

Womxn University Students' Narratives of Gender-based Violence through Digital  
Storytelling.

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# Womxn University Students' Narrative of Gender-based Violence through Digital Storytelling

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# Womxn University Students' Narrative of Gender-based Violence through Digital Storytelling

## **Abstract**

Gender-based violence (GBV) against womxn is highly prevalent in South Africa. This study contributes to literature on representations of GBV against womxn in a Higher Education Institutions (HEI), through digital storytelling (DST), an underexplored participatory action research method. Specifically asking, 'what shared narratives do womxn students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) relay about gender-based violence against womxn through digital-storytelling?'. The study was conducted with five self-identifying undergraduate and postgraduate womxn students at UCT, who were above the age of 18 years. A series of meetings were held with students, which included focus groups, a digital training workshop and an image/video reviewing session. Through DST, the womxn students visually captured various sites that represented their narratives of GBV at UCT. Some of the key emerging findings illustrate how intersecting identities of oppression are sites of abuse and are often associated with being burdensome; how UCT is constructed as an institution that aids the perpetuation and maintenance of GBV through its structures; and lastly, how GBV is maintained through the silencing of 'victim's' narratives and experiences. Through the digital training workshop and focus groups, the co-researchers captured images and videos that meaningfully represented their narratives of GBV. Employing DST honoured each student's process of authorship and contribution to knowledge production. This study contributes to the transformation of how research on GBV is conducted and brings awareness to GBV against womxn in HEIs.

*Keywords:* Womxn, gender-based violence, narrative, digital storytelling, intersectionality

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## Womxn University Students' Narrative of Gender-based Violence through Digital Storytelling

Gender-based violence (GBV) against womxn is prevalent in South Africa, and its broader societal experiences are reflected in the country's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2018). GBV refers to any act or threats of acts which will or are likely to result in any form of harm or suffering to an individual or groups in relation to societal norms about their gender (Langa-Mlambo & Soma-Pillay, 2014). In the United States, the increased recognition of GBV has been fuelled by a series of high-profile cases in prominent universities wherein 'victims' voiced their painful and traumatic experiences (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2018). Similarly, in developing countries, including Ethiopia, Malawi, and Nigeria, GBV within tertiary education is concerning (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2018). In South Africa, despite the limited availability of reliable data GBV is widely prevalent in the country's HEIs (Vetten, 2014). According to a report released by the Department of Higher Education and Training, 10% of rape cases in the country are reported by university students (South African Government News Agency, 2018). Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Higher Education Aids Programme reports that 62% of mxn and womxn students interviewed in the study, believed that womxn students are more likely to be sexually harassed on campus (South African Government News Agency, 2018). These findings speak to the vulnerability of womxn in HEIs.

### **Gender-based Violence in Higher Education Institutions**

GBV in South African HEIs is underreported, making it difficult to gauge its prevalence (Gender-Based Violence at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa, 2015). There is a large pool of international research on GBV in HEIs. However, such research is lacking in South Africa. Public reports of GBV in HEIs contributes to the increasing awareness of GBV as an issue in South African HEIs (Gender-Based Violence at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa, 2015). Despite this increasing awareness, information of the nature and extent of GBV is often retrieved from studies that conduct self-reporting surveys (The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2016). The prevalence of GBV cannot be retrieved from such studies as they often use small samples and truthful responses in the surveys are not guaranteed due to underreporting. Despite an awareness of the pervasiveness of GBV in HEIs, incidents of violence are largely unreported, making the true prevalence of GBV in South African HEIs unknown (Gender-Based Violence at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa, 2015). Therefore, there is a great need for scholarly research that provides a clear

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understanding of the nature and extent of GBV in South African HEIs (Gender-Based Violence at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa, 2015).

The body of work interested in GBV through the lens of womxn's experiences and views are increasingly conducted through employing Participatory Action Research (PAR), a qualitative research method used to conduct research that is aimed at producing knowledge construction in a transformative way (Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012). Work on GBV is often limited to personal experiences (e.g. Finchilescu & Dugard, 2018; Gross, Winslett, Roberts, & Gohm, 2006; Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011), however, we found that it is also important to reach all womxn who may have views on GBV that is not limited to personal experiences. This line of inquiry may explore and acknowledge shared views and narratives of GBV amongst womxn and how they make meaning from those narratives. This study sought to add to the existing PAR body of scholarship on GBV in a South African HEI by exploring womxn students' meanings of GBV at the University of Cape Town (UCT) through Digital Storytelling (DST).

### **Narratives of Identity in South African Higher Education Institutions**

Narratives of identity in South African HEIs are important in understanding the importance of research on GBV. Kessi and Cornell (2015) conducted a photovoice study at UCT, to explore the impact of racialised discourses that represent black students as undeserving, lacking competency, and lowering the academic standards of the institution. Their findings illustrate the kinds of identity dynamics and coping strategies employed by black students in order to counteract these discourses that act as forms of material and symbolic exclusion. These had negative effects on the self-esteem, academic performance and sense of belonging of black students at the institution. These findings aid in understanding the intersecting identities and experiences of black students in HEIs. For example, in Collins and colleagues' (2009) study, black womxn students expressed discourses of feeling unwelcomed or uncared-for in a HEI because of the intersecting identities they possess – being black and a womxn. Literature indicates that young black womxn are more susceptible to being 'victims' of violence than white womxn (Barrick, Krebs & Lindquist, 2013). Insofar as HEIs are predominantly white, hegemonic, classist and patriarchal, young black womxn students



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continue to experience vulnerability to violence that mimics the culture of violence outside HEIs.

Gouws (2017), indicates that students' narratives of identity in South Africa HEIs have been constructed in political spaces (e.g. protests). Additionally, the intersection of these identities is experienced through erasure and exclusion by "racist and white hegemonic institutional cultures" (Gouws, 2017, p. 23). According to Gouws (2017), students refer to intersectionality as pertaining to both the intersecting of identities of oppression (e.g. race, gender, class, and sexuality etc.) and to the experiences associated with those identities. The prioritisation of gendered identity and importance of its intersections with race (particularly being a womxn and being black) has been uncovered by subjective experiences of GBV on campus. These narratives have been voiced through protests and campaigns such as #EndRapeCulture, and most recently, #AmINext? (Gouws, 2017). Students' experiences of GBV on campus have highlighted the importance of intersecting identities of oppression, especially intersections between race and gender (Gouws, 2017). Therefore, understanding the intersectional experiences of black womxn in South African HEIs is important for research on GBV.

### **Approaches to Research on GBV**

The employment of PAR was essential to this study. PAR is an approach to research wherein knowledge production occurs in a collaborative relationship with those who are affected by that knowledge, to understand more about the issues affecting their social, educational and material environments (Blanche et al., 2006). International research studies concerned with the wellbeing and experiences of womxn are often approached through PAR (Wang, 1999). These studies on GBV employ PAR methods, such as interviewing; focus group discussion; and photovoice methods, to name a few (for example, Boonzaier & Zway, 2015; Clowes, Shefer, Fouten, Vergnani, & Jacobs, 2009; Mosavel, Ahmed, & Simon, 2011; Radzilani-Makatu & Mahlalela, 2015; Shams, Kianfard, Parhizkar, & Mousavizadeh, 2017).

Boonzaier and Zway (2015) explored the experiences of black LGBTQI+ womxn in the Western Cape. They employed a photovoice study that incorporated focus groups, photostories and interviews to foreground these womxn's experiences and representations of

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violence and discrimination (Boonzaier & Zway, 2015). They found photovoice to be a useful method of engagement with the young womxn (Boonzaier & Zway, 2015).

