



**Negotiating Gender identities in Higher Education: Experiences of female
residence assistants at selected student residences in Durban**

A dissertation presented by:

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DECLARATION

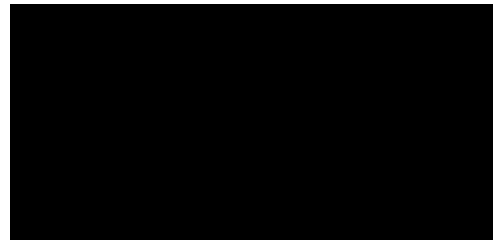
I, Phakamile Mazibuko declare that:

The research reported in this dissertation is my original research and where the work of others has been used, it has been appropriately cited and referenced. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Sanele Mazibuko and my brother, Lindokuhle Mazibuko.

Thank you so much for your continuous support.

I love you always and ALL ways.

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I wish to firstly thank God for his protection, guidance, and mercy upon my life.

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- My sincere gratitude to the participants who volunteered to be part of this study; thank you so much for your valuable contributions.

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of residence assistants' lived experiences in higher education remains an under-researched area of work despite the emerging challenges relating to gender inequality, toxic masculinities, and homophobia. A residential experience is an integral part of students' identity, learning, and development. This suggests that "external" environments such as personal and social contribute to students' overarching educational experiences and are crucial to be studied. Existing literature both nationally and internationally suggests a gap of knowledge, particularly the lived experiences of female residence assistants who are also final year or postgraduate students. The gap of knowledge is a concern considering the peak times of gender inequality and different forms of violence taking place in student residences such as Gender-based violence and Intimate partner violence. The aim of this study was to explore female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. I therefore used the intersectionality theory by Crenshaw (1989) as a theoretical framework to make sense of the participants' experiences. This study adopted the qualitative research approach and used narrative inquiry as a research methodology. Letters and semi-structured interviews were used to generate data. Four participants wrote the letters to the researcher and were each interviewed three times. To analyse data, this study used narrative analysis (first level) and analysis of narratives (second level) approaches. The study found that female RAs experienced multiple oppressions in Durban student residences such as bullying and harassment as a result of their multiple intersecting identities. The study also found that despite the extreme challenges and pressures exerted on female RAs, they still demonstrated agency, commitment, and resilience towards negotiating for diversity, gender equality, and tolerance in student residences. The study has shown that higher education spaces, particularly student residences are still hubs of gender inequality, hostility, and intolerance towards women and the queer community. The study concludes by suggesting that there is an urgent need to study the lived experiences of residence assistants within the queer community, this will be helpful to enhance respect for diversity in higher education spaces.

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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Higher education residences are ‘homes away from home’ where students from different social and cultural backgrounds live together; as a result, different beliefs, values, and practices exist in student residences (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015). As crucial as the classroom environment is to the educational experience, other environments such as personal and social in which students interact also add to their overall educational experiences (Harmon, 2011). In this case, students’ experiences in residences are an integral part of their overarching university experience (Bleiberg, 2004). As a result, residence assistants (hereafter RA) have a responsibility to manage these residences in order to ensure conducive and inclusive living/learning environments for students. Since there is diversity in student residences in terms of race, gender, sex, religion, and class among others, this further upsurges the complexities that RAs are confronted with to negotiate their gender identities within the complex and diverse environment. However, existing literature both nationally and internationally suggests a gap in RAs’ lived experiences in negotiating multiple identities, especially female RAs (Cornell et al., 2016; Cousineau & Chambers, 2015; Harper et al., 2011); This lack of research is a serious concern considering the peak times of gender inequality and different forms of violence taking place in higher education spaces, for instance cases of Gender-based violence and Intimate partner violence. In this study, I am seeking to explore female RAs’ lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. In this chapter, I will firstly discuss the problem statement and rationale of the study which will be followed by the focus and purpose of the study. Thereafter, I will discuss the objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. Lastly, I will present the overview of the study and the conclusion.

1.2 Background and Problem Statement

In 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared Gender Based Violence (GBV) as South Africa’s second pandemic (Ellis, 2020). The above declaration was a result of the ongoing and rising cases of GBV in the country. GBV is violence that is directed at an individual, based on his or her biological sex or gender identity (Gutura & Nunlall, 2020). It encompasses physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, psychological, and any other form of abuse committed primarily on the basis of gender. South African media and scholarly literature have reported a significant rise in GBV

cases which shows that while both women and men experience GBV, the majority are women and girls (Oparinde et al., 2021). The social and economic stress brought by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequalities (Gutura & Nunlall, 2020). Currently and even under a national lockdown, there has been an exponential growth of GBV cases in the country (Oparinde et al., 2021). Crime Statistics South Africa (2020) reported that about 51% of women have experienced GBV in South Africa (SA) and that one in five women have experienced violence at the hands of a partner. The World Health Organisation (2020) estimates that 12.1 in every 100 000 women are victims of femicide in SA each year. This means a woman is murdered every three hours, which is five times worse than the global average of 2.6 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). From the aforementioned statistics, it is clear that GBV and femicide are some of the most pressing social issues affecting South Africa, and universities are no exception (Mahlori et al., 2018).

In addition, Mahlori et al. (2018) report that student residences of higher education institutions in South Africa have been identified as one of the most extreme GBV sites. There has been an outburst of GBV cases and other violent cases at student residences where females, males, and queer students have been victims (Enaifoghe & Idowu, 2021; Shefer et al., 2018); To highlight some of the recent incidents from the media reports; Nosicelo Mtebeni, a female student from the University of Fort Hare who stayed at a private accommodation in East London was allegedly killed by her boyfriend and her remains were found on the streets of the city in a travelling suitcase (Buhlungu, 2021). Moreover, there was a case of Samkelo Zondi, a male student who was burned to death by his roommate who allegedly saw him as a “zombie” at a University of KwaZulu-Natal residence (Singh, 2019). Furthermore, Zolile Khumalo, a female student from the Mangosuthu University of Technology was stabbed and killed by her boyfriend at a student residence in the CBD of Durban (Singh, 2020).

Studies such as Cornell et al. (2016), Mahlori et al. (2018) and Oparinde et al. (2021) have shown violent activities taking place in student residences and the society at large. As seen above, violence is rampant among student residences especially violence against students (Mahlori et al., 2018; Oparinde et al., 2021). Since RAs manage student residences, they are then faced with significant pressures to ensure that residence spaces are conducive, inclusive, and safe with zero violent practices. Therefore, this study seeks to explore female RAs’ lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. Exploring the female RAs’ lived experiences will be helpful to understand how young women negotiate

their gender identities in student residences within Higher Education spaces. I discuss the rationale, focus, and purpose of the study in the next section.

1.3 Rationale

The motivation to conduct this study is driven by both personal and scholarly reasons. Personally, it emanates from what I experienced as a female RA in one of the selected student residences in Durban. My experience could be summed up as gender inequality, sexism, and discrimination. When I took the job opportunity of serving as RA one of my colleagues at the time boldly said, “This residence is not a suitable space for female RAs, only males can be RAs here, it is dangerous and females cannot manage here”. The remarks made me feel inferior and belittled because I was judged according to sex and not my capabilities to manage the residence. Also, the remarks reinforced a certain stereotype that portrays females as weak and vulnerable, therefore assuming that females cannot cope in a dangerous or demanding environment. Thus, such social and structural elements underpin power and gender hierarchies between women and men in societies (Hunter, 2019).

It appears that my challenges as an RA were largely related to the fact that I am a female. I had to tolerate being undermined, disregarded, and disrespected with comments from students (mostly males) such as “Ngabe kuncono ukube kusawu Themba (pseudonym) hhayi le ntombazane” [It would be better if it was still Themba (previous male RA), not this girl]. I felt uncomfortable, unworthy, and undeserving which in turn affected my work as an RA, school work, and in turn my whole university experience. For a long time, I fed myself negative thoughts that, Themba (pseudonym) was better than me just because he was a male RA in a male-dominated student residence. Similarly, Elsesser and Lever (2011) report that women have been made to feel uncomfortable in overtly competitive situations and spaces that are male-dominated. As overwhelming as my experiences were, I had to find ways to negotiate my gender identity and manage the student residence while maintaining academic excellence in my studies as a student. Thus, I am interested to explore how female RAs negotiate gender identities in student residences, particularly in Durban.

In an attempt to learn about the phenomenon of RAs’ experiences, I discovered that there are few studies reporting on RAs’ experiences in student residences, both nationally and internationally (Cousineau & Chambers, 2015; Donahue, 2015). Within the few studies available, they mostly report on RAs’ experiences on their roles and impact on academic

success (Harmon, 2011; McLaughlin, 2018). International studies such as Donahue (2015) and Harmon (2011) have explored RAs' roles in relation to their motivations, behaviours, environment, and academic success. Locally, studies such as Gopal and van Niekerk (2018) and Mahlori et al. (2018) have explored safety in student residences mainly focusing on students' experiences. Drawing from the above discussion, the experiences of RAs are understudied especially in research relating to sex and gender. This is problematic, especially in the critical times when student residences are marked as unsafe, intolerant, and homophobic (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015). The above statements highlight the scholarly reasons that motivated me to conduct this study. I am particularly interested to explore female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. The lived experiences include their feelings, perceptions, and attitudes, as well as the realities of negotiating gender identities as female RAs who are also students. From the above discussion, it is clear that understanding female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at student residences is a significant contribution to knowledge, especially in higher education. In the next section, I present a discussion of the focus and purpose of this study.

1.4 Focus and Purpose of the study

As previously highlighted, student residences are described as one of the most extreme sites for violence in higher education (Mahlori et al., 2018). RAs must then negotiate space within these violent and complex environments to account for diverse students' living needs. In essence, RAs are professional personnel responsible for managing student residences employed by the institution's Department of Student Residence Affairs (or department of student housing in other contexts). This study will therefore focus on four female RAs who are pre-service teachers at a teacher education institution in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal Province in South Africa. This means that while they have to fulfil their roles as RAs in student residences, they also have academic demands and pressures as students. Bleiberg (2004) argues that a residential experience is a central part of students' identity, development, and negotiation, therefore, it is an important component of their overall educational and university experience. The above statement suggests that RAs' lived experiences in student residences and how they negotiate their gender identities in complex student residences is a crucial area that is befitting to be explored in research. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. I

am hopeful that this study will greatly contribute to understanding the overarching experiences (personal and social context) that affect female RAs' in higher education.

I am aware of sex and gender debates which subsequently impacted on choosing the term “female RAs” over “woman RAs” in this study. To manage this, I asked my participants to indicate their sex identity and all of them indicated female. In doing this I was aware that using the term “woman” would have been restrictive since gender is socially constructed while sex (female) is determined by biology (Griffin et al., 2021). Thus, I needed to identify the participants according to how they identify themselves. This study focuses on and will contribute to the scholarship of female RAs' experiences on negotiating gender identities in higher education spaces, particularly in student residences. Next, I discuss the objectives and research questions of the study.

1.5 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are:

- To understand female residence assistants' lived experiences at selected student residences in Durban.
- To understand how female residence assistants, negotiate their gender identities at selected student residences in Durban.

1.6 Research questions

- What are the female residence assistants' lived experiences at selected student residences in Durban?
- How do female residence assistants negotiate their gender identities at selected student residences in Durban?

1.7 Significance of the study

In South Africa, there is a fair amount of literature on higher education institutions (Mutekwe, 2017; Mzangwa & Dede, 2019; Scott & Ivala, 2019; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019). However, most of that research has been on “in-class environment” “formal curriculum” based studies, and not so much on student residences. This suggests that there has been little research that reports on student residences in higher education institutions. Within those available studies,

they focus mostly on students' experiences such as teaching and learning as well as assessments. Subsequently, there is an existing gap in the literature that reports on RAs' experiences, especially those that are female (Cornell et al., 2016). This study is therefore important because it focuses on female RAs' experiences in negotiating gender identities in student residences, which is an understudied area of scholarship. Understanding how females negotiate gender identities in higher education spaces is important, especially in violent times around South Africa. The study is therefore significant to promote social justice and gender equality practices in higher education spaces both nationally and internationally. The study is also important because it will contribute knowledge to the international literature by offering the experiences of South African RAs who are female in student residences. Since RAs are also students in this teacher-education institution, Bleiberg (2004) asserts that student residences are a crucial component of students' overarching university experiences that need to be studied. In addition, this study explores student residences in the notorious area Durban, Point which often gets attention because of its geographical complexities, such as violence, crime, and substance abuse. Thus, exploring how female RAs negotiate gender identities in student residences located in such an area is a significant contribution to the scholarship of residence life experiences and particularly the experiences of female RAs' in higher education. The next section presents an overview of how the chapters of this study have been organised.

1.8 Chapter Overview

This section presents an overview of the chapters in the study which will be divided into six chapters:

Chapter one:

This current chapter which is chapter one presents a background and introduction to the study. It also provides a discussion of the problem statement and rationale of the study which is followed by the focus, purpose, and significance of the study.

Chapter two:

Chapter two will present and locate the study within the existing literature both in national (South Africa) and international contexts to show what has been studied previously and to indicate a potential gap in the existing research. The review of literature will be presented in

themes as emerged from the readings. The literature review chapter will be followed by chapter three which is the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter three:

Chapter three will present a discussion of the theoretical framework used to frame the study. The theoretical framework I have chosen in the study is the intersectionality theory by Crenshaw (1989). Basically, with this theory, I am seeking to understand how different intersecting identities inform or shape the complex experiences of female RAs. The theoretical framework chapter will be followed by Chapter four which is the methodology of the study.

Chapter four:

Chapter four will present a detailed research methodology on how the study was conducted including methodology (which is narrative inquiry), research approach (qualitative), and data generation methods (letters and semi-structured interviews). The chapter will also discuss the trustworthiness, data analysis approach and ethical considerations addressed in the study. The research methodology chapter will be followed by chapter five which is the data analysis.

Chapter five:

Chapter five will present a discussion of data analysis and presentation of findings, presented in themes that emerged from the findings. I analysed data using narrative analysis (first level) and analysis of narrative (second level) approaches. I then identified and presented themes using Braun and Clarke (2006) six stages of thematic analysis. The data analysis chapter will be followed by chapter six which concludes the study.

Chapter six

Chapter six will present a conclusion of the study including the main findings, limitations as well as implications for policy, practice, research, and conclusion.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the background and introduction of the study. I first presented the background, problem statement, focus, and purpose of the study. Thereafter, I presented the rationale, key research questions, objectives, location as well as the significance of the study.

Lastly, I presented a discussion of the overview of each chapter. Student residences in South African higher education institutions have been marked as one of the extreme hubs of violence, homophobia, and gender prejudices among others (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015; Mahlori et al., 2018). This presents extreme pressures for female RAs as they have to manage student residences in peak times of violence, hostility, and gender inequalities. Therefore, this study aims to explore female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. Exploring the female RAs' lived experiences will be helpful to understand how young women negotiate their gender identities in student residences within Higher Education spaces. The next chapter aims to review and critically discuss existing literature on the phenomenon of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Undertaking a literature review for a research project is one of the important and yet challenging tasks that a researcher ought to do. Bruce (1994, p. 218) affirms that a literature review is “an important chapter in the thesis, where its purpose is to provide the background to and justification for the research undertaken”. Likewise, Hart (2018) defines a literature review as an identification, selection, analysis, and synthesis of available studies (published and unpublished) which contain data and evidence, concerning a particular phenomenon. These studies include articles, reviews, abstracts, dissertations, electronic media, and other research reports. Undoubtedly, a literature review is important because it gives a historical background of one’s research with an overview of related research and shows how one’s work extend/challenge/address gaps in a field of work (Ridley, 2012). The above statement relates to what Blaxter et al. (2010) stress as a purpose of the literature review, to locate a research project and form its context with a critical analysis of insights from previous studies. The purpose of this study is to understand female RAs’ lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. This literature review, therefore, aims to provide a comprehensive outlook on previous studies relating to residence assistants and student residences by identifying commonalities, silences, and gaps. The review will discuss the following aspects: Residence assistant and their roles, History, and development of student residences, The massification of Higher Education, DHET infrastructure funding on student residences, Types of student residences and the outlook of student residences in Durban. This will be followed by a review on Experiences of residence assistants, Gender discrimination and inequalities in Higher Education, Toxic masculinities and violence in student residences.

2.2 Residence Assistant (RA) and their roles

In international countries such as England, Germany, and United States of America, a residence is managed by full-time personnel known as a residence hall director (Sage et al., 2012). Residence hall directors have the opportunity to act as managers and mentors to students they live with (Kenna, 2011). Likewise, South African universities also have these personnel and vary according to full-time and part-time employment. To highlight a few, at the University of Cape Town, they have wardens (full-time) and sub-wardens (part-time) who are senior students (UCT, Student Housing, 2020). The Durban University of Technology has residence advisors (full-time) and assistant residence advisors (part-time) who are senior students (DUT Support

Services, 2020). The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal has residence supervisors (full-time) and residence assistants (part-time) who are senior students (UKZN Student Services, 2019). Literature indicates that most South African universities use senior students (postgraduates) as residence assistants (Hubbard, 2009). It appears that this is one of the university's initiatives to enhance senior students' leadership skills with the assumption that, they have spent sufficient years in the university to act as managers and mentors. It is also about creating employment opportunities and to introduce senior students to the world of work. This study will therefore use "residence assistant" (RA) to refer to part-time personnel (also a student) responsible for managing student residences (UKZN Student Services, 2019).

The roles and responsibilities of an RA include management of a residence by assisting residence administrators with admissions, ensuring adherence to residence rules, mentoring students, implementing educational programs and other residence life programs (UKZN Student Services, 2019). Tight (2011) reports that RAs performing duties as staff and students often experience challenges and frustration in balancing the two roles. Thus, role conflict, ambiguity, and work overload have been found to contribute to the frustration, anxiety, and declining performance of RAs (Ogunbayo & Aigbavboa, 2019).

2.3 History and development of student residences

According to Holton (2016) accommodation is a place of residence and habitation. Over the years in most international countries such as the United Kingdom, Norway, and Sweden, the terminology and characteristics of accommodation have varied in higher education development from dormitories, halls, hostels, rooms, houses to residences (Avni & Alfasi, 2018). Similarly, in South Africa, numerous terminologies have been used to refer to student accommodation such as student halls, housing, and residences. According to Holton and Riley (2013), a residence is a place to live for a particular duty or enjoyment of residential benefit, for a certain period. In this case study, students are accommodated to stay for the duration of their studies in student residences. Therefore, this study will use "student residences" to refer to accommodation for students, to ensure coherence and consistency.

Silver (2004) asserts that Global North countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany, have been providing residences for students since the thirteenth century. The above statement includes Oxford and Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. In the thirteenth century, student residences were not seen as living and learning spaces on a full-time basis, instead, they

were seen as dorms which are derived from the Latin word dormire, meaning “sleep” (Keashly et al., 1997). This means that student residences were seen as facilities that gave students a place to sleep only, after a day of classroom learning (Vreeland, 1973). Since then, the characteristics and purposes of student residences have evolved over the years.

Over the years, there has been a rapid growth of students’ enrolment in tertiary education globally (Hubbard, 2009). Avni and Alfasi (2018) label this growth as studentification, which is also referred to as the massification of higher education. They assert that studentification is a global phenomenon that has been prominent since the large-scale expansion of South African higher education in the early 1990s. Allinson (2006) adds that studentification which will be referred to as massification of higher education in this study, refers to a range of economic, environmental, physical, and social processes which take place when large numbers of students move into cities or towns where desirable universities are located. In simple terms, the massification of higher education in the context of student accommodation refers to a large number of students who occupy accommodation spaces in cities for the duration of their study, away from their original homes. For instance, when the United States expanded higher education in the 1950s and 1960s after world war II, there was enormous growth in student residences as a result of massification (Allinson, 2006). Similarly, in South Africa post-1994 (after the apartheid period), there was an increased demand for higher education to provide educational access for all (Gresse et al., 2015). This demand and increase was an attempt to address historical injustices and inequalities. As a result, institutions not only had to provide additional lecture rooms but they also had to provide additional accommodation in cities for students away from their original homes which are referred to as student residences in this study (Holton & Riley, 2013).

2.4 Massification of Higher Education

The 5th chapter of the higher education Act (No.101 of 1997) outlines South African government’s intentions to redress past discrimination, ensure representativeness and equal access to promote the potential of every student while appreciating diversity (Higher education Act, 1997). The White Paper on Education and Transforming (1995) also laid the foundation for the post-apartheid education and training system in South Africa, and it supported the government’s commitment to remove barriers to education for those who had been previously disadvantaged by the past educational system. Since then, the South African government has

put enormous pressure on educational institutions to achieve the national goals of equality, equity, and transformation by providing access to education to all (Msiza et al., 2020; Mzangwa & Dede, 2019). The above discussion suggests that massification was not a negative idea, instead, it was and still is a social justice agenda (Mohamedbhai, 2014; Msiza et al., 2020).

For teaching and learning, studies have reported that the effects of massification include poor physical infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and a shortage of staff among other things (Mohamedbhai, 2014). He further argues that an increase in massification has led to a rise in student enrolment which subsequently increases the output of graduates from higher education institutions. As a result, the high graduation rate equals the high rate of unemployment amongst graduates especially in developing countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe (Mashamba et al., 2022). In South Africa (as of 29 March 2022), the unemployment rate went up to a new high record of 35.3% (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Evidently, the amplified number of unemployed graduates or unemployment rates is a serious threat to the economic development of the country especially in South Africa as a developing country (Mashamba et al., 2022). It is worth noting from the above discussion that, education in particular higher education is an important component of social and economic development (Mashamba et al., 2022).

Moreover, as previously alluded that massification has steered a growth in student enrolment which resulted in poor physical infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and a shortage of staff (Mohamedbhai, 2014). Barrett et al. (2019) argue that quality education which will enhance socio-economic development is not attainable where there is poor infrastructure and teaching/learning. The above statements suggest that while massification ideally redresses the inequalities of the past, however, on the other hand, it somewhat compromises the quality of education (Barrett et al., 2019).

There have been outbreaks of student protests usually at the beginning of the academic year/semester in most higher education institutions in South Africa. The student protests have been demanding free education to enable formerly disadvantaged groups such as black people to have access to higher education (Mutekwe, 2017). These student protests have been supported by famous revolutionary campaigns such as #FeesMustFall #RhodesMustFall #FreeEducation amongst others. The higher education institutions have then made numerous efforts to accommodate student demands through scholarships, bursaries, and crowd funding among others, which then contributed to student funding. Consequently, the massification of

higher education did not only affect the teaching and learning and infrastructure. It also affected the institutions' capacity to offer sufficient student accommodation (Gresse et al., 2015). As a result, the high intake of students required institutions to outsource student residences to private companies which is discussed in detail in the next section. At this particular teacher education institution, some of the residences are outsourced but RAs who are students of this institution (university) manage the residences. Thus, RAs of student residences are then pressured to devise ways to foster student friendly residences with limited resources (McLaughlin, 2018). The pressure is therefore challenging for female RAs to negotiate their gender identities in student residences. In light of the above discussion, this study then seeks to explore the negotiation of gender identities by exploring the lived experiences of female RAs in selected student residences in Durban.

2.5 DHET Infrastructure Funding on student residences

For the past two decades, most African universities, such as those in Zimbabwe and Nigeria, have been struggling to provide sufficient student residences especially the on-campus residences (Holton, 2016). Likewise, South African universities have experienced a shortage of student residences as the number of students enrolled has continued to rise each year (Gresse et al., 2015). As a result, most higher education institutions opted to involve and outsource private accommodation sector to meet the demand for residences (Tight 2019). However, eleven years later, with the above-mentioned attempts being made among others, there are still challenges regarding the shortage as well as unfavorable conditions at student residences (Maharaj et al., 2010). For example, there was a recent protest where students violated and burnt beds in one of the student residences in Durban (Govender 2019). Given the infrastructural challenges in student residences that were highlighted above, several commitments have been made by the government, particularly the Department of Higher Education in partnership with various organisations, to provide infrastructure for student residences such as the Budget Facility for Infrastructure (BFI) and Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA).

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr. Bonginkosi “Blade” Nzimande presented the keynote address at the launch of the University of Fort Hare’s student housing scheme on 31 May 2021. Nzimande (2021, p. 1) stated that “the provision of accessible, decent, safe and academically conducive student accommodation at all our post-school

education and training institutions is of great importance to providing quality teaching, learning, research and innovation spaces”. The above statement suggests that student residences are an integral part of quality teaching and learning, therefore accessible, safe, and academically conducive student residences should be prioritized. Thus, the development of student residences has been marked as an urgent priority by the ministry, for public universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2021).

