

“When We’re in Spaces Among People of Colour, Your Ideas Just Flow”: Politicized Trust and Educational Intimacy in Activist Spaces

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Abstract: This paper examines how relationships of educational intimacy and politicized trust were constructed in an activist community. Bridging theories of politicization and activist becoming with emerging research on the significance of relationships for identity development and solidarity, this paper brings micro-interactional data of how relationships are constructed and why they matter. Tracing a group debrief by members of colour within the Fossil Free UofT activist group allows us to see how humour constructed intimacy alongside intense disclosure and collectivized grievance construction. This contributes to work in the learning sciences to demonstrate the political contexts and consequences of learning and provides tools for activists to organize learning ecologies for educational intimacy and politicized trust.

On relationships and learning

The question of how relationships shape learning has animated many of us in the learning sciences over the last decades, and particularly in recent years as attention in our field has shifted to attend more closely to the political and ethical dimensions of learning. Recent research has examined how relations of educational intimacy (Uttamchandani, 2021) and politicized trust (McKinney de Royston & Vakil, 2019) have made specific forms of learning possible, and this work, alongside other interventions toward understanding relationships and politicization is vital in understanding how other possible futures are imagined and enacted through the joint work of community members. This paper theorizes political transformation through a sociocultural lens, arguing that politicization is a learning process, one that unfolds not in the minds of individual participants, but rather as co-constituting processes of development involving the political concepts, practices, epistemologies, and identities of learners as they transform through their engagement in building new possible futures (Curnow, et al., 2020).

These theoretical and analytical questions align closely with questions emerging from social movements, where the need to understand how, when, and why some relationships support learning and collective action to change social systems toward more just futures (and why some do not). This question was a persistent undercurrent in the work of FossilFree UofT, a campus-based climate activist group. In their campaign to push the University of Toronto to divest the endowment funds from the 200 fossil fuel companies with the largest reserves, many of the young people engaged in this work dramatically shifted their political orientations. So often, young activists in the campaign wondered why some people “wouldn’t learn” and why, by contrast, other spaces felt so nurturing of their political engagement and growth as climate justice activists.

In this paper, I take up those questions, asking how relationships of educational intimacy enabled politicization. I use one particularly rich interaction as the basis of analysis, looking at video of an impromptu debrief of people of colour after a tense meeting. In this debrief, we can hear explicit talk about the value of relationships of trust and shared experience, and also see the ongoing unfolding of educational intimacy. Building from Uttamchandani (2021) and Vakil & McKinney de Royston (2019), I argue that the relationships of intimacy and politicized trust enabled participants in the debrief to become politicized, and that the politicization process further entrenched and reinforced their relationships.

To make this argument, I begin with a brief overview of recent research on relationships, politics, and learning from sociocultural perspectives. I then provide more detail on the context of Fossil Free UofT before describing the participatory action research project we undertook, the data collection, and the methods of analysis. I then pivot to an analysis of the debrief, highlighting the sensemaking happening in real time, and identifying how the relationships of politicized trust and intimacy make that learning possible.

Literature: Relationships, politics, and learning in the learning sciences

Research that interrogates learning as a sociocultural and interactional accomplishment is foundational to the learning sciences. Within that broad framing, we can look more specifically at work that attends to the affordances for learning that relationships enable. There has been work investigating how friendship shapes learning processes and outcomes among students (Takeuchi, 2016; Jackson, et al.; 2020; Vakil & McKinney de Royston, 2019), among social movement organizers (Curnow, et al., 2021; Teeters & Jurow, 2018; Uttamchandani, 2021; Vea, 2018), between teachers and students (Boaler, 2008; McKinney de Royston, et al., 2017), between research collaborators (Vakil, et al., 2016), and among researchers (Jackson, et al., 2020). All of this work recognizes that learning is social, and that who learners are surrounded with matters for what they learn, how they learn, and how

they feel about learning. This work also identifies that a focus on relationality is a political act within a system of racial capitalism, but the political interventions they highlight are diverse. In this section I highlight the important contributions that have been made in this area to situate my work and to celebrate the web of relationships my analysis is entwined in. Through the process, I orient readers to the invitations and directions that emerge when these papers are read alongside each other.