Clowes and colleagues' (2009) article which drew on a larger qualitative study conducted at the University of Western Cape (UWC) employed focus group discussions, found that coercive sexual practices are common in heterosexual relationships within this institution. It underlined the importance of understanding that these relationships are informed by power inequalities that are central to gender roles (Clowes et al., 2009). Radzilani-Makatu and Mahlalela's (2015) study used focus groups to explore dating violence at a South African HEI and found that students' knowledge regarding dating violence was high and the prevalence of dating violence was largely influenced by peer-pressure and culture. They also found that the consequences of dating violence amongst students resulted in poor academic performance and unplanned pregnancy (Radzilani-Makatu & Mahlalela, 2015). The participants of the study suggested strategies aimed addressing dating violence which included awareness campaigns, providing counselling and instilling confidence in the 'victims'. Mosavel and colleagues' (2011) study explored the barriers that affect the wellbeing and health of youth through focus group discussions. They found that health programs were needed to create safe spaces and opportunities for the youth to critically engage and question assumptions and manifestations of GBV (Mosavel, Ahmed, & Simon, 2011). They found that multi-sectoral interventions are needed to adequately address and prevent GBV (Mosavel, Ahmed, & Simon, 2011). International research that focuses on interventions against domestic violence presents similar findings. Shams et al., (2017) focused on the educational interventions against domestic violence. They conducted focus groups with married womxn aiming to explore perceptions of domestic violence against married womxn in Iran (Shams et al., 2017). Their findings focused on the empowerment of womxn and how womxn could be empowered to prevent the occurrence of domestic violence, if adequately educated through training programs and mass media, (Shams et al., 2017).

The aforementioned studies employed PAR methods because of their interest in the democratisation of knowledge production and in addressing the power dynamics and tensions existing in the relations between researchers and participants (Blanche et al., 2006). However, there are PAR methods that are not employed in studies of GBV against womxn, including DST. DST is the artistic process of storytelling through a combination of multimedia with

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other traditional forms of narration (Bernard, 2008). It is a transparent and self-revelatory approach that can be employed as a means of transforming the knowledge production, through its ability to form engaging environments for the voices of those who are often silenced (Hlalele & Brexa, 2015). Employing DST emphasises the co-creation of knowledge between researchers and co-researchers, by enabling a clear digital illustration of their narratives. The digital illustration of narratives ensures that the views and representations of GBV are presented as initially desired by the womxn students. DST is significant because it adds another digital element to existing PAR methods.

The research gap identified in the current study is the employment of DST as a PAR method, as it is underexplored. We considered DST as a key method in investigating womxn students' narratives of GBV against womxn. Employing DST ensured that each narrative is reflected as the co-researcher conveys it, and will thus honour each womxn student's agency, process of authorship and contribution to knowledge production (Lambert, 2013). Furthermore, employing DST enabled meaningful and transformational dialogues to take place within the institution. It allowed the co-researchers to relay their perspectives and narratives without any alteration from the researchers. DST has the potential to provide UCT with insight into the existing narratives of GBV against womxn students so as to inform future practice and policy. As such, the co-researchers act as advocates of change within the institution.

### **Aims and Objectives**

This study aimed to contribute to literature on representations of GBV against womxn in HEIs, using a PAR method – DST. DST was employed to challenge traditional and marginalising methods of studying womxn and critically engaged with representations of GBV against womxn by womxn students. DST allowed us to challenge these forms of engagement and resistance within focus groups. The employment of DST and focus groups enabled us to yield womxn student's general views and meanings of GBV. Additionally, this study formed part of a broader project that centres womxn and aims to unsettle knowledge production on GBV and sexual violence in South Africa.

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## **Main Research Question**

What shared narratives do womxn students at the University of Cape Town relay about gender-based violence against womxn through digital-storytelling?

## **Sub-questions**

- What kinds of stories do they tell about GBV in institutions of higher education?
- How do the intersections of social identities, including race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, etc, shape their understanding of stories on GBV?
- How do womxn students make meaning of their stories of GBV in institutions of higher education?

## **Methodology**

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employed intersectionality as a theoretical framework. Intersectionality is a heuristic method rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). Kimberlé Crenshaw, one of the key scholars to coin the term and approach, used intersectionality to foreground how social movement organisations concerned with violence against womxn neglected to acknowledge the vulnerability of black womxn, especially those that are from socially marginalised and unfavoured communities (Carbado et al., 2013). Scholars and activists then expanded intersectionality to engage a bigger scope of issues, such as social identities, power dynamics, legal and political systems, and so forth (Carbado et al., 2013). It became a research paradigm for studies concerned with womxn (McCall, 2005), and has been used both conventionally and unconventionally to examine and understand the challenges and various intersecting identities of womxn (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008). Intersectionality empowers us to expand how we think about gender and feminism, to consider the influence of various contexts (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008). It thus, suggests that gender cannot be a framework independent of inquiring into how issues of identities of oppression play into and shape womxn's experiences (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008). In many instances, womxn's representations and experiences of violence are influenced by other aspects of their identity, in addition to gender (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality

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theory was central to the current study's aim to unpack womxn students' narratives of GBV. This study employed intersectionality theory to explore GBV narratives, by considering the impact that issues of identities of oppression have on womxn students' representations of GBV. The employment of intersectionality was essential, given the relations between South Africa's historical oppressions of race and class, and gender violence. Lastly, it is worth noting that during focus groups, the womxn students emphasised the importance of their social identities, particularly race, in how it shapes their understandings of GBV. Their narratives were centred around intersecting identities of race, gender and sexuality. This focus aligned with the theoretical framework of the study in analysing the data. This is further discussed in the methods and analysis sections respectively.

### **Design and Setting**

A qualitative PAR approach – DST was employed in this study. DST is aligned with the central principles of conducting research that is aimed at producing and facilitating knowledge construction in a transformative way (Blanche et al., 2006; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012). This is done through active partnership between the researcher and the participatory community (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012). The core intention of PAR and DST is to address, expose and criticise underlying power systems of social inequality and, thus achieving social justice by contributing meaningfully to the social, educational and physical well-being of that participatory community (Blanche et al., 2006; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012). DST addressed the aim of this study to understand the meanings of GBV amongst womxn students and enabled the womxn participating to explore narratives of GBV at UCT.

### **Study context**

This study draws on data from an HEI, the University of Cape Town, in the Western Cape. UCT was established in 1829 and it is the highest-ranking African University in the QS World University Ratings and its language of instruction is English. The university has six campuses, with its main campus geographically located on the slopes of Devil's Peak in Rhodes Estate and whilst its remaining campuses - Middle and Lower and Health Science campuses - are spread through the suburbs of Rondebosch, Rosebank, Mowbray and Observatory, which are considered elite shopping and business districts in Cape Town. Its remaining two campuses

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are in urban areas around Cape Town; Hiddingh campus in Company Gardens and the Graduate School of Business in Greenpoint.

## **Sample**

To be considered for participation in the study, the womxn students had to be self-identifying undergraduate or postgraduate womxn and be 18 years of age or older. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit the womxn students. The group consisted of five womxn who self-identified as black. Three of the womxn were doing their postgraduate studies and two were doing their undergraduate studies at UCT. Despite advertising widely and inviting all womxn students to participate, the study drew a sample of only black womxn students. We thus acknowledge that the conclusions drawn about narratives of GBV against womxn at UCT are limited to this sample of womxn, but we also took this opportunity to reflect on the collective narratives of identity that were made possible through this group formation of black womxn.

