

Researchers' Stories About Doing Research on Gendered and Sexual Violence:  
A Photovoice Study

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## Abstract

While research on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is important given the widespread prevalence of violence in society at large, the effects of SGBV often extend beyond research participants and impact researchers themselves. Researching SGBV is an emotionally demanding experience in which researchers often experience secondary and vicarious trauma and may even experience profound personal and emotional growth; however, contemporary literature rarely focuses on researchers' lived experiences. Unsettling knowledge production on SGBV necessitates shifting the lens onto SGBV researchers' experiences and asking critical questions about who is doing this research, how this research impacts them, and what meanings they attach to researching violence. Grounded in decolonial feminism and participatory action research, this study uses photovoice to explore and gain in-depth insights into researchers' lived experiences of doing SGBV research. Five postgraduate student researchers were entrusted with capturing images that tell their stories about doing SGBV research. Focus groups and co-researchers' photo-stories were then interpreted using a dual decolonial intersectional narrative and visual arts-informed analysis. Three key narratives emerged: *trauma and institutional entanglement; research as personal; opportunities for hope, positivity, and social justice*. This study also aims to pioneer new methodologies of approaching SGBV research that embrace emotionality, subjectivity, and critical reflexivity. Unsettling knowledge production on SGBV also inspires a call to create new opportunities for producing and disseminating knowledge about SGBV – which this study hopes to honour through representing its findings through creative media including photography and film.

Key words: gender-based violence, violence, trauma, unsettling knowledge, decolonial feminism, photovoice, decolonial intersectional analysis, arts-informed analysis, film, photography

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a major societal concern with an extremely high prevalence in South Africa (Boonzaier, 2018; Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021) which has motivated research into understanding the causes and risk factors of gendered violence (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2021) and victims/survivors' lived experiences (Fraga, 2016; Sexual Violence Research Initiative [SVRI], 2015). However, the impact of SGBV often extends to those researching it (Coles et al., 2014). Along with topics such as suicide (Chen et al., 2019), and bereavement (Fox & Wayland, 2020), SGBV is also an example of a 'sensitive topic' in research which exposes researchers and participants to emotional and psychological vulnerability (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Fraga, 2016). Researchers often engage with these topics by solely focussing on ensuring their participants' wellbeing (Berger, 2020; Chen et al., 2019) without considering how the research affects them (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022).

Contemporary literature rarely explores researchers' experiences of researching sensitive topics (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022), and of the little existing literature, even less has focused on the experience of researching gendered violence. Given the widespread impact of SGBV in South African society, researching SGBV may be more traumatic and emotionally demanding than other topics (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Hensel et al., 2015). Doing research on sensitive topics may, however, also provide opportunities for impacting change in others' lives (Williamson et al., 2020) and emotional growth (Smith et al., 2021). This study therefore seeks to centre the experiences and stories of postgraduate student researchers doing research on SGBV.

### **Secondary Traumatic Stress and Vicarious Trauma**

Research on sensitive topics can be stressful for participants who retell traumatic stories of violence (Fraga, 2016). Researchers are thus ethically obliged to minimise participants' exposure to psychological harm during the research process (SVRI, 2015). However, researchers themselves are also exposed to harm which is seldom discussed in literature (Herman, 2015; Whitt-Woosley & Sprang, 2018).

Researchers often experience Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), commonly understood as researchers' chronic stress from repeatedly encountering participants' traumatic stories (Grundlingh et al., 2017; Hensel et al., 2015; Padmanabhanunni, 2020), or Vicarious Trauma (VT) which is similarly defined as researchers' indirect exposure to participants' trauma through empathetic connection and emotional engagement (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Grundlingh et al., 2017; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Symptoms include intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal (Nikischer, 2019; Padmanabhanunni, 2020), emotional

exhaustion (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009), and alterations of self-esteem, worldview and self-efficacy (Biruski et al., 2014; SVRI, 2015) as observed in research on suicide prevention (Chen et al., 2019), bereavement (Fox & Wayland, 2020), and terminal illness (Watts, 2008).

STS and VT threaten researchers' psychological and emotional wellbeing (Herman, 2015; SVRI, 2015) and could potentially compromise researchers' ability to collect and analyse data competently (Meth & Malaza, 2003). Institutional support is cited as an important protector against these effects (Grundlingh et al., 2017; Taylor, 2019). However, STS and VT are often worsened when researchers feel they cannot openly express or discuss their emotions during the research process.

### **Emotionality**

Researching SGBV as a sensitive topic can be triggering for participants (Fraga, 2016) which makes empathy extremely important for researchers (Bondi, 2016). Emotional or empathetic rapport is understood as the authentic interpersonal connections researchers make with participants to make them feel safer while retelling their traumatic stories (Bondi, 2016; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Watts, 2008). Researchers tend to emotionally identify with participants (Sextou et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021) and may even consider disclosing their emotional selves to encourage participants to share their stories (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). Capacity for empathy may also be influenced by researchers' own intersectional identities, histories and positionalities (Smith et al., 2021; Taylor, 2019). Researchers can sustain their capacity for empathy through emotional reflection which also helps prevent burnout and compassion fatigue while improving listening skills and emotional awareness (Bondi, 2016; Sextou et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021). Reflecting on one's emotions is arguably as equally important as reflecting on how positionality affects one's approach to research (Bondi, 2016; Davison, 2007). However, while researchers are particularly sensitive to their participants' emotions, they often overlook their own.

The academic dominance of positivism has often rejected the apparent unreliability of emotions in favour of stoicism and objectivity in research (Clarke & Braun, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; Watts, 2008). This institutional culture dissuades researchers from openly discussing or reflecting upon the affective nature of research (Bondi, 2016) and associates vulnerability and sensitivity with poor academic credibility and professional 'weakness' (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022). While participants freely express their emotions, researchers often repress theirs causing frustration, emptiness and shame (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Bondi, 2016; Watts, 2008) which could in turn worsen STS and VT (SVRI, 2015). If provided adequate institutional support and encouraged to engage in self-care practices,

researchers would perhaps feel more comfortable engaging with the affective nature of research (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022).

### **Self-care and Institutional Support**

The emotional and psychological ramifications of researching sensitive topics need to be addressed (Taylor, 2019). Institutional support and self-care enable researchers to respond to these negative impacts of engaging in sensitive research (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018). Effective self-care strategies include exercise, spirituality, meditation, proper nutrition, recreational activity and social support (Coles et al., 2014; Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018). Notwithstanding the usefulness of these strategies, researchers should not be solely responsible for their own wellbeing (Taylor, 2019) and their affiliated institutions need to offer meaningful support (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Nikischer, 2019). Institutions could lessen the effects of VT and STS through normalising discussions about researcher trauma; providing adequate training; sensitive and responsive supervision; regular debriefings; and counselling (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Grundlingh et al., 2017; Whitt-Woosley & Sprang, 2018). Sensitive research is undeniably challenging, making it paramount for meaningful support structures to be established. However, while doing research on sensitive topics may be challenging, there are some potentially rewarding outcomes (Smith et al., 2021).

### **Rewarding Outcomes of Doing Sensitive Research**

Posttraumatic growth has been noted as one rewarding outcome of doing sensitive research, whereby researchers experience positive psychological change as a result of doing sensitive research (Smith et al., 2021). Some researchers feel proud and hopeful after doing research which holds social justice and empowerment potential (Smith et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2020). Notably, researchers have also experienced emotional growth, heightened empathy, and increased resilience to traumatic stimuli (Smith et al., 2021; SVRI, 2015). Although there are rewarding outcomes, most studies focus on the potential risks and challenges of conducting sensitive research. However, exploring potential risks *and* benefits suggests a more holistic exploration of researchers' experiences of researching sensitive topics such as SGBV.

This holistic exploration could even pioneer new methods of approaching SGBV research that embraces emotionality, subjectivity and critical reflexivity which centres and explores the lived experiences and realities of researchers who research SGBV instead of silencing and minimising them (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). This study aims to forge new directions and more creative and participatory forms of research to address the limited

amount of research dedicated to the lived experiences of researchers of SGBV, especially in a South African context where SGBV prevalence is high.

### **Aims**

This study aims to qualitatively explore and gain an in-depth insight into qualitative researchers' stories of doing research on SGBV. The study recognises the complex interplay between challenges and rewards associated with researching SGBV. This study also aims to democratise knowledge production and enable participants to become co-researchers, representing their lived experiences on their own terms.

### **Main Research Question**

- Using photo-narratives, what stories do researchers tell about their experiences of doing SGBV research?

### **Sub Research Questions**

- What meanings do researchers attach to doing research on SGBV?
- What challenges and rewards about doing research on SGBV are revealed through the researchers' photo-narratives?

### **Theoretical Framework: Decolonising Research**

Mainstream psychology's frequent reliance on the positivist paradigm often silences subjectivity, critical reflexivity, and emotionality in research (Bondi, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2019) while bolstering knowledge production traditions from the global North (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). Positivism often reduces researchers to mechanistic technicians and disavows them of their subjective lived experiences (Bondi, 2016; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). To counter these effects, this study embraces a decolonial feminist lens.

Decolonial feminism sees researchers as fully constituted humans and validates their holistic and subjective lived experiences (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019). Decolonial feminism embraces intersectionality (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991) in exploring how researchers' social identities influence their research experiences. Decolonial feminism inspires new ways of doing research by embracing subjectivity, eclectic epistemologies, and humanising the research process (Clarke & Braun, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). The potential for social justice and institutional transformation arises when hegemonic perspectives of the research process are challenged (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018).

This study embraces decolonial feminism to remove the barrier between 'researcher' and 'researched' by exploring the stories of researchers *as* participants, thus enabling critical



and emotional engagement with their identities and lived experiences (Bondi, 2016). Cornell et al. (2019) conceptualises photovoice as decolonial feminist praxis because it allows critical thinking about how researchers and participants can best co-produce knowledge in the presence of looming power imbalances. Through generating new ways of doing, thinking and feeling about research, and centring emotions, personal meaning, and narrativity, this study grounds itself in decolonial feminism (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018).

### **Methodology: Humanising the Researcher**

#### **Research Design**

**Participatory Action Research (PAR).** A PAR approach was utilised in this study to encourage collaboration (Kagan et al., 2006) and challenge the traditional power imbalances between researchers and participants (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). While acknowledging the omniscience of power imbalances (Cornell et al., 2019), PAR endeavours to empower and share power between researchers and participants (Baum, 2006) and encourage their active involvement in the entire research process (Ledwith, 2007). PAR aims to democratise knowledge production and provide opportunities to mobilise social action (Pain et al., 2011), making it suitable for this study which emphasises shared perspectives and collective forms of knowledge production. As such, we refer to our study participants as ‘co-researchers’.

**Photovoice.** This study used the PAR methodology of photovoice which involves participants being provided with cameras and receiving photography training to take photographs to represent and express their lived experiences of which they are considered active experts (Cornell et al., 2019; Kessi, 2013; Wang & Burris, 1997). ‘Photo-stories’ are created through combining photographs with accompanying written narratives which contextualise the images (Malherbe et al., 2017). Photovoice’s main goals are critical consciousness raising, empowerment, and social action (Kessi et al., 2019; Wang, 2006) which are achieved through enabling participants to record and reflect upon important issues in their communities, promote collective critical dialogue, and reach key stakeholders (Malherbe et al., 2017). This is often achieved through a photo exhibition where the photo-stories are shared with community members (Cornell & Kessi, 2017).

While most qualitative methods tend to favour verbal data, words alone are often insufficient for representing complex emotions (Christensen, 2019; Pickin et al., 2011). Photovoice is suitable for this study as visual images offer an alternative way for co-researchers to articulate the ineffable (Brunsdon et al., 2009; Capous-Desyllas, 2013) and collectively engage with emotional and sensitive topics such as SGBV.

## **Participants and Study Context**

Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique involving the selection of co-researchers who are well experienced with the research topic, was utilised (Campbell et al., 2020; Palinkas et al., 2015). This was suitable as this study did not intend to generalise results to the entire population (Etikan et al., 2016). The selection criteria was postgraduate students who have had experience doing SGBV research. Five postgraduate students were recruited. This number is fitting given the scale of an Honours study, and postgraduate students have been focused on given their underrepresentation in literature about researchers' experiences of researching sensitive topics (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022).

