

Youth Engagement in Northern Communities: A Narrative Exploration of Aboriginal Youth
Participation in a Positive Youth Development Program

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to enhance our understanding of youth engagement experiences from the perspective of Aboriginal youth living in the Canadian North, as positive youth development programs can foster community engagement among youth and may have implications for Aboriginal youth involvement in community healing. With an asset-based orientation that recognizes that youths' strengths co-exist with, and are understood in relation to, environmental challenges, narrative inquiry was used to explore the experiences of six Aboriginal youth who participated in a program that promotes community engagement. Rich participant accounts resulted in better understanding youth engagement as a profound culture-bound process rather than simple participation in a program, and illuminates the importance of positive relationships, adult support, and pre-program community involvement to building subsequent engagement. This study has implications specific to Aboriginal youth as having a role in promoting health and healing in their communities through their engagement.

For the movers and shakers of the North

Makkuktunut ukiuqtaqtumiut sivulliqsavut. Ajunngilagut, ajunngittugut.

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This research is dedicated to the young people of the North who are aspiring and striving to take on initiatives that help to create change in their communities. Particularly, I dedicate this work to the participants of this study who have challenged themselves to do something different, seek to understand challenges in their communities, and to be a part of something greater. Your stories have moved me, challenged me, and inspired me. Through this project, I hope I can share your hopeful stories from the North; stories not only of challenge, but of strength, (com)passion, and resilience. Thank you for your time and patience in my research process—but perhaps more importantly—thank you for the energy behind stories that you have shared.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

A Personal Prelude

This study used a narrative and YPAR-inspired approach to explore experiences of engagement by Aboriginal youth in their communities after having participated in a program aimed at fostering community engagement. It is inspired by my personal experience with developing and delivering youth development programs within several Aboriginal communities in Canada. More specifically, living in a small fly-in community in Nunavut for two months helped me to value the potential of youth in the community. Although I appreciated the uniqueness of the community and began to see how my role as a youth worker was addressing particular needs in the community (e.g., providing youth with a safe place to hang out, positive activities, or alternatives to undesirable behaviour; connecting youth with Elders and cultural activities/events), I could not help but wonder if my role was more than simply providing programming for youth.

As I started to prepare for my transition out of the community, I knew that for the initiatives to sustain themselves the youth would need to learn how to deliver them without my presence. I started to engage the youth with more responsibility and opportunities to make decisions, which led to a heightened awareness of the youth voice within the community. Over time, I noticed the youth gained skills and started to implement initiatives with less involvement from me. I felt inspired by the potential of the youth in the community, which left me excited about supporting their contributions to the activities I helped to oversee. I started to rally other adult leaders that the youth could turn to for support. I also began to notice a shift where the youth's involvement was so much more meaningful than simply participating in the programs I had delivered. With this shift, I also noticed a change in youth's attitude and a deeper desire for youth to contribute to positive change in the community.

These experiences are particularly what drew me to this study. Although I was a cultural outsider in Nunavut, I was able to provide youth with an opportunity to make some sort of meaningful contribution to their community. As the power in decision-making shifted toward the youth, it became less about *what I thought* was important or needed attention, but more about *what youth felt* the community needed at the time. Through these experiences, I witnessed first-hand the potential impact of empowering young people with meaningful roles and

responsibilities in the community. It left me wondering about the potential greater impacts of this process; perhaps engaging youth in a meaningful process where they have a voice and are able to build positive relationships with peers and other adults could have a positive impact on their development, or maybe even within the community at large.

These experiences in Nunavut helped me foster a strong sense of youth as capable agents of change in communities. As a counselling student, I bridged the idea of youth engagement from my experiences as a youth worker to my role as a counsellor. Engaging youth in a meaningful process echoes principles within client-centred modalities; it honours voice and is therapeutic in its way. Youth engagement allows for Aboriginal youth to determine what is meaningful or significant to them. This is especially important given the history of colonization in Canada. Youth engagement also echoes principles of social justice by providing an opportunity for change to be driven from within the community itself. I also see youth engagement as a means for counsellors to have a role in the community—beyond the office—helping support young people through meaningful therapeutic processes while also ensuring programming is culturally relevant to those involved.

Finally, I acknowledge that I engaged in this study as a non-Aboriginal. My ideas around Aboriginal communities and culture are shaped primarily by my experiences living in Aboriginal communities. These experiences include two months living in Nunavut and four months living on reserve in Northern Alberta. Additionally, I spent one year working with Aboriginal youth involved with an urban Aboriginal non-profit agency in British Columbia. My understanding of Aboriginal peoples has also been supplemented by my undergraduate minor degree in Aboriginal studies. Through various courses, I developed some sense of traditional knowledge and learned about Aboriginal healing models. Despite these experiences, I am aware of my positioning as a cultural outsider in this study and continued to reflect on my experiences as this research study unfolded. More specifically, I later include a reflection of my personal experiences, pre-understandings, and leanings as they relate to ACTIVATE, the North, and youth engagement programming.

Background to the Study

Although studies have shown that the health of Aboriginal communities has improved over time, it still lags behind that of the general population within Canada (McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009). The Aboriginal population has been deemed at greater risk of developing serious

health problems related to diabetes, obesity, smoking, violence, mental health, substance misuse, and cardiovascular disease. In particular, Aboriginal persons face high levels of alcohol and drug addiction, eating disorders, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted infections (McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009; Zinck et al., 2013). The suicide rate in Aboriginal communities is five times than that of non-Aboriginal communities (McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009; Niezen, 2009). Additionally, Aboriginal girls are seven times more likely than non-Aboriginal girls in Canada to witness and experience violence in their homes (Berman et al, 2009). Despite the prevalence of health issues, Aboriginal youth generally lack access to basic health care services in Canada (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2001). Aboriginal youth also have poorer educational experiences overall (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2001). This results in Aboriginal students being less likely to graduate high school, with less than half of Aboriginal students graduating, compared to an 88% graduation rate among non-Aboriginal students (Pirbhai-Illich, 2010).

There exists a general perception that the youth population is “at risk,” unable or unwilling to contribute positively to their own development or to the common good (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzez, & Calvert, 2000). Aboriginal youth in Canada are no exception, particularly given the health and social challenges stemming from a history of marginalization and social injustice (Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Embrace Life Council, & Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2010; Hay, 2004; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009; RCAP, 1995; Zinck et al., 2013). Northern Aboriginal youth report challenges in their communities as a result of suicide, culture and language, housing, and limited opportunities for employment. However, despite these challenges, many Aboriginal youth across Canada have in fact expressed a need to be valued as contributors to community health and healing, and have taken initiatives to this effect (Feathers of Hope, 2014; RCAP, 1995; Ruby, 2005).

One way Aboriginal youth have responded is through participation in programs intended to promote youth engagement. Participation in such programs may influence how youth respond to social responsibilities and become agents of social change through active citizenship (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Yohalem & Martin, 2007; CEYE, 2012; Dallago, Cristini, Perkins, Natin, & Santinello, 2009; Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011), though the voice of Aboriginal youth is virtually absent from this body of research.

ACTIVATE, the chosen youth development program, is appropriate for this study, as it aims to “inspire, train, and support ACTIVATE youth leaders to develop and initiate their own sport and physical activity projects in their communities to improve the lives of other youth” (Motivate Canada, 2014, para. 1). Based in principles of Positive Youth Development (e.g., the 6 C’s discussed in the Literature Review), “ACTIVATE seeks to create a country of connected youth leaders who care about their world, who have the confidence and competence to contribute to their communities, and who have the character to inspire the same qualities in others” (Motivate Canada, 2014, para. 2). I chose ACTIVATE to help anchor participants experiences of engagement through one common program. This particular development program is unique in that it facilitates skill building and opportunity for youth to identify and create action plans for youth to address challenges or concerns of interest and relevance to them.

Thesis Overview

In the next chapter, I further situate this research with a review of the literature. I provide the rationale for the current study by challenges facing Aboriginal youth situated within the potential for youth engagement to provide positive development among youth. In Chapter Three, I provide an overview of the current study, including the research question and the conceptual framework in which this study was conducted within. In Chapter Four, I describe the epistemological approach, the chosen methodology, and the procedures applied for data collection, analysis, and validity and trustworthiness. In Chapter Five, I present the results including descriptive narratives for each participant. In the final chapter, I discuss the results as they relate to each component of the research question, provide a reflection on the chosen methodology, present implications for youth programs within Aboriginal communities, identify strengths and limitations of this study, and end by proposing ideas for future research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

In this chapter, I review literature on Aboriginal populations in Canada, focusing on challenges Aboriginal youth face in their communities and the historical context from which they emerged. I then present principles, models, and empirical research related to youth engagement.

Aboriginal Youth in Canada

The term “Aboriginal” in Canada refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit persons. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, Aboriginal persons account for 4.3% of the population of Canada. Population growth among Aboriginal persons in Canada is almost 4 times that of the national average (Government of Canada, 2014). Children and youth aged twenty-four and under make up almost half (48%) of the Aboriginal population in Canada compared to 31% of the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2006). In effect, Aboriginal youth represent the fastest growing segment of Canada’s youth population despite being among those who face the highest levels of poverty, unemployment, and suicide largely tied to a history of oppressive colonization (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2001; McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009).

Although the intersecting influences of emotional wellbeing, poverty, violence, and racism that Aboriginal youth face have not been systematically researched (Berman et al., 2009; Zinck et al., 2013), it is well established that intergenerational issues, some of which are addressed in the section on historical context below, have resulted in the current circumstances of Aboriginal peoples (Hay, 2004; Zinck et al., 2013).

Historical context underlying community issues. Canada’s history of colonization has fostered a legacy of social injustices and suffering for Aboriginal persons (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009; RCAP, 1995). Centuries of colonization and repeated exposure to trauma have deeply impacted individuals, creating a co-dependence associated with alcohol abuse and a lack of trust (Tousignant & Sioui, 2009).

It is important to consider that experiences of colonization differ across Canada. For example, colonization in the North¹ occurred much later than colonization experienced in the rest of Canada (Dickason, 2006; Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). As the majority of the participants in the

¹ The term ‘North’ has been chosen to represent the Canadian Arctic, more specifically Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Although less specific than ‘Arctic’, the term ‘North’ is more widely used by those living in the territories. Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Although less specific than ‘Arctic,’ the term ‘North’ is more widely used by those living in the territories.

current study identify as Inuit, the following section provides historical context underlying issues affecting much of the Inuit population in the North. Given that each person's experience of colonization is likely different, attempting to demonstrate what colonization looks or looked like within a particular region for a particular group may help anchor our understanding of individual experiences. The Government of Nunavut and partners (2010) describe historical events that help to provide a context in which present day risks and protective factors can be understood:

While Inuit had differing levels of interaction with whalers, missionaries, and fur traders for centuries, most Inuit feel that the truly traumatic impacts on their society began after World War II, when Government of Canada policies coerced Inuit into moving from their seasonal camps into newly established communities. Southern values were imposed in these new communities: the wage economy was introduced; formal schooling of children was made mandatory; Inuit traditional justice was replaced by the Canadian justice system; inadequate and substandard southern-style housing was erected; and non-Inuit administrators tightly controlled the operations of each community. Inuit associate this transitional period with an overarching loss of self-reliance. (p. 5)

These Government-mandated Inuit communities affected the Inuit in many ways. They became more susceptible to infections and respiratory illnesses. To this day, many Inuit travel South for treatment of disease, losing social ties to families and communities. The residential school system resulted in immense amounts of trauma for Inuit children and their families. Many children lost their Inuit language as they were forbidden to use it. Students were denied regular contact with their families and prevented from learning skills that were fundamental to Inuit life. Moreover, many students were sexually, emotionally, and physically abused while attending residential schools (Government of Nunavut et al., 2010).

Residential schools affected the entire community. When students returned home, they had lost their ability to trust because of the trauma they had experienced by school authorities. Additionally, as students were indoctrinated with the belief that anything to do with Inuit culture or practices was "bad," the returning students were reluctant to accept the knowledge that their parents or grandparents were attempting to pass on to them. Ultimately, this generation of Inuit did not build a strong foundation for Inuit social skills to live and be passed on to their own children (Government of Nunavut et al., 2010). Again in the Government of Nunavut's words, residential schools have contributed to intergenerational transmission of historical trauma:

The trauma experienced firsthand by Inuit in the settlement transitional period has had an immense impact on all following generations, as many Inuit who were negatively affected in this period did not ever heal. This unresolved trauma compromised their ability to cope with stress in a healthy manner. Negative behaviour often followed in the form of alcohol abuse, sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, child neglect, and violent crime. It is important to note that elevated suicide rates emerged within the first generation of Inuit youth who grew up in communities. In the absence of an adequate healing process, a continuous cycle of trauma has been created, which has been passed from generation to generation. (p. 7)

Intergenerational trauma does not excuse individuals who afflict harm onto others, nor do the roots of trauma provide blame to one single entity for the challenges faced. The Government of Nunavut (2010) stresses that this understanding of the historical context provides the first step in breaking a cycle of challenges in Nunavut.

Youth perspective on Aboriginal issues. Given the nature of this study on youth engagement, it is important to develop an understanding of how the youth perceived these issues stemming from a colonial past. A seminal evaluation report from the National Inuit Youth Summit (T. Eclarin, personal communication, March 2014) and the Feathers of Hope initiative explored the youth perspective on the challenges that their communities face. The Aboriginal youth who were consulted expressed feeling as though they are caught in two worlds, the “modern” and the “traditional,” yet feel disconnected from both worlds.

Inuit youth who were consulted identified suicide, culture and language, housing, and employment and education/training as four key issues impacting them today. The youth expressed a desire to speak their traditional language, as well as build deeper connections to the land, traditions, communities, and Elders. They stressed a need for culturally-informed social and clinical services for community members, Elders, and young people experiencing intergenerational trauma. Finally, they identified a need for healthy and addiction-free adults in the community to be positive role models as parents, community leaders, and mentors for the youth (Feathers of Hope, 2014). Northern Aboriginal youth have expressed wanting to live in communities where they can give back and help one another, while stressing the importance of strengthening their sense of identity as First Nations young people.

Aboriginal youth-led healing movement. As more than half of the Inuit population are under the age of 25 and many of these individuals face issues of mental health, substance abuse, addiction, suicide, and lack of education/career in their communities, engaging Northern Aboriginal youth in positive, meaningful ways is important now more than ever. Moreover, Lane, Bopp, Bopp, and Norris (2002) describe a crisis among Aboriginal youth explaining that, despite the healing and recovery among many Aboriginal communities, the next generation of youth appears to be even more deeply entrenched in crisis and addiction than their parents' generation. They purport that community healing must involve extensive work with the children and youth. Other authors also suggest that mental health promotion that emphasizes both youth and community empowerment will likely have positive impacts on mental health and overall wellbeing among Aboriginal communities (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; Thira, 2006).

In fact, indigenous sources indicate that many Aboriginal youth have a fresh perspective, and want opportunities to gain tools and skills to problem-solve and be politically and economically empowered (Feathers of Hope, 2014; RCAP, 1995). Some Aboriginal youth desire having a voice at all levels of government, yet a growing number among them are expressing how leaders do not recognize youth as valuable resources in their communities. Most importantly, many Aboriginal youth see healing as a necessary first step to personal empowerment. These collective observations forefront the potential for Aboriginal youth to be strong leaders in their communities capable of initiating and engaging in an Aboriginal youth-led healing movement.

Given the growing perception that community healing hinges on the participation of Aboriginal youth and that Aboriginal youth, in actuality, are increasingly involved in improving the well being of their communities, it stands to reason that youth engagement programs can play a role in this healing movement. While there do exist youth programs specifically for Aboriginal youth aimed at fostering their engagement in community, little is known about Aboriginal youth's experiences of such programs.

Youth Engagement

In this section, I discuss how youth engagement is a concept borne out of a body of research on Positive Youth Development (PYD). I then define youth engagement, give an overview of guiding principles and models that conceptualize the phenomenon as a complex

process that changes over time, provide an overview of the process of youth engagement, and end with research on outcomes and challenges to youth engagement.

Positive youth development. Damon and Gregory (2003) purport that there has been a destructive legacy of the deficit approach to youth development, which has impacted the way that youth are perceived in the dominant culture. For example, Service Canada refers to youth as anybody between the ages of 15 and 29 (Shen, 2006; Yeung, 2007), a definition that Shen (2006) raises concern over in that it “infantilizes young adults and extends the period of their powerlessness” (p. 2). Ginwright and James (2002) report that community leaders typically blame the youth themselves for the challenges they face, concluding that youth are the cause of their own problems. These negative stereotypes have resulted in diminished opportunities for youth and adults to work in partnership, holding the assumption that young people are either unable or unwilling to contribute positively to their communities (Zeldin, et al., 2000). The result is that youth, especially those who are members of minority groups, often do not have a voice or influence in many aspects that have a bearing on their lives (Evans, 2007). Moreover, when studying youth development, researchers often focus on reducing problem behaviours rather than enhancing positive development (Benson & Pittman, 2001; Chan, Carlson, Trickett, & Earls, 2003; Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2004). One of the biggest criticisms of focusing on reducing problem behaviours is that it does not always provide the assets young people need to develop in a positive manner (Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009; Phelps et al., 2009).

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) perspective is considered an alternative to the long-held deficit models of youth development (Lerner, von Eye, Lerner, Lewin-Bizan, & Bowers, 2010). PYD has been defined a number of ways, but it generally refers to purposeful involvement in creating opportunities, usually in the form of activities or programs, for youth that are intended to promote healthy development (Benson & Pittman, 2001; Chan, Carlson, Trickett, & Earls, 2003; Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2004; Yates & Youniss, 1996). A shift towards the PYD perspective adopts the notion that youth are not ‘problems to be fixed’ but rather all young people have strengths that can be utilized (Benson, 1997; Benson & Pittman, 2001; Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2004). Furthermore, many researchers suggest that young people can steer their own development, harnessing both their ideas and abilities (Damon, 2004; Larson, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, 2004; Pittman, 2000). Approaches adopting a PYD perspective can

also promote a young person's resilience by placing greater emphasis on the responsibility of communities to create, support, and value the role of young people in organizations, institutions, and communities (Lewis-Charp, Yu, Sengouvanh, & Lacoe, 2003). With opportunities for PYD to transpire, communities and society at large might also experience benefits.

One way to promote Positive Youth Development is by encouraging young persons' involvement in structured activities. Youth activity involvement has been well researched by measuring frequency, duration, intensity, breadth, and density indices (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Rose-Krasnor, 2009; Rose-Krasnor, Busseri, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006) and found to be associated with social development and wellbeing, including healthy interpersonal connections, peer support, social integration and community connectedness (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Hart & Fegley, 1996; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003; Youniss et al., 1999). Involvement in activities has also been associated with strengthened initiative (Larson, 2000), higher self-esteem (Lerner et al., 2005; Rose-Krasnor, Busseri, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006), academic success (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003), reduced substance use (Youniss et al., 1999) and school drop out rates (Eccles & Barker, 1999, 2003; Mahoney, Schweder, & Strattin, 2002), and psychological outcomes such as lower depressed mood, less anxiety, and fewer psychiatric visits for high school youth (Mahoney, Schweder, & Strattin, 2002).

While this descriptive body of research affords a thorough characterization of what youth do activity-wise and associated outcomes, little research has explored the psychological component of structured activity involvement (Sharp, Caldwell, Graham, & Ridenour, 2006) to recognize the complex processes of activity involvement. Moreover, it was Pancer, Rose-Krasnor and Loiselle (2002) who coined the term "youth engagement" to promote a distinction between "mere participation" in activities compared to a more elaborate conceptualization of youth involvement as extending over time as part of a developmental process. This conceptualization is further highlighted within the widely accepted and empirically researched *Five Cs Model of PYD* (Lerner et al., 2005) in which components of positive development are operationalized (i.e., competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring). This body of research led to recognizing a 6th C, Contribution. Most notably, it started to point to a more nuanced consideration of a young person's involvement beyond the behavioural aspects of activity involvement, and gave birth to the concept of "youth engagement."

Defining youth engagement. Considering the range of contexts in which youth engagement can occur, there are many terms used in the literature when addressing the concept. Youth engagement has been referred to as youth participation, youth action, youth voice, youth-organizing, youth decision-making, youth empowerment, civic activism, and civic engagement (Campbell & Erbstein, 2011; Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006; Christens & Dolan, 2011; Lewis-Charp et al., 2003; O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002; Tolman & Pittman, 2001; Yeung, 2007). Although some terms directly emphasize certain aspects of community involvement (e.g., political engagement, student governance, advocacy), they all appear to involve engaging youth collectively through a process, acknowledging that engagement develops over time. This process of engagement is understood to be fluid and ongoing, rather than a single specific practice or program (CYCC Network, 2013). The *Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts Network*² (CYCC Network) explains that youth engagement can look very different across a range of settings:

There is no cookie-cutter approach to engaging youth. What sustains one youth in one setting may or may not work for another somewhere else, or even in the same setting.

Working effectively means taking the time to collaborate and explore with youth what is important to them. (p. 9)

For the purpose of this research, the term youth engagement will refer to “meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity with a focus outside of him or herself” (Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002, p. 49), and to instill a sense of active citizenship and social responsibility (Shen, 2006). This definition provides a more complex conceptualization of a young person’s involvement beyond the behavioural aspect of involvement in activities.

Youth engagement can occur in many contexts, including community, youth and cultural organizations, art programs, and employment or school settings (CEYE, 2012; Yeung, 2007). What distinguishes youth engagement from other efforts oriented to positive youth development is its meaningful and direct involvement of young people in leadership and decision-making, oftentimes for the betterment of their communities (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003; Pittman et al., 2011; Tolman & Pittman, 2001). More specifically, youth engagement has been described as

² “The CYCC Network is a national [Canadian] body with an international reach. We bring together community groups, front line practitioners, government officials, and researchers, all working with children and youth in challenging contexts throughout diverse Canadian communities” (CYCC Network, p. 2).

having three general components: (a) an affective component, including the emotional or subjective responses to an activity (e.g., excitement, frustration, meaningfulness); (b) a cognitive component (e.g., knowledge about the activity); and (c) a behavioural component, comprising actions related to participation (e.g., attendance at group meetings, playing a sport). Although this multifaceted conceptualization of engagement can be distinguished from ‘mere’ participation in a behavioural sense, researchers have rarely made this distinction (Sharp, Caldwell, Graham, & Ridenour, 2006). Indeed, there is limited research on studying youth engagement as a complex process that encompasses all three components.

Guiding principles. The following principles of youth engagement stem from evidence-informed practice, practice-based evidence, and local knowledge to provide a unique understanding of youth engagement and to serve as guidelines for understanding components that contribute to youth engagement. Crooks, Chiodo, and Thomas (2009) have set out principles specifically for working with Aboriginal youth and have based these principles on their understanding of general best practices and in consultation with existing literature and policy reports. These principles are: (a) understanding and integrating cultural identity, (b) increasing youth engagement, (c) fostering youth empowerment, and (d) establishing and maintaining effective partnerships. These principles have been specifically proposed as considerations for adapting existing programs and materials to meet the needs of Aboriginal youth.

Similarly, the CYCC Network (2013) has identified principles that embody key components to effectively engaging youth. Whereas the principles outlined by Crooks, Chiodo and Thomas (2009) are specific to Aboriginal youth programming, the CYCC Network proposes principles that are specific to engagement. Although many of the principles overlap (e.g., understanding and integrating cultural identity vs. culture and context; establishing and maintaining effective partnerships vs. positive relationships), the CYCC Network has elaborated on the principles of increasing youth engagement and fostering youth empowerment through principles of youth voice, civic engagement, and participatory research.

The CYCC Network (2013) proposes the following five guiding principles: youth voice, civic engagement, culture and context, participatory research, and positive relationships.

- *Youth voice* is central to youth engagement as it involves incorporating and respecting the unique ideas, opinions, and concerns of the youth. This is put into practice by creating opportunities for youth to speak, be heard, and be listened to.

- *Civic engagement* helps promote youth to be agents of change, and engage them in initiatives that help to address community issues. This can be accomplished through community participation, social enterprise and economic participation, online engagement, political participation, and sport.
- *Culture and context* helps account for the many beliefs and perspectives towards the needs of young people by acknowledging that beliefs vary across contexts. One way this principle is seen in practice is through applying strength-based approaches, as they help account for culture and context and privilege local knowledge within communities.
- *Positive relationships* provide support and resources for young people. These positive, supportive relationships with peers and adults are a fundamental way for young people to develop and maintain positive mental health, nurture resiliency, and prevent harmful behaviour. Positive relationships are seen in practice through adult-youth mentorships, peer mentoring, and partnerships.
- *Participatory research* involves a process where youth have the opportunity to collaborate with researchers to identify research questions that are important to them. Youth can play an active role in carrying out all aspects of the research.

Models of youth engagement. The principles for youth engagement outlined above serve as a foundation for youth engagement. Models incorporating the principles present various ways in which youth engagement can be fostered across different contexts. Zinck and colleagues (2013) cite a personal conversation with the Director of the Centre of Excellence in Youth Engagement when describing implementing models of engagement: “youth engagement is not a particular practice but a process; an attitude and approach that by nature facilitates meaningful involvement and ownership on the part of the youth” (Zink et al., 2013, p. 22). To this end, the process of engaging youth is not straightforward, but the following models help explain some of the processes involved in youth engagement.

Roger Hart’s ladder of youth participation. The model of youth participation most widely referred to is a ladder concept by Roger Hart (1992), shown in Figure 1. When this model was initially developed, the term *participation* referred to “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives” (Hart, 1992, p. 5). However, since Hart’s development of the model in 1992, the terminology has evolved to include an important distinction between *participation* and *engagement*. Both terms are often

used when describing activities and programs concerning youth in a number of different contexts, and are sometimes used interchangeably. It is important to think of *participation* and *engagement* on a continuum of involvement. By placing participation and engagement on a continuum of involvement, participation can be characterized as “more passive” and engagement as “more active” (CYCC Network, 2013; Paterson & Panessa, 2008; Zinck et al., 2013). This distinction is especially important when conceptualizing youth engagement.

This model’s greatest contribution has been in helping practitioners recognize, and work to eliminate, forms of “non-participation” such as manipulation, decoration, and tokenism of youth. Hart argues that the first three levels of the ladder represent *token participation*, meaning youth are ‘involved’ with no opportunity for their input into decisions. Token participation occurs when youth are physically present but their voices are not actively heard and listened to. These first three levels of participation generally do not provide meaningful opportunity or benefit for the youth involved (Paterson & Panessa, 2008). The remaining four levels of the ladder represent indicators to determine the level of youth involvement in programs. Hart’s model presents youth involvement within programs on a continuum ranging from young people who are assigned and informed by adults to young people and adults sharing in decision-making, where the former reflects participation and the latter reflects engagement. Although adults may initiate the involvement, youth are encouraged to have more ownership through sharing in the decisions and having their perspectives incorporated. Through this process of engagement, youth are encouraged to become autonomous with their involvement and to initiate their own actions. This type of involvement is understood to be “meaningful” or “authentic” (CYCC Network, 2013, p. 7).

These indicators of participation involve criteria for who initiates, runs, and makes the final decisions regarding the program. This model also includes indicators about how informed young people are about the program goals, and how feedback is sought and incorporated into plans for implementing programs (Hart, 1992, 1997; Paterson & Panessa, 2008). Although Hart (1992) had not connected these indicators to engagement at the time he developed the model, research since then suggests that progression along the continuum leads to engagement (Paterson & Panessa, 2008; Shier, 2001; Zinck et al., 2013).

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

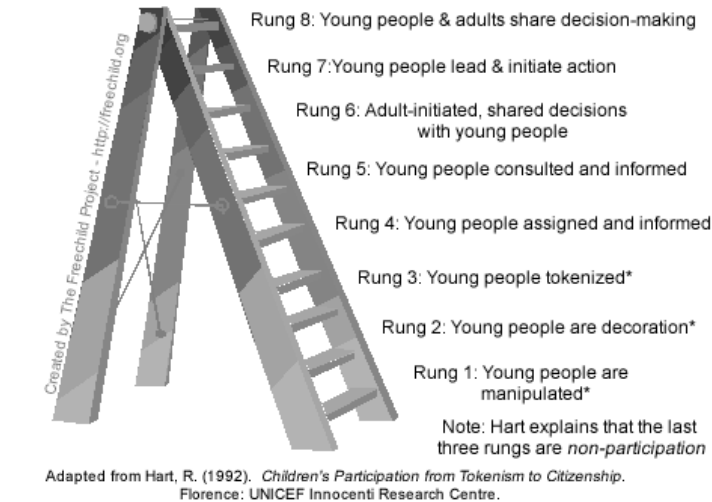


Figure 1. An adapted Version of Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation.

Retrieved from "Working with Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts to Promote Youth Engagement" by Zinck et al., p. 21. Copyright 2013 by *The Freedom Child Project*. Reprinted with permission.

It is worth repeating here that Hart's (1992) model has created a useful stepping-stone for understanding the progression of youth involvement from participation to engagement. Hart's model places a strong emphasis on both the role of adults and of youth within youth involvement. This emphasis has helped researchers view youth engagement as a means to achieving a goal that involves a partnership where youth and adults alike share power in the design, implementation, and assessment of the program (Paterson & Panessa, 2008). While Hart offers two extremes of involvement (i.e., participation vs. engagement), which help define the different ways youth can be involved, there is no single optimal level of involvement that has to take place across all situations (Rocha, 1997; Shier, 2001; Zinck et al., 2013). For example, there may be circumstances in which engagement might not be as suitable as participation, such as in politically or economically unstable environments. There may be environments where it is safer or more appropriate for youth to participate rather than fully engage and potentially become a target as a result of political unrest.

Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement conceptual model. Although Hart (1992) proposed a model that provided insight into the progression from participation to engagement, it does not account for the youth experience of engagement. Based in Canada, the *Centre of*

Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE) “brings together the expertise of youth, youth service-providers, academic researchers and policy makers to identify, build and implement models of effective practice for meaningfully engaging youth” (CEYE, 2012, para 1). Through this process, the CEYE engages young people—with the support of professional adults—in every step of the research, policies, and documents generated.

The CEYE (2007) articulates the complexities of youth engagement through a working model depicting the interaction between three elements: (a) what helps initiate or poses a barrier to engagement, (b) what sustains or poses a barrier to continued engagement, and (c) positive or negative outcomes of engagement. For each component there are individual (e.g., values, temperament, interests), social (e.g., friends, parents, teacher), and systemic (e.g., schools, organizations, communities, country of origin) influences that are interconnected and considered to shape the experience of engagement. This model affords a “dynamic and fluid” representation of the engagement process (CEYE, 2007, p. 1).

With this model, engagement is further characterized by subjective and objective quality of engagement, as depicted in Figure 2. *Subjective qualities* of engagement include feelings about the activity, thinking about the activity, and how good the person is at the activity; whereas *objective qualities* include behaviour while doing the activity, the structure of the activity, and the content of the activity. These different qualities are important as they suggest engagement is deeper than what can simply be observed or measured, and begin to point to the importance of the lived experience of engagement.

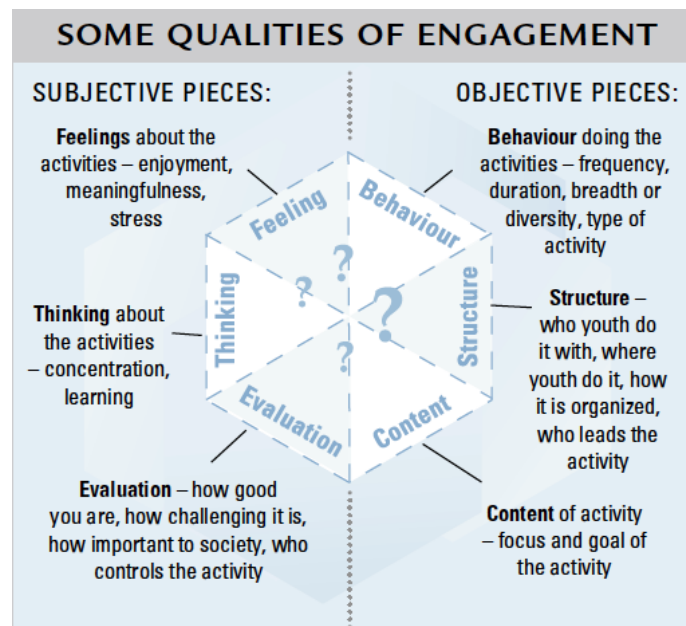


Figure 2. Subjective and Objective Qualities of Youth Engagement. Retrieved from "Youth Engagement: A Conceptual Model", p. 1. Toronto, ON: Students Commission of Canada. Retrieved from http://www.tgmag.ca/aorg/pdf/4pager_e2008FINAL_web.pdf Copyright 2007 by Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement. Reprinted with permission.

The CEYE acknowledges that the model cannot directly address every context since there are aspects that cannot be foreseen across all situations. However, this conceptualization of youth engagement allows for a more comprehensive look at the characteristics that influence a young person's choice to both initiate and sustain their engagement. More specifically, this model provides insight into the qualities of engagement experienced through a process in which youth initiate and sustain their engagement, and perceive the impact of their engagement.

The youth engagement process. Using the CEYE (2007) model as a guideline for understanding the process of youth engagement, the following will explore empirical research as it relates to (a) what helps or poses a barrier to initiating engagement, (b) what helps or poses a barrier to sustaining engagement, and (c) positive or negative outcomes of engagement.

Initiating youth engagement. One of the most interesting studies with regard to the psychological component of engagement explored a psychological process for which youth become engaged in youth programs. Dawes and Larson (2011) formulated an empirically-based grounded theory on the process through which such engagement develops. They explored narrative accounts of 44 youth who reported experiencing a positive turning point in their

motivation for initiating engagement. For 38 of the youth they interviewed, this change process involved forming a personal connection and a progressive integration of personal goals with the goal of the program activity. Youth reported developing a connection to three personal goals that linked the self with the activity: learning for the future, developing competence, and pursuing a purpose. Dawes and Larson (2011) suggest that since motivation can be fostered, youth do not always need to enter into programs intrinsically engaged. They also propose that programs should be creative in helping youth explore ways to form authentic connections to program activities. This research suggests that connections to others and purposeful involvement seem to be important considerations for young people.

Sustaining youth engagement. Programs or activities that promote youth engagement are generally different than programs targeted for youth participation in that the former encourage community building, volunteerism, and active citizenry (Yeung, 2007). The literature suggests the following four characteristics of programs are important for facilitating youth engagement: (a) a youth-friendly environment, (b) opportunities to complete meaningful tasks, (c) adult support, and (d) opportunities to learn and use new skills (CEYE, 2002; Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006).

Youth-friendly environments. A youth-friendly environment is one where youth feel welcomed and appreciated, with barriers to participating removed (e.g., lack of transportation, inconvenient meeting times; Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006). McLaughlin (2000) explains how effective youth organizations create youth-friendly learning environments through programs that are youth-centred. Programs deemed to be youth-centred are characterized as:

- responding to diverse talents, skills, and interests of the youth;
- identifying and building on the youths' strengths;
- tailoring activities and events to the interests and strengths of the youth;
- providing personal attention to the youth involved;
- actively reaching out into the community to let youth know about programs; and
- featuring youth leadership and voice.

Programs that carry these characteristics also help foster environments that are more youth friendly, providing opportunity for meaningful engagement.

Meaningful participation. "Youth engagement efforts risk being devalued to tokenism, decoration, or even manipulation unless genuine opportunities exist for youth to participate in

decision-making processes and complete meaningful tasks” (Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006, p. 222). Youth engagement is fostered when youth are given tasks that help a team meet an overall goal and provided with meaningful tasks that build on skills that contribute to their overall development (Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006).

Another way to conceptualize meaningful participation is through civic engagement. The CYCC Network (2013) elaborates on how civic engagement can foster collective action for community problems:

When [youth] are engaged in their community they become agents of change. They begin to see that they can positively influence a situation. They see themselves in a more positive light, and others in the community do so as well. (p. 11)

The Network proposes five ways youth programs can promote civic engagement: community participation (e.g., planning community social events, promoting physical activity, helping seniors, and participating in community design plans); online engagement (e.g., coordinating protests, communicating between civilian networks, appealing to the international community to stop violence or injustices); political participation (e.g., becoming more socially aware and active in their communities); social enterprise (e.g., developing vocational skills, creating employment opportunities); and sport (e.g., promoting positive characteristics, including fair play, cooperation, sharing, respect).

Adult support. Hart’s model emphasizes building positive adult-youth partnerships whereby the adult and youth work towards a common goal with clear and meaningful roles. These partnerships could be with youth service providers, organizations, culturally-specific leaders (e.g., Elders), and older youth mentors. Based on quantitative data from diverse communities, it is suggested that youth and adult partnerships are a multidimensional construct comprised of: (a) principles and values, which youth use to orient the relationship to guide behaviour; (b) a set of skills and competencies through which the behaviours are focused; and (c) a method to implement and achieve collective action (Camino, 2000). These types of partnerships allow for the necessary collaboration to develop programs that address the needs of youth, as opposed to adults deciding what the needs are of the youth who will be participating in programs. These types of processes generally have a positive impact on youth health and development by fostering a sense of agency among the youth and the ability to contribute positively to their community (Gurstein, Lavato, & Ross, 2003).

Adults can also foster youth engagement by demonstrating respect and equality when working with youth (Camino, 2000; Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006). Programs that promote youth engagement vary on the extent to which youth are invited into the development and implementation of programs, as well as how much input, decision-making, and authority is vested in the adult advisors versus the youth. The CYCC Network (2013) proposes two types of adult–youth relationships: adult–youth mentorship and partnerships. An adult–youth mentorship involves the adult being a positive role model for the young person, usually by giving support, advice, and encouragement. A partnership involves adults and youth working together as a team, where both the adult and youth are viewed as having something to contribute through a mutual exchange and support. Partnerships also challenge adult–youth power imbalances by emphasizing equality in the relationship. Overall, research suggests a balance between adult and youth involvement provides optimal room for growth and development, as well as provides different experiences for both the youth and adults involved (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005).

Skill development. This fourth and final component of youth engagement programs refers to the notion that effective and meaningful youth engagement provides the opportunity for youth to learn and use new skills, which inevitably contribute to community change (Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006). Youth engagement provides youth with the opportunities to build competencies that can be applied to different domains of their lives (Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006). In one study exploring the process of youth empowerment through youth participation in a project, the youth experienced compromise, teamwork, cooperation, perspective-taking, and a breakdown of stereotypes through their involvement (Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward, & Green, 2003).

Impact of youth engagement. Research exploring the impact of youth engagement through youth programs suggests youth engagement can have an impact on individual, organizational, and community levels (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Yohalem & Martin, 2007). Each level of impact is explained below.

Individual impact. Individual-level impacts include: an enhanced sense of belonging and connection to community, communication, leadership, and problem solving skills; an enhanced sense of control, social responsibility, and hopefulness (Campbell & Erbsstein, 2011; Christens & Dolan, 2011; Yohalem & Martin, 2007); and lower rates of alcohol and drug use, pregnancy, and depression (Zeldin, et al., 2009). This body of research and the CEYE (2009) suggest that youth

engagement supports positive mental health. More specifically, after surveying 242 rural youth, Armstrong and Manion (2006) found that youth engagement in extracurricular activities was significantly associated with lower levels of suicidality. Many quantitative studies have also revealed that when youth are engaged, they make connections with other peers and supportive adults (Armstrong & Manion, 2006; Campbell & Erbsstein, 2011; Christens & Dolan, 2011; Yohalem & Martin, 2007). These social connections have been linked to less risky behaviour and increased participation in activities that promote community building (Armstrong, 2009; CEYE, 2012). Youth learn through engagement that they can have a role in improving communities, which fosters a sense of empowerment (Campbell & Erbsstein, 2011; Dallago, et al., 2009; Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011). Programs that promote engagement can also provide protective factors—such as a positive relationship with a caring adult, hope and expectations of success, opportunities for meaningful participation—that promote resilience among youth (Pittman et al., 2003, 2011; Ungar, 2013). Engaging youth in meaningful ways can also be an empowering experience as it is a process that allows youth to see their voices lead to action, in turn promoting resilience and making positive change in their community.