## **Data Collection and Procedures**

Data was collected by means of semi-structured focus groups in addition to a combination of three elements of DST by employing a collaboration between photography (still images), video and voiced/audio storytelling. Data collection took place over a series of phases. These included three focus group sessions; a DST training workshop; and a debriefing session. Voice recordings of the sessions were transcribed and analysed.

The three focus groups and a DST training workshop were conducted in the Psychology Department at UCT, each 60 to 110 minutes long. The first focus group was 99 minutes long in which we introduced the study to the womxn, including information regarding the aims and procedures of the study. Students were given consent forms to sign (see Appendix B) and a referral list for counselling and support (see Appendix C). The focus group discussions were semi-structured and were guided by a set of questions that covered critical conversations about GBV against womxn (see Appendix A). The first focus group covered conversations about: how the womxn describe GBV against womxn; how they describe their experiences as womxn in the university; and how their background shapes how they think about GBV and being a womxn. The second focus group was 108 minutes long and covered conversations about how

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the womxn think GBV occurs within the university space; how the university culture shapes the ongoing prevalence of GBV; and the kinds of changes they think need to be put in place to curb incidents of GBV in spaces of higher education.

During the DST training workshop, the womxn were taught by a trained photographer/videographer on how to use the DSLR camera when taking images and videos. They were provided with guidelines on the kinds of images they could take and the importance of receiving consent from the individuals they want to include in their photos and videos.

Following the DST training workshop, the womxn students captured images and videos of the things that illustrated their narratives of GBV, over a period of two weeks. They also captioned some of their images and videos.

The third focus group took place after the DST production and was 80 minutes long. In this session, the womxn students presented their captioned images and videos to each other. They also reflected on the experience of photography and videography, and the study thus far. We concluded with a discussion on the planning of the exhibition, where their images and videos would be presented in the form of a digital story.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysed for this study constituted of images, their photo stories, and the transcribed focus group data. Although video clips were additionally gathered, these were not analysed for this project but will rather be displayed at the exhibition planned for the end of the year (see attached flash drive and Appendix F). This data was analysed using a thematic narrative analysis. Thematic narrative analysis focuses on the stories relayed by the participants to create meaning and explain social identities, whilst finding themes through their narratives (Reissman, 2008). Six phases of analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006) were applied to identify and develop themes. The voice recordings from the three focus groups were transcribed. We noted down initial ideas from the images, photo-stories and the transcribed data. We systematically coded interesting features of the data and collated these codes with relevant visual data and extracts from the transcriptions. These codes and relevant data were then collated into potential themes and the themes were reviewed. The themes were then refined, defined and were each given a name. In addition, we analysed the data while keeping in mind

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the theoretical framework applied in this study – intersectionality. Intersectionality helped us understand how the womxn students' narratives of GBV have been shaped by the intersections between identities of race, gender and sexuality. Four main themes were analysed from the transcribed and visual data, including, the consciousness of intersecting identities, the normalisation/desensitisation of GBV; silenced voices and; institutional responses and narratives of blame. These will be further discussed in the analysis and discussion section.

### **Ethical considerations**

It is important to consider ethics by balancing the potential harms and benefits that will result from a research study (Bold, 2012). There has been an increasing body of research conducted on GBV and the ethical issues arising from this (Jewkes, Watts, Abrahams, Penn-Kekana, & García-Moreno, 2000). Ethical clearance for this study was granted by the Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Psychology as well as the Department of Student Affairs at the university (see Appendix E). Ethical issues were addressed as follows:

### **Potential Risks and Benefits to Participants**

The principle of nonmaleficence required us as researchers to ensure that any potential harm, resulting directly or indirectly from the research to the participants was reduced (Blanche et al., 2006). Harm comes in different forms, including physical, mental, emotional, etc. The study posed the risk of potential emotional distress, as GBV is a sensitive topic and should, therefore, be handled with care. However, as the intention of the study was to invite womxn students to share representations of GBV, rather than personal experiences, it was unlikely that the content would cultivate a distressing environment. Furthermore, much care was taken in how the focus groups were conducted, in a supportive and sensitive way, and importantly towards encouraging empowerment. However, in the case that participants did experience psychological distress, they were provided with referrals for psychological counselling and support (see Appendix C). Furthermore, to ensure that potential emotional risk had been addressed, students went through a debriefing session, whereby they reflected on the experiences of previous sessions. This was particularly important in the context of 19-year-old and first year student Uyinene Mrewtyana's rape and murder which overlapped with our study and it drew the reality and threat of GBV even closer to the lives of students at the university.



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The study's employment of PAR allowed for longer relationships to be built over a period between the researchers and the womxn students. This ensured a good rapport and comfortability between them. Taking part in the study provided the students with the opportunity to tell their stories in their own voices while contributing to the production of knowledge. The study was conducted within the context of a country where womxn's experiences of GBV are often silenced and under-reported. We anticipated that this study would, therefore, offer a safe space for womxn to voice their views, meanings and stories related to GBV, with the potential to empower them.

### **Informed Consent**

The researchers obtained voluntary and informed consent from participants who chose to participate in the study. Therefore, at the first focus group, the students were given consent forms (see Appendix B) to fill out, and we made certain that all the co-researchers fully understood the research (by reading out and explaining the consent form), its processes, risks, benefits and also that they could withdraw participation from the study at any point of the process, without incurring any harm or loss. The co-researchers were given the opportunity to ask questions for clarification. The signed consent forms indicated that 1) they understood the processes of the study, 2) that they agreed to take part in the study 3) that they agreed to be audio recorded during focus group discussions, and 4) that they agreed to the potential use of the focus group data for academic purposes (including the sharing of interview data with the researchers - two honours students and the supervisor).

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality refers to a formal pledge taken by a researcher to protect the anonymity of the research participant (Blanche et al., 2006). The identifying details of the womxn students were not recorded on any of the research and we also assigned pseudonyms to the womxn students to further protect their identity. All the sessions were conducted in a private space, the GCS lab in the Psychology department. The recordings and transcriptions of the womxn's narratives were stored in a private device that only the researchers had access to. The focus group data was only shared with the research team, through password protected files, and the physical records are kept in a locked space in the department. Confidentiality during focus groups was not guaranteed, as it entailed discussions with other participants, yet it was

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encouraged given the sensitive nature of the topic and the narratives that were shared amongst the womxn students. Data collection comprised of images and videos taken by the womxn students. We anticipated that our co-researchers may take images and videos of other people around campus and so in the training session, we ensured that verbal consent from anyone who's image or video they were going to take was obtained.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is the ability of researchers to explicitly recognise and be conscious of how their background and role in the research informs the research process and outcome (Bold, 2012). As researchers, it was important for us to locate ourselves in the study, in relation to the co-researchers. We interrogated the effect of our presence in focus group discussions and influence on the kinds of narratives that womxn shared.

We conducted this study as individuals who identify as black womxn students. This assisted us in understanding the co-constructed narratives of the womxn students, but it was also triggering to relate quite personally with some of the narratives. We were continuously reminded that even though we are researchers, we are also students at the institution and thus we were not immune to the narratives relayed by the womxn students. Two of the womxn students were older than us and the other co-researchers, however, their narratives were similar to the rest of the co-researchers. This illustrated that despite the age disparity their narratives of GBV transcended time and age - further illustrating the static yet persistent nature of GBV. During data collection, we heard about the brutal rape and murder of first year UCT student, Uyinene Mrewtyana. As a result, most of the co-researchers' images and videos featured news and events surrounding Uyinene's disappearance, the night vigils and memorial service held in her honour. This was a particularly difficult time for the co-researchers, and for us too, as we were confronted with the reality and prevalence of GBV. The final focus group focused heavily around these events and it was a moment for both the co-researchers and the researchers to reflect about their feelings and thoughts.

