

Programming to Promote Social Identity Formation among Youth



A Report from The Students Commission of Canada
and the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

June 2019

Many thanks to the support from the Canada Safety and Security Program (Department of Defence Research and Development Canada), our partners in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, youth and adult allies from across Canada participating in the #CanadaWeWant movement and Matt Drabenstott, PhD student, Queen's University, Dr. Heather Lawford, Bishop's University, Dr. Heather Ramey, Brock University/Humber College, and Dr. Linda Rose-Krasnor, Brock University.

Safer Spaces Intervention Model

Protective Social Identity Formation: Creating safer spaces for exploration

This is the final report of the Influences on Social Identity Formation project funded by the Canada Safety and Security Program. The report first presents the finalized Model of the Safer Spaces Intervention that we developed and tested, then describes highlights of the journeys of youth leaders in the project. Other products previously produced include a Literature Review, an Environmental Scan, a Process and Progress Report, and two Youth Workshop curriculums. Together, these products provide the full background to the development of the Model and its testing in the field.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background: how the model was developed.....	3
Definitions: social identity, safer spaces	6
Stage 1) At the beginning: social identity influences (who are my people?).....	8
Stage 2) Brick by brick – Isolating experiences and influences can build walls (polarized Us and Them)	10
Stage 3) Polarized Us and Them emerges	12
Stage 4) Towards the other – (in small groups or as an individual).....	14
Stage 5) Safer space – (Intentionally crafted)	16
Stage 6) Youth voices define safer space ingredients	18
Stage 7) When a safer space is compromised	20
Stage 8) Exploring and vulnerability.....	22
Stage 9) Three-dimensional listening builds bridges	26
Stage 10) Risk, the Bridge of Vulnerability (authenticity in motion).....	28
Stage 11) Discussing influences of off-line and on-line cultures	30
Stage 12) Making connection last (what sustains/what diminishes)	31
Stage 13) Belonging – sustained connection.....	33
Stage 14) Prolonged sense of belonging	34
Stage 15) Resiliency (many bridges of vulnerability crossed).....	37
Social identity formation (SIF) and safer spaces summary visual	40
Safer spaces summary	42
Discussion: Limitations and challenges in implementing the model.....	43
Strategies to address uneven benefits.....	44

<i>The youth leaders journey</i>	49
Individual changes following conference	49
Takeaways from workshops	50
Long-term individual changes	51
<i>Data collection: head, heart, feet and spirit</i>	55
Summary of the themes and process	56
Day-To-Day Analysis	59
<i>References</i>	71

Background: how the model was developed

The *Influences in Social Identity Formation* project has gathered from the academic literature and subject matter experts, including youth, key findings on what influences adolescent and early adulthood social identity formation. Our overall purpose was to understand how these influences either support healthy adaptive behaviours or result in maladaptive ones that may lead to violent extremism.

Another primary goal was to develop “interventions” in the form of programming and/or program additions that promote positive youth engagement and social identities that protect against violent extremism and radicalization.

The literature review and environmental scan occurred from November 2017 to February 2018, with the core intervention developed and delivered in March 2018 and implemented for testing and further development with youth from April 2018 to March 2019.

The objectives for the intervention focused on giving youth positive experiences and comprised of the following: 1) shared pro-social norms; 2) sense of belonging; 3) embracing diversity of others; 4) contributing to others, to community, to Canada; and 5) critical thinking and reflection about influences and behaviours related to their social identity formation.

The methodology for the intervention phase started with a core curriculum delivered during a intense, national youth conference (Pancer et al., 2002), followed by an adult ally supporting individual youth activities in their home communities, with some group booster videoconference sessions, and sustained one-on-one supportive conversations with the adult ally. The adult ally also collected data.

We completed the Literature Review and Environmental Scan during the period 2017 to early 2018, which involved youth working with researchers to interview subject matter

experts. This adult/youth team identified the following key factors in preventing radicalization to extreme violence:

- positive experiences of diversity,
- addressing exclusion and
- creating belonging

The research phase suggested that social identities fostering these factors, in both off-line and on-line spaces, could be an important protection against radicalization to violence.

An intervention was designed that combined off-line and on-line experiences. This intervention supported youth as its leaders to explore, test and further develop the hypothesis.

The intervention began in March 2018 with a macro-scale experience of diversity at the Canada We Want national youth conference (e.g., Pancer et al., 2002) with 150 youth, facilitated by 30 trained youth facilitators. A sub-group of youth from the conference spent five days in deep discussion about social identity formation in their lives, facilitated by Matt Drabenstott, Ph.D. candidate, who would execute the intervention research conducted for the project. An additional key factor that emerged directly from the youth discussion was added to the evidence-base; this was the role of spaces that allowed youth to test and be their authentic selves, especially in the context of on-line social media pressures.

The Youth Team presented their findings to all of the other youth at the conference in a cross-pollination exercise, and then at a Knowledge Exchange Event in Toronto that March, hosted by RBC and attended by policy makers, youth organizations, and academics. Their report was shared in English and French at www.studentscommission.ca.

Six members of the group continued to be involved in the work post conference, engaging their peers in micro interventions that they developed, from their macro conference experience. They continued to be supported by the researcher Matt Drabenstott through monthly calls and check-ins. Four key themes informed their work: authenticity, belonging, the hurt youth may experience in online interactions, and online/offline differences in identity development. Consistent with the group's recommendations, the youth created a curriculum for social identity workshops to be held in the youth's communities.

The goal of these workshops was to introduce their peers to exploring facets of their social identity through activities and discussions centered around authenticity and belonging. Over the course of 6 months, 5 youth (and in the case of 2 sessions, adult allies) facilitated 18 social identity workshops for more than 270 youth spanning Edmonton, AB; Saskatoon, SK; Barrie, ON; Toronto, ON; and a host of international university students in San Francisco, CA.

After facilitating a workshop, youth facilitators debriefed with Drabenstott, identifying what worked and didn't work in their execution, and also describing personal shifts that they and their peers were making in their on-line and off-line behaviours. Each facilitator was also debriefed after completing social identity workshops to capture their reflections about their own social identity development and to identify shifts in thinking about social identity at a conceptual level.

Quotes and significant themes from these debrief sessions informed the summative evaluation report. Additionally, participants from half of the workshops filled out a 10-item open-ended questionnaire at the end of the workshop. Described above.

In November 2018, some of these youth facilitators, with Drabenstott and Dr. Heather Lawford, attended a social-polarization and radicalization prevention conference hosted by OPV and CPN-PREV in Edmonton, AB. Dr. Lawford was one of the academic partners for the project. At the Edmonton conference, they presented their social identity findings from the 2018 Conference, as well as from the social identity workshops that they had given to national and global leaders in violence prevention. Dr. Lawford presented on the role and potential significance of fostering youth engagement and generativity (giving back and concern for legacy and future generations) in violence prevention work, using the youth leaders at the conference as a concrete example.

A second macro diversity Canada We Want national youth conference was held in March 2019, with approximately 40 returning youth from the first macro conference, and key youth leaders of the interventions held over the previous year. Drabenstott again facilitated a smaller theme group, explicitly exploring social identity, using in part anonymized survey responses from the intervention research and key themes and results from the reflections of the youth intervention implementers during their debriefings with Drabenstott.

A modified version of the intervention workshop was given to all of the conference participants in a plenary session, and a cross-pollination session with all participants gathered additional data and input. These exercises and discussions engaged youth in validating a visual model of social identity formation (entitled "Safer Spaces Intervention Model") generated by the project.

The visual model, which is described in the document that follows, outlines the role that specific components of the intervention play in social identity formation, particularly core positive values that are explicitly promoted in youth environments, safer spaces and experiences of diversity. It also traces the pathways for positive or negative outcomes when youth experience forces that encourage them to become polarized in their social identities.

Definitions: social identity, safer spaces

Social Identity definition and attributes: The parts of one's identity shaped by group membership(s)

- Social identity formation involves the development of “us” and “them” categorizations (Onorato & Turner, 2004).
- Importance of integration and relation between one's personal identity (the formation of personal values, goals and beliefs) and social identity (the sense of belonging to social groups) (Lannegrant-Willems et al., 2018).
- In some contexts/moments, social identity involves the perception of one's self as an exemplar of some social category, rather than a unique person (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Onorato & Turner, 2004). The implication is that one may feel personally anonymous and/or not responsible for actions one takes to further the group's goals (Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012).
- Accepting or taking on a social identity has implications for young people's lives (e.g., Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012)¹:
 - Head (cognitive): how one views themselves and others
 - Heart (affective): how one feels about the emotional value and significance of membership to a group
 - Feet (behavioral): how one acts within the group and toward members of other groups
 - Spirit: how one feels connected to something greater than one's self (e.g., group, cause, ideology)

Characteristics of positive/adaptive social identity:

- **Grounded in critical consciousness/critical thinking:** In-group does not depend on dehumanizing or hostile view of out-group/other (Thomas et al., 2010)
- **Feels good:** Contributes to self-esteem (Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012)
- **Fulfilling:** Satisfies need to fit in, belong, and stand out in a unique way; Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012)
- **Aligned:** Social identities and individual identities can be aligned, reflecting harmony among self-values and beliefs held by the group (Turner-Zwinkels, Postmes, & Van Zomeren, 2015).
- **Diverse:** Belonging to more groups leads to positive inter-group attitudes (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2013)

¹ The head, heart, feet and spirit implications of social identity are especially relevant for consideration in program development; full engagement in a youth program consists of all these aspects (Pancer et al., 2002). Outcomes in each of these areas are linked to young people's positive development as well as long-term thriving beyond adolescence (Khanna et al., 2014).

- **Pro-social:** Belonging to groups that have prosocial norms (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Ma, 2012; Turner et al. 2014)
- **Outward focus:** Attention on current events and focus on social change (Angie et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2010)
- **Flexible:** Not always prioritizing the group's needs/interests over personal needs/interests, or those of other people; can join other groups and explore identity (e.g., group-level behavior expectations in gangs vs. individual's behavior preferences: Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012)

Positive/Adaptive social identity leads to:

- Reduced fear of the 'other'
- A richer and more diverse sense of belonging and community (Ellis & Abdi, 2017)
- Confidence to be one's 'true self' within social networks
- Finding a place for one's unique qualities and traits amidst social networks (Brewer & Gardner, 1996)
- Resilience to negative and extremist group influences (Bonnell et al., 2011)
- Reduction in problem behaviours (Newman et al., 2007)
- Desires to seek out and create safer spaces with increasingly diverse others

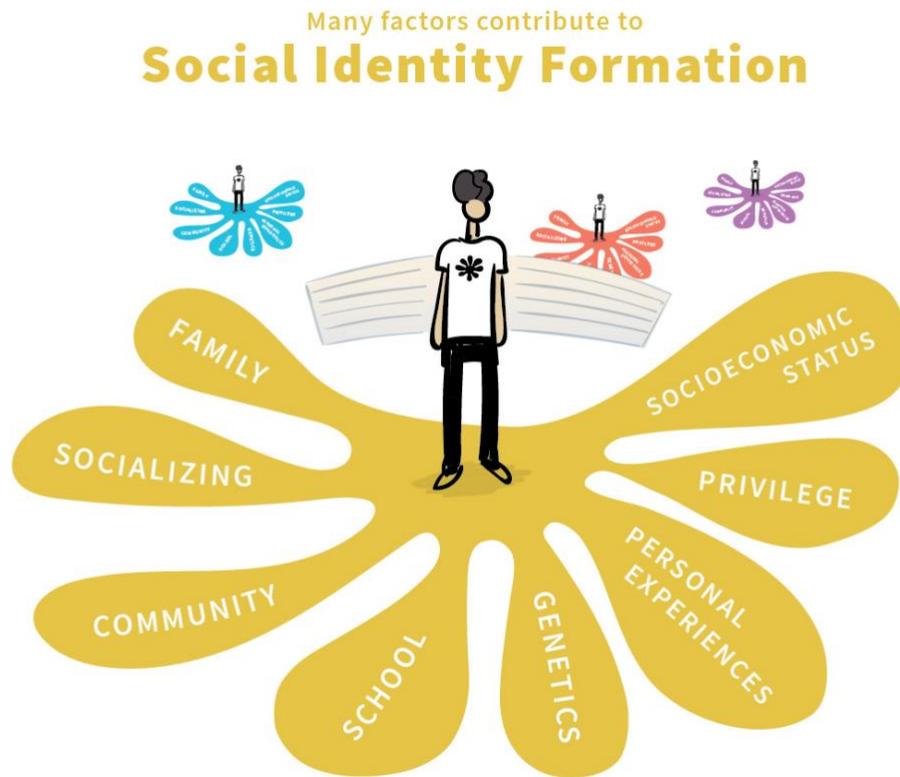
Rationale:

Intentional exploration of one's identity as a youth or young adult is an apropos activity given that identity development is a primary goal of adolescence (Erickson, 1968; Adamson & Lyxell, 1996). Lifelong identity trajectories are embedded in the personality, orientation of values, psychosocial, societal, relational, and ideological developments forged in adolescence (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999; McLean, Yoder, Syed, Greenhoot, 2014). Identity development is a fluid and dynamic process that is constructed through internal and external processes, pressures, and motivators (Crocetti, 2017). Essential to the formation of prosocial, adaptive social identities is granting youth opportunities to explore and adopt identity development, with factors such as the depth, breadth and commitment identity exploration being important (Luycks Goosens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2005). The Safer Spaces model builds scaffolding where youth can fully experience the dynamic nature of identity formation and conduct rigorous identity work with diverse others, supported by each other and a skilled facilitator. Successful traversing of the Safer Spaces model equips and empowers youth to (co)construct spaces for their own and other youth's continuous identity work.

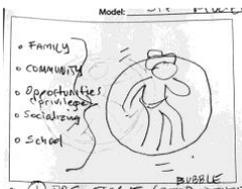
Safer Spaces versus safe spaces. The Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health has convened a national group that is developing youth engagement standards in which the concept of safer spaces, is an element. The adoption of the term safer spaces versus safe spaces recognizes that safety exists on a continuum of risk for different youth in different contexts and requires continuous and in-time critical appraisal by youth and service providers.

Stage 1) At the beginning: social identity influences (who are my people?)

①



Social identity formation begins at a young age through a combination of innate and environmental factors. These factors create a view of reality, a comfort zone, a container for the person in which they define themselves. Social identity can even be the boundary of what a youth considers safe. Genetic makeup may predispose youth to develop ‘this’ or ‘that’ personality trait, which influences how they build and maintain relationships.



Genetics also influence a youth’s physical features, such as skin colour, which will influence how others will view, and possibly even treat, the young person. Environmental factors also play an important role in shaping one’s social identity. Personal experiences, afforded privileges, socioeconomic status, where someone grows up, and education are contributing factors to a youth’s environment. The

relationships and individuals who contribute to one’s environment are key to social identity formation: Who does a youth consider family? Who do they go to school with? Who is a youth interacting with at community, religious centers, or cultural centers? Who do youth bump into at the local mall? Every youth’s social fabric looks very different.

When considering the complexity of an individual's social networks, a dartboard is a helpful metaphor, extrapolated from Brewer's (1991) figure of individual and social identities. The red bullseye in the dead center represents the individual. The widening segmented rings that surround the bullseye are the many social contexts to which the individual is knowingly, or sometimes unknowingly, connected. Several developmental psychologists' social theoretical frameworks align with this metaphor. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner's (1977; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) bioecological model of development suggests that individuals develop and grow within interacting layers of social networks, from intimate relationships, such as families, to distant social influences such as national political pressures. In this way, one's development exists in a social context (Sameroff, 2010). The widening concentric circles of relationships around a young person illustrate the starting and expanding (or perhaps contracting) boundaries for a youth's social identity zones.

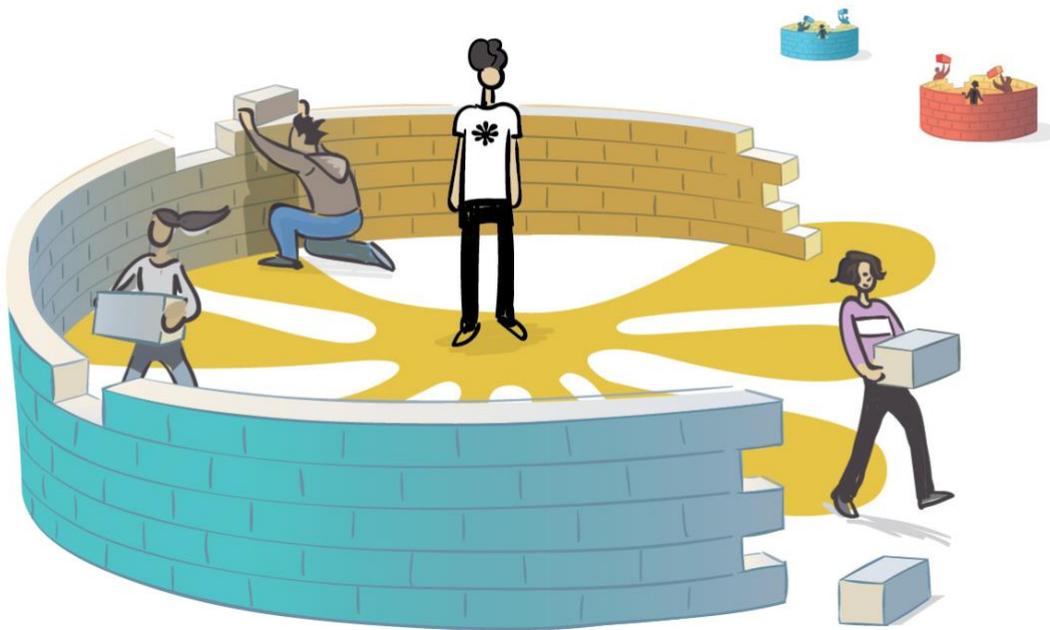
I think, a long time ago, I was following the Wednesday meet up groups, even though I never went to a Wednesday meet up. And then I saw it through there and it was like, "For people who lurk but don't actually come out..." SME 4²

² Throughout this description of the Model, we insert evidence from the Literature, as well as evidence from youth gathered from interviews with youth Subject Matter Experts (identified by SME by the quote), youth participating in the Canada We Want conference intervention (CWW), and youth participating in leading the Social Identity workshops that they created between CWW conferences.