Organizational impact. Youth engagement is also helpful for youth-serving organizations, also referred to as “service providers,” to achieve and improve program objectives. Service providers can use youth engagement as a tool to build community awareness of the independence, agency, and knowledge of youth who are understood to be at risk. Youth engagement also gives youth the opportunity to provide input that may result in better youth programming. Organizations can foster youth engagement to tap into the resources of youth, including their creativity, energy, and drive (Mafle’o & Api, 2009).

Community impact. Community-level impacts include enhanced community awareness, new program implementation, policy change, and institution building. Youth engagement initiatives can foster a more positive public perception of youth, embed youth development and engagement principles within key institutions, inform community planning and design, build social and political capital, generate new community resources, and develop new policies (Campbell & Erbsstein, 2011). Such community impacts have been found to contribute to an intergenerational and multicultural collaboration in the exercise of power (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Yeung, 2007; Yohalem & Martin, 2007; Zeldin, et al., 2009). Moreover, individual impacts of engagement—observable through a young person’s civic engagement, volunteerism,

employment, and active citizenship (National League of Cities, 2010)—seem to have a positive impact on community.

Challenges and limitations to youth engagement. There are many challenges, whether systemic or logistical in nature, to engaging youth in a meaningful way. Systemic challenges arise when youth engagement is not well understood by the adults or agencies involved, whereas logistical challenges regard youth access to programs, community support networks, and managing the expectations of youth.

Systemic challenges. Although there is a growing interest for agencies to create roles for youth to become more engaged, such opportunities risk taking the form of tokenism if not exercised in an authentic way (Campbell & Erbstein, 2011). Additionally, only providing opportunities to a select few youth (e.g., one youth representative on an advisory board) may result in exclusivity, whereby only the most privileged or skilled youth are chosen to participate.

Negative constructions of youth in the minds of adults can also create systemic challenges. Some practitioners are under the assumption that by engaging youth, they must relinquish their roles (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002). Yet even the best-intentioned adults might not actually understand what youth engagement means. Mitigating this challenge requires adults and agencies alike to change their perspectives and understanding of youth and how to best work with them. More specifically, it requires challenging misconceptions about the ability of youth to partake in important decision-making, and recognizing that these misconceptions are possibly fostered by power imbalances between adults and youth (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002).

Systemic challenges also emerge from creating structures that integrate youth and adults in joint decision-making. Campbell and Erbstein (2011) report empirical findings that suggest the energy, focus, and time needed to establish a working coalition between youth and adults make it difficult to complete short term goals. This struggle was also reflected from the perspective of organizations involved in the study, as it was difficult for agencies to shift from youth as program recipients to engaging them as co-creators of goals and plans. Agencies particularly struggled to create developmentally appropriate settings for youth involvement in decisions (e.g., program decisions, strategic planning). Campbell and Erbstein (2011) report that more work is needed to create venues where youth and adults participate in joint decision-making to move beyond token or trivial leadership roles.

Logistical challenges. As best practices for youth engagement are still being developed, logistical challenges are emerging related to youth access to programs, community support networks, and managing the expectations of youth that are worth noting. Mafle'o and Api (2009) discuss the importance of adults acknowledging that youth are not “superhuman” and that “[youth] have needs that require a marshalling of resources targeted at youth and at changing environmental circumstances” (p. 417). Additionally, youth from more privileged backgrounds are more likely to become engaged in their communities as they have many of the family and community supports needed to initiate and sustain their engagement (Campbell & Erbsstein, 2011; CYCC Network, 2013). This disproportionate enrolment in youth programs may suggest that extra barriers and challenges exist for marginalized populations, with the result of unfavourably impacting a young person's ability to access programs that promote engagement.

Challenges are also present when youth engagement programs are implemented with expectations of youth that surpass their skills or the resources available to them. Therefore, the needs and capacities of young people must also be considered throughout the process of engagement. Adults may need to consider the resources that young people have available to them (e.g., time, transportation) and design programs accordingly. To this end, adults may need to help youth with activities such as raising money, or help create more supportive environments within the family and community (Campbell & Erbsstein, 2011; Mafle'o & Api, 2009).

Challenges in the North. These challenges are present across many different contexts. In the North, youth experience a wide range of additional challenges that could impact their engagement in the community. One systemic challenge specific to the North centres on the overarching impact of colonization. Due to social challenges stemming from historical colonization (e.g., addiction, poor parenting skills, low levels of education), some barriers to engagement stem from fewer adult role models and poor adult-youth communication skills (Kral, Salusky, Inuksuk, Angutimarik, & Tulugardjuk, 2014).

There are also a number of logistical challenges specific to the North. Kral et al. (2014) acknowledge 24 hours of daylight in the spring and summer as a logistical challenge associated with school attendance. Similarly, from my experiences in the North, when the sun is up all night, youth tend to not go to bed and have trouble attending youth programs the following morning. Additionally, one study exploring common challenges for capacity development programs for youth in the Canadian arctic suggests challenges emerge from: marketing the

program and finding Northern youth, finding the resources to run and enhance youth programming, strengthening programs' alumni networks, and evaluation. Limited resources in the North are perpetuated by isolation, the high cost of living, and expensive travel between Northern communities and to bigger Canadian cities (Buckler, Wright, & Normand, 2009).

Promoting Aboriginal Youth Engagement through Programs

There is a growing recognition that youth engagement is central to the success of programs or interventions that involve young people (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Gurstien, Lovato, & Ross, 2003; Hart, 1992; Zinck et al., 2013). However, it is important to discern youth engagement as a process, rather than a particular practice or program (Zinck et al., 2013). With this mind, youth engagement can be viewed as a way to strengthen a program's ability to sustain a young person's involvement. These programs and services acknowledge the independence and agency of youth by providing them opportunities to give feedback on the programs that serve them. With this, programs that promote engagement shift from being developed *for* youth to being developed *with* youth (Zinck et al., 2013).

Although the CYCC Network's principles of youth engagement (2013) outlined earlier are considered applicable across different contexts, there are additional considerations for working effectively with Aboriginal youth, such as the role of strength-based approaches, understanding and integrating Aboriginal cultural identity, and involving non-Aboriginal persons from dominant cultures. A strength-based approach is understood to be critical for Aboriginal youth because it helps account for the Canadian historical context:

By placing the high rates of violence, substance abuse, and poverty experiences by Aboriginal families into the context of colonization and assimilation, [an asset-based] perspective shifts the perceived deficits away from the individual and allows us to focus instead on the resilience many of these youth have demonstrated. (Crooks, Chiodo, & Thomas, 2009, p. 8)

As Aboriginal youths' lack of a connection to culture has been identified as a risk factor with respect to social issues that affect Aboriginal communities, promoting youth assets while making important cultural connections is important when designing Aboriginal youth programs (Crooks, Chiodo, & Thomas, 2009; 2010). When designing programs for Aboriginal youth, some people have concerns about the role of non-Aboriginal individuals or organizations. Crooks and colleagues (2009) explain:

How do mainstream organizations help support Aboriginal youth, families, and communities, without further entrenching the existing power structures? We think the answer to that lies in how the work is approached. When youth are approached from a place of respect, a place that recognizes historical context, and a place of partnership, then this work can be achieved in a way that honours all of the participants. (p. 9)

They further suggest that there may be an obligation on the part of individuals and organizations in the dominant culture to find ways to “balance out historical wrongs” by bringing recognition to the value of indigenous knowledge and ways of practice (p. 9).

One study exploring capacity-building programs in the North identified several recommendations for youth programs to address the complex issues that the North currently faces. One recommendation was to give Northern youth a stake in their future by broadening opportunities for youth to participate in decision-making processes. Additionally, widespread mentorship programs for young people may provide them with increased self-confidence and inspire them to make a difference in their communities. The study also advocates for more ownership of programs by First Nations or Inuit organizations. Finally, it suggests a need for more local youth-driven and youth-focused programs at the community level to build confidence, life and leadership skills, and nurture entrepreneurship, while remaining contextually relevant (Buckler, Wright, & Normand, 2009).

Recognizing that challenges within Aboriginal communities persist today and that there is a growing youth-led movement in service of community healing, youth engagement provides a means for youth to have meaningful and sustained involvement in an activity that has the potential to contribute positively to their development. In the next chapter I describe my study, which aimed to explore experiences of youth engagement from the perspective of Aboriginal youth.

CHAPTER III

Current Study

In this chapter, I state the rationale and the research question of the study. I also provide an overview of the conceptual framework that informed the research question and reflects how I understood engagement in my approach to the study.

Rationale

The current generation of Aboriginal youth are increasingly perceived as the generation of hope for healing among Aboriginal peoples amidst current community challenges, many of which stem from colonial systems. Engaging Northern Aboriginal youth in positive, meaningful ways is important now more than ever, as than half of the Inuit population are under the age of 25. Many of these individuals, as well as their families and communities, face significant issues related to mental health, substance abuse, addiction, suicide, and limited education and career opportunities. Youth engagement involving youth programs may provide a means for Aboriginal youth to contribute positively to both their own development and that of their community.

Although principles of youth engagement have been established, little is known about ‘real life’ experiences of participating in positive youth development programs that apply these engagement principles. Past research has been mostly descriptive in nature, characterizing the behavioural aspects and outcomes of youth participating in program, therefore not much is known about the complexity of engagement as a process. Few studies have explored what it is like—from the youth perspective—to engage in a program that promotes youth engagement. Doing so would deepen our understanding of youth engagement beyond research to date that has been predominantly descriptive in nature. Exploring the experience of Aboriginal youth in particular would also help unveil how positive youth development programs may provide a means for them to respond to challenges in their community and may have implications for Aboriginal youth involvement in community healing. Aboriginal youth from Canada’s three territories were of particular interest in this study given the health and social challenges stemming from a history of marginalization and social injustice.

Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

The research question addressed in this study was: “What narratives emerge, and are co-constructed, when exploring the experiences of Aboriginal youth who engage in a positive youth development program aimed at fostering youth engagement?” More specifically, the participants

and I co-constructed narratives, based on the participants' experiences, that reflect how Aboriginal youth (a) initiate engagement in a program that promotes youth engagement, (b) sustain the process of their engagement in such a program, and (c) perceive the impact of their engagement on their personal development and their community.

In this study, youth engagement was defined as “meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity with a focus outside of him or herself” (Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002, p. 49), and to instill a sense of active citizenship and social responsibility (Shen, 2006). Additionally, the study had an asset-based orientation—stemming from the literature on Positive Youth Development—recognizing that youths' strengths co-exist with, and are understood in relation to, environmental challenges. With this lens, I conceptualized youth engagement as encompassing three main concepts:

1. Youth engagement includes affective, cognitive, and behavioural *components*;
2. Youth engagement is a *process* that is dynamic and fluid and includes temporal components related to initiating engagement, sustaining engagement, and outcomes of engagement; and
3. Youth engagement is *culture* bound.

The interaction between these three components is depicted in Figure 3.

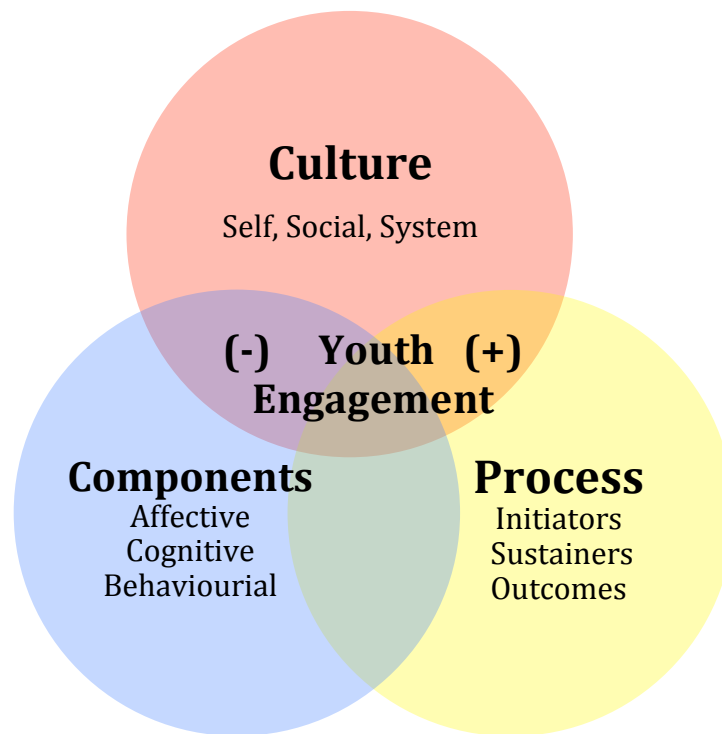


Figure 3. Conceptual framework depicting the interaction between culture, components, and the process of engagement.

Components of engagement. Youth engagement has been described as having three general components: affective, cognitive, and behavioural (Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002; Sharp, Caldwell, Graham, & Ridenour, 2006). Additionally, the CEYE (2012) have further qualified these three components into two main categories: subjective (which includes affective and cognitive components) and objective (which includes behavioural components). For the purpose of this study, I conceptualized youth engagement as including all three components as described below:

- Affective component: Feelings about the activities (e.g., enjoyment, stress, frustration, meaningfulness, excitement);
- Cognitive component: Knowledge about the activity (e.g., learning a new skill, concentration); and
- Behavioural component: Actions related to the activity (e.g., frequency, duration, breath, type of activity, structure of the activity, goal of focus of the activity).

This study acknowledges all three components as being important to engagement. Although this conceptualization of engagement is accepted among researchers, there is limited research studying youth engagement as a complex process that encompasses all three of these components. This study sought to understand engagement beyond the behavioural aspects of being involved in activities that are predominantly reflected in the literature.

Engagement as a process. The CYCC Network (2013) emphasizes engagement as a fluid and ongoing process, rather than a specific singular practice or program. Drawing from CEYE's (2012) model, I conceptualize youth engagement as an ongoing and iterative process between three temporal elements that reflect initiating engagement, sustaining engagement, and engagement outcomes. More specifically, valence can be attributed to these engagement processes in exploring (a) what helps or poses a barrier to initiating engagement, (b) what helps or poses a barrier to sustaining engagement, and (c) positive or negative outcomes of engagement. Researchers have explored each of these elements separately but have yet to explore their interconnectedness within a process that unfolds over time.

Engagement as culture bound. The literature on youth engagement suggests that cultural considerations have an important role in the experience of youth engagement. The CYCC Network (2013) proposes that culture and context help account for the many beliefs and perspective about the needs of young people, emphasizing a need for strength-based approaches that privilege local knowledge within communities. Additionally, Crooks, Chiodo, and Thomas (2009) have set out principles for working with Aboriginal youth that include understanding and integrating cultural identity into programs.

Given the Aboriginal focus of this study, the role of culture contributes to how I conceptualize youth engagement. Similar to the CEYE (2012), I understand culture to be reflected in and influenced by the individual (self), the interpersonal (social), and the community (system). This accounts for the notion that people exist as individuals but have relationships with other people and may be influenced by their greater community. Given the history of marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the consideration of culture on individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels was especially important for this study. More specifically, this study was grounded in the perspective that intergenerational historical issues have resulted in the current circumstances of Aboriginal peoples (Hay, 2004; Zinck et al., 2013). With this in mind,

the current study recognizes that Aboriginal youth today experience social injustices and challenges resulting from colonizing systems within Canada.

This conceptual framework depicting youth engagement is especially fitting for this study because it supports the idea that engagement encompasses several dimensions at the individual level (e.g., affective, cognitive and behavioural), but also represents engagement as a fluid and dynamic process that is influenced by an individual's cultural context.

CHAPTER IV

Methods

In this chapter, I start by describing the epistemological approach of social constructionism and how it relates to my primary methodology of narrative inquiry. I then describe participant sampling and the instruments I used to gather data. I also present the procedures I applied for data collection, analysis, and validity and trustworthiness, and explain how I selected documents to provide additional context to participants' stories.

With the intension of honouring the voice of the Aboriginal youth participants in this study, the following figure provides a view of the methodological elements of this study—namely narrative inquiry and social justice principles, and aspects of youth participatory action research—as they relate to the overarching epistemological framing of social constructionism.

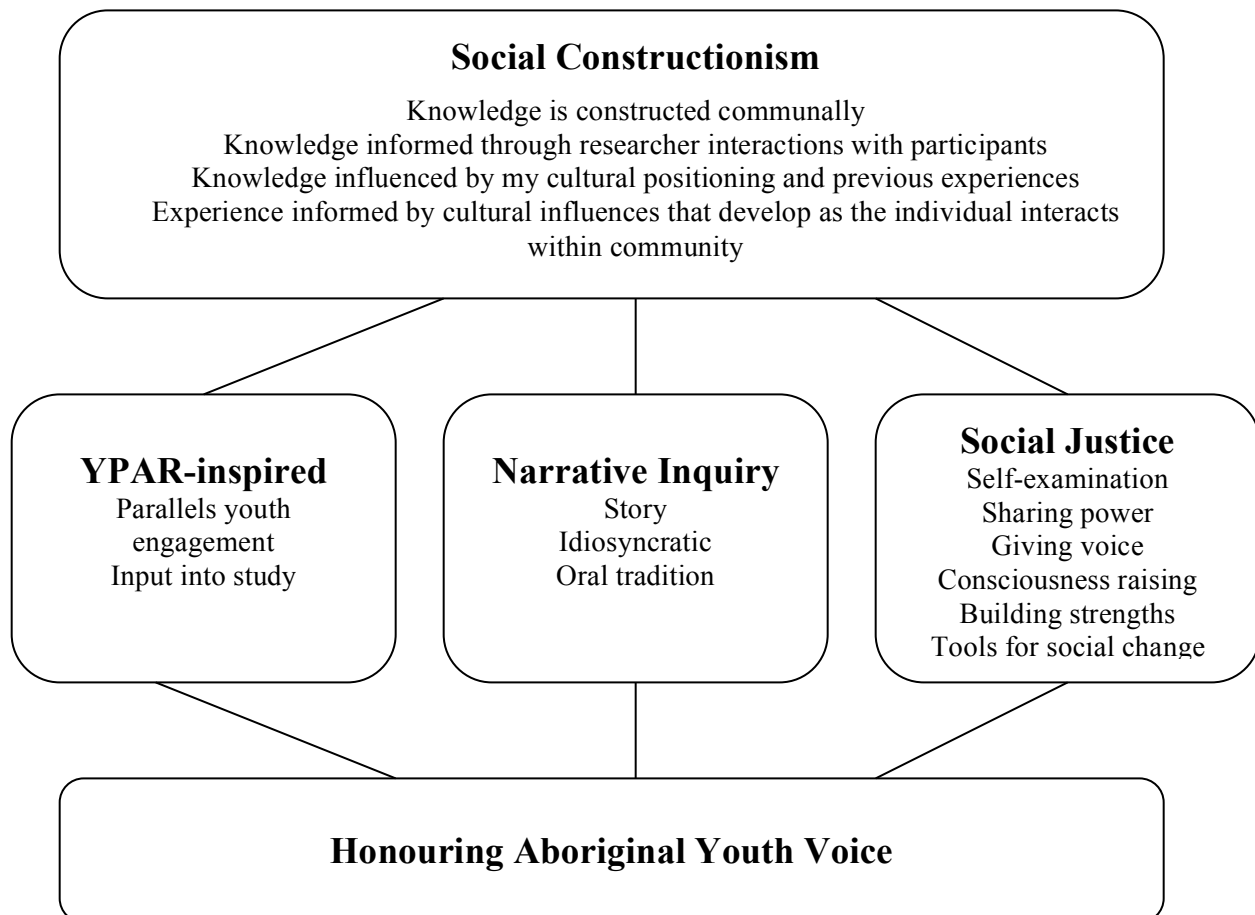


Figure 4. Overarching epistemology and methodological elements applied in this study, and the relationship between them.

Social Constructionism

The majority of the current literature on youth engagement is limited in that it does not account for behavioural, cognitive, and affective components of engagement. In fact, research has often explored youth engagement from a dichotomy of ‘engaged’ vs. ‘not engaged,’ and has rarely recognized engagement as a developmental process that is fluid and ongoing. With this in mind, the current study is grounded in a social constructionist perspective, adopting the notion that knowledge and meaning are constructed communally (Paré, 1995; Yang & Gergen, 2012). “Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266), with consideration for the cultural and historical context from which knowledge is constructed (Paré, 1995; Young & Collin, 2004). From this perspective, humans are active constructors of their world and researchers are interested in understanding how people construct and interpret experiences (Lock & Strong, 2010). Whereas *social constructivists* consider knowledge to be something that is created within the individual through their experiences, *social constructionists* consider knowledge to be a product of social interactions (Young & Collin, 2004). Paré (1995) explains how social constructionism “refers to knowledge neither in the observed nor the observer, but rather in the place between the two, in the social arena among interpreting subjects” (p. 3). Social constructionists emphasize how language is both historically and culturally specific; therefore language “constitutes, rather than reflects, reality” (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 377). This study was grounded in a social constructionist approach whereby participants’ stories were sought as a means to unveil the interconnectedness of the engagement process by exploring experiences of Aboriginal youth engagement. Social constructionism leads to privileging local knowledge, and this study aims to privilege both youth- and Aboriginal-based knowledge. This epistemological perspective implies an interaction of the participants’ and my own experiences of youth engagement, allowing for the co-construction of narratives. It also involves a consideration for the interconnectedness between individual and community cultural contexts as they relate to experiences of youth engagement.

Methodology

Youth participatory action-inspired research. Consistent with the spirit of social constructionism, values espoused by Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) inspired this

study. YPAR expands on the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) by incorporating an element that embraces the strength of youth and conducting research “with” as opposed to “on” youth (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. vii). Participatory action models strive to privilege those who have not had a voice in the past (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), legitimizing perspectives and information that have previously been discredited. In the context of this study, YPAR is particularly important as a means to forefront the voices of those who have previously been silenced as a result of colonization. YPAR also adopts the notion that those who have been historically marginalized or silenced carry substantial knowledge about how injustice is developed in society (Romero et al., 2008). While YPAR was not applied in its entirety, this study integrated elements of YPAR to encourage participant involvement in the following ways:

- eliciting suggestions for the interview protocol;
- eliciting input around avenues and venues for the interviews to take place;
- eliciting suggestions for other possible sources of data (e.g., resources to learn more about participant’s community);
- eliciting feedback on interpretations of the data; and
- initiating reflection for how this research could lead to follow-up action.

Using a YPAR-inspired approach for this study contributes to the notion that young people, despite their age and often assumed lack of skills and abilities, have the capacity to create change in their communities. Involving Aboriginal youth participants in the research process was important for validating and integrating their voice into the dissemination of this research. Considering this study explores experiences of Aboriginal youth engagement, it is particularly appropriate to engage the Aboriginal youth participants in the research process, and to do so in a manner that captures their voice in a meaningful way.

Narrative inquiry. The primary methodology for this qualitative study was narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry, which is grounded in traditions of social constructionism, involves generating and analyzing stories of life experiences (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2008; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Narratives provide a means of understanding “one’s own and other’s actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (Chase, 2005, p. 656). Narrative researchers use narrative accounts as data, exploring the stories, the language used, how the narrative connects with a particular experience, how the narrative changes, and the way

that it is shared with others. The construction of a story reflects the “current internal world of the narrator as well as aspects of the social world in which he or she lives” (Josselson, 2001, p. 226).

Storytelling is understood to be a powerful way of sharing and creating meaning for a lived experience. The process of selecting details of an experience to share, reflecting on them, giving them order, and therefore making sense of them is what makes storytelling a “meaning-making” experience (Seidman, 1991). Narrative inquiry also plays an important role in voicing the stories of marginalized groups. A sense of shared experiences can be gained through stories that can create a basis to mobilize others into action for social change (Riessman, 2008). The empowerment gained through the process of narrative sharing offers potential forms of social action or change to occur (Murray & Sargeant, 2011). A narrative methodology is also particularly well suited for the chosen participant population of this study given the importance of oral histories and storytelling in the Aboriginal culture (Dickason, 2006; McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009). A narrative approach keeps the youth voice at the forefront while preserving the context of shared stories. Additionally, through sharing their story of engagement in the community, a meaningful and invigorating experience can emerge for the participants (Murray & Sargeant, 2011). Overall, a narrative methodology is compatible with the principles of youth engagement and is culturally aligned with Aboriginal traditions.

Social justice principles. Lastly, this study embraced a social-justice oriented framework based on principles proposed by Goodman et al. (2004). These principles include (a) ongoing self-examination, (b) sharing power, (c) giving voice, (d) facilitating consciousness-raising, (e) building strengths, and (f) leaving clients the tools to work towards social change. These principles were incorporated through the research process and as a lens to understand the data. I participated in ongoing self-examination throughout the research process through research journals and conversations with my supervisor. The principle of *sharing power* was also facilitated through the YPAR-inspired framework, helping to provide participants with opportunity to contribute to decisions within the research process. The research centred the principle of *giving voice* among the Aboriginal youth participants with an understanding of advocating for marginalized groups by amplifying their voices through sharing the results of this study. The principle of *consciousness-raising* means helping participants understand the extent to which individual difficulties are rooted in larger historical challenges. Although not a primary focus of study, this principle helped me to understand the issues the participants shared as part of

a greater systemic issue. The *asset-based focus* on this study viewed challenges in communities as an “adaptive responses” in the face of oppressive social structures (Goodman et al., 2004,). Finally, through the YPAR inspired framework, client were given the opportunity to reflect on their skills as they related to future opportunities to work towards *social change*.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was first conducted to assess the quality of the interview protocol, evaluating its clarity and ability to elicit rich stories. The pilot study included two female participants, both of whom have attended ACTIVATE and completed an ACTIVATE-in-Action project. Unfortunately, the pilot study could not be conducted with Aboriginal youth from the North; both participants were non-Aboriginal, Ontario residents. To account for the two types of avenues in which face-to-face interviews could take place, one pilot interview took place in person, while the other interview was conducted by distance using Skype video chat. Based on feedback from the pilot interviews and preliminary analysis of the transcripts, I added a series of sub-questions to the original interview protocol to allow for prompting of additional information, if needed. The pilot study also helped me practice my interview skills, including paraphrasing and prompting for stories within the participants’ responses to interview questions.

Participants

ACTIVATE involvement. To reiterate, participants were selected for their involvement in the ACTIVATE program as the program embodies principles of youth engagement and provides the potential for participants to initiate a community project. Although there are other programs with similar aims, ACTIVATE was also selected because of its distinct partnership with Aboriginal youth organizations across the country that has resulted in reaching many Aboriginal youth since ACTIVATE’s conception in 2004.

The ACTIVATE program includes two components: a 5-day leadership conference and a youth-initiated community action project following the conference. Whereas the conference provides the inspiration, skills, resources, network, and insight to develop project ideas, the projects themselves are initiated and sustained by the youth in their respective communities. Community action projects can include implementing a community event, engaging other youth through initiating a new community program, or partnering with existing programs to increase levels of youth engagement while enhancing the overall services and programs targeted to young people in the community.

Participant criteria. The following criteria were used for eligibility to participate in the study: (a) be between 18 to 24 years of age; (b) self-identify as being of Aboriginal descent (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit); (c) have attended an ACTIVATE Conference in 2007 or later; (d) have engaged in a community action project or returned to ACTIVATE as a volunteer; and (e) have access to the internet, email, and a phone, either personally or through a community agency, for research communications and interviews. Participants must have had attended ACTIVATE in the past 5 years to allow considerable time to subsequently engage in a community action project given that such projects, depending on the magnitude, typically take several years to unfold.

Participant sampling. Using purposeful sampling, participants were selected with consideration for balancing gender, geographic region, and representation from First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities. Given my previous experience with the ACTIVATE program, purposeful selection allowed for a pre-existing rapport between me and the participants that helped elicit rich stories during the interviews.

Patton (2002) explains how sample size is determined by “what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources” (p. 244). In-depth information from a small number of people can be very useful, given the depth and richness of the data (Patton, 2002). Considering the intention of receiving rich accounts from the in-depth interviews, I set out to recruit 3 to 6 participants for the current study. A total of 6 participants participated in the study, and are described in Table 1 of the Results section.

Instruments

As we live in a world full of narratives, there are many potential sources of data (Murray & Sargeant, 2011). This study included several sources of data. In-depth interviews were conducted to elicit rich stories, whereas a demographic questionnaire and documents about the participants’ communities assisted in further contextualizing participant stories.

Demographic questionnaire. I used a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) to learn more about each participant and included demographic items such as age, gender, native language, community, ethnic background, and employment/school status, as well as questions about the participant’s community and the nature of their engagement with the ACTIVATE program. I gathered this information to provide additional context to the stories offered by participants and to assist with interpretive analysis.

Interview protocol. Using interviews as a form of data collection provides opportunity to increase our understanding of the experience of other people and the meaning they make of their experiences. Although the experience can never be perfectly understood, Seidman (1991) suggests that interviews are oftentimes the best source of data for research exploring both the experience and the meaning others make of their experiences. During a narrative-focused interview, the interview protocol provides a tool to “stimulate narrative production,” enhancing the participant’s ability to share their story (Elliot, 2005, p. 22). Therefore, researchers must both invite stories and attend to the stories being told (Chase, 2005).

The interview protocol (Appendix C) was structured based on the conceptual model of youth engagement presented by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement. Specifically, the protocol included three components of the model; participants were asked about how they: (a) became engaged in a program that promotes youth engagement, (b) experienced the process of their engagement in such programs, and (c) perceive the impact of their engagement on their personal development and their community. For each component, a series of sub-questions was developed to serve as prompts for elaboration, and used only when needed.

Additional action oriented components sought in this study through the YPAR-inspired approach were asking participants to a) contribute to the development of the interview protocol and b) reflect on the potential for action. Participants contributed to the development of the interview protocol by reflecting on components of their engagement they felt were most relevant or important to be asked about. This conversation occurred at the time of the demographic questionnaire, and I integrated the participants’ responses into the interview protocol. Then, in the spirit of stimulating action from voice captured within the narratives, I invited participants at the end of the interview to reflect on and identify how they might share a message generated from having shared their experiences with me. More specifically, messages were derived by asking participants specifically about aspects of the interview that felt most meaningful or important to them. Participants then brainstormed the next steps they could take to help share this message with others.

Documents. Community context is an important component to conducting qualitative research, especially when using narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008). Document analysis is a technique used to review existing documents that are relevant to the current project. In this study, I used document analysis to supplement the information collected through interviews with the

participants, to increase my understanding the participant's community, and to provide greater context regarding the community participants affiliate with most. For the purpose of this study, the community that participants "affiliate with most" was the one that they identified as having the strongest connection toward—which may or may not have been their community of origin.

Document selection occurred in collaboration with the participants. I asked participants for insight into where to best learn more about their respective community. These documents included resources such as Statistics Canada references and local websites that provide relevant community information. For the most part, when possible, I relied on the local community's or band office's official website. Sometimes I referred to government or tourism websites for extra information not available from the band or community's website.

Researcher as instrument. Through my personal experiences with youth engagement, I have directly experienced and witnessed both the challenges and impacts youth engagement can have among Aboriginal communities in the North. As a non-Aboriginal raised in Ontario, I am aware of my disposition as a "cultural outsider" entering into this research project (Bridges, 2001; Okech & DeVoe, 2010; Vera & Polanin, 2012). I use transparency by sharing my pre-dispositions and biases to the reader to assist them in understanding my interpretation of what the participants have offered and by checking-in with myself about any bias I may hold given my disposition as a cultural outsider. With biases and cultural location in mind, I use my experiences as data and incorporate them into the analysis and construction of participant narratives to contribute to meaning-making and to add context when needed. A more comprehensive description of my experiences can be viewed in Appendix A.

Procedures

Data collection. The following outlines the steps that I took to collect data as it pertains to the participant recruitment, obtaining consent, the interview process, and document selection.

1. Following ethics approval from the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board (REB), I obtained permission from Motivate Canada to recruit through the ACTIVATE program for this study.
2. Following approval from the REB, I obtained researcher licences from both the *Aurora Research Institute* of the Northwest Territories and the *Nunavut Research Institute*. No research licence was required for the Yukon. The proposal for the *Nunavut Research Institute* was translated into Inuktitut as requested by the institute.

3. Motivate Canada identified 10 eligible individuals from the ACTIVATE listserv and sent these individuals a copy of the Recruitment Text (Appendix D) and Study Description (Appendix E). Interested participants were invited to contact me directly by email if they had any questions about the study. A total of 5 individuals responded to the initial call, and were eligible to participate in the study. The final participant was recruited through a follow-up email I sent two weeks after the initial call for participation.
4. As participants confirmed their interest in participating in the study, I mailed them a package, using Canada Post, which included two copies of the Consent Form (Appendix F) along with a stamped return envelope. Participants were asked to sign and return one copy of the consent form to the researcher using the return envelope. In some instances, participants were able to scan and return the signed consent form electronically.
5. Upon receiving the signed consent form by mail or as an electronic scanned document, I contacted participants by email to set up a time to review informed consent and complete the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B). Participants were not given a copy of the interview protocol as initially planned. I made this decision in hopes that a conversation would prompt more ideas on what areas the interview protocol could focus on as opposed to developing actual interview questions.
6. During the first meeting, approximately 20 minutes' duration, participants were given the opportunity to read and ask questions about the informed consent form, which they had already reviewed, signed, and returned to me. Administration of the demographic questionnaire was audio-recorded for each participant. All but one demographic questionnaire was conducted through a secure Skype network, using the voice-only function to call a landline. The remaining questionnaire was conducted Skype-to-Skype. The initial plan was to have all the demographic questionnaires completed before starting the in-depth interviews in order to integrate feedback into the development of the interview protocol. However, I seized an opportunity for an in-person face-to-face interview before I had completed each of the demographic questionnaires. I completed a demographic questionnaire for three of the six participants before the in-person in-depth interview was conducted with the first participant, and all but one demographic questionnaire by the time of the in-depth interview with the second participant.

7. After I completed the demographic questionnaires, I contacted participants to schedule the in-depth interview based on avenues (by distance) and venues (in-person) for the interview to take place. Given the nature of the interview protocol, the in-depth interview questions were open-ended and aimed to prompt story telling. The in-depth interview occurred within one-week of the demographic questionnaire, except for two participants who were interviewed two months after completing the demographic questionnaire. These delays occurred due to scheduling conflicts and attempts to plan an in-person face-to-face interview.
8. I began the in-depth interviews by asking participants if they had anything to add from the first conversation covering the demographic questionnaire. Participants were also given the definition of youth engagement used for the study, which was “meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity with a focus outside of him or herself” (CEYE, 2012, para. 2), and to instill a sense of active citizenship and social responsibility (Shen, 2006). They were asked to describe youth engagement in their own words. This was done to develop a sense of the participants’ understanding of youth engagement.
9. The interviews were audio-recorded and ranged from 1 to 1.5 hours in duration. Two of the six interviews occurred in-person at a time and location that was mutually convenient, free from distraction, and in private to maintain participant confidentiality. One in-person interview took place at my counselling office and the other in a private room at Nunavut Sivuniksavut, a college in Ottawa for students from Nunavut. In both instances, conducting interviews in person enabled me to build rapport with the participant as well as capture nonverbal observations during story telling that could be included in the analysis. The remaining four interviews took place over Skype in a voice-only recordable format. Although the initial goal was to use Skype’s video-chat feature to approximate an in-person experience during the interview, this was not possible. The video component of Skype was not successful for one participant due to a slow Internet connection. Another participant did not feel comfortable activating the video feature of Skype. The remaining two participants used Skype as a secure network to call from their landline, as they did not have access to Skype software.

10. Following the interviews, I selected documents for each participant's community from a wide range of sources including: government, local band office, and regional Inuit or First Nation organizations.

Data analysis. I transcribed verbatim each audio-recorded interview for analysis, making note of any pauses, laughs, and hesitations. Transcripts from both conducting the demographic questionnaire and the in-depth interview, along with documents identified by participants, were sources of data in this study. The method of analysis is described below.

Narrative analysis. The approach to narrative analysis is quite varied across different disciplines, providing opportunities for individual researchers to target their analysis based on their specific needs (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). Chase (2005) explains "when it comes to interpreting narratives heard during interviews, narrative researchers begin with narrator's voices and stories, thereby extending the narrator-listener relationship and the active work of listening into the interpretive process" (p. 663). Josselson (2001) elaborates on how narrative analysis emphasizes the content and its meaning, which are sometimes revealed in structural forms. The analysis must also account for the difference between the content ("the told") and the structure ("the telling") of the narrative (p. 227).

The analysis was conducted using the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan et al., 2003). The *Listening Guide* is a method that guides the researcher through a process, attuning to the multiple layers and voices heard through the participant's story. Gilligan et al. (2003) explain the following:

The Listening Guide comprises of a series of sequential listenings, each designed to bring the researcher into relationship with a person's distinct and multilayered voice by tuning in or listening to distinct aspects of a person's expression of her or his experience within a particular relational context (p. 159).

They further point out that each step is called a 'listening' rather than a 'reading' because each listening is not a simple analysis of the text, but rather is intended to guide the listener in tuning into the story being told on multiple levels, and to experience, note, and draw from his or her resonances to the narrative.

In line with the social constructionist perspective, this method was selected for this study because of the emphasis on voice while providing a means to uncover the multilayered individual experience with relation to the cultural context in which these experiences occur. It

was also selected because it intentionally brings the researcher's responses and experiences into the process, which contributes to the co-construction of the narratives.

After interviews were conducted, both the initial demographic questionnaire and in-depth interview were transcribed verbatim and analyzed with the following steps: (1) Listening for the Plot, (2) Generating 'I Poems', (3) Listening to Contrapuntal Voices, and (4) Composing an Analysis. The following outlines each of the steps used to conduct the analysis:

Step 1: Listening for the plot. The first step involved creating a narrative that conveyed the participants' story. This comprised two parts: (1) listening for the plot and (2) taking note of my response to the interview. Listening to the plot included attending to what was happening or what stories were being told. In this process, I also took note of repeated themes and various social or cultural contexts. I also attuned to instances where the participant spoke to me outside the context of the interview questions, or spoke to any previous experiences we had together through the ACTIVATE program.

In this step, I attended to my own responses to the stories being told, aiming to bring attention to my own subjectivities in the analysis. This involved making notes about my own thoughts or feelings about the story being told, noting my responses to different aspects of the story, possible contradictions, and observations as they may have related to my own experiences of ACTIVATE and engaging youth in their communities.

Step 2: Generating 'I-poems'. The second step involved listening to the way the participant used the first person. This was done by identifying 'I-poems' to help understand how he or she spoke of him or herself. Gilligan et al. (2003) explain two purposes for this step: 1) to listen to the participant's first-person voice, and observe distinctive cadences and rhythms; and 2) to hear how each participant speaks about themselves. Gilligan et al. (2003) explain the following rationale for generating I-poems:

Sometimes the I-poem captures something not stated directly but central to the meaning of what is being said. Other times it does not. In either case, the I-poem picks up on an associative stream of consciousness carried by a first-person voice, cutting across or running through a narrative rather than being contained by the structure of full sentences. Cutting the text close and focusing in on just the I pronoun, the associated verb, and few other words moves this aspect of subjectivity to the foreground, providing the listener

with the opportunity to attend just to the sounds, rhythm, and shifts in the person's usages of "I" in his or her narrative. (p. 163)

In considering the value of collectivism reflected in Aboriginal cultures (Kral et al, 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), I expanded on the *Listening Guide's* protocol to include 'we poems' to help explore the collective self, in addition to the individual self. Each time the participant used "I" or "we," it was highlighted with the accompanying verb or associated text to construct a poem.

