

ANTI-RACIST APPROACHES WITH YOUTH IN LIBRARIES AND OTHER PUBLIC SPACES

Pathways to Prosperity, 2023

- Amber Matthews (Western University) *Anti-Racism, Public Libraries, and Black Youth in Canada*
- Katie Crossman (Bow Valley College) *Everyday Inclusion of Racialized Youth in Libraries and Other Public Spaces*

Anti-Racism, Public Libraries, and Black Youth in Canada

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Study overview

Research Problem

- Many conclude that LIS has not done enough to dismantle structural oppression built into library work
 - Gibson et al. 2020; Leung and López-McKnight 2021; Mehra and Gray 2020; Overbey and Folk 2022; Ossom-Williamson et al. 2020
- Lack of prior research leaves Canadian public libraries under-equipped and contributes to Black youth disengagement when they feel that libraries are not welcoming spaces or responsive to their needs
 - Gibson and Hughes-Hassell 2023; Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell 2017; Matthews and Thomas 2023
- Research shows that Black youth often feel surveilled, harshly disciplined, and unwelcome in libraries
 - Agosto and Hughes-Hassell 2010; Gibson and Hughes-Hassell 2023; Kumasi 2019; Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell 2017
- **What is needed to create culturally and socially appropriate library spaces with and for Black youth?**

Study Goals

- 1) better understand why some youth use community-based services instead of public libraries and how this might relate to experiences or perceptions of anti-Black racism
- 2) identify programs and services that help youth with challenges they face and opportunities for public libraries to support youth better
- 3) explore family decisions to seek programs at the library and/or in community-based spaces



Map courtesy of Arku, Kemp and Gilliland 2011

Study design

Methodology

Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin 2013)

Counter-Storytelling (Delgado 1989)

Study Sample

Black Youth aged 13 to 24

Parents of Black Youth

Data Collection

Interviews with youth and parents

Personal Meaning Mapping (PMM) with youth

Data Analysis

Critical Race Methods

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2023)

Personal meaning mapping

PMM is an age-appropriate method in which youth are not limited to only questions and verbal descriptions and was developed for use with youth in informal learning settings (Falk, Moussouri, and Coulson 1998).



Cora, aged 24, depicted feeling lack of belonging and representation in public library programs compared with acceptance and inclusion in the community-based programs she attended.

Theoretical framework

Critical Race Theory

- Examines socio-historical relations from perspective of those with lived experience with racism in society and institutions (Delgado and Stefancic 2017)

Anti-Racism

- Anti-oppressive approach to identify and address racism and other inequities in society and institutions (Dei 2014)

Critical Diversity Studies

- Interdisciplinary approach to critical issues arising in and through equity, diversity and inclusion (Ahmed 2013)

