PROJECT TITLE: EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN RESEARCHERS

Lead researcher’s: Ms Peace Kiguwa, Dr Mzikazi Nduna

This report was put together by the trainee research assistant Ms Tidimalo Padi. Tidi led the drafting of the report with input from Dr Nduna and Ms Kiguwa. We are grateful to Tidi for the admin support to the project in addition to her being a participant in the project.

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1. Description of Project Staff and profiles

Profile on Peace Kiguwa:

Peace Kiguwa is a lecturer in the Department of Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. She currently lectures in gender studies and social psychology in the School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand. She is co-editor on Critical Psychology, The Gender of Psychology (both UCT press releases) and Gender and Migration (Zed Press). Her research interests include critical race theories, asymmetrical social relations, critical psychology, gender and sexuality and teaching and learning. She was Research Fellow on the South African Netherlands
Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD) and has served on the executive committee of the Division for Research and Methodology (PsySSA) as well as associate editor on *Psychology in Society* (PINS) and *New Voices in Psychology* (UNISA). She is currently working on a PhD in Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand titled “Performing ‘race’: what price cultural capital? Black students negotiating identity at a historically white institution”.

**Profile on Mzikazi Nduna:**

*Mzikazi Nduna (PhD)* is a Senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. She has research interests in sexual and reproductive health, gender and gender-based violence and psychological distress pertaining to women, children, and sexual minorities. She is an alumnus of the Sexuality Leadership Development and the Carnegie Fellowships and currently holds the ICP CHANGE fellowship Award. She has co-authored more than 20 peer reviewed journal articles, presented in international and local conferences and reviews articles for more than five international journals. She is a board member at Genderdynamix and a member of the gender-based violence Prevention Network for the Horn, East and Southern Africa.

**2. Description of Student Trainees**

**Tidimalo Padi:**

Tidimalo has completed her BA, majoring in psychology and Law at the University of the Witwatersrand. She is currently in the process of completing her honours in psychology. She has been volunteering as a counsellor at the South African Depression and Anxiety group since 2010. She also worked as a tutor and call centre assistant in 2010 and 2011 at the University of the Witwatersrand. She has also worked for Attittance from 2009-2011. Tidimalo is currently working as a research assistant at the University of the Witwatersrand.
Thandeka Mdletshe

THANDEKA PRUDENCE MDLETSHE is a Soweto born young woman currently pursuing her MASTERS in Research Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors. She was the Vice President for Wits Students Business Society in 2009, a Youth team leader in Dobsonville from 2005-2006 and an Editor of a school magazine. She has held worked as a Research Assistant, Academic Tutor, Residence Assistant, and as a Peer educator and counsellor herself at the University of the Witwatersrand’s Counselling and Career Development Unit from 2010 to date. She was involved in research on Peer Educator’s perceptions and opinions of the female condom in Soweto and her current research is on how young people cope with absent fathers: the strategies they adopt. In addition, she is also a Fellow at the Africa Gender Institute’s Young Women’s leadership Initiative, coordinated from the University of Cape Town.

Tish White:

Tish completed her BA, majoring in Psychology at Wits University in 2011, and completed an introductory course in LGBT studies in 2011 through University of North-West. She has worked extensively with LGBTIA student issues, as a former chair of Activate Wits LGBQTIA student solidarity society. She is also the current National Vice Convenor of the Kaleidoscope Youth Network – a body that incorporates LGBTIA student solidarity societies across South Africa. Tish is currently employed by the University of Witwatersrand Transformation Office.