This study is located within the larger *Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence in South Africa Project* (hereafter known as 'the Project') of the Psychology Department at the University of Cape Town (UCT) of which both researchers are members. Co-researchers were recruited from the Project via the WhatsApp group and mailing list. The Project was used because of convenience; the fact that Project members are already engaging with topics around SGBV; and we have already established relationships with Project members being Project members ourselves. However, we also advertised our study on social media (Twitter and Facebook), to recruit co-researchers outside of UCT to gain a wider perspective on the topic. An information sheet (Appendix A) accompanied the call for participation.

## **Data Collection**

Co-researchers were asked to attend two focus group discussions; create photo-stories which tell stories of their experiences doing research on SGBV; write a short reflective piece describing their experience (Cornell et al., 2018); and organise and participate in the photovoice exhibit. The first focus group discussion (Appendix B) involved an explanation of the research goals and what was expected of co-researchers (e.g., Simmonds et al., 2015); and a discussion to stimulate their critical and creative thinking about the research topic (Malherbe et al., 2017). Co-researchers signed informed consent forms (Appendix C), and use of digital cameras (Appendix D) and basic training was offered by one of the researchers well versed in photography. Co-researchers spent two weeks creating their photo-stories. In the second focus group (Appendix E), co-researchers presented their photo-stories, which allowed for deeper emotional engagement and collective exploration of narratives (Duffy, 2018). Co-researchers decided which photo-stories they wanted us to analyse. This session enabled co-researchers to debrief and reflect on their holistic experience of participation (Capous-Desyllas, 2013; Moya et al., 2014) which was also the prompt for their reflective

pieces which we asked them to submit the next day. Only two co-researchers submitted reflections.

Focus groups were used as they best foster collaborative knowledge production, sharing and meaning making (Goodhart et al., 2006; Kessi et al., 2019) while enabling co-researchers to provide feedback, recognition and emotional support to one another (Christensen, 2019; Malka, 2022). Online participation accommodated co-researchers unable to physically attend. Both focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by a third party service provider who signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix F). All physical meetings took place in the Psychology Department at mutually agreed upon dates and times.

In September, the group reconvened to discuss organisation of the photovoice exhibit which happened on 29 September in the UCT Psychology department (Appendix G).

### **Data Analysis**

Tsang (2020) notes the importance for photovoice data analysis to address both the written and visual aspects of photo-stories in order to prevent the photographs from being decorative and ornamental; and to fully immerse the researcher within each participant's narrative. Therefore, a dual analytical method was adopted in this study: decolonial, intersectional narrative analysis (DINA) (Boonzaier, 2019), and an arts-informed analytical framework (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018).

DINA is grounded in decolonial, narrative and feminist traditions as explained by Boonzaier (2019). It follows four flexible 'phases': an analysis of narrative content; analysing decolonial, intersectional power; articulating resistance; and crafting a plurivocal narrative. DINA emphasises storytelling by focussing on co-researchers' lived experiences in context and understanding the meanings attached to their stories. DINA addresses the influence of co-researchers' intersectional identities on how they tell their stories; addresses structures of power and oppression; explores how co-researchers' stories are used to resist marginalising and reductive representations; and implores researchers to be critically reflective of how our own subjectivities have shaped the research process. DINA importantly reflects the tenets of decolonial feminism such as an intersectional ethos; embracing eclectic subjectivities and epistemologies; and harnessing potential for social justice.

The arts-informed approach addresses the visual aspect of photovoice as inspired by Capous-Desyllas and Bromfield (2018). This approach holds that storytelling through art is inherently subjective and emotional, and thus centres the researchers' subjectivities and emotional responses to the photo-stories. Researchers visually analyse co-researchers' photographs through exploring aspects such as colour, composition, shot scale and camera

proxemics. Gerstenblatt (2013) even suggests the use of photo collages to analyse narratives visually. This subjective analysis aims to help orientate the researcher towards their own subjectivity and critical reflexivity. This approach explicitly addresses the artistic and visual components of the data, and is grounded in empathy, creative thinking, and personal emotional engagement which have often been excluded in mainstream academia. The approach also pioneers new ways of representing data beyond traditional textual analysis.

Both DINA and the arts-informed approach encourage researchers to critically, creatively and emotionally reflect on the knowledge co-produced in this study for which the arts in general and decolonial feminism advocate (Boonzaier, 2019; Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Cornell et al., 2019). DINA is a textual analysis which centres co-researchers' narratives in context whereas the arts-informed approach incorporates the visual element of photo-voice data while being firmly grounded in the researchers' own subjectivity. Both approaches are suitable for their critical and creative focus on narrativity which aligns with this study's aim to explore and gain an in-depth insight into researchers' experiences and stories of doing research on SGBV as inspired by decolonial feminism.

### **Documentary**

The data collection process and the photo-exhibit were filmed by a small camera crew along with other Project related events and activities to create a documentary. Exploring research with the audio-visual medium necessitates an approach to disseminating research which moves beyond traditional textual representations (Grant, 2014; Lavik, 2012). Film being an emotionally-oriented medium (Grant, 2014) also helps this study to re-centre emotionality and subjectivity in the research process (Kessi et al., 2019). The documentary will broadly tell the Project's story using this study as a framing device, and will serve as an accessible and easily disseminated story of the photovoice study as inspired by the arts-informed approach (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018) and the decolonial feminist ethos of creating new ways to disseminate knowledge to an audience outside of the academy (Cornell et al., 2019). The documentary will be completed in 2023 after which co-researchers and Project members will collectively decide how it will be distributed.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study has met all requirements for ethical approval which has been granted (Appendix H).

**Voluntary and Informed Consent.** It is important that co-researchers are well-informed about what their participation in the study entails and that they decide to participate freely of their own volition (Terre Blanche et al., 2014). Informed consent forms were issued

at the first focus group session containing all relevant information about the study. It was explained also that participation in the documentary is optional.

**Confidentiality.** This refers to keeping co-researcher information safe and private (Terre Blanche et al., 2014). Both focus groups were conducted at the *Hub for Decolonial Feminist Psychologies in Africa* at UCT with the door closed to ensure privacy. Co-researchers were asked to not share with external parties the focus group discussions' content. However, even though the researchers attempted to encourage an environment of mutual respect and solidarity, it was beyond the researchers' control to ensure that co-researchers actually adhered to this. All research data has been kept in a password-protected computer. All members of the camera crew signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix I). Data was only accessible to the researchers and the study's supervisor.

Theoretically, no personally identifying information should appear in the photo-stories; however, the visual component of photovoice disrupts these assumptions, especially when participants photograph themselves (Harley, 2012; Kessi et al., 2019). While co-researchers' identities must be protected, ethical practices should not unduly censor their photo-stories (Cornell et al., 2018). As such, explicit and clear communication about the implications of self-photography was discussed. Co-researchers were involved in decision-making about what they wanted to photograph. However, pseudonyms were used in the thesis write-up to offer some measure of anonymity.

Co-researchers were actively involved in organising the photo-exhibition including which photo-stories to present and exhibit; however, involvement in the photo-exhibit was not compulsory and two co-researchers chose not to participate. Co-researchers who chose to participate in the documentary will decide what footage they are comfortable with being included once editing commences. Co-researchers were provided with two documentary consent forms - one giving permission for video recording (Appendix J) and the other, confirming participants' satisfaction and comfortability with the footage that will form part of the final documentary (Appendix K).

**Ethics Surrounding Secondary Participants.** Secondary participants are the subjects who are not a part of the study but whose images are captured (Malherbe et al., 2017). Co-researchers were informed that secondary participants may only be photographed if they provide their verbal consent and understand for what purpose their photographs will be used (Harley, 2012).

**Risks and Benefits.** Telling stories about doing challenging research on SGBV may be distressing for co-researchers and could potentially trigger traumatic memories. Co-

researchers were made aware of this potential risk and were asked to only share what felt comfortable. A referral list for psychological support (Appendix L) was provided. A debriefing session with the Project's affiliated clinical psychologist was suggested, but the need for this did not arise. Focus groups took place at convenient times for all co-researchers and online participation was accommodated. For in-person participants, refreshments were provided. In terms of benefits, this study enabled co-researchers to share and represent their experiences on their own terms using photo-stories while contributing to the limited knowledge on this topic. The results of this study may potentially serve to provide recommendations on how researchers doing work on sensitive topics such as SGBV can be supported.

### **Reflexivity**

It is important for us as researchers to be critically reflective of how our subjectivities and positionalities influence the research process (Berger, 2015), and how we will support each other during the study. One of the researchers is a woman who has engaged with the traumatic and painful stories of those close to her having experienced sexual assault. She was at UCT in 2019 when the brutal murder of fellow student and black woman Uyinene Mrwetyana and the anti-SGBV protests that followed, took place. Although engaging in conversations surrounding SGBV had brought up painful memories, the researcher felt mentally and emotionally prepared to engage with such content and received support from family and friends. The other researcher is a cis-gendered heterosexual man who was at UCT during the 2019 anti-SGBV protests which critically conscientised him towards recognising his gendered privilege and inspired him to use his positionality to help affect social change and activism to mobilise against SGBV. He is aware of how his positionality and presence in the project may have influenced the research and was committed to critical reflexivity. He was also prepared to engage with the research.

Although we and the co-researchers are all postgraduate students doing work on SGBV, we are novice researchers and have limited experience unlike our more experienced co-researchers. This difference in levels of experience may have impacted the stories we were able to understand or relate to; however, the PAR methodology addressed this experience gap in us co-producing knowledge with the co-researchers. We, as researchers, briefly met after each focus group to reflect, debrief, and provide constructive feedback to one another. We met regularly throughout the data collection and analysis processes and provided emotional support to one another.

## Analysis & Discussion:

### Narratives of Trauma and Institutional Entanglement, Research as Personal, and Opportunities for Hope, Positivity, and Social Justice

Three narratives emerged from our analysis: *trauma and institutional entanglement; research as personal; opportunities for hope, positivity, and social justice*. Excerpts from the co-researchers' photo-stories and focus group discussions (FG) have been included. The complete photo-stories appear in Appendices M - Q. Pseudonyms have been used.

#### Trauma and Institutional Entanglement

Co-researchers' stories characterised doing research on SGBV as challenging because of the nature of the research itself, such as the first photo-story, and larger forces of academic positivism within colonial institutional cultures (Bondi, 2016; Taylor, 2019).



#### Appendix M: Siya (Children on Jungle Gym)

*“... the sight of two children of the opposite sex playing together unsupervised has become anxiety inducing... Child play may range from innocent play to sexual misconduct and in the absence of supervision children are prone to act inappropriately... In an ideal world, I wish for children to be supervised and guided.”*

Typically, children playing freely is innocuous and harmless; however, Siya sees it as anxiety-inducing as she feels unsupervised children are prone to enacting sexual misconduct. These views and thoughts were informed by Siya's work on sexual misconduct and violence

amongst children. Siya's photo-story suggests the possibility of being vicariously traumatised by her research through experiences of hyperarousal and intrusive thoughts (Nikischer, 2019; Padmanabhanunni, 2020; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; SVRI, 2015). This potential vicarious traumatisation indicates how one's research can alter one's initially naive or optimistic worldview (Biruski et al., 2014; Hensel et al., 2015), and Siya's research may have entirely altered how she perceives children. Artistically, the photo-story juxtaposes nature (grass and trees) with human construction (concrete path and wooden jungle gym). The nature appears surrounded the concrete and wood, which represents how the natural and innocent expression of child-play has been re-framed by 'unnatural' aspects of human nature such as SGBV. This artistically reflects Siya's potentially altered view of child-play after such prolonged exposure to her research.

As Siya's photo-story reveals, research on SGBV is challenging and traumatising, but this is often aggravated by colonial and positivist institutional cultures which can make doing research on violence even more traumatic and alienating (Grundlingh et al., 2017; Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Hensel et al., 2015). Researchers become entangled in their institutions' culture which often become inseparable from their research (Taylor, 2019) as the next photo-story reveals.



