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Analyzing Intergroup Dialogue's Impact on Perceptions of Inclusion Among Students

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--Analyzing Intergroup Dialogue's Impact on Perceptions of Inclusion Among Students

Maeve Hemmer & Dr. Herb Thompson (Faculty Advisor)

Abstract

This case study was intended to explore how perceptions of inclusion among college students taking an Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) course changed across the four group stages. This study was done by collecting and measuring changes in self-reported levels of overall inclusion, individuation and belonging of students enrolled in an IGD course. IGD was a semester-long pilot course intended to increase social understanding, relationships, and action, and was offered in Spring 2023 at a midwestern university. The findings showed that perceptions of inclusion, individuation, and belonging increased as the four group stages progressed. This case study demonstrated the need for additional research to better explain these connections between IGD and inclusion.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Herb Thompson for his generous support, mentorship, and expertise during this project, and with the many other things you've supported me in during my time at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. You were someone I was supposed to meet and for that, I am incredibly grateful. This project was special because we got to collaborate on what we both love - inclusion and leadership. Thank you for everything.

Thank you to Dr. A.T. Miller for their dependable advocacy and action. I believe IGD is the future of UNO and a more connected Omaha community; I am so thankful for your intentionality to bring it to UNO's campus. UNO is better because you are a Maverick. Thank you for everything.

To the students who participated in this case study; thank you. It was the honor of a lifetime to co-facilitate the first IGD course on UNO's campus. I will hold our time as a special memory of my time at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. You all inspire me!

To the Honors Program and specifically Dr. M, thank you. Your support has meant everything to me during my time at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. If I could tell incoming students one thing, it would be "find your people". For me, Dr. M and the Honors Program were "my people". Thank you!

Introduction

Sandro Galea, in his book *Well* (2019), explores the widespread implications of a capitalistic society, rooted in individualism and survival, on our individual and collective health outcomes. As exclusion, polarization, and the resulting stigma dominate our society, loneliness plagues the lives of many. Health of individuals and communities will continue to be poor as long as we fail to invest in common spaces that offer communities the chance to connect and build social networks. (Galea, p 64, 2019) Further, the United States' Surgeon General, has declared loneliness as a Public Health crisis citing the decline of social connectedness and increased feelings and practices of social isolation among Americans, and especially young adults in America (Murthy, 2023).

A decline in social connectedness and participation are due in part to the decreased size of individual's social networks and increased use of forms of social media and internet. A variety of other factors such as societal infrastructure and individual experience specific to demographics (cooperation or discrimination) also have an impact on social connectedness and participation. (Murthy, p.16) According to Dr. Galea and Surgeon General Murthy, it is critical that communities provide opportunities for connection and social connection.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) has historically had low student involvement on campus, given its start as a commuter campus. In the last 25 years, UNO has taken concerted efforts to reimagine itself into a traditional University with investments toward campus construction and student inclusion and involvement, specifically the development of student housing on campus in 1999 (Gateway, 2008). UNO, situated in the metropolitan community of Omaha, NE, serves the most demographically diverse and socioeconomically burdened student body in the University of Nebraska system. The UNO Student Body consists of

over 40% of students identifying as first generation college students, 30% of students identifying as ethnically diverse, and 87% of students receiving some form of financial aid (University of Nebraska, 2022). This provides a unique set of challenges that the UNO student body must face; building social networks and achieving social connectedness can be one of the many challenges.

Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) is a "communication-based curriculum that employs targeted instructional methods to increase understanding, relationships, and collaborative action." (Thompson, in press) Started at the University of Michigan in response to the Michigan Mandate, IGD is a course that is peer facilitated at universities around the country and has proven to be effective in decreasing prejudices (increased social understanding). In Spring 2023, IGD piloted at the University of Nebraska at Omaha for 20 undergraduate students. One of the stated aims of this class is to contribute to the institution's overall goal of student inclusion and involvement. While much research has been done to understanding IGD's correlation to increased social understanding, relationships, and action, there has not been research done to understand IGD's relationship to inclusion or social connectedness.

This study examined perceptions of inclusion among students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha that were enrolled in IGD during the Spring semester of 2023. Further, this study hoped to better understand one central question and three research questions:

CQ: How do perceptions of inclusion for IGD students change across group stages?

R1: How does student desire for inclusion compare to their experiences of it over group stages?

R2: How does perception of belongingness for students change over group stages?

R3: How does perception of individuation change over group stages?

Background Information

In 1989, IGD was developed at the University Michigan in response to the Michigan Mandate - a university wide acknowledgement of academic excellence and social diversity and commitment toward better serving the future (University of Michigan, 1990). IGD has roots in Allport's intergroup contact theory and exists to "develop skills to reduce prejudice across social differences" (Thompson, in press). IGD is a peer facilitated course that is overseen by faculty and brings students of various social identities together to teach a framework that intends to develop intercultural skills. This curriculum offers learning on issues specific to differences in privilege, power, and identity. IGD has demonstrated its effectiveness at improving:

- Social understanding
- Social relationships; and
- Social action

In the winter of 2023, UNO's Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), Dr. A.T Miller piloted the first training for Intergroup Dialogue student facilitators alongside faculty members Dr. Herb Thompson and Claire Du Laney. Dr. Miller spearheaded many of the IGD efforts at their previous institutions and prioritized introducing IGD onto UNO's campus following their arrival to campus as UNO's second CDO. Following the completion of the winter 2023 session, there were nine undergraduate students certified to peer facilitate IGD. In Spring 2023, UNO's first pilot IGD course launched with six undergraduate peer facilitators (facilitators) and 20 undergraduate students. This course split into two sections with three facilitators and ten students in each. IGD is best facilitated in classes with two or three facilitators and no more than 12 students. Given the small group context that is necessary for the optimal delivery of IGD, the

classes/curriculum typically progress through the natural group growth cycles (Bonebright, 2010). These stages are:

- Stage 1 (Forming). Group beginnings: Forming and building relationships

- Stage 2 (Storming): Exploring differences and commonalities of experience

- Stage 3 (Norming): Exploring and dialoging about hot topics

- Stage 4 (Performing): Action planning and collaboration

IGD relies heavily on readings, activities, and developing skills that provide a framework for approaching improved social understandings, relationships, and action. Introspection (through journals and a final reflection), engagement (through class attendance and participation in activities), and action (through a collaborative group project) are the basis on the assessment of students for class grade. Grades are led by the faculty overseeing the class. Given the success of the Spring 2023 pilot, IGD is continuing into Fall 2023 with 12 facilitators and 80 anticipated students.