### **Analysis and discussion**

Using thematic narrative analysis, the transcribed data from the focus group discussion, the photo stories in addition to the images taken by the womxn students, were examined to

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identify common shared narratives about GBV against womxn. Specifically, to answer the question: What shared narratives do womxn students at UCT relay about GBV against womxn through DST?

The theoretical framework was incorporated into the data analysis. Intersectionality was used to understand the experiences of the womxn students as a result of their intersecting identities. This allowed us to further unpack how their gendered and racial identities have come to influence their narratives of GBV within and outside UCT. The narrative of identity is foregrounded in the first theme to build context to the themes that follow.

### **An Analysis of Womxn Students' Narratives of Gender-based Violence**

Narrative themes about GBV at UCT in relation to intersecting identities around gender, race and sexuality are presented as follows: 1) narratives about the womxn's awareness of intersecting social identities in the representations of GBV; 2) narratives about the different ways in which GBV is normalised and desensitised on campus; 3) narratives about how the experiences and voices of cisgender womxn and LGBTQI+<sup>1</sup> womxn are silenced and suppressed by hegemonic and patriarchal structures; and 4) narratives of blame and how UCT has responded to incidences of GBV.

### **Consciousness of intersecting identities.**

The conversations in the focus groups were not solely contained to the institution, and consequently the co-researchers' narratives often included references to their experiences of intersecting identities (i.e., race, gender and sexuality) in other spheres of their life. The students reflected on their experiences of being black womxn at the intersection of their racialized and gendered identities – and their experiences of inhabiting these identities both inside and outside of the institution. The reference to these intersecting identities is present in each of the students' articulation of their experience of being a black womxn and it was often portrayed as a negative series of thoughts, encounters and expectations in two of the three focus groups. For example:

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<sup>1</sup> The lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex community

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Ayanda: ... firstly, it's very important to know that you're a black womxn ... Because with that comes a whole lot of baggage, a whole lot of labels, a whole lot of assumptions...

Koketso: ... there are a lot of stereotypes that you have of black womxn, and one of them has to be the strong or angry black womxn label. (FG1)

Ayanda and Koketso co-construct a dominant narrative of being black womxn, which is deeply entrenched in how they regard themselves, but also how they expect others to regard them. There appears to be shared narratives of being misunderstood but also shared experiences of being labelled and stereotyped because of their intersecting identities. These womxn both agree that they expect people to make assumptions about what their identities mean, their capabilities and how they are supposed to behave. Interestingly, both Ayanda and Koketso's narratives speak to issues of prejudice, discrimination and vulnerability because of these identities they inhabit. Their narratives highlight a prejudice that is specific to them only (i.e., different to that experienced by white womxn or black mxn, for example). Furthermore, these prejudices highlight the various forms of oppression faced by womxn (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008). Research on intersectionality has been used to illustrate the various challenges and vulnerabilities faced by womxn – and in this instance black womxn. As such, womxn's representations and experiences of violence are influenced by other aspects of their identity such as their gender (Crenshaw, 1991). In this study, the womxn students' narratives demonstrate how they experience their womxnhood differently, yet it is also underpinned by stereotypes and expectations embedded in discourses of black femininity circulating in society. Moreover, the identity 'black womxn' is associated with misfortune, heaviness, and the presumption of objectification by mxn. Qualitative research has shown that colonial discourses have historically depicted black womxn as deviant and inferior to white womxn - who have historically been portrayed as “pure” white bodies (Lewis, 2011, p. 17). As such, black womxn have also been historically represented as lacking respectability and have subsequently been denigrated for this, whilst discourses of white femininity in South Africa have predominantly positioned white womxn as innately possessing respectability. These discourses of femininity serve to dichotomise the kinds of femininities considered deviant/pure and respectable/pathological (Lindegaard & Henriksen, 2009). In addition, in a study conducted by

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Collins and colleagues (2009), black womxn students revealed that they felt unwelcome in higher education spaces as they often felt despised, not cared for and not listened to.



*Ayanda: "Cage. As women, it's always about what we can do to protect ourselves.  
Attacked at every level"*

The above image reflects the idea that black womxn do not feel welcome at UCT. The image of the fenced barricade juxtaposes the womxn's position as outsiders looking into the institution. Similarly, the intersecting identities highlighted by the students were understood to also be sources and reasons for performance. According to the students, black womxn are expected to perform their anger, intellectual ability, and confidence in spaces to assert their presence:

Koketso: ... in spaces of black womxn you always have to be a strong black womxn, be outspoken, be very loud and everything, but we're not at all like that. Some of us want to keep quiet, or want to be a listener, want to be that person, and spaces don't allow for that sort of, you know, performing of their identity...you know, it's the performance of a certain type of black womxn that's accepted.

Susan: At UCT you can't think of yourself as a womxn without thinking that you're a black womxn (FG1)

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The womxn students are co-constructing the narrative about how they are marked as black womxn at UCT, and how they are expected to conform to dominant representations of black femininity. Koketso and Susan speak to how they feel they are expected to perform a particular kind of black femininity; they narrate this as a necessity in certain spaces, rather than a choice.

UCT and its culture are constant sources of reminders regarding how black womxnhood ought to be performed, yet dominant discourses around black femininity seem to pervade spaces at UCT. The reference to the performance of a strong or angry black womxn made by the womxn students is profound and echoed in a study conducted by Clarke (2009), which aimed at analysing the common representations of African American womxn. In this study the author posits that assertions about black womxn's strength or anger is used to encourage high levels of responsibility and exploitation whilst simultaneously taking care of familial responsibilities at the expense of neglecting the self (Clarke, 2009). This discourse feeds into the 'superwoman' image often portrayed and revered in literature about black womxn. However, it is also oppressive and a symbol of violence as it depicts any other performance of the black womxn as inadequate, self-centred and insignificant.



*Koketso: "Black womxn are expected to be strong or angry"*

The image above illustrates the performance associated with black femininity. In the image, a black womxn students stands and appears to be addressing a group of people. Behind

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her are other black womxn students listening to her. This image, taken at a night vigil held in honour of Uyinene, reflects Koketso and Susan's shared narrative – that black womxn are expected to be strong despite how they may feel or what they may be going through. The darkness of the image reflects the state of mourning around the campus at the time, despite this, the image depicts a black womxn stepping in, negating her feelings or experiences to be there – albeit symbolically - for others.

The intersecting identities discussed by the womxn students were also presented as a source of internal conflict for themselves and they subsequently experienced self-doubt:

Keneliwe: Sometimes, honestly, I doubt myself. Like I doubt everything about myself because I'm a womxn and I'm black... (FG1)

Keneliwe's self-doubt stems from her position within a historically white, patriarchal university that shapes her experiences of self-esteem and doubt. This is also fuelled by her possession of these intersecting identities which are agitations and catalysts for this self-doubt. The oppression continuously experienced by these black womxn in different spheres of their life (e.g., academic spaces, social spaces) is being internalised. The positioning of the co-researchers in a historically white university appears to make them doubt if they deservedly attained a job, a relationship or whether they managed to successfully convince any counterparts of the legitimacy of their skills and abilities. Additionally, the self-doubt of these womxn's positioning in the university is further propagated by affirmative action policies, which aim to advance historically disadvantaged groups in areas such as employment, education or housing. The institutionalisation of such policies means that employers are obligated to employ individuals from different gender, race and cultural backgrounds as a means of bringing diversity and transformation (Leonard, 2005). The issue therein lies in the obligatory nature of the policy which may result in disadvantaged groups (i.e., black womxn) doubting whether they deservedly obtained their achievements.

