics committee.

Gatekeeper approval had been obtained (Appendix 2), as well as an ethical clearance letter and number from the university (Appendix 3). A clear, detailed information sheet and informed consent was provided to each participant, explaining the purpose and process of the research study. This includes introducing the topic, research reasons and objectives of the study to the participants.

The researcher did ensure that each participant understands that their contribution is voluntary and that a consent form is signed, which explained the interview process, and that

the researcher receives full permission to use the information collected for research purposes only.

Furthermore, to ensure ongoing respect for participants, their names will not be disclosed in the research study, they will be referred to as either 'participant A or B' and so forth. The raw data will be treated with respect, as only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to it. After a period of five years, the data will be disposed of.

### 3.12. Reflexivity

Reflexivity brings to attention the changes a researcher can go through as a consequence of the research experience (Palaganas et al., 2017). Having studied an undergraduate degree via correspondence, I always felt like that the social aspect and subsequent motivation was lacking, hence I began this study with the assumption that students will enter their new and socially vibrant environment with an enthusiasm to meet new people and form new relationships. However, after conducting the research I have learnt that students are much more cautious than expected. They have specific requirements from the relationships they have, whether it be for academic assimilation or take a stance in campus politics, and sometimes opt for meaningful bonds and relationships outside of their university, it was also noticed that this is often to the disappointment of the few that are eager to socialize. I have come to learn that not everyone will perceive environments and react to people in the same way.

### 3.13. Summary

In conclusion, elaborating on the data methodology, as was done in this chapter, is a crucial step in a research study. It provides the research study with direction and explains the approved methods of conducting research. In summary, this research study will use

qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The researcher used six undergraduate psychology students, who participated in private interviews based on an appropriate questionnaire, targeted at answering the research questions, and thereafter the researcher conducted thematic analysis to analyse the data in a comprehensible manner. The findings of the study are discussed in the chapters that follow.

## **Chapter 4: Results of the Study**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter will focus on discussing the themes that were generated, using thematic analysis, after the data collection procedure. Data collection entailed a semi-structured one-on-one interview process, targeted at allowing tertiary students to express their views of the social dynamics of their university experience. Four main questions guided the structure of the interview process. Each interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed. The responses from each participant were recorded verbatim and broken down to identify important information that will contribute to answering the research questions. The information from the interviews was collated and compared to identify the themes or major areas of discussion. When discussing the themes, excerpts from the interviews will be



included, each significant excerpt will include the participants number and their response. This will enable the reader to make sense of the research study in a recent local context and allow this research process to be viewed with credibility and transparency.

It is important to note the current dynamic of the local university environment. When the data collection was being conducted, it was during a time where students were protesting the lack of electricity on campus, a significant protest, where protestors were demanding that students join them in solidarity by leaving the lecture halls and library. It was also a time where the local news and social media were focusing on the rates of violence against women, especially amongst female university students. Looking at the responses by the participants, it is clear that such external factors impact their flexibility and willingness to engage in diverse social interactions.

#### 4.2. Participant details

**Table 1**

*Participant Details*

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>
1	19	African	Female
2	25	African	Female
3	19	Indian	Female
4	20	African	Male
5	18	White	Male
6	22	African	Female

As mentioned in section 3.3, part of the data collection process entailed observation, as such it will be useful to include a brief description of the disposition and characteristics of each participants, as this will enable a more accurate understanding of their responses.

Participant 1 came to the interview session with her friend, as they had just finished a lecture, her friend departed and she remained, initially she was reserved, it was noticeable that she sought comfort in having a friend walk her to the session. Participant 2 was older than the rest of the undergraduate participants, she presented with a unique outlook on her university experience, she was in a complicated romantic relationship with a man that was not pursuing a tertiary education, and she was in the early stages of pregnancy. However, she was determined to attempt and complete her studies. Hence, she sought interactions that were beneficial and supportive. After the session, she intended to find her classmate and work on an assignment. Participant 3 came to the session eager to contribute, she expressed her feelings openly, she admitted to feeling intimidated at the beginning of the year but was determined to make friends, and this caused her to join various social groups, she did not have pleasant encounters in the past, and often felt left out. When I met participant 4, he was sitting with a group of girls watching YouTube videos, he had a relaxed attitude, and this was also present in his discussion on the research topic. Participant 5 was sitting alone in the library, preparing for an upcoming test, he displayed a sense of caution regarding not socialising with students that will distract him, he laughed about how he met his current friends and how they usually relax in unexpected areas, such as the car park. Participant 6 showed insight and expressed unfavourable attitudes of fellow students toward her, her family not being South African, but African Muslims, and that immigrant identity poses its own challenges and challenges opinions of others toward her.

Moreover, based on observations, the overall social climate of the university was relaxed, with undergraduate students usually found in the library, working either individually or in groups.

A statement made by participant 4 nicely encapsulates what emerged from this research study *“these relationships are different than those made in school...we have more freedom to mix with who we want and are more inclined to social diversity”*

#### 4.3. Main themes

The objective of this research study was to obtain a better understanding of how different social relationships are created and maintained within a university environment and whether these have an impact on the lives of students. Hence, in line with this objective, open-ended questions were generated, to engage in a dynamic conversation with the participants, and get an idea of how they perceive the social climate of their university and their own social patterns.

The questions were asked to target four broad categories, under which more specific questions followed. Firstly, the researcher wanted to ascertain the creation, development, and maintenance of social relationships. Secondly, a discussion on the type of university settings and facilities that are mainly featured in socialising patterns followed. Thirdly, the researcher wanted to gauge the student's opinions on their relationships and how they felt these contributed to their overall university experience. Lastly, the researcher wanted to explore the most popular on-campus relationships.

Each main theme that was discovered in this study is with relevance to the research objectives. The themes will be discussed according to the affiliation with the research questions, as numbered below.

#### 4.3.1. Research question 1: How are social relationships formed and maintained?

This question was important in setting the tone for the interview and enquiring about the factors that encourage students to initiate and maintain their relationships. The sub-questions under this first research question was aimed at encouraging discussion on how students spend their free time and what they find appealing in their social interactions. Moreover, it clarified that the research was not directed at exploring one particular type of relationship; on the contrary, it sought to explore the variety of relationships within the university context. The two themes presented below are closely linked with the first research question, that aims to gather information on how students find and maintain their close relationships.

##### 4.3.1.1. Familiarity and similar backgrounds

Participant 1 stated *“I know my best friend from high school...we are now studying the same subjects”*, participant 2 similarly, said *“Although my best friend is younger than me, we recognised each other from high school..”*, participant 3 reiterated similar sentiments *“...out of my two closest friends, I met one in high school..”*, and participant 6 stated the importance of maintaining old relationships and the fear of losing her identity *“I still make time to keep in touch with friends from high school...I also joined the Muslim Students Association...I get to mix with others of similar beliefs...I have a fear of losing that”*(the Muslim Students Association is a group of Muslim students that get together on a regular basis to plan and create gatherings commemorating religious events). On the other hand, when individuals are too cautious and only socialise with those that they are familiar with, it can make for a difficult and uncondusive social environment, on this note, participant 6 once again raised a unique and valuable point, relating to her ethnicity and religious background, and said *“...people often question me about being black and a Muslim...they make the mistake of thinking that only Indians can be Muslim...this makes them less friendly in the beginning...”*.