Zanele Makhubo:

Zanele Makhubo is a 21 year old woman from Johannesburg, currently completing her Ba degree in Political Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. She is currently involved in LGBTI student activism on campus, working with the Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action where she has been involved in coordinating and facilitating lesbian and bisexual women’s inter-generational discussion forums the past two years. She served as an executive committee member for Activate Wits, an LGBTI students society on campus, in the past, and continues to be a member. She has been trained in Art Advocacy media tools, and in 2012 coordinated the ICUH8R campaign at Wits university, aimed at encouraging LGBTI students on campus to report hate crimes committed against them on campus. She has been trained in silk-screen printing, and served as a core-group member at the newly established Amplified Studio at the 1in9 Campaign.
3. The Intervention

The aim of the AGI project is to build the capacity of young researchers to conduct action research from a feminist perspective. In order to achieve this, we have organized the intervention under three activities. These are 1) providing the student trainees with relevant theoretical input on feminist and action research 2) allow the student trainees to attend intervention workshops, evaluate their delivery and use this as a data collection tool, 3) to write up research findings and present them at conferences. Staff involved in the project also undertook to expose the student trainees to their other research projects so as to maximize their training opportunities. This is reflected below:

To assist us in this regard, the Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA) agreed to provide us with the platform to recruit some of their members. GALA is one the most established research organizations for those who have a particular interest in the promotion and preservation and contemporary experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in Africa. Directed by Anthony Manion, GALA has many outreach and education programmes in place for research purposes in order to promote opportunities and advocacy work those who are part of the LGBTI community and for those who are interested in this community. They have exhibitions in place that showcase the impact of the national Constitution on the lives and experiences of marginalized groups such as the LGBTI community. Thus, the outcomes expected to result from the AGI project will be far reaching, not only for forward thinking organizations such as GALA.

1. Theoretical Input on feminist action research:

Staff and students collaboratively identified theoretical articles that the group will read and critically analyze. Seminars to discuss these papers were held by staff and students jointly at least monthly. There were no formal summaries of the papers read and discuss but students were expected to learn from these and use what they have learnt to reflect on research undertaking and align their research practice with feminist principles. The papers were as follows:


III. Experiences of Feminism in Southern Africa: 9h00-10h30 Session


2. Conference Attendance:

Student trainees were encouraged and coached on how to apply for conference attendance, put together conference presentations and secure funding to attend the Conference. This has been possible where a student had data. Thandeka presented her Honors research findings at two conferences in 2011: one local and the other International (see appendix 1). We attribute Thandeka’s courage to do this to her (and her supervisor’s) involvement in this AGI project. It is very unusual for honours students to be able to present their research findings at conferences as soon as they finish their project. She probably was the only one in her class of 52 in 2011. The students will be expected to attend a Conference on LBTI youth and education in May where they will be expected to present the findings on the AGI project. This platform will provide them with invaluable experience that may be applied elsewhere once they leave the project. It is a platform that offers widespread opportunities, not only in research but in developmental and outreach programmes.

**Eastern Cape and Cape Town Conference (attended)**

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<th>Date</th>
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<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>23 September 2011</td>
<td>Peer education in South Africa: Strengths and perils</td>
<td>Ms P.T. Mdletshe</td>
<td>Eastern Cape: East London Garden Court</td>
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<tr>
<td>23-24 November 2011</td>
<td>Female condom as a prevention tool for young transgender people in South African township</td>
<td>Ms P.T. Mdletshe</td>
<td>Cape Town: Upper Eastside Hotel</td>
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### Papers submitted for conference attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper title</th>
<th>Conference details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies for negotiating undisclosed paternal identity in the home among young people in Mpumalanga and Northern Cape provinces in South Africa</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>Thandeka Mdletshe</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstinence VS. Condomisation: peer educators’ attitude towards the female condom</td>
<td>June 2012, ICP 2012 Conference, Cape Town</td>
<td>Thandeka Mdletshe</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
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### 3. Action Research Practical Application

Whilst students were being exposed to theoretical input they were at the same time allowed learning how to collect data in action research through participatory research methods. Stepping Stones (Rachel Jewkes, Nduna, & Jama, 2002) was used as an opportunity for students to engage with participatory methods of both delivering an intervention and collecting data for action research purposes.

