



Conversations on Compassion Podcast

Still Here, Still Queer: Creating Art & Spaces of Belonging for LGBTQ Youth with Chelsea Farrar and Russ Toomey

Russ Toomey: We know from research that doing things like using the pronoun that a young person is asking a teacher to use reduces suicide by about 60%.

Music intro

Leslie Langbert: Welcome to Conversations on Compassion. I'm your host, Leslie Langbert. Today, I have two guests in the conversation. We're talking today about a unique community/university collaboration, specifically between the University of Arizona Museum of Art and our local community. This program is called 'Mapping Q'. It's the creation of my friend and colleague Chelsea Farrar, who is part of the conversation today, a community nonprofit, and young people who are part of the LGBTQ community here in southern Arizona.

We're going to hear about what Mapping Q is, how young people get involved, and my friend and colleague, Russ Toomey, Professor in Family Studies and Human Development, is also going to share about some research findings around the impact of the Mapping Q program as well as broader research that's emerging around how we can best support LGBTQ youth to thrive in their lives, in their communities, in school settings everywhere.

You can find more about the Museum and about Mapping Q by visiting the links in our show notes. Enjoy the conversation.

Leslie: All right. Thank you guys so much for coming and having this conversation today.

Chelsea Farrar: Thank you for having us.

Leslie: I'm so, so excited to talk Mapping Q! So before we get into it, I want to let you to introduce yourselves. Chelsea, you want to start?

Chelsea: Sure. I'm Chelsea Farrar, Curator of Community Engagement at the University of Arizona Museum of Art, and I am the founder and facilitator of Mapping Q.

Russ: And I'm Russ Toomey. I'm a professor in Family Studies and Human Development, and I have studied LGBTQ youth mental health for about the past 20 years now, and have been able to work with Chelsea on the Mapping Q project.

Leslie: This is always such a joy for me to be able to be in conversation with people that I care about so much, and whose work I admire so much here at the University. So, I'm so excited to talk about Mapping Q.... One of the really incredible programs that is at the University of Arizona Museum of Art.



And we're going to just get into all of it. We're going to talk about what Mapping Q is. We're going to talk a little bit about the impact of that program on young people who have taken part in it.

I'm hoping that our listeners are going to feel inspired in some way to either, you know, want to kind of recreate something like this in their community or to become involved, or that it just helps to open the heart, open the mind a little bit more.

So Chelsea, I know Mapping Q was and is something that you envisioned and brought to life. So let's just start there.

What is Mapping Q?

Chelsea: Yeah. So Mapping Q is an art-based program that focuses on self-harm and suicide reduction specifically for LGBTQ youth ages 13 to 24. That's how we are defining youth, and in that sense and it came out of some experiences that I had as a classroom teacher. I was teaching high school art here in Tucson, and was the sponsor of our GSA, our Gay Straight Alliance Club, and I had youth that were constantly coming into my room, expressing experiences where they felt like they weren't being treated as equal to their cis/straight peers on the campus.

And you know this was like back in 2014 or 2013, and I was assuming that I kind of understood what the problem was, but I was really interested in the idea of the high school as a space...how the students were experiencing that space, because how they were experiencing it was, you know, they were saying it was different for them than their other peers.

So we created a map, and I invited them to mark the spaces on campus, where they felt like they were like either unsafe or they were being treated in ways that were othering, you know, bullying through words, through physical interactions, and they were to mark those on the map.

And we came back, and I was really kind of thrown by the results of that map.

It was very informative for me, as I saw that the highest rates of where they were marking those types of occurrences, those negative experiences they were having on campus were either in classrooms or in our administrative offices. So, in the spaces where the adults were in charge were the places where they felt less safe.

And I was expecting it to be bathrooms and hallways, this peer-to-peer interactions and that wasn't the overall impact that those students were experiencing. And that was really kind of game-changing for the way that I thought of these educational spaces, and I was really curious about how that looks in informal education spaces.



I was at the time pursuing a graduate degree here at the U. of A and I had a position at the Museum of Art, and they were really open to applying that same kind of art-based research in the space. So we did something similar in collaboration with the Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation, and we invited the youth to come in and make art. But in and leading up to the art making, they mapped the space, and where they saw what representations they saw on the walls and the labels and the signage.

