

Young women's narratives of gender, sexuality and violence in Mitchell's Plain: A  
Photovoice project

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### **Abstract**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a ubiquitous issue that globally threatens women's access to gender equity. Constructions of gender and sexuality and its intersections with socio-economic conditions are essential towards understanding the social problem of GBV, yet youth-centered knowledge in this arena has been sidelined in South African literature. This study thus explored young women's understandings of gender, sexuality and violence through Photovoice in one low-income community in the Western Cape. The study consisted of nine young women in Grade 11 from Beacon Hill Secondary School in Mitchell's Plain. Over six months, they participated in focus group discussions, produced photographs, personal reflections and photostories. The data was analysed using a thematic analysis, within a feminist post-structuralist theoretical framework. The findings showed that young women in one low-income and violence-prone community negotiated constructions of femininity through discourses of passivity and resisting vulnerability. Their constructions of gendered violence was embedded in their broader context of socio-economic deprivations intersecting with gendered boundaries defined by gangs. They emphasised building social solidarity in attempting to address violence, and also positioned themselves as active agents of change. This project contributes theoretically and methodologically by enhancing knowledge on the diverse understandings young women make, as active agents, regarding gender, sexuality and violence; and on practical levels in that it elicits how young women want to address violence within their context, and thus makes visible the possibilities for meaningful solutions.

*Keywords:* feminist poststructuralism; gender; gender-based violence; photovoice; violence; young women

## **Introduction**

Violence against women is a global concern that has extensive social, human rights and health implications (Wood, Lambert, & Jewkes, 2007, 2008). The pervasiveness of gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) constitutes a major barrier towards gender equity worldwide. Research has increasingly shown the high prevalence of GBV directed at young people (Mason-Jones et al., 2016). The interplay between underlying structural inequities and young people's constructions of gendered and sexual identities play a vital role in understanding GBV. These understandings are therefore essential when attempting to ameliorate IPV amongst youth (Schepers & Zway, 2013). Yet there remains a paucity of qualitative research in South Africa on the multiplicities of youth-centered knowledge on gender, sexuality and violence (Lesch & Kruger, 2005). Current research tends to frame youth within a 'risk- paradigm' (Zway & Boonzaier, 2015). Whilst researching risks faced by many young women is important, we must also find new ways of foregrounding narratives of young people. The use of participatory action research (PAR) methods is identified as one such way. This study uses PAR to center a holistic perspective of young women with the aim of surfacing multiple subjective positions of gendered identities and experiences relative to their context.

### **GBV amongst youth in South Africa**

Within South Africa, the legacy of apartheid and structural inequities created conditions for gendered violence to prosper (Wood et al., 2007, 2008). South Africa has one of the highest rates of violence against women (VAW), with IPV as a dominant expression of this (Petersen, Bhana, & McKay, 2005). This is confirmed by estimates showing 50% of murdered women in South Africa were killed at the hands of intimate partners. This is approximately six times the world average (Mathews, Abrahams, Jewkes, Martin, & Vetten, 2008). Recent statistics in South Africa indicate that an average of one in five women over the age of 18 reported violence by an intimate partner (National Department of Health, Statistics South Africa, South African Medical Researchers Council & ICF, 2017).

Much current research on IPV in South Africa is focused primarily on the adult population (Durevall & Lindskog, 2015; Kiss et al., 2012; Rigby & Johnson, 2017; Yee et al., 2018). When youth IPV is a focused topic it is mostly explored quantitatively. Various quantitative studies, for instance, have shown that IPV in heterosexual adolescent relationships is highly prevalent in South Africa (Flisher, Myer, Mèrais, Lombard, & Reddy, 2007; Mason-Jones et al., 2016; Swart, Stevens, & Ricardo, 2002; Wubs et al., 2009). One

quantitative study with a sample of 549 grade 8 learners in Cape Town, Russell et al. (2014, p. 283) found that 39% of girls reported physical violence from an intimate partner. In similar vein, Shamu et al. (2016), using a sample of grade 8 learners in Cape Town, found that a third of the sample experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Both studies were designed to inform prevention programmes about potential factors that put adolescents at risk (Russell et al., 2014; Shamu et al., 2016). Many quantitative studies on IPV amongst adolescents are framed around identifying prevalence of and risk factors to IPV. For example, quantitative studies consistently show family and peer influence, substance use, socioeconomic factors, attitudes, in association to forced sex amongst adolescent relationships (Flisher et al., 2007; Kiss et al., 2012; Mason-Jones et al., 2016; Naidoo, Sartorius, de Vries, & Taylor, 2017; Swart et al., 2002; Wubs et al., 2009).

In summary, IPV amongst (young) adolescents in South Africa is a serious issue. However, the research reviewed mostly provides a quantitative assessment of the problem, which is largely researched according to an agenda of preconceived notions regarding possible risk factors (Allen, 2004; Lesch & Furphy, 2013). This makes invisible the diverse lived experiences and understandings amongst young persons that guide meaningful interventions (Gevers, Jewkes, Mathews, & Flisher, 2012). This raises the question of what the subjective understandings of young people may be.

### **Young people's understandings of GBV**

Fewer, but growing, research explores how young people make sense of intimate relationships and GBV (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). Current literature in this arena indicates persistent themes including the normalisation of violence, hegemonic femininities and masculinities, and increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

An emerging pattern in qualitative studies is the 'normalisation' of violence in adolescent relationships (Makongoza & Nduna, 2017; Schepers & Zway, 2013; Wood et al., 2007, 2008). This was reflected in the perception by young women that abuse inflicted by their partner was considered to be 'normal', or even anticipated. For instance, Wood et al. (2007) found that some young people in relationships understood violence and coerced sex as an expression of 'love'. This might help explain the under reporting of IPV victimisation and over reporting of perpetration identified, however, this issue has not been investigated (Wubs et al., 2009).

Studies highlight the persistence of traditional constructions of (hetero-) sexual identities and gendered relations, including male dominance and female subservience (Petersen et al., 2005; Schepers & Zway, 2013). Shefer et al. (2008) found a perception in a

Western Cape community that young women who contracted HIV are identified as ‘deserving’ of violence due to supposed promiscuous behaviour policed by male control. Such findings of continuing sexual ‘double standards’ are found in qualitative research accounts (Shefer & Foster, 2001). Varga’s (2003) study for example, with a sample of young persons in Durban, found that it was deemed acceptable for young men to have multiple partners as it validates their masculine status (through sexual entitlement), whereas for young women it was deemed unacceptable. Young women are often framed within a ‘passive femininity’ framework and GBV often emerges when this is challenged (Bhana, 2012; Varga, 2003). Bhana (2012), for instance, found that young girls feared boyfriends and experienced sexual objectification, in order to satisfy male desires. These studies and various others (Bhana, 2012; Bhana & Pattman, 2009; Petersen et al., 2005) tend to frame young people, specifically young women, around the discourse of ‘victimhood’.