Stage 2) Brick by brick – Isolating experiences and influences can build walls (polarized Us and Them)

2

Brick by Brick Isolated experiences Build Walls of Polarization



The sense of 'Us' — a sense of community, comfort, closeness — is made possible by having the space to build relational capacity. There tends to be an aspect of homogeneity, or sameness, perceived about one's family or home community. Cheering for the same home team, speaking the same language, and a sense of 'insiderness' — inside jokes, inside the same buildings, in and among each other's lives—are several examples of an 'Us' culture. 'Us' feels familiar, safe, and can even feel like home.



'Us' exists within implicit and/or explicit boundaries. Social attitudes, along with factors that make up one's comfort zone, lay the framework of who is 'in' and who is 'out' — in other words, who is 'Us' and who is 'Them' (Killen, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013).

Exclusive boundaries are constructed through group norms, traditions, stereotypes, self-interest, and biases. 'Us' can be bound by a postal code, a set of values, support network expectations, or shared paradigms. Although family, community, and support networks may help erect this boundary, the individual can also contribute as well. This boundary may be protective and could allow youth to feel safe and supported throughout identity development. This boundary may also be restrictive, distinguishing between those people who are familiar and those who are "foreign". Although the defining boundary of 'Us' illustrated above is depicted as a brick wall, sometimes boundaries are not as clearly defined nor as impervious.

I think it's very uplifting to see a group of black women striving to make change and it's nice to see because there's not a lot of people that want to help out and stop the racism and the black violence and stuff. SME 3

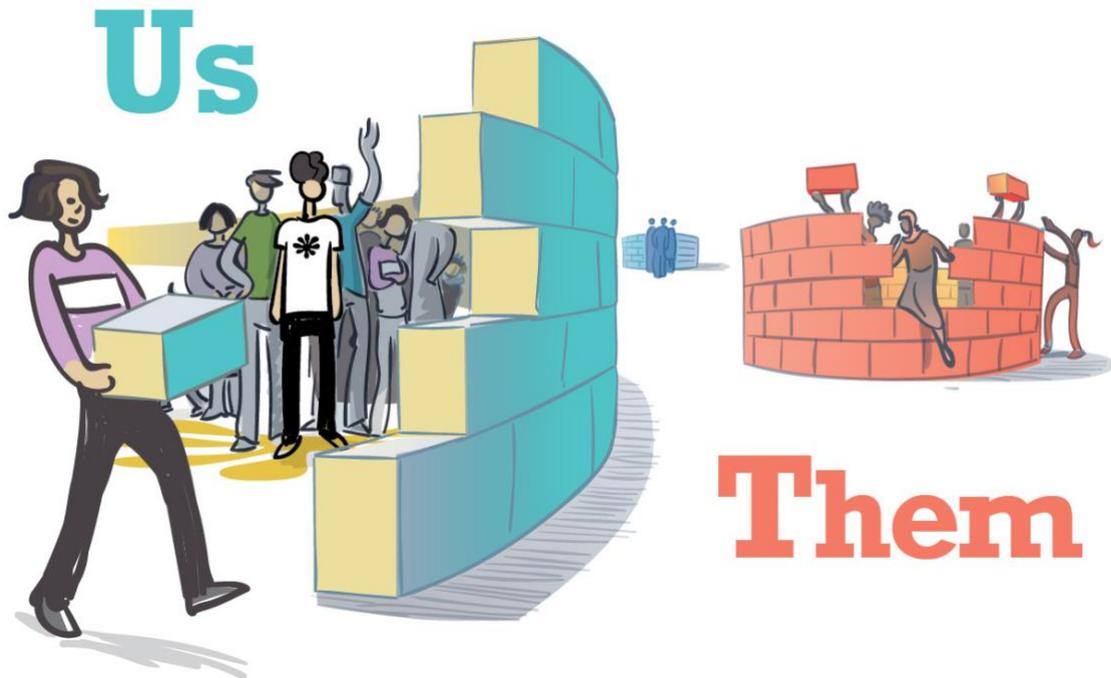
Contemporary research exploring anti-black racism, for example Dr. Ibram Kendi's scholarship, suggests that self-interest is a large part of the boundary-building. This is one of the reasons why some of the research re exposure and interpersonal contact and prejudice is contested by other scholars. Our work developing this model has the purpose of assisting those designing safer spaces to ensure that those creating opportunities for exposure and interpersonal contact do so with great care, informed skills and intention, paying attention to unintended, unknown and unexplored consequences that may be occurring.

We intend in further iterations of the model to continue to explore and incorporate emerging scholarship In the field.

Stage 3) Polarized Us and Them emerges

3

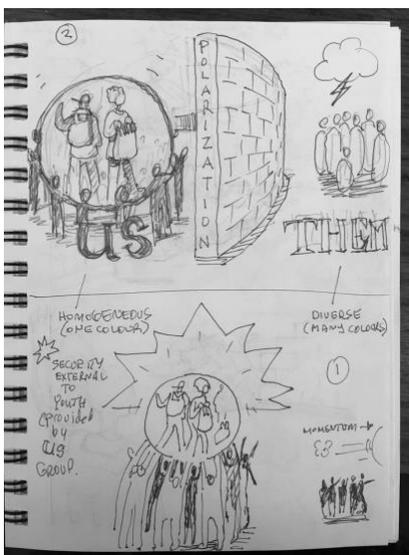
Polarization Us and Them



An inward focus among in-group members creates favor toward 'Us' members, and generates comparisons and contrasts with those outside of the in-group (Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2005). Those beyond the established, familiar 'Us', are often perceived as 'Them'. A strange otherness may be ascribed to individuals who are unfamiliar and beyond 'Us' (Alport, 1954). Individuals considered 'Them' may be underestimated feared, disliked, or in some cases even hated. Relations between in- and out-groups are shown to influence prejudice more than are an individual's identity characteristics (Nesdale et al.,

2005). A person or a group of people may be considered 'Them' for a variety of reasons: different culture, political views, religious beliefs, race, postal codes, gender, ability, and sexual orientation just to name a few.

The distance between 'Us' and 'Them' is referred to as polarization. The more insular and/or homogenous



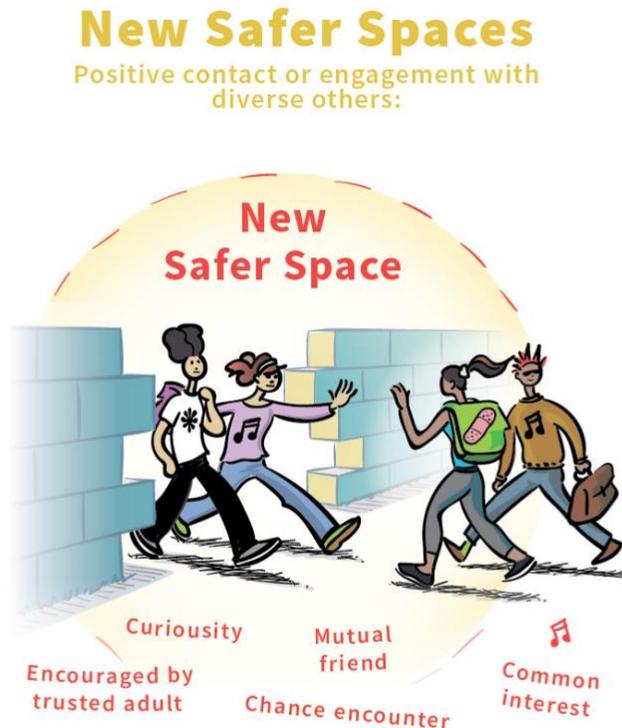
environment from which a youth comes the more divergent one's sense of 'Them' likely will be.

Intergroup attitudes about 'Us' tend to be highly resistant to change (Murrar & Brauer, 2019). A youth is likely to remain within their 'Us' community (i.e., behind the wall) and maintain polarized perceptions so long as these perceptions benefit them, they are supported and their needs are met. It often is healthy and positive to enjoy, be proud, and even thrive within 'Us' communities.

I came here mostly out of curiosity. I'm, most of my friends are heteronormative, you know, very monochromatic, almost the average people. They play a lot of video games and have diverse interests, but they're not diverse lifestyles, so I came here mostly out of curiosity to meet new people [who] have different perspective that I would completely lack [...] SME 10

Stage 4) Towards the other – (in small groups or as an individual)

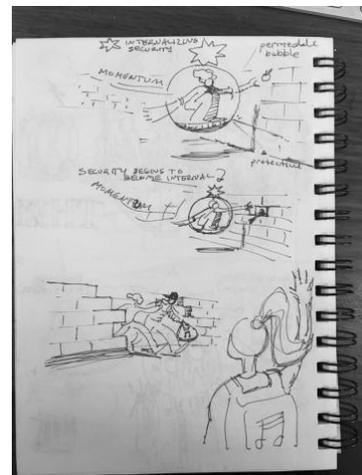
3b



Youth can be exposed to and even encounter others (i.e., 'Them') in online or offline settings and still maintain polarizing perceptions. Traversing or breaking through the polarization requires positive contact or *engagement* with diverse others (see Pettigrew, 2016 for a review).

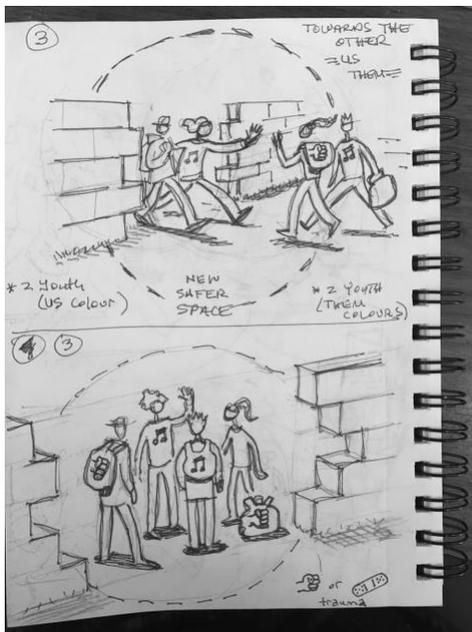


Youth engage diverse others for a variety of reasons: curiosity; an invitation through a mutual friend; having a common interest with another; being encouraged by a trusted other' or even 'happenstance' encounters evolving into a meaningful interaction. Youth are more likely to engage with diverse others once they have internalized a sense of security and feel supported beyond their 'Us' comfort zone. Furthermore, youth are more likely to engage diverse others when their peers have a history of, or are currently, engaging with diverse others.



*"Today I connected by actively participating and not being disengaged."
— Youth Participant CWWC*

In order for engagement between 'Us' and 'Them' to be meaningful, a safer space must be established among youth. This safer space can be an *offline* space (e.g., the local mall, Tim Hortons, a community centre) or an *online* space (e.g., online chat room, online video games, social media, group texts). In the safer space, youth may take risks, examine and explore their prejudice and polarizing perceptions, if the sense of safety is high enough.



This safer space allows for a healthy tension between a broad array of differences among diverse youth. Here, youth can discuss hot topics, or resolve an issue. These safer spaces afford youth opportunities to suspend uncertainties and questions about their identities and explore who they are.

Safer spaces afford youth the opportunities to explore facets of their identity or even 'try on' new identities. Online spaces in particular give youth anonymous venues to try on and shape identities (Neira & Barber, 2014; Ridout et al., 2012). As youth build relationships with peers in online and offline spaces, they make sense of themselves (Davis, 2012). To this end, identity experimentation leads to discoveries and the defining of the personal self (Leung, 2011).

Key qualities of safer spaces can emerge organically among youth. However, safer spaces are likely to be far more meaningful when they are intentionally crafted (e.g., Bonnell et al., 2011).

"I met lots of amazing people and I stepped out of my comfort zone and sat with people I didn't know."

"Today was good because I got to meet new people."

“Today was a tiring and slow day but I enjoyed meeting new people.”

“[I connected by] meeting new people.”

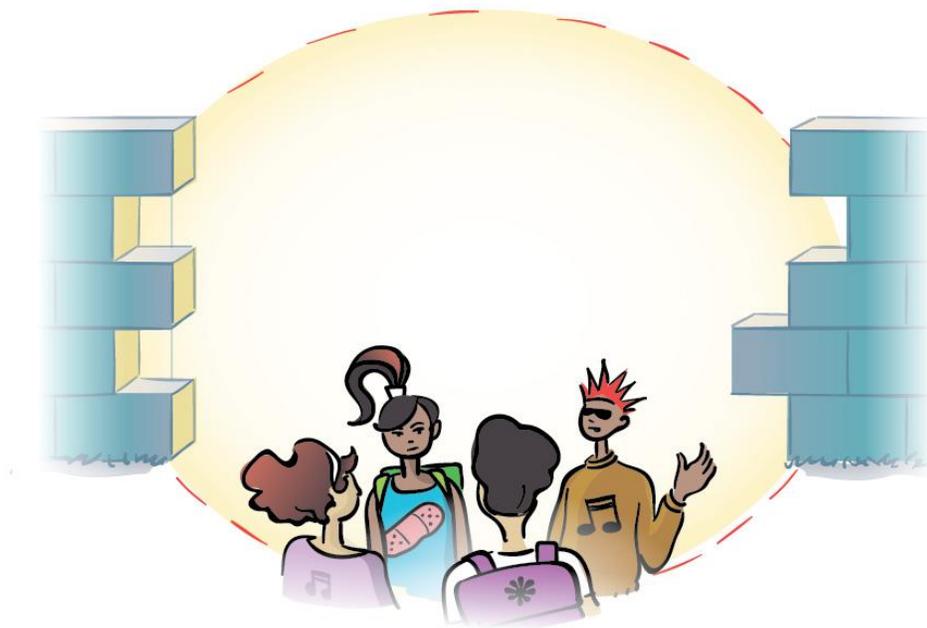
— Youth Participants CWWC

Stage 5) Safer space – (Intentionally crafted)

4a-1

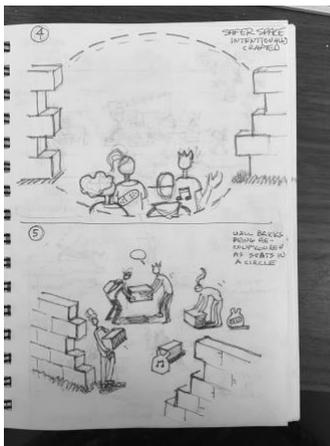
Safer Spaces

Intentionally crafted



Within a safer space, youth’s unique abilities, experiences, and perspectives are respected, heard, and even championed. Rather than dividing youth into ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ groups, differences are explored and celebrated within the safer space.

A well-crafted safer space is a work of art, intentionally crafted using a number of safer space building factors (see below). The Students Commission is renowned for including many of these



factors to scaffold a safer space. The following list highlights a number of variables that can be combined to create a safer space, but this is by no means an exhaustive list.

- Grounding the group in common values (e.g., the Students Commission’s four pillars: respect, listen, understand, communicate™)
- Taking the time to ‘check-in’ at the beginning and end of sessions (e.g., make sure everyone knows each other’s names, emotionally debriefing, reflection)
- Purposefully trying to incorporate languages and cultures of all who are in the group
- Creating equity among group members, ensuring that everyone’s voice is heard, perhaps in different ways
- Creating a space microculture (e.g., inside jokes)
- Using Icebreakers and laughter as integral purposeful program components
- Prioritizing relationship-building over other agendas
- Creating informal spaces for youth to get to know each other
- Embracing an emergent, dynamic, ‘go-with-the-flow’ format
- Being open to a participation flow. It’s truly voluntary participation—there is no pressure for the youth to stay in the group.
- Trusting the process: participants eventually ‘buy-in’ to be a part of the group.
- Using smaller group sizes.
- Meeting in the same room or online forum.
- Adding splashes of magic. (Using the word ‘magic’ might seem out of place. However, in 28 years of Student’s Commission evaluations of its conferences by youth and adult participants and staff, the word “magic” consistently surfaces to summarize the experience.)



Safer spaces naturally develop some level of exclusivity. The comfort and security of the safer space are contingent upon the group maintaining consistency of its members. Social dynamics can drastically fluctuate with the addition of someone new to the space or the absence of key group members. Sometimes the addition of a new member(s) can ‘reset’ a safer space, requiring a group to re-lay its relational foundation. It is possible

for new members to join the safer space without the group losing ‘safer space traction’, so long as the individuals are open and receptive to the group’s existing values and norms and the group can meaningfully include and accommodate the new members without compromising its foundation. The explicit naming of the process of creating a microculture, revisiting and sharing its key features or “insider” codes and jokes as others join, establishes its principle to be inclusive and respectful of “Others.”

