

Research that affirms and disrupts

21 June 2017 | Story and Photos Kate-Lyn Moore.

<https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2017-06-21-research-that-affirms-and-disrupts>

What does it mean to be a young trans person in Cape Town?

This was the question underpinning Sorrel Pitcher's master's thesis in psychology.

For the past year, Pitcher has been facilitating a [PhotoVoice](#) project with a group of trans young adults.

“This specific project focused on young trans people's experiences, about what it means to be a young trans person in Cape Town today,” Pitcher explained.



The project culminated in an exhibition, which took place in the UCT psychology department on 1 June, where participants displayed their photo stories, thereby taking ownership of their own narratives.

[Text above reads] “As a Trans person, much like the sea-snails’ trail in this photograph, I struggle to find direction on my journey sometimes – in terms of transition as well as life-wise and career-wise. My path through transitioning feels like it has been going in circles for years, and whenever I get close to progress I somehow end up going in the complete wrong direction.”

Pitcher's project forms part of a larger effort within the Department of Psychology to work with young people on matters of identity, gender and sexuality. They favour the PhotoVoice method, which brings to the fore the knowledge and experiences of young people in relation to their identities.

"We find that much of the research being done by psychologists and other social scientists tends to produce knowledge from an adult perspective that centres adult questions and ways of working," said Associate Professor Dr Floretta Boonzaier, who supervised this project.

Challenging knowledge creation

"PhotoVoice projects aim to create spaces where those who have historically not been given a platform can share their experiences through photography and storytelling," said Pitcher.

In this way, PhotoVoice presents a challenge. It allows for the world to be viewed from perspectives that differ from those who have traditionally been in control of narratives.

The project was run as a collaboration between the [Triangle Project](#) – a Cape Town-based non-profit organisation offering services to protect and promote the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people – and UCT, a partnership that was brought together by the UCT [Knowledge Co-Op](#).

Trans – parencey:
**The Lives of South African Trans
Youth Told Through Photography**

Thursday, 1st June 2017
6.30pm for 7pm
UCT Psychology Department foyer
(PD Hahn Psychology Building)
Refreshments will be served
RSVP: 30 May
uct.photovoice.project@gmail.com



The invitation to the exhibition

"When we were approached to be a part of this project, it was a natural fit," explained Matthew Clayton, the Triangle Project's research, advocacy and policy coordinator.

“It is about letting people control their own narratives and shaping conversations and, especially for LGBTIQ+ people, shaping those conversations away from what other people want to speak about (sex and death, for example) is very important,” Clayton said.

“Our project doesn’t claim to represent all young trans people in Cape Town or South Africa. We worked with a very small group of people, and it is just an insight into their experiences at a particular point in time and in a particular social and political context,” said Pitcher.

Disrupting disciplines

The project, which culminated in an exhibition in the psychology department on 1 June, aims to disrupt and hopefully change the way trans bodies are spoken about within psychology and psychiatry.

The exhibition serves two purposes, Pitcher explained. “Firstly, to create a space where young trans people can share their photo narratives and represent their identity on their own terms. Secondly, exhibitions are visually powerful events that can contribute to awareness around social issues and facilitate change.

“I think it is very significant that this exhibition is taking place within the psychology department, because psychology and psychiatry as disciplines have very problematic histories with trans people and trans bodies and identities, in terms of pathologising them. That is still something that is very much ongoing today.”

Pitcher’s hope is that this work will contribute to more affirming research.



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UCT KNOWLEDGE CO-OP

The research for this exhibition was conducted as a Masters Dissertation based on a request for such research by the **Triangle Project**.

The UCT Knowledge Co-op facilitated this collaborative project.

See <http://www.knowledgco-op.uct.ac.za> or
Contact us at barbara.schmid@uct.ac.za / 021 – 650 4415