The protests that were occurring on campus actually benefited participant 5, and he interestingly, and to his amusement, stated “*I met my friends during the student protests...we were all confused...now we sit together during lectures...*” demonstrating that a confusing time can bring unity amongst students.

#### 4.3.1.2. Personality preferences

Participant 4 spoke about the types of personalities people have saying “*..I like to hang out with those that give off positive vibes and have a good personality...*”, on the other hand participant 1 was more specific, and said “*...honesty is important in our relationship, we don't hide anything from each other...*”. Participant 4 and 2 mentioned the value in socialising with students that are committed to their studies, participant 4 stated “*...I enjoy spending time with others that have the same mindset and are academically inclined...*”, and participant 2 made reference to the fact that she's older than the rest of her classmates “*..because of my age, I like to socialise with people that I can relate to, are focused of their studies...and are not here for fashion or boys...*”. Participant 3 mentioned the importance of communication “*I think communication is important....I like to socialise with those that have a friendly personality; we are comfortable with each other...and there are no unspoken rules, we have a mutual understanding...even if we don't see each other for a while, we remain friends...*”

#### 4.3.2. Research question 2: What type of university settings cultivate these relationships?

The two themes presented below are closely linked with the second research question, these particularly look at exploring the factors present within the most common on-site facilities, that allow students to socialise freely. The questions that followed this main research questions included inquiring about students favourite on-campus places to socialise and whether or not students are interested in joining any extra-curricular programs or

activities, with the interest of pursuing diverse socialisation. Participant 1, 5 and 6, expressed enjoying a balance, spending most of their time either between areas that offer entertainment and those that offer a conducive area for learning, i.e. the library. On the Pietermaritzburg campus, there is a popular cafeteria and entertainment area, The Hexagon Theatre, fondly or even sometimes notoriously known by the students as ‘the Hex’, there is also a library on the main campus that is frequently utilised by the students, as well as areas of lawn or grass outside lecture halls, where you can often find students relaxing and socialising.

#### 4.3.2.1. Food and entertainment

Participant 1 described the nature of her interactions “...*I usually go to the cafeteria to get something to eat, before or after lectures...it’s just a hi/bye spot...very informal*”, participant 2 specified “...*we like to go to sports evenings and theatre nights...the cafeteria would be our favourite place to eat...*”. Participant 4 explained what he enjoyed about these areas “...*I like hanging out at the hex...there’s food, entertainment, and a good vibe...*”, participant 5 found it funny, saying “*my friend and I chill by our cars in the car park...we listen to music and relax...*” and participant 6 reiterated “...*our favourite places are closest take-aways or at res...*”

#### 4.3.2.2. Working together

Participant 1 said “*I usually hang out at the library, it’s easy to find other classmates and make friends that way...*”, Participant 3 was less specific, but stated “...*I like to hang around in areas that are close to the lecture halls...this helped me become more approachable, if students needed help....I like to be remembered as someone that helped them...*”, this was significant, as participant 3 often mentioned that she found it difficult to maintain her friendships and this was a way of her gaining control of that. Whilst Participant 5 clarified

*“...you can find me hanging out at the library mainly during test time...when I feel overwhelmed, knowing others are around and also studying helps...”*

#### 4.3.3. Research question 3: How do these relationships contribute to students' academic experiences?

The three themes presented below are linked to the third research question, that aims at generating information pertaining to the benefits and risks of student relationships. This question was especially important in exploring whether or not these students perceive that their diverse social interactions are of value and enriching to their university experience. The data revealed that students socialise and form relationships for a variety of reasons, this is depended on the function of the relationship and the role that it serves in the life of a student. This question complements the previous two questions and reiterates the needs that undergraduate students have for diverse relationships. The contribution of these relationships can either pose a challenge or be of benefit to students, the latter being more prevalent in the data, as highlighted below.

##### 4.3.3.1. Workload

Participant 2 said *“...we learn from each other...”* emphasising that the biggest benefit of having relationships with your fellow students is that you can learn how to navigate the new environment and manage the workload together. Echoing similar sentiments participant 3 stated *“...we can meet deadlines by helping each other...”*, explaining that her friends often help each other before a deadline, by editing their work together, highlighting that their progress in their initial academic years is a collective effort. Moreover, participant 6 asserted that there was a certain benefit to having valuable student relationships, saying *“...definitely, they help me focus and stay motivated...”*

#### 4.3.3.2.Emotional support

The following two participants explained that diverse social relationships can be beneficial, and not only those that are useful for academic purposes. Participant 2 said “...*it helps with the stress...the most beneficial relationship with someone that understands you and you can trust...they can understand what you’re going through and are supportive...*”, and participant 3 was more specific saying “...*informal social interactions can provide a useful distraction when I feel stressed...just to hang out and discuss important current events...to voice my opinion and feel heard...*”, so as not to discount the value in informal relationships, we can tell from these responses that these students often feel stressed and find emotional support in their peers. However, although diverse relationships can be distressing and useful, it is argued, as participant 4 said “*those that like to party a lot can distract you from on your studies...*”

#### 4.3.3.3.Romantic Relationships

Two of the six participants mentioned the importance of setting boundaries in relationships. Participant 5 implied that she would not form or maintain any time-consuming romantic relationships at this stage and said “*my relationships don’t pose a risk...I set boundaries...each person has a place...and I know what’s important to me*” and participant 6 explained the danger of not setting boundaries and said “*relationships can be risky if boundaries are not in place*” expanding on that she also said, “*I do have boys that are friends. Still, I know that that’s all that they are...if they become more than friends, it can become stressful, because expectations change...you end up giving more time and attention to that person...*”



Participant 2 said *“I have a boyfriend, and this relationship is often time-consuming and can distract me from my studies...”* on a similar note, participant 3 said *“I have a boyfriend, and I am pregnant. It is very time-consuming and it is not a healthy relationship...he doesn't understand why I have to come to university...I can sense that he is jealous”*, Participant 3, on the other hand, explained that although she was cautious about pursuing romantic relationships, it still affected her, she said *“I feel left out when my close friends spend a lot of time with their boyfriends...I wouldn't engage in anything that's risky...but I do get lonely...”*, paragraph 4.2 will give us a better understanding of her response in this regard.

#### 4.3.4. Research question 4: What are the most popular social relationships?

The two themes presented below are related to the fourth research question, that intends on identifying the most and/least popular social group on campus. By using the word ‘popular’, the research question implied which students or groups received the most amount of social attention. Many air quotes were used by participants when answering this question, implying that what is being said is said in an ironic or mocking manner.

##### 4.3.4.1. Fashion and entertainment

Participant 2 noticed that students like to exert their fashion freedom and gain popularity by doing so, she proceeded to say, *“those that ‘dress to impress’ are often the most popular”*. Popularity can also be gauged by the size of the social groups, areas such as the cafeteria attract students that enjoy a relaxed environment, participant 3 frowned upon the demeanour of these students, and said *“the most popular group would be those that hang out at the hex...they play cards...and have that laid-back attitude and ‘high-school mentality’ ...”*.

