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Oral History and Qualitative Analysis with Youth: Cultivating Attachments to Create Publics

SAMAR SABIE, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

ROBERT SODEN, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada

TAPAN PARIKH, Cornell Tech, New York, NY, United States

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Samar Sabie
Institute of Communication, Culture,
Information and Technology
University of Toronto
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada
samar.sabie@utoronto.ca

Robert Soden
Computer Science & School of the
Environment
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
soden@cs.toronto.edu

Tapan Parikh
Information Science
Cornell Tech
New York, New York, USA
tsp53@cornell.edu

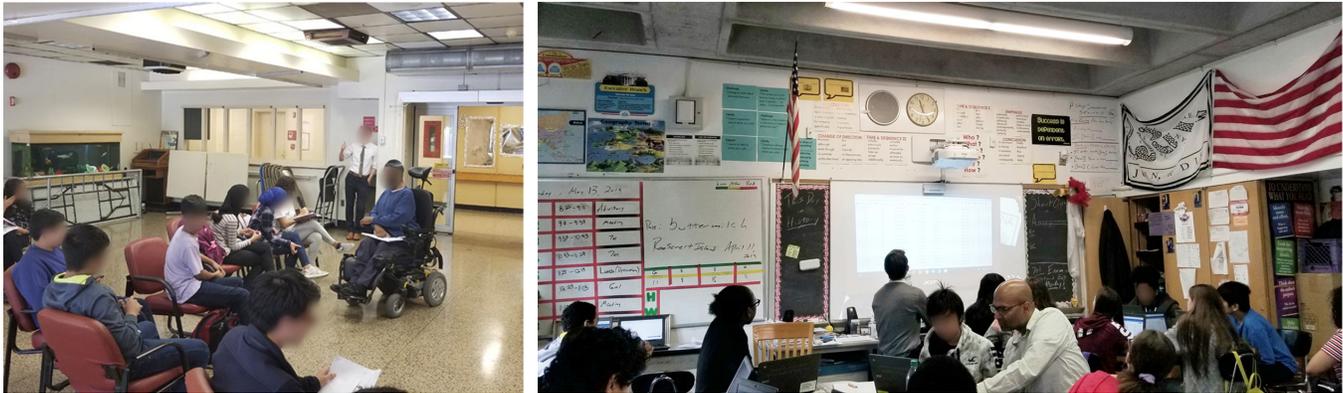


Figure 1: Left: Oral history interviews at Evergreen Hospital (an alias). Right: In-class code revision activity

Abstract

Urban environments can inhibit the formation of publics due to their distracting nature and distant social ties. Yet, forming publics is critical for bringing and mobilizing citizens around issues. In this paper, we introduce a methodology that combines oral history collection and qualitative analysis to foster connections among youth in a North American public school. During our project, the youth interviewed classmates, guardians, and strangers from their community about the meaning of home, then collectively analyzed the oral histories using qualitative analysis techniques. Our findings highlight that this process generated unexpected connections around shared experiences despite the different backgrounds of project participants, thus fostering a sense of attachment to home as a cause for public formation. Our paper demonstrates the effectiveness of such approach in building attachments as a pre-cursor to public formation in community-centered work, while reflecting on the associated practical challenges like skill development, sustained engagement, and emotional labor.

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CCS Concepts

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Keywords

home, oral history, strangers, publics, attachments, youth

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1 Introduction

HCI and design researchers seeking transformational societal change have increasingly called for approaches that support the formation and maintenance of *publics* [9, 10, 12, 23, 25, 26, 58, 59, 66, 88]. John Dewey argues that publics form when people come together around common issues that have consequences on them, even on a “smaller, more intimate scale” [21]. Dewey’s concept of publics holds an implication when doing work for public good: since publics form when citizens unite around specific issues, a *public does not exist a priori*. Therefore, it is essential to create conditions that facilitate the formation of publics [21].

However, the formation of publics in this manner is often easier said than done [21, 61, 104]. In *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, sociologist Georg Simmel explains that modern migratory trends have led to the emergence of *the stranger*. The stranger “comes today and stays tomorrow”, but remains distant from the group because they

were not members from the start and may cease to be members at any point [107]. Despite being an active participant in society, what the stranger shares with society members - occupation, nationality, or classroom tables - remains *general* and *generic* [127].

Historically, the stranger was often a trader. Today, strangers include immigrants, expatriates, and international students. With global movements driving population shifts everywhere, the stranger “remains one of the most powerful sociological tools for analyzing social processes of individuals and groups confronting new social orders” [105]. This ubiquity, coupled with the distractions and apathy associated with urbanism [34, 104], translates into societies deficient in curiosity and engagement - both of which are needed to form publics [20, 21, 66, 129].

HCI scholars Christopher Le Dantec and Carl DiSalvo argue that the work required to form (or infrastructure) publics hinges upon discovering *attachments* [64, 66]. Attachments are the “social and material dependencies and commitments” within a public [66]. They act as the “connective tissue of a collective” which makes them crucial for understanding issues and cultivating participation around them [64]. To achieve the many and potential benefits implicated by the formation of publics, we first need to create contexts for citizens to form attachments to ensure that a public forms and “adheres.”

In this paper, we present a pedagogical approach that combines oral history collection and qualitative analysis to scaffold the rise of a public among a group of youth around a shared concept of *home*. Historians such as Studs Terkel [81, 115] used academic oral history to document counter perspectives (for example on the Great Depression), making these histories popular with the public. Today, scholars, activists, and governments use oral history not only to archive past events [15, 124] but also to elicit subjective experiences and marginalized voices [44, 45, 73, 74], link micro-level experiences to larger societal and political dynamics [31, 91, 120], support participatory history-making [56, 119], and construct epistemic understandings of cultural terrains through insider perspectives [18, 68, 114].

Our project leverages oral history to bridge past experiences with present meaning-making to reveal deeper connections among participants in the context of a North American public school. Located in the vicinity of the third author’s campus, the school’s ethnically-diverse student body is composed of many immigrants and expats who experienced frequent social and geographic dislocations due to their guardians’ shifting work placements. This made it challenging for the youth to form deep connections despite many of them living in the same neighborhood.

We collaborated with the school’s social studies teacher to design and deliver a unit in which grade seven students conducted oral history interviews with classmates, guardians, and community members. The youth then engaged in a scaffolded qualitative analysis process on the oral history transcripts to find patterns and a collective notion of home for the class. We specifically chose the topic of home for the project because it is a powerful pre-existing source of attachments amongst people, and also because it is a term that those who are new to a place or have lived through migration and other forms of transience struggle to come to terms with.

Our findings reveal that the process of collecting oral history interviews and analyzing them as a class led to unexpected yet powerful connections among the youth. These connections served

as *attachments* for the youth and emerged organically from three sources. The first is the relational conception of home which all oral history interviewees shared despite their diverse backgrounds. The second is the synergy of *different backgrounds yet similar experiences* which connected the youth as they learned about the interviewees and themselves through the common narratives found in the oral histories. The last source was qualitative analysis which played a critical role in cultivating deep engagement and synthesis through close reading, coding, revising, and categorizing with peers.

This paper makes three contributions. First, we implement a methodology that combines oral history and qualitative analysis to foster interactions for creating publics among strangers. We show that using a topic of universal importance (e.g. home) could mend disconnections among participants while creating a context and a purpose to counteract the distracting nature of contemporary societies. Second, we report on how listening to and coding the oral history interviews in the context of our project helped the youth become more aware of the diverse nature of their class, and that finding commonalities among such a diverse group can turn into attachments. Third, we reflect on the practical implications of operationalizing such approach, particularly around cultivating skills for interviewing and qualitative analysis with participants, creating sustained engagement around the attachments formed, and tending to the emotional labor required to develop understanding and connections among strangers.

