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Title:

**THE ROLE OF FACEBOOK IN A SURVIVOR'S POST-ASSAULT LIFE: RAPE ON  
CAMPUSES, WOMEN ACTIVISTS, AND MENTAL HEALTH**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The rise of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) has raised concerns about the negative impact social media platforms, and in particular Facebook, has on their users. Research has linked the excessive use of Facebook with mental health challenges such as loneliness, depression, and stress. This research examined how Yolanda Dyantyi, a gender rights activist registered as a student from 2015 to 2017 at Rhodes University, used Facebook as an outlet following the #RUreferencelist protests and her subsequent permanent exclusion from the institution for her role in the protests. The study explored Dyanti's use of Facebook, examining in particular her ongoing activism, her mental health challenges, and her struggles to re-establish herself in a community after the exclusion from Rhodes. The study employed an intersectional feminist theoretical framework and drew on a qualitative content analysis, a semi-structured interview, and the scroll back method to review the Facebook posts she had made. A thematic analysis of the data showed that Dyantyi is a multifaceted, and evolving Facebook user and contrary to existing research her prolific use of Facebook has had positive effects on her mental health and has enabled her to build social capital. The study suggests that activism is an important component to research alongside studies of mental health on such media platforms.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The proposed research aims to examine how Yolanda Dyantyi, a gender rights activist, registered as a student from 2015 to 2017 at Rhodes University, used Facebook as an outlet following the #RUreferenceList protests at Rhodes University. The main objective of this study is to examine how Facebook can contribute to positive mental health of its users. Dyantyi was chosen as the research subject because of how she was a prolific Facebook user sharing her life struggles after her permanent exclusion at the institution. This thesis will explore how Dyantyi used her Facebook to amplify her voice, reinscribe herself in society, build social capital, continue her activism and for mental health purposes. These five aspects of her Facebook use cannot be disaggregated. They intersect and influence each other in this person's life. Therefore, this thesis does not focus solely on mental health but integrates it with these other factors.

This chapter set out to introduce Dyantyi: her upbringing, school/academic life, her activism, and her experiences of using Facebook throughout the years from when she began.

## 1.2 YOLANDA DYANTYI

### 1.2.1 Born an activist

Yolanda Dyantyi was born on 13 May 1997 in Johannesburg, she was raised by her grandmother who was a live-in domestic worker for a white family in one of Johannesburg's suburban areas. She stayed with her grandmother in the white family's home which she later realised had influenced their relationship. Dyantyi believes their living arrangement had an impact in the transfer or cultural exchange between her grandmother's way of disciplining and the white family's ways which they were exposed to, i.e. how the white family raised their children, which ultimately influenced how her grandmother raised her.

My upbringing was definitely influenced by the environment that I grew up in, I grew up having exposure to an alternative of looking at completely different ways of looking at family, white people and how they were raising their children. My grandma obviously had to then perhaps, let go of certain things, indlela akhuliswe ngayo (how she was raised) and how she raised her own child, who's my mother.

Growing up, Dyantyi was a curious, confident, and very talkative child. Unlike in most households in the black community where a child is disciplined when they talk back.

When I was a child, my grandmother talked to me like I was an adult, she gave me room to exchange ideas.

As a child Dyantyi was afforded the opportunity to ‘ukuphikisa’ (back-chat), deemed as being rude and disrespectful, which a lot of children do not get away with. She would always be reprimanded for ukuphikisa but she was listened to regardless. Dyantyi also got into a lot of trouble at school because of back-chatting to teachers.

And ‘into yam yokuphikisa’ (my habit of back-chatting) was a trait I had even at school, and this is like in grade three or four, my teachers would write that in the report that I am a good student, but the problem is that I back-chat. My grandmother always got the same report every year.

Dyantyi has always been an individual who’s headstrong and an activist at heart.

If I strongly believe in something, I want to see through it to the end or fight for it. I've always been that person who stood up for things that she strongly believes in, it is that aspect of being an advocate or an activist against things. I think I've carried that sense of that whole thing from a young age.

### **1.2.2 School / academic life**

Dyantyi was a popular child both in primary and high school, she was involved in a lot of activities such as swimming. She was a good student, who was on top of her grades, she was always amongst the best between the top 10 or 15. Her favourite subject in primary school, which she was also awarded for, was computer studies.

I was privileged to know how to operate and be introduced to technology like a computer and the internet from a really young age like literally from grade one.

This was because of her proximity to whiteness as she grew up as a domestic workers’ child, staying in the white family’s home.

They had computers in their home of which then I had access too, so, I was way ahead of my classmates back at my school in the township.

Her proximity to whiteness had a positive outcome on her studies.

### Early Facebook experience

Consequent to her exposure to technology and the internet at a young age in primary school, Dyantyi started using Facebook in 2009 when she was in grade seven (standard five).

I was a child; I was 12 when I got exposed to Facebook.

She acknowledges that the way she was using Facebook back then has evolved to how she uses the medium now. However, she maintains that even though she evolved in how she uses Facebook, some things remain the same.

I think you will probably find a lot of questionable things when you scroll back on my Facebook timeline, things that are being said by a 12-year-old. But it's more or less still the same, just to express myself and engage and I think throughout this past 10 or 11 years a lot has changed since I have been on Facebook.

Alluding to her level of consciousness regarding her use of Facebook, Dyantyi asserts that:

Back then I'd use the platform for personal reasons but also for my politics over the years and which when I look back, I'd like to think I wasn't talking about gender-based violence.

Dyantyi's level of consciousness has been evolving over the years, consequently influencing her use of Facebook from being an 'enabler' to being an activist against patriarchal values because on 12 April 2013 when she was in grade eleven (standard nine), Dyantyi posted the following on her Facebook:

I value myself as a woman, I know I won't fall easy to these biased, critical statements from men, EVER!!! It's about high time women did the same thing too!

This post seems to be reflecting her natural activism side and a feminism which she might not have been aware of at the time, from affirming herself as a woman and calling out men.

## Dreams and goals after high school

Initially, Dyantyi's goal after finishing high school was to become a radio personality. However, things did not go according to her plans.

I was fascinated by TV and radio but obviously wanted to be educated and get a job, I was also interested in politics, I wanted to do a radio course, but that didn't happen.

Her grandmother refused, insisting that Dyantyi apply to go to a university and get a degree, Dyantyi applied for a place to study at Rhodes University.

### **1.2.3 Coming to Rhodes University**

Dyantyi was accepted to study at Rhodes University for the 2015 academic year. Historically a white institution, Rhodes is a small university situated in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown) in the Eastern Cape province with a population of about 8 000 students. It has a diversity of students from different races, cultures, religions, backgrounds, and classes. Dyantyi enrolled for drama in politics and international relations and philosophy.

I applied at Rhodes because it was far away from home, I was always looking into a varsity that was far away outside of Johannesburg. I told myself if I'm going to have a varsity experience, let it be exactly that in a different environment.

## The rape

On 31 May 2015, four months after being enrolled at Rhodes University, Dyantyi went out for drinks to Revelation's restaurant situated at Pepper Grove Mall in Makhanda with a friend who was also a fellow student. Upon arrival at the establishment, they bumped into two male students who were also from Rhodes University and acquaintances of Dyantyi's friend. The friend introduced them, and they decided to join them and proceeded to drink together. According to Dyantyi, her memory of that night begins to fade after she came back from the bathroom. She had left her drink at the table with the two male students.

I woke up the next morning, not knowing how I got to my res, and I noticed that the dress I wore the previous night had semen stains on it which shocked me. I texted my friend to ask how I got to my res, she told me that one of the male Rhodents drove me back to res.

I asked for his cellphone number because I wanted to inquire about the events of that night leading up to him driving me back to res as I couldn't remember anything, I spoke to him on WhatsApp, and he told me that 'we had sex' inside his car in the parking lot outside Wimpy restaurant which is also at the Pepper Grove Mall vicinity a few metres away from Revelations.

While trying to process this, the male student revealed more about the events of that night, He also confronted me for 'having sex' with another male student, who he was friends with and whom I had apparently met at a house party later that same night, which I was also shocked to find out.

Investigating further and trying to recall these events, Dyantyi requested the friend's cellphone number.

I also got in contact with that guy on WhatsApp to ask him and he confirmed that 'we had sex' on campus at the Great Field (Rhodes main sports field) which I could not recall, I could not even recognise that guy's face on his WhatsApp avatar.

Dyantyi asserts that she has gone out with friends before, drank and became drunk, but she would still recall events of the previous night, this was a first for her. She therefore believes that she was drugged by the first male student, blacked out and subsequently taken advantage of and raped by both men as she did not consent to having sex with either of those two men.

### **1.3 SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES**

Research reveals that sexual violence towards women is a global phenomenon and it is commonly high on university campuses (Phipps and Smith, 2012). Recent research also reveals that rape statistics in South Africa are amongst the highest globally (Macleod et al, 2018). In 2017, there were 48 rape incidents reported in South African universities (Sobuwa, 2018). The highest number of rape cases were recorded from the following universities: University of Cape Town with nine cases, Walter Sisulu University with seven cases, Tshwane University of Technology with six cases, Nelson Mandela University with five cases and the University of Johannesburg with four cases (Sobuwa, 2018). In March 2019, academics from all over South African universities wrote to the Minister of Higher Education and Training accentuating the prevalence of gender-based violence and sexual harassment on campuses (Retief, 2019). The Minister responded by appointing

a task team to assist in preventing the consistent plague of sexual harassment and sexual violence at universities (Retief, 2019).

### **1.3.1 Rhodes women students act against sexual violence on campus**

University students have for the longest time in history fought against campus rapes around the world, mainly through protesting (Warshaw, 2019). Therefore, the 2016 protests by South African university students against sexual violence towards women were aimed at combating the scourge of rape in university campuses and society at large (Macleod et al., 2018). It was also an outcry by women students who felt they were failed by university management in handling rape cases, demanding that university management ameliorate their ways of dealing with this violence on campuses (Macleod et al., 2018).

Following the lack of confidence in the universities' and the justice system's inability to successfully prosecute rape cases on campus, Rhodes University women students, in an attempt to get management's attention to change the rape policies on campus, organised themselves and formed a group called Chapter 2.12, coined by Rochelle Jacobs a student at Stellenbosch University at the time (Chengeta, November 2017). The campaign's primary purpose was to put up posters on university campuses to shame the university for protecting perpetrators over victims of sexual violence. Chapter 2.12 was reference to the section of the Bill of Rights, which guarantees the right to safety. Dyantyi was also part of the chapter 2.12 organisation.

During the week of 11 April 2016, the Chapter 2.12 organisation went ahead and placed posters on the wall of the Rhodes library (Macleod et al., 2018). These posters revealed statements that were allegedly made by management to the victims of sexual violence when they went to report their cases (e.g., "Are you sure you want to proceed; you will ruin his career") (Macleod et al., 2018). The campus security at Rhodes, named Campus Protection Unit (CPU), removed these posters, but they were later replaced. Women students accused the university management of trivialising rape by not taking serious action against reported perpetrators and instead protecting the perpetrators (Macleod et al., 2018 and Gouws, 2018).

### Using Facebook to name and shame rapists

After the women students at Rhodes felt unheard or not listened to, they then opted to use Facebook to fight back by naming and shaming the alleged rapists (Chengeta, November 2017). On Sunday 17 April 2016, an anonymous post appeared on the RU Queer Confessions, Questions and Crushes Rhodes University's Facebook page with the hashtag #RUreferenceList (Chengeta, November 2017). The post simply named 11 men (former and then-current students) but was understood immediately to be naming rapists, one of Dyantyi's alleged rapists also appeared on the #RUreferenceList. The term 'reference list' refers to the academic reference list which students are obliged to supply as evidence when writing their academic essays (Macleod et al., 2018). The post spoke to the bafflement young women felt as to how the university was strictly monitoring plagiarism but was not applying similar sanctions against perpetrators of rape. This "list" thus initiated a nationwide debate around rape culture on university campuses across the country (Macleod et al., 2018).

Rhodes management called for the removal of the 'reference list' posted on Facebook, warning students that accusing the 11 alleged rapists without formal charges being laid was a violation of human rights (Whittles, 2016). However, the women students were adamant that the men whose names were on the list were notorious around campus for being sexual perpetrators and that the university was not doing anything about that (Gouws, 2018).

#### **1.3.2 #RUreferenceList protests**

Following the release of this list, a group of women students mobilised and organised themselves and then followed a five-hour demonstration around campus (Chengeta, November 2017). The demonstration first took off at the Student Representative Council (SRC) offices in the Students' Union Building, then proceeded to the various male residences, Jan Smuts, Goldfields, Calata, Cullen Bowels and Graham (Chengeta, November 2017). Those involved in the protest, argues Macleod et al., (2018) were attempting to find and confront the students who were on the list and demand an explanation of why their names were on that list. Macleod et al., (2018, 83) assert that:

What happened next is a matter of dispute between the management of the University and the students concerned. What is known is that the men in question were taken out of their residences ("kidnapped" according to management; "encouraged" according to protesting

students), surrounded by a crowd of women who shamed them openly for a good part of the night.

The events that night led to two weeks of protests and academic shutdown, students disrupted classes, women organised naked protests, the university access routes were barricaded, and nighttime vigils were held by students who were also joined by the university staff, “the #RUreferenceList protest took place within the context of high levels of gender-based violence nationally” (Macleod et al., 2018, 84). Essentially, the protests resembled a climatic point of constant complaints by women students at Rhodes about the scourge of sexual violence on campus, “a collective body of students – many of them Black womxn, many of them queer, many of them fallists – had decided to act upon a social knowledge and to break the silence which maintains rape culture” (Chengeta, November 2017).

In response to the protesting students, Rhodes management summoned the South African Police Services (SAPS) to campus and got an interdict to stop the protests:

Police entered the campus and used rubber bullets, tear gas and pepper spray to disperse students. By Wednesday 20 April, management took out an interdict against protesting students and those associating themselves with the protests. (Macleod et al., 2018)

This seemed like a strategy by Rhodes management to silence protesting students, “Rhodes sought a wide-ranging final order clamping down on protests against rape and sexual violence, despite admitting that they are “prevalent” on its campus” (SERI, December 2016).

#### Dyantyi’s involvement in the #RUreferenceList protests

Taking into consideration Dyantyi’s upbringing; her feisty personality, back-chatting character trait, fighting spirit and her innate activism, as someone who grew up questioning her seniors (grandmother) and people in authority (teachers), standing up for what she believed in and not letting anything go without a fight, her involvement in the #RUreferenceList protests comes as no surprise. She was in the forefront of the protests and deeply involved in the activism. Maanda Makwarela (2020) wrote that:

Dyantyi is a symbol of opposition to gender-based violence and rape culture 365 days a year. In refusing to accept the status quo, she embodies the bravery that young women are encouraged to possess. As a country, we have to ask if we value the sacrifices made by

protesters like Dyantyi, who force us to examine uncomfortable realities and help to spur change.

During the #RUreferenceList protests, Facebook played a pivotal role in Dyantyi's activism as she was constantly posting during the protests, giving updates about the protests, creating awareness about the pervasiveness of sexual violence on campus, encouraging other students to engage in the discourse on sexual violence, calling out Rhodes management for not punishing rape perpetrators, calling out heterosexual men for their complicity, and pushing the feminism narrative in fighting the patriarchal system which was looming behind the pervasive sexual violence on campus. Not only did Dyantyi fight the persistent rape on campus to dismantle rape culture, but it was also personal for her because she was also a rape survivor.

### **1.3.3 The aftermath of #RUreferenceList protests**

The university management deemed Yolanda Dyantyi, Dominique McFall and Naledi Mashishi to be the ringleaders of the protests and Dyantyi and McFall were charged by the institution and found guilty of kidnapping, insubordination and contravening the student disciplinary code (Pather and Smit, 2017). Mashishi left the institution before being charged. Dyantyi and McFall were permanently excluded from Rhodes and their academic records expunged (Pather and Smit, 2017). Dyantyi was expelled from Rhodes in November 2017, two exams away from finishing her degree. Makwarela (2020) asserts that:

Yolanda Dyantyi was expelled for life from Rhodes University for her role in a protest against GBV on campus, and her transcripts were marked 'Unsatisfactory Conduct: Student found guilty of assault, kidnapping, insubordination, and defamation. She would have been the first person in her family to earn a university degree.