And obviously you know, well, not obvious to everyone, but in some ways that was not shocking to me- Is that what they were seeing is *not* seeing themselves in the space. And so through art making they are able to create works of art that are about themselves, about the spaces that they want to see themselves in how they imagine themselves now, in the future.

You know, trying to think of positive representations that counteract the negative representations, and then we do an exhibition of the work.

And we have been doing that since 2014. So I think we're...I've lost count now, because we've had several years where we've done multiple exhibitions. So I think we're probably into our eighth or ninth exhibition that we'll be doing in probably 2023.

Leslie: That's awesome. And, it's heartbreaking as I'm hearing you talking about mapping out students' experiences, and where they're experiencing marginalization, bullying, othering, and that it's happening in spaces where there is supposed to be, right?- this supportive, caring, adult presence.

Russ, I know so much of your research is around how can schools and institutions really identify, create, foster, support, supportive policy and spaces for young people? So I want to invite you to kind of jump in on this.

Russ: Yeah, I think just thinking about that initial mapping activity that created out of that was the creation of Mapping Q in the museum space, it's actually inconsistent with all of the other research on bullying that's been conducted with young people when we don't ask their sexual orientation.

So in the kind of, quote, general bullying literature that's focused on bullying broadly, not specific to sexual orientation gender identity, we see that the places that Chelsea was expecting to see the bullying - bathrooms, locker rooms, hallways... that is, that's where other researchers who have used kind of heat maps in their research - have found the bullying to occur.

But it is not surprising that when we are looking at LGBTQ youth, we see them identifying spaces where there are adults in the administrative office. There are several studies, some of



which I've been involved in as a researcher, where we find that LGBTQ youth experience harassment, or bullying in ways of, for example, dress code enforcement.

So a teacher, you know, has an issue with whatever the young person is wearing that's maybe inconsistent with their gender assigned at birth, and they get sent to the principal's office. The principal's office, then reinforces that heteronormativity with that dress code, and the student gets punished, right? And so we can see it play out in the very policies of the school that are written from and enforced from a heteronormative perspective.

And so we know we have this this kind of this group of 5 policies that we say are best practices, but in reality it's, you know, having a nondiscrimination policy that includes LGBTQ people, different sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions.

Those are often just words, unfortunately, and we do see in national surveys that you know young people are reporting high levels of percentages of young people reporting harassment, victimization from school administrators, from teachers, from the adults in their life that are supposed to be caring for them.

Leslie: I know that we are living in a time when there are many adults who are deeply biased, and they're ignorant in a lot of ways, and are, you know, sort of actively or intentionally kind of enforcing these policies that are harmful.

But I also want to believe that there are other adults that simply just are unaware, and are maybe questioning or thinking about, like. 'Oh, my God! Am I in a space where I think that I'm providing a supportive environment for young people? And am I not aware that I am actually *not* doing that?'

Can we talk a little bit about what that looks like in terms of supportive welcoming spaces How do we begin to shift that and change that?

Chelsea: Yeah, from my experience teaching on the high school campus, I think you're right. I think there are some adults, teachers, administrators who see themselves as supportive, you know? Maybe don't identify as allies, but maybe some do, and yet are still performing and engaging and interacting with students in ways that are potentially harmful unintentionally.

And then there's institutional policies that are in play that are heteronormative, and it's what I like to call the 'hidden curriculum' in these spaces and formal and informal educational spaces. It's the policies that the students sometimes don't know about. It's the ways in which those policies are inequitably applied.

Dress code policies like Russ mentioned, as well as you know, rules about public displays of affection that you know when a boyfriend and girlfriend kiss each other before you know, they



get to class, teachers overlook it. Technically it's in the Rule book. You know, it's against school policies on some campuses, but it usually gets overlooked. But when it's, you know, queer or gay students those policies are often applied, and so students are getting in trouble in the ways that they're literally seeing their friends next to them, you know, not. So it shows up in various ways.

I think the first thing is getting adults to recognize that there is a problem, and to have that sense of empathy and trust that when students say this is, I don't feel like 'I'm being treated equally. I'm not safe' to believe them.

And I think that's something that Russ talks quite a bit about is, you know, believing in youth and trusting youth that they are the wisest people in the room when it comes to their personal experience.

Russ: Yeah, I mean, what we know is that when youth feel like they are being seen, when they are being validated for who they are, and when they see adults in their environment trying to do what's best, it doesn't mean that the adult is actually engaging in the behavior that's what is best for the young person, but they see them *trying* to do so.