2 Related Work

2.1 Oral History

Oral history is the “firsthand testimony of people’s experiences of history” [2]. It centers a historical moment of interest while also delving into earlier and later events to “see who the person is and how that person’s particular point of view was formed” [2]. Building on the prior work of anthropologists and other social science researchers, historians at Columbia University formalized oral history as an archival technique in 1948 when recording the memoirs of Americans who “led significant lives” [93, 118] - majorly political leaders and influential businessmen.

Since then, the engagement of researchers and community activists’ with oral history has served important social goals that go beyond oral history’s roots in archival practices. Oral history can help a community “define and explain present conditions according to how it remembers (or wants to remember) the past” [93]. Collective recollection can forage a meaningful narrative of the past and present [92] and how people find relationality [102]. These aspects serve as a valuable “reflection on what has been lost” or overcome [93], and a form of creating meaning [102] rather than mere fact sharing [101]. Numerous communities and researchers therefore work with oral history today as a means for meaning-making [13], building counter narratives [28, 69, 86], creating rapport across generations [111], supporting collective resistance [73, 75], and revising and re-interpreting the past “from within” [72, 102, 109, 123].

In HCI, oral history forms a part of the increasing attention towards historical methods in the field [98, 110], and has been applied to support cultural preservation, community engagement, and collective resistance. Based on an interview study with 17 migrant families, Chowdhury et al. examine the intricate plethora

of historical practices such as oral narration through which these families preserve their pasts amidst dislocations, and call for a “memory-based historicist sensibility” when designing for communities [18, 30]. Other scholars have shown that using technology to share every-day heritage practices cultivates interactions among community members and leads to new meanings and connections [35, 50, 95]. Tsenova et al. argue that engaging heterogeneous participants from Luxembourg to gather and curate historical knowledge about their community supported “public formation, intermediation, and the proliferation” of historical knowledge [119]. Through a participatory “Museum in a Box” project, the oral histories and artefacts community members shared in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa highlighted the “postcustodial” role citizens can play in shaping and managing community memory as a counter-practice to institutionally-curated histories [120]. Analogously, a participatory exhibition in Namibia where a group of youth reflected on their colonial past and present identities helped foster “dialogic engagements” between people and their collective memory [56].

HCI researchers have also engaged with oral history through action research [47]. In their multi-year work with the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project [75], Halperin and McElroy report on how oral histories of housing injustice sometimes require “slow design” so as to foster reflection and community building [45]. Halperin et al. further investigated the affordances of conversational storytelling agents in collecting oral histories, uncovering concerns around reduced relationships and engagement scale-ups [44]. Our work adds to the growing repertoire of oral history studies in HCI, but contributes a pedagogical angle that can formalize oral history as a method for supporting communal memory, action research, and public formation.

2.2 Participatory Research with Youth

Researchers have used oral history (and qualitative analysis to a lesser extent) in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) to help young citizens re-think normative methods of producing knowledge [39], and to engender rapport and mentorship as the interviewees become invested in helping young people contextualize what is narrated [19, 29, 83, 92]. For example, to highlight educational inequity in New York City, Guishard et al. formed a youth research collective to document the struggles of local women’s initiatives for educational justice using oral history. The youth researchers, working with adults, conducted interviews and focus groups, leading to a deeper appreciation of their parents’ struggles and the “catalytic energy” of intergenerational collaboration [42]. Similarly, anthropologists working with African American youth on collecting oral histories from older community members report on the communication and rapport established across the two generations, with the young serving as record keepers of the community’s past [123]. Soliman et al. document Palestinian youth collecting 100 hours of oral histories from their marginalized community around resistance, agriculture, celebrations, and traditional tools [111]. The authors argue that the oral histories served as epistemic tools that support youth in developing testimonial injustices, preserving their heritage, and emulating the story-telling traditions of their ancestors [111].

Teachers and researchers have also engaged youth with oral histories in the classroom, noting its value in teaching history, exposing students to research outside the classroom, and hearing multiple perspectives around the same event [54, 89, 103]. Al-Shammari finds that social studies teachers perceive oral history as an effective teaching approach as it cultivates class engagement, supports the students’ inter-personal and intellectual development, and improves “national values and identity” [1]. Putman and Rommel-Esham examine how elementary school students gather oral history to investigate change over time, going from knowledge elicitation to deeper analytical levels in the interviews and analysis with Venn diagrams to compare information from two time periods [89]. Despite its potential for youth empowerment and “capacity building” [111], oral history faces challenges for wide pedagogical adoption including tight timelines, student disinterest, limited teacher training, and that classroom oral history is a grassroots innovation spread by word of mouth [92, 108].

When it comes to handling oral data, expert historians traditionally took that on [117]. “Borrowing” methodological developments from other fields such as qualitative sociology has helped shift oral history analysis to an accepted and widely adopted method of knowledge and theory generation [102]. Central to this activity is *qualitative analysis* and inductive coding in particular; the iterative process that entails “open ended” and “organic” treatment of the data in systemic ways that leads to emergent findings [16, 52, 128]. Despite the centrality of qualitative analysis among many HCI, education and social science research traditions [112], there is very limited literature on engaging youth with qualitative data analysis. One notable exemption is Caraballo and Lyiscott’s account of teaching critical qualitative research in a YPAR project [14, 77]. Similarly, Marciano and Beymer report on an after-school program where youth conducted collaborative research activities by developing research questions and collecting interviews, surveys, and a focus group. The youth then analyzed the data by discussing what they collected in small-groups, and built on discussions and reflections to revisit their research questions and collect additional data [77].

Our work contributes to this body of research by reporting on an oral history curriculum (with data collection and analysis) that can be implemented with limited resources. We also detail how we taught and applied open coding in the classroom to generate a shared conception of home *grounded* in the participants’ oral histories. We describe how we emphasized coding and categorizing in this project as the primary means to extrapolate a “broad view of the data” [79] and find reoccurring themes. Oral history was an especially fertile ground for this kind of analysis due to the centrality of the youth’s own voices, as well as of those who were closest to them (family and nearby community members). In this way, qualitative coding went beyond being an analytical tool, and became a method that facilitated collective meaning making among a dispersed and diverse community.

2.3 HCI and Public Formation

HCI and design researchers seeking transformational change through critical discourse have increasingly called for approaches that support the formation and maintenance of publics [9, 10, 12, 23, 25, 26, 66, 88]. This body of work draws on John Dewey’s theory

Week Number and Topic	Details
1 What is Oral History?	Basics and oral history examples, project introduction
2 Skills to Interview	How to perform interviews, how to obtain consent and why How to follow up and seek clarifications Semi structured interviews
3 Recording with Mobile Phones	Interview recording basics Using a mobile phone for recording Task: Practicing recording in student groups HW: Interview your guardian about the meaning of home
4-7 Qualitative Analysis	The importance of data coding and analysis Modeling open coding on a generated 701 transcript HW: Qualitative coding on own transcript
8-9 Computational Analysis	Finding patterns and themes through word frequencies Google N-grams and Trends Computational vs. manual analysis
10-11 Putting it Together	Creating a presentation: "What Does Home Mean to Us?"
12 Summarizing	Literacy skills summary Unit recap: What makes A Place A Home?

Table 1: Meaning of Home Syllabus

that the public sphere is not a singular, undifferentiated mass of citizens [21]. Rather, it consists of multiple publics rich in social complexity and cultural diversity [6], with each forming whenever citizens recognize the consequences of an issue and unite around it [21]. While technology and globalization have enhanced citizen engagement [122], the scale of urban issues and the “diffused” nature of urban populations can inhibit public formation [21]. Some scholars have accordingly described publics as “practical fictions” because they exist as imaginaries - yet are quite powerful in shaping modern social worlds [122].