*Cause you guys actually give two sh*tts about like the community and like black people. Obviously you guys give a sh*t. Like, I don't really see organizations that give a sh*t.*

Especially because [the program] was starting to pick up on like, LGBTQ programming and I was very much wanting to get involved with that.
SME 19

Stage 6) Youth voices define safer space ingredients

4a-1



"Safe space was actually achieved. Great communication, opened and non-judgmental works miracles."

"My being is content and safe on site, in this space."

"How important translators are...the 4 pillars and how they interconnect. Although everyone knows they are important, it is good to revisit them"

"I feel pretty good about today and was glad to be able to choose a group that trusts each other and supporting people."

"Apply what we learned about the 4 pillars [respect, listen, understand, communicate] in everyday life, not only here at this conference."

"Really broke out of my shell to make a comfortable & safe space"

"Had a lot of fun getting to know everyone."

"Just by being present, it plays an important role in the creation of goods."

" [I connected today] By trusting everyone"

"Keep an open mind"

"Today I learned about the importance of bilingual supports for community chats & the need to support Indigenous languages"

"Even trying to speak French helps a lot"

"Doing a smudge was really nice and balancing."

"[I connected today through] mostly with icebreakers and get to know everyone. Although I didn't share too much I mostly listened."

"Not everyone communicates with their words."

"I walk away with I full heart, and respected"

"I'm going to come back tomorrow & keep going"

"I'm excited to really dive into the group"

"I warmed up a bit toward my peers"

"We were all more energetic today to know each other more because we had some free interaction time; it wasn't forced."

CWWW Participants

Stage 7) When a safer space is compromised

(A

4b



Given the dynamic nature of a safer space, there is a possibility that the space is compromised for a youth(s) or possibly even the whole group. This might occur by someone new 'cannonballing' their way into the group, disrupting the existing safer space. Or, a challenging topic emerges too quickly in the space, driving a wedge between youth. Or perhaps, there might just not be enough magic. For whatever reason, a compromising event will push youth out or prompt youth to abandon the safer space. A youth might remain or re-enter a safer space if another from the group pulls them back into the safer space and reconciles whatever has sparked them to leave.

Without such an intervention, the youth may return to their previous notion of 'Us'—to what is known, comfortable, and safe. When a youth returns to their prior perceptions of 'Us', they may be less open to seeking out diverse others, thus adding another brick to the 'wall of polarization'. After experiencing the compromising of a safer space, a youth may think: "they don't understand me so I am going to circle the wagons around the people that I know and a group that understands me." This mindset likely is accompanied by rigidity around their identity. A stronger influence likely will be needed to spur the youth to engage with diverse others in the future.

CWW 221 | Non-Indigenous | Female | 16 | Teen Dating Violence

*Day 1- Personally, I was **dealing with my depression & anxiety** all day which brought me down.*

Day 2- I feel very lost until I shared my stories and people who I don't even know felt for me.

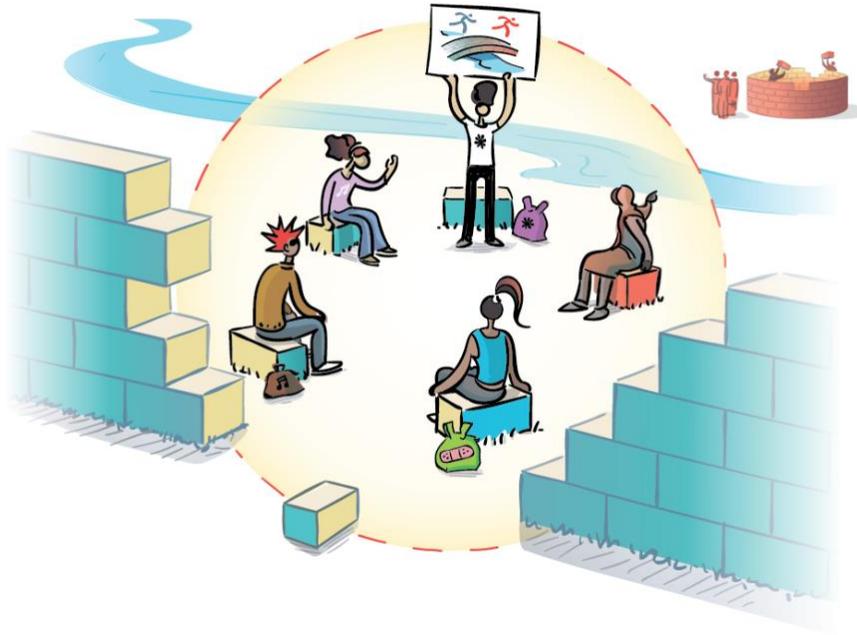
Day 2- I felt very connected with people I barely know which isn't always a bad thing.

*Day 4- When I came I **was extremely depressed (still am), but now I'm leaving motivated** to help youth in situations similar to mine as well as all situations.*

Stage 8) Exploring and vulnerability

5

Exploring and vulnerability Building positive momentum



If a safer space remains intact, a group may build positive momentum towards meaningful connection and identity development. Participants likely will agree on a set of values that guide discussion and behaviours; groups will laugh together; discussions will take on



depth; individuals will increasingly feel validated for their presence in the group; and participants will develop trust with others in the group. Youth begin to realize that they are not as different from each other as they might have initially thought. As group interaction comes to embody the qualities of a safer space, the more confident youth may begin to share their stories.

“the whole group connected a lot by comparing our different point of views”

“We all have something in common”

“I talked about what has been bothering me.”

“We shared our experiences and a lot were similar”

“Similarities exist between the experiences of indigenous and African youth in Canada”

“I Connected with other individuals who are having similar experiences”

“[I connected through] debates; sharing circles.”

“I connected through shared, laughter.”

“[I feel] Tired, stressed somewhat, trying hard to trust the process”

“I connected great. I felt extra loud which is rare.”

“Our team is jelling and we are one!

CWWW Participants

Vulnerability is the bridge that sparks meaningful connection among group members. Vulnerability is one of the “truest marks of courage”, when one shows up to one’s own story and is willing to be seen by another (Brown, 2012). Vulnerability researcher Brené Brown (2006) interviewed 215 women about their experiences with sharing shameful and uncertain aspects of their life stories. Brown found that participants developed resilience to shame when they were able to reach out to others, finding empathy and connection. Critical to connection was participants’ realization that “the experiences that make us feel the most alone, and even isolated, are often the most universal experiences” (Brown, 2006, p. 49). Deepening trust, establishing rapport, exploring more challenging topics, and increasing confidence allow and encourage many youth to tell others in the safer space a personal detail of their story. In sharing any intimate or challenging aspect of their story, youth are taking a risk on the group, especially if they are among the first in the group to share their story (Brown, 2012). After all, the safer space is comprised of diverse youth from various backgrounds, and their reactions may be unpredictable. Telling one’s story is an authentic action, an attempt to embrace aspects of oneself around others (Brown, 2010). In this way, vulnerability is a way youth own their story and make sense of facets of their identity. Brown (2012) warns that vulnerability without boundaries can result in disengagement, or even disconnection, which is why this step follows the establishment of the safer space, based on evidence-informed practices and components.

Care must be taken in the approach as it may not be universal for everyone in all contexts. Evidence in the intergroup contact and perspective-taking/giving literature, as well as from sociological and historical research, suggests the benefits can be one-sided; the people who benefit the most (or at all) are those in the dominant group (i.e., dominant or centred in society). People/youth who are marginalized may not benefit as much or at all (and in some cases, are harmed) by sharing their perspectives and experiences with and hearing the perspectives/experiences of those in dominant groups (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Feddes et al., 2015)

"Today, I learned patience, listening, and courage."

"I felt a lot of emotional comments, heard a lot of stories, I felt great for getting some weight off my shoulders"



"Today I connected by sharing a part of my story (even though it was just in pairs) and also by capturing what was going on around me."

*"I feel heavy emotions, **everyone** shared stories"*

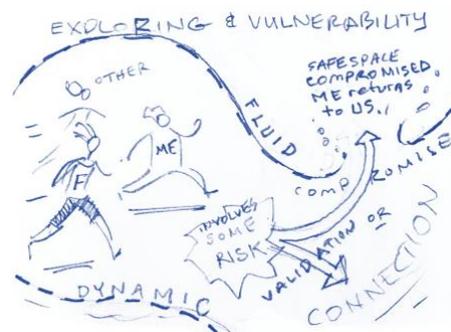
"[I connected] by sharing a real personal story :('"

"I was sad but it was wholesome and I was thankful that they were brave enough to say."

"Indigenous youth came together and expressed their minds and hearts about indigenous views on Canada's law system."

"[I connected by] telling peers my story."

CWWW Participants



Creating spaces for sharing vulnerability must be approached with care and skill. In the intergroup contact and perspective-taking/giving literature, there is evidence that the

benefits may be one-sided in certain circumstances, and the people who benefit the most (or at all) are those in the dominant group (i.e., dominant or centred in society). People/youth who are marginalized may not benefit as much or at all (and in some cases, are harmed) by sharing their perspectives and experiences with and hearing the perspectives/experiences of those in dominant groups (see: Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Feddes et al., 2015)

Stage 9) Three-dimensional listening builds bridges

5



In the best-case scenario, the people in the safer space embrace youth in their vulnerability. They hear the other's story with three-dimensional listening and without judgment. Three-dimensional listening refers to a heightened, active listening process which leads to a thorough understanding of what someone is saying—to listen with one's ears, eyes, and even heart. Listeners validate for each other that their story is important. Even if other youth cannot relate to what was shared, they can convey sympathy. The embrace of others supports the vulnerable youth, leading to an enhanced positive self-worth, a sense of 'who I am is enough in this space', and increased engagement with others in the group (Brown, 2012). If someone else in the group has experienced something similar, they may be moved to share their story, or wrap their arms around the other in empathy. 'When a youth's story is met with affirmation and acceptance, youth are likely to experience temporary 'sparks' of connection with others in the safer space. Brown explains how "connection is an energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued" (2012, p. 145). In domino fashion, others are spurred to be vulnerable once they see how youth who have shared their story were positively received by the group. Validation experienced after being vulnerable can render healing.

*"[I feel] Healed. The more I talk the more I heal,
even if just a little bit."*

"It felt good to talk about these things/healing."

"I shared and listened and empathized."

*"I feel very lost until I shared my stories and people
who I don't even know felt for me."*

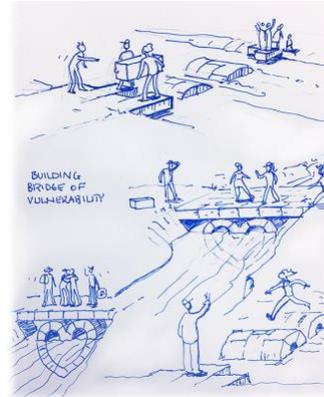
*"I really helped others open-up and tried to
communicate alot with others."*

*"I always plan to listen and take the time to appreciate the joys of others
and to be presented with their sadness"*

"I really got a feel for what people are going through"

*"I felt relieved to be able to talk about my own struggles about living on
reserves especially with substance misuse and how it's common."*

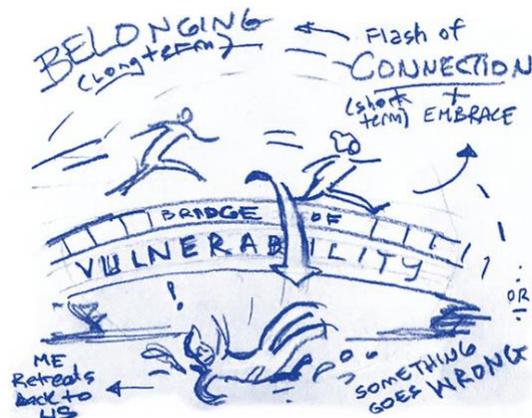
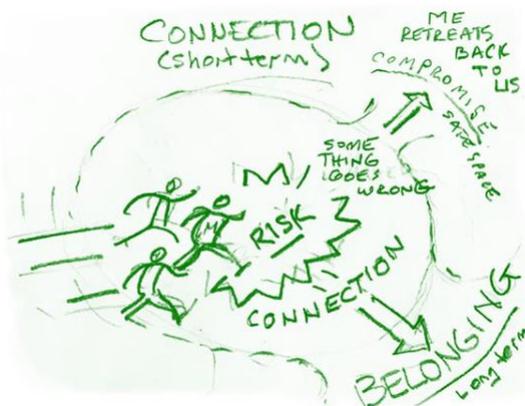
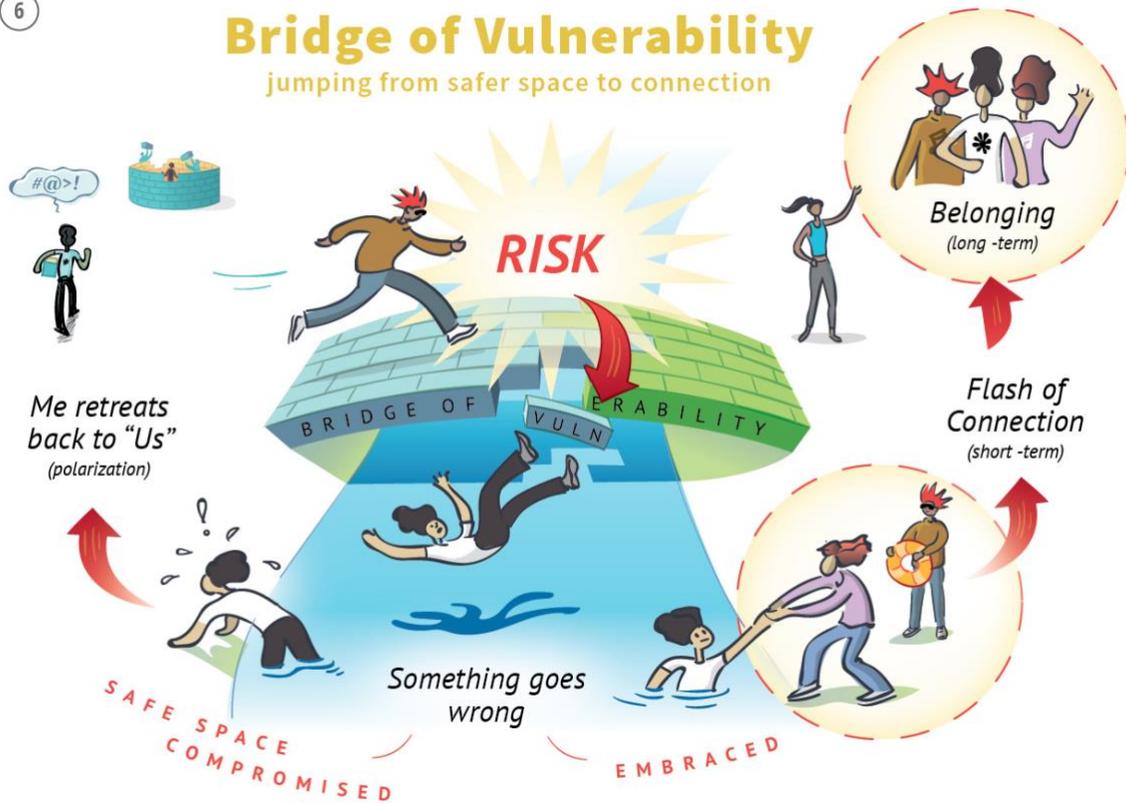
"You're not alone. There's lots of people going through similar things."



CWWW Participants

Stage 10) Risk, the Bridge of Vulnerability (authenticity in motion)

6



However, in this movement from the safer space to connection, on that bridge of vulnerability, it is possible that something goes wrong. Perhaps, while a youth shares the story of the trauma that they have been holding close to their chest for so long, someone else in the safe space is laughing about a text they received. Even though the other's laughter has nothing to do with the youth who is sharing their story, the vulnerable youth can feel shame, rejection, or even self-hate. Experiences of shame make youth feel small, fearful, unworthy, and disconnected (Brown, 2012).

Furthermore, youth who are marginalized have to take greater risks to share their story than others. As a result, some youth will never be completely safe in these spaces. That's why the language "safer" space rather than "safe" space is emerging as a practice standard.

Therefore, the explicit discussion and naming of the continuum of risks related to being vulnerable are important components of a "safer" space. When vulnerability is not heard and honoured by everyone in the group, or even may unintentionally be perceived as insensitive, the safer space has been compromised and affected youth will retreat to their prior notion of 'Us' unless convinced to stay by other(s) in the group.

CWW 328 | Indigenous | Female | 15 | Social Identity Formation

Day 1- Today I connected by sharing a part of my story (even though it was just in pairs) and also by capturing what was going on around me.

Day 2- I feel interested in what was happening. I felt like I belonged, and it was intriguing to what they all said.

Day 3- Today I felt sad in the morning, but in the afternoon I felt lighthearted and calm.

Day 4- overwhelmed by my talk



Stage 11) Discussing influences of off-line and on-line cultures

6

Safer Spaces Culture

Explicit guidelines enable participants to critically evaluate shared space



Youth who return to prior notions of 'Us' are far less inclined to enter another safe space with diverse others in the future and thus add another brick to the wall of polarization, increasing the distance between 'Us' and 'Them'. Online spaces make it particularly difficult for others to notice when the safer space has failed someone who is being vulnerable.