DHET (2021) reports that major infrastructure development has happened in South African institutions over the past years, with approximately 34% (R9.719 billion) of the Infrastructure and Efficiency Grant funding being provided to the eight historically black universities. Notably, the significant investment in historically black universities points to the commitment of DHET to transform the history of unequal spatial and institutional development in higher education institutions (Nzimande, 2021). The Student Housing Infrastructure Programme is said to provide 300 000 beds at the 26 public universities and 50 TVET colleges at over 300 campuses in all nine provinces over a period of 10 years (DHET, 2021). The main sources of funding for student residences development include DHET, Budget Facility for Infrastructure grant funding, Development Bank of Southern Africa, Infrastructure Investment Programme for South African grants, developers, and financial institutions (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). Successively, there have been reports of student residence projects in various institutions. For example, the selected teacher education institution of this study has newly built student residences (on campus) which were opened in 2021 for occupation. There are other institutions such as the University of Fort Hare and the University of Venda (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). From the above-discussed efforts made to develop student residences, there are however challenges of inadequate and poor student residences in South African institutions (Maharaj et al., 2010). The student protests fighting and demanding adequate student residences still occur. For student residences in Durban, the protests include burning of beds, property, and roadblocks experienced in student residences mostly from the Durban University of Technology, Mangosuthu University of Technology, and University of KwaZulu-Natal (Makhanya, 2021).

Recently, on 18 April 2021, the University of Cape Town (UCT) caught fire that damaged several historical buildings (Davids, 2021). Human and Damons (2021) report that approximately 4 000 students were evacuated from residences and moved to emergency

accommodation sites around Cape Town, following the fire damage that affected the Rondebosch campus and surroundings. Consequently, Davids (2021) documents that students have experienced trauma, and their academic programme was affected. The Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) residence in Durban recently caught fire during the unrest that unfolded in KwaZulu-Natal, July 2021. The unrest involved the looting of goods, vandalizing and burning of property, and people killing each other in areas such as Phoenix, which is unfortunately close to the central town where most student residences are located for most KZN institutions. Again as previously highlighted, a student's residential experience is an integral part of their holistic university experience particularly teaching and learning (Bleiberg, 2004). Arguably, the experiences amongst others have brought severe challenges for students in residences, resulting in emotional, academic, and social instability. This could be far more challenging for students who are residence assistants who have double roles as students as well as RAs.

From the above discussion, it is without a doubt that RAs managed student residences at a time of extreme social, political, and economical challenges such as social unrest and student protests. Subsequently, this has severe pressure and effect on their professional role as well as personal aspect. Therefore, this study aims to explore female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban.

2.6 Types of student residences

Student residences are situated on-campus and off-campus residences. On-campus means staying inside the university's premises while off-campus means that students reside outside the university's premises (UKZN Student Services, 2019). Shushok et al. (2011) further report on three models of student residences namely: the sleep and eat model, which suggests that residences are merely a place to sleep which was highlighted previously as used in early centuries. The second model is the market model, which offers desirable amenities to students which are non-curricular such as entertainment/leisure activities. The third model is the learning model, which consists of communities led by both staff and student affairs professionals with the primary goal of promoting student learning in residences. The learning model advocates that a residence is a place where students should foster learning. Evidently, from the above discussion, it shows that South Africa currently uses a combination of all three

models where students are ideally provided with desirable facilities as well as conducive spaces for learning in most student residences (UKZN Student Services, 2019).

From the above discussion, it is clear that there are unique living arrangements in a student residence that are usually different from most students' normal homes. This is supported by Allinson (2006) who asserts that staying at a student residence is associated with adapting to a new independent lifestyle. This means that students are responsible to take the first time or adaptable measures as they experience unique living experiences with various diversities, which are likely different from their home environments (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015). To support students in this transition, Minister of Higher Education Dr Nzimade emphasized that "the provision of accessible, decent, safe and academically conducive student residences in South African universities is of great importance to the success of students" (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). The above discussion highlights the crucial role of residence assistants to act as managers, role models, and mentors, to promote safe and conducive student residences. However, several reports, discussed in the next section have marked student residences to be unsafe and violent especially in Durban.

2.7 Outlook of student residences in Durban

Over the years, Durban has attracted a lot of businesses and individuals to venture into property investment in student accommodation as a result of institutions outsourcing and privatising student residences (Meyer, 2019). Durban is situated in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa with major tourist attractions because of its warm climate and extensive beaches (Maharaj et al., 2010). Durban has an estimated population of 3 720 953 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). It is a central city of student residences for institutions of higher education in KwaZulu-Natal, particularly in the Ethekewini Metropolitan Municipality (Holton, 2016). However, in recent years, Durban has been regarded as the third most violent city in South Africa (South Africa Crime & Safety Report, 2020). The above statement places a huge threat to students' safety and living conditions since most universities and colleges in KZN have student residences in Durban.

Moreover, there have been numerous reports about illegal migrants in Durban especially in South Beach, Point (Pineteh, 2018). Although the problem of "illegal" migrants in Durban first

came to attention in the late 1980s, it is only after 1994 that this influx happened in crisis proportions in the official and public mind (Knight & Rogerson, 2019). Similarly, Memela and Maharaj (2018) report on the emergence of Durban as a new destination for legal and undocumented African migrants in the 1990s. As a result, Durban experienced a rapid population growth rate causing housing backlogs, increased informal settlements, poverty, and high unemployment rates for the majority of the population (Vahed, 2013a). Moreover, there has been a widespread stereotype to stigmatize foreign nationals as people who take jobs from local residents (Pineteh, 2018). Consequently, many xenophobic attacks have since then occurred and are still happening today in Durban (Kollamparambil, 2019). Thus, the above discussion indicates that crime in Durban is not an act that began recently but it has a history.

In addition, Crime Statistics (2019) revealed that weekends contributed 60% of most criminal cases especially murder in South Africa. Ideally, this places a challenge on students as they often attend risky spaces on weekends such as night clubs, especially when stipends or meal allowances are paid. Thus, crime and substance abuse has been a major problem in Durban, especially in student residences. The literature reviewed in South Africa highlights that the most cited negative impact of crime on students was depression, addiction, and poor academic achievements (Letsela et al., 2019). The literature has also shown that there has been discrimination experienced among diverse student residence spaces (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015; Mahlari et al., 2018; Stephenson et al., 2020). The studies assert that residence spaces have been described as intolerant, unwelcoming, hostile, and homophobic towards people who are known or assumed to be non-heterosexual (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015; Stephenson et al., 2020). Student residences of higher education institutions have students who come from different backgrounds in terms of race, nationality, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Vandeyar & Mohale, 2016). Consequently, there have been ongoing reports of discriminatory practices experienced by students such as bullying and harassment.

Jagessar and Msibi (2015) reported that queer students have not been feeling safe at student residences. Undoubtedly, students' safety and sense of belonging are important for the overall students' well-being which in turn serve as an integral part of their overarching university experiences (Letsela et al., 2019). In addition, Bleiberg (2004) argues that a residential experience is a central part of students' identity, development, and negotiation, therefore, it is an important component of the overall university experience. Since RAs are responsible for managing, and mentoring students at a residence, they are then faced with the challenge to

employ strategies to manage the space and negotiate their identities within student residences to ensure safety and inclusivity for all. As previously highlighted, student residences are largely marked as one of the GBV sites experienced mostly by women (Mahlori et al., 2018). This means the above challenges are harder for female residence assistants as a result of how they are perceived and treated because of their gender identity, especially in male-dominated spaces (Strebel et al., 2018).

2.8 Experiences of residence assistants (RAs)

From the literature I reviewed, I discovered that few studies are reporting on RAs' experiences in student residences, both nationally and internationally (Kessi et al., 2019). Within the few studies available, they mostly report on RAs' experiences on their roles and impact on academic success (Donahue, 2015; Harmon, 2011; McLaughlin, 2018). The literature reported RAs' negative experiences of stress namely burnout, anxiety, and depression in meeting the academic demands (Donahue, 2015). One of the most recurring reasons in literature for this burnout on RAs' experiences is role conflict and management (Harmon, 2011; McLaughlin, 2018). Since RAs live and work with peers, students, and supervisors in the same residential space, it can be difficult to distinguish RA work from academic, social, and personal time (Harmon, 2011). Therefore, the constant demands of RA work allow little opportunity for other commitments since there is always work to be completed in the residence (McLaughlin, 2018).

Blimling (2010, p.63) advocates for assertiveness training because RAs "are often exposed to a variety of stressful situations in their positions, they may need training in handling their own emotions and feelings". Additionally, a study by Donahue (2015) recommended that future studies ought to explore RAs' experiences across a large spectrum of institutional disciplines and identities. Donahue argued that exploring RA's multiple identities in a wide spectrum would be beneficial to understand how their different identities intersect and come into contact with their roles as RA and students. The above discussion indicates a gap in the literature in terms of exploring female RA's experiences of negotiating gender identities in student residences. In South Africa, a fair amount of literature reports on students' experiences in student residences but as noted earlier there is very little that reports on RAs' experiences especially those that are female.

2.9 Gender discrimination and inequalities in Higher Education

Gerry (2011) argues that race, class, and gender are intertwined through which power relations are produced to subordinate previously disadvantaged groups such as women. Notably, a post-apartheid South Africa remains a country challenged with inequalities, where historical injustices are still present (Shefer et al., 2018). To begin with, men are still reported to be occupying more positions of power compared to women in organizational settings especially such as business industries and educational institutions (Babic & Hansez, 2021). Likewise, the above notion is also a case in this selected teacher education institution of this study. For example, the 2020/2021 Student Representative Council (SRC) of the selected teacher education institution was made up of 6-member councils which consisted of only 1 woman and 5 men. This under-representation of women leaders goes further to residence assistants and house committees in student residences (UKZN Student Services, 2020) which is a serious concern. One would argue that the under-representation is the one that perpetuates discrimination, especially from male RA/students to female RA/students because female leadership is not normalised in student residences. Thus, I was interested in understanding the lived experiences of female RAs in negotiating their gender identities in student residences.

Even though the introduction of women leaders has relatively increased in the last half-century globally with efforts such as affirmative action in South Africa. There are still, negative attitudes toward women leaders in business industries and educational institutions (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010; Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). As a result, women have been reported to experience discrimination, harassment, and other violent practices in the workplace (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). For a long time, societal gender roles have not seen a woman as belonging or worthy of being in the workplace. For example, the women's stereotypical gender roles have included communal roles, such as being a caregiver, home cook, and nurturer. Thus, if women do not conform to the above gender roles, they get a negative attitude in a form of discrimination or harassment (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015).

In relation to the above discussion, Eagly and Heilman (2016) argue that female leaders suffer two types of prejudice namely: descriptive and prescriptive. Descriptive bias occurs when female leaders are stereotyped as possessing less potential for leadership than males while prescriptive bias occurs when actual female leaders are evaluated less favourably because

leadership is seen as more desirable for males than for females (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Elsesser & Lever, 2011). The above statement suggests that when women conform to their “communal” gender role, they are not perceived as having leadership potential. Contrary, if women enact leadership characteristics that are traditionally associated with men; they are then mistreated for behaving in an unfeminine manner (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Johnson et al., 2008). These biases place a huge threat to RAs especially female RAs who have to negotiate their gender identities in student residences. Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (1991) argue that women’s experiences are shaped by different multiple and intersecting identities which produce or normalise systems of oppression and privilege. Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (1991) views will therefore assist in unpacking and understanding the nuances of this phenomenon.

2.10 Toxic masculinities and violence in student residences

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), masculinities are socially constructed behaviours that are regulated by society, through certain rules or actions. This is closely linked to the concept of the “Man Box” which describes how masculine norms often comprise sets of rigid and constraining standards that place pressure on men to act in a certain way (Ragonese et al., 2019). Subsequently, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) add that rules and expectations on what is considered masculine behaviour often dominate in society. For instance, it is expected that a man must be heterosexual, powerful, controlling, and unemotional. In this way, behaviours that deviate from the social construct are considered to be feminine and undesirable (Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). As a result, men are found to be committing violence and many other harmful acts on women, a point I had discussed earlier in the chapter.

Numerous studies have documented that young men considered violence as an important way to display power and prove their masculinity in spaces they occupy (Connell, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Shefer et al., 2018). The above statement suggests that men use force, power, and violence to maintain the hierarchy in various contexts such as their home, school, work, or society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This is referred to as toxic masculine behaviour which includes being violent, assertive, and aggressive among others (Harrington, 2020). Consequently, such behaviours reinforce power and gender hierarchies between women and men in the society and the residences (Hunter, 2019). Students, particularly female students in higher education institutions have experienced violence at the hands of men with famous cases such as Uyinene Mrwteyana, a female student from the University of Cape Town, who

was raped and murdered at the nearby Post Office (Nombembe, 2019). The second case is that of Zolile Khumalo, a female student from Mangosuthu University of Technology who was stabbed and killed by her boyfriend at a student residence in Durban (Singh, 2020).

A third and a recent case occurred on 19 August 2021 at the University of Fort Hare (UFH) where Nosiselo Mtebeni, a fourth- and final-year student was brutally killed, allegedly by her boyfriend (Buhlungu, 2021). Nosiselo's remains were reported to be found on the streets of the city. Sakhela Buhlungu, vice-chancellor of the UFH stated that "Nosiselo lived in private accommodation in East London, which is not under the control of the university. This confirms that we need to expand the residential arrangements in East London that are owned by the university so that we have full control of them" (Buhlungu, 2021, para. 10). The above statement from the VC suggests that students' lives are at great risk (exposed to horrific acts of violence) where institutions have little/no control in accommodation spaces that are privately owned. Drawing from Nosiselo's case when institutions outsource responsibilities such as the provision of safe residences, put students' lives at risk and make them vulnerable. It is even more concerning that this incident took place in August which is declared a women's month in South Africa. "Enough is Enough" (Buhlungu, 2021, para 13). Various institutions have adopted the anti-gender-based violence policy however, with the ongoing cases of GBV in student residences and private accommodations, there is clearly more that needs to be done to create safe student residences that are conducive (Ngabaza et al., 2015; Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019).

Student residences have also been described as unsafe and intolerant with extreme discriminatory practices of homophobia against queer students (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015). Queer is an umbrella term to include the group of all non-heterosexual and non-cisgender sexual and gender minorities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual and other (Matebeni et al., 2018). Despite a national call from the DHET 2011 Annual Report for the institutions' provision of accessible, decent, safe, and academically conducive student accommodation, safety in student accommodation in South Africa remains a serious challenge (Department of Higher Education and Training 2011). It has been 10 years since DHET reported the above concerns but institutions of higher education, as well as student residences, are still marked unsafe, homophobic, and violent. Ngabaza et al. (2015) wrote on safe spaces among campus engagements, they found students identifying as queer to be marginalised and denied access to participate in rugby because it is regarded as a masculine sport. The above statement suggests

the dominance of rugby as a masculine sport used to discriminate against non-conforming masculinities. Likewise, Harrington (2020) argues that toxic masculinity is one of the major reasons for discrimination and gender-based violence in student residences.

Sexual violence has also been reported to be one of the toxic masculine behaviours identified in student residences (Casale et al., 2021). It has become an “it” thing to have multiple partners for a man to prove their masculinity. In most student residences’ language, they call it a “player”, a man who has and sleeps with multiple women, often in exchange for money. Casale et al. (2021) state that poverty and gender inequalities are key factors that place young women and girls at risk of experiencing gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. This indicates the proximity of power to masculinities, in that money is used to assert toxic masculinities. This is supported by Connell (2002) who asserts that the power of heterosexual men in a patriarchal society pushes women to be treated as objects and allows them to benefit from the inequalities. Notably, from the above discussion, the female RAs are presented with extreme pressures to manage student residences that are embedded with issues of toxic masculinities and violence.

While there are ongoing “rumours” in most institutions of higher education that male lecturers are having transactional favours with female students, also students are alleged to be having transactional relationships with other men. A fair number of studies have explored the congruency of these rumours. To highlight a few, a study by Shefer et al. (2018) on transactional sex at a South African university, reported that it is fairly common for female students to engage in sexual relationships with older men, commonly referred to as “sugar daddies” or “blessers” to help them pay for daily living and learning expenses. This relates to the point made by Casale et al. (2021) that poverty makes women vulnerable to acts of sexual exploitation and some may lead to GBV. The literature on this subject has focused largely on student experiences in South Africa, with little focus on RAs’ experiences especially of those that are female (Kessi et al., 2019). In this day and age, women's experiences are crucial to be studied to promote social justice and gender equality in our society and educational contexts (Oni et al., 2019). Therefore, there is a pressing need to study the lived experiences of how female RAs negotiate their gender identities in student residences.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the reviewed literature on residence assistants' experiences and student residences with a focus on various themes that emerged from the literature, drawing from both international and South African contexts. The review suggests that much has to be done to explore and understand the lived experiences of female RAs on negotiating gender identities at student residences. Therefore, this study will contribute significantly to the existing gap in the literature. Following next is a chapter on the study's theoretical framework.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Grant and Osanloo (2014) state that a theoretical framework is a blueprint or guide for research that includes concepts and descriptions from an existing theory that are related to a study to be undertaken. A theory is therefore used to interpret and make sense of the data, which responds to the study's objective (Imenda, 2014). The objective of this study is to understand female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. Thus, to achieve this study's objective, I will employ a theoretical framework to frame the female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences. Since the key participants of this study are female residence assistants, Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (1991) argue that women's experiences are shaped by different intersecting identities which produce or normalize systems of oppression and privilege. As a result, Crenshaw (1989) argues for intersectionality as an approach to study complexity in individual experiences, particularly of female RAs in this study. Similarly, Collins and Bilge (2016) posit that intersectionality is a way to understand and analyse the multiplicity of intersecting identities/experiences in a social world. This study will therefore use intersectionality theory to understand how gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and other identities intersect in ways that inform/shape female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban.

Framing female RAs' lived experiences within the intersectionality theory will assist me to understand the complexities around their experiences especially in critical times of Gender-based violence, gender inequality, massification of higher education, Xenophobia in Durban, July 2021 unrest, and #FeesMustFall #IAMNEXT movements. In doing so, this theoretical framework section seeks to provide a comprehensive discussion on the intersectionality theory. Firstly, I will discuss the history and nature of intersectionality theory. Thereafter, I will discuss the critiques of the theory. Lastly, this section will discuss the suitability of the theory in the study and the conclusion.

3.2 History of intersectionality theory

Intersectionality is from a broader theory of feminism which was coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), an African-American law Professor who critiqued the anti-discrimination law of the United States of America and argued that its models failed to cater for black women's experiences. She reported that black women experienced violence as a result of their multi-layered identities such as race and social class (Crenshaw, 1991). In light of the above, she argued that black women's intersectional discrimination was not catered for in the anti-discrimination law, which treats identity categories as mutually exclusive grounds of discrimination. Consequently, she introduced the intersectionality theory to study how race and gender mediated the experiences of black women in the USA (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). In this way, Crenshaw (1989) used the idea of intersectionality to explain the unique systems of discrimination experienced by black women at the intersection of race and sex. She challenged lawyers, feminists, and civil rights organisers to transform their strategies/frameworks for addressing discrimination, in order to attend to the realities of black women's intersectional discrimination (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). Intersectionality was then aimed to enable feminism, anti-racist activism, and anti-discrimination law to highlight the multiple ways in which racial and gender oppression were experienced by black women.

However, before I further discuss Crenshaw's work on intersectionality, it is noteworthy that long before Crenshaw (1989) coined the term, there were intersectional writings that emerged from women of colour during the 1960s and 1970s (Collins, 1991). During these periods of the 1960s and 1970s, black feminist organisations called for the creation of movements that studied simultaneous oppressions that were faced by women of colour in the United States of America (Crenshaw, 1991; Kannan, 2018). The black feminist organisations among others included the Third World Women's Alliance (1968), the National Black Feminist Organisation (1973), and the National Alliance of Black Feminists (1976). Notably, the tradition of black feminism stems from the condition of being both Black and a woman, it focuses on the intersection of racism and sexism and how they create the social issues and inequalities for Black women (Collins, 1990). The Third World Women's Alliance was an organisation that aimed to address issues of capitalism, racism, imperialism, and sexism faced by women of colour. The National Black Feminist Organization (1973) aimed to address the unique issues affecting black women particularly, the double oppression of sexism and racism. The National Alliance of Black Feminists (1976) sought full equality for African-American women by addressing gender, race, and class discrimination in the USA.

The black feminist organisations, therefore, implemented various interventions to address the above-mentioned aims for equality and social justice. For example, the Third World Women's alliance conducted interactive theatre and discussion groups in schools to explore the intersections of racism, colonialism, and sexism (Harper et al., 2011). However, the Black feminist organisations faced numerous challenges and pressures such as limited funding, resources, white feminism, and lack of support which consequently led to activists' burnout and failure. Thus, the continued inequalities based on race, class, and gender among others, are evidence that women in general and specifically black women are still experiencing inequalities. Intersectionality, therefore, serves as a response to recognise black women's experiences which were and still are neglected in social justice movements (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 2013; Nash, 2008).

Subsequently, in the late 1980s, Crenshaw (1989) formally coined the intersectionality theory. She provided a metaphor of crossroads (intersection) to describe the study of how structures of domination marginalise black women. According to Crenshaw (1989), the structures of domination included race, gender, and class. Metaphorically, she used intersecting roads to describe and explain how structures of domination interlock to produce black women's experiences of marginality. For example, one road could be labelled as "race", the other could be "age", and another road could be "class". These roads then produce more than one form of oppression as they connect at the intersection. To support the above, Crenshaw (1989; 1991) argued that, where roads intersect, there is a double, triple, multiple, and many-layered blanket of oppression. For example, as an RA, when identities of being a female (sex), woman (gender), black (race) and middle-class status (class) intersect, they produce multiple experiences of privilege and marginalization. This means that the RA's marginal experiences could be of sexism while privileged experiences could be related to class, race, or age among others. Notably, the aforementioned examples highlight that individuals, particularly women deal with multiple forms of oppression that inform their complex experiences (Crenshaw 1989).

The above discussion highlights that early works of intersectionality studied how race, gender, and class intersected to construct black women's experiences of oppression which were ignored by the law (Anthias, 2013b; Crenshaw, 1989). In over thirty years since Crenshaw (1989) coined the intersectionality theory, it has become a significant theory that is used widely in feminist research, anti-discriminatory, gender equality, and other movements for social justice (Carastathis, 2014; Collins, 2017; Dhamoon, 2011). Scholars have used and expanded the intersectionality theory over several studies. Patricia Hill Collins is one of the prominent social

theorists who has largely contributed to the scholarship of black women with specific reference to intersectionality. Collins (1991) extended on Crenshaw's (1989) work where she argued for intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis to develop a complex understanding of social inequality and injustices. The above statement presents intersectionality as a critical inquiry to address social inequalities by exploring multiple forms of oppression, to encourage gender equality and social justice practices (Collins, 2019). Intersectionality, therefore, offers a critical and social lens for studying individual experiences to foster social transformation (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Thus, intersectionality as a critical practice, allows a study to explore how systems of oppression interact to shape women's marginal experiences in specific social contexts (Anthias, 2016). The social context is argued as one of the key features that should be looked at when using the intersectional framework to help us understand individuals' experiences in a social world (Collins and Bilge, 2006).

It is for the above reasons that this study will use the intersectionality theory to understand how female RAs negotiate gender identities and how their intersecting identities inform experiences of marginality or privilege (Collins, 1991). Understanding female RAs' experiences of negotiating gender identities is important for addressing gender inequality and ensuring social justice in Higher Education spaces. In the next section, I unpack the intersectionality theory.

3.3 Nature of the intersectionality theory

Generally, Colfer et al. (2018) describe intersectionality as a fact of life, they further assert that intersectionality has been and is still present in the ways that we live and interact to understand the domains of discrimination. This means that intersectionality exists in our everyday lives as we try to navigate or negotiate different intersecting identities that produce our unique experiences. Intersectionality is also a research tool that has been commonly used in many fields such as law, education, human rights, and others. According to Crenshaw (1989) and Peters (2017), intersectionality starts from the premise that people live multi-layered identities resulting from social relations, history, and power structures in society. These identities are not limited to race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, ability, and religion (May, 2015). As mentioned earlier, intersectionality posits that, when these different identities intersect, they produce privilege and oppression for individuals (Crenshaw, 1989). Subsequently, individuals experience multiple realities and can experience oppression and privilege all at once (Crenshaw, 1989; Levine-Rasky, 2011).

Collins (2000) and Symington (2004) state that individuals are members of more than one community at the same time, which means that they can experience oppression and privilege simultaneously. For example, a woman who occupies a powerful leadership position in the community (privileged) may suffer from domestic violence at home (oppression), abused by her husband who is toxic and patriarchal. Therefore, intersectionality aims to expose ways in which gender inequality, patriarchy, toxic masculinity, and other systems of oppression produce marginalizes women (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 2013; Symington 2004).

In light of the above discussion, Collins (2000; 2019) therefore maintains that complexities brought about by multiple intersecting identities, are important to be studied to recognise both oppression and privilege in black women's experiences, in this case, female RAs. Similarly, Crenshaw (2013) argued for intersectionality as a discrimination approach that reflects the identities and experiences of black women. It is therefore imperative to consider how different identities intersect in order to understand how the social world is constructed and negotiated (Symington, 2004).

