

Perspectives on  
Mental Health: An  
Interdisciplinary  
Virtual Symposium

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# Youth Perfectionists' Mental Health Experiences During the Pandemic

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# OVERVIEW

- Project & Context
- Talking about Mental Health
- Final Thoughts



# Project & Context

- Supported by an Early Research Award to Danielle Molnar
- 58 Interviews were conducted with self-identified young perfectionists between the ages of 13-24
- Conducted during May-June 2020 during first lockdown
- We did not ask about mental health yet this emerged as a prominent theme and seven sub-themes
- 42 of the 58 participants discussed mental health
- Participants are divided into two groups
  - 1) elementary and high school students
  - 2) PSE students and recent grads



# Positive Impacts

- Four participants in postsecondary plus group focused on being relieved to have a break from their usual schedules and the associated stresses.
- Nine young women in high school who also identified positive mental health associated with the pandemic.
- Like the postsecondary group, all of them reported enjoying a break from usual life and routines and a reduction in stress
- Brenna (16) reported “I have been significantly less stressed...My life isn’t as chaotic as it normally is”
- Aria (15) “I don’t have to, like, worry about what other people are going to think of me... I’m not trying to, like, impress people from home”
- This group indicated that positive impacts were time limited and faded as restrictions continued



# Focus on the Self

- 14 participants, 8 postsecondary and 6 from the other group, identified having time to focus on the self as being a positive mental health impact
- Mary (20) “it’s helped me focus on myself a little bit more”
- Lyli (24) “it’s given me a lot of time to reflect on my own personal development”
- Bella (14) I’ve been able to spend just like more time alone and like get to know myself better”
- Charlotte (17) “I’m reflecting most on what I need to be happy and healthy because I didn’t have the time to look at that before because of how busy I was”
- Terri (18) valued the opportunity to work on herself without “external opinions and stuff” intruding
- Aria (15) spoke of valuing the opportunity to develop “a better self image of myself”



# Negative Impacts/Isolation

- 10 individuals in the postsecondary plus group and 12 individuals in the younger group spoke about negative impacts
- All of the postsecondary individuals and 9 of the younger group made reference to sadness, depression, or directly identified mental health challenges associated with the pandemic
- Anna (13) “it has like been hard mentally... like at nights I cry in my bed”
- social isolation and withdrawal was reported by 6 of the older group and 7 of the younger group
- Chloe (16) “I feel extremely disconnected from the outside world”
- Callie (17) “it’s hard like going from always being social to like having no social abilities.”
- Terri (18) “I’d say keeping away like just isolating, even from my family. I just wanted, like being alone and not talking to people”



# Negative Impacts/Isolation

- Gabby (18) was in her senior year in high school and identified loss of milestones, “I’m more upset about like the experiences that I have been looking forward to since like forever... So that’s the most challenging part. Being sad and angry... that I’m missing the things that everyone else is going to get.”
- Soraya (20) spoke to a more complex sense of loss around human contact, “It’s like everybody’s afraid of each other right now, it seems like, and I feel like, it just makes you feel so uncomfortable. I get it and I’m definitely going to miss just like, or I definitely am looking forward to just like hugging everybody again, and not like, being afraid of other people.”



# Stress/Anxiety

- 9 young women and 2 young men spoke about anxiety whereas only 5 women spoke about it in the older group
- The five women focused on trying to control worry, current conditions, fear of things not returning to normal, and stress over PSE on-line
- On-line school, falling behind, pandemic behaviours, generalized fear and fear of future
- Amy (13) “Then they started doing online schooling and that’s when everything went to chaos. That’s where my anxiety started acting out, my perfectionism got worse”
- Ben (17) “that stressed me and frustrated me a lot because I was doing what they asked and they were not”.
- Ellie (17) “I would say feeling very stressed out about the future”



# Lack of Motivation/Anhedonia

- Only one person in the older groups specifically spoke about lack of motivation
- Sean (20) “just feeling useless and not getting anything done. So it's sometimes hard to be motivated to get things done... Like I could go on a run, but I'm not really motivated to do it.”
- 5 participants in younger group
- Claire (18) “I think just because there’s no routine right now, it kind of makes you feel like unproductive and like the motivation to do school work is definitely very low right now”
- Amanda (15) reported, “So I’m in my bed more, it’s really sad. Like I wish I was, like, motivated to go out and, like, do something”
- Brenna (16) “I guess motivationally, I don’t want to do my school work... and I’ve noticed my procrastination in has increased severely... I’m not talking to any of my friends either”.



# Lack of Motivation/Anhedonia

- Ellie (17) stood out as experiencing anhedonia

“A lot of the things that I feel passionate about, I don’t really feel passionate about at the moment. I like to write as well and I, like I, I literally cannot do it. Like I cannot sit at the piano and play or I cannot write a poem...I’m having a really, really hard time doing the things that I, I know I enjoy. But like right now I don’t even feel like I enjoy them.”



# Awareness of Other's Struggles

- 8 postsecondary plus individuals and 2 from the other group
- Colton (16) “I can definitely see with other people that they’re kind of losing it”
- Charlotte (17) “I know people have struggled with it, especially kids my age”
- Older group tended to offer more nuanced and specific observations
- Lucy (18) “I don't agree with social distancing with that, just because I know so many people have been struggling because of this.”
- Lacey (18) “So nobody really knows how everyone’s dealing with things” and “I should have been more empathetic of how you guys were all feeling super sad ... it took me a while to accept that this was like actually happening.”



# Strategies

- 14 (7 per group) spoke to strategies they used to cope with pandemic conditions self-care, staying busy, schedules, relaxing/breaks
- Self-care: physical activities such as working out, yoga, walking, sports; connecting with others,
- Supports: community investment; increased awareness; motivation to engage in learning one's role; collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty; student pressures
- Rose (18) "I think the most beneficial thing is just keeping busy right now. Or else I'll just feel like more wrapped up in my own head."
- Fiona (14) "try to do fun things that keep me entertained, just make me feel sort of stable"



# Concluding Thoughts

- Future steps will be comparing interviews from young dancers and looking at other stages of the pandemic

Thank you

