

Title: Through our eyes: *An action research project exploring the identities and experiences of NEETs in a South African township.*

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work I am submitting for assessment contains no section copied in whole or in part from any other source unless explicitly identified in quotation marks and with detailed, complete and accurate referencing.

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to give voice to the subjective experiences of NEETs (youth not in employment, education or training), often viewed as risk taking, apathetic and a strain on the economy and to think about their identities differently. The aim was also to provide ways to forge new versions of themselves in the future, allowing the participants an opportunity to ‘read the world’ differently and to think about new possibilities, through recollecting the past and exploring their present place in the world. This study utilised participatory action research and narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of a group of NEETs in a township in South Africa, and together with the researcher were involved in active engagement with their social worlds, through photographic documentation and in-depth interviews.

The data were analysed using thematic and narrative analysis. The focus of the narrative analysis was to understand the meaning that the participants made of their own experiences, and the thematic and visual analysis focussed on understanding their context, their interaction with place and people in forming their identities, and the opportunities and versions of identities that they thought were possible in the future.

The significance of these findings points to the past and the effects of South Africa’s history on youth identity. However, despite the structural constraints that impact on youth growing up in disadvantaged townships, and the impact that these constraints have on their identities, these youth have found ways to challenge the stereotypes that define their lives, and in different ways offer glimmers of hope for their futures. Their identities, though impacted by their interaction with their environment and the people in their context, are remarkably complex and encouraging. Furthermore, this study provided insight into the issues facing ‘at risk’ youth, and allows for new possibilities for their issues and concerns to be addressed.

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To Organisation for Youth (OFY), thank you for allowing me to use your space, for being supportive throughout the research process, but mostly for supporting the young men that participated in the study, and the other youth in your community that you work with. Keep up the good work.

To all my family and friends, who helped in big and small ways to get this research report completed, thank you.

This work is dedicated to the young men who participated in my study. Thank you for sharing your stories with me, and allowing me into your personal experiences and aspirations. I have learnt so much from all of you.

DEDICATION

To the young men who graciously shared their stories

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