#### **Appendix N: Sim**

*“Doing research on SGBV can be very challenging...consciously aware of just how unsafe I and so many others are...Unless one is fortunate enough to be in a space like the Hub and the Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence Project, there is no place to feel safe whilst one struggles with the complexity of doing*



*this kind of work... it often feels like UCT doesn't see or doesn't care to see the strain of the work... the realities of what it means to be doing this work are pushed aside and made inconsequential... I can't live comfortably knowing but doing nothing about people being silenced and feeling unsafe."*

Sim draws attention to the "I don't feel safe" sticker to reflect on how unsafe she often feels doing her research at UCT. Sim describes feeling disregarded, marginalised and side-lined in her research environment which is artistically reflected by the sticker and its message being on the margins of the photograph itself. The sticker is not framed as central to the picture as the hallways and other posters, which artistically represent the institution's research standards and "*academic demands and expectations*". As implied in Siya's photo-story, Sim recognises "*...how overwhelming it can be to do this kind of work*" (FG) and how this is aggravated by minimal institutional support. Other co-researchers echoed similar statements such as Mbali who said "*I'm always overwhelmed. I think that is what doing a PHD is*" (FG) and Lebo who confirmed that she often feels "*so overwhelmed [she] can't even do anything.*" (FG).

Despite researchers feeling so overwhelmed, Sim's photo-story indicates how institutions often overlook the secondary traumatic stress (Padmanabhanunni, 2020), vicarious trauma (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995), and emotional labour (Watts, 2008) of SGBV research. This narrative suggests that institutions could do more to make researchers feel supported, heard, and safe (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018; Taylor, 2019). Sim asserts that institutions only care about "*the output of work*" which "*must be within the constructs of their standards.*" This speaks to the academic dominance of positivism which discourages an institutional culture of emotional sensitivity to the affective nature of research (Bondi, 2016; Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Watts, 2008).

Sim also links her feeling of unsafety with those of survivors/victims of SGBV:

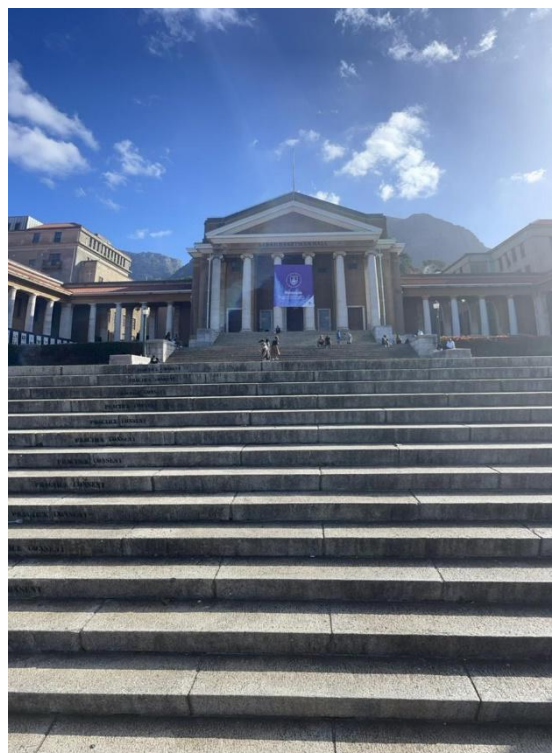
*"...a reflection of just how people who are survivors of sexual violence must feel on campus...navigating this world and not feeling safe, feeling silenced... unless we stop and we actively acknowledge the fact that they don't feel safe, we are going to walk right past them..."* (FG)

Sim links her experience of institutional marginalisation with survivors of SGBV who are "*silenced in every way and do not feel safe*" which links up with Siya's earlier concerns

about the safety of children. Sim's and Siya's photo-stories read together could speak to both the vicarious trauma that researchers face (Hensel et al., 2015; Herman, 2015), and a change in their perception of their own safety or those of others (Biruski et al., 2014). However, both photo-stories also indicate the co-researchers' motivations for why they continue to do their research. Where Siya wishes for children to be "*supervised and guided*", Sim is motivated to continue her research as she feels she cannot "*live comfortably...doing nothing about people being silenced.*" Sim explains how her sometimes repressive institutional culture can paradoxically spark motivation for her research to counteract the marginalisation of victims/survivors:

*"I want to try and create a place of safety... I don't want my work to perpetuate that silencing and creating unsafe narratives..."* (FG)

Sim's narrative reveals that institutional entanglement paradoxically represents a juxtaposition between one's institution simultaneously being a site of alienation or re-traumatisation, and a site for motivation to continuing one's research to challenge restrictive institutional cultures (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001; Smith et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2020). Thus, narratives of institutional entanglement can evoke a contrast between traumatic experiences and positive motivation, as articulated in the next photo-story.



### Appendix O: Anisha (The Institution)

*“ I have conducted all my research within...UCT, which has provided me with access to resources and people, including my supervisor and friends...central to the ideological transformation which resulted in my pursuing of researching violence...I am so grateful to this institution ...On the other hand... this historically white university, is a European imposition, and this is clear in the architecture and visuals of campus. The upward angle, central positioning and framing of this photo thus also represent the domineering colonial ideals...This picture is tension for me... ”*

Similarly to Sim’s, Anisha’s photo-story reflects a contrast of both traumatic experiences and positive motivation emerging from the institution. Anisha also offers her own artistic interpretation describing how the upward angle displays the architecture of her “historically white university” and its “domineering colonial ideals” while also representing the pride and gratitude she feels for studying there. This represents tension in simultaneously experiencing “joy of having this space to do my work in and the pain of not fitting in it.” Anisha explains:

*“There’s a part of me that sometimes feels proud to be part of UCT ... it’s where I found this passion for the work that I do...which makes it extra painful when UCT is problematic and exclusive, and so colonial ...” (FG)*

Like Sim’s photo-story, Anisha’s reflects a tension between the institution representing coloniality while also offering an ideological home through which she has found passion and motivation for continuing her research. Anisha uses this tension in not fitting in as motivation “in doing [her] work, being here and contributing” as a way for her to start to “colour the institution with [her] own ideals.” This narrative of research being an avenue for social justice and decoloniality will be discussed later, but for now, it is important to recognise the complexity and the duality which conducting research on SGBV entails.

As Sim’s and Anisha’s photo-stories reveal, institutional entanglement means that, for researchers, institutions are often inseparable from their research. While their institutions can indeed be sources of pride, identity, and positive motivation to affect change within the institution, they can also perpetuate coloniality which may re-traumatise and alien researchers, adding to their feeling of “not fitting in it” (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018; Taylor, 2019). Institutional entanglement reveals how researchers need to embrace their subjectivity,

emotionality and recognise their research as personal (Bondi, 2016; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018) to create safety within a potentially marginalising environment (Taylor, 2019).

### Research As Personal

Co-researchers produced narratives that expressed how deeply personal, reflective, and emotionally intensive doing research on SGBV is (SVRI, 2015; Watts, 2008) which is at odds with often positivist institutional expectations (Bondi, 2016; Herman, 2015).



### Appendix P: Lebo (The Research and Me)

*“Mirror: This has in many ways reflected my own life and pushed me to reckon with things I have not dealt with and currently dealing with. The stories shared with me are not mine but I see so much of my own story.*

*Sitting position: Some of the traumas that were triggered go back to my childhood which is represented by me sitting on the floor in that position.*

*Home: The picture is taken in my home. This is to represent the many ways doing this work filters into my relationship with my partner.*

*Sunflowers: I put a painting of sunflowers in the picture to show that though doing this research is often challenging, there have also been beautiful moments where I have felt seen, validated and laughed from the bottom of my belly. I also specifically*

*chose sunflowers because I once read that when it is cloudy and grey, they face each other and share their energy. Black women do this for each other.”*

Lebo’s photo-story introduces a deeply reflective quality to doing research on SGBV. Lebo’s current research explores black women’s intersectional lived experiences of violence in South Africa who find themselves at the disadvantaged intersection of race and gender, which also reflects her own identities as a black woman. Lebo artistically analysed her photo-story and reflected on what the mirror represents:

*“...could be me engaging with my research, me engaging with all the co-researchers and as I do that my own story is reflected...”* (FG)

Lebo acknowledges that her participants’ stories share many parallels with her own narrative. She describes being able to “*see so much of [her] own story*” in theirs. These parallels could be childhood traumas as represented by Lebo’s seating position, and how these traumas and “*things*” undealt with filter into her home and relationship with her partner.

Lebo’s photo-story shows how deeply personal researching SGBV can be, sometimes reflecting parts of one’s own lived experiences, and how the work follows you home, one of the most personal spaces someone can occupy. Home can serve as a representation of the present narrative, how personal the research is- it is close to “*home*”. Lebo also noted:

*“certain things have happened in my own life that I have not really thought about...and then through conversations... they come to the surface, and you’re having to deal with things in your own life that you were not quite ready to deal with.”* (FG)

Lebo’s story reveals the reflective nature of research whereby certain emotional triggers and traumas are elicited, suggesting that researchers are emotionally and psychologically embodied within their research (Hollowell et al., 2005). This personal connection to research is often deeply experiential, directly or indirectly, and implicates the researcher in unexpected and pervasive ways (Williamson et al., 2020) when they emotionally engage and identify with, and hold space for their participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2021; Watts, 2008).

This experience contradicts colonial institutional expectations of researchers to emotionally distance themselves and become disembodied from their research (Bondi, 2016; Watts, 2008) as alluded to by another co-researcher, Anisha below. Lebo's reflection in the mirror can be seen more clearly than her actual self and body which could suggest that it is the image or the expectation of what a researcher should be, which institutions focus on instead of the researcher's actual embodied existence.

However, Lebo's photo-story reflects a duality in research eliciting difficult memories and traumas, but also presenting opportunities for joy, gratitude and "*beautiful moments*". Lebo's inclusion of the sunflowers articulates that "*although this research is very, very challenging, it has this certain good...*" (FG). This potential for good will be discussed in the next narrative, but from Lebo's reflection, there is a recognition that doing research on SGBV represents a duality between trauma and emotional challenge on the one hand, but also positivity and hope on the other.



#### **Appendix O: Anisha (Mise-en-scène)**

*“While my output often argues that I am researching media, or institutions or men, in many cases I am truly researching myself. It is my own experiences, lenses, pains, blind spots and errors that shine out at me through the data. This is what this picture represents through the laptop containing my image.... My face is blank, without make-up. This represents the raw vulnerability of research which is so close to home.*

*It is challenging as it can be retraumatizing. It can also show me parts of myself or my life I did not want to see. My work is personal...*

Anisha's photo-story explains how researching SGBV often reveals a lot about oneself to the point where for her, it feels like she is "*truly researching [her]self*", explaining that:

*"...you're writing about it, like you're talking about something separate from you, but...it constantly requires you to look at yourself ... as you see things in other places, you also see them in yourself".* (FG)

Anisha speaks to how this personal nature of research makes her vulnerable in confronting parts of herself that she did not want to see which can be challenging and retraumatizing. This vulnerability is represented by Anisha not wearing any makeup, just being natural, and her being positioned as looking at her own reflection on the laptop where data would usually be. Anisha describes her use of purple in this photo-story, a colour which represents SGBV for some organisations, as a "*kind of spirituality...a connection to something bigger*" (FG) within her research. The colour purple thus links the public and the personal realms of SGBV research.

Similarly to Lebo, Anisha also recognises a duality in her research through it being fulfilling and rewarding while also challenging (Smith et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2020). She explained that "*this work gives me purpose. I'm very enmeshed with it and it's very central to what I care about...*" (FG) and that she has derived happiness from doing important work which can positively impact people's lives.

Positivism assumes that research is supposed to be an objective and detached endeavour, and researchers are technicians who conduct research without it personally affecting them (Bondi, 2016; Watts, 2008). This explains the mainstream institutional tendency to overlook the emotional and psychological impacts of researching SGBV (Hensel et al., 2015; Williamson et al., 2020). Sim, when speaking about these expectations to be objective, noted that:

*"... this idea of objectivity has been particularly challenging to achieve because I am so engrained in the work that I do and I care about it"* (FG)

This reveals that researchers are in fact deeply connected to their work unlike what positivist institutional culture would assert. Anisha's and Lebo's photo-stories both produce counter-narratives to this notion of research as an objective and impassive endeavour, asserting that their research is personal and "*close to home*" where emotions, subjectivities, lived experiences, and intersectional identities are all implicated (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Clarke & Braun, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018).