Intersectionality also assists in understanding social complexity and diversity in different contexts (Bailey & Mobley, 2019). For example, two black women (one able-bodied, the other living with disability) can both experience racial and gender prejudice while the one who is able-bodied experiences privilege in the category of ability. There is also a stigma that is associated with categorising people living with disabilities as individuals who are not intellectually capable which often results in acts such as bullying, harassment, and discrimination (Ledingham et al., 2022). As a result of complexities, intersectionality allows a theoretical, critical, and robust frame to understand multiple experiences of oppression faced by women, particularly female RAs in this study (Collins, 2012). Collins and Bilge (2016) further report on six central ideas of intersectionality namely; relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice. They assert that all of the aforementioned ideas contribute to individuals' complex ways of seeing/understanding the world.

The emphasis on relationality focuses on the relational processes that connect different intersecting identities (Moore, 2012). Also, Crenshaw (1989; 2013) argues that race, gender, class, and other systems of power are constituted and maintained through relational processes

and in turn, develop meaning through the intersection. This means that class, gender, race, and other forms of power inform one another through the interactional process. As a result, there would be no intersectionality without relationality (Collins, 2019). Relationality is therefore an essential construct for intersectionality to show how different power, gender, race, and ethnic relations produce experiences of marginality or privilege in a social world.

According to Anthias (2014) intersecting power relations produce social divisions of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and others which are understood as in connection with one another. Likewise, Levine-Rasky (2011, p. 241) affirms that “gender is always raced and race is always gendered.” The above statement suggests that racialised differences within social class groups exist in the same way that social class differences within racialised groups exist. Intersectionality, therefore, maintains that systems of power influence one another in ways that produce unequal experiences for individuals within social hierarchies. For example, the fact that I am black (race), female (sex), woman (gender), and young (age) have largely contributed to my marginal experiences as an RA, especially as a female in a male-dominated space. This connects to the common stereotypes that perceive men as capable and powerful whereas women are perceived as passive and weak (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Cho et al. (2013) and Davis (2008) also stress that systems of power are interactive as they mutually construct and gain meaning from one another. Collins and Bilge (2016) emphasise the increasing significance of ideas and culture to influence power relations. They make use of the FIFA World Cup as an example to showcase how the power of ideas, practices, and relations have normalised certain cultural attitudes and expectations in a social world. For example, in gendered practices, sports have shown unequal power dynamics between men and women since sportsmanship is recognised more than sportswomanship globally. For instance, in South Africa, it was revealed that the female footballers complained that they were not receiving equal salaries compared to male footballers (Ngidi and Xabanisa, 2018). Subsequently, this has created inequalities and divisions among men and women in sports and to a certain extent, in social contexts. The above example of a FIFA World Cup also relates to the importance of understanding mass and digital media as a powerful tool to reach a large audience that perpetuates inequalities in communities at large. Therefore, it is important to examine attitudes, ideas, and practices communicated in such social spaces to foster equality and social justice. For instance, the recent win of the African Cup Championship by the

Banyana Banyana, which is a South African female football team is worth mentioning in efforts to foster equality and social justice (Vardien, 2022)

Intersectionality points to power relations in producing social inequalities and the social problems they engender (Steyn, 2012). Collins (2019) further suggests that categories such as; race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others, are a useful starting point for inquiry. According to Collins and Bilge (2016), intersectionality is a way of analysing and understanding the complexity in the world, and individual experiences. For example, in the case of South Africa, the experiences of most minority groups are often obscured such as black women, disabled people, the queer community, and African nationals. Intersectionality, therefore, serves as a theoretical and practical response to understand the unique experiences of discrimination. Similarly, Symington (2004) views intersectionality as a springboard for a social justice action agenda. This means that intersectionality helps us understand the inequalities created by different systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 2013). The above statements suggest that social justice fosters a notion of intersectionality as a critical inquiry to solve social problems.

According to Collins (2000), and Collins and Bilge (2016) intersectionality can be used as a critical inquiry or praxis. In general terms, as praxis, it encompasses an analysis of practice and critiquing how things are like in our daily lives while as an inquiry, it encompasses a study of a particular phenomenon (Collins, 2000). In other words, intersectionality refers to ways of understanding how oppression operates and to challenge the status quo (Collins, 2019). For example, in the context of this study, there have been reports of gender inequalities experienced by women in Higher Education spaces (Mahlari et al., 2018). Intersectionality, therefore, assists to understand oppression and critique ideas, actions, structures, and institutions that reproduce inequalities and repressive systems of domination (Collins & Bilge, 2016). As a result, framing this study within the intersectionality theory will help me understand how female RAs' experiences are shaped by diverse systems of power to produce marginality or privilege. The above statement speaks to the importance of this study to recognise inequalities that exist in female RAs' experiences, and to inspire gender equality. Although intersectionality theory has been widely used by many scholars in various disciplines, there are however limitations, and implications attached to the theory, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.4 Limitations of the intersectionality theory

From the above discussion, it is clear that scholars have developed intersectionality to cater for multiple differences over the years. On the other hand, scholars have also written on its critiques and limitations (Gines et al., 2018). Primarily, the complexity and ever-expanding scope of intersectionality has been criticized. Ludvig (2006) claims that the social world in its complex nature raises problems for intersectionality. She further argues that the list of differences is endless or even seemingly indefinite. For example, a group of female RAs can identify themselves as females however among them, they could be additional differences in respect to sexuality, age, class, ethnicity, and possibly other categories. The above example posits that one identifying themselves as female or a woman, are not the only categories that are possibly attached to their gender or sex identity. They could be transgender, intersex, or more. Thus, Davis (2008) stresses that the endlessness of differences is a weak point in intersectionality because the analysis often gets blurry with the possibility of misinterpretations and omissions of differences as well as experiences. However, on the other hand, intersectionality theory with its multidimensional, multiple, and robust nature, caters for individuals' complex and diverse experiences (McKoy et al., 2022). This is contrary to the single-focus approach which simplifies the complexities of individual identities, in turn, stories and experiences of those with intersectional identities such as transgender women are neglected. Therefore, the intersectionality theory as critical and praxis is suitable to explore multi-layered intersecting identities that produce diverse experiences of marginality of privilege (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Anthias (2013a) acknowledges that the function of social categories is to specify how people are sorted or placed in society. However, she argues that social categories of gender, race, and others sometimes create socially “accepted” behaviours and practices that misrepresent one’s differences. This means individual identities and practices may be different from the social category they have been classified in (Anthias, 2013a). The famous black athlete, Caster Semenya once said, “I am a woman and I am fast” (North, 2019). The above statement notes an individual who challenges gender norms because of their manifold identities within the spectrum of sex and gender categories. Considering the above example, individuals embody complex and multiple identities that intersect to produce unique experiences (Symington, 2004). Therefore in an attempt to understand the lived experiences of female RAs’, this study will not view identities as homogenous or universal to cater for RAs’ unique differences (Anthias, 2016).

Moreover, on critiques, Monro (2010) argues that the process of categorisation is itself an exercise of power because constructions that allocate value, hierarchy, and inequality are embodied in these categories. Ludvig (2006) adds that in many if not most cases, the values attached to these categories, foster and create social hierarchies. For example, in the literature reviewed, most intersectionality work has reported largely on race, gender, and race with little recognition of other differences such as sexuality and disability. Dhamoon (2011) even calls race, gender, and class the “big three” as most feminist scholarship has been dominated by them. However, Anthias (2016) brings another view and asserts that focusing on gender, race, and class does not imply that sexuality, age, disability, and other identities cannot be incorporated in the intersectional analysis. For example, there have been writings that expanded beyond “the big three” and focused on differences that received little attention in past years such as sexuality and disability (May, 2015; Valentine, 2007). May (2015) has argued that intersectionality should not be understood between race and gender only, it should include a variety of identities, such as sexuality, ethnicity, class, religion, and more. In this way, the intersectional approach takes account of multiple and diverse identities to understand the complexity in the world.

In light of the above discussion regarding catering for multiple identities, Ludvig (2006) argues that it is impossible to take into account all the differences at any given moment. Similarly, Levine-Rasky (2011) asserts that frameworks can be restricting, especially when exploring multi-dimensional identities as well as experiences. For example, it can be challenging sometimes for an individual to clearly mark or understand the experience from the intersection (Ludvig, 2006; Carastathis, 2014). The above could be a result of multiple identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and others, being closely connected, which makes it difficult for one to understand a point of marginality or privilege (Ludvig, 2006). While the above critique may be valid to a certain extent, it is, however, noteworthy that they may come from a limited understanding of the framework itself (Nash, 2008).

The intersectionality theory aims to expose several forms of oppression experienced by individuals without fragmenting those experiences to cater for multiple differences (Crenshaw 1989). Intersectionality is therefore a useful framework to understand complexity with its multiplicity, robust and critical lens to inquiry (Collins, 2019). In this way, intersectionality enables a study to explore multiple intersecting identities of individuals that inform their unique experiences, in particular contexts (Collins, 2019). Thus, framing this study using the

intersectionality theory will assist me to deeply understand the multifaceted experiences of female RAs on negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban.

Furthermore on critiques, Nash (2008) has questioned intersectionality on its lack of universal applicability, arguing against its application to mostly marginalized groups. Alternatively, one may argue that the above statement is a result of the core origin of intersectionality, to explore and address the oppression of black women's experiences. Collins and Bilge (2016) have addressed the critiques and have expanded on the theory's applicability as a critical inquiry and praxis, which was highlighted in the previous sections. They argued that intersectionality as a critical inquiry allows an exploration of individuals' diverse identities that produce experiences of marginality and privilege in various contexts. Intersectionality therefore critiques ideas, statements, actions, structures, and institutions that reproduce society's unequal and repressive systems of domination (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality theory will help me to explore multiple experiences of female RAs and how they negotiate their gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. The statement introduces the next section to discuss ways in which the intersectionality theory will assist in framing this study.

3.5 How will the intersectionality theory assist (as a framework)?

To begin with the discussion, Collins (2000; 2019) argue that using intersectionality in a study requires a researcher to think differently about identity, equality, and power to understand the complexity of individual experiences. My study focuses on female RAs. I aim to comprehensively understand the lived experiences of female RAs on negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. Therefore, using intersectionality as a framework will assist in showcasing how different intersecting identities inform or shape the complex experiences of female RAs. The above statement means that through the intersectional approach, I will be able to understand how experiences of oppression and privilege are produced within the female RAs' intersecting identities (May, 2015). For example, I am interested to understand their unique experiences such as; how do they negotiate their gender identities? Multiple Oppression? What does it mean to be a female RA in times of violence? How do they feel? How do they negotiate their various identities? Symington (2004) argues that we are members belonging to multiple communities with distinct identities, in turn, when our distinctive identities intersect, they produce unique and manifold experiences.

Collins (2000) and Crenshaw (1991) add that intersectionality is a useful tool for connecting systems of oppression to the social, economic, and political contexts that contribute to women's experiences of marginalization and privilege. Therefore, in using the intersectionality theory, I wish to showcase how intersecting identities inform the negotiation of female RAs' gender identities at selected student residences. This is important to critically understand how women negotiate gender identities in higher education spaces and communities at large, for gender equality and social justice (Collins and Bilge, 2016). The participants in this study are also students at a selected teacher-education institution. Arguably, the two roles of being a student and professional staff extend the multiplicity and complexity of their experiences (Bose, 2012). For example, as a student, one must achieve and maintain good academic standing. While as a professional staff, one must fulfil the duties of an RA to ensure a conducive student residence. As identities intersect, there is a possibility of other identities being conflicted (Anthias, 2013a). Crenshaw (1989; 2013) therefore argues that women's experiences are omitted and neglected if they are considered using a single-focus framework. This means using a framework or analysis that focuses on a single identity for example, gender, race, and sex only, discounts women's experiences as it does not cater to the multiplicity of identities. Intersectionality is indeed a suitable framework to explore and understand female RAs' lived experiences. . This is important to be studied because diverse identities somewhat reinforce the experiences of oppression and privilege (Garry, 2011).

In addition to the above discussion, intersectionality offers an understanding of complex power dynamics because it provides a multidimensional lens of how power operates and influences individual experiences (Ludvig, 2006). According to Manetje and Martins (2009), power refers to sets of relations that exist between individuals to maintain a particular cultural order. The above statement relates to Foucault's (1978) argument that power is not something that individuals can escape where interrelationships exist. This means that there cannot be interaction among individuals outside power. Similarly, Borch (2005) argues that power is ever-present in the environment in which individuals are subjects and agents. Therefore, in attempts to understand how female RAs negotiate their gender identities at selected student residences in Durban, the above arguments helped me explore the inevitable dynamics of power that may exist in understanding female RAs' lived experiences.

For example, as highlighted previously, student residences at this selected teacher education institution are mostly dominated by men, both in students' occupation as well as managing and leadership roles such as RAs and House Committees respectively (UKZN Student Services, 2020). In this way, such power dynamics in the context of gender produce marginal experiences for women, particularly female RAs. Likewise, Collins (2000) asserts that the intersection of power relations such as gender, sexuality, race, and class among others, produce complex and unequal experiences for women (multiple oppression). Intersectionality theory is therefore useful to understand and analyse such multiplicity of unique intersecting identities and experiences. Thus, the intersectional framing of this study helped me to understand the complexity of female RAs' lived experiences on negotiating gender identities (McCall, 2005).

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have provided a discussion of the intersectionality theory in framing the lived experiences of female RAs on negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. By using the intersectionality theory, I am hoping to understand the complex ways in which the female RAs enjoy privilege or experience oppression. Thus, the intersectional framing of this study will allow the recognition of multiple voices, perspectives, and experiences of female RAs (McCall, 2005). In the next chapter, I will discuss the research methodology chosen for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a discussion of the intersectionality theory that informed this study. This chapter presents the research methodology that was employed in this study. A research methodology is the core of any research study as it presents how the study is conducted (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2013) describe research methodology as systematic approaches and methods carried out by a researcher to achieve the study's objectives. In terms of this study, the objective was to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of female RAs' lived experiences. The experiences include their feelings, attitudes, and various realities. This chapter is therefore important to showcase how the study was undertaken for its credibility (Cohen et al., 2011). Thus, this chapter will discuss the research methodology that was used to generate and analyse the data. In doing so, I will firstly discuss the research approach, paradigm, and methodology. Thereafter, I will discuss the selection, location, and data generation methods of the study. Lastly, I will discuss the data analysis process, researcher's reflexivity, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

4.2 Research approach

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), research approaches refer to plans and procedures for research that outline steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data generation, analysis, and interpretation. These research approaches are namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study followed a qualitative research approach because the study aimed to understand the lived experiences of female RAs (Creswell, 2014). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world, which involves a set of interpretive practices to understand experiences and interpretations of the social world by humans. Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) view qualitative research as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individual experiences in a social world. The above statements suggest that researchers use qualitative research to understand how individuals construct their worlds and interpret their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For Clandinin and Connelly (2000) experience is best understood through narrative because experience is the stories people live. In this way, qualitative research allows for a rich and in-depth understanding of individuals'

meanings, actions, and experiences (Creswell, 2014). The study, therefore, used a qualitative research approach. As a result, the qualitative research approach enabled an in-depth understanding of female RAs' lived experiences on negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) posit that the process of undertaking a qualitative study begins with broad assumptions that are central to a qualitative inquiry. This means that researchers bring their worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the inquiry. Thus, in the following section, I present the paradigm (worldview) that informed this study.

4.3 Paradigm

A paradigm or worldview is a basic set of beliefs that guide an inquiry as well as how to go about studying the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011; Guba, 1990). Since the purpose of this study was to understand female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities, it was therefore informed by the interpretive paradigm. Cohen et al. (2011) assert that the interpretive paradigm aims to understand the subjective world of human experience. The interpretive paradigm involves explorative methods in authentic situations where knowledge is created through interpretations, to understand social behaviour, and how people make meaning of their unique and multiple experiences (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial for researchers to understand the philosophical assumptions that underpin the study, to position the study within a particular view (Guba, 1990). The ontological assumption refers to the nature of reality, on what is the reality within a particular paradigm, whereas epistemological assumption is the nature of knowledge that entails what is considered as knowledge in a particular paradigm (Creswell, 2013).

For example, the ontological assumption of this study posits that reality is socially constructed with multiple realities and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). In turn, this study's knowledge is subjective, and individuals experience multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). This study was therefore informed by the interpretive paradigm to understand the multiple realities experienced by female RAs on negotiating gender identities and how they make sense of their lived experiences at selected student residences in Durban (Denzin & Lincoln, 2010).

Clandinin (2013) further argues that interpretive positions provide a widespread lens on an inquiry to understand unique experiences of often under-represented or marginalized groups. In doing so, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest a narrative inquiry to explore and understand experience. They assert that experience is storied and therefore argue for a narrative

inquiry as a way of understanding experience. The above statements suggest that an interpretive paradigm is compatible with the narrative inquiry because it allows an authentic, deep, and subjective exploration of individuals' lived experiences (Clandinin, 2013). In the next section, I unpack how this study used narrative inquiry as a research methodology.

4.4 Research Methodology

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is a way of inquiring and understanding experience. Riessman (2008) further asserts that a narrative inquiry uses individuals' stories and narratives as a basis to understand their lived experiences and how they construct their selves. In this study, a narrative inquiry was therefore used to explore female RAs' experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban, through understanding their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further indicate that narrative inquiry is both a phenomenon and a method. According to Creswell (2013), narrative inquiry as a phenomenon is about narratives of a particular phenomenon for example, in simple terms, narrative can be a phenomenon being studied such as narratives of private student accommodations in South Africa. As a method, it is about generating data through listening to individuals' stories, co-constructing stories with the participants, and understanding their lived experiences. For example, as a method, it entails data generation and analysis of individuals' experiences through their told and lived stories (Chase, 2005). Likewise, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) affirm that individuals lead and tell stories of their lives while researchers ought to re-create the stories, to understand individuals' storied experiences.

This inquiry was grounded on Clandinin and Connelly (2000) work that view narrative inquiry as a study of experience. They argue that narrative inquirers understand experience as a narratively composed phenomenon. Thus, this study followed the view of experience as a storied phenomenon. This view of experience is informed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Dewey's (1981) conception of experience. Dewey (1981) describes the experience as an interaction between subject and object, between self and the world, and it stretches. He describes this stretch as "indefinitely elastic" which extends into realms of personal and social meaning. Similarly, Clandinin (2007) asserts that the focus of narrative inquiry does not only recognize individual experiences but also explores the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, and enacted. Thus,

Dewey's (1981) conception of experience resonates with narrative inquiry because it focuses deeply on different dimensions of experience including interpretation of self, experience, and cultural context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The above statements highlight the open-ended, multiple, and robust lens of experience which was helpful in conducting this study.

This study also referred to the epistemological and ontological commitments of what counts as a narrative inquiry. There are 3-dimensional commonplaces of narrative inquiry namely: temporality, sociality, and place/context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this study, the commonplaces assisted to foster direction in understanding female RAs' complex experiences. Temporality is about individuals and events in the study who are in temporal transition (Clandinin, 2006). This means individuals and events are always in process of transitioning. Therefore, through temporality, I was able to understand RAs' lived experiences and events relating to their past, present, and future (Clandinin, 2006, 2013).

The second commonplace of narrative inquiry is sociality and it attended to the personal conditions of female RAs including their feelings, desires, and reactions. It also attended to the social conditions of female RAs which understood their experiences as constituted in cultural, social, and institutional conditions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The third commonplace of narrative inquiry is place and Clandinin (2006, p. 480) defines place as "the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place". The above statement assisted this study to understand that events take place at a particular place/context, meaning context matters in narrative inquiry. Subsequently, this study simultaneously attended to the commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place to understand the complexity of female RAs' lived experiences both inside and outside of an inquiry (Clandinin, 2007).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Dewey (1981) also report on the three-dimensional view of experience that is interaction, continuity, and social. The interactional view posits that human experience is an interplay of personal and social interactions in various contexts (Dewey, 1981). The interactional position, therefore, enabled this study to explore female RAs' experiences of their personal and social interactions. In terms of the continuity position, Dewey (1981) views experience as continuous and the experiences cannot be isolated from other experiences (past, present, and future). This continuous view of experience enabled this study to understand that female RAs' experiences grow out of other experiences, which subsequently lead to additional experiences (Clandinin, 2007). Similarly, as previously mentioned that

experiences stretch and extend into personal and social realities (Dewey, 1981). The above statement then brings me to the third-dimensional view of experience, which is the social position. This position extends to the situational, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Clandinin, 2013). Therefore, this study explored the unique and complex experiences of female RAs' on negotiating gender identities as presented by their social environments. In addition, Clandinin (2013) posits that narrative inquirers are to study individuals' lived experiences by listening, observing, living alongside writing, and interpreting their stories, this will be unpacked more in the next sections.

4.5 Selection of participants

Scholars in most qualitative research literature have used numerous terms to refer to the selection of participants in their respective studies; some have used selection while others have used sampling. Polkinghorne (2005) argues that although sampling is generally used in qualitative research to refer to the selection of participants and documents, it has however been adopted from quantitative practices. He further argues that sampling carries the connotation that, participants selected are a sample of a population. The above statements, in simple terms, mean that sampling only refers to selected participants that are representative of a population (Polkinghorne, 2005). Since qualitative research (herein narrative inquiry) is concerned with understanding experience, Denzin and Lincoln (2013) and Polkinghorne (1988; 2005) argue that the selection of participants should be non-random and in certain cases, purposeful. Unlike random selection, the purpose of non-random selection in qualitative research is to foster in-depth exploration and description of individuals' experiences rather than to generalise (Polkinghorne, 2005). Thus, for the above reason, this study used the selection term because it is associated with the focus of qualitative research particularly narrative inquiry, to provide rich data (rather than quantity) to understand female RAs' experiences.

The selection in this study was purposeful, which refers to the identification and selection of individuals that can provide an in-depth understanding of the research problem and phenomenon under study (Creswell, 1994). As a result, female RAs were purposefully selected in this study, to provide deep and rich descriptions of their experiences on negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban (Creswell, 1994). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2013) and Polkinghorne (2005) argue that individuals who can provide in-depth

descriptions of an experience are predominantly those who have had or are having that experience. Therefore, this study used non-random selection to purposively select female RAs. Emmel (2013) further states that purposive selection in qualitative research usually has a small selection size with unique or specific criteria. The intention of a narrative inquiry is not to generalise but to understand individuals' lived experiences more closely and deeply. The selection size of this study was therefore four female RAs which were all black. The students' demographics in this university, particularly of those who are staying at student residences are predominantly black. Subsequently, the final sample was a reflection of the demographics of student residences and RAs in this university. Additionally, the selection criteria was that these RAs must have worked at least 1-2 years in one of the student residences located in Durban. The RAs of this study worked between the years of 2018-2021 in Durban student residences, respectively.

The RAs were identified and recruited from the database of the selected institution, in particular the Department of Student Residence Affairs' (DSRA, thereafter). The participants' records in the database had to meet the specific criteria mentioned earlier. DSRA is a designated department from this selected institution's Student Services Division, which is responsible for managing all residences' administration and operations (UKZN Student Services, 2019). Cohen et al. (2004) indicate that access to organisations and individuals to study requires a gatekeeper's approval. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), a gatekeeper is an initial contact for the researcher that leads the researcher to other participants. Thus, gatekeepers have a gatekeeping function, to prevent unethical research from taking place and protect participants (Cohen et al., 2004). Therefore, a gatekeeper's approval letter was obtained from the Institution Registrar's office. Since the participants of this study were RAs from the year 2018 to 2021, I had expected that some of the RAs could be working as teachers and others could be pursuing their postgraduate studies. However, I applied for gatekeeping from the institution's Registrar's office since I was exploring their experiences as RAs in the University space. Essentially, the RAs recollected their experiences of being residence assistants which took place while they were students in this University. Thus, the above reasons support the Registrar as the primary gatekeeper for both participants who are postgraduates in the University and those who are employed externally. Following this section, I discuss the location of the study.

4.6 Location of the Study

The location of this study comprised of off-campus student residences that are located in the city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Durban is the third-largest city in South Africa with an estimated population of 3 720 953 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). It has major tourist attractions because of its warm subtropical climate and extensive beaches (Maharaj et al., 2010). This study will focus on residences that are located in the area of Point in Durban. On a positive note, Point is close to amenities such as schools, hospitals, parks, malls, and other recreational facilities. It is known for its beautiful beaches and tourist attractions such as Ushaka Marine World. On the other hand, Point is also known for violent crimes and protests (Vahed, 2013). Drawing from personal experience of staying in Durban, and particularly in the Point area, I have personally witnessed daily experiences of violent protests and crimes to an extent where someone would be robbed in a corner that you will have to pass in the next minute.