Following this, Dyantyi ended up completely stripped of everything. She became homeless, jobless, and struggled to navigate life financially. Makwarela (2020) postulates that:

Dyantyi has been severely reprimanded for exercising her right to protest. Her exclusion for protesting sends the message to other young women that protest is only allowed when sanctioned as an 'appropriate' protest by those who hold power.

After this silencing and expulsion from Rhodes, Dyantyi started picking up a particular kind of a relationship with Facebook which she didn't have before. She began to use Facebook as a vehicle to continue her activism, to build an online community, to addressing her mental health issues which were affected by her sexual violence experience and her life after her exclusion.

### Moving back to Johannesburg

After she was expelled in November 2017, Dyantyi moved back home to Johannesburg, a year later she moved out because of the toxicity of the environment, and she became homeless. On 27 November 2019 Dyantyi posted:

On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, I left where I was staying (won't call it home, coz it isn't) because of the toxicity of the environment. I lived with strangers, then friends until I couldn't any longer.

In January 2019, Dyantyi moved to a shelter for abused women and children in Bertrams, Johannesburg. She stayed there for over a month and then moved again. In the same post mentioned above Dyantyi said:

At this shelter, we ate expired food dating as far back as October 2018 donated by Woolworths and PNP every day. No fresh food.

Dyantyi moved into an apartment in the Johannesburg CBD. On 4 March 2019 Dyantyi posted:

This past weekend I moved into a new apartment. I got an apartment in the CBD, which I cannot afford (God knows how I make it every month).

After two years of waiting, in November 2019 Dyantyi finally had a court date to challenge Rhodes to review her exclusion. Makwarela (2020) wrote that:

Yolanda Dyantyi challenged her lifetime expulsion from Rhodes University after standing up for herself and for others when she protested against gender-based violence and rape culture at the university. Last year, on 4 December, Dyantyi headed to court to challenge her expulsion from Rhodes University as a result of her participation in a protest.

Dyantyi lost the case and was ordered to pay for the legal costs. On 27 March 2020, Dyantyi posted:

Amidst the anxiety and stress caused by this pandemic, I get to top it all off with a judgement from the Grahamstown High Court regarding my application for review on my exclusion from Rhodes University in 2017 that I have lost my case. In the matter of Dyantyi VS Mabizela VS Rhodes University, I have further been ordered to pay Rhodes University's legal costs.

She appealed the judgement in the Grahamstown High Court in September 2020 and was granted leave to appeal in the Supreme Court in Bloemfontein. The date for the appeal is set for 21 February 2022.

#### **1.4 USING FACEBOOK TO DOCUMENT HER LIFE**

Despite the challenges Dyantyi faced after the #RUreferenceList protests (see above), she continues to use Facebook prolifically to document her post-protest life. There is extensive research on the negative impact Facebook can have on the mental health of its users such as causing depression (Pornsakulvanich, 2017; Wilson et al., 2012). However, there is minimal research done on the positive impact Facebook can have on the psychological well-being of its users (Steinfeld et al., 2008). Contrastingly, there is other research that has linked the use of Facebook to positive effects, such as the development of social capital which may lead to improved mental health (Johnston et al., 2013). Even though Dyantyi is a strong woman and an activist at heart, her sexual violence experience and exclusion from Rhodes University, and the ongoing court cases do take a toll on her mental health as she has addressed these on Facebook. Why then does she continue using Facebook despite suffering these challenges and how does she use Facebook to address them?

#### **1.5 THESIS OUTLINE**

Chapter two of this study will employ an intersectional feminist theoretical framework (Crenshaw, 1990). I will use a qualitative methodology (Babbie and Mouton, 2001), using a qualitative content analysis, scroll back method and semi-structured interview as methods of analysis. These are discussed in Chapter Three. For the data analysis in Chapter Four, I employed the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as a method of analysis. Because there is a lot to cover in relation to the topic, this method is used to identify common themes to how the topic is discussed or written and make sense of these commonalities by grouping them together for a

coherent reading (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Finally, in Chapter Five, I discuss the findings from the data analysed in Chapter Four and offer a conclusion to this research project.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decades society has seen a shift in the way people engage and communicate. This is because of the development of the internet with the advent of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). Before the emergence of SNSs, communication was only dependent on face-to-face interactions but currently individuals can also communicate through digital platforms via long-distance interactions (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). This chapter provides literature on the continuous development of SNSs and how they continue to transform our sociality. The chapter focuses particularly on Facebook, because it is the most popular and commonly social network used in society (Business Tech, July 2021).

Despite extensive research on any negative impact the ‘excessive’ use of Facebook can have on the mental health of its users, such as causing depression (Pornsakulvanich, 2018), I argue that Facebook can contribute to the improvement of mental health. I use Yolanda Dyantyi’s Facebook account which she uses as an outlet for her mental health challenges, and for activism, amongst other things, as an example. Because her activism evolved during the prevalence of sexual violence at Rhodes University, I provide literature on sexual violence and the history thereof, formed as part of colonial and apartheid history in South Africa (Gqola, 2015).

To provide insight and perspective into this literature I approach this project with a theoretical framework of feminism, exploring intersectionality between race and gender and how this intersection further perpetuates sexual violence especially against ‘black’ women. For decades women across the world have and continue to fight against sexual violence through protests (Warshaw, 2019). Therefore, I also provide a framework of feminist activism through protests and explore the significance of SNSs particularly Facebook, through the hashtag# movements, in amplifying these protests. I use the #RUreferenceList protest as an example. Finally, to support my argument, I reveal how Facebook can be used to improve individuals’ mental health and to gain legitimacy and credibility by examining how Dyantyi, who experienced sexual violence on campus and was later excluded for her activism, uses Facebook to regain her voice in and build social capital.

## **2.2 THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNET**

### **2.2.1 Social Networking Site (SNSs)**

The evolution of the internet has seen a new type of mediated sociality evolving and a change in how people socialise and communicate in society, this is a digital society with the development of digital platforms and Social Networking Sites (SNSs), (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). In the past sociality was dependent on the concepts and perspectives of the self and influence of the people around us, individuals only had access to local shared knowledge and had intimate face-to-face interactions (Thompson, 1995). The forms of intimacy were reciprocal in character, “that is, their intimate relations with others involved a two-way flow of actions and utterances, gains and losses, of rights and obligations” (Thompson, 1995, 208). This is the type of sociality that existed before the advent of the media. “With the development of mediated forms of communication, however, new kinds of intimate relationships became” (Thompson, 1995, 208).

SNSs are the latest and fast communication tools that are commonly used in society which allow people to communicate and share information with others conveniently (Pornsakulvanich, 2018). They also allow users to create public profiles within a bounded system, which lets them view their own and other users’ online social networks, this also permits them to interact with people they are connected with and those made by others within their social networks (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). So, SNSs offer a variety of services targeted at miscellaneous audience (Johnston et al., 2013). Over the past decade SNSs have increased rapidly and continue to gain popularity because of the growing number of users (Gerson et al., 2017). Therefore, with the emergence of digitalization and datafication, society has seen a change in how people socialise (Couldry and Hepp, 2017), meaning this continuous development of SNSs has brought about new forms of human interactivity in society (Couldry and Hepp, 2017).

In addition to other technologically mediated communication channels, for example, texting and video chatting, the emergence of SNSs, has basically reshaped how people relate to one another (Bevan et al., 2014). Thus, “the self is expected in many societies to be available for interaction through digital platforms and even feels a certain pressure to represent itself on these platforms in the ‘culture of connectivity’” (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, 145). These interactions and / or representations of the self are through these various SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram,

YouTube, LinkedIn and many more. Amongst all these, this thesis focuses particularly on Facebook.

### **2.2.2 Facebook**

Facebook is currently the most popular network with users who share content with their ‘friends’ online by updating statuses and / or uploading pictures (Social Media Stats, September 2020). The site was launched by a then 19-year-old Harvard sophomore scholar Mark Zuckerberg, on February 4, 2004 (Carlson, 2010). It was first dubbed ‘thefacebook.com’ and has since become one of the biggest websites in the world visited by 400 million people every month (Carlson, 2010). Recent reports by the South African Social Media Stats for 2020 reported that “Facebook is still largely the most-used social media platform in South Africa” (Social Media Stats, September 2020). Current reports by Business Tech on *‘The biggest and most popular social media platforms in South Africa, including TikTok’*, report that “Facebook upholds its position as the most popular social media platform in the country, with an estimated 27 million local users – 18 million of these users are exclusively mobile” (Business Tech, July 2021).

This medium has been viewed as strengthening social ties and acquisition of social capital (Burke et al., 2010, Steinfield et al., 2008). It has both significant and positive impacts on society because it allows social contact across time, distance, and personal circumstances (Nadkarni and Hoffman, 2012). In addition, Facebook has allowed people to connect with immediate and distant family members, friends, and colleagues, it also connects strangers who share the same interests. Moreover, Facebook gives people control over who they choose to friend and unfriend.

Contrastingly, the usage of Facebook has become both epidemic and significant in society, people’s lives, and their wellbeing (Pornsakulvanich, 2018). This increase in the use of Facebook has both negative and positive impacts in society, “communication through Facebook has changed the way people connect with their social network” (Pornsakulvanich, 2018, 116).

## **2.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FACEBOOK AND MENTAL HEALTH**

### **2.3.1 The negative impact of Facebook on mental health**

There has been a great concern in the media regarding the effects of SNSs on individuals' mental health (Steinfeld, Ellison and Lampe, 2008). This stems from the assumption that SNSs may be causing serious harm on people's psychological well-being. For scholars interested in online technology, SNSs have become an interesting subject as they look at how these have an impact in society (Steinfeld, Ellison and Lampe, 2008). Loneliness, depression, and stress are some of the mental health issues associated with the heavy use of SNSs, this is because online communication has driven people to having relationships with strangers and acquaintances instead of bonding with local friends and family (Kraut et al., 1998). In addition, heavier internet use is linked with declines in users' communication with family, the size of their social circle and increases in depression and loneliness (Kraut et al., 1998). Furthermore, internet communication produces an impoverished and sterile form of social exchange compared to traditional face-to-face interactions, hence it produces negative outcomes for its users such as loneliness and depression (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). At the individual level, it is argued that lack of proper social interaction can cause poor decreased psychological health (Kraut et al., 1998).

Some media reports have shown interest in this matter questioning the impact Facebook has on the psychological well-being of its users. Suggesting that SNSs, such as Facebook, can have a negative impact on its users as it may cause people to be depressed, lonely and jealous (Frontiers in Psychology, January 2017). This research is based on studies which observed that as people spend more time on Facebook their feeling of well-being decreases as they feel lonelier (Kross et al., 2013, O'Keefe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Because of the popularity of social media platforms Cyberbullying has been reported to be widespread on social media. People can create fake accounts, disguise their identity, and bully others (Kwan et al., 2020). The Indian Express reported that "use of social networks can expose individuals to harassment or inappropriate contact from others" (The Indian Express, February 2015). Furthermore, cyber bullying and harassment on Facebook can cause a variety of mental health issues such as depression (The Indian Express, February 2015).

### **2.3.2 The positive impact of Facebook on mental health**

Most research conducted on the use of Facebook is focused on the negative effects of the psychological well-being of its users (Wilson et al., 2012) and little research is done on the positive impacts Facebook can have on its users' psychological well-being (Steinfeld et al., 2008). There is however experiential research conducted which links the use of Facebook to numerous positive effects in society, for instance the development of social capital which can lead to improved mental and physical health, economic well-being, etc. (Johnston et al., 2013).

Furthermore, concerns have also been raised about the reach, effectiveness, and sustainability of conventional methods of mental health care which rely mostly on face-to-face meetings with expensive professionals (Naslund et al., 2017). New approaches are necessary to make mental health care more available to a wider population particularly to those who cannot afford it (Naslund et al., 2017). Facebook has created that opportunity for non-professional support that people use to address their mental health challenges by calling on their friends to support them virtually (Naslund et al., 2017). Therefore, SNSs such as Facebook can also be considered as contributing to positive psychological health (Hart et al., 2015).

Additionally, Facebook continues to help many young people in socialising, discovering interests, advancing their skills, and being independent (Hart et al., 2015). For instance, many young people use their smart phones to take videos of themselves either acting, dancing, or singing and share them on SNSs such as Facebook (Hart et al., 2015). Here, their talents / skills are established as they post these regularly and they are simultaneously forced to be independent because they are not working for anyone but themselves. Some even create a separate Facebook 'page' where they constantly produce content for their 'work' or businesses where they advertise their brands (Hart et al., 2015).

Moreover, people obtain information for jobs and bursaries, and some peoples' careers are discovered by prominent people on this site (Hart et al., 2015). The Indian Express emphasises this point mentioned above stating that "these connections can help one with a variety of things like seeking a job, locating assistance, free advertising, making, or receiving advice etc., (The Indian Express, February 2015). These are some of the positive impacts Facebook has on the mental health of its users. Furthermore, as SNSs have become a principal mode of social interaction in the past decade, self-expressive profiles, and postings on sites such as Facebook have

become an outlet for individuals' motivated social behaviour (Hart et al., 2015). For instance, many women have and continue to use SNSs as an outlet to speak out and fight the prevalence of sexual violence in society.

## **2.4. SEXUAL VIOLENCE / RAPE**

### **2.4.1 Sexual violence / rape against women**

Sexual violence against women is a prevalent phenomenon worldwide and has thus been the focus of numerous research studies, different types of activism, and women's rights conceptualisations for many decades as it continues to affect women's exercise and enjoyment of these rights (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017). This type of violence has been happening for a long period of time in human history across the world (Warshaw, 2019). "It is estimated that at least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime" (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017, 9). This forms the basis for a strong request to increase efforts to prevent violence against women globally. These attempts involve additional research and advocacy work.

The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women came up with the dominant understanding of Violence Against Women (VAW). The Declaration of Violence Against Women defines VAW as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017, 9). This definition draws on the ideas of the human rights concept and other instruments which explicitly talk about the human rights of women (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017, 9).

VAW is understood as encouraging discrimination against women based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, work, age, disability etc. (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017, 9). This conception of VAW suggests that sociocultural notions about men and women (gender ideology) in a specific context are significant for the definitions of VAW. Moreover, it highlights the duties of the state government in their obligations to human rights, according to the social contract, in their commitment to work for the promotion of social justice by putting an end to VAW, protecting women from it, looking into acts of violence, and holding perpetrators accountable (Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017, 9).

Despite the efforts made towards involving gender equality as a global goal by including it in several UN conventions and the Millennium Development Goals, there is still much progress to be made (Peacock and Barker, 2014). Men's violence against women is still a prevalent phenomenon worldwide. Men and boys are thus given more attention by being engaged to end men's violence against women (Peacock and Barker, 2014). Globally, programmes and policies meant to promote significant and positive change in men's gender-related attitudes and practices have been put in place led by non-governmental organizations. These included lessening the use of violence by men against women (Peacock and Barker, 2014).

#### **2.4.2 (a) Defining rape**

Gqola (2015) argues that rape is not sex, "it is sexualised violence, a global phenomenon that exists across vast periods in human history" (Gqola, 2015, 21). Echoing this is author Cahill (2001) who postulates that rape is a kind of violence that is clearly sexual and a gendered one because it serves the patriarchal systems' oppression of the female or feminine. According to Warshaw "sexualised violence is a way of empowering half the human race against the other half, it's all about male control of wombs and reproduction" (Warshaw, 2019,1).

South Africa is notorious for its high levels of rape. Recent research reveals that rape statistics in South Africa are amongst the highest compared to other countries (Macleod et al., 2018). Mapombere asserts that "it is a known fact that at least one in three South African women will be raped in her lifetime, and one in four will face domestic violence" (Mapombere, 2011, 4). The 2015/16 rape statistics by Africa Check revealed that there were 41 503 rape cases reported and that an average of 109 rapes were recorded each day (Africa Check, October 2017). The Eastern Cape was found to have had the highest rape rate at 105 per 100 000 people (Africa Check, October 2017). Furthermore, the 2020 rape statistics by country reported that South Africa has the highest rate of rape in the world with 132 incidents per 100 000 people (World Population Review, 2020). Even though the South African Parliament passed the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act in 2007 to review and reinforce all laws concerned with sexual violence, reported rape rates, sexual violence against women and children and domestic violence continued to raise (World Population Review:2020).