In some spaces, both on-line and off-line, in fact, the culture of a safer space does not exist. Explicit group discussions of what makes a safer space may help build members' capacity to critically evaluate the spaces that they inhabit outside the safer space. These discussions help them adjust their behaviours accordingly, managing the risks of being vulnerable in some, and potentially exercising their power where possible to avoid those that are not safe.

I think word of mouth. Like just the first participants would tell other participants. A lot of the youth brought their friends. Well, that's how I got here. I got involved like earlier this year cause like I hang out with all of them at school, they invited me to come down and help out and I said sure. So yeah I guess it was a lot of just us pushing each other to come out. SME 32

It's just something in your life that's important to you and you couldn't imagine having different things to do, like that's who I am, and this is definitely one of those things. You feel that exact same effect. SME

Stage 12) Making connection last (what sustains/what diminishes)

7

Making Connection Last

A sense of belonging



The energy of connection experienced from presenting vulnerability is a short-term perception and/or emotion. Lasting bonds among peers, also referred to as one's sense of belonging, are forged out of frequent, stable, and positive interactions with others (Beaumister and Leary, 1995). Reciprocity among relationships, particularly a reciprocity of care, is vital to belonging relationships (Beaumister and Leary, 1995; Mahar, Cobigo, & Stuart, 2013; Van Orden et al., 2010). Put another way, a group's cohesion and a youth's sense of closeness to each person in the group is contingent on the frequency of interactions, willingness to participate, and courage to be vulnerable. Taking time to debrief and recognize brave moments in the group, such as vulnerability and validation, can encourage more vulnerability within a group.

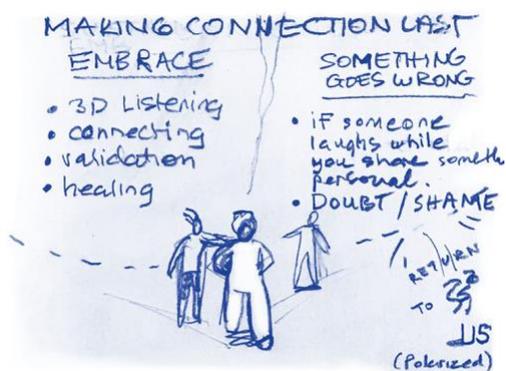
The more times youth cross the bridge of vulnerability, the more moments of connection youth will likely have with one another. Youth may develop confidence to share increasingly difficult aspects of their stories or experiment with different identities as they experience connection.



Sustained connection may develop into an enduring sense of belonging. It is important to note that youth choosing to be vulnerable and sharing their story may stir up mixed emotions in themselves and others. Exhaustion, motivation, joy, anxiety, and heaviness are several frequently cited emotions at the Canada We Want Conference, an event that combines a once-in-lifetime experience, long days, lack of sleep, and meeting many new people.

"With time we all participate and get involved"

"I feel quite shocked about how many people had so many personal experiences"



"I connected by crying with everyone and telling stories."

"we all have a lot in common"

"Everyone shared. Everyone had a story."

"I connected through words, emotions, and holding space."

"I connected by listening to everyone's stories and sharing my own."

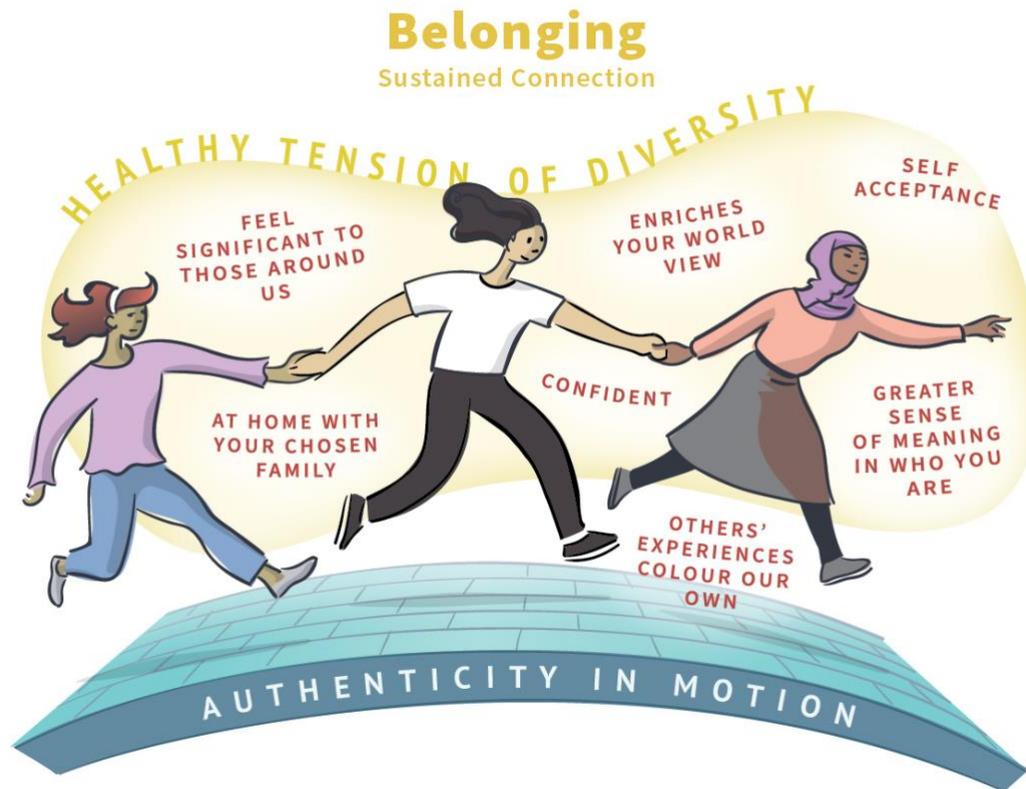
"I felt very connected with people I barely know which isn't always a bad thing."

"[Today I learned] That working in big groups and hearing everyone's voice makes a big country"

CWWC participants

Stage 13) Belonging – sustained connection

8a



In addition to diverse others from well-connected safer spaces, one's sense of belonging includes individuals from the original 'Us'—family, friends, and communities. The phrase 'chosen family' resonates with many youth when thinking about their sense of belonging.

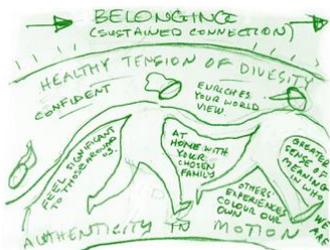
CWW 252 | Indigenous | Female | 16 | Teen Dating Violence

Day 1- My heart is kind of heavy. I let myself go through the worst in an abusive relationship. Just to satisfy someone who didn't deserve my heart.

Day 2- It was very emotionally difficult and tiring.

Day 2- Not ever let someone be abusive toward me ever again.

Day 2- Teen dating violence hits close to home. I've experienced a series of abusive relationships so it's comforting to know I'm not alone.

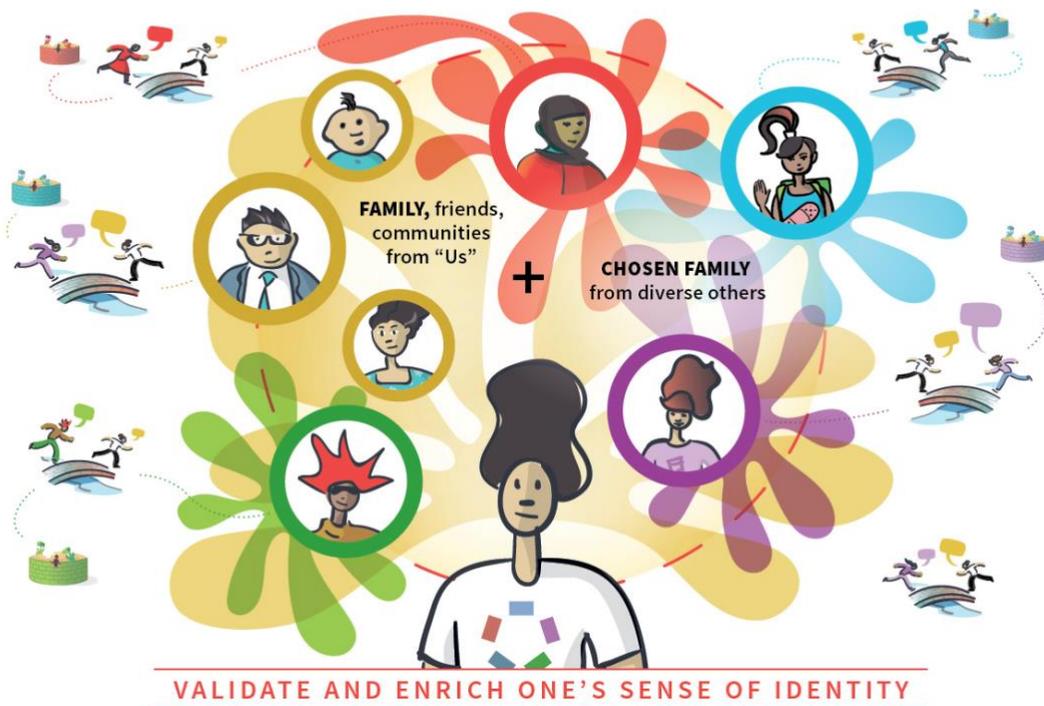


Stage 14) Prolonged sense of belonging

8

A Growing Sense of Belonging

Through richer interactions “Us” grows to become “We”



In the drawing above, a youth’s growing network of belonging is referred to as a ‘We’ instead of an ‘Us’, embodying a richer, strengthened sense of connection among the group. Youth may try to incorporate diverse others into their ‘Us’ communities, thus reducing polarization at a greater social level. According to some theorists, youth are increasingly gaining control over their sense of belonging due to youth’s increasing participation in online social forums (Robards & Bennett, 2011). Agency, or having the voice and ability to control one’s interactions and experience, is cited as an essential need for all humans (Bandura, 2001). Additionally, the number of relationships that comprise one’s sense of belonging has multiplied exponentially, spanning pluralistic networks of online and offline relationships (Robards & Bennett, 2011). Metaphorically, what used to be a four-piece belonging puzzle is now perhaps a 5,000-piece belonging puzzle. These diverse groups to which youth belong form a more complex social identity, which can have positive impacts on positive inter-group attitudes (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2013).

An individual's sense of belonging may become a complicated web of relationships spanning pluralistic networks and diverse groups (Robards & Bennett, 2011). Diverse others within one's belonging network enable a youth to triangulate their core qualities across varying social landscapes. Let's take the example of music. Think of one's authentic identity as a single instrument (let's say a harmonica); other youths' unique identities might be a guitar, or a bongo, or maybe an accordion. As a youth experiments with their identity, they find that they can connect or harmonize with other instruments and still shine in their own way. They also learn to play their identity in different styles (e.g., jazz, pop, blues). Becoming cognizant of the diversity of one's belonging network, and valuing that diversity, is one of the Search Institute's behavioural indicators of thriving (Scales et al., 2000). When shared experiences among diverse others are uncovered in safer spaces, the nuanced facets of others' experiences provide a new lens for looking at one's own experience. This benefit is particularly helpful when the shared experience is a negative (e.g., trauma).

One's sense of belonging is a grounding force in one's life (Mahar et al., 2013). Visualize belonging as a boat anchor. A person who has a strong sense of connection and belonging



to core interpersonal relationships tends to be less threatened by 'winds of change' and 'buffeted from life storms' by being anchored to interpersonal "rocks". Conversely, one who does not have an anchored sense of belonging, or lacks key interpersonal relationships, will be much more susceptible to encountered challenges.

Confident within one's 'chosen family,' youth likely feel significant to the world around them (Elliott, 2009). Youth can find meaning in being a part of something greater than themselves (Brown, 2012, CEYE 2002). Youth tend to no longer feel alone in regard to the uncertain or shameful aspects of their stories (Brown, 2006). When empathy has been shared with other youth in the safer space, they are likely able to look at their own experiences through the lens of another's experience. The experiences of other people colour their own perspective, enriching their experience and view of the world. Moreover, youth tend to be more accepting of these aspects of their identity and personal story moving forward.

"I felt like I belonged, and it was intriguing to what they all said."

"I am making friends that I'd like to stay in touch with."

"I felt super connected with everyone today."

“[I feel] Great! Super hard conversations to have but so special. Feeling the most connected I ever have with a group of youth.”

“[I will] Keep contributing to my community.”

“[I will] bring back information and connections to my community.”

“[I am going to] stay in contact with my group members.”

“Sad to say goodbye. Excited to reconnect.”

CWWC participants

Stage 15) Resiliency (many bridges of vulnerability crossed)

9

Belonging

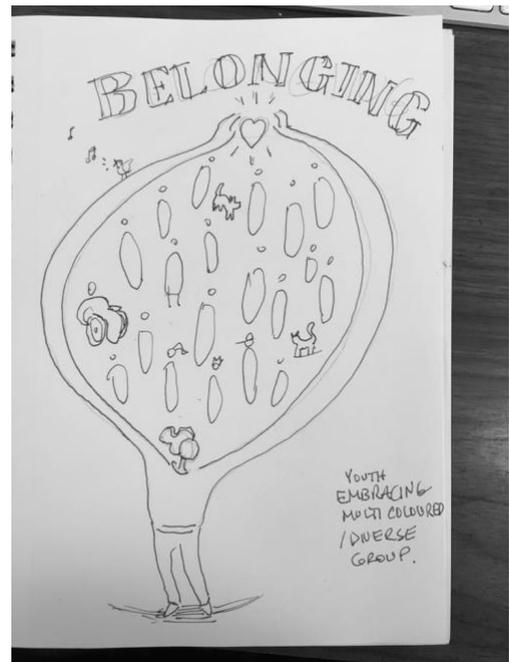
Experiencing connection in a safer space



After youth successfully experience connection sparked by vulnerability and feel grounded in their sense of belonging, they are prone to seek out rich safer spaces to hash out the deeper parts of their identity. Youth tend to be more inclined to engage with diverse others who are farther outside of their comfort zone. Youth may be braver, explore more nuanced aspects of their identity and probe into deeper issues in future safer spaces, leading to more vulnerability, connection, and a wider sense of 'We.'

Entering safer spaces with diverse others and choosing to share one's story is still a risk; there is the possibility the safer space malfunctions or a vulnerable action bellyflops. However, the more that a youth traverses the path of a safer space to belonging, the more confidence a youth may develop about their identity among diverse others and groups, thus becoming resilient to the failure of unsafe spaces.

In particular, empathy and perspective-taking are proposed experiences that lead to a reduction in fear of future interaction of others (Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005). Picture a well-worn path in the forest. The path becomes more noticeable and hike-worthy as more people follow the path. So it is with youth successfully experiencing connection in a safer space. Youth will likely actively seek out, craft, and create safer spaces as they experience connection, grow their sense of belonging, and find confidence in their unfolding identity.



As youth develop momentum in the process of seeking out new safer spaces with diverse others, the wall that we saw at the beginning of our model, that polarization wall between 'Us' and 'Them', likely opens up. Positive narratives (i.e., storytelling) around intergroup connections have been demonstrated to reduce prejudiced attitudes towards 'otherness' and spur individuals to interact with 'Them' (Murrar & Brauer, 2019). As the wall opens, more youth begin to see through the wall to the other side. Unfamiliar others, those on the 'Them' side of the wall, become far less scary, encouraging other youth to enter safer spaces with diverse others to share their story, explore facets of their identity, connect, and widen their sense of belonging.

"I'm going to turn a new leaf and become the best version of me."

“My voice is powerful. Being open makes people trust you so don't be afraid to share.”

“More about experiences & stories from any group of people I've ever been in before this topic (unhealthy/abusive relationships). I like it, tons of resilience now.”



“[I learned that] You don't ever need to feel insecure about your story.”

“It is important to not sacrifice who you are because someone else wants you to.”

“I can carry it on back home and share the stories I heard.”

“[I am going to] Keep this connection going and bring back all the knowledge discussed here to youth in my community.”

