"I don't want to follow the pack": Canadian adolescents' lived experiences of silence and quietude among friends and family

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ABSTRACT

What are adolescents thinking and feeling during times of talking, listening, and silence or non-communication with their peers and family? Do their experiences differ according to context? How do such acts of (non)communication relate to one's sense of identity and well-being over time? The present multiple case 3-year longitudinal study explored these questions with a group of six Canadian 13–15-year-olds. Participants provided written self-descriptions and were interviewed about their communication experiences of talking, listening, and silence with their friends and family members. Results showed differences across individual responses with consistent themes. That is, all participants felt mixed emotions when silent or not talking, and happy when talking and listening to others. They also reported feeling unhappy and distressed when they knew that they were not being listened to. Results showed diverse conceptions and emotions about themselves as individuals across the three years. Such findings suggest a nuanced differentiation in self-identity, relationships, and communication with peers and family. These findings can inform how identity and communication are studied across adolescence and promote the development of future interventions to promote a positive and coherent sense of self and effective socio-communication skills.

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1. Introduction

The slippery and unstable psychological landscapes and emotional geographies of relationships in adolescence involve an ambiguous mixture of talking and listening with one's family and friends (Hargreaves, 2001). With the importance of relationship re-structuring in adolescence, communication and social power (dominance) dynamics with friends and family plays a vital role in an adolescent's life (Guo et al., 2023; Moore et al., 2023; Schacter et al., 2023). While social communication is important for self-growth and well-being in adolescence (Han et al., 2023), little is known about how teenagers feel when they are talking, listening or silent in their interpersonal interactions (Bowker et al., 2023; Thomas & Bowker, 2015). As silence and quietness can be a source of ambiguity, the ability to make sense of silence within conversations may also help youth to develop their social-communication skills. Accordingly, over the course of 3 years, this study explored how six Canadian

adolescents develop a sense of self in times of communication and silence within the context of their family and peer relationships.

1.1. Identity and communication within relationships in adolescence

Research illustrates that an individual co-constructs their idea of the self throughout the lifespan within a relational context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The formation of one's personal identity is a core factor in development particularly during the transitional period of adolescence (De Moor et al., 2023; Steinberg, 2023), and self-reflection assists in defining the path towards adulthood (Johnson et al., 2022). Most contemporary developmentalists support Erikson's (1968) view that similar to infancy, the central task of adolescence includes the development of one's own identity within the social context (Crocetti, 2017). Adolescence involves a vast social context of face-to-face communication with multiple partners, including conversations and nonverbal communication including facial affect, gaze, vocal affect or silence, and head orientation (William & Daniel, 1988). Thus, the adolescent's main task is to develop a sense of self and identity within their social relationships and experiences of communication (talking and listening) (Branje et al., 2021) and silence or non-communication (not talking).

Research on identity content and relationships in adolescence shows how adolescents begin to define and understand themselves in terms of their interactions with others such as a 'friend' or "son" (Johnson et al., 2022). Social roles may also shape evaluative perceptions about the self and others, which in turn guide communicative patterns that involve talking, listening, or being silent and not talking. Despite the important role communication and silence plays in self-development, few studies explore how adolescents define themselves in terms of times of their experiences of talking, listening, and silence during conversations with others (Bowker et al., 2023; Coplan et al., 2021; Stern & Walejko, 2020). Thus, due to a lack of longitudinal, in-depth study of adolescents' self-processes within social-communicative experiences (Gazelle et al., 2023), how this process unfolds across the years of adolescence for different youths remains unclear.

More specifically, why do researchers continue to neglect the complexities involved during social communication and adolescence silences (Nguyen et al., 2019)? Is there anything distinctive and beneficial about adolescents' self-development and the place of silence in their lives? What are the emotional costs (if any) of being alone and being silent or non-communicative? To answer such questions, this study considers how adolescents make sense of themselves, including their experiences of silence.

Studies on how adolescents think of themselves and describe themselves show a development from mainly physical attributions to more psychological states (William & Daniel, 1988) . Adolescents sense of self centres on physical appearances and social qualities such as popularity or likeability, as well as one's hobbies, sport, and interests (Castro et al., 2023). In contrast, adults are more likely to incorporate psychological characteristics and values into their self-description (Hihara et al., 2022; Naudé, 2022). Focus on dimensions of the self may have different psychosocial outcomes. For example, (Vartanian et al., 2023) found that those older adolescents who were more likely to define themselves in terms of physical appearance reported less clarity in their self-definition and understanding. Although such results are useful as they help researchers understand adolescents' self-processes, they fail to explore how self-descriptions and self-understandings connect to perceptions of social communicative experiences or having conversations with others.