Anisha speaks about the downward angle in her photo-story which reflects her position of power as a researcher who needs to be "*constantly aware of [their] power and the ethics involved*" (FG) when engaging with data while also representing how "*academia, and colonial ideals are always watching over*" (FG) her as researcher. This photo-story reveals the overlap between the personal and institutional realms of research which are often separated by traditional forms of research (Bondi, 2016; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018).

Both Lebo's and Anisha's photo-stories reveal how research can re-activate traumas which could potentially place them at an increased risk for negative psychological impacts (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002; SVRI, 2015). However, such reflection also provides an opportunity for increased emotional growth, self-reflection, and positive psychological changes from doing research such as feeling proud and hopeful for contributing to social justice and empowering marginalised groups (Smith et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2020). This is reflected in Anisha's description of her work being "*a part of [her] purpose*" which she finds "*truly fulfilling*", and Lebo's "*beautiful moments.*"

Doing research on SGBV is thus deeply personal and reflective which can sometimes be challenging and traumatising, but which also seems to affirm researchers' sense of purpose and connection to their work which they see as meaningful. Doing work on SGBV often necessitates the intersection between personal, interpersonal, and institutional realms, as the above photo-stories reveal. Researchers are implicated personally in their research, but also interpersonally and institutionally in terms of what motivates them or helps them overcome the traumatising parts of doing research.

### **Opportunities for Hope, Positivity and Social Justice**

This narrative speaks to how researchers can further social justice and institutional transformation to create more humanistic, hopeful and positive ways of doing research in line with decolonial feminism (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2019).





### **Appendix O: Anisha (The Decolonial Feminist)**

*“...There was a part of me that was resistant to recreate this photo as its history is so directly linked to white feminism. However, that is part of decolonial work... bringing representation of cultures, experiences and ideals that do not originate in coloniality...My work has been the thing that has solidified my identity as a feminist...When women’s abuse is portrayed as resulting from their inherent weakness, it makes me angry and so I wanted to create this photo as an assertion of the strength of women.”*

Anisha recreates an image of Rosie the Riveter which circulated during World War II in pursuit of advocating for women’s rights (Santana, 2016). Anisha somewhat identifies with this image’s active sense of feminism through her replication of the strong-arm pose. She resonates with women’s strength and expresses frustration at how frequently narratives of women’s apparent weakness and vulnerability are propagated (Boonzaier, 2018). Anisha’s research endeavours to resist these narratives which frame women as perpetual helpless victims:

*“...my work recently has just solidified for me how much society hates to think of women as strong... the way to understand gender-based violence that is socially acceptable, it seems, is to understand it as a consequence of the natural vulnerability of women... ”*

(FG)

Anisha also recognises that her identity and positionality are not entirely reflected by Rosie the Riveter. She re-creates the image to explicitly represent and celebrate her positionality in terms of gender, race, and culture in open defiance to the coloniality which seeks to silence her (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019). This reveals decolonial feminism's aim of challenging and reclaiming space and power in the context of whiteness and coloniality (Cornell et al., 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). Anisha also recognises the immutable role of her positionality in her research:

*"... Just because it [the image] has a particular history doesn't mean that I don't have a space there... I see a lot of my work as something that has really been about my own identity ...showing how that positionality plays a role in my work."* (FG)

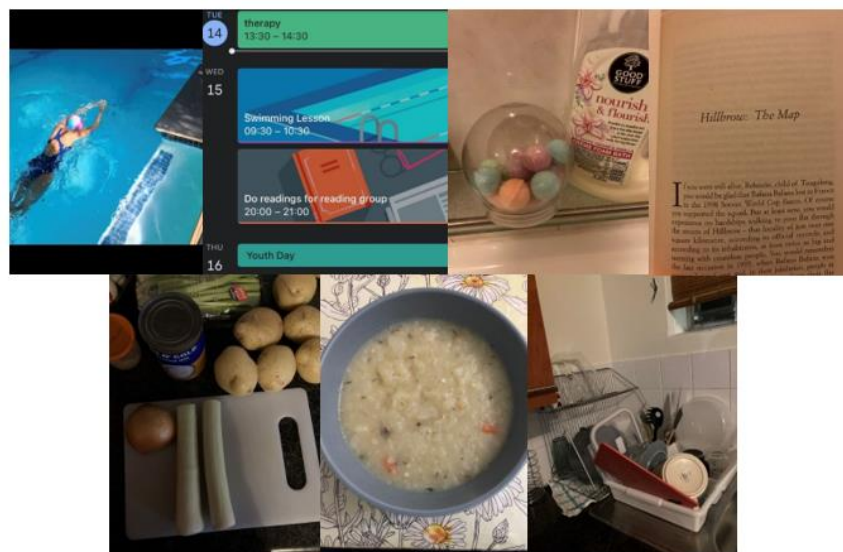
Anisha's pride and hopefulness in her research furthers the decolonial feminist goal of social justice (Cornell et al., 2019) through empowering those whom the Psychology discipline has traditionally marginalised (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). These narratives of active feminism and intersectional representation exemplify decolonial feminism's emphasis on mobilising research and knowledge production to advance epistemic justice (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). Anisha uses her research to unsettle notions of academia being a passive activity removed from the 'real' world:

*"...a lot of the time in academia there's this silo...very removed from practical worlds... being a decolonial feminist researcher kind of really tries to resist that...knowledge has real consequences in the world, so the knowledge that we created is an active process..."* (FG)

In discussing her research on sexual abuse amongst children, Siya similarly expressed her belief in the power of the knowledge production in relation to social justice:

*"... this [research] is serious...people's lives depend on it... through our research we are generating knowledge... It is through research that that knowledge will be legitimised...I do feel a strong sense of commitment to social justice."* (FG)

Anisha's and Siya's stories demonstrate that even though research on SGBV is institutionally entangled, it still has real-world implications and is not as objective and epistemologically detached from the external world as positivist research may suggest (Clarke & Braun, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). Decolonial feminism recognises the role of subjectivity, intersectionality, and eclectic epistemologies in humanising the research and knowledge production processes (Clarke & Braun, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018) to achieve radical institutional transformation (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Cornell et al., 2019). The interpersonal and personal realms are also sites for decolonial feminist praxis in researchers' lived experiences as the next photo-story explores.



### Appendix Q: Mbali

*“One of the ways I try to make it [research on SGBV] sustainable...is by paying attention to my mental and physical health. These pictures represent this aspect of trying to care for myself...I struggle to find a balance between all the work of keeping myself cared for and focusing on the work. So there are also uncapturable moments, where anxiety and overwhelm and financial precarity take over.”*

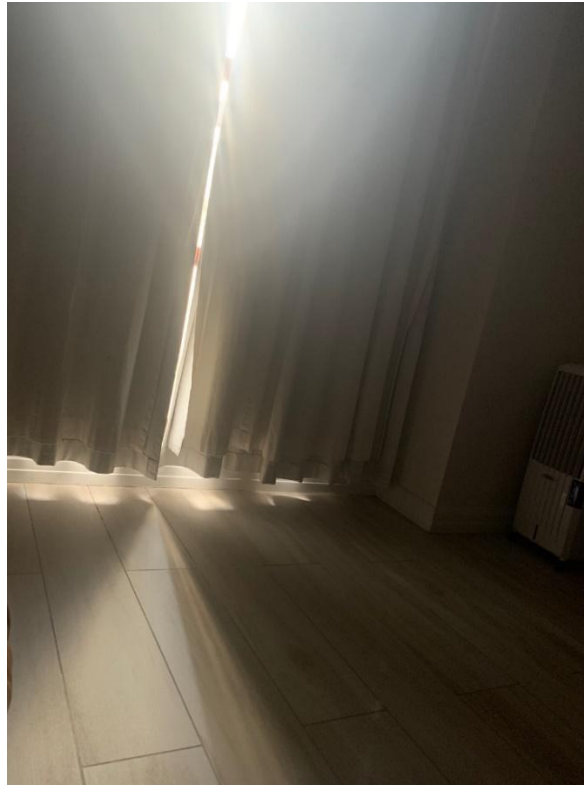
Mbali's photo-story explore how she makes her research personally sustainable and nourishing. She does this through self-care strategies recognised by other researchers such as keeping the house tidy, reading for pleasure, swimming, engaging with psychotherapy, and cooking and eating healthily (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018; Coles et al., 2014; Whitt-Woosley & Sprang, 2018). Mbali focuses on her *“daily practices that need to happen before [she] can write”* (FG) as opposed to exploring her research. This choice to focus on her physical and

mental health achieves social justice for the researcher in fully humanising them as people who conduct research on SGBV, but who also have physical, psychological, and emotional needs and must attend to “*the work on keeping [themselves] alive*” (FG).

Mbali’s photo-story challenges hegemonic positivist assumptions of researchers being emotionally-detached academic technicians who do not need to prioritise mental or physical health (Bondi, 2016; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). Artistically, the book represents learning, the swimming represents feeling energised and renewed, and the bubble bath bombs represent feeling refreshed while the soup and clean dishes represent transformation and growth. These indicate opportunities for enjoyment, peace and positivity in the research process which can also co-exist with the difficulties and challenges (Smith et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2020). Mbali acknowledges this difficulty in noting:

*“... the times [she] feel[s] guilty for not doing academic work ... there are a lot of things that aren’t visible.”* (FG)

This feeling of guilt likely emerges from institutional cultures which put enormous pressure on researchers to produce results while not attending to their psychological and emotional needs (Bondi, 2016; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). Researchers are not typically encouraged to prioritise their own physical and mental health (Nikischer, 2019; Taylor, 2019). Thus, the honesty and vulnerability in Mbali’s photo-story calls attention to the absolute necessity of institutions taking researchers’ health more seriously (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Grundlingh et al., 2017).



#### **Appendix N: Sim**

*“Doing this work and being in the Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence Project, although daunting in many ways, has been so freeing...gives me hope. There is so much darkness in the world and so much darkness as to why there is SGBV. But in spaces like these and within the Project, there is hope and selfishly there is also healing. There is hope that we can do something about this consuming and heart wrenching issue... Try as it might, the darkness can’t help but retreat from where the light shines...that is a lot of what this work is about, making sure the darkness doesn’t prevail. At the same time, the journey so far has been overwhelming at times, but there has also been so much light that I have experienced from the spaces in which I am able to do my work.”*

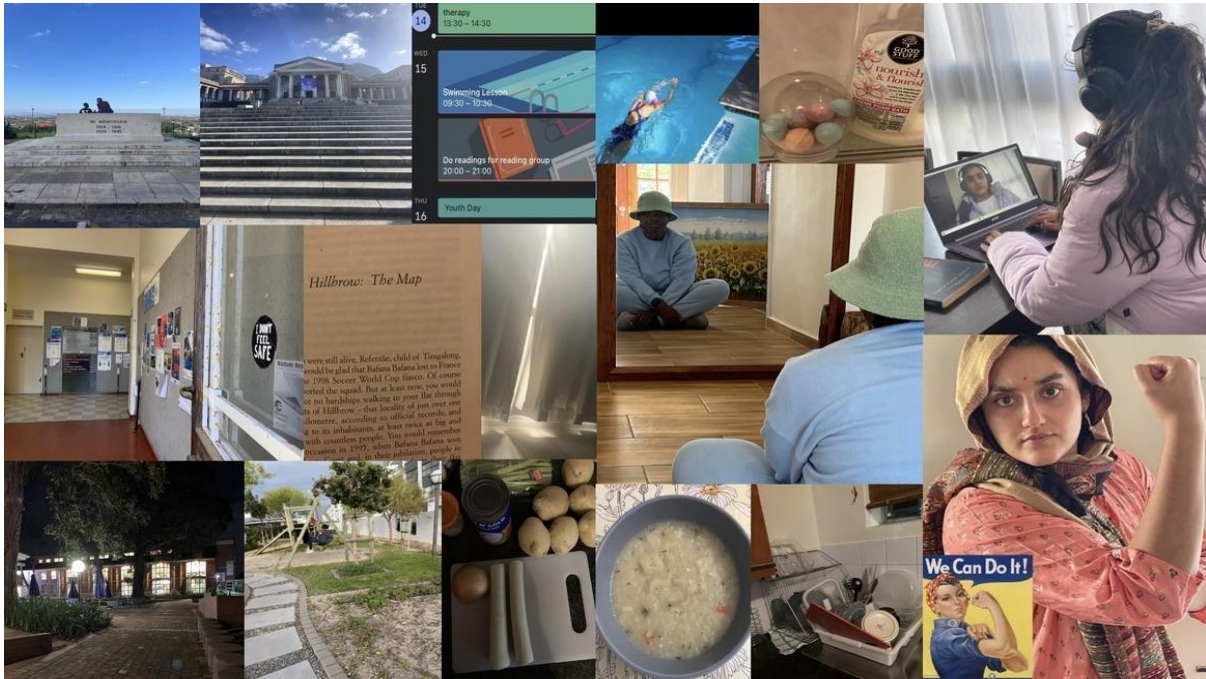
Sim’s photo-story reveals how “freeing” doing her research as part of the Project has been and how it has come to represent light and hope in the midst of the darkness in the world and the darkness of SGBV. The darkness could also represent colonial research practices which strip victim/survivors of their dignity instead of empowering them which Sim alludes to when she says:

*“I don’t want my work to perpetuate those silencing narratives and creating unsafe spaces”* (FG).