It is noteworthy that in Point, most buildings are residences for students in the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Durban University of Technology (DUT), and Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), with the rest of the buildings, largely owned and occupied by African foreign nationals (Cinini & Mkhize, 2021). Durban has additional Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and private colleges that use Point for accommodation because of its proximity to Durban Central where many colleges are situated (Liako & Cecile, 2019). Therefore, most public individuals have furnished private flats to rent out to students, which is referred to as “Private Accommodation”. In light of the above discussion, it was crucial for this study to explore and understand the lived experiences of female RAs at selected student residences in Durban. Especially noting the diversity and complexities that come with living and being a female RA in Durban. In the next section, I discuss the data generation methods that were used in this study.

4.7 Data generation methods

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), data generation is a critical process in research methodology because it demonstrates the evidence or information generated by the researcher to respond to the key research questions. As previously alluded, narrative inquiry is a methodology in qualitative research that uses stories to describe human experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Similarly, Polkinghorne (1988) affirms that stories give meaning to people’s lives and the stories are treated as data in narrative inquiry. Over the years, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have suggested data generation methods which they refer to as field texts.

They regard field texts as reflective co-compositions that are used for generating, narrating, and telling the experiences of participants and researchers. These field texts (commonly known as the data generation method in qualitative studies) include autobiographies, journals, letters, conversations, interviews, documents, photographs, artifacts, and many others. This study particularly used letters and interviews to generate data.

To begin, I will discuss the use of letters, which fall under the broad term of personal documents (Clandinin, 2006). Denzin and Lincoln (2013) state that personal documents refer to any first-person narrative that describes an individual's actions and experiences. Likewise, for Huberman and Miles (2009) personal documents are useful to understand individuals' feelings, behaviour, attitudes, and lived experiences, which is what this study seeks to explore about RAs. Thus, this study used letters as the first data generation method. I requested participants to write letters to me, reflecting on their experiences of negotiating gender identities that they can recall as female RAs at a student residence in Durban. I requested their permission in the consent form to sign as affirmation that they agree and are comfortable in writing the letters. All the participants consented to write letters and submitted them via email.

I chose letters because letter writing is personal, it honours the individual's time and space while offering the privacy of thought and clarity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The letters were therefore informal; I did not stipulate any specifications in terms of grammar, structure, language, and length. The above notion was to encourage participants to be open and write their letters using their preferred style. As a result, this positively contributed to the willingness of the participant to deeply share their experiences. Thus, letters were suitable for this study's methodology (narrative inquiry) because they are expressive and afforded RAs to think and reflect which provided an in-depth account of themselves as well as their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly (2000).

As discussed, earlier RAs had to recall experiences from a period of 2018 to 2021, respectively. The letters were, therefore intended to stimulate RAs' memory in recalling their experiences of negotiating gender identities at student residences in Durban. This process subsequently assisted in the interview sessions because the RAs had fairly remembered and revisited their experiences. The content of the letters were also integrated into the interview sessions to allow the participants to make connections and expand on what they wrote on the letters, in the interview sessions (Creswell, 2014). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further affirm that using letters before interviews establishes and develops a positive relationship between the researcher

and participants. As participants give accounts of themselves in letters, they also make meaning of their experiences while establishing relationships with others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Consequently, the RAs felt relaxed and comfortable to share their experiences deeply and openly during the interview sessions that I discuss next.

An interview is a dialogue between the researcher and the participant, where the researcher aims to gather information from the participant with particular questions to be answered (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that an interview is an interchange of views between a researcher and participants that involves an interpersonal and social encounter. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further assert that interviews are useful for narrative inquiry researchers to understand the feelings and experiences of participants on how they interpret their world through telling, retelling, living, and reliving their stories. As a result, the stories of experiences become the source of data (Clandinin, 2006). Interviews, therefore, use the first-person account of experience for participants to tell and share their stories (Polkinghorne, 2005). In addition to the above statements, Riessman (2008) argues that interviews allow participants the opportunity to tell their stories in their own ways, hence sharing power within the conversation. This probes participants to share experiences and yield in-depth data (Riessman, 1993). It is for the above reasons that interviews were useful, particularly for this study to allow deep exploration and understanding of RAs' lived experiences through stories.

The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of three sessions per participant with approximately 45-60 minutes per session. I chose semi-structured interviews because they allowed me to probe questions, with the flexibility to add new insights that arose during the interview (Creswell, 1994). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that questions asked and how they are structured provide a framework in which participants shape their accounts of their experiences. As a result, Clandinin (2013) suggests a notion of the narrator-listener to yield valuable accounts of experience in the interview. Subsequently, while I had semi-structured and open-ended questions to guide the interview but participants also had the freedom to share stories in their way. This is an advantage of the semi-structured interviews to allow such flexibility and in-depth engagement on female RAs' stories (Riessman, 1993). I conducted the interviews on weekdays and weekends. The schedules were determined by the availability of each participant. The participants' demographics and interview details are presented in the table below.

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Race	Experience as an RA	Interview Dates
1	Hlubi	22	Black	2 years	05, 12, 24 October 2021
2	Londi	24	Black	2 years	07, 15, 22 October 2021
3	Anele	24	Black	2 years	08, 09, 20 October 2021
4	Kate	26	Black	1 year	16, 18, 28 October 2021

4.8 Getting to Know the Participants

The purpose of this section is for readers to know the participants, in a form of “imagery”. The intent is not to give away the identities of participants but to allow readers to know basic information and introductions to the participants. Since this study is a narrative inquiry, it is, therefore, important to provide a brief background of each participant, to meaningfully understand/engage with their experiences (Clandinin, 2006).

Hlubi

Hlubi is from a small village called Mshalane situated in Paulpietersburg, KwaZulu-Natal and she is aged 22. She has a Bachelor of Education degree and is currently pursuing her Honours degree specializing in Educational Psychology. She indicated that she is passionate about psychology and takes an active role in raising mental health awareness, especially in her rural community where such issues are ignored/not taken seriously. She embodies excellence in academics, leadership and aspires to become a Lecturer one day. Currently, she is employed part-time as a residence assistant at a student residence in Durban. In her spare time, she enjoys singing and reading books.

Londi

Londi is from a township called Gamalakhe situated in Port Sheptone, South of KwaZulu-Natal. She is 24 years of age and was raised by her grandmother. After matric, she took two gap years because she did not have any financial means to go to varsity. During the gap years, she joined a local non-profit organization and took part in community development initiatives. She indicated that working at the organization helped her realize the necessity to further her studies. She subsequently applied at this teacher-education institution, and she was accepted. Londi continued to take part in this institution’s clubs/societies because of her love for

engagements. Currently, she is a full-time Honours student and employed as a residence assistant at a student residence in Durban. She enjoys writing and wishes to pursue writing as a career someday.

Anele

Anele is from a township called Madadeni situated in Newcastle, KwaZulu-Natal and she is aged 24. She stated that her purpose in life is to help people, this is why after high school she started her post-matric studies at a nursing institute. She, unfortunately, had to drop out in her second year because she did not have enough funds to continue with her studies. She then applied at this teacher education institution, and she was awarded the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) for financial support. In her first year as a student-teacher, she became friends with an RA at the time, fell in love with the role, and vouched that she will become an RA one day. She served for two years at a student residence in Durban. Anele is a leader at heart with a passion for leadership, particularly politics. She is currently unemployed and looking for a job as a teacher.

Kate

Kate is from a township called Lamontville situated in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal and she is 26 years old. She holds a Bachelor of Education degree which is her second qualification, her first qualification was from Culinary Arts. She worked as a food consultant at a private company in Durban before she came to this teacher-education institution. Kate indicated that her family did not fully support her Culinary Arts career, as a result, she applied at this teacher education institution to become a teacher for job security purposes. During her time in the university, she held numerous part-time positions including being a demonstrator, mentor, and subsequently a residence assistant to make extra money. Despite her busy schedule, she managed to graduate with good grades. She is currently employed as a foundation phase teacher at a school in Durban. She indicated that she loves children and has one of her own. She also enjoys cooking and is currently owning a fast-food business, catering for meals on weekends.

Since I have discussed the background of the participants, the next section unpacks the interview sessions that I had with the participants.

4.9 Interview sessions

Clandinin (2006) asserts that narrative inquiry requires deep exploration and engagement. I, therefore, conducted three interview sessions in this study with each participant. The purpose of the first interview was to establish rapport between myself and the participants. Huberman and Miles (2009) recognise rapport as affiliation and empathy in human interaction that builds positive relationships. I did this by introducing myself, got to know the participants more (general details), and outlined the interview process. The second interview began with a brief overview of the first interview (build-up), continued with the open-ended questions and RAs told their stories in thick descriptions. By the second interview, the RAs felt more relaxed and had fairly recalled their experiences. Successively, the second session was deep and rich which fostered a thorough and far-reaching engagement on female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. The third session built up from the two interviews and integrated the letter's content which allowed the participants to elaborate on their reflections and also shared new insights that arose. Participants submitted the letters prior to the interview sessions. It was interesting to understand the significance of what RAs remembered and chose to write in the letter. Overall, the letters and multiple interview sessions allowed depth in understanding female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities in student residences.

In conducting the interviews, this study was informed and adhered to the Covid-19 safety guidelines. The global pandemic of coronavirus (COVID-19) is an illness caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2) that spreads from person to person (National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020). COVID-19 was first reported in December 2019 by the World Health Organization following the cases reported in Wuhan City of China (World Health Organisation, 2020). It was in no time before South Africa became a part this ongoing pandemic. The Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize on 05 March 2020, made a national announcement of a confirmed COVID-19 case in South Africa, of a 38-year-old man from KwaZulu-Natal who travelled from Italy (National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020). On 15 March 2020, the President of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, declared COVID-19 as a national state of disaster. Since then, South Africa has been under a national lockdown that stresses acts of social distancing and isolation to limit the virus transmission supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. To date, SARS-CoV-2 continues to spread across the globe (Gallaher & Charles, 2020). As a result, flexibility and adherence to Covid-19 guidelines in the interviews were essential to ensure safety.

The interviews were therefore driven by two aspects namely: lockdown guidelines and safety. On 30 September 2021, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared South Africa to be on level One under the national lockdown. This meant that contact was permitted and consequently, physical interviews were conducted in this study. This was also keeping up with the Human and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) guidelines of this selected institution during the pandemic of COVID-19. The HSSREC provides different research guidelines for each level of the lockdown. For level one, they permitted research that involves face to face contact.

As a result of the above-mentioned reasons, I conducted physical interviews in safe spaces, following safety protocols such as; wearing a mask, social distancing, and sanitising. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that physical interviews allow personal interaction between the researcher and participants which significantly builds their relationship. Similarly, Butina et al. (2015) assert that physical interviews are important in narrative inquiry as they provide a natural setting that fosters a conversational and close engagement between the researcher and the participants to elicit stories. In this way, stories were engaging and interactive which also directed attention to emotions and non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and gestures. Successively, the physical interviews enabled interactive, and real-life engagements between myself and the RAs which yielded in-depth stories from them.

In a total of 12 interview sessions conducted, ten were physical and two were online. The two online interviews were a result of two participants being away in another city, for their third sessions. Thus, for these two online interviews, I used an online tool called ZOOM. ZOOM is an online research tool that is a collaborative and cloud-based videoconferencing service offering features such as online meetings, group messaging, and secure recording of sessions (Archibald et al., 2019). In this way, ZOOM offered great convenience and flexibility in terms of place and time for conducting the interviews. For these above reasons, I was able to have online interviews with the participants while we are in different cities.

As an online tool, I anticipated challenges to occur in using ZOOM, for example, I anticipated that some participants may be unfamiliar with ZOOM navigation. As a result, I conducted basic training for all participants to ensure that they are aware of what and how to use ZOOM. I also anticipated network issues due to load shedding and poor internet connection. We had a few technical problems at the beginning as the network was not stable but fortunately, the network connection was restored and there were no further challenges.

In addition, I had anticipated that some participants may feel overwhelmed by the questions due to the psychological impact of COVID-19 such as fear and anxiety (Naidu, 2020). I considered such challenges and prioritised participants' well-being throughout the interview processes. For example, I allowed space for comfortability, took breaks and allowed enough time for participants to respond. I also provided the participants with the resources and materials (handbooks) from the counselling division (support service) of this institution in case they required additional support. This included counselling information and student counsellors' contact details. Information on external support such as toll-free helpline for anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues was also made available to participants. This kind of support greatly assisted to enable participants to be open and comfortable.

All interviews were audio-recorded and participants signed the consent letters as an agreement to be recorded. Recording the interview sessions was very important because it allowed me to go over the interviews multiple times, for in-depth exploration and understanding of the content as well as the analysis process. The recording also allowed me to cross-reference and check the audio recording on what the participants said against the transcripts for trustworthiness purposes. Overall, the data generation methods of this study included letters and interviews. Huberman and Miles (2009) assert that data generation methods influence how data is analysed in the study, this introduces the next section of the data analysis process.

4.10 Data analysis

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the data analysis section presents findings with a certain degree of interpretation, order, structure, and meaning in the data collected. Clandinin (2013) suggests that analysis in a narrative inquiry should demonstrate a true reflection of participants' stories presented in depth, for trustworthiness purposes. Therefore, in this study, I analysed data using a narrative analysis (first level) and analysis of narratives (second level) approaches. I chose these two approaches because while they enable data analysis and interpretation to be coherent and meaningful, they also maintain the richness of participants' stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). Each analysis approach provided a different and insightful way of understanding female RAs' experiences on negotiating gender identities (Riessman, 2008). I unpack these analysis approaches in detail, in the next section.

Since this study used two data generation methods namely: letters and interviews, the female RAs told stories of their lived experiences inconsistently and in no particular order (Clandinin,

2007). As a result, as a co-constructor of their stories, I organised these stories for coherence and meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In doing so, I began with narrative analysis. Narrative analysis refers to “a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form” (Riessman, 2008, p.11). To achieve the above, different levels of narrative analysis were used namely; telling, transcribing, and analysing (Riessman, 1993). In this way, the study facilitated narrative telling in interviews, and wrote a detailed transcription to approach narratives analytically. I then moved from transcripts to stories. I did this by organising the storied events in plots, to re-story participants’ stories. This is supported by Riessman (1993) who asserts that re-storying creates order. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also support that while individuals lead and tell stories of their lives, researchers ought to re-story them, to understand individuals’ experiences.

I re-storied participants’ stories and formed different plots, for meaningful data analysis and interpretation (Behar, 1993). Polkinghorne (1995) states that a plot is used to connect a series of events into a whole to give meaning. Thus, the stories were organised into different plots to create meaning. In addition, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that data analysis should entail identifying categories, patterns, narrative threads, and themes to cater to individuals’ complex and multi-layered experiences. Therefore, to supplement the narrative analysis, I used the analysis of narratives. I employed Braun and Clarke’s six stages of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying common categories, patterns, or themes within data to create meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Subsequently, in this study, I identified categories and themes within the plots using Braun and Clarke (2006) six stages of thematic analysis.

The six stages of thematic analysis comprise familiarisation of data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review of themes, the definition of themes as well as data analysis report. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress that these stages should not be undertaken in a linear process instead, they argue for a recursive process where one should move back and forth if needs be. As a result, I was flexible in moving back and forth between stages, when necessary, in the analysis process. I unpack the stages in detail, in the next section.

4.10.1 Familiarisation of data

Since this study used interviews as one of its data generation methods, I firstly transcribed the interviews’ audio recordings into written transcripts. Letters were already in text and there was no need to transcribe, instead, I typed letters that were handwritten so that there could be

uniformity in my data presentation. I then read and re-read all transcripts to familiarise myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Riessman (1993) asserts that transcription is an excellent way to familiarise with data because it requires constant listening to audio recordings as well as the writing of data. Moreover, I checked the transcripts against the audio recordings and gave them to participants to also check (member checking) for trustworthiness purposes. The exercise of repeated reading enabled me to familiarise and immerse myself with the data. Thereafter, I developed a list of codes to identify essential ideas in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), this stage is discussed in the next section.

4.10.2 Generation of initial codes

According to Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 207), a code “is a word or phrase that captures the essence of a particular data that is useful to the study’s research objectives”. The above statement means that coding is a process that refers to identifying essential and relevant pieces of data that respond to the research questions (Boyatzis, 1998). Therefore to code data, I went through each transcript and highlighted every piece of text that is relevant to and specifically addressed the research questions of this study. I used highlighters and coloured pens to identify and collate codes. As a result, the above exercise produced a list of different codes which subsequently required a further organisation to create meaning (Seale, 2004). I needed to identify themes and I elaborate on this in the next section.

4.10.3 Identification of themes

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), themes represent the significance of meanings and patterns in the data that respond to the research questions of the study. Since themes are characterised by significance, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that one should look into codes including similarities or differences between them to identify themes. Therefore, in doing this exercise, I analysed different codes by identifying the similarity between them to determine broad themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) further suggest that it is helpful to use visual representations to sort the different codes into themes such as tables, mind-maps, and graphs. Consequently, I used tables to collate codes into broad themes that respond to the research questions of the study. In addition, Patton (1990) advises on the importance of reviewing identified themes to ensure accuracy.

4.10.4 Review of themes

Patton (1990) stresses the importance to review, modify and develop preliminary themes. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) concur and assert that themes should represent major findings that respond to the research questions of the study. To satisfy the above statements, I read all the collated pieces against data for each theme to determine the extent to which they reflect a correct and coherent pattern that represents the major findings of the study. While I was doing this, it was also necessary to merge and split themes accordingly, to ensure precise and meaningful data representation as supported by Braun and Clarke (2006).

4.10.5 Definition of themes

As previously alluded, it is important to ensure that themes capture the significance of the data that respond to major findings and research questions of the study. The above statement stresses the importance of defining themes to distinctively present each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I did this by allocating names as well as detailed descriptions of each theme, including their nature and essence. The above exercise was informed by Braun and Clarke (2006) who suggest that a theme should have a specific name and detailed analysis that relates to the research questions of the study.

4.10.6 Data analysis report

After reviewing, naming, and defining themes, I wrote a detailed analysis report that provided a coherent, logical, and meaningful analysis and interpretation of data. I presented my analysis in a way that demonstrated the relation of the data to existing literature, theoretical framework, and research questions of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to be transparent about the study's methodology and analysis processes for trustworthiness purposes, I will discuss my reflexivity in the next section.

4.11 Researcher's Reflexivity

According to Elsesser and Lever (2011), the subjective nature of qualitative research is recognised by establishing how one's identity (gender, class, sexuality, race, age, language, culture, etc.) and positionality contribute to the research process and findings. This positionality is explored through the use of the researcher's reflexivity (Flick, 2007). Positionality, therefore, describes the researcher's worldview and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context (Butina et al., 2015; Flick, 2007). Reflexivity then assists to signpost the influences that informed the decisions and choices made in the research process

for transparency (Davis, 2020; Palaganas et al., 2017). In other words, reflexivity entails reflecting on decisions made during the research study. Therefore, in this reflexive section, I intend to openly present my beliefs, values, potential biases, and background to show how my positionality directly/indirectly influenced the research process. The primary objective of reflexivity is to reduce the likelihood of researcher bias. In turn, this improves the credibility of the study, for trustworthiness purposes (Palaganas et al., 2017).

As part of the reflexive process, I kept a notebook, more like a journal where I wrote brief notes after each research process including the interview sessions. In addition to the notes, I wrote during and after the interview sessions, I re-read transcripts and listened to audio recordings multiple times to immerse myself in the data and reflect on specific moments. In light of the above discussion, I will begin the reflexivity with a discussion on my personal background and being a former RA in the student residence in Durban. Thereafter, I will discuss the challenges of finding relevant literature and selecting the research approach and methodology. This will be followed by a reflection of selecting data generation methods and experiences in conducting interviews during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lastly, I will reflect on the interview sessions' psychological impact and the process of analyzing the data, and the conclusion.

4.11.1 My personal background

Malterud (2001) and Holmes (2020) posit that reflexivity starts by identifying preconceptions brought into the study by the researcher, including their previous personal and professional experiences". I will therefore start by outlining my personal, political and social background together with my personal and professional experience. I am a young (age), black (race), female (sex) from a middle-class family. I am from a small town called Ulundi which is situated in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, South Africa. I hold a Bachelor of Education and Honours degrees in Education, which I completed at the selected teacher-education institution (a site of this study). I have served as a Residence Assistant for two terms (2 years). The first term was in a student residence in Pinetown and the second term was in Durban. I am a feminist with strong advocacy for equal rights for all and more specifically the practices of women. I have always been a leader who is an agent of change, dedicated to implementing progressive movements, especially for disadvantaged communities and underrepresented groups. For this study, the intention was to explore and document the untold stories/experiences of female RAs

on negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban and I unpack this more in the next section.

4.11.2 Being a former RA in a student residence in Durban

I have worked as an RA for a period of two years, in student residences of this selected teacher-education institution. As noted earlier, in the first year, I worked in a Pinetown student residence, and in the second year, I worked in a Durban student residence. While I was working at the student residence in Durban, I encountered challenges relating to gender, harassment, and violence because of my gender identity. I had to negotiate my gender identity and thrive in managing the residence and achieving good academic results since I was also a student. I was therefore interested in understanding other female RAs' experiences, particularly on how they negotiate their gender identities in student residences around Durban. The focus of the study and the choice of female RAs as participants was influenced by my experiences as a former RA at a Durban student residence.

Being a former female RA gave me advantages in engaging with the participants of this study. It was easy to communicate and engage with them because I understood the terminology and complexity of the RA role. For instance, I could understand their stories easily compared to someone else who might not have had an RA background, lived in Durban, or was not a student at a higher education institution. I assume that the advantages that I had could have been different or not easy for someone who might have lived outside Durban, KZN or someone who does not understand the social and political spheres of Durban, KZN particularly the unique diversity of Durban such as; race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion.

On the other hand, engaging with the participants triggered some of my negative experiences as an RA. Although this affected me personally, it did not affect my research or participants. I remained professional and calm throughout the research processes including the interviews and the participants did not notice any emotional challenges on my side (although they were present). To address this, I sought help from the counselling unit and they assisted throughout the process. I will unpack this in detail in the later sections where I share my data generation experiences. Following next, I wish to discuss the challenges that I experienced in finding literature.

4.11.3 Challenges in finding relevant literature

While I was interested in conducting the study, emanating from my previous experiences as an RA. It was somewhat difficult to find literature on RAs' experiences at student residences, particularly those of females. I reviewed literature both on national and international levels. I was particularly interested more in the local literature (South African context) but did not find sufficient literature. Most literature in SA focused on students' experiences and less on RA experiences, especially female RAs. From the literature reviewed (see chapter two), I began to read more to understand the phenomenon I am studying and the emerging scholarly trends within this topic globally. I reviewed literature from different sources namely, journal articles, books, media reports, newspapers, and official documents amongst others. I utilised the library of the selected institution for most books to assist me with the research processes.

4.11.4 Selecting the research approach and methodology

According to Cohen et al., (2004), it is important for researchers to make sense of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the study. In this study, I adopted the interpretive paradigm which suggests that knowledge is subjective and there are multiple realities experienced by individuals (Creswell, 2013). This view assisted me to understand the multiple realities experienced by female RAs on negotiating gender identities and how they make sense of their lived experiences. In this study, I, therefore, used the qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach subsequently informed the choice of using the interpretive paradigm and the narrative inquiry as a research methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Since this study aimed to understand the lived experiences of female RAs on negotiating gender identities, the narrative inquiry was a suitable research methodology because it uses individuals' narratives and stories to understand their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It was important for me to make use of the most appropriate approach that resonated with my worldview whilst at the same time ensuring that it matched the objectives of the study. Additionally, a feminist perspective— an intersectionality theory was used to frame this study in understanding the lived experiences of RAs in negotiating gender identities.

4.11.5 Selecting data generation methods

I used letters and interviews to generate data in this study. The choice of the methods was largely influenced by the suitability of letters and interviews as personal documents to yield an account of experience in a storied form. I used letters as a first data generation method to stimulate female RAs' memory, to recall their lived experiences. The letters were informal and

encouraged flexibility and openness; the RAs were at liberty to write in their preferred style. As a result, the semi-structured interviews allowed participants to deeply share stories of their lived experiences with thick descriptions. I chose to conduct physical interviews because they provide a natural setting that fosters close engagement which in turn elicited in-depth stories from participants. As a result, physical interviews were interactive and directed attention to emotions and non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and gestures. However, there were challenges that physical interviews presented, and this introduces the next section of conducting interviews, particularly during a Covid-19 pandemic.

4.11.6 Conducting interviews during the Covid-19 pandemic

As previously alluded that I chose to conduct physical interviews because they allow a real-life, and face-to-face conversation which fosters an in-depth engagement with participants. At first, I had anxiety around the thought of physical interviews during the Covid-19 pandemic. I then decided to get vaccinated on 24 August 2021 in preparation for the interviews. As I was getting to know my participants, it was such a relief to learn that they had all been vaccinated too. I began to have confidence in my choice for physical interviews and I was ready. It was fortunate that two of my participants were pursuing their postgraduate degrees, and they preferred to use the campus for interviews. They were comfortable using the Conference room in the Library which allowed social distancing, we also sanitized continuously and wore masks. This was an important exercise to adhere to Covid-19 safety guidelines. For the other two participants, they were comfortable using the community Library in central town for their convenience and Covid-19 safety guidelines were adhered to. This suggests that I did not impose on the process of selecting the date/place/time of the interview sessions. Instead, the participants were at liberty to schedule a date/place/time for each session I had with them.