#### 4.3.4.2. Familiarity

As discussed previously, many of these students have the comfort of socialising with those that attended the same high-school as them, and this allowed them to adjust to their new environment in a less overwhelming manner, participant 6 explained *“I’m not sure about the most popular group...people like to stick to others they’re familiar with...in the beginning it’s all about understanding your environment...”*. Moreover, it was identified that the participants were cautious and found that they preferred to befriend other students, this, highlighted that the most popular social relationships were friendships, particularly amongst those that feel familiar with each other, participant 1 clarified and said *“friendships are popular...with those that you are familiar with...we have each other on Facebook and some like to show cool things about their life...”*. An interesting statement was made by participant 5 *“the ‘wannabees’ from high school, they walk around with superiority...”*, he said mockingly, and explained that these particular students tend to attract attention as they had previously received it in high-school. They thought that this gave them a social upper-hand and a misconceived notion of superiority and popularity.

#### 4.4. Summary of findings

This data collection process was interesting, and some unique themes emerged. Although the sample group consisted of six participants, each participant brought a unique perspective on how they view their socialisation patterns and those of others. It is important to note that many participants displayed caution when interacting with other students, at this stage of their tertiary career, they appear to be focused and mentioned the value of having boundaries and creating relationships with individuals that will benefit them in their academic work and help them manage the stressors of their new environment. Participant 5 expressed insight into

herself and her fellow students' cautious attitudes toward social interactions and said "...I feel like with time it will get more enjoyable, right now everyone is cautious and focused and stressed...".

#### 4.5. Summary

This chapter focused on discussing the important themes that emerged during the data collection process and the subsequent thematic analysis. The results are arranged in a comprehensive manner, under each of the four main interview questions. The identified themes were discussed in relation to the purpose of the study and was supported by excerpts taken from the participants responses. The information provided in this chapter will be elaborated on in chapter 5 and will include supporting literature from chapter 2.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on discussing the research results in conjunction to the relevant literature, in doing so, we can get a better understanding of the research study, as opposed to discussing the results in isolation. The findings will be discussed per the research questions, bearing in mind that there were four main, open-ended, research questions that were asked. The previous chapter, chapter 4, dealt with identifying and exploring the main findings or themes, this chapter will now elaborate on that, with support from chapter 2.

Identifying and exploring the research objective clarified the reason this research is valuable and why it is important to unpack the relationship between student social behaviour and their university experience, in other words, obtaining a better understanding on how different social relationships are created and maintained within a university environment, and how these relationships contribute to students' well-being.

Additionally, the focus of this chapter is to interpret the research findings in relation to the theoretical framework. Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958), a social constructivism paradigm, formed the foundation for this research. This was an important foundation, as it laid the understanding that complete and total learning is not independent of a students' interaction with their social environment. The theory suggests that a student's social preferences are influenced by how they perceive ways in which they can either benefit from their social interaction/s or how these interactions can protect them from threat. This was quite clear, as a common theme between all participants was that they had a clear reason for forming and maintaining relationships with certain individuals and not with others.

Moreover, Tinto's Model of Retention (Schreiber et al., 2014), describes that both social engagement and support influence a student's decision to continue at their tertiary institution.

Although this research study did not explore the concept of retention directly, it did discover the level of social, and related, academic satisfaction amongst undergraduate students.

## 5.2. Discussion of Results

Below follows a discussion, of the participants responses, provided in chapter 4 in relation to congruencies in the local and international literature, provided in chapter 2. It was noticeable that there were also some disparities between the two, which will be discussed further. The results will be discussed per research question.

### 5.2.1 Research question 1: How are social relationships formed and maintained?

The main findings identified in relation to the first research question, were that social relationships were more often than not formed on the basis of familiarity, similar backgrounds, and personality preferences. To elaborate, participants reported that certain criteria influenced the decision to form relationships with their fellow students.

#### 5.2.1.1 Familiarity and similar backgrounds

Undergraduate students showed an inclination for forming and maintaining social bonds with those that they were familiar with, particularly those that attended the same high school as them, or those that came from a similar cultural background. Regarding this preference about socialising with those from similar cultural, social and religious backgrounds, the literature stated that when students are under the impression that they have things in common with their peers, they are more willing to maintain these relationships (Pettigrew, 1998). Furthermore, students are resistant to change (Brown, 2004), and have a fear of losing their previously established relationships (Buote et al., 2007).

#### 5.2.1.2 Personality preferences

Amongst the six research participants, students had particular preferences that determined who they socialised with. This is consistent with Kelman's Theory of Social Influence (1958), on the process of identification, that a student is influenced to socialise with others that have an attractive set of values that are congruent with their current or desired value system. The process of identification provides a reason explaining why students are more inclined to accept certain social influences, and that is in order to maintain an enjoyable self-defining relationship to another student or group (Kelman, 1958). In the case of this research study, the six participants all had a similar trait of desiring strong social bonds with other students that were academically inclined, describing that this will assist them in alleviating the stress of a new and demanding tertiary environment.

Particular student characteristics influence their socialisation patterns, amongst which are their experiences prior to university and their cultural background. Once again, the literature reviewed supported this research study which demonstrated that most local students often find the adjustment from high school to a tertiary environment (e.g. Sennet et.al., 2003), and from adolescent to adulthood, difficult and can be resistant to change. This resistance influences their initial socialisation patterns, making them create stronger bonds or maintain relationships with other students that either went to the same high school as them, or grew up in a similar background. However, as students' progress through their academic career, their social preferences tend to change. In this case, we were examining their initial social patterns, considering that the research participants were all undergraduate students. Thus, it was noticeable that students preferred to socialise with those with whom they felt came from a similar background.

Moreover, students are apprehensive about losing their previously acquired relationships (Buote et al., 2007). These findings correspond with the reactions from the participants, considering the geographic location, many students attended the same high school as one another. Considering that the local context, the place where the data was collected, is a small city, it was quite often presented that students attend university and find companionship in fellow students that were peers from their high school. As such they were significantly more prone to socialise with those that they were familiar with. This provided them with a source of comfort during a time of transition, they relied on each other for academic guidance, navigating their way through the tertiary environment, they also found that in this way they were more relatable to each other, due to their previous associations. This proved that students were certainly cautious about losing previously acquired relationships, which provided them with a sense of security.

Personality traits and qualities are a prominent factor that determined whether or not students chose to maintain their relationships. Regarding the theme of personality preferences, research participant 4 did allude to the fact that personality traits are important and impacted her decision on who to socialise with, she mentioned that having a good mindset is a positive and attractive trait in the other, whilst research participant 1 explained the importance of honesty and thus she chose to maintain relationships with those that she could trust. The process of identification and social self-esteem are closely connected (Du, King & Chi, 2017), a student's self-worth can be influenced by the manner in which they identify with their predominant social groups, and these patterns are strongly influenced by their perception of themselves and others, their personality, and what their preferences entail. Hence, from the responses above, it can be understood, that participants who desire particular personality preferences in the individuals with whom they choose to socialise with, such as an optimistic mindset, also have a need and desire to inculcate such traits into their own lives.

This trend also brings to the fore mention of academic self-efficacy and growth mindset, as an academically self-efficacious student is attractive as a source of support for other students (Zander et al., 2018), these student are confident in their ability to assist others and other students find this quality appealing.

## 5.2.2 Research question 2: What type of university settings cultivate these relationships?

### 5.2.2.1 Food and entertainment

The on-campus cafeteria is a busy spot for students; it was noticeably a popular place for them to get good food and enjoy the company of their friends. During the observation it was noticed that many students were just talking, whilst others were in groups, playing cards. Outside the cafeteria, one would find a board advertising upcoming theatre or entertainment events. The type of interactions and the function they serve differs from student to student. The main findings that were found in relation to the second research question were that areas that incorporated food, entertainment and/or were conducive to students working together were useful in creating a socially friendly atmosphere. University facilities that allowed students to interact informally were popular areas that were conducive for the development of diverse social relationships. It was often found, in the local tertiary context, that environments, where students felt relaxed, were popular places for them to interact with each other.