<div align="center">

Literature Review

</div>

With the hope of tracking perceptions of inclusion across the group stages of IGD, it was critical to understand: first, what is inclusion and second, how is inclusion fostered?

What is inclusion?

Inclusion can be defined as "the degree to which an individual perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her need for belonging and uniqueness" (Shore, 2011). Inclusion has been explained as a focus on two needs being met: individuation and belonging (Brewer, 1991). What is inclusion *not?* A mandate for everyone in the group to be the same. In fact, Brewer (1991) argued that groups must "maintain distinctiveness in order to survive" (p. 478). Inclusion hinges on the ability for

individuals to navigate space authentically while being honored and respected for their differences as well as similarities. Inclusion is a central component of building thriving social networks, and on a large scale, communities that can combat the public health crisis of loneliness and isolation.

How is inclusion fostered?

"Personal identity" - or individuation - honors the difference of characteristics of the individual in relation to the larger social context. Belonging has been defined as the "need to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belonging can be found in a group "social identity". Social identities depersonalize the identity and group it into a category of experience. Examples of social identities would be Women, Black People, Nebraskans, etc. All share a similar experience but are not individually recognized for their difference in other experiences/identities. Brewer (1991) believed that social identity "derives from a fundamental tension with human needs for validation and similarity to others [belongingness] and a countervailing need for uniqueness [individuation]" (p. 477). Specific to group inclusion, there are four options: 1) exclusion for those whose belongingness and uniqueness needs are not met, 2) assimilation for those who feel they belong but are not valued for uniqueness, 3) differentiation for those who are valued for uniqueness but do not feel they belong, and 4) inclusion for those who have both needs met (Shore, 2011).
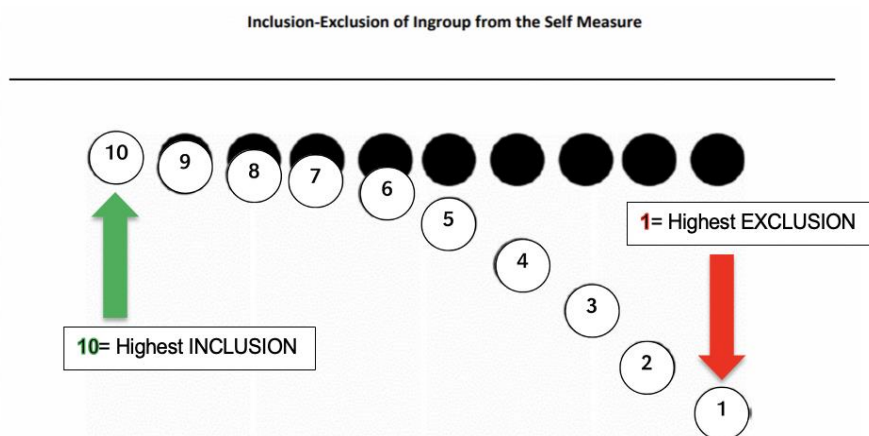
Methods

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 20 undergraduate students attending a midwestern public university. Each participant was enrolled in the pilot IGD class for Spring 2023. The duration of the class was one semester and met once weekly. The timing of survey administration was aligned with the ending of each group stage. Participants voluntarily

participated through anonymous survey completion. Some participants did not complete surveys due to absence which cause minor fluctuations in the number of responses as group stages progressed.

Design

Pulling from an Inclusion/Exclusion of In-Group study by Becker and Tausch (2014) and the Perceived Group Inclusion Scale by Jansen et al. (2014), Dr. Thompson and I developed a modified survey that allowed participants to self report their perceptions of a) their current perception of social inclusion, b) their desired level of inclusion, c) perceived insider or outsider experience, and d) level of authenticity in the class context.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 provide the survey questions that were administered following the completion of each group stage. Figure 1 was intended to measure overall perceptions of inclusion. Figure 2 was intended to measure belonging among group members by exploring insider/outsider feelings of participants. Figure 3 was intended to measure perceptions of individuation among group members by exploring participant authenticity offerings. All answers were self reported anonymously by participants.

Inclusion-Exclusion of Ingroup from the Self Measure

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

1= Highest EXCLUSION

10= Highest INCLUSION

Note. The white circle represented the participants and the black circle the group they were thinking about. Participants were asked to select the number that best represented how close to, or distant from, this group they felt.

Figure 1: (Becker & Tausch, 2014)

Part 1 of 2

*In Figure 1 the white circle is meant to represent you and the black circle is meant to represent your class (your intergroup dialogue group). In the figure, circle #1 represents an experience where you feel completely included in the group and circle #10 represents an experience of complete exclusion. Please select the circle numbers that best represents 1) how close or distant you **CURRENTLY** feel to/from the other members of your group, and 2) how close or distant you **WANT** to feel from the peers in your group.*

1. Which circle # represents how included you feel in your **CURRENT** group experience: #_____
   If you feel comfortable, please explain why you feel this level of inclusion/exclusion:

2. Which circle # represents how included you **WANT** feel in your group experience: #_____
   If you feel comfortable, please explain why you want feel this level of inclusion/exclusion:

Part 2 of 2 [1]*

These questions explore your class experiences related to the concepts of group membership and authenticity. Please take a few moments to respond to the questions below.