I remember how nervous I was on my first interview, I kept on checking if all is in order before the participant came in because I did not want to create an uncomfortable environment for anyone of us. It was challenging at first, (I was panicking, not knowing how the participant will respond) but as the interview sessions went by, I noticed that participants started to become more relaxed which gave me confidence. The feeling was mutual, and the participants openly engaged to provide in-depth descriptions of their experiences. For example, one of the participants, Anele, at first she seemed to be hesitant to speak about herself (she firstly had short answers when I asked about herself) and I began to think that perhaps she is generally a

reserved person. As I started to explain the intention and purpose of our interview, I also mentioned that she can speak in IsiZulu. The tone and pace of the conversation changed drastically to be more relaxed, open, and far more personal. My second session with her was so intriguing, I usually write key points during the interview sessions but with Anele that day, I only wrote summary notes after the interview because I was glued to her engagement. She is talented when it comes to storytelling/narrating, her skill of storytelling was befitting to the narrative inquiry methodology. As much as the physical interviews allowed for a real-life engagement that encouraged deep connection and empathy, there were also psychological effects that I felt after the sessions which I highlight in the next section.

4.11.7 Interview sessions' psychological impact

As previously mentioned in earlier discussions about my unpleasant experiences as a female RA, when the participants were telling their stories, my trauma was triggered. This is consistent with Naidu's (2020) argument, when she asserts that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) triggers are everyday situations that cause a person to re-experience the traumatic event as if it was reoccurring in the present. I was emotional at times, but I did keep my calm during the interview sessions because I did not want to scare the participants. But after the sessions, I decided to go for numerous counselling sessions which helped me a lot to cope and deal with my emotions. I also made the support resources available to participants which served as additional support in case they needed to talk or engage with a professional, as they contained information about the Counselling Unit and toll-free helpline numbers.

As I engaged more with the participants, I connected more with each one of them. When I consolidated the summary notes that I wrote during and after each interview session, I could begin to see similarities (themes) emerging from the participants' stories. It seemed as if RAs' experiences are different yet so similar. It was interesting to learn that we sometimes think our experiences are unique to ourselves only whereas there are similarities. I was grateful to my participants that they trusted me with their stories, and I was strongly motivated to employ the best data analysis strategy to analyse and represent their stories. The above discussion introduces the next section of my experiences in analysing the data.

4.11.8 Experiences of analysing the data

I am aware that my background and knowledge might have affected the direction of data analysis and presentation. Therefore, in analysing the data, I was constantly cautious, and I kept the research questions in front of me. I printed out the research questions and pasted them on my study board to constantly remind myself of the objectives and focus of the study. This exercise assisted me to not to deviate or move towards my biases which might have influenced the data. So, I was continuously aware of my position not to impose my biases or experiences on data. In addition, I also met with my supervisor when I encountered challenges which was part of strengthening my neutral position. We had weekly meetings which greatly assisted me because he clarified aspects that I did not understand or needed assistance with, especially in analysing data. The regular meetings and communication with my supervisor enabled me to keep the focus of the study, maintain participants' views and stay away from my biases. My supervisor was constantly probing how I presented the data to him to show me possible biases or imposition that I may had on the data. This also assisted to strengthen my neutrality.

In analysing the data, I used narrative analysis as well as analysis of narrative. The choice for this data analysis strategy stems from the choice of this study's research methodology, narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a study about experiences and experience is best understood and analysed through narrative analysis and analysis of narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 1993, 2008). Each analysis method provided a different way of understanding the lived experiences of female RAs in negotiating gender identities (Riessman, 2008). I also attended different seminars/workshops provided by the school and the college to ensure that the data generation and data analysis processes were smooth and followed the guidelines of narrative inquiry.

Overall, this exercise has enabled me to be reflexive and recognise my positionality on how it may have influenced this research study's decisions and process. I am now self-aware and can better understand my position both as an insider or outsider in this research topic. I understood that as a researcher, I should not impose/perpetuate oppressive decisions and practices that are harmful and unjust within the research and participants.

4.12 Trustworthiness

According to Tobin and Begley (2004), it is imperative to conduct research in a rigorous, methodical and detailed manner to be accepted as trustworthy. Shenton (2004) states that trustworthiness is the way a researcher can convince readers that the findings of the study are

accurate, legitimate, and of high quality. In doing so, various scholars such as Shenton (2004), Tobin and Begley (2004) and Denzin and Lincoln (2013), and others have written on procedures to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research. This includes dependability, credibility, and confirmability.

4.12.1 Dependability

Tobin and Begley (2004) assert that research processes are to be logical, traceable, and documented to ensure dependability. Likewise, Shenton (2004) indicates that issues of dependability can be addressed if the processes within the study are to be reported in detail. Therefore, this study provided a detailed methodological description (processes undertaken) to enable the reader to understand each stage of the study and how the data was generated, analysed as well as presented.

4.12.2 Credibility

Tobin and Begley (2004) indicate that credibility addresses the correctness between participants views and the researcher's representation of them. Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) have suggested the process of member checking to compare findings and interpretations with the participants. Thus, as previously mentioned earlier, I conducted member checks and participants checked to confirm if the transcripts reflected their original views and lived experiences.

4.12.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with the extent to which the researcher's findings and interpretations are derived from participant's stories (data) rather than the researcher's biases (Tobin & Begley, 2004). According to Butina et al. (2015) and Gary (2017) reflexivity can be used as a technique to demonstrate how findings and interpretations have been reached in qualitative research. I wrote a detailed reflexive section to highlight my beliefs and subjectivity as a researcher. In my reflexivity, as discussed in the previous section, I was transparent about my positionality including the decisions and processes undertaken in this study. The next section discusses the ethical considerations of this study.

4.13 Ethical considerations

According to Cohen et al. (2011), ethics concerns what researchers should and should not do in research. Ethics are defined as a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, Wang and Geale (2015) assert that ethics in narrative research are sets of responsibilities that include the promotion of dignity, privacy, and well-being of participants. Furthermore, ethical considerations are crucial to ensure that the study is conducted appropriately for the researcher as well as participants (Gary, 2017). For this study, I requested permission from the participants and their gatekeeper for access, which is the Registrar of this institution, and permission was granted. I also requested permission (ethical clearance) from this institution to conduct the study and permission was granted. In addition, Flick (2007) asserts that informed consent is important to gain access to people, documents, institutions, settings, and information. Participants were therefore given consent forms to sign for participation. In the consent form, I explained the purpose of the study, highlighted voluntary participation, and that participants can withdraw anytime if they feel uncomfortable.

I prioritised the well-being and comfortability of the participants because I understood that they may feel scared or overwhelmed as a result of COVID-19 psychological effects (Naidu, 2020). I was patient, considerate, and empathetic towards my participants. Additionally, I made Professional support resources available to participants from the Counselling and Support Unit of the institution as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, on ethics, Denzin and Lincoln (2013) assert that a research study should ensure anonymity by removing the identification of participants. I, therefore, used pseudonyms to protect participants' original names and identities. All research proceedings were explained clearly and politely to participants.

4.14 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented a discussion of the research methodology used in the study including detailed descriptions of the research approach, paradigm, methodology, selection, location, and data generation methods. It also discussed the process of data analysis, researcher's reflexivity, trustworthiness as well as ethical considerations. In other words, this methodology chapter presented how data generation and analysis occurred. The next chapter presents and discusses the data.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS (FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION)

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology for the study. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of female residence assistants on negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. In this chapter, I will therefore present and discuss the findings thematically. Harding (2013) states that the data analysis chapter is a process of understanding and interpreting the data that was generated for the study. Likewise, Marshall et al. (1999) describe data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass data, for synthesis and interpretation. I present my discussion by drawing from theory and the literature. As mentioned in previous chapters, I used the intersectionality theory to understand how female RAs negotiate gender identities and how the intersection of identities informs their experiences (Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989). In the discussion of themes, I also present extracts from the participants' stories, I do this to present the data and to foreground their voices (Chase, 2005). As noted in the previous chapter I have used pseudonyms to refer to my participants. The pseudonyms are, Hlubi, Londi, Anele, and Kate. I will firstly present and discuss findings under different themes and sub-themes, in line with procedures of thematic analysis. To reiterate I used the thematic approach of analysing the data as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set. Following this approach, I was able to generate the following themes: Understanding the role of residence assistants, Diversity in student residences, Negotiating gender, Working relationships with male RA colleagues, Violence and crime in/around student residences in Point-Durban, The impact of Covid-19 on RAs, and the Conclusion of the chapter.

5.2 Understanding the role of residence assistants (RAs)

In this section, I present the first theme which is understanding the role of residence assistants. I will be using the abbreviation “RAs” to refer to Residence Assistants throughout this chapter as it has been in the previous chapters. To begin the discussion, it is significant to firstly highlight the role of RAs. UKZN Student Services (2019), defines the roles and responsibilities of RAs as comprising the management of student residences, which includes assisting

residence administrators with admissions, ensuring adherence to residence rules, mentoring students, and implementing residence life programs. While the above is true and enacted, this study, however, found that the realities of RAs in relation to their roles in student residences go above and beyond what is stipulated on paper. For instance, I found that the RAs are performing the roles of being psychologists, caregivers, and mentors among others. The participants noted:

“I found myself being a psychologist on the ground when students had challenges relating to their school work and personal lives. I was also a parent sometimes because there were critical issues that they were faced with especially on mental health that required me to play a motherly role, without judging them.” (Hlubi)

“The realities of RA were of things that I did not expect. I was a mother, a psychologist, a counsellor, a nurse, a mediator and everything else.” (Kate)

“Being an RA was a huge role, I was a leader, manager, a mentor, a mediator, all at once. I was a mother, a caregiver, and a big sister especially since I was managing students who were young “ama 2K” [this is a slang word used in South Africa to refer to the youth born from the year 2000] just fresh from high school, being babied and all. So many students looked up to me.” (Londi)

The above extracts reveal that the roles of RAs went beyond what the residence department has stipulated to be. Instead, it also included parenting, mentoring, caregiving, and being a role model. The data shows that RAs became the first point of contact for students when they encountered problems. Drawing from the data, it suggests that majority of the participants noted the demands to enact the role of a psychologist/counsellor to assist the students, although they were not qualified or trained to offer such a role. This indicates that they are working in a terrain that is possibly troubled with mental health related issues. Likewise, for Mofatteh (2021) and Pillay and Kramers-Olen (2021), poor mental health is a complex and common psychological problem among university students both in South Africa and globally. What was also common amongst the participants was the role of being a mother and a sister which appears to be premised on their gender identities. I say this because women generally use the words mother and sister as a form of identity and in society, they are affiliated with nurturing and caregiving roles both at home and to a certain extent, in workplace environments (Sharma et al., 2016). In addition, women are expected to perform nurturing and caregiving activities in different spaces within society. Moreover, despite the age margin (which is relatively small)

between the participants and the students, the participants performed a role of a mother to the students. This suggests that performing a motherly role in a context where the age margin is relatively small is enabled by a hierarchy of RAs in terms of their leadership responsibilities being senior to the students. The data also indicates the expectation and self-policing of the RAs to perform traditional gender roles that are stereotypically aligned to their identities.

While I have provided data and a discussion on the roles of the RAs, the emerging data herein suggest that there were extensive challenges and pressures for the participants (RAs). I found that the role of RA was demanding for the participants, it required their availability and that they stay alert 24/7. The RAs noted:

“I had to be prepared 24/7 for anything that could happen in the residence. Students are human beings, and by nature students are unpredictable, so in my experience, the trick was knowing and figuring out how to deal with whatever happens and when it happens accordingly and diligently.” (Londi)

“I had to be available and present for all the students at all times since I was the first person on the ground to handle all types of situations that arose or reported in the residence.” (Hlubi)

“Students did not look at me as another student who is just relaying information to the officers instead, they looked at me as an RA, as part of the management and they demanded answers. They saw me as an employee of DSRA, who was getting paid to provide them with answers and solutions.” (Kate)

The attention that the participants had to provide to students was without acknowledging the fact that they (participants) were also students. Tight (2011) found that RAs performing duties as staff and students often experienced pressure and frustration in balancing the two roles. For instance, they experienced conflict and work overload in managing the demands of the two roles. Likewise, in this study, I found that female RAs' roles exerted pressure which resulted in additional responsibilities and overload. For instance, RAs had to account for other roles such as counselling and caregiving since they are students' first point of contact in the residence. It appears that the unofficial/unstated additional roles and responsibilities of the RAs were complex and required them to draw from their multiple identities, to respond to students' challenges. For instance, their personal identities such as gender as well as professional traits such as accountability, communication, empathy, and flexibility, among others. Herein, participants highlight how they handled students' emotional challenges:

“In my residence, I had students who were suicidal, depressed, stressed, and pressured by different factors personally, at home, at the residence, and university. So before I referred them for professional counselling, I had to play the counsellor role first hand. (Hlubi)

“I was the students’ first contact. I had to listen to their issues and be emotionally present for them. This was sometimes draining and heavy because it took me a long time to get over the emotional stress. I sort of became attached to their issues, and I struggled to keep up because I also had my own issues.” (Londi)

Londi described the emotional attachment that RAs had to students’ issues which creates additional emotional stress. Getting attached to students and the urge to solve their problems appears to be good signs of empathy and compassion, but on the other hand, I found that it was emotionally straining to RAs. Furthermore, they reported an increase in attempted and actual suicidal cases within student residences as can be seen from Hlubi’s extract. This means that while RAs struggled with their own possible mental health challenges, stress, and exhaustion; they also had to attend to cases and support students. As Hlubi indicated above, students came with complex issues which was a combination of their academic and personal lives, Hlubi had to provide support prior to referring them to the student counselling department.

In addition, I found that the roles of RAs also included cross-checking students’ records. For instance, RAs were faced with challenges of dealing with students who were dishonest on crucial aspects such as medical history and background. As a result, they had to spend significant time verifying students’ information which demanded additional time and a rigorous process. Students would produce sensitive documents indicating sensitive medical conditions as a way to obtain an on-campus single room. Hlubi highlights:

“Some students lie and produce fake documentation of a sensitive medical condition so that they can get on-campus/off-campus single rooms.” (Hlubi)

Hlubi shared how problematic students’ immorality was especially on medical information as they created fake documentation. What emerges from the data is that some students created fake documentation so that they can get on-campus or off-campus single rooms. Over the years, the act of producing fake documentation in higher education institutions has been prevalent such as fake qualifications and medical certificates among others (Linda & Suki, 2019). The above statements show that the conduct of presenting fake documents is not new in higher education institutions, however, in this study, it has extended to student residence. The conduct

appears to be problematic, and its implications are inevitable. For instance, producing fake documents for single rooms deprives students who might need the rooms for severe medical/physical conditions.

In addition, the study further found that the implications for fake documents and failure to disclose or update the student residence department on certain medical conditions exerted more pressure and stress on RAs who, on the spot (in case of emergency) were expected to have all the relevant information about the students. The participants said:

“I had a case of a student who had a mental disorder, it turned out that she did not take her medication for a while and had extreme episodes. When I checked the medical form that she submitted and signed, she had written NO medical conditions.” (Anele)

“Whenever a student came to a residence, I did check their records but it was almost impossible to tell if the student is telling the truth, I would only see when the student gets sick and only then they admitted to the conditions.” (Kate)

What emerges from the data is the efforts made by RAs to cross-check students’ records to ensure their well-being and appropriate response in cases of emergency. However, I found that they struggled with this process because some students provided untruthful or totally withheld information. This presents severe implications because if the RAs are not aware of students’ medical records, they cannot assist and monitor affected students accordingly and with the urgency it deserves. From the above discussion, the findings reveal that RAs were challenged with multiple roles and complex issues that gave rise to them experiencing stress and exhaustion. Having said that, they still needed to negotiate ways to balance their different roles. In the following theme, I present data and discuss ways in which the participants handle diversity within the residences.

5.3 Diversity in student residences

Student residences in higher education institutions have students who come from different backgrounds in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion among others (Martin & McGee, 2014). Subsequently, RAs have a crucial role to ensure that residences accommodate diversity among the student population. In a nutshell, student residences embody the essence of a “home away from home” space that accommodates individuals from different backgrounds (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015). In this study, I found that two of the four participants

were not from Durban or the surroundings. This is important to highlight because it extends the complexities experienced by these participants as they had to adjust and familiarise themselves with Durban, which is different from their home environment. The participants noted:

“I come from a township called eMadadeni in Newcastle which is not as big as Durban and the residence that I managed had students from various cultural, economic, and social differences, all in one building.” (Anele)

“I found Durban to be fast and busy since I am from a small and quiet area of Mshalane in Paulpietersburg so I needed to adjust to the Durban culture and lifestyle differences.” (Hlubi)

What emerges from the data is that Anele and Hlubi are from the rural and township areas that are far from Durban and its surroundings. The data suggest that this had implications on how they understood diversity when they first arrived in Durban and when they were appointed as RAs. For instance, Hlubi shared experiences of culture shock in the way things were done in the busy city of Durban; the people, culture, and lifestyle. I found that Durban student residences came with vast diversity in terms of gender, sexuality, class, and religion among others. Anele, in the previous extract, noted that she was exposed to a large cohort of students from all walks of life, in the extract below she notes an additional form of diversity not only amongst the student population but external members of the community who resided in the same building. Anele notes;

“I came in and saw this huge building of 32 floors, I was shocked thinking how I am going to manage a massive building like this. So, I took it upon myself to do some background research on the building such as student capacity, demographics, and management. I found out that there were other institutions and tenants in the building.” (Anele)

It appears that Anele had to deal with and communicate with students from her institution, students, and RAs from other institutions as well as the tenants (non-students). Anele displayed being proactive by conducting a background check of the residence which enabled her to learn about the capacity and demographics of students. However, there were inclusivity challenges for her and other RAs since they managed residences that had students from different backgrounds and identities, for example, gender, sexuality, age, and class among others. Considering the size of the residences and the number of students, RAs encountered challenges

relating to inclusivity. The study found that acts of intolerance, hostility, homophobia, and conflict were present in the student residences. The data suggest that intolerance and hostility were more on the students within the LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex) community. For instance, a student in Kate's residence was discriminated based on his sexual orientation; it is alleged that a roommate would pray for him to be saved from same-sex relations. A similar case can be observed in Hlubi's experiences, where heterosexual male students did not want to share rooms with students who engage in same-sex relations. Thus, the study found that students belonging to the LGBTQI community were discriminated. To highlight a few experiences, the participants noted;

"I had a case of a student who was homosexual and was living with a student who was a Christian. The homosexual student found out that the Christian student was homophobic through his prayers that were directed to save him from the sin of homosexuality." (Kate)

"Students shared rooms, and there were particular units where heterosexual-male students did not want to share the rooms with gay students." (Hlubi)

The above data suggest that student residences are somewhat unwelcoming, hostile, and homophobic. Thus, in this study, religion particularly Christianity has been found to stigmatize and discriminate against those belonging to the LGBTQI community. Sanger and Clowes (2006), Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy (2015) also reported religious groups' attempts to convert LGBTQI students' sexual orientation through prayer. For instance, Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Sandy's (2015) study on discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students at a rural university in South Africa. They found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals are often labelled as sinners, satanic, or 'demon-possessed'. This suggests that concerns around religion and sexuality are not something new, religious groups have been reported and seen demonising same-sex relations (Gibbs et al., 2015). In this way, religion and sexuality then sustain the legitimacy of heterosexuality while limiting other forms of sexual expressions (Msibi, 2011). In addition, Nadar (2005) posits that the 'unholy trinity' which is the relationship between religion, culture, and gender sustains homophobia and violence against women. Participants were faced with complexities resulting from the intersection of religion, culture, gender, and sexuality. They constantly had to deal with homophobia in the residence often fuelled mostly by religion and culture.

The above discussion is consistent with the work of the following scholars: Jagessar and Msibi (2015). Jagessar and Msibi (2015) reported on student residences being homophobic, intolerant, and unsafe for queer students. It appears that years later student residences in higher education are still hubs of homophobia, even though the rights and freedom of everyone are enshrined in the constitution. The constitution of South Africa (1996) Section 9 stipulates that “(3) The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth. (4) No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3)”. Therefore, the continued discrimination against the LGBTQI community is unconstitutional.

Although numerous studies such as Jagessar and Msibi (2015), Mahlori et al. (2018) and Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019) have reported on issues of hostility and intolerance in higher education, it seems like higher education institutions, similar to the society are still battling with eradicating homophobia and managing diversity amongst the student and staff population. This suggests that there has not been sufficient learning or professional development in the past years within the wider higher education community. I found that inadequate education and training on issues of diversity have perpetuated practices of intolerance and discrimination in student residences and I unpack this further in the next section.

5.3.1 Training on issues of diversity

I have presented the cases of homophobia and discrimination in the above discussions. The data suggests that there is no sufficient training on issues of diversity. The study found that training for RAs is usually offered once or twice per semester. For instance, the participants noted that training is usually at the beginning of the semester which is more like an introduction to the RA role, on a course of one to three days. Thus, most of the participants shared their frustrations with the training received from DSRA; they described the training as irrelevant and outdated on issues such as diversity and mental health. The participants noted:

“The training was mostly based on residence programs, DSRA structures, reports, and file submissions which was generally the information that was not specific to the reality on the ground. We are faced with students who are homophobic, depressed and suicidal.” (Hlubi)

“The training was about three days at most and usually occurred once or twice at the beginning of the semester, inducting us to the RA role.” (Anele)

“I feel like the training we received as RAs was irrelevant considering the current issues happening that were not part of the training. It could have been easy for me to be incompetent, inconsiderate, insensitive to students’ critical issues such as homosexuality and depression.” (Kate)

Most of the participants highlighted the relevance of the training as the main concern in the execution of their duties and managing diversity. These issues include the underlying concerns of homophobia, bullying, and mental health among others. Fortunately, most RAs in this study demonstrated knowledge of diversity from their background and previous experiences. However, this leaves room for concerns about those who might not be familiar and could be insensitive to the diversity of students. Subsequently, it breeds more acts of homophobia, racism, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression.

Kumashiro (2000) writes about different approaches to address oppression through anti-oppressive education. Anti-oppressive education is one that works against various forms of oppression such as racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism among others (Kumashiro, 2000). He posits that engaging in anti-oppressive education requires a combination of four approaches namely: education for the other, education about the other, education that is critical of privileging and othering, and education that changes students and society. According to Kumashiro (2000, p.26), the term "Other" refers to “those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society, i.e., such as students of colour, students from under- or unemployed families, students who are female, or male but not stereotypically "masculine," and students who are, or are perceived to be queer”. He argues that the four approaches addresses the multiplicity and situatedness of oppression which enable educators to "look beyond" the field of educational research and explore other forms of oppression that are still marginalized. In this case, the above statement suggests that in the training of RAs, anti-oppressive education can be incorporated for them to understand the dynamics of oppression. This will further assist RAs in devising strategies that cater to multiplicity/diversity and address any forms of oppression in the residences.

Steyn (2012) writes about Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL) which is a complex set of analytic skills (orientation) that aim to recognise, read and address prevalent relations of social

oppressions. In this way, CDL allows RAs to confront and engage with the increasing complexities of difference and “other” in student residences. Therefore, it is important to capacitate RAs on diversity and training to create safe spaces in student residences. Tshilongo and Rothmann (2019) argue that institutions of higher learning need to provide safe spaces for all students, especially for those students who are faced with different forms of oppression such as the LGBTQI community. Kumashiro’s (2000) anti-oppressive education as well as Steyn’s (2012) critical diversity literacy could be a critical addition to RAs training.

5.3.2 Creating inclusive and safe spaces in the residences

Noting that there were challenges of diversity and lack of training in managing the residences, Kate and Hlubi created interventions that were mainly educational to negotiate inclusivity in the residences. For instance, Kate organised a session which she terms a ‘sexuality class’ and Hlubi appears to have spoken to the students and negotiated peace and tolerance towards diversity. They highlighted:

“It was a hassle to educate homophobic students about sexuality and inclusivity, they were very traditional in their thinking and beliefs and saw absolutely nothing wrong with being homophobic. It became more of a sexuality class.” (Kate)

“I negotiated an understanding with students that we are all different and we ought to respect each other’s differences in the residences.” (Hlubi)

Hlubi and Kate in the above extracts, seem to have understood the complexities around inclusivity, particularly on sexuality, and further engaged with their students. In this case, the RAs negotiated issues around homophobia using the intersectional approach to cater to all differences. Hlubi’s strategy looks at the intersection of differences amongst her students and ways in which they can elicit respect for everyone. Kate conducted sexuality education engagements to negotiate an understanding of respect and acceptance to promote diversity in student residences. This indicates that despite the poor training on issues of diversity, the participants took an initiative to ensure an inclusive diverse community in the residences.