Traditional discourses are maintained in a growing body of research exploring the linkages between victimisation of IPV and HIV/AIDS risks amongst particularly young women (Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna, & Shai, 2010; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Leach & Humphreys, 2007). In support, studies indicate a gendered inequality in the high rates of HIV/AIDS in South Africa that identifies young women as most at risk of infection (Bhana, 2012; Fox et al., 2007; Jewkes et al., 2010; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010, 2012; Russell et al., 2014). However, literature predominantly focuses on the individual adolescent risk behaviour rather than young people’s understandings of risk (Scheppers & Zway, 2013). This reinforces the ‘risk-paradigm’ that dominates research concerning young women in South Africa (Zway & Boonzaier, 2015).

In summary, literature shows that qualitative approaches are necessary for exploring social dynamics of IPV amongst youth (Fox et al., 2007), and begins by centering young people’s voices (Lesch & Kruger, 2005). The studies have illustrated that underpinnings of gendered and sexual violence shape, and are shaped by, young peoples’ understandings. However, the aforementioned qualitative research mostly frames young women around a dominant discourse of victimhood. One-dimensional constructions of women’s assumed vulnerability to men may overshadow alternative discourses (Hollander, 2002).

### **Beyond the ‘risk-paradigm’: Agency and alternatives**

Studies that explore alternatives to hetero-normative masculinities and femininities remain marginal (Bhana & Pillay, 2011). However, it is also important for qualitative research to explore views that challenge ‘traditional’ constructions that often maintain hetero-patriarchal structures (Zway & Boonzaier, 2015). Zway and Boonzaier (2015) argued that focusing on

‘risk’ discourse denies agency of young women and obscures a part of their lives that are empowering and enjoyable. Mudaly’s (2012) study challenged predominant research on young women. The findings showed how young women actively resisted dominant discourses, for example, by privileging their own sexual desires and having multiple sexual partners. This diversifies conventional ideologies of gender, but remains an uncommon finding across most literature.

Pattman (2013) suggests that qualitative research concerning youth gendered identities and relations from their perspective should encourage ‘participatory methods’. In support, Zway and Boonzaier (2015) revealed how young black lesbian women resisted dominant narratives of victimisation by representing their multidimensional experiences through Photovoice. They argue that this method serves as an empowering tool to break away from the single story approach by eliciting the multiplicities in gendered and sexual identity constructions of young people (Zway & Boonzaier, 2015), and can help mobilise interventions addressing GBV based on their own views (de Lange & Mitchell, 2014; Moletsane et al., 2009).

### **Rationale**

In light of reviewed literature, constructions of gender and sexuality are linked to GBV in the South African context. However, there are emerging gaps, a) Qualitative research on youth-centered knowledge (mainly older adolescents) on IPV in South Africa is marginal. b) Qualitative research with young women moving beyond a ‘risk-paradigm’, and including alternatives, is lacking. Thus, critical qualitative research is needed on young women’s subjective understandings of gender, sexuality and violence that also challenge dominant narratives.

### **Aims and Objectives**

This study aims to ‘give voice’ to young women’s multiple understandings of gender, sexuality and violence through Photovoice. It aims to contribute to diverse youth-centered knowledge and allow participants to represent themselves on their own terms. The main research question is:

- How do young women choose to represent understandings of gender, sexuality and violence through Photovoice?

The sub questions:

- To what extent do the narratives of young women uphold or contest the ‘traditional’ constructions of hetero-patriarchy?

- How do young women in a low-resource community make sense of violence and GBV?
- How do young women envisage addressing GBV?

### **Design and Methods**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is located in feminist post-structuralism to foreground the variability in the lived experiences young women choose to represent.

**Feminist post-structuralism.** Feminist research privileges women's voices, concerns and lived experiences (Beckman, 2014). Feminist poststructuralism, a critical feminist theory, stresses that there is no absolute truth, and identity is neither static nor homogenous, but rather always in a state of flux (Weedon, 1987). Feminist post-structuralism helps move beyond the hegemonic narrative of femininity and highlights the importance of also acknowledging the differences amongst women, by recognising the multiple systems of oppression (Hesse-Biber, 2014). In using feminist poststructuralism this research is considered a political tool to support social justice and change (Hesse-Biber, 2014), which aligns with the central aims of Photovoice (as discussed below).

Feminist post-structuralism proposes that language plays a significant role in the construction of subjectivity (Gavey, 1989). It stipulates that knowledge is linked to power, and that knowledge production and subjectivity are constituted through language (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). Subjectivity is reconceptualised as fluid, fragmented and discursively constructed. We are thus always subjects "in-process" and "in-relation" (Davies et al., 2006, p.36). In this way, the constructions of gendered identities are considered to be relational and shifting.

Overall, this theory is aligned with acknowledging the multiplicity and nuances of gendered subjectivities embraced in this study. It underlines this study's aim of centering the diversity of women's experiences and enhancing voices that have been subjugated within systems of knowledge production (Gergen, 2008).

#### **Research Design**

A critical qualitative approach was identified as most suitable, as it elicits a multi-layered understanding of the individual as embodied social beings constructed within particular contexts (Parker, 2005). In order to gain in-depth understandings of what young women deem important Participatory Action Research (PAR) was utilised.

PAR attempts to balance the power relations in the research process by centering participants as the 'experts' and co-producers of knowledge, and supports a critical feminist



paradigm (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004). Moreover, the collaborative process aims to build upon local knowledge and facilitate empowerment at both the individual and communal level. This includes raising critical consciousness and dialogue on social issues that emerge and are meaningful for participants' own lives (Malherbe, Cornell, & Suffla, 2015). This project used Photovoice, a visual PAR method (Strack et al., 2004). Contemporary research has increasingly shown that Photovoice can be used as an empowering tool for actively engaging youth (Kessi, 2011). This method is congruent with this study's objectives as it foregrounds the multiple experiences, and understandings, from young peoples' perspectives (Suffla, Kaminer, & Bawa, 2012). Photovoice equips participants with cameras to take photographs, in order to record and represent their realities. 'Photostories', written by the participants, accompanies these as personal accounts of their photographs (Malherbe et al., 2015). Photographs become a way in which areas of concern and strengths are surfaced, and critically engaged with, as a catalyst for socio-political action (Suffla et al., 2012). Photovoice was chosen to encourage the involvement of young women to co-construct knowledge about their realities and stories they want to tell.