So a teacher may misgender maybe by accident a young person. That young person needs to see that adult in that space, apologize and move on, and then do better the next time. And we know from research that doing things like using the pronoun that a young person is asking a teacher to use reduces suicide by about 60%. So we can work with teachers. We can work with adults. I do a lot of trainings with adults in spaces like schools.

How can they show up for their LGBTQ students better? And, in fact, I say LGBTQ students, but they're actually showing up for all of their students better when they show up for their LGBTQ students better, because it's showing that community that 'I care about everybody in this classroom, and I expect you to care about everybody in this classroom because I'm the adult modeling that behavior'.

And so when we can engage and teach teachers or other administrators how to show up better for their students, hopefully, we see change. You know, there aren't many studies that actually look at whether we see change after we do these educational opportunities, professional development sessions. But we can attempt to teach adults that just by making these quote unquote simple changes of using a kid's pronoun - using a student's name in the way that they're asking them to use them is one of the easiest forms of suicide prevention.

Leslie: Yeah to me, everything that you all are sharing really speaks to this deep sense of building community and belongingness and connection. I want to explore, too. So for young



people that come into Mapping Q when they come into the program, how does that unfold? How do students get involved? What is the program like for them?

Chelsea: Yeah. Well, it's you know you self-identify and self-select where it's open, it's free. We are not awesome with our consistency in being able to program it, and that's you know just due to limitations of staff size at our museum, Unfortunately, and then we have a limitation of of studio space.

So we're always kind of beholden to what other organizations we can partner with, that will offer up and have space for us to operate in, whether that's the University School of Art or the Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation. We work with the Tucson Museum of Art, you know we're we're always kind of looking for folks to collaborate with, and that sometimes determines our schedule for how many sessions we're able to offer. But typically we're trying to run about 6 to 8 sessions a week.

Leslie: Russ and I, when we did compassion training together several years ago with non-binary and transgender youth, one of the things that we were so struck by was the sense of community that was created with the cohort of young people that felt like that was so much of a part of the impact is that it was like, you know, young people all together building this connection, so is it similar in Mapping Q? Where it's a cohort of a number of young people that are continually coming together again and again and again, and building those friendships and connections?

Chelsea: Yeah, I mean it sometimes depends, you know, like any educator knows that each cohort of young folks that you get together. It's always a little bit different, depending on the personalities and where people are at. But we definitely have seen that happen.

We've had youth that have started at age...I think the youngest was youth starting at age 15 and aged out -you know, just did their final Mapping Q that they could do at age 24. There are youth that are coming back repeatedly.

And then, you know, because they're doing that, they're almost becoming kind of you know, peer leaders and mentors because they're able to show like 'this is what I created last year', or 'this is how I solved that problem' or 'this is how I wrote my label' and it's really fantastic to see those youth come back again. It's also validating as a facilitator, as an educator to know that there's something about it that they want to come back.

And yeah, there are youth that have forged really strong bonds through their art making. You know, seeing someone else that not only identifies as queer but is also an artist. And that is kind of like another micro community within that community.



And that's also really, really wonderful to see and see them continue to support them each other after they have aged out of Mapping Q.

Leslie: That's awesome. I want to touch on that, too, on the process of creating all the art, the different media that is part of Mapping Q and the impact for young people. And is this... so, this is actually kind of 2 questions, but the different media that's created in Mapping. Q.

But I know that, Chelsea, you and Russ have worked together around, you know, really kind of looking at the impact of Mapping Q. And so I definitely want us to, you know, to have an opportunity to share about that as well.

Chelsea: Yeah, I could share a little bit about the materials that we make available. And then, Russ, if you want to talk about the Photo Voice, which is really where we're able to get some of the really great research data and results.

So, I mean the original idea with Mapping Q is not to be available for youth who were already into making art. I mean it often is, and those who self-select, and they're like 'I really like making art, and this is a space I can come make art for 2 hours a day for free'. We get several who are into that. But also, most of the time we're just getting youth who just don't have a space to belong in, and they hear from their peers that you know, we're a good space, so it's all trying to look at materials, and prompts and inspirations in an artistic way that is open for all youth.