For McKinney de Royston, Vakil, Nasir, Ross, Givens, and Holman (2017), a focus on politicized care means that interactional dynamics of support for Black boys from teachers, and in particular Black men, shapes the terrain of learning through kinship networks that extend beyond the classroom and are rooted in shared experiences of racialization. The use of “politicized trust”, then, signals a shared experience within racialized relations, and the ways adults hold space for young people to be valued. This is political in that it works against normative anti-Black discourses that devalue and dehumanize Black children and centres their brilliance. Also working from the idea of politicized trust, Vakil & McKinney de Royston look at the ways politicized trust is enacted in STEM classrooms, examining how students come to understand and respect each other and enact solidarities (or not). Their use of the concept centres on the idea that relationships between students must be premised on good faith and solidarity when people are working across difference. When examining an explicit conversation about race in a classroom, they note how the conversation devolves in the absence of shared experience, politics, and identities, and how the absence forecloses opportunities for learning (predominantly for the White boy student). The trust that is politicized is premised on a shared understanding of the nature of racialization and racial injustice and a willingness to learn alongside each other in service to racial justice. This is a theoretical stance against work that takes up colour-blind approaches to learning and relationships (ie. Boaler 2008) and insists that learning relations must grapple with the lived experience and dominant social relations of white supremacy rather than elide them.

Teeters & Jurow (2018) look at how community promotoras build relationships of trust, commitment, and reliability that also extend beyond the bounds of their official work. Through creating spaces for shared stories which built *convivencia*, a sense of communalism, they built relationships that allowed them to surface experiences of domestic violence and create educative spaces for women to share their experiences, decreasing their sense of isolation, and building networks of support when women took legal action against their abusers. These relationships were consequential and political, embodying care and facilitating safety through listening and building programs from needs revealed to them in confidence—led by and for Latina im/migrant women.

For Vea’s investigations of animal rights activists (2020), friendships are both a learning target and process for enabling learning. For these activists, being friends, building relationships of care and intimacy, and making activism fun and social creates incentive structures that attract people to vegan activism and keep people in. These relationships are instrumentalized in service to the political goals, and drive identity development as animal rights activists. Here the relationships are politicized in that they incentivize and sustain political engagement, fostering a sense of community and empowerment in contradistinction to meat eaters which keeps people involved in the fight for their shared vision.

Finally, in his work with LGBTQ2S+ youth, Uttamchandani draws our attention to the way relationships make political work possible. He argues that educational intimacy focuses on noticing the spaces that are created and how they prefigure relations of care, focusing on the discursive patterns of support created through joking, ribbing, gentle correction, and practiced facilitation strategies that were gender affirming and fluid. While Uttamchandani did not set out to theorize politicization, we can see ways that the youth in Chroma prefigured a queer social space that was affirming in the face of cis/het normativity/queerphobia in their schools and communities—which was and is a political act. This kind of work that draws attention to the mechanisms of spaces that stand outside the mainstream and in tension with mainstream politics and practices is exactly the type of work I take up as well, looking to see how the people made marginal through hegemonic masculinities, trans- and queer-phobia, and white supremacy, etc. make their own spaces and how those spaces then re-make them.

Across this emerging work, the attention to learning as collective, as always political and in service to political projects of liberation is vital—this learning is consequential (Jurow & Shea, 2015). These relationships are framed as political interventions in the context where learning itself is political, and where learners are engaged in counter-hegemonic action to build space for themselves in opposition to systems that devalue their existence. They show us that trust, in many forms, including felt trust and empowerment, politicized trust, and *confianza* and solidarity, make it possible for people to learn and work together to contest inequitable relations.

Conceptual framework: Politicization

I orient here to theories of learning as becoming (Lave, 1996). Situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) describe processes through which new members become centrally recognized and enmeshed participants within communities of practice. Full participation unfolds not only by

learning skills or discourses, but more holistically by developing the ability to participate in the full practices of the community. Alongside this growth, new members come to identify with and be recognized as members of the community.