Common constructs for providing citizens with contexts to gather around matters of concern, voice their opinions, and participate as publics include participatory design [10, 23, 66], Actor-Network Theory [8, 53], and democratic design experiments [12, 25, 26]. HCI researchers Christopher La Dantec and Carl DiSalvo demonstrate how participatory design can form change-seeking publics by creating a digital service kiosk at an emergency shelter - which supported the emergence of different public groups based on their roles and needs - and involving diverse participants in a bridge repair project [64, 66]. Working with Middle Eastern immigrants through the Malmö Living Labs, Björgvinsson et al. use participatory design to create “agonistic public spaces” where new technologies and collaborations emerge from bottom-up interactions thus democratizing innovation through co-created publics [10]. Grassroots experiments in design, democracy and collaborations driven by those affected by technology also act as methods for expanding the public sphere [12, 24, 26]. Even computing artifacts (software, hardware, applications, and networks) used in an app to record citizens’ bike rides and generate data for city planners can become active participants in the formation of publics as Jenkins et al. argue [53].

While design and technology play a crucial role in constituting publics, challenges such as co-optation and enticing public formation remain open. Prendeville and colleagues for example argue that publics can mirror existing power structures and dominant voices [88]. Further, “enabling participation” and “constituting publics” are two different mandates, as the latter requires finding “attachments”

or dependencies to convey the consequences of issues among a group citizens and enroll others in the cause [64, 66]. This highlights that HCI researchers interested in publics must not only consider how to enable citizen participation but *also how they can identify and form attachments* so a public adheres [63, 78]. Our work contributes a new methodology to this discourse using the concept of “home” as a fertile ground for developing and negotiating the complex, inter-linked identities among a diverse group of participants. We share practical strategies for researchers who want to combine oral history with inductive coding to engage youth and other non-expert participants in qualitative research using limited resources and timelines. We further show how this methodology can help participants learn about one another and engage in communal sense-making *as a precursor to forming publics*.

3 The Meaning of Home

This project takes place on a small residential island within a major American city. A large number of immigrant and expatriate families live on the island due to its affordable rent options (although gentrification is rapidly changing that) or for its proximity to their work location at a large international organization. The island has a public school with grades pre-K to eight and a long-term care public hospital, which we anonymize as Evergreen Hospital.

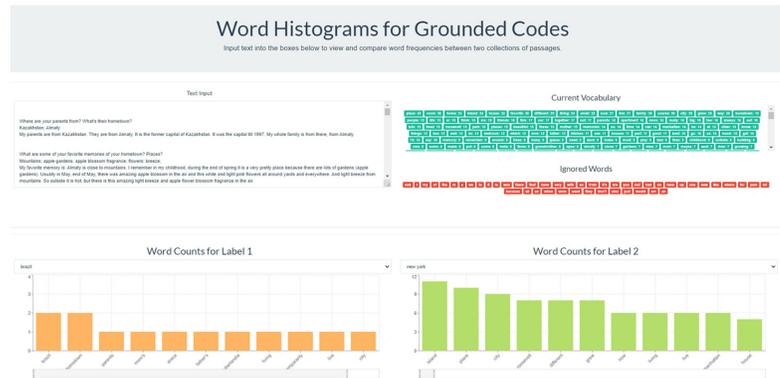
3.1 Motivation

In the fall of 2017, the first and third authors met with the school administration and teachers to explore research collaborations. The social studies teacher, anonymized as Mr. Finn, expressed interest in collaborating with our lab. Mr. Finn noted that the school’s student body is ethnically diverse (which is common for public schools in the area), and *uniquely transient* given that many international students enroll or leave at any point during the semester due to their guardians’ shifting work placements. Diversity and transiency made it harder for students to find deep connections with their classmates despite the majority of them living in the same neighborhood.

Mr. Finn, who had worked as a museum historian before becoming a social studies teacher, was interested in oral history as

Codes	
Kazakhstan	
	Where are your parents from? What's their hometown?
Kazakhstan; Almaty	My parents are from Kazakhstan. They are from Almaty. It is the former capital of Kazakhstan. It was the capital till 1997. My whole family is from there, from Almaty.
	What are some of your favorite memories of your hometown? Places?
Mountains; apple gardens; apple blossom fragrance; flowers; breeze;	My favorite memory is: Almaty is close to mountains. I remember in my childhood, during the end of spring it is a very pretty place because there are lots of gardens (apple gardens). Usually in May, end of May, there was amazing apple blossom in the air and this white and light pink flowers all around yards and everywhere. And light breeze from mountains. So outside it is hot, but there is this amazing light breeze and apple flower blossom fragrance in the air.
	What was your home like there?
apartment	We were living in an apartment; it was an apartment.
Hill view; missing nature; disappearing nature; favorite place; memories	Just after our building, the gardens in Almaty had begun and outside our window there was a great view for hills, green hills, close to Almaty. And I am missing it because now there are no green fields. There are more buildings and apartments. But in my childhood there was just hills; green hills all around. That was my favorite place when we were small kids.

(a)



(b)

(c)

(d)

(e)

(f)

Figure 2: Unit Artefacts: (a) Transcript coding template for students (b) Histogram of the word frequencies of the guardians' oral history transcripts, (c) Teaching slides, (d) Oral history interview packet, (e) Homework transcript coding packet, and (f) Example code compilation from a student transcript to be used for categorization

a potential practice for his students to learn and apply to find commonalities. We in turn were inspired by the documented affordances of oral history around community building [31, 50, 92, 102] and therefore chose it over other methods such as focus groups, guided group conversations, and weekly classroom discussions. The first and third authors, who were first and second generation immigrants respectively and had also grappled with their fair share of transience, had also both recently moved to this community. The *Meaning of Home* thus served as a natural and shared interest between the research team and the members of the community.

3.2 Pedagogical Design

Starting October 2017, we met regularly with Mr. Finn at his classroom during the prep period (8:00 am) on a bi-weekly basis. After two months of meetings, we converged on the idea of a unit in which students collect and iteratively code [100] oral histories around the meaning of home as a way to surface commonalities among them. Through data collection, analysis, and synthesis, the students would answer the question: *what does the word home mean: a space, a memory, a group of people?*

3.3 Pilot Run

In February 2018, Mr. Finn tested a pilot version of the oral history protocol with a group of students from eighth grade. We ran this pilot to: 1) gauge the expected length of oral history interviews, 2) determine if the resulting transcripts were doable for students to

code, and 3) design a paper-based coding template that would be easy to students to use in lieu of of a qualitative data analysis tool.

Based on this result, we launched the unit in March 2018 with Mr. Finn's 7th grade class, which would run until the final student presentations in June 2018. We met every Thursday during Mr. Finn's 8:00am prep period to set up for the next day and discuss material for the following week. Mr. Finn did most of the teaching, but the first and third authors taught the parts we were well acquainted with such as obtaining consent, qualitative coding, and data analysis.

3.4 Teaching

The unit covered the following topics in-order: oral history basics, semi-structured interviewing skills, recording on mobile phones, transcript coding, thematic extraction, computational text analysis, and computational vs. manual analysis (Table 1). The culmination was group presentations on "What Home Means to our class." We collaboratively developed the material slides using the template Mr. Finn used for teaching (Figure 2-c).