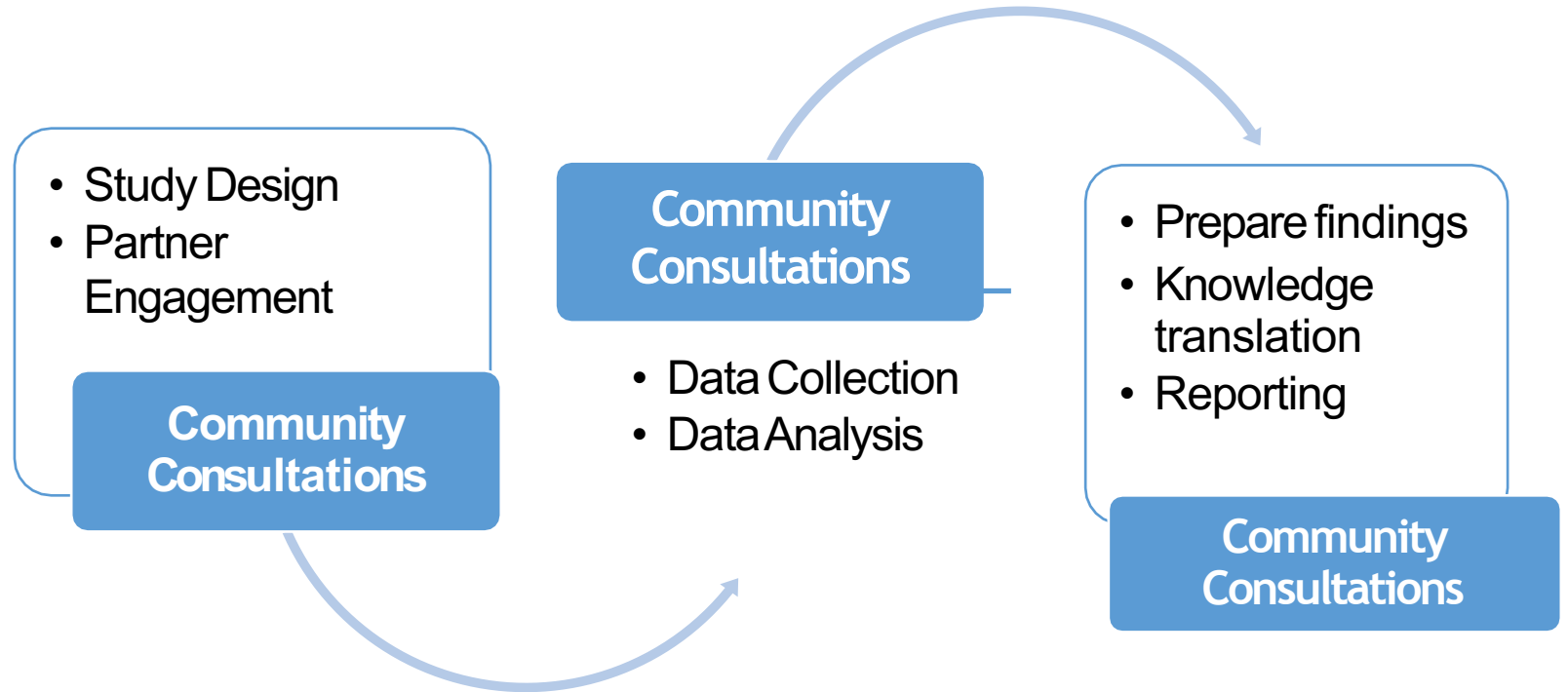
COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH MODEL

Community Partners

- Where WeAre Now (WEAN)
Black Community Centre
- London Black Community
Public Library
- London Black History
Coordinating Committee

Research Funding Partners

- Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada
- Western University
- Ontario Library Association



Themes Identified

1. Early memories of public libraries are positive with strong connections to childhood and family

It was something that I loved to do with my Mom. It was like our time and as I got older, I started to hang out with, you know, kids and go out and do other things instead of, it just wasn't a place where we like went as a group.

Cora, aged 24

I feel like with the library it was more because when I was very young my Mom used to read to me like she would read like chapter books to me... So since then, it's kind of been ingrained.

Jake, aged 17

Like why should I stay in terms of like public libraries and programs? To me, it was more just like 'OK you go in and you leave'. I'm not really sure like what I was supposed to do there.

Aleia, aged 19

2. Representation and a sense of belonging are core issues for youth

I never experienced any racism or anything. You know, it's just like, it was definitely like I was the only like Black kid there and like out of place.

Jake, aged 17

You know, it's just like it's silence for 11 months. And then February, it's like woohoo Black people are great. And then it's like silence again.

Aleia, aged 19

Public library.
• Free internet
• Unnecessary glares.
• Away from reality.

Tia (aged 16)

PMM describing experiences of surveillance

3. Parents drive early youth involvement and seek safety, belonging, and mentorship

I think the biggest one is I see me. I see me either in the staff or see me in the content. I see me in the, you know, in the activities. Yeah, I just see me in it and my family and people like me participating in it.

Laurel, parent

She made a comment about they're coming with their Starbucks, meaning they have money, but their kids don't represent or show that right. So, I was just like OK, I don't know if I was supposed to hear that, but I wanted to be like what do you mean that they have a Starbucks? Is it because Starbucks is expensive that you assume that they wouldn't have money or do you assume that they because they can afford a Starbucks, then their kids should behaved differently?

Amani, parent

4. Importance of Black peer group, professionals, and community-based mentors

Even if people look down on them, they still fight through it, like because of their race and all that...it gave me motivation and confidence that they're willing to do anything to be successful.

Jay, aged 16



Aleia (aged 19) used the visual of a running track to depict family and community-based youth leaders and mentors encircling her with love and support.

5. Perception that public libraries lack Black community and culturally-specific information, resources, and representation

I know there are a lot of authors who write about their experiences as a person of color or minority and I'm not sure if they really have a section like that or if they are actively looking for books to diversify that sort of input.