So they don't... no one has to have an art background. They just have to be willing to take a risk and figure out what is the way that they want to make a mark or multiple marks? What's their kind of artistic legacy that they want to try to uncover through Mapping. Q.

So we, you know, watercolor is one of those mediums that is frustrating, but also really freeing, and we've seen some youth do some amazing work through Mapping Q through watercolor...you know, other art materials, acrylic, collage...

We have a lot of youth that you know they start with our materials, and they start bringing their own because they just get like, really encouraged, and you know art making is also about problem solving and figuring like 'I have this thing that I want to say. I don't know how to do it', and the more that they do it, the more that they uncover that they can find other ways to express that, and that's always really exciting to see them bring in their own materials too, like they figured out how to solve that communication expression problem.

We're always really open to what the youth are hoping to uncover.



They always bring like really great problems to me of like, 'I want to work with ceramics.' And I'm like, 'okay, we'll figure it out. I have no idea how we're going to get it fired, but we'll figure out along the way.'

Yeah, and then we've never been able to do photography. But Russ can talk about the Photo Voice where we were actually able to do photography for the first time.

Russ: Yeah, let me actually talk about how we got to Photo Voice. Because I think that's really interesting and important. So back in 2017, I believe it was. Yes, it was right after the inauguration of a certain President, and we had gotten some grant money to do some data collection, looking, you know, quantitatively at what is the impact on mental health belonging well-being, resilience, support over the course of Mapping Q.

And so we surveyed the participants at the beginning of Mapping Q, and then we surveyed them at the end of Mapping Q that year.

And what we found was, I mean, pretty incredible. I mean, we found significant decreases in this concept that we call 'thwarted belongingness'.

So this idea that a person doesn't belong in any of the spaces that they inhabit, right? So constantly navigating the world feeling like I don't belong here. I don't belong here. I don't belong there. Where do I belong? And Mapping Q, Participating in Mapping Q, reduced 'thwarted belonging'. They felt like they more, they felt, increases, I guess, in that they belong that they had a place at the beginning.

in addition to that, they reported higher levels of peer support, higher levels of school support, so that cohort some of the youth actually switched schools to be with the other participants that they had met through Mapping Q because they heard about the different experiences in those different schools, and they were able to move to those schools.

We didn't see increases in parent support. which is actually a good research check. You wouldn't expect a program like Mapping. Q- that's not engaging parents- to increase parent support. So we saw all of these amazing peer support type increases.

We also saw decreases in depression which is incredibly important for this population.

So the next year, I go back to survey them again, and they say, 'Russ, we don't want to do your surveys. We hate taking surveys. Why are you doing a survey again?'

And I said, 'Fair, fair enough, you know i'm a researcher. So this is what I do for a living, but fair enough. I'm going to listen to you.' And so with the participants, the prior year through interviewing we came up with the idea of doing a Photo Voice project where we provided the



participants that particular year with old-school disposable cameras, which was an interesting time-travel endeavor for myself, and we had them create prompts of 'what do you want to take pictures of that you think would be meaningful for others to learn about you?'

And so they decided on 2 prompts. They took pictures of 'Things That It Looks Like';
My identity feels like....

My community Looks like....

It was just so incredibly insightful. I mean one of the things that I always go back to when I'm presenting or working with this data is this idea that the community, what community looked like to them were things like their pets.

Their animals that were in their environment, you know. And this idea of pets being those like, you know, warm bodies in our environments that are there to unconditionally love us and support us when other humans in our environment may not do that same thing.

Taking photos of nature. There were so many pictures of nature and that connection with the world around us, even if you can't get it in spaces that you're inhabiting every day like a school.

and just incredible. I mean, the richness of those photos was striking in terms of being able to convey who one is and where they feel seen and valued and respected.

Chelsea: I was really worried at first when we realized. Okay, we're going to have to use disposable cameras.

And to me, my experience with disposable cameras is like it's a cheap product. It's like it's not the real, right? It's this fake plastic thing, but the youth who had never experienced such a thing it was like this precious object. It was like this kind of like antique historic object that they had never experienced before, so they were so excited to go out and take pictures, because taking a picture with your cell phone is just so normalized they just do it, and they take a picture and you forget about it. It just stays on your phone. It just becomes digital data.

