

How to enhance refugee advocacy in four hours: research

September 28 2017

Education researcher Nadia Naffi, made a promising discovery when she adapted cutting-edge interview techniques traditionally used in constructivist psychology as part of her ongoing study of how social media shapes young people's attitudes toward refugees.

"During one-on-one interviews with teens and young adults, participants reflected more thoughtfully on their own reactions to Facebook posts about Syrian [refugee](#) resettlement, and they sought to better understand the attitudes of others," says Naffi, a Concordia PhD candidate and 2017 SSHRC Storytellers competition winner.

"In as little as three or four hours, we saw empathy for the refugees emerge, as well as empathy for those who feel differently."

Naffi's findings were published in the journal *Personal Construct Theory & Practice* this fall.

The article is co-authored with Naffi's supervisor, Ann-Louise Davidson, associate professor of education in the Faculty of Arts and Science and Concordia University Research Chair in Maker Culture.

Methodology breakthrough

"The interviews triggered something in the participants," Naffi explains.

"They wanted to get more involved, not just be passive bystanders when faced with posts they considered intolerant or racist. They decided to express themselves online in order to share another perspective."

[Building on earlier stages of the study](#), Naffi acted on an interdisciplinary hunch.

She adapted four [interview techniques](#) from personal construct psychology (PCP), which posits that people understand the world not directly, but indirectly by creating personal constructs to anticipate what comes next, which guides their behaviors and attitudes.

The specific PCP interview protocols Naffi used were George Kelly's self-characterization technique, H.G. Proctor's perceiver element grid, Kelly's repertory grid test and N.D. Hinkle's laddering [technique](#).

The interview techniques Naffi used helped participants understand their perceptions about Syrian refugees. The tools also allowed the interviewees to step into the refugees' shoes and see things from their perspective. This is where the empathy emerged.

Naffi conducted the interviews—some online—with 20 Canadians between 16 and 24 years old and 22 youth from other countries.

Critical thinking in troubled times

Participants experienced several "a-ha" moments, including the realization that their reluctance to be part of the online conversation was actually harming Syrian refugees because, most of the time, only anti-resettlement opinions were being shared.

The results suggest that this type of [interview](#) protocol is an effective learning tool. Naffi's research shows that it can allow youth from host

societies to engage in [critical thinking](#) and to learn to live with the one they perceive as being "the other."

According to Naffi, the timing is right for this kind of discovery.

"In this troubled time, people need to understand where their political tolerance or intolerance is coming from."

Provided by Concordia University

Citation: How to enhance refugee advocacy in four hours: research (2017, September 28)
retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-09-refugee-advocacy-hours.html>

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