Jake, aged 17

I just don't find it useful. It's not, it's not, and even for like <16 year old son>. I got him a library card and he's just like nah. I just don't think he sees... he's like there's nothing there for him that he finds interesting.”

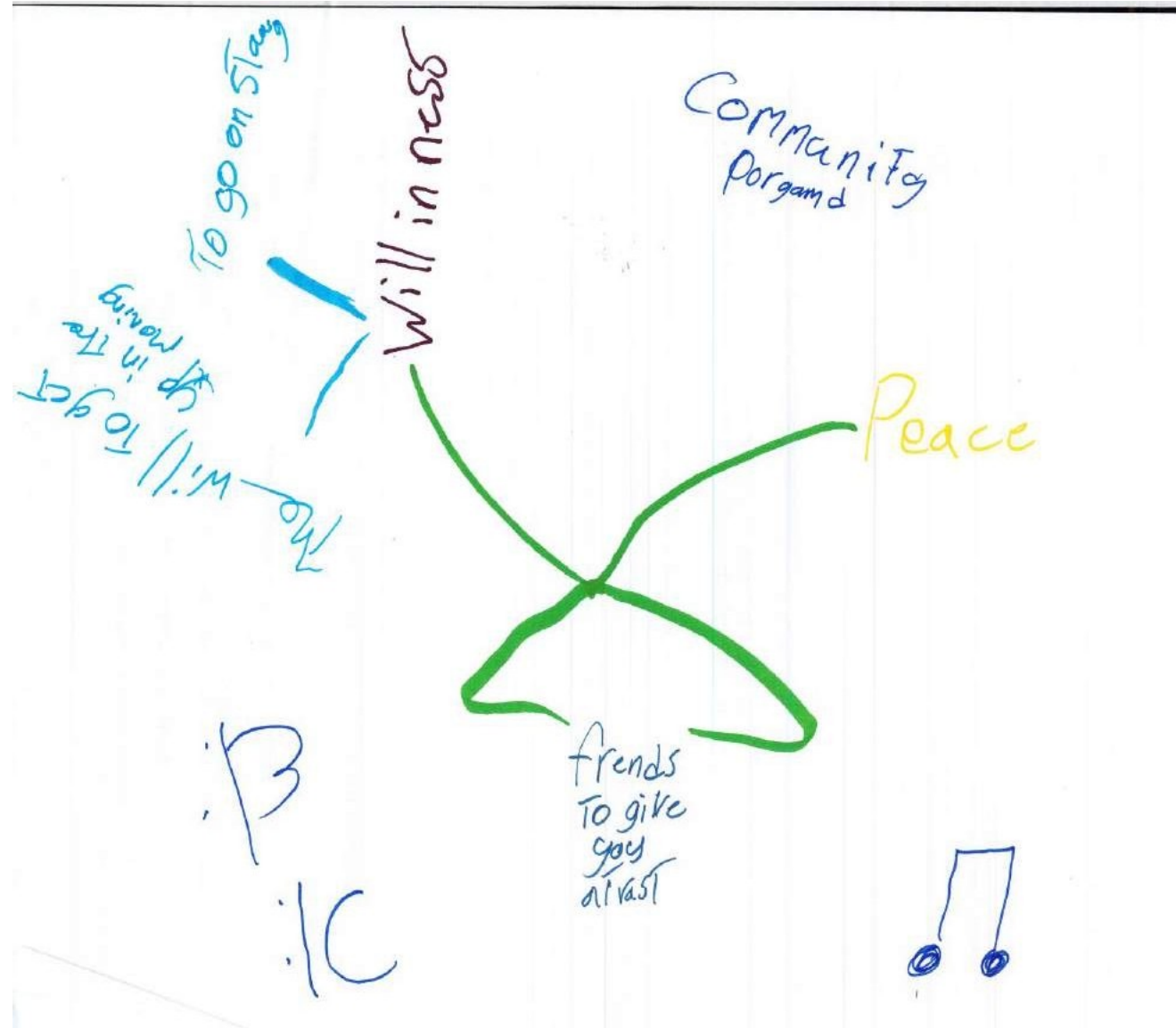
Amani, parent

The books that are there are not beneficial to us. There's like a small catalog for us to educate ourselves about our culture... We need things that pertain to us as well. It can't just be one.