But yeah, they were. They were really really motivated, You know in Mapping Q, some of our issue is getting youth to consistently return, and that's, you know, external factors of you know they get a job or school takes over. You know transportation is also a factor. So we weren't able to collect all of them to print them, to process the film, but we know just through conversations that most of them went out and took a lot of pictures. It was a lot of data for Russ and his grad students to go through.

Leslie: I love that. It's a brilliant, brilliant way to capture experience and an insight beyond our standard ideas of the way we think about research that it is a survey. It's a questionnaire capturing in that way.



So i'm hearing a lot of the threads in this is around that there's so much it feels like there's so much opportunity to expand, both like spaces for art to be created and different media to work with. So I hope folks that are listening to this, if you know you're in a space, have access to some of these resources or studios, is that something that Chelsea, do you feel like that's an avenue of wanting to be able to expand if there, if there are folks out there that are interested and want to reach out and connect?

Chelsea: Yeah, it's a question that I've been feeling since Mapping Q started in 2014, and I know Russ has as well. It's like, what else can Mapping Q do? And I finally had this year uncovered or discovered that the elements of Mapping Q are, or can be there in so many different ways. And the key aspect is this sense of that there is a connection to art-making potentially, and our sense of self-care, and that's really something that I've become really attuned to in this. Mapping Q is giving youth the tools and the strategies to take care of themselves first, and then to take care of their community, second. One can't happen without the other.

So this this idea of like radical self-care is definitely something that is, you know, being talked a lot about in a lot of underserved and marginalized communities in the queer community, especially so that this idea of self-care and art making is something that I'm really trying to play around with at the museum and seeing broader communities on campus and off-campus that we can serve. And so that is an expanded programming offering that we are going to be looking into and creating at the Museum.

Leslie: Love it. Yeah, I feel like we can't practice it enough, that capacity to see ourselves in a more full way, and to really honor our own beauty, really, before we can see others, in their fullness.

Which for me also then, you know, opens the door to recognize that we are all *That*. You know, when we're looking around at every being, we are looking at pieces of The One.

And art is such a to me such a beautiful way to tap into that, because it takes us out of you know, just solely being in cognition and there's not the sense of boundaries or boxes that we need to fit into.

It's beautiful to hear that participants don't need to identify as artists or to have any art experience right? Like we all have the capacity to create and to express to express whatever is within.

Chelsea: I always challenge the statement that when people say, 'I'm not an artist.'

And I think it goes back to this idea as the 'hidden curriculum' again, is we have this institutionalized idea of what it means to be an artist is to illustrate something that looks like a



photograph- that looks exactly like the thing that we're trying to create. And that is such a limited idea of what art is.

There's so many other ways to create art. So I always respond that maybe what you're actually saying is that you cannot draw realistically.

Fine. I'm not great at doing that, either. But there are so many other ways to leave your mark. Some of the youth were really into music, and we were recording their voices and making that available in the space as well. So it doesn't have to be visual art.

So many youth were into music, dance, performance art. There's ways in which we are able to express ourselves. And it's really all about this idea of being vulnerable.

Yes, that's the hard part.

That's what's actually I think the most difficult thing not making the image... it's about being vulnerable and trying something that we maybe haven't tried before, and I think that's a great experience for not just youth, but a lot of us adults, and I point the finger at myself that I that I need to step into that sense of vulnerability as well.

Leslie: you know, as soon as you said the way that we can get caught in thinking that what we need to do is to reproduce almost like photorealistically whatever the other thing is, that was so powerful because it felt to me that it's almost it's. It's the sense of 'I have to reflect back exactly what I imagine the model is, and that there is only that one representation'. And so to just, you know, break that idea apart...

Chelsea: Yeah, it definitely applies to the to what we're trying to do with Mapping Q and Russ with your research, and trying to show like there are so many other ways of being, and they are not threatening, right?

Russ: That's such an important point in this moment that we're in politically, because we have in 2022, the most ever recorded anti-LGBTQ legislation introduced across the country over 200, and I think the last I heard was over 270 anti-LGBTQ bills introduced in State legislatures across the country last year.

We are in week one right now, currently as we are recording this in Arizona, of the State Legislature, and, to my knowledge, there have been at least 5 in the first 3 days now introduced into our Legislature here in Arizona.

And essentially all of these bills are trying to erase any representation of a lived experience of a trans non-binary queer person in our public sphere, particularly in schools. I mean, particularly in K through 12 schools are where most of these bills are targeting the erasure of trans and non-binary youth in particular.