On the other hand, Londi and Anele’s interventions were closely associated with negotiating for gender equality and safety. For instance, Londi created Wellness Wednesdays which was an interactive platform to engage with her students while Anele invented Women and Men

forums where they provided diversity and safety awareness in the residences. Londi and Anele note:

“I developed a concept of Wellness Wednesdays, every Wednesday in the month, with different topics each month but all directed to diversity and safety awareness. We worked with different departments such as the Campus HIV and AIDS Support Unit, Risk Management Services, and Counselling Unit.” (Londi)

“I created Women and Men Forums to communicate and engage with students on academic, personal, and social issues in/outside the residence. Our intention was clear, we wanted our residence to be safe, comfortable, and conducive for everyone.” (Anele)

The above extracts show interventions that RAs implemented as per the specific needs of their student residences to negotiate safe and inclusive spaces. What emerges from the data is that RAs’ interventions also included the execution of residence life programs to develop students academically, personally, and socially. For instance, they worked with support services such as the Campus HIV and AIDS Support Unit (CHASU), Risk Management Services (RMS), and the student Counselling Unit among others. Minister of Department of Higher Education, Blade Nzimade emphasised that “the provision of accessible, decent, safe and academically conducive student residences in South African universities is of great importance to the success of students” (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 1). The above discussion stresses that a student’s residential experience is an essential part of their holistic university experience, particularly on teaching and learning (Bleiberg, 2004). This suggests that it was imperative for RAs to devise ways in which they can create conducive student residences for the comfort of all the students.

The discussion above highlights a sense of agency displayed by the participants in this study. According to Biesta and Tedder (2007), agency is an interplay of individual efforts to act. In simple terms, agency is the capacity and ability to act. The participants in this study demonstrated agency and implemented interventions to negotiate for inclusivity in the student residences, respectively. For instance, they created platforms to educate students on sexuality, developed wellness engagements, and created Women/Men forums. It is clear that other RAs could have chosen to continue with their operational work and ignore everything else that is outside the RAs’ scope of work. Therefore, the participants’ agency encouraged them to negotiate for diversity, tolerance, and safety in the residences. Next, I present a discussion of RAs’ negotiating gender in student residences.

5.4 Negotiating Gender

As previously highlighted, I found that in the residences there were acts of gender prejudices, with some towards the female RAs and others towards the students. The residences are managed by one or a maximum of three RAs. The number of RAs per student residence and placement is the prerogative of the student residence department and it is also determined by the student capacity in each building. The intention of providing this administration background brings me to the finding herein. Amongst the participants, there were frustrations around the placement of RAs, they highlighted gender biases and felt like males were more privileged. Furthermore, the data shows that participants such as Anele and Kate had to constantly prove themselves in male-dominated spaces. For instance, Kate felt that females are constantly underestimated in society hence a need to prove herself. The participants noted:

“It is unfortunate that I had to prove myself countless times, especially as a female RA in this male-dominated space. I was aware of the kind of society we live in which underestimates women, hence I was adamant to continuously prove that I was equal to the task.” (Kate)

“I was managing a big student residence alongside two other male RAs. I could not understand why there are always two males and one female RAs in big residences such as Santone and Kemila (pseudonyms)? Why can't it be two females and one male or females RAs only? I felt like we were undermined as female RAs. I knew it was not going to be easy for me especially as the only female with two other male RAs so I had to do MORE. In my engagements and negotiation, I never put myself in a position where I wanted them to pity me just because “I am female” instead I showed up and did more work. I was ahead with administration, reports, programs and all.” (Anele)

Anele's extract above highlights the structural norm from the department to have two males and one female RAs in large student residences. Although this has been accepted by many as a 'norm', there are no sufficient and strong reasons for this approach. In contrast, the approach presents females as individuals who are incapable of handling the tasks and constantly in need of men to assist with bigger residences. Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) state that women have experienced gender biases in organizational structures that view them as incapable and incompetent. Likewise, in this study, as mentioned earlier the female RAs worked extra hard in order to prove that they were equal to their male counterparts and to prove their capabilities. As a result, such gender prejudices consistently overrate men and underrate women (Heilman,

2012) The data suggest that women experience oppression as a result of sex and gender discrimination.

In addition, Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) report that some women tend to either feel sorry for themselves or expect special treatment in the workplace because of historical gender biases. In this study the above was not the case, instead, it was the intersection of gender, sex, and complexities relating to the work RAs do that yielded unpleasant experiences for them. For instance, they were undermined and not taken seriously because of their gender identities. Although most of the participants had negative experiences, one felt privileged in terms of her gender identity. Hlubi shared that the landlord of the building stated his preference for females RAs due to their perceived nurturing traits. Hlubi noted;

“My landlord explicitly wanted a female RA, he said that ‘it is easy to work with females, they are humble, mature, and they understand and negotiate very well. Even if they do not approve, they do not have that harsh approach, they are calm.’” (Hlubi)

The landlord’s preference could be interpreted in many ways but in this study, I present two views; Firstly, it appears that his preference could be driven by gender stereotypes that view women as passive negotiators (Pardal et al., 2020). Secondly, the landlord could be having a genuine concern drawing from his past experiences with male RAs. As much as Hlubi was privileged on being selected in the student residence that was intended to be managed by a female RA, as per the landlord’s preference. She also shared that; the landlord was sceptical at first about having the residence managed by a female who is also young. In this way, the data suggest that when gender intersected with age the female RA was prejudiced further. For instance, Hlubi’s residence housed Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students who are doing a postgraduate certificate and have had an experience of residence life in their previous qualifications. Herein Hlubi was infantilized because of her age (22 years old), and perhaps level of study. This was done to her despite her seniority in the residence as an RA. It is also the case with Londi, who was discriminated by mainly male private tenants as noted earlier that some of the residences housed both students and private tenants. Londi was told that she was young and had no authority to provide orders.

While this study focuses on gender and the intersection of identities, it is important to highlight that RAs' jurisdiction in residences with private clients should be revised or re-looked at. Hlubi and Londi noted;

“I experienced disrespect, arrogance, and backlash from a group of students in the residence who were PGCE students. They told me that ‘ngiyingane’ [I am child], and they were not going to take orders from me.” (Hlubi)

“I was discriminated by tenants who were staying at the building. It was largely male tenants. They had an attitude towards me and vouched that they would not take anything from me because I am young and I am a student.” (Londi)

From the above extracts, Hlubi experienced both oppression and privilege simultaneously. She experienced oppression (in terms of age) and privilege (gender) at the same time. Collins (2019) and Symington (2004) state that because of multiple identities, they assert that individuals are members of more than one community at the same time. In turn, when those identities intersect, they produce unique experiences (Symington, 2004). Thus, Hlubi's experiences were complex because it was not mainly about her gender but also age.

For Londi, she felt oppressed by the tenants because of her age and student status. The residence she managed had students from other institutions as well as tenants in the same building. As much as she was only responsible to manage the students from this institution, the interaction with other students from other institutions and tenants was inevitable as they shared the same building. The above speaks to the unique and complex setting of student residences, especially off-campus leased residences. For instance, the participants and students came from different backgrounds in terms of race, nationality, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. As a result, the participants experienced bullying, abuse, and harassment, among others in these complex residential spaces. The above finding reveals multiple oppression that women face as a result of their specific identities in higher education, especially those emanating from male domination. The fact that RAs in the residences are senior and are entrusted with various responsibilities such as implementing residence rules and issuing fines for offences, makes it more complex for female RAs who are not only undermined because of age but gender as well.

5.4.1 Male dominance in Durban student residences

Generally, women are stereotyped as a relatively powerless social group compared with men, who are thought of as being powerful in most societal and organizational structures (Heilman,

2012). In this way, male dominance is reinforced which produces unequal gender experiences for women. I found that this is also a case in this study where higher education spaces, particularly student residences are male dominated. The data also suggests that student residences in this study had a greater number of male students who were predominantly black. For instance, Kate, Anele, and Londi revealed that they managed residences that consisted of largely black male students. In this way, it appears that the participants received ethnic privilege as black RAs since the student residences are predominantly black. The participants said:

“My residence was big and I had mainly black students who were mostly male students. The RAs’ capacity also had more males, especially occupying big residences in Durban residences. I have noticed that there is a certain trend of placing female RAs mostly on campus or in areas closer to campus.” (Kate)

“The tenants from other floors in the building were far more diverse but my students were mostly black students so I did have that sense of belonging, oMkhaya bami [my home-line].” (Anele)

“The student capacity consisted of black male students with fewer female students, for the longest time, in all my years of being an RA, I have actually had more male students in the residence. From the RAs side, there were more black male RAs in our group.” (Londi)

What emerges from the data is that there was a greater number of black students in student residences of this selected teacher-education institution. Kate and Londi further revealed that male RAs were greater than female RAs in student residences situated in Durban-Point. From Kate’s above extract, it seems like male students and male RAs were placed in further areas such as Point while female RAs were mostly placed in areas closer to campus. This is evident by the male capacity and dominance that is present in student residences in Durban for both students and RAs.

According to Chikapa (2021), there are unequal and unjust practices that women experience especially in male-dominated spaces. Particularly in this study, participants felt marginalized because of the injustices that they were confronted with in student residences such as bullying and harassment. This is consistent with what Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) assert that women

experience discrimination, harassment, and other violent practices in gendered workspaces. The data suggests that the female RAs' experiences are similar to the current workings of gender in the wider spectrum of the patriarchal society. Therefore, we cannot isolate student residences from society. Likewise, Crenshaw (1989), asserts that intersectionality starts from the premise that individuals have multi-layered identities and experiences resulting from social relations, history, and power structures in society.

Over the years, there have been societal gender roles that have not seen a woman as belonging or capable of being in the workspace (Chikapa, 2021; Heilman, 2001). For example, the women's stereotypical gender roles have included communal roles, such as being a caregiver, home cook, and nurturer. Heilman (2001) reports that if women tend to not conform to the above gender roles, they receive negative attitudes in a form of discrimination or harassment. The female RAs of this study revealed experiences of discrimination because of their gender identity. Likewise, Crenshaw (2013) argues that gender and sex are intertwined through which power relations are produced to subordinate previously advantaged groups such as women.

The above discussion suggests that residence life is an extension of what is happening in our everyday society. Likewise, intersectionality points to power dynamics that produce social inequalities and oppression. It is therefore important to view student residences as part of the society to understand how complex power dynamics produce marginal experiences for women. The same way that women have discriminatory problems in a workplace or business environment is likely to crossover in any role that a woman holds in society (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). This suggests that residence life does not exist outside the society. Understanding the female RAs' experiences of oppression is therefore critical to foster gender equality and non-discriminatory practices in higher education spaces, especially student residences.

The above section provided a discussion of the male domination that is prevalent in student residences. The implications of such dominance exerted pressure on female RAs to negotiate tolerance with male counterparts in student residences. This introduces the next discussion of female RAs' working relationship with their male RA colleagues.

5.5 Working with male RA colleagues

This theme focuses on the working relationship between female RAs and their male RAs colleagues. As noted earlier, the size and student capacity of residences in this study were large,

it required multiple RAs. For instance, each residence for Anele, Londi, and Kate had a capacity of 400 – 600 students each. As a result, they had two male RA colleagues; this means that their residences consisted of three RAs altogether (two males and one female). As previously mentioned, female RAs had to prove themselves to their male counterparts. I found that female RAs had to negotiate ways to facilitate effective working relationships with their male RA colleagues, which had different implications for each participant. The participants revealed that negotiating gender or doing work with male RAs was not an easy task considering the gender prejudices and imbalances that existed in residences as earlier discussed. The data suggests that female RAs had different and complex working relationships. For Anele and Londi, they showed good working relationships with their male RA colleagues, and they highlighted:

“We tried to communicate frequently and as much as we had different floors to manage but submissions such as reports and files, we submitted collated documents together. It was not easy at first and we did experience challenges here and there such as time clashes and disagreements, but we resolved them professionally.” (Anele)

“We developed our plan of action and we allocated tasks among ourselves. They knew what they were responsible for what and I also knew my responsibilities.” (Londi)

What emerges from the data is that Anele and Londi had professional and collaborative working relationships with their male RA colleagues. According to Anele and Londi the male colleagues completed the tasks allocated to them without experiencing gender-related discrimination. While Kate on the other hand experienced violence and harassment from her male RA colleagues. The first experience of harassment was when Kate’s male colleague initiated an intimate relationship with her despite him being rejected multiple times. Kate notes:

“My male RA colleague started asking me out towards the end of the year. This was weird because he had a live-in girlfriend who was pregnant. He knew that I was also in a relationship at that time but still went on to ask me out which made things awkward and uncomfortable between us, when I say no, it is no. I could not understand what was difficult for him to understand that a no is a no. I felt uncomfortable and miserable!” (Kate)

Emerging from the data, I found that Kate experienced different forms of harassment which were emotional and verbal. She expressed how uncomfortable and miserable she felt as a result of being harassed by her male colleague who asserted his masculine power over her. Rospenda et al. (2000) define harassment as an act of aggressive pressure and intimidation that is intended

to cause physical and emotional harm. Kate noted in the above extract that the colleague was asking her out and was not taking a no for an answer. Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) assert that men's intimate or sexual entitlement feature in the social constructions of masculinity and violence is often used to enforce these social constructs. Thus, the data suggests that the harassment that Kate experienced was at the hands of men and fuelled by toxic masculinities, in this case, the perpetrator was a male RA colleague in the same building. Similarly, Towl and Walker (2019) report on accounts of harassment at a particular university in the United Kingdom. Female students revealed that the majority of harassment is carried out by senior male academics which includes acts of physical and sexual assault (Towl & Walker, 2019). The above discussion suggests that harassment in higher education institutions has become a worldwide problem (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020).

What makes Kate's experience more complex is that the male RA was asking her out, at a time when the male RA's girlfriend was pregnant and stayed in the same building. For most men especially in student residence spaces, the notion of having multiple partners is considered as "cool" to prove their masculinities (Harper, 2004); the male RA was therefore trying his luck with Kate. It appears that the male RA's behaviour is consistent with a problematic perception amongst men, assuming that women are always readily available for men or should make themselves available (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). In this way, it appears that Kate was presumed to be available due to her gender identity hence the male RA was insistent and taking no for answer. The above case reinforces the interlocking matrix of oppression that women face, which exposes their vulnerability to marginal experiences because of their gender identities (Collins, 2019).

Another marginal experience for Kate was by her other male RA colleague (second male RA) who was disrespectful, intolerant, and incompetent in his job. Kate notes:

"This other male RA was living with his baby and girlfriend in the residence. It started being a problem when students went to his room, he would not be there and he would leave his girlfriend to be in charge to handle his queries in his absentia. The girlfriend was clueless about the role and gave wrong information to students. His incompetency was just causing problems and inconveniences for me, I had to do my job and do his job. It was just tiring and stressful." (Kate)

Kate expressed her frustration of having to do double work which created an inconvenience and work overload. According to Kate, the pressure accelerated to stress as she practically was

handling the residence alone. The data suggests that while the male RA was found to be disrespectful and incompetent, he also delegated tasks to his girlfriend who was not an RA and who was not authorised to handle some of the sensitive issues of students. This speaks to the male privileges and selfish behaviours that men exert in decision-making which in turn undermines women. Similarly, Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) reported on gender inequality and discrimination that exist in organisational structures which overlook women in decision-making. In addition, what is emerging from the data above is that Kate experienced numerous accounts of subordination at the hands of her male RA colleagues. This study, therefore, found harassment, disrespect, and intolerance to have yielded experiences of subordination for female RAs. Chikapa (2021) asserts that women, and in the context of this study, female RAs work at extreme times of harassment and sexual offenses in workplaces. The data suggests that experiences of oppression on women still occur in higher education spaces.

Additionally, Kate's experiences expose the common thread of RAs who stay with partners in the residence. In this case, Kate's male colleagues both stayed with their girlfriends in the residence which is essentially against the residence rules. However, it appears that because of privilege, the male RAs were persistent to do as they please and stayed with their girlfriends even though it created unfavourable working conditions for Kate. This speaks to the toxic masculinities that men particularly male RA colleagues exerted on participants. In the same way, Barnes and Munsch (2015) assert that the paradoxical privilege of men and masculinity is embedded in various social institutions, including workplaces, schools, and colleges which further contribute to discrimination and inequality. This is similar to what this study found, as highlighted above, men who exert their male privileges and masculinity to oppress women in student residences. I discuss toxic masculinity in the next section.

5.5.1 Toxic Masculinity in student residences

There is considerable research that focuses on masculinity in higher education (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Morrell et al., 2009; Shefer et al., 2018). According to Singh (2016), gender inequalities in a patriarchal South Africa are embedded in societal, political, and cultural injustices that have resulted in a high degree of interpersonal violence. This means gender, patriarchy, and violence are intimately connected (Hearn et al., 2022). In other words, male privilege and masculinity are reinforced by patriarchal gender discourses to subordinate women (Gilbertson, 2020). Scholars such as Ngabaza et al. (2015) and Stephenson et al. (2020) have

reported that men consider violence as a way to display power and to prove their masculinity in spaces they occupy. This is referred to as toxic masculine behavior which includes being violent, assertive, and aggressive (Morrell et al., 2009). Morrell et al. (2009) further argue that toxic masculinity is one of the major reasons for harassment, discrimination, and gender-based violence in higher education spaces. As noted earlier, I found that the participants experienced bullying and harassment. For Anele, she managed a student residence where she was the first female RA. In the past, it had been male RAs only. At first, she was bullied by a group of students who refused to acknowledge her position and authority. Secondly, she was harassed by students (political opponents) on social media. Anele notes:

“I was the first female RA to serve in my residence, in the previous years before I came it was male RAs only. I remember during the first week of my arrival at the residence, I received an anonymous text that was threatening. The text said, “If you come here with an attitude, you will pack your bag very soon [...] some students manipulated and bullied me; it was like I don’t exist to them as an RA. As someone who was also politically active, there was a group of male students from my political opponents who wrote about me on Facebook, and they accused me that I was selling spaces in the residences.” (Anele)

Anele expressed that she felt like she was non-existent to students as they did not take authority from her. Anele’s active participation in politics made matters worse because students went on rampant cyber-bullying activities such as the allegations that she was selling spaces in the residence which were detrimental to her reputation. To reiterate the point I made earlier, Anele was politically active and higher education institutions have political parties that contest annually for student governance. These include the South African Students Congress (SASCO), South African Democratic Students' Movement (SADESMO), and Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC) among others. The above discussion exposes how Anele experienced bullying at the hands of some male students in her residence. Thus, in this study, I found that in student residences men assert masculinities in ways that are toxic for women. Bullying and harassment were also experienced by another RA, Hlubi who shares her experiences of being violated by male students in the residences. Hlubi notes;

“I had a group of male students who were troublesome and they had historical cases of harassing female students but they were still occupying the residence because the

processes to remove students from the residence has a lot of protocols. They continued with their behaviour to belittle and mock female students including myself.” (Hlubi)

What emerges from the data is that participants were bullied and violated as a result of their sex and gender identities. The data indicates that there is a deliberate attempt to mock, belittle and undermine women including RAs who are in the position of authority within the student residences. The participants particularly Hlubi noted the effects of systematic challenges relating to disciplinary processes for problematic students. This suggests that the female RAs are not only frustrated by the negative experiences which are resulting from their sex and gender identities but they are also frustrated by systematic challenges such as student discipline. The above discussion points to the systemic and structural ways in which bullying, harassment, and violence are embedded in student residences of higher education institutions (Jagessar & Msibi, 2015).

5.5.2 Support in the residences

As previously highlighted that female RAs experienced a range of pressures from managing complex student residences, for instance, harassment, bullying, and violation. In such cases, support was very crucial for them to manage student residence operations effectively. In this teacher education institution, we have different types of student residences under DSRA which are university-owned residences and leased residences. Since the majority of student residences in this study are leased, they are managed by external building management. What emerged from the data is that RAs worked and liaised with building managers, DSRA, and sometimes landlords in the residences. I found that the RAs had complex and unique experiences in terms of the support received from each of these structures. For instance, it appeared that Kate received support from building managers more than DSRA whereas Londi received more support from DSRA, respectively. What emerges from the data is the impact of systematic power on women as a result of multiple intersecting identities and experiences (Collins, 2000). In terms of the building management, Kate felt supported in ways that the building managers were available and present to offer assistance where needed. She also expressed the sense of belonging that she felt as a result of the support from building managers since she was not on good terms with her male RA colleagues. For instance, they supported her on residence maintenance issues and sponsorship for programs. Kate notes:

“The building managers were supportive, the owner, in particular, was mostly available in the residence to assist with maintenance issues. On residence programs, they usually sponsored refreshments. So, the management was visible, available and tried to assist in ways that they can, especially with my male RA colleagues’ weird dramas.” (Kate)

On the contrary, Londi and Anele shared their frustration about building managers’ insensitivity concerning their poor service delivery and maintenance. For these reasons, the building managers accused students of theft, according to Londi. For Anele, she revealed frustrations and pressures that she experienced from students’ demands as a result of building managers’ poor maintenance on residence facilities. Since RAs are also students, it seems like building managers may not have offered support because they possibly saw RAs as students, and in their view; students are problematic. Arguably, this notion negatively affects RAs’ functionality since they occupy the position of authority, and some students look up to them in the residence. The participants note:

“The building management always saw students as people who steal or damage things, always found students at fault. Even as an RA, I received minimal benefits than other RAs from other residences. Another thing, they do have this tendency of looking down on RAs, especially female RAs. They were not supportive nor student-friendly at all.” (Londi)

“It was challenging to initiate change in a big residence like this and students had their demands and time frames which also put pressure on my side because I had little control, it was the management who continuously delayed and failed to deliver services on time such as residence equipment and maintenance.” (Anele)

The above discussion presents different experiences of support that RAs received from the building managers. What emerges from the data is the RAs’ frustration on being undermined by building managers. For instance, Londi highlighted in the above extract that building managers had a “tendency” to look down on her as a female. In this way, Londi experienced subordination as a result of the injustices that are presented by her gender identity. Heilman (2001) asserts that women have been presumed to be incompetent and in turn undermined in various social institutions. This means that the notion of looking down on women, particularly female RAs in this study, is not something new. In other words, gender prejudices produce marginal experiences for women in social institutions such as being undermined or disparaged based on their gender. There was also data emerging regarding the support received from the

DSRA; the participants indicated a lack of support and to an extent uniformity from different officials of the DSRA.

Essentially, DSRA oversees student residence operations both in university-owned and leased student residences. In this discussion, I present the support that they provided for the participants. I found that DSRA was mostly supportive of residence administration, statistics, and programs. For instance, Kate and Anele concur that DSRA was largely interested in residences' administration, reports, and statistics. In turn, they expressed that they felt left out as there was no significant amount of emotional support. Kate and Anele noted:

“DSRA was not much supportive, I was just expected to write and submit incident reports, do administration and all. So, I just reported for the sake of in case anything happens, it is documented to protect myself.” (Kate)

“The department mostly supported me when we had residence programs and events. They are also interested in numbers, statistics, administration, and student capacity. In terms of checking how I was or how was I coping, it was rare, very rare. It was just little support from the RLO from another cluster.” (Anele)

While the above extracts present support mainly for administration and reports, Londi in the extract below notes that she did receive counselling even though it was broad. This was problematic because she needed in-depth and closely monitored support as a result of her traumatic experiences from the KZN unrest and Covid-19 impact (this will be discussed in later sections). Londi notes:

“I did receive support from my RLO and RLC even though I think more could have been done to help me cope. The counselling I received was broad, I feel that it may have been more impactful if it was precise and relevant to the emotional challenges I was dealing with, especially with the psychological impact of Covid -19 and the July 2021 unrest.” (Londi)

What emerges from the data is that the participants received inadequate support from the DSRA, especially on psychosocial and emotional aspects. As a result, the implications of this lack of support increase the vulnerability of participants. In other words, participants become vulnerable and exposed to subordination which may affect their roles, both as students and RAs. For instance, Londi shared the traumatic experiences of the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) unrest which left her depressed and in turn affected her academic and RA work, due to lack of

emotional support. This will be discussed greatly in the next theme of violence and crime in/around student residences in Point, Durban.