Politicization is a process of becoming; one where transformation toward collective action in the shared repertoires of social movements is critically important, and where ideas about what futures are possible (Gutierrez & Jurow, 2016) shift and expand based on the shared ideas, identities, practices (Curnow, et al., 2020). Politicization is a multidimensional shift in the political concepts/cognition, the practices, the epistemologies/ways of knowing and being, and the identities of learners (Curnow, et al., 2020). In our conceptual framework, these pillars cannot be disarticulated from each other, they continually reinscribe the development of each other as participants become increasingly politicized. This work builds on popular education (Horton & Freire, 1990; Arnold, et al., 1991) theory and practice and theorizations of sociopolitical development (Watts & Guesseous, 2006; Kwon, 2014) that attend to how people's understandings of their worlds shift toward systemic political analysis and drives them toward collective action to remake their worlds in more just and equitable ways. Politicization is a highly consequential learning process, and is a process of making and remaking ones' self, community, and larger social relations.

Within the framework of politicization, though, many questions remain about the when, the why, and the how of politicizing processes. Why do some members of a community of practice become more radical in their politics while others do not? What are the mechanisms that support politicization in learning ecologies? These questions animate social movement organizers whose aim is to expand the base of people engaging in politicized practices, and for whom political education work is a core focus. For this reason, I bring together the emerging work on relationships, to examine in micro-interactional detail how the relational practices of a subset of youth organizers within the Fossil Free UofT demonstrated the politicization of members while creating space for further politicization. In analyzing the relational construction of educational intimacy and politicized trust as it unfolds, we gain tools for understanding how space was held to enable politicization.

Context: Fossil free UofT

Fossil fuel divestment was the most common student campaign to address the climate crisis. The campaign works with students on campuses to their leadership bodies to divest their endowments from the 200 fossil fuel companies with the largest reserves of fossil fuels (Fossil Free, 2015). It is a kit-based campaign, coordinated by 350.org. At the University of Toronto, the fossil fuel divestment campaign was coordinated by undergraduate and graduate students. From October 2014 through May 2016, Fossil Free UofT met weekly to coordinate the divestment campaign. Between 15 and 35 people attended regular meetings. The group tended to be majority white, with roughly even numbers of men and women attending, and no openly identified (at the time) non-binary or trans students participating. Racial and ethnic make-up shifted over the course of the campaign, but the group remained predominantly white, even as Indigenous, Black, Latino, South Asian, and East Asian students became increasingly involved, in terms of numbers and leadership in the group.

This paper is based on a participatory action research project that examines how student activists learned about race, colonialism, and patriarchy through their involvement in environmental activist campaigns. We situate our work within militant ethnography. This approach anchors researchers within the social movements we are part of and argues it is inadequate for researchers to merely observe political contestation, but that researchers must be engaged in shared struggle (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). We enacted our commitments to relational accountability through a participatory action research campaign (Maguire, 1987) that resulted in the co-creation of the Rad Lab. This writing is a product of the RadLab analysis. The ideas that alternative spaces shaped their political development came out of those very spaces, and through the articulation of the shifts we were seeing. RadLab members were involved in bringing these ideas into the world, and as they have moved on from the project, I continue documenting findings and reaching out for feedback from the team (thus, when I use "we" I am talking about the collective work at the time (as part of FFUofT) or the collective analysis (we the RadLab), and when I use "I" I speak to my analysis here that draws from the collective work but isn't collaboratively written.

Methods

We started from the broad question: how do participants in the fossil fuel divestment campaign become politicized around racial justice, feminism, anticolonialism, and other radical politics? In the process, we worked collectively to theorize from below and articulate what we meant by politicization (Curnow, et al., 2020), and then to figure out when we became politicized, and when others who took up more radical politics became politicized, what enabled that? What could we recreate in other organizing spaces that would be useful to help develop critical consciousness, radical repertoires, a counter hegemonic worldview, and shared identity? From that question, we narrowed our scope to the impact that "alternative spaces" had in enabling the learning that we were interested in.