During weekly meetings, the teacher gave feedback on the slides and activities we developed - ensuring that class activities do not last too long - and provided enough variation of activities to prevent fatigue and maintain student engagement. In-class teaching activities included listening and learning from oral history interviews from YouTube, Stop and Jot/Turn and Talk about concepts taught or homework assigned, and doing Socratic circle discussions, among



Figure 3: Categorization activities: (a) Category "plates" generated by the project team, (b) Students categorizing transcript codes in groups, (c) Groups distributing their codes across category plates, and (d) Affinity diagrams for the final class-level categories

others. Except for guardian and hospital interviews, all the unit activities took place at the school.

3.5 Oral History Interviews

We chose *life story interviews* as the form of oral history students would practice, focusing on the chronological unfolding of events over the course of a person's life [48]. Our protocol (Appendix 10) zoomed in on two frames of reference in the interviewee's life: the places, memories, and events associated with their hometown, and then those associated with where they live now.

We spent the first three weeks of the unit (6 periods in total) on how to listen to and conduct oral history interviews. Our teaching and feedback emphasized the reciprocity of the interview process and the "shared authority" [32] among the two parties in directing the course of knowledge extraction. We also covered attentive listening, how to elicit more information, and how to guide the conversation back to the main topic.

In the third week, students brought their phones (after obtaining the necessary school permissions) and practiced interviewing each other on a topic of their choice. After that, they had a few days to interview their guardians at home and share the recordings with us through the class cloud drive - a process we had rehearsed in class.

Initially the students were tasked with interviewing a family or community member. Interviewees had to sign an oral history interview release form. Students administered the consent process we covered in class, which they were already somewhat familiar with as it was based on the assent/consent process they went through for participating in our research project. In the case that a guardian did not want to sign the release form, was not comfortable with an oral interview, or was not available, students had the choice to interview a different guardian/family member/community member, or submit a written interview. Students used a paper interview packet with the protocol questions (Figure 2-d). The oral history homework with guardians resulted in 23 oral interviews and 3 text interviews, and they ranged in length from 2 to 16 minutes.

In week 9, we took a field trip to interview residents at Evergreen (Figure 1) which is a long term public care facility five minute walk from the school. The hospital houses primarily low-income minority patients with chronic health conditions who were not able to pay for private health care. While these patients were also residents of the community, they were often alienated and isolated due to their disabilities and socio-economic status. The students

interviewed a group of residents/activists who were victims of gun violence using the same protocol as the guardians'. The residents then played music and read poetry about resilience and staying out of trouble.

3.6 Qualitative Data Analysis: Coding and Categorizing

The goal of coding the guardians' oral history transcripts and building themes was to help students move from data collection to analysis, detect patterns in the data, and deliberate a collective notion of home from the class. We introduced coding to students as "an interpretive, heuristic, and exploratory process" [94] to summarize and condense data. We did a live example in class on one of the pilot transcripts using both *descriptive coding* (codes that summarize the excerpt) and *in vivo coding* (codes quoted directly from the excerpt) [100]. We also provided a list of what codes can capture such as actions (e.g. lining up for lunch), activities (e.g. living one day at a time, concerned with unhealthy diet), concepts (e.g. racial diversity, sense of self worth), differences (e.g. conflicting cultural norms), opinions (e.g. smiling is more important than wearing fancy clothes), and processes (e.g. melting ice caps). Finally, we emphasized that coding is a creative and interpretive process that there are no right or wrong codes as long as they stay true to the transcript.

The first author transcribed all the guardians' oral history interviews and organized them into a paper packet for each student (Figure 2-a and e). After some coding practice in class, students coded their transcripts as homework using the packets. If they needed more than one code per row, they used arrows to indicate which sentence(s) each code was referring to. To emulate the iterative and reflexive coding used in qualitative research, each student had to also code the transcript of a classmate and reflect on how that was different from coding their own. The following week, students received the transcripts of their classmates, did the coding in class, and we reflected on the process. Students then got their transcripts as coded by a classmate, went through the codes, and revised their codes accordingly (i.e. second cycle coding). Students then wrote the final codes on post-its, attached them to the coding packet (Figure 2-f), and submitted them to us.

We brought back the transcript packets (with code post-its) to our lab, and went through all of them to generate category plates (Figure 3-a). The following week, we went from codes to categories.

Categories	Number of Codes in Category	Most Common Codes (not based on categories)
hometown	39	"where you never feel alone"
family	30	"a space with family"
memories	27	"a place where it is safe"
likes and dislikes	18	"where she is safe and family [sic]"
places	17	"where family is and happiness"
change	16	"synonymous to family"
activities	15	"place as kind of a new beginning"
meaning of home	10	"studying and working hard"
nature	8	"my family traditions, culture, food and family values"

Table 2: Qualitative Analysis Outcomes

Students in groups of 3 to 5 consolidated their codes first, combining similar ones, and generating categories to classify the codes (**Figure 3-b**). During the activity, groups practiced telling stories using codes only, modeling the sharing of qualitative data in narrative form. We then asked everyone then to choose representative codes from their groups and put them in the appropriate category plates (**Figure 3-c**). Lastly, we went through the post-its in each plate and sketched the final categories on the whiteboard through affinity diagramming (**Figure 3-d**). The result was to go from two hours and twenty minutes of audio transcripts to 10 categories.

4 Final Unit Outcomes

After three cycles of group and class level affinity-diagramming on the oral history transcripts and codes, students converged on the following categories: family, memories, nature, change, activities, places, likes and dislikes, meaning of home, and hometown (**Table 2 Columns 1**). Once data analysis at the class level was done, students in groups of three worked on the final project deliverable. They chose one of the categories and created a presentation on what the category means the class in the context of home. We required that students refer to transcript codes as well as cite relevant quotations from at least three oral histories from outside their groups. This was one more opportunity to encourage students to learn about each other and their guardians.

To make codes accessible, we scanned the code post-its students generated in class and put them in separate pdfs (one for each category). Each pdf file contained all codes that related to that category (refer to **Table 2 Columns 2** for the number of codes in each category).¹ We also uploaded the transcripts to the class cloud drive and encouraged students to use images, maps, and word frequency histograms on the transcripts (**Figure 2-b**) to support the narratives they presented.

The most common codes and quotations students surfaced in the project are listed in **Table 2 - Column 3**. Nature was a prevalent theme in the interviews, with students finding that many of their parents commonly citing one park in the city as a reminder of their hometowns. In the final presentations, student groups noted that while their class is an *"international class,"* the *"families had their meaning of home in common"* and *"are all connected in a meaningful*

¹"hometown" was the category with the largest number of codes since each oral history mentioned the guardian's hometown at least once. But this category was not as thematically prevalent as others such as "family" and "memories"

way." Some students also incorporated photos of their families in relation to the categories they presented on, which added to the plurality and richness of the stories. The ultimate commonality students surfaced from the project is that whether a guardian/community member grew up in Dhaka, Bangladesh or in Brooklyn, NYC, home meant the same thing to them: being with family, having good times and making memories with friends, relaxing in nature, and working hard to obtain education.

5 METHODOLOGY

This project is based on the firsthand experience of the first and third authors developing and teaching Meaning of Home at the public school in the vicinity of the third author's campus. 26 students were enrolled in the class. At least half of the students were either born outside the US or both of their parents were foreign-born. Roughly one third of the students in the class were expats. Some of the countries represented in the class included the US, Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Libya, Vietnam, Brazil, Japan, and Jamaica (among others). On the first day of the unit, we went over the consent and assent processes for class observations and audio recording. Mr. Finn helped ensure all consent and assent forms were collected before the research started. After the project's final presentations, we distributed a sign-up sheet in the class to recruit participants for post-project semi-structured interviews. We emphasized that participation was voluntary and did not impact the students' grade. No monetary compensation was provided to the students. 12 students signed up for the interviews: seven males (S1, s2, S4, S5, S6, S11, S12), and five females (S3, S7, S8, S9, S10). We conducted the interviews in-person at the school in empty classrooms asking students about what they learned in the unit and the challenges they faced.