### 5.2.2.2 Working together

The research participants all showed a common preference for finding places, to socialise with their fellow students, that allowed them to discuss and work on academic deadlines. It was found that many of the participants were students that valued their studies and were



found to be frequenting the library to complete assignments or meet up with their fellow classmates. It is important to note that the library gives students access to computers, the internet, and online resources, it also offered spaces for groups to work together. The responses from the research participants provided insight into the academically driven mindset of many undergraduate students. The students were frequently found working on research or assignments, individually, in pairs, and groups.

Lecture rooms are conducive to forming social networks as students who take the same classes together have more positive and engaging social experiences, forming what is known as learning community experiences (Kuh, 2009). Research participant 5, the youngest of the group, had an interesting experience that influenced the formation of his current closest relationships, meeting his friends during a student protest, he primarily interacts with them during and after lectures, their bond is prevalent in their seating patterns in lecture halls, preferring to sit next to each other, and avoiding the strike and/or other politic conflicts. Kelman's Theory of Social Influence (1958) comes into effect, demonstrating both the processes of compliance and internalization. Both processes have a significant influence on students, the process of compliance explains the desire for students to gain specific rewards as an outcome of their interaction, and the process of internalization explains how students are inclined to form relationships with fellow students that have similar values to them (Kelman, 1958). This was also true in the case of the students in this study, students who agreed or felt strongly about the need to protest, formed a strong bond based on that reason, whereas the participant and his friends formed a strong bond on the basis of not wanting to get involved in student politics. Hence, the processes of compliance and internalization come into effect.

There has been a significant amount of studies exploring the nature of student social groups (e.g. Schrieff, 2005), students that tend to group will learn which areas they feel most

comfortable in. Moreover, finding these areas provides them with a way to create dominance in their environment, maintaining the use of a limited number of spaces. This highlights the use of the cafeteria as described by participant 3, that was being used by groups for recreational reasons. In the area, the cafeteria, the dominant group can often be seen asserted themselves by casually sitting with their group members, playing a game of cards. Students that have the opportunity of socialising in the same areas are establishing their spatial identities (Schrieff et al., 2005). Other students, knowing well, that they could find them there.

Once again, perception is important, when students do not feel compelled to behave in a certain way, it enables informal and useful social interactions (Schrieff et al., 2005). In addition, finding lecture halls as a place of interaction is common, and provides students with a sense of belonging. This can be seen in the responses given by research participant 5, who met his friends during a student protest and now they sit together during lectures, being a minority racial group, he is more inclined to feel a sense of belonging to his university when he engages in formal and pleasant interactions with fellow students (Meeuwisse, Severiens & Born, 2010).

### 5.2.3 Research question 3: How do these relationships contribute to students' academic experiences?

The main themes identified in relation to the third research question were grouped according to workload, emotional support and romantic relationships.

#### 5.2.3.1 Workload

Considering that the participants were undergraduate students, it was prevalent that they had a desire and a need to perform well and pass their academic year, the major contributions

made by diverse social relationships were that they assisted students in managing their academic workload, bringing to mind the concept of learning community experiences (Kuh, 2009), that students that take the same courses are more likely to seek each other and actively pursue academia together, these relationships also provide a source of comfort to undergraduate students during a stressful transitional time.

#### 5.2.3.2 Romantic relationships

Students had the opportunity to pursue romantic relationships, but this weren't prioritized amongst participants, they expressed their caution, as they feared that a romantic relationship will be demanding and will influence them (Orina et al, 2002), away from their studies, the data does confirm that participant 3 was battling with this dilemma, being pregnant and being challenged by an unapproving romantic partner.

#### 5.2.3.3 Emotional support

Emotional support is an important outcome of successful student interactions and student relationships (Wilcox et al., 2005). Students who feel more connected socially are inclined to immerse themselves academically, engaging with their friends on a variety of matters, allowing them to develop in their learning environment, by becoming more competent when interacting with different groups of people (Smith & McCabe, 2008). These social interactions have been proven to assist students in adjusting to their new environment by normalising the experience for them, because they are faced with other individuals with similar dilemmas and therefore feel less alienated.

Positive social interactions provide a new student with emotional support and assist them in making sense of their new environment, a time where they are likely to be resistant to change (Gurin et al., 2002). The literature also discusses a significant correlation between the

quality of socialising and student adjustment (Stratton, 2015), research participants did confirm that those with whom they prefer socialising with help to ease their feelings of stress and help them feel more connected to their environment. A construct mentioned in the literature in sub-section 2.6, is social self-esteem, which is how students identify themselves in relation to how they feel others perceive them (Du King & Chi, 2017). This point is relevant as the data shows that participant 3, particularly struggled with how she related with others, she often believes that other perceive her negatively, and expressed that she is actively working on improving her social skills by trying to join diverse social groups. Correlating this experience with the social constructivism paradigm (Thomas et al., 2014), we can learn that her attempts to make more of an effort socialising, will allow research participant 3 to challenge her existing knowledge and enable her to gather new knowledge of people and herself, and thereby enrich her learning experience. Her perceptions also alluded to the concept of social self-esteem (McLaughlin, 2010), that connections with others can impact how she feels about herself. This finding also provides insights into the probability of social phobia which is a common appearance amongst female undergraduate students (Desalegn et al., 2019), although social phobia was not completely prevalent, participant 3 and participant 6, described that they were hesitant to form diverse relationships as previous experience taught them to be more cautious as others can perceive them and interact with them in a way that they were not comfortable with.

Positive student relationships can promote overall student wellbeing, students that get along can provide each other with useful information and help each other navigate their environment, resulting in a pleasant undergraduate experience. In terms of romantic relationships, the literature does show that dating couples were more influential to each other and that there is an aspect of power for these individuals to adhere to the requests of their significant other (Orina et al., 2002). From all the responses, it was noticeable that romantic

relationships posed the biggest challenge for students. We can gather, from the responses, that romantic relationships require more time than others, This was prevalent in the data gathered from research participant 2, who was experiencing a stressful romantic relationship, and who felt guilt at the judgment from her boyfriend, as he frequently questioned her about pursuing a degree whilst pregnant, implying that he did not approve.

#### 5.2.4 Research question 4: What are the most popular social relationships?

The main themes discovered in relation to the fourth research question were grouped according to fashion, entertainment, and familiarity.

##### 5.2.4.1 Fashion and entertainment

Participants described that students were often perceived as popular if they were fashionable in their appearance, provided a source of entertainment, and/or were familiar to each other and friendly. Participant 1 did mention the use of social media, students can use this platform to initiate contact with fellow students and to create a positive online image, as they have the freedom to alter this image to suit what they would want to be seen as, they can find this less overwhelming than creating favourable in-person encounters (Magde et al., 2009 & Picciano, 2002)

Corresponding with Kelman's Theory of Social Influence (1958), as cited in the literature, valuable relationships hold a source of attractiveness and power, and this influences whether a student is inclined to conform with their peers, this is also dependant on the values of the student and what appeals to them. Kelman's Theory of Social Influence (1958) describes the process of compliance, in this case students are expected to create and maintain relationships in the attempt of seeking approval from those around them and avoiding disapproval.