Lexi, aged 24

Benefits of culturally-responsive and directed youth programming

- Recognition of macrosystem influences
- Expanded perspectives on opportunities and future for Black young people
- Sense of belonging and connection through culture-specific philosophies
- Positive interpersonal interaction with youth leaders and role models
- Promote positive collective identity



Omar (aged 13)

PMM describing benefits of community-based programming in his life.

Where We are Now:

Black Community Centre and Public Library

Mission

Our mission is to serve all members of the community with a focus on supporting and empowering Black and marginalized communities by creating initiatives for equal opportunity and equal access to well-being, spiritual health and personal economic prosperity. Our mission is to serve all members of the community with a focus on supporting and empowering the black and marginalized communities by creating initiatives for equal opportunity and equal access to well-being, spiritual health and personal economic prosperity.



Black Community Public Library

- Collection of approximately 1,000 titles representing diverse authors
- Collection developed through a consultation process by WEAN and supported by London Public Library
 - Open call for books
 - Book list review and consultation with multiple stakeholder groups
 - Community meetings
- Community-identified programs to improve health, well-being, and opportunities for Black communities
 - Business development
 - Reading and STEAM programs (children and youth)
 - Wisdom community integration



Suggestions for public libraries

- 1. Adopt approaches to representation and inclusion found in community-based programs**
 - representation with/from the Black community
 - identity-affirming programs and activities
 - positive and motivational staff
- 2. Collaboration with partner organizations**
 - schools, community organizations, ethno-cultural associations, neighborhood associations, etc.
- 3. Dedicated outreach in Black communities**
- 4. Improve staff attention to youth needs**
- 5. Cultural and structural sensitivity training**

They're so much more likely to be...labeled as a non-academic or, you know, not intelligent or not capable of academic achievement, right? It's the labels that get put on them. That's the reality... And so, the way that I think the library can acknowledge that reality is by building programming that actually supports them outside of those environments because they can't do anything about those environments.

Laurel, parent



Scan me to view more PMM's
and a full study description!

Thank you!

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Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

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Everyday Inclusion of Racialized Youth in Libraries and Other Public Spaces

Katie Crossman, PhD



Calgary has experienced rapid diversification



33% immigrants 60%
first-and- second
generation immigrants
(City of Calgary, 2023)



4th most common
settlement city for
immigrants (Statistics
Canada, 2023)



46% of newcomers
surveyed have not used
settlement services.
(Calgary Local Immigration
Partnership, 2021). The
actual number is likely much
lower.

Background

- Complex barriers to meaningful integration remain entrenched (Ager & Strang, 2008; Freeman, 2004).
- Programmatic approaches to integration have **not** always been successful.
- Expanding on the concept of “**everyday multiculturalism**” (Wise & Velayutham, 2009), we are exploring how public spaces, such as libraries, can foster inclusion and belonging with Racialized youth.
- There is a research **gap** about the experiences and needs of **Racialized youth** in Canadian libraries (Matthews, 2020).
- An anti-racist lens is crucial in this work.



Methods



Data collected:

- Interviews ($n=14$)
- Surveys ($n=79$)
- Observations ($n=20$)

Participants

- Youth aged 16-19
- Recruited through library

Qualitative thematic analysis



Findings: Themes

Accessibility

Removing barriers to ensure information, activities, and/or environments are sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible. Barriers may include:

- Location
- Design/layout
- Time
- Surroundings
- Cost

We **observed** how Racialized youth interact with space in public areas.

We **asked** Racialized youth about their experiences with and perceptions of accessing public spaces.

Accessibility: Findings



Location is near home/school/recreational facilities



Convenient & safe public transport



Useful and usable technology and other resources



Specific programs and services (in the past or present)



Culturally and linguistically relevant materials and resources

Accessibility: Findings

“This is in the NE suburbs, so not necessarily the safest place in Calgary :/ and someone keeps breaking the bus stop glass, but the accessibility is nice.”

(Survey respondent, age 18)



Accessibility: Findings

“They were a big part of my childhood. I took all the swimming courses with Recreation Calgary. I did basketball, a few summer camps, and I went to yoga. I did quite a few activities as a kid with the recreational center. So, it definitely felt like a place that I'm always going to be welcomed in.” (Sofia, age 16)



Representation

To conceptualize representation, we explore:

What/who is present?

What/who is absent?

What/who is “different”?

What is the meaning behind that?

Representation often came up when we asked youth about what makes them feel welcome in a public place.