### **Sample and Data Collection Procedures**

**Sample.** The sample for this study came from Beacon Hill Secondary School, in Mitchell's Plain. Mitchell's Plain is a community in the Cape Flats, Cape Town, characterised by high rates of poverty, unemployment, gangsterism, violence and lacks much needed resources. The sample group included nine young women from Grade 11 (average age of 17 years old). The research was presented to a group who met the criteria, and who then self-selected to participate. The study forms part of a larger project. As such, the sampling strategy used was 'purposive sampling' where the recruitment of participants took place through the researcher's connections and networks (Kelly, 2006).

**Photovoice.** The data collection in Photovoice is set out in proposed steps (Wang, 2006), but these are flexible and serve as a guideline (Strack et al., 2004). Over six months, data was collected from participants through photographs, photostories, and focus groups. It was done as a team with a Master's student. There were a total of seven sessions (between 40 minutes – 1 hour); all sessions except the exhibition were audio-recorded. Six focus groups took place in a private room on the school premises with both researchers. There was debriefing after every discussion, and the researchers were available for questions. The procedures took place over four phases:

*1 - Focus groups and photography training.* A focus group is a discussion with multiple participants in one sitting, which is facilitated by the researcher (Atkinson, 2017).

Importantly, it allows participants the opportunity to co-construct information and share experiences through synergy with fellow participants (Atkinson, 2017). There were two initial focus group discussions (FGD) where the participants explored what they found important and were guided within a particular topic using a semi-structured guide (see Appendix A and B). Based on discussions, participants were asked to consider what meaningful story they wanted to represent through their photographs. Led by a professional photographer, participants were then taught camera features, ethics and shown practical examples in a photography-training workshop. Participants were given two weeks to take the photographs with a digital camera (issued after signed agreement, see Appendix C). Additionally, they were asked for written narratives to accompany their photographs.

*2 – Focus groups and photo sharing.* A third FGD (see Appendix D) was held to provide participants an opportunity to see their photographs and talk about the process of taking their photographs and writing their stories.

*3 – Photograph selections and exhibition planning.* Another FGD was held after a few weeks to discuss the selection of photographs for the photo-exhibition posters, and the participants also discussed the planning of the exhibition (i.e. time, venue, and programme). A core tenet of Photovoice is to ensure that participants are actively involved throughout the research process (Malherbe et al., 2015).

*4 – Final reflections and photo exhibition.* The participants requested another session before the exhibition to share their final thoughts and reflections together. This illustrates the flexible participatory nature of the research. The Photovoice exhibition took place in their school hall on 20 October 2018. Consistent with PAR, the participants were key decision-makers in terms of deciding who was invited, which stories were showcased, and how the exhibition process was to unfold,

### **Data Analysis**

The photostories and FGDs were analysed using thematic analysis (TA). This qualitative analytic approach is flexible and compatible with any theoretical framework by “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data” across different types of datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). This type of analysis is a useful method to identify broad themes instead of following a predetermined agenda, and thus made it the most suitable exploratory tool for analysing the collected data in Photovoice. TA aligned with feminist poststructuralism as it offers a way to unearth rich content of various stories, and subjectivities of participants and the socio-cultural contexts and discourses which shapes the subjective account (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To further support the theoretical framework,

attention was paid to language used in constructing subjective accounts. The analysis took place in several steps broadly outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1) Familiarisation with data; 2) Generating initial codes; 3) Searching for themes; 4) Reviewing themes, through processes of comparing differences and similarities; 5) Defining and naming key themes, which was interpreted within the chosen theoretical framework and research question, and 6) Producing the report.

### **Ethical considerations**

**Informed Consent.** This project worked alongside a Master student's dissertation, and forms part of a larger study. Both obtained ethical approval from the Psychology Department's Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix F and G).

Informed consent, with all necessary information, was given to all potential participants. Both the participants and parents (of minors) were asked to grant informed consent and assent (see Appendix H). The consent form was read through with the participants at the first session. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Consent was received for audio-recording purposes in the informed consent and verbally in sessions.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity.** Although confidentiality was not guaranteed in FGDs, the dangers around sharing information were outlined at the beginning of each session. It was also included in consent forms. Pseudonyms were utilised and all identifying information removed. Participants were also asked if they wanted to issue their names in the exhibition. Audio-recordings, transcriptions and photographs were stored in a safe location. Moreover, participants were informed that they could eliminate any information from the recordings.

**Risks versus Benefits.** A benefit of the study was giving the young women an opportunity to voice their understandings and what they considered important within their context. Their insights could advance developing violence prevention programmes with other young people in their community, and beyond. They were also taught photography skills and received a certificate. The sensitive nature of the topic may have elicited distress and psychological risk. The participants were thus informed that if they experienced any discomfort they could withdraw or speak with the researcher, and in such cases the researcher would have assessed whether referral was necessary. In order to avoid risks in taking pictures of secondary participants, the photography training included issues of safety and ethics.

**Secondary Participants.** Participants were informed in the workshop to receive verbal consent from people before taking the photograph. Photographs of minors required

further parental or guardian permission. The faces of people in the photographs were blurred to ensure anonymity.

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is the practice whereby a researcher is continually, and critically, self-aware of one's positionality and ways in which own systems of belief and social identities, are implicated in the co-production of knowledge (Suffla, Seedat, & Bawa, 2015). That being said, as a cisgender, woman of colour, and Honours student, from a middle-class setting, I am aware that my diverse overlapping identities influenced my research. For example, possessing a degree from a 'prestigious' institute such as UCT inevitably shaped my social encounters, especially with schoolgirls from a low-income setting, by embodying a level of expertise and power connected with my social identities.

Whilst Photovoice attempts to mitigate power dynamics in the research process, I was mindful that my positionality and identities were still noticeably that of an 'outsider' in this study. The participants vocalised their struggles with trusting people in their community, and as an 'outsider' this made it more difficult for them to trust me fully. This was made apparent in the group discussions where they talked more from an observer perspective rather than that of a personal stance. Their concern with trustworthiness may have impacted their ability to discuss personal experiences with me (an outsider) as well as in the group. For instance, Ayshia expressed "what if I speak out about my household and then one of them like go outside." It is crucial to recognise that the participants thus conveyed a particular kind of story for a specific type of audience (Parker, 2005).