Moreover, the process of compliance does not last very long, as time passes, students prefer

to maintain bonds with those that hold similar, appealing values, and thus their prominent relationships become dependent on the process of internalization (Kelman, 1958). For the participants, academic support was most appealing, but when asked what the popular groups' relationships were like, they frowned upon them, saying that the popular groups held values that prioritized appearance and recreation. These 'popular' students were likely to group themselves, just like the participants, and this corresponds with the literature, mentioning the types of groups, students cluster according to their interests and the purpose that these relationships serve. For the participants of this study, majority of them could be described as 'tight-knitters', providing social and academic support for each other, forming their relationships on the grounds of familiarity, and having mutual friends (McCabe, 2016). Two of the research participants, namely participant 5 and participant 3, can be described as 'samplers' (McCabe, 2016), having different social groups each for a different purpose.

Corresponding to the concept of social support, students find that support, of different kinds, whether it's emotional and/or academic, can be accessible to a student through their social ties to other individuals, often those that are in or have experienced a similar situation.

Over and above the dedicated open-ended interview questions, the research participants were asked whether there was anything else of significance that they would like to add to their contribution to the study. The majority of participants elaborated on the value their positive relationships had, in improving their overall tertiary experience, motivating them to pursue their academic careers with growing confidence. This confirms Tinto's Model of Retention (1975), although long-term student retention is difficult to predict at this stage, this study assisted in demonstrating that students can be influenced to remain committed to their tertiary environment by their social engagement and social support.

### 5.3. Implications of the study

Research implications are worth mentioning, as it considers the possible ways that the research findings can be used to convey a message that influences policies, practices, and future research. Recommendations will be discussed, in detail, in chapter 5. However, it can be highlighted that the findings herein are valuable and contribute to an understanding that diverse social relationships thrive in a tertiary environment and are an important factor in determining the overall well-being and satisfaction amongst students.

### 5.4. Limitations of the study

Limitations are identified and taken into account in this research study in order to avoid over-generalization of the research results. This study was limited in the following ways.

The literature did make significant mention of on-campus residential facilities; however, due to the limitations of using a convenience sample, none of the participants lived on-campus. All the research participants commuted to and from the university. However, previous literature did expand on that point, that those that travel to university as opposed to those that live a residence have the added advantage of forming relationships with others away from the university setting (Buote et al., 2007). This was prevalent in the study, as these participants, maintained both platonic and romantic relationships with others away from the university. This did not assert as much pressure, as expected, for them to form new social relationships, as those that stay on-campus residence. They appeared to be satisfied with their brief and cordial encounters with classmates but did acknowledge the importance of positive social interactions.

An additional limitation of the study was that the sample was limited to undergraduate psychology students and thus the results cannot be inferred to the general, wider student

community. The sample also consisted of more female participants than males, and as alluded to, female students are more inclined to be selective in their socialising patterns (Brown, 2004) and assert extra caution, making more deliberate decisions regarding who they intend forming relationships with, as opposed to their male counterparts. Hence, it may have been for this reason that the research results did not yield a diverse range of social relationships, as expected.

Furthermore, due to the nature of the research sample, minority race groups were under-represented. The literature reviewed stated that students from minority race groups show a greater sense of belonging to their universities when they have more satisfying relationships with other students limited to interacting for formal reasons, but majority race groups showed a sense of belonging when they maintained informal relationships (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Hence, a just comparison was unobtainable at this point.

Being a cross-sectional study, researching a particular group at a time, meant that continuous and on-going research into their long-term overall academic and social satisfaction was not possible.

### 5.5. Summary of the Study

Combining the data and literature is important to identify the value of this study. This chapter was purposeful in providing a more elaborate discussion with regard to the research findings, and the literature review and theoretical framework. Kelman's Social Influence Theory (1958) supported the findings and made sense of the nature of socialising patterns amongst students. Importantly the chapter highlighted that the tertiary environment is such that indirect learning can occur, and more often than not, these are socially mediated. The chapter that follows will focus on how the above discussions have been valuable and can contribute to further research in the field regarding students and their social patterns. It was



interesting to discover that the topic of social diversity is not something that undergraduate students pay much attention to, with this being said, it was during the interview process, when they were probed on the topic, they reacted with curiosity and newfound insight.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### 6.1. Conclusion of the study

Having knowledge of socialisation patterns is valuable in understanding the way people behave and the way that they perceive the world around them. This research study began with the assumption that different social interactions are influential contributors to the overall well-being of undergraduate students. Accounting for the fact that these students will have difficulty adjusting to a new environment and managing its academic and social demands.

Therefore, this study was an attempt to identify the different types of relationships that hold prominence in the lives of undergraduate students, and to understand whether or not these relationships, constitute social diversity, and help students manage in a tertiary setting.

To clarify, diversity in the context of this study refers to the various types of relationships a student is likely to have, from friendships to romantic relationships. The term relationship was aimed at identifying social bonds that had an impact and influence on students.

The purpose of this study was to obtain research results with the aim of fulfilling the research objectives, which was to obtain a better understanding on how different social relationships are created and maintained within a university environment. It was also to determine whether there were any particular university facilities that were conducive to promoting social interactions, whether there were some peers than were more popular than others, as well as to understand whether these relationships significantly contribute to a student's academic experience and performance. Ultimately the role of this study was to uncover and explore the relationship between student social behaviour and their university experience. The research questions, corresponding to the research objectives, as discussed above, were answered by using an open-ended interview schedule.

The overall impact of social diversity amongst tertiary students was explored. The findings suggested that social diversity was limited, which was not initially expected. Local and

international literature was reviewed in order to conceptualise the study. Six volunteer undergraduate students participated in individual open-ended interview sessions. Ethical considerations were taken into account and maintain, the students understood that their participation was voluntary, they gave their consent to participate, the university where the research was conducted granted permission, and confidentiality was ensured. These interviews were conducted during the second semester, which gave undergraduates, especially first-year students time to assimilate and become familiar with their fellow students, and therefore have a better idea when expressing their thoughts on their socialisation patterns. The findings revealed that there were both congruencies and incongruencies between this data and previous studies.

After the interviews were conducted, the responses were recorded in detail, thereafter thematic analysis was used to identify and discussed important areas or themes that were mentioned in the responses.

The research participants were shown to exert caution in their social behaviour, knowing which types of relationships they did not want to pursue as they were risky and could distract them from academic retention and achievement. However, they did acknowledge that they were now faced with the freedom to interact without restriction.

Considering the interactive nature of the university environment, students are likely to support each other and form strong relationships based on admiration and mutual values (Kelman, 1958). Reiterating the research problem statement, social interactions are an underestimated aspect in the tertiary environment. Taking into account, that many undergraduate students can feel overwhelmed by the change of environment and the workload, they need the support of a diverse range of relationships to help them manage. Research results showed that romantic relationships were not as popular as expected, and

most of the students associated risk with romantic relationships, preferring the company of platonic relationships.

This research study demonstrated that social factors do affect learning, as the students often described their closest relationships as those that help them transition easily into the tertiary environment and those that offered them support and assistance during stressful times. The research results showed that students are more inclined toward creating diverse relationships when they are exposed to more people and when they are required to pursue new experiences.