As part of this practical experience, students were expected to attend classes on qualitative methods for the duration of the project. In these seminars, students gained theoretical knowledge on qualitative methods with the use of a textbook and class notes. The first two seminars delved into what qualitative research is and what it is not. They looked at how this compares with quantitative methods. It was established during these seminars that there is, in fact, a need for qualitative research. Many myths were dispelled in the process and the practical application of these methods was considered with the focus on data collection methods.

Discussions on various types of qualitative analysis were covered during the lectures including, feminism, narrative, insider/outsider perspective, phenomenology etc. This analysis was tested through presentations and an assignment that allowed students to learn how to analysis from real transcripts. The conduction of field work, how it is conducted and the limitation therein were also explored. It was
further established that research is not only academic in nature, but logistic and administrative as well. Since researchers often work in teams, peer review is a common way of ensuring the trustworthiness of the data by letting your peers evaluates your work.

4. Administration: (Tidimalo and Thandeka)

Project administration skills are important in successfully running a research project. In recognition of this we also gave the student trainees an opportunity to gain skills in project administration. An office was secured for them in the Department of Psychology, fully equipped with a computer and access to internet and email.

*Working with the principal researchers—Peace Kiguwa and Mzikazi Nduna Tidimalo and Thandeka were expected to:*

- Assist the researcher(s) with organizing and setting up meetings and workshops as well as taking notes during these events
- Prepare and submit conference abstracts and present at conferences (Where a need arises)
- Organise and attend research trainings in or outside campus
- Prepare and revise drafts of the project report
- Manage the diary of events related to the research project activities
- Ensure that all claims (e.g. remuneration, transcriber, editor etc...) are submitted on time
- Follow up on claims to make sure that they are paid
- Deal with queries related to payments from the project funds

5. The workshops:

About the Stepping Stones (Welbourn, 1995): Stepping Stones is a training package in gender, HIV, communication and relationship skills. It is also sometimes described as a life-skills training package, covering many aspects of our lives, including why we behave in the ways we do, how gender, generation and other issues influence this, and ways in which we can change our behaviour, if we want to.
Stepping Stones was developed between 1993 and 1995, mainly in Uganda, working with a rural community, comprising Muslims, Protestants, Catholics and others, all living together in the same village. The package was designed in response to the vulnerability of most women, men and young people in decision-making regarding sexual behaviour, through men’s gendered patriarchal domination of women and older people’s generally repressive attitudes towards youth. The full title of the original Stepping Stones manual is: Stepping Stones: A training package in HIV/AIDS, communication and relationship skills. To learn more about the Stepping Stones go to the website: http://www.steppingstonesfeedback.org. Steeping Stones has been scientifically evaluated in South Africa (R. Jewkes et al., 2008)

The workshops focused on a core group of 12 participants who were a combination of gay men, lesbian women, heterosexual women and a bisexual bisexual woman. We sought to get the participants immersed in the training manual through practical exercises and reflection exercises at the end of each session. The first few sessions were focused on listening and communicating without judgement. The majority of the participants found the exercises both enlightening and frustrating because all of them have, at one point or another, found themselves yearning for a kind ear to listen to them and did not received it or vice versa.

It was found during the body mapping exercise that sex with the women (regardless of sexual orientation) depended on the person they were engaging in coitus with whereas gay men did not seem to care either way. The gay participants revealed that there is a difference in the way that sexual activity is conducted depending on whether they identify as a top or a bottom. With ‘tops’ being identified as the masculine gays and ‘bottoms’ being identified as the more feminine gays. Some workshops allowed for more discussion while others focused on doing the practical exercises to highlight the purpose of the workshop session.

The session on HIV/AIDS prevention was one that all the participants seemed to find particularly enlightening. It was particularly interesting to find out that the notion of being HIV phobic was pervasive among most of the participants. It seems that conversations about sex with the older generation are quite limited due to the patronising manner in which parents speak to their children. However, one of the participants pointed out that if the correct behaviour was modelled to someone
who is HIV/AIDS phobic, it can change the way that they interact with HIV positive people. It was discerning to find out that not all situations are high risk for contracting HIV/AIDS. Therefore, it is likely that people often have the wrong perceptions of what is high risk. One element that is often taken for granted is how to put on a condom. It became very clear during the exercise, that this was not as easy task as the gay men took three tries in comparison with one try for the women in an attempt to put on a condom correctly. Hence, it appeared that people are often unaware if their limitations and/or ignorance with regards to sexual protection. This may be one of the reasons for the continued transmission of the virus: when in a hurry to have sex, people may fail to put on the easiest form of protection. During the role play session, it was found that it was somewhat easier to convince a partner not to use protection as opposed to using it.