“I feel more at peace”

CWWC participants

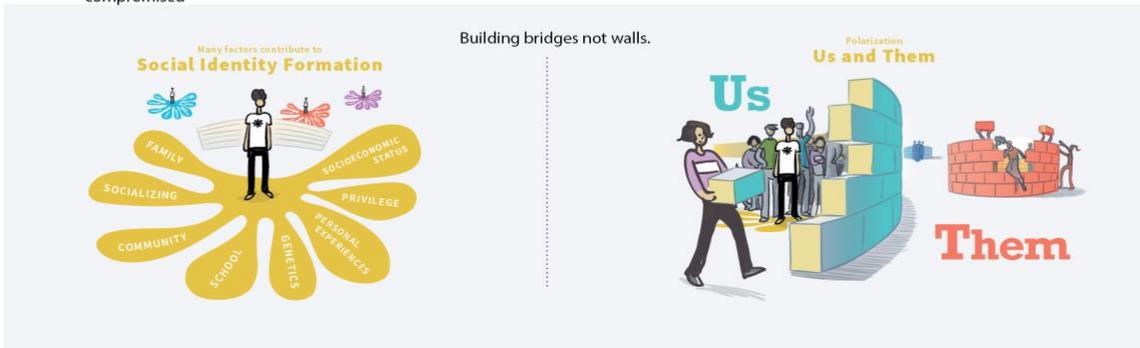
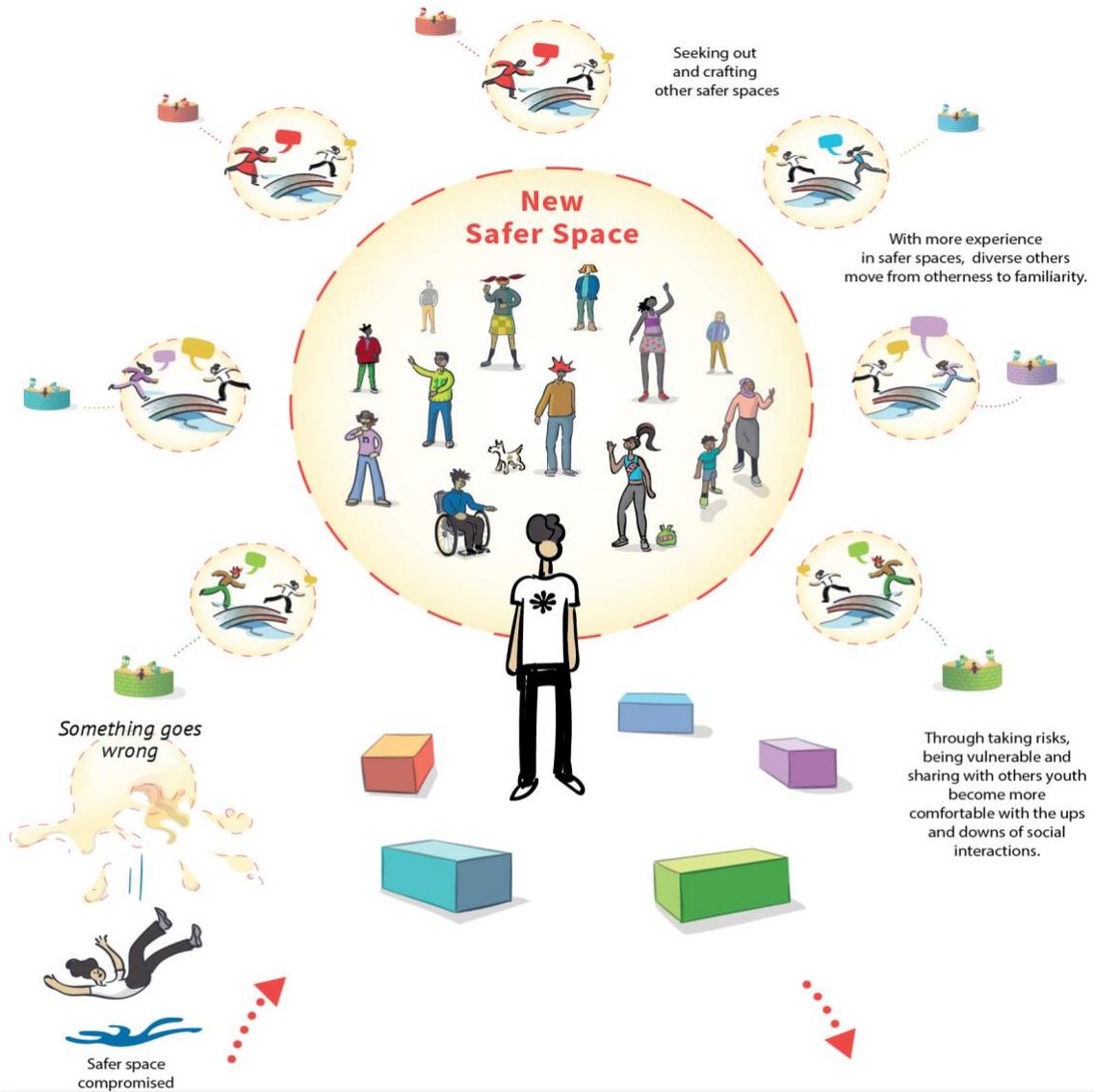
Social identity formation (SIF) and safer spaces summary visual

95



SIF Summary

Experiencing connection in a safer space

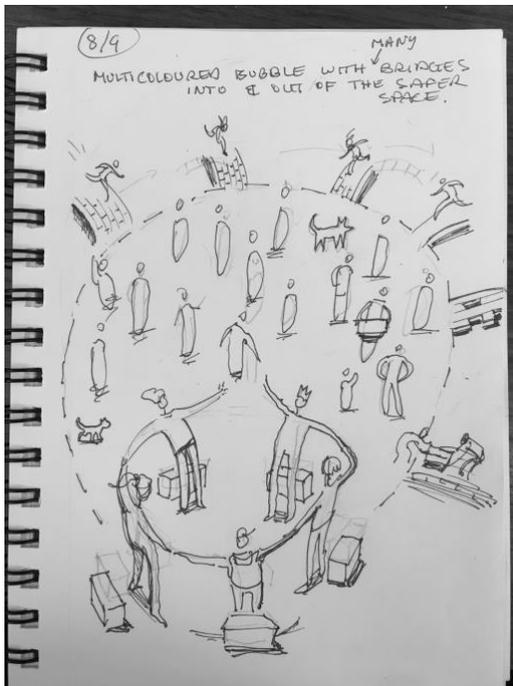


Safer spaces summary

The process begins with a young person who has a very established and rigid social identity with a homogeneous “Us” group of family, people in their school and town. At times, this identity may function positively or negatively for them. There is a high wall of “unknown”, quite often fear and polarization between themselves and Others who are different from them.

Changes begin to happen when people from the Us side of wall and people from the Them side of the wall find themselves together by happenstance, a shred of a common interest, or a mutual connection in safer spaces. These safer spaces are emergent and grounded in

a common set of values. Eventually confidence is built where the youth will share something very personal about themselves in a state of vulnerability, which leads to connection.



The more youth experience the temporary connections with those who they are bringing into their emerging “we”, the more these connections may “drip down” into a rich and deep feeling of “chosen” family. These diverse perspectives on identity and a rich sense of communion around celebrated shared life differences and similarities start to create an enduring sense of belonging. Youth become more prone to seek out safer spaces within their existing group and to craft and create safer spaces for other people in their community. Often, these efforts are directed at people who were a part of that initial homogeneous Us group, with youth motivated to begin to add diversity of perspectives. An enhanced continuum

of belonging grows to include those groups with whom they now can identify.

Youth’s efforts toward broadening the perspectives of others can often be challenging and hurtful if they are rejected. Support from understanding adult allies as youth undertake these efforts is helpful in promoting the success of these attempts.

Discussion: Limitations and challenges in implementing the model

Spaces characterized by diversity are often safer for some youth than others; engaging with others who are different from themselves can be riskier for youth who face structural and interpersonal discrimination. Furthermore, youth who are marginalized in society may not benefit as much from these spaces. Therefore, it is essential in program spaces to address structural barriers and inequities, provide strategies and options that recognize and mitigate risks that different youth take to be in the space, and offer opportunities that provide benefits for all youth.

Who benefits from diverse intergroup contact?

The conference intervention creates a space for intergroup contact and dialogue, which may improve positive attitudes about people who are different from themselves (i.e., out-group) and decrease stereotypes, especially if three conditions are met: 1) both/all groups have equal status in the space; 2) they are all working towards a common goal; and 3) it is sanctioned by some authority (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). These conditions are upheld during the conference intervention through inclusive practices, shared purposes, and organizational support. However, safer spaces are nested within broader societal contexts and power dynamics. As a result, the benefits of intergroup contact, even with the above conditions met, tend to be mainly one-sided; only those who are already privileged (i.e., dominant in society) tend to benefit (e.g. White versus Black Americans: Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005; Beelman & Heinemann, 2014; Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). In the Canadian context, characterized by historical and structural conditions such as colonization, intergroup contact tends to reproduce, rather than challenge inequities and prejudice (e.g., Denis, 2015).

Who benefits from storytelling?

At the conference, diverse youth come together and share their experiences and perspectives. However, interventions that promote sharing perspectives (i.e., perspective-giving and perspective-taking) have had mixed results. For example, structured programs intended to reduce prejudice or promote positive intergroup attitudes among young people have low- to moderate-sized effects. Those that were based on direct contact experiences and social-cognitive training programs to build empathy and perspective taking were the most effective, but again the majority group benefited the most. Interventions that focused on reducing prejudice or promoting positive attitudes towards ethnic groups (as compared to out-groups with disabilities or senior citizens) were less effective (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014).

Unfortunately, perspective taking has been associated with more positive attitudes toward ideology-based violence (Feddes et al., 2015). This unexpected result may be explained by differences in status and power of those who are sharing perspectives. In a study by Bruneau & Saxe (2012), those who have “lower societal status” had decreased

bias only in perspective-giving (i.e., feeling heard about their living conditions) rather than perspective-taking opportunities. In situations where marginalized youth listen to perspectives of youth from dominant groups, they may become more socially polarized and have increased negative sentiments towards the dominant group (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). Similarly, youth from privileged groups can have their stereotypes of others confirmed and reinforced through perspective taking (McKeown & Dixon, 2016; Skorinko & Sinclair, 2013). Furthermore, intergroup contact can have the ironic effect of decreasing the collective resistance to social inequality of disadvantaged groups (e.g., see McKeown & Dixon for a review).

Finally, sharing stories contextualized by marginalization can be taxing and emotionally exhausting, particularly to others who do not understand due to their social location or self-interest, or have to be “convinced” that discrimination and inequity exists. These costs of educating those with relative privilege can cause material harm.

Strategies to address uneven benefits

Minoritized youth are not the minority

In the conference intervention, attention is given to the balance of participants; the majority of youth in the conference have experiences of marginalization in society. Without this balance, more privileged youth benefit from being educated on the backs of young people who share stories of structural discrimination. With this balance, youth can find solidarity with one another to address injustices that are interconnected.

Critical thinking framework

In order to undermine prejudice and the individualization of social issues, a key characteristic of the conference intervention is that it is grounded in frameworks that foster critical thinking and reflection. Critical thinking involves identifying societal inequities and social problems, recognizing them as unjust, and understanding them as systemic (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011).

Critical Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (e.g., Torre et al., 2012) and borderlands scholarship (e.g., Anzaldúa 1999; 2002) explore the politics of space, and inter-group relations in the “contact zone”, a politicized social space “where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt, 1991 in Torre et al., 2008, p. 24). In the most recent conference, groups were using several different lenses that pay attention to structural racism, colonialism...

These frameworks also shape the safer space to challenge hegemonic power structures and reduce harm for marginalized youth (e.g., center non-dominant worldviews, integrate culturally-relevant ceremonies). As a result, these spaces can produce an alternative mode of encounter (Ahmed, 2002) that recognizes relationships of power, fosters intentional dialogue about our differences, and offers space and focus to develop a shared social identity. Sara Ahmed (2002) suggests that speaking across difference requires locating

difference in the “mode” of encounter rather than the individual characteristics of the Other:

Such a politics based on encounters between other others is one bound up with responsibility – with recognizing how relationships of power mediate and frame the encounter itself. A politics of encountering gets closer in order to allow the differences between us, as differences that involve power and antagonism, to make a difference to the very encounter itself. The differences between us necessitate the dialogue, rather than disallow it – a dialogue must take place, precisely because we do not speak the same language. The ‘we’ of such a collective politics is what must be worked for, rather than the foundation of our collective work. In the very ‘painstaking labour’ of getting closer, of speaking to each other, and of working for each other, we also get closer to ‘other others’ (p. 570).

Focus on social change and activism capacity building

Youth who are disproportionately harmed by social issues can benefit directly from changes to their social conditions. The collaborative focus on social change in the conference intervention can more equitably redistribute the benefits from interventions that bring diverse youth together.

Ginwright & James (2002) recommend principles of youth engagement in social issues, which are grounded in critical thinking (p. 34-35):

Principles	Practices	Outcomes
Analyze power in social relationships	Political education and strategizing Identify root causes Identify influential power holders Self-reflect	Critical thinking Sociopolitical awareness Transform systems due to youth and adults sharing power
Centre identity	Initiatives and resources that support identity exploration and development Critiquing identity stereotypes	Pride in one’s identity Awareness of forces that influence identity Connection to something greater Capacity to build solidarity
Promote systemic change	Work to end social inequality Refrain from oppressive behaviors Address root causes	Sense of purpose and optimism Liberation from social oppression
Encourage collective	Community organizing and	Capacity to change personal,

action	action Rallies and marches Boycotts, walkouts, hunger strikes Electoral strategies	community and social conditions Empowerment and healing
Embrace youth culture(s)	Recognize and celebrate youth culture(s) in organizational culture and processes	Authentic youth engagement Youth-led organizations Effective recruitment and communications Engagement of marginalized youth

Options for group/identity-specific spaces

Spaces for groups with shared social identities (e.g., Indigenous youth, queer youth of color) provide a context for youth to speak about issues they could not in other settings, discuss issues more deeply, and build solidarity; these groups may have some shared understandings and shared goals that can be silenced, undermined or decentred by the burden of voyeurism and educating others (e.g., racialized girls and young women: De Finney, 2010; similar to online spaces for LGBTQ+ youth: Hanckel & Morris, 2014). Furthermore, these spaces can challenge structural exclusions and dominant assumptions and norms (e.g., not assuming heterosexism, masculinity, or whiteness as the norm). These spaces can also function as a container to unpack stereotypes without harming those targeted and harmed by those stereotypes (e.g., white youth unpacking racist stereotypes, young men unpacking misogynist beliefs).

However, these groups are still heterogeneous and cannot be assumed to share similar perspectives, experiences and values. They can also unintentionally reinforce provisional categories (e.g., Lee, 2006) and replicate structural exclusions (e.g., dividing a group by binary gender, which excludes Two-Spirit, gender-queer, trans, and non-binary youth).

Visibility of diverse young adult/adult allies

Youth and young adults who attended previous conferences are invited to take on facilitator roles. Adult allies and Elders are intentionally invited from young people’s home communities to provide support as needed. As a result, youth facilitators and adult allies tend to reflect the diversity of the conference participants. This is not a strategy for “representation”, but to prevent erasures and ensure visibility so that youth feel supported and that the experiences of diverse youth and communities are kept at the forefront. For example, Indigenous youth facilitators and Elders at the conference help to keep the space open to Indigenous knowledge and ceremonies.

*CWW 283 | Indigenous | Female | 14 | theme group Justice
Day 1 (Head) I've learned that many people see the justice system is no*

good. (Heart) Today my heart was kind of heavy (Feet) I will tell my mom & dad about what I've learned. I'll also share stories to my family.

Day 2 (Heart) I felt good about today. I felt more connected.(Spirit) I connected great. I felt extra loud which is rare.

Day 3 (Head) Today I've learned about how to prevent drug overdose. I've learned a lot of legal terms, I've learned different aspects of different communities. (Feet) I will probably spread the word. So tell my family about everything I've learned. Also make my friends/peers more aware.(Spirit) Today I honestly didn't really feel connected. I'm not sure why, maybe it's just an off day.

Day 4 (Heart) Today I felt really good with a bit of sadness because of all of us leaving.(Spirit) I felt super connected with everyone today.

CWW 196 | Indigenous | Female | 15 | theme Inclusive Story Teller

Day 3-I felt very heavy hearted after the morning discussion about reconciliation Today I connected by sharing a part of my story (even though it was just in pairs) and also by capturing what was going on around me.

CWW 328 | Indigenous | Female | 15 | theme Social Identity Formation

Day 1- Today I connected by sharing a part of my story (even though it was just in pairs) and also by capturing what was going on around me.

Day 2- I feel interested in what was happening. I felt like I belonged, and it was intriguing to what they all said.

Day 3- Today I felt sad in the morning, but in the afternoon I felt lighthearted and calm.

Day 4- overwhelmed by my talk

221 | Non-Indigenous | Female | 16 | theme Teen Dating Violence

Day 1- Personally, I was dealing with my depression & anxiety all day which brought me down.

Day 2- I feel very lost until I shared my stories and people who I don't even know felt for me. - I felt very connected with people I barely know which isn't always a bad thing.

Day 4 - When I came I was extremely depressed (still am), but now I'm leaving motivated to help youth in situations similar to mine as well as all situations.

The youth leaders journey

Youth played an integral role in shaping and implementing this project.

Canada We Want conference

Youth engagement, particularly the sustained involvement of a core group of youth, has perpetuated and shaped the Social Identity Formation initiative from the beginning. The core group of youth—Isaac Lauren, Ali, Astrid, Erica, and L—got involved with the project during the 2018 Canada We Want Conference. Social identity formation was one of many theme teams offered to participating youth that year (e.g., Mental health, Justice and Sustainability, etc.). Some of these youth joined the group out of interest in the topic, others because they were encouraged by peers to join. Within the social identity formation team at the conference, these youth (alongside 6 other youth who did not stay involved with the project) examined data from the Social Identity Literature Review, explored and shared their own experiences and stories surrounding identity, and brainstormed how they could share their social identity insights with other youth across Canada. Four guiding themes emerged as core to understanding social identity: belongingness, authenticity, differences between online and offline identities, and the realities of being hurt online.