The location for the study and the type of research participants were pre-determined, to enable a more focused study. The location was limited to one local university and the participants were restricted to undergraduate psychology students, although consisting of different age groups, as it was important to explore whether social interactions were diverse and valuable during the initial years of tertiary education.

The geographical area chosen for the study influenced the outcomes of the study, some students live in Pietermaritzburg and attended high-schools' in the same town. Therefore, some participants knew each other before entering university. The political climate was also an influential factor, and this study was conducted during a time when students were protesting paying tertiary student fees. This meant that a sense of camaraderie was formed amongst many students on the basis of having similar values and opinions.

Being a qualitative study, the researcher was a fundamental instrument. Hence, during the observation and interview process, it was revealed that many students had strong perceptions about each other. They were inclined to stick to those that had corresponding values and attitudes. They also reflected on how they thought other students perceived them, which, in their view, was often negatively. These and other factors, contributed to these undergraduate students not forming many diverse relationships, as one would have expected.

However, one thing was certain, that positive and supportive relationships, especially those that students have with one another, proved to be beneficial in providing them with emotional support, a means of managing stress, and an overall positive experience.

The paradigm that was selected influenced the approach of the study. Operating from a social constructivism paradigm, viewing the development of knowledge and learning as a socially mediated activity, meant that students were believed to not only learn the content outlined by the curriculum, but also by interacting, relating and forming a diverse range of relationships with others, they are able to learn and form new perceptions, opinions and knowledge of the world around them. Evaluating and understanding the way in which students communicate with each other assisted in uncovering the meaning behind their interaction, viewpoints on the nature of their social environment, understanding their mindset and their inclination to change.

The interview questions were targeted at discovering more information relating to four areas. Firstly, the manner and circumstances in which students formed their closest relationships. Secondly, identifying areas that students found most conducive to interacting and bonding with their peers. Thirdly, the contribution and value of these relationships. And lastly, the most popular social groups on campus.

The research participants revealed that they were inclined to create and maintain relationships with others that held certain personality traits, such as honesty, a positive mindset, and where they understood each other without harsh judgement. They also showed a fondness, which was common amongst all participants, toward others that came from a similar cultural, religious, or school background, finding solace in familiar faces saying that these students understood them. Participants lived off-campus, and as such were more inclined to have important and influential relationships outside their tertiary environment (Buote et al., 2007).

Finding suggests that student engagement can occur in multiple places. The areas that were found most conducive to socialising were places that either offered a recreational appeal or places that appropriate to work together in. These were discussed as the most likely places to find social partners or groups, as they offered an opportunity to unwind and find comfort in each other when working or discussing academic demands.

The participants found value in their relationships, describing the support they received, particularly in alleviating emotional distress. It was interesting to note that they found this comfort from their fellow students, understanding that they share similar experiences. Whereas romantic relationships, especially those off-campus, seemed demanding.

The most infamous social groups were described as groups of students that spend the majority of the time at the cafeteria, playing games and not paying sufficient attention to their academic programs. The research participants frowned upon this behaviour, implying that they preferred to socialise and become better acquainted with those that could assist them academically, stating that their attitude stems from their desire to succeed.

These research findings can draw support from theory, particularly the theoretical framework as proposed by Kelman (1958), that the preference of a relationship can be determined by how much the student perceives they can benefit from that relationship and how susceptible they are to influence. Moreover, students are likely to form strong bonds based on the processes of compliance, expecting to receive specific rewards, such as academic support, as an outcome of their relationships.

## 6.2. Recommendations for policy and practice

This study corresponds to the literature. As research shows (e.g. Gurin et al., 2002) that first-year students have the opportunity to develop socially. This study demonstrated that socialising is an important aspect of determining whether students transition successfully and

that their wellbeing is conducive to learning and development. The findings can be used to recommend that universities create and maintain facilities in order to enable diverse and positive social engagement.

### 6.3. Recommendations for further research

In recent times distance learning has become a popular choice for students, due to convenience and a reduction in tuition fees (Merrill, 2001). It would be interesting to further research on whether social diversity does significantly influence retention by comparing retention rates between on-campus students and those that study via correspondence.

Due to insufficient local evidence, further research should be done at local tertiary institutions, particularly exploring whether students are likely to change their socialisation preferences and patterns as they progress with their studies. Larger sample size should be considered, and the diversity in relationships should be compared between the first year and third year or even post-graduate students.

This study enabled a comprehensive exploration of social diversity amongst undergraduate university students. The findings differed from the initial expectations and did not always concur with previous literature. However, social diversity and patterns amongst students did correspond with the theoretical framework, Kelman's Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958).

## Reference list

- Archer, E. (2018). Qualitative data analysis: A primer on core approaches in S Kramer, S. Laher, A. Fynn & H.H, Janse van Vuuren (Eds.), Title of book: Online Readings in Research Methods. Publisher: *Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA)*. Retrieved from <https://www.psyssa.com/newsroom/publications/orim/orim-2-2-2/>
- Bella, T.T., & Omigbodun, O.O. (2009). Social phobia in Nigerian university students: Prevalence, correlates and co-morbidity. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 44, 458-463. DOI: 10.1007/s00127-008-0457-3
- Bojuwoye, O. (2002). Stressful experiences of first year students of selected universities in South Africa. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 15(3), 277-290. DOI:10.1080/09515070210143480
- Bowen, W., Bok, D. & Burkhert, G. (1999). A report card on diversity: Lessons for business from higher education. *Harvard Business Review* 139-149. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/hbr.org/amp/1999/01/a-report-card-on-diversity-lessons-for-business-from-higher-education>
- Buote, V.M., Pancer, M.S., Pratt, M.W., Adams, G., Lefcovitch, S.B., Polivy, J. & Wintre, M.G. (2007). The importance of friends: Friendship and adjustment among 1<sup>st</sup>-year university students. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 22, 665-689. Retrieved from <http://jar.sagepub.com>
- Burke, A. (2019). Student retention models in higher education: A literature review. American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRO), 94(2), *AACRAO* Retrieved from <https://www.aacrao.org/research-publications/quarterly-journals/college-university-journal/article/c-u-vol.-94-no.-2-spring/student-retention-models-in-higher-education-a-literature-review>
- Crosling, G., Heagney, H., & Thomas, L. (2009). Improving student retention in higher education, improving teaching and learning. *Australian Universities Review*, (51). Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/244990185\\_Crosling\\_G\\_Heagney\\_M\\_and\\_Thomas\\_L\\_2009\\_Improving\\_Student\\_Retention\\_in\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Improving\\_teaching\\_and\\_learning\\_In\\_Australian\\_Universities%27\\_Review\\_Vol51\\_No\\_2](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/244990185_Crosling_G_Heagney_M_and_Thomas_L_2009_Improving_Student_Retention_in_Higher_Education_Improving_teaching_and_learning_In_Australian_Universities%27_Review_Vol51_No_2)
- Desalegn, T. G., Getinet, W., & Tadie, G. (2019). The prevalence and correlates of social