### **Analysis and Discussion**

When employing a thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) outline, three main themes were identified in the data: *Negotiating constructions of femininity*; *Constructions of gender-based violence*; and *"We deserve to live in harmony": Addressing violence*. Only the main themes will be discussed due to space constraints. Using a feminist post-structuralist framework, the themes are recognised as not representative of a single reality. Rather, based on their diverse and comparable understandings, the analysis highlights the discourses participants drew on to negotiate and make sense of them as young women.

#### **Negotiating constructions of femininity**

As the participants spoke about young womanhood in their community they frequently positioned women as subscribing to hegemonic femininity. Traditionally, femininity is constructed as weak, complacent, and fragile (Schippers, 2007). In this study the young women negotiated these traditional narratives through acts of opposition. Thus, two

subthemes, ‘discourses of passivity’ and ‘resisting vulnerability’, emerged when negotiating constructions of femininity.

**Discourses of passivity.** Amongst the participants many drew attention to women’s lack of agency under masculine dominance. In particular, discourses of passivity illustrated the ways that women’s bodies are considered objects, and become subject to masculine control. For instance, female sexuality and behaviour was constructed as powerless, especially in relation to talk about sexual violence, as stated below:

*You can’t wear too short stuff also then it’s like you ask to be geraped (raped) or so. That’s why like us girls we don’t feel comfortable anymore wearing dresses or so, because it’s like they always look at it with the wrong intention. They don’t look at it with the intention, like you’re wearing it and you look pretty or so. (Zara, FGD 1)*

Zara referred to women collectively to emphasise that all women are vulnerable under the male gaze where they are objectified and possibly victimised by men’s supposed uncontrollable sexual urges. As found elsewhere in South Africa, sexual abuse was legitimated through supporting myths that women wearing revealing clothing cause men to have uncontrollable sexual urges, and are ‘asking’ to be raped (Petersen et al, 2005). Zara positions herself as being implicated in the construction of ‘rape myths’ rooted in patriarchal ideological beliefs that subordinate women through oppressive discourses, such as victim-blaming. These discourses largely stem from the ‘male sexual drive discourse’, which constructs male sexuality as active/insatiable (Shefer & Foster, 2001). The implication of this construction is that the onus is on young women to prevent rape, by modifying their behaviour rather than on young men changing their violating behaviour.

Passive female sexuality was also constructed by participants in relation to their male peers’ sexual objectification of girls:

*Because like you are with her because she looks like that (‘the sexiest girl’) and now you get like, how can I say, you get praising’s for that. (Kailin, FGD 2)*

Kailin mentions that boys are with girlfriends who are sexually attractive because they are considered achievements. By using the term “praising’s”, young women are reduced to trophies, and passive objects of sexual desire. In the process young women are devalued and are considered part of the social ‘currency’ used by their partners to improve their status in male peer groups. The above extracts resonate with Anderson’s (2010) findings showing that for men, social power and status is secured by asserting an ‘active’ male sexuality through the sexual objectification of women.

As illustrated below, participants also mentioned policing and surveillance of female bodies by constraining female (hetero-) sexuality:

*Like men [...] they like go sleep around. And for a lady, she thinks about herself, like what are people going to think of me. Now men don't do that. A man just does what he wants to. (Zara, FGD 2)*

Above, Zara echoes the sexual double standard found in previous studies (Varga, 2003), when constructing male and female (hetero-) sexualities, where it is deemed more acceptable for men to “sleep around” (i.e. have multiple partners). For women, however, their reputations are at stake. Zara’s construction that “a man does what he wants to” ascribes men as having more power, and women as lacking sexual agency. Megan also illustrated this regarding the way her community regulates and maintains discourses of passivity: “[...] *then the people always think like bad stuff, because you're always around boys, now they think like you are having sex*”. This construction draws on the Madonna/whore discourse where female sexuality is constructed as either constrained (pure) or wild (immoral) (Macdonald, 1995). Megan constructs the ‘whore’ discourse, that is, being around many boys is perceived as having an active femininity and considered immoral. The double standard of female sexuality in the above extracts imposes a disciplinary role on how women construct their relations with men in a hetero-normative patriarchal society.

Research in a similar community has shown that abiding to hegemonic discourses allows women to attain respectable ‘moral’ reputations, which gains social capital and acceptance (Salo, 2003). The communal perceptions that reinforce constructions of passive femininity thus make it difficult to challenge oppressive discourses. Women are not inherently passive; rather, overarching hetero-patriarchal structures reinforces a sense of powerlessness women face when contesting hegemonic discourses. However, it can also be argued that the participants were resisting by pointing to the different ways men and women are regulated.

**Resisting vulnerability.** Resistance to dominant discourses of passive femininity emerged in the ways that participants negotiated their autonomy. Critical feminist research recognises women as not only ‘victims of patriarchy’, but also possessing agency and multiple subjective positions (Gordon, 2017). For instance, Kailin contested constructions of female sexuality as passive by asserting control over her own body:

*This is my body and you're going to respect my body until I say yes. (Kailin, FG 6)*

Kailin resists the image of girls as sexual objects, who have no sexual authority and ability to negotiate their sexuality. She thus opposes the normative representation of women as passive

recipients and objects of male pleasure. Ayshia also resisted dominant narratives by voicing her ability to verbally retaliate against men:

*But I'll say you don't speak to me like that, because who are you [...] the boys tend to just run over them like they want to because they see you're not a person to stand up for yourself. So basically they stand for you. (Ayshia, FGD 6)*

Above, Ayshia illustrated discourses of passivity as associated with vulnerability and possibly positioning young women at the risk of masculine control, but also accuses young women for being compliant in upholding these discourses. Conversely, Ayshia attempts to oppose ideologies that subordinate women by constructing herself as an active agent capable of self-protection, thus embracing alternatives to femininity. Moving beyond the framework of vulnerability was further echoed in Crystal's self-portrait:



**Figure 1:** This is my story.

*My mother tried to flush me down the toilet and I don't know my father. There are some children that think to not have a mother, they would rather go fall pregnant, or they think I will join gangsters. Those are the choices they make. I had a choice and I told myself that I am not going in that direction. I am not going to make myself a bad person, that is why I am always so happy and outspoken. I just want to finish my school career and be the best I can ever be. (Crystal, Photostory)*

Crystal represents herself as having agency in deciding her future and resists dominant narratives by living contrary to the norm within her context. She uses her photostory as resistance by asserting her rights and shifting away from the mainstream

construction of powerless and vulnerable women. Participants also distanced their self-identities from passivity through the terms “they”/ “them” referring to other young women. The participants’ negotiations of femininity in relation to structures of hetero-patriarchy transpired in their constructions of gendered violence.