### 2.4.2 (b) The history of sexual violence / rape in South Africa

In South Africa, the issue of sexual violence is a central part of the colonial legacy and thus a top priority for any programme of decolonialisation (Coetzee and Du Toit, 2018). The role of race and racism is a well-established insight in the process of Western colonisation (Coetzee and Du Toit, 2018). Therefore, “race is integral to the systematic inferiorisation of the conquered which supposedly allowed for violent conquest, slavery and subjugation as central elements of European global expansion” (Coetzee and Du Toit, 2018, 216). The logic behind colonisation was that those who are superior (inherently, and biologically should rightly rule over those that are naturally inferior (Coetzee and Du Toit, 2018). This simultaneously allowed the colonial conquerors to ‘save’ or ‘civilise’ the group that is supposedly inferior to them, even though that was through exploiting without mercy, lands, labour, and sexuality (Coetzee and Du Toit, 2018). Therefore, the significance of the pseudo-biological type of race for the colonial establishment must be considered when we think of what the issue in the project of decolonisation is (Coetzee and Du Toit, 2018). In addition, the ongoing widespread of sexual violence primarily against women in the South African post-colony, and the broad social and institutional complicity which hinders it from being contained effectively, should be understood alongside this historical background, including the slave history (Coetzee and Du Toit, 2018).

Tracing rape culture back to the years of slavery, Gqola in her book: *Rape: A South African Nightmare* asserts that “the history of race is the history of slavery, colonialism and race science” (Gqola, 2015, 37). She discusses in depth the institutionalisation of rape within slavery, and postulates that “rape was a core facet of enslavement” (Gqola, 2015, 41). Slavery reduced humans to the status of an object, dehumanised and deprived humans of will and self-ownership (Gqola, 2015, 40). Under slavery conditions, there was no bodily autonomy, ‘slaves’ bodies belonged to those who captured or bought them, “their masters and mistresses owned their bodies, along with their reproductive, sexual, and reproductive labour” (Gqola, 2015, 40-41).

Maldonado-Torres, in the *Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality*, supports the statement above and asserts that “the colonised were meant to be bodies without land, people without resources, and subjects without the capacity for autonomy and self-determination whose constant desire is to be other than themselves” (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, 17). Warshaw shares the same views in her book *I Never Called It Rape* and argues that “sexualised violence is a way of

empowering half the human race against the other half, it's all about male control of wombs and reproduction" (Warshaw, 2019,1).

Furthermore, Maldonado-Torres states that being colonised meant that living one's life constantly expecting the likelihood of one's body to be violated (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). Adding that "this is particularly devastating for colonised women because in the modern / colonial world masculinity is defined as power over women, meaning that anyone who wishes to claim masculinity is expected to perform violence over female bodies" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, 17). Colonised women's bodies are used as an affirmation of masculinity and there are no major consequences, "there did not have to be an ultimate purpose for violence to be exercised over the black, native, and colonised women. The system marked them as available for immediate sexual gratification" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, 17). Therefore, during slavery, sexual violence was a demonstration of power (Gqola, 2015).

Moreover, colonialism and the apartheid regime both played a part in the social and political spheres which created the culture of violence that still oppresses South Africans especially violence against women (Morrel, Jewkes and Lindegger, 2012). Furthermore, the apartheid regime alone established racial and class divisions which created violence (Morrel, Jewkes and Lindegger, 2012). Although the past injustices have been recognised and noted in the democratic constitution of South Africa and an appreciation of the consequential damage, sexual violence is still prevalent though it has been two and a half decades after the abolishment of apartheid (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Supporting this statement, Mills asserts that "although South Africa transitioned from apartheid to democracy, high levels of gender-based violence are still a huge challenge in the country" (Mills, 2010, 251).

Gqola reveals how rape came to be a powerful language that controlled women in South Africa, it thus became a language that is an established part of power in South Africa (Gqola, 2015). Although any individual can be raped based on their sexuality, heterosexual women are the most vulnerable to be victims of rape by heterosexual men (Gqola, 2015). In conclusion, Gqola argues that rape is an insidious, intractable global phenomenon, it is not a novel occurrence in contemporary society nor is it a South African invention despite the attention it has recently received on university campuses (Gqola, 2015).

### **2.4.3 Sexual violence /rape against women in South African university campuses**

University campuses globally are affected by the scourge of rape. “International (and largely North American) research literature on prevalence rates for sexual and other forms of gender-based violence suggest that the incidence of such phenomena in university contexts is consistently high” (Macleod et al., 2018, 85). Gender and sexual violence research in higher education institutions has revealed that this is a widespread phenomenon on university campuses globally (Phipps and Smith, 2012). Sexual violence in university campuses has been a persistent issue and some students have been actively challenging this violence from the 1980s and even earlier than this (Warton and Moore, 2018).

Therefore, university campuses have become a focus for attention in relation to sexual violence which is perceived as an enduring, serious problem largely because of the uniqueness of university life as a special social context (Macleod et al., 2018). Students gain independence as young adults, there is unlimited access to freedom, alcohol, nightclubbing, and no curfews (Warshaw, 2019). Despite that, university is widely regarded as a home away from home, especially in the case of a predominantly residential campus like Rhodes. Yet, while campuses operate as enclaves in society, they have been shown to be unable to secure the safety of women from sexual violence. In response to this violence, many campuses operate their own methods of discipline and retribution for criminal acts (Warshaw, 2019). For instance, Rhodes University’s Section 35(3) (h) of the Sexual Offences Policy (2020) states that: “Every accused person has the right to a fair trial, which includes the right to be presumed innocent, to remain silent, and not to testify during the proceedings”. This policy accords with the South African Constitution’s Bill of Rights under Section 35 (3) (h) which affords every person accused of rape this right.

Another issue with universities and dealing with sexual violence internally is that “university boards are also concerned with the public perception of their campuses” (Warshaw, 2019), meaning they tend to protect the universities’ name more than protecting the victims, “concerned mainly with cases involving plagiarism, vandalism, and alcohol abuse, these boards are often ill prepared to handle the complexities of acquaintance rapes” (Warshaw, 2019, 147), meaning the University does not have the capacity to prosecute alleged rapists, and that resources should be focused on prevention.

## **2.5 FEMINIST INTERSECTIONALITY**

### **2.5.1 The intersection between race and gender**

Intersectionality describes the way people's social identities can overlap. The term emerged within a black feminist theoretical framework because of the intersecting oppressions that black women are faced with (Crenshaw, 1990). Race, gender, class, ethnicity are the different identities that define individuals' social relation. These identities can intersect, meaning an individual can be identified by two or more of these. For instance, one can be identified by their race as 'black' and by their gender as a 'woman', therefore, that individual is defined as a black woman (Crenshaw, 1990). Intersectionality evolved due to the multiple oppressions faced by black women based on race, class, and gender (Crenshaw, 1990). The term was coined by Kimberly Crenshaw, who described it as a "discourse about identity that acknowledges how identities are constructed through the intersection of multiple dimensions" (Crenshaw, 1990). It is essentially another way of seeing how the different kinds of inequalities can operate together to reinforce each other (Crenshaw, 1990). One cannot think of oppression faced by a black person and a woman exclusively, these oppressions reinforce and reinvent each other (Crenshaw, 1990). Therefore, race inequality is not separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status; it is often not considered that some people experience these simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1990).

In South Africa, social environments and social identities are largely shaped by race (Moolman, 2013). Therefore, social identities are constructed within social relations and social institutions, and thus "within a postcolonial perspective, social identities are further framed through 'history' and 'place' and are central in shaping identities" (Moolman, 2013, 94). Moreover, South African identities ought to be understood and studied based on the historical discourses of race and apartheid (Moolman, 2013). "The idea of intersectionality is very personal because intersectionality attempts to understand how intersecting identities create instances of both opportunity and oppression, where a person can, depending on his or her particular identity in a particular social context, experience advantage, disadvantage, or both at the same time" (Stephens, 2013, 3). For instance, in South Africa women experience oppression such as gender-based violence and / or sexual violence because of their gender identity as women this is because the dominant ideology in society that men are superior to women, therefore, that is the disadvantage of being a woman.

Intersectionality theory's primary concern is to dismantle oppressive patriarchal institutions to create equality and social justice. It also advocates for the inclusion of race, class, and other social identities in the fight for gender equality (Carbin and Edenheim, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of intersectionality is to break down hegemonic ideologies that marginalise certain bodies (Crenshaw, 1990). This theory uncovers the significance of connecting the oppression experienced by different people from specific social identities to the systematic structures that form and exacerbate these oppressions on an interpersonal and societal level (Crenshaw, 1990 and McCall, 2005). Crenshaw further states that everyone holds a particular identity which has a certain standpoint within broader society (Crenshaw, 1990). Moreover, some people find themselves with oppressed identities that were historically marginalised such as being black and being a woman. There is an interconnection between these oppressed identities and the impact they have on individual's life, this means that, everyone with an interconnectivity of different identities has different lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1990 and McCall, 2005).

### **2.5.2 Solidarity through intersectionality**

The persistent violence that women have, for decades, endured regardless of their race, class, ethnicity and skin colour, invigorated them to fight against gender-based violence. Women drew strength from their shared experiences and organised themselves towards eradicating this violence (Crenshaw, 1990). Women realised that there is more power when millions of them fight in solidarity against sexual violence (regardless of their different social identities such as race, class, ethnicity, and skin colour) compared to a few isolated individuals' fighting against sexual violence (Crenshaw, 1990). Because of this, our understanding of violence against women has changed, for instance, things that were considered as private (family matters) and aberrational (errant sexual aggression) such a battering and rape, are now generally recognised as part of a broad-scale system of domination that affect women as a class (Crenshaw, 1990).

Stephens (2013) states that the reason for a different intersectional identity-based movement comes from the fact that generally social movements focus only on one identity. This relates to how third world feminism ignores struggles of women of colour. Because there are numerous social identity groups, solidarity for one group excludes members who are not part of that main group, leaving out those with more than one social identity in the out-group (Stephens, 2013). This further proves

the purpose of feminist intersectionality, which is to deconstruct patriarchal structures highlighting acts of violence. Furthermore, feminist intersectionality also validates and affords marginalised voices a platform to express their dissatisfaction with the system of oppression towards them (Carbin and Edenheim, 2013).

In South Africa, the different social identities of race, gender, sex, and class have been characteristics for 'othering', meaning, because of the history of our country, the stories of poor black women are often ignored, and their bodies are still not considered visible (Crenshaw, 1990). Sexual violence, in addition to the consequences of the social structures of sex or gender equality, also plays a central role in the preservation of these unequal power structures, thus far rape "forcibly re-sexualises women, turns them symbolically into objects and possessions of men, treat them as natural objects for the use of men, and thus, de-politicises their status" (DuToit, 2012, 13).

Through the idea of intersectionality, women have organised themselves and worked together to put a stop to gender-based violence and sexual violence and the disadvantages that women especially black women, for decades, have experienced because of their social identity, these have been done through various forms of protests.

## **2.6 FEMINIST ACTIVISM**

### **2.6.1 The history of activism / protests**

A protest can be referred to as an action or movement that fights for social rights. An alternative term to refer to a protest can be activism, being an active agent by campaigning to bring political or social change. Activism is driven by a movement, a group of people working together to advance their shared political, social, or artistic ideas. This is borne out in the hashtag# protest movements that women and students across the world recently took part in against sexual violence towards women.

The recent protests in South African universities bear resemblance to the long history of protest action in South Africa which fought for political, economic, and social gain (Bashonga and Khuzwayo, 2017). In the apartheid regime protests were used to fight social injustices such as inequality, racial discrimination, sexism, and many other issues which created social divisions (Mapobmere, 2011). For instance, on 9 August 1956, about 20 000 women of all races marched to the Union Buildings. This was one of the largest demonstrations staged by women in South African history (SAHO, 2011). The march was staged “to present a petition against the carrying of passes by women to the Prime Minister, J.G Strijdom” (SAHO, 2011). It was organised by the Federation of South African Women (FSAW). This group challenged the patriarchal system which institutionalized male dominance in society subsequently suppressing women because of their gender. Despite the first black democratic president Nelson Mandela’s vision of freedom and human rights for all, the new generation relives some of these past tribulations that were fought for in the past (Mapombere, 2011). This is because of social structures that are still suppressing people in post-apartheid South Africa, such as violence against women (Mapombere, 2011).

### **2.6.2 Current activism / protests (the use of SNSs to start and / or amplify protests)**

Research shows that SNSs can and have influenced national and international discourse on the issue of rape (Awobamise et al., 2019). The #MeToo movement in the United States of America is the best example of how social media has aided in raising awareness on the issue of rape (Awobamise et al., 2019). It started out in 2017 by a single tweet from Alyssa Milano. The Hollywood actress’s tweet asked that anyone who had been sexually assaulted or harassed should respond with “me too” (Awobamise et al., 2019).

That single tweet by Milano started perhaps the greatest social justice movement of post 2010. The #metoo movement is notable for the fact that it brought to the forefront an issue that has been discussed well but discussed in hush tones. Victims prior to the #metoo era often times did not tell their stories, perpetrators of rape crimes seemed almost untouchable (Awobamise et al., 2019: 201).

Furthermore, the #MeToo movement also helped birth many other hashtag movements which sought to make it easier for women to speak out about being raped and encouraged public discourse on the issue of rape (Awobamise et al., 2019). #RURReferenceList campaign was one of the cases where young women were mobilising people to fight against sexual violence in university campuses and South Africa at large. The young women later took the protests to the streets, bare breasted or in underwear, demonstrating their anger and that they have had enough of the violence (McCall, 2019: 3):

What is remarkable is the fact that they embrace a feminist identity, something that was less common with an older generation of women who were suspicious of a type of feminism that draws on essentialised identities that masked white women's experiences as the norm, even though they embraced feminist notions of gender equality.

Thus, these young women were brave enough to speak in a feminist register from the position of intersectional, radical African feminism (McCall, 2019).

### **2.6.3 Using Facebook as an outlet and to garner support online**

Research reports that “with nowhere to run and with no one to speak to, rape victims and their supporters are now turning to social media to tell their stories, share their experiences and call out their victimisers” (Awobamise et al., 2019, 200). Using social media for these purposes can also help the survivor deal with the negative effects of reporting the rape which often lead to public humiliation, backlash, and not being believed (Awobamise et al., 2019).

The torment of rape can cause physical, psychological, and emotional damage for the victim. Mental health consequences of rape include nonpathological distress, i.e., fear, sadness, anger, self-blame, shame, sadness, or guilt (WHO, 2012). In the face of such consequences, social media returns control to survivors because they are afforded opportunities to own their story, choosing what they want to say and do and who they want to speak to (Awobamise et al., 2019). This has

the potential to encourage others to speak out, to not be ashamed and to garner support from the online community. These possibilities offer a survivor help in addressing their mental health challenges.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter discussed how the internet and SNSs have transformed our society regarding our ways of engagement and communication. Focusing particularly on Facebook, I discovered that this site has both negative and positive impacts on its users. Therefore, I explored its relationship to our mental health for both positive and negative consequences. I unpacked the history of sexual violence from its colonial origins to apartheid and its continued pervasiveness in contemporary society including universities globally. The framework I applied is feminism intersectionality discussing the relationship between race and gender in relation to sexual violence and how black women suffer twice the oppression because of this intersection of being black and a woman. In addition, I uncover how women regardless of their different social identities fight sexual violence in solidarity through activism. Therefore, in adding to intersectionality, I discuss the framework of activism through protests and uncover the significance of SNSs such as Facebook in amplifying protests through the hashtag# campaigns. And due to the absence of faith in the justice system, I discover that women have turned to SNSs such as Facebook to share their sexual violence / rape experiences, including Dyantyi who after she was silenced by Rhodes because of her activism used Facebook to continue her activism and used as an outlet to address her mental health challenges.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses the research methodology as well as the methods used to conduct the research. To answer the research questions, I used a qualitative methodology (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The point of a qualitative research is to understand meaning rather than to generalise (Forman and Damschroder, 2007), which was ideal for this study because the nature of my research questions does not allow me to count or generalise data but seeks rather to interpret, describe, and understand the meaning behind Dyantyi's use of Facebook and her posts there. To clarify the main characteristics of qualitative research, I discuss the epistemological and ontological assumptions of qualitative methodology. The methods employed in this research are qualitative content analysis, scroll back and semi-structured interview. For data analysis I chose to use a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as the analytical method for this research.