- phobia among undergraduate health science students in Gondar, Gondar Ethiopia. *Research Note*, 12(438). DOI:10.1186/s13104-019-4482-y
- Du, H. King, R.B., Chi, P. (2017). Self-esteem and subjective well-being revisited: The roles of personal, relational and collective self-esteem. *PLoS One* 12(8).  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0183958>.
- Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72, 330-366.  
 DOI: 10.17763/haer.72.3.01151786u134n051
- Hagenauer, G. (2014). Teacher-student relationship at university: An important yet under researched field. *Oxford Review of Education*, 40 (3), 370-388. DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2014.921613
- Imaledo, J. A., Kio, O. B. & Asuquo, E.O. (2012). Pattern of risky sexual behaviour and associated factors among undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. *Pan African Medical Journal*, 12, 97. Retrieved from  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3489398/>
- Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization three processes of attitude change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2(1), 51-60. Retrieved from  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002200275800200106>
- Khumalo, I. P. & Klerk, W. (2018). Ethical psychological research and community engagement in a South African context. In S Kramer, S. Laher, A. Fynn & H.H, Janse van Vuuren (Eds.), *Online Readings in Research Methods*. Psychological Society of South Africa. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/BNPFS>
- Kuh, G. D. (2009). What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 683-706.  
 DOI:10.1353/csd.0.0099.
- Lizzo, A.J., & Wilson, K.L. (2009). Student participation in university governance: The role conceptions and sense of efficacy of student representatives on departmental committees. *Studies in Higher Education* 34(1).
- Madge, C., Meek, J., Wellens, J. & Hooley, T. (2009). Facebook, social integration and informal learning at university: 'It is more for socialising and talking to friends about work than for actually doing work'. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 34(2), 141-155. DOI: 10.1080/17439880902923606.
- Mccabe, J. (2016). Friends with academic benefits. *American Sociological Association*, 15, 22-29. Retrieved from <http://contexts.sagepub.com>

- McLaughlin, N. (2015). An analysis of the effect of relationship status on self-esteem and academic performance. *Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 25, 1-22. Retrieved from <https://www.mckendree.edu/academics/scholars/mclaughlin-issue-25>
- Meeuwisse, M., Severiens, S. & Born, M. (2010). Learning Environment, Interaction, Sense of Belonging and Study Success in Ethnically Diverse Student Groups. *Res High Education* 51, 528–545. DOI: 10.1007/s11162-010-9168-1.
- Merrill, D. M. (2001). Distance education in South Africa. *Educational Technology Research and Development*. 49(3), 123-125.
- Oliver C. Robinson (2014) Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical Guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), 25-41.  
DOI:10.1080/14780887.2013.801543
- Orina, M. M., Wood, W. & Simpson, J. A. (2002). Strategies of influence in close relationships. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 459-472. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.204.8142&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Ozbay, F., Douglas, C.J., Dimoulas, E., Morgan, C.A., Dennis, C. & Southwick, S. (2007). Social support and resilience to stress. From neurobiology to clinical practice. *Psychiatry (Edgmont)* 4(5), 35-40.
- Palaganas, E.C., Sanchez, M.C., Molintas, M.P., & Caricativo, R.D. (2017). Reflexivity in qualitative research: A journey of learning. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(2), 426-438. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss2/5>
- Petersen, I., Louw, J. & Dumont, K. (2009). Adjustment to university and academic performance among disadvantaged students in South Africa. *Educational Psychology*, 29(1), 99-115. DOI: 10.1080/01443410802521066
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 65-85. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.65>
- Picciano, A. G. (2002). Beyond student perceptions: Issues of interaction, presence, and performance in an online course. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 6, 21-40. DOI:10.24059/olj.v6i1.1870
- Reeder, H. M. (2000). 'I like you...as a friend': The role of attraction in cross-sex friendships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 17, 329-348. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407500173002>
- Schreiber, B., Mamashela, T. L. & Moja, T. (2014). Tinto in South Africa: Student

- integration, persistence and success, and the role of student affairs. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 2(2), 2307-6267. DOI: 10.14426/jsaa.v2i2.64
- Schrieff, L., Tredoux, C., Dixon, J. & Finchilescu, G. (2005). Patterns of racial segregation in university residence dining-halls. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 35, 433-443. Retrieved from [https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/item/17546/Schrieff\\_Article\\_2005.pdf?sequence=](https://open.uct.ac.za/bitstream/item/17546/Schrieff_Article_2005.pdf?sequence=)
- Sennet, J., Finchilescu, G., Gibson, K. & Strauss, R. (2003). Adjustment of black students at a historically white South African university. *Educational Psychology*, 23(1), 107-116. DOI:10.1080/01443410303219.
- Sirgy-Joseph, M., Grzeskowiak, S. & Rahtz, D. (2007). Quality of college life (QCL) of students: Developing and validating a measure of well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 80, 343-360. DOI:10.1007/s11205-005-5921-9.
- Smith, C. & McCabe, V. (2008). What is the attraction for exchange students: The host destination or host university? Empirical evidence from a study of an Australian University. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 10, 593-607. DOI:10.1002/jtr.692
- Stratton, M. (2015). Tinto's theory of departure. <https://prezi.com/4b4poexzx3kv/tintos-theory-of-departure/>
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089>
- Umberson, D. & Montez, J. K. (2010). Social relationships and health: A flashpoint for health policy. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 51, 54-66. DOI:10.1177/0022146510383501
- University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (2017). Retrieved from [http://alumniaffairs.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/Development\\_Brief/At-a-Glance-2017.sflb.ashx](http://alumniaffairs.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/Development_Brief/At-a-Glance-2017.sflb.ashx)
- Wagner, C. Kawulich, B. & Garner, M. (2012). Doing social research. A global context. McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Wilcox, P. Winn, S., & Gauld, M. F. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30, 707-722. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500340036>
- Wild, L. & Ebbers, L. (2002). Rethinking student retention in community colleges.

*Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 26, 503-519.