This study was done with the approval of our university's institutional review board, as well as by the city Department of Education (DoE). All of the involved researchers completed human subjects research training, and were subject to a background check as per DoE regulations. The curriculum was developed in collaboration with the classroom teacher through weekly design sessions, with the primary aim being to fulfill important content area topics for the subject (e.g. the importance of individual primary accounts in the formation of historical narratives). The teacher also took the lead in delivering the majority of the lessons. Participation in the classroom activities was part of the subject curriculum as determined by

the classroom teacher. Student participants (and their guardians as per the informed consent/assent process) could choose to opt out of any or all the research aspects, including recording of classroom activities, having their artifacts analyzed, and/or conducting the final interview. They were also given the freedom to choose from a wide range of potential respondents (including family, community members and friends) for conducting their oral history interview. Students were divided into groups and only groups that gave consent had audio-recorders on their tables. All student names used in the paper are pseudonyms.

The data collected includes 100 homework pages scanned from the student notebooks, 359 pages of scanned worksheets, 24 hours of in-class audio recordings, and 8 hours of oral history recordings generated by students (90 minutes of in-class recordings, two hours and twenty minutes with their guardians, and one hour in total with Evergreen residents). Data further includes 36 hours of in-class observations, a 2-hour audio recording of the final presentations in the class, and 12 semi-structured interviews with the students conducted two weeks after the unit concluded. These interviews ranged in length from 10 to 35 minutes. We also took extensive field notes during class activities, field trips, and informal conversations with the teachers. Our class notes focused largely on the knowledge students knew or acquired about each other, details of their reactions to the activities and oral histories, and the shared stratum of experiences and sentiments growing each class.

The audio recordings were transcribed using Otter and identifying information removed. The first author read the transcripts to fix errors and imported transcripts into QDA Miner Lite for coding and thematic analysis. The first and third authors analyzed the data inductively [80] by reading each transcript and assigning a code to every sentence (open coding [16]). We focused on interactions, relationships, new things the youth learned, and attachments to certain concepts. Example codes included “relating to a stranger”, “coding led to close reading”, and “restarting the recording multiple times.” Once consistent codes began to emerge, we drafted the first round of codes and tentative themes such as “learning about strangers” and “oral history as border crossing.” We also discussed the themes while reading about the stranger as a phenomenon - specifically Simmel’s [106, 125], Dewey’s concept of publics [21, 22], and Sennett’s work on publics and urbanism [104]. The themes were further supported by referring to field notes and the oral history codes the youth generated in the project. After three iterations, the research team agreed upon the themes of “relational notion of home”, “attuning through qualitative analysis”, and “scaffolding public” and refined them with the rest of the codes.

6 Findings

The process of collecting oral history interviews and analyzing them together as a class led to unexpected yet powerful connections among the youth. These connections ultimately formed attachments among the youth around the meaning of home. The attachments emerged from two sources. The first is the relational conception of home which all interviewees shared despite their diverse backgrounds. The second is the synergy between the different backgrounds yet similar experiences the youth discovered as they learned about the interviewees and themselves and the narratives

found in the oral histories. Qualitative analysis further played a critical role in cultivating attunement towards the oral histories and the close ties embedded in them through close reading, coding, revising, and categorizing with peers.

6.1 Sources of Attachment

Prior to the project, the youth had already shared many commonalities, such as playing the same video games, being young, living in the same neighborhood, going to the same school, and socializing in similar places in the city. According to Mr. Finn, these factors were not sufficient however for students to feel a deep bond (Simmel describes such connections as *general* and *generic* [127]). In the oral history interviews, the youth found connections that spanned a wide temporal dimension (because they went back to the guardians’ hometowns), a massive geographic footprint (given that the participants are from all over the world), and an affinity among different groups (youth, their guardians, Evergreen residents). The wide-spread affinity - most evident in the interviewees’ relational definition of home and their shared experiences - was unexpected for the youth, but also deep and meaningful that it became a source of attachment to the entire class.

6.1.1 Relational Definition of Home: The youth perspective of home shifted from a purely physical locus to a relational concept as they collected oral histories and analyzed them. S1 narrates: “... in the start, I thought that it was just a design. So like an apartment, how big it is, how small it is, how many people in it, and stuff like that. But then it changed, right. When you go there, you just feel comfortable and safe in that space.” S11 similarly reflected on how “before this project, I just thought of home as where I live, and now it’s more like where my family are, where I’m safe and where I feel that I’m at home, and it’s a good home.”

The youth discovered that the relational meaning of home was common among all interviewees. S7 accordingly reported that this relational concept of home served a connective purpose: “We all have different meanings of home, but we can all conclude to one meaning and we can use that to unite us in some ways.” S6 even declared: “everyone around the world has similar opinions about their meaning of home!” S11 described how the oral history transcripts seemed quite similar, as “almost everyone said that home is a place where they feel safe, home is their family, very few people. Actually, one person just said that home is where I live, but everybody else was sort of like home is where my family is, where I feel safe.” S10 reported the similarity between her mom’s definition and the overall class: “I learned that from my classmates that most of their parents um think that home is where you feel loved and like where you’re comfortable and where you get to express yourself the most ... me and my mom agree that home is like where we get to be comfortable with our family where all of them can come and we can all like spend time with each other.” When we asked S12 if she encountered any challenges when building a definition of home she declared: “That was the easy thing because we have so many similar things!”

The Evergreen oral histories also shared this relational definition of home. S4 for example expressed astonishment about how he and his interviewee shared the same “mentality” when it comes to

home,² which made them feel closer: “He [Evergreen interviewee] was like talking about the meaning of home...And he said, he said it was where you come to rest... I was like, I said: that’s what I said! And I didn’t have no worries. We, him, had the same, like, mentality when speaking about home.” S11 also noted that Evergreen residents shared a notion of home rooted in being around family, which was similar to what the youth guardians said in their oral histories: “I learned that even they, like, who actually never had a proper family or, like, the person who I interviewed, he’d actually never had a proper family and he’s had that injury for 27 years. But even to him, home means his family -not where he lives, it’s still to him as his family.” S11 eloquently sums up connectivity through a relational concept of home as follows: “even though we’re from different countries and, like, we’re completely different, we still have that, like, definition of home and how we feel about our families is sort of ties together.”

6.1.2 Different backgrounds / Similar Experiences: Beyond the relational definition of home, the oral history interviews were riven with other similarities - to the point that finding them was both surprising and the easiest part of the project as the youth reported. Difference was the first “unexpected similarity” the youth encountered in the oral histories. S2 recalls how “everybody is from different places. Like, it’s like all over the world, not just from America.” The phrase “everybody is from different places” recurred not only in post-project interviews, but also in class observations, homework submissions, and final presentations. Difference ultimately became a similarity as per S8: “My class was similar because everybody was - this sounds weird - but everybody was from different places, so it was all similar because everybody was like, oh, I’m from here, here, here, here!” S11 breaks down this difference-as-similarity: “Almost everybody is like foreign and that also kind of helped [in finding connections]. You see that they moved here and now they’re calling this place home because they feel safe here.”

