

Abstract

This study forms part of the broader project by Dr Yael Kadish, aimed at exploring participants' experiences of the annual Wits Silent Protest against sexual violence march. This particular study aimed to explore how male supporter participants in the Silent Protest made meaning of their participation in the protest, how they experienced participation in the protest as men, and to explore the views of the male supporter participants on how the protest can improve the experiences of male supporter participants in order to improve male participation. This study is an exploratory study that made use of a qualitative research design. Six males who participated in the Silent Protest at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2015 were interviewed. Participants were recruited on the day of the protest and data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Reflexivity throughout the research process included considerations of being a woman interviewing men on a relatively sensitive issue, as well as touching on the overlap of advocacy and researcher roles.

Five major themes were derived from the interviews: *Personal Reasons for Participating in the Protest*; *Lack of Knowledge and Understanding of the Purpose of the Protest*; *Sexual Violence Happens only to Women*; *Negotiating one's Sense of Masculinity in the Silent Protest*; and *More Male Faces Needed in the Protest*. These themes illuminated three major findings in this study: The first of these is that the issue of sexual violence was thought by interviewees to be a women's issue. The second is that they often feel that they are unfairly painted as potential perpetrators of sexual assault. Lastly, the third is that participation in the protest appears to be in direct contravention of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

Finally, it is suggested that in order to lower societal desensitization and the level of tolerance for sexual violence and to effect real social change, it is important to include all members of society - individuals from all social and gender groups and categories, not just women.