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*Keneliwe: “The womxn are the ones always having this talk”*

Black womxn at UCT are not exempt from these experiences as affirmative action policies apply to HEIs too. Narratives expressing the normalisation and maintenance of GBV within the university space are further explored in the following theme.

## **Normalisation/desensitisation of GBV on campus.**

The womxn in the focus groups expressed the ways in which occurrences of different forms of GBV are normalised across campus. For example:

Researcher: What are some of the forms of gender-based violence that are out there?

Ayanda: I feel like treating me badly is abuse in itself. Because growing up I got to see that first-hand how my dad would interact with my mom. And that’s when I realised that because there’s this – especially now, in this day and age where we’re in now, it’s been so normalised to treat women badly, it’s been so normalised to treat other people badly... it’s how the person treats me as a female and me normalising that behaviour.  
(FG1)

According to the data above, mistreating womxn is underplayed as a form of GBV in society; as Ayanda explains, it has become “normalised”. Furthermore, Ayanda also reflects on her subjective experience about her exposure to how her father interacted with her mother; this highlights a revelation to her about the normalisation of patriarchy and the subtle ill-



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treating of womxn, particularly by mxn. These kinds of experiences and reflections echo an observation by Yount, Halim, Schuler, and Head (2013), that mxn and womxn justify GBV by normalising certain forms of patriarchy. Hence, it is unsurprising that a substantial part of feminist research argues that dismantling patriarchy plays an essential role in the eradication of GBV against womxn and other mxn too (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991). Interestingly, Ayanda also notes that she is implicated in a system that normalises GBV and patriarchy (e.g., “and me normalising that behaviour”). The example below further illustrates how types of violence on campus, specifically rape, are normalised; and how these notions are driven by a system of patriarchy that womxn may be complicit in but that also serves to subjugate them.

Researcher: For me the first thing that comes to mind is what was often referred to as rape culture, which happened quite a lot last year and I think the year before ... So, I think that for me was very alarming to hear that many girls were raped in res<sup>2</sup> where you should be feeling safe. (FG 2)

Susan: I would say, because again if I think of my experience since 1993, I was here '93 to 2004, and then again 2017 to now. Rape is all over the place. (FG2)

Martha: It's about power play, the one dominating the other ... The culture is very silent. We've had the gender violence walk. But after a while everything sort of, you know, goes right down into sub-zero. (FG2)

Following an example made by the researcher about the rape culture at UCT, Susan, as one of the older womxn, expressed that rape in the university has always been present. In their study, Gordon and Collins (2013) similarly reflect on how violence is an ever-present peril that womxn are required to accept and cope with. This acknowledgment and acceptance of violence, particularly rape, is echoed in Susan's statement that for the thirteen years that she has been at UCT, rape has been ever-present, it is “all over the place”. In addition to acknowledging the pervasiveness of rape in the university, which Boonzaier and van Schalkwyk (2011) consider to be a “manifestation of the assertion of male dominance and womxn's subservience” (p. 279),

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<sup>2</sup> Shorthand for 'residence'

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Martha also reflects on how the subduing of rape reflects a patriarchal system on campus (e.g. “it’s about power play, the one dominating the other”).



*Keneilwe: “The penis on this statue speaks to the patriarchal power that men think they are entitled to invade a womxn’s space and agency. They feel entitled to speak louder than a womxn; liberate themselves at a womxn’s expense.”*

The above image further highlights how the patriarchal system on campus is perceived by womxn students. In addition to the normalisation of a rape culture, literature indicates that rape survivors refrain from sharing their experiences because of the negative reactions they receive from the society, which included the blaming and doubting of victims (Ahrens, 2006). This speaks to a narrative of silencing, in which rape survivors and womxn are silenced and denied the power to voice their experiences. Lastly, Gordon and Collins (2013) found that the culture of normalisation is supported by the silencing and invalidation of womxn’s voices and experiences, respectively. The narratives of silencing are further illustrated in the next theme.

### **Silenced voices.**

In the first focus group, the womxn students constructed a narrative of silence through patriarchal and hegemonic structures and discourses. The womxn specifically reflected on being silenced by hegemonic masculine identities, culture, religion and UCT as an institution;

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and the ways in which these systems work to suppress womxn's voices and experiences. This is illustrated below:

Koketso: I ... wanted to mention something about womxn being gatekeepers of patriarchy. And, especially in our families where the majority of people who are at meeting[s] are womxn ... That speaks to internalised misogyny and how having more womxn...speaking to ... womxn doesn't necessarily solve the problem ... The idea that just because you are a womxn, you can understand certain things more, internalised misogyny is a thing, you can also be sexist. You can also be protecting patriarchs. (FG1).

Ayanda: ... it also comes back to like society in general. A womxn is sexually liberated ...[there] is a term for her, but a guy doing the same thing...he is just being a player, he is doing what guys do. So, it's problematic. It makes certain people warranted to treat you a certain way. So, it's probably these gender roles that people have that are instilled in all of us. Very problematic. And, it takes a lot of unlearning...there is a lot of unlearning to do and I don't know if it's going to happen in our lifetime, but there is a lot.

Koketso constructs a narrative about womxn being silenced by other womxn, and how womxn can also have "internalised misogyny". Furthermore, she expresses with frustration, that the voicing of experiences of GBV amongst womxn will not resolve the core issues, because some womxn perpetuate the victimisation of womxn through silencing voices. She places "internalised misogyny" at the core of silencing and constructs those who silence as protectors of patriarchy. Ayanda co-constructs the same narrative as Koketso around the silencing and the protection of patriarchy, through a different yet relatable phenomenon. To Ayanda, it is not only womxn, but "society in general" that protects patriarchs. She reflects on how mxn's sexual behaviour is justified by society and is regarded to be innate, however, if the same behaviours are acted out by womxn, they are problematised. This highlights how the condemnation of womxn's actions is a form of silencing.

Conversations about experiences of GBV can be cathartic and emancipating, however, research indicates that silencing narratives of GBV are consistently prevalent in South Africa (Gordon & Collins, 2013). Ahrens (2006) describes being silenced as being denied power. The

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conceptualisation of silencing as the inability to express the mind and will of oneself, places emphasis on social power structures that afford privilege for some voices while other voices, often womxn's voices, are excluded (Ahrens, 2006). The womxn further shared sentiments about GBV and silencing in relation to the LGBTQI+ community, and how the exclusion and ignorance of womxn in the LGBTQI+ community perpetuates the notion of silencing and sometimes their erasure. For example:

Susan: Gender-based violence gets a lot of airtime ... through the convention on elimination of discrimination against womxn. And, it doesn't really speak about gender in the sense of LGBTQI+. It's speaking [about heterosexual] womxn ... I think it's important for us to understand that gender-based violence is something that is also happening to trans-people, to queer people, to lesbians, gays and so forth ... And, the exclusion of people in fact is ... not an interpersonal element, as is what we typically talk about, but a structural one that exclusion is also gender-based violence. (FG1)

Ayanda: ... I think I agree with you a lot on that point because then it's a form of silencing somebody and silencing their experiences and silencing ... their stories ... In that way you are saying, excluding you from the phenomenon, from the ideology of gender-based violence is, kind of says that you matter in society and we're forgetting about you and ... that also reinforces pain. (FG1).