In addition some of the main reasons given for sexually risky taking behaviour were being “horny”, alcohol consumption, boredom, fun and the like. Nevertheless, despite all the participants having been involved in risk taking behaviour at some point or other in their lives, they all advised against it for other people. We found that, we as humans all take calculated risks all the time which in turn relates to HIV/AIDS so everyone is at a risk of contracting the virus. Even education, does not keep you from being at risk.

The session on relationships was also quite telling. All the participants had to identify as either plungers, waders, testers or delayers. One of the participants (participant 2) pointed out that “there is a clinical psychological reason for people who sit around waiting, and that’s single”. It was clear during the discussion that people act differently in all relationships and that “there is no formula” for getting into relationships.

Some of the participants pointed out that it is imperative that one owns his/her ideas and decisions with respect to relationships. The notion that “life does not happen to you, but that it happens from you”\(^1\) was carried out throughout the research. Plunging, although prima facie perceived as a brave move, was in effect found to be a naïve way of approaching relationships because one would move from one relationship to another thus creating instability and making room for more deep rooted psychological problems to ensue.

\(^1\)Participant 2
It was pointed out during the discussions that the concept of singlehood is not being addressed appropriately. In other words, being single is not necessarily a negative entity, but sometimes a choice not to be in a committed relationship for a number of reasons (some of which were related to commitment readiness, psychological and emotional readiness, or sheer preference to be single). Thus notions around singlehood as a taboo in our society—“you have walls or cobwebs”—tend to perpetuate the stigma that being single means that you are not making an effort or something is wrong with you. It was further suggested that those who claim to choose to be single are in fact making an “excuse.” Thus, all the reasons given for choosing to be single may not be real reasons at all but in fact excuses to avoid getting into a relationship. Therefore the sooner one is honest about the real reasons why they do not want to be in a relationship, the sooner they can own up to their singlehood. There are a number of judgments that will be received by someone when they are single in a society that is obsessed with being in a relationship. Perhaps this stems from the fact that humans are deemed to be people who are supposed to live in unison. Thus when one strays from the norm, they are judged and pressured to conform.

Other issues of interest were discussed with regards to the reasons for having sex. Some of the predominant motives given where rebound as a type of therapeutic session in getting over an ex; “pussy power” for pity sex; boredom; horniness.

At the final workshop, a focused group discussion was held with all the participants in an attempt to get their thoughts about the workshop as a whole in the absence of Mzikazi and Peace. This session was facilitated by Tidi and Zanele. This particular session was important in that it ironed out some of the subtle issues, concerns and potential areas of interest that had been identified during the duration of the workshops. One such area of interest which was raised very early on in the conducting of the workshops was that of the silence among the women in the group or in particular, the lesbian women in the group. However, it is important to note that this dynamic changed as the weeks progressed and this will be discussed in the following.

Generally, most of the participants found the workshops to have been incredibly educational with particular reference to issues of contraception and HIV/AIDS, albeit somewhat useless for them due to their sexual orientation (especially the contraceptives session). The HIV/AIDS session did not provide