To answer these questions, video was collected with the University of Toronto (UofT) fossil fuel divestment campaign. Video was collected at meetings, actions, some caucus spaces, and debriefs over the two-year campaign, resulting in over 15,000 minutes of video. Videos last from 60-240 minutes and were captured from one to four angles and stacked so streams are visible and coded simultaneously.

After video was collected, it was content-logged and pre-coded using codes based on the research question (including race, gender, and colonialism). The first substantial analytic pass of coding was conducted by the RadLab members, including five women participants from the group, one white, one South Asian, two East Asian, one Indigenous, and one Black man. We watched segments of videos from across the year together and coded “interesting” segments, asking the broad question of how race matters in our group, discussing every instance someone raised and making extensive notes. After conducting “interesting” coding on three segments from the beginning, middle, and end of the year, we reviewed the “interesting” and consolidated them into codes that were most present in the video we reviewed and in our experiences of the group. From this collaborative data analysis, we established early coding domains which were applied to the video and other data.

In coding for moments where racialization, colonialism, and gender were discussed directly, I generated a condensed transcript of relevant talk from the content logs and transcripts. I then iteratively coded that looking for what enabled that talk. In this coding, specific instances that were particularly meaningful, where I could see learning reflected and unfolding simultaneously became examples of particular interest. In these instances, I found that the mechanics of educational intimacy were significantly different. I coded for humour, intimacy, and disclosure, as well as something harder to count, but which was deeply felt when watching the video; the significance of trust, the network of support, and the assumptions of shared experience/shared values/shared goals. These were identified through interactional practices, in tone, facial expressions, gesture and use of space, and in the context of the talk.

Findings

One example of learning is shared here, where politicization simultaneously unfolded and is demonstrated as an accomplishment as Black members and members of colour from the group expressed and constructed politicized trust, built consequential relationships where grievances were collectivized, enacted educational intimacy, and through the process sustained their ability to participate through rich relations of solidarity. I focus on a selection of talk by activists of colour where teasing, laughter, and intense disclosure and grievance construction are woven together. This choreography of levity and intensity created the conditions for politicization and reflected the ongoing learning of the community. This moment came during Winter Term in the second year of the campaign. At this point in time, the political dynamics in the group were growing increasingly polarized, as one set of group members became increasingly committed to working through bureaucratic structures toward a technocratic approach to addressing climate change, while another group became increasingly politicized around ideas of climate justice, where addressing colonialism, racism, and capitalism were central to their aims. As part of this polarization, the uneven racialized, gendered, and classed dynamics of who spoke in meetings, for how long, and to whom became problematized, as white men spoke an overwhelming majority of the time, creating a space that members of colour and white women described as problematic after it became clear how endemic the problem was. In the meeting, the Women’s Caucus presented their concerns about women’s experiences in the campaigns and the ways their voices rarely broke through, and when they did, how they were not affirmed (Curnow, et al., 2020). In the large group discussion of the problems raised, people of colour bridged the gendered experience in Fossil Free UofT with the racialized experience, noting that people of colour were systematically marginalized and “underappreciated”. The response from the members of Fossil Free UofT was mixed; some were grateful to learn the critiques, while others reacted angrily. The meeting included yelling, tears, and storming out.

An impromptu debrief happened after the meeting, as members of colour gathered in the back of the room to affirm the contributions several of the members of colour had made in the meeting, where their racialized positions and experiences were discussed explicitly, which almost never happened in the large group contexts. The debrief conversation lasted for over an hour, as at first a small group, and gradually almost all the members of colour in the group joined the huddle in the back of the room. There was other activity in the room and hallway, as several members (who had been unhappy about the content and process of the gendered grievances) gathered in the front corner of the room to discuss strategy that they said had not been adequately discussed in the meeting because of the fight over the Women’s Caucus. Others gathered in the hallway around someone crying. What unfolds here is a snapshot of the broader trajectory of politicization and the relationships that fostered that politicization, but it is emblematic, and demonstrates sensemaking as it unfolds, the ways that consequential relationships were constructed, and how those relationships made transformational learning possible.