Sim also acknowledges that despite the darkness she has derived hope and a sense of purpose from being a Project member and doing work which contributes towards addressing SGBV. This links up with Anisha’s earlier photo-story about finding her research being a part of her purpose and this being *“truly fulfilling.”* Sim’s comments about the Project highlights how institutions and organisations also have a role to play in mitigating the negative impacts of doing research on sensitive topics.

Most research on sensitive topics gives the impression that doing research is mostly negative, traumatising, overwhelming and emotionally draining with no space for positivity (Hensel et al., 2015; Herman, 2015; Whitt-Woosley & Sprang, 2018). The co-researchers’ photo-stories, however, speak against this in their reflections that, in Lebo and Anisha’s words respectively, *“though doing this research is often challenging”*, it can be *“truly fulfilling”*. Sim’s photo-story artistically represents this hope and fulfilment by the beam of light shining through the curtain and overcoming the darkness. The light represents goodness, joyfulness, and hope (Forceville & Renckens, 2013) which suggests that doing research on SGBV is not always traumatising or ‘dark’, but can also offer opportunities for hope, positivity, and social justice (Smith et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2020).

Lebo explains that there have also been beautiful moments where *“[she] felt validated.”* (FG) through the ability to hold space for her participants and vice versa, noting that *“Black women do this for each other”* referring to black women’s reliance on one another for healing and working collectively to confront injustices and transform society (Neville & Hamer, 2006; West, 2004). This represents a rewarding outcome of doing research in being able to contribute to social justice (Williamson et al., 2020) which resonates with decolonial feminism’s goal of empowering marginalised groups (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019). The motif of the sunflower represents hope in the same way that Sim uses light and Anisha uses the blue sky in their respective photo-stories. Words such as *“freeing”*, *“healing”* and *“beautiful”* have been used by co-researchers in their stories, pointing to the duality of doing research on SGBV: it is both challenging and rewarding.



Drawing from the arts-informed approach (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Gerstenblatt, 2013), we compiled a collage of the photo-stories to better engage our subjectivity and emotionality. The construction of the collage is guided by the co-researchers' narratives which allows us to interpret the photographs without misrepresenting the co-researchers' stories. We have placed photographs on the left which depict the institutions through which co-researchers conduct their research foregrounding the entanglement between their research and institutional cultures.

The photographs in the middle centre the co-researchers' personal connection to their research and reflect on the emerging challenges and opportunities. The middle section also shows how researchers are attending to their mental and physical health, and self-care to make the research process more sustainable (Coles et al., 2014; Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018). The photographs from home environments represent the personal nature of research, and challenges traditional positivist assumptions of research being neutral, objective and emotionally detached (Bondi, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2019). Co-researchers looking at themselves, through the mirror and laptop screen, illustrate the self-reflective nature of research.

The photographs on the right represent ways that co-researchers take action through their research to further social justice and institutional transformation as advocated by decolonial feminism (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). Light is a recurring theme in the co-

researchers' photographs symbolising joyfulness and hope (Forceville & Renckens, 2013) which can be derived from doing research on SGBV.

### **Reflections**

In the spirit of centring our subjectivity, critical reflexivity and emotionality, we have decided to briefly reflect on our research experience.

**Yuri Behari-Leak.** I have found the experience of doing this research on SGBV incredibly moving, emotionally rich, and insightful. It has truly been an inspiring experience collaborating in knowledge production with my research partner, co-researchers, supervisor and members of the Project. It is invigorating to contribute to unsettling knowledge production on gendered violence in creative ways to further social justice and institutional transformation. I am proud of our research and the stories we have told, and as a film student, am excited to be creating a documentary alongside our psychological research which celebrates interdisciplinarity and allows me to integrate my critical and creative selves.

**Lesedi Mosime.** Doing this research has been inspiring and life-changing. It has been an amazing experience engaging with people who have a true passion for the work that they do and deeply care for the people they work with. This has been an emotionally-laden research experience, our co-researchers sharing with us their experiences, some of which are not very glamorous. There is hope, however, that the work that our co-researchers do will contribute to something bigger, and bring about change in the lives of the marginalised. This research process has been a great consciousness-raising process of which I have learnt and gained a lot from and I am honoured to have been a part of this project.

### **Conclusion and Significance of the Study**

Researchers' stories and experiences of researching sensitive topics are rarely explored (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022). This is especially true of researchers of SGBV despite the high prevalence of SGBV in South Africa (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2021; Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021). This study is of great significance in a number of respects.

This study has endeavoured to gain an in-depth insight into researchers' stories of doing research on SGBV, thereby contributing towards the body of knowledge in this under-researched area. Although only a small number of co-researchers were recruited (n=5), this fits within the scope of an Honours project and may even be indicative of the repressive institutional culture which subtly discourages researchers from openly talking about their experiences (Bondi, 2016; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Watts, 2008). This reinforces the



necessity of our study - to create a space where these kinds of reflections and storytelling become commonplace.

This study has also contributed to an important decolonial feminist ethos of humanising the researcher and validating their subjectivities, lived experiences, and emotional and intellectual complexity (Clarke & Braun, 2019; Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018) while challenging restrictive and essentialist narratives of what a researcher is or should be (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022). This study has contributed to embracing and accepting sensitivity, vulnerability and emotionality in the research process to counteract negative effects of conducting research on SGBV (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Hensel et al., 2015; SVRI, 2015) while also being able to enrich and relish the positive opportunities for growth (Smith et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2020) and social justice (Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Cornell et al., 2019).

This study has revealed that some researchers can often feel very alienated, marginalised and uncared for in their institutions (Kumar & Cavallaro, 2018; Taylor, 2019) which can aggravate the already challenging nature of researching sensitive topics such as SGBV. This exploration implores institutions to take more seriously the effects of vicarious and secondary traumatic stress on their postgraduate researchers and the overall challenges that researchers face (SVRI, 2015) and put in place practices and interventions to make researchers feel heard and supported in their research (Grundlingh et al., 2017). While researchers can indeed support themselves through self-care strategies, institutional support is urgently needed to normalise discussions about researcher trauma and encourage emotionally sensitive training and supervision (Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Grundlingh et al., 2017; Whitt-Woosley & Sprang, 2018). However, institutions also need to decolonise their rigid, often positivist and colonial practices and expectations of researchers in order to support them at an institutional level (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). It is noted that a limitation of our study is its exclusive focus on postgraduate student researchers. Thus, future research could explore how institutions can support more senior researchers as their experiences may be different to those of our co-researchers.

Finally, this study has contributed methodologically in terms of re-conceptualising how we can think, feel about, and do research differently in line with decolonial feminist praxis (Cornell et al., 2019). The inclusion of the arts-informed analytical approach is a relatively new addition to photovoice research (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018) and through combining it with decolonial analytic methods (Boonzaier, 2019), this study has demonstrated how data analysis itself can be more creative, artistic, and emotionally

engaging in bringing together participant's stories in context and researchers' own subjectivities. Our photo-exhibit strived to achieve photovoice's goals of collaboration and co-production of knowledge in line with PAR and decolonial feminism (Cornell et al., 2019).

The documentary represents an important opportunity for research to be represented more creatively in the inherently visceral and emotional audio-visual medium of cinema (Grant, 2014; Lavik, 2012) which also serves to re-centre emotionality and subjectivity in the research process (Kessi et al., 2019). Once completed in 2023, the documentary will enable the knowledge co-produced and the stories told in this study to be disseminated and accessible to more people outside of the academy and its traditional textual representations of research in the form of journal articles, chapters, etc (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018). We are also thinking about creating a photo-book of the co-researchers' photo-stories to serve as a recollection and reminder of the energies, emotions and stories explored leading up to and during the photo-exhibit.

This study has truly unsettled knowledge production on SGBV through exploring alternative ways of representing such knowledge which reflects the decolonial feminist ethos of increasing greater accessibility to research and knowledge while centring emotionality and narrativity in the research process and creating new ways of doing, thinking and feeling about research.

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## Appendix A

### English information sheet

#### UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



#### Department of Psychology

### Researchers' Stories About Doing Research on Gendered and Sexual Violence: A

#### Photovoice Study

You are invited to take part in a research study about the experiences of doing research on Sexual and Gender-Based violence (SGBV). This research is conducted by researchers from the Psychology Department at the University of Cape Town and is a contribution to the larger Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence in South Africa Project which reflects on knowledge production on gendered and sexual violence in South Africa. The Project asks questions such as how academic research on gendered and sexual violence can operate against dehumanizing research discourses and practices whilst working toward knowledge production that can make meaningful changes in the lives of women (both cis and transgender) and girl children, as well as gender non-conforming persons who are affected by misogynist, racist, patriarchal, and homophobic/ transphobic violence. This study aims to explore and gain an in-depth insight into qualitative researchers' experiences and stories of doing research on SGBV. There is very little literature focussing on researchers' own experiences of doing this research, and this study aims to add your voices and inspire more critical conversations and institutional focus on researchers' experiences of doing SGBV research.

**If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to do the following:**

- Attend two focus group discussions in June and/or July 2022 with other participants which you can choose to attend either in-person or online.
- The first focus group discussion will be held to discuss the research goals and purpose and to explain all aspects of the study and what participation in the study entails. Consent forms will be handed out and digital cameras (and brief photography training) will also be offered. A discussion on the research topic will also take place to stimulate creative and critical thinking about the topic.
- The second focus group session will be held where you will present your completed photo-stories back to the group.
- Take photographs and write accompanying narratives.
- Write a short reflective piece describing your entire experience of participating in the photo-voice project.
- Participate and help design the photovoice exhibit.
- Become a part of a documentary (optional)

*This research will give you an opportunity to share your stories and contribute to the small body of literature that exists which shifts the lens onto researchers' experiences of doing SGBV research.*

**Any questions, concerns or complaints about the study?**

**Please contact:**

**Researchers: Lesedi Mosime on 079 341 4933 or email at [MSMOTS003@myuct.ac.za](mailto:MSMOTS003@myuct.ac.za)**

**OR Yuri Behari-Leak on 078 854 5810 or email at [BHRYUR001@myuct.ac.za](mailto:BHRYUR001@myuct.ac.za)**

**OR**

**Research supervisor: Floretta Boonzaier at [floretta.boonzaier@uct.ac.za](mailto:floretta.boonzaier@uct.ac.za)**

**OR**

**The Ethics Committee: Rosalind Adams on 021 650 3417 or email at**

**[Rosalind.Adams@uct.ac.za](mailto:Rosalind.Adams@uct.ac.za)**

## Appendix B

### Focus Group Schedule: Session 1

The study goals, aims and objectives as outlined in this Research Proposal will be explained to participants. Expectations of participants (i.e., participating in both focus groups, creating photo-stories, writing a short reflective piece describing their entire experience participating in this study, and organising and participating in the photovoice exhibit) will also be explained. Participants will be asked if they have any questions, concerns, or queries about these matters, and will be given their consent forms to sign. After these introductory and administrative matters, the session will then shift focus to its substantive component. A semi-structured focus group schedule will follow which aims to stimulate discussion about the research topic, namely researchers' experiences and stories about doing research on SGBV. Examples of questions and prompts appear below:

- 1) We would like to learn more about what everyone's research studies.
  - What are the topics of your research studies?
  - What stages are you in your research?
  