Gilligan et al. (2003) also explain two rules in constructing the 'I-poems.' First, to underline or select every first-person "I" within the passage along with any "seemingly important accompanying words" (p. 162). Secondly, to maintain the sequence the phrases appear in the text, placing each on a separate line, the way it would read in a poem. I modified this rule when there were multiple instances of "I" or "we" in one phrase, for example 'I feel like I have to'. In this case, the phrase was kept together as one stanza to the poem.

Step 3: Listening to contrapuntal voices. The third step, listening for contrapuntal voices, involved several more readings of the transcript to identify "voices" as they related to each component of the research question. These 'listenings' helped to reveal and distinguish the layers of the story being told, identifying several different voices. This involved reading through the transcript three or more times, each time tuning into a different aspect of the research question including how Aboriginal youth: (a) initiate engagement in a program that promotes youth engagement, (b) sustain the process of their engagement in such a program, and (c) perceive the impact of their engagement on their personal development and their community. I then read the transcript, listening for the most prominent voices (e.g., voices that were heard multiple times); making note of when voices were heard in relation to another voice, or heard on their own. This process helped me develop an understanding of how these voices move in relation to each other within the context of each component of the research question.

Step 4: Composing an analysis. Gilligan et al. (2003) suggest the results of the first three steps should be integrated together to compose a final analysis that pulls together and synthesizes all that has been learned about the participant through the analysis process. They also suggest centering the composition around several questions including: "What have you learned about this [research] question through this process and how have you come to know this?; What is the evidence in which you are basing your interpretations?" That said, Gilligan et al. (2003) do speak

to adapting the process to fit each researcher's needs. Specifically, in a personal communication with second author Renée Spencer (July 2014), she proposed that a composition of analysis may stay close to the data by including components of each of the steps:

This is really where you step back and reflect on what you think you have learned about your research question from your engagement with this participant, having gone through all of the steps and now read through the transcript multiple times. It can take many different forms and may or may not contain portions from the early steps in the analysis. I tend to include things like I poems, quotes, contrapuntal voices, etc., as I like to stay pretty close to the data in this step yet still moving to greater interpretation of the data. This helped inform my decision to compose an analysis integrating the first three steps of the *Listening Guide*. I concluded that the questions that Gilligan et al. (2003) propose above would be better discussed in Chapter six, where I discuss the results in more detail. Therefore, the overall composition of analysis for participants in this study consists of an integration of the first three steps of the *Listening Guide*. For each of the participant's composition, I integrated observations from the participant's story of engagement (Listening to the Plot), participant positioning throughout the story (I-poems), and participant's voices as they relate to the story being told.

Document analysis. In addition to analyzing individual transcripts, documents were also analyzed to learn more about the community in which each participant engaged. This step helped provide context by including elements that focus on each individual in relation to community. I selected documents for each community from a wide range of sources including: government, local band office, and regional Inuit or First Nation organizations. First I gathered factual and descriptive information about the community, including information pertaining to the population, geography, language, and demographics of the community by reviewing at least two sources (when available) for each descriptor. If discrepancies were noted between two sources, I chose the sources that came from the communities themselves.

Then I gathered information pertaining to specific social issues identified through the interviews with participants, and as they became apparent to the story through the analysis process. I selected this information based on the relevance to the participants' experience, choosing a primary focus on community issues the participants identified as having been influential or important to their experiences of engagement. This involved a process of reading

the selected documents and identifying recurring themes (Riessman, 2008) as they related to the specific issue of interest. I then integrated this information in a manner that helped to highlight both the youth experience and “factual information” as they relate to the community issue the participant highlighted.

Trustworthiness

In quantitative research, trustworthiness is developed through concepts of validity and reliability—the degree to which the study measures what it intends to measure, and the extent to which a measurement gives consistent results. However, in qualitative research these concepts cannot be addressed in the same way. Qualitative research rejects the notion that a researcher can maintain objectivity in relation to the phenomenon under study (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007; Shenton, 2004). Therefore, trustworthiness procedures are put into place to demonstrate how the researcher develops and uses methods appropriate to his or her research questions, epistemologies, and situated perspectives (Riessman, 2008). These trustworthiness procedures contribute to a qualitative study’s credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2007).

Credibility. The term *internal validity* is primarily used in quantitative research representing the degree to which the tool measures what it set out to measure (Shenton, 2004). However, that concept of internal validity has been adopted within qualitative research as “how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124). In qualitative research, this concept is known as credibility. A qualitative study is considered credible when it provides an accurate description or interpretation of an experience under study that other people who share that experience would recognize (Sandelowski, 1986).

In this study, I conducted member checks upon completion of data analysis; I consulted participants by asking questions about resonance, discrepancies, or omissions with respect to the extent to which participants felt the composition of analysis truly reflected their experiences. Following the analysis, I provided participants with a copy of the composite analysis—in the form of a written narrative—resulting from their respective interviews and invited them to verify and provide feedback on the narrative (see Appendix G for member checking questions). These member checks were conducted by secure email and participants were given a period of two weeks to provide feedback. This step enabled me to verify the extent to which the representation

of experiences through the resultant data analysis resonated with participants. I then incorporated participant feedback into the narratives and I followed up with participants to seek additional clarity when needed. I received feedback from two of the six participants within the proposed time limit. Participants' feedback was mostly about resonance and wanting more or less emphasis on particular aspects of their story. For example, one participant noted that an attitude she observed in her community was not held by everyone; therefore she asked me to be sure this is represented clearly in the narrative.

In addition to member-checks, I also kept a research journal throughout the study to engage in self-reflexivity. I made reflections throughout each step of the research process, including: ethical considerations and recruitment, personal positioning through the interviews, reflections pertaining to analysis and composition of results, and finally implications of the results for all those with invested interest in the study. More specifically, a summary of some of these thoughts are included in Appendices H to M as the 'Researcher's Response' to the interview conversations with participants. The journaling process helped assist with validity and trustworthiness as it allowed me to track and process my own reactions and experiences throughout all stages of the project. For example, I remember feeling slightly discouraged after one interview, feeling I had not elicited the richness of the data I had hoped. Through the journaling, I was able to write about this initial response, coming to recognize that this perceived "weak data" might actually reflect the participant being at a different part of the process of engagement and leadership within the community compared to what I had learned from the other participants. This realization helped to inform my results and became a finding in itself. In this example, by giving myself this opportunity for reflection, I was able to name a thought or predisposition that originally could have swayed me to minimize aspects of the participants' experiences.

Transferability. An important distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is that qualitative research does not "control variables;" rather, each finding is context-specific. Therefore, qualitative research does not attempt to generalize findings but findings can be transferable and applied to other similar contexts (Krefting, 1991; Shenton, 2004). Given this, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide sufficient contextual description regarding the study so that the reader can determine transferability of its findings. In this study, to help ensure transferability and cultural context for the reader, I provided background information on the

participants that includes their demographic information and context related to their community. I have also provided detailed description of my background and experience with Aboriginal youth engagement in Appendix A.

Dependability. Dependability refers to the consistency of data. In other words, if the study were to be repeated in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results should be obtained (Shenton, 2004). For a study to be dependable, its procedures must be replicable and its research method clearly outlined (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I ensured dependability of this study by providing a detailed description of the research methods, explicating analysis procedures, and providing contextual information on the participants as well as myself.

Confirmability. Confirmability or neutrality refers to the extent to which the findings reflect the participants' experiences and the conditions of the research are free of biases and motivations (Guba, 1981). Steps were taken to help ensure that the findings were derived from the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than by the characteristics and preference of the researcher. This definition may be reminiscent of 'objectivity' in quantitative research where the researcher is to keep proper distance between him or her and the participants, thus minimizing bias. However, in qualitative research, findings are enhanced by decreasing distance between researchers and the participants (Krefting, 1991). Therefore, confirmability is not about the neutrality of the researcher but rather focuses on the transparency of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Through the narrative analysis of this study, the results inevitably contain my interpretations and perspectives. However, my personal experience and keen interest in youth engagement posed a risk of skewing participants' accounts during the process of interpretation. My motivations threatened the accuracy and confirmability of participants' accounts. Guba (1981) suggests that researchers exercising awareness of their influence on the data via reflexive analysis is a key strategy to ensuring confirmability. To this end, I kept field notes that tracked my judgments, reactions, and internal comments. In addition, I conducted member-checks to ensure that my understandings resonated with those of participants. My thesis supervisor also served as 'auditor' and I consulted her during the data analysis stage to further explore resonance between the final narratives with the various sources of data (i.e., demographic information, interviews, documents). This process involved my supervisor asking me for certain clarifications

about the methods, my interpretation of the participants' experiences, the composition of analysis, and meanings generated. Through a consensual process, feedback was incorporated into the results.

CHAPTER V

Results

This chapter begins with an overview of how I constructed the analysis using the *Listening Guide* as a framework for each composition. Then I provide a description of the ACTIVATE program followed by demographic information about the participants in the study. Following this preliminary information, I have included the composition of analysis for each of the six participants in the study.

Structuring of the Overall Analysis

I have composed an analysis for each participant based on Gilligan et al.'s (2003) first three steps of the *Listening Guide* which are: (1) Listening for the Plot, (2) Generating 'I Poems', and (3) Listening to Contrapuntal Voices. Gilligan et al. (2003) suggest the results of the first three steps should be integrated together to compose a final analysis that pulls together and synthesizes all that has been learned about the participant through the analysis process. My compositions of analysis are organized by the three research sub-questions: how Aboriginal youth (a) initiate engagement in a program that promotes youth engagement, (b) sustain the process of their engagement in such a program, and (c) perceive the impact of their engagement on their personal development and their community. While Gilligan et al. (2003) propose centering the final composition around several questions including "What have you learned about this [research] question through this process and how have you come to know this?" and "What is the evidence in which you are basing your interpretations?", I have chosen to discuss observations emerging from these questions separately in the discussion chapter, Chapter VI.

Each composition of analysis is co-constructed based on conversations with each participant, contextual information about their respective communities, and my own personal experience with youth engagement and the ACTIVATE program. More specifically, I draw on my own experiences of being a youth worker in the North (specifically, Cambridge Bay, Nunavut) and having been personally involved with the ACTIVATE program to help provide additional context as needed. Each analysis includes verbatim excerpts from participant transcripts, which are represented in quotation marks or blocked text. I selected excerpts from the interview transcripts based on (a) the analysis described above, (b) feedback obtained from YPAR-inspired 'action orientated' questions asking about the participants' message, and (c) the member check if new or different aspects of the story emerge.

For transparency into my process through each step of the Listening Guide, I have included Appendices H to M, which provide concrete examples of the researcher's response to the plot, I-poems, and contrapuntal voices for each participant. The researcher's response provides a brief overview of my response to the story being told and is intended to provide the reader with more insight into my internal experience when conducting the analysis. This includes my personal response to the narrative, bringing my own subjectivities into the process of interpretation. Following this response, I provide concrete examples of I-poems for each participant and a reflection of how the poem has informed my understanding of the participants' positioning through the telling of their story. Finally, I have included examples of contrapuntal voices I observed throughout my conversation with each participant. The following outlines each of the sections comprising the composition of analysis for each participant.

Participant introduction and background information. Each analysis begins by introducing the participant (pseudonyms are used to maintain their anonymity). Then, for each participant, I describe the community they identify as affiliating most with. These descriptions reflect salient aspects about the community that are relevant to their story. This includes the context of community challenges that the participants identify themselves as having impacted their engagement in some way. In all but one instance, this was the community participants grew up in and where they resided at the time of their participation. One participant, "Jessika," identified most with the reserve her family is from, despite living most of her life off-reserve about 3.5 hours away. In this instance, where appropriate, I provide some context for both communities.

Participant's engagement story. This section provides an overview of the participant's story of engagement in his or her community in the context of having participated in *Motivate Canada's* ACTIVATE program. The stories depict the participants' specific experiences of youth engagement, which includes how they got involved in their communities, participation in the ACTIVATE program (i.e., attending the forum and subsequently carrying out ACTIVATE-in-Action project), and subsequent community initiatives that they undertook (i.e. cultural festivals, youth talent shows, partnering with other community projects, etc.). Following that are reflections on how they saw these experiences as impacting themselves personally and impacting the community in which they were involved. Additionally, two participants (Sila and Martha) also spoke to impact their experiences had on peers. The engagement story integrates key

observations from Gilligan et al.'s (2003) first three steps of the *Listening Guide* which are: (1) Listening for the Plot, (2) Generating 'I Poems', and (3) Listening to Contrapuntal Voices.

Participant's message. Each analysis concludes with the participant's overall message to readers. This is not something that Gilligan et al. (2003) include in the *Listening Guide* but I added given the YPAR-inspired approach to this research project. To encourage reflection on the experience of having participated in the research conversation and prepare for action-orientated reflection, each participant was asked about an overall message from the story they shared with me. This component of the conversation aimed to empower the participants to think deeper about their engagement and provide an opportunity for action through their own reflection of the interview.

Before describing participants and presenting their respective composition of analysis, I provide additional context about the ACTIVATE youth development program which participants were a part of, as the program embodies youth engagement and provides the potential for a community project that the participants themselves have initiated.

Description of the ACTIVATE program

Having presented the theory behind the ACTIVATE program earlier (in Chapter III, Current Study), this next section will describe how the program is delivered. Although the current study does not focus solely on experiences of ACTIVATE, the program was used as a vehicle for accessing participants and permitted a deeper exploration of their engagement beyond the ACTIVATE program. This description of the program aims to provide additional context to assist the reader in situating engagement experiences offered by the research participants as made possible through a youth leadership program.

The longest standing and most well known component of the ACTIVATE program is the ACTIVATE National Forum. This Forum brings together 50 youth representing every province and territory in Canada, and the 5-day forum is hosted annually in May in Ottawa. The participants are guided through a series of workshops developed by a team of ACTIVATE-alumni who have been selected as Youth Volunteers. Since its commencement in 2004, ACTIVATE has developed and expanded to serve various needs and populations. These adaptations have resulted in several localized ACTIVATE Forums.

ACTIVATE North, launched in 2010, was adapted specifically for Aboriginal youth living in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. It is held when funding permits—

typically every 2 years—and is hosted in Yellowknife. ACTIVATE North is designed similarly to ACTIVATE National Forum, except that it more directly addresses the specific needs of Aboriginal youth living in the North, and the ACTIVATE-alumni selected to be youth volunteers are also of Aboriginal descent from the North.

Despite the many different types of ACTIVATE Forums, all encompass the same framework based upon Motivate Canada's concept of Youth Driven DevelopmentTM, which includes the following seven steps: (1) Learning about self (e.g., Life Mapping, Community Mapping); (2) Sharing self (e.g., sharing life and community maps, sharing culture and personal experiences, opportunities to showcase talents); (3) Learning about others (e.g., exposure to different cultures and experiences, connecting workshops leading to meaningful and engaged action planning); (4) Connecting to others (e.g., connecting with each other, youth leaders, key sport and community organizations, keynote speakers, and ESTEEM Team Athletes³); (5) Creating valuable sport networks (e.g., ACTIVATORS⁴ become knowledgeable of resources and sport networks that could help with community projects); (6) Help others to participate (e.g., through ACTIVATE-in- Action projects, ACTIVATORS are able to return to their communities and encourage others in their community to be engaged); and (7) Support and encourage others to do the same (e.g., youth volunteers who help to develop and implement the ACTIVATE Forums).

Participants

A total of six Aboriginal participants were selected to participate in the study. Participants in the present study included five female youth, one who identifies as First Nation and four who identify as Inuit, and one male youth who identifies as Inuit. They ranged from 21 to 24 years of age ($M=22.50$, $SD=1.05$). Four of the participants are from Nunavut, one participant is from Northwest Territories, and one participant is from Yukon. Table 1 below summarizes demographic information about each participant and her or his community.

³ ESTEEM Team Athletes are motivational speakers who have experience competing in high performance sport. Many are Olympians and/or World Champions who share inspirational stories of overcoming challenges. They are a part of Motivate Canada's ESTEEM Team program.

⁴ The term ACTIVATOR is used to identify someone who has previously attended an ACTIVATE forum

Table 1

A Summary of Demographic Information of Participants for the Current Study.

Pseudonym	Description	
	Participant	Community
Sila	22 years old Inuit (Nunavut region) English, Inuktitut	Iqaluit, Nunavut Population: 7,177 60% Inuit Accessible by air
Martha	23 years old Inuit (Nunavut region) English, Inuktitut	Baker Lake, Nunavut Population: 1,700 80% Inuit Accessible by air
Sarah	24 years old Inuit (Nunavut region) Inuktitut, English	Rankin Inlet, Nunavut Population: 2,266 80% Inuit Accessible by air
Jessika	21 years old Kluane First Nation English, Southern Tutchone Currently lives in Whitehorse	Burwash Landing, Yukon Population: 95 Majority First Nation Accessible by road
Laura	23 years old Inuit (Inuvialut region) English, Inuvialuktun	Paulatuk, Northwest Territories Population: 313 Majority Inuit Accessible by air
George	22 years old Inuit (Nunavut region) English, Inuktitut	Iqaluit, Nunavut Population: 7,177 60% Inuit Accessible by air

To provide an overall picture and orient readers to each participant's resulting composition, Table 2 provides an overview of the *what* observed through the plot of the stories told and Table 3 provides an overview of the *how* heard through the I-poems and contrapuntal voices.

Table 2

A Summary of Results from Step 1: Listening to the Plot

	Engagement		
	Prior to ACTIVATE	After ACTIVATE	Perceived impact
Sila	- President of a youth centre - Reputation for being a leader	- <i>ACTIVATE-in-Action project:</i> Girls Sport Night - Tobacco Has No Place Here (a tobacco awareness campaign)	Self: - Personal growth - Increased confidence Community: - Others empowered to initiate change
Martha	- Member of a youth committee - Reputation for being a leader	- <i>ACTIVATE-in-Action project:</i> Community Talent Night - Taught throat singing to day-care students	Self: - Personal growth - Increased sense of personal responsibility Community: - Others empowered to initiate change - Shift in community attitudes
Sarah	- Raised funds for her soccer team - Assistant soccer coach	- <i>ACTIVATE-in-Action project:</i> Summer Soccer Camp - Organized a music festival - Canada World Youth	Self: - Personal growth - Increased sense of pride - Increased confidence - Skill development - Connection to community Community: - Increasing interest for music - Shift in community attitude towards change
Jessika	- Volunteered at community events	- <i>No ACTIVATE-in-Action project</i> - Involved with local festival	Self: - Personal growth - Increased personal awareness

		- Attended international youth forum on climate change - Returned as volunteer	- Connection to culture and community Community: - Less substance use - Increased positive attitudes toward change
Laura	- Volunteered in the community - Created Sober Payday initiative - Reputation for being a leader	- <i>ACTIVATE-in-Action project</i>: : Youth-driven media campaign to raise awareness about issues of their choice (initiative in development) - Returned as volunteer	Self: - Personal growth - Skill Development - Increased confidence - Sense of empowerment - Increased Pride - Connections to culture and community Community: - shift in community perspective towards change - community pride - increase in community interests
George	- Not involved in his community	- <i>No ACTIVATE-in-Action project</i> - Teaches breakdancing to other youth - Tobacco Has No Place Here (a tobacco awareness campaign)	Self: - Personal growth - Skill Development - Increased confidence - Sense of empowerment - Personal change Community: - Increased interest in breakdancing by the community - Increased confidence in others

Table 3

A Summary of Results from Steps 3 & 4: 'I-poems' and Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

	I-Poems	Contrapuntal Voices
Sila	- Sense of urgency for community change	- Personal Awakening and Self-Doubt - Personal Responsibility and Fear - Connectedness and Empowerment - Frustration
Martha	- Always learning and sharing with others - Sees herself as empowering others through the process of her engagement	- Connectedness, Personal Responsibility, and Empowerment - Connectedness and Resilience - Connectedness and Hope - Disconnectedness and Powerlessness
Sarah	- Positions herself positively toward connections to others - A shift towards increased certainty towards her skills and abilities	- Connectedness and Confidence - Connectedness and Personal Awakening - Connectedness and Empowerment - Personal Responsibility and Empowerment
Jessika	- Positions her learning from a place of personal development - Attributes personal responsibility for change	- Enchantment and Initiative - Preservation and Idleness - Connectedness and Empowering others
Laura	- Places responsibility for her mistakes and desire for positive change - Experienced growth and change through her engagement - Positions herself in relation to other youth through their similarities and her ability to be a leader	- Connectedness and Empowerment - Personal Responsibility and Empowerment - Responsiveness and Personal Awakening

George	- Ambivalent about his role in the community	- Positiveness, Contribution, and Growth - Empowering others and Feeling Fake - Empowering others and Personal Awakening
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Sila

Participant Introduction and Background Information

Sila is a 22-year-old Inuk⁵ from Iqaluit, Nunavut. Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, is located on Baffin Island at the northern end of Frobisher Bay. Although her first language is English, Inuktitut was her prominent language until she was 10. Inuktitut continues to be spoken by people living in Iqaluit, with 28% of the population speaking Inuktitut most often at home (Statistics Canada, 2012a). Despite 40% of the population being non-Inuit, Iqaluit remains rich with traditional Inuit culture and is home to many Inuit artists, filmmakers, and musicians (Nunavut Tourism, 2013a).

Growing up, Sila experienced Iqaluit as being a very close-knit community, until Nunavut Territory was established in 1999—resulting from the largest Aboriginal land claims agreement between the Canadian government and the Inuit people. Sila was 7 years old when Nunavut was established, after which Iqaluit started to feel a bit different to her. Iqaluit started to “boom” with development and the community grew much bigger. With a growth rate 3 times the national average (Government of Nunavut, 2013), Iqaluit, population of 7,177, continues to be one of the fastest-growing communities in Nunavut. This growth rate has resulted in Nunavut having the youngest demographic in Canada—with 60% of the population under the age of 25 and 41% under the age of 16 (City of Iqaluit, 2013)—and is expected to continue to increase.

Iqaluit also continues to grow as a major government hub in Nunavut. The city has made a “long term commitment towards sustainable development and is expanding municipal services to meet the growing and wide range of developmental needs” (City of Iqaluit, 2013, para. 2). Iqaluit is the gateway for all communities in the Baffin region. Sila attributes some of the opportunities that she has been given to living in this hub. Growing up in Iqaluit, she had several opportunities to play sports, allowing her to develop a deep passion for basketball. At the time of

⁵ The term Inuk is the singular noun, while Inuit is the plural noun. Because Inuit means ‘the people’ the words *the* or *people* are not needed

the interview, Sila was living in Ottawa finishing her second year of the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program⁶. Since finishing the program, she returned to Iqaluit and is working with a radio station.

Sila's story of community engagement is one of empowerment, growth, and motivation driven by community issues that she has witnessed in Iqaluit. One of these issues is the prevalence of smoking, especially among the youth. In Nunavut, 59% of the population identifies as smoking tobacco, compared to 19% in the general Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2013). It "infuriates" Sila that smoking among young people in the North is the norm, and many adults do not reprimand the children for smoking or chewing tobacco.

Another challenge she identifies is the prevalence of mental health issues paired with limited access to mental health services, especially resources for children and youth. Statistics Canada (2012b) reports that 10.6 % of people living in Nunavut perceive themselves as having fair or poor mental health, compared to 5.7% of people in the general population. Findings from a 2014 CBC article indicate that the suicide rate among Inuit in Nunavut hit a record high in 2013 of 13 times that of the rest of Canada ("Suicide numbers in Nunavut", 2014). Scarce mental health resources available in the North perpetuate these issues. When resources are available, Nunavummiut⁷ experience challenges with the quality of services available, high turnover rates of counsellors, and an overall confusion about where to access services ("Suicide numbers in Nunavut", 2014). Sila suggests that promoting mentorship and peer support programs might help increase community capacity for addressing mental health issues. Sila's story of engagement in her community stems from these issues, which she witnessed and experienced while living in Iqaluit.

Sila's Community Engagement Leading up to ACTIVATE

Sila's first memories of community engagement were as a 14-year-old being elected into the role of president at her community's youth centre. The youth centre serves as a place for youth to hang out and socialize with other youth. At the youth centre, youth are given time to access the Internet and play a variety of games with their peers. Youth workers at the centre also provide structured opportunities for youth to take on more of a leadership role, and this is how

⁶ This is an eight-month college program based in Ottawa for Inuit youth from Nunavut who want to prepare for educational, training and career opportunities that are being created by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and the new Government of Nunavut (Nunavut Sivuniksavut, 2013).

⁷ Nunavummiut is an Inuktitut term used to describe all people living in Nunavut

Sila was introduced to her role as the youth centre president. Sila's position as the youth centre President "just presented itself." She reflected that perhaps she was elected because her peers valued her initiative to voice her perspective and provide ideas for solutions.

Sila attended a weeklong gathering through the Baffin Youth Regional Council, which is made up of all the youth centre presidents in the Baffin Region. This gathering involved learning leadership skills and empowering the youth to believe in their abilities as leaders. Sila shared having some initial ambivalence towards her leadership role, expressing uncertainty about the impact she was having through her "informal" responsibilities. In fact, as Sila explored her experiences as Youth Centre President, a certain personal awakening toward a leadership role and identity seemed to emerge during our interview. However, this awakening was often described in tension with self-doubt. As Sila continued to unpack her experiences at the gathering, self-doubt seemed to transform into increased awareness of her leadership role and her potential to have an impact on those around her. She explains:

I didn't know that being president came with any leadership roles. I just felt like "we should do this," "we should do that," and I wasn't trying to say anything about it ... but when I went to the Baffin Inuit Regional Council, they taught us a lot about leadership roles and skills, and that is actually when I started to think "Hey I can become a leader" or be seen as a leader, and this is something that is bigger than I thought. I am not just participating; I am actually the one doing the work.

This experience was consistent with a theme for Sila of feeling empowered through connectedness. Connectedness seemed to emerge out of the youth council presidents bringing together resources to help one another. Sila explains how sometimes a sense of connectedness could lead to momentum and, in some instances, empowerment. The presence of others, creating a stronger force as a group, and drawing from the momentum of others contributed to her feeling empowered toward maximizing her role as Youth Centre President and being inspired by other people's work.

When Sila returned from this gathering, she felt inspired and empowered, particularly by the two coordinators whom she later learned were ACTIVATE-alumni. After the gathering, there was a goal for all the youth council presidents in the Baffin Region to remain connected and continue to share resources and support through conference calls. This proved difficult as

Internet in the North is limited and attendance on conference calls depleted as each month passed.

Despite feeling less connected to the Baffin Regional Council, Sila carried the motivation she gained at the gathering to promote her engagement in the community. As an alternative to decisions being made solely by adult staff, Sila started to organize impromptu meetings with the goal of engaging youth to talk about changes they would want implemented at the youth centre. For example, the youth would establish rules and brainstorm ideas for new activities and programs to be offered at the centre. For Sila, these meetings felt so informal that she never really identified as a leader, even within this president role.

As president, Sila developed a special relationship with “Maya,” a youth worker who ran the youth centre and became Sila’s mentor. Sila felt a personal connection through this relationship, as Maya helped to support Sila’s role as president and further foster Sila’s leadership skills. In fact, when the ACTIVATE program was being promoted at the youth centre, Maya personally approached Sila and encouraged her to apply. Maya thought Sila’s active role at the youth centre made her an excellent candidate. At first, Sila thought of ACTIVATE as a “trip down South” but, as she learned more about it, she got excited about the opportunity to learn more about leadership and sport. Maya helped Sila overcome barriers to applying to ACTIVATE by giving her access to a computer and helping her complete the online application. At the time, Sila believed that, given her poor typing skills, she might not have had the patience to complete the application without this extra support.

Sila’s ACTIVATE Experience

When Sila was 17 years old, she attended an ACTIVATE National Youth Leadership Forum. It was an “eye-opening” experience. She started off the experience feeling really shy and as though she did not fit in because she did not feel like a leader. Sila believed what she was doing back home in Iqaluit was somehow not as important as the initiatives that others were doing. She felt like she needed to “catch up” to the others, leading to her feeling that she was not “good enough” of a leader to be there. She explains: “Other people were opening up an entire new soccer field and, you know, I was just the president of the youth centre.” She was overwhelmed by a feeling of inferiority, feeling like she could be doing so much more in her community.

Sila's identity as a leader developed throughout the ACTIVATE National Forum. Sila started to make connections with people who validated the work that she was doing at the youth centre. Both prior and during the ACTIVATE forum, Sila doubted herself as a leader in the community. At ACTIVATE, she remembers silently comparing herself to others whom she felt were "doing more important things". However, other youth at ACTIVATE challenged this belief, enforcing a notion that what she was doing was indeed relevant. Throughout my conversation with Sila, she emphasized the importance of the connections she formed with a supportive network of peers who believed in her as a leader. She attributed her newfound validation as a leader and her enhanced leadership skills to her connections, which fostered a sense of self-empowerment. This left her feeling supported by young leaders from across the country. Through discussions with other delegates at the forum, she developed new ideas that she wanted to bring back to Iqaluit.

As Sila had hoped, upon her return to Iqaluit she implemented an ACTIVATE-in-Action project to help increase female participation in sport. She planned a 'Girls Sports Night' that brought young girls from Iqaluit together to play different sports and try new activities. She partnered with a local counsellor who also helped to run the sports, provide healthy snacks, and facilitate a conversation around barriers for girls to participate in sport. Sila discovered that the girls' reasons for not engaging in sport ranged from being on their period, to simply not being interested. Overall, the project was a success; the girls seemed to have a really fun evening and enjoyed being more active. At the time of the project, Sila did not know about the importance of evaluating project impact, and had not included any evaluation measure in her own project. However, she now feels she has the skills to implement evaluation measures into future projects, and expressed interest in conducting a follow-up to her first project to learn more about the impact it had on subsequent female participation in sports.

Sila met other Aboriginal youth from the three territories while attending the ACTIVATE National Forum. Together, they felt there was a need for a forum like ACTIVATE targeted to Aboriginal youth in the Arctic. As a group, they felt like youth in the North face different challenges than those in the South. Not long after the ACTIVATE National Forum, Sila and the others made plans to help bring ACTIVATE to the North. Ultimately, with the help of a grant Motivate Canada had received, they were able to implement 'ACTIVATE North' and Sila was a

part of its founding youth committee. Her role continued into the forum, helping to plan and facilitate workshops to the Northern delegates.

Despite her newfound identity as a leader, the 10 months between ACTIVATE National Forum and ACTIVATE North were difficult for Sila. Although she completed a few different projects during that period of time, she experienced some ups and downs. She was no longer the youth centre president, had stopped going to the youth centre, and overall was just feeling low. She says, “I was just being a teenager and just living my life.” ACTIVATE North came at an optimal time for Sila; it felt like a blessing. She explains:

Just before I got there, just before the forum, I felt so low about myself. I don’t know where it came from, but I remember feeling low about myself and feeling so grateful for ACTIVATE North that it put me to tears. Just that I was able to become a part of this, that I was able to just participate and be a part of something so wonderful. But I guess just the time in between [ACTIVATE National and ACTIVATE North] felt like a long time.

Sila’s Engagement after ACTIVATE

Throughout our conversation, Sila described a sense of confidence and rejuvenation that came from her involvement with ACTIVATE North. She explains: “I always come out confident and ready to get involved and that anything is possible to tackle ... It was a really positive and uplifting experience.” Through her experience with ACTIVATE North, Sila finally felt confident as a leader and became more comfortable taking the lead on projects. Other youth in Iqaluit started to take note of her endeavours—such as attending out-of-community programs like ACTIVATE and striving to achieve goals, both personal and academic—and wanted to achieve the same for themselves. Sila explains: “...by merely just watching me, and feeling my energy. Without me encouraging them, they want to go out and do it too.” When asked about how her role in her community is different now from when she was Youth Centre President, she reflects on a certain urgency to take action in her community:

I didn’t really feel like I was needed, or that it needed to be done. My roles are very different. I feel like it needs to be done now, after my education with Nunavut Sivuniksavut, you find out about all the problems back home and you know what needs to be fixed. ... There is nothing going on there, like somebody needs to do something. Like it is mandatory now. You know suicide rates are going up. You know? You are

afraid that something bad is going to happen if you don't do something. Compared to back then, it was "you can do something if you want" or "you don't even know what you are trying to do." But now it feels more direct.

I asked Sila for an example of a project that felt "more direct" than previous projects. In response, she shared her involvement with the *Tobacco Has No Place Here* youth action team. *Tobacco Has No Place Here* is a campaign to raise awareness of many ways that tobacco is affecting Nunavummiut. The tipping point for Sila was when a 13-year-old in the community tried to buy a cigarette from her. It left Sila feeling appalled and Sila persistently voiced frustration over the perceived lack of valuing of health, especially since she herself had quit smoking a year earlier. Sila elaborates:

Like they're just allowed. I can't smack them and take their cigarettes anymore because their parents know. They are just allowed. Like are you kidding me? I was so disgusted with that. Little things just started to bother me and I thought here is a way I can become more involved in the community.

These personal experiences contributed to her decision to become a member of the youth action team for *Tobacco Has No Place Here*, and help organize various public action initiatives around town and promote a smoke-free Nunavut.

As Sila reflected on her motivation for becoming engaged in her community, there was a strong sense of personal responsibility, but this sense of responsibility was often accompanied by fear. In listening to 'personal responsibility' throughout Sila's story, a singular (I) and plural (we) first-person voice was easily identified through her narrative. The following transcribed excerpt below seems to best reflect Sila's positioning towards herself (I) and the greater community (we). Each instance of 'I' or 'we' is underlined with the accompanying verb or associated text to construct a poem:

I feel like I have to give back to my society because of all of these opportunities they have given me. Like all these youth opportunities, like ACTIVATE, and ACTIVATE North and the regional conference, and the youth centre. And just being a part of all of these different things, I feel like I have to help. You know? I have to help. If not, then who is going to do it? You know? And like there is always this thought in the back of my head. You know—if you don't do it, think about it! Who is going to do it? And I can never think of anybody else. ... And these are issues that like everybody says, "We can't just let this go by

anymore, like we can't, we need to stop it" [pounds table with hand] and you are saying the words but you are not doing any of the actions. I want to be a part of the community. I want to help someone, I want to help advance, I want to help progress, I want to help the wellbeing, I want to somehow, you know, at least just try. It is too much to just sit back and rot like everybody else. Sorry for the rot part, but you know. Just I don't want to be left behind and [people say] "I don't know what is happening in my own town, it's such a small community, I can't see any issues in front of me, I have no awareness." That terrifies me.

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined 'I' and 'we' portions of the excerpt above:

I feel like I have to give back
 I feel like I have to help
 I have to help
 I can never think
 We can't just let
 We can't
 We need to stop it
 I want to be
 I want to help
 I want to help
 I want to help
 I want to help
 I want to somehow
 I don't want

Reading this poem helped me develop a sense of how Sila positions herself, both as an individual and collectively within her community, as it relates to her experience of promoting positive change in her community. When discussing what motivates Sila to engage in her community, her passion for needing to "do something" to address community challenges was prominent. I noticed this most in the rhythm and escalating tone when she shared stories about responsibility, shifting from "I feel like I have to help" to "I want to be a part of the community" to an emphatic "We [must do something]!" The rhythm observed in the following excerpt, to me,

spoke volumes to Sila's desire to have a role in helping, as well as fear manifested in her realization of "I don't want to be left behind":

Sila shared how, for her, having a trustworthy person like Maya from the youth centre to look up to helped her change her attitude towards the challenges that she observes in her community. She explained the importance of having somebody to talk to:

If I had had nobody to talk to, I would have stayed there. But let's say, somebody, even a role model who you really look up to, who is trustworthy [who you can talk to]. Like that whole turnaround of attitude after you let it all out and see the light, it makes you want to do good things. It makes you want to go out and help people. It makes you aware of what is around you instead of what is in front of you. You know like all your problems, and how those problems can be solved too if you try to help somebody with theirs. You definitely have to be well yourself in order to go out and help others.

She continues to explain that there are many capable youth who are achieving so many great things and helping their community. However, some youth experience personal challenges whereby "they can't handle themselves" anymore. Sila observed young leaders who aimed to do great things but got burnt-out by the pressure of being a leader and, consequently, were not able to effectively manage personal challenges that arose. To address this challenge, Sila identified a need for better access across Nunavut for support—whether it be counselling or peer support programs such as mentorship and role model programs.

Sila identifies the sense of feeling tokenized for her youth and heritage as a frustrating aspect of her experience of engagement in her community. For example, she and her peers were invited to take part in a public protest, but rather than being given the opportunity to be active members in protesting and sharing the true message behind the event, they were simply invited to showcase traditional Inuit culture. In this example, she felt that Inuit youth were tokenized for both their youth and their Inuit heritage without the opportunity to participate in a manner meaningful to the Inuit youth.

Sila mostly realizes the impact of an experience upon her return home when she reflects on the lessons she has learned. In one example, after returning home from a program that brought together youth from the circumpolar region to discuss the youth role in climate change, she unexpectedly felt more connected to the earth and had an enhanced respect and appreciation for the environment. She explains: "I never thought I would come out with that. You just never

know what you are going to learn ... it makes me want to apply for just anything I don't know about and see what comes out of it." Overall, Sila expresses a great desire and openness towards learning and seizing opportunity.

The Impact of Sila's Engagement

Throughout our conversation, Sila reflected on ways her experience of engaging in her community has had an impact on her personal growth, her peers, and the greater community.

Sila's personal growth. Sila describes herself as having been "a careless teenager doing careless things" prior to becoming engaged in her community. She was experimenting with drugs and alcohol and getting caught up in what she describes as "normal of what you can get caught up with in Nunavut ... being young and living in the Arctic with nothing to do leads to doing bad stuff." Sila identifies as someone who was easily peer pressured and troubled, but has developed into feeling responsible and much more confident. Sila explains: "I feel like I am a good person, I am pretty happy about who I am now." Sila feels more comfortable with public speaking and confident in sharing her thoughts and perspective, especially as they pertain to community issues. She has learned to be more patient, and understands that she may not see results right away, as she is a part of a change movement that is taking place over time.

Impact on peers. When reflecting on how her engagement may have impacted others, Sila began to reminisce about all the great project ideas she heard from her peers through Facebook following ACTIVATE North. She describes this great feeling of having been a part of a movement across the North, not just in her own community. She felt proud to be friends with the other youth who were doing projects in their own community, and felt camaraderie and support despite being so far away. Through ACTIVATE, Sila witnessed more youth taking ownership for issues in their community; she observed a shift in perspective from youth saying "it is not really my job" to having more initiative to go out and make changes themselves and "not wait for somebody else to do it."

Impact on community. When Sila was asked to reflect on how her engagement may have had an impact on her community, she responded with uncertainty, saying that generally people think youth engagement "is a good thing" but that youth do not typically get the recognition for it. Sila elaborates that it is not enough for adults in the community to praise youth for good work; adults also need to "step up" and be involved in positive ways. However, Sila does perceive the connections through her various avenues for engagement as having provided

her with a sense of community support. This support sustains Sila's engagement, helping to promote feelings of empowerment and inspiration for new goals and ideas to be implemented in the community.

Sila's Message

I asked Sila about a message that she would like to share about her story of engagement. Sila wanted to emphasize the importance of meaningful leadership as opposed to "just looking good." She feels she tends to think negatively about the impact that her engagement is having, which sometimes leads her to self-doubt. However, her experiences of engagement in her community have also promoted a critical reflection to be sure that there is purpose behind her efforts. Her message is about growth. Sila urges: "Go out and chase opportunities because you will gain something from those opportunities. It doesn't matter where you start, you will also end up better." She feels that if she had not challenged herself in the beginning to try and make a change, she would still be where she was before. She would like to share this message with "troubled youth, youth who see opportunity and make nothing of it." She hopes that others will read her story and see that, while community engagement might feel overwhelming and insignificant at the beginning, even the smallest opportunities lead to something positive.