1. Over the first few weeks of this class, would you consider yourself an **insider** or **outsider** in this class/group?

   a. _____ Insider

   b. _____ Outsider

   c. Please explain why you feel/believe you are an insider or outsider in this group:

2. What percentage (1%-100%) would you use to describe the authenticity you are comfortable showing others in your group (*1%=not authentic. 100%=completely authentic*).
   a. _____%

   b. What has helped or caused you to feel that level of comfort in your authenticity?

Data Analysis

Following collection of data after each group stage, I met with subject expert, Dr.

Thompson, to review and analyze results. Through content analysis and statistical evaluation, we

were able to identify trends and compare them with the open answer responses/themes in order

to draw interpretations of the changes in perceptions of inclusion, belonging, and individuation we observed across group stages.
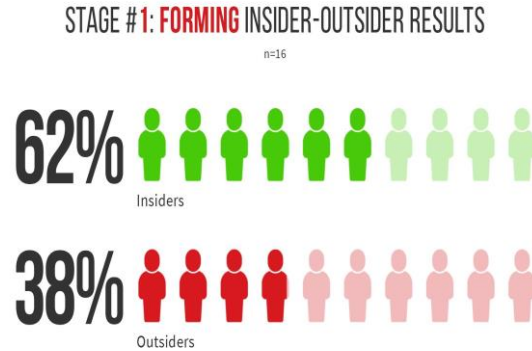
Results

Stage 1: Forming

Inclusion-Exclusion Measure: Following the first group stage, the average experienced inclusion among participants was 7.53 while the average desired inclusion was 9.29. Figure 4 shows the participant average for experienced and desired inclusion following the Forming Group Stage.
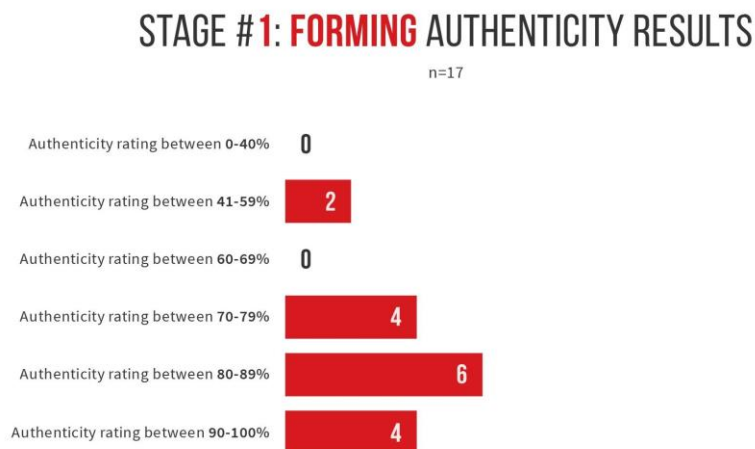

Insider-Outsider Measure: Following the first group stage, 62% of participants reported feeling like an "insider" while 38% of the participants reported feeling like an "outsider". In other words, 62% felt as though they "belonged" in the group. Figure 5 shows the insider/outsider perceptions of participants following the Forming Group Stage.

STAGE #1: FORMING INSIDER-OUTSIDER RESULTS

n=16

62% Insiders

38% Outsiders

Authenticity/Individuation: Following the first group stage, 2 participants reported offering 41-59% authenticity to the group, 4 participants reported offering 70-79% authenticity to the group, 6 participants reported offering 80-89% authenticity to the group, and 4 participants reported offering 90-100% authenticity to the group. Figure 6 shows the reported authenticity offerings from individual participants following the Forming Group Stage.

STAGE #1: FORMING AUTHENTICITY RESULTS

n=17

Authenticity rating between 0-40%	0
Authenticity rating between 41-59%	2
Authenticity rating between 60-69%	0
Authenticity rating between 70-79%	4
Authenticity rating between 80-89%	6
Authenticity rating between 90-100%	4

Stage 2: Storming

Inclusion-Exclusion Measure: Following the second group stage, the average experienced inclusion among participants was 7.94 while the average desired inclusion was 8.63. The average experience inclusion increased by 0.41 while average desired inclusion decreased by -0.66 from

group stage one. Figure 7 shows the participant average for experienced and desired inclusion following the Storming Group Stage.

STAGE #2: STORMING INCLUSION-EXCLUSION RESULTS

n=16

7.94

Experienced
(Class Average)

8.63

Desired
(Class Average)

Insider-Outsider: Following the second group stage, 67% (increase of 5% from group stage one) of participants reported feeling like an "insider" while 33% (decrease of 5% from group stage one) of the participants reported feeling like an "outsider". In other words, 67% felt as though they "belonged" in the group. Figure 8 shows the insider/outsider perceptions of participants following the Storming Group Stage.