Susan and Ayanda co-construct a narrative about the exclusion and silencing of the LGBTQI+ community as a form of violence and a form of secondary traumatisation, at times inflicted on those who have already experienced GBV. They reflect on the notion that the exclusion of the LGBTQI+ community from the phenomenon of GBV assumes that members of this community do not experience GBV. Furthermore, dialogues and conversations around GBV, that centre womxn, only address cis-gendered womxn, which thus silences and erases womxn in the LGBTQI+ community and denies them the power to voice themselves and their experiences. The intersection of hegemonic identities such as whiteness, masculinity and heterosexuality play a role in the erasure and silencing of LGBTQI+ womxn. Pallotta-Chiarolli and Rajkhowa (2017) encourage us to think about patriarchy in a broad and extended form, by considering the power-based intersection of dominating identities. They go on to indicate that the experiences of LGBTQI+ womxn are often invalidated by structural and institutional

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heteropatriarchy, alongside heteronormativity and heterosexism (Pallotta-Chiarolli & Rajkhowa, 2017). This is reinforced by the limited number of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus (see image below). This goes to show that cisgender womxn and LGBTQI+ womxn's voices are often silenced by the power-based intersection between cisgender mxn and heterosexuals.



*One of the few and far between gender neutral toilets on campus.*

The womxn students also indicated that narratives about silencing do not only relate to the interpersonal sphere, but that they also experience institutional silencing within the university:

Ayanda: I feel like if a person is going to speak up that they were abused, ... the institution does nothing about it. That in itself is a form of abuse ... We have this guy here, who continues in this position of power and he probably feels untouchable because this girl had to leave, and he's got his friends covering for him. I remember, I asked one of his friends, I was like, "so I heard that your friend was accused of this, this, this?" And he's like, "ja, but it wasn't a big deal" ... You know... men ... in this space ... continue to live in so much comfort and ... they are so prioritised, guys are so

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prioritised... That thing of being unheard. The institution continues to reinforce that. (FG2).

Koketso: ... Adding on your point ... I was present in the SRC meeting ... Two of the SRC members were accused of gender-based violence this year. (FG2)

In addition to being silenced by mxn and womxn within and outside of the university, the data above indicates that the womxn also feel silenced by the institution. Through her subjective experience with fellow mxn students, Ayanda explains that the institution (UCT) does not afford enough attention to incidences of GBV against womxn students; that accused 'perpetrators' at UCT are protected while the 'victims' are not afforded the same treatment. Furthermore, this is how she constructs a narrative about the institutional protection of perpetrators; UCT does not provide consequences for perpetrators of GBV, particularly those who sit in positions of power (i.e. members of the SRC). She expresses that this institutional response "reinforces" the "thing of being unheard" and the narrative of feeling silenced and muted as womxn.

These narratives about institutional silencing speaks to the hegemonic and subtle patriarchal structures at play in the university, and that shape womxn students' narratives on GBV.

### **Institutional responses and narratives of blame.**

In all three focus groups, reference to inadequate institutional resources such as training of staff, services and the affordability thereof at UCT were expressed by the students. Furthermore, the general lack of knowledge amongst students of the available resources was also present in their narratives:

Koketso: ... but those CPS officers are supposed to be the people who are trained to understand certain situations... they're supposed to be trained to say, okay, this is what we're all going to do.

Keneliwe: ...we don't have enough trained people. Your first people to go to, like they went to CPS ... CPS has virtually put a barrier between you and getting access to that

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help because you get there and you're like, I've already been judged, was it my fault, what was I doing.

Susan: People aren't trained, because they always tell you ... do wellness, do wellness, do wellness. And do wellness will tell you come in two weeks' time... (FG1)

The womxn students explained that the continuous ill treatment of Campus Protection Service (CPS) officers toward 'victims' of GBV makes it difficult for them to seek assistance. The judgement and lack of knowledge regarding procedure in cases where a student has experienced GBV isolates 'victims', causes them to blame themselves and prevents them from seeking further medical attention. Koketso's extract - that CPS officers ought to understand certain situation wherein violence occurs - highlights, albeit subtly, the tendency of authorities to blame the 'victim' for the violence. The treatment of 'victims' by authorities demonstrates that the violence endured by the students does not end when the incident has passed, instead the lack of sensitivity given to 'victims' by CPS officers - in particular - is yet another form of trauma that they have to endure, and it fosters mistrust and the inability for the student to establish a sense of safety. A consequence of this is that, cases of GBV go unreported within the university. Collins and colleagues' (2009) study indicates that many victims of GBV do not access available services and support because of staff's lack of training, and the insufficient mobilisation of resources when 'victims' are reporting a case. This led the 'victims' to believe that their issues were not being taken seriously. The ill treatment of 'victims' by staff due to a lack of training is dangerous as it has the potential to cause increased psychological harm and damage. A review report published by the Discrimination and Harassment Office (DISCHO) at UCT in 2016 specifically noted the need for all staff - especially line managers - to attend compulsory training that dealt with the particularities of procedure and orders. We do not know if these training sessions have taken place, however, the students co-constructed narratives about CPS and other first responders at the university suggests that these training sessions, 1) have inconsistently taken place or, 2) they are ineffective. These narratives emanated from the womxn's personal encounters with CPS and DISCHO; narratives they heard from friends; and Student Representative Council (SRC) meetings they had attended that made mention of these factors. Susan, Koketso and Keneliwe delivered a narrative that reflected the conscious act of holding the aforementioned structures accountable for their lack of training and resources of its staff members.



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*Keneliwe: Although this sign reads “emergency”, it is another indication of the poor state of safety and security on campus as the officers do not respond to this with urgency*

Evidence suggests, if university campuses were to invest in the training of staff whilst simultaneously providing a service that mobilised psychological, health services and other support services for the ‘victims’, issues such as underreporting would be vastly reduced (Collins et al., 2009; Axemo, Wijewardena, Ruvani, Cooray, & Darj, 2018). This narrative was evident across all of the focus groups and the womxn further noted that the training of first responders was crucial. This encompassed CPS officers, employees at student wellness services, wardens and sub wardens at residences who are often the first point of contact for individuals who are physically or emotionally distressed. Staff members also need to commit themselves to various social justice policies. Susan further echoes this:

Susan: There is a lack of sensitivity amongst staff to these issues and this is reflected in the failure to understand that it is not a matter of a few counselling sessions and three months later you should be back to normal (FG3)

There was consensus amongst the co-researchers regarding the need to pay for wellness services and how it further isolated ‘victims’ from seeking support. This reality was in direct contradiction to the encouragement by the university for students to utilise wellness services on campus. This links to Susan’s narrative around the re-traumatisation of ‘victims’ through



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the gaps in institutional responses. Coupled with these financial constraints was the issue of availability and the long duration students have to wait prior to being treated at the wellness service.

Leadership structures used the lack of services and resources at UCT to shift the blame and to not take action against alleged perpetrators of GBV. According to the students, the SRC claimed that insufficient resources and access to certain services was an obstacle to taking action against members of the SRC who had been accused of perpetrating GBV:

Koketso: But two of the SRC members were accused of gender-based violence this year.