### **3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.2.1 Defining qualitative methodology**

This research employed a qualitative methodology, which focuses on studying human action through the social actors themselves, allowing the researcher to get the 'insider's perspective'. In other words, "to view the world through the eyes (perspective) of the actors themselves" (Babbie and Mouton, 2001, 271). The aim of this study using this approach is explained as describing and understanding rather than explaining human behavior (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Echoing this, Bryman (2004) proposes that, this research methodology usually puts more value on interpretation and explanation instead of quantification when collecting and analysing data.

This methodology is concerned with meaning, context and an understanding of the underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of the research subject (Bryman, 2003). By spending time with subjects in their comfortable spaces, researchers are putting themselves in the subject's shoes, by observing to try and understand their actions, decisions, and behaviors from their perspective (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Qualitative researchers are "interested in how people make sense of their world and how they interpret and experience different events" (Hignett and McDermott, 2015, 120). In relation to Dyantyi's posts, the qualitative methodology approach enabled me to elicit meaning and context and unearth the motivations which underlie Dyantyi's use of Facebook

to speak about and seek support for her experiences and difficulties after the #RUreferenceList protests.

Qualitative research is an observational study that gathers non-numerical data (Bryman, 2003). Defining some of the key points in qualitative methodology, Hignett and McDermott (2015), explain qualitative methodology as non-numerical, concerned with scale instead of measurement and consistent in representing the world with words and pictures instead of numbers. Echoing this, Leedy and Ormrod (2001), suggest that qualitative research includes studying the characteristics, or qualities, that cannot be limited to numerical values and intends to analyse the distinctions and complexities of a particular phenomenon.

Regarding scale, research frequently focuses on a number of cases offering many variables, “qualitative studies tend to follow an idiographic mode of inquiry by focusing on the individual rather than groups” (Hignett and McDermott, 2015, 120). This project, however, chose to focus on a single case, out of the women activists that were part of the #RUreferenceList protests including the other two which were also excluded alongside Dyantyi, I chose to focus on one individual and not a group of activists. This is because Dyantyi stood out to me as an activist as she frequently posted on Facebook during and after the #RUreferenceList protests.

### **3.2.2 Epistemological and Ontological assumptions of qualitative research**

The epistemological assumption of qualitative research is that it is based on interpretivism, and it is an ‘intensive’ research strategy (Bahari, 2010). Interpretivism depends on both a self-reflective researcher and the human subjects to use as the instruments that will measure some phenomena. It involves observations, interviews, and argues that the subject matter of the social sciences, which are the people, cannot be studied within natural sciences.

The central characteristics of qualitative research are hermeneutics and phenomenology. Hermeneutics is rooted in Max Weber and Wilhelm Dilthey, who are German scholars (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). They share with phenomenology an emphasis on the ‘subjective understanding or interpretation’ of human action (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). This is an interpretive understating of social action in-order to arrive at the cause-and-effect notion within a social science but looking at how people are reacting to a particular thing that is influenced by a particular context.

Phenomenology is concerned with understanding how people make meaning in their lives, how they inject meaning in the social phenomena (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). For instance, the use of Facebook may mean different things to individuals. As discussed in the previous chapter, people use Facebook in varied ways. This is because they have decided on how they will utilize Facebook, since there are no rigid rules as to how or what individuals should post on their Facebook, people have injected different meanings of what Facebook represents in their lives. As indicated in the previous chapter that there is extensive research on the negative and positive effects Facebook has on its users. Having observed Dyantyi's Facebook timeline, I could not assume what effect Facebook has on her life based merely on reading her posts. I needed to bring in context to my assumptions by finding out from her how she uses Facebook and what impact it has on her life.

The ontology for qualitative research is subjectivity. This means inter-relating to your subjects. "Qualitative research tends to be associated with the idea or views that social life is the product of social interactions and the beliefs of the social actors" (Bahari, 2010, 24). This idea is known as subjectivism, that is "beliefs that social phenomena is shaped from the perceptions that follow from the actions of social actors concerned with their existence, this can be thought of as a continual process" (Saunders et al., 2007, 108). This social phenomenon continues to be revised and improved through social interactions (Bahari, 2010).

### **3.3 QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS**

The primary method this project employed is a qualitative content analysis of Dyantyi's Facebook posts (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). This includes the analysis of textual data and is interested in the characteristics of language as communication by focusing on the meanings of the texts (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Content analysis has to do with words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, and themes (Deacon et al., 1999), which is applicable to the kinds of posts created on Facebook. It is interpretive in nature, and it seeks to find meaning in the text. I chose Dyantyi's Facebook timeline because after her exclusion from Rhodes (and her ongoing case against Rhodes) she has continued to use Facebook to speak out about the judgement, to continue to protest gender-based violence and post her experiences and feelings.

Qualitative content analysis is used to analyse textual data, "it is a generic form of data analysis in that it is comprised of an atheoretical set of techniques which can be used in any qualitative inquiry in which the informational content of the data is relevant" (Forman and Damschroder, 2007, 40).

They argue that qualitative content analysis differs from other methods in that, instead of focusing on the informational content of data, it highlights the theoretical perspectives (Forman and Damschroder, 2007). For instance, narrative analysis uses hermeneutical perspective that focuses on interpretation and context and puts more emphasis on the stories individuals tell and the devices they use to make meaning in stories. The focus of this research is on the interpretation, contexts and meaning of the posts by Dyantyi and more importantly highlights the tool / platform she uses to narrate these stories which is Facebook.

Furthermore, qualitative content analysis studies data that is the product of open-ended data collection techniques targeted at detail and depth, instead of measurement, “compared to quantitative inquiry, the goal of all qualitative inquiry is to understand a phenomenon, rather than to make generalisations” (Forman and Damschroder, 2007, 41). For instance, if I used a closed-ended survey to inquire about Dyantyi’s use of Facebook I would not get the full details and depth of the meaning of her posts, her answers would only measure her constant use of Facebook. As an alternative to measuring her use of Facebook, an open-ended interview, in which Dyantyi’s responses are not constrained by close-ended questions, was used to explore, and get more in-depth understanding of her reasons and how she uses Facebook as an outlet for her mental health challenges and to speak out against sexual violence towards women. The schedule of questions I prepared for the interview are in Annexure B.

### **3.4 SCROLL BACK METHOD**

This project made use of the scroll back method (Robards and Lincoln, 2017), a qualitative research method employed in interviews through which a researcher and participant “scroll back” through the social media timeline history of the participant (Robards and Lincoln, 2019). This method discovers shared scrolling-and-remembering practices in social media archives, revealing the participant’s historical digital use. It “involves sitting with research participants as they scroll back through their social media timelines or profiles and asking them to narrate and explain what they see” (Moller and Robards, 2019, 105). This method was formed to analyse how social media practices continuously transform over time and to work with research participants to reflect on the longitudinal nature of digital traces on social media (Moller and Robards, 2019). Scroll back interview means going back to the stored “semantic bodies” of research participants, which usually bring about experiences of nostalgia, embarrassment, shame, and joy (Robards and Lincoln, 2017).

Scrolling back on Facebook means collecting digital traces documented and regarded as important by the Facebook user. “The scroll back method uses the Facebook timeline as a memory object and, through collaborative interrogation of it, confronts the participant with earlier versions of his or her mediatized life through memory objects” (Moller and Robards, 2019, 105). It can be used in examining a great variety of social phenomena, such as romantic relationships, family life, alcohol consumption, body image, political participation, and any other facet of life that is observable and recorded through social media, or in any study which getting to know a research participant’s broader life world might be valuable in building rapport with the participant (Robards and Lincoln, 2019). It is intimate in various ways, because the digital traces put together using Facebook are traces of personal and intimate lives: sleeping patterns, friendships, familial ties, tastes and interests, sex lives, and experiences of loss, sadness, and happiness. In a research setting, the “contextual integrity” of some disclosures can be compromised (Moller and Robards, 2019). Moreover, the research attention paid to this depends on the extent to which the participant can look back on the reworking of the recorded moments (Moller and Robards, 2019).

For this research, Dyantyi had to scroll back through her Facebook timeline uncovering information / old posts that she had forgotten about which afforded me an opportunity to gain rich stories of her mediatized life (Moller and Robards, 2019). This process required Dyantyi to choose posts that are significant to her to be analysed thereafter explaining them (Moller and Robards, 2019), which allowed me to elicit the meaning behind her posts and get greater detail and information on her use of Facebook to narrate her life’s journey.

### **3.5 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AS A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD**

The second qualitative method I employed is the semi-structured interview (Bryman, 2004), “a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions” (Longhurst, 2003, 103). While the bulk of the research relied on a study of Dyantyi’s Facebook timeline, I also interviewed her to supplement that information. Semi-structured interviews are conversational and informal in tone, they allow for an open response in the participants’ own words instead of a ‘yes or no’ type answer, granting participants the opportunity to explore topics they feel are significant (Longhurst, 2003). Indeed, the interview with Dyantyi was conversational and informal, I allowed her to explain and explore other issues

that were at times unrelated to the questions I prepared but were also very useful in understanding her better and her use of Facebook.

To a certain degree this type of interviewing has a predetermined order however it guarantees flexibility in the manner issues are addressed by the interviewee (Longhurst, 2003). Prior to the interview I had prepared questions to ask Dyantyi but the rest of the interview did not rely on the predetermined questions but rather a conversation that evolved due to the explanations and exploring of other issues that arose in our conversations. Therefore, using semi-structured interviews helped me interpret, explain, and add to the content analysis of the Facebook posts (Bryman, 2004). I also observed that some of the responses to her posts and requesting help are not evident online. Instead, Dyantyi often posts updates indicating that people have responded to her privately. The interview helped me gauge the nature of the offline responses, it also allowed me, as Holstein and Gubrium (1995) propose, to provide empirical data about the social world by asking Dyantyi to discuss her life and experiences.

Moreover, choosing a qualitative method was perfect for this research as it helped me make sense of Dyantyi's world and her experiences and it answered the research goals. On the other hand, a quantitative method would not have been consistent with the aim of this research, as Bryman (2003) suggests that a quantitative method is concerned with numerical analysis of data collected either through questionnaires or surveys, "typically exemplified by the social survey and by experimental investigations" (Bryman, 2003, 3). Thus, because of the nature of my research, I would not have been able to thoroughly understand and interpret the meaning behind Dyantyi's posts as she explained them better through the interviews.

In addition, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, although Dyantyi was not the only individual at the forefront of the #RUnreferenceList protests, an activist for sexual violence against women and / or an excluded student from Rhodes for protesting, I opted not to use focus groups even though they are part of qualitative research because the interview comprises of information that is personal and intimate such as experiences of sexual violence. Thus, focus group interviews, as Gibbs (1997) argues, could impede interviewees from fully expressing themselves because of the environment shared with other people. Since the research topic is sensitive, I purposefully narrowed my research to focus on one individual.

### **3.6 ANALYTICAL METHOD FOR DATA ANALYSIS**

To analyse the data for this study, I chose to use thematic analysis, a method used to analyse qualitative data which involves searching through a data set to ‘identify, analyse, and report patterns’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 77). This method “is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities” (Braun and Clarke, 2012). It is also for describing data as well as interpretation while selecting codes and constructing themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006), “through focusing on meaning across a data set, thematic analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (Braun and Clarke, 2012). After the interviews with Dyantyi I used coding to identify patterns and similar things she discussed, for instance, I gathered everything she said about using Facebook for; social capital, as an outlet, speaking out against sexual violence (naming and shaming alleged rapists), mental health, feminism, and activism into one group respectively. The themes and analysis relate back to the literature discussed in the theoretical framework chapter where I string the two together and thread them. This method helped me in ‘identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set’ (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter presents the qualitative methodology deployed by this research project and which entails understanding human actions through the individuals themselves in-order to make sense of their world. To bring more insight about qualitative methodology, I explained the epistemological and ontological assumptions of a qualitative methodology. The main method employed for this research was a qualitative content analysis which includes analysing textual data, using the ‘scroll back’ method, Dyantyi scrolled through her Facebook timeline and chose posts that are significant to her which relate to the research questions. I also explained that the semi-structured interview, another qualitative method, allowed Dyantyi to clarify and interpret the meaning behind her posts. For data analysis, I explained my choice of the thematic analysis method, which is also a qualitative method used for identifying and organising patterns from the interview and the scroll back process to gather common information together with the research participant for a coherent discourse.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this research was to examine how Yolanda Dyantyi uses Facebook as an outlet to rebuild her social capital following her exclusion from Rhodes University in 2017. This curiosity stemmed from my observations of how Dyantyi continued using Facebook prolifically for her activism and for sharing her life struggles after being excluded. The main objective of this study was to examine how the use of Facebook can contribute to one's positive mental health. This interest was provoked by the current extensive research on the excessive use of Facebook and the possibilities of it causing mental health challenges such as loneliness, stress, and depression for its users (Kraut et al., 1998). Seeing that Dyantyi is a prolific Facebook user, I wanted to find out about her experiences of using Facebook throughout the years, especially as an activist, what the impacts were on her mental health and also how she used Facebook to address mental health challenges.

This research intends to add to the minimal existing research on the excessive use of Facebook and the positive impact that can have on the psychological well-being of its users (Pornsakulvanich, 2018). This chapter analyses the Facebook posts which Dyantyi chose as significant to her through the scroll back method as explained in chapter three.

As indicated in the methods and methodology chapter, in this section of the thesis, I will be conducting a thematic analysis to “identify, analyze, and report patterns” (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I will first do coding to identify themes and patterns in both the Facebook posts and in the interviews, I held with Dyantyi. There is no specified order or the number of posts that will be analysed. The posts that will be chosen and the interviews conducted will be analysed based on the literature provided in chapter two, additional literature relevant to the discourse has been provided. Both the Facebook posts and interviews will be analysed simultaneously based on the following six themes.

4.2 Using Facebook as a space for curation and control,

4.3 Using Facebook as a diary,

4.4 Using Facebook as a vehicle for activism,

- 4.5 Using Facebook for mental health purposes,
- 4.6 Using Facebook for a sense of community, and
- 4.7 Using Facebook for Social Capital.

## **4.2 USING FACEBOOK FOR CURATION AND CONTROL**

### **4.2.1 Having a Facebook account**

As one of the frequently used communication tools in society, Facebook allows individuals to create a public profile, fill in their personal and professional details and upload a profile picture to indicate who is behind that Facebook account (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). After an individual has created their Facebook account, then they can request/invite other people with a Facebook account to be their 'friends'. Once the other one accepts the request/invite, then they will be able to follow and consume each other's content, comment on their posts, and write on their Facebook wall (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). In addition, when individuals no longer want to be friends with people on Facebook, they can stop following them or block them, so that they will not be able to see their content. Therefore, Facebook gives people control over who they choose to friend and unfriend. Dyantyi agrees with this statement and postulates that she has control over her Facebook:

Facebook is a public platform, there are things such as locking my account, for instance, and choosing who gets to view my content and the whole point is to share content with the people you are friends with on Facebook, those that follow you and that you follow back. It's my Facebook, I curate it, I'm the one who is in control of my Facebook. I don't go around adding people on Facebook and I stopped doing that years ago. I think I don't even know what led to that decision I don't add people on Facebook unintentional, I don't go around searching people I don't know and adding them that's weird.

This control over one's Facebook account means that individuals can also protect themselves from intended harm by other Facebook users. Cyberbullying and harassment is widespread on social media and are reported to cause mental health challenges (Kwan et al., 2020). Therefore, it is vital for users to guard their mental health by unfollowing or blocking those who bully or harass them. When an individual blocks another on Facebook they cannot see each other's profiles or their

comments on their mutual friend's posts or in the friend suggestion list. Dyantyi asserts that she too has blocked people before to protect her psychological well-being.

I'm currently working on a particular project, and I posted about it on my Facebook and somebody, a Facebook 'friend' decided to tag a person that I'm no longer in communication with, we're not on good terms, there's no beef, but I've cut the person out of my life, because of certain personal events that transpired last year. This person is now going out their way discrediting my work, this project, on towards securing funding for it. Basically, calling my work illegitimate and how they personally wouldn't suggest it to somebody else. This person was coming for me unprovoked. We're not even Facebook friends, you've been tagged by our mutual Facebook friend, which I decided to also remove that person because I realised that I have the power to kind of control the narrative on my Facebook. I also wouldn't want to be around or surrounded by people who are friends with my enemies. I removed the person who tagged my enemy, so I blocked both.

In a further act of curation and control, Dyantyi has since deleted the above-mentioned post where this individual was discrediting her work in the comments section.