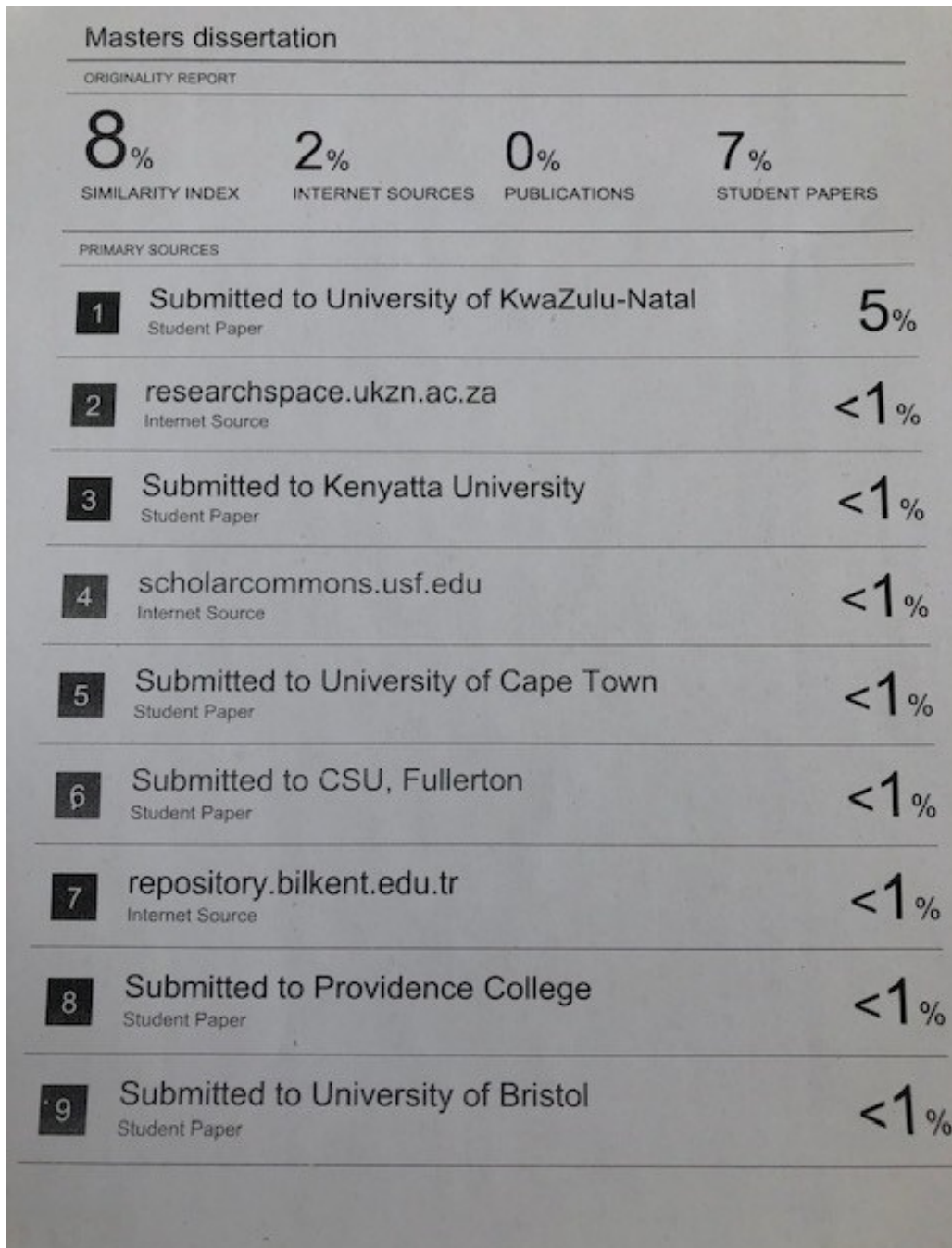
DOI:10.1080/2776770290041864

Zander, L., Brouwer, J., Jansen, E., Crayen, C., Hannover, B. (2018). Academic self-efficacy, growth mindsets, and university students' integration in academic and social support networks. *Science Direct*, 62, 98-107.

<http://www.citypopulation.de/php/southafrica-kwazulunatal.php?cityid=563012001>

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Turnitin Originality Report



10 Submitted to University of Arizona  
Student Paper <1%

---

11 Submitted to University of College Cork  
Student Paper <1%

---

12 Submitted to Walden University  
Student Paper <1%

---

13 Submitted to EDMC  
Student Paper <1%

---

14 Submitted to UC, Boulder  
Student Paper <1%

---

15 Hüseyin Ünlü, Yaprak Kalemöglü. "Academic Self-Efficacy of Turkish Physical Education and Sport School Students", Journal of Human Kinetics, 2011  
Publication <1%

---

16 oro.open.ac.uk  
Internet Source <1%

---

17 Submitted to University of Newcastle  
Student Paper <1%

---

18 www.readbag.com  
Internet Source <1%

---

19 Submitted to Kennedy-Western University  
Student Paper <1%

---

20 www.ideals.illinois.edu



Internet Source

<1%

---

**21** Getachew Tesfaw Desalegn, Wondale Getinet, Getnet Tadie. "The prevalence and correlates of social phobia among undergraduate health science students in Gondar, Gondar Ethiopia", BMC Research Notes, 2019  
Publication

<1%

---

**22** "Abstracts from the 37th Annual Meeting of the Society of General Internal Medicine", Journal of General Internal Medicine, 2014  
Publication

<1%

---

**23** Submitted to Clark Atlanta University  
Student Paper

<1%

---

**24** Submitted to University of Melbourne  
Student Paper

<1%

---

**25** Submitted to University of Central Florida  
Student Paper

<1%

---

**26** Submitted to Bridgepoint Education  
Student Paper

<1%

---

**27** Submitted to University of Ulster  
Student Paper

<1%

---

**28** manualzz.com  
Internet Source

<1%

---

"Integrating Engineering Education and

**29** Humanities for Global Intercultural Perspectives", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2020 <1%  
Publication

---

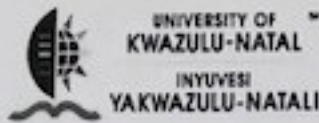
**30** Erika Löfström, Katrin Poom-Valickis, Markku S. Hannula, Samuel R. Mathews. "Supporting emerging teacher identities: can we identify teacher potential among students?", European Journal of Teacher Education, 2010 <1%  
Publication

---

Exclude quotes  Off      Exclude matches  Off  
Exclude bibliography  On



Appendix 2: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Gatekeepers Permission



18 April 2018

Ms Fathima Badat (SN 216072665)  
School Applied Human Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Pietermaritzburg Campus  
UKZN

Email: [fathimabadat@gmail.com](mailto:fathimabadat@gmail.com) [buthelazin@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:buthelazin@ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Ms Badat

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

*"An exploration of the diversity of student social relationships in a university context".*

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with students on the Pietermaritzburg campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

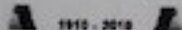
**MR S. MOKOENA**  
**REGISTRAR**

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: [registrar@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:registrar@ukzn.ac.za)


Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg

Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance Certificate



UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL  
INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

10 September 2018

Ms Fathima Badat 216072665  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Badat

Protocol reference number: HSS/0897/018M  
Project title: An exploration of the diversity of student social relationships in a university context

**Full Approval – Expedited Application**

In response to your application received 9 July 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.


Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the 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.

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

Yours faithfully



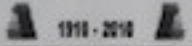
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Nontobeka Buthelezi  
cc. Academic Leader Research: Professor D Wassenaar  
cc. School Administrator: Ms Priya Konan

---

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: [embad@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:embad@ukzn.ac.za) / [svsmam@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:svsmam@ukzn.ac.za) / [ncfwood@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ncfwood@ukzn.ac.za)  
Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

  
1911 - 2018  
100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville



## Appendix 5: Data Collection Instrument

### Appendix B Interview Schedule

- Gender:
- Race:
- Age:
- Year of study:
- Living on-campus residence:

Question 1) How are social relationships formed and maintained?

- 1.1) How do you spend most of your free time?
- 1.2) Can you explain what factors make you decide who to socialize with? If so, please elaborate.
- 1.3) What are the relationships that you prioritize the most? Please describe how you've developed these relationships.
- 1.4) In your view, what factors help you to maintain these relationships? Or how do you maintain contact with these individuals? Please elaborate.

Question 2) What type of university settings cultivate these relationships?

- 2.1.1) Where do your social gatherings usually occur?
- 2.1.2) How do these facilities promote these interactions?
- 2.2.1) Do you participate in any extra-curricular activities? Please describe these activities.
- 2.2.2) If so, how do extra-curricular activities contribute to your university experience?

Question 3) How do these relationships contribute to students' academic experiences?

- 3.1) In what way do you think that these relationships contribute to your overall university experience?
- 3.2) Do any of these relationships pose challenges or risks toward your academic success? Why do you say that?
- 3.3) Would you say that you are satisfied or dissatisfied with your overall university experience and in what way?

Question 4) What are the most popular social relationships?

- 4.1) What would you recommend as being the most beneficial relationship for a student? Why?
  - 4.2) How would you describe the most 'in/hip' or popular group?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add in relation to this topic?