

Qualitative Methods Talks

Winter semester 2026/27

Healing Through Writing: Community-Led Participatory Practices and the Role of Community Voices in Qualitative Research

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Introductory remarks by Prof. Lynn Hendricks, Stellenbosch University

22 October 2026 | 16:00–18:00 c.t. (starts at 16:15)
Department of Sociology, LMU Munich | Konradstr. 6, Room 109
The talk and discussion will be held in English. All are welcome.

Abstract

Community-based participatory approaches to qualitative research recognise lived experience, local knowledge and community agency as essential to knowledge production. Yet research can reproduce unequal power relationships when communities are treated primarily as sources of data rather than partners in shaping questions, interpreting experiences and determining how findings are shared. This presentation explores Healing Through Writing as a community-led, arts-based participatory practice grounded in relational engagement, dignity and care.

Drawing on practice-based experiences from community initiatives in the Western Cape, South Africa, the presentation considers how reflective writing, storytelling, facilitated dialogue and creative expression can open spaces for women and young people to articulate experiences of identity, belonging, trauma, resilience and social inequality. Particular attention is given to The Letters of Care, a creative letter-writing approach through which participants may reflect on personal relationships, community concerns and the meaning of care. With appropriate consent, such writing can offer contextualised narrative material for qualitative inquiry while allowing participants greater choice over what they disclose and how they express themselves.

The presentation examines the ethical responsibilities associated with these methods, including informed consent, confidentiality, trauma-informed facilitation, emotional safety, participant agency and the responsible use of personal narratives. It also considers the limits of confidentiality in group settings and the importance of distinguishing supportive writing activities from formal therapeutic interventions.

Situated within discussions of community-based participatory research, narrative inquiry and epistemic justice, the presentation asks whose knowledge is recognised, who controls interpretation and what benefits return to communities. It argues that participatory writing can enrich qualitative understanding when accompanied by reflexivity, shared decision-making and accountability beyond data collection. Ultimately, Healing Through Writing invites researchers to move beyond extracting stories towards building relationships in which community members are recognised as knowledge holders, ethical partners and contributors to meaningful social change.

Keywords: Community-Based Participatory Research; Healing Through Writing; The Letters of Care; Narrative Inquiry; Arts-Based Research; Research Ethics; Epistemic Justice.