The youth also identified with the oral histories and their narrators on an interpersonal level. S10 for example learned that her mom was like her as a child in that she “never used to listen”. S10 elaborates: “she always scolds me for doing stuff. But like, she did the same thing and she still does... She’s like, oh my God, walk with slippers in the house! She doesn’t wear slippers either... [now] I could feel not as bad because I know that she did the same thing because she was smaller.” For S7, he always thought “everyone’s having a good life. Don’t go through stuff, but after seeing what they [interviewees] have been through, it shows. That’s not true. It shows that we have a good amount of similarities. It unites us in some ways.” In the case of S4, he found how the Evergreen residents are “people that are just like us and they sometimes share the same experiences that we have!” S3 used the exact phrase to describe the neighbors she never knew before the project: “they’re just like us!” After the project, S2, S5, and S10 reported either going back to Evergreen to visit or regularly greeting the residents whenever they ran into them on the island.

In some cases, the youth specifically sought out to ask questions that foregrounded similarities. S10 for example reported asking:

²Before the visit, most of the youth did not interact with Evergreen residents despite seeing them on the island, and had a vague perception of them as “sick”, “were shot at”, or “spent time in jail”

“five or six extra questions about stuff that I could relate to like basketball and shoes and some stuff he likes to do with his family and some of his favorite ball players and favorite sports and stuff.” S7 and her group implemented a similar practice to get to know their interviewee more: “we used those questions that you guys gave us, but we used follow-up questions. Like if he said something, we asked another question based on it or something and we actually got to know him.”

In general, the youth did not seem to remember the differences since the similarities were the most obvious aspect of the oral histories. When we asked S6 for example if there were differences too, she responded “Oh yeah, like some people wrote different things for their home and other... I don’t really remember because there were just more similarities!” For S7, regardless of the nuanced differences, all the oral histories shared a positive sentiment: “everyone makes different memories in different places, but they all have like a positive meaning to it. Like for example, like my dad made it in Pakistan, Rifat’s family made it in Bangladesh, Fayza made it in Libya, and then Adam made it in Montreal.”

6.2 Attuning through Qualitative Analysis

We designated eight classes for the youth to code, categorize, and develop a definition of home from the oral history interviews. This process allowed the youth to spend time with the oral histories, breaking down the transcripts into memorable pieces (codes) and making sense of the data and relationships embedded in them through revising codes, categorizing, and affinity diagramming. These steps helped the youth see “how all the students in the class relate ... and how all our families think together. And how we’re so diverse and stuff” (S10). By acting as a cumulative and repetitive process of attunement, qualitative analysis cemented the shared values and narratives among the youth and fostered a strong attachment to a public emerging around the concept of home.

Qualitative analysis started with the youth reading the transcripts of their guardians to code them. Later on in the process, they also read their classmates’ guardians transcripts to give feedback on codes and prepare for the final presentation. For S11, close reading was the most critical component of engaging with the oral histories because “the actual reading [of] everybody’s transcripts and thinking that, like seeing the same idea so many times, that made me feel like, yeah, that’s correct [in being similar]!” In learning about everyone from the transcripts, S7 easily recalled stories about Nancy, Audrey, Awais, their guardians, and other guardians, which supported the affinity the youth started to develop towards one another.

After close reading initiated engagement with the oral histories, coding made the transcripts easier to comprehend and remember, while revising codes facilitated another close pass on the transcripts. S7 shared that codes “could remind me of the main points and help me summarize it”. They can also distill different points jumbled within a single answer if the interviewees “covered many topics in one question” (S7), thus creating clarity and organization. As for reviewing each other’s codes after the first round of coding, S9 found that feedback from classmates allowed her to pay even closer attention to the details in the oral histories because her initial codes “were too vague ... One of them was just ‘likes to do this’ and I changed

it. I put some more codes. I made it a little bit specific, so I could put more information into the code.” For S7, the collaborative nature of revising codes was helpful and enriching: “Aysha, she gave me like so many good codes. She was like, I didn’t have ‘scenic views’ [as a code]. I had ‘Suntrail Island views’ and then she made it shorter and like more meaningful to it. And like I helped Manal, Manal helped me. And yeah, like Manal had like well sentences. And so did I, but like we helped each other and that was really helpful.”

Bringing the codes together - through categorizing on a group level then affinity diagramming on the class level - was when the youth truly saw a coherent home narrative emerge, which cemented their collective as *the class in the school with a shared definition of home*. Seeing the codes slotted in the affinity diagram made S6 recognize the shared ideas among guardians: “We put it on the board... and that helped us know that everyone really had the same ideas.” This process led to developing a shared relational definition of home where each code - as S2 puts it - “added like a little bit like intense things like safety, like freedom and all that stuff. So like every day they added something new to the list because they learned more and more over the time.” The social nature of categorizing and affinity diagramming made the process easy and enjoyable as S4 recalled: “The easiest part, I think, was categorizing post its. I really enjoyed doing it... It was fun because, you know, I was doing it with my friends and I felt like I learned a lot from it.”

Beyond the youth declaring that they can now code and categorize “anything” (as per S4), they recognized how qualitative analysis garnered the time and attention needed to *attune* to the oral histories of the plethora of strangers interviewed. S4 expressed this sentiment: “It’s, um, it [qualitative analysis] takes, it takes, uh, I think it takes more time, [but] you get more out of it, you know... you take, take time and you learn stuff from it, you know... And you go step by step and it gets you farther.” The final result speak to this, where each presentation drew on the transcripts of “everyone’s, like ... I could say a sentence: Memory is a vague word. The way [our class] and their parent interpret the memory is da-da-da-da. And then we give an example of Manal, like, I give an example of my dad’s interview, I quote it, and then I say, additionally, Aʃ and Manal’s interview can relate, because [X, Y, and Z]...” (S7).

6.3 The Time, Effort, and Emotional Labor Required

The youth reported strong enthusiasm from the interviewees to share their oral histories. S3 recounted: “I was about to interview my mom but then my dad would keep giving answers every time I asked my mom a question!” While potent in creating a collective and surfacing attachments, oral history collection still had some challenges. The youth reported having to do multiple retakes due to laughter, errors, family interruptions, or noise. S8 had to do “a hundred takes” because she and her mom “kept laughing. She kept messing up. I kept messing up. It was just not working out.” S7 provides a similar account of the “million takes” she had to do because her dad gave very short responses originally, “...I was like, okay, I need it longer, so I made him redo it... [then] my sister came over and she said hello and ruined my interview. And then my dad kept saying small things so I had to restart it... it took me 15-20 minutes.”

S10 also encountered recording difficulties due to noise, because her family “kept interrupting... So I had to do like four or five times to finish.” For S6, he had to restart a couple of times because his “brother was screaming in the background.” In the case of S2, nervousness and feeling “weird” prompted multiple retakes. As he reports: “I get nervous when I like when I like record things like I laughed a little bit so I had to stop it and like restart it. Because like in the beginning I was like okay it’s this, this and this recording ... and I sort of laughed because like I don’t know I’m just like I really don’t like recording myself.”

The youth overcame some of these challenges by the time we went to Evergreen. As S10 recalls: “it was not going to get any quieter because there was over 20 people in there. So I just, you know, just kept the phone closer to me and I talked a lot.” However, asking strangers personal questions was challenging for the youth due to fear of crossing personal boundaries. S10 reports that her group members felt uncomfortable and “weird” interviewing a stranger at Evergreen, so she conducted the oral history interview: “the reason I talked to him because my friends weren’t comfortable talking to him ... it’s not that they weren’t comfortable. It’s just weird to them. But like, I talk to strangers all the time... So I’m kind of usually just talking to people I don’t know.” S9 was one of the students who delegated the oral history interview to her group members because she “was kind of shy to ask some personal questions. So I just took the work of recording. I mean, writing everything down. I wasn’t sure what I could ask. Like if they would be offended by me asking anything.”