Following the conference, the core group of youth met regularly via video conferencing and stayed connected through a Facebook Group. Our video conference calls were focused on sustaining our sense of belonging as a group, discussing how the conference had impacted everyone's online and offline behaviour, and figuring out how we were going to share our identity conversations with other youth. The core group's involvement with the conference had led to significant changes in their lives in the weeks and months following the conference.

Individual changes following conference

After sharing that “nobody really understands me” at the conference, L convened a group of school administrators and teachers to start conversations about how the school environment was not conducive to cultivating authenticity for students. Isaac quickly pieced together his own survey instrument and began polling youth in classrooms and community groups about their online and offline interactions. Erica, an avid video gamer, began to only play games with gamers she had a positive online rapport with, avoiding interacting with aggressive or even abusive others. She referred to her group of positive players as her ‘video game family’. Ali wanted to create a space to share difficult parts of her past to let youth who had experienced similar issues know that “they are not alone.” Ali created an anonymous blog where youth can connect with her through anonymous commenting.

One change embraced by all core group youth was a commitment to authentic posts that reflect their *real* selves on social media platforms. Youth took longer to think about social

media content before posting, as well as were more inclined to risk sharing something true and real about themselves when uncertain about peer uptake. Additionally, youth were more conscientious about followers and friends on social media platforms. Youth were more motivated to curate follower lists comprised of people they knew and wanted to see their posts, rather than mutual friends or even strangers.

Developing SIF workshops

During our regular video conference calls following the conference, the core group of youth shared common interest in mobilizing social identity knowledge so other youth could make similar positive shifts in their online and offline behaviours. Youth wanted a space where they could comfortably discuss social identity and the themes they uncovered at the conference (e.g., authenticity, belongingness) with youth in their communities. A flexible workshop was created by the group complete with: icebreakers, activities, discussion questions, and other pertinent identity content. Core group youth facilitated social identity workshops within their secondary schools, universities, and community organizations. Youth were given the autonomy to piece together workshop curricula that they were comfortable delivering. For this reason, each workshop looked a little differently. Although, a 'master curricula' was eventually compiled to include activities and content developed by core group. Workshops were delivered across four provinces, and one state (one youth went to university in the states following the conference) to more than 270 youth.

[Takeaways from workshops](#)

Following each workshop, youth facilitators were debriefed to gather highlights, takeaways, and challenging aspects of the workshop. This feedback was compiled and used as data for the 2019 Canada We Want Conference Social Identity theme team to analyze. Below is a selection of quotes and experiences from youth participants of the social identity workshops. These quotes showcase the level of comfort and safe space that youth facilitators achieved with youth in their community. Additionally, these quotes demonstrate a receptiveness and relatability to having deliberate, youth-led conversations around social identity.

- *In efforts to blend in with their peers, one participant admitted to researching 80s rock for hours to try to fit in. To be desired.*
- *"Social media is a dirty thing. It makes me question my self-worth, and it makes me sad."*
- *"It's really hard to be authentic online. People are so judgmental."*
- *"I want vibrant communities that will celebrate diversity and appreciate youth for their true identity."*
- *"In the online world, you can make up whatever you want about yourself and see how other people react. You have infinite possibilities of who you can be!"*
- *"I have 1,000+ friends on FB, but I don't have 1 friend in real life. The illusion that I have so many people online, makes it easier to cope with the fact that I don't have many real life connections."*

Workshops received swift uptake in youth facilitator communities. Community youth groups, including cultural groups, made direct requests to the Students Commission and youth facilitators to participate in workshops. One youth facilitator, Isaac, was requested by every teacher in his grade to conduct workshops in their classrooms after conducting the first workshop at his school. One series of workshops developed into a social identity podcast featuring the voices of youth from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds.

Presenting findings at violence prevention conference

Through partnerships forged by the Centre of Excellence and Youth Engagement, facilitators were invited to share their findings from social identity workshops at the 2018 Prevention of Radicalization and Extremist Violence Conference in Edmonton, AB. At this conference, youth delivered a multi-media presentation to a federal Cabinet Minister and over 100 practitioners specializing in radicalization and violence prevention. In a debrief following the presentation, youth described the opportunity to present as: “This is something I never thought I would ever do”; “I feel brave and proud of myself.”; “I can’t believe *that* just happened.”; and “Talking in from of all of those people was intense, but I’m glad we got to say what we said”.

Long-term individual changes

After facilitating workshops and presenting in Edmonton conference, Erica, L, Ali, and Isaac were debriefed one last time to capture their current perceptions of social identity. These conversations unearthed a trove of language surrounding adaptive social identity and significant growth in their own identity development,

Erica

Erica explained that she had no idea what social identity was when she first joined the group at the conference. She explained how her social identity now is wrapped up in everything she does now and who she is becoming. Specifically with playing video games, an avid passion, Erica feels like she can be more honest and real with her online video game community. She now recognizes that repeated game play with the same people gives her a sense of belonging and importance. Erica is also more involved in her offline community. She looks for opportunities to volunteer around her community, as well as spending intentional time with established friends, making a point to offer her help when she can. Erica explains, “In general, I have more presence wherever I am.”

Erica is more comfortable with being her authentic self around others. She expressed how she doesn’t ‘nitpick’ which aspects of herself that she shares with people. Erica explained, “Social identity is showing the real you and not necessarily caring about people would say about it. Go big or go home.” Part of showing the real ‘Erica’ involved getting a half sleeve tattoo of a wolf wrapped in smoke to remind her that she doesn’t need to be ashamed of her indigenous heritage. She also wants to help other youth find their authentic self through inclusion of others. “Including people encourages people to open up,” Erica explained.

L

L views social identity as who someone is when they are around other people. She has started to ask herself two questions to keep in tune with her social identity: Do I like who I am?; What am I willing to do about who I am becoming? One of the big steps L taken since being a part of the social identity project has been to apply and attend university. L explained how she infused her application showcased the 'real L' and not trying to tick all of the boxes of what a university registrar might want to hear. She was accepted " and now attends the liberal arts university of her choice, which is where she conducted her social identity workshops. Since moving to the United States, L describes her identity as fluid, mainly because she has found a core group of people to belong to. L explains how she is aware how she portrays herself to different groups and different contexts as she tries to figure out her core group.

Vulnerability has been an important discovery from for L's social identity. She remembers the theme team at the conference becoming meaningful to her when others shared their stories, but especially when she shared her story. The social identity theme team at the Canada We Want conference was the first time she had been open about the large questions surrounding her identity. L now seeks out spaces and groups where she feels comfortable being authentic, sharing her story. She says it's easy to recognize when other people are not being authentic, or when she is not being her most authentic self, because she will feel an internal discomfort. She highlighted that it is easier to be authentic and relate to others in small groups. She's discovered that trying to be authentic with groups that she doesn't have a level of comfort with thwarts her sense of belonging.

L found that social identity workshops created a meaningful space for a diverse group of international students in her university program. L explained how running multiple workshops with the same group encouraged a sense of belonging to develop among the group. In L's experience, the workshops were a welcomed excuse for young people to discuss substantial issues. Navigating a new country with as a foreigner with different values and backgrounds was one issue that sparked much discussion at the workshop. She often found that these conversations expended beyond the workshop. In the final debrief L asked this question: "Why do we need an excuse to talk about meaningful topics in our lives?" She recommended that we begin to have conversations around authenticity and identity at a much earlier age. She used the example of bullying, "People talked to me about bullying when I was young, and now I am very conscious of it. Why couldn't we start talking about our identities from a younger age?"

Ali

Ali's definition of social identity is very close to L's. Ali thinks of social identity in terms of who she "physically is when being around people." Ali clarified, "being around people" can be in online or offline settings. Ali described an "ah-ha moment" at the conference during the debrief: "I just realized how *many* social media accounts I had. I was like wow, I am such a different person. There are so many versions of Ali." Ali has been working to be more authentic on all of her social media platforms. Compared to when she first joined

the initiative, she explained that she is being “100% more authentic” now in social circles. An important part of authenticity for Ali is being honest with herself, particularly the difficult aspect of her past. She expressed, “I have not being honest to the hurt that I have experienced and I need to change that.”

Similar to L’s experience of vulnerability at the Canada We Want conference, the project became meaningful to Ali when she felt comfortable sharing difficult aspects of her story with the social identity theme team. She has developed the confidence to share her struggles with select friends. Ali has developed boundaries around who she considers is a part of her circle of trust within her belonging network. She discussed how she unfollowed and defriended people on social media sites, as well as walking away from multiple unhealthy relationships. Ali conveyed how she surrounds herself—online and offline—with people who help her accept who she is and becoming.

Ali is still sharing her story via anonymous blog in hopes of helping youth not feel alone in their struggles. Beyond her blog, she and another core youth, Lauren, have drafted an early framework of an online platform that will encourage youth to share their identity-shaping stories and connect. She expressed, “Young people need a space to talk. They need a space to figure out their hurt and what that means for who they are.” Ali has also been involved in conversations about a multi-year grant regarding the impact of identity work on mental health.

Isaac

By facilitating social identity workshops, Isaac has sought out his peers’ “brutal honesty” regarding his social identity. Isaac began his workshops by showing screenshots of his social media to youth, asking them for their honest impressions. According to Isaac, many of his peers have followed his example by asking for open feedback surrounding their social media accounts. Isaac found Student Commission’s four pillars (Respect, Listen, Understand, and Communicate™) necessary for the conversations that occurred during his workshops. He expressed a desire to use the four pillars as a way for grounding future conversations around his own identity development. Isaac was sure to mention that on a day-to-day basis, he doesn’t feel as he is being as authentic as he should be. “Everybody has different masks they where is different places,” he explained. Though, he is thankful that he can at least detect infrequencies that are hampering him from his ‘truest’ self.

Similar to Erica’s desire to be more inclusive, Isaac expressed being more willing to engage other young people who might be on the fringe. He explained, “Now, I always say ‘hi’ to the kid who sits in the corner. You don’t know if they is the only and first interaction that the person has had all day.” He has found that creating group chats with select mutual friends is another way to create inclusive online safe spaces. He prizes equality in these spaces. “I like being a part of smaller groups,” Isaac explain, “it’s important for everyone to be able to look each other in the eye. You know?” He has developed a practice of taking a risk in the safer spaces to be the first person to share something meaningful. Isaac has

found that other youth are more comfortable sharing their story once he has 'broken the ice'.

Lauren

Prior to joining the Social Identity Formation theme team, Lauren did not think much about social identity, let alone identity. This is not very shocking considering that Lauren had just turned 14 when she got involved with the project. A year and a half later, Lauren actively reflects on her social identity. Lauren thinks social identity has both psychological and social implications, which she seeks to trace in her own life. She explained how she regularly sits down with pen and paper and 'maps out' who she is. In this mind map, she considers: her interests; who she fits in with; and what aspects of her story she is, or is not, sharing. She explained how through this process, "I'm better at recognizing my successes, failures, where my strengths lie, and what my weaknesses are."

In the course of her involvement with the project, she notices that she has become more authentic in online and offline settings, especially surrounding her mental health challenges. Lauren doesn't really post on social media; she said the "compulsion to post" is gone. Where Lauren used to incessantly look for the validation of other people online, she has learned to empower herself. "I'm more resilient within myself now," she expressed. Lauren has found the voice to tell others her story, regardless of validation. "You can't force someone to be there or to share." Though, Lauren has found that sharing her story in online and offline settings has given her peers the courage to share their story. Part of owning her story has been to learn how to advocate for her needs with adults, particularly teachers. Lauren said that she doesn't hesitate to tell people about what she needs to thrive. Lauren has large aspirations for her future. Although the specifics of what she wants to do remain unknown, she said that she wants "to help people find their voice and tell their story."

Data collection: head, heart, feet and spirit

The 2019 Canada We Want Conference (CWWC) provided youth from every province and territory in Canada with opportunities to generate recommendations around prominent issues. Coming from coast-to-coast-to-coast, youth participants represented a vast array of unique regional, cultural, and individual traits—CWWC is an extraordinarily vibrant and colorful week-long community! Here, youth encounter diverse perspectives and backgrounds of others on daily basis: bumping into each other walking from one end of the campus to the other, getting to know each other through ice breakers and other team building activities, sharing meals together, and working closely in smaller theme teams. In the early days of the conference, especially day 1, youth are quick to identify differences between themselves and others: different languages, hot takes on contemporary issues, cultural differences, how they grew up, experiences with the justice system. Despite encountering much diversity, youth voiced enjoying meeting new faces during the first two days of the conference.

The following section presents an overview of data collected at the final intervention conference organized with respect to two research goals: first a summary of the overall themes and then a day-by-day analysis of the developmental identity journeys of 42 individuals.

What data were gathered

Over the course of the 2019 Canada We Want Conference (CWWC), youth participants were invited to complete one Head Heart Feet Spirit (HHFS) form at the end of each day, for a total of 4 days. The HHFS module is comprised of 4 open-ended questions to gather cognitive (What did I learn today?), affective (How do I feel about today?), behavioural (What will I do with what I learned today?), and spirit/engagement (How did I connect today?) Most HHFS data spanned the first two days of the conference. Significantly fewer forms were collected on Day 3, and even fewer on Day 4. This trend is likely attributed to pace and format of the conference. Theme team dynamics and priorities have shifted, the teams are frantically working on pulling together deliverables, many of the youth are exhausted from staying up late, to name a few contributing factors of participant attrition. Given this consideration, we do not have enough data to show convincing trends in identity work from the beginning to end of the conference. Notwithstanding, HHFS data unearth a trove of rich language around the benefits of identity work among a diverse group of youth, and showcase the CWWC as a safer space where youth can experience adaptive identity development.

Methodology

2019 CWWC HHFS data was coded for significant statements using the conceptual framework of the Safer Spaces model. The following constructs were used as coding lenses to identify adaptive identity practices: encountering and interacting with others' differences, group membership, safe spaces, sharing one's story, vulnerability, connection,

belongingness, and changes in perception and/or behaviour. Anonymous User IDs were then attributed to highlighted significant statements. Participants with significant statements spanning more than one day were separated and compiled into a scoped data set. From the 150 conference participants, 42 were included into the secondary scoped data s. These 42 individuals are featured in the analysis below. Significant statements from this group of conference participants was sorted by day and then grouped together using an emergent open-coding analysis. The discussion below relies on the emergent themes from the day-to-day analysis to showcase social identity development at the CWWC.

Summary of the themes and process

Early on in the conference, youth were quick to realize that diverse others were not as different as they might have originally thought:

*I have learned that these people aren't so scary as they seem.
We all have something in common*

By the second day of the conference, many youth were finding ways to incorporate diverse traits within their smaller Theme Team groups, in a way 'meeting others where they are at'. Youth took steps to speak others native languages, participated in cultural ceremonies, and were creating new ways to listen to others.

*Doing a smudge was really nice and balancing.
Even trying to speak French helps a lot*

Youth created and maintained safer spaces

A core piece of allowing youth to fully experience the differences of others, as well as take inclusive steps to accommodate others, was the creation and maintenance of a safer space. The Student's Commission's Four Pillars (Respect, Listen, Understand, & Communicate) were a bedrock in forming the foundation of the safe space. Indeed, the Four Pillars are peppered in youth feedback from the conference:

*I am walking away with a full heart and respect.
In the future I will] Listen more carefully.
It's important to understand there may be factor as to why they are the way they are
and how to help them
Not everyone communicates with their words*

Most youth believe that a safer space among their theme team group was created by day 2. (As an aside, the term 'safe spaces' was used among conference facilitators as a way of giving language to a space that was comforting, trusting, and exemplified the Four Pillars. It's no surprise then, to read youth using the phrase in their responses.) More impressively, youth saw themselves as a part of shaping this space:

[Today, I connected] through words, emotion, and holding space.

Safe space was actually achieved. Great communication, open and non-judgmental works miracles.

[I learned] how to meet people where they are - not focus on the outcomes but focus on the process.

Youth shared stories, perspectives, and problems

The presence of safer spaces allowed youth to be present and show up to their Theme Team groups in an authentic way. Starting on day 2 of the conference, youth were sharing personal stories from their own life. Youth shared past hardships, personal issues that they carried much uncertainty about, and perspectives about prevalent contemporary problems (e.g., drug use, the justice system). In the process of sharing personal stories and perspectives, youth used their Theme Teams as an audience, a sounding board, to make meaning of their lives and shape their social identities. In sharing personal stories, it almost seems that youth were using safer spaces to test the boundaries of what others could handle about who they were (Perhaps something along the lines of, “Will you still accept the *real* me if you knew this?”).

Everyone shared a story.

More about experiences & stories from any group of people I've ever been in before this topic (unhealthy/abusive relationships). I like it, tons of resilience now I feel very lost until I shared my stories and people who I don't even know felt for me.

You don't ever need to feel insecure about your story.

In sharing perspectives about larger contemporary issues, youth were using a rare space to validate and shape their value systems and broader world views.

These issues are very real, not just in movies.

Indigenous youth came together and expressed their minds and hearts about indigenous views on Canada's law system.

So many horrific experiences in Canada that we don't hear about in cities but a lot of people face in rural communities. And a lot of racism.

On day 3, youth began sharing issues from their home communities (particularly indigenous communities) that were deeply impacting them. This trend emphasizes youth's trust in the safer space and the desire to explore larger 'unknowns' with a diverse group of others, despite only knowing this group for 3 days!

I learned about the struggles and problems other individuals in the indigenous community faced in their own communities.

I added into the conversation and shared stories from my reserve and what I have seen in my lifetime.