Martha

Participant Introduction and Background information

Martha is a 23-year old Inuk from the town of Baker Lake, Nunavut. Baker Lake, population 1,700, is the territory's only inland community. Close to the geographic centre of Canada, Baker Lake is situated on a large lake at the mouth of the Thelon Heritage River. Like Martha, 92% of the residents in Baker Lake are Inuit (Nunavut Tourism, 2013b). Martha's first language is English. Similar to 91% of other Inuit living in Nunavut, Martha also speaks an Inuit language. She speaks Inuktitut, explaining that growing up she would speak both English and Inuktitut at home, but that as she has grown older she notices that she speaks mostly English.

Martha describes Baker Lake as a small town, attributing a significant growth in recent years to an economic mining boom. Growing up, Martha perceived Baker Lake to be a very safe place to live; while elaborating, Martha reports "everybody knows each other." She also grew up alongside a lot of family members, whom she considers to have had a big impact in her upbringing. Her childhood was filled with many traditional outdoor activities, including "going out on the land," fishing, and camping. Martha reports that the community has changed a lot in

recent years, in part because Baker Lake has become home to people from all across Canada, not just Inuit. Martha explains that, to her, this development made the community feel less isolated.

Martha identifies suicide as a significant issue in Baker Lake. Suicide continues to impact Martha as several members of her “close-knit community” have died by suicide. It was not until quite recently that suicide became a challenge in Nunavut. A Government of Nunavut document on Nunavut’s Suicide Prevention Strategy (2010) reports that, in the past, suicide was infrequent and rarely involved youth. However, over the past few decades, hundreds of Inuit in Nunavut, particularly youth, have died by suicide, placing Nunavut’s suicide rate far above that of the rest of Canada. More specifically, young Inuit men aged 15 to 29 are most at risk of suicide (Government of Nunavut, 2010). In general, the suicide rate among Inuit is 11 times higher than the overall rate in Canada and about 5 times that among First Nations People in Canada (ITK, 2008).

Although it is much more difficult to track rates of suicide ideation, the rates across Nunavut are understood to be very high. In 2009 alone, the RCMP responded to 983 instances where people were reported to be threatening or attempting suicide. Frontline workers at the hospital in Iqaluit report that almost half of the hospitalization of people ages 20 to 29 are a result of suicide attempts. A survey in one Nunavut community found that 43% of the respondents had thought of attempting suicide in the previous seven days, and 30% had attempted suicide at least once in the previous six months (Government of Nunavut, 2010).

Another challenge Martha has noticed in her community is an attitude or mindset that Inuit are “incapable,” leading some community members to develop a sense of hopelessness. Martha stresses that this is not an attitude held by everybody. When I prompted about this attitude, she pointed me to a document that explores the historical context underlying many challenges in Nunavut, specifically the high suicide rates. It is strongly believed that historical trauma that Inuit have experienced in Nunavut has contributed to the increased suicide rate across the territory. The Government of Nunavut (2010) also state the elevated suicide rate in Nunavut is a result of the rapid and radical changes that have occurred (e.g., federally-established Inuit communities, residential school systems, and the introduction of mainstream ideology); therefore discussion on suicide prevention has shifted to explore ways to counteract these changes.

Martha identifies with many other Inuit youth who leave their communities to pursue other opportunities. Martha first left her community to attend the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program in Ottawa, followed by attending Carleton University, and subsequently living and working full-time for a local Inuit organization in Iqaluit. Moving to the South to attend school is a common experience for youth living in the North. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK, 2008) identifies job opportunities (38%), wanting to get away or seek change (22%), education (21%), and family relocation (16%) as reasons Inuit living in all Inuit regions across the Arctic (e.g., Inuvialuit, NT; Nunatsiavut, NL; Nunavik, QC; and Nunavut) would consider leaving their communities. On the contrary, while job opportunities (20%) are also a reason for Inuit living in Nunavut to stay in their community, Inuit mostly cite different reasons such as family (69%), hometown (34%), and friends (22%) (ITK, 2008).

Martha's Community Engagement Leading up to ACTIVATE

Martha remembers her engagement in the community starting at a young age. When she was 13-years-old, she became a part of a youth committee. Martha describes what it was like:

I was selected to be on a youth committee. It basically started off as a suicide prevention youth group because suicide was a big issue in the community at that time. I had started to hang out with a bunch of my friends, and we had this one adult mentor leader type of person who helped us out. We basically would meet and talk about anything that we wanted to do in the community—anything that we wanted to help the young people keep busy and active. I guess as a way of being proactive in the community.

With the help of the adult mentor who supported the youth committee, the initiative spread to other communities, igniting a youth-driven movement in the region. Martha elaborates that, over time, youth from neighbouring communities were flown into Baker Lake to partake in workshops, including a healing camp that took place out on the land.

Overall, Martha describes the experience of being involved in her community as being extremely supportive. Martha was by far one of the youngest involved in the committee. She felt the youth committee had the support of an adult mentor and that, overall, the group members supported one another, encouraging everyone to get involved in one way or another. It felt like a community initiative, and everybody was welcomed. She explains:

They encouraged people as young as 10 to come and play this game with us. Like to do something. [It] was a whole community thing, and because I felt like I was doing something, and a part of the community, I didn't think that my age was an issue.

Martha describes how the sense of it being a 'community initiative' allowed for the youth involved to have access to a big support network. She reflects, "We could just call up people and they would gladly help us... it was supported by the community." Although the community was not directly involved in the initiative, they would demonstrate support by attending the events and gatherings the youth organized. Adults in the community also supported the initiative by volunteering when extra hands were needed, such as supervising a teen dance, driving a school bus, or chaperoning.

For Martha, her initiation into her engagement became something very personal to her. When I asked Martha why she thinks she got involved in her community in the first place, she responded with the following:

I guess because I knew of the opportunity and I had friends that were involved. But the main issue of focus was suicide. I was already 13 and already at that age could name a handful of people that I knew who had committed suicide. It wasn't something that I understood, but I thought that the opportunity was a way to talk about the issue. It is not something that people know how to deal with easily, but I felt like doing something was better than doing nothing.

However, after a couple of years of Martha being involved with the group, the youth committee dissolved. Martha attributes a number of reasons to its breakdown, the first being that the adult mentor started her own family and was no longer able to commit the time for the group. The group started to miss meetings and just gradually dissolved. One year later, as a high school student, she and her friends formed a similar group and the idea of the 'youth committee' was revitalized. Martha felt that there was a general perception that although suicide was still very much a challenge in the community, nothing was being done to help address the issue. The group was revitalized in part because the Hamlet of Baker Lake "took notice" of the needs around suicide.

The Hamlet office took responsibility by helping to re-form a committee and appointing an adult who would support the youth. Martha states, "One of the Hamlet council's had it in his portfolio and basically he just asked a handful of young people if they had any friends who might

be interested... and that is how this other youth committee came to be.” For Martha, this second experience was a bit different because she was older and had “more of a say and role.” She reflects that feeling supported by the community, especially the Hamlet office, helped in that the youth committee had more access to funding for advertising and even more community support. Overall, Martha described the main goals of this newly formed group as:

It was basically a group that would be able to support each other in providing activities for young people. Activities, workshops, anything because I really think, like again, the issue of suicide is one of the main reasons. It was really a way for people to feel like they were doing something—counteracting—not necessarily preventing, but trying to do something to keep young people busy, to help give young people different options and help them do what they might want to do... just to relieve the sense of isolation so that people cannot continue to say, “There is nothing to do, there is nothing to do” but here we have plenty to do!

Martha remained involved with the group until she finished high school and moved to Ottawa as a student with the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program. It was a difficult transition for the group because Martha was not the only person who left the community for school, leaving the group without a strong sense of leadership and the youth committee “sort of died out once again.” While Martha was home for the summer, she tried to re-engage the group; but by this point, she did not feel that she had the same support that was previously available and it was hard to maintain the youth committee from afar. It was at this point when Martha learned about the ACTIVATE program.

Martha’s ACTIVATE Experience

Martha first learned about ACTIVATE through word-of-mouth. She explains that the opportunity was widely circulated within the community, particularly through friends who had been involved with Motivate Canada in one way or another. When she heard about the opportunity, she thought it sounded interesting and she applied. Martha reflects:

It was a really good timing for me too. I found myself in a position where myself and another friend were trying to continue to do things in the community; trying to keep active and having things for people do to in the community. We didn’t really see enough being done, and we thought we had the ability, and at that time, we were passionate enough about this topic that we really wanted to do something. But we didn’t really feel

that we had the support at the time. So ACTIVATE came at a good time for me because it helped me feel like I had that support.

The sport element of ACTIVATE is what first caught Martha's eye, but she also liked the idea that it was targeted towards community development. Martha identifies the role of sport in her life as having an impact on her development. Martha has integrated sport into her lifestyle as a result of her positive experiences with being on a sports team. She now uses sport itself as a tool to engage other youth in her community. Martha thought of ACTIVATE as helping to fill the missing element of support, explaining "I thought it could be supportive to me in having fulfilling community and youth development activities."

Martha's first experience with ACTIVATE was as a delegate during ACTIVATE North. At the time of attending, she was living in Ottawa for the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program and was feeling a bit disconnected from her community. However, Martha recalls how ACTIVATE inspired her to start thinking of project ideas for her return to Baker Lake in the summer months. Through the connections that Martha made through the ACTIVATE program, she reflected a sense of hope as she says:

Um, I don't know, just what comes with ACTIVATE—the kinds of activities and discussions that were going on gave us a sense of hope—that you are not alone, that there are other people out there, and we can kind of figure stuff out for our communities. Like definitely the focus on community and in the end people being like leaders as young as we were. It was good to be around more people like that, rather than feeling alone all the time.

Martha's reflection suggests that the connections that she made, the types of people who were brought together through ACTIVATE, and the activities and discussions they had all helped to foster a hopeful attitude. Martha became hopeful that she was not alone in her quest to create change in her community while empowering others to do the same.

Despite being asked directly about her experiences at ACTIVATE, Martha spoke mostly about her experiences in the community following her time at ACTIVATE. Following Martha's experience in ACTIVATE, she and a friend who also attended the forum felt they had more resources and more determination to implement a project in their community; they felt they "had that extra boost of motivation to go out and organize some youth-focused activities." Martha organized an ACTIVATE-in-Action project that involved a youth talent show, where community

members were invited to share and showcase a skill on stage. Martha reports that sometimes going on stage was not even to showcase a specific talent per se, but rather was a chance to receive recognition from the community. Martha and her friend also integrated games and activities into the evening; specifically, games that were intended to help build confidence and get the youth involved to start a process of implementing their own community initiatives. The evening finished off with a youth dance, and youth dances are always a big hit in Baker Lake.

Martha's Engagement after ACTIVATE

In the summer following ACTIVATE North when Martha returned to Baker Lake from living in Ottawa for school, she managed to get a group of friends together and organize a leadership camp for the youth. By using sport as a tool to connect with the youth, Martha was able to branch out and teach them about other life skills. This opportunity came with an increased sense of responsibility. She emphasized:

I felt like I could show other people that I was capable as a young person who makes things happen. Like I find that attitude that people have is "Oh I can't do this, I can't do this" and I see this as a way for me to show young people and adults alike that you have no excuse. You have opportunities; you have responsibility to take the lead if nobody else is going to do something; because there are people out there that need something from them. They need that extra support in their life.

At the time of our conversation, Martha was living in Iqaluit and she identified some challenges with not living in her home community of Baker Lake. She said, "One of the driving reasons for my involvement in my community was that it was my home. I felt like we were all dealing with the same issues, and if one thing happened [in the community] then everyone would be affected." She reports that living in Iqaluit impacts her ability to take on a leadership role in the community; if she were living in Baker Lake, she would most definitely have had more of a leadership role. Living away from Baker Lake has been a challenging transition for Martha: "I have had to accept and come to terms with the fact that it is okay for me to focus on my own personal development and not feel guilty about not living at home right now." Living in Iqaluit, she is still looking for ways to become more involved. Martha states, "I am not sitting around doing nothing, but definitely not involved to the degree that I would be if I were home."

Throughout my conversation with Martha, I heard a sense of personal responsibility for responding to community challenges. She explained the importance of modeling what she

describes as “doing something with her life” with the goal of influencing—or empowering—others to help “deal with their own problems.” There are numerous instances where Martha expresses frustration with a tendency for *some* community members to react to challenges, instead of responding in a way that would contribute positively to the community needs. Martha describes the importance of people responding positively to community challenges:

These problems haven’t gone away. These problems still happen and they are going to continue to happen unless people, like myself, try to do something with their own lives and hopefully influence and help others to deal with their own problems. Just people are all connected right. And anything I do, I hope to positively influence someone else. And then that can continue and that person can continue to help someone else. And I guess that is something that has always stayed with me.

As Martha describes, the sense of personal responsibility is largely related to a desire to empower others to also become engaged. Each initiative reflects her perceived responsibility to bring others together in a movement towards community change. For Martha, galvanizing others was not just about “having something fun to do” but also about planting seeds for change; new skills and a more positive outlook that could be passed on to a future generation.

One of the initiatives Martha was involved with in Iqaluit at the time of this study is teaching throat singing to daycare students. She indicates that this type of program is very different from all the others she has been involved with, as it is not related to sport but rather involves a connection to her culture. The program is much less structured as Martha attends the day-care whenever she can, balancing work and other commitments. This flexibility has helped Martha to realize how much ‘easier’ engagement can be. Although it took some planning to set up a schedule and patience with the children, Martha describes this initiative as much more “laid back” compared to other initiatives. It is meaningful to Martha because she has learned “little things can make more of a difference than we think sometimes.” The project has been more successful than she anticipated. The children have responded really well, it has been featured in the community newspaper, and a video was made of the children throat singing to show their parents. Overall, the parents are overwhelmed with pride to see their kids learn more about the culture. Martha elaborates, stating that the cultural component to this project has made it “extra meaningful.” Martha adds:

Some of the parents were just so proud and happy that they were crying. Just little things like that, especially because there is some sensitivity to some cultural aspects. Throat singing, for example, was something that once upon a time was frowned upon by people, like missionaries and people from the, quote, “outside” that were not Inuit and [throat singing] was on the verge of being lost. And now when parents see their kids doing something like that, it is kind of empowering to both the children and parents.

When asked to reflect on important aspects of her engagement, Martha immediately points to the relationships that she has made through her various involvements. However, with these relationships came additional challenges. She reflects:

I think the most important part [of my engagement] would be how I was able to develop relationships with young people ... I think because of my activity in the community, I think that younger people looked up to me and saw me as—I guess I became a role model for them. I do not know. It wasn't always easy for me to be in that position. It wasn't what I was aiming for in my mind. I was not out to be a role model, but I wanted to make things happen and try to make a difference.

Martha's leadership and eventual status as a role model was not something she had planned for herself. But she states that because others viewed her this way, she was able to have a much greater impact:

Because [I was viewed as a role model] I think I had a good sense on people to show them that “yes, you can go to college, you can graduate, you can organize some community level activities, you can do this, you can do that.” I guess I was able to show other people that they can do these things too.

Overall, Martha feels that her sense of passion and responsibility at a young age has helped sustain her involvement over time. She explains another driving force are the social issues present in Baker Lake. She reflects:

It hasn't exactly gotten any better since I was 13. I can't say that it has really got much worse either. But there are a lot of issues here, a lot of people that are hurt from the past and inter-relational trauma. Things that have happened to Inuit in the past, people today are still feeling the effects today. And I guess in my community, I always felt like people felt a sense of helplessness and sometimes hopelessness. And people, despite all this, continue to live their lives, trying to make others feel better, working together as a

community for the common good. They do all of that to be able to be a solid community, despite all the difficulties they have to face.

Despite this greater sense of community working towards a common goal, the community continues to experience challenges. Martha elaborates:

It is not that these problems haven't gone away. These problems still happen and they are continuing to happen, unless people like myself try to do something with their own lives and hopefully influence and help others to deal with their own problems. We are all connected, and anything that I do, I hope will positively influence somebody else; and then that person can continue to help others.

This sense of empowering others to contribute to a greater movement is something that Martha speaks very passionately about. And, while this has been a sustaining factor for Martha, there have been instances when Martha experienced burnout and was no longer able to remain engaged in her community. Martha's engagement in her community was particularly difficult when she left Baker Lake to attend school in Ottawa. She states, "it was really hard on me when I was trying to continue my education down South and being so disconnected from my community." She emphasizes that this was not just a physical disconnection from Baker Lake, but feeling like she was not able to help when she was so far away; she elaborates, "It was hard for me because I felt like my community needed my help, it needed people like me." I heard a sense of powerlessness as Martha spoke of being disconnected from her community. However, Martha accepted the limitations of what she could and could not do for her community while living in the South. She decided she could not keep doing what she was doing for the community and had to change the way she was thinking. This involved shifting her focus more towards herself and trying "not to feel that extra weight or pressure" that she felt she was getting from people back home. Martha felt tension between her decision to continue her education to be able to better help her community in the long run and her community's need for her presence. She does not feel that people at home necessarily understood her hope that receiving an education would have a positive impact on her entire community in the long run.

In addition to the tension around pursuing her education, Martha also identified funding as a challenge to sustaining her engagement. More specifically, she describes the uncertainty about whether funding would be secured as limiting and feels discouraging because programs sometimes end abruptly. She elaborates that one program she was involved with did not fully

account for the extra expenses that come with the high costs of delivering a program in the North. It was a particularly disappointing and discouraging experience for Martha. She felt that, beyond the lack of financing for the program, she did not receive the support because, as she explains, “the realities of the North were not understood by those offering us support.” Martha elaborates, “It reinforced the idea to my work partner and I that it is sometimes better for social and community development initiatives to start at the grassroots level, from within.” She reflected that this was challenging not only for her own planning, but found it to negatively impact the community when programs suddenly stop running.

Something that Martha mentioned as being important to her engagement was the opportunity she has received to travel. This was especially important coming from the North where isolation is a factor. She elaborates:

I think [travel] is important [because] there are great opportunities for kids to get out of their communities and see the bigger picture; see that there is more out there for them, and that there are other things that they can do with their lives. I think that it is a really big thing that young people living in small communities face—*ilea*⁸—for those that don’t get out of their community, they might not realize that once they do get out of the community a whole new world opens up to them. Some people don’t always have that opportunity.

The Impact of Martha’s Engagement

Throughout our conversation, Martha reflected on ways she sees her experience of engaging in her community as having impacted her personal growth, her peers, and the greater community.

Martha’s personal growth. It was difficult for Martha to reflect on her personal growth through her engagement in the community because engagement is something that she has almost always been doing. She believes that her experiences with engagement are what contributed to her passion towards empowering people, especially young Inuit. Martha positions herself within the community as somebody who is learning and sharing with the greater community. In attuning to Martha’s positioning within her experiences, I noticed a progression as she spoke about meeting with others, learning with others, and finally a sense of ability as a collective to achieve

⁸ *ilea* is Inuktitut slang, and means “umm,” “well....,” “but...” (personal communication with Sarah, another participant in the study who uses this term frequently)

goals. This progression helped provide insight into Martha's growth as she engaged in various initiatives.

Additionally, Martha thinks that if she had not been engaged, she would have been more likely to "adopt a common attitude of being helpless or hopeless." She states that, perhaps if it were not for her engagement in community, she might have been bored and more likely to turn to drugs or alcohol. She reflects, "I don't know. I think I could easily be a negative, unhappy, pessimistic person that falls under the weight of different problems and blame other people for this and that." However, she feels that through her involvement, she has had a support network from a very young age.

Finally, she feels her involvement in the community has initiated other opportunities in her life. Martha feels that the increased sense of responsibility has helped her to "grow up" a bit faster by becoming more reliable, learning how to work with others, and being open-minded. This increased responsibility has helped Martha develop a sense of work ethic, as she says her engagement in community has "motivated her to work hard." Finally, Martha perceived her engagement as having made her more proactive and responsive to community issues, as opposed to reacting negatively to the issues.

Impact on peers. Martha's various leadership roles in community have strengthened her ability to be a positive role model for others. Others view Martha as a person who can initiate projects by rallying a group of her peers together. Her peers felt her absence when she moved South for school. Martha reports that other youth in the community look up to her. She describes younger children and teens as excited to see her on the streets and sometimes expressing that she is somebody they would like to be like.

Martha also shared a story about feeling as though others may feel more empowered to do similar things in the community. Each instance of 'I' or 'we' is underlined with the accompanying verb or associated text to construct a poem:

I think people feel empowered ... So, for example, my neighbour that I grew up with, an older neighbour, an older lady, and she is now actively now trying to revive some cultural aspects and language in the community. And she works with myself and a couple other young people to, say, teach throat singing for example. When I go home, we meet up with her and we go learn from some Elders and then we try to teach what we learn to other young people ... despite all of the hard times that people in the community go

through... like if one thing happens, everybody is affected ... We are able to come together and be a strong support for each other. I think that is something I have learned in my home community and I think that is one of the reasons why I love my hometown so much!

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined ‘I’ and ‘we’ portions of the excerpt above:

I think people
I grew up
I go home
We meet up
We go learn
We try to teach
We are able
I think
I have learned
I think that
I love

Reading this poem helped me to develop a sense of how Martha positions herself, both as an individual and collectively within her community, as it relates to her experience of promoting positive change in her community. For example, in this particular poem, Martha positions herself within the community as somebody who is also learning (“we go learn”) and sharing (“we try to teach”) with the greater community. I also notice a positioning where Martha acknowledges a role that she personally might have had to contribute to this sense of sharing with others, while she continues to learn both knowledge from Elders and more about her community.

In addition to this positioning, I notice an escalating tone within the ‘we’-portion of the poem, building from “we meet up” to “we go learn” to “we try to teach” to “we are able.” This tone has a natural progression but also provides a bit of insight into a process of empowering others from Martha’s positioning within her role in having promoted these initiatives.

Impact on community. Martha struggled to identify the impact her engagement may have had on her community. However, more generally, she reflected a relationship between the connections that engagement creates with others and community resilience. She explains:

Things that have happened to Inuit in the past, people today are still feeling the effects today of those things. And I guess in my community, I always felt like people often felt a sense of helplessness—sometimes a sense of hopelessness. And people, despite all these, people continue to live their lives. And in my community people are trying to make others feel better, working together as a community for the common good. And I find they do all of that to be able to be a solid community, despite all the difficulties that they have to face.

Martha perceives others in her community to be “working together for the common good” and, through this desire to improve the community, she feels they are able to do work together “despite the challenges they have to face.” The connections that she perceived others to be making are heard as they overcome adversity, demonstrating a developed sense of resilience.

In addition to Martha’s broader reflections on overall community resilience, she also reflected on the impact her engagement has had on the community by speaking to her leadership within the community. She states, “I think people definitely see me as a leader, a strong person to look up to.” Although this created pressure for Martha to live up to the expectations of her community, she thinks the community perceives her as someone who is able to overcome challenges. She elaborates:

I wanted to show others that there is hope, that we can try to be positive and, rather than feeling negative or fighting with each other, we could work together to address those challenges. It was my hope that I could show others that things can change, that within the individual level we all have the power to be a part of making positive change and encouraging each other to do the same.

Martha then refers to the empowerment that the youth in the community have felt as a result of the initiatives of youth leaders in the community. She reports that, since the deterioration of the two youth committees that she once was a member of, new youth leaders have successfully re-activated the committee. Martha proposes that perhaps the youth younger than her realize that they could do something as well and that it would be good for the community.

Overall, Martha is unsure about the exact impact her engagement has had on the community. She explains how she feels she is having an impact at the time of her engagement; but then, when she reflects back on her experience, the impact seems less profound. She emphasizes:

I like to think that there have been changes—maybe not on the whole community level, but definitely on a more individual level, like the people in the community. I think some of those things that we were involved in might have changed the way some people thought. ...there are some attitude issues that people have. Not that they are not without good reason, because they are... But it can be hard to get people living a different way.

She elaborates on this “attitude problem” with the following:

For example, one attitude that young people in the community have is “Oh I am Inuk so I am ajuq” which in English means ‘not capable.’ I think that is definitely a major attitude that people have and it really annoys me. (laughs) But again, it is one of those things that come up from historical circumstance and people not knowing how to deal with some of the issues that have come from their parent’s generation or the generation before. It is an attitude that needs to change.

Since her engagement in the community, Martha feels the attitude of “not capable” is shifting more towards one of empowerment. Martha stresses that this is why there needs to be a greater focus on the young people in the community: so that they can grow up challenging this attitude, changing the mindset, and realizing that they are capable. Martha is optimistic that with this focus on youth, the attitude can be transferred to the next generation and be carried for a lifetime.

Overall, Martha feels that her community has been empowered through her engagement. She reflects that community members are beginning to see the youth as “working hard because they want things to be better for themselves and for their future,” and believes this contributes to a newly formed perspective of “Well I should do something too!”. Martha shared an example of how this happened in her community where she directly empowered her neighbour to help revive the Inuit language of Inuktitut in the community.

Martha’s Message

As a result of the interview process, Martha realizes that she would not be the same person she is today if she did not have the opportunity or experience of being engaged in her community. She laughs saying, “I would be someone that today I get annoyed at.” With that,

Martha's message to readers is around "the importance for young people in Nunavut to be encouraged and supported because it can make all the difference." This is a message that she would like to share directly with the youth in Nunavut, and eventually to all the adults. She adds:

I would like to see Elders in the community take more of a leadership role and work directly with the young people. Teach them things, teach them cultural skills, language, anything. Just simply encouraging young people on a larger community level. I would like to see that.

That said, Martha also recognizes the pressure that sometimes comes when Elders encourage youth to take on leadership roles:

While it is great they are encouraged to do work in communities through youth committees, I think there definitely needs to be more support for them. The wellbeing of the community should not remain in their hands alone—they are kids after all. I think there needs to be more community-wide efforts to promote wellness and healing. These things are happening around [Nunavut] but sometimes youth activities and initiatives are viewed to be the responsibility of the youth alone.

Overall, Martha's mission would be to help challenge the "I am Inuk, therefore I am ajuq" attitude in the community, starting with the youth who can adopt a more positive perspective and carry that perspective for future generations to come.

Sarah

Participant Introduction and Background Information

Sarah is a 24-year-old Inuk who considers Rankin Inlet her home. Rankin Inlet, population 2,266, is located on the west coast of the Hudson Bay, about 300 km north of Churchill, Manitoba. It serves as the transportation, health services, and business centre of the Kivalliq Region of Nunavut (Hamlet of Rankin Inlet, n.d.). Sarah spent most of her childhood living in Baker Lake and moved to Rankin Inlet when she was 13 years old.

The Hamlet of Rankin Inlet was established with the opening of the North Rankin Nickel Mine, and continues to be a mining 'hub' in the North. This hub has helped create a sustainable economy for the Inuit, as many people work in the mining industry. The mining in Rankin Inlet also attracts people from all over Canada, which accounts for about 20% of the population in Rankin Inlet (Nunavut Tourism, 2013c). Canadians from the South come to Rankin Inlet in search of jobs, typically staying for a couple of years and leaving once they "make the big

bucks” (personal communication with Sarah, 2013). However, there are long time Southerners who become strong members of the community and call Rankin Inlet home. Sometimes these people are referred to as *Inumiat* meaning ‘practically Inuk’.

Like 69% of other Inuit living in Nunavut, Sarah speaks an Inuit language (ITK, 2008). She grew up speaking mostly Inuktitut, explaining that as she grows older she speaks mostly English. Sarah describes Rankin Inlet as a “great place to live”—a tight-knit community where everybody knows each other. She also describes Rankin Inlet to be very community and family orientated and reports having had wonderful sport opportunities in Rankin.

Sarah’s Community Engagement Leading up to ACTIVATE

When Sarah first moved to Rankin Inlet when she was 13 years old, she joined a soccer team. She remembers becoming involved in fundraising initiatives with her team, such as bingo nights, teen dances, bake sales, and car washes. Fundraising on a team was viewed as crucial when playing sports in the North. Sarah explains. “It is really expensive to travel anywhere and our community is not big enough to have a soccer league... If we wanted to play competitive soccer, we would have to leave the community.” Reflecting back on these early memories of engagement, Sarah remembers feeling nervous at first, mostly because she was new to the community and did not know many people yet. Sarah’s cousin, who also played on the soccer team, had a role in helping her become involved. Sarah also felt supported by her coach who would help the team with the fundraising.

Through her involvement with the soccer team, Sarah started to get more involved in other community initiatives. As she grew older, her involvement led to coaching soccer in the community. It was at this time that Sarah first learned about ACTIVATE. Sarah saw ACTIVATE as an interesting opportunity to further develop her skills in leading sport-related programs. She was also drawn to the fact that ACTIVATE was hosted in Ottawa, as it would be an opportunity for her to travel out of her community and experience something different. At the time of ACTIVATE, Sarah was taking time off after finishing the first year of the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program and living in Rankin Inlet, where she was working as a support worker at the school and volunteering as the assistant coach for a girls soccer team.

Sarah's ACTIVATE Experience

Sarah attended ACTIVATE as a delegate when she was 19 years old and returned as a volunteer for ACTIVATE North two years later. When she first arrived at ACTIVATE, she felt nervous and shy. She states:

I was still pretty timid, still pretty shy and—ileá—it sounds terrible, but I was really intimidated by ‘southerners’, and so the experience was difficult for me. I was my own worst enemy, I didn’t really want to talk to anybody and that kind of ruined my experience. But at the same time, by the end, I realized how my attitude is so important and how people perceive me ... I learned from that.

Despite these feelings of shyness, Sarah reflects on how empowering ACTIVATE was for her:

I had never imagined that it was possible for me to plan an entire soccer camp. They had just asked us to plan an activity in our community and I was like “Oh my god, I don’t know what I am going to do. I don’t even know what I will pretend to brainstorm on.” But it was something that I did end up picking and—ileá—I never thought that it was actually possible for it to happen.

Sarah took away from ACTIVATE the message that “it was actually possible to be involved in my community, on a larger scale.” She feels that ACTIVATE helped her see her own potential while meeting and connecting with other youth whom she considers as role models. When she returned from ACTIVATE, she told her father about her new idea for the community. At first he was doubtful that she would be able to pull off such an initiative; but once the summer was over and Sarah had successfully developed and implemented the soccer program, her father was really impressed.

Sarah's Engagement after ACTIVATE

In the period following the ACTIVATE forum, Sarah became involved in her community by organizing and leading a variety of local events. Only months after attending her first ACTIVATE forum, Sarah surprised herself by organizing a five-day soccer camp for the Kivalliq region of Nunavut. To achieve this, Sarah applied for funding and received the money to hire a facilitator from the South, cover the cost of airfare for participants, and rebuild the old soccer field that was not safe for the children. They were also able to hire young people as ‘junior coaches’ who would work alongside the facilitator. The hope was that the junior facilitators would learn the skills to run a similar program in the future without having to hire

from the South. There were 300 participants in the camp. The goal of the program was to introduce soccer skills to younger generations and increase overall physical activity in the community.

Sarah was also responsible for coordinating a music festival for the community. Sarah explains that the festival was a partnership between the Hamlet and a local mine. The overall goal was to engage the community and demonstrate a partnership between the local mining company and the municipality. It was an initiative that involved many community members, bringing them together to create a fun event for everyone. Hired by the Hamlet of Rankin Inlet, Sarah oversaw every aspect of the festival: the music line-up, creating and distributing a schedule, inviting artists, having children's activities, organizing volunteers, and more.

Sarah also participated with a National youth development organization as the liaison between the organization and her community for a project that focused Aboriginal access and support. She helped to organize host families and work placements for a group of youth coming to Rankin Inlet for two months. She was also responsible for developing and proposing community volunteer initiatives to the youth visiting Rankin.

Overall, Sarah feels her involvement has evolved over time. She elaborates that she is now able to be more selective and critical of her involvement, thinking about how her participation in a project might impact her image or what contributions she might be able to make.

I feel like I have a responsibility as someone who has grown up from there, someone who sees both the good and the bad about Rankin. I am helping and I have skills that I can put to use. It just feels like it is a responsibility.

When I asked about where that sense of personal responsibility came from, Sarah responded, "It is something that I have grown up with—something that my family has always said." However, it was not always easy for Sarah to stay involved within her community. She notes this challenge as coming from feelings of "being let down" by others and being just too "physically exhausted" to continue.

Criticism from the community can also be a difficult challenge to overcome. Sarah reflects:

Sometimes criticism from the community, "Oh it should have been done this way" ... It annoys me because I think to myself, "Here are people who have never done anything for

the community, or never planned anything, but they still criticize. And they are doing nothing to change it.”

Through the support of Sarah’s friends, who are also engaged alongside her, Sarah is usually able to “brush it off,” remembering that they can never please everyone.

Sarah also receives a lot of support from the local recreation coordinator, the same person who helped her apply for the funding needed to rebuild the outdoor soccer field in the community. For example, this adult mentor provided facilities and organized other people to assist Sarah with events when needed. However, there are other times when Sarah feels that adult leaders in the community take a lot of credit for the work that she has put into initiatives, and she finds this very frustrating at times.

The Impact of Sarah’s Engagement

Throughout our conversation, Sarah reflected on ways she sees her experience of engaging in her community as having impacted her personal growth and the greater community.

Sarah’s personal growth. Sarah described feeling more connected to members of her community through her experience of being engaged. She reports having a stronger network in Rankin and feels that she has the support of other community members for future projects. She elaborates:

It reminds me that I am really a part of the community here, that Rankin is my home, and that Rankin is the kind of place where things like that can really happen. It makes me really proud to be from Rankin.

This sense of feeling more connected to her community has also contributed to an overall increase in confidence. For example, the following I-poem reflects a sense of how Sarah positions herself with the newly formed connections she has made in Rankin Inlet as it relates to her experiences of engagement in her community. Each instance of ‘I’ is underlined with the accompanying verb or associated text to construct a poem:

I feel like I am more connected now, or that, I have stronger networks in Rankin and if I want to do something I have the support and the people around me that would allow it to happen. Like, in the beginning, I didn’t know anyone, but know I know exactly who to talk to if I want to get something done. Like, yeah, I know that I will be able to find people who will be able to help me, like volunteers, like I feel like I could do anything (laughs).

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined ‘I’ portions of the excerpt above:

I feel like I am more connected

I have stronger

I want to

I have the

I didn’t know

I know exactly

I want to

I know that I will be

I feel like I could do

Not only does she feel more sure about the support that she receives from others, heard through “I have the support and people that would allow it to happen” and “I know exactly who to talk to,” but she also has confidence in her own abilities to “get something done,” as she states “I feel like I could do anything.” Additionally, there is certain personal awakening witnessed through Sarah’s perceived growth from having engaged in her community. More specifically, she expressed feeling more “community oriented” and having an enhanced understanding of where she comes from. As a result of Sarah’s engagement in the community, she feels a greater sense of identity as it relates to her community, feeling more a part of Rankin Inlet and overall more connected to others.

Through her experience of engagement, Sarah feels an increased sense of pride. Through ACTIVATE, Sarah feels that she has learned how to plan and implement projects more effectively, learning the steps to take before implementing a project. It helped her discover how much she “fell in love with coordinating [community initiatives].” Sarah also reflects on a feeling of being more respected by the community. She feels that, through her engagement, the community has started to take notice of her involvement and recognizes who she is. Consequently, Sarah feels more valued by others in the community because of her efforts. Overall, Sarah’s engagement has help increase her confidence. She states, “It made me realize that I was capable.” Reflecting on how she has changed through her engagement, Sarah indicates:

I was just a kid—ilea—I was just a teenager doing my own thing and not very concerned about anything outside of myself... I would say that I am very community orientated

now. Most of what I do is for my community. I feel like I am a part of the community. I feel like I am an active member. I better understand where I come from and am more connected to people. I have more relationships built ... I think I always wanted to be that person—Ilea—I just didn't have the confidence or the relationships in place to do so. Finally, Sarah feels that she has gained skills, both professional and personal. More specifically, she identifies these skills as coordinating, facilitating, public speaking, communication, teamwork, and project management. As a result of these skills, she feels more confident and more connected to her community. She adds that she has also learned things from working closely with others:

Like from everyone I have worked with I have learned something. You learn something from different people. So one thing I have learned is [to have] appreciation and believe that you can truly learn from everyone.

Impact on community. Given the nature of some of her initiatives, Sarah feels that there is a greater appreciation for music in the community as more concerts and music are being brought in. She also perceives the youth in her community as having a greater interest in soccer. Overall, during the soccer camp, she noticed the youth were just happier and more excited, as well as more confident about their soccer skills. Sarah identified this initiative as being most meaningful to her because of the impact she perceived it as having on her community. She reflects:

Every once in a while I would just stop what I was doing during the festival and just look around and I could see that everybody was enjoying themselves and that they were really happy. It makes me feel really proud to know that I could help make that happen.

A stand-out observation for Sarah was that "Rankin is capable of hosting events like this." Sarah explains that Rankin Inlet had never hosted a music festival, and this event helped demonstrate that the community was capable of having events of this magnitude.

Additionally, Sarah described the youth in the community as having increased coaching skills through their involvement as junior soccer coaches during the Soccer Daycamp program. She also describes these youth as gaining leadership skills that have helped to build the capacity of young people in the community. Sarah explains that by assuming the role of junior coaches, the youth involved gained confidence in their abilities to lead and coach soccer initiatives. Sarah elaborates, projecting a hope that through opportunities for young people to become more

involved through meaningful roles, the capacity of young people to become leaders will be enhanced and, in turn, deter “youth with nothing to do” from experimenting with alcohol and drugs.

Sarah describes a shift in the community’s relationship with youth. She reflects, “I think the biggest thing is an increased appreciation for what youth are capable of doing if you give them the space to do so.” She also feels that, being a young woman herself, she has helped to promote gender equality in the community. She has encouraged young girls to be leaders and to see that girls are capable of doing well. Capturing the overall picture, Sarah states, “My initiatives are a part of a larger movement towards increasing youth involvement in Rankin.”

Sarah’s Message

Participating in the interview was a neat experience for Sarah; she reflects, “It was nice to go back to it and remind myself why I do the things that I do.” She feels that the most meaningful part of her story is the potential that her community has. She describes feeling as though Rankin Inlet has a lot of opportunity to increase the community’s, as well as youths’, capacity. Her message to readers: “Don’t be afraid to make mistakes because that is inevitable... Learn from them.” With respect to her community engagement, she emphasized the importance of people recognizing where they go wrong and learning from those mistakes.

Jessika

Participant Introduction and Background Information

Jessika is a 21-year-old First Nation member of Kluane First Nation. Jessika grew up, and currently lives, in Whitehorse, Yukon. Whitehorse—population 25,000—is the largest city in the Canadian Arctic. Named ‘The Wilderness City,’ Whitehorse is situated on the banks of the Yukon River, and is surrounded by lakes and mountains. The economy in Whitehorse includes mining, transportation services, tourism, and government services (City of Whitehorse, 2014). According to the 2011 census, 16% of the population of Whitehorse is of Aboriginal decent, predominantly First Nations. In Whitehorse, 6.2% of the Aboriginal population report speaking an Aboriginal language. The most frequently Aboriginal language spoken in Whitehorse is Northern Tutchone (Statistics Canada, 2006), which is a commonly spoken language in central Yukon.

Although Jessika grew up and currently lives in Whitehorse, she identifies most with her traditional community which is home of the Kluane First Nation Government. This community is

called Burwash Landing and is located on the shores of Kluane Lake (Kluane First Nation, 2014). Known as the smallest community in the Yukon with a population of 95 people, Burwash Landing is located 285 km northwest of Whitehorse between Kluane National Park and Kluane Lake (Kluane First Nation, 2014). The majority of Kluane First Nation peoples identify themselves as descendants of Southern Tutchone speakers; although 75% of the population's mother tongue is English (Yukon Government, 2012). Jessika identifies Southern Tutchone as her second language. The community remains a predominantly First Nations community, however it is "growing multi-culturally" (Kluane First Nation, 2014, para 3). More specifically, the 2011 Census reports 80% of the population of Burwash Landing to be First Nations, about 10% to be Métis, and the final 10% identifying as Canadians of European decent.