7 Discussion

Oral history collection can pave communal pathways of knowledge production by capturing the experiences of “ordinary” people [27, 116]. When coupled with qualitative analysis, oral history in our project also supported engagement and relationship building. A public even emerged around the shared concept of home, and adhered when some of the youth stayed on to work on a subsequent project for improving the sense of home on the island [84, 96]. In this section, we break down three outcomes of our methodology that pertain to scaffolding publics: border crossing, ordinary hope, and consciousness building.

7.1 The Role of Border Crossing in Scaffolding Publics

We can describe the engagement that youth experienced with strangers and non-strangers in the project as a form of *border crossing*. Border crossing is a postmodernist educational approach for creating interactions and dialogues among students and strangers with “disparate social histories” [121]. Henry Giroux [36] proposed border pedagogy in the 1980s to balance universal modernist ideals with the “postmodern critique of foundational knowledge and unified subjectivity” [121]. Through the border metaphor, students traverse “within and between” physical, identity, cultural, and social borders. Crossing borders can foster understanding, empathy, and connection among individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences, which is the first step towards creating a public [21, 64, 104, 107]. Here we recall S12 - a shy new student who said that before the project, he “would never go to” his classmates to ask them personal questions - let alone about their guardians or Evergreen histories.

But now he can conduct interviews to “*make connections all around the world*”. For HCI researchers, designing border-crossing methodologies can be supportive of public-formation in three ways.

First, border crossing helps us “identify and map the multidimensional boundaries” that shape our daily experiences [38] and inhibit engagement with strangers. Once identified, we can intentionally design for how to cross borders so a public can start to identify and articulate itself. In our case, *physical borders* meant leaving the school to enter places one “ordinarily would never enter” [46] - for example Evergreen Hospital. By adopting and experiencing new roles - e.g. the youth becoming interviewers and bringing family narratives into the classroom, we crossed over *identity borders*. *Cultural borders* can offer insights into different values and traditions [46] - and we crossed these borders when different ethnicities and life circumstances became a common topic in the class. Lastly, as participants learned about the varied life histories of their neighbors and started to visit and greet them, *social boundaries* were crossed. Each of these boundaries offer entry-points to HCI researchers seeking to adopt border-crossing as a tool for public formation in community-engaged research.

Second, immersion in “borderlands” demands cognitive and emotional investment to navigate unfamiliar environments and tasks. In our work with students, we noticed that the attention needed to approach the different project components seemed to offer the potential to dampen blasé behavior [107] among youth, in that it sparked curiosity and other conditions to forage new relationships and ways of knowing and being with strangers (and non-strangers) [38]. Similarly, a study on community history projects in HCI has noted that the collective narration of shared history can help foster collective notions of identity and membership that transcends other differences [30]. Finally, prior work has shown that engagement with others is a crucial factor when it comes to developing individual commitment to the common good [20] - and so is finding “issues” that “create a ground upon which a collective might form” [64]. Border crossing can therefore support public formation by highlighting the importance of developing and maintaining relationships within, across, and outside of our social networks and institutions. By doing so, participants both develop or extend attachments to shared issues with others that are constituent of publics in that instance, but can also reinforce their commitment and skills at doing so more generally. As we discuss in greater detail in the Design Implications section, this points to the potential benefits of sustained engagement and opportunities for repetition, practice, and learning to cross borders towards public formation.

7.2 Public Formation as Ordinary Hope

Recent work in HCI has drawn attention to the need to attend to daily habits, mundane interactions, and “work on the ground” as sources of solidarity and transformation during difficult times [51, 90]. These actions - mediated through or sans computational systems - is “ordinary hope.” Hope of this nature is significant for HCI because it dwells on participation, connection, and care-oriented planning to navigate the “complexities, setbacks and partial complicities of interventionist life” [90]. Our project findings highlight the value of personal histories in forming attachments and understanding one’s own life while tending to the stories of others.

Such knowledge and interactions that support public formation is ultimately a form of ordinary hope.

Steve Jackson proposes “ordinary hope” as an action-oriented property that is vital for sustaining change and interactions in the world. This hope is “ordinary” because it embraces the everyday “heroism” required to navigate world challenges. It is “thick” (in contrast to “thin” hope which relies on external salvation) by emphasizing deep connections to others. “Humble” and “patient”, at times “boring”, ordinary hope is rooted in the everyday, supporting engagement with the world’s strengths through modest, care-oriented, enduring, and creative (inter)actions. Enacted through the practical, ongoing work of building and living “from the fragments and pieces around it”, Jackson argues that hope with these characteristics is needed “now more than ever” when designing socio-technical interventions [51].

The opposite of ordinary hope is grand hope [51]. Going back to border pedagogies, Jones et al. contend: “educators hope that something powerful happens for students who enter environments and experience life circumstances often dramatically different from their own” [55] - moral developments for example. In their inception as radical sites for justice and democracy [37, 46, 55], border crossings embody a *grand hope for salvation*. This salvation is similar to what we often see associated with techno-optimism [4, 90]. In contrast to this envisioned grandness, the findings of our project invite us to see scaffolding publics as sites of mundane, ordinary, but necessary interactions. These sites do not claim to enact radical democracy, re-orient moral compasses, or change the quality of public life. Their value lies in their ability to connect strangers to broader historical/geographical/social contexts and form attachments through them.

When S3 learns about her mother’s past activities, such as jogging or buying unique pastries, it provides a sense of continuity and personal history that enriches her understanding of her mother’s life and, by extension, her own. It’s a form of “thick” hope, which emphasizes deep connections to others and is rooted in the everyday. For S1, knowing that his father received all of his education in the same town may offer insights into the values and stability that have shaped his family’s life. It can also reflect the importance of community and place in one’s personal development. S10’s discovery of her mother’s rule-breaking reveals the complexities of family dynamics and personal choices. It challenges S10 to consider the nuances of rules and the meaning of family, potentially leading to a broader consideration of how different families understand roles an rules. S7’s father detailing memories of his interactions with friends, sports, and nature provides a rich tapestry of lived experiences that contribute to S7’s own identity and worldview.

The personal narratives and memories surfaced through oral history and qualitative analysis are *ordinary* - not grand - border crossings. Its resulting process of scaffolding publics is in service of ordinary hope because it enables and makes visible the hard work (“fumbings, learnings, accumulations, accountabilities, and ‘becoming with’s” [90]) it takes to engender mundane but meaningful interactions. The everyday acts of this project formed a basis of participation and connection among the familiar and unfamiliar, and led to enduring connections between the participants and our team as we worked on subsequent projects (which were more technological in nature than this project). According to Ratto and

Jackson, learning to engender and document such interactions is necessary because “everyday collective practices” is how the “future comes to be” [90]. As S7 put it when recalling his dad’s home memories - these are all “*very small stuff, but create a big meaning.*”

7.3 Design Implications

The combination of oral history and qualitative analysis holds unique affordances. First, our technique goes beyond immediate participant concerns and identities to deep historical, cultural, social and familial concepts. This, coupled with a longer temporal framework, helped the youth gradually understand the broader social and historical background of their community, which can motivate collective action in face of urbanism-induced “deficiency” of engagement [34]. Collecting oral histories “off-site” and individually analyzing them first allowed for the inclusion of diverse and marginalized perspectives (e.g. around religious practices), without one group dominating the conversation over others - which is crucial to counter co-optation [88]. Compared to purely oral discussions, the combination of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and visiting interviewees requires significant emotional and cognitive investment, which strengthened participants’ attachment to the public they were forming. Lastly, by focusing on the concept of home, which is deeply personal and universally relevant, the project taps into pre-existing attachments and helped our participants find common ground. Below we discuss three takeaways for HCI researchers interested in leveraging oral history and qualitative analysis as a method for public formation.