- 2) What personal meanings or significance does your research have for you?
  - What inspired you or motivated you to choose this particular topic to study?
  - How do you think your identity has affected your research thus far?
  
- 3) How have your experiences of conducting your research on SGBV been so far?
  
- 4) Why do you think you are doing research on SGBV? What has brought you to being a researcher of violence and trauma?
  
- 5) What does it mean for us to all be openly talking about ourselves, our emotions, and our experiences in doing research on SGBV?

After discussions in response to this schedule have concluded at an appropriate moment, the session will break for 10-minutes.

After this, a brief introduction and explanation of the photovoice method in conjunction with the preceding conversation will also be explained as has been outlined in this Research Proposal. The documentary and photo-book initiatives will also be introduced and explained as have been outlined in this proposal. Participants will be offered digital cameras from the Hub and offered basic camera training. Participants will be reminded of the expectations outlined above, and the date for the second focus group will be agreed upon. Dates for submissions of the photo-stories to the researchers will also be agreed upon.



## Appendix C

### Informed Consent Form

#### UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



#### Department of Psychology

### Researchers' Stories About Doing Research on Gendered and Sexual Violence: A Photovoice Study

#### 1. Invitation and purpose

You are invited to take part in a research study about researchers' experiences about doing research on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). We are researchers from the Department of Psychology at University of Cape Town and this photovoice study forms a part of the Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence in South Africa Project. The purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding about how postgraduate Psychology student researchers experience the process of doing research on SGBV. We are interested in what it means for you to be doing your research and inviting you to reflect on what experiences you have had flowing from the process of doing your research. Your stories and experiences of doing research on SGBV will be used to help better understand the lived experiences of researchers in an effort to make more explicit and open discussions about researchers' experiences doing SGBV research more commonplace in academia and research. The project uses a method called photovoice which combines photography, and the development of narratives (stories) and critical dialogue.

#### 2. Procedures

If you decide to take part in this photovoice study, we will ask you to participate in two focus group discussions with us during June and/or July 2022. You will be able to participate in person or online, depending on your availability and physical location.

The focus group sessions will help guide you in the process of photovoice while providing an opportunity to discuss and reflect, as a group of postgraduate researchers, on the topics mentioned above. Should you decide to take part in this study, dates and times of these focus groups will be confirmed at times and dates most convenient for you. Each focus group session should take no longer than 2 hours. You will be offered digital cameras for the duration of the study.

In addition to attending and participating in these focus group discussions, you will be expected to take photographs which represent your experiences and stories about doing research on SGBV during June and/or July 2022; write short captions or 'photo-stories' contextualising these photographs; submit a short written reflection on your experience participating in the photovoice study; and helping design and organise a photo-exhibit in October where your photographs and photo-stories will be publicly displayed. You do not have to participate in this public event if you don't want to, but if you do, you will decide which photographs or stories you would like to include.

The focus group sessions and eventual photo-exhibit will also be documented by a small film crew towards producing a documentary about this photovoice study and the Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence in South Africa Project. You may also be invited to participate in one-on-one interviews with the film crew and talk generally about your experience in doing postgraduate research on SGBV and in this photovoice study.

If you decide to take part in this photovoice study, we will discuss with you the logistics of the documentary project and what this entails in more detail.

With your permission, photographs, and photo-stories that you are comfortable with being shared will be compiled into a photo-book for publication and dissemination after the photo-exhibit.

### **3. Risks and Inconveniences**

We recognise that telling stories of one's experience of doing challenging and emotionally-laden research such as SGBV research may be distressing or uncomfortable. As such, you will only be expected to share stories and experiences that you are comfortable sharing. If participating in this study does make you feel distressed, we will provide a referral list for opportunities to seek counselling or psychological support. If requested, a debriefing session with a clinical psychologist affiliated with the Project will be arranged after the focus groups have been completed.

The focus groups will be conducted at The Hub for Decolonial Feminist Psychologies in Africa at the University of Cape Town's Psychology Department in Rondebosch. Should you require transport, it will be arranged for you. The most convenient time for you and the researchers will be arranged.

### **4. Benefits**

You are given an opportunity to share your stories and experiences about doing research on SGBV and your own research projects, and your stories will help contribute to the larger project of re-thinking how we do research and transform academia and institutional culture to make researchers feel more supported, heard, and understood in their experiences of doing research. Your participation will help start the important task of shifting the lens onto researchers of SGBV who are so often invisibilised in contemporary publications and literature.

### **5. Privacy and confidentiality**

With your permission, the focus group discussions will be audio-recorded and filmed. The researchers will take strict precautions to safeguard your personal information throughout the study. The recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer and only accessed by individuals who are involved in working on this study such as the researchers, the research supervisor, the film camera crew (who will be signing confidentiality forms), and Project members should this work be published. You will be informed of who has access at what time, and whether you consent to access being shared. Once the study is complete, your tape-recorded information will be stored for a further 5 years and after this period it will be destroyed. While this research will be used for educational purposes, there is a chance that this work might be published in an academic journal and be used for the documentary and photo-book. You will still exercise agency in all these initiatives as to how much of your identity you are comfortable with being shared or recorded. It is entirely possible to participate in this project completely anonymously, with your identity only being known to the researchers and other participants, if you so choose.

## **6. Voluntary Participation**

You may choose to participate in this project and elect to stop participating in this project at any time without any negative consequences.

You may also decide to participate in the photovoice project, but not the documentary, photo exhibit, or photo-book, or you may decide which combination of these three ancillary projects you wish to participate in.

If you choose to participate in the documentary, photo exhibit or photo-book components of the project, you will decide what images, recordings of you or your stories you are comfortable being shared and used.

## **7. Money matters**

You will be reimbursed for any transportation costs incurred to and from the research venue, and if necessary, transport will be organised for you to and from the Hub. You will not be

remunerated for participation in the study. Refreshments will be provided at each focus group session.

## 8. Contact details

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the study, please contact the

**Researchers:** Yuri Behari-Leak on 078 854 5810 or email at [BHRYUR001@myuct.ac.za](mailto:BHRYUR001@myuct.ac.za)

OR Lesedi Mosime on 079 341 4933 or email at [MSMOTS003@myuct.ac.za](mailto:MSMOTS003@myuct.ac.za) **OR our**

**Research Supervisor:** Floretta Boonzaier on 021 650 3429 or email at

[Floretta.Boonzaier@uct.ac.za](mailto:Floretta.Boonzaier@uct.ac.za) **OR Contact for the Ethics Committee:** Rosalind Adams on 021 650 3417 or email at [Rosalind.Adams@uct.ac.za](mailto:Rosalind.Adams@uct.ac.za)

## 9. Signatures

The participant has been informed of the nature and purpose of the procedures described above including any risks involved in its performance. They have 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 study, or any of its ancillary projects, at any time, and that doing so will not cause me any penalty.

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

**PERMISSION TO AUDIO-RECORD**

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

---

Participant's Signature

**PERMISSION TO VIDEO-RECORD**

I consent to me being video-recorded for purposes of the documentary. I also understand that I will be able to decide what footage of me I am comfortable using in the final documentary and no audio or visual clips may be included without my permission.

---

Participant's Signature

## Appendix D

### Equipment Use Agreement and Indemnity for Participant Camera Use

#### UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

#### Department of Psychology

As part of participating in this study, you will be offered the use of a digital camera to assist with your photography and creation of your photo-stories. Use of said digital camera is not compulsory.

If you do elect to use a digital camera for the duration of your participation in this study, you agree to the following terms:

- 1) I shall ensure that the equipment is never put at risk, for example, left unattended in a motor car, loaned to someone else while under my care, taken into dangerous areas without proper precautions, etc.
- 2) Should the equipment be lost, damaged, or stolen while it is in my care, whatever the circumstances, I accept that I will be liable for whatever payments are incurred and will liaise with the administration of the *Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence in South Africa Project* promptly to settle whatever claims, costs or payments are necessary to restore the physical integrity of equipment, including replacement and repairs.
- 3) The equipment will be returned safely to the researchers at such time when I have completed my photo-stories.
- 4) The equipment will be stored in a safe location (e.g. my home) for the duration of my use of said equipment.
- 5) Only I am authorised to use said equipment, and my use of said equipment is limited to the creation of my photo-stories for purposes of my participation in this study.

---

**Name of Participant**

---

**Signature of Participant**

---

**Date**

## **Appendix E**

### **Focus Group Schedule: Session 2**

Participants will return having completed and submitted their photo-stories to the researchers which will be compiled into a virtual presentation (e.g., PowerPoint) so that those participants who are comfortably doing so may present their photo-stories to the group. The purpose of this session is to allow for collective emotional engagement and collective identification of themes, issues, ideas, opportunities, and stories which will guide data analysis. This session will also be an opportunity for participants to debrief and reflect on their holistic experience of participating in this photovoice project and what it has meant for them.

Before the presentations, the group will be welcomed, and a short check-in will follow:

- 1) We would like to check in everyone who feels comfortable sharing how they have found the experience of taking photographs and writing photo-stories about their experience of conducting their research.

After the group has checked-in, those participants who are comfortable will share their photo-stories with the group and explain their photo-stories. Group members will be able to comment or response to their fellow group members' photo-stories.

After all those presenting have done so, a few discussion points will be followed:

- 2) How do you think participating in this photovoice study has influenced your own research and/or you personally?
- 3) What new ways of thinking about, feeling about or doing your own research on SGBV has this process opened up for you, if any?
- 4) What does it mean for you to be openly talking about your experiences, subjectivities, and our experiences in doing research on SGBV?
- 5) Having participated in this photovoice study, how are you now feeling about doing or continuing with your research on SGBV?



Participants will be thanked and reminded of any other future participation as part of the study (e.g., the photovoice exhibit). A date for submission of participants' short written reflections will be set. Any questions or queries about study participation and expectations will also be answered and discussed as a group.

## Appendix F

### Confidentiality Agreement for Transcribers

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



Department of Psychology

#### Confidentiality agreement between: Transcriber and Client

1. This document serves as an agreement between the following parties:

- a) Companies/entities delivering transcription services for the client
- b) The client who is a member of the research team on the project, entitled: *Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence in South Africa*

2. As the focus of the aforementioned project is of a sensitive nature, researchers involved in the project need to ensure that all transcribers engaging with the data (such as audio files) for the project practice confidentiality. This means that all information, including any personal identifiers mentioned in the data, are kept secret to ensure the privacy of those individuals.