One of the social challenges that Jessika identifies in Burwash Landing is alcohol use. According to the CBC, access to alcohol is unrestricted in Burwash Landing. Communities in the North have varying levels of restrictions with regards to purchasing and possessing alcohol (Booze Beyond 60, 2013). For example, across the three territories, 15 communities are dry, meaning alcohol is not permitted within the community; and 35 communities have restrictions, which vary on the degree to which alcohol can be brought into the community and the quantity allowed per individual at a time. Like 45 other communities in the North, alcohol in Burwash Landing is unrestricted, however there is no liquor store located within the community itself. As Burwash Landing is accessible by road all year round, alcohol and other drugs are more readily available to the community. Although there are no specific counselling or treatment programs located in the community, there are such services in Whitehorse.

Jessika's Community Engagement Leading up to ACTIVATE

Jessika remembers being a little girl who always wanted to feel more connected to the community of Burwash Landing. Growing up in Whitehorse, Jessika envied her cousins who were living in Burwash Landing because she always thought it was a "cool place." She particularly remembers feeling jealous of her cousin who got to take part in different community initiatives that she could not be a part of. With the help of her aunt, Jessika's engagement started when she was given the opportunity to volunteer for a community event in Burwash Landing where she was responsible for helping to cook at a potlatch, which is a gift-giving feast practiced by some indigenous peoples in Canada. She elaborates:

[Burwash Landing] hired me to do a few jobs in the community... That is how I got started ... I really liked it out there ... I have always been proud of my First Nations side... It felt more like home to me... It felt good. It felt like it was just something that I wanted to do. I needed to be determined, like when I want to do something I just do it. Over time, Jessika continued to be connected to Burwash Landing as much as she could. It was not always easy for Jessika to stay connected because of the distance from Whitehorse, but she would try to return to Burwash Landing for community events as much as she could. After Jessika graduated from high school, she was able to move to Burwash Landing and work for the Band Office as a liaison officer between the Kluane First Nation and a local industrial company. There were times when Jessika felt overwhelmed by her responsibilities: "I was doing a lot and I didn't really know what I was doing." It was around this time when Jessika received an email from a friend who had previously attended ACTIVATE (also known as an ACTIVATOR), who invited her to apply to the ACTIVATE conference. The Yukon is generally under-represented at the ACTIVATE conferences, and Jessika saw this as an opportunity to represent her community. It was something that the former ACTIVATOR had talked to Jessika about before, and Jessika was intrigued. She wanted to have a similar positive experience to that of her friend who had encouraged her to apply.

Jessika's ACTIVATE Experience

Jessika attended ACTIVATE when she was 19 years old. She described ACTIVATE as being different from other youth conferences she had attended prior to ACTIVATE. She describes the experience in the following way:

It was just so new and it was weird because I am pretty shy, so it was stepping out of my bubble. [It was different] because of how much youth involvement there was, the energy and the people you get to meet. You don't relax that week but it is a week that you will not forget.

She continues to explain that ACTIVATE helped her "open her eyes" to what she wanted to do in her community. She adds:

It just made me think about what you don't have in the Yukon. Like we have so much, and there is so much to do, but a lot of people don't have the knowledge or experiences to do it. And a lot of people do not have the resources...and everybody should have access to it. Like there is so much to do here and there is just not enough funding.

She reflects on the opportunity available to her in the Yukon explaining, “I have had it lucky, but thinking about other people and what they haven’t got to do. Like somebody might never get that chance to do it.” Overall, the ACTIVATE experience helped Jessika to survey her community’s needs and what her role might be in addressing some of those needs. She elaborates:

It has made me think about what I could do or what other people could do. Because even if I am not the one who is going to start the motion, or if I am the one who starts the motion, it is the second person who has got to make it work ... I am not saying that I am the person who is going to change the world, but I know that I can help other people do that.

As Jessika unpacks her ACTIVATE experience even more, she reflects on her role as someone who can start a movement towards change. She does not feel like she will always be the person to act directly on an idea, but she thinks that she can help inspire others to support her with an idea. She explains, “I am the person who can help push others in the right direction.” Overall, through her relationships, Jessika feels she can “help other people do that,” implying that, through her connections with others, she feels that she can help them “change the world.”

Jessika also returned the following year to ACTIVATE as a volunteer for the ACTIVATE North forum. She describes her role with ACTIVATE North mostly as a role model for the other delegates in attendance. She explains:

I know what it is about and whether or not it is helping your community in a small way or a larger way. I was able to give people insight and help them through it, or help them through tough times. I am generally good at giving advice, so if somebody needed it and they were willing to ask, I would.

Jessika’s Engagement after ACTIVATE

Jessika explains that she has not yet completed an official ‘ACTIVATE-in-Action’ project; although she has a few ideas brewing, she has focused primarily on her education since attending ACTIVATE. She would like to get her yoga certification so that she can do a project teaching yoga to the Elders in her community. She has also been hired for a new position as an environmental technician working for both the First Nation and the local mining companies.

At the time of our interview, Jessika was involved with a local festival that has been a winter tradition in Whitehorse intended to help bring some change to the long and difficult winter. She describes:

Winters are so long that they needed something to keep them on their feet during the winters ... We made a festival at the end of February so that people could enjoy winter, get outside, open up, and say hello. It is what brings people's spirits up and give them something to look forward to.

Jessika's initial involvement included fundraising and doing various events leading up to and during the festival. She got engaged in the festival because she believes that it is important to bring the community together.

Following ACTIVATE, Jessika also attended an international youth forum that is aimed at giving youth a voice with regards to environmental activities around the globe. She traveled to India and attended some talks on various environmental issues that were held in conjunction with a larger environmental conference. The youth had discussions with the adults at the conference to forefront the impact of environmental decisions on the youth. Jessika was selected to attend the forum to share an Indigenous perspective with respect to climate change and biodiversity. She describes a tension where some of the participants did not understand why she was in attendance, as most participants lived near a marine or coastal biodiversity. Jessika reflects on the experience:

I was able to explain why I was actually there. It was because as a First Nations person I am able to connect with the earth more, and not just spiritually but I am able to understand 'this is that' or 'without this that wont survive' ... and the people I was working with did not understand that. ... They weren't looking at the entire picture. I had to show them. ... And I still had a lot of people at the end of the day asking me why I was there, and I was like, "You know what, don't worry about it. You don't understand."

For Jessika, opportunities like this Forum and community festivals that recognize and, in some ways, celebrate her culture are what keeps her going. Her rationale for engaging with the festival was also along these lines as she says, "It is an event that helps keep the magic and the mystery of the Yukon alive." Part of what made that engagement easier for Jessika is that she felt she had so much support from other people:

I have a lot of supporters being from a smaller community and just seeing my family get involved and seeing everybody want to come out and support [the festival] because of me. It was just so different. I have never really felt that way before.

Overall, the experience with the festival was meaningful because of the connections that Jessika felt with other people—not just with her family and supporters, but with the other people involved with the festival as well. She felt a great sense of cohesion with the team and, overall, just felt like everybody was proud of one another.

However, there were times when her engagement in the community was difficult to maintain. She indicated that her engagement in the community could sometimes be stressful, and emotionally and physically draining. She reported that during her work with the festival, she did not have as much time to spend with her friends and family. She adds that balancing her time becomes more important as she becomes involved with community. She also describes the challenge of being in the public eye, especially because she finds herself to be a “pretty hush-hush person.” Jessika elaborates that she felt strange being in the public eye; there were posters of her all over town related to the festival, and she was interviewed on the radio and featured in the newspaper.

She also states that having the support of adult leaders in the community makes it a bit more manageable. For Jessika, this support came from a youth coordinator who “helped her along the way.” Jessika adds, “She helped push me towards the right direction.” When asked why she is engaged in her community, Jessika responded:

There is something about the Yukon that is magical. I don’t know what it is. It could be the mountains, the sky at night, or the snow, but there is something there. Ever since I was a little girl, I have always gone to [community events] ... Like, it is different up here. It is an artistic community. It is very, I don’t know how to explain it, but it is beautiful and it is what brings me in ... It is like keeping something alive, right? Like if you let one things die out, a lot more other things will go. What we don’t realize is that you need every bit of it and then some to keep it going.

This unique beauty Jessika experiences the Yukon to have is what inspires her to attend various community events and festivals. Through her participation at these events, she has been given future opportunities to engage in her community in meaningful ways. Jessika’s connection to the land—especially given her First Nations heritage—is something that she values and considers to be a very important component of her engagement. This connection to the land has helped to initiate her engagement and served as a means for her involvement through projects that aim to protect or educate about the land.

Jessika uses metaphors, like “keeping something alive,” that accentuate her ecological interest through her understanding that everything in the community is interconnected. Jessika describes how her engagement is used as a tool to help “keep something alive.” She explains how through the winter months the community in general can fall into a “slump,” as there are few activities or opportunities to connect with others through the winter months. This sense of idleness is also heard alongside Jessika’s connections to others through her engagement in the festival by “waking people up” and giving them “something to look forward to” to help preserve and enhance the community morale or, as she describes, “bring people’s spirits up.”

When asked more about her desire to help other people, Jessika explains that it is also inspired by her own family challenges:

I grew up around alcoholics, smokers, drug addicts, and wanting to help people. Like I wanted to help my dad, different people, and my sister. It has helped me to be what I don’t want to be and what I do want to be ... I have learned a lot about drug and alcohol use ... and like knowing all about it, and then seeing it, and then realizing that all those issues are in your own community. Like in my community there is a lot of drinking.

There is nothing for them to do there. So like, [I am always] looking for ways to help them out ... We have our own ways of doing things and we make it so that it is like what they do, because they are hurting against what is healthy and I have always found that weird so that is something that I have wanted to help out with.

The challenges that Jessika experienced in her family fostered her desire to help people and think of new solutions for the community.

The Impact of Jessika’s Engagement

Throughout our conversation, Jessika reflected on ways she sees her experience of engaging in her community as having impacted her personal growth, and the greater community.

Jessika’s personal growth. Overall, Jessika sees her community engagement as having helped her to identify what she is good at. It has also helped her to come out of her shell a bit more and not be as scared to try new things. She explains:

Before going to ACTIVATE I was not willing to try new things or do anything new. I was under, like in the dumps kind of. Ever since then, I have been doing different things, I think that are better for me and helping me. Not just even me, but other people as well. But in order for me to help somebody else, I need to be able to help myself first. And I

have been trying to get myself out there, and be the person I can be instead of being this shy little person who can't talk about things.

Jessika also emphasizes that her engagement in the community has supported her in developing a more positive outlook on both her own life and her community:

Being involved in my community has helped me to stay positive because there was a little while there when I was really negative and going down a bad path. But I found my way out of it and I do my best to stay positive and just keep going ... If I experience something traumatic, I take it as a learning experience. I haven't taken it as "I am going to go and become an alcoholic" or "I am going to dwell on my problems." I feel like I have tried to make things better for myself instead of becoming something that I don't want to be.

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined 'I' and 'we' portions of the excerpt above:

I was really
I found my
I do my best
I experience
I take it
I haven't taken
I feel like I have
I don't want to be

Reading this poem helped me to develop a sense of how Jessika positions herself within her personal development and through moments where she has learned more about herself. Her reflections from the past give momentum to how she currently positions herself towards the struggles in her community. I also hear Jessika's initiative through statements like "I found my" and "I do my best," helping me to hear how Jessika takes personal responsibility for both finding a way out of "going down the wrong path" and staying positive.

Jessika also feels that there is an element of her engagement that goes beyond what she is actually doing in the community. She explains that it is not just about delivering community initiatives, as she has also personally benefited from having had the experience:

It is not just about the physical things, like what you brought back to your community, how you as a person benefit from it, emotionally... I think because I know when I was [at ACTIVATE] I talked to a lot of people who were going through different things.

Listening to the [closing circle] at the end of the week was very eye opening for me. It was something that, whether you realized it or not, that was one of the main concepts of ACTIVATE. Like not only bringing ideas to your community to be more involved but, like, becoming a stronger person and giving yourself the ability to be a stronger person. You just need to let yourself be free.

Jessika's engagement has also strengthened her desire to become more fluent in her traditional language. She wants to be able to communicate more effectively with the Elders in her community and, in general, learn more about her heritage and culture.

Impact on community. Jessika reflects that her community has responded well to her engagement, especially community members of Burwash Landing. She states, "They keep trying to get me to come back." She feels she has had an impact on people in the community. On a more personal level, Jessika explains that her family does not drink or smoke in her presence, which Jessika attributes to her strong feelings against these behaviours. Although she does not feel that she has "helped" her family, she feels that she is "something for her family to be proud of."

Jessika's Message

The conversation I had with Jessika brought back some great memories for her. She explains that it provided the space to reflect on some important times in her life. For Jessika, the most meaning comes from the people she has met along the way. She explains:

It is about certain people that you meet ... just like people that really put that change in you. ... It is almost like you have taught them something or have showed them something else. Like you have given them realization that they are super thankful for it. Like if you can teach somebody how to build a fire properly, they are thankful for the rest of their life because they can now cook and keep heat.

Through this reflection, Jessika's message for reader is to take a "leap of faith"; she encourages readers to become involved even if they cannot see the outcome right away. Jessika describes having experiences that were not always what she initially expected, but that she has not regretted her experiences because she has learned from each of them. Jessika stresses the

distinction between “being involved in the community” and “taking the next step.” She describes feeling as though there are lots of people who are involved in their communities, but that they get comfortable with what they are doing. Jessika hopes to encourage others to: “Take the next step and push yourself to better yourself. And when you better yourself, you better everything around you.” She hopes to share this message with everyone; not just youth but people of all ages. She sees her role as being supportive and empowering others to take action.

Laura

Participant Introduction and Background Information

Laura is a 23-year-old Inuk from Paulatuk, Northwest Territories (NWT). Paulatuk, population 313, is situated on the shores of Darnley Bay in the Amundsen Gulf approximately 400 kilometers East of Inuvik (Hamlet of Paulatuk, 2013; NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Paulatuk means ‘place of coal’ named for the coal found in the area in the 1920s and used by local Inuit who settled there. Similar to the majority of members of her community, Laura identifies as Inuk—specifically Inuvialuit. The Inuvialuit are descendants of two cultures: the Mackenzie Delta Inuit and the Alaskan Inupiat whose ancestors immigrated to the region in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Hamlet of Paulatuk, 2013; Inuvialuit Regional Corp, 2006). Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK, 2008), a national not-for-profit organization that advocates for Inuit in Canada, reports that approximately 5,000 Inuvialuit peoples live in six communities across the northwestern part of NWT.

Laura’s first language is English, and she mostly spoke English growing up. Her second language, Inuvialuktun, is the traditional language spoken by Inuvialuit people. According to ITK (2008), 20% of the Inuit peoples living in the Inuvialuit region are able to converse in Inuvialuktun, with 14% identifying it as their mother tongue, and 3% primarily speaking Inuvialuktun in the home. These statistics are quite low compared to other Inuit regions. In general, 69% of Inuit in Canada speak their traditional language, 64% identify it as their mother tongue, and 50% speak their traditional language most at home (ITK, 2008).

Paulatuk is a traditional northern fly-in community—meaning it is only accessible by air—that relies heavily on hunting, trapping, and fishing. Many people in Paulatuk make their living off the land, but many also now have wage employment. The continuation of oil and gas exploration in the Beaufort Sea is important to the modest local economy, as are arts and crafts. Despite these efforts, Laura identifies unemployment as an issue in her community. Specifically,

the unemployment rate for Inuit living in Inuvialuit region is approximately 25% compared to 4% of non-Inuit peoples living in the region and the national average of 7.1% (Statistics Canada, 2012a). In the Inuvialuit region, ITK states that the main reason for unemployment is due to school (24%), followed by retirement (18%), family responsibilities (13%), no full-time job available (11%), and health problems (11%). Laura explains this challenge amidst the increased cost of living in the North. For example, in Holman—a community located in the Inuvialuit region—a 5lb bag of potatoes costs \$9.56, compared to \$2.49 in Ottawa; 1lb of ground beef averages \$4.99 in Holman, compared to \$2.30 in Ottawa; and 1 litre of 2% milk costs \$3.99 in Holman, compared to \$2.49 in Ottawa (ITK, 2008).

Laura identifies alcohol use as another challenge in Paulatuk. While there is little information available on the prevalence of alcohol use in the community, Paulatuk, as with many communities in the Arctic, have alcohol restrictions in place (Booze Beyond 60, 2012). Like 23 other communities in the North, alcohol in Paulatuk is restricted whereby residents can order or bring alcohol in from out of town but are restricted in how much each community member can order in (Booze Beyond 60, 2012). However, as the CBC reports, there are many ways for these restrictions to be overlooked (Booze Beyond 60, 2012). Some community members bring alcohol back to the community after travelling South, and this is not monitored carefully at the airport. The Beaufort-Delta Health and Social Services Authority (n.d.) suggests that mental health and addictions issues have impacted almost everyone living in NWT. There are four residential treatment options for NWT residents looking for help with their addiction, however they are all located in Alberta or BC (Beaufort-Delta Health and Social Services Authority, n.d.).

Laura lived in many places across NWT, but her family settled in Paulatuk when she was 9 years old. She affiliates most with the Hamlet of Paulatuk. Overall, Laura describes Paulatuk as “a good place to grow up.” In our interview, Laura described having lots of freedom growing up in Paulatuk—freedom to travel the land and fish. She also described Paulatuk as very isolated, explaining that the isolation only became more noticeable for her when she grew older and graduated from high school. She views the isolation as creating a lot of challenges for youth, but also protecting youth from “the larger outside influences.” Laura elaborates that, despite the isolation, she appreciates having grown up in a close-knit community with strong family values because it meant “there was always someone there for you.”

Laura identifies challenges with tension leaving the community for opportunities elsewhere. This is a common experience for youth living in the North whereby ITK (2008) identifies job opportunities (38%), wanting to get away or seek change (22%), education (21%) and family moving (16%) as reasons Inuit in the Arctic would consider leaving their communities. Laura left her community several times for education and employment.

Laura is a very creative person, with a strong interest in filmmaking. She has completed her high school diploma and some college. She first attended the ACTIVATE National Conference in Ottawa as a delegate and returned the following year as a Team Leader for ACTIVATE North in Yellowknife. Below is the story of how she became a youth leader through engagement opportunities.

Laura's Community Involvement Leading up to ACTIVATE

Laura's first experience of being involved in her community was through volunteer work. This led her to discover her innate desire to help other people. With the support of her mother, and other connections she made in the community, she developed a reputation as always being willing to help out when she could. Laura first remembers getting involved in her community when she was about 12-years-old. Coming from a small community, Laura described a large need for others to chip in and help out when there are big community events; because there are only a couple of paid positions to run the events, there is a great reliance on volunteers. At the time, Laura's mother continually required volunteers for events that she was responsible for organizing through her employment. Through her mom's need for volunteers, Laura was introduced to volunteering at a young age. Her role started with simple tasks such as helping to bring Elders together for an afternoon tea, or preparing meals for community events.

Laura felt good volunteering and knowing that she could help others. The more Laura learned from her own experiences in life, the more she wanted to share those lessons and good feelings that came from her experiences with others. She reflects, "I am not doing this for myself. I am doing it for others." There is also a factor of isolation in Paulatuk that leads Laura to volunteer; it helps her fight the isolation and boredom by keeping busy. For Laura, her involvement helped her to socialize with other people and be around her community in the winter months when there is a tendency to withdraw and stay home.

As the years passed, Laura's role evolved into the actual planning and implementation of community events and celebrations. She continued to help wherever she could and eventually

became a very active youth leader, in Paulatuk as well as in NWT. Soon she was helping her sister, who was coordinating the youth centre, deliver some of the youth programs. Laura and her sister initiated a program to help address binge drinking that was happening on days when alcohol was delivered to the community. Together, Laura and her sister implemented programming, not just limited to the youth but for the entire community, where people could come and make a commitment to sobriety for the evening. Laura describes the program:

We wanted to put together youth programming so that kids weren't just hanging around for 6 hours at night. So [my sister] put together a little program where on the scheduled flight days—when alcohol would enter the community—she would have activities planned. [The activities] were not limited to youth, but adults and everyone who [would] choose to be sober that night. [They would] come to the youth centre and do a bunch of fun activities and have a chance to check-in as a “I choose not to drink this evening.” They would then be entered to win a draw to win a free iPod or something cool. It worked out really well, but she ran out of funding [and it stopped].

In addition to volunteering, Laura's engagement was also initiated by a sense of personal responsibility, specifically a response to her perception that others were not stepping up to the plate. She started to dislike the behaviour she would observe in her peers. She wanted to be different and change the things she did not like in her community. Laura elaborates how she wanted to be viewed differently from other youth in her community:

I was really young, maybe about twelve years old, when I noticed that I did not want to be looked at as one of those kids who just ran around and did nothing all day with their time. I wanted to get out there and mingle around with my community and set good examples. Well I guess one main reason [for my engagement], if you look at [all the reasons] put together is “Well if I don't do it, I don't see anybody else that is going to do it.” And this is a really good thing, good things can come out of it, so why not, right?

Throughout these initial experiences in her community, helping her mother through volunteering at events and developing skills as a leader in her community, Laura experienced a process of personal awakening. Through her engagement, she was responding to the urge to help address community needs as well as learned that helping other people was an essential part of who she was, especially as an Aboriginal youth in her community. She reflects:

But here, it is a part of our culture to help others—especially the older people—the Elders in the community. Yeah, it is a big part of our cultural values and, um, just to put the Elders ahead of yourself and maintain that respect. That has to be part of the root, one of the reasons that I have got involved. I got involved because it is a cultural thing as well.

Laura started to develop a reputation in the community and it was not before long that she found herself travelling to different places to attend youth leadership conferences, and became known for her public speaking and being good at representing her community. However it was not always easy for her. Laura went through a few ups and downs as her reputation as a leader in the community began to grow. When Laura was younger, she was given an opportunity to go on a leadership exhibition and she was really excited. Laughing she says, “I didn’t have much, what you would say, leadership or role model skills,” but she wanted to learn and be engaged in the program. However, she explained that, leading up to the exhibition, she “got herself into trouble” and was no longer allowed to go:

And I felt that, I felt that. I really really felt that. I felt that I had sabotaged myself and I never forgot that. And that was the only time I ever let that happen and I said to myself, “I am going to show these people, that [pause] I wasn’t the wrong choice. I am going to show these people that I was just really young and I wasn’t taking it seriously.” And that experience made me 100% stronger. ... If I hadn’t had that experience, I probably wouldn’t have succeeded in anything, you know? So what I did was I got double involved. I learned from that, and yeah, it was a motivation, a motivation to show them that I am not just another kid who doesn’t care. I actually do care...

Throughout my conversation with Laura, she positioned her setbacks within a place of growth and motivation to continue despite challenges. As Laura matured, her engagement in the community became a way of being. She continues:

My involvement has not only been a personal choice but is cultural. It is a way of showing respect. It is a part of our culture to help others, especially the older people, the Elders in the community. Yeah, it is a big part of our cultural values to put the Elders ahead of yourself and maintain that respect... Part of the root and one of the reasons, that I got so involved with volunteering, because it is a cultural thing as well. It has not only been a personal choice but it is cultural, it is also your way of showing respect.

This ‘way of being’ has often led to a feeling of pride for her community and the North. Laura was selected for the *NWT Ambassador Program*, where she had the opportunity to volunteer at both the *Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games*. This is something she is very proud of. Through the Ambassador program, she continues to be selected to represent NWT at various events, giving her the opportunity to represent Paulatuk in positive ways.

Laura’s ACTIVATE Experience

Laura developed a reputation in the community as someone who wants to help out whenever she can. It was through this reputation that she was approached by community leaders as a potential candidate for the ACTIVATE program. Laura was attracted to the idea of ACTIVATE as an opportunity to leave the hamlet and meet with other youth from across the country and to learn more about leadership. During the years leading up to discovering ACTIVATE, Laura had been on the hunt to find resources to create new programs and develop sport in her community. Laura sees these opportunities as being especially important given the isolation of her community. She elaborates:

I was really trying to get resources to try and start up a youth program. It was really difficult at first because I didn’t know where to start, and I also knew that if I were to go to ACTIVATE that I would be able to create a network of people who could help.

ACTIVATE was pretty much the thing that was just a really good fit for me.

At the time of ACTIVATE, Laura was going to college and had not been involved in her community for two years. She just did not feel like herself and did not feel like she was doing enough. Laura had always been engaged in her community and she wanted to re-engage. She was overcoming some personal challenges in her life, and explains that, at this time, she needed to step back from being a role model and look after herself and her family. She explains, “I finally got out of that and everything started looking good. I needed to, you know, I don’t feel like myself, I need to get back out there, I need to get involved again.” ACTIVATE was a launching pad for Laura to reconnect with her own engagement.

Laura’s ACTIVATE experience was overall very positive. After attending ACTIVATE National, Laura applied and was selected to be a youth volunteer for ACTIVATE North. ACTIVATE North was a very rewarding experience; she felt good knowing that she was able to help other youth living in the Arctic. She explains:

You take 25 youth from isolated communities [across the North] and bring them together to teach them new things. You know, you see that look on their faces when they know that they can actually make a difference. You know, where as before, they were like, “Oh well, I can’t do this. I am not big enough to make a change. I’m just from a small town.”

Returning home from ACTIVATE North, Laura initiated the first steps for her ACTIVATE-in-Action project. She chose to use media and film to center her project on. She is really passionate about the arts and reflects, “I want to share my passion with others, you know, growing up here in Paulatuk, there are no opportunities for the arts, and this was tough for me.” Laura always knew that she wanted to become a filmmaker. She was given a camera for her birthday one year, and since then she has been fascinated with filmmaking. Her desire to become a filmmaker was so unique in Paulatuk. Laura really needed to create resources for herself. She says:

I still have big dreams. But it is hard when you come from a town of 350 people. There is not art studio here, no resources to get involved with [filmmaking]. You have to create that for yourself. So what I want to do is just get that little bit of opportunity out there.

Laura’s project involved developing and implementing a filmmaking awareness program for kids in the community. She hopes that they will have the opportunity to also spark an interest in filmmaking or wanting to be leader. She says: “It is also really [important for them to] add to their experiences because they are the next generation who are going to be running this place.” The project would involve raising awareness about a community issue of their choice. Laura provides the example of youth drug and alcohol use. Through film, the youth involved in the project were to provide some solutions to the problem. She reflects:

And you know, is the cool part of it, the fun part, but really what they are doing is getting together and letting them put their ideas and heads together to find different ways to create awareness. They can figure out for themselves, because every kid has a solution for some of the issues that we have here. That way they will learn, and I will be there to help push them in the right direction. From there, they can create something that they can be really proud of.

More specifically, Laura speaks about the initiative as being an outlet for youth in the community to share awareness about a community issue or concern that they feel is meaningful to them. Through my conversation with Laura, she acknowledges that the young people in

Paulatuk are capable of coming up with solutions for some of the issues they experience. Laura describes the filmmaking initiative as a tool to respond to challenges experienced within the community, as well as a mechanism to engage and empower others to “create something they can be proud of.” Unfortunately, Laura felt challenged with this project due to a lack of funding, but she has a few grant applications that she is applying for with the help of her older sister. Laura’s biggest challenge to sustaining her engagement is funding. She says, “Oh if I had funding, I would never stop.”

Laura’s Engagement after ACTIVATE

After returning home from her ACTIVATE North experience, Laura continued to engage in various projects throughout her community. She organized a trip for a group of youth to travel to Whitehorse for a breakdancing workshop. Her role post-ACTIVATE involved getting other youth engaged. Laura was so proud of the youth that were involved in this initiative. She was proud of the way Paulatuk was represented at the event, and proud that her community was being viewed in a positive light.

Like all experiences where Laura is given an opportunity to leave the community, after ACTIVATE she found herself wanting to share her experience with others. She described wanting others in her community to know that “you can achieve anything.” Laura tried to empower other youth in her community to follow suit, to get involved in something that they feel passionate about. One of Laura’s main hopes for her own engagement is to inspire and empower others to become more engaged. She hopes that her stories will spark an interest in others. Laura has intentionally tried to empower others to make opportunities for themselves. She elaborates:

I know what it is like to be young here; there is little-to-no opportunity. I was fortunate and there were tons of opportunities when I was young, maybe not for others, but I made opportunities for myself. It gave me something to look forward to all the time. Instead of getting involved in negative influences, I would think, “Oh there is this event coming up.” I would have something to look forward to and I would want to get involved.

Laura describes how her role has shifted to being less participatory and more organizational. As her skills developed, Laura started to take on more responsibility for the projects that she was involved with; she now takes on more responsibility for the implementation and delivery of the programs. The objectives of the projects target the youth in the community,

aiming to get more youth involved and more young people developing into role models themselves.

There are so many reasons for Laura's engagement, but the single most prominent reason is her desire to empower and motivate other youth. She says, "Well if I don't do it, I don't see anybody else that is going to do it." Laura's sense of personal responsibility for initiating change fosters her desire to take the initiative in her community. Additionally, this personal responsibility drove her to create opportunities for others to engage meaningfully in response to community challenges. By creating these experiences for herself, Laura explains how she overcame the challenge of living in an isolated community with what appeared to others as having limited opportunities.

Coupled with this sense of personal responsibility, Laura echoes the positive outcomes from her engagement and tried to help others see the benefit of being engaged. Another big influencing factor for Laura is her younger sister who looks up to Laura. Laura wants to help show her sister the "right way" of doing things. The "right way of thinking," as Laura describes, is: "Don't watch, don't sit there and watch somebody struggle with something. Get up and lend them a hand."

Laura's connection to others in her community is a large part of her engagement. She feels that she understands the challenges that come with growing up in Paulatuk. She explains how she was there once too, and likes to empower other youth in the community to try and change their perspective of the community. She describes:

Not to say that older people don't relate to the youth, but I am right there with them. I know what they are going through and I can relate to them. I think that is going to be a plus side. ...They can look at me and relate to me, and I can look to them and relate to them. We can all relate to each other. We are all young and I have been young and have learned from my mistakes. I can help them like that.

Laura's perspective on her own engagement implies help is effective when having shared similar experiences and challenges. She does not see her young age as a barrier but as something that helps to promote engagement in her community. Laura positions herself as a mentor in the community, as someone who has also experienced similar challenges as other young people in the community. The "mistakes" Laura has made in her past have encouraged her to overcome more challenges that come her way. Her engagement has developed to help other youth

understand the role that “mistakes” can have in their lives, using them as motivation to become even more driven. Laura thinks that it is important that youth in her community are involved despite their age, and that they understand that, despite their own age, they too can have a positive impact on the lives of others. In Paulatuk, it can sometimes be difficult for youth to engage because the community is so isolated and some opportunities are limited. There are challenges to youth getting involved and excited about something because there is, oftentimes, a cost to the opportunity. Laura describes the challenge of isolation:

Isolation is such a huge issue here, it is not like you can just travel to the next community and get involved with something. ... To get kids to go out and compete in a tournament of some sort, you need to fundraise, and in a town of 350 people, that is not easy to do.

Laura suggests that the solution to this challenge is to get youth excited about engaging in meaningful ways within the community itself. She proposes that this can be accomplished by connecting youth to leadership roles so they can become leaders in the community, rather than mere participants in programs. The barrier of cost and isolation would then become less of a burden, and youth would be able to actually act on something that might help to minimize the impact of a social challenge within the community. Laura emphasizes the importance of role modeling, and showing others the impact that her own experiences have had on her. Laura explains how her experiences have sparked a lot of interest in the community. More specifically, she has observed other youth taking note of the great opportunities she has had and expressing an interest in doing similar things.

The Impact of Laura’s Engagement

Through our conversation, Laura reflects on ways her experience of engagement in her community has had an impact on her personal growth and the greater community.

Laura’s personal growth. Laura’s engagement has helped her develop positive values and morals. She feels that she is not the same person as she used to be and has learned many different skills. She is still developing as a person and values the growth process. Laura considers each experience to be important to her development. She explains that the growth is not the involvement itself but what it makes of you as you experience it. Laura’s engagement has left her feeling really empowered and feeling more confident in her skills and abilities as a leader. Laura describes this feeling of personal change:

If I wasn't involved in anything positive, then I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have the goals I have today ... all from the learning experiences that I have gathered from over the years. Umm, I feel more able to do things, more able to impact positively than maybe when I was younger. I know at the ACTIVATE conference they mentioned that, you know, like how young people sometimes feel like they can't do it because they are young, and I know I felt like that when I was younger and now I feel much more able because that is not the case at all.

Laura's engagement in her community has also instilled a sense of pride, as she is proud to be representing her community in a positive way. She is also proud of the youth whom she has engaged, the way they have represented Paulatuk at gatherings, and the changes she has witnessed in them. Laura is proud to be from Paulatuk and of her accomplishments so far. She states, "I am still representing this little area of the world, this little area of Canada... representing Paulatuk in a positive light, so that is good. I am a young leader here in Paulatuk. Its positive." She further reflects:

I am definitely not the same person I was when I first started off. I am a better person, completely. I have learned so many different skills. I have gained so much knowledge in terms of representing, leading. ... On a personal level, I have learned so many good moral values.

Although Laura described having several setbacks throughout her journey of engagement within her community, she voices a sense of resilience as she identifies these setbacks to be important to her overall experience. She explains that setbacks are what has made her stronger and have given her the motivation to set out and prove to others that they were wrong in how they viewed her potential to be a leader.

Impact on community. Laura described her perspective of change in community. Her engagement has played a role in helping galvanize people towards change:

If I see an issue, I know there are issues, but it doesn't just take myself. It is going to take everybody else. That is what it is going to take, good motivational skills to get people motivated and pumped up about doing something and then, there is almost always a positive outcome.

Laura feels that others in the community have shifted their perspective from being somewhat pessimistic about challenges they experience to being more optimistic about change

and creating positive opportunities within the community. When reflecting on a vision for the future, she shares:

I really hope to see the kids here, not only just the kids, but I really hope to see more people stepping up, taking charge, getting involved and making good things happen for this town because that is what we really need. You know, we need that. We don't need to fly in other role models to give speeches to the kids because we have so many here and they don't even know it yet. Right?

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined 'I' and 'we' portions of the excerpt above:

I really hope

I really hope

We really need

We need that

We don't need to

This poem demonstrates Laura's hope for her community, heard through her own desires alongside her perspective of what the community does and does not need. Laura's repetition of "I really hope" is powerful as she conveys a hope for change in the community. This 'hopefulness' is heard throughout Laura's conversation with me. The progression I heard as Laura says "we really need," to a more affirmative "we need that," to an even more firm "we don't need to," suggests a sense of energy or passion towards the potential of young people in her community. This was heard both as Laura described her engagement in the community and as she reflected on the impact her involvement has had on her community.

Laura has noticed an enhanced community pride as a result of her engagement. She perceives youth in the community having a greater appreciation towards their Inuit heritage and being from Paulatuk. When asked about the changes Laura sees in the youth she has worked with, she responds, "They were more eager to get involved in stuff like that, more eager to join things and come together to create opportunities for themselves." Additionally, she reflects that youth are gaining a more positive reputation in the community and, therefore, more youth have been selected to leave the community to represent Paulatuk at various events. Laura has noticed more youth in her community eager to become more engaged and motivated as a result of her efforts. More specifically, related to the breakdancing program Laura helped to organize, Laura

notices a newfound interest in dance among the youth who participated. Since returning from the workshop in Whitehorse, these youth continue to be active and have expressed interest in having Laura assist them in sustaining a dance program in the community.

Laura's Message

Laura wants others to see the importance of learning from their mistakes, rather than letting them become a barrier. She explains, "If negative things are happening to you, you can take that and turn it into motivation." After being "rejected" from the program when she was younger, Laura learned from that experience and gained self-awareness and the impact that she has on others. Reflecting back on this experience, she describes insight and demonstrates awareness on who she wants to be. She hopes to always be engaged in her community, and to continue motivating and engaging others to have a stronger role in creating change around them.

George

Participant Introduction and Background Information

George is a 22-year-old Inuk from Iqaluit, Nunavut. Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, is located on Baffin Island at the northern end of Frobisher Bay. Although English is his first language, he grew up speaking mostly Inuktitut until grade 2 when he switched over to schooling in English. Inuktitut continues to be the dominant language for those living in Iqaluit, with 28% of the population speaking Inuktitut at home (City of Iqaluit, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2012a). Despite 40% of the population being non-Inuit, Iqaluit remains rich with traditional Inuit culture and is home to many Inuit artists, filmmakers, and musicians (Nunavut Tourism, 2013a).

George experienced some challenges growing up in such a small community. He explains that, because the community was so small, it was difficult for him to avoid bullying from others. Bullying impacts youth from across the country. Canadian Institutes on Health Research (CIHR, 2013) report at least 1 in 3 adolescent students in Canada have experienced bullying. Additionally, any involvement in bullying increases risk of suicidal ideation (CIHR, 2013). Although statistics on bullying are limited for the North, a Nunatsiaq Online article written by Dawson (2013, May) discusses the premier of Nunavut's plans to help address bullying in schools through training staff and implementing new student codes of conduct.

Another challenge that George addresses in his conversation with me is the prevalence of smoking among young people. Smoking is especially common in Nunavut, with 59% of the population identifying as smokers, compared to 19% of the Canadian population. Moreover,

although smoking rates are generally higher in the North, the prevalence in Nunavut is almost twice as high as in the other territories, with Yukon reporting 25% and NWT reporting 33% (Statistics Canada, 2013). However, the results of the 2012 to 2013 Youth Smoking Survey indicate youth smoking rates are at an all-time low since it was first monitored in 1994 (Health Canada, 2014). Although this trend might be reflected in the North, results from this survey do not include data from the 3 territories.

George's Community Engagement Leading up to ACTIVATE

George's involvement in his community started after attending ACTIVATE. He explains that prior to ACTIVATE he was "not doing too much with helping out." He describes, "[I was] just playing soccer, breakdancing, that was about it. Sometimes I was a hermit, I would stay inside most of the day. That is about all I was doing."

Although George was not involved in his community prior to attending ACTIVATE, it is important to note that George's passion for breakdancing was central to his engagement after having attended ACTIVATE. George learned how to breakdance long before he attended ACTIVATE. He explains, "Breakdancing is not something that is easily accessible in Iqaluit." He first became exposed to it after being inspired by a dance show on MTV and, after watching the show, he and a friend started to teach themselves how to breakdance using online YouTube videos. He was fascinated with the idea of doing something different; he says, "I thought we could be cool if we were like that, nobody else here is doing that at all." After two months of dedication, he and his friend finally had mastered a headstand.

George's ACTIVATE Experience

George found out about the ACTIVATE program through a peer who encouraged him to apply. He reflects, "I was at home all the time and it was just the same old things. It was the perfect opportunity to get out there and try something new." He had never experienced anything like ACTIVATE before. He was nervous to meet with 50 other youth from across the country and a little unsure what to expect. George had never done something like this before; he had never had an experience with so many people he had never met before. Attending the ACTIVATE forum gave George a feeling of 'positiveness' that he wanted so badly to bring back to his community. George returned from ACTIVATE with a sense of empowerment to do something positive in his community. This inspired him to bring that feeling of 'positiveness' back home for others to experience.

Other delegates at ACTIVATE helped affirm George's ideas and goals. For George, attending ACTIVATE was a turning point whereby it created an opportunity for him to become aware of his potential as a young person in his community. He explains:

It is just like, because I was sort of heading down the wrong path around that point. And like just the whole environment, and support. Like everyone is just so positive and supportive at ACTIVATE, it is just like, I want other people to know how that feels, kind of thing. I kind of want to be a role model. I don't feel like I am quite there yet at all, because I haven't done my project, and I am still like partying and that stuff. And that is not the greatest role model, but I do want to become like a great role model in my community.

That initial experience of a positive and supportive environment made George want to be a role model and share the positive feeling with other people back home. He explains the feeling of having returned home after ACTIVATE:

It is that feeling that gives you the drive to want to do the positive things in your community. Like I honestly believe that [ACTIVATE] put me from going [down] the wrong path to being back on track and wanting to do the positive things. ... It just gave me a drive to want to do something in my community.