STAGE #2: STORMING INSIDER-OUTSIDER RESULTS
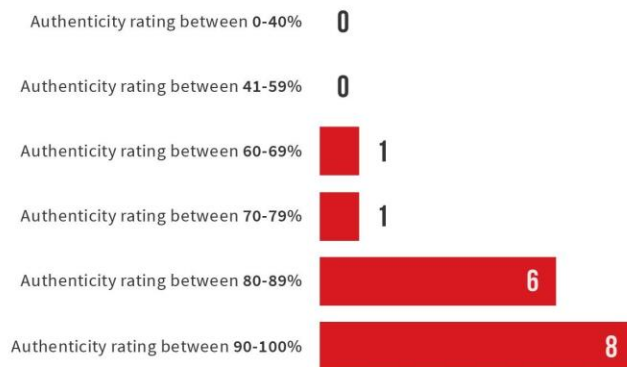
n=15

67%

Insiders

33%

Outsiders
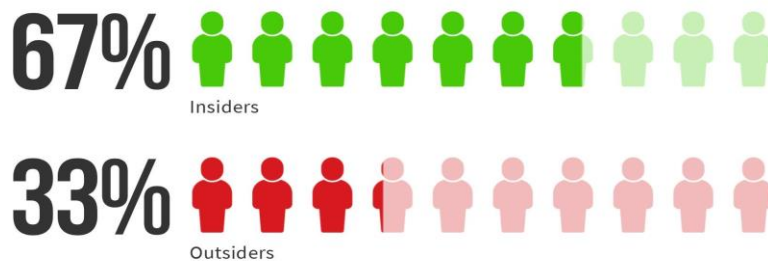
Authenticity/Individuation: Following the second group stage, 1 participant reported offering 60-69% authenticity to the group (increase of 1 from group stage one); 1 participant reported offering 70-79% authenticity to the group (decrease of 4 from group stage one); 6 participants reported offering 80-89% authenticity to the group (remained the same from group stage one); and 8 participants reported offering 90-100% authenticity to the group (increase of 4 from group stage one). Figure 9 shows the reported authenticity offerings from individual participants following the Storming Group Stage.

STAGE #2: STORMING AUTHENTICITY RESULTS
n=16

Authenticity rating between **0-40%**	0
Authenticity rating between **41-59%**	0
Authenticity rating between **60-69%**	1
Authenticity rating between **70-79%**	1
Authenticity rating between **80-89%**	6
Authenticity rating between **90-100%**	8

Stage 3: Norming

Inclusion-Exclusion Measure: Following the third group stage, the average experienced inclusion among participants was 9.08 while the average desired inclusion was 9.58. The average experience inclusion increased by 1.14 while average desired inclusion increased by 0.95 from group stage two. Figure 10 shows the participant average for experienced and desired inclusion following the Norming Group Stage.

STAGE #3: **NORMING** INCLUSION-EXCLUSION RESULTS

n=12

9.08

Experienced
(Class Average)

9.58

Desired
(Class Average)

Insider-Outsider: Following the third group stage, 77% of participants reported feeling like an "insider" (increase of 10% from group stage two) while 23% of the participants (decrease of 10% from group stage two) reported feeling like an "outsider". In other words, 77% felt as though they "belonged" in the group. Figure 11 shows the insider/outsider perceptions of participants following the Norming Group Stage.
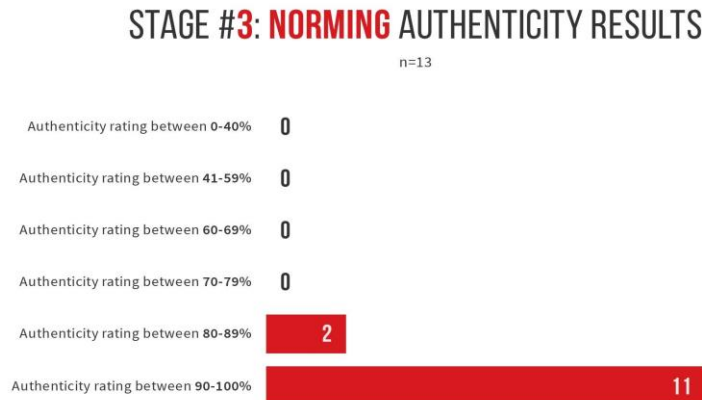
STAGE #3: **NORMING** INSIDER-OUTSIDER RESULTS

n=13

77% Insiders

23% Outsiders
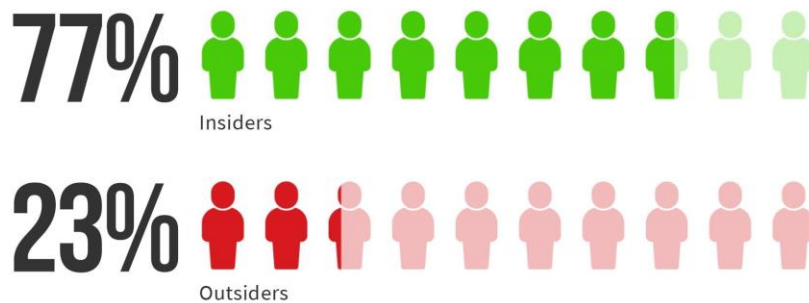
Authenticity/Individuation: Following the third group stage, 2 participants reported offering 80-89% authenticity to the group (decrease of 4 from group stage two); and 11 participants reported offering 90-100% authenticity to the group (increase of 3 from group stage

two). Figure 12 shows the reported authenticity offerings from individual participants following the Norming Group Stage.

STAGE #**3**: **NORMING** AUTHENTICITY RESULTS

n=13

Authenticity rating between **0-40%**	0
Authenticity rating between **41-59%**	0
Authenticity rating between **60-69%**	0
Authenticity rating between **70-79%**	0
Authenticity rating between **80-89%**	2
Authenticity rating between **90-100%**	11