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2 Participant 3  
3 Participant 2  
4 Participant 6
completely new information to the participants; however, it did provide additional information that was unfamiliar to them. One area of weakness that seemed to be echoed by the majority of the participants was the fact that the Manual, although teaching about safer and better relationships, it did not necessarily give proper guidelines as to how to improve one’s relationships. As one of the participants candidly noted that “there wasn’t much of ‘how to’ approach problems and how to fix this. If I was part of this with a boyfriend or husband, I don’t think we’d leave equipped to deal with our problems even I had a voice during the forums...”\(^5\) The workshop sessions were generally perceived to be fun and exciting particularly in the way that the exercises were paired with the discussions, thus affording the participants an opportunity to reflect on their experiences during that session. Some participants were predominantly affected by the exercise on the negotiation of condom usage. It was reported that sometimes, they were lax in terms of negotiation but the workshop helped them realize how important it was to have a voice that is heard because HIV/AIDS does not discriminate amongst people. Moreover, these workshops helped to bring to the fore the lives of gay men and to a lesser extent, lesbian women. This disparity was purely due to the transparency of the gay men as opposed to the lesbian women.

This silence amongst the lesbian women was perceived by the gay male participants as a lack of assertiveness on the women’s part. A number of reasons and explanations were provided for this. One of the lesbian women claimed that the questions posed by the Manual were not specific enough and thus she and her fellow counterparts were unable to answer the questions as such\(^6\). Some of the lesbian women agreed with this statement. However, the gay men in the group brought up an important point: they were posed with the same general questions however, they took into cognisance the fact that the research was focused on their unique experiences as gay men and therefore they chose to bring that to the forefront as often as possible throughout the forums.

The women then responded to this argument by stating that a) it never occurred to them to separate their experiences from general female experiences, and b) they did not see the need to divide because women everywhere have many shared experiences regardless of sexual orientation. One of the possible reasons for the fluidity of lesbian women and other women alike was attributed to the fact that when a man is gay, he is treated differently by his family and his society ("they don’t include you in manly

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\(^5\) Participant 1
\(^6\) Participant 4
stuff”\(^7\), whereas a women identifying as lesbian still has the same expectations falling on her as she would have had she been heterosexual for instance. Thus this may contribute to the challenge that lesbian women suffer in separating themselves or perhaps being assertive.

It was further suggested that the two heterosexual women in the group overpowered the lesbian women in the group by their sheer presence. This is due to the fact that “the heterosexual female experience is everywhere so even if you are in the minority, you are not…”\(^8\) This translates into the way lesbian women are treated by society. There is almost a lack of acknowledgement in that expectations as a woman do not vary based on sexual orientation as opposed to when you are a gay man. As participant 7 pointed out “society expects that women are like this and like this but, society doesn’t expect a lesbian”. That being said, it is very important that people be able to identify themselves in their varying roles depending on the context because even though at home you are expected to perform your “womanly duties”, you navigate around different spaces and should therefore own who you are. “If you have the insight to say that society in a particular situation would expect a lesbian woman to play soccer…we need to say this. People change their expectations with each of the spaces [that they move between]”\(^9\)

However, it is very clear that in contrast to gay men, the lesbian women are women first at home and they “can go be lesbian there outside” as one the participants pointed out\(^10\). It is important to note that the majority of the lesbian women in the forum were from the township and therefore these notions may be greatly influenced by the context within which they live. Since people in these communities tend to harbour negative emotions towards homosexuals and lesbians in particular, participants are forced to identify first as women for their very livelihood. In a country where ‘corrective rape’ is rife, it is to their advantage not to be too obvious about their sexual orientation which might explain their lack of transparency throughout this research process. This is further perpetuated by the feminist movement in that women all have something that is for women thus uniting all women.\(^11\) Hence, the lesbian women identify as part of a larger group first. It was indicated that this is not necessarily a

\(^{7}\) Participant 1  
\(^{8}\) Participant 2  
\(^{9}\) Participant 9  
\(^{10}\) Participant 8  
\(^{11}\) Participant 11
negative thing because lesbians join all women in the struggle against “universal suffrage...so [they] are not silenced at all.”