George's Experience after ACTIVATE

For George, attending the ACTIVATE program was "life changing." It gave him the desire to do more positive things in his community and intentionally recreate the support he received from others at ACTIVATE. He describes:

Um, I just say, like the whole positiveness around ACTIVATE. Like when I went, there is just so much inspiration, so much support, and it just like, wanted me to give a little bit of that positiveness back home. Like it really did change who I am in the best way possible. So I want, definitely want, to spread that positive-ness around in my community.

Attending ACTIVATE gave George the drive to want to do something in his community. He also describes feeling inspired by the other youth he met at ACTIVATE, reflecting that they encouraged him to make some changes in his life. One of the changes he noticed was the type of people that he hung out with. He indicated that, before ACTIVATE, he was "hang[ing] around the wrong crowd back home." However, he expressed wanting to make some changes to his peer

group—to surround himself with more supportive and positive people, similar to what he experienced at ACTIVATE. He describes others at ACTIVATE as “supporting [him] no matter what.” George reflected that the positive people he met at ACTIVATE are what helped him become aware of his strengths. With the support of other ACTIVATORS behind him, he developed an idea to become engaged through coaching a soccer program at the local high school. He felt this project idea would create an avenue for sharing with other youth in Iqaluit some of the positiveness he experienced at ACTIVATE.

Returning home from the ACTIVATE conference and driven to get started right away, George initiated a meeting with his high school principal to ask about potential coaching opportunities for the following fall. Unfortunately, all the spots were already assigned, but George was proud that he had taken the initiative and felt that he demonstrated to his principal his newly developed leadership and organizational skills. Upon his return, he was also eager to share with his dance instructor everything he had learned through ACTIVATE. This sparked an opportunity for him and a friend to help the instructor, and eventually teach breakdancing to youth in the community on their own. He describes this progression: “And then later down the line, she uh, gave me the opportunity to start teaching some classes while she was gone, and [now] ... we are running our own class without her.”

Sharing his experiences at ACTIVATE with his breakdancing instructor and high school principal gave George other opportunities to become more engaged in his community; for example, with the support of his dance instructor George started to teach dance to youth in the community. Sharing his ACTIVATE experience with people made him feel like others have more confidence in his abilities and, with that, adults in the community started to give him more opportunities to lead in the community. For the most part, his engagement in the community has been a really positive experience for George; however, he expresses sometimes experiencing tension with the support that he receives in the community, more specifically with respect to balancing the level of input he is able to have in the programs he helps to deliver.

Following ACTIVATE, George was offered opportunities to travel to several other communities in Nunavut for two projects he became involved with: the *Tobacco Has No Place Here* campaign and a suicide awareness initiative. Through these initiatives he was given the opportunity to share his love for dance in a meaningful way. He explains:

We just hope that the students that we teach continue to do what we were there to teach them. ... But we also gave a lot of information about what tobacco does to your body. So like, the point of that trip was to get the kids aware of what smoking does to their body and hoping that they stay smoke free with the information that we gave them. And have that information in the back of their minds sometimes... And for the suicide intervention week, it was about bring a positiveness to the community—so a light something to turn to—like a hobby or something, you can take up break dancing. If you love it, then it will be there for you all the time.

Throughout our conversation, George expressed the importance for him to help empower other youth in the community get healthy and be on the right track. George initiated and sustained his engagement through his desire to help prevent kids from, what he describes as, “go[ing] down the wrong path.” George expressed a desire to become a role model in his community because this, he feels, is important to helping others to also succeed. He elaborates:

That is what I like to focus on, just like, for the better. I used to smoke a lot of pot... and when I see 16, 17 year olds coming [to open soccer] and are super stoned, I try to have a short like—whether it is impactful or not—I try to have a short little conversation with them like, “It is not worth it, you are just wasting yourself.”

Despite George’s desire to become a role model in his community, he appears ambivalent about his own positioning as a role model in the community. Although George describes a deep desire to empower others through his engagement, he does not always feel as though he “acts like a role model” despite “[bringing] a positiveness to the community.” He describes himself as somebody others can look up to, but feels that he is still in a process of making personal changes for himself. His engagement has helped spark his desire to make some changes, for the community as well as lifestyle changes for himself.

The Impact of George’s Engagement

Throughout our conversation, George reflected on ways his experience of engaging in his community has had an impact on his personal growth and his community.

George’s personal growth. One of the biggest impacts George has experienced is on his growth. More specifically, George reports increased confidence, personal lifestyle changes, and an enhanced desire to become a better person. He describes feeling more confident in his own skills as a leader and feeling as though he has the skills to launch a project of his own. However,

despite these skills, he still expresses some hesitation about his ‘readiness’ towards initiating a community project. He expresses feeling like he can put to action some of his ideas after having learned new skills, and he gained confidence through both ACTIVATE and his involvement in the community. The following transcribed excerpt below seems to situate George’s ambivalence towards his readiness to initiate a community project:

Maybe I wasn’t really back then, but now I feel like I have learned. And I might not be ready even now, but I am ready to take that—I don’t know if risk is the right word. But to get out there and try with confidence—like I feel like I can do that now.

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined ‘I’ portions of the excerpt above:

I wasn’t really
I feel like I have learned
I might not be ready
I am ready
I don’t know
I feel like I can do that now

In this I-poem, I notice George’s reflection about himself after having learned new skills at ACTIVATE (“I feel like I have learned”), and discovering his own potential after experiencing the forum. However, I also hear ambivalence with respect to George’s readiness when he says, “I might not be ready” but then encourages himself by quickly responding with “I am ready.” The ambivalence heard above was a prevalent positioning throughout my conversation with George. It was noticeable both as he reflected on his desire to initiate, develop, and implement a community project and with respect to his smoking habits. However, George’s positioning changes after attending ACTIVATE, as he reflects on having learned new skills at ACTIVATE, discovering his potential, and being validated by his peers.

Given the nature of George’s involvement with ACTIVATE and the Tobacco Has no Place Here campaign, George has made some personal lifestyle changes. He explains that, because of ACTIVATE’s no-drug policy, he actually was able to quit smoking pot. He reflects that the opportunity to leave the community and not use pot for 5 days, coupled with being inspired by other young leaders, was enough for him to quit altogether. He describes himself as not feeling as “lazy and fried” as he was when smoking pot. He has noticed a change in his desire to travel across Nunavut for various projects. At the time of the interview, George

expressed some ambivalence about owning the title of “role model” because he was still smoking cigarettes. However, George describes wanting to become a better person through his process of engagement:

It has made me a better person as a whole ... especially how I mentioned that I wanted to be a role model. Wanting to do the better things, and wanting to make good decisions when given a decision. And like just to be, yeah, like a good role model, so people would rather be the good role model that I am, rather than be smoking pot with me. Which would probably be the reality if I didn't go to ACTIVATE.

In addition to lifestyle changes, George reports that his experiences with ACTIVATE and future community initiatives have also contributed to personal lifestyle changes. He elaborates:

I think in many ways, like just, like I said, being a role model and trying to do the most positive things—like I am trying to quit smoking, and that is something that I am determined to get done with in this year. And like, um, just sharing, sharing my experiences from like ACTIVATE and stuff—and try to help the youth go down the right path kind of thing.

As our conversation progresses, I sense a shift in George from ‘feeling fake’ to a sense of ‘personal awakening.’ George comes into a perception of himself that seems to reflect growth from having attending ACTIVATE; he says, “[the support from others] just made me want to go [away] from what I was doing before ACTIVATE, and I want to take the other path and I want to share it.” A sense of personal awakening emerges as George starts to see the path he was on as less desirable compared to the new possibilities inspired by ACTIVATE. George’s feelings of conviction about the new possibilities through ACTIVATE come through loudly in his desire for others to have similar experiences. He says, “I just want to show them that the better the things you do... [the] better [it will be] for you in the end.” George uses his own journey as a means to help empower others to see the potential for something “better.”

Impact on community. It was difficult for George to identify community changes as a result of his engagement. However, George has observed an increased interest in breakdancing among some of the youth. He describes seeing more youth in the community becoming engaged and passionate about dance. He explains:

We had two students who never missed a class. They started off with their hands in their pockets—and like not sure what they were going to do. And by the end of it, when we are

teaching a routine, they try to get ahead of us teachers (laughs) and have way more confidence in what they are learning and trying to do. Yeah, so like, they went from having their hands in their pockets and looking shy with their movements, to like the second we mention a movement, the kid will just do it and be so proud of himself. I think it gives them a bit of confidence too.

George's Message

George feels he is still on a journey of connecting with and inspiring others. He explains, “I want to make a difference with the youth and try to get them to make the right decisions and stuff like that, and try to help them not go down the wrong path.” He hopes that his story will inspire others to be more involved and lead to a future generation of youth who are passionate about something—stressing it can be “anything”—but who use that passion to help others. He says, “Do what you feel really passionate about. Like, if you want to help youth at risk, then help youth at risk. Start with something really small.” George plans to continue to share this message through breakdancing and possibly even use soccer as a tool to share the message in the future.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion

In this study, I explored the research question “What narratives emerge, and are co-constructed, when exploring the experience of Aboriginal youth who engage in a youth development program aimed at fostering youth engagement?” More specifically I, as researcher, and the participants co-constructed narratives that reflect how Aboriginal youth initiate, sustain, and perceive the impact of engagement in a program that promotes youth engagement, such as ACTIVATE. Participants spoke about their engagement in the community stemming from their experiences attending the ACTIVATE forum. I discuss each of these aspects of engagement below, bringing forth the value of a social constructionist perspective in understanding youth engagement. I end by presenting implications for programs that engage youth and for practitioners who work with Aboriginal youth, as well as discussing limitations and recommendations for future research.

Initiating Engagement

Participants described the initiation of their engagement in community as relating to their community context and pre-ACTIVATE community involvement.

Community context. Community context is especially important given the uniqueness of the communities identified in this study. Challenges and limitations among Aboriginal communities are prevalent, but are exasperated in the North. Drawing on my personal experiences living and working both on-reserve in Northern Alberta and in a small fly-in community in Nunavut, I witnessed first-hand some of the challenges particular to small and isolated communities in the North. For example, the effects of 24-hour daylight on children and youth in the community, funding challenges associated with traveling outside the community, limited infrastructure or access to supplies, and the chaos that can be triggered by alcohol associated with a ‘beer dance,’ BINGO night, or even pay-day. That being said, I also experienced positive aspects of living in the North that were very different from Aboriginal communities in the south. For example, the proximity and vastness of the land, an overall heightened sense of culture and tradition, and a sense of simplicity and interconnectedness that I attribute to geographic isolation.

Community context seemed to play a role in how participants became involved in youth engagement as well as the nature of their involvement. Participants in this study live in

communities that they describe as having undergone significant change and transition as a result of a colonial presence. These changes were both a source of opportunity and struggle that seemed to shape their engagement. Economic growth and community development seemed to provide opportunities for engagement, such as available infrastructure for programs and funding opportunities. With respect to the nature of their involvement, participants did not specifically name responding to colonization as the main impetus for their engagement, however they seemed to conscientiously engage in their community as a response to challenges that have arisen as a result of colonization and rapid community development, such as high rates of alcoholism, smoking, and suicide. This finding is important in an Aboriginal context, as youth engagement may be initiated, in part, as a response to the impacts of historical colonization (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009; RCAP, 1995). Therefore, it seems the process of effectively engaging Aboriginal youth should include understanding and accounting for the cultural and community contexts in which the youth live, as these contexts can inform youths' motives for initiating engagement.

Pre-ACTIVATE involvement. While it is proposed through the CEYE model that there are both initiators and barriers to a young person's engagement, the literature is less clear on *how* youth become involved in programs that promote community engagement. However, the results of this study suggest that community involvement often precedes participation in more formal youth engagement programs like ACTIVATE. This prior involvement reflects engagement as a dynamic process and was important for participants in several ways. First, it exposed participants to developing and validating certain skills and interests that they could carry forward and utilize in future engagement. Second, for some participants it became a gateway to learning about further engagement opportunities through a program like ACTIVATE.

With respect to prior community involvement, participants seemed to be involved in a variety of activities, oftentimes described as being rooted in their cultural values. Some activities were more structured, such as being a part of a community group or club, while others were less structured in nature, such as volunteering or fundraising with no specific schedule. Through their prior community involvement, many participants gained a positive reputation in the community that seemed to expose, prepare, and connect them to subsequent community engagement opportunities. These findings on pre-program involvement are consistent with literature that suggests both unstructured and structured activities provide young people with access to support

networks and the tools they need to thrive throughout their development (Larson, 2000; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006; Lerner et al, 2005; Mahoney, Schweder, & Stattin, 2002).

Participants' motivations for community involvement can be understood as a response to community challenges and their desire to do something positive. All six participants identified their community engagement as emerging from a place of concern, and in many cases a perceived lack of action from members of their community to address important social issues. This seemed to foster a sense of personal responsibility among participants to initiate change in their community. Additionally, some participants' desire to (re)connect to their culture helped initiate their community involvement. Understanding the participants' motivation this way is consistent with other authors who have stressed the importance of creating meaningful engagement experiences for youth by acknowledging that engagement is not only a behavioural process, but also an affective and cognitive process that reflects youths' motivation to engage (CEYE, 2012; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002; Sharp, Caldwell, Graham, & Ridenour, 2006).

Similarly, the literature suggests that youth engagement can be fostered when engagement opportunities complement youths' personal goals, such as pursuing a purpose in life (Dawes & Lawson, 2011). Findings in this study suggest that meaningful engagement involves the opportunity for youth to identify and take ownership of goals they feel passionate about, or causes they feel personally responsible for addressing. In this case, responding to community issues seems to be an important intrinsic motivating factor for initiating Aboriginal youths' engagement in their community.

Sustaining Engagement

It is an oversimplification to view engagement solely as a particular practice or program. Through the social constructionist lens of this study, engagement is understood not as a binary process where an individual is either engaged or not engaged, but rather as a process that changes and can be built upon over time. Below I discuss what was found to sustain *ACTIVATE participation* (i.e., engagement experiences specific to attending the ACTIVATE forum) and what was found to sustain *community engagement* (i.e., engagement experiences other than attending the ACTIVATE forum).

ACTIVATE participation. With respect to their participation in the ACTIVATE forum, study participants identified the following as important to sustaining their engagement: (a)

establishing meaningful relationships, (b) recognizing their potential, and (c) being inspired to contribute to change. Meaningful relationships were formed through a sense of connectedness with other youth and adult leaders at ACTIVATE, which helped foster confidence as participants received validation for their ideas. By forming positive relationships with others, participants explained that they became more aware of their potential as youth leaders in the community, thereby feeling empowered and capable of initiating change. As participants returned home from ACTIVATE, they felt inspired to implement a community initiative of their own. This inspiration was fostered from both a sense of hope, and increased awareness, for community change.

These results are aligned with the literature showing both positive relationships and empowerment may stem from engagement experiences. Firstly, the results echo literature that suggests positive relationships, both with peers and supportive adults, help to sustain engagement (Adamchak, 2009; CYCC Network, 2013; Jekielek, et al., 2002). These results also suggest that recognizing one's potential helps youth sustain their engagement. Previously, this notion has been represented in the literature as an outcome of youth engagement, rather than a sustaining factor. Also consistent with the literature are results showing engagement as a process that allows youth to see their voices lead to action, in turn promoting their resilience and making positive change in their community (Dallago, et al., 2009; Serido, Borden & Perkins, 2011). Therefore, these results suggest that engaging youth in meaningful ways, through programs such as ACTIVATE, can also be an empowering experience, which not only contributes to the overall impact of engagement, but also helps sustain a young person's involvement over time.

Community engagement. Looking beyond participation in the ACTIVATE forum and more generally at engagement in the community, participants in this study identified the following as having a role in sustaining their engagement within their communities: (a) pre-ACTIVATE community involvement, (b) ACTIVATE participation, (c) adult support, (d) peers, (e) culture and tradition, and (f) overcoming barriers.

Pre-ACTIVATE community involvement. Results from this study indicate that youths' community involvement that took place before engaging in a youth development program should not be overlooked. In addition to being a key initiator to engagement, such involvement can also influence how engagement can be sustained over time. Interestingly, the degree to which ACTIVATE-in-Action projects were completed after attending the program coincided with

participants' involvement in their communities prior to attending the ACTIVATE program. While the literature does not currently explore the relationship between a youths' pre-program community involvement and involvement subsequent to attending a youth development program, the results in this study indicate that pre-program community involvement may prime youth favourably for sustained engagement in their community.

ACTIVATE participation. All participants reported an increase in community involvement after participating in the ACTIVATE program, which they found to be a positive experience overall. In turn, attending the program seemed to promote future community engagement through personal capacity building. All six participants felt more confident about their ability to implement an ACTIVATE-in-Action project; learned new skills, such as grant writing and networking; and gained access to the resources needed to plan and lead a community initiative. But perhaps more importantly, as suggested by participants' increased attention in the interviews, ACTIVATE provided them with the space to make personal connections, identify their passions and interests, and share and receive validation from others for community projects. Ultimately, rather than focus on the skills and knowledge acquired through ACTIVATE, most participants focused on how attending ACTIVATE was a "stepping stone" for future ongoing and sustained community involvement.

The literature reflects these findings, particularly around the CYCC Network's (2014) guiding principle of positive relationships, as participants spoke emphatically about how the connections they made helped support their future community initiatives. These findings also shed insight into the meaningfulness of experiences, something that is also very well established in the literature, suggesting youth engagement is sustained when youth are provided with meaningful tasks that build on skills that contribute to their overall development (CYCC Network, 2014; Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006). However, results from this study help further qualify meaningful involvement as including an opportunity to build project ideas stemming directly from youths' passions and interests. Therefore, sustained engagement may attest to a program's capacity to effectively give voice to what youth find meaningful and provide useful tools and resources necessary to pursue community projects.

Adult support. All of the participants had supportive relationships with adults in the community, which played a central role in sustaining their engagement in the community over time. These adults helped provide the participants with support, resources, and infrastructure for

their initiatives, which often helped minimize barriers to implementing and sustaining community initiatives. More broadly, adult role models—whose presence varied in the different communities—were seen as mentors and positive symbols for the younger generation to aspire to. These findings align with a body of research that shows positive adult relationships are very important with regards to youth engagement (CYCC Network, 2013; Gurstein, Lavato, & Ross, 2003; Hart, 1992; Paterson & Panessa, 2008; Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006; Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011; Shier, 2001; Zinck et al., 2013), especially for youth living in marginalized communities (Jekielek et al., 2002).

However, while adult support is key to enabling sustained engagement, a delicate balance of shared voice between youth and adults is critical. The participants reported tension when they did not feel that their ideas and perspectives were being heard, or when they perceived the adult to “take over” their initiative. The participants described being able to navigate the tension through peer support and continue to pursue their initiatives. Additionally, the high turnover rate of adult mentors common among Northern communities was also reported as a barrier to sustained engagement. These findings suggest that the role of adult support in the community extends beyond behavioural elements of engagement (Gurstein, Lavato, & Ross, 2003; Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005), and requires careful consideration of balancing voices and adults demonstrating patience as youth progress through their engagement.

Peers. Participants reported the importance of connecting with other youth who share similar interests, as doing so helped them develop positive relationships that encouraged them to get involved in the community in the first place, as well as sustain their engagement over time. Almost all of the initiatives described in the interviews involved collaboration with other youth from their community. More specifically, some participants explained how these connections helped them build confidence, recognize their individual and collective capacity as community leaders, and validate their ideas for community initiatives. However, participants sometimes reported challenges, including a lack of consistency and reliability among their peers.

Role modeling was another interesting element of peer support, as some participants noticed an increase in young role models in their communities that their own engagement had helped inspire. With their involvement in various initiatives—both within and outside the community—some of the participants themselves were viewed as role models by other youth. These positive relationships youth formed with both adults and peers through the process of

engagement increased their sense of being supported. Participants reported that having other role models and closer connections to peers in the community enhanced their overall social support network. Within the participant perspective, role modelling can be symbolic and help inspire a movement for community change—when young people see their peers as role models, it can spark a desire to become role models themselves.

Although the role of positive relationships in youth engagement is well addressed in the literature, the focus is largely on the role of adult mentors. Surprisingly, there is less of a focus on how peer support might foster and support youths' community engagement. However, there is some literature that points to the value of youth peer support, which can be understood as a strategy of "youth helping youth" (CMAH, 2007, p. 4). Additionally, peer support can take shape through a variety of informal and formal ways, such as peer support groups, peer-run programs, and peers as providers of service and support (CMAH, 2007). With respect to role modeling, CMAH (2007) suggests peer support in the North can be a challenge because of the lack of local role models. Although some participants in this study noted a lack of adult role models in their community, many expressed an increasing number of young role models. There appears to be value in exploring more closely not only the ways in which peer support and role modeling may contribute to a youth's engagement but how.

Culture and tradition. Participants' sustained engagement in their community is inevitably connected to culture and tradition. For some, engagement is part of their culture and 'way of life,' stemming from Inuit and First Nation values of helping others. More specifically, the connection between engagement and culture can also be related to concerns about land and environmental sustainability, and encouraging social sustainability through a 'pay-it-forward' model that is focused on leaving a positive legacy for future generations.

The literature on youth engagement suggests that both culture and context are important principles to youth engagement (Crooks, Chiodo, & Thomas, 2009; CYCC Network, 2013). This is noteworthy as it relates to the tension expressed by the Aboriginal youth involved in *Feathers of Hope* when they describe feeling "caught between two worlds"—modern and traditional—yet feeling disconnected from both (Feathers of Hope, 2013). Similar to those consulted in *Feathers of Hope*, participants in this study expressed having a responsibility—rooted in their culture—to respond positively to the challenges that they experience in their community. This finding aligns with research by Crooks and colleagues (2009) that suggests engagement should be culturally

relevant for engagement to be meaningful for the youth involved. Additionally, these findings suggest meaningful engagement provides the space for the youth themselves to identify ways to incorporate cultural elements into programs and initiatives that directly affect them.

Overcoming barriers. As the research on youth engagement is limited, little is known about what youth identify or experience as barriers in their community engagement. However, my conversations with participants revealed insight into barriers they experienced in sustaining their engagement, which could be characterized as either external barriers and personal barriers. External barriers were outside of the participant's control and more structural or logistical in nature. These barriers include limited funding and time, as well as the physical distance involved in leaving the community to pursue education in elsewhere in Canada. Many of the participants also described experiencing barriers of a personal nature, such as perceived community attitudes or mindsets that they felt inhibited some community members from seeing the potential for change.

Additionally, some participants described the importance of the personal wellness of youth leaders, including themselves. Participants voiced that tension can develop when youth leaders struggle with their own personal challenges, which are sometimes related to the issues their initiatives aim to address. These personal challenges can interfere with sustaining their engagement and their ability to help other youth. Such a barrier is especially difficult in the Northern context because of the limited access to professional help and the stigma attached to talking about personal issues with others in a small community. And finally, many participants experienced the pressure of feeling they are under the scrutiny of the community and have to meet expectations as a leader in their community, resulting in a fear of making mistakes or "letting the community down."

Participants recognized that effectively managing barriers, whether external or personal, could significantly contribute to their growth and development, as well as deepen their engagement. These findings emphasize that engagement likely does not occur without obstacles. However, participants interestingly provide insight into the broader value of finding ways to effectively manage challenges and barriers when they do arise. While there is not much information in the literature on the degree to which engaged youth credit the lessons learned from overcoming barriers, these findings lend credence to the notion that the needs and capacities of a young person should be considered when implementing youth engagement

programs. Finally, while the literature acknowledges that tailoring programs to youth should account for any limitations regarding their skills and resources available (Crooks, Chiodo, & Thomas, 2009; CYCC Network, 2013; Hart, 1992), findings from this study suggest that youths' potential to overcome barriers and be resilient within their community's challenges should not be underestimated.

Impact of Engagement

Findings of this study reveal that youths' engagement experiences had both a personal impact on participants and a perceived impact within the community.

Positive impact on self. Participants in the study reported noticing five main changes in themselves as a result of their engagement experiences, including personal growth, increased confidence, skill development, and an enhanced connection to culture and community.

Personal growth. All participants experienced personal growth by virtue of having engaged in their communities, with many experiencing a shift from being a "typical careless teenager" to a responsible and caring member of their community. More specifically, engagement helped to promote positive values and morals within some participants, as well as a sense of pride for their accomplishments and the potential for leadership in the community. The research on Positive Youth Development (PYD) suggests that *character* is a component of positive development that—along with confidence, competence, connection, and caring—can sometimes lead a young person to contribute positively to their community. It seems that participants developed character through their engagement as they described themselves becoming more responsible, proud, and (re)connected to their culture and community. The research is also aligned with this finding, as engagement can lead to an enhanced sense of belonging and overall personal growth (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Yohalem & Martin, 2007). More specifically, meaningful engagement was experienced as an empowering process that contributed to personal growth, insofar as it values the perspectives of youth and provides the space for them to see their ideas lead to action, in turn providing potential for positive change in their community (Dallago, et al., 2009; Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011; Ungar, 2013).

Increased confidence. All participants gained an increased sense of confidence, both in having been a part of the ACTIVATE program and having engaged in their communities more broadly. Some expressed feeling more confident as a result of the affirmation and support they received from peers, while also gaining confidence in their ability to "learn from their

experiences.” Similar to these findings, confidence as an outcome of youth engagement is largely represented in the literature. Research on PYD, which can be promoted through the process of youth engagement, also proposes confidence as an outcome of positive development. These findings, along with previous research, stress that when youth develop confidence through their role in improving communities, a sense of empowerment is fostered (Dallago et al., 2009; Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011).

Skill development. Interestingly, skills development was not a large focus of discussion for the participants, although many reported developing new skills through ACTIVATE and engagement in their communities. These skills included grant writing, networking, public speaking, and problem solving. In contrast, skill development is well established in the literature as a component of youth engagement programming. More specifically, research suggests that engagement can also contribute to communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Yohalem & Martin, 2007), which are closely reflected in the experiences of the participants in this study. This slight shift in focus, from the results of this study and the focus in the literature, suggests that the emphasis on skill development may be different from the youth perspective. For example, perhaps youth focus more on the initiatives they can put into place, and the change it can lead to, rather than the skills they acquire in the process.

Connecting to culture and community. In addition to helping initiate and sustain youth engagement, participants’ experiences suggest that an enhanced connection to culture and community is also an impact of their engagement. Many participants learned something new about their community and/or culture through their engagement. Furthermore, some participants expressed a sense of personal awakening with respect to—and a greater appreciation for—their Inuit or First Nations identity and culture. The current literature is clear that youth programs need to account for culture. While research in this area has yet to explore the specific impact of engagement on cultural connectedness, it is suggested that engagement can enhance youths’ community awareness (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Yeung, 2007; Yohalem & Martin, 2007; Zeldin, et al., 2009). The participants in this study incorporated culture into their initiatives in ways that felt meaningful for them and for participating community members, such as throat singing and cultural festivals. This suggests that engagement offers a means for Aboriginal youth to develop a greater connection to their communities, and provides the space for them to take an

active role in creating, and possibly having input into, meaningful, culturally relevant programming. Although “measuring” the impact of youth engagement on Aboriginal community healing was not within the scope of this study, there is literature proposing a link between community healing and reconnecting with cultural traditions (Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, 2009). It stands to reason that youth engagement may have a role in healing and is worth looking at more closely.

Negative impact on self. While both the literature and participants in this study speak to the positive outcomes of engagement experiences, there was some discussion about negative impacts, which reflects barriers previously discussed. These barriers—if not properly addressed—can create negative experiences within engagement that impact youth’s sense of self. Barriers include overwhelming pressure from the community regarding community change, further perpetuated by the participants’ sense of personal responsibility for community change. Although participants received recognition for their efforts in the community—which included being congratulated, validated, and thanked by others—some participants felt tension as they believed other community members needed to also “step up” and assist in a greater change movement.

While the literature emphasizes the need for adults to recognize that youth are not “superhuman” and require targeted resources (Mafle’o & Api, 2009, p. 417), research has not yet focused on the impact that pressure from the community may have on the youth who are actively engaged, especially when that engagement is tied to a struggle that affects the community at large. There are lessons to be learned from participants in this study. By simply being engaged, these youth seemed to experience additional challenges as a result of their newfound responsibilities and occasionally finding themselves under the scrutiny of the community. Ultimately, although engagement has many positive impacts, there may be added pressures stemming from the community, whether actual or perceived, that youth might experience once active in the community.

Perceived impact on community. Many of the participants had difficulty describing the perceived impact of their engagement within the community. Understandably, some participants did not know the degree to which community change may have occurred as a result of their initiatives. However, they were able to articulate observations of how others responded to their

involvement, which included increased interest within the community and empowering and motivating others toward change.

Increasing interest within the community. Some participants perceived an overall increase in community interest with regards to activities related to participants' projects or initiatives. Examples include more appreciation for music after attending the community's first music festival, more willingness and open-mindedness to breakdancing after attending a class, and more cultural pride after learning throat singing. Following exposure to these new areas of interest, participants described community members, youth, and adults alike. While not explicitly reflected in the literature, these findings suggest that engagement can bring community members together through newfound, shared interests.

Motivating and empowering others towards change. Participants felt that others in the community became more motivated or empowered as a result of their engagement initiatives. In this study, participants observed *motivation* in others when they heard them express a desire to take action toward certain change, whereas they observed *empowerment* when others expressed or demonstrated an ability to create change. For example, participants perceived some community members as more motivated to create positive change in their own lives (e.g., living a healthier lifestyle, adopting a more positive outlook); while other members actually increased their involvement in the community. The literature on youth engagement has mostly focused on empowerment as an individual impact of engagement; when youth realize they have the potential to positively impact the community, they feel empowered (Dallago, et al., 2009; Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011). Although there has been some recognition that the individual impact of engagement can also impact the greater community through enhanced civic engagement, volunteerism, employment, and active citizenship (National League of Cities, 2010), this study's findings suggest that engaged youth can directly motivate and empower other community members. To this end, engagement can be considered an empowering experience; when a young person sees their voice lead to action, it may play a part in influencing others and promoting overall positive change in the community because the youth who live there are more empowered themselves. This finding is especially important for the Aboriginal context, given youth engagement's potential to galvanize community members' interest in responding to community issues prevalent in the North (Dickason, 2006; Frideres & Gadacz, 2008; Government of

Nunavut et al., 2010; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009; RCAP, 1995).

In the next section, I begin by reflecting on possible influences of my cultural positioning as a researcher when conducting this study. I then discuss the methodology I applied in this study, taking note of its merits and limitations. Specifically, I reflect on the YPAR-inspired framing of this study and my experience applying the *Listening Guide* as a tool for analysis. Following these reflections, I discuss the implications of the study's findings as they relate to youth service-providers, youth programming, and community wellness.

Cultural Positioning of Researcher

When conducting cross-cultural research within a social-constructionist lens such as with this study, it is important that I acknowledge that my positioning as a cultural outsider shaped encounters with the participants on both micro and macro levels. On a micro-level, I encountered a few cultural differences during the interview process that are worth noting. With respect to language, several participants identified Inuktitut as their first language, or as a language they spoke most at home. Participants sometimes used Inuktitut slang in our conversation that I had to ask clarification about. Additionally, conducting the majority of interviews by distance may have created cultural barriers for some participants, given that they were speaking to me via Skype, rather than the more culturally appropriate face-to-face interactions. On a macro level, my cultural positioning is inevitably different from that of the participants who identified primarily as Inuk and have transgenerational experiences of colonization. This positioning does not allow me to fully understand the challenges they face as a result of colonization and historical marginalization. More specifically, my white privilege presents me with opportunities that my participants may not have and may also have impacted the way the participants told their stories to me. While unable to ascertain definitively, it is possible that participants may not have spoken directly about colonization with me because of my social location.

Discussion on Methodology

This study attempted to incorporate methodological elements that both value and keep the youth voice at the forefront, by preserving the context of shared stories and staying true the voice of the participants. Inspired by a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) framework, this study also incorporated elements that embrace the strength of youth. The *Listening Guide* was used as a tool for analysis to attune to the multiple layers and voices heard in the stories shared

by the participants. Below, I reflect on how I integrated YPAR elements into the study and used the *Listening Guide* as a tool for analysis.

Reflection on YPAR-inspired research. YPAR expands on the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) by incorporating an element that embraces the strength of youth by conducting research “with” as opposed to “on” youth (Camarota & Fine, 2008, p. vii). Using a YPAR-inspired approach for this study acknowledges that young people, despite their age and often assumed lack of skills and abilities, have the capacity to create change in their communities. Involving Aboriginal youth participants in the research process was important for validating and integrating their voice into this research and future dissemination.

I decided to use a YPAR-inspired approach because it was also well suited for the nature of the research and it compliments the principles of youth engagement. However, as a Masters project, a true YPAR research study would not have been feasible given the lengthy process required. Therefore, I integrated elements of YPAR into the research framework that would encourage participant involvement. These elements included eliciting suggestions for the interview protocol, input around avenues and venues for the interview to take place, suggestions for other possible sources of data, feedback on interpretations of the data, and finally initiating a reflection for how this research could lead to follow-up action.

When eliciting suggestions for the interview protocol, I was able to broaden my understanding of aspects of engagement the participants considered to be important to their experience, which shed light on important elements for the research study. For example, through Martha I learned about the importance of travel—something that I had not initially included in the interview protocol. The feedback received for selecting other sources of data was also quite insightful. Through a collaborative process via email, participants assisted me with additional questions I had about their communities. For example, during the data analysis I became curious about access to alcohol in the communities given participant initiatives that centered on addressing substance use. This information is not readily available online, but participants were able to point me to other sources of data (e.g., band offices, news, and research articles).

Finally, another interesting element of this YPAR-inspired approach was the component of the interview that initiated reflection for how this research could lead to participants’ follow-up action. To my surprise, this invitation sparked many of the participants to reflect on their engagement as a whole, as heard through statements like “Being able to tell you everything at

once, kind of makes me want to be a role model that much more” (George), and “It was really good to reflect; I don’t always look back on how it all started, but it was good to remind myself that something was accomplished along the way” (Laura). Reflecting on their participation in the interview process helped participants easily identify the message they wanted to share with others. These rich messages include: the importance of Aboriginal youth being encouraged and supported, taking advantage of opportunities, not being afraid to make mistakes, focusing on passions and interests, and using community challenges as a motivation for engagement. All participants also identified whom they wanted to share the message with and how they would do it. Most participants directed their message to the younger generation living in their community. Additionally, one participant wanted to direct her message to adults in her community, as she emphasized the greater need for partnerships with Elders.

Overall, the YPAR-inspired framing helped me to identify and become more aware of what the participants identified as being most meaningful to them about their engagement experience, which helped inform and provide additional scope for my analysis of the data based on their perspective.

Reflection on narrative analysis using the *Listening Guide*. Gilligan and colleagues’ *Listening Guide* (2003) allowed me to analyze the data from several different perspectives. I found the first step, *Listening for the Plot*, helpful in situating myself with the participants’ stories; as well as noting my own observations, dispositions, and resonance within and positioning towards the stories being told. I enjoyed how this step systematically attuned me to my personal reactions to the text, and helped me navigate the data as it related to my personal experiences with ACTIVATE and living in the North.

The second step, *Generating ‘I-poems,’* helped me observe the participants’ positioning within their stories while providing insight into their internal process of engagement. Initially, it was challenging to observe different tones and rhythms in the transcripts and I had to “train my ear” for it. I found it helpful to choose a specific excerpt of text within a transcript that represented a profound element of the participant’s story, noticeable through a change in tone or rhythm within specific excerpts of text. Through this process, I also gained insight into the participants’ internal positioning toward both themselves and the collective community as it related to their engagement.

The third step, *Listening for Contrapuntal Voices*, involved shifting focus from ‘what’ the participant spoke about to ‘how’ he or she spoke about it. Once I distinguished the difference between a more common theme (content or subject in text) and a voice (quality or affect of what was said), it became easier to attune to multiple layers of voice. This step really helped me ‘hear’ the various elements of the participants’ story, as I listened for complex nuances that I may not have been able to observe as readily through other tools of analysis, such as the prevalence of connectedness across the engagement process.

The final step, *Composing an Analysis*, I also found difficult because the authors of the *Listening Guide* do not offer specific guidelines on how to do this step. Ultimately, the onus is on the researcher to decide how to approach this step, given his or her unique positioning within the research context (i.e., the research question, the nature of the study, and how to best honour participant offerings within certain cultural context). I based my approach to this step through an integrated composition of my interpretation of the process of the first three previous steps. Overall, the *Listening Guide* provided me with the steps to attune to the various layers and complexities of the stories being told, and helped to preserve the participants’ voice throughout the process.

Implications

This study’s findings provide interesting insights about youth engagement, which may be of assistance to service-providers who work with Aboriginal youth, such as youth workers, program developers, youth organizations, and youth counsellors. The findings, specific to the context of Aboriginal youth engaging in their communities, have implications for: (1) understanding what makes engagement meaningful; (2) building on pre-program community involvement; (3) fostering support through positive adult and peer relationships; and finally (4) engagement as a social justice approach to Aboriginal health and wellness.

Implication #1: Understanding what makes engagement meaningful among Aboriginal youth. Seeking to understand what makes youth development programs meaningful for Aboriginal youth may have a bearing on initiating and sustaining their engagement. The results of this study have helped to further qualify and deepen the understanding of “meaningful participation” as part of the definition of youth engagement. Programs that give youth the flexibility to take what they learn and ‘make it their own’ provides the opportunity for youth to create meaningful experiences that both reflect their individuality and address community issues

that touch them. Additionally, programs that allow space for Aboriginal youth to explore and identify what they find personally meaningful can inform how youth subsequently engage within their community. This can be achieved by directly involving youth in programming decisions in a way where their perspectives are heard, valued, and supported. These empowering environments help engage youth through the cognitive and affective process of engagement, which helps to further inform the definition of youth engagement itself. Doing so may also increase the likelihood that the program is culturally relevant. Equipped with the skills, tools, and resources gained in part through the program, youth can seek purposeful opportunities within their communities and engage from a place of concern for social issues.

Implication #2: Building on pre-program community involvement. Many Aboriginal youth already have experiences of being involved in their communities prior to participating in a program, which is often not recognized within program development and implementation. This prior involvement—even if “passive” or unstructured in nature—seems, in part, to shape youths’ subsequent engagement in their communities. Programs may render engagement more meaningful for youth by capitalizing on this type of pre-program community involvement and “meeting youth where they are at.” Exploring previous community involvement may also bring to light potential motivating factors for individual youths’ engagement and the strengths that they possess and could utilize moving forward. Service-providers who tailor their programs to account for previous experiences may help youth progress to more active and meaningful forms of engagement by recognizing, accommodating, and building on skills, knowledge, and motivations that youth already possess.

Implication #3: Fostering support through positive adult and peer relationships. Through positive youth development programs, youth build relationships with adults and peers that enhance their network(s) of support. This happens when youth develop relationships in which they feel both valued and heard by adults and peers involved with the program itself and in the greater community. These programs promote a positive environment while connecting youth to additional sources of support. These connections can be established through interactions between peers and adults, as well as through role modelling and peer support—both of which have yet to be explored in the context of youth engagement—that provide youth with something positive they can aspire towards. Through these positive relationships, youth learn to navigate their own challenges as they feel they have the support of others around them. The potential for

strengthening support networks is especially pertinent in the North, where professional support might be limited or difficult to access (Government of Nunavut et al., 2010). Therefore, service-providers should consider integrating elements into programs that will foster positive relationships between peers and adults, both in the forms of peer support and role modelling.