Stage 4: Performing

Inclusion-Exclusion Measure: Following the fourth group stage, the average experienced inclusion among participants was 9.53 while the average desired inclusion was 9.64. The average experienced inclusion increased by .45 while average desired inclusion increased by 0.06 from group stage three. Figure 13 shows the participant average for experienced and desired inclusion following the Performing Group Stage.
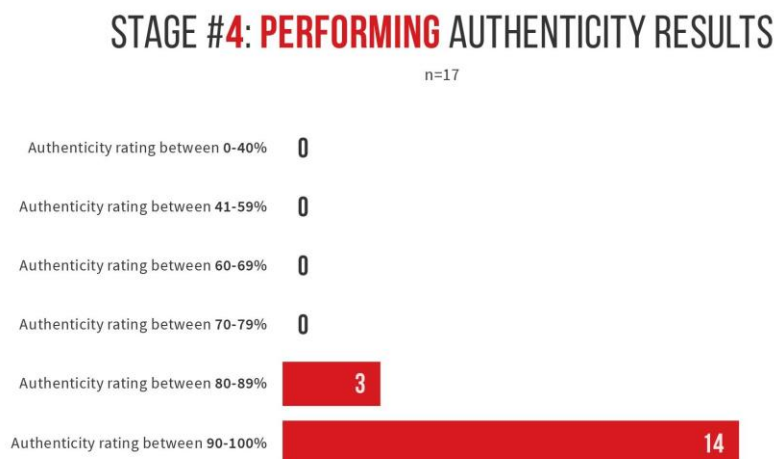
STAGE #**4**: **PERFORMING** INCLUSION-EXCLUSION RESULTS

n=17

9.53

Experienced
(Class Average)

9.65

Desired
(Class Average)

Insider-Outsider: Following the fourth group stage, 88% of participants reported feeling like an "insider" (increase of 11% from group stage three) while 12% of the participants

(decrease of 9% from group stage three) reported feeling like an "outsider". In other words, 88%

felt as though they "belonged" in the group. Figure 14 shows the insider/outsider perceptions of

participants following the Performing Group Stage.

STAGE #4: PERFORMING INSIDER-OUTSIDER RESULTS

n=17

88% Insiders

12% Outsiders
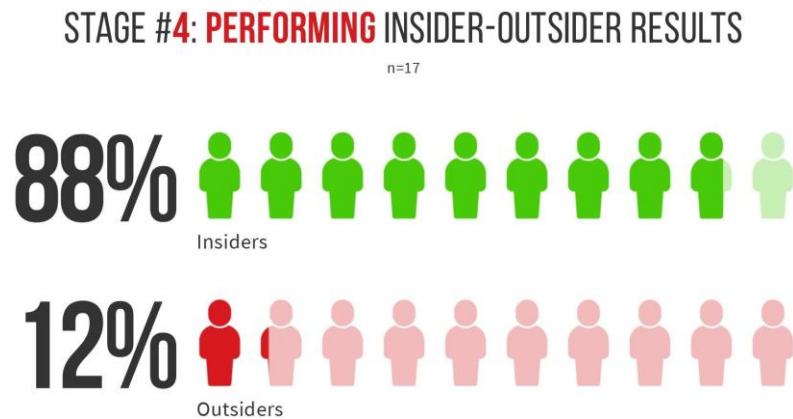
Authenticity/Individuation: Following the fourth group stage, 3 participants reported

offering 80-89% authenticity to the group (increase of 1 from group stage three); and 14

participants reported offering 90-100% authenticity to the group (increase of 3 from group stage

three). Figure 15 shows the reported authenticity offerings from individual participants following

the Performing Group Stage.

STAGE #4: PERFORMING AUTHENTICITY RESULTS

n=17

|	
Authenticity rating between 0-40%	0
Authenticity rating between 41-59%	0
Authenticity rating between 60-69%	0
Authenticity rating between 70-79%	0
Authenticity rating between 80-89%	3
Authenticity rating between 90-100%	14

Discussion

Following data collection after each group stage, I met with subject expert, Dr. Thompson, to review and analyze results. Through content analysis and statistical comparison, we were able to identify themes that could potentially explain the changes we observed across group stages.

Inclusion/Exclusion:

Figure 16 shows the change of the average experienced and desired inclusion across the four group stages.

INCLUSION-EXCLUSION COMPARISON OVER STAGES
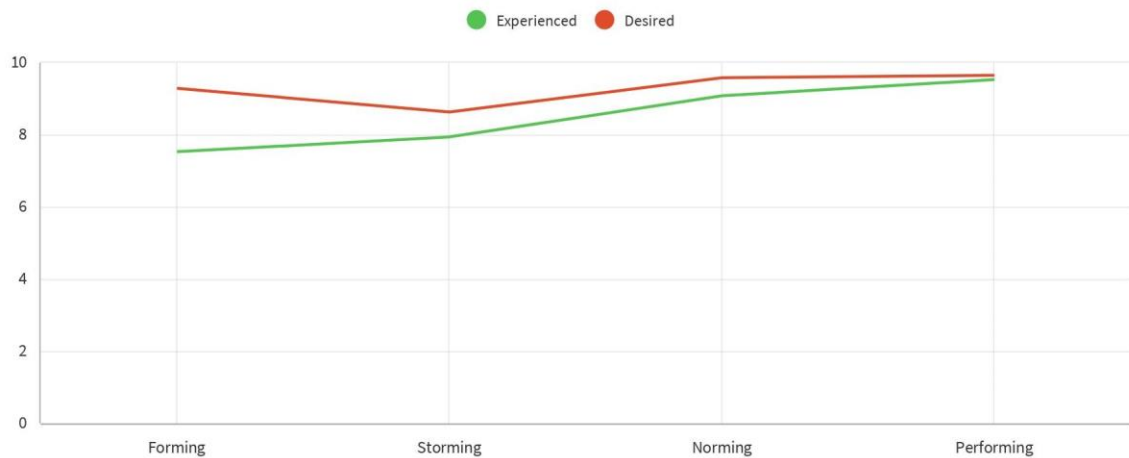
As evident in Figure 16, experienced inclusion among participants maintained a steady increase across the four group stages. This displayed that time was a helpful factor in nurturing participants' perceptions of inclusion. In qualitative research, that came from Figure 1 (Question 1), exploring why participants were experiencing their reported level of inclusion/exclusion, common themes arose in each stage.