#### The social pressure to have/use Facebook

The rise of SNSs also created a certain pressure in society for people to be on digital platforms to interact with others in the "culture of connectivity" (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, 145). Dyantyi agrees with this statement, asserting that:

There are those pressures of how we are evolving as society and the influence of social media in our lives. Me saying this is obviously me being aware that Facebook has played a huge part in 'my story' being out there and who I am, my name. So, I am conscious of that, and I might continue to need it and I like it. I need it, I do need Facebook, I enjoy Facebook.

#### **4.2.2 Evolution of Dyantyi's use of Facebook**

As mentioned in chapter one, Dyantyi has had a Facebook account since she was in grade seven and admits that her use of Facebook has evolved since she started using it. Because she was 12 when she started using Facebook, she postulates that:

I think what I mirror on social media is exactly who I am as well so, a lot has changed since I started using Facebook. My level of consciousness and what I was using social media for at the time versus now obviously changed in a way. When I started out on Facebook, I would post quotes by any random person, whether they're a public figure, an idol, a musician, or politician, whatever the case may be, or just search quotes that spoke or speak to a specific theme, whether it's love, happiness, anger, human rights, whatever, you know, and I'll share those quotes. So, I wouldn't really say that those may be false, or they were not true, but they were things that, I guess at the time, I would be able to relate with. Whatever it was that I was posting I think, I was very much exposed to pop culture because I had the reach of social media that was the only thing, I was interested in.

An example of a post by a young Dyantyi who was into pop culture is a post from the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2009:

You are my roc Baby you're the truth... You are my roc I love to rock with... I love ds song and I'm soooo inlove with ya!

Dyantyi was 12 years old and in grade seven when she posted this. These are lyrics to a song by music icon Beyonce, titled "You are my rock". The lyrics are accompanied by a short message by Dyantyi expressing that she loves the song, and she is in love. Because Dyantyi was exposed to pop culture at the time, so, as she mentioned before, she only posted about issues she was exposed and related to.

#### **4.3 USING FACEBOOK AS A DIARY**

Throughout the years Dyantyi's use of Facebook continued to evolve, she started posting more personal stuff about her life as compared to when she started posting. Dyantyi asserts that she now uses her Facebook as a diary, as a result she shares on Facebook, for the first time, things that she has never shared with family or close friends, Dyantyi maintains that: "For me I always approach my Facebook as like my diary." Dyantyi also admits that she shares a lot about her life on Facebook; good, bad, personal, professional, but mostly significant moments of her life: Dyantyi asserts that:

There are so many things that I share on my Facebook; my break up's, my abortion, being excluded, winning things, losing things, being mugged, moving into a new place, getting into new relationships, I share so many things.

Therefore, Dyantyi proves Couldry and Hepp's (2017) theory that, because of SNSs and digital platforms such as Facebook there has been a shift in how people socialise and communicate with one another. Since this shift, sociality no longer depends on face-to-face interactions with people you are in proximity with unlike in the past (Thompson, 1995). Therefore, the emergence of SNSs has transformed how people relate to one another (Bevan et al., 2014). Furthermore, Pornsakulvanich (2018) adds that this shift in the way people communicate and connect is not only limited to their friends, but it also includes family. Dyantyi is disclosing very personal things not face-to-face to family and to close friends but is using Facebook in an intimate way for them to find out. So, this intimacy becomes a different sort from the face-to-face kind. Therefore, Dyantyi agrees that sociality has transformed into a digital sociality and asserts that: "I realised I wouldn't share things with my family and my partner. I would go post about it and then expect them to see my post." Dyantyi further explains that:

There are so many posts that I have shared but the one that stands out though is an eventful post, a post that made people aware about me being raped and the consequences I was facing because of the #RURreferenceList protests. This is a post from 2017, during my trial, my disciplinary hearing with this whole Rhodes case. It was my first time speaking publicly about being raped and my whole experience with the disciplinary hearing and the possibilities of me getting excluded something along those lines, how it was like literally the end. That was the first time even my ex-boyfriend at the time finding out that I was raped, and then my mom also saw that post, and then my grandma was also told about that post and then she called me. My mom also called me, and she was like people are sending her screen shots of the post. I don't think I had spoken about it ever to anyone, publicly, so people were like shocked, and sympathized with me. I think it was the first time speaking about my disciplinary hearing like giving it proper context to like what I'm feeling and going through.

Dyantyi asserts that: "I feel like even if I have friends in my life. I don't always want to talk to them in person. I'd rather we discuss what I've posted once they'd seen it."

On 6 November 2017, Dyantyi shared for the first time on Facebook that she was raped by two men, who were both registered Rhodes students, on the same night. In this post Dyantyi reveals details about how she was raped and how she could not remember anything the next day except for a few flashbacks from that fateful night. She explains that she did not report the rape to the police, describing how traumatic this was for her because she was facing a possible exclusion due to her activism during the #RUreferenceList protests, whilst the men who raped her continued with life like nothing happened. Dyantyi was blamed and slut shamed by men because of how drunk she was the night she was raped. She shares that this was something she has never told anyone before including her family and her boyfriend at the time. Below is the lengthy passage being the above-mentioned post.

I want to tell ya'll about how I got raped at Rhodes in my first year by two men, on the same night, and I didn't report it the very next day when I woke up and had the evidence inside of me and all over my clothes because 'friends' were like 'don't you remember last night'. I want to tell ya'll about how it's like walking past someone who texts you the next day telling you how amazing last night was when you have no recollection of what happened, YET ALONE KNOW THE GUY. I want to tell ya'll about how traumatizing and daunting it has been for me since May 31, 2015, walking past my rapists, with their heads high because they are the cool kids on campus and forever 'stay winning' when each time I'd see them, my heart would sink even deeper. I want to tell ya'll that even after confrontation of my second rapists (mind you they are friends) he still didn't find anything wrong in what he did, but slut shamed me for being 'so drunk' last night. I remember he said to me on WhatsApp- 'you rode me like a monkey', it was crazy'. I remember waking up the next day to inbox messages from people (MEN FROM RHODES) that were at the site of the rape telling me how they had seen me naked in a car and 'how can I not be ashamed of myself. I want to tell ya'll how I had flashbacks shortly after and I started remembering parts of that night. I was raped at Pepper Grove by Wimpy, and I was raped in a car at a party that I did not even remember. One of the guys is on the RUreferenceList, the other isn't, but he's still outchea getting his masters/PhD and flourishing because 'stay winning'. Me on the other hand, I kept this to myself and only came to terms with it last year when I heard that one guy is in fact a serial rapist on campus, and I fell prey to him. Me on the other hand, I am facing 10 years exclusions at Rhodes University and every

other institution because of protesting a vile rape culture that exists in this colonial institution. I'll probably even get in shit for just sharing this.

#### **4.4 USING FACEBOOK AS A VEHICLE FOR ACTIVISM**

##### **4.4.1 Development of Dyantyi's level of consciousness**

Currently a politically and socially conscious feminist and activist, Dyantyi believes that she has always been politically conscious. However, her level of consciousness when it came to political and social issues was not yet developed when she started using Facebook. Although she had some level of awareness when it came to gender issues, for instance, how men oppress women (example provided below). She was not yet knowledgeable on discourses of, for example, the patriarchal system, feminism, or sexual violence against women at the time. Her level of consciousness gradually developed over the years in high school and more so when she became a university student and a feminist activist. She was well informed and involved in a lot of political and social issues including sexual violence against women discourses and protests. Dyantyi asserts that:

I think I have been politically conscious for the most part of my life, but I wasn't talking about black feminist, ethics and morals, ideas like I am now and grabbing the land and all these ideas that are influenced by politics obviously because I was twelve.

This level of political consciousness seems to have started developing when Dyantyi was in high school because on 12 April 2013 when she was in grade eleven (standard nine) and 16 years old, Dyantyi posted the following:

I value myself as a woman, I know I won't fall easy to these biased, critical statements from men, EVER!!! It's about high time women did the same thing too!

In the above-mentioned post, Dyantyi exhibits a level of consciousness about her social identity as a woman. She raises three issues; the fact that she knows her worth as a woman, she refuses to listen to men's opinion about women, and in general she's advocating for women to stand their ground. Therefore, Dyantyi does seem to have started developing her political consciousness when she was in high school.

To further gauge the development of Dyantyi's level of consciousness throughout the years of her use of Facebook, scrolling down her Facebook wall, we found a post which was posted six years later to the one mentioned above. These two posts are both similar in that Dyantyi shows support and advocates for women. However, compared to the first post, the following post is more in-depth on details about current social discourses. Posted on 17 March 2018 by Dyantyi, the post read:

Zodwa Wabantu is a feminist icon wethu. People are just against her because she doesn't look or sound like what society expects her to – bougie with a touch of “academia”. She's a feminist. She's the epitome of owning her sexuality and importantly her body in South Africa right now. She's got a lot of men and women shook. She can do as she pleases with her vagina and that should not invite violence on her because of your patriarchal and conservative views on black women's bodies.

Zodwa Wabantu is a South African media personality, socialite, and dancer. She is mostly popular for dressing half naked in public events, almost revealing her private parts, especially when she is dancing. She also posts half naked pictures and videos on her digital platforms. Zodwa Wabantu also speaks openly about her sex life and the men she has slept with. Because of this, Zodwa Wabantu has received a lot of backlash from society, she has been shamed, called indecent, and labelled as a whore. Most South African men and women have criticised Zodwa telling her to cover her body because as a 'woman' she shouldn't be revealing her body for the public to see.

In this second post Dyantyi is in support of Zodwa Wabantu who doesn't conform to societal norms including beliefs about how women should dress or carry themselves to be respected, especially by men. Dyantyi believes Zodwa Wabantu is a feminist icon who refuses to listen to a patriarchal and conservative society. Like the first post when Dyantyi was 16 years old, in this second post Dyantyi was 21 years old and was still advocating for women like she did six years ago in the first post.

The dissimilarity between the above two posts is that, unlike the first post, when Dyantyi was still in high school, the second post exhibits a more politically and socially conscious Dyantyi. In the second post she is still supporting and advocating for women. However, she exhibits more knowledge about social discourses on feminism, sexuality, patriarchy, body autonomy and current

social issues such as violence against women. Therefore, the second post shows that Dyantyi's level of consciousness evolved over the years.

#### **4.4.2 Digital activism**

As indicated in chapter one, Dyantyi seems to have been something of an activist since she was very young. It is thus not surprising that after her exclusion at Rhodes for protesting the pervasive sexual violence on campus, she did not stop her activism, instead she used her Facebook account to continue. Dyantyi's posts show that she is not only using Facebook as an outlet to post about her personal life, but she is also using the platform to continue her activism and deal with the consequences of having been an activist at Rhodes.

Mutsvairo (2016) asserts that because of the availability of social platforms such as Facebook, activists post and share information and it immediately reaches a massive audience, consequently, Facebook has proven to be an effective platform for purposes of activism. In addition, social networks such as Facebook are pivotal spaces for expressing dissent and for the mobilisation of activists (Mutsvairo, 2016). Social media such as Facebook have thus played a role of being an alternative arena for public deliberation (Bosch, 2017). With sexual violence against women being rife in the world, social media such as Facebook creates a space for women to share their experiences and creates a space for gender solidarity, often engaging in critical discussions about gender and its impact on equity and liberation, "Women of color use social media as a tool to unite and inform" (Williams, 2015, 342).

Dyantyi's use of Facebook to continue her activism can be referred to as digital activism, according to Bosch (2017) digital activism is where people use the internet and SNSs as platforms for mass mobilisation and political action. Since the evolution of digital platforms and social media networks, as stated by Bosch (2017) activists have moved towards digital networks as a channel for action because of its capacity that reaches a massive audience. In addition, the internet is helpful for spreading information to large audiences (Bosch, 2017). Dyantyi asserts that:

I very much work with Facebook, my activism lies on Facebook right now and so I use Facebook to interact with my followers, people who might be interested in knowing about developments regarding my case with Rhodes. Because it is a high-profile legal battle, I would like to think that people who follow me also want to see what progress has been made in that regard, how I've picked up the pieces post my exclusion.

Below is a post in which Dyantyi explains the importance of social media in our lives and how it has been useful in various ways. Dyantyi also accentuates that social media is a significant tool in the digital society especially for activism with regards to mobilising the youth for social issues. Posted on 8 March 2018, the post reads:

Social media has become a huge part of our lives as we live in this digital world. Social media has become a tool for connection in various ways such as spreading information, job employment advertising, crowd funding for needy individuals, platforms of success for others and most importantly an organ of mobilisation for the youth on socio economic and political issues.

Like many feminist activists, Dyantyi has moved towards digital networks to channel action. She affirms that she uses her Facebook to spread information to large audiences and believes that her activism depends on her Facebook presence. Dyantyi also believes that it is important to her to keep people who are interested in her court case against Rhodes updated, this also helps her garner online support. Updating her friends/followers on 3 April 2020 Dyantyi posted the following:

Just checked my emails and my lawyers have informed me that #RoadToSupremeCourt has begun. #StandWithYolanda is taking a colonial and historically anti-Black, anti-poor rape infested institution to the Supreme Court. Both parties have finally agreed on the record, and we'll be filling in a few days in the matter between Dyantyi VS Rhodes University. This has been a 5-year journey, it's crazy how I'm going to the highest court in the land all because I want justice and it's taken this long, the levels of fight in this matter, it's been intense to say the least.

In this post, Dyantyi is updating her Facebook friends/followers specifically those who are following her case against Rhodes and supporting her that she is finally going to the Supreme Court to fight Rhodes University for excluding her because of her activism for protesting rape on campus. Dyantyi also expresses her feelings and says that it has been an intense five years fighting for justice. In the post Dyantyi also has the #hashtag StandWithYolanda which encourages people to stand with her by supporting her and sharing her posters via their social media platforms to spread awareness to the masses and garner more online support during this period of the court case.

## The significance of hashtags

Over the years digital activism has proven to be a powerful tool for political mobilisation and provides a new platform to engage protesters (Bosch, 2017). Activists also make use of #hashtags to drive a movement and encourage others to engage in that conversation under that #hashtag. #Hashtags are “used for grouping messages and content to make it easy for users to find the information they are looking for” (Lips, 2018). “Hashtags have emerged as an effective way to share information and spur action about a demographic that seems to get little support from its nation – black women” (Williams, 2015, 342). Although #hashtags started and are mostly popular on the social media platform Twitter (Lips, 2018), they are also used on Facebook for these purposes.

For instance, as mentioned in chapter one, the #hashtag #RUreferenceList protests at Rhodes started as a post on Facebook, posted anonymously in a Facebook page dubbed RU Queer Confessions, Questions and Crushes. This Facebook page was administered to allow anyone to post anonymously. That post sparked a conversation on the comments section and saw students engaging about the pervasive rape on campus at Rhodes and the men whose names were on the list, before a physical protest erupted. Sharing her thoughts on the anonymous Facebook post at Rhodes Dyantyi asserts that:

Because Facebook is a popular platform at Rhodes University, a lot of student pages are created on Facebook, not on Twitter, or other social media platforms. I would think that for something to be almost legit, in terms of student politics, whatever it is, you would go on Facebook to see if anyone is talking about it. So, that's why I think the students at Rhodes used Facebook to post the 11 names of alleged rapists.

The #RUreferenceList movement is an example that portrayed social media as a significant tool for mobilising the masses and disseminating information (Bosch, 2017). Digital activism is thus significant because it creates a space where everyone has a voice in public discourses (Williams, 2015) such as the students at Rhodes who started engaging on the post and the conversation got widespread that it transcended to another social media platform – Twitter. This consequently sparked a national conversation around rape in the country especially on university campuses. Williams asserts that “Black feminists’ use of hashtag activism is a unique fusion of social justice, technology, and citizen journalism” (Williams, 2015: 343). Essentially, social media hashtags

bring attention to black women's issues which have been ignored for decades (Williams, 2015). Dyantyi says:

The significance of Facebook and the hashtag movements is that it allows for you to share and connect and to reach a wider audience. In terms of sparking or gaining a reaction or conversation, #RUreferenceList did achieve a reaction, a conversation, a very important conversation that needed and still needs to be had constantly in many environments.

