

Welcome to the Open Lens Study Group!

The Open Lens Study Group is an invitation to anyone holding space for learning and growth. We want to collectively explore and reflect on meanings of diversity, inclusion, identity, power, and privilege for ourselves and in our practices. In this, the intention is to co-create an interactive learning space exploring who we are in relation to the different bodies in the spaces that we hold.

What is the Open Lens Study Group, and how does it work?

The Open Lens Study Group is an online learning and development journey co-created and organized around different themes under the diversity and inclusion umbrella. It is offered in five-week cycles using live online sessions, with each cycle focusing on a specific theme. These sessions will be facilitated by an external practitioner who specialises in the overarching theme.

The general flow of a cycle is the following:

Week 1 - Arriving:

Together with the external practitioner, a member of the Open Lens Study Group will hold space for getting to know each other, establishing group rules and opening the cycle's theme.

Weeks 2 to 4 - Diving deeper:

The external practitioner will lead the group through exploring and reflecting on the theme, ourselves and our practice.

Week 5 - Moving further:

The last session of each cycle serves as space to close the theme, connect learning and bridge to the next theme. The external practitioner of the following cycle will be invited to join this session as an observer.

The sessions are live and will not be recorded to allow the group to explore the theme in a safer, brave space. The concrete dates and

times of the sessions will be available before the application. Each participant is responsible for their own learning and growth.

Each cycle will have a dedicated Slack channel, which will be the primary way of communication in between the live sessions. The external practitioner and the group are in full ownership of this channel. So, it is up to them to choose how to best use this space (sharing resources, reflections, and beyond).

You can discover our upcoming cycle [here](#).

Who is the Open Lens Study Group for?

The study group is open for everyone who holds space for learning and growth and wants to reflect on the intersection of diversity and inclusion and their practice. Those can be facilitators, teachers, mentors, support persons, coaches or whatever you call yourself.

We welcome both folks already working on the core topics in relation to themselves and their practice and those at the beginning of their journey. We believe that un- and re-learning inclusive and reflective practices is a life-long adventure.

How can you join the Open Lens Study Group?

Each cycle of the Open Lens Study Group will have an application phase. For the first cycle starting in September 2021, we decided to accept participants on a first-come-first-served basis. The maximum number of participants in each cycle of the Study Group is 25 people.

For each following cycle, participants can choose to recommit. Spots that are available will then be open on a first-come-first-served basis

again. This procedure might change based on the learning of each cycle.

Check out the upcoming cycle and sign up [here](#).

Who created and organises the Open Lens Study Group?

The Open Lens Study Group was born out of the desire of a group of individuals to self-reflect, learn and grow personally and professionally. The goal is to increase our own awareness and practice around diversity, inclusion, identity, power and privilege, and develop new resources and practices to support other people doing the same in the spaces that we hold.

We envision this study group as a collective that works collaboratively, taking turns in different tasks and sharing responsibilities so that the initiative eventually becomes sustainable and self-organised. We learn as we go, and we welcome everyone who wants to join us on this journey!

Should you have any questions, you can reach us [here](#). But, please, be aware that the organisers of the Open Lens Study Groups are volunteers, so the response time might differ.

Cycle 1 - Intersectionality

At the core of the Open Lens Study Group is the belief that all layers of our identities are interconnected and create a very specific lived experience. Intersectionality, for us, is an approach to understand and work with this diversity of diversity.

Therefore, we decided for the theme of our first cycle to focus on exactly that. Together with our first external practitioner Heleneard

Louw (he/his), the group will explore intersectionality and how it relates to discrimination and oppression, power and privilege, and the politics of identity within the different spaces we hold.

External Practitioner - Helenard Louw

Helenard formerly worked for the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. As an intersectional pro-feminist researcher, who is currently pursuing a PhD at Vrije University of Amsterdam, his area of work is the “construction, embodiment, performance and representation of masculinities and disability among the coloured racial identity in South Africa”. Having a background in Psychology, Organisational Psychology, and Gender Studies, he currently explores the intersection of race, disability, masculinity, and violence.

In his practice, he uses life stories and photo-voice to explore the narratives and experiences of coloured men who acquired a spinal cord injury through interpersonal violence. His work looks closely at meanings of identity and embodiment, and what happens when identities collide. Looking forward to working with the Open Lens Study Groups, he is most excited about the co-production of knowledge that the space will offer, but also what it means to, collectively, learn and unlearn parts of ourselves and others in an intimate and online setting.

We decided to work with Helenard not only because his area of research and work matches very well with the theme we will explore in the first cycle, but mainly because we were amazed by his deep connection, understanding and commitment to approaching things through an intersectional lens and a critical eye.

Since our first contact with Helenard, he has shown nothing but openness, genuine curiosity, self-awareness, an ability to grasp our needs and expectations (as well as our hesitations) for this space, while being ready to create an experience that takes all of that into account. We are convinced that Helenard will help us all create a space of learning, kindness and deep reflection.