### **Constructions of gender-based violence (GBV)**

A recurring theme across the participants’ narratives was their continuous exposure to violence within their community, which was constructed as gendered. The participants drew on several intertwining subthemes in their constructions: men’s authority and control; normalisation and socialisation; and socio-economic conditions.

**Men’s authority and control.** When discussing GBV, the participants made reference to men’s authority and control over women. Men were mostly mentioned as perpetrators of violence in their context. Aneeqa chose to represent one such example through a photograph of her mother who was a victim of child sexual abuse:



**Figure 2.** Sexual abuse.

*When my mom came into this world, from the age of 8-15 years she was abused by her step-father. He was a policeman and at the time they could not talk about the abuse because people would not believe them, and it was embarrassing. (Aneeqa, photostory)*

Here, Aneeqa refers to intergenerational cycles of violence within households. She narrates the fear of dismissal and humiliation, and thereby exposes an absence of safe spaces for girls to disclose experiences of abuse. This is similar to child rape accounts in Jewkes, Penn-Kekana and Rose-Junius’s (2005) study in South Africa where girls and mothers, were falsely held accountable for the incidents of child sexual abuse rather than male partners



(Jewkes et al., 2005). Aneeqa illustrates how the combined authoritative power of police and men reinforces patriarchal power structures within home and community systems that silence the voices of women and girls.

All participants agreed that violence against intimate women partners was common in their community. When describing the violent heterosexual relationship, some participants constructed the inability of women to assert agency due to masculine power:

*[...]I think she's also going to be afraid of what if he beats me up if I tell him something bad. (Karen, FGD 2)*

*Because they are actually afraid their man is going to hurt them again. (Kailin, FGD 1)*

Above, both participants describe a form of self-regulation that is maintained under fear of men's authority and violent repercussions. This construction resonates with findings showing that GBV emerged when women disobeyed the subordinate role enforced under male control (Bhana, 2012). The young women also described observations of hegemonic ideologies of gendered violence:

**Zara:** *They walking in the road ne, and then the lady don't want to kiss the man and then [hitting gesture] they smack her.*

**Aneeqa:** *Or maybe another boy look at this girl, and then the boyfriend beat her up. (FGD 2)*

Here, the participants both construct male control, female non-compliance and sense of ownership over female bodies as underpinning forms of violence against women partners in their community. This concurs with Boonzaier and van Schalkwyk (2011), who find the possessiveness of men partners is symbolic of their sense of power over women partners, and thus reinforces the belief that the perceived disobedience of women should be controlled and disciplined.

Whilst men perpetration was spoken of more commonly, violent femininities also come to the fore, especially in school settings:

*[...]like this girl, she smacked a boy in the class because he said 'jou ma se' and then he kicked her back [...] he didn't have the right to say it, but she could have just been the better person [...]. She didn't have to take it to violence. (Zara, FGD 2)*

Here, Zara narrates herself witnessing violence perpetrated by a school girl in response to verbal abuse by a boy. Whilst she disapproved both their behaviour, she was more opposed to the girl's violent reaction by saying "she didn't have to take it to violence". Similarly, Sathiparsad (2005) showed that young people's views of girls who display violent

behaviour “deserves no respect” (p.84). Zara thus upholds the norm and expectation of women positioned within a discourse of passivity as influenced by local systems shaped by violent masculinities. Violent acts are reinforced as ‘normal’ masculine traits and seen as aberrations of feminine behaviour.

**Normalisation and socialisation.** Intimate partner violence within their context, was constructed as normalised by some participants:

**Megan:** *I think the lady thinks it's okay to be beaten up, and then tomorrow she just goes back there. And then he'll just beat her up again.*

**Karen:** *And sometimes they are so blinded by the love they think they deserve it.*

(FGD 2)

The above extracts highlight the constructions of violent behaviour by men as normalised to the point where women partners perceive it is “okay” or ‘deserved’. This perception of normalisation resonates with narratives of women abuse in studies showing women participating in deeply rooted discourses of victim-blaming by attributing violence to their actions (or inactions), or reclaiming experiences by expressing being ‘blinded by love’ to avoid victim labels, which may in turn make issues of GBV invisible (Wood, 2001). Another interpretation of violence against women was attributed to socialisation:

*But now you see its like generations go past like the kids they see how my father beats my mother, so they think it's okay. I will also do it, that's how it continues and goes on and on.* (Ayshia, FGD 1)

The statement above reflects constructing violence as learned behaviour that originates from observing abusive fathers. Furthermore, Ayshia elicits the discourse of intergenerational transmission of violence, by saying it “goes on and on”. Another social learning agent mentioned was that of peers, in saying “*they get bullied by bigger boys [...] so he bullies that girls. So as it grows, it's growing slowly inside of him, so it's continuing*” (Zara, FGD 2). Whilst being exposed to or experiencing violence may be one contributing factor, it is not a given that all boys will be abusive and violent (Boonzaier, 2008). Constructing social learning of violence as internalised and uncontrollable by “growing slowly inside of him”, insinuates that it is inevitable. This perception is used to justify gendered violence and deflect from the implications of men’s behaviour (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). It thus raises the question of how broader structural and environmental conditions influence constructions of violence.

**Socio-economic conditions.** The participants illustrated intersections between socio-economic deprivations, gangsterism, and hegemonic masculinities, as shaping unequal

gendered power relations in their community. The pervasiveness of gangs were depicted in their narratives of gang-related shootings, which impact their schoolwork, psychological states, and threaten their everyday safety:



**Figure 3.** *I dream of a better world where women do not have to be afraid. A world where you do not need to question where you are walking in fear of death due to others.* (Jessie, Photostory)

All of the participants mentioned that local gangs play a significant contributing role towards maintaining the social limitations they experience as young women, Ayshia stated: *“We can’t do things like socialise with our people in other communities, [...] we are too afraid [...] because the gangs might come and interfere”*. Research on male gangs in the Cape Flats found that local socio-spatial boundaries are maintained and policed by violent masculine dominance, where asserting violence is legitimated within local ideologies of hegemonic masculinity (Salo, 2007). The participants’ community experiences of high-levels of gang violence ultimately shape constructions of violent masculinities as hegemonic, which was illustrated in participants’ localised constructions of youth IPV:

*A **hard** relationship [...] There they (hitting gestures) box each other...And you get the girl, she think she strong now, but she can’t box him back, because he overpowers her. And then you get the **soft** relationship, where they have arguments, [...] They not (hitting gestures) here (sounds of agreement).* (Zara, FGD 2)

The participants constructed youth intimate hetero-sexual relationships within a binary of “soft” and “hard”. According to participants, the former was defined by “soft” boys,

“*boys you can trust, the gentle boys*” (Jessie, FGD 2). Aneeqa similarly described them as “*you tell them now a story that happened to you then they’ll start crying out of the blue. Then you don’t even cry, but he cries.*” This masculinity was constructed as gentle, sensitive, non-violent, and therefore trustworthy. They thus constructed and were supportive of ‘alternative’ masculinities, which elucidates resistance to hegemonic ideologies of women’s inherent vulnerability to men’s inherent violence (Hollander, 2002). Contrastingly, “gangster boys” (“hard” boys) were illustrated as physically violent towards female partners and possessing masculine power. Despite links to violence, the consensus amongst participants was that dating “gangster boys” was common within their community. As such, the hegemonic masculinity constructed within their context was shaped by hetero-normativity and the gang subculture infiltrating the youth, which reproduced traditional patterns of active/violent masculinities.

The participants observed that young women within their community appeared to gravitate more towards this type of masculinity because of its associated power:

**Zara:** *And they think like dating a gangster boy is like a benefit for them and that’s how they get involved in gangs.*

**Crystal:** *Like money and support a baby and stuff like that...*

**Jessie:** *And protect them.* (FGD 2)

Here, participants construct women as further upholding a ‘provider’ masculinity as hegemonic within their community. Describing their local context was depicted through labels of “unemployment”, “teenage pregnancy”, “drug addiction” and “poverty”:

*Gangsterism is a major problem in our society but so is poverty. Our people are left jobless [...] they don’t know what to do with their lives so they start gangs.* (Karen, Photostory)

Karen intersects the propensity for gangsterism to socio-economic issues such as poverty and unemployment. Salo (2007) suggests that the legacies of apartheid reproduced processes of socio-economic deprivations and segregation that support a culture of violence and creation of gangsterism in the Cape Flats. Gangsters gain prominence by propagating images that social power and gaining access to resources is vested in gang-related activity (Salo, 2007).

The participants, however, positioned themselves against being in relationships with “gangster boys” despite it being aligned with status in their community. To emphasize this, one participant mentioned “*I’m now one in a million girls that don’t have a boyfriend that’s a gangster*” (Jessie, FG 6). Instead, they highlighted the importance of mutual respect, communication and being empathetic, as voiced by Ayshia, “*The main thing they should*

*learn is to respect each other, learn to understand each other's feelings [...] because when I speak I speak with respect towards you*" (FGD 5). Although violence was constructed as normalised in their community, the majority of participants oppose this and indicate an awareness of unequal gender relations and its structural nature. Whilst the participants expressed vulnerability as young women, they also resisted, rejected, and negotiated ways of addressing violence in Mitchell's Plain.

#### **"We deserve to live in harmony": Addressing violence**

The young women visualised ways of laying the foundation for a future without violence, as Lauren stated: *"We deserve to live in harmony"*. An important theme of addressing violence was embraced in the accounts of the participants. Particularly, the need for social cohesion to encourage and support youth came across strongly:



**Figure. 4:** *I feel as the youth we need love. We need someone or something to keep us encouraged and motivated. If this is done, we can keep our peers encouraged and we can feel good about ourselves.* (Karen, Photostory)

**Building a sense of togetherness.** All participants place value in standing together in the community, government, schools and households so that they can together address common conditions. The lack of community action as influencing the ability of individual action was a connecting thread across their narratives, Lauren noted *"there is nothing we as individuals can do about it because our community is too afraid to act against this corruption."* An unsupportive culture experienced by the participants reflects in how they talked about constantly adjusting themselves, where having to "protect yourself" and "watch your back" often emerged in narratives. Participants also voice feelings of isolation and

inability to trust anyone and place high value on engaging in social activities that builds communities as ways of overcoming exclusion. One participant's photograph represented a weekly feeding scheme as an example of a community initiative that helps impoverished children:



**Figure 5.** *I think that's something good [...] But it would be nice if you can give like something to eat to the community, the children of the community each day.*

(Karen, FGD 5)

Employing the Photovoice method creates an opportunity for the young women to also demonstrate agency and voice their aspirations for positive change (de Lange & Mitchell, 2014). In this study, participants wanted to increase active engagement amongst youth for emotional and tangible support:

**Megan:** *I would say like things like outings, things to keep them like active and listen to their stories, it's important to listen to their stories give them more advice.*

*Sometimes not everybody went through it but you can try ... just to listen.*

**Aneeqa:** *[...] a club, for young guys and girls like to come and speak about their experiences as a teenager and then they can take us out... just to have fun.* (FGD 1)

Above, the young women place emphasis on social inclusion and having a sense of belonging. Creating safe spaces for communication between young men and women was understood as a way to promote support networks. Being heard and getting advice makes them feel part of a community and that they, and their views, count. Similarly, another Photovoice study found that involving young women in active spaces that encourages support

helps them form a sense of solidarity and community, which establishes positive identity affirmation (Zway & Boonzaier, 2015).

**Active agents of change.** The participants mentioned that they are also active agents of change by being role models to young people, including younger siblings and peers. One participant for example, wanted to start a youth camp as a way to “*open doors for children which are struggling, make change*” (Megan, FGD 3). Another participant said, “*I wish that I can be the change of tomorrow*” (Kailin, Photostory). Across many narratives, they describe their circumstances as not defining their future, one participant noted:

*You can choose to go up in the ... say now your parents are on drugs or they're alcoholics, you can follow in their footsteps or you can go your own way and make a change.* (Jessie, FGD 4)

To all of the participants, there was a desire to finish school and study further as a way to “make a change” in their own lives and to achieve their goals, hopes, and dreams. This was spoken of as a way “to come out of this area.” Megan illustrated this in her photograph:



**Figure 6.** *Because if you really had a goal then you really put everything, if you don't want to live in Beacon valley anymore, this is the place to start* (Megan, FGD 5)

There was also consensus amongst participants that other young women in their community should be more ambitious and aware of the opportunities studying further may create. However, participants expressed that they faced barriers including lack of parental support, teacher encouragement, and positive peer influence. Significantly, there was little agreement amongst the participants when asked what constitutes a “safe space”, which reflects the invasiveness of violence in all spheres of their lives.