Furthermore, activists communicate on social media by posting a message "that seeks to collectively address the problem" (Chon and Park, 2020, 5). People then engage on that topic by using the same #hashtag to spread the message across social media platforms and that is how protests are mobilised (Chon and Park, 2020). Dyantyi also adds that #hashtag movements are significant because they allow the #hashtag itself to archive and store pieces of information that one can easily categorise and access. She asserts that: "When you search #YolandaDyantyi, #StandWithYolanda or #RUreferenceList, it's like a digitised version of a library." In addition, digital activism has thus provided a space for young black women to unite and speak about their shared experiences and struggles, particularly when it comes to rape and/or GBV (Williams, 2015).

#### Using Facebook to speak out against rape

Facebook is a significant tool that can be used to make the public aware of violence against women because it allows anti-violence advocates to engage with society at large immediately without depending on how the mainstream media frames sexual violence and black women (Williams, 2015). Moreover, "social media hashtags bring attention to black women's issues when traditional mainstream media newspaper articles and television stories ignore black women's concerns as they have for decades" (Williams, 2015, 342). Dyantyi thinks that it is necessary to use platforms such as Facebook to speak out about being raped because it also encourages other survivors to speak up:

I think speaking on platforms like Facebook kind of dispels the myth that rape or sexual violence is not common in our society. I do think that Facebook helps in the sense that it helps you connect with other people, possible survivors who also are looking for a place where they can speak and share and connect with people who have had similar experiences with them. So, it helps other survivors because you connect with the community of other

people, it kind of eliminates that idea of isolation or being the only one or feeling any sort of shame, because I think anything, people are moved by seeing other people talk about things that they are not necessarily comfortable with speaking up about. So, there's that level of encouragement.

Most women who have been raped do not easily speak out about being raped, and a vast majority never approach the police to report the rape. Dyantyi claims that it took a while for her to understand what had happened to her and for her to come to terms with it:

Opening a case was the last thing on my mind, I didn't think about it. I was dealing with school academia, trying to pass my modules so I can go to the next year and just essentially complete my degree. When I think about it, opening a case was the least of things in my mind. I think I was just going through a very long time of processing, denying, even wanting to forget that night happened, because I was very uncomfortable with the information that I was given the morning of that. So, I think those are kind of the reasons why what led to me not opening a case against the police.

In addition to this, Dyantyi says that her decision not to open a rape case with the police was also influenced by the fact that she does not have faith in the police. She heard of many cases from her social circles and in the media in which perpetrators were not convicted and survivors were shamed and blamed. This is also something she also experienced when she was raped. Dyantyi also believes that there is a huge discrepancy between the number of reported cases and rape convictions:

Just by looking at statistics, the number of successful convictions towards the number of cases that have been reported, there's a huge discrepancy, a huge gap, things don't make sense. And looking at the number of rape cases and we look at the number of cases that have been reported, because some cases are reported, but they're not necessarily reported that the case has been opened at the police, but it's reported maybe to a social worker, which reported maybe to a civil society organisation that works with survivors, there are various ways that I think statistics are gathered, apart from reported cases, there's still discrepancies. So just generally, just looking at the way that the system has dealt with issues of sexual violence, I don't have faith in the system. I think the system is under resourced, over incapacitated for me, there's no faith.

### Silenced survivors find their voices on social media

“The stigmatization of the rape victims also accounts for more reasons why rape incidences are mostly silenced by victims and their family members who consider the impact of such reports on their daughter and family reputation” (Awobamise et al., 2019, 201). When women speak out against rape, they challenge the patriarchal system, this defiance is more likely to be rejected by the majority in society, especially men. So, on top of the trauma of being raped, women must face public humiliation, backlash, being shamed, blamed, and not believed (Awobamise et al., 2019).

*Khwezi* the title of a book by Redi Tlhabi (2017), reflects on the life of Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo who reported that she was raped by a very powerful man in the country, Jacob Zuma, who was, at the time, the deputy president of South Africa. Amongst other issues discussed in the book, the story mirrors the horrendous experiences of what rape victims must go through in society after being raped and speaking out against rape especially against men who hold very powerful positions in society. “Jacob Zuma, the man who became the president of South Africa in 2009, was acquitted of rape in 2006” (Tlhabi, 2017). After the rape trial against Zuma, Fezekile had to escape the country for her safety, Tlhabi writes:

The day after the trial concluded, Fezekile and her mother left South Africa for their second exile. Their country, their home, had spat on them. Fezekile told me that, whether she had won the case or not, she reckons they would still have had to live their lives on the run, simply put they had been hounded out. During the trial, their house in KwaMashu, a township in KwaZulu Natal was burned down. It is suspected that Zuma supporters were the perpetrators, but no one was arrested for this crime. There is no doubt that this criminal act was meant to scare Fezekile and Beauty into submission (Tlhabi, 2017).

As a result of this shaming, blaming, and harassing of rape victims as attempts to silence them, because they speak out against rape and/or report their rapists to the police, most women thus choose to be silent about their sexual violence experiences. This is because even those who report it and open a case do not get justice, as most alleged rapists get acquitted of the rape charges. One of Tlhabi’s interviewees for the book was a journalist who claimed she was almost raped by Jacob Zuma but escaped because she had told him that she was on her periods while he was caressing

her. She told Tlhabi that she had never spoken out about the incident. Tlhabi asked what her reasons were for not speaking out, the journalist said:

So many reasons: my family, Zuma's position... and I covered the trial. I saw how brutal it was, the total humiliation of Fezeka and her mom, I did not have the appetite for it. The easiest thing was to just block it off. Who would have believed me, anyway? (Tlhabi, 2017: 196).

This is an example of why many rape survivors choose to be silent about being raped especially by powerful men in society, it also reveals the horror that these survivors must go through during a rape trial such as being threatened to be killed. Another example of a woman whom society tried to silence for standing up against rape is Cheryl Zondi, a then 21-year-old South African woman from Gqeberha who testified against a Nigerian Pastor Tim Omotoso whom she says took advantage of her and molested her from a young age (Akwasi, March 2019). Arrested on 20 April 2017 by the South African priority crime unit, hawks at the Port Elizabeth International Airport, Omoto is senior pastor of a Jesus Dominion International, based in Durban, South Africa. He is currently in jail and on trial at the Gqeberha high court for rape and human trafficking (SABC News, August 2021).

Zondi was accused by the Christians of South Africa (COSA) of being a "slay queen" and a "criminal" after she opened the Cheryl Zondi foundation to help victims of sexual violence by so-called "evil" pastors in South Africa (African News Agency, September 2019). After the National Lottery and other givers donated to the foundation COSA said the money was taken to fund "slay queen" lifestyles (African News Agency, September 2019). African News Agency (2019) also reported that:

"The lies that have been perpetuated are a deliberate smear campaign that aims to discourage Cheryl from continuing with the case," deputy chairperson of the CZF board, Thoko Xaluva-Mkhwanazi said. "It is secondary victimisation of a survivor in the hands of so-called 'men of God' in defence of one of their own. Cheryl will not be silenced, intimidated and scared through lies that are being peddled by people who do not deserve to be called Christians let alone leaders of Christians."

In addition to this, during this rape trial Zondi, like Fezekile (Tlabi, 2017) was forced into exile because she received death threats for speaking out. Even the witness protection programme did not protect her.

### Social media returns power to survivors

Because of the lack of faith in the police and the experience of being shamed and judged by society, many rape victims have thus opted to use social media to tell their stories and name and shame their rapists (Awobamise et al., 2019). Dyantyi asserts that there are social media pages that allow individuals to be anonymous. These pages have been used by women who fear being revictimised by society for reporting a rapist. They use these anonymous pages to report their rapists and make the public aware of that person and simultaneously receive online support from people who believe them. This ultimately encourages other victims to speak out about their experiences. Dyantyi adds that:

The Facebook pages that allow you to be anonymous hides an individual and protects their identity from being revictimised by society. When we talk about protection, the person who's behind that profile has all the power. Because at the end of the day that's just really what it's about, power.

For instance, the person who posted the names of alleged rapists called #RUreferenceList was enabled to be anonymous and thus was protected from being harassed or bullied by the men whose names were on the list, the student body at Rhodes or by society at large. The person was also protected from legal repercussions.

Therefore, anonymous pages on SNSs platforms such as Facebook are thus significant because in the past women such as Kwezi, Zondi and Dyantyi who have challenged the system and spoke out against rape were dealt with harshly by the justice system. Therefore, social media returns control to survivors because they are afforded opportunities to own their story choosing what they want to say and do and who they speak to. This in turn has the potential to encourage others to speak out, to not be ashamed and to garner support from the online community. These possibilities also offer the survivor to address their mental health challenges.

#### **4.4.3 Difference between the old generation of feminists and new generation**

“Young activists combine on-the-ground mobilisation with cyber activism that maximises the potential of new communication technologies (Internet and cellphone) and social networks (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube)” (Skalli, 2014, 244). Recent protests about rape have seen a shift in how the young generation of women and men mobilise and initiate protests of this nature (Skalli, 2014). Notable, of course, is the use of social media platforms which are now available for protest as well as other social uses. Therefore, social media appears to have transformed ways young people convey their generational consciousness, their involvement in politics and taking part in the ongoing transformations in society (Skalli, 2014).

Although social media is meant to be a space where everyone has equal democratic participation compared to movements in the pre-digital era, it is also used to amplify marginalised voices with fewer recourses. Dyantyi agrees that the new generation of feminists is quite different from the old generation:

Technology and social media, and the internet have created that vacuum that didn't exist in the 20th century, that now exists in the 21st century, which is this whole thing of engaging online under a pseudonym or anonymously, and can post and say whatever you want, with minimal or little repercussions if you're not caught, which was not provided in the 20th century, that kind of freedom of expression, even the ways that we've gone about protesting are different, the 21st century generation that I'm a part of is unapologetically fearless.

Mapomere (2011) claims that women activists have in the past initiated gender-based violence and sexual violence protests on social media platforms using hashtags (#). Although their cyber activism created a continuation of previously established efforts by feminist groups and women rights groups, it identifies itself as different from them in self-conscious and unconscious ways (Skalli, 2014). Young women activists are usually hesitant to identify with ‘feminism’. However, when they do, they quickly add that their feminism embraces class, race, gender, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation (Skalli, 2014). Therefore, the young generation has re-defined their feminist activism by being clear about its continuity with the previous generation as well as distancing itself from it (Skalli, 2014). Dyantyi suggests that:

And if you think about the 1956 march there was kind of promo protesting for women's rights to be acknowledged in the country, which is more or less in essence, the same thing that has happened with #RUreferenceList or the #Totalshutdown women's movement in 2018 in South Africa. Those are different kind of women, 2018 total shutdown movement involved, a different breed of women who chose to be identified as women whereas in 1956, it was another kind of women of that generation, who were modest, who was told by society that this is what a woman is. The differences are also influenced by other things that we are not in control of like the evolution of society and leaning towards modernisation and Western ideas of being.

For instance, further comparing the different generations of feminist activists, Dyantyi refers to the #RUreferenceList protests, and claims that, in addition to social media's role in this generation of feminist activists, the difference between the 20<sup>th</sup> century generation of feminist activists to the current generation is that the current generation is about inclusivity in terms of gender and sexuality:

The #RUreferenceList space was from the get-go for anybody and everybody to speak out about their experiences with abuse including men who may have been gay or transgender or non-binary individuals. I think it acknowledged that rape culture doesn't just affect straight women. So, I think our generation's women or rape protests such are different in terms of gender and sexuality was considered, for instance, in the #RUreferenceList protests. And even with the leadership, although it was very much documented as a leaderless movement but throughout the time of the protest, there was a task team that comprised of about maybe 15 to 20 students of all sorts, white, black, gay, lesbian cishet, queer, non-binary. It was inclusive of all our differences as a society.

#### **4.5 USING FACEBOOK FOR MENTAL HEALTH PURPOSES**

For Dyantyi Facebook has played the role of both “addiction” and support for mental health care:

I love Facebook, I am addicted to Facebook. I think it's very important to look at it from that angle, it comes from an addict point of view. I'm an addict to Facebook because I don't think a day goes by that I don't log on to Facebook. It's checking into the world, the people that I know, that I might be interested in and their content. More so because now we are on lock down, one doesn't have a lot of opportunities to check in on people in a physical sense;

meeting up with friends, going to events, seminars, workshops etc., because of this pandemic and so one is kind of forced to check in on people and see what's going on in the country and around the world. I typically check in and log on to my Facebook account, every day. I can do without Facebook though, but currently and in the life that I'm leading, I rely on Facebook to engage on a personal level with several people because I don't have a smartphone. I'm not on WhatsApp, so Facebook becomes the kind of like immediate communication space, and for working, I use it to find opportunities.

### The impact of Facebook addiction on Dyantyi's on mental health

Dyantyi claims that she is addicted to Facebook and that not a day goes by without her logging in on her Facebook account. Kraut et al., insist that there is a link between heavier internet use, the decline in participants' communication with family members and the size of their social circle together with increases in depression and loneliness (Kraut et al., 1998). In addition, at the individual level, it is argued that lack of proper social interaction can cause poor and decreased psychological health (Kraut et al., 1998).

Bargh and McKenna support the above argument and add that internet communication produces an "impoverished and sterile form of social exchange compared to traditional face-to-face interactions and will therefore produce negative outcomes (loneliness and depression) for its users" (Bargh and McKenna., 2004). Dyantyi agrees that Facebook can have a negative impact on one's mental health because of things that one can be exposed to such as bullying and/or harassment from other Facebook users. She confirms that:

Facebook can have a negative impact on a person's mental health, for instance, when people say hurtful things that are not true. I don't think I've ever experienced loneliness because of Facebook but I've been stressed, I've had my life targeted because of Facebook. People will befriend you on Facebook solely because they want to see your actions, your moves. It's very easy for you to add people that you don't know on Facebook, because you're really trying to expand your community. You think people are what they seem, but they really aren't. So, Facebook can be stressful, it can induce a sort of level of anxiety or depression.

“Despite the benefits and opportunities afforded by Internet-enabled mobile technologies, there have been concerns about the growing rate of harmful online activities involving deliberate malice and harassment such as cyberbullying” (Kwan et al., 2020). Dyantyi claims that she has suffered mental health challenges before because of the bullying she experienced on Facebook when she was still at Rhodes and running for an SRC position:

When I was at Rhodes, Facebook was very big that's where other students also get to share how they feel about you, especially if you're in the public space where you're popular, and I was a popular well known student activist. I ran for public office in the SRC, being in that position kind of put me in a vulnerable position, I was exposed to all sorts of comments, positive and negative. The negative things that were said about me had an impact on my mental health. It's horrible things people say, nasty things about what they think about you, your politics, or how you go about carrying yourself.

Dyantyi describes the negative impact on her mental health as just having ‘stress’ but not depression or loneliness which are some of the mental health challenges described by Kraut et al., (1998) as the results of excessive use of Facebook. However, Dyantyi adds that she doesn’t allow the mental health challenges to control her life. Dyantyi posits that:

I don't think I allow my mental health to get me to a point where I don't eat or sleep because of Facebook, I don't recall even in the times where I did experience being bullied, harassed, being stalked by trolls, people creating fake accounts, just to come and tell you nonsense. I would be stressed yes but they don't lead to me not eating or sleeping, if anything, I probably eat a lot. I am not hard on myself like that, I just allow myself to feel what I need to feel. And if I feel like being present on Facebook, I'll be present if I don't I won't.

Dyantyi say that she doesn’t speak much about her mental health or some of the mental health challenges she has faced partly because of the traumas and violence she has experienced, she posits that the other reason behind this decision is “because I sometimes fear speaking about mental illness challenges or mental health problems in ways that are problematic.” The 10<sup>th</sup> of October is World Mental Health Day and Dyantyi used to this opportunity to share with her friends/followers about some of the mental health challenges she has faced in the past. On 10 October 2021 Dyantyi posted:

The only thing I've been diagnosed with is PTSD and this was after this one time in my 1<sup>st</sup> year at Rhodes I had a severe mental breakdown, and it (my state in that time, my actions) affected the people around me, my friends, I couldn't stop, and they brought a psychiatrist (I think) who was threatening to sedate me if I 'didn't snap out of it'. Anyway, this is to say that every day is an opportunity to learn and to seek community in places that are affirming. I see you.

In addition to revealing her mental health challenges Dyantyi also encouraged her followers to learn more about mental health and try to find help in spaces that offer emotional support and encouragement. Therefore, Dyantyi used her Facebook to address her mental health challenges and spread awareness about mental health.