Constructing politicized trust

In a small circle of five people of colour, Cricket tells Dawood what he appreciated about Dawood's powerful interventions in the meeting while Jade nods enthusiastically, with Jade adding "No, I totally know, it's amazing." Over the course of the debrief, participants shared experiences and went into more detail about the kinds of discrimination that they had experienced on campus and had only hinted at in the large group meeting. As they talked, they were all affirmed, with Amil snapping, Jade nodding vigorously, and lots of verbal continuers, like "yeah", "mmmhhmmmm", etc.

Standing around in the corner in a tight circle, as others moved in and out of the room, and as others dealt with the aftermath of the conflict-riddled meeting in the hall as well, the immediate processing was an extension of the sensemaking that was happening in the meeting, as people took up arguments that had been initiated in the meeting. The circle discussed the content of the meeting in serious and in mocking ways, noting the problematic nature of demands that women get permission to meet outside of the large group space. They discuss shared experiences of struggling to be heard in the group and the racialized experiences of being shut down that impact their participation in the group, especially when the White men were acting aggressive. Referring to one of the sticking points in the meeting where one of the men accused the women's caucus of not speaking up in meetings or raising their concerns in the moment, Jade took up this line of reasoning:

Jade: Also, y'know sometimes, it's not that we don't want space to say it — sometimes we have nothing to say, because we're like internalizing all the thought (Wiggling fingers near head). And it takes a while for some people to like think of something to say from the brain and the (Gestures from head to heart space). Like some people just, like, whip it out (Snaps). Where for me it takes like 15 minutes, to like think of something. So yeah, different for everyone.

Amil: (Snapping for Jade as affirmation) How much of that is being in spaces where your ideas are being shot down. It's like a mechanism to preserve...

Jade: (Nodding) A lot, yeah.

Amil: This is like something I find surprising. When we're like in spaces among people of colour, pretty sure for women (Gesturing widely around to this group of people), your ideas just flow, right?

Tresanne: Yeah (Laughs)

Amil: ... but when you're in the space, how are you going to judge me...

Jade: Yeah

Amil: Cuz I've been in spaces where people shut down your ideas (Whipping gesture) and then you're like, OK. You shouldn't say anything.

There is consequential sensemaking happening across this exchange, all read through the relationships of politicized trust that are assumed in the circle. First, we can see Jade critiquing both the demand that women (and by her own extension, other people of colour) respond to men's requirements for how they participate in the space. She takes up the assumption that participants must think quickly and respond verbally for their feedback to count. This links up with two of the ongoing critiques that had circulated in the Women's Caucus and the People of Colour Caucus: the logic of being quick on your feet as a classed, gendered, and racialized performance, and the idea that the only valid criticism was explicit and verbal, which effectively ignored the embodied feedback, the withdrawal, and the refusals that were more common among women and people of colour in the group. Jade is bringing those arguments into the space, linking them to this context and problematizing the ideas yet again. Amil takes these up and extends to another idea that the People of Colour Caucus had discussed widely at this point in the campaign — their experiences of being shut down and the overall experience of being minoritized on UofT's campus. The political analyses are being rearticulated and collectivized again here, using the space of community to validate their experience, and to share these political critiques with Cricket and Jennifer, who were newer to the campaign and had been less involved in other alternative spaces. While these were pedagogical expressions, which I believe Amil intended to shape how others read the field, they also seem to be seeking validation and building solidarity among others who were likely to have experienced similar (though distinct given the expressions of anti-Blackness at UofT and in the world) things. His frank discussion of the strategic moves he makes to protect himself from racist responses was an invitation and a starting point for solidarity. It was a practice of invitation that made space for politicization and deepened politicized trust through vulnerability and shared marginalization. We see the significance of that relationship when he says, "When we're like in spaces among people of colour, pretty sure for women (gesturing widely around to this group of people) ... your ideas just flow, right?" Naming the dynamics of this small group, he notes the significance of politicized trust in relationships among people of colour, showing how they were flowing, as they riffed on each other's ideas in response to the problematic meeting, and noting that the relationships of support allowed them all to do that work

without fear of being shut down. The ongoing construction of politicized trust enabled space to collectivize grievances, similar to what Teeters and Jurow found and what McKinney de Royston, et al. described. The relations of trust rooted in shared experience iteratively politicized members and reinforced feelings of belonging and shared identity within the People of Colour Caucus.