Perceptions of representation may vary.



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Representation: Findings



For many Racialized youth, representation is necessary for belonging.

This means seeing their ethnicity and culture represented in

- language,
- books,
- activities, and
- celebrations/events

Teens who feel represented feel safer and more welcome. They are more likely to visit and remain in a space.

Representation: Findings

“Lately I have been noticing the change where we come in. If we're speaking Spanish, a representative of a public library or recreational center might greet us in Spanish, kind of making the area more welcome...That's nice.” (Sofia, age 16)

“I think because it has diversity. ... you can likely find someone who has the same background issue or has similarities. And then it feels more inclusive.” (Netta, age 18)



Safety

“Safety is a state in which hazards and conditions leading to physical, psychological, or material harm are controlled to preserve the health and well-being of individuals and the community **to realize their aspirations.**”

(Maurice, 2001)

We explored approaches to safety:

**Objectively, through
environmental parameters**

**Subjectively, through youth
perceptions and experiences**

Safety: Findings

Safety is holistic:

- Familiarity
- Diversity
- Representation (services, events & working teams)

Youth we interviewed preferred youth-friendly environments over youth-specific environments.

- Feeling accepted and valued *throughout* a place and not just within a specific zone means safety to them.

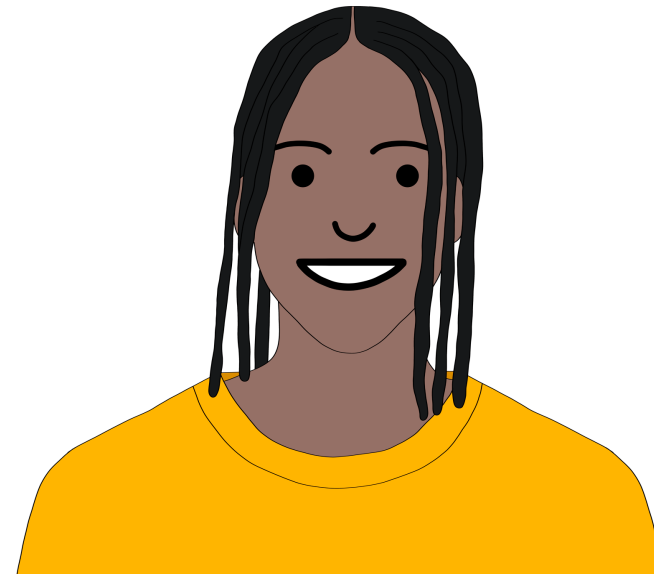
Security measures may have unintended consequences for Racialized youth.



Safety: Findings

“If there were security guards I would feel as though as there’s bound for something to happen, like they’re waiting for something to happen, so that would ...be distracting” (Amira, age 16)

“I think it’s safer because there's more people that go there and it's more modern. You see a lot of people that are around a similar age to you.” (Michelle, age 16)



Findings



And so?

In the settlement sector, we may gravitate to programmatic interventions, but are these anti-racist?.

But what about those who don't access services, programs, and other resources?

We have a co-design group of Racialized youth who are helping us understand our findings

They are thinking about interactive installations & outreach





Findings +

We didn't want to stop at findings, so we created a **co-design team** to help us understand our findings and include Racialized youth in making spaces more welcoming

What is Co-design?

- is designing *with*, not for. It's about making things and learning together.
- challenges the power of individuals who make important decisions about others....often with little to no involvement of the people who those decisions will most impact.
- is about working with the people closest to the solutions, prioritizing relationships, being honest, making sure people feel welcome, using creative tools, balancing idealism and realism, building and sharing skills.
- uses inclusive facilitation that welcomes and works with many ways of knowing, being and doing.

(McKercher, 2023)

Co-design is anti-racist.