In Group Stage One (Forming), participants shared feelings of unfamiliarity with other classmates that was intensified by the sensitivity of the material IGD was covering. Participants reported fears of "saying the wrong thing", not overcoming preconceived notions other participants may have about them, and practices of filtering what they contributed so they avoided stepping on toes. However, participants shared a confidence that with time and increased interaction with other group members that their experienced inclusion would increase. Participants shared an appreciation of IGD's curriculum, which offered group members an opportunity to observe the similarities participants had from the very beginning. One participant said, "I think we're all getting to know each other… but we've already established some ground rules to help feel people included." Participants utilized the opportunity to collaboratively develop "ground rules" that would guide the class dynamic and cultivate group investment. The Hope and Fears Exercise, which offered all participants the opportunity to anonymously share their hopes and fears for IGD with their class, was also cited for having had an impact on an increased inclusion level. The participant reflected on this activity saying, "I feel close just because we all have shared feeling nervous but [are also] interested in the class."

As the group progressed into Group Stage Two (Storming), average experienced inclusion increased by 0.41. While participants experienced increased inclusion, they also reported an increased awareness of differences among the group. One participant shared, "I feel like I have an enjoyable relationship with my classmates, but based off dialogue, know that we share a lot of differences in beliefs." General feelings of enjoyment of and appreciation for the group from participants was a common theme; many participants mentioned feeling heard, seen, and respected. However, the spectrum of confidence among participants was diverse; some doubted if they would ever be able to feel fully included: saying, "I feel pretty included in the

group. I just don't think I will 100% be comfortable but that isn't the group's fault. That's just how I am."

Group Stage Three (Forming), brought the steep increase of 1.14 for experienced inclusion among participants. Feelings of understanding and relationships (two objectives of IGD) were clear in participants' reflections. Participants were direct about their improved comfortability with other group members, saying "I feel comfortable opening up to my peers… without the fear of them misunderstanding what I'm saying," and "I feel very comfortable and [am] able to talk to everyone about anything." The IGD curriculum associated with the Forming Stage offered group members opportunities to further cultivate understandings, relationships, and begin working on collaborative action specific to social justice following the Storming Stage, which was largely focused on exploring differences among the group. For this reason, having the largest increase for perceived inclusion in the Forming Stage was not surprising. The increased perceptions positioned participants to move into the final group stage (Performing) where participants would wrap up their collaborative action.

The Performing Stage had an increase of average experienced inclusion of 0.45. Multiple participants shared increases in confidence specific to expressing themselves and initiating conversation with the IGD framework, saying "I have… learned how to have better and more engaging discussions…" and I am "confident in my speaking." Through all group stages, participants reported increased levels of experienced inclusion as well as a clear grasp of the understandings, relationships, and action that IGD intends to cultivate in its participants' lives.

The fluctuating result, displayed in Figure 1, of participants' desired inclusion is a reminder that participants had the agency to decide how included - or not included - they wanted to be in the group. Through the group stages, the desired inclusion level started high, dropped,

and then finished with a steady increase. The desired inclusion never dipped below 8.6 on the 10 point scale. Participants were ambitious in their desire to feel included even as their reported understandings (Figure 1, Question 2) of what that achievement looked like changed across the stages.

In Group Stage One (Forming), participants shared hopes of full inclusion in the group looking like friendships, reporting thoughts like "I like creating new bonds with people & making new friends," and "hopefully I can make friends eventually." IGD prides itself as a framework/approach that prioritizes dialogue in its effort to acknowledge and act on differences in privilege and power among various social groups. The IGD curriculum does not aim to achieve inclusion in groups with close friendships but rather by cultivating group respect for differences in experience, identity, and thought. This realization that IGD's goal was not to develop a group of best friends became apparent to many participants in Group Stage Two (Storming). Participants expressed this realization through quotes such as, "despite differences, I want to feel comfortable and accepted in the groups." The 0.66 decrease in desired inclusion was understandable given the reorientation of group inclusion that happened for many participants in the Storming stage. Even given the dip, participants maintained high desires to be included in the group. Group Stage Three (Forming) resulted in a 0.95 increase and participants reporting satisfaction specific to the balancing of individuation and belonging that Brewer argued was necessary for meaningful groups. (Brewer, 1991) One participant reported, "I like being distinct but still feeling included." Others said, "the more the semester is going, the more I feel comfortable here as I get to know my peers and understand their different views," and "I think I am in a good spot. I don't need to be super besties with everyone in the class, but I know them well enough to have an open and honest conversation with them." The Forming stage provided

participants with improved understandings of differences and increased comfort with difference

which prompted relationships that cultivated opportunities for unified action in the final stage.

The Fourth Group Stage (Performing), resulted in a 0.06 increase in desired inclusion levels.

Participants shared satisfaction with the relationship between their experienced and desired

levels of inclusion, saying things like "I feel that this is a great spot for me to be in!" and "I'm

grateful to be…included". Some participants demonstrated a commitment to including others: "I

want to be here and want others to feel the same.". While others navigated the newness of this

experience: "I want to feel included. It's hard to feel like I belong." Although the desire to be

included was consistently high among participants across the group stages, the indicators of what

inclusion felt and looked like were reoriented to naturally mirror the intent, and historical impact,

of the IGD curriculum as the group stages progressed.

As the four group stages progressed the gap between participants' experienced and

desired inclusion decreased, demonstrating that participants' desires for inclusion were being met

through their time in the IGD course. Participants reported new desires that transitioned from

hopes of friendships to hopes of respect and acceptance of difference across the four group

stages. That demonstrated the power of IGD; honoring and including differences in identity and

experience that ensured people of various identities could collaborate toward action.

One of the six colleges at this same midwestern university employed a school-wide

Inclusion/Exclusion measure. Given it was college-wide, it provided a larger sample size.