In their reflections, participants revealed that Photovoice gave them a safe space to engage with and listen to their peers' stories:

**Megan:** *We learnt a lot about each other and the areas that we live in*

**Crystal:** *We're not so far apart from each other*

**Karen:** *[...] like you would always like judge the next person and say, that person had an easy life, why do I have it difficult, but now we actually got insight into everybody's lives (FGD 5)*

The above highlights the importance participants place on the collective engagement provided by the Photovoice method. The discussions of their stories enhanced dialogue regarding issues of gendered violence in their community. Their critical self-reflections made them realise that they all face similar struggles, and sharing their stories formed a sense of togetherness and positive self-affirmation that they valued. Kailin expressed Photovoice as an empowering tool that reaffirmed her sense of agency: *"this programme changes people's lives and we know that we can become better people"*. This method is testimony that fostering safe spaces for young women to be heard and recognised as active social agents is an essential part towards building solidarity and resilience.

### **Conclusion**

The outcome of this research shows multidimensionality in young women's chosen representations of gender, sexuality and violence through Photovoice. Firstly, findings suggest that constructions of femininity were negotiated through discourses of passivity and resisting vulnerability. The social landscape they navigated was constructed in relation to hetero-normative patriarchal structures that constrained and objectified young women's bodies, and this aligns with existing literature by Bhana (2012), Gevers et al. (2012) and Petersen et al. (2005). Public constructions of passive femininity contribute towards reinforcing discourses of victim blaming, and supports the danger of silencing or legitimating GBV. Importantly, however, young women themselves negotiated how as agentive beings they are capable of resisting dominant narratives of vulnerability.

Secondly, participants constructed violence perpetrated by men as expressing masculine power and control over women partners, and perpetration by women as aberrations of feminine behaviour. Entrenched patriarchal systems rooted in hegemonic masculinities establishes an environment where violence perpetrated by men may be perceived as 'normal' or 'inherent'. Furthermore, systems of socio-economic deprivation, hegemonic masculinities and gangsterism intersected in ways that shaped local constructions of youth IPV. New insights were gained into the local constructions of IPV within the context of high-levels of



gangsterism in one particular low-income setting. Building upon local knowledge through collaborative processes is shown to be important when attempting to address social issues (Malherbe et al., 2015).

Thirdly, a significant contribution of the Photovoice method was reflected in how participants chose to represent themselves as active agents of change in their own future, and in their community. This importantly moves beyond the one-dimensional representations of young women in low-income communities as passive, lazy, irresponsible (Kessi, 2011), and merely ‘victims of patriarchy’ (Gordon, 2017). Participants recognised that individual action is necessary, but to create active change mobilisation through networks of solidarity across different structures in society are necessary. At an epistemological level, the value of a feminist poststructuralist lens is that it emerged multiplicity (including alternatives) from narratives where varied subjectivities were relationally constructed through discourse, socio-cultural systems and material conditions (Gavey, 1989).

A limitation includes the cultural and language differences between the researcher and participants (mostly first-language Afrikaans), which may have affected their ability to fully express themselves, and impacted the researcher’s interpretations thereof. In sharing their views, the participants usually referred to others lived experiences rather than their own. This may have been because the researcher was seen as an ‘outsider’ or that their experiences were too personal to publicly announce. The group sessions were beneficial in creating collaborative dialogue, but it may have suppressed personal experiences. This research focused on one low-income community, and research in comparable communities may produce different representations of young women’s constructions of GBV. Future research in South Africa could focus on various contexts (including young men) using more PAR methods to further diversify youth-centered knowledge on this topic. Furthermore, triangulating individual interviews with PAR and researchers fluent in the participants’ home language may elicit more personal and nuanced accounts.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the limited body of knowledge in South Africa on young women’s multifaceted understandings of GBV and ways of resisting mainstream discourses of heteronormative patriarchy. This research also revealed how young women locate themselves as active agents, who attempt to negotiate gendered and sexual identities and violence in contested terrains. It was shown that Photovoice can be an empowering tool for young women who have been marginalised within broader structures to voice their stories, create critical dialogue, and provided them a platform for representing

their own social worlds through their exhibition to catalyse social change and meaningful interventions within their context.

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*Appendix A*

Focus Group 1: Schedule (Jade Daniels and Laura Lee Fortune)

Opening session: Run through consent forms and retrieve signed copies. “Are there any questions about this project or about your participation?”

Introductions: Each person introduces themselves (including researchers), i.e. saying their names and something interesting about themselves.

Expectations: “What do you hope to get from this project? Is there anything you are worried about?”

Reminder: Ask for agreement to audio-recording. Any information said can be removed.

Participation is voluntary, may choose not to answer questions. There are no right or wrong answers. Tell them to please respect the opinions of everyone, even if they disagree.

Confidentiality of any personal information and stories is important for everyone in the group. Sharing something without permission may be detrimental to the person’s reputation or dignity. We ask for you to respect the privacy of all members in the group by not discussing details or comments outside the group.

Broad topic and main questions: “For today’s group discussion, we want to talk about your lives and how you experience being a young woman in your community”.

- What is it like growing up in your community?
- What it is like being a girl/young woman in your community? What are some of the issues you face in your lives as young women?

Prompt questions:

- What do you think are the main causes of violence within your community?
- How do you make sense of the violence?
- What do you think are some of the issues that lead to VAW?
- How do issues of safety impact your daily life? Which spaces/environments make you feel most at ease/safe?
- How do you think we can end violence against women? What kind of interventions would make you feel safer as young women?

*Appendix B*Focus group 2: Schedule (Jade Daniels and Laura Lee Fortune)

Introductions: Go around and repeat names.

Reminder: Ask for agreement to audio-recording. Any information said can be removed.

Participation is voluntary, may choose not to answer questions. There are no right or wrong answers. Tell them to please respect the opinions of everyone, even if they disagree.

Confidentiality of any personal information and stories is important for everyone in the group. Sharing something without permission may be detrimental to the person's reputation or dignity. We ask for you to respect the privacy of all members in the group by not discussing details or comments outside the group.

“How did you find the previous group discussion? Did anything seem particularly interesting or stand out?”

Broad topic and main questions: “For today’s discussion we want to focus more on your lives as girls at school and having relationships”

- What makes your school a good place to be?
- What is it like being a girl/ young woman at school?
- Can you describe intimate relationships in your community? at school?

Prompt questions

- What happens when there is violence at your school?
- What is it like being a young woman in a relationship with someone?
- Are there certain things girls can or cannot do compared to boys?
- Can you tell us about violence in intimate relationships?
- Can you tell us about maintaining friendships between both boys and girls?