Consequential relationships

Relationships made the space possible; the intimacy that was created was expressed in the context of friendship, trust, and shared experience. This was made explicit as Dawood spoke. He was a newer member who was almost always silent at meetings, and who hadn't participated in many of the activities outside of large group meetings.

Dawood: I feel so much more connected and appreciated in the group just by communicating myself. I don't even need a response from everyone.

Jade: (Nods enthusiastically) Yeah, I know.

Dawood: Just communicating it makes me feel more comfortable.

Jade: Exactly

Dawood: This is probably the first time you noticed me talking.

In this space, the validation from sharing their stories seemed impactful, further entrenching the shared identities, politicized trust, and the sense of accountability to one another, and the kinds of communalism that Teeters and Jurow note in their work. In this exchange the interactions feel transformed from that of the meeting. Where the meeting had been tense and the members of colours' gestures seemed fearful and quieter, this space looked different, filled with big gestures, smoother movements, and constant affirmative continuers, verbal and physical. The comfort that was built through articulating a different politics and a non-dominant experience that was shared clearly built the foundations for sustained engagement in what was otherwise a hard environment.

Fostering educational intimacy

Another dynamic in this impromptu debrief was the warmth and affirmation, the laughter and teasing, and the moving between very heavy conversation and joking. In this short example, we can see all of these at play, echoing Uttamchandani's findings around the construction of educational intimacy.

Tresanne: But I think this is a really nice — yeah, this is a meeting I'll remember forever.

Jade: (Nods vigorously) Yeah, I'll die remembering it

Amil: What?!! (laughs)

Jade: I mean on my deathbed. (All the participants are laughing about the different meanings.)

Amil: (Laughing hard, looking at the faces everyone else was making in response to Jade's slip) Everyone's reaction!

Jade: (Buries her head in arm) Sorry! I know, really dramatic.

Amil: We, um... Yep. Yeah yeah. This is a sidebar, it's like, sorta like, learning to be people of colour, while dealing with all these historical oppressions while being in solidarity with Indigenous people. In a system of weird complicity

Tresanne: Yeaah

Jade: Yeah, yeah.

In this exchange the sense of familiarity and friendship comes through strongly, as Amil teases Jade, everyone laughs, but in a way that is inclusive and builds relationship, rather than making fun or isolating. The moment in the video is so warm, and it's hard to demonstrate that feeling of intimacy through a transcript. Given the context of a very hostile and harmful meeting, the fact that this space emerged which was community-affirming, pleasant, and joy-filled was a meaningful and powerful thing. Centring relationships among members of colour was an active intervention to build belonging, to carve out a shared identity within this broader space. And then we see the fluid move back into one of the more challenging political questions that Amil had been dealing with, navigating white supremacy and settler colonialism as a Black person. This moment may seem like a non-sequitur, but it could only have emerged out of this shared space of racialized community, where politicized trust was being actively enacted and where shared practices of affirmation existed alongside educational intimacy and joking, as a place where the shared experience of members of colour was assumed and appreciated. In the context of those relationships, this broader political struggle around identity and accountability could be voiced and affirmed.

Redeeming and incentivizing participation

In this informal debrief, as people stand around in their coats, then take their coats off to stay longer, there's teasing, there's laughter, there are these very quick moves between intensity and levity, with learning and community. Across the room, during the entire exchange, three White men had gathered across the room to strategize around the governing council and seemed to act like there had not just been a big drama, or to acknowledge that other people were still out in the hall crying. When the White men walked past the debrief and said goodbye awkwardly, there was a collective exhale in the circle. One of them whispered "that's fucked," a shared acknowledgement of the trauma. Nothing else was said for a beat, and then they turned to levity, talking about setting up a potluck and discussing the Canadian Minister of Environment. The relief, the community, the relationship, and the space to just...be... is palpable in this small community where shared experience is understood and cherished. This is the kind of emotional intimacy that Uttamchandani points our attention to, except in this context it is hard won through conflict and micro and macro aggressions within the group rather than in a supportive learning community. In this way, educational intimacy was a tool for redeeming an otherwise hostile space and for incentivizing friendship, to echo Veal's findings, which kept participants active in this movement space. This debrief was the real time construction of community that was otherwise missing, and they carved out space for politicization through relations of intimacy that sustained their participation in the campaign.