However, the results from college-wide survey compared to the results from the IGD group

proved to be interesting and potentially telling. The college students reported a lower

experienced inclusion than did the IGD students which might be explained by IGD's more

individualized experience. However, more notably, the college students also reported a lower

average desired inclusion than IGD. This suggests that IGD is offering an experience that

encourages and attracts inclusion among its participants. Further, the results from this case study

reveal that desires for inclusion remain high, even as knowledge of shared understanding,

relationships, and action mature: IGD provides sustainable experiences and desires for inclusion.

Belonging (Insider/Outsider):

Figure 17 shows the change of percentage of participants self identifying as an insider
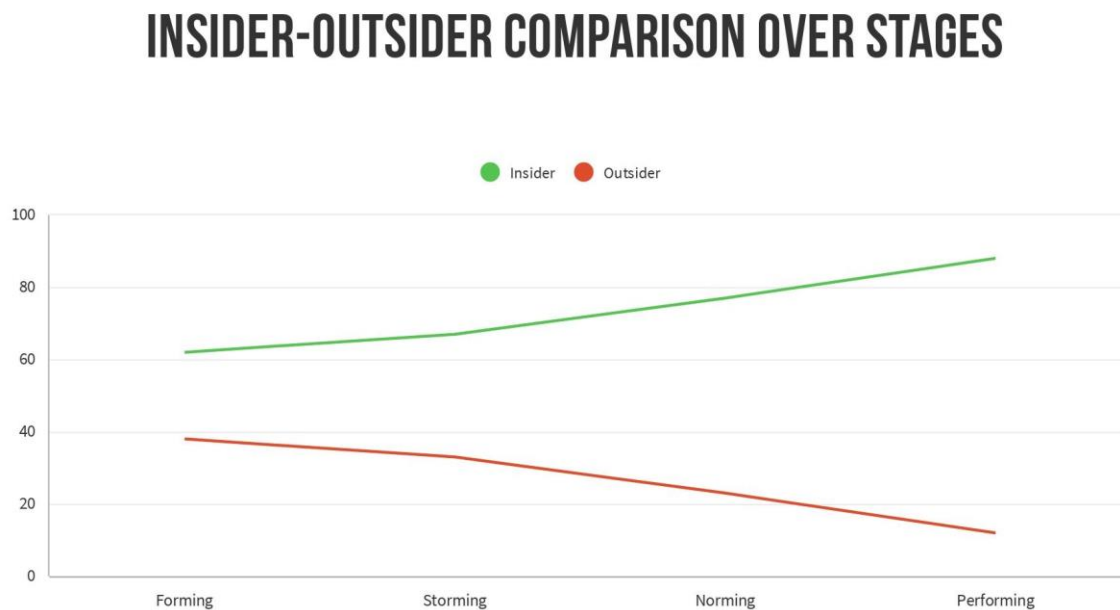
versus outsider as the group stages progressed.

Figure 17 demonstrates the persistent increase of the percentage of participants self-identifying

as an "insider" of their assigned IGD group over the course of the four group stages. This figure

was intended to measure the participants' experience specific to belonging while in IGD.

Similar to the experienced inclusion levels, through the first two group stages (Forming and Storming), participants reported a need for more time as they navigated finding their place in the newly formed IGD groups. The desire participants had to be an insider was clear from the beginning; one participant shared, "we're all acquaintances at this point, with the course of time I will feel like an insider." However, difference still posed a barrier to participants considering themselves an insider. Some participants identifying as an outsider explained, "I am open to listening to different perspectives but not yet comfortable in sharing my own thoughts in an environment that may not be ready for a different point of view…"; "because I am a minority, mom, and wife. Most of my peers aren't going through what I am," ; and "simply because I believe we've all had different life paths, and mine seems to be too different from everyone else's…" However, what was also clear was the other participants' desire and commitment for their peers to feel like an insider, too. Participants identifying as insiders wrote, "I hope everyone feels like an insider. I have felt very included and cared about,"; "they want to hear from you and listen when you speak"; and "I feel like an insider because they have worked to make me feel comfortable." Through participant explanation on why they felt they were an insider or outsider (Figure 2, Question 1c), it was clear that there was a culture of intentional inclusion and commitment to listening among participants and facilitators of IGD.

As the stages progressed into the last two group stages (Forming and Performing), participants found their way into the group and self-identifying as an insider increased. By the third group stage (Norming), 77% of participants were identifying as an insider: a 13% increase from the first group stage. Participants attributed this feeling to the culture of listening and affirmation the groups had developed, saying "I feel like I've been embraced by the group for who I am," and "I think everyone has done a great job of welcoming everyone's ideas and

thoughts." For those participants identifying as outsiders, their belief relied mostly on their hesistation to share with the group: "I was afraid to show myself to others and [did] not express thought and feelings freely." By the final stage (Performing), 88% of participants self-identified as insiders. Almost 25% of the 88% that reported as an insider attributed it to "being heard" and another 25% of the 88% specified feeling "included" in activities and exercises. One participant that identified as an outsider shared their regret as "I was shy at first so I didn't participate as much as I would've liked." Similar to the experienced inclusion levels, perceptions specific to belonging took time, patience, and intentional effort from other group members.

This result of an increased number of participants identifying as insiders is anticipated given the demonstrated increase of experienced inclusion among participants in this case study and the proven correlation between belonging and inclusion. (Brewer, 1991) The culture of inclusion that was evident in the IGD groups played a large role in ushering participants into feeling like an "insider". These results are important, especially given the newness of the "insider" experience for many of the participants in their college careers. IGD's ability to create an inclusive culture that invites differences into an insider role could be a transformational piece in increasing belonging and social connectedness on UNO's campus - and beyond.

Authenticity (Individuation):

Figure 18 demonstrates the percentage of authenticity that participants reported they could offer into their assigned IGD group.