3. To be completed and signed by the person providing transcription services:

**I, Elaine Grobbelaar, as an individual providing transcription services on behalf of On Time Transcribers CC, swear to comply with practicing confidentiality when engaging with any data concerned with the aforementioned project.**

Elaine Grobbelaar

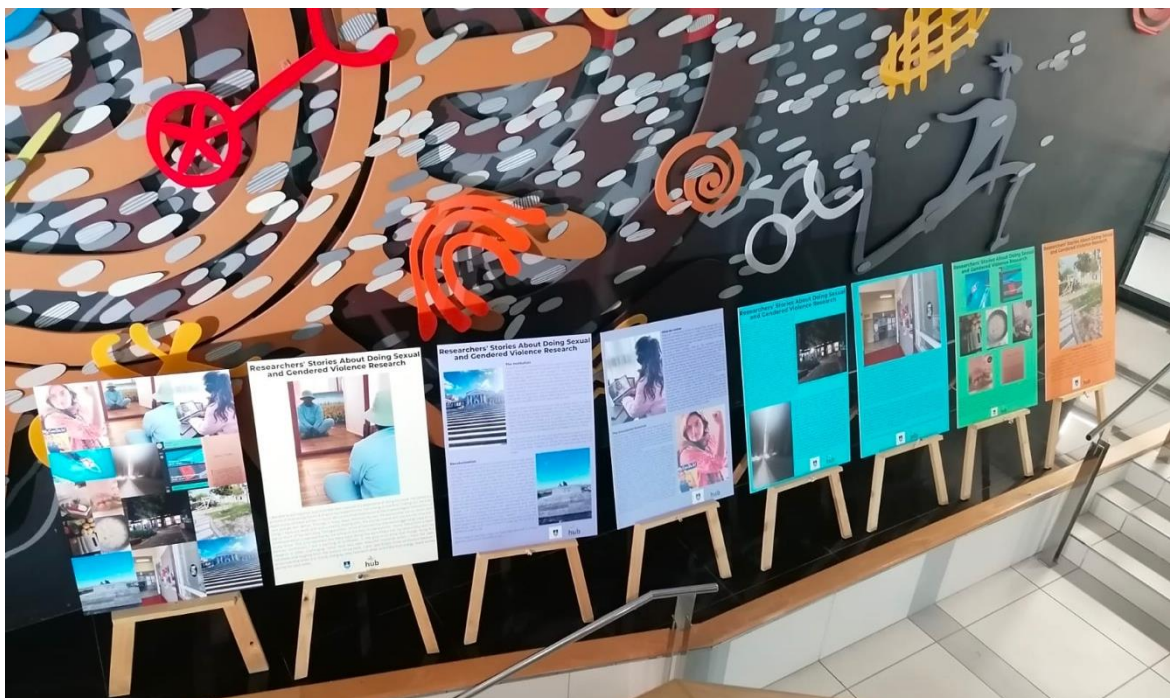
16.09.2022

Signature of Transcriber

Date

## Appendix G

### Pictures from the Photo-exhibit



## Appendix H

### Ethical Approval Letters

# UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



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## Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa

Telephone (021) 650  
3417 Fax No. (021)  
650 4104

25 July 2019

Prof. F. Boonzaier and Dr T. van Niekerk

Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch 7701

Dear Prof. Boonzaier and Dr van Niekerk

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, Unsettling knowledge production on gendered and sexual violence in South Africa. The reference number is PSY2019-045.

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**

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**Department of Psychology**

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa

Telephone (021) 650 3417

Fax No. (021) 650 4104

02 August 2022

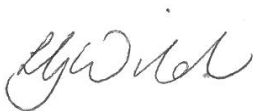
Otsile Mosime and Yuri Behari-Leak  
Department of Psychology  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7701

Dear Otsile and Yuri

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, *Researchers' Stories and Experiences About Doing Gendered and Sexual Violence Research*. The reference number is PSY2022-028.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely



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

## Appendix I

### Confidentiality Agreement for Film Crew

#### UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



#### Department of Psychology

#### Confidentiality agreement between: Film Crew and Researchers

1. This document serves as an agreement between the following parties:

- a) Companies/entities delivering videography services (as part of the Film Crew) for the clients
- b) The researchers who are members of the research team on the project, entitled: *Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence in South Africa*

2. As the focus of the aforementioned project is of a sensitive nature, researchers involved in the project need to ensure that the camera crew engaging with the data (such as video files) for the project practice confidentiality. This means that all information, including any personal identifiers that will be mentioned in the data, are kept as a secret to ensure the privacy of all individuals involved.

3. To be completed and signed by the person providing services as part of the Film Crew:

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name), as an individual providing services as part of the Film Crew and on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ (insert company name OR 'private' if providing services in individual capacity), swear to comply with practicing confidentiality when engaging with any data concerned with the project at hand.

---

**Name of Film Crew Member**

---

**Signature of Film Crew Member**

---

**Date**

## **Appendix J**

### **Documentary Consent Form 1**

#### **UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**



#### **Department of Psychology**

### **Researchers' Stories About Doing Research on Gendered and Sexual Violence: A Photovoice Study**

You have been invited to take part in a research study about researchers' experiences about doing research on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). We are researchers from the Department of Psychology at University of Cape Town and this photovoice study forms a part of the Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence in South Africa Project. The purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding about how postgraduate Psychology student researchers experience the process of doing research on SGBV.

You are reading this form having already read and signed the initial informed consent form. This form explains more about the documentary component and confirms your voluntary participation and consent to be recorded by audio and video equipment.

#### **1. Documentary Rationale and Procedure**

We are interested in what it means for you to be doing your research and inviting you to reflect on what experiences you have had flowing from the process of doing your research. Your stories and experiences of doing research on SGBV will be used to help better understand the lived experiences of researchers in an effort to make more explicit and open discussions about researchers' experiences doing SGBV research more commonplace in academia and research.



While this study already uses the photovoice method, we as the researchers were also exploring other creative means through which the knowledge collectively produced in this project between the researchers and participants could be represented and shared with the academy and members of the public. Two of these initiatives include the photo-exhibition and the publication of the photo-book, which have been introduced in the initial informed consent form. The documentary is the other creative project associated with this project. The audiovisual medium of cinema has been chosen as an ideal means of telling the story of this project, broadly the story of the Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence in South Africa Project, and how you as a participant in this study have made a valuable contribution to exploring an important and relevant topic in society today.

Events and process associated with the study will be documented throughout the year, including your participation in both focus group sessions and the photo-exhibit, should you choose to participate in this. You may also be asked to participate in one-on-one interviews and invited to discuss your research and stories in more detail than collaborative discussion in a focus group allows.

## **2. Privacy and Confidentiality**

With your permission, the focus group discussions will be audio-recorded and filmed for purposes of the documentary. The researchers will take strict precautions to safeguard your personal information throughout the study. The recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer and only accessed by individuals who are involved in working on this study such as the researchers, the research supervisor, the film camera crew (who will be signing confidentiality forms), and Project members should this work be published. You will be informed of who has access at what time, and whether you consent to access being shared. It is entirely possible to participate in this project completely anonymously, with your identity only being known to the researchers and other participants, if you so choose.

## **3. Voluntary Participation**

You may decide to participate in the photovoice project, but not the documentary. If you decide to participate in the documentary, you can withdraw your participation at any time thereafter without any negative consequences.

If you choose to participate in the documentary, you will decide what images, recordings of you or your stories you are comfortable being shared and used. Nothing will be put in the final documentary or released to the public without your explicit written approval.

#### **4. Signatures**

The participant has been informed of the nature and purpose of the procedures described above pertaining to the documentary. They have 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 as it pertains to the documentary. I agree to take part in this documentary as a participant. I know that I am free to withdraw this consent and quit the documentary at any time, and that doing so will not cause me any penalty.

---

**Name of Participant**

---

**Signature of Participant**

---

**Date**

## **Appendix K**

### **Documentary Consent Form 2**

#### **UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**



#### **Department of Psychology**

### **Researchers' Stories About Doing Research on Gendered and Sexual Violence: A Photovoice Study**

You have recently participated in our research study about researchers' experiences about doing research on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). You are reading this form having already read and signed the initial informed consent form and an additional form pertaining specifically to the documentary and the audio/video recordings of the study. You are reading this form now at a stage where a draft cut of the documentary has been compiled by the relevant filmmakers, and this cut has been made available to you for viewing. As stated in both the aforementioned forms, you must approve of any and all audio or visual footage or photography of you included in the documentary. This form serves as written confirmation that you have viewed the most recent cut of the documentary and that you are satisfied with how you have been represented in the documentary. You are still, at this time, able to withdraw your participation from the documentary without any negative consequences. This means that all or some of the audio/video clips of you in the documentary would be removed.

I (participant) have viewed the most recent cut of the documentary and am satisfied with how I am represented. I have communicated any needs or concerns to the researchers; these have been handled with care; and I am content with the extent of my inclusion in the documentary. I allow the documentary to be edited further, and anticipate communicate should any more

clips of me be included. I know that I am free to withdraw this consent and quit the documentary at any time, and that doing so will not cause me any penalty.

---

**Name of Participant**

---

**Signature of Participant**

---

**Date**

## **Appendix L**

### **Resources List**

Below is a list of where free counselling can be accessed.

**Name:** SADAG

**Contact Number:** 011 234 4837

**24hr Helpline:** 0800 456 789

**For counselling queries e-mail:** [zane@sadag.org](mailto:zane@sadag.org)

**Name:** Lifeline

24 Hour counselling line

**Contact Number:** 011 422 4242 OR 0861 322 322

**Email:** [lifelineoffice@gmail.com](mailto:lifelineoffice@gmail.com)

**Name:** The Triangle Project

**Contact Number:** [021 712 6699](tel:0217126699)

#### **UCT Student Wellness Services:**

24/7 telephonic counselling services are available toll free, even during weekends and after hours:

**UCT Careline:** 0800 24 25 26 or text 31393

**SWS ICAS line:** 0800 87 26 76

**Higher Health Counselling:** 0800 36 36 36

**ER24 UCT collaboration:** 010 205 3010

## Appendix M

### Siya's Photo-Story



#### Children on Jungle Gym

As a SRHR researcher the sight of two children of the opposite sex playing together unsupervised has become anxiety inducing and a cause for concern. Child play may range from innocent play to sexual misconduct and in the absence of supervision children are prone to act inappropriately. Engaging in inappropriate behaviour may have long term traumatic impact for the children. In an ideal world, I wish for children to be supervised and guided.

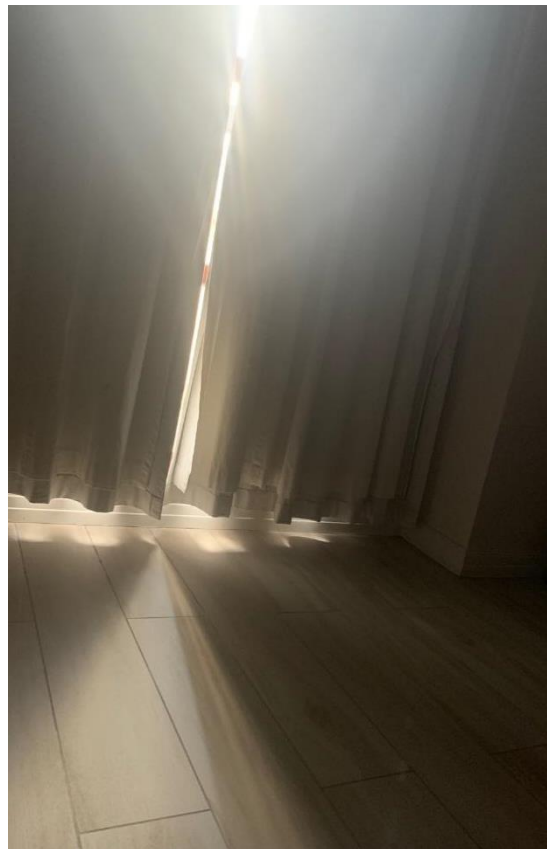
## Appendix N

### Sim's Photo-Stories



The photo is of where I went to school. I took a picture looking up at the library because it made me think of the positioning we can, and indeed I have placed on specific forms of learning. It is largely a glass building that can be looked into but not necessarily accessed. For me this has been a metaphor for certain parts of knowledge but also as a metaphor for myself on this journey of doing work on SGBV. Specifically curated spaces like the one in the image are the ideal and so there has been a process of having to unlearn the idea that those are the only true or right spaces to exist within the knowledge learning and production space. I am deeply connected and moved by SGBV work but typical forms of research dictate that researchers have to be objective in their work. For me, this idea of objectivity has been particularly challenging to overcome because it's been so engrained. But how can I work not to harm or cause more harm if I am not deeply moved and connected to my work? Unlearning these ideas has been crucial because, as I do this work, I do not want to cause harm to survivors of SGBV and that means I can't, and do not want to be objective.