I felt relieved to be able to talk about my own struggles about living on reserves especially with substance misuse and how it's common.

Sharing was a vulnerable action

Youth recognized the significance of the depth and meaning of stories that were shared. Youth saw story-sharing as a vulnerable and brave act. Youth listened to each other with a sense of gratitude and deep reverence:

I was thankful that they were brave enough to say.

I did not participate in conversation but listened and reflected on what has happened in my life and relating to those who were brave enough to speak up.

[Today, I connected] by listening and appreciating voice

Vulnerability coupled with safer spaces led to youth experiencing sympathy, empathy, acceptance, and healing. These experiences with others encouraged the creation of safe spaces and sharing stories with more diverse others beyond the CWWC:

I feel appreciated and accepted

[I feel] Healed. The more I talk the more I heal, even if just a little bit.

I feel more at peace.

Diverse youth connected

Connection was riddled throughout the conference experience; connection was by far the most coded construct in the below data. This finding is significant provided that diverse youth, many of whom had not met prior to the conference, were experiencing substantial feelings of closeness with one another. Connection was most commonly linked with sharing and listening to other participant stories, further emphasizing the importance of vulnerability and open dialogue:

I connected through shared, laughter.

I connected by crying with everyone and telling stories

The whole group connected a lot by comparing our different point of views

[I feel] great! Super hard conversations to have but so special. Feeling the most connected I ever have with a group of youth.

I felt very connected with people I barely know which isn't always a bad thing

Starting on day 2, youth voiced a desire to maintain relationships with the diverse youth in their theme team. Youth used language like friendship, belonging, staying in touch, and reconnection.

I felt like I belonged.

[I will] stay in contact with group members.

I am making friends that I'd like to stay in touch with

Youth Developed New Perspectives and Future Goals

Youth walked away from the CWWC more open-minded to differences in others, more mindful, eager to embody the Four Pillars, and become the best versions of themselves.

I'm going to turn a new leaf and become the best version of me.

Remember to use the 4 pillars in what I do on the daily.

[In the future, I will] keep an open mind

[I will connect in the future by] being mindful in all that I do.

Most significant, youth felt empowered to help other youth through similar situations they had overcome. Youth found their voice, confidence, and maybe even a perceived 'expertise' to aid other youth.

When I came I was extremely depressed (still am), but now I'm leaving motivated to help youth in situations similar to mine as well as all situations.

[I have learned] how can i make a difference about this issue.

I feel positive & ready to take action.

Day-To-Day Analysis

Day 1

A safer space was created (27)

None of the positive identity changes featured in this report would have been possible without the creation of a safer space. Safer spaces are paramount to identity work and relational connection. Participants use the term 'safe space' to describe the level of trust and comfort perceived among their Theme Team groups the broader conference. This is probably due to the fact that 'safe space' is a term used by Students Commission staff at the conference. Since its first conference in 1991, the Students Commission has compiled activities, curricula, and strategies that promote inclusion, comfort, trust, and feeling safe at the conference. The Students Commission spends one entire day prior to participant arrival to train CWWC facilitators in 'tried-and true' activities that helps to build a safer space. Each group of Theme Team facilitators adapted activities, shuffle in a few of their own, and even co-create these activities with their Theme Team groups over the course of the conference. In short, until the Safer Spaces model, little has been done to name and formalize the processes which create safer spaces.

More than any other day of the conference, youth talked about the creation of a safer space most on the first day. The participants use language like contentment, trust, support, and comfort to describe safer spaces:

My being is content and safe on site, in this space.

I feel like my team group are getting more comfortable and not so nervous around each other which is really nice

I feel pretty good about today and was glad to be able to choose a group that trusts each other and supporting people.

[I connected today] by trusting everyone

[I feel] good and safe.

For some youth, being a part of developing a safer space took risk and stepping out of their comfort zone:

Really broke out of my shell to make a comfortable & safe space.

[I connected today through] Listened. Understood. Got in my zone and became outgoing

I met lots of amazing people and I stepped out of my comfort zone and sat with people I didn't know.

Participants identified icebreakers, heartfelt stories, ‘showing up and being present’, taking the time to get to know one another, and communicating in everyone’s native language as being instrumental in creating the safer space. For one youth, participating in the creation of a safer space was lifesaving:

This morning I wanted to die. But I kept myself busy with the things they did. It made me felt better, and I felt lightly calm.

Youth met new people who were different from them (22)

Youth spoke frequently about meeting new faces at the conference on Day 1. This is not a surprise as the SCC recruits delegate from every province and territory across Canada. Most of these youth referenced meeting new people in the Head portion of the HHFS, though few placed this detail in Heart or Spirit sections of the module. This finding shows points to most participants not having an immediate sense of connection with new faces. Far more than the other days of the conference, youth also were prone to point out that there were differences between them and other participants within their conference theme team groups. These differences spanned language, cultural differences, others’ perspectives, and experiences. One participant shared:

I have a better understanding of other people and community struggles.

Multiple participants’ sense of difference revolved around other youth’s experiences of injustice and struggle.

[I have learned about] many different interpretations and views that others have on Canada's justice system, everyone had a story.

I learned about the troubles that some people have due to their background when it comes to education and jobs.

Youth realized that others were not as different as they thought (17)

Despite noticing differences of others on the first day, many youth were able to recognize that others were not as scary as they might have initially thought. Beyond a descaling of ‘fear of the other’, youth were able to name substantial similarities between themselves and others. Here are four testimonials:

I have learned that these people aren't so scary as they seem. I learned about identity and social life.

We all have something in common

I learned more people than I thought have similar experiences.

Similarities exist between the experiences of indigenous and African youth in Canada

Youth shared stories (33)

With the creation of a safe space, youth were comfortable to share their experiences, perspectives, and stories. There are two important observations about the stories that youth shared on day one. Firstly, many youth reported that *everyone* shared something in their Theme Team Groups:

I feel good, like I'm comfortable with sharing

a lot of fun getting to know everyone- it was good to hear everyone's story.

Everyone shared a story.

Sharing stories was not easy for everyone, especially at the beginning of the day:

It was difficult at the beginning. But after I had the chance to communicate, it is good

And for some youth, they were not ready to share their story on the first day:

I feel like today went well in terms of the group though I feel as if I could have made more of an effort to engage

The second interesting quality of the stories shared on the first day is the depth of stories. Many participants felt comfortable sharing substantial and/or personal stories from their life. Some youth alluded to the content of their story in the HHFS form (e.g. abuse and injustice); however most referred to the gravity of their shared experiences (i.e., 'the weight' of a story).

I felt a lot of emotional comments, heard a lot of stories, I felt great for getting some weight off my shoulders

More about experiences & stories from any group of people I've ever been in before this topic (unhealthy/abusive relationships). I like it, tons of resilience now.

I feel quite shocked about how many people had so many personal experiences with unhealthy relationships

In addition to feeling comfortable with sharing, participants were keen to listen to others' stories. Most responses about listening were noted in the Spirit and Heart sections of the HHFS module, alluding to quality and depth of listening. Youth listened with their ears, eyes, heart, and even spirit.

[Today I connected] by letting my spirit show, and listen actively to what others had said to me.

Today I learned that body language is crucial when communicating because people zone out when listening and end up watching instead

[Today I connected by] listening and understanding people who are here

Listening is one of the Students Commission's Four Pillars (Respect, Listen, Understand, Communicate). At the beginning of the CWWC, Theme Teams reviewed the Four Pillars in detail, asking youth to think of practical ways they wished to see the pillars lived out in their group. It is evident from their responses that youth saw listening develop as a core aspect of their group culture.

[In the future I will] Listen more carefully.

Youth connected (30)

Through the process of sharing and listening in a safe space, youth experienced connection with one another. Story sharing came up most often in the Spirit section of the survey, which prompts youth to reflect on how they connected with what happened during the day:

[I connected] by speaking and connecting with other people.

[I connected by] J'ai communiquer avec des nouvelles personnes

[I felt] Fantastic and wonderful when I had chances to discuss different social issues

[I connected] By sharing and making space

Through sharing, some youth found acceptance and healing:

*I feel appreciated and accepted
[I feel] Healed. The more I talk the more I heal, even if just a little bit.
I learned so much about the other participants here & I feel like I have a better
sense of my role & what my group is supposed to be doing*

Through listening, youth felt deep sympathies for other youth in their group who shared stories.

*The things we talked about hit close to home. Not first-hand just second-hand
Hearing about others difficulties made me feel sorrow for them.
I felt bad for other people, but like not in a bad way, I felt bad for them because
their stories touched my heart*

Several youth talked about connecting with most people in their group on day one and being excited to continue the work they had started:

*I connected with almost everyone in some way
Although I was really tired, I feel that I connected well
I feel like we are bonding
I'm going to come back tomorrow & keep going!
Excited to really dive into the group.*

Even though it was the first day of the conference, one participant discussed in the Heart portion of HHFS their desire to stay connected with their group beyond the conference. This testimonial speaks to quality of space and rapport that was created among their group over one day:

*I feel like I wish all of the people lived in my city because they are so cool. I wish we
could hang out more beyond being here. I'm tired. And apparently I look tired.*

Youth adopted new perspectives(14)

Mostly in the Head and Feet sections of the HHFS, youth reported adopting new perspectives about others, themselves, and larger community issues. Youth found listening to diverse others' stories "eye-opening" and "inspiring". Several youth described a desire to keep a more open, non-judgmental mind in the future. This hope may be the internalization of what they had experienced in their safer space at the conference. Here are a few new perspectives of participants after day one:

*I learned alot about myself and how I view other stories.
[I will] be grateful for the community I live in and share others stories.
So many horrific experiences in Canada that we don't hear about in cities but a lot
of people face in rural communities. And a lot of racism.
I have learned peoples stories that have a connection to our justice system. I
learned about all of our wants and rights. They gave me another perspective on the
justice system.*

Youth were empowered to take action (14)

Youth were inspired to take what they experienced in the first day of the conference and make goals for the future. Youth responses about their next steps were all found in the Feet section of HHFS. Multiple of these responses involved sharing the stories they heard

with their home communities or family. These testimonials further highlight the personal impact and perceived benefits of hearing others' stories:

I can carry it on back home and share the stories I heard.

Honour people's stories with advocacy

I will tell my mom & dad about what I've learned. I'll also share stories to my family.

Multiple youth expressed a desire to live out the Four Pillars in their daily life.

Communication was mentioned by several participants as a focus, possibly because they experienced first-hand the benefit of communicating by sharing their stories.

[I will]Apply what we learned about the 4 pillars in everyday life, not only here at this conference.

Communicate with others even though I wouldn't usually be so outgoing.

Youth also shared a desire to promote equity and justice in their communities:

I'm going to make a better effort to support Indigenous languages & learning

Help use it into my social justice project

Find solutions to bring equity to our systems

Day 2

Youth still noticed others' differences (12)

On the second day of the conference, most youth had interacted with all of the people in their Theme Team groups. Though, two youth talked about meeting new faces. Youth noted far fewer differences between them and others on the second day as opposed to the first day of the conference. Many of these responses were oriented around unique aspects others' community and culture, such as:

I've learned different aspects of different communities.

Farther up north food and thing such as products get a very inflated price due to shipping cost

That people @ the conference come from communities as small as 40 People

[I learned about] the throat singing tradition.

Other youth commented on differences in how other youth communicate and what is permissible to share. These testimonials underscore how youth are embodying and practicing the Four Pillars:

Not everyone communicates with their words.

There are many valid perspectives to what info can be shared.

Youth took steps to include others' differences (9)

Like day one, youth noticed similarities between themselves and others. However, on the second day of the conference, youth were finding ways to incorporate others' differences and take steps out of their comfort zone in order to meeting others where they were comfortable. Youth did this in several ways:

Youth attempted to speak in others' native languages:

Even trying to speak French helps a lot

[I connected by] participating in discussions and I helping to translate

Youth actively tried to place themselves in one another's shoes, trying to see the others' perspective and why they might think and act certain ways:

It's important to understand there may be factor as to why they are the way they are

and how to help them

[Moving forward, I will] Realize how the four lenses affects different people (be more woke) about people's different experiences and do more to make positive changes.

(A note about the last quote: The 2019 CWWC had four "lens" that each group considered alongside their topic. These four lenses were: Child Rights, Rural and Northern Communities, Structural Racism, and Truth Leading to Reconciliation.)

A final way youth incorporated diversity on day two was to participate in cultural ceremonies. Here is one nonindigenous youth that speaks about their experience being a part of a smudge ceremony:

[I connected] well! Doing a smudge was really nice and balancing.

A safer space was achieved (10)

On day 2, youth were less inclined to talk about the activities and strategies that constructed the safer space, and more inclined to talk about what the safe space encouraged among participants:

Safe space was actually achieved. Great communication, open and non-judgmental works miracles.

a safe space allows youth to open up and disclose.

I am walking away with a full heart and respect

Moreover, some youth described how they were an active part of making a safer space for their group:

[Today, I connected] through words, emotion, and holding space.

Buying into the process of making a safer space can be difficult. Youth spoke about feeling stretched and stressed about creating a space that allows for honesty, authenticity, and vulnerability:

I feel tired, stressed somewhat, trying hard to trust the process

It has been very emotionally difficult and tiring.

Youth were vulnerable in sharing more of their stories (16)

The continuity of a safer space and the people who returned to the safer space spurred youth to continue sharing their experience and perspectives. On day 2, many youth took greater risks sharing stories that held personal significance. Several youth spoke about sharing unresolved issues, as if they were seeking the guidance and acceptance of fellow group members.

Today I spoke and talk about my issues in [my home town].

I talked about what has been bothering me.

I learned the stories of others who have gone through pretty bad stuff.

These issues are very real, not just in movies.

It also appears that some teams used more than just words to tell stories:

[In the future, I will] incorporate more art and other forms of language into the things I do.

One participant attributed a sense of bravery to those in their group who were willing to share when they were not ready to open up in their group:

I did not participate in conversation but listened and reflected on what has happened in my life and relating to those who were brave enough to speak up.

This same participant expressed elsewhere in their HHFS reflections how being vulnerable and sharing one's story does not always require words:

I connected by participating and non verbally showing about things that I normally wouldn't.

In line with bravery, one participant outlined three key ingredients that enabled youth in their group to share their stories:

La patience, l'ecoute et le courage [Translation: "Patience, listening, and Courage."]

Deeper sharing, or vulnerability, gave youth a sense of purpose and mattering in their group:

I feel very lost until I shared my stories and people who I don't even know felt for me.

Youth heard and related to shared stories (15)

Youth still placed great value on listening on day 2; listening remained a key source of connection for several participants.

I will hold their stories in my heart.

I connected by listening to everyone's stories and share my own.

On day 2, however, participants' deep listening was accompanied with sympathetic perspectives and empathetic experiences. This is likely due to two days of hearing the same youths' stories and hearing more vulnerable stories on the second day of the conference.

I shared and listened and empathized.

I will think back on today and keep my mind to those that have struggled and know that everyone comes from different homes.

Seeing the degree of reception of stories, one youth commented about how every youth should feel about their own story:

You don't ever need to feel insecure about your story.

Youth felt more connected with others (37)

More than any other day (provided that responses petered off during day 3 and 4), youth used the most language around connection on day 2. Like the first day, many of responses about connection are couched in comments about sharing stories.

The whole group connected a lot by comparing our different point of views

I connected by crying with everyone and telling stories.

[I connected by] Giving my opinions and sharing my thoughts

This quote, in particular, showcases how sharing stories was a conduit for connection for youth:

[I connected today by]To start, I felt a bit distanced from everyone, tired, and distracted. Then afterwards, after the group discussions, I felt like myself again.

Youth generated more examples of how they connected with others in their group on day two. These included: laughter, crying together, opportunities to socialize informally, and sharing circles.

I connected through shared, laughter.

I connected by crying with everyone and telling stories.

We were all more energetic today to know each other more because we had some free interaction time; it wasn't forced.

[I connected today through] debates and sharing circles.

There appears to be a boost in connection among all group members on day 2. Several youth mentioned connecting with most members of their group on day 1. However, multiple youth felt like their *whole* group was connected on day 2. Additionally, several youth on day 2 used language in their HHFS responses to talk about feeling *more* connected with members in their group. Here are six reflections that spoke to the whole group connecting at a deeper level. (Note how several youth point out how odd it is connecting with people that have never met before.)

[Our] team is jelling and we are one! Yay for connections!

[I feel] great! Super hard conversations to have but so special. Feeling the most connected I ever have with a group of youth.

I felt very connected with people I barely know which isn't always a bad thing.

The whole group connected a lot by comparing our different point of views

[I connected] socially. I know everyone more #friends#fun#open

As a result of connecting deeply with youth in their group, youth felt like they had a sense of belonging with other youth in their group and a full heart:

I feel interested in what was happening. I felt like I belonged.

I walk away with I full heart and respect

I will hold [others'] stories in my heart.