Koketso...we just also didn't know what to do about it and they were like no ... if we didn't have the resources to deal with certain things, because some things should be dealt with by police and wharra, wharra... (FG2)

Koketso's explanation of how current members of the SRC still retain their leadership positions despite the allegations levelled against them is telling of the culture of silencing and ignoring 'victims' when they speak out against GBV at UCT. The reference to the lack and inaccessibility of resources made by the student leadership structure was used to excuse their inaction. Koketso delivers a narrative of blame shifting by student leadership, and subsequently UCT management as to why there are no consequences for alleged perpetrators of GBV at the university. Furthermore, she reports how the inaction of the SRC – which is predominantly womxn-dominated – may be interpreted as protection of these alleged perpetrators. It is in direct contradiction to the claim that the current SRC is a forward-thinking leadership structure dominated by womxn with the intention of bringing about change within the institution. These factors also reveal the underlying issues present within the highest decision-making body of the student populace and their tolerance of violence. According to Collins and colleagues (2009), all universities and its stakeholders must illustrate their intolerance of violence by actively and continuously attending workshops about GBV sensitivity.

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## Summary and Conclusion

This study sought to add to the literature on narratives of GBV against womxn in HEIs and to challenge traditional and marginalising methods of studying womxn, by critically engaging with representations of GBV against womxn by womxn students, through DST as a PAR method. Intersectionality as a theoretical framework coupled with a thematic narrative analysis was employed to examine shared narratives of GBV against womxn on campus. The following narratives emerged in the womxn students' images, and conversations on GBV against womxn: 1) narratives about the womxn's awareness of intersecting social identities in the representations of GBV; 2) narratives about the different ways in which GBV is normalised and desensitised on campus; 3) narratives about how the experiences and voices of cisgender womxn and LGBTQI+ womxn are silenced and suppressed by hegemonic and patriarchal structures; and 4) narratives of blame and how UCT has responded to incidences of GBV. Analysis of the womxn student's narratives parallel with existing literature and provides newly established insights in this area of research.

The findings from the study indicate that the womxn students co-constructed narratives of GBV at UCT. They discussed these narratives in relation to intersecting identities of gender, race and sexuality. The students reflected on how UCT, as a historically white and patriarchal institution, emphasised and reminded the womxn of their positioning within the institution, and how being at UCT as a black womxn also meant that they doubted themselves. These findings were present in literature, where black womxn students felt unwelcome or unacknowledged in HEIs (Collins et al., 2009). Our findings also revealed the womxn's internalisation of oppression at UCT, due to their intersecting identities. The womxn expected to be discriminated against and forced to conform to the expectations of their counterparts.

The womxn students relayed narratives of normalisation by dominant systems of patriarchy. They constructed narratives about the ways in which different forms of GBV are normalised on campus, and this normalisation is often driven by a system of patriarchy. The womxn students were disappointed when they contemplated how womxn complicity participate in this system that serves to subdue them.

The data indicated narratives of silenced voices on campus, how womxn are condemned for their actions; are denied power; and their experiences are ignored, by mxn and sometimes even womxn that are represented as protectors of patriarchs. The womxn students

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acknowledged the role played by power-based intersections of dominating identities, particularly between cisgender mxn and heterosexuals, in the silencing, exclusion and sometimes erasure of cisgender womxn and LGBTQI+ womxn. Additionally, the womxn expressed how UCT as an institution silences them by protecting 'perpetrators' of violence yet failing to afford the same attention the 'victims' of violence on campus.

The lack of institutional responses emerged as a factor that perpetuated GBV at UCT. Although this factor is not present extensively in literature, the findings suggest that for HEIs to combat GBV, an increase in institutional structures (i.e., training and resources) needed to occur. Furthermore, the lack of proper institutional resources was often used by university leadership structures to shift blame from themselves and their inaction onto this lack of resources.

We found that there were factors that limited the depth and extent of narratives of the data. Although we advertised the study to all womxn, we attracted five black womxn students. Due to this, the narratives reflected by the womxn are not racially diverse and can only be considered in relation black womxn students at UCT. However, qualitative research does not aim to generalise. Therefore, future research can be extended to include a more racially diverse sample. This study held three focus groups. It may have been beneficial to have ongoing dialogue with the group, especially considering the extent and sensitivity of topics surrounding GBV, and following the events surrounding Uyinene's death. However, given the brief time frame and scope of the honours year this was unfortunately not possible. Future, and perhaps continued work, may explore the value of more dialogue settings that create conscientising spaces for womxn to reflect on how GBV incidents reinforced or reshaped the womxn students' narratives. Although these narratives were not reflected in the current study's focus group sessions, they were present in the womxn's videos and images. Thereby, illustrating the value of dynamic modes of engagement allowed through PAR methods.

Future research on GBV against womxn should include larger samples that are racially and sexually diverse. It is desirable for this kind of research to consider other South African HEIs, to evaluate the similarities and/or differences between womxn's narratives in these institutions.

The significance of this study lies in the subtle difference in approach to research. It employed DST as a PAR method, allowing the womxn students to elucidate their narratives

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of GBV through various digital methods. The images and videos captured their narratives in a meaningful way by innovatively translating knowledge. This ensured that narratives are illustrated as intended by the womxn students and are not overwritten by the researcher's interpretation. Employing DST increased the womxn students' participation in the research and production of unaltered knowledge. The womxn students, therefore, hold a power over their narratives which is translated into meaningfully digital knowledge. This study also acknowledged and was inclusive of all womxn, as they are positioned as the most vulnerable to violence in the South African society (STATS SA, 2016). We are confident that this study will contribute to the transformation of how research on GBV is conceptualised and conducted. We also hope that the study empowered the co-researchers, that it will potentially increase awareness on GBV against womxn in HEIs and contribute to eradicating the silencing of womxn's voices.

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# Womxn University Students' Narrative of Gender-based Violence through Digital Storytelling

## **Appendices**

### Appendix A

#### Focus group Questions

1. How would you describe gender-based violence against womxn? Probing question: what are some forms of GBV?
2. How would you describe your experience as a womxn at the university? Is it different from your experience of being a womxn in other settings? If so, how?
3. In what ways, do you think, your background and where you come from might shape how you think about GBV and being a womxn?
4. In what ways, do you think, GBV might happen in the space of the university? Probing questions: what kind of stories would you tell someone, if describing how GBV occurs in the university setting?
5. How might the space or culture of the university shape the ongoing prevalence of GBV? How might the university guard against incidences of GBV?
6. What kind of changes do you think need to be put in place to curb incidents of GBV in higher education contexts?
7. Is there anything else you would like to add before we end off?

# Womxn University Students' Narrative of Gender-based Violence through Digital Storytelling

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

#### Meanings of Gender-based Violence against Womxn Through Digital Storytelling

##### **Invitation and Purpose**

You are invited to take part in a research study that evaluates meanings and narratives of gender-based violence against womxn. We are researchers from the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town.

##### **Procedures**

If you decide to take part in this study you will be asked to participate in focus group discussions, that will take place in the following structure:

**Phase 1: Introduction of the study and information.** This is the first session of the study, in which the broad aims of the study will be explained in conjunction with what the approaches of digital storytelling are. You will also be given this form to take home, and you will return it in the next meeting.

**Phase 2: Focus group 1.** This will be a 60-minute focus group session, in which you will be asked questions relating to your general views on gender-based violence against womxn. You may choose not to answer any questions you do not wish to respond to.

**Phase 3: Digital-storytelling training.** You will be required to attend a workshop in which you will be trained on digital storytelling with a trained photographer/videographer. The training will provide you with guidelines regarding the kinds of images you can take. You will also be trained on narration.

**Phase 4: Digital-storytelling production.** You will be given two weeks to take images or record your videos and narrate them.

**Phase 5: Focus group 2.** This will be a 60-minute focus group session in which you will present your videos/narrated images to each other. You will then be asked to do a personal reflection about the themes that are occurring in the presented digital stories.

**Phase 6: De-brief meeting 1.** This will be an hour-long meeting where you will share your experience of producing their digital stories and the feelings it brought up for you.