The Co-design Team

- A group of 6 Racialized youth met regularly over the course of six months
- They discussed findings and themes and ultimately designed two projects

Small Acts of Kindness
Tied Together



Small acts of kindness

- The co-design team walked around downtown Calgary, performing small acts of kindness of many different people
- They asked people what kindness meant to them
- They gave people
 - Small gift cards
 - Flowers
 - First aid key chains
 - Affirmation cards



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Small acts of kindness

- Participants were initially a bit nervous to approach strangers, especially unhoused people
- They enjoyed the activity and approached many different people and were received warmly
- The reception was mostly very positive
- They told us it was:
 - an opportunity to have agency in making a public space more welcoming
 - empowering
 - confidence-building
 - rewarding
 - easy to do (i.e., affirmation cards in public spaces)

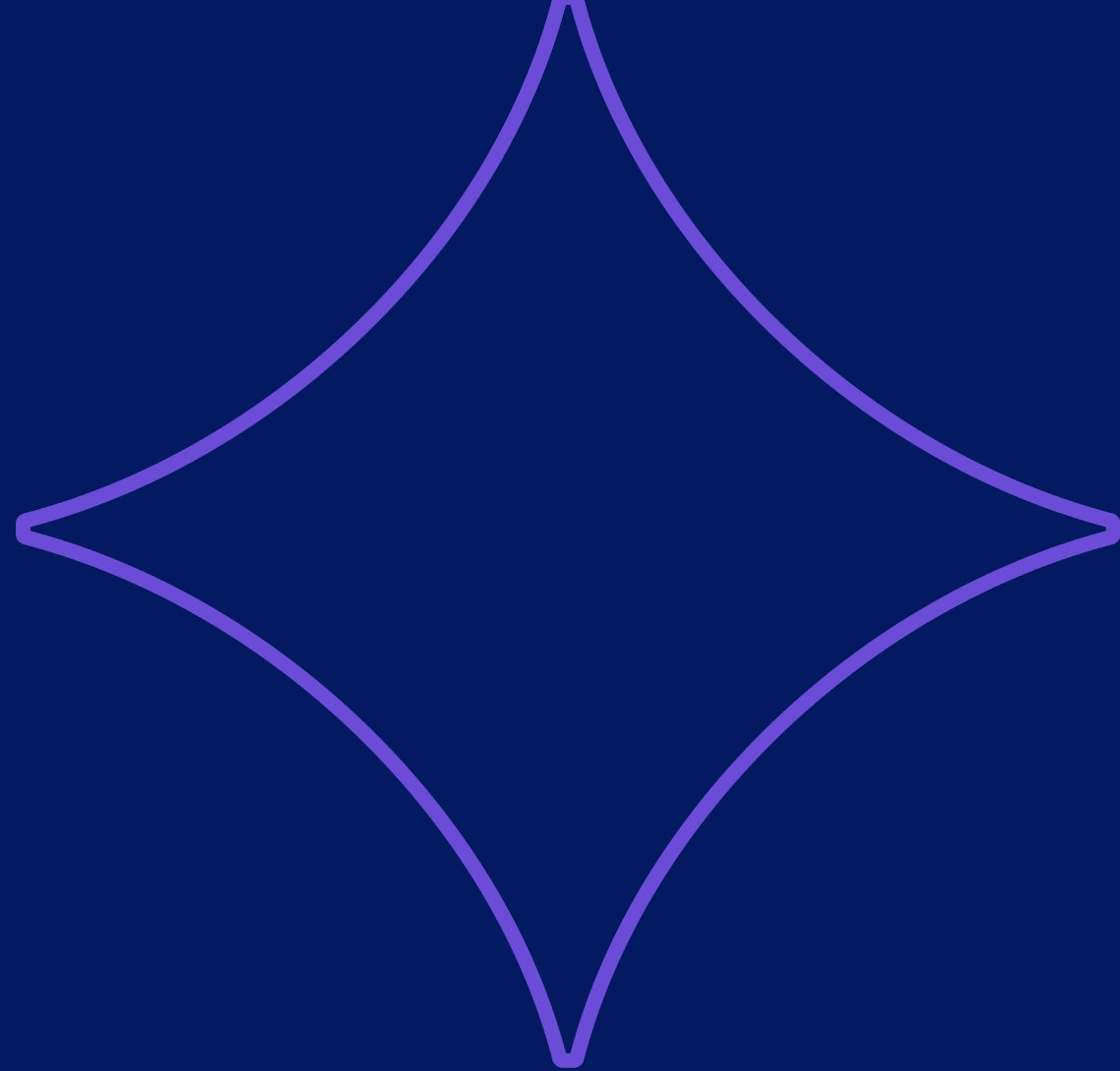
Small acts of kindness

understanding safety
sympathy kindness
interaction care
support positivity
trust others community
true helping love engagement
smile happiness sharing hope empathy
compassion building friendship
generosity

Thanks!

Q&A

We love to talk about our research!
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