Moreover, several youth discussed a desire to keep the strong connection among their group going and to stay connected with group members beyond the conference:

[I want to] keep this connection going

[I feel] very good. Very excited to continue working

[I connected by] creating friendships with more people in this group

I am making friends that I'd like to stay in touch with

Youth walked away more open-minded (5)

Unlike day one, there were far fewer responses regarding new perspectives and next steps identified on day 2. This could be due to youth feeling present and fully immersed in the experience of the conference. There are still two full days of the conference after day 2, so there is less need to think about the future beyond the conference. (In other words, if youth experienced *this much* perspective, identity exploration, and connection in two days, what do the next two days have in store?!) It makes sense, in some ways, that the new perspective most youth were resolved to take after this day was to keep an open mind about what was to come:

*[In the future, I will] keep an open mind
[Today I connected] by being open minded.
My view has opened up to what other people view something so common.*

Day 3

As prefaced in the outset of this report, HHFS response rate began to drop dramatically on day 3. There was about half of the amount of data on day 3 that was recorded on day one or day 2. Even more dramatic, day 4 had about half of the data that was recorded for day 3. Had more youth completed the HHFS survey on these days, the data may have revealed stronger identity and connection trends. All the same, themes found for day one and 2 are echoed in day 3 and 4 responses, as well as some new themes.

A safer space was maintained (10)

By day 3, a safe space had been fully developed among most Theme Team groups. Youth ceased to identify differences between themselves and others. Instead, youth reflected on their ability to relate to others' intimate struggles like these two youth:

*You're not alone. There's lots of people going through similar things.
I felt relieved to be able to talk about my own struggles about living on reserves especially with substance misuse and how it's common.*

Youth still worked to incorporate others diverse qualities by "meeting people where they are.":

*[I learned] how to meet people where they are - not focus on the outcomes but focus on the process.
Speaking French is hard.*

Most language about the safer space described what qualities the safer space afforded the group. Principally, youth felt like they were able to support one another. Feeling supported was also discussed alongside feeling comfortable and having a positive outlook:

*Another good day with good conversation and I also felt that the group is coming more comfortable with each other.
[I feel] Positive and supported
I had some really deep conversations with people and felt we were able to help and support each other well :).*

Youth were increasingly vulnerable in safer spaces (9)

Building from the vulnerable momentum of day 2, youth shared personal stories, stories of struggle and pain, and spoke from the heart on day 3.

*[Today, I connected] by sharing a real personal story :'.
Each person holds a story that can cause pain.
I felt relieved to be able to talk about my own struggles about living on reserves especially with substance misuse and how it's common.*

Like day 2, 'bravery to share' was language that emerged to describe the process of sharing stories that were close to the heart:

I was sad but it was wholesome, and I was thankful that they were brave enough to say.

One of the most interesting aspects about youth being vulnerable is that youth started to be open about issues beyond their personal experience. Multiple youth used the safer space on day 3 to discuss issues that were impacting their community. Most of these revolved around indigenous community issues. This finding speaks to a safer space's ability to address a multitude of youth issues.

Indigenous youth came together and expressed their minds and hearts about indigenous views on Canada's law system.

I learned about the struggles and problems other individuals in the indigenous community faced in their own communities.

I added into the conversation and shared stories from my reserve and what I have seen in my lifetime.

Indigenous youth felt grounded in their culture and healed (4)

A focus on indigenous community issues led to indigenous participants feeling grounded in their cultural values, and in some cases healed:

I really connected with [participant] by talking about own culture.

I feel more at peace.

We talked about indigenous issues and I feel healed

Youth were heard and appreciated (7)

On day 2, youth's response to the hearing stories was largely sympathy or empathy. On day 3, youth experienced empathy and a sense of appreciation for youth who shared. The added appreciation to listening on day 3 hinted at a perceived increase of value towards those who shared:

[Today, I connected] by listening and appreciating voice

[In the future,] I will listen and take the time to appreciate the joys of others and to be presented with their sadness

I really got a feel for what people are going through

Groups connected more deeply (15)

Like day one and day 2, youth largely connected through sharing and listening to one another's story. Based on day 3 HHFS responses, it seems that this type of connection was happening within and outside of the formal group setting:

[Today, I connected] through group sharing and I made new friends :)

[During] a break with a participant, we had a good heart to heart.

Participants also reiterated feeling closer to their groups as compared to previous days:

[I feel] closer to my group.

Today I feel/felt good and way more connected with the group

Up to this point in the conference, youth had discussed many personal and community issues with one another. On day 3, groups were working to solve some of these issues, which resulted in feeling closer to one another:

By finding solutions together we got even more close to each other

Youth wanted to share conversations with others (10)

Youth expressed a desire to share what they had heard and learned in their safer spaces over the three days of the conference. They saw how youth voice had power and an ability to create change within one another and the greater communities:

it is the voice of the young people that counts.

I will probably spread the word. So tell my family about everything I've learned.

Also make my friends/peers more aware.

After successfully experiencing connection with diverse others through safer spaces, youth voiced a desire to join and participate in new groups.

[In the future, I will] work in groups more

[I learned] that working in big groups and hearing everyone's voice makes a big country.

Youth aimed to better themselves (10)

Youth articulated ways that they could better themselves beyond the conference. Several youth reflected hopefully about the brighter future they would have, some adopting a more positive outlook:

[I feel] excited! about the conference, the content we are producing, and the bright future youth have.

[I feel] Full of hope and confident of [our] achievements

I feel like I have to stop thinking so negatively because I'm not going to go anywhere.

Youth wanted to become the best versions of themselves. Practicing the Four Pillars was seen as a primary way of achieving that best self:

I'm going to turn a new leaf and become the best version of me.

Remember to use the 4 pillars in what i do on the dayly.

[In the future, I will] think, Understand, and grow with the knowledge.

It is interesting that no youth spoke about open-mindedness, especially after being so strongly featured in day 2. A few youth did, however, speak about a desire to be more mindful in the future, which may reflect a more embodied open-mindedness:

[I will connect in the future by] being mindful in all that I do.

[In the future, I will] Always be thankful with how my situation is because it can always get worse.

Day 4

The data on day 4 gives us a few sprinkled after-thoughts of the CWWC as the conference came to an end. The sparse responses that were collected were very brief, sometimes just a few words. These responses largely highlighted empowerment, contribution, and a desire to stay connected.

Youth continued to connect through stories (11)

By day 4, it appeared as if everyone had reached a place of comfort in sharing their ideas as hinted at in these two quotes:

The shy ones have incredible ideas

[Today, I connected by] telling peers my story.

Youth felt empowered by sharing. They thought their voice had power, and that others had heard a message that they had hoped to get across:

[I learned] to be patient and not interrupt. My voice is powerful. Being open makes people trust you so don't be afraid to share.

[Today, I connected by] getting people to learn about traditional knowledge.

Participants drew connections between what they heard and other youth in their group, a continuation of the deep empathy experienced in earlier days.

We are all kinda similar in a way. Same mindset.

Through empathy and listening, many youth experienced healing:

It felt good to talk about these things/healing.

It surprised me about how open others were to my cultural healing

Youth hopeful to Help others (11)

Whereas on day 3 youth outlined ways that they wished to better themselves, youth spoke about bettering others on day 4. Some youth were motivated to help other youth through similar situations that they had overcome. It seems with these individuals that the conference had been instrumental in helping them process a piece of their struggle.

When I came I was extremely depressed (still am), but now I'm leaving motivated to help youth in situations similar to mine as well as all situations.

I'm excited to go back to my community and help you with unhealthy situations.

I've learnt how important it is to help people because people lose their lives over this.

Go back to my community to help youth. It's starting to become a passion.

Beyond a passion, motivation, or desire, youth felt equipped to take action in helping others.

[I have learned] how can i make a difference about this issue.

I feel positive & ready to take action.

Youth wanted to stay connected and come back (10)

Leaving the CWWC was an emotional experience for a number of youth participants:

I feel sad, last day of the conference

Sad, because its the LAST day together

I did well with connections & getting emotional

Connections between participants was evident in responses about missing others at the conference after they parted:

Everyone was awesome this conference and I'm gonna miss them.

I'm gonna cry cuz I probably won't see anyone again.

Many youth spoke about staying connected with other conference participants, and even coming back to CWWC. These responses point to a deepened sense of belonging among participants:

Sad to say goodbye. Excited to reconnect.

[I will] stay in contact with group members.

References

- Adamson, L., & Lyxell, B. (1996). Self-concept and questions of life: Identity development during late adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence*, 19(6), 569-582.
- Ahmed, S. (2002). This other and other others. *Economy and Society*, 31(4), 558-572.
- Alport, 1954
- Amiot, C. E., Sablonniere, R., Smith, L. G., & Smith, J. R. (2015). Capturing changes in social identities over time and how they become part of the self-concept. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 9(4), 171-187.
- Angie, A. D., Davis, J. L., Allen, M. T., Byrne, C. L., Ruar, G. A., Cunningham, C. B., Hoang, T. S., Bernard, D. R., Hughes, M. G., Connelly, S., O'Hair, H. D., & Mumford, M. D. (2011). Studying ideological groups online: Identification and assessment of risk factors for violence. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 41, 627-657.
- Anzaldúa, G. E. (1999). *Borderlands: The new Mestiza* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Aunte Lute Press.
- Anzaldúa, G. E. (2002). (Un)natural bridges, (un)safe spaces. In G. E. Anzaldúa, & A. Keating (Eds.), *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation* (pp. 1-6). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual review of psychology*, 52(1), 1-26.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497
- Beelman, A. & Heinemann, K. S. (2014). Preventing prejudice and improving intergroup attitudes: A meta-analysis of child and adolescent training programs. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 35, 10-24. DOI: 10.1016/j.appdev.2013.11.002
- Bonnell, J., Copestake, P., Kerr, D., Passy, R., Reed, C., Salter, R., Sarwar, S. and Sheikh, S. (2011). *Teaching Approaches That Help to Build Resilience to Extremism among Young People* (DFE Research Report 119). London: DFE.
- Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17(5), 475-482. doi:10.1177/0146167291175001

- Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this 'we'? levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(1), 83.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32(7), 513-31.
- Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994
- Brown, B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. Gotham.
- Brown, 2010
- Brown, 2006
- Bruneau, E. G., & Saxe, R. (2012). The power of being heard: The benefits of 'perspective-giving' in the context of intergroup conflict. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48, 855-896.
- Crocetti, E. (2017). Identity formation in adolescence: The dynamic of forming and consolidating identity commitments. *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(2), 145-150. doi:10.1111/cdep.12226
- Davis, K. (2012). Friendship 2.0: Adolescents' experiences of belonging and self-disclosure online. *Journal of Adolescence*, 35(6), 1527.
- de Finney, S. (2010). "We just don't know each other": Racialised girls negotiate mediated multiculturalism in a less diverse Canadian city. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(5), 471-487.
- Denis, J. S. (2015). Contact theory in a small-town settler-colonial context: The reproduction of laissez-faire racism in Indigenous-white Canadian relations. *American Sociological Review*, 80, 218-242.
- Dovidio, Glick & Rudman, 2005
- Eccles, J. S., & Gootman, J. A. (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Elliott, G. (2009). Family matters: *The importance of mattering to family in adolescence*. Chichester, U.K; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ellis, B. H., Abdi, S. (2017). Community resilience to violent extremism through genuine partnerships. *American Psychologist*, 72, 289-300. DOI: 10.1037/amp0000065

- Erikson, E. (1968). *Youth: Identity and crisis*. New York, NY: WW.
- Feddes, A.R., Mann, L., Doosje, B. (2015) Increasing self-esteem and empathy to prevent violent radicalization: A longitudinal quantitative evaluation of resilience training focused on adolescents with a dual identity. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 45*(7), 400-411. DOI: 10.1111/jasp.12307
- Ginwright, S., & James, T. (2002). From assets to agents of change: Social justice, organizing, and youth development. In B. Kirshner, J. L. O'Donoghue, & M. McLaughlin (Eds.), *New directions for youth development: Theory practice research. Youth participation: Improving institutions and communities* (pp. 27-46). San Francisco, CA, US: Jossey-Bass.
- Hanckel, B., Morris, A. (2014). Finding community and contesting heteronormativity: Queer young people's engagement in an Australian online community. *Journal of Youth Studies, 17*, 872-886. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2013.878792
- Hennigan, K. & Spanovic, M. (2012). Gang dynamics through the lens of social identity theory. In F.-A. Esbensen & C. L. Maxson (Eds.) *Youth Gangs in International Perspective: Results from the Eurogang Program of Research*, pp. 127-150. New York: Springer.
- Khanna, N., MacCormack, J., Kutsyuruba, B., McCart, S., Freeman, J. (2014). *Youth Who Thrive: A review of critical factors and effective programs for 12-25 year olds*. Toronto, ON: YMCA GTA. Available online: <http://www.youthwhothrive.ca/resources/Critical-Factors-for-Youth-Thriving-Report.pdf>
- Killen, M., Mulvey, K. L., & Hitti, A. (2013). Social exclusion in childhood: A developmental intergroup perspective. *Child Development, 84*, 772-790. DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12012
- Knifsend, C. A., & Juvonen, J. (2013). The role of social identity complexity in inter-group attitudes among young adolescents. *Social Development, 22*, 623-640. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9507.2012.00672.x
- Lannegrant-Willems, L., Chevrier, B., Perchec, C., & Carrizales, A. (2018). How is civic engagement related to personal identity and social identity in late adolescents and emerging adults? A person-oriented approach. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 47*, 731-748. DOI: 10.1007/s10964-018-0821-x
- Lee, J. A. (2006). Locality, participatory action research, and racialised girls' struggles for citizenship. In Y. Jiwani, C. Steenbergen & E. Mitchell (Eds.), *Girlhood, redefining the limits* (pp. 89-108). Montreal, QC: Black Rose Books.

- Leung, L. (2011). Loneliness, social support and preference for online social interaction: The mediating effects of identity experimentation online among children and adolescents. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 4, 381-399.
- Luyckx, K., Goosens, L., Soenens, B. & Beyers, W. (2006). Unpacking commitment and exploration: Preliminary validation of an integrative model of late adolescent identity formation. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29, 361-378. DOI: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2005.03.008
- Ma, H. (2012). Moral competence as a positive youth development construct: A conceptual review. *Scientific World Journal*, 1, 1-8.
- Mahar, A. L., Cobigo, V., & Stuart, H. (2013). Conceptualizing belonging. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 35(12), 1026-1032.
- McKeown, S. & Dixon, J. (2016). The “contact hypothesis”: Critical reflections and future directions. *Social & Personality Psychology Compass*, 11: e12295. DOI 10.1111/spc3.12295
- McLean, K. C., Syed, M., Yoder, A., & Greenhoot, A. F. (2014). Identity integration: The importance of domain content in linking narrative and status approaches to emerging adult identity development. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 26, 61-76.
- Meeus, W., Iedema, J., Helsén, M., & Vollebergh, W. (1999). Patterns of adolescent identity development: Review of literature and longitudinal analysis. *Developmental review*, 19(4), 419-461.
- Murrar & Brauer, 2019
- Neira, C. J. B. & Barber, B. L. (2014). Social networking site use: Linked to adolescents' social self-concept, self-esteem, and depressed mood. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 66, 56-64.
- Nesdale, Durkin, Maass & Griffiths, 2005
- Newman, B. M., Lohman, B. J., & Newman, P. R. (2007). Peer group membership and a sense of belonging: Their relationship to adolescent behavior problems. *Adolescence*, 42, 241-263.
- Onorato, R. S., & Turner, J. C. (2004). Fluidity in the self-concept: the shift from personal to social identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 34(3), 257-278.
- Pancer, S. M., Rose-Krasnor, L., & Loiselle, L. D. (2002). Youth conferences as a context for engagement. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 96, 47-64.

Pettigrew, 2016

Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006

Ridout, B., Campbell, A., & Ellis, L. (2012). "Off your Face(book)": Alcohol in online social identity construction and its relation to problem drinking in university students. *Drug and Alcohol Review, 31*, 20-26.

Robards, B., & Bennett, A. (2011). MyTribe: Post-subcultural manifestations of belonging on social network sites. *Sociology, 45*(2), 303-317.

Sameroff, A. (2010). A unified theory of development: A dialectic integration of nature and nurture. *Child development, 81*(1), 6-22.

Scales et al., 2000

Skorinko & Sinclair, 2013

Thomas, E., Smith, L., McGarty, C., & Postmes, T. (2010). Nice and nasty: The formation of prosocial and hostile social movements. *Revue internationale de psychologie sociale, 23*, 17-55.

Torre, M. E., Fine, M., Stoudt, B. G., & Fox, M. (2012). Critical participatory action research as public science. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 171-184). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/13620-011>

Torre, M. E., Fine, M., Alexander, N., Billups, A. B., Blanding, Y., Genao, E., et al. (2008). Participatory action research in the contact zone. In J. Cammarota, & M. Fine (Eds.), *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion* (pp. 131-151). New York, NY: Routledge.

Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005, Turner, I., Reynolds, K. J., Lee, E., Subasic, E., & Bromhead, D. (2014). Well-being, school climate, and the social identity process: A latent growth model study of bullying perpetration and peer victimization. *School Psychology Quarterly*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/spq0000074>

Turner-Zwinkels, F. M., Postmes, T., & van Zomeren, M. (2015). Achieving harmony among different social identities within the self-concept: The consequences of internalising a group-based philosophy of life. *PloS one, 10*(11), e0137879.

Van Orden et al., 2010

Watts, R. J., Diemer, M. A., & Voight, A. M. (2011). Critical consciousness: Current status and future directions. In C. A. Flanagan & B. D. Christens (Eds.), *Youth civic development: Work at the cutting edge. New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 134, 43-57.