AUTHENTICITY COMPARISON OVER STAGES
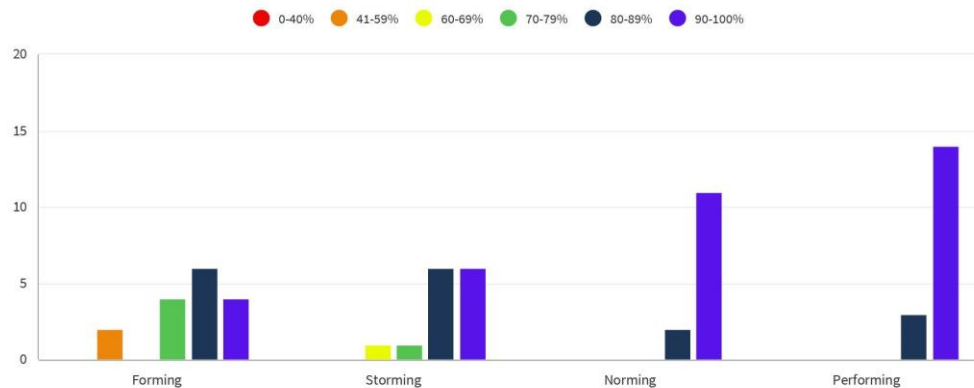
As demonstrated in Figure 18, as the four group stages progressed participants reported offering increased levels of authenticity in their contributions and participation with their assigned IGD group. Authenticity is a central component of inclusion as it provides individuals distinctness (individuation) from the group; a group that promotes both individuation and belonging is sustainable and is likely to receive long term commitment from its members. (Brewer 1991)

In the first two group stages (Forming and Storming), participants reported a more diverse range of authenticity offerings to the group. Participants shared a willingness to be genuine with their contributions but maintained hesitation with providing details deeper than surface level. Similar to perceptions of inclusion and being an insider, participants identified time as a necessity to achieving increased authenticity. One participant said, "I am naturally reserved so I think it will come with time." Authenticity among the group was encouraged and fueled by examples from courageous group members sharing authentically and vulnerably. The positive reinforcement participants received from their peers that offered vulnerable details about their lives encouraged contributions from reserved participants. Two participants said, "hearing

other's experiences and what they feel comfortable sharing helps me to feel more comfortable," and "the fact that more people are opening up makes me want to do the same." The culture of listening and affirmation that participants detailed in their reflections about belonging, encouraged authenticity among group members, too. In fact, the trust that developed among the IGD groups built a commitment from one participant to another. One participant said, "as others opened up, it gave me the courage and confidence to be vulnerable as well. If the group is in, so am I." During the Storming Stage, there is an activity called the "testimonial"; this is an opportunity for participants to share the impact social identities have had on their life. Historically, this exercise is an emotional time that forms a bond among the IGD group members. For this case study, multiple participants cited the Testimonial as being a pivotal experience; one said, "the testimonial definitely helped me be more authentic." Participants specified small group activities as helpful in finding relatability among other group members which supported their ability to be more authentic. As time passed, curriculum was navigated, and trust was built among the groups, participants' authenticity levels increased.

By Norming, all participants reported they were contributing at a 80% or above authenticity level. By Performing, 76% of participants were contributing at a 95% or above authenticity level. One participant cited the "ground rules" that the groups developed during the first couple weeks of class as a contributing factor to why they are able to be so authentic toward the end of the semester: "I felt comfortable to be myself because of our boundaries/rules set at the beginning of the semester." Participants cited the "safe space" that their group had created through mutual respect and group trust. One participant described it as: "I feel we have set a standard for a safe space and each have done our part to follow through." There was a clear group commitment to one another to provide a safe, empowering environment for each

participant to show up authentically. The IGD groups environment became a place for one participant to reflect about their group members this way: "I would tell them my deepest secrets & know I wouldn't be judged". Another participant shared that they were able to come out to their IGD group as Transgender. The experience of individuation that had a commitment to ensuring an environment that was conducive to individuation for all team members formed among both IGD groups and supported participants as they navigated toward shared understandings, relationships, and actions together.

The reflections that IGD participants shared quantitatively and qualitatively highlighted the potential opportunities that IGD has to support the fostering of inclusion and social connectedness through shared understanding, relationships, and action.

Limitations

The limitations of this case study were related to the sample size, measure administration, and researcher's involvement in class. Given that this case study was studying a pilot version of IGD, the sample size was small. However, as the program continues past its pilot stage, having a healthy sample size should not be a challenge. Additionally, there was no true beginning point for data due to the first data collection happening after the class had started. Getting a true beginning point of all questions will be important for future studies to better understand the difference between beginning and end feelings specific to inclusion. Additionally, a calendar for survey administration and clarity on measures for participants would strengthen the collection of the data in the future. Finally, the primary researcher was a facilitator for one IGD group which could have had an unintended influence on the participants' answers and/or case study results. Future studies should work to reduce this influence.

Conclusion

This case study explored the positive increases in participants' levels of individuation and belonging across the four group stages of the pilot IGD course. The increases in individuation and belonging along with other factors supported enhanced feelings of inclusion and desires for inclusion among participants across the four group stages. This case study provided additional demonstration on the effectiveness of IGD in achieving shared understanding, relationships, and collaborative action for various social identity groups. Given the minimal amount of research that has been conducted to understand the connections between IGD and perceptions of inclusion, this case study provides an argument for this relationship to be further examined with complementary studies. The future research will assist in the discovery about the link between IGD and perceptions of inclusion. This is urgent considering the present need for intentional efforts toward improving community connection given the aforementioned public health crisis of loneliness (Murthy, 2023). This study provides another avenue which can foster spaces for social networking, community connectedness, and inclusive support of students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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