5.6 Violence and Crime in/around student residences in Point, Durban

As noted earlier, this study focused on the area called Point in Durban. Upon analysing the data, there were multiple instances where RAs were referring to Point in relation to crime, substance abuse, violence, and many other harmful practices. Point is situated in the heart of Durban, it is regarded as one of the most fast-paced and busy areas in Durban town. Though Point is positively known for its recreational activities such as entertainment hubs, beaches, hotels, and casinos among others. However, on the other hand, Point has also been described as a high-risk crime zone area (Vahed, 2013). Likewise, in this study, Point was found to be notorious by all participants. They described Point as fast and busy with extreme acts of crime, substance abuse, and violence among others. They highlighted:

“My residence was situated in Point, where there is drug abuse, crime, and violence everywhere. In general, Point is busy, especially with “amaphara”, and students were heavily affected. They were mugged, violated and abused in many incidents.” (Anele)

“The crime challenges inside the residence involved students who were stealing clothes from each other in the rooms and laundry. Outside the residence, it was mostly pickpocketing when students came back from campus or the shops and this occurred any time of the day.” (Kate)

“We were faced with a lot of issues on crime, violence, drugs, and alcohol as a residence that was in Point. Most students had easy access to drugs and alcohol in the area. Another challenge was theft incidents since the building had four different institutions, students were then stealing from one another.” (Londi)

“I had students who did not mind drinking from Monday to Sunday. It was just crazy, it became more like a social club, in a way that even if a student does not have money, they will have a group of friends who will have the means to get the alcohol. Alcohol was easy to get in Point; liquor stores and clubs are literally next to the residence.” (Hlubi)

From the above extracts, drugs, alcohol abuse, and crime were found to be extreme challenges that RAs were faced with in Durban residences. Earlier, I highlighted that Point is known for its famous entertainment hubs such as clubs, beaches, and casinos among others. This means that the setting and geographical area of Point is central, commercial, and recreational. As a result, student residences that are in a fast-paced area of Point present complex experiences for participants, arguably different from those in other areas that are non-central and non-commercial. This reinforces the multiple pressures experienced by the participants as they negotiated their gender identities in student residences situated in Durban, Point.

5.6.1 Crime and Substance Abuse (drugs and alcohol)

As previously mentioned, crime and substance abuse were among the extreme pressures experienced by the participants. The data suggests that students had different reasons either to steal or consume drugs/alcohol because of economic, social, and personal pressures. For instance, according to the extracts below, Hlubi revealed incidents of theft in her residence and associated them with some students who did not have the financial means to provide for their living expenses. Anele also revealed that drug and alcohol abuse was associated with stress and anxiety in coping with the underlying demands of the university. The participants noted:

“A group of students were reported to have stolen, I decided to engage with them individually to find out why and I found out that some students stole because they could not provide for themselves since they did not have funding and were coming from humbling homes.” (Hlubi).

“I noticed that drugs and alcohol abuse was just an escape for students, to escape from all the anxiety, stress and demands of the university and worse in Point, drugs were easily accessible anytime.” (Anele)

“I had numerous incidents where I had to deal with students who were selling drugs and consuming drugs in the residence.” (Londi)

The above extracts show that students were heavily involved in drugs/alcohol since there was easy access in Point. Londi shared that students also sold drugs and alcohol in the residence. It seems like the activities around drug dealings could be associated with the area of Point. As noted earlier, Point has been found to be unsafe, violent, and notorious (Maharaj et al., 2010; Vahed, 2013b). The data also suggests that there was a greater number of students that were

affected by substance abuse in student residences. In dealing with such, the RAs indicated that they tried to enforce that students get checked in the front gate but it did not assist because students used tenants to enter with drugs and alcohol as they (tenants) were not checked at the front gate. The above discussion questions the suitability of having students and tenants in the same building because tenants are free to do/engage in whatever they want as “independent adults” and the RA has no jurisdiction over tenants. The RAs highlighted:

“I tried to negotiate with the security guards to intensify security measures such as monitoring cameras regularly, and checking students’ bags when they enter the residences but it did not quite work because the cameras were not functional and students used tenants to smuggle in drugs and alcohol.” (Kate)

“As much as there were cameras but the control room was not inside the building, it was in PMB. The building is part of a major property group so the control room was not easily accessible. This really affected the living conditions at the residence, it was also not suitable for learning because of the extensive use of drugs and crime.” (Londi)

From the above extracts, it appears that the security measure of camera surveillance was not effective in combating crime in the residences of this study. For instance, for some residences, cameras were not installed. In other residences where cameras were installed, they were either not functional or controlled in the head office of the building group. Thus, from the students’ tricks to use tenants to enter with drugs in the building and camera surveillance challenges, there was continued drugs and alcohol abuse, crime, as well as violence in the residence. As a result, participants were faced with extreme pressures in/around the residence because of the continued acts of substance abuse, crime, and violence. For instance, they had to devise interventions to address the afore-mentioned issues in the residence, with limited support and resources. It appears that these challenges may have threatened the residence not to be conducive for living and learning, according to Londi. When analysing the data further it emerged that there were also outside interferences that caused other criminal acts such as pickpocketing. According to Piper (2018), pickpocketing is a criminal act of stealing things out of people’s pockets such as money, wallet, cellphone, and others. The data herein reveal that pickpocketing was a challenge around student residences in Durban. The participants noted:

“Point is situated in the middle of town, shops are everywhere, people stood outside on the streets especially “amaphara”, so students would get into a residence and their

stuff was missing because of being pickpocketed especially when dropped off by the bus.” (Kate)

“The bus did not stop at the entrance of the residence. It stopped by Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) so we had to walk a short distance to the residence. In that short distance, a lot happened because it was in those moments that gave thieves enough time to steal whatever they wanted from the students.” (Hlubi)

For Hlubi and Kate, they experienced a common bus issue which was an element that accelerated students’ getting pickpocketed and mugged. It appears that there was no bus stop in front of the Hlubi and Kate’s residences, as a result, the buses stopped at the back entrance. Students were then pickpocketed and mugged when they got out of the bus and walked to the residence. Hlubi and Kate shared that there was no solution because both residences were located in the city’s busy roads. They highlighted that the biggest challenge was when the bus stopped at the front (where there is no bus stop), it created obstruction, which resulted in heavy traffic. The traffic frustrated the municipality as previously mentioned that Point is part of Durban Metropolitan, which in turn pressured the RAs to use alternative measures to address the bus stop challenge. Kate noted:

“The only limited and temporary solution was to ask the security to patrol when students came from and to the bus. I also negotiated with the bus driver to drop off students in the front of the residence at night because there was less traffic.” (Kate)

Kate highlighted that the above solution was limited because one security guard for +-100 students per bus was not sufficient. The bus and traffic challenge further questions the suitability of buildings in the Central business district (CBD) as student residences. I say this because the safety of students and RAs appeared to be threatened and at great risk in this busy and fast-paced area of Point. The above discussion shows that although there are high rates of crime incidents, the RAs decided to devise strategies and interventions to eradicate such acts. For instance, they requested the bus driver to drop students in the front entrance at night, access to camera surveillance and asked security guards to patrol in/around the residence. It appears that the female RAs were experiencing multiple challenges coming from different sides such as security threats and crime incidents. This means that female RAs had to negotiate spaces even though they were confronted with pressures of crime, substance abuse, and violence in student residences, as earlier noted. Given the space where Point is and its economic and social

demands, some students started to engage in transactional relationships. I unpack this discussion in the next section.

5.6.2 Transactional relationships

As previously discussed, Point is situated in Durban City where there are commercial and entertainment areas such as clubs, beaches, and casinos among others. I found that the economic and social pressures resulted in some female students engaging in transactional relationships. For instance, they were engaged in acts of prostitution and relationship with tenants and men older than them. It appears that female students were involved in such practices for financial purposes. This posed extreme challenges for female RAs as they had to negotiate ways to reprimand this behaviour as in certain instances; it affected some of the students. The RAs had little control over such relations (students with older men or tenants) since students in higher education are essentially “young adults”, they are free to be and do whatever they want. Anele noted:

“There were cases of prostitution in the residence, various female students were hooked in this practice, and they consumed drugs very heavily. Few started then it grew and started becoming like a trend because ‘the money is good’ as they said.” (Anele)

Some students had intimate relationships with tenants. It created challenges relating to maintaining order and discipline for students that I manage as they engaged with people outside my authority (tenants). For example, I had a case of a female student who tended to have their partner in the room which she shared with other students. The students complained because they could not be free in their space since they made noise, threw parties, and would often fight when they were drunk. This put me in a difficult position because I did not know where to begin disciplining a tenant who was not under my authority, I felt intimidated.” (Londi)

What emerges from the data is that students engaged in transactional and intimate relationships that presented disciplinary challenges to RAs as they had little control over these relations. Anele revealed that students were engaged in sex work, also known as prostitution in her student residence. The above finding is similar to Shefer and Strebel’s (2012) study of transactional sex at a South African university, they reported that female students engage in sexual relationships with older men, commonly known as “sugar daddies” or “blessers” for

money. This shows that transactional relationships are becoming prevalent in higher education institutions. According to the above extracts, it appears that even though these student relationships with tenants (or other older men) may bring financial freedom, they also put the students at great risk of being harassed, and abused. For instance, Londi highlighted that there were often fights especially when these students or tenants were intoxicated. Likewise, Casale et al. (2021) assert that substance abuse is one of the key factors that place individuals at risk of experiencing gender-based violence. In this way, female RAs were presented with extreme pressures to manage student residences that are ingrained with issues of harassment, prostitution, toxic masculinities, and gender-based violence which I discuss next.

5.6.3 Gender-based violence in the residences

As noted earlier in South African higher education spaces, particularly in student residences, there are prevalent acts of violence. In this study, I found that RAs had to deal with multiple acts of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). According to Anitha and Lewis (2018) GBV is violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex or gender identity which includes physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse among others. In chapter two, I presented a discussion of the famous cases in higher education institutions such as Zolile Khumalo from Mangosuthu University of Technology, and Nosiselo Mtebeni from the University of Fort Hare. There seems to be a rampant trend emerging from higher education institution spaces where female students are continuously abused by their partners. This is consistent with Mahlari et al. (2018) study which affirm that student residences have been described as one of the extreme GBV sites experienced mostly by women. Similarly, this study found female students to be victims of GBV, especially in intimate-partner relationships in student residences. As previously highlighted, drug and alcohol abuse appeared to be one of the significant causes of GBV and many violent practices in the residences. The participants noted:

“I experienced many cases of violence in the residence including GBV, the cases were a lot worse when students were drunk or high. At one point it was like I am watching a Yizo-yizo, it was just a mess.” (Londi)

“Most students suffered abuse from their partners, I received many incident reports from female students who were beaten up by their boyfriends because of certain accusations such cheating.” (Anele)

From the above extracts, it appears that apart from drug and alcohol abuse, GBV is fuelled by the power of toxic masculinities that are enacted in student residences. For instance, Anele shared in the above extract that the accusation of cheating was one of the recurring causes for GBV. This might suggest behaviours of insecurity and jealousy that prompt male partners to assert toxic masculinity. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) has been identified as one of the forms of extreme violence that men exert to prove their masculinity in South Africa (Isaacs, 2016; Sikweyiya & Shai, 2015; Stephenson et al., 2020). Likewise, in student residences, there have been increased cases emanating from the students' intimate partners, such as "older men" or partners who are not students. This is similar to Zolile Khumalo's case from the Mangosuthu University of Technology, who was allegedly shot by her boyfriend (non-student) inside the residence (Singh, 2020). The boyfriend did not stay at the residence, it was an outside affair but the shooting took place in the residence. The extreme acts of violence mentioned above suggest the urgent need to possibly review residence rules or policies that could enable students' relations to be monitored for safety purposes. For example, students may disclose their intimate partner relationships and consent for RAs and DSRA to intervene when necessary. Another solution could be to prohibit visitors/sleep-overs across all residences which will protect students from outside perpetrators. DSRA could also develop an alert or reporting tool which can enable students to report anonymously on any violent practices in the residences. The anonymous alert or reporting tool could work because students in this study were found to have a fear of reporting abusive partners. For instance, Kate and Hlubi note:

"It was difficult to assist because as much as I did know the students abused but since they did not report, I couldn't act upon it as an RA. I think they were afraid of being labelled victims." (Kate)

"The truth of the matter is, a lot was happening other than what was reported. I noticed that male students were also victims of GBV, especially from their intimate student partners but they did not report because of fear and stigma." (Hlubi)

Kate concurs with Hlubi, they both assert that GBV cases are more than what is reported in student residences. Hlubi, in the above extract, went further to share that male student have also been victims of GBV in her residence. This is important to mention because the literature suggests that men have been relatively discarded and ignored as GBV victims both in student residences and society at large. Thus, what emerges from the data is that there was certain fear and stigma associated with being a victim of abuse or GBV. Anitha and Lewis (2018) assert

that the stigma exacerbates the GBV impact and creates chances of experiencing additional violence. Likewise, in this study, it appears that the stigma resulted in many GBV cases being blind-sided and not reported to RAs. What also emerges from the data is that RAs and students have not fully been educated on GBV and its overarching issues. Londi and Kate note:

“There has not been any impactful GBV awareness and education in student residences, student do not understand the seriousness of GBV.” (Kate)

It appears that the lack of seriousness and attention given to GBV in student residences might be linked to the societal and normalized practices that are culturally or gender inclined. For instance, in a large part of our societies, GBV has been stereotypically regarded as a “lie”, “joke” and “non-existent” act. The data suggest that student residences as part of society have also adopted these stereotypical beliefs, which is a serious concern. The RAs expressed that female and male queer students felt marginalized because of the toxic masculinities and the patriarchal culture that existed in residences. As a result, RA had to negotiate an understanding of diversity and safety in student residences. For instance, this could happen through engagements such as women and men forums as earlier discussed in this chapter. Hlubi also highlights that she regularly inspected the building. She notes:

“The building supervisor and I did inspections regularly in the residence. We went into students and required proof of registration on regular basis, this security measure assisted us to ensure safety and that there are no squatters in the residence.” (Hlubi)

It appears that there were ongoing safety pressures that presented challenges for RA roles because of the diversity and complexity found in student residences. Additionally, there were other violent practices found in the residences which demanded RAs’ attention and intervention such as student protests. Hlubi’s inspection with the building supervisor seemed to be intended to check for non-residents and squatters. This seems to be premised on an understanding that students had to behave appropriately as they do not know when the next inspection could be. I discuss the dominating violence of student protests in the next section.

5.6.4 Student protests

There has been an increase of student protests in higher education institutions in South Africa for different reasons ranging from funding (#FreeEducation, #FeesMustFall), to accommodation issues (#PoorStudentResidences, #UnsafeStudentResidences) among others

(Mutekwe, 2017). For student residences in Durban, I found that the protests have been extremely dangerous and violent which included harmful acts such as the burning of property, and roadblocks. The participants note;

“Students mostly protested because of poor maintenance in the residence. There was this big protest which even aired on TV, students closed down and demolished the main road, they were complaining about bed bugs and Wi-Fi.” (Kate)

“Last year, we had a bit of a disturbance because our residence got renovated. So we did not have study rooms even during the exam time and my students decided to strike.” (Londi)

I found that lack of maintenance and poor service delivery from the building management was a challenge for RAs and students. It is concerning especially for issues such as Wi-Fi and study rooms, which should ideally enhance the academic experience of students in the residence. This affected the RAs because they too are students, as previously highlighted. Thus, the above-mentioned challenge suggests that the university or DSRA should look into the compliance of non-negotiable measures for a student residence such as functional Wi-Fi and study rooms. In this way, if building measures are suitable and conducive, it will curb some of the student protests. Londi shared that student protests have been about destroying and burning property to make the building management or DSRA suffer. However, the same property that students often destroy, or burn is the same property they live in together with RAs. In this way, the RAs face extreme pressures to control protests in order to avoid more disruption in residences such as negotiating order. On the other hand, in attempts to negotiate for order during the protests, it appears that RAs also put their lives at risk because of the dangers involved as stated by Anele in the extract below. Anele expressed the terrific experience of having to be the first person on the ground during the protests which appears to be dangerous. Anele notes:

“I had the most frightening experiences during the protests because students did anything and everything to destroy and get the attention of the managers. I risked my life so many times whilst trying to create calm and peace because students shout, break, burn and do many dangerous acts during the protests.” (Anele)

What emerges from the data is that RAs put their lives at risk while negotiating for peace and order during the protests. Londi on the other hand, negotiated together with her students to have support from the municipality and conducted a peaceful protest.

“We negotiated for a peaceful protest, the municipality and traffic officers were there to facilitate that it was safe for everyone and no one got injured or hurt.” (Londi)

Despite the RAs' aforementioned interventions and efforts to negotiate peaceful protests in Durban student residence and enhance living/learning conditions, it appears that it has been extremely difficult to maintain order in a busy area of Point. The RAs complained about the issue of excessive noise in Point. For instance, Anele described it as “never-ending” while Kate described the noise as a “24-hour headache”. Point is generally busy, people are moving day and night, and businesses close very late with some opening 24/7. What emerges from the data is that the excessive noise directly influenced the living/learning conditions of Durban Point student residences. It appears that Point is not suitable for a student residence. Over the past year, there have been unforeseen circumstances that threatened the living conditions in Point and other areas in KwaZulu-Natal, caused by the unrest. I present the KZN unrest discussion further in the next section.

5.6.5 The KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) July 2021 unrest

The KwaZulu-Natal unrest first took place in Durban CBD, where Point is located. The unrest involved the looting of goods, vandalizing and burning of property, and people killing each other in areas such as Phoenix, which is unfortunately close to the central town (Harding, 2021). As a result, the KZN unrest and looting heavily affected the student residences situated in Point Durban. I found that two of the RAs suffered from the unrest. It appears that the RAs experienced the unrest first-hand because it started in Durban CBD areas including Point (Harding, 2021). The participants highlighted:

“At Point, the unrest started right in front of our eyes. There was a building that was burning down next to ours, I was terrified for my life. I do not think I will ever forget that day, and I do not think my life will ever be the same again after experiencing that tragedy.” (Londi)

“I get goosebumps just thinking about the experiences of the looting. Not only was I scared that my studies would be disturbed and not finish my degree. I was also scared that I can potentially lose my life in that havoc, I was stressed throughout the unrest.” (Hlubi)

In the above extracts, Londi and Hlubi share their KZN unrest experiences which brought stress, trauma, and instability in their lives. According to Kunene (2021), the unrest in KZN created havoc and destabilised many parts of communities which left them unstable. Likewise, in this study, Londi and Hlubi shared that they experienced anxiety, stress, and trauma from the unrest effects. For instance, some of the students were also part of the looting, according to Londi in the extract below. The participants note;

“The saddest thing that disappointed me was to learn that even my students were part of looting. They then started stealing from each other in the building. Shortly after the unrest, we ran out of food. We had no food, we had no means to get food since there was no transport, petrol was not available and there was absolutely no movement!”
(Londi)

Londi’s extract shows that the looting escalated to the residences wherein students were now stealing from each other. This affected both students and the RAs because they eventually ran out of food. The widespread looting and torching of grocery stores in KwaZulu-Natal left most areas without access to basic groceries such as bread and milk (Mashego & Smith 2021). Point, as one of the central areas of Durban, was affected which may have prompted students to steal from each other in the residences. The above discussion of raises concerns about the security in the residences. It is problematic if student residences do not guarantee a sense of safety and belonging for participants, both as students and RAs.

Scholars such as Gopal and van Niekerk (2018) have reported on the challenges of inadequate, poor, and unsafe student residences in South African institutions. A national call was issued by the DHET (2011) Annual Report for the institutions to provide accessible, decent, safe, and academically conducive student accommodation. It has been a decade since DHET issued the above call, however, the emerging data in this study suggest that safety in student residences remains a serious challenge. The above statement suggests that female RAs manage complex student residences which are also unsafe, which in turn presents extreme challenges and risks. For instance, the unsafety of the student residences exposes female RAs’ vulnerability to acts of crime and violence among others. As earlier noted, participants’ experiences in student residences are a crucial part of their whole university experiences and should therefore be favourable. In addition, it appears that some RAs in the study experienced more complexities than others as they were presented with Covid-19 challenges while having to negotiate safety in the residences. I unpack the impact of Covid-19 on RAs in the next theme.

5.7 The impact of Covid-19 on RAs

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Covid-19 is an illness caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2) that spreads from person to person (National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020). This study found Covid-19 created uncertainties and confusion around the RA role and student residence operations. Subsequently, Covid-19 was found to have psychologically impacted the two female RAs of this study. The participants note:

“I was not sure of what I was doing to be quite honest. I was confused, the virus was new, no one knew for sure what it was and how to deal with it. I felt in a dark and I did not know what to do.” (Londi)

“Covid-19 came in as a shock and put our lives upside down. Everything was fast, the vastness of the disease itself and what it did to change our lives. Nothing was certain even in the residences. Students were scared, I was scared too but it was worse for them because they even had panic attacks.” (Hlubi)

The Covid-19 virus created uncertainty and fear of the unknown to everyone all over the world and this was also a case for two RAs in this study. Londi and Hlubi expressed that they were scared, confused, and fearful as nothing was certain. It appears that RAs and students suffered from panic attacks. One of the RAs, Londi shared that she tested positive for the virus, she told building managers and DSRA about her status but did not tell students because of the Covid-19 fear and stigma that was present in the residences. Londi highlights:

“So amidst the craziness, I got infected by the Covid-19 virus and I could not resume my duties at that time. The building management together with DSRA instructed me to isolate. I kept this from my students because there was a stigma associated with people who tested positive, I did not want to also scare them. During that time, I also lost some members of my family, it was very hard for me and I got depressed.” (Londi)

It emerges that Londi’s unfavourable and traumatic experiences happened all at once. For instance, she contracted the virus, was in isolation, and lost some of her family members, all in a short period which led to stress and depression. This speaks to the complex realities and experiences she faced as a result of the interaction between her identities, roles, and social context. For instance, she also highlighted the isolation challenges that were presented by the building managers who did not want to accommodate students with Covid-19. It appears that

since the hospitals and other quarantine places were full, the students on quarantine were kept in the residence rooms. Londi shared that building managers fought with her and demanded students who tested positive be removed from the residence. She notes:

"I fought for students because I had students who lived in far rural areas such as eNkandla, so it was insensitive to send them away to travel with the virus and risk infecting their families at home." (Londi)

What emerges from the data is that Londi negotiated with the building management to keep students in the residence who are in quarantine. From the above discussion, it is without a doubt that female RAs are faced with personal, academic, political, economic, and social pressures in and outside student residences. For instance, these include the earlier discussed RAs' experiences of bullying, harassment, gender discrimination, and gender-based violence among others. Collins (2000) asserts that the violence that many women experiences is often shaped by multiple dimensions of their identities. In this case, dimensions of gender, age, sex, and ethnicity among others, when they intersect, they produce complex experiences for participants in the student residences.

Additionally, what emerged from the data is that some of the RAs' negotiations and actions were informed by students' experiences. Essentially, as previously noted RAs are responsible for the management of student residences. In this way, they manage students, so some of their negotiations and interventions on residence issues were informed by what students experienced. For instance, I earlier discussed that student residences were found to be hubs of homophobia, toxic masculinity, gender biases, and many other marginal experiences which required RAs to negotiate their gender identities to survive and thrive, both as students and staff in student residences.

5.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has presented findings and discussion on the lived experiences of female RAs negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. The findings reveal that Durban student residences are sites of gender discrimination, toxic masculinity, and homophobia among others. It is important to note that student residences are spaces of living and learning, either during contact teaching or during the times of remote learning. However, Durban particularly Point area was found to be notorious and unfit for student residences. As

seen in the data presented in this chapter, the female RAs in Point student residences experienced multiple forms of challenges that they needed to address and while doing so, they had to negotiate their gender identities. For instance, they had to deal with issues of homophobia, violence, substance abuse, and crime. Moreover, they had to deal with gender prejudice issues relating to toxic masculinity such as bullying and harassment at the hands of their male counterparts. It is a serious concern that higher education spaces are still flooded with gender inequality practices that oppress women. This finding supports the importance of the study to explore and understand ways in which female RAs negotiate their gender identities at selected student residences in Durban.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented an analysis and discussion of the findings. Therefore, this chapter will discuss a summary of the key findings and provide a conclusion for the study. The purpose of this study was to explore female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. The study had two research questions and they are: (1) What are the female residence assistants' lived experiences at selected student residences in Durban? and (2) How do female residence assistants negotiate their gender identities at selected student residences in Durban? Thus, the summary of key findings intends to demonstrate how the study sought to respond to critical research questions. Thereafter, I will present the implications of the study on policy, practice, and research. This will be followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study and the conclusion.

6.2 Discussion of key findings

As previously stated, the study had two critical research questions that informed the focus of the study. Below I present a discussion on ways in which the findings responded to the key research questions of the study.

Research question 1: What are the female residence assistants' lived experiences at selected student residences in Durban?

In conducting the research, I found that the lived experiences of RAs in relation to their roles in student residences go above and beyond what is stipulated in their contracts. According to UKZN Student Services, the essence of the RA role entails managing a student residence which largely constitutes residence administration, operations, and management (UKZN Student Services, 2019). However, in this study, I found that their roles were extended to include parenting, mentoring, caregiving, and being role models to students. Interestingly, the role of being a mother and a sister seemed to be premised on their gender identities as female RAs. Likewise, Sharma et al., (2016) assert that women usually use words like "mother and sister" as a form of identity in a society. In turn, such words in society are associated with nurturing and caregiving roles both at home and to a certain extent, in workplace environments. Some of the reasons for RAs' extended roles was the fact that when there were problems, they were the first point of contact for students. In this way, the participants enacted the additional roles of

being psychologists and counsellors, to assist the students although they were not qualified or trained as professionals in these roles. This suggests that women are expected to perform nurturing and caregiving roles/activities in different spaces within society, because of their gender identities. In other words, the female RAs were expected to enact traditional gender roles that are stereotypically aligned to their identities such as mothering.