# Womxn University Students' Narrative of Gender-based Violence through Digital Storytelling

**Phase 7: Exhibition planning.** An exhibition will be planned where a few you will be asked to present your stories at the Decolonial HUB meeting in the Psychology Department at the University of Cape Town.

**Phase 8: Final de-brief meeting.** The final debrief meeting is intended to get you to talk about your experience throughout the study.

## **Discomforts & Inconveniences**

1. The topic of gender-based violence is sensitive and you might feel uncomfortable to discuss. However, the study intends for you to share stories and meanings of GBV, rather than personal experiences. Therefore, it is unlikely that the content will cause distress and traumatisation. Furthermore, you will not be required to participate in any part of the discussion that you do not wish to, and you are allowed to withdraw your participation at any point of the study without negative consequences.
2. If the discussions are in anyway triggering and cause emotional distress, you can choose to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences and you will be given a referrals list with contact details for counselling and support.
3. You might be inconvenienced by having given up time to take part in the study.

## **Benefits**

Through the focus groups, you will gain the opportunities to learn skills on digital storytelling. You are given an opportunity to share your views on GBV, contribute to knowledge production and the larger purpose of understanding how students view dating abuse.

## **Privacy and Confidentiality**

1. The focus groups will be conducted in a private room.
2. All information shared throughout the discussion will be kept confidential to the researchers. However, complete confidentiality is not guaranteed, as focus group require you to have discussion with other participants.
3. You will be given a pseudonym which will ensure that you remain anonymous.
4. All recordings of the focus groups will be kept safe and locked away in a secure cabinet to which only the researcher will have access.

## **Contact Details**

Womxn University Students' Narrative of Gender-based Violence through Digital  
Storytelling

If you have any further questions with regards to the study, please email the  
**Researchers:** Minkateko on [ndlmin004@myuct.ac.za](mailto:ndlmin004@myuct.ac.za) or Karabo on  
[mbskar001@myuct.ac.za](mailto:mbskar001@myuct.ac.za) or Dr Taryn Van Niekerk at the Department of Psychology,  
UCT on [taryn.vanniekerk@uct.ac.za](mailto:taryn.vanniekerk@uct.ac.za) **OR Contact for the Ethics Committee:**  
Rosalind Adams on [rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za](mailto:rosalind.adams@uct.ac.za).

**Signatures**

The participant has been informed of the nature and purpose of the procedures described  
above including any risks involved. He/she has been given time to ask any questions and  
these questions have been answered to the best of the researcher's ability.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature Date

I, (participant) have been informed about this research study and understand its purpose,  
possible benefits, risks, and inconveniences. I agree to take part in this research as a  
participant. I know that I am free to withdraw this consent and quit this project at any time,  
and that doing so will not cause me any penalty.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature Date

**PERMISSION TO TAPE-RECORD**

I consent to the interview and focus group being audio-recorded. I understand that the  
interview and group discussion will be tape-recorded and that the researcher will take strict  
precautions to safeguard my personal information throughout the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

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Appendix C

Referral List for Counselling and Support

Should you require counselling services during or after participation in the study, contact any of the services in the list below.

**DISCHO - The Discrimination and Harassment Office - University of Cape Town**

Tel: 021 650 3530

**University of Cape Town Counselling Service**

**Tel:** +27 (0)21 650 1017

**UCT Student Wellness Centre**

Tel: 021 650 1020

**Life Line South Africa**

National Counselling Line: 0861 322 322

Stop Gender Violence (toll-free lifeline): 0800 150 150

**FAMSA**

FAMSA offers individual trauma and debriefing services, and domestic violence counselling:

021 447 7951

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Appendix D

Research Advertisement

**Email to DSA Research Invitations**

Dear student,

You are invited to participate in a study on gender-based violence. We (Minkateko Ndlovu and Karabo Mabaso) are Honours students from the Department of Psychology at the University of Cape Town. We are conducting a research study that evaluates meanings and narratives of gender-based violence against womxn.

Eligibility criteria:

1. Must identify as a womxn
2. Be 18 years and older
3. Be undergraduate or postgraduate student

The study will take place in the form focus group discussions and in the following structure:

**Phase 1: Introduction of the study and information.** This is the first session of the study, in which the broad aims of the study will be explained in conjunction with what the approaches of digital storytelling are. You will also be given this form to take home, and you will return it in the next meeting.

**Phase 2: Focus group 1.** This will be a 60-minute focus group session, in which you will be asked questions relating to your general views on gender-based violence against womxn. You may choose not to answer any questions you do not wish to respond to.

**Phase 3: Digital-storytelling training.** You will be required to attend a workshop in which you will be trained on digital storytelling with a trained photographer/videographer. The training will provide you with guidelines regarding the kinds of images you can take. You will also be trained on narration.

**Phase 4: Digital-storytelling production.** You will be given two weeks to take images or record your videos and narrate them.

## Womxn University Students' Narrative of Gender-based Violence through Digital Storytelling

**Phase 5: Focus group 2.** This will be a 60-minute focus group session in which you will present your videos/narrated images to each other. You will then be asked to do a personal reflection about the themes that are occurring in the presented digital stories.

**Phase 6: De-brief meeting 1.** This will be an hour-long meeting where you will share your experience of producing their digital stories and the feelings it brought up for you.

**Phase 7: Exhibition planning.** An exhibition will be planned where a few you will be asked to present your stories at the Decolonial HUB meeting in the Psychology Department at the University of Cape Town.

**Phase 8: Final de-brief meeting.** The final debrief meeting is intended to get you to talk about your experience throughout the study.

The focus groups will be conducted in a private room. All information shared throughout the discussion will be kept confidential to the researchers. However, complete confidentiality is not guaranteed, as focus group require you to have discussion with other participants. You will be given a pseudonym which will ensure that you remain anonymous. All recordings of the focus groups will be kept safe and locked away in a secure cabinet to which only the researcher will have access.

The study intends for you to share stories and meanings of GBV, rather than personal experiences. Therefore, it is unlikely that the content will cause distress and traumatisation. Furthermore, you will not be required to participate in any part of the discussion that you do not wish to, and you are allowed to withdraw your participation at any point of the study without negative consequences. If the discussions are in anyway triggering and cause emotional distress, you can choose to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences and you will be given a referrals list with contact details for counselling and support. You might be inconvenienced by having given up time to take part in the study.

Your participation in the study, will give you the opportunity to learn skills on digital storytelling, and an opportunity to share your views on GBV, contribute to knowledge production and the larger purpose of understanding how students view dating abuse.

If you have any further questions with regards to the study, please email the **Researchers:** Minkateko on [ndlmin004@myuct.ac.za](mailto:ndlmin004@myuct.ac.za) or Karabo on [mbskar001@myuct.ac.za](mailto:mbskar001@myuct.ac.za).

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Appendix E

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa  
Telephone (021) 650 3417  
Fax No. (021) 650 4104

07 June 2018

Minkateko Ndlovu and Karabo Mabaso  
Department of Psychology  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7701

Dear Minkateko and Karabo

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your study, *Womxn University Students' Narrative of Gender-based Violence Through Digital Storytelling*. The reference number is PSY2019-026.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lauren Wild'.

Lauren Wild (PhD)  
Associate Professor  
Chair: Ethics Review Committee

University of Cape Town  
PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT  
Upper Campus  
Rondebosch



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Appendix F  
Link to Digital Story

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jB7ytxQT3PKJSNCKDiQ3\\_UcwX8kW82zB/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jB7ytxQT3PKJSNCKDiQ3_UcwX8kW82zB/view?usp=sharing)