Dates and Application

The first cycle will take place in September 2021. The live sessions will be held on every Wednesday of the month, specifically on the following days and times:

Week 1 - 1st of September 2021 at 19:00 (SAST)

Week 2 - 8th of September 2021 at 19:00 (SAST)

Week 3 - 15th of September 2021 at 19:00 (SAST)

Week 4 - 22nd of September 2021 at 19:00 (SAST)

Week 5 - 29th of September 2021 at 19:00 (SAST)

Please note that some regions of the world might have a time change during the period above. It is the participant's responsibility to what time sessions will take place in their own time zone.

For cycle 1, we are offering the following options for financial contribution:

- I can pay the regular fee of 100 euros and an additional amount of XXX to help support another participant.
- I can pay the full regular fee of 100 euros.
- At this moment, I can only commit to paying the XXX.

[Apply now](#)

Before selecting one of the options, please consider the following:

- The difference in general income between countries in different parts of the globe: for example, the minimum wage in the UK (1,661 EUR) and in Brazil (178 EUR).
- The different life circumstances that one can experience that could justify financial support: Unemployed/full-time student/ financially supporting family members/ etc.
- For members of an affected, marginalised and/or minority community, entering into learning spaces like this can include huge amounts of emotional labour. As a participant, will you mostly learn from affected, marginalised and/or minority communities or are you a member of those communities who will contribute to the learning of others through your lived experience?

Refund policy

Should you have any questions regarding Cycle 1, you can reach us here. Please, be aware that the organisers of the Open Lens Study Groups are volunteers, so the response time might differ.

The next cycle will take place in November and December 2021 and the theme will be announced [here](#) once it is defined.

Don't want to participate in this cycle, but want to contribute to this initiative? Support us [here](#).

Values and visions of the Open Lens Study Group

Safer brave space

Untitled Poem by Beth Strano

'There is no such thing as a "safe space" -

We exist in the real world.

We all carry scars and have caused wounds.

This space

seeks to turn down the volume of the world outside,

and amplify voices that have to fight to be heard elsewhere.

This space will not be perfect.

It will not always be what we wish it to be

But

It will be our space together,

and we will work on it side by side.'

Inspired by this poem, we aim to create a safer brave space - a space in which you feel safe enough to show up as your fullest self and brave enough to push the boundaries of your being and thinking. We want to hold this space through truth and love while acknowledging that we are all on an ever-changing journey of learning, un-learning and re-learning.

Co-creation and shared responsibility

The Open Lens Study Group was dreamed and thought into existence by those who stepped up when the idea was first raised.

This moment was sparked by concrete discussions and work around diversity and inclusion in facilitation. We believe that this does not give us ownership of the themes and spaces created within the framework of this initiative. We don't understand ourselves as leaders or experts in this space and are aware of the limitations and biases our own backgrounds bring with them.

Based on that, we want the Open Lens Study Group to be a truly co-created space in which the future of the initiative is shaped by everyone taking part in it. We hope that the organisation, development and themes will be carried by whoever in the community feels called to it and be rooted in the learning and reflecting of everyone involved. That also means that people can step back from organising to just participating at any point along the journey. This initiative will exist as long as folks commit to holding this space for each other.

De-centering culturally dominant voices

To this day, both spaces of education and learning and the work around diversity and inclusion, are shaped strongly by culturally dominant ideas and practices. Those are often rooted in Europe and Northern America. The experts are often white, cis, formally educated and able-bodied.

With the Open Lens Study Group, we commit to actively reaching out to knowledge holders in affected, marginalised and/or minority communities to join us as external practitioners. We seek to prioritise voices from the Global South. We encourage those practitioners to lead the group using whatever tools and resources they deem appropriate, exposing us to diverse approaches and knowledge and challenging our comfort.

Compensation actual and emotional labour

Holding and organising spaces of learning and growth are demanding a huge amount of actual and emotional labour from everyone involved. That gets amplified if those people come from affected, marginalised and/or minority communities. To honour and compensate everyone's contributions to this space, we adhere to the following principles:

- Providing just compensation for the external practitioner sharing their knowledge and skills.
- Waving/reducing the fees for those volunteering to organise and handle the logistics of a cycle.
- Reimbursing those providing infrastructure for the study group (e.g. platform subscriptions, payment system, hosting).
- Allowing members of affected, marginalised and/or minority communities to reflect on their likely emotional labour of contributing to the learning of others when choosing their participation fee.

Accessibility and sustainability

Spaces of learning and growth are often only accessible for a small group of people. The barriers to them are as diverse as the learners interested in them. To account for those while creating a sustainable format, we actively enforce the following principles:

- Accessible language - The working language of the study group is English, but we do our best to keep it as simple as possible. External practitioners are guided to reflect that in their facilitation. We also are cautious of the barrier of academic and conceptual language, terminology, and concepts.
- Participant driven approaches first - Even though we are encouraging the external practitioners to use the methods and approaches that they see fit, we also challenge them to create interactive and experience-driven sessions instead of lectures or similar formats.
- Just participation fees - We are aiming to make the Open Lens Study Group a financially self-sustaining initiative while also being aware that participation fees are the main access barrier. Therefore we decided to give participants the power to self-determine their financial contribution to account for both the privilege and oppression they individually experience.

- Pay it forward - At the end of each circle, we will share the actual costs and revenue of the cycle as well as give the opportunity for participants to contribute an additional amount to the sustainability of the Open Lens Study Group based on the value and learning each individual participant got out of the session.