And so to have a space like Mapping Q where they're not only interrogating this, and they're thinking about this, and they're talking about it with the mapping experience, but they're creating work that represents them that is then on display in a museum for other people to see.

They are. They are creating that representation. And how powerful as a young person to be able to create that representation for your community, so that other people coming in can see themselves represented in ways that most queer and trans people have not grown up in spaces, or navigate spaces in their daily, on a daily basis, where they see themselves represented.

And so this idea of you know, do I have to be that heteronormative, cisnormative model that is all around me in society? And for young people grappling with their sexuality, their gender, they actually know who they are. It's they're not seeing that represented back and reflected back. And so Mapping Q allows for that to happen.

Leslie: Beautifully, beautifully stated.

Yeah, I want to talk about the gallery at the Museum of Art for Mapping. Q. I absolutely love, love. That's one of my favorite galleries in the Museum of Art. It's so deeply moving.

I know myself when I go in, and I spend time with all of those pieces of art I come away with such...there's so much there, there's such a deep sense of resilience and hope, and a deep sense of love. A really fierce sense of love in that space. When do those exhibits...when are they part of the gallery? When do they change? How can people access those?

Chelsea: Yeah. So our last Mapping Q Exhibition just came down about 2 weeks ago, and it's in the gallery that you're talking about is what we call 'Our Stories: Community Gallery'. Mapping Q was the first exhibition that we ever did that was a community exhibition and created that space. Really, it was from Mapping Q that we realized that we need to be doing more of these with other communities in the region. So we do a few other community-based exhibitions in that space.

The next one actually will be youth focused and it's all used by high school artists in Pima County, and oftentimes there is a repeat of some mapping youth that are in Mapping Q. Getting that work in that exhibition as well also just an incredible reminder of not just the skill of youth, but the ideas that they're able to bring forth with their work when they're provided the space to do that on the school campuses and they have fantastic art teachers and access to art making materials.

Our next Mapping. Q Exhibition right now hasn't been scheduled because we're still working in developing those community partners for this session this spring. But we expect that we'll have another exhibition in the Fall.



Leslie: Okay. Great. Tell me, both of you, a little bit about what this means to you...your vision for the impact of this, and especially in this time, when there is so much ignorance, so much misinformation, so much - as Russ describes - attempts at erasure. Just touching into like what this means for you to really push against that in creating the space.

Chelsea: Yeah, I mean, I push back a little bit on the idea that it was like a you know, a radical idea – Mapping Q, and I always get kinda confused when people are like, ‘How did you come up with this idea?’ or people reach out and they’re like ‘How can we do this?’ and my first thought is just like you just have to care about people.

You just you have to first assume that everyone has a right to be a human being, and then from there you can, you can create a program and give people art-making materials and just let go and let them be. But yeah, if you can't get to that first step. you know, I don't know what advice to give people.

Yeah, I think you know where I've come to this place in advocacy, you know. For years I was an activist.

I was a part of the Lesbian Avengers in Denver and Chicago. People can look that up -as a historically, you know a grassroots revolutionary group of folks, and we would march. We would literally eat fire, you know, in protest, and push back against legislation, and folks that were, you know, preventing queer and trans folks from accessing public spaces, and I was very active out in the public in that regard all through my twenties.

And as I don't know if it's probably part of being a teacher and a parent, I've realized that I personally don't have the...I don't have the heart for that type of work anymore. And so I've found that the best way that I can care for myself is by caring for my direct community.

And so that's you know, through loving and supporting my kids and advocating for them in the spaces that they occupy and trying to get them more access to spaces that they don't occupy yet, and then, and just creating as welcoming and accepting and celebratory of a space in the spaces that I operate in, whether that's a classroom or teaching at the Museum.

That's how I hope to create change. and you know the mark, the legacy that I that I hope to leave you know, after I'm gone.

And there are other amazing people like Russ, and some other incredible parents in our communities that are you know, shaking things up, and are advocating in louder ways that I don't have the capacity for. And I wish I did.

Russ: For me, I think Mapping Q, as a researcher... like solely as a researcher who studies LGBTQ youth populations, Mapping Q was an opportunity for me to see and be a part of, and



provide evidence for, the 'on the ground' type of work that we say is necessary all of the time in our in our research findings, when we're documenting disparities or the reasons for disparities. Things like discrimination, right?