*Appendix C*Camera sign-out agreement:

I have been given a compact digital camera to use for 2 weeks for a Photovoice project taking place in cooperation with Beacon Hill Alumni and UCT Psychology department.

- I agree to handle the camera with care and take responsibility for its loss or damage.
- I agree to return the camera (with accessories) within two weeks.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Camera model: \_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix D*

Focus group 3: Schedule (Jade Daniels and Laura Lee Fortune)

Reminder: Ask for agreement to audio-recording. Any information said can be removed.

Participation is voluntary, they may choose not to answer questions. Confidentiality of any personal information and stories is important for everyone in the group. Sharing something without permission may be detrimental to the person's reputation or dignity. We ask for you to respect the privacy of all members in the group by not discussing details or comments outside the group.

Broad topic and main question: "For today's group discussion, we would like to talk about the learning process on how to take photographs, and what it was like taking your own photos. And, if any of you would to, you can talk to the rest of the group about the photos you have taken"

- How was this for you?
- What stood out for you?

Prompt questions:

- How did you decide what photographs you ended up taking?
- What was it like for you to take photographs? And asking people for permission to take photographs of them?
- What did you like about taking the photographs?
- How was it difficult or challenging for you?
- What would you like to share to the the rest of the group, and other people, about the photographs you took?

"We wanted to begin talking about any themes you might have noticed in our previous discussions. This does not have to specific, it can be anything you find important that was mentioned before or if you found different people discussing similar things."

- If you can think of anything and want to share, what did you think was important from our earlier discussions?

*Appendix F*

Permission Letter: Laura Lee Fortune's (research partner) project



**Faculty of Humanities  
Postgraduate Administration  
University of Cape Town**

Room 110, Beattie Building  
Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701  
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 2883  
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10 April 2018

Miss Lauralee Fortune  
E-mail: [FRTLAU005@MYUCT.AC.ZA](mailto:FRTLAU005@MYUCT.AC.ZA)  
Student no.: FRTLAU005

Dear Miss Fortune

**ACCEPTANCE OF MASTERS PROPOSAL BY HUMANITIES FACULTY BOARD**

I have pleasure in advising that your research proposal as detailed below has been approved by the department, and the Faculty of Humanities in the Dean's Circular HUM 01/2018.

Kind regards  
[Sylvia.chauke@uct.ac.za](mailto:Sylvia.chauke@uct.ac.za)  
Miss Sylvia Chauke  
Faculty of Humanities: Postgraduate office

cc Supervisors: A/Professor Floretta Boonzaier/Dr Taryn van Niekirk

ANDIGATE	STUDENT NO.	DEPT	SUPERVISOR	CO-SUPERVISOR	TITLE
Fortune, L.	FRTLAU005	PGY	A/Professor F Boonzaier	Dr Taryn Niekirk	Intersections of race, class and gender in young women's narratives of violence against women in a Johannesburg suburb



*Appendix G***UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN****Department of Psychology**

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa  
Telephone (021) 650 3414  
Fax No. (021) 650 4104

25 January 2017

Assoc. Prof. Floretta Boonzaier  
Department of Psychology  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7701

Dear Prof. Boonzaier

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for the amended protocol, submitted 25 January 2017, to your study, "The gendered and sexual lives and identifications of South African youth: A participatory project". The reference number remains PSY2014-002.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Lauren Wild'.

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

*Appendix H*

THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

**Young women's narratives of gender, sexuality and violence in Mitchell's Plain: A Photovoice Study**

**1. Invitation and Purpose**

You are invited to take part in a Photovoice research study; the study will focus on young women's stories of gender, sexuality and violence.

**2. Procedures**

- A. Upon agreeing to participate in this study you will be required to a series of group discussion. One of these discussions is a photographic skills workshop.
- B. You will be required to take your own pictures over the course of two weeks, a camera will be provided to you.
- C. These pictures will form part of an exhibition as well as the research write-up
- D. Although you have volunteered you will be allowed to end your discussion at any given time if you feel uncomfortable or no longer want to proceed with the research.

**3. Risks and Harms**

- A. The study poses some harm to participants. The subject matter is of a sensitive nature. Should you feel uncomfortable, you may withdraw their participation. The focus group setting allows you to share only what you feel comfortable with.
- B. The study will take place at an appropriate time for all participants however the focus group will last for one full hour and this may be an inconvenience.
- C. Violence against women is understandably a sensitive subject, should you feel distressed, you will be able to voice your concerns to the researcher.

**4. Benefits**

- A. Participating in this study will allow you to share your lived experience with those in your community and the academic community. You will be an integral part of creating knowledge which is aimed at social change.
- B. You will learn to use photography as a form of activism art.

### **5. Privacy and Confidentiality**

- A. The focus group will involve group discussions where any story may be shared, as such we will ask all group members to respect the confidentiality of each other in all the groups. The researchers cannot control what can be said outside the group discussion, which means that full confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
- B. The focus group will be recorded and transcribed. These recordings and transcriptions will only be accessible to the researchers and our academic supervisor. The researchers will take strict precautions to safeguard all personal information.
- C. If you feel that you do not want a specific portion of your data to be recorded or used you are welcome to ask me to eliminate that specific piece of information.
- D. Pseudonyms will be used in the write-up to safeguard personal details.

### **7. Contact details**

If you require any clarification or have suggestions or complaints regarding the research extend communication to myself: Laura Lee Fortune phone number 0786066581; Jade Daniels 0827367478 or Prof Floretta Boonzaier at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town (UCT) 021 650 3429.

If you have any questions regarding this research study, or your rights as a participant and would like to speak to the Chair of Ethics committee, please contact Rosalind Adams at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town, 021 650 3417.

### **8. Signatures**

I, {Participant's name} \_\_\_\_\_, have been appropriately informed of the nature of the study. Possible harms and risks have been explained and I agree to consent to participation and the use of my data. Any questions pertaining to the research process has been answered and I have complete understanding of the study. **I agree to have my voice tape-recorded.**

---

Participant signature and Date

---

Researcher's Signature and Date

**Parental/ Legal Guardian Permission**

I the parent/ legal guardian have been adequately informed of the nature of the study and I consent to my child' participation in this study and the use of her data. Any questions I had have been answered in a satisfactory manner.

I agree to allow my child's voice to be recorded and I understand the researchers will take precautions to safeguard my child's personal information at all times.

---

Parental/legal guardian Signature and Date