Implication #4: Engagement as a social justice approach to strengthen Aboriginal wellness. Youth engagement programs embody social justice principles by giving voice to the youth involved, sharing power through decision making, facilitating personal awareness, building on strengths, and giving youth the tools for social change (Goodman, et al., 2004). Youth engagement provides a means to respond to community challenges by galvanizing the youth perspective and placing value on the ideas of youth, reflecting the notion of equity. Service-providers are able to partner with youth, sharing decision making and redressing the traditional power imbalance that exists between youth and adults. Youth engagement also provides the means to integrate cultural elements into programs. In turn, the process of youth engagement offers the opportunity to understand and account for the cultural and community contexts within which the youth live. Youth engagement is a useful and culturally relevant approach to working with Aboriginal youth, as it provides opportunities for them to develop autonomy and learn and develop new skills. Personal awareness, fostered through engagement, helps to promote a sense of hope and empower the youth involved.

Aligned with a social justice perspective is the notion that the challenges people experience do not reside within the person, but rather within the experienced inequality within society (Kenny & Medvide, 2012). Engagement is a means for youth to gain tools and eventually initiate change from within the community itself, including the means for community issues to be identified and addressed by the youth. This is consistent with decolonizing approaches that stress that change among Aboriginal communities must be initiated from within the community itself to minimize the risk of ‘outside helpers and healers’ from imposing values that are not culturally compatible (Kirmayer et al., 2007; Smith, 1999). Programs that foster engagement serve as a means to work with youth in ways that are both culturally and contextually relevant as the youth themselves shape program development through their ownership and contribution. This becomes especially relevant for non-Aboriginal service-providers who work with Aboriginal youth, as community engagement provides the opportunity for change to be initiated by the youth who are directly impacted by the challenges they experience in their communities. As

agents of social change within their communities, youth who are meaningfully engaged can develop agency in their own health, wellbeing, and development that can be passed on to future generations.

Delimitations

The results of this study are limited in that they only explore the engagement experience of youth who took part in the ACTIVATE program and, consequently, do not capture the experience of engagement through other programs. Other engagement programs may provide youth with different experiences or may reflect the principles of engagement in different ways. Although this study is limited to the experiences gained through the ACTIVATE program, some of these findings may resonate with other positive youth development programs.

Second, the youth interviewed in this study were all ‘actively’ involved in their communities, or have returned to ACTIVATE as a youth volunteer. This is not always the case—some youth do not continue to engage after having attended the ACTIVATE program. As a result, this study cannot account for the experiences of these youth and cannot provide a complete representation of all individuals participating in ACTIVATE. It should be noted that the participant sample may be biased toward individuals having had a positive experience at ACTIVATE, who have “bought into” the idea of engaging in their community, and are particularly committed to social change. Therefore the participant sample may not address the experience of youth who were less engaged in the community, despite having attended ACTIVATE. Additionally, the participant sample was not balanced across gender, geographic location, or Aboriginal ancestry. Engagement as a complex, context-based process means that it can take many different forms and can occur across many different contexts; while the current participant sample does not exhaust all possibilities for engagement experiences, the resulting narratives demonstrate the “fluidity” of engagement.

Finally, as it was not feasible to conduct all interviews in person, opportunities to build rapport with participants were limited and it was not possible to consider nonverbal observations in the analysis of all of the interviews. With respect to the two in-person interviews that were conducted, the experiences felt more natural and less rigid; they felt much more like conversations than interviews. In two of the four interviews conducted by distance, the experiences were similar to in-person interviews in that I felt I was able to develop rapport with the participant and have a dynamic conversation. However, I felt that the final two distance

interviews were slightly more rigid and I attribute this to distance inhibiting the degree to which rapport can be built. Although in-person interviews are ideal, practicality necessitated some distance interviews. I believe that conducting interviews by distance is better than not conducting them at all (i.e., missing the voices of these youth completely). Finally, my pre-existing rapport with the participants through my own experiences with ACTIVATE may have helped mitigate, to some extent, the effect of distance.

Considerations for Future Research

This study explored the experience of Aboriginal youth who engage in a youth development program aimed at fostering engagement. The research was motivated by recognizing that little is known about ‘real life’ experiences of participation in youth programs that apply engagement principles and models. With respect to understanding *how* youth engagement programs are experienced, the results of this study suggest that engagement is more profound than and extends beyond participating in a youth development program. This study demonstrated that youths’ pre-program community involvement is likely relevant to the quality of engagement overall. Future research on engagement should account for pre-program community involvement to further our understanding and maximize the potential benefits of such involvement for subsequent community engagement. Additionally, longitudinal studies that ask youth about their experiences during direct engagement and in a follow-up afterwards would provide more insight into the process of youth engagement in “real time” and over time, and may provide more accurate accounts of the experience.

Theoretically, youth development programs increasingly account for culturally-relevant programming as reflected in principles of engagement. While this study has implications for understanding how meaningful engagement is experienced among Aboriginal youth from the North, further research is needed to deepen our understanding of what makes engagement experiences culturally meaningful for Aboriginal youth.

Additionally, this study has implications for understanding engagement as a decolonizing, social justice approach to strengthen community wellness. Future research could directly explore the degree to which youth engagement might have a role in contributing to community healing and wellness. More specifically, examining the potential youth engagement has as a means for change to happen within the community itself may illuminate ways forward in developing decolonizing approaches to Aboriginal healing. Similarly, future research may

explore more deeply the role of peer support stemming from engagement, as it relates to the potential role youth have in supporting each other through the challenges they experience. This is especially important given the Northern Aboriginal context where support resources in isolated communities are limited.

Finally, research on youth engagement should continue to explore engagement from the perspective of youth, building on our understanding of how youth experience engagement both in programs and in the community. Given the nature of youth engagement, a future YPAR research project engaging youth in a fully collaborative research process would identify and provide additional knowledge on this area of interest from the perspective of the youth.

Final Remarks

Youth engagement programs have the potential to create opportunities for youth to engage in culturally relevant ways that feel meaningful and purposeful to their individuality and community contexts. Developing an understanding of a young person's involvement prior to engaging in programs help youth progress to more active and meaningful forms of engagement. The positive relationships youth build through the process of having engaged in a youth development program provide them with enhanced support networks. A social justice perspective has a very important role in the experience of Aboriginal youth engagement, especially in the North, by helping the youth understand their positioning and role within the community and for service-providers to consider the historical context affecting communities and driving the response to community issues. Aboriginal youth can take an active role in responding to issues they experience in their community, with the potential for becoming involved in a greater change movement. In this way, understanding the youth engagement process may help develop and implement programs that could empower younger generations to become agents of change by gaining the skills to eventually lead their own health-promoting projects in the community.

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Appendix A

Researcher as Instrument

My interest for youth engagement stems from many years as a youth worker living and working in diverse communities across Canada. As a youth worker living in Aboriginal communities in Nunavut and on-reserve in northern Alberta, I witnessed first-hand the potential impact of empowering young people by providing meaningful roles and responsibilities in the community. I learned to adopt a method to empower young people, giving them ownership over the programs that we together implemented in the community. With these experiences behind me, I have certainly placed value on programs that incorporate youth perspectives and ideas into the design and implementation. This represents a personal bias towards the impact of designing programs in this manner, and must be monitored throughout both the data collection and analysis process.

I have also personally experienced engagement through the ACTIVATE program. My ACTIVATE experience is very unique in that I was never a direct participant (or delegate) in the program, but rather was engaged in the original development and implementation of the program in 2004. Since 2004, I have remained engaged in many different ways as a youth organizer, youth volunteer and staff member. Although not currently employed by Motivate Canada or actively engaged in the ACTIVATE program, I am aware of how my previous experiences shape my perspectives on the aims and goals of the program itself.

I will need to be aware of my own experiences through the ACTIVATE program. My initial engagement in ACTIVATE was a bit of a “fluke” in that I did not actively apply for the opportunity, but I did however actively approach the lead organizer, expressing an interest in becoming involved. I was a grade 10 student who had little prior experience in leadership or youth engagement (had only previously attended one student leadership conference) but it was something about this specific program (probably the use of sport for development) that caught my attention. I remained engaged from year-to-year as I enjoyed the process of feeling valued and felt like I was contributing to the experience of other young people who would attend ACTIVATE. Although I did not remain actively engaged much past 2007, I felt that my previous involvement in the program was meaningful and help shaped other areas in my life. Although I did develop and implement an ACTIVATE-in-Action project, I feel that my engagement in other ACTIVATE conferences was more meaningful to both me and my community. My ACTIVATE-

in-Action project was something I put together quickly and was not personally meaningful to me, but it served more as a way to advocate and share information about ideas around using sport as a tool for social change. I do feel that my engagement in ACTIVATE has led to many other initiatives that could also be considered as community action projects.

I was re-engaged in the ACTIVATE program as Motivate Canada's summer student in 2011. This was the first year where the program took youth engagement to a different level, fully engaging the youth-led volunteer team into every component of the national conference. The youth volunteers were in charge of deciding which workshops would be included and developed the content for each. I served as an advisor to the volunteer team, furthering their thought process by asking important questions to be considered through the workshop development.

In addition to reflecting on my experiences as both a youth worker and through my engagement in the ACTIVATE program itself, I feel that it is also important I reflect on my assumptions and biases towards Aboriginal people. As a non-Aboriginal myself, my ideas around Aboriginality are primarily shaped by my own experiences living in predominantly Aboriginal communities. My first experience, in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, exposed me to the many challenges an isolated northern community can face. Although at first I was shocked by the living conditions in this northern community, I quickly learned to embrace other aspects of the community, including the surreal landscapes surrounded by the Arctic Ocean and the rich culture that was embraced by all community members. My second experience, living on a small reserve, Chipewyan Prairie First Nation, I experienced the challenges faced by a community that was isolated yet very accessible by bigger cities close by. The community's accessibility to bigger towns like Fort McMurray and Edmonton allowed for more drugs to be brought into the community.

I learned an appreciation for the Elders in each of the communities and witnessed inter-generational teaching and storytelling. I also learned a bit about the impacts of oppression, holding witness to many parents, adult, and youth suffering from drug and alcohol abuse. However, I was also witness to tremendous healing efforts lead by both the Elders and the youth of both communities I lived in, with Elders hosting healing camps and youth hosting sharing circles to discuss the challenges faced by the community. Overall, I have an assumption that many Aboriginal people are resilient individuals who are passionate about creating change for future generations.

After reflecting on both my experiences through youth development programs and having lived in two Aboriginal communities, I have developed several predispositions and biases towards youth engagement:

1. Meaningful engagement includes dynamics where young people feel valued and understood, and are given an important role in the project/community;
2. Young people are capable and willing agents of community change; and
3. Young people may not always perceive the impact (both on themselves and community) of their involvement immediately, but that this perception of impact takes shape over time.

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

1. What year were you born?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your first language?
4. What language did you speak most growing up?
5. What language do you speak most now?
6. What, if applicable, is your second language? Third?
7. What is your ethnic background? (First Nation, Métis, Inuit)
8. What community do you currently live in?
 - a. What community did you grow up in?
 - b. What community do you affiliate most with?
 - c. Tell me a bit about this community? What was it like growing up there?
 - d. Where might I learn more information about your community? Resources? Books? Websites?

7. What is your current employment/student status?
8. What is your highest level of Education achieved?
9. What is/was your engagement in the ACTIVATE program?

Type: National/North Year: Role: Delegate/Volunteer/Volunteer Team Leader

Type: National/North Year: Role: Delegate/Volunteer/Volunteer Team Leader

Type: National/North Year: Role: Delegate/Volunteer/Volunteer Team Leader

9. Tell me a bit about your community action project?

Year:

Location:

Brief Description:

10. Prior to ACTIVATE, were you involved in other youth engagement programs? List
11. Since ACTIVATE, did you engage in other youth engagement programs? List

Co-constructing the Interview Protocol

12. If you were the interviewer, what components of youth engagement would you find important to ask about?

13. After reviewing the interview protocol I've proposed, are there any questions you would change?
14. After reviewing the interview protocol I've proposed, are there any questions you would add?

Snowball Sampling (only asked if more recruitment is needed)

1. Do you know of any other Aboriginal ACTIVATORS who have either completed a community action project or have volunteered at an ACTIVATE conference who might be interested in participating? If so, please feel free to pass on the recruitment letter.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Definition of Youth Engagement used in this study is: “meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity with a focus outside of him or herself, leading to active citizenship and social responsibility”

Preamble for the Interview: The purpose of this conversation is to hear your STORY. The story of how you got engaged in your community through the ACTIVATE program, what it was like, and how you perceive the impact of your engagement. Anything that you choose to share is relevant to my project. Sometimes in interviews people pick and choose aspects of the story to share, but because for this project I am interested in stories, please feel free to share as much of the story as you would like.

- Before we begin, do you have any questions?

1. How Aboriginal youth become engaged in initiatives that promote youth engagement:

- **Tell me about how you first started getting involved in your community**
What made you want to get involved?; What was it like to be involved in your community?; Was there anybody who helped you get involved?
- **Tell me about how you got involved in the ACTIVATE program.**
How did you learn about ACTIVATE?; Tell me what sparked your interest about ACTIVATE?; Tell me about your ACTIVATE experience; What was it like for you to participate in ACTIVATE?
- **How has your involvement changed (if at all) from when you first started getting involved?**
How is it different?; How is it the same?; What stands out as being more important?; What stands out as being less important?; How has ACTIVATE contributed (if at all) to your engagement in community?; What role, if any, do you think ACTIVATE has on getting you (or keeping you) involved in your community?
- **Tell me why you are engaged in your community.**
What has influenced or inspired your engagement in an initiative?; What has kept you engaged?; Why have you remained involved in your community?; Who has helped you stay engaged?; How has this person been helpful, or unhelpful, in keeping you engaged?

2. How Aboriginal youth experience their engagement in programs:

- **Tell me about some of the initiatives you have been involved with in your community**

Which initiatives that you have been involved in stand out as being more meaningful to you?; What makes them feel more meaningful?; What would a successful community initiative be for you? What would make it successful?; What were, if any, challenges that you faced?; How did you overcome these challenges?; How has travel impacted your experience of engagement?

3. How Aboriginal youth perceive the impact of their engagement on their personal development and their community:

- **Tell me about the impact you feel your engagement has had on your personal development**

How do you feel being engaged in your community has changed you?; What have you learned through your experiences?

- **Tell me about the impact you feel your engagement has had on your community**

How has your community changed since the initiative?; What role, if any, did you have in making this change possible?; What have you learned about your community through your engagement?

Debrief and creating the potential for action:

- What was it like to share your experiences with me?
- After having shared some of your experiences, are there any aspects of your story that stand out for you as being most meaningful or important to you?
- If there is a message that you could share about the experiences we have talked about today, what would it be? Who would you like to share this message with?
- Now that you have shared a bit about your experiences with youth engagement, where might you go from here?
- If you had the opportunity to act on your message, what would it look like?
- What might your role be in sharing this message?

Appendix D**Recruitment Text**

Department of Educational Counselling, University of Ottawa

Participants Needed for Research in Counselling

Dear _____,

I am recruiting volunteers to participate in a study on Aboriginal youths' experience in youth programs that foster youth engagement. In collaboration with _____, Acting ACTIVATE program Manager, you have been selected as a candidate to participate in the research study. Although we have identified you as being a candidate, your participation is 100% voluntary and should you wish not to participate, we have identified other ACTIVATORS who can take your place in the study.

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to an interview session with me to share your experience of becoming engaged in Motivate Canada's ACTIVATE program. The interview time will be arranged at a time that is mutually convenient and will take up to 1 hour.

For more information regarding this study, or to participate in this study please contact me at _____ or email: ecall027@uottawa.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Cristelle Audet at _____ or caudet@uottawa.ca

Thank you,

Christina Callingham

Appendix E

Study Description for the Participants

This is to invite you to participate in a research project I am conducting for my Masters degree in Educational Counselling at the University of Ottawa. This research project focuses on Aboriginal youths' experience in youth programs intended to foster youth engagement, specifically Motivate Canada's ACTIVATE program. If you agree to participate, you will be invited to an interview session to share your experiences in the ACTIVATE program with me. It is anticipated that this research project will be of benefit to researchers, community stakeholders, and youth practitioners to better understand how Aboriginal youth perceive their engagement in programs.

If you agree to participate, we will arrange a brief (20 minute) telephone conversation for me to learn more about you prior to the interview. This conversation will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you, with the researcher acquiring any long distance charges. With your consent (and parental consent for participants under the age of 18), this conversation will be audio-recorded to help the researcher access the interview discussion for transcription and data analysis.

If you agree to participate, the interview will be arranged at a location and time that is convenient for you. The interview will be conducted in-person. If an in-person interview is not possible, we will conduct it over the telephone take approximately 1 hour. With your consent (and parental consent for participants under the age of 18), the interview will be audio-recorded to help the researcher access the interview discussion for transcription and data analysis.

If you agree to participate, you will also be consulted (by phone) throughout the data analysis to ensure that your experiences are accurately depicted and that your voice is captured throughout the writing of the research results. This consultation process will take approximately 20 minutes.

Your participation is completely voluntary. All information will be kept strictly confidential and you can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you decide you no longer want to participate in the study, all information obtained from you will be destroyed. Should any concerns arise from discussing your experiences during the interview that you wish to discuss further with a counsellor, the researcher will suggest individuals that you may contact.

If you would like to participate in this study or have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Christina Callingham at call027@uottawa.ca or my supervisor Dr. Cristelle Audet at cristelle.audet@uottawa.ca

Respectfully,

Christina Callingham

Appendix F

Consent Form for Study Participation

Consent Form for Participation in Qualitative Exploration of the Aboriginal Youth Experience in Programs that Promote Youth Engagement

Department of Educational Counselling, University of Ottawa

I, _____, am aware that the purpose of this study is to deepen our understanding youth engagement from the perspective of Aboriginal youth. Through an interview format, I will be asked to describe my experiences in the ACTIVATE program as much as possible. I am aware that this research project will be of benefit to researchers, community stakeholders, and youth practitioners to better understand how Aboriginal youth perceive their engagement in programs. I understand that the present study will be conducted as part of a Masters Degree thesis requirement by Christina Callingham under the supervision of Dr. Cristelle Audet of the Department of Educational Counselling at the University of Ottawa.

I agree to participate in the study and am willing to share my experiences with the interviewer. I am aware that as part of the data collection process one in-person or phone interview of approximately 1 hour in length will be audio-recorded and will be transcribed for later analysis. I understand that I will also be consulted by the researcher after the initial interview to ensure that the results accurately depict my experience of ACTIVATE. I realize that my participation in the interview is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If I choose to withdraw from the study, any information about me or any data that I provide will be destroyed immediately.

I am also aware that if discussion of my experiences raises any concern for me that I wish to discuss further with a counsellor, Christina Callingham will suggest resources that I might contact. Should none of these resources meet my needs, I may contact the researcher for additional resources.

I am aware that all information associated with this study is strictly confidential and that my identity, or that of any people that I mention, will be known only to the researcher and will not be revealed at any time. When transcribing the interview recordings, the researcher will use pseudonyms (i.e. False names) for my name or those of any people that I mention. The pseudonyms will also be used in writing the thesis document and any related publications or presentations. Any details in the interview recordings that might identify me or any persons that I mention will also be changed during the transcribing. Quotes may be used from my transcript, however, no information that can identify me will appear in the quotes. Furthermore, the researcher and researcher's supervisor will be the only people will access to the audio-recordings and interview transcripts. These will be stored in a secure place for five year after which time they will be destroyed.

I am aware that information obtained from the interview will be used by the researcher solely for the purposes outlined. I also understand that the results of this study may be disseminated through conferences and publications.

I am also aware that any inquiries about the research study should be addressed to: Dr. Cristelle Audet, [REDACTED], ([REDACTED]) or Christina Callingham, [REDACTED], ([REDACTED]).

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Printed Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO THE RESEARCHER BY MAIL:

Dr. Cristelle Audet
c/o Christina Callingham
Faculty of Education
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix G

Member Checking Questionnaire

- Which aspects of the narrative resonate most with you?
- Which aspects of the narrative resonate least with you?
- Do you feel that the narrative resonates with your overall experience? How so? How not?
- Are there aspects of the narrative that stand out for you?
- Are there components of your story that you feel are missing from the narrative?
- Is there anything that you would remove from or add to the narrative?

Appendix H

Sila's Analysis

Researcher's Response

When listening to the plot and piecing Sila's story together, I found myself filled with vivid images and associations of 'rotting' or 'dying too young' through her emotionally-charged dialogue with respect to the challenges that are faced in her community (this is described in more detail below through I-poems). These images helped me to see Sila's process of engagement in the context of the challenges she experiences in her community. Sila spoke strongly about her desire to be a part of something greater in her community, voicing a frustration for the lack of action by others. With this, I noticed myself tuning into Sila's shift from a "want" to a "need" in the community. I found this shift especially interesting given Sila's initial ambivalence about her role and abilities as a leader in her community. I found myself acknowledging that, for Sila, development as a leader was in part observed by a change in her personal positioning within the community. Finally, I found Sila's observations about needing to "be good yourself" in order to help others interesting. She connected this notion to the limited health and wellness resources in the community. For me, this helped to make the connections between the potential for youth engagement to serve as an additional point of support for young people. Sila describes a need for young people to feel like they can open up to their peers and feel comfortable seeking support from them when they need it. I think Sila's proposition of engagement providing a means for peer support especially caught my attention given my employment as a youth counsellor. Through my employment, I have had the opportunity to facilitate group sessions where I witnessed the value in youth connecting with each other and seeking support from their peers.

Generating 'I-Poems'

In listening to Sila's story, a singular (I) and plural (we) first-person voice was easily identified through the narrative. The following transcribed excerpt below seems to best reflect Sila's positioning towards herself (I) and the greater community (we). Each instance of 'I' or 'we' is underlined with the accompanying verb or associated text to construct a poem:

I feel like I have to give back to my society because of all of these opportunities they have given me. Like all these youth opportunities, like ACTIVATE, and ACTIVATE North and the regional conference, and the youth centre. And just being a part of all of these different things, I feel like I have to help. You know? I have to help. If not, then who is going to do

it? You know? And like there is always this thought in the back of my head. You know – if you don’t do it, think about it! Who is going to do it? And I can never think of anybody else. ... And these are issues that like everybody says, “We can’t just let this go by anymore, like we can’t, we need to stop it” [pounds table with hand] and you are saying the words but you are not doing any of the actions. I want to be a part of the community. I want to help someone, I want to help advance, I want to help progress, I want to help the wellbeing, I want to somehow, you know, at least just try. It is too much to just sit back and rot like everybody else. Sorry for the rot part, but you know. Just I don’t want to be left behind and [people say] “I don’t know what is happening in my own town, it’s such a small community, I can’t see any issues in front of me, I have no awareness.” That terrifies me.

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined ‘I’ and ‘we’ portions of the excerpt above:

I feel like I have to give back
 I feel like I have to help
 I have to help
 I can never think
 We can’t just let
 We can’t
 We need to stop it
 I want to be
 I want to help
 I want to help
 I want to help
 I want to help
 I want to help
 I want to somehow
 I don’t want

Reading this poem helped me to develop a sense of how Sila positions herself, both as an individual and collectively within her community, as it relates to her experience of promoting positive change in her community. For example, in this particular poem, I observe the overall rhythm and tone that escalates throughout the poem as she transitions from “I feel like I have to

help” to “I want to help.” Some ‘I-poems’ can provide insight on possible contradictions or ambivalence within the story; however, in this example, I notice the ‘I-poem’ provides insight into Sila’s certainty. Through this escalating tone, Sila positions herself with a sense of urgency, “I feel like I have to help,” which is followed by a sense of certainty to the urgency with “I have to help.” As Sila positions herself as a collective ‘we’, I also notice a similar escalating tone as she shifts from “We can’t just let” to “We need,” suggesting a shift from ‘change’ not only as a desire but as a necessity for the community.

In addition to an escalating tone, I also notice Sila’s certainty towards things she wants and things she does not want. This is demonstrated by attending to her shift from “I have to help” to “I want to help” to “I don’t want.” The ‘I-poem’ generated from this passage highlights Sila’s desire to have a role in helping, as she states, “I don’t want to be left behind.” Sila’s desire is also highlighted through the repetition of “I want to,” which reads like a refrain in the poem.

Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

There are seven prominent contrapuntal voices that can be heard throughout Sila’s story of engagement in her community. Firstly, a voice of *Personal Awakening* can be heard alongside the voice of *Self-Doubt*. Personal Awakening echoed through Sila’s development as a leader, and was often heard in tension with her Self-Doubt as a leader. Secondly, the voice of *Personal Responsibility* was observed in congruence with the voice of *Fear*. Sila’s desire to take responsibility for change in her community is driven by a fear of being left behind in society. Thirdly, the voice of *Empowerment* is noticed parallel to the voice of *Connectedness*. More specifically, she experiences both empowerment through self-doubt and incongruence with others, and she feels empowered by the resources gained from her network of peers. Lastly, the voice of *Frustration* could be heard as Sila reflected on challenges in her community as they relate to her engagement.

The voices of ‘personal awakening’ and ‘self-doubt’. The voice of *Personal Awakening* was echoed through Sila’s development as a leader, and was often in tension with *Self-Doubt* towards her identity as a leader. As Sila describes the impact of her engagement in the community, the tension between Personal Awakening (identified in *italics*) and Self-Doubt (identified in **bold**) seems to diminish in light of her development as a leader.

As the youth centre president, **I didn’t really feel like a leader**. It was very informal, **I didn’t feel like what I was doing was really that important, I felt like I was just like**

doing it ... But when I went to the Baffin Inuit Regional Council, they taught us a lot about leadership roles and skills, and that is actually when I started to think '*hey I can become a leader*' or *be seen as a leader*, and *this is something that is bigger than I thought*. I am not **just participating**, *I am actually the one doing the work* ... I started to realize that what I am doing isn't because **I am just doing it**, but *I am doing it for other people too. I am representing other people*. They just kept saying that *I could be a leader*. The voices of Personal Awakening and Self-Doubt were often in tension throughout many excerpts of Sila's story. Sila consistently spoke of her growth through her doubt as a leader in her community. Throughout the course of Sila's engagement, self-doubt transformed into an increased sense of awareness of both her role and her potential to have a positive impact on those around her. These conflicting voices demonstrate Sila's ambivalence about being a leader.

The voices of 'personal responsibility' and 'fear'. *Personal Responsibility* (identified in **bold**) and *Fear* (identified in *italics*) were also seen in tension with one another. Sila's fear of not taking responsibility for contributing to change can be seen in the following excerpt:

I feel like I have to give back to my society because of all of these opportunities they have given me. Like all these youth opportunities, like ACTIVATE, and ACTIVATE North and the regional conference, and the youth centre. And just being a part of all of these different things, **I feel like I have to help**. You know? **I have to help. If not, then who is going to do it? You know?** And like there is always this thought in the back of my head. You know – if you don't do it, think about it! Who is going to do it? And I can never think of anybody else. ... And these are issues that like everybody says, '*we can't just let this go by anymore, like we can't, we need to stop it*' [pounds table with hand] and you are saying the words but you are not doing any of the actions. I want to be a part of the community. I want to help someone, I want to help advance, I want to help progress, I want to help the wellbeing, I want to somehow, you know, at least just try. *It is too much to just sit back and rot like everybody else*. Sorry for the rot part, but you know. *Just I don't want to be left behind* and 'I don't know what is happening in my own town, it's such a small community, I can't see any issues in front of me, I have no awareness'. *That terrifies me*.

This 'listening' helped to reveal and distinguish the layers of the story being told. As we progress through the excerpt, the voices of personal responsibility and fear become even more prominent.

However, in listening more closely, we witness a certain tension between responsibility and fear; Sila feels a personal responsibility for creating change, and this responsibility seems fuelled by the fear of doing nothing.

The voices of ‘connectedness’ and ‘empowerment’. For Sila, *Connectedness* (identified in *italics*) and *Empowerment* (identified in **bold**) were often seen together. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1:

And by then, I still didn’t feel important, or like, what I was doing was important. *But others would say ‘what you are doing is important!’* So I thought I had to get better if what I am doing is important. As if I wasn’t good enough already ... I wasn’t a leader – okay **now I think I can be a leader** – and now, *I’m amongst all these leaders*, and **I am trying to be a leader**.

Excerpt 2:

The goal was to unite the Baffin Region ... *to unite a voice, collaborate and just try to help each other out.* We all apply for the same funding and so we made use of that one resource. This was something that had never happened before. And with that council, we could **move off each other’s work**.

The voice of Connectedness and of Empowerment were observed in two different contexts: when experiencing incongruence between herself and others, and when galvanizing possibilities by uniting others.

Incongruence between self and others. In the first excerpt, Sila’s uncertainty about herself as a leader develops into a sense of empowerment. A notable incongruence emerges when Sila silently compares herself to other youth leaders who are “doing more important things.” However, Sila’s peers challenge this belief, enforcing a notion that what she was doing was indeed important. For Sila, connectedness within a supportive group environment with peers who believe in her as a leader helped validate and strengthen her leadership, and fostered a sense of empowerment.

Galvanizing possibilities by uniting others. In the second excerpt, the sense of connectedness emerged out of youth council presidents bringing together resources to help one another. Sila explains how sometimes a sense of connectedness could lead to momentum and, in some instances, empowerment. The presence of others, creating a stronger force as a group, and

drawing from the momentum of others contributed to feeling empowered and inspired by other people's work.

The voice of 'frustration'. A voice of *Frustration* (identified in **bold**) permeated Sila's story and, by way of demonstration, is captured in the following example:

I'm not smoking anymore and maybe I never will again, and that was something I cared about because even some of my younger cousins smoke too. **Like they are just allowed,** like I can't say, **I can't smack them and take their cigarettes anymore.** Their parents know, and **they are just allowed to smoke. Like are you kidding me? I was so disgusted with that.**

In this reading, Sila's frustration towards the adults' lack of value for health, specifically in terms of allowing children to smoke, is demonstrated. Frustration was heard as an undertone throughout her story, particularly present when Sila talked about reasons for her engagement and her personal responsibility for taking action.

Appendix I

Martha's Analysis

Researcher's Response

When listening to the plot and piecing Martha's story together, I found myself filled with images of 'being the change' and 'doing something different' by responding—rather than reacting—to some of the community issues. I also noticed this through Martha's choice to focus our conversation more on her community initiatives and less on her time spent at ACTIVATE. I perceive this to mean that, for Martha, these subsequent experiences were more meaningful for her, perhaps because ACTIVATE complimented her already existing leadership role in the community. This was coupled with the association that 'this was normal' for Martha; that she does not know anything different from this perspective. I begin to be filled with an image that suggests this desire to create change is innate for her. I find myself saddened by the attitude of *ajug* Martha describes some Inuit as holding: that because they are Inuit, they are incapable. I took particular note of Martha's competencies and sense of personal responsibility for change. I found myself appreciating Martha's confliction as she spoke of the tension she experienced leaving Baker Lake and wanting others to understand she was receiving an education to then be able to contribute more to her community. I also noticed how Martha spoke of the community 'feeling' her absence and how she tried so hard to keep her connections to her community strong. Overall, I felt empowered by Martha's story, her raw recounts of the impact of suicide in her community and attitudes of incompetence, helplessness, and hopelessness—heard through her account which radiates her competence and hope for the future.

Generating 'I-Poems'

In listening to Martha's story, a singular (I) and plural (we) first-person voice was easily identified through the narrative. The following transcribed excerpt below seems to best reflect Martha's positioning towards herself (I) and the greater community (we). Each instance of 'I' or 'we' is underlined with the accompanying verb or associated text to construct a poem:

I think people feel empowered ... So, for example, my neighbour that I grew up with, an older neighbour, an older lady, and she is now actively now trying to revive some cultural aspects and language in the community. And she works with myself and a couple other young people to, say, teach throat singing for example. When I go home, we meet up with her and we go learn from some Elders and then we try to teach what we learn to

other young people ... despite all of the hard times that people in the community go through... like if one thing happens, everybody is affected ... We are able to come together and be a strong support for each other. I think that is something I have learned in my home community and I think that is one of the reasons why I love my hometown so much!

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined ‘I’ and ‘we’ portions of the excerpt above:

I think people
I grew up
I go home
We meet up
We go learn
We try to teach
We are able
I think
I have learned
I think that
I love

Reading this poem helped me to develop a sense of how Martha positions herself, both as an individual and collectively within her community, as it relates to her experience of promoting positive change in her community. For example, in this particular poem, Martha positions herself within the community as somebody who is also learning (“we go learn”) and sharing (“we try to teach”) with the greater community. I also notice a positioning where Martha acknowledges a role that she personally might have had to contribute to this sense of sharing with others, while she continues to learn both knowledge from Elders and more about her community.

In addition to this positioning, I notice an escalating tone within the ‘we’-portion of the poem, building from “we meet up” to “we go learn” to “we try to teach” to “we are able.” This tone has a natural progression but also provides a bit of insight into a process of empowering others from Martha’s positioning within her role in having promoted these initiatives.

Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

There are six prominent contrapuntal voices that can be identified in Martha's story of engagement in her community. The most prominent voice heard throughout Martha's story was the voice of *Connectedness*. Connectedness was observed in congruence with several voices: the voice of *Personal Responsibility*, a voice of *Empowerment*, a voice *Resilience*, and a voice of *Hope*. Finally, the voice of *Disconnectedness* was heard in congruence with the voice of *Powerlessness*.

The voice of 'connectedness'. The voice of *Connectedness* is the most prominent in Martha's story of engagement in her community. Through Martha's experience, the voice of Connectedness is heard as she speaks to her relationship with other people. Connectedness is heard as Martha positions herself with others, emphasizing herself in relationship with others as she: feels personally responsible for change, empower others, and promotes resilience and hopefulness. With that, the voice of Connectedness is heard alongside the voices of *Personal Responsibility*, *Empowerment*, *Resilience*, and *Hope*.

'Connectedness', 'personal responsibility,' and 'empowerment'. The voice of *Connectedness* (identified in *italics*) is heard alongside the voice of *Personal Responsibility* (identified in **bold**) and *Empowerment* (identified in underline) as Martha projects her own responsibility to encourage others to also make changes in their lives. The voice of Personal Responsibility for addressing problems that Martha's community faces and echoed through Martha's innate desire to have an impact on others, promoting a sense of empowerment. Martha's voice of Connectedness, Personal Responsibility, and Empowerment are heard as she feels responsible for role modeling a positive lifestyle to empower others to find better ways to cope with the challenges:

These problems haven't gone away. These problems still happen and they are going to continue to happen **unless people, like myself, try to do something with their own lives** and *hopefully* **influence and help others to deal with their own problems.** Just *people are all connected right.* And **anything I do, I hope to positively influence someone else.** And then that can continue and that person can continue to help someone else. And I guess that is something that has always stayed with me.

Martha feels responsible for acting in response to issues in her community by modeling what she describes as "doing something with her life" with the goal of influencing—or empowering—

others to help “deal with their own problems.” There are numerous instances where Martha expresses frustration with a tendency for *some* community members to react to challenges, instead of responding in a way that would contribute positively to the community needs.

These voices of Personal Responsibility and Empowerment were often heard together throughout the transcript, particularly as Martha spoke of her experience of engaging in her community (voice of Connectedness) as a response to community challenges. Specifically, the voice of Empowerment was heard as Martha spoke to various ways in which she has become engaged. Each initiative reflects her perceived responsibility to bring others together in a movement towards community change. For Martha, galvanizing others was not just about “having something fun to do” but also about planting seeds for change; new skills and a more positive outlook that could be passed on to a future generation. Through this process, Martha’s engagement in her community has provided a sense of empowerment, to youth and adults alike. These three voices, heard together, helped Martha to model to community members to take action, thus promoting empowerment with the community.

‘Connectedness’ and ‘resilience’. The voice of *Connectedness* (identified in *italics*) and the voice of *Resilience* (identified in **bold**) can be heard alongside each other as Martha describes how she perceives the impact of her engagement in community. In this case, resilience refers to one’s ability to adapt positively to challenges or adversity in their lives. More specifically, Resilience is heard in two different ways: with respect to community resilience and Martha’s own resilience. The following exemplifies community resilience:

Things that have happened to Inuit in the past, people today are still feeling the effects today of those things. And I guess in my community, I always felt like people often felt a sense of helplessness sometimes a sense of hopelessness. And people, **despite all these, people continue to live their lives.** And in my *community people are trying to make others feel better, working together as a community for the common good.* And I find they do all of that to be **able to be a solid community, despite all the difficulties that they have to face.**

The following exemplifies Martha’s personal resilience:

Um, I think because of my involvement in the community at home *I think people definitely see me as like someone, a strong person, to look up to.* And like I mentioned, it is not something that I ever aimed for (laughs) and it is not always easy to deal with that

pressure, but I think because *these younger people, or even older people, because they see someone like me who is going to make things happen despite the things that I have to deal with* because I am human too. **I have my own struggles to deal with, but I don't like to think that I am not someone that has to succumb to that** but rather *I show people in the community that you can react differently and that your life is what you make of it basically.*

These two different types of resilience heard alongside the voice of connectedness, helped to reveal a layer of Martha's story that speaks to both community strength and personal strength. For example, Martha perceives others in her community to be 'working together for the common good' and through this feels they are able to do this "despite the challenges they have to face." The connections that she perceived others to be making are heard as they overcome adversity, demonstrating a developed sense of resilience.

As Martha reflects on the impact of her engagement, she describes feeling as though the community views her differently; Martha believes her community has taken notice of her growth despite the personal challenges she has also faced. She continues to connect with others by "show[ing] people in the community that you can react differently." Martha characterizes "reacting differently" as a response to community challenges that has resulted from a developed sense of resilience with respect to community challenges.

'Connectedness' and 'hope'. As Martha reflected on her ACTIVATE experience, the voice of *Connectedness* (identified in **bold**) was heard alongside a voice of *Hope* (identified in *italics*). Through the connections that Martha made with the other Aboriginal youth at ACTIVATE North, she felt that she was not alone with the challenges faced in Baker Lake, giving her, and the others at ACTIVATE, a sense of hope:

Um, I don't know, just what comes with ACTIVATE—the *kinds of activities and discussions that were going on* **gave us a sense of hope—that you are not alone, that there are other people out there, and we can kind of figure stuff out for our communities.** Like definitely the focus on community and in the end people being like leaders as young as we were. *It was good to be around more people like that,* rather than feeling alone all the time.

Overall, a sense of hope seems to emerge out of becoming connected with other youth leaders across the North through the ACTIVATE program. As Martha says, "It was good to be around

more people like that, rather than feeling alone all the time,” suggesting that the connections that she made, the types of people who were brought together through ACTIVATE, and the activities and discussions they had all helped to foster a hopeful attitude. Martha became hopeful that she was not alone in her quest to create change in her community while empowering others to do the same.

The voices of ‘disconnectedness’ and ‘powerlessness’. Contrary to the most prominent voice of *Connectedness*, the voice of *Disconnectedness* (identified in **bold**) was also heard through Martha’s story, specifically during times when she was not living in her hometown, Baker Lake. More specifically, *Disconnectedness* was heard alongside a voice of *Powerlessness* (identified in *italics*):

It was really hard on me when I was trying to continue my education down South and **being so disconnected from my community**. Not just physically, but disconnected but ***I didn’t know how to help when I was so far***. And that was hard for me, because *I felt like my community needed my help, it needed people like me*.

When listening to these two voices, it reveals an added challenge with respect to Martha’s engagement in her community; more specifically, the tension Martha experienced leaving her community to gain an education. This tension is especially heard through “I didn’t know how to help when I was so far away.” Martha knows she wanted to help her community, but was unsure how she can while living so far away. More specifically, Martha wanted to be able to help her community, but felt tension through the disconnect she experienced living so far away from home. This tension resulted in a feeling of being powerless—not knowing how she could to respond to the needs of her community. Martha not only felt disconnected from her community physically, but she felt she was not able to “help” from afar; she has always helped others in her community, and she did not know how to continue helping from so far away. The powerlessness is especially heard through “it needed people like me”, where I hear in Martha’s voice of powerlessness, a hint of guilt, as she later expresses tension with the decision of moving to pursue an education that she felt would help her community in the future.