#### **4.5.1 Rape and mental health challenges**

As mentioned before, Dyantyi is a rape survivor. Research reveals that rape can be very tormenting and can cause physical, psychological, and emotional damages to the victim (WHO, 2012). Mental health consequences of rape include nonpathological distress, i.e., fear, sadness, anger, self-blame, shame sadness or guilt (WHO, 2012). On top of these are anxiety disorders which include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, medically unexplained somatic complaints, alcohol and substance abuse and other suicidal ideation and self-harm (WHO, 2012). Dyantyi asserts that she also suffered mental health challenges because of being raped, on top of that she was also consumed by guilt and shame, as a result she used alcohol and nicotine to cope with the challenges:

I relied heavily on alcohol and narcotics. I smoked a lot of cigarettes. Why? you smoke because you feel like you're anxious, and smoking might calm the anxiety. I didn't know why I picked up this habit, I think I remember why I began smoking cigarettes, but it had nothing to do with sexual violence. But I think it became more amplified because of it and also being in the environment that I was in that obviously played a number on my mental health, specifically after being raped and just kind of navigating that space that I was in of not knowing who to speak to about my experience, how do I even articulate, kind of getting over the guilt and the shame. So, I think without even the narcotics, I was overwhelmed, I just felt foreign in my body. I felt weird, I can't really recall and go back to the time perhaps

for traumatic reasons but right at the top of my mind right now, just speaking and answering this question. Alcohol abuse definitely became a thing and smoking a lot.

Even though it has been six years after Dyantyi was raped, she says she is still dealing with the mental health consequences:

I am a person who is still in the process of overcoming mental health challenges, years later, like four years, five years later, I'm still in that process, I think the process just looks like having people around, who can also help you identify that you are not okay and want to help you or hold your hand in whatever ways that they can and are willing to, I think overcoming includes having such conversations be having to speak about your experience year in and year out. And I think it's tiring, But I think it's kind of important in the sense that you're able to touch base with yourself and really reflect and kind of see how far you've come with dealing with, such challenges or the emotional, mental spiritual level?

Chapter seven of *Khwezi* reflects on Fezekile's second exile after the rape trial. One of interviewees for the book was Teresa, she and her husband Marc Wegrif had opened their home to Fezekile in Dar es Salaam (Tlhabi, 2017). Teresa spoke on the mental health challenges that Fezekile faced after the rape trial: "Teresa concludes that Fezekile showed signs of depression, although she did not recognise them at the time" (Tlhabi, 2017, 180). In addition, Tlhabi states that, prior to Fezekile's death Teresa had learnt that she was on antidepressants. Allan (Fezekile's ex-boyfriend) claims that Fezekile did open to him about the rape trial and told him that, it ruined her psychologically. Therefore, rape trials also affect survivors' mental health (Tlhabi, 2017).

#### **4.5.2 Facebook's contribution to survivors' psychological well-being**

Although not a rape trial but Dyantyi's internal hearing and then court cases against Rhodes have also taken a toll on her mental health. On 3 December 2019 Dyantyi posted:

If anyone asks me how I'm feeling just know that I genuinely hate being the 'center of attention' under such circumstance, so in fact, this whole Rhodes court case has been nothing but mentally exhausting, andifuni noxoka. Having your whole life on display and having to plead for rightful justice is something I didn't sign up for in this life thing.

In this post Dyantyi is expressing her feelings towards the court case against Rhodes as mentally exhausting. She further explains that it is not something she signed up for. “As digital technologies become embedded within societies and cultures worldwide, opportunities will arise to leverage these technologies for advancing global mental health care” (Naslund et al., 2017). Technology could be the driver rather than the facilitator of change to mental health care delivery in low-income and middle-income countries (Naslund et al., 2017).

Given South Africa’s expensive medical system with no real support for the uninsured, Dyantyi has not been able to afford to admit herself into a mental health hospital. On 9 December 2019 Dyantyi posted:

I need to admit myself into a mental health hospital for a bit, but I don’t have medical aid nor money. I can’t handle it anymore.

Recent research on global mental health care revealed that the reach, effectiveness, and sustainability of traditional methods of mental health care has been a cause of concern. This is because they mainly depend on face-to-face meetings with expensive professionals which a lot of people from low-income and middle-income countries like South Africa cannot afford (Naslund et al., 2017). Therefore, new approaches are needed to make mental health care more accessible to a wider population especially to those who are unable to afford it because of impoverish backgrounds they come from (Naslund et al., 2017).

For Dyantyi, Facebook has opened that space for non-professional support for people to use and speak about their mental health challenges including having their friends to support them virtually (Naslund et al., 2017). Furthermore, Dyantyi believes that SNSs such as Facebook can also be considered as contributing to positive psychological health (Hart et al., 2015):

I could say yes, it has created that space. I mean, the reason why people share content, I'm speaking from a professional and a personal point of view. We all have different reasons as to why we join social media, but the main thing is to connect with people, to see what other people you know in your community are doing. And for you to also be part of that space where you are sharing as well, whatever life achievements, or events may be happening in your life including being in a downward spiral in terms of your mental health, which is something that I've also shared, And I think for those who use Facebook sharing, whether they're having a high or low moment in their life, such as myself, I often find that

sharing can be very therapeutic in its own right, just by knowing that or relying on the fact that someone out there will come across my post, they will read it, they will comment or engage or even if they don't, I know that my post hasn't been entirely skipped by the world. And I think Facebook provides that opportunity from the friends you have, however many, one of them is bound to come across your post, and one of them may or may not be moved to interact with that post in terms of commenting, but they will read it, if they choose to read it and I think it's just resting in that fact, that idea that my post is going to reach someone. And you look forward to any engagements you may have, it's just the idea of being heard, that somebody is listening, watching, reading what you've written. It can be seen as a place where you can rely on your friends for some sort of support.

Naslund et al., maintain that:

Digital technologies could help empower individuals with mental health challenges and their families to take charge of their own care and to support each other. We have observed this process, described as online peer-to-peer support, unfold on social media websites such as Facebook, whereby individuals with highly stigmatized mental illnesses connect with each other, provide support, challenge stigma, and share personal strategies for coping with symptoms (Naslund et al., 2017).

Facebook is one of the online support networks that might allow individuals with stigmatised mental health challenges to feel less alone and to find support from other users who share the same experiences with them of having mental health challenges (Naslund et al., 2017). In addition, using Facebook for the purposes of mental health care also gives individuals “access to important resources such as social support, recommended coping strategies, and self-help programmes through online communities” (Naslund et al., 2017).

#### **4.6 USING FACEBOOK FOR A SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

Dyanti asserts that she sees her Facebook as an online community where she can network with people, ask for help and help others where she can. The concept of ‘community’ originates from personal identification based on common places. However, “In the era of the internet, the common place where people live, and work has been dramatically extended and transformed. It is no longer physically bounded in time and location” (Zhang et al., 2012, 69). Furthermore, contemporary

communities are not defined by physical boundaries but more by social boundaries. For instance, things such as shared values, shared activity, or common fate, as well as its frame of reference (Zhang et al., 2012) Dyantyi says:

That's how I use my Facebook. I see my Facebook as a community on the internet that I'm able to speak to and I put myself in the middle of the road and I say to this community I need help and somebody's going to help me, you operate like that in life. I get that from my upbringing you must speak up, you mustn't sit knowing you are in trouble that's what my grandmas always taught me don't sit when you know, you're in a problem, it's gonna grow and grow and grow into something that was not meant to be, whereas if you had spoken up early, people, somebody could've have helped you. I am thinking about it now as I am talking to you, literally my motto, I mean it's not easy to ask for help. But why be on social media, what else am I gonna do on social media, only post about my relationships and how happy I am I don't think that's real; I don't think that reflects who I am and what I am going through and if I decide to curate my social media to be like all about happy vibes but am I really happy? But is my happiness going to stop me from engaging people? No, it's not. So, I use my social media, I use my Facebook as a platform to express my disinterest, my unhappiness, anger, whatever it is, anything.

Furthermore, research has shown inconsistent results on the use of social networking sites and social support, "some studies revealed a positive relationship between SNS use and social support" (Pornsakulvanich, 2017, 116). Hampton, Goulet, Rainie and Purcell also discovered that Facebook users declared high levels of emotional, instrumental and companionship support than non-Facebook users (Pornsakulvanich, 2017).

As Dyantyi is currently unemployed and looking for work, she affirms that she asks for any help she needs on Facebook. This includes asking for an Uber ride through to help with her rent. And people have responded positively:

That's why I believe in community, and I am a community member and I speak to my community members to help me the same way when I am able to help, I would do my part.

Because Dyantyi has no post-matric qualification, it is difficult for her to get a stable job that could sustain her life, "I attempted entrepreneurship/self-employment because dololo jobs, and no one is

trying to hire someone with solely a matric certificate who was ABOUT to graduate.” She therefore has also used her Facebook to ask for work opportunities, for donations to help pay for rent, data, food or Uber rides. On 22 August 2018 Dyantyi posted: “Your girl is looking for a job any job. Please, help spread the word. Hook me up.”

Again, on 30 December 2018 when she wanted to move out of home because of the toxicity she was exposed to, she posted on Facebook:

Friends I need a place to stay, I’m desperately trying to leave an abusive place called ‘home’. I refuse to bekezela any longer.

Dyantyi confirms that she does receive help through these appeals:

The ones who want to respond, respond. That's what happens in society, you have a community of people, and you hope that the community will help you and that's how I use my Facebook.

On 26 October 2020 Dyantyi updated her followers about money she managed to raise from the donations she gets from the public, she posted:

I’ve managed to raise R18 720 over the past 7 weeks. Most of it (code for all) has been used to pay my living expenses and keep me afloat. The fundraiser is still going. Please see the posters below for details on how to donate. Every rand counts, and every rand will be appreciated here.

Dyantyi admits that in a community, help is not always guaranteed and that she doesn’t always get what she asks for:

It’s like applying for a job and you don’t even get a regret email and they just ignore your application it’s the same feeling. Facebook is not the beginning and end. I have other social media platforms; I have other networks. Me posting for help on social media, I live in a real world that’s the thing you need to draw the distinction, do I live on Facebook, or do I live in a real world? So, if social media is not gonna help me in that particular moment I have to come back into my reality, my real physicality and figure the fuck out how am I going to solve my problems the one that I need help with I tap into the actual resources that I have in my real life and not the ones that are by usernames online.

#### **4.7 USING FACEBOOK FOR SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Research on individual-level social capital has commonly separated social capital between two different types namely, bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). On the one hand, bonding social capital is built among individuals who are in emotionally close relationships such as family and close friends (Putnam, 2000). On the other hand, bridging social capital derives from loose connections referred to by network researchers as “weak ties”. These are people who may provide useful information or new perspectives for another but generally not for emotional support (Granovetter, 1983 cited in Steinfield et al., 2008).

Dyantyi’s use of Facebook for social capital falls under bridging social capital. Although she has had long periods of unemployment, Dyantyi has become known as an activist and speaker for gender rights. She also started an NGO called Archive Amabali Wethu focusing on GBV-related issues, “The Archive: Amabali Wethu is an organization that aims to cultivate a practice of dialogue that broadens our understanding of GBV and recovery in South Africa.” She explains how Facebook helps facilitate her business:

Facebook has provided a space where I can advertise, give identity, and share information about my organisation. So those are the ways that it is facilitated indirectly, but directly, Facebook has just been that marketing environment for my organisation. Facebook has allowed my organisation to exist in a market. And because Archive Amabali Wethu is a digital first organisation, before being on the ground in anything like that. We're very specific on working with media, or multimedia platforms and so it was inevitable for us not to be on Facebook. We had to be on Facebook without a doubt.

Dyantyi claims that one of the biggest challenges of using Facebook for business is building funds:

Trying to grow a business, from an entrepreneurial perspective, self-employed perspective, I think what I have been dealing with is using Facebook as a space to reach funds that’s the difficulty, using Facebook to make money, I have a difficulty in that I think particularly because maybe of the number of followers that I have because Facebook is a space that can provide opportunities to make profit.

## Social capital and psychological well-being

Research reveals that social capital is one of the indicators of subjective well-being (Helliwell and Putman, 2004). Subjective well-being has to do with people's emotions and cognitive evaluations of their lives, including what people perceive as happiness, peace, fulfilment, and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2003). Kross et al., (2013) assert that subjective well-being also predicts an array of consequential benefits involving enhanced health and longevity; therefore, it is important in its own way.

Studies have indicated the possible pejorative effect of social networking sites to intervene with users' well-being and life satisfaction but there is little research on the way Facebook has an influence in the subjective well-being over time (Krasnova et al., 2013, Kross et al., 2013). The relationship between Facebook and well-being is very nuanced and is possibly influenced by numerous factors such as number of Facebook friends, perceived supportiveness of one's online work, depressive symptomology, loneliness, and self-esteem (Kross et al., 2013).

Dyanti confirms Helliwell and Putman's theory and declares that using Facebook and gaining social capital has had a positive impact on her mental health. She declares that it makes her feel good to be acknowledged and recognised because of the work that she shares on Facebook. Dyanti also believes that the reactions to a post she shared do boost her self-confidence which improves her mental health:

Facebook has potential to be beneficial, and contribute to one's mental health positively, because it's nice when you post something, and it gets positive reactions. The love hearts, the likes, the laughing faces, it's nice to get to kind of sass out reaction from people and to see where people are at and how they feel about a specific piece of content that you've put out. So, I definitely think when I've just shared something and it's garnered the kind of support that I was hoping it would or that even if I wasn't, but it has, and its positive support that obviously does a number on my mental health, it shoots right out of the roof. It's nice, to be acknowledged, being recognised.

The relationship between Facebook usage and psychological well-being has been challenged by scholars. Some scholars argue that Facebook may have positive cognitive effects on well-being for various reasons such as helping reduce uncertainty, providing a basis for social trust, civic engagement, and political participation (Kraut et al., 1998 and Krasnova et al., 2012). Other

scholars see Facebook as broadening its users' horizons and building a sense of connectedness. Studies have also found that younger people with more social capital will presumably engage in behaviours that lead to better health, academic success, and emotional development (Steinfeld et al., 2008). The acquisition of social capital has been thus linked to benefits in users' psychological well-being. Which has proven to be true in Dyantyi's case. Below is a list of examples of the recognition, gigs, and job opportunities, afforded to Dyantyi via her use of Facebook.

#### Media recognition, speaking gigs and job opportunities

Dyantyi has gotten recognition from national media houses (both TV and radio) such as 702, SA FM, Kaya FM, Power FM, Aljezeera, BBC, Newsroom Africa, and various SABC platforms. Amongst other issues which she addresses are sexual violence, GBV, #RUreferenceList protests, her exclusion from Rhodes, being a rape survivor, #RhodesWar etc. In April 2018, Dyantyi was also featured in a column on Marie Claire international magazine alongside well-known feminist and scholar Pumla Gqola. She has published articles online on GBV-related issues and through Huffington Post SA.

Dyantyi secured an internship at an activist organisation called Gender Links SA, "A Southern African NGO that promotes gender equality and justice which recognises that patriarchy is deeply imbedded in society. The organisation seeks to reverse the vicious negative cycle of women's lack of voice, choice and control, through actions at regional, national, community, household and individual level that show that change is possible, through working with men and women, boys and girls" (Gender Links SA, 2021). On 16 April 2018 Dyantyi posted:

First day of my internship programme at the Gender Links SA. I'm thankful, I'm grateful. I'm excited. Camagu!

On 3 October 2018, Dyantyi secured another three months' internship at Amandla.mobi, Dyantyi posted:

First day at the Amandla.mobi of my three-month fellowship programme. One of 6 successful applicants who've been selected to learn and be part of contributing to the growing space of digital activism.

On 9 August 2020 Dyantyi was a guest speaker at the EFF National Women's Day virtual rally in honour of Mama Winnie Mandela:

It was such an honour to speak at the National EFF Women's Day Virtual Rally right next to Madikizela-Mandela's grave. I received a sense of renewed energy as we paid our respects to her for the efforts and sacrifices, she made towards the struggle for the liberation of ALL women and marginalised groups in South Africa (yes including you too, Sfiso). BUT most importantly as a women's rights and feminist activist I feel so blessed - today was such a beautiful day. I will continue to fight and disrupt all these spaces that continue to push the historical agenda of excluding BLACK women from being able to practice our agency as people on this land.