I found that the female RAs had multiple identities such as gender, age, class, and religion among others. When these identities intersected, the female RAs subsequently experienced pressure which in some cases led to additional roles, exhaustion, and overload. For instance, some RAs were empathic and emotionally attached to students' issues (academic and personal). In turn, this created additional emotional stress since RAs also had their own issues to deal with while supporting students. Some of the participants also dealt with students who were dishonest about their medical history and background. Participants then had to cross-check and verify students' information through a rigorous process that required additional time and administration. This was crucial because in case of emergency, participants were expected to have all the relevant information about the student. Although the participants made efforts to verify students' medical and background information, however, it was problematic because some of the students provided untruthful information or withheld information which created frustration for the participants. I found that the above challenges contributed to the participants' mental health and resulted to various challenges such as frustration, stress, and exhaustion in executing their roles as RAs.

In addition, the experiences of the participants were more complex considering the context and diversity in their student residences. Essentially, student residences are diverse spaces that have students who come from different backgrounds in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion among others (Martin & McGee, 2014). This means the participants had to draw from their multiple identities such as gender, sex, and age among others, to respond to students' diverse challenges. For some of the participants, they were not from Durban or the surroundings and they had to familiarise themselves with Durban. This extended the complexities experienced by these participants as they adjust to Durban's living conditions which were different from their home environment. The data suggested that there were implications on how they understood diversity when they first arrived in Durban and when they

were appointed as RAs. For instance, they experienced culture shock in the way things were done in the busy city of Durban; the people, culture, and lifestyle. On the other hand, participants were presented with diversity demands that they had to deal with in Durban student residences from the diversity of students. In this way, participants had to negotiate for inclusive and conducive spaces in student residences, suitable for living and learning. For instance, they created interventions that were educational and social to negotiate for diversity in student residences. Some of the participants organised and hosted wellness engagements as well as Women and Men Forums. Apart from the highlighted demands on diversity, it is worth noting that the participants had to meet their academic demands as they were also students at the same teacher-education institution selected as a site of investigation for this study.

Moreover, I found that there were extensive challenges and pressure for the participants, especially as females in diverse student residences which perpetuated gender prejudices and biases. For instance, some of the participants had the student population and tenants who privately leased their apartments within the same student residence building. Even though the participants were responsible for managing students from the selected institution but interaction with tenants was inevitable as they stayed together in the same building. The participants experienced discrimination from tenants because of their gender, age, and student status. For instance, some of the participants were told that they are young, female students and therefore no instruction will be taken from them. In this way, the participants felt marginalised because of the way tenants treated them on the basis of their gender, age, and student status. In light of the above discussion, it is, therefore, crucial to revise RAs' jurisdiction with private clients in student residences to promote favourable conditions for everyone. While the intervention of revising the jurisdiction of RAs, it appears that the experiences of the participants in this study were more complex because they are women and young. The complexities experienced by the participants speak to the interlocking systems that oppress women in social institutions as a result of their intersecting identities such as gender and age (Collins, 2019).

The participants also encountered challenges relating to intolerance because of the size and the large number of students in student residences. As previously mentioned earlier, participants managed residences that had students from different backgrounds and identities, for instance, gender, sexuality, age, religion, and class among others. This contributed to the magnitude of challenges relating to diversity and intolerance in student residences such as hostility, conflict, and homophobia. I found out that elements of intolerance and hostility were targeted especially to students belonging to the LGBTQI community. For instance, some LGBTQI students were

discriminated on basis of their sexual orientation; one roommate (identified as straight) allegedly prayed for the other roommate (identified as queer) to be saved from same-sex relations. Some male students who identified as heterosexual also did not want to stay in the same rooms with queer students. It appears as if student residences were somewhat embedded with traditional gender stereotypes which did not accept any difference outside the “norm” such as engaging in same-sex relations. “Through colonisation and apartheid, underpinned by Christianity, heterosexuality and gender inequalities and identities were normalised” (Bhana et al., 2019, p. 3). The above statement highlights the apartheid, religion (Christianity), and colonialism role on forced heterosexuality. In other words, the workings of religion, culture, gender, and other structural forms maintain homophobia and gender biases. Such forms of oppression discriminate against minority groups such as the LGBTQI community and women.

I also found that while the participants tried to negotiate for diversity and tolerance, they also experienced gender prejudices that resulted from the construction of masculinities within the residences. The findings showed that this was masculinities enacted by male RAs (colleagues to the participants) and male students. For instance, the participants were constantly undermined by the male RAs and this led to the participants wanting to prove themselves in executing their RA duties. In doing so, the participants experienced multiple encounters of harassment, abuse, and violence at the hands of their male counterparts. For instance, some of the participants experienced bullying while others experienced violation and harassment as a result of their sex and gender identities. It appears that men exercise their toxic masculinities to oppress women in student residences. This speaks to the workings of oppression that are confronted by women in higher education spaces because of their complex and various identities (Collins, 2019). Female RAs are therefore managing student residences at extremes times of harassment, abuse, and violence against women. It is quite concerning that in this day and age, higher education spaces which are presumed as transformed and change agents continue to be hubs of gender inequality and social injustices that marginalise women.

The findings also showed that the participants were undermined by postgraduate students and building managers on the basis of age. This brought more complexity for participants as they were not only undermined because of gender but age as well. For instance, the participants felt that their building managers and private tenants (a point I discussed earlier in detail) did not see them as RAs but as students, and in their view; students are problematic. Postgraduate

students viewed some of the participants as young and in turn assumed that participants cannot manage the student residences. This means that participants were undermined as a result of the assumptions associated with their identities such as gender, age, and student status. Similarly, Heilman (2012) argues that women have been presumed to be incompetent and in turn undermined in various social institutions. This relates to the traditional gender stereotypes and prejudices that oppress women in institutional environments, which were experienced by the participants in student residences. Likewise, Collins (2019) and Crenshaw (2013) asserts that women experience oppression because of the complexities brought by their multiple intersecting identities such as gender, age, sex, and ethnicity among others.

At the time when the participants were serving as RAs, they were also confronted with the extreme pressure of student protests in some of the Durban student residences. To highlight some of the protests, they were related to issues such as funding and accommodation related challenges. Subsequently, the participants experienced emotional trauma as they had to negotiate for order to control protests and avoid more disruption in residences. It appears that participants were one of the first people on the ground during the protests which put their lives at risk because of the dangers involved in the protests. The participants were exposing themselves to danger by trying to control the protests whilst students were chanting and burning tyres. Furthermore, protests were not the only forms of violence taking place in the Point area where most of the residences were located in. The participants also had to deal with students who appeared to be abusing drugs and alcohol who in turn returned to the residence and caused problems. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, Point is situated in the heart of Durban which is regarded as one of the most fast paced and busy areas in Durban town. Participants described Point to be notorious with acts of crime, substance abuse, and violence among others.

In the South African institutions, there has been an increasing occurrence of violent cases, especially gender-based violence (Mahlori et al., 2018). Also, in this study, participants had to deal with multiple acts of GBV, especially those emanating from intimate-partner relationships. It appears that GBV is somewhat fuelled by the exotic power of toxic masculinities that are enacted in student residences. In addition, some of the participants had to deal with students who were engaged in acts of prostitution and relationships with tenants and older men. I found that economic and social pressures resulted in some of the female students engaging in transactional relationships (as per the participants' observations). This presented extreme pressures for participants as they had to negotiate ways to address these exotic practices to protect students' rights and dignity while ensuring safety in the student residence. For instance,

they supported students through residence programs and forums. The above discussion shows that participants had to manage student residences that are embedded with issues of harassment, alleged prostitution, toxic masculinities, and gender-based violence among others.

In the past two years, there have been also unforeseen circumstances that threatened the lives of not only the participants in this study but everyone around the world. This study found that Covid-19 created uncertainty and instability for some of the participants, as it brought significant changes to the RA role and student residence operations. As a result, the Covid-19 impact was found to have affected the participants personally and as RAs. Uncertainties were even more complex for the participants as they experienced the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) July 2021 unrest. The findings suggest that the July 2021 unrest brought stress, trauma, and instability to their lives. The above discussion suggests participants were faced with personal, academic, political, economic, and social pressures in and outside student residences.

Considering the magnitude of the challenges experienced by the participants in student residences, the findings show that there was not sufficient and relevant support for the participants. Some of the support mechanisms they required included emotional support which appeared crucial, particularly in managing the residences in times of crises, uncertainty, and the overall intolerance. Instead, the findings indicate that DSRA was largely interested in residences' administration, reports, and statistics. This was problematic because participants needed in-depth and close monitoring support as a result of their traumatic experiences, especially with the KZN unrest and the impact of Covid-19. The implications of this lack of support increased the vulnerability of participants. In other words, participants become vulnerable and exposed to subordination which may affect their roles, both as students and RAs. This reinforces the multiple oppression that overlaps to produce marginal experiences for women in social institutions as a result of their intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 2015).

From the above discussions, it shows that participants experienced multiple forms of challenges that they needed to address and while doing so, they had to negotiate their gender identities. The findings of this study paint a gloomy image of residential spaces in higher education, particularly an image that is dominated by elements of an unjust society such as; gender inequalities (by students and male RA colleagues) and prejudice against sexual diversity and ageism. In the next section, I discuss the second research question in this study.

Research Question 2: How do female residence assistants negotiate their gender identities at selected student residences in Durban?

In the previous section, I discussed key findings relating to female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. Herein I shift to focus on the second research question as stated above. Amongst other things that I discussed previously was the gender inequality and deliberate undermining of the participants by their male counterparts. As female RAs, they encountered multiple experiences of subordination and oppression such as being undermined, violated, and harassed. Likewise, Crenshaw (2015) argues that power dynamics in relation to gender and sex oppress previously advantaged groups such as women. Even though participants experienced subordination from their male counterparts, they still had to negotiate their gender identities to ensure smooth work relations. For instance, the participants highlighted that they were tolerant towards the advances, insults, and violations experienced that they experienced from their male counterparts, for the sake of smooth work relations. This however had several implications; the participants highlighted that negotiating tolerance, respect, and equality with the male RAs was easy, considering the gender biases and imbalances that existed in student residences.

I also found that in the absence of relevant training especially on issues affecting the broader society which are in most cases mirrored in the student residences such as; discrimination on the basis of socioeconomic class, sexual diversity, and gender among others. As noted earlier, the participants decided to be creative and proactive in managing student residences of this kind. For instance, they created practical engagements and forums where they provided diversity and safety awareness in the residences. Most of their engagements were educational with the intention to promote gender equality, diversity, and safety in student residences. One of the participants even organised sexuality education classes that were intended to establish peace and tolerance towards diversity within the student residences. The findings indicate that the participants adopted an intersectional approach in their interventions. For instance, they understood the complexities brought by multiple identities (gender, sexuality, class, religion, etc) that oppresses minority groups such as the LGBTQI community and women.

Interestingly, the above discussion also highlights the sense of agency displayed by the participants in this study. Arguably, other RAs could have chosen to be ignorant or homophobic since they are inadequately trained, especially on critical diversity issues. This means the participants in this study chose to be assertive. For instance, they created interventions and engagements aimed at addressing diversity challenges in the student residences. It is worth mentioning that participants' interventions also included the execution of residence life programs to develop students academically, personally, and socially. The intention of these

programs was to also engage in and address critical issues affecting students such as crime, substance abuse, and violence. For instance, participants worked with support services such as the Campus HIV and AIDS Support Unit (CHASU), Risk Management Services (RMS), and student Counselling Unit among others.

In addition, the proximity of the student residences to the Durban, Point area created an inevitable probability for criminal activities associated with drugs, and alcohol abuse to reach the residences. This means that female RAs, in addition to negotiating their gender identities, they also had to manage the residences to ensure safety for themselves, and fellow students. The RAs were confronted with pressures of crime, substance abuse, and violence in student residences. In dealing with such, the participants tried to enforce rules that students get checked at the front gate but this was not helpful as it is alleged by some of the participants that students tended to use tenants to enter with drugs and alcohol as they (tenants) were not checked at the front gate. The above statement raises further questions on whether or not the setting of having students and tenants in the same building is suitable for a student residence? The findings show that it is somewhat difficult for RAs to control the tenants because they have no authority over them, which in this case, increases the cases of drug and alcohol abuse in the residences leading to distractions and violence. Other measures that were employed by the participants were to rely on and request the assistance of security personnel and to monitor the camera surveillance systems for any incidents or suspicions.

Despite the participants' efforts to negotiate for safety in Durban student residences and enhance living and learning conditions, the findings showed that it was extremely difficult to achieve such especially in a notorious area of Point. In other words, this study found Durban, Point to be an unsuitable area for a student residence as it compromises the primary objectives of living and learning. Subsequently, the participants demonstrated agency, commitment, and resilience towards negotiating for diversity, gender equality, tolerance, and safety in student residences. This was despite the gender discrimination and inequalities that they experienced. Findings suggest that participants negotiated their gender identities in ways that fostered respect for diversity, equality in student residences and constantly holding their male counterparts accountable.

The above discussion has shown how the findings responded to the critical research questions of the study. Subsequently, this has implications for policy, practice, and research which I discuss next.

6.3 Implications

The previous section presented a discussion of the main findings which were seeking to respond to the key research questions. Herein I discuss the implications that the findings of the study have on policy, practice, and research.

6.3.1 Implications on Policy

The findings showed that the participants experienced numerous gender imbalances as a result of their gender identity. Furthermore, the participants experienced traumatic encounters such as Covid-19 and the KZN unrest, which had a significant impact on their wellbeing and academic performance. The above findings have implications for policy, there is a need to develop a policy/program that will promote the overall wellbeing of residence assistants which will encompass psychosocial support and facilitate gender education in student residences. This can promote mental wellness and gender equality within the residences.

The findings also showed that student residences are hubs of homophobia that discriminate against the minority of queer students. This implies that there is a need to revise existing policies or develop new policies that seek to promote greater social inclusion and acceptance of queer students in higher education spaces. These policies should also specify the strategic approaches (practical) to be taken in addressing discriminatory practices in higher education spaces, especially in student residences. Additionally, Judge and Nel (2008) assert that continued discrimination, stigmatization, and mistreatment of gay and lesbian people is a threat to South Africa's fledgling democracy. This means homophobia is not only a challenge in student residences but a nationwide crisis. As a result, Francis and Msibi (2011) suggest a need for holistic modules that will not only teach about sexual orientation but will also explore the interconnections between sexual orientation and other forms of identification. This will hopefully address issues around homophobia and heterosexism in higher education spaces and communities at large.

Bullying, harassment, and violation were among the extreme challenges that participants experienced. It appears that Gender-based violence practices continue to dominate student residences, especially toward minority groups such as women and the LGBTQI community. Although the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has developed numerous policy frameworks over the years, I suggest that policymakers should review old and outdated policies that are no longer working to promote inclusive and safe spaces. For instance, the

world is constantly changing and so are student residences with complex diversity challenges that present cases of bullying, harassment, and violence among others. While most higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa have adopted the “Anti-Gender based Violence” policy, the extent of these policies working “in reality” is questionable, considering the prevalence of violence in student residences (Gutura & Nunlall, 2020; Mahlori et al., 2018). There is an urgent need to implement the policies in a creative and efficient way. For instance, the DHET could develop measuring and monitoring tools to assess the compliance and commitment of HEIs in ensuring safe spaces that accommodate diversity.

6.3.2 Implications on Practice

The findings indicated that there is a lack of training and support, particularly on psychological and emotional aspects. This is a concern, especially with the traumatic experiences that the participants experienced such as the Covid-19 impact, and the 2021 July unrest that affected KZN and Gauteng. Naidu (2020) states that the Covid-19 impact includes mental health presentations such as post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorders. Likewise, a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (2020) reported that 33% of South Africans were depressed, while 45% were fearful, and 29% were experiencing loneliness due to the psychological, and social predicaments in South Africa. Mental health appears to be a huge challenge not only in the institution of higher learning spaces but also to the society at large. Apart from the psychological and mental health related support, the findings revealed insufficient and to an extent irrelevant training on diversity issues for RAs. Since RAs are responsible for managing student residences, I propose that they should receive extensive training on diversity (inclusive of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality). The findings revealed that diversity education is not only a need for RAs, but it is also significant for general students in higher education. Institutions across the country have made inroads in this aspect but there is a need to revisit the content and engagements on diversity. Scholars such as Bhana et al. (2019), Kumashiro (2000) and Reygan and Steyn (2017) have been writing about the importance of diversity and the different ways in which diversity can be taught and enhanced in higher education.

Furthermore, considering the concerns that the participants raised about the lack of uniformity in university-owned and leased student residences. I would suggest for DSRA to be more consistent in implementing uniformity towards management and operations, across all student residences in the university as well as private accommodation. There has been a prevalence of

student cases taking place in private accommodations which are often not managed by the university but in turn, do affect the university. In my view, a centralised system across all student residences (owned/leased/private) could improve control, cohesion, and safety in the residences. This may possibly lift off the weight and pressure that the RAs are currently facing in ensuring safety in student residences, especially with the support structure.

6.3.3 Implications on research

Given that student residences in Durban (context) are situated in one of the most violent cities in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2021). The nature of Durban as a geographical area particularly the Point area exerts pressure on RAs as they have to deal with crime, substance abuse, and other forms of violence especially female RAs. In light of the above finding, there should be more research looking at RAs' experiences in other contexts, cities and different types of universities. While this study has given insights on lived experiences of female RAs, there is still a gap on research that focus on the lived experiences of RAs within the queer community. Therefore, future research could look into the lived experiences of RAs within the queer community. Additionally, future research could focus on the ways in which the lived experiences of RAs influence their academic performance as they are also students.

6.4 Limitations of the study

As previously stated, this study focused on female RAs' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. This study focused on four female RAs only and the student residences that these female RAs managed were from a selected teacher-education in KwaZulu-Natal. This means that the study did not consider other RAs outside the selected student residences in Durban nor engaged with other RAs from other institutions. Having discussed the main findings, implications on policy, practice, and research as well as the limitations of this study, I wish to draw the study to an end and present the conclusion in the next section.

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has presented a discussion of the main findings, implications on policy, practice, and research as well as the limitations of the study. In essence, this study aimed

to explore the lived experiences of female RAs on negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. Understanding the lived experiences of how women negotiate their gender identities in higher education spaces is crucial to understanding gender dynamics and promoting practices of gender equality. The study revealed that student residences were spaces where the participants felt undermined, discriminated, and violated on the basis of gender and age. Subsequently, the lack of training particularly on diversity contributed to acts of intolerance, harassment, discrimination, and violence. This lack requires urgent attention because institutions of higher learning ought to be spaces that promote diversity and gender equality practices which in turn extend to the realms of the society.

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Appendix 1

Informed Consent Form

University of KwaZulu-Natal
Edgewood Campus
Private Bag X03
Ashwood
3605
April 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

My name is Phakamile Mazibuko, I am a Master's student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood Campus in Pinetown. You are kindly invited to participate in my study titled: Negotiating Gender identities in Higher Education: Experiences of female residence assistants at selected student residences in Durban. The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of female residence assistants' lived experiences of negotiating gender identities at selected student residences in Durban. The data of the study will be used for this degree purposes only, your name and other details will be kept confidential.

The study is expected to enroll four female residence assistants as participants. If you agree to participate, I would like to humbly request you to complete an unstructured/informal letter and also have a dialogue with me in a semi-structured interview of about 60 minutes. I intend to gain an in-depth understanding of your lived experiences on negotiating gender identities as a female residence assistant at a selected student residence in Durban.

Should you wish to contact me, my supervisor, or the UKZN Ethics office, please see details below:

Researcher	Supervisor	Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration
Name: Phakamile Mazibuko Qualification: B.Ed. Honours Cell: 079 953 9498 Email: 215029257@stu.ukzn.ac.za	Name: Mr Vusi Msiza Qualification: M.Ed. Telephone: 031 260 3755 Email: msizav@ukzn.ac.za	Research Office, Westville Campus Govan Mbeki Building Private Bag X 54001 Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Kindly note the following:

1. Your confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed; you will only be identified by your pseudonym (not your real name).
2. Participation is voluntary, you have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research at any time. You will not be penalized for any above action.
3. All your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality
4. There are no right or wrong answers, please respond to each question in a manner that will reflect your personal opinion.
5. The interview may take approximately 60 minutes and under no circumstances will you be forced to disclose information you do not wish to disclose.
6. Your participation is purely for academic purposes and there are no monetary benefits involved when participating in this study.
7. The collected data will be used for purposes of this research only and it will be kept in a safe place after the research for five years.
8. If you consent to be interviewed, will

Yes	No
-----	----

 you allow the interview to be recorded with an audio device (please tick):

Thank you.

DECLARATION

I _____ (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to participating in the research project.

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

I provide consent for the researcher to audio-record my interview.

Signature of the Participant

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

Appendix 2

LETTER WRITING

Dear Participant

Kindly write an informal letter to me, reflecting on your experiences of negotiating gender identities as a female residence assistant at a student residence in Durban. There are no specifications in terms of grammar, structure, language, and length of this letter. You can share as much as you would like. Your privacy and anonymity are guaranteed.

This letter intends to help activate your memory in recalling your experiences of negotiating gender identities as a female RA, in preparing for the in-depth interview sessions to follow in this study.

Thank you.

Appendix 2

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Details of the participant:	
Date and time:	

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Session One

1. Kindly tell me about yourself, your name, surname and where do you come from?
2. Are you doing your postgraduate studies or working now?
3. If studying, how are your studies going OR how is it working, in these unprecedented times of Covid-19?
4. You have led as a female residence assistant at a student residence of a Higher Education Institution; tell me about your interests on why did you want to become a residence assistant?
5. What is your general understanding of gender identity?
6. Do you think you were placed at your residence based on your gender identity or your capability? Why?

Session Two

7. Kindly describe in detail, what were your experiences of negotiating gender identities at your student residence in Durban as a female residence assistant?
8. How was it like to be a student and RA simultaneously in a Durban student residence? Were you affected academically, personally, and socially? How so?
9. What challenges did you face in negotiating identities in this type of student residence? How did you feel and how did you cope/react? What was your responsive behavior?
10. How did you negotiate gender identities at your student residence? What informed your negotiation?
Also, integrate content from the letter.

Session Three

11. Durban is known for violent crimes and protests, did you (directly or indirectly) experience any of these issues? How did you feel? How did they impact your work?
12. Did you get support from students, RAs, DSRA, University, or others to assist you?
13. If so, what kind of support did you receive? Was it helpful or not? Why?
14. Do you think these experiences would have been different if you were a male RA? Why?
15. How did you address gender-related challenges?

During the interview, I will use probing questions to gain in-depth and detailed information.

Appendix 3



24 June 2021

Miss Phakamile Mazibuko (SN 215029257)
School of Education
College of Humanities
Edgewood Campus UKZN
Email: 215029257@stu.ukzn.ac.za msizav@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Miss Mazibuko

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 degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Negotiating Gender identities in Higher Education: Experiences of female residence assistants at selected student residences in Durban."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting semi-structured interviews with female residence assistants (Taking in account the regulations imposed during lockdown ie restrictions on gatherings, travel, social distancing etc. Zoom, Skype or telephone interviews recommended) on the Edgewood 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 the '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

DR KE CLELAND: REGISTRAR

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

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Appendix 4



18 September 2021

Miss Phakamile Sethabile Mazibuko (215029257)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Miss Mazibuko,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003151/2021

Project title: Negotiating Gender identities in Higher Education: Experiences of female residence assistants at selected student residences in Durban.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 04 August 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) 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/departments for a period of 5 years.

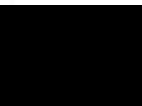
This approval is valid until 18 September 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

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

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 5

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Circle Park
KLOOF
3610

Phone 031 – 7075912
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E-mail:
dr1govender@telkomsa.net
sathsgovender4@gmail.com

Dr Saths Govender

27 JUNE 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

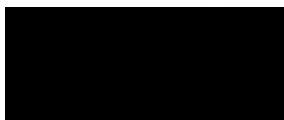
LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

This serves to inform that I have read the final version of the dissertation titled:

Negotiating Gender identities in Higher Education: Experiences of female residence assistants at selected student residences in Durban,
by Phakamile Mazibuko, student no.215029257.

To the best of my knowledge, all the proposed amendments have been effected and the work is free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am of the view that the quality of language used meets generally accepted academic standards.

Yours faithfully



DR S. GOVENDER

B Paed. (Arts), B.A. (Hons), B Ed.
Cambridge Certificate for English Medium Teachers
MPA, D. Admin.

Appendix 6

Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 21-Jun-2022 11:37 AM CAT

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Masters thesis By Phakamile Mazibuko

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