Discussion

This relatively short instance of politicizing and politicized talk among activists of colour is highly generative for understanding both the what of politicization — that is, how it unfolds in real time as participants make sense of the testimonies of their comrades, the conflicts of the campaigns, and the shifting political commitments in the group — and the ways that relationships among the participants of colour held space for that learning through constructing educational intimacy rooted in expressions of politicized trust.

Looking to the learning sciences literature on sociocultural processes of learning and relationship, this study draws several pieces into focus. First, this analysis brings more texture into Uttamchandani's ideas of educational intimacy, we can see in living colour the ways that the participants here moved in and out of joking turns, and how teasing created space for difficult articulations of marginalization and made space for fun that sustained participation. While Uttamchandani's discourse analysis paints beautiful scenes of LGBTQ young people building spaces of educational intimacy, this work offers additional analysis into the interactional accomplishments that create that space (the gestures, the proximity, the facial expressions) and how the interactional practices related to the talk/learning/politicization. Second, speaking to McKinney de Royston and Vakil's theorization of politicized trust, this work brings another site of learning to bear, showing how shared experience is articulated and used to build that relationship, and how that trust becomes actively politicized. Trust, in this space, goes from being more than an assumed shared experience to being an articulated shared experience and an affirmed experience, moving people from lingering questions about whether they were the problem (so to speak) and into a politicized understanding of white supremacy and how it worked in the group and beyond the group. Finally, for studies of politicization or sociopolitical development, we can see how relationships facilitated the process of becoming more radical, how relationships served as an accelerant, throwing lighter fluid on the hot takes and making them collective/shared, important, and valid. This is important for the field, because while relationships make all learning possible, the kinds of counter-hegemonic transformations that we document across our work with the RadLab are often hard, both because they go against normative descriptions of how and why the world works as it does, and because it relies on naming difficult experiences of minoritization. Thus, having a community that welcomes that, holds space for it, and can sustain participation in that work is critical for staying in that learning and transforming it into collective action.

Conclusion

For participants in Fossil Free UofT, and particularly for the people of colour whose sensemaking we trace, relationships were consequential. The intimacy they constructed through their joint sense making, shared experiences, and emergent politicization opened possibilities for growth and created avenues for politicized participants to practice leadership and scaffold a pedagogical space for others to become politicized within. For organizers and designers, these moments of refuge show how important alternative spaces can be for minoritized participants to build community, to heal, to build political analysis, to laugh and to breathe. Designing intentional space can be a strategy for sustaining engagement in hegemonic spaces and forging politicized trust and educational intimacy that travels across spaces of participation.

For social movement scholars of learning, this work points us, again, to the significance of relationship, not as a fluffy or simply nice-to-have additive, but as an essential, prefigurative political process that enables and produces sense-making in ongoing ways. For theorists of learning, relationship needs to be at the core of what we

examine to understand when, why, and how people learn, as well as whose learning is fostered or constrained through relationships that reinforce or contest hegemonic participation. This analysis brings texture to the conversation and expands the scope of political learning. Where others in the field have theorized politicized trust, educational intimacy, and other related concepts, the case explored here shows us again how important these relations are and what they make possible. In examining the interrelatedness of joy and grievance construction, we can see new avenues for future analytic work, to examine the choreography of learners and facilitators in making sense of tense conflict situations and finding levity within them that is rooted in shared experience and politicized trust.

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Acknowledgments

A huge thank you to the RadLab members Amil Davis, Lila Asher, Jade Wong, Jody Chan, Tresanne Fernandes, and Keara Long for the years of co-learning, collaboration, and friendship. Thanks are also due to Tanner Veal, Suraj Uttamchandani, Noel Enyedy, and Andrew Kohan for support on bringing this paper into the world. This paper was written with the support of the NAEd/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship and SSHRC.