7.3.1 Consciousness Building. As HCI researchers, our work is a site where we frequently apply qualitative research methods. Citizens and community partners in this work are often the sources of data, are sometimes data collectors [40, 65], but are rarely involved in the analysis. Observing young people collect data then experience qualitative analysis for the first time opened our eyes to the value of providing a participatory data framework. Its iterative and reflexive nature allowed participants to revisit and refine their understanding of the oral histories and of each other’s perspectives, ultimately building consciousness around the concept of home. Since developing shared consciousness can help form attachments - and then publics [21, 64], HCI researchers should consider collaborative data collection and analysis with citizens and community partners in their projects. This is especially useful for YPAR to form youth publics around technological issues they face within their communities. This long (but low-cost) methodology can also be used in classrooms to learn about the impact of social media or AI, and solicit bonds both online and offline by youth collecting oral histories for example about life before these technologies and analyzing the data.

HCI researchers can further apply this method to engage participants with stories collected at scale [44, 62]. Using digital technologies and conversational agents to vastly expand story collection can “render them flat or, even worse, turn them into commodities” to be “mined, searched, edited, and consumed at will” [85]. HCI scholars found that grassroots organizations collecting oral histories around housing insecurity for example “are wary of focusing on growth and the quantity of stories at the expense of local relationships and practices” [44]. Our methodology calls for “the act of listening

(perhaps even more so than that of collecting and archiving made possible with digital technologies)” [85]. In our project, the majority of everyone’s time, care, and effort were devoted to the more relational, reflective, and “slow” [17, 33, 41, 45, 71, 82, 113] practices of carrying out interviews, crossing borders, and performing qualitative analysis. This constellation cultivated “attentiveness to the act of listening” [85] to the oral histories collected. It transformed the multitude of subjects in the project from “uniform,” “unimportant,” or “submerged in the crowd,” into entities invested in the meaning of home [104, 125, 127] - i.e. a public. HCI researchers working on public formation, community engagement, storytelling, and reflective design practices can leverage our approach with participants as the debt “we owe to stories” and their narrators [85].

7.3.2 Repetition and Endurance. HCI researchers interested in applying oral history and qualitative analysis as a public formation method should make space for the research team and participants to engage in repeated practice. To select the appropriate oral history questions, the team built a protocol together (Appendix 9), deployed it with eight students, coded the resulting oral histories, and discussed modifying questions to cultivate diverse narratives (Appendix 10). This process took over six weeks. As for the youth, they completed three rounds of oral history interviews: first with each other in class, then with their guardians, and finally with Evergreen residents. Recalling the youth who had to do a “million takes” when interviewing their guardians (e.g. S10, S8, and S7) - by the time they conducted Evergreen interviews, they had become more competent and adapted to the noisy environment, asking more questions, keeping their phone closer, and speaking louder. Each round of interviews made interviewing easier for the youth, which contributed to deeper engagement with the interviewees, and ultimately more insightful data.

Creating sustained forms of engagement is also necessary to ensure the continuity and reinforcement of relationships and attachments formed. HCI scholars have raised concerns about sustaining the lessons and relationships gained from such projects as they might be completely “forgotten” [5, 55, 67, 97]. The public scaffolded in this project “adhered” to some extent because of the longer project cycle, a subsequent project we led on enhancing the meaning of home in the community [96], and youth mentorship on our campus - both of which some students joined. Some of the youth are still in touch with our team and recall home as a unifying concept among their seventh grade class. Researchers can therefore create subsequent programs or consider digital tools for supporting deliberations [60] or taking action [7] among the publics formed.

7.3.3 Emotional Care and Contextual Affordances. HCI researchers working to cultivate relatedness and group belonging among strangers must address several challenges. Asking personal questions can be difficult due to personal boundary concerns, but it may be necessary to reveal attachments. Initially, engaging with strangers was not typical for many youth, except for a few like S10, who regularly communicated with strangers on behalf of her deaf mother. To overcome this, we signal the value of a trusted figure - like Mr. Finn - who ensured an emotionally safe experience for the youth. Creating opportunities for relationships to thrive between participants and the research team was also valuable as the youth grew comfortable conveying their thoughts to the first

author. This echoes findings by other researchers that building “a trusting” relationship [3, 57] with team members who have the capacity to connect well with participants can help manage “obstacles” [5] and make it safer for participants to raise “sensitive” matters [11, 70, 130]. Creating supportive environments where participants feel safe yet encouraged to step out of their comfort zones is essential for fostering public formations and could mean bringing on community researchers or experts from outside HCI.

An ethics of care is also needed to take the context into perspective [57, 75, 97] and design around topics that would support, rather than inhibit, publics and attachments. “Home” worked as a source of attachment in our project because we know that most of the participants were trying to make the island feel like a home. However, scholars have argued that strangers can threaten one’s “phantasmatic” vision of home as a space of safety and withdrawal from difference and conflict [49, 104]. If the school demographic was more homogeneous, this very same method could have led to alienating the minority students. We acknowledge that the diversity of our context and Mr. Finn’s deep knowledge of his students worked to our advantage and made it possible for home to become an attachment. Saha et al. suggest the following as a good subset for understanding a context: “culture, societal norms, natural environment, built environment, legal considerations, and economic factors” [99].

8 Conclusion

In this project, we sought to create opportunities for strangers to connect in the context of an urban and ethnically diverse seventh grade classroom where many of the students were recent immigrants or expats. The combination of intergenerational oral-history collection and qualitative data analysis helped the youth converge on a joint narrative of home rooted in family, memories, friends, and nature. Conducting oral history interviews required crossing physical, institutional, cultural, and social borders, which led to unforeseen connections - and ultimately attachments - to the socially shared nature of values [121] and histories of our participants. The youth went from purely passing by their Evergreen neighbors to loving their time with them and wanting to go back to the hospital. Ultimately, we saw that oral history, when coupled with qualitative analysis, can go beyond an archival method to help participants make sense of the present and cultivate attachments to shared concerns and experiences. Lastly, the potential of oral history and qualitative analysis to support public formation inspire us to consider the implications of this work in other contexts. For example, the public deliberations approach put forth by Habermas [43] and other political philosophers [61, 76, 87, 126], hinges on the idea that “a free society composed of diversities can ... enjoy moments of commonality” [126]. Our method can help surface such commonalities and make them an ordinary practice. After all, as S12 declared, “I learned about how to conduct interviews so that we can make connections all around the world in one room!”

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9 Pilot Oral History Protocol

- (1) Where are you from? What is your hometown?
- (2) What are some of your favorite memories of your hometown?
- (3) What were your favorite places in your hometown?
- (4) What was your home like there?
- (5) What are some of your favorite memories of your home?
- (6) What was your favorite part of your home?
- (7) Where do you live now?
- (8) What is your home like?
- (9) What are your favorite places where you live now?
- (10) Which places remind you of where you grew up?
- (11) How is where you live now different or similar to where you grew up?
- (12) What changes would you make to your current home if you could?

10 Final Oral History Protocol

- (1) Where are you from? What is the place you'd call your hometown and why?
- (2) What are some of your favorite memories of your hometown?
- (3) What were your favorite places in your hometown?
- (4) Why do you choose to call this place as your hometown? What is important about it?
- (5) Where do you live now?
- (6) What are your favorite places where you live now?
- (7) Do any of these places remind you of where you grew up?
- (8) What changes would you make to your current home if you could?
- (9) What does home really mean to you?