Additionally, that is a building of books and knowing, yet I do not see the realities of myself represented there, I do not see the ways of knowing or even understanding what it means to be a marginalised person from those walls and the knowledge inside. In ways that I could not articulate at the time, this meant that I was not able to grapple with the realities of the brutality of marginalised people's lives. I shared the story of my friend who shared that she was sexually abused by her family member whilst at this school and how I was ill equipped to be a source of safety for her, because like that building, I was living in a glass bubble, with ways of knowing that were so far removed from what the world is actually like for so many people. For me, doing this work has involved wanting to shatter that glass, both for myself, but hopefully for others too, in order to challenge and confront systems that ostracise and retraumatise survivors of SGBV. The place in that image represents the catalyst for my research interest in SGBV, and of everything I no longer wanted to be or participate in, in the hope that other people can come forward with their experiences, and be safe, be held, be empowered, in a way that I was not able to for my friend





Doing this work and being in the *Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence Project*, although daunting in many ways, has been so freeing. Doing this work and being surrounded by the community I am surrounded by gives me hope. There is so much darkness in the world and so much darkness as to why there is SGBV. The fact that SGBV is so big and so consuming that there can be and are so many different ways in which it can be researched baffles me. But in spaces like these and within the project, there is hope and selfishly there is also healing. There is hope that we can do something about this consuming and heart wrenching issue. Hope that things won't continue this way forever. In a room of darkness, even the smallest glimpse of light changes the dynamics of that room. Try as it might, the darkness can't help but retreat from where the light shines. For me, that is a lot of what this work is about, making sure the darkness doesn't prevail. At the same time, the journey so far has been overwhelming at times, but there has also been so much light that I have experienced from the spaces in which I am able to do my work.



The third image is a conjunction of how I can sometimes feel about this work, but also why I continue to do this work.

Doing research on SGBV can be very challenging and unsettling. In some ways it re-sensitises you to the reality of marginalised people's experiences and how, despite being grossly wrong, navigating the world that way is normalised. It makes me consciously aware

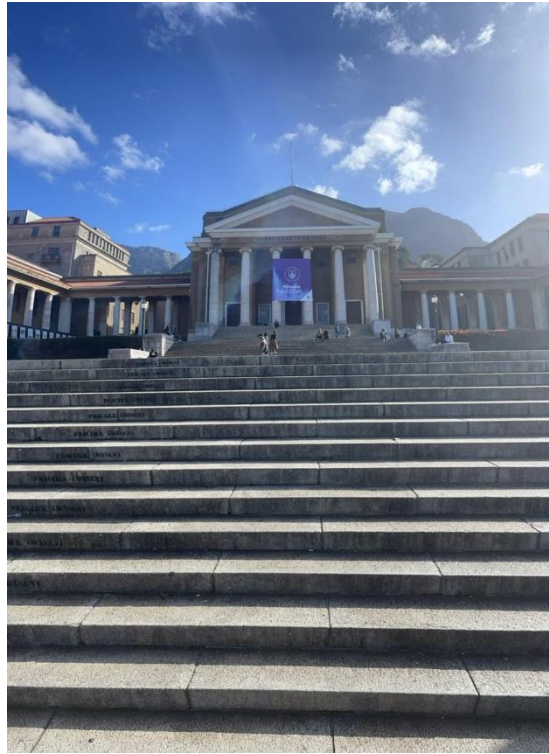
of my identity and my body and just how unsafe I and so many others are in this world. Additionally, this image feels like a reflection of the process of doing this work in institutions like UCT. Unless one is fortunate enough to be in a space like the Hub and the *Unsettling Knowledge Production on Gendered and Sexual Violence Project*, there is no place to feel safe whilst one struggles with the complexity of doing this kind of work. Research on SGBV comes with its own impact, however it often feels like UCT doesn't see or doesn't care to see the strain of the work. Instead, they only care about the output of work and even then, it must be within the constructs of their standards. The feelings, the strain, the realities of what it means to be doing this work are pushed aside and made inconsequential

More importantly, there are so many people, survivors of SGBV who not only feel silenced, but who are silenced. There are people who are not safe, physically, emotionally, psychologically, they are not safe. But unfortunately, their safety and their voices are sidelined, being noted only on the periphery of society, of this university. The outcries, the pain, the resistance, it's all there, but if you don't stop, notice or pay close attention, you'll walk right passed the pain, unmoved, undeterred, looking only to what lies next for you in terms of capitalist ideals of society, or the university's academic demands and expectations. Survivors are silenced in every way and do not feel safe in anyway, but that reality is never a real focal point, it is always just one of the many things that come and go on the agenda. The "real" stuff, the "important" stuff, lies directly ahead.

I can't live comfortably knowing but doing nothing about people being silenced and feeling unsafe.

## Appendix O

### Anisha's Photo-Stories



#### **The Institution**

I wanted to start with this photo which sets the context for the work I do. I have conducted all my research within the institution of UCT, which has provided me with access to resources and people, including my supervisor and friends (also known as colleagues), who have been instrumental in my research career to this point. UCT was also the setting for the #RhodesMustFall campaign that I was exposed to which was central to the ideological transformation which resulted in my pursuing of researching violence. In so many ways, I am so grateful to this institution for these things and so in one sense, the light, the portrait framing and the upward angle of this photo represent the pride I take in being here

On the other hand this institution has a history which is clearly evident in the architecture here. This building mimics ancient Roman buildings, where universities were born, where English finds many of its roots and where colonialist ideals were rife. This historically white university, is a European imposition, and this is clear in the architecture and visuals of

campus. The upward angle, central positioning and framing of this photo thus also represent the domineering colonial ideals which my research aims to resist.

This picture is tension for me... the joy of having this space to do my work in and the pain of not fitting in it. I have included it as part of my picture story because in doing my work, being here and contributing here, I begin to colour the institution with my own ideals.



## **Decolonisation**

The most powerful thing about this photo was that it was candid. This is the memorial stone for the two world wars and it stands very near where the old Rhodes memorial statue stood. The removal of Rhodes was a powerful time in my memory of the University. It was a time when many values, traditions and assumptions were called into question, in ways that forced both UCT's students and its staff to think about what it means to be welcoming to black students, women, black women, gender-non-conforming individuals and so on. This is the powerful result. Here we see two black students, resting on this Eurocentric memory, enjoying the view and each other. Two black students that Rhodes would never have allowed

into this institution. Two black students whose history is not the “world” wars but a much longer war, that remains both not represented and overly present on UCT campus. Yes these students are men, and this represents the exclusions and hierarchies that are still to be resisted, but this candid photo is why I research. It is why I am motivated to the work I find challenging, painful and sometimes alienating. I see it as instrumental in creating the world as I believe it ought to be. This image is one that could not have been possible in worlds gone by, and that is incredible to me.



### **Mise-en-scène**

What am I researching? While my output often argues that I am researching media, or institutions or men, in many cases I am truly researching myself. It is my own experiences, lenses, pains, blind spots and errors that shine out at me through the data. This is what this picture represents through the laptop containing my image, rather than some other data.

My face is blank, without make-up. This represents the raw vulnerability of research which is so close to home. It is challenging as it can be retraumatizing. It can also show me parts of

myself or my life I did not want to see. My work is personal and I take it personally and that is an incredibly vulnerable position to be in.

My jacket and laptop are purple- a colour which has come to represent GBV for some organizations, the area of my research. In this case it enshrouds me, representing the enmeshment with my work. Purple has also always been one of my favourite colours, and has represented a kind of spirituality for me- a connection to something bigger. This speaks to the ways in which I believe my work to be part of my purpose. I do find it truly fulfilling.

There is also a downward angle in this photo. The photo is taken from above which speaks to the ways in which academia, and colonial ideals are always watching over me, peaking over my shoulder. I am then looking down on my work, which represents the position of power I have as a researcher. As a researcher I aim to be constantly aware of my power and the ethics involved in this. Its part of the nature of research but thinking this way can be challenging. There is this pressure to do no harm, which is important, yet such a delicate thing to achieve.



## **The Decolonial Feminist**

This photo is a recreation of this white liberal feminist art, which has been recreated many times to represent more inclusivity. There was a part of me that was resistant to recreate this photo as its history is so directly linked to white feminism. However, that is part of decolonial work. Sometimes it starts with bringing representation of cultures, experiences and ideals that do not originate in coloniality, into historically colonized and “white” spaces.

The other thing about this image is that it conveys a very active sense of feminism through the use of the typical strong arm pose. My work has been the thing that has solidified my identity as a feminist (although I am open to more accurate labels). It has been a space where I feel I can act out my feminism in its truest form, which then filters into my other ways of being, choices and actions. This action is also a contradiction to the very academic nature of research. Decolonial feminism challenges research to be as impactful, at every stage, as possible through participatory action methods. While I have yet to embark on that kind of participatory research, this value resonates deeply with me.

The final thing about this image that was important for me was the focus on the strength of women. I have begun to see GBV as a subjugator’s tool, and as such, it is used in response to women’s strength and resistance rather than their weakness as it is so often portrayed. When women’s abuse is portrayed as resulting from their inherent weakness, it makes me angry and so I wanted to create this photo as a assertion of the strength of women.

## Appendix P

### Lebo's Photo-Story



#### The Research and Me

I decided to put together a picture that best captures my experience of doing this work. The above is a picture of what doing this kind of work has meant for me. I am sitting on the floor looking into the lived experiences of black women in South Africa who find themselves at the disadvantaged intersection of race and gender.

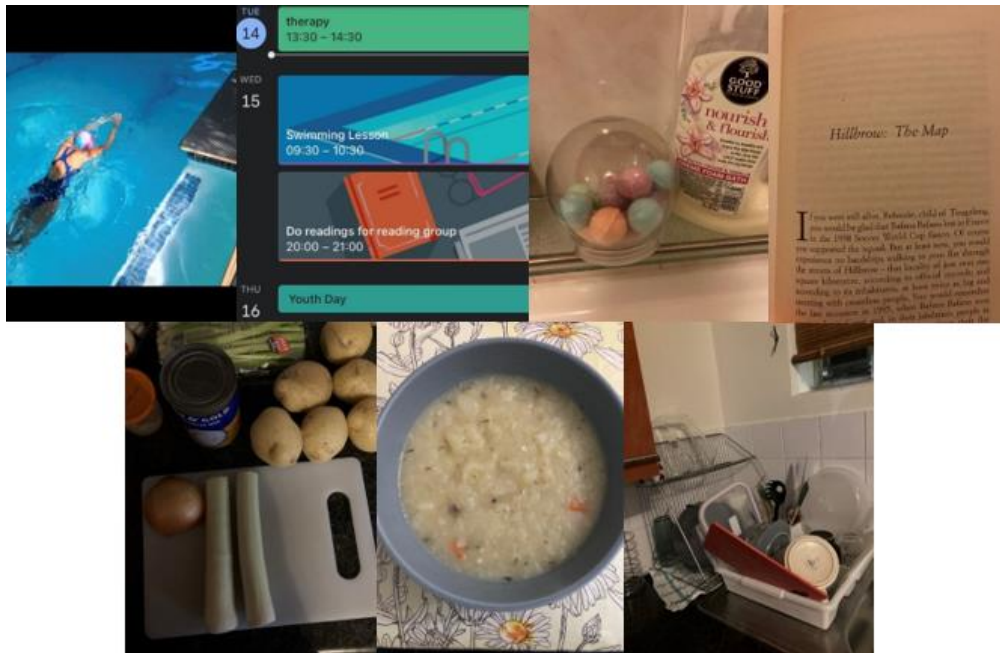
- Mirror: This has in many ways reflected my own life and pushed me to reckon with things I have not dealt with and currently dealing with. The stories shared with me are not mine but I see so much of my own story.
- Sitting position: Some of the traumas that were triggered go back to my childhood which is represented by me sitting on the floor in that position.
- Home: The picture is taken in my home. This is to represent the many ways doing this work filters into my relationship with my partner.



- Sunflowers: I put a painting of sunflowers in the picture to show that though doing this research is often challenging, there have also been beautiful moments where I have felt seen, validated and laughed from the bottom of my belly. I also specifically chose sunflowers because I once read that when it is cloudy and gray, they face each other and share their energy. Black women do this for each other.

## Appendix Q

### Mbali's Photo-Story



Much of studying sexual violence for me is an experience of making it sustainable. To be dealing with a very grim topic can be really debilitating, especially over such a long period of time. One of the ways I try to make it sustainable, so that I can actually finish my research, is by paying attention to my mental and physical health.

These pictures represent this aspect of trying to care for myself. Some of it is about things I struggle to do, like keeping my house tidy, and some of it is about things that are easy and feel good, like reading for pleasure.

I struggle to find a balance between all the work of keeping myself cared for and focusing on the work. So there are also uncapturable moments, where anxiety and overwhelm and financial precarity take over.