Dyantyi recently signed with Waka Talent Agency which represents her as a speaker, emcee, and facilitator. Waka Talent Agency is a boutique Pan African talent agency that manages TV and radio personalities, actors, speakers, emcees, brand ambassadors and digital influencers. On 25 September 2020 Dyantyi posted:

Happy to share that I have been signed under Waka Talent Agency and have the pleasure to be guided and trained by the great Rosie Motene. Book your girl gigs bethun! I am excited for this journey and look forward to more great things to come.

As a result, Dyantyi was invited to speak at TedX Lyttleton Women on 20 November 2020. TedX Lyttleton Women theme for 2020 was Pathfinders and Connections with the intent to showcase speakers from South Africa and the African Continent who represent women's political, economic, and civic illumination. Additionally, Dyantyi secured her first international gig to participate in a dialogue on 28 January 2021 at the University of Columbia in New York on gender-based violence activism, research, and the arts. On 9 October 2020 Dyantyi posted:

I'm excited to announce that I will be speaking at this year's TedX Lyttleton women 2020 sharing the stage with some of the continent's influential women in business and leadership. Thank you to my agent Rosie Motene and the TedX team granting me this opportunity.

## 4.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter analysed a selection of Dyantyi's Facebook posts using the scroll back method. Tracing back her use of Facebook from when she started using it in primary school, through high school and university to her current use of Facebook, the posts were analysed based on the literature provided in Chapter Two with additional literature provided to supplement the theoretical ideas the research was based upon. The following six themes were identified as significant from the scroll back method and through interviewing Dyantyi: Using Facebook as a space for curation and control, as a diary, as a vehicle for activism, for mental health purposes, for a sense of community and for social capital.

In the next chapter I draw out the significance of this study by discussing how Dyantyi's multifaceted use of Facebook enables us to add to our understandings of the role SNSs are playing in the lives of young, black women in South Africa today, women who are also feminists and activists.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses Dyantyi's multifaceted use of Facebook and the impacts thereof on her mental health, social capital, and activism. This discussion is going to add to our understanding of the role that SNSs play in the lives of young, black women who also identify as active feminists in South Africa today.

### **5.2 DISCUSSION**

The content of Dyantyi's Facebook posts were analysed using a qualitative methodology approach, which enabled me to understand Dyantyi's world and acquire information about her personal life. Dyantyi is very descriptive in her posts and shares personal and sensitive narratives about her life on Facebook making it possible to get a sense of who she is, from reading her posts. However, that would be assuming, or making a generalisation about her based on posts and this would also bring into question my positionality as a researcher. As a result, more clarity on some posts was needed, hence I chose a semi-structured interview as the second qualitative method with the aim that she could explain the meaning behind her posts and possibly add more information in the interview. Through this approach more in-depth information about her life was revealed which was useful for the research because her background and upbringing are reflected in her character (see chapter one) which then makes her posts, and her story in general make sense, this approach was useful for the analysis of the data.

The scroll back method used revealed how Dyantyi's use of Facebook evolved over the years. The data collected from Dyantyi's Facebook timeline and the information elicited from the interview revealed that Dyantyi is a multifaceted, evolving Facebook user who uses Facebook for various purposes but in this study, it centres predominantly her activism and mental health. Due to this, for analysis purposes I used a thematic analysis, which was ideal for the study because the capacity of the data collected helped me to identify themes from the information gathered and code them. Hence, I formulated the six themes which described how Dyantyi uses her Facebook for curation and control, as a diary, for a sense of community, for social capital, for mental health purposes and as a vehicle for activism (see chapter four).

Although Kraut et al., (1998) assert that the excessive use of Facebook causes mental health challenges (loneliness, depression, and stress), this research discovered that not everyone who is a prolific Facebook user will suffer from mental health challenges. Dyantyi is a prolific Facebook user who claims to be addicted to using Facebook. She uses Facebook for various reasons which require her to be constantly online posting and engaging her friends/followers. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, her use of Facebook has not provoked any mental health challenges. Although there is evidence that using Facebook can affect one's mental health from bullying and harassment (Kwan et al., 2020), they also have a choice on how to use the platform, who gets to see their posts, who to engage with and who to block. Essentially, they have the power to protect themselves by unfriending/unfollowing or blocking those who bully or harass them, tactics Dyantyi employs. Ultimately, it is possible for people can use Facebook prolifically without their mental health suffering.

Facebook has been both an 'addiction' and a support for Dyantyi as she also uses her Facebook to bolster her mental health. Dyantyi posted on her Facebook timeline on 10 October 2021 that in 2015 she was diagnosed with PTSD, whereupon she received virtual support from her Facebook friends in the form of likes, hugs and heart reactions which comforted her. Naslund et al. (2017) assert that traditional methods of mental health care such as counselling with a professional therapist are expensive and most people, especially those from low-income countries (as Dyantyi is), cannot afford them. In such contexts, alternative approaches need to be explored to make mental health care accessible to those who cannot afford expensive professional help. Facebook offers the potential to make that possible for people in Dyantyi's position who find value in virtual responses, users' comments regarding their own mental health challenges and the sharing of advice and encouragement.

Although individual's mental health diagnosis is a personal matter, Dyantyi chose to document her personal life and share sensitive information on Facebook, using the platform as a diary. Bevan et al., (2014) postulate that SNSs also transformed our social relations with our families and close friends. Before SNSs, people either kept personal and sensitive information in their confidential diaries or only shared with their family or close friends (Thompson, 1995). The availability of social media platforms made it possible for individuals like Dyantyi to narrate their personal stories to large audiences. This was beneficial for Dyantyi. The emotional and financial support

contributed positively to her mental health as she became happier and more confident after receiving this virtual support. It is evident, therefore, that sharing personal information to large audiences on Facebook can contribute positively to one's mental health. Facebook users become a community of people who support one another in various challenges that they face.

Zhang et al., (2012) contends that the definition of 'community' evolved with the emergence of SNSs, from being limited only to physical boundaries to now including social boundaries. However, the meaning is still the same, that is, a group of people who share commonalities and support one another. Furthermore, online communities have the potential to offer even more support because of the larger number of people connected. This translates to more support than a member would get from just family or close friends. Dyantyi uses Facebook to post seeking help to find a place to stay, request money for rent, food, data, jobs etc., and her Facebook community helps her to acquire these.

As a result of this, Dyantyi regained her social capital. She gained speaking engagements and became known as an activist and spokesperson for gender rights. She also started an NGO. Social capital was established by Helliwell and Putman (2004) to be one of the indicators of subjective well-being. Although still unemployed Dyantyi affirms that being acknowledged and recognised makes her happy and confident which contributes positively to her mental health. Therefore, using Facebook to gain social capital can contribute positively to one's mental health.

Mutsvairo (2016) contends that as SNSs became popular and social media platforms like Facebook became available, activists used that opportunity to post and disseminate information to large audiences. Women like Dyantyi have turned to social media to fight about various structural issues that oppress women such as gender inequality, GBV, rape etc. Therefore, social media allows women to be in solidarity and protest social injustices especially violence towards women. This is known as digital activism. Bosch (2017) postulates that digital activism has proved to be a powerful tool because activists are able to engage large audiences immediately and simultaneously and to mobilise protests, the #RURferenceList protests is an example of this. Thus, social media returns power to survivors who have been silenced by their perpetrators and the justice system.

SNSs play a significant role in society especially in the lives of young, black women who identify as feminists and activists. Dyantyi is notable in using Facebook to deal with the effects of sexual violence and the consequences she has suffered because of her activism. She has been vocal on

her Facebook page about the aftermath of the #RUreferenceList protests on her life including the effects on her mental health. Being silenced by Rhodes University did not silence her, she reclaimed her voice by speaking and representing her trauma as political. When Dyantyi protested sexual violence on campus, Rhodes University used institutional means to silence her because of her activism, she was excluded. However, since those experiences, Dyantyi has exploited the affordances of Facebook to regain and to amplify her voice in society. She has found a way of not being silenced by using Facebook to reinscribe herself in society. She has made her voice heard in the public discourse by using Facebook to share her post-protest life.

### **5.3 CONCLUSION**

This research examined how Yolanda Dyantyi, a gender rights activist, has used Facebook as an outlet following her exclusion at Rhodes University in 2017 for protesting sexual violence on campus. It explored Dyantyi's experiences as a prolific, evolving Facebook user and as an activist and found out the impacts thereof on her mental health and how she uses Facebook to address her mental health challenges. After her exclusion from Rhodes University, she lost her voice, social capital, friends, comrades, a home and was left with an on-going court case with Rhodes University. Through using Facebook, Dyantyi regained these and other kinds of capital. Through using Dyantyi as a case study, this study reveals that sharing personal information to large audiences on Facebook can be beneficial for its users and can contribute positively to their mental health and enhance their activism, garner support against social injustice and to a great extent provide its users with a form of social capital that can in turn give access to opportunities for upward mobility in causes that the users are fighting for.

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## ANNEXURES

### ANNEXURE A: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: The role of Facebook in a survivor's post-assault life: rape on campuses, women activists, and mental health.

*Sinethemba Juliet Witi* from the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

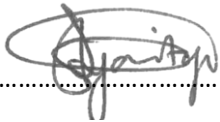
I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to look at how a particular woman activist uses Facebook as an outlet and support to openly speak about her mental health following experiences of abuse and following the consequences of her activism during the #RUreferencelist protests.
2. The Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project and I have seen/ may request to see the clearance certificate.
3. My participation in this research project has the potential to contribute to the awareness of Facebook as a vehicle for users to articulate mental health and life challenges.
4. I will participate in the project by allowing the researcher to use my Facebook timeline as a method of data collection and participate in an interview.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.

6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research.
7. I will not be kept anonymous. I have accepted that the researcher uses my name in this research project.
  - The research will be seen by supervisors. Therefore, will be limited to academic parameters unless I give consent for the research to be published online or I share it.
8. There may be risks associated with my participation in the project. I am aware that,
  - a. the following risks are associated with my participation:
    - having to share private and sensitive information.
    - Being triggered by sensitive and personal questions.
  - b. the following steps have been taken to prevent the risks:
    - I can dictate how much personal information I am willing to share.
    - I can withdraw from the research process at any point.
    - I can decline to answer any questions on any topic I am not comfortable talking about.
9. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of 50% Masters thesis.
10. I will receive feedback in the form of copy of the dissertation regarding the results obtained during the study.
11. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research or my participation will be answered by researcher Sinethemba Juliet Witi ([mawitazana@gmail.com](mailto:mawitazana@gmail.com)) or her supervisors Proff Anthea Garman ([a.garman@ru.ac.za](mailto:a.garman@ru.ac.za)), Ms Gillian Rennie ([g.rennie@ru.ac.za](mailto:g.rennie@ru.ac.za)) and the Ethics Controller Siyanda Manqele ([s.manqele@ru.ac.za](mailto:s.manqele@ru.ac.za)).

12. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
13. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.

I, .....Yolanda Dyantyi..... have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research. I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.



.....  
**Participants signature**



.....  
**Witness**

2 August 2021.....  
.....

**Date**

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics  
Ethics Coordinator: [ethics-committee@ru.ac.za](mailto:ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)  
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707  
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Ethics Controller: Siyanda Manqele ([s.manqele@ru.ac.za](mailto:s.manqele@ru.ac.za))

## **ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

*The general assumption behind asking personal questions is that the subject has already shared these personal experiences on various social media platforms such as Facebook. She has already put out via her own writing, years of writing and speaking on social media platforms such as YouTube, this means she is familiar with articulating potential consequences. However, the participant has a right to decline to answer ANY question should they feel uncomfortable engaging in that topic.*

### **Life before Rhodes University**

1. How would you describe yourself, e.g. your personality?
2. Please describe for me the kind of teenager that you were academically, socially and at home.
3. What were your dreams and goals before coming to university?
4. You enrolled in a BA drama Studies and Politics and International Relations and Philosophy. What were your plans after graduating from university?
5. After you registered at Rhodes, what were your first general impressions of the university?
6. Was it always your plan to come to Rhodes University specifically? why Rhodes?
7. Both socially and academically, what was the transition like from high school to university?
  - What challenges were you experiencing as a first-year student at a university and how did you overcome these challenges?

### **Using Facebook / scrolling back**

8. When were you first exposed to social media specifically Facebook?
  - If you could scroll back to the first time you started posting on Facebook and compare it to your current posts. What would you say is the difference in the content you post now and then?
9. Scrolling back in your Facebook timeline around the time you started posting, how would you describe your level of consciousness when it came to social issues such as race, class, sexuality etc.
  - Can you find posts that speak to these issues?

10. Scrolling back on your Facebook timeline is there something that you once posted that you could say changed your life?

- If there is, how did it change your life?

11. What were some of the significant moments of your life that you shared on Facebook?

- Why were these important for you to post?

12. Are there any posts that you feel were very personal to you that you shared on Facebook? Why did you decide to share those?

### Current use of Facebook

13. What would you say is the most challenging part about using Facebook?

14. How do you use Facebook as an outlet and support to openly speak about your mental health following experiences of abuse and following the consequences of your activism during the #RUreferencelist protests (such as unemployment and homelessness)?

15. How do your Facebook 'friends' respond to posts when you are seeking help and in what ways have you been assisted / supported by using this vehicle?

16. How does it make you feel when you post asking for help and no one responds or reacts to your posts?

- Have you ever had to ask for something more than one time because you were not getting help, did you eventually get help?
- Have you ever not been helped at all after you posted something?

### **Additional questions**

17. Did you expect any specific questions that I did not ask you? If so, what are they?

18. Do you feel that our conversation covered everything that matters to you? Would you like to add anything?

## **ANNEXURE C: FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS**

### **Follow up questions from previous interview**

1. You mentioned that you “probably overshare” on Facebook, what leads you to make this statement? Is it a value judgement? i.e., is oversharing “wrong” or bad or undesirable if so, where would you say the line is?
2. If you spent less time on Facebook, do you think you would post differently? Do you think the ‘oversharing’ comes from spending overtime on Facebook?
3. You also mentioned that you are “addicted” to Facebook. What would you say is being addicted to Facebook, e.g., how many hours do you spend a day on Facebook?
4. Has this addiction on using Facebook ever had a negative impact on your mental health? in what ways?
5. You mentioned that one of the challenges of using Facebook is trying to raise funds for your organization, despite this, how has Facebook helped you grow your organization Archive Amabali Wethu?

### **New follow up questions**

6. Have you experienced loneliness, depression, or stress from using Facebook?
7. Have you ever been harassed or bullied on Facebook?
8. In your view and / or experience do you think that Facebook has created an opportunity for non-professional support (e.g., therapy) that people use to address their mental health challenges by calling on their friends to support them virtually?
9. Would you say then that Facebook can also be considered as contributing to positive mental health?
10. What negative and positive impacts has Facebook had on your mental health?  
e.g., if she says she gets depressed, what does depression look like for YD (eating? Not eating? Sleeping? Not sleeping? More Facebook use? You get the idea) so how would she define positive impact...exercising? Sleeping better? Less Fb? Less ranting on Fb? You get the idea?).

## **#RUreferenceList**

11. In your view, what led the students at Rhodes to use Facebook to list the 11 names of alleged rapists?
12. Do you think the goal was accomplished? In what ways?
13. What do you think this says about Facebook as a medium?

## **Sexual violence / Rape**

14. What are some of the mental health challenges you faced after being raped and how did you overcome them?
15. Did you open a case with the Police? If not, why?
16. What do you think are the ‘negative’ (negative used loosely) effects of reporting rape to the police?
17. How do you think speaking out on Facebook helps as opposed to telling people or reporting to the police?
18. How does speaking up about rape on Facebook help other rape survivors?
19. In what ways do you think having anonymous pages on Facebook such as the #RhodesConfessions helps rape survivors?
20. What are thoughts on the following statement?

“University is widely regarded as a home away from home, especially in the case of a predominantly residential campus like Rhodes. Yet, while campuses operate as enclaves in society, they have been shown to be unable to secure the safety of women from sexual violence “(Warshaw, 2019).

## **Feminist activism**

21. What do you think is the difference between the old generation (Mid-20th century) of feminists and the new generation (21<sup>st</sup> century)?
22. How did intersectionality (race and gender) play out during the #RUreferenceList?
23. What role did Facebook play in intersectionality during the #RUreferenceList protests?
24. What role does Facebook play in activism?
25. What do you think is the significance of Facebook in the #hashtag movements?

26. Would you like to add anything that you feel passionate about regarding Facebook, feminism and / or activism?