But up until about 5, 5 to 7 years ago, most of the work around how do we reduce disparities was either policy-driven or it was clinically driven. And so you had to either change policy, which we know takes decades to do, if not centuries. Or clinical help, but clinical help is only available to those who can access it.

Chelsea: It is determined by policies.

Russ: Exactly, and so, being able to be part of Mapping Q, I think, was just an incredible gift for me to be able to see how one can use the arts to create those spaces where youth can just be.

And they could be in that space. Just be.

You know they didn't even have to talk about being queer, being trans. They could just be and create the art that they felt best expressed themselves, and share that with the world and the world will take from it what it needs to become a better world and it's really they're doing that activism work in a different way.

Yeah, I mean, many of them are also doing the loud shake up. Shake up the structure of work as well. But that sharing representation in a museum context is activism work in a different way. So it's been really amazing to be part of that journey and watch them be able to take up that space and share their stories with the world.

Chelsea: One thing that I was thinking about, Russ when you were talking, that I failed to mention is this other key component that I think exists in Mapping Q is that when they create artwork and they write their own labels.

So that's kind of a different practice than you'll see in museums. Typically is the curator of the exhibition is writing the label. So they're interpreting the artwork. They're kind of determining what's really important about the artist or the artwork that should be shared with the visitor

And in Mapping Q the artist, They write their own. They wrote their own label

and I think that first person voice is also what I see visitors responding to. I hear visitors responding to. They say reading the labels is such a key experience in that space.

But we don't. We don't edit you know, the work, no matter what work they give us, is what we put on the walls. So we don't curate the space we don't judge the space. And so this idea of you know what you were saying is, you know, youth being able to come exactly as they are, show up as their whole selves, and we don't edit that.



That is likely a situation, a scenario, and experience that most of us don't have the opportunity to participate in - *especially* queer youth. So I think that's also what is a really kind of revolutionary aspect of Mapping Q.

But in practice it's really not hard. I'm very lucky that I get to work with some of the most supportive, courageous folks in the museum space that are so willing to kind of push back on those normative practices that are in museums. But it's really not difficult, because our visitors have been overwhelmingly supportive of it.

It's why we have now more community exhibitions, because we've had so many other people reach out to us, and they're like 'How else can we, you know, get involved?' And 'how can we support, or what other exhibitions can you do that are like this that are clearly highlighting, celebrating folks that we are not able to see in the Museum?'...and that's you know, that's tragic.

It's changed our collecting policy. We now specifically have identified LGBTQ artists as a deficit in our collection and are actively collecting works by contemporary artists, and just last year purchased 2 works by 2 queer artists. So it's got a lot of really beautiful tentacles that are impacting some really positive change.

Leslie: Yeah, that's a that's a huge impact, a huge impact.

Chelsea: Listeners can't see. But Russ has a mathematical equation that's tattooed on his arm - and I've heard you say that you were really into hard numbers and quantitative research, and Mapping Q made you kind of forced you to stretch and look at the qualitative.

Russ: That it did! Yes, we did do some quantitative work with Mapping Q, but we did interviews which I didn't even mention.

But we did interviews with some of the participants from the first round provide some richness around the number aspects, and I mean in those interviews they talk about just amazing things, like the use of watercolor as a way to release negative energy, that they learn that skill, you know through Mapping Q.

And so, yeah, Mapping Q definitely pushed me away from this equation-based tattoo that's literally tattooed on my body. You know as is part of the graduate training that I went through is, you know, you can answer complex questions with this numerical data, but really, you know, the photographs give us so much more insight into those daily lived experiences.



Chelsea: It's the fuller picture, right? The numbers are part of it. It's a huge part of it. Sometimes the lived experience is so abstract, and it's hard to grapple. And mathematics gives us that kind of concrete answer that we're looking for sometimes.

But yeah. We're, we're abstract beings, and so we need the...we need the arts as part of it, too. Right?

Russ: And I saw what you did there, Fuller picture with pictures.

Chelsea: Totally meant that.

Leslie: Thank you both so much for this conversation!

Everyone go visit the University of Arizona Museum of Art! If you're in Tucson, come and check them out in person, wander the galleries, and if you're outside of Tucson, visit them online at [artmuseum, dot arizona dot edu](http://artmuseum.arizona.edu).

Music Outro