Some recommendations were suggested during these forums as to what should be included in the adapted manual for the LGBTI community. It was suggested that the manual should subdivide issues and ask issues that are pertinent to the gay community. It was further proposed that the group to be used should consist of a different sample to the one chosen for this particular workshop. Perhaps we ought to use a sample of a mixture of heterosexual and homosexual participants. Thus, we should have an equal number of participants. We should also include transgender participants. Nevertheless, it was evident that the manual did have some positive effect of the participants in one form or another. As one of the participants said, “Too often our thinking was as that we are passive in this process as opposed to giving and I think that you have to give then you’re in a better position to assert what you didn’t like.” It was felt that a lot of the themes covered throughout the manual are too broad and should be more specified in order to get more out the workshops. It was also suggested that a larger, more racially balanced group of gay men would be more representative of the sample and render better data. Perchance, a larger group of lesbian women alone should be made to form part of the forum next so as to allow for them to speak freely about their experiences.

4. Project strengths and challenges

Strengths:

Recruiting participants from GALA will help to promote the revised Stepping Stones Manual with a well-known organization. This Manual may be used later by other organizations with the same focus or those wishing to adapt it for other projects.

12 Participant 12
13 Participant 2
A sense of community developed between the facilitators, the research students and the participants.

Invaluable insight into the lives of all the participants in the group contributed immensely to the writing of this paper.

Research experienced gained throughout the process for the students.

All participants left the workshops feeling g that they had learned something about themselves or other issues that might affect them.

**Challenges:**

There were changes in student registration status during the course of the project. One was not registered in the second calendar year of the projects, one moved to UNISA and the others pursued higher degrees and were hardly available due to MA workload and coursework demands.

An interdisciplinary student team though it has benefits of cross pollination for ideas was a challenge. The supervisors felt that it was easier for them to work with in-house student trainees (within psych department) as they are always within reach. It was not always possible to meet with students from another School and to align their other work with this project.

There was a dual role assumed by three of the project students who are also activists or employed at GALA. The students helped us gain access at GALA but somehow this could pose conflict of interests’ tensions. Tish and Zanele already had strong associations with Gala. Tish was a volunteer and a member of the support groups. It was observed that they sometimes were not sure whether to behave as GALA representatives, students or researchers. One of the students who was initially recruited and agree to be part of the team sat on the ‘communities’ side on the day when the team visited GALA for community access. Noma was a full time employee. She subsequently discontinued engagement early and this seemed to be due to this role confusion and the fact that her MA studies took priority and she was not finding time.

Even though we had a requested a core group at the commencement of the research, we still encountered random participants attending at participating throughout the duration of the study.

Most of the participants knew each other from previous GALA forums therefore this could bias the results in that some information may not have been deliberately disclosed because people don’t want
everyone to know their story. Had the participant’s not known each other, they might have been more open about their unique experiences, in particular the lesbian women in the group.

**Early Outcomes:**

Two members – one active participant from the SS Workshops, Muzi Mthembu and Nomacontsho Pakade, who had been initially part of the project conceptualization and remained available in an advisory capacity on the relations with GALA – were both recipients of the MAC AIDS FUND LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE. This initiative “was launched in collaboration with Columbia University and UCLA in 2007. In 2009, we were joined by a partner in South Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The Leadership Initiative is designed to cultivate emerging leaders in South Africa who will make major, sustainable contributions to HIV/AIDS prevention in the context of gender equality”. Muzi Mthembu, who is also a peer counsellor, will be facilitating PAR Stepping Stones Workshops with young LGBTI adults from GALA.
5. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Conferences attended, (planned for 2012) and presentations

5th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights

The 5th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights will take stock of responses to sexual health and rights on the continent since ICPD, and interrogate the status of sexual health and rights, with particular focus on women, girls, adolescents and youth. The conference is being hosted by the Namibia Planned Parenthood Association (NAPPA), an affiliate member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) under the auspices of the African Federation for Sexual Health and Rights.

Appendix 2: List of publications submitted and planned
1. References


Maple, M. (2010). Locating and Understanding Voices in Narrative Inquiry: A Journey of Discovery. Qualitative Journeys,


Experiences of Feminism in Southern Africa: 9h00-10h30 Sessi