Appendix J

Sarah's Analysis

Researcher's Response

In listening to Sarah's story of her engagement in Rankin Inlet, I was filled with images of persistence and confidence. Sarah's persistence to continue to deliver programs stood out for me, as it was not always an easy task. I especially noticed how efficient Sarah was with the newfound inspiration and energy she gained at ACTIVATE, implementing a large-scale community wide initiative only a few months after returning from the forum. Sarah spoke very confidently about her initiatives, as well as her own strengths and contributions to each project. I found myself especially struck by her confidence; as I had no previous rapport with Sarah, I was taken by her bold and self-assured descriptions of her skills and abilities. It left me wondering how she learned to be so confident, or if this was just the way she has always been.

Generating 'I-Poems'

In listening to Sarah's story, a singular (I) first-person voice was easily identified through the narrative. The following transcribed excerpt below seems to best reflect Sarah's positioning towards herself. Sarah rarely used a plural (we) first-person, and when she did it was descriptive of an action or a step for a project. Therefore I have not included a we-poem for this specific analysis. Each instance of 'I' is underlined with the accompanying verb or associated text to construct a poem:

I feel like I am more connected now, or that, I have stronger networks in Rankin and if I want to do something I have the support and the people around me that would allow it to happen. Like, in the beginning, I didn't know anyone, but know I know exactly who to talk to if I want to get something done. Like, yeah, I know that I will be able to find people who will be able to help me, like volunteers, like I feel like I could do anything (laughs).

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined 'I' portions of the excerpt above:

I feel like I am more connected
 I have stronger
 I want to
 I have the
 I didn't know

I know exactly

I want to

I know that I will be

I feel like I could do

Reading this poem helped me develop a sense of how Sarah positions herself with the newly formed connections she has made in Rankin Inlet as it relates to her experiences of engagement in her community. In this particular poem, I observe Sarah's uncertainty with respect to her connectedness in the community shift from "I didn't know" to "I know exactly." I also notice her own positioning towards her development as she acknowledges her growth through the transition into the community. I hear this through "I feel like I am more" and "I have stronger," which suggests a shift in which she positions herself to be more connected and strong. Finally, her positioning reflects potential for the future, observed through "I want to" and "I feel like I could do," suggesting she understands herself to be directly positioned towards "getting something done," "finding people who will be able to help," and "doing anything."

Through the examination of 'I-poems', I also observed Sarah's positioning towards how her engagement has developed over time, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

My heart is still there because in the beginning I had good intentions and I wanted to help my community, so that has stayed the same... in the beginning, I just wanted to get involved in anything, but now I feel like I can be selective with what I want to commit myself to ... I think more critically about that now and also I think about how my participation in the project might impact my image or what I am known for.

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined 'I' portions of the excerpt above:

I had good intentions

I wanted to help

I just wanted to get

I feel like I can be

I want to commit

I think more critically

I think about

I am known for

Reading this poem helped me to see how Sarah's engagement has changed over time. I notice the shift from the past tense ("I had good intentions" and "I wanted to help") into the present ("I feel like I can be," "I think more critically," and "I think about") and finally to the future ("I want to commit"). I also notice the progression towards a more affirmative tone from "I want ..." to "I think ..." to an affirmative tone of "I am ...". Overall, this poem helped me to be attuned to Sarah's positioning as her engagement develops over time.

Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

There are six main voices heard throughout Sarah's story of her engagement in her community. Firstly, the voice of *Connectedness* is heard alongside the voice of *Confidence*, the voice of *Personal Awakening*, and the voice of *Empowerment*. The voice of *Personal Responsibility* was also heard in conjunction with Sarah's *Confidence*.

The voice of 'connectedness'. The voice of *Connectedness* was heard throughout Sarah's story of engagement in her community. It was most prominent as she spoke about perceived impact of her engagement. Connectedness was heard as Sarah reflected on her relationships with others and her community at large.

'Connectedness' and 'confidence'. The voice of Connectedness (identified in **bold**) was heard alongside the voice of Confidence (identified in *italics*) as Sarah reflected on the impact of her engagement, specifically as she spoke to her confidence for implementing programs given her new relationships within the community.

I feel like I am more connected now, or that, **I have stronger networks in Rankin** and if I want to do something ***I have the support and the people around me that would allow it to happen.*** Like, in the beginning, I didn't know anyone, but now ***I know exactly who to talk to if I want to get something done.*** Like, yeah, ***I know that I will be able to find people who will be able to help me, like volunteers, like I feel like I could do anything*** (laughs).

The excerpt above exudes Sarah's newfound confidence that stems from the support she feels from others in the community. Not only does she feel more sure about the support that she receives from others, heard through "I have the support and people that would allow it to happen" and "I know exactly who to talk to," but she also has confidence in her own abilities to "get something done" as she states "I feel like I could do anything."

‘Connectedness’ and ‘personal awakening’. The voices of *Connectedness* (identified in **bold**) and *Personal Awakening* (identified in *italics*) were heard as Sarah reflected the impact of her engagement on her personal growth:

I would say *I am very community oriented now*—ilea—most of what I do is for my community. Um, and I mentioned this before, but **I feel like I am a part of the community**, I feel like ***I am an active member***. *I understand where I come from better*, ***I am more connected to people*** – ilea – **I have more relationships built**.

The voice of *Personal Awakening* is heard through Sarah’s perceived growth from having engaged in her community. More specifically, she expressed feeling more “community oriented” and having developed an enhanced understanding of where she comes from. The voice of *Connectedness* is heard through Sarah’s reflection of feeling more “a part of the community” and having built more relationships with others. The voices are heard together when Sarah reflects on her realization of the impact these connections have had on her growth. For example, Sarah says, “I am an active member” and “I am more connected to people.” As a result of Sarah’s engagement in the community, she feels a greater sense of identity as it relates to her community, feeling more a part of Rankin Inlet, and overall more connected to others.

‘Connectedness’ and ‘empowerment’. The voices of *Connectedness* (identified in **bold**) and *Empowerment* (identified in *italics*) were heard as Sarah spoke of her perceived impact her engagement has on other youth in the community, specifically through her attempts to empower girls in her community to realize their own potential:

I think the biggest thing is an increased appreciation for what youth are capable of doing if you give them the space to do so ... ***I want [younger girls] to see that women are capable of doing things as well***. And that like, lets say for example, in the area of sport, it is not only up to the guys to make these projects or to do these changes, but that women also have a space for that as well ... I think about the projects that I have worked with, ***a lot of them encourage confidence building among youth*** and ***if youth can build that confidence then maybe they will avoid doing other things***.

In listening to this excerpt, the two voices of *Connectedness* and *Empowerment* are heard at the same time. *Connectedness* here seems to connote a different meaning; whereas previous participants voiced *Connectedness* through their interpersonal relationships with others, Sarah voices *Connectedness* through establishing relationships with other girls in the community as a

means to foster empowerment. In other words, Sarah's voice of Connectedness in this sense is heard as she hopes to empower other girls. In "I want younger [girls] to see that women are capable of doing things as well," we can hear how Sarah hopes to use her relationships with young girls to help empower them to reach their full potential. In this instance, the voice of Connectedness is heard more through Sarah's desire (a positioning observed through I-poems where she states "I want") to help foster confidence in young girls. More specifically, I observe Sarah's connectedness to others as an avenue for her to foster a sense of confidence in others. The potential for empowerment was fostered through opportunities Sarah created for young girls to gain confidence, and "avoid doing other things" as a result.

Voice of 'personal responsibility' and 'confidence'. The voices of *Personal Responsibility* (identified in **bold**) and *Confidence* (identified in *italics*) were heard as Sarah spoke about the impact of her engagement on her personal growth. Sarah speaks of how she feels responsible for taking action in some way given her skills and abilities.

Um, because **I feel like I have a responsibility** – as someone who has grown up from there, someone who sees both the good and bad about Rankin—ilea—*I am helping, and I have skills that I can put to use. It just feels like it is a responsibility.*

The voice of Personal Responsibility is heard through "I feel I have a responsibility" and "It just feels like a responsibility." Sarah attributes some of this responsibility having grown up in Rankin Inlet and having experienced some of both "the good and the bad about Rankin." This sense of responsibility is coupled with Confidence, heard through "I am helping and I have the skills that I can put to use." She exudes Confidence in her own skills and abilities to take responsibility in her community.

Appendix K

Jessika's Analysis

Researcher's Response

In listening to Jessika's story of her engagement in the community I was struck by how articulately she describes a connection to her culture and land. I experienced Jessika's reflection on engagement to be deeper than the mechanics of her involvement, with her connection to the land and community permeating our conversation. I experienced Jessika's sharing of experiences differently from other participants' sharing; I felt especially connected to her vivid use of language, and therefore found it challenging to depart from her words when putting the composition of analysis together. Phrases like "the Yukon is magical" and describing engagement as a means to "keep something alive" struck a cord with me, prompting me to take particular note of Jessika's use of metaphor. I found In listening to Jessika's story, a singular first person voice was easily identified. Unlike some other participants, a plural collective 'we' is not heard through Jessika's story. When Jessika uses "we," he typically refers to himself and a friend working together or refers to logistics regarding his engagement. I did not include these instances of "we," as I did not feel Jessika was truly referring to a collective 'we' within the community.'s connection to her land and culture especially interesting given that she grew up in an urban community.

Generating 'I-Poems'

In listening to Jessika's story, a singular first person voice was easily identified. Unlike some other participants, a plural collective 'we' is not as prominent through her story. Although there were a couple instances where Jessika used "we" to refer the collective self, she often used "we," when discussing logistics regarding her engagement. The following excerpt includes mostly instances of 'I' followed by one instance of 'we':

Um I have always been really quiet and shy and I have always done what I have been told. Like I listen to my Elders and I learn well. Being involved with my community has just helped to keep me staying positive because there was a while there where I was just really negative and going down a bad path but I found my way out of it and I do my best to stay positive and just keep going. I am not one to regret anything, like I really don't believe in regret, and I hate when people tell me that they regret something, because we shouldn't be dwelling on the past. It just hurts you more.

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined ‘I’ and ‘we’ portions of the excerpt above:

I have always been
 I have always done what I have been
 I listen to
 I learn well
 I was just
 I found my
 I do my best
 I am not
 I really don’t
 I hate when
 We shouldn’t be

Reading this poem helped me to develop a sense of how Jessika positions herself within her personal development and through moments where she has learned more about herself. Through reflections of “I have always been” and “I have always done what I have been,” I hear the repetition of “I have always.” Through this repetition, I position her development as occurring through listening and learning. I understand this to be something that happens organically for Jessika as depicted in “I have always been/I have always done/I listen to/I learn well.” I also hear Jessika’s initiative through statements like “I found my” and “I do my best,” helping me to hear how Jessika takes personal responsibility for both finding a way out of “going down the wrong path” and staying positive.

The second part of the poem helps me to develop some understanding towards how Jessika positions herself within the community. In reading “I really don’t,” I heard her emphasis on the word *really*, suggesting stronger feelings against holding regret. This is also heard through “I hate when,” which suggests an even stronger positioning against holding regret. She then connects this to the community by saying, “we shouldn’t be,” helping me to understand how Jessika perceives her own disposition against regret in the community.

Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

There are three pairings of prominent contrapuntal voices that can be heard throughout Jessika’s story of engagement in her community. Firstly, a voice of *Enchantment* can be heard

alongside a voice of *Initiative*. Jessika's enchantment towards the Yukon and her community is what drives her initiative to become more engaged in her community. Secondly, the voice of *Preservation* is heard together with *Idleness*. The low energy that Jessika witnesses within her community during the winter months serves as a motivation toward community preservation, given her interest in ecology and understanding that everything is interconnected. Thirdly, the voice of *Empowerment* is noticed parallel to the voice of *Connectedness*. This is heard through Jessika's perspective of empowering others to make positive contributions.

Voice of 'enchantment' and 'initiative'. The voice of *Enchantment* (identified in **bold**) was echoed through Jessika's descriptions of her community, and was often heard parallel to the voice of *Initiative* (identified in *italics*) with respect to Jessika's engagement in her community.

Um, **it is something about the Yukon that is magical**. I don't know what it is. It could be the mountains, the sky at night, or the snow, **but there is something just there**. Ever since I was a little girl, *I have always, done, I've always gone to [a community festival], I have always been at Canada Day. I've done everything*. I've been to different little events that most people won't know about, and somehow *I got tickets for it and still got to see it*. Like, **it's different up here**. It is an artistic community. **I don't know how to explain it**. ***But it is beautiful and it is what brings me in***.

Jessika describes how the magical beauty of the Yukon is what "brings [her] in." She reflects that she has always had an interest in community events through "ever since I was a little girl." The enchantment heard through "but there is something just there" projects Jessika's perspective of the Yukon as a "magical place. This is something that—although hard for Jessika to describe—is what has sparked her interest to become more involved in her community.

This unique beauty Jessika experiences the Yukon to have is what inspires her to attend various community events and festivals. Through her participation at these events, she has been given future opportunities to engage in her community in meaningful ways. Jessika's connection to the land—especially given her First Nations heritage—is something that she values and considers to be a very important component of her engagement. This connection to the land has helped to initiate her engagement and served as a means for her involvement through projects that aim to protect or educate about the land.

Voices of ‘preservation’ and ‘idleness’. *Preservation* (identified in **bold**) and *Idleness* (identified in *italics*) were also seen parallel with one another. Jessika explains how community festivals can bring people together despite the challenges over the winter months:

Its like keeping something alive, right? Like if you let one thing die out, a lot more other things will go – and we don’t realize that, but it, its really like, you need every bit of it, and then some more to keep it going. Like even if it is just the beauty that brings you here, you still need it to stay pretty, you still need it to do this, or do that.

And for the community, the small events, or large events, that happen are what make our communities a community. Like the [community] winter festival is basically there because *everybody would get into a slump in the winter, and they would have nothing to do for the last 6 months here.* So when you are in the darkness for that long, we made a festival at the end of February *so people could enjoy the winter, get outside, kind of open up a bit and say hello. Like it kind of is what brings people’s spirits up, you know?*

Whether you are doing something for the community or not, **you still have something to look forward to.**

This observation centers metaphors that accentuate Jessika’s ecological interest through her understanding that everything in the community is interconnected. Jessika describes how her engagement is used as a tool to help “keep something alive.” She explains how through the winter months the community in general can fall into a “slump,” as there are little activities or opportunities to connect with others through the winter months. Through her voice of Preservation, I hear her engagement in the festival as a means to spark energy in the community, boost community moral by creating “something to look forward to.” The voice of Idleness is also heard alongside Jessika’s connections to others in the sense that waking people up and giving them “something to look forward to” will help to preserve and enhance the community moral or, as she describes, “bring people’s spirits up.”

The metaphors around “being alive” heard through Jessika’s voice of Preservation is heard through her connection to land—in an ecological sense—as well as her connection to community. She positions herself within her relationship to the land and offers comparisons to her engagement in the community. She describes her engagement as a means to keep the momentum in the community towards positive changes. Jessika speaks of needing to keep one

thing alive for other things to continue, as she says, “like if you let one thing die out, a lot more will go.”

Voice of ‘connectedness’ and ‘empowering others’. The voice of *Connectedness* (identified in **bold**) and *Empowering Others* (identified in *italics*) were often heard together as Jessika reflected on her role in helping other people take steps toward positive change.

Even if I am not the one who is going to start the motion, or if I am the one who starts the motion, it is the second person who has got to help make it work... Yeah, because I am not saying that I am going to be the one to change the world. But I know how to help and *I can help other people do that ...* And I guess you need to take a leap ... like *take your next step and push yourself to better yourself, and when you better yourself you better everything around you.*

Jessika sees herself as having a role in supporting others in creating momentum for change, although she does not always see herself as being the primary initiator. Through her relationships, she feels she can “help other people do that,” implying that through her connections with others, she feels that she can help them “change the world.” The voice of Empowerment is most loud when Jessika says, “take the next step to push yourself to better yourself, and when you better yourself you better everything around you.” The two voices come together and are both heard through “you better everything around you,” as Jessika describes a ripple effect in that the impact of her community engagement may reach beyond just the one person who is empowered to “take [their] next step and push [themselves] to better [themselves].”

Appendix L

Laura's Analysis

Researcher's Response

In listening to my conversation with Laura, I was taken back by the overwhelming sense of pride for her culture and community. She oozed with pride as she spoke of her engagement as a means for her to “represent this little part of the world.” This really struck me. I also took note of the role of overcoming challenges in promoting and sustaining Laura's engagement in her community. As Laura overcame these challenges, she was initially feeling misunderstood by her community. She took these initial setbacks and used them as motivation to prove adults, who initially doubted her, wrong. Laura identifies overcoming these challenges as having a major impact on her experience of engagement in the community. Laura has expressed wanting to help demonstrate to others in her community that they can learn from the mistakes they make. Laura's desire to form meaningful connections with others and empower them to have an impact in their community was what stood out the most for me. Laura's engagement and projects in her community seem to come from a deeper desire to help empower the future leaders to find something that they are passionate about and turn it into something meaningful for the community.

Generating ‘I Poems’

In listening to Laura's story, a singular (I) and plural (we) first-person voice was identified through the narrative. In particular two specific ‘I-poems’ stand out from her transcript. The first I-poem from the following excerpt demonstrates Laura's positioning towards her growth:

Well I have learned from trial and error, when I was really young, I was selected to go on a leadership exhibition, and (laughs), I didn't have much, what you would say leadership or role model skills. I was always the one that was in a little bit of trouble and that trip was taken away from me. And I felt that, I felt that. I really really felt that. I felt that I had sabotaged myself and I never forgot that. And that was the only time I ever let that happen and I said to myself, “I am going to show these people, that (pause) I wasn't the wrong choice. I am going to show these people that I was just really young and I wasn't taking it seriously”... I got double involved, I learned from that.

The I-poem is generated by extracting the underlined ‘I’ portions from the excerpt:

I have learned
 I was really young
 I was selected
 I didn't have
 I was always
 I felt that
 I felt that
 I really really felt that
 I felt that I had sabotaged
 I never forgot that
 I ever let that happen
 I said to myself
 I am going
 I wasn't
 I am going
 I was just really young
 I wasn't taking
 I got double
 I learned

Reading this poem helped me to develop a sense of how Laura has perceived her growth as a leader in her community. For example, in this particular poem, I observe the overall rhythm and tone escalate from “I felt that” to “I felt I had sabotaged.” She shifts from personally feeling the impact to a reflection on the role of her own decisions. This positioning helped me to witness a sense of growth and empowerment. I also hear Laura’s initiation being reflected as she shifts from her experiences in the past “I was really young; I wasn’t taking” to a sense of empowerment reflected in “I got double; I learned,” also helping me gain insight into Laura’s positioning towards her growth.

The second ‘I-poem’ reflects Laura’s connection to others in relation to having had experienced similar challenges within the community:

I am still young and spearheading it. Not to say that older people don’t relate with the youth. But I am right there with them. You know, I know what they are doing through. I

can relate to them, and I think that is going to be a plus side. It can't be a negative, it can only be a positive, right? Yeah, and to be able to—because I know they can look at me and related to me, and I can look to them and relate to them – we know, we all relate to each other, we are all young and I have been young and have learned from mistakes and I can help them like that.

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined 'I' and 'we' portions of the excerpt above:

I am still young
 I am right there
 I know what
 I can relate
 I think that
 I know they can
 I can look
 We all relate
 We are all young
 I have been young
 I can help

This poem provides insight into Laura's relation with others. Laura's shift from "I know they can" to "I can look" reveals a positioning that reflects a power balance between her and others. Another interesting positioning observed through this 'I-poem' involves how Laura positions herself given that she is young herself as a mentor to other youth. This is observed through the shift from "I am still young" to "We are all young" to "I have been young." This reflects Laura's desire to find common ground with others while reflecting on her own experiences when she was younger. Although this might reflect some ambivalence in her role as a leader while still being young herself, I understand this positioning to be more Laura's role as a youth leader and her ability to relate to other through her youthfulness.

Finally, the 'I-poem' generated from the following excerpt demonstrates Laura's positioning within her community as she strives to empower others through her engagement:

I really hope to see the kids here, not only just the kids, but I really hope to see more people stepping up, taking charge, getting involved and making good things happen for this

town because that is what we really need. You know, we need that. We don't need to fly in other role models to give speeches to the kids because we have so many here and they don't even know it yet. Right?

The resulting poem reads as:

I really hope

I really hope

We really need

We need that

We don't need to

This poem demonstrates Laura's hope for her community, heard through her own desires alongside her perspective of what the community does and does not need. Laura's repetition of "I really hope" is powerful as she demonstrates a hope for change in the community. This 'hopefulness' is heard throughout Laura's conversation with me. The progression I heard as Laura says "we really need," to a more affirmative "we need that," to an even more firm "we don't need to," suggests a sense of energy or passion towards the potential of young people in her community. This was heard both as Laura described her engagement in the community and as she reflected on the impact her involvement has had on her community.

Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

There are five prominent contrapuntal voices that can be heard throughout Laura's story of engagement in her community. Firstly, the voice of *Empowering Others* was heard loudly throughout Laura's story of engagement in her community. More specifically, *Empowering Others* was heard most prevalently alongside the voices of *Connectedness* and *Resilience*. Laura's desire to empower other youth in her community is heard through the connections and rapport that she builds in the community and through sharing how she has learned to overcome challenges with others. Lastly, the voice of *Personal Responsibility* was observed in congruence with the voice of *Positiveness*. Laura's desire to take responsibility for change in her community is driven by the positive experiences she has had through the opportunities she has been given as a result of her reputation as a leader.

Voice of 'empowering others'. Laura's story of engagement embodies her desire to empower others in her community. The following excerpt best exemplifies this desire for others

in the community—not just the youth—to be empowered to “take charge” and “make good thing happen” for Paulatuk. The voice of *Empowerment* is identified by **bold**:

I really hope to see the kids here, not only just the kids, but I really hope to see more people **stepping up, taking charge, getting involved and making good things happen for this town** because that is what we really need. You know, we need that. **We don't need to fly in other role models to give speeches to the kids because we have so many here and they don't even know it yet.** Right?

Through “I really hope to see more people stepping up, taking charge, getting involved and making things happen for this town,” we hear Laura’s desire for the future to be one where others in the community take on initiatives for the better of the community. I also hear an interesting positioning that Laura has between herself and others in the community when she says “we don’t need to fly in other role models to give speeches to the kids because we have so many here and they don’t even know it yet,” implying that the community does not yet realize the potential for the youth who are already in the community. This is a common challenge in the North where community leaders bring in outsiders to help empower and inspire the youth, while overlooking other youth leaders within the community who might be good candidates. Laura challenges the notion of needing outsiders to inspire the community, stating that there are other role models who live in the community. Through “they don’t even know it yet,” she implies that there is an empowerment process that had yet to happen.

In listening for the voice of *Empowering Others* in her story, I heard how Laura both connected with others while also sharing her own story of overcoming challenges to help create a sense of empowerment for others. I will provide examples of each of these below.

‘Empowerment’ and ‘connectedness’. The voice of *Empowerment* (identified in **bold**) through Laura’s relationships with others in her community was heard alongside her voice of *Connectedness* (identified in *italics*) as she positioned herself to have a role of empowering others to contribute positively in the community.

You know, filmmaking is the cool part of it, but really *what we are doing here is getting together* and **letting them put their ideas and heads together to find different ways to create awareness. And figure [things] out for themselves, because every kid has a solution, figure out a solution for some of the issues that we have here.** And that ways

they will learn, and *I will be there to help push them in the right direction*, and **they can create something that they can be proud of.**

The excerpt above demonstrates a complimentary relationship between the two voices as Laura speaks about her filmmaking initiative. More specifically, Laura speaks about the initiative as being an outlet for youth in the community to share awareness about a community issue or concern that they feel is meaningful to them. Through “and figure [things] out for themselves” and “because every kids has a solution,” Laura acknowledges that the young people of today are capable of coming up with solutions for some of the issues experienced in Paulatuk. With this, Laura’s filmmaking initiative is a tool to respond to challenges experienced within the community as well as a mechanism to engage and empower others to “create something they can be proud of.” Through the rapport and relationships that Laura has with others in the community, she explains that she will “be there to help push [the youth] in the right direction” but while helping them have autonomy over the initiative itself.

‘Empowerment’ and ‘resilience’. Laura often speaks of her role in the community as being based in the connections that she has with others, in that she not only can relate to the experiences of the young people, but that she herself, has overcome many challenges that she can share to help empower others to do the same. Through sharing her stories, I heard a voice of *Resilience* (identified in *italics*) echoed alongside the voice of *Empowering Others* (identified in **bold**). The following excerpt is an example of how Laura uses her ability to overcome challenges to help foster a sense of empowerment in others:

Yes, I have been one of those kids who has been involved with, you know, testing the waters, making mistakes and what not. *But even if you make mistakes it is not the end of the world. You can get back up and you can still do great things.* And I think that is so important in this community that kids are involved and **that they know that no matter what age they are, that they can still have a positive impact on themselves and others, and to help each other.** Because we need that here. We need more of these things. You know?

Although Laura described having several setbacks throughout her journey of engagement within her community, the voice of resilience is heard as she identifies these setbacks to be important to her experience. She explains that setbacks are what has made her stronger and have given her the motivation to set out and prove to others that they were wrong in how they viewed her potential

to be a leader. The voice of empowerment is heard through “no matter what age they are, they can still have a positive impact on themselves and others.” Similar to Laura’s closing message to readers, this excerpt demonstrates the importance of helping others to see the potential to bounce back after difficulties, as well as empower them to realize their potential.

Voices of ‘personal responsibility’ and ‘positiveness’. Throughout Laura’s story of engagement in her community, a voice of *Personal Responsibility* (identified in **bold**) could be heard as she reflected the *Positiveness* (identified in *italics*) of her engagement. The voice of *Positiveness* was often heard as she explained the positive outcomes of her engagement. In the excerpt below, Laura described the reason for her community engagement:

There are so many reasons [for my engagement]. Well I guess the one main reason, if you look at them all put together is, well, **if I don’t do it, I don’t see anybody else that is going to do it.** *And that is a really good thing, good things come out of it,* so why not? Why not take that extra step forward and see where this is going to go and do it for the people. **I know a lot of kids here and I genuinely care ...** You know, **it is the right way of thinking.** You know, **don’t watch, don’t sit there and watch somebody struggle with something. Get up, and lend them a hand.**

The voice of *Positiveness* is reflected through “that is a really good thing, good things come out of it, so why not?.” Laura often speaks about this notion of engagement as “being a good thing,” and this message is usually conveyed through the voices of *Connectedness* and *Empowering Others*. Laura stresses sharing her positive experiences with others to help them see the merit in joining her movement to help make Paulatuk the best it can be. Throughout Laura’s conversation with me, the voice of *Personal Responsibility* echoed through statements like “if I do not do it, I do not see anybody else who is going to do it.” This fostered Laura’s desire to take the initiative in her community and create opportunities for others to engage meaningfully as a response to community challenges. By creating these experiences for herself, Laura explains overcoming the challenge of living in an isolated community with what appeared to others as having limited opportunities.

Appendix M

George's Analysis

Researcher's Response

Through my conversations with George, I was filled with the image of him wanting to share the 'positiveness' he experienced with others. This concept of sharing the positive 'vibe' he experienced at ACTIVATE was woven into the entire conversation with me. I found this interesting and I was intrigued by what motivates George's desire to spread the positive energy he felt at ACTIVATE. I found myself wondering if part of George's desire to share that positiveness to others in the community somehow came from a perspective that his community was missing a positive vibe. Similar to George, I too feel the "overwhelming" positive energy of attending ACTIVATE is unique, and it makes me wonder where else youth can be a part of such a deeply empowering experience. However, I get the sense from my conversation with George that ACTIVATE had an ever more profound impact on his life, as it "changed [him] in the best way possible." And with that, I can understand why George would want to share this positiveness with everyone.

I noticed myself at times taken aback by George's ambivalence towards himself as a role model. Throughout the conversation, it was clear that becoming a role model was very important to him. At times I felt disheartened by George's perception that he is "not yet a role model." I understand his thoughts around feeling "hypocritical," promoting a smoke-free lifestyle when he continues to smoke. However, I have witnessed him as a volunteer leader at ACTIVATE; I have seen the way other youth at ACTIVATE respond to George's energy and passion for his community, his culture, and his desire for positive change within his community and for himself. It is evident to me that other youth at ACTIVATE looked up to George, and for those reasons I experienced some tension upon hearing from George that he does not yet see himself as a role model to others.

Generating 'I-Poems'

In listening to George's story, a singular first person voice was easily identified. Unlike some other participants, a plural collective 'we' is not heard through George's story. When George uses "we," he typically refers to himself and a friend working together or refers to logistics regarding his engagement. I did not include these instances of "we," as I did not feel George was truly referring to a collective 'we' within the community.

The following transcribed excerpt below seems to situate George's ambivalence towards his readiness to initiate a community project:

To be quite honest, I thought after ACTIVATE, but now being through all the programs that I have been through, it kind of feels like, maybe I wasn't really back then, but now I feel like I have learned. And I might not be ready even now, but I am ready to take that – I don't know if risk is the right word – but to get out there and try with confidence – like I feel like I can do that now.

The following poem is generated by extracting the underlined 'I' portions of the excerpt above:

I thought after ACTIVATE
I have been through
I wasn't really
I feel like I have learned
I might not be ready
I am ready
I don't know
I feel like I can do that now

Reading this poem help me to develop as sense of how George positions himself towards what he has learned through his experiences with both ACTIVATE and his involvement in the community. Throughout my conversations with George, this was a prevalent positioning. It was noticeable both as he reflected on his desire to initiate, develop, and implement a community project and with respect to his smoking habits.

In this I-poem I notice George's reflection about himself after having learned new skills at ACTIVATE ("I feel like I have learned"), and discovering his own potential after having experienced the forum. However, I also hear ambivalence with respect to George's readiness when he says, "I might not be ready" but then encourages himself by quickly responding with "I am ready."

Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

There are six prominent contrapuntal voices that can be heard throughout George's story of engagement in his community. Firstly, the voice of *Positiveness* can be heard alongside the voices of *Contribution* and *Personal Growth*. Secondly, the voice of *Empowering Others* is first

heard in tension with the voice of *Feeling Fake*; however, as George's story of engagement in his community unfolds, Empowering Others is heard alongside a voice of *Personal Awakening*.

The voices of 'positiveness', 'contribution', and 'personal growth'. In listening to George's story of engagement, I was especially struck by a unique voice—something that George calls "positiveness." George first mentioned this feeling of "positiveness" when describing his ACTIVATE experience, but this voice is something that is observed throughout the entire transcript. The voice of *Positiveness* (represented in **bold**) is best reflected in the following excerpt alongside the voice of *Contribution* (represented in italics) and *Personal Growth* (represented in underline):

Um, I just say, like **the whole positiveness around ACTIVATE. Like when I went, there is just so much inspiration, so much support,** and it just like, *wanted me to give a little bit of that positiveness back home. Like it really did change who I am in the best way possible. So I want, definitely want, to spread that positive-ness around in my community ... It is just like, because I was sort of heading down the wrong path around that point. And like just the whole environment, and support. Like everyone is just so positive and supportive at ACTIVATE, it is just like, I want other people to know how that feels, kind of thing. I kind of want to be a role model. I don't feel like I am quite there yet at all, because I haven't done my project, and I am still like partying and that stuff. And that is not the greatest role model, but I do want to become like a great role model in my community.*

This excerpt best represents George's voice of Positiveness as it was echoed through Contribution and Personal Growth.

The voice of 'empowering others'. The voice of *Empowering Others* was initially heard in tension with a voice of *Feeling Fake* but, as the interview progressed, this later progressed into a voice of *Personal Awakening*.

The voices of 'feeling fake' and 'empowering others'. The voice of *Empowering Others* was echoed through George's development as a leader, and was often in tension with *Feeling Fake* with respect to not always acting like a role model. As George describes the goals of the Tobacco Has No Place Here campaign, the tension between Empowering Others (identified in *italics*) and Feeling Fake (identified in **bold**) is heard:

It just had a lot to do with living a healthy lifestyle, especially with the Tobacco Has No Place Here campaign. That has a lot to do with living a healthy lifestyle—a smoke free lifestyle—and **I was again feeling like I am not a role model yet was because I went there and I smoked cigarettes. I didn't smoke around any of the students, but I was there for an anti-tobacco awareness campaign** ... And for the suicide intervention week *it was about bringing a positiveness to the community—a light, something to turn to—like a hobby or something. You can take up breakdancing and, if you love it, then it will be there for you all the time.*

George has a deep desire to empower others through his engagement in the community, however he doesn't feel as though he always acts like a 'role model'. George describes, "Feeling like I am not a role model yet," as he "[brings] a positiveness to the community." This tension suggests a process in which a young person can empower others while undergoing a process of personal change themselves. Near the end of the interview, George explains how attending ACTIVATE allowed him to quit smoking pot, and that he had already started a plan to quit smoking.

The voices of 'empowering others' and 'personal awakening'. As our conversation unfolded, George's feelings of being a 'fake' role model developed more into a sense of personal awakening. George became less critical of himself as a role model and offered a positioning that reflected an awakening of his progress and desires towards becoming a role model. The following excerpt echoes the voice of Empowering Others (identified in *italics*) heard along side Personal Awakening (identified in **bold**):

And just like that support of putting together an action plan, **just made me want to go from what I was doing before ACTIVATE, and I want to take the other path and I want to share it.** You know, because I know people who are going down the same path, like me when I was in high school right now, and *I just kind of want to show them that the better the things you do, like um, once you start going down the right path it will all be better for you in the end.*

George's voice shifts from 'feeling fake' to a sense of 'personal awakening' as the interview progresses. George comes into a perception of himself that seems to reflect growth from having attending ACTIVATE; he says, "[the support from others] just made me want to go [away] from what I was doing before ACTIVATE, and I want to take the other path and I want to share it." The voice of personal awakening emerges as George starts to see the path he was on as less

desirable compared to the new possibilities inspired by ACTIVATE. George's feelings of conviction about the new possibilities through ACTIVATE come through loudly in his desire for others to have similar experiences. . He says, "I just want to show them that the better the things you do... [the] better [it will be] for you in the end." George uses his own journey as a means to help empower others to see the potential for something "better."

Appendix N

REB Ethics Approval Notice

File Number: 06-12-40

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/24/2012



Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa
 Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice

Social Science and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Cristelle	Audet	Education / Education	Supervisor
Christina	Callingham	Education / Education	Student Researcher

File Number: 06-12-40**Type of Project:** Master's Thesis**Title:** Aboriginal Youth Involvement in a Youth-driven Program: A Narrative Exploration of the Process and Impact of Engagement

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
07/18/2012	07/17/2013	I a

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only, I: Partial approval)**Special Conditions / Comments:**

N/A

File Number: 06-12-40

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/24/2012



Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Kim Thompson

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Appendix O
Nunavut Research Institute Scientific Research License

Nunavummi Qaujisaqtulirijikkut / Nunavut Research Institute

Box 1720, Iqaluit, NU X0A 0H0 phone: (867) 979-7279 fax: (867) 979-7109 e-mail:
mosha.cote@arcticcollege.ca

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH LICENSE

LICENSE # 03 017 12N-M

ISSUED TO: Christina Callingham
University of Ottawa

TEAM MEMBERS: C.Callingham,C.Audet

AFFILIATION: University of Ottawa

TITLE: Aboriginal Youth Involvement in Youth-driven Initiatives: A Narrative Exploration
of the Process and Impact of Engagement.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH:

Aboriginal youth across the country have expressed a need to be valued as contributors to community health and healing, and have taken initiative to this effect through participation in programs that promote youth engagement. The aim of this qualitative study is to explore how Aboriginal youth both act and perceive themselves as agents of change in relation to having participated in programs that promote youth engagement and aim to contribute to a greater social change movement.

TERMS & CONDITIONS:

DATA COLLECTION IN NU:

DATES: October 15, 2012-August 31, 2013

LOCATION: Baker Lake,Iqaluit,Rankin Inlet

Scientific Research License 03 017 12N-M expires on December 31, 2012

Issued at Iqaluit, NU on October 23, 2012


Mary Ellen Thomas
Science Advisor



Appendix P
Northwest Territories Scientific Research Licence

Licence No. 15159
File No. 12 410 935
October 10, 2012

2012

Northwest Territories Scientific Research Licence

Issued by: **Aurora Research Institute – Aurora College**
Inuvik, Northwest Territories

Issued to: Ms. Christina M Callingham
University of Ottawa



Affiliation: University of Ottawa

Funding: Self/Private

Team Members:

Title: **Aboriginal Youth Involvement in a Youth-driven Program: A Narrative Exploration of the Process and Impact of Engagement**

Objectives: The proposed study aims to explore the following research question: "What narratives emerge, and are co-constructed, when exploring the experience of Aboriginal youth who engage in youth development programs aimed at fostering youth engagement?" Using the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement model for youth engagement as a conceptual framework, this study will specifically inquire how Aboriginal youth (a) become engaged in programs that promote youth engagement, (b) experience the process of their engagement in such programs, and (c) perceive the impact of their engagement on their personal development and their community.

Dates of data collection: October 15, 2012 to December 31, 2012.

Location: Phone interview with individuals who are from Paulatuk (currently living in Alberta) and Whati (currently living in Yellowknife)

Licence No.15159 expires on December 31, 2012
Issued in the Town of Inuvik on October 10, 2012

*** original signed ***

Pippa Seccombe-Hett,
Director, Aurora Research Institute

Appendix Q
Written Permission for Copyrighted Contents

Correspondence with Adam Fletcher

From: CA Office <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Ladder of Participation Graphic
Date: 9 April, 2015 1:09:42 PM EDT
To: Christina Callingham [REDACTED]

Hi Christina, and thank you for writing.

I have re-interpreted the Ladder again and have stopped using the graphic you've attached. Feel free to use it as you wish; however, I'd encourage you to take a look at the new form I've created in the attached article.

Best wishes,
- Adam

Adam Fletcher
Author, Speaker and Consultant
Founder, SoundOut and The Freechild Project
[REDACTED]

On Tue, Mar 31, 2015 at 8:40 AM, Christina Callingham <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Hello there,

I am writing because I am in the final stages of completing my MA thesis on Aboriginal youth engagement. In my literature review, I use the attached image that was originally retrieved from a report created by the Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts (CYCC) Network.

I have reviewed the APA guidelines and it says that I need to receive permission from the creator to use the image.

Are you able to confirm that I would have permission to use the attached image (or another image of the ladder that you have, I cannot seem to find this exact image on your website) for the sole purposes of my MA thesis project.

Thank you,

Christina Callingham
University of Ottawa

Correspondence with Nishad Khanna, Research Director at the CEYE

From: Nishad Khanna <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Permission to reprint CEYE image
Date: 20 August, 2015 7:36:29 PM EDT
To: Christina Callingham <[REDACTED]>

Hi Christina,

Thanks for your request. We are glad that our youth engagement conceptual model has been useful for your research. Please accept this message as our permission from the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement to reprint this Qualities figure attached below from "Youth Engagement: A Conceptual Model" in your Masters thesis.

Please use this complete citation:

Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (2007). "Qualities of Engagement" excerpted from "Youth Engagement: A Conceptual Model", p. 1. Toronto, ON: Students Commission of Canada. Retrieved from http://www.tgmag.ca/aorg/pdf/4pager_e2008FINAL_web.pdf
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Regards,
Nish

Nishad Khanna
Research Director
Students Commission / Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement
Victoria Office
www.studentscommission.ca
Mission: "I'd rather be the program than the reason for the program"

Christina Callingham <[REDACTED]> , 8/20/2015 6:27 PM:
Hello Nishad,

To follow up from our phone conversation today, attached is the image that I would like to include in my MA thesis. Below the image will be the following citation:

Figure 2. Qualities of Youth Engagement. Retrieved from "Youth Engagement: A Conceptual Model" by Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, p. 111. Copyright 2007 by Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement. Reprinted with permission.

Please let me know if I have the CEYE's permission to use this image for the sole purposes of my MA thesis project.

Thank you,
Christina Callingham
University of Ottawa