1.2. The role of family and peers in adolescents' social and emotional growth experiences

Family plays a crucial role in the individual growth of the adolescent (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Studies with youth show that reciprocal and emotionally connected parent-child communication relates to higher levels of well-being and happiness in adolescents (Guo et al., 2023) (Tsai et al., 2021). In addition to family, the peer group plays an increasingly important role in a youth's life (Gazelle et al., 2023). Early to mid-adolescence (10-15 years) signifies a time of transition in their identity development and social network (De Moor et al., 2023). Peer relations become increasingly important, and youth learn to think critically about their interactions and status with their peers (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2019). For example, feelings such as familiarity, trust, and intimacy become more important during this time, and are developed through peer social communication (Białecka-Pikul et al., 2021; Furman & Bierman, 1983; Matthews et al., 2015). Despite the research on adolescents' social communication with one's peers and family members

(Leach et al., 2019; Schwartz et al., 2023), few studies explicitly explore adolescents' perceptions of talking, listening, and silence as part of the larger context of social-emotional skills and the implications for self-growth (Han et al., 2023; Kashdan et al., 2011; Owen, 2021).

1.3. Silence and communication in context – links to identity and well-being

The ability to communicate with others within relationships increases feelings of emotional connection, which in turn increases feelings of belonging and acceptance (Tilton-Weaver & Rose, 2023). Adolescents who are proficient in socio-communicative skills and prosocial behaviours are more likely to have a stronger sense of agency in directing their life (Schoon & Cook, 2021), and well-being (Johnson et al., 2022; Proulx et al., 2023) a lack of quality parent and peer communication relates to lower self-worth, lack of agency, and greater feelings of loneliness in adolescents (Nunes et al., 2023). Close peer relationships can help adolescents to feel more connected and less lonely (Białecka-Pikul et al., 2021) (von Soest et al., 2020). Thus, connected and emotionally close communication with parents and friends helps adolescents to develop a positive sense of self and feelings of social connection and overall well-being (Kekkonen et al., 2020).

Within relationships, reciprocal conversations include experiences of talking and silence or not-talking, listening, and being listened to (Alerby & Brown, 2021; Azmitia & Montgomery, 1993) (Han et al., 2023). When adolescents communicate, they may have preferences as to whether they prefer to spend the majority of their time talking, listening, or a balance of both. Such preferences may be reinforced by their experiences and the roles they take in their relationships such as the 'talkative one' with their friends and family. Developmental research on communication and identity shows that over time (Pollard, 2018), such experiences and preferences may become integrated into the adolescent's developing sense of self (West et al., 2023). Thus, a youth may begin to define themselves as either a 'talker' or more of a 'listener,' and this communicative identity may differ according to whether or not they are with their family or friends. Studies on identity shifting suggest that adolescents often change their identities and communication patterns with others depending on whom they are with (Loyd et al., 2023).

Silence and quietude may provide opportunities to be mindful and expand one's inner dialogue and cognitive flexibility (Larson, 1997; Ost Mor et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2022). Silences within relationships promote cognitive broadening that allows one to think about different ways to address an unexpected challenge or to interpret an ambiguous social situation (Puchalska-Wasyl, 2023). Such opportunities for silence or choosing not to talk may also help promote intrapersonal understanding as it may encourage one to be inquisitive about one's mind and explore one's inner self (Litman et al., 2017).

1.4. The present study

Overall, few studies explore how adolescents' developing sense of self relates to their communication with peers (Tilton-Weaver & Rose, 2023) and family (Han et al., 2023). Accordingly, this longitudinal multiple case study follows a group of six 13-year-olds over three years (13 to 15 years) to explore how they come to see themselves in their social worlds and how they make sense of their identity within their experiences of silence and social-communication with family and friends.

To summarize, our research questions were as follows:

- How do adolescents' self-understandings/descriptions reflect their communications with their family and friends, and how do they change over time (13-15 years of age)?.

- What are their social-communicative experiences, communicative identities (talker/listener), and experiences of silence (i.e., not talking), as well as being ignored or not listened to?.

1. Method

2.1. Participants

The current purposive sample consisted of six (4 girls and two boys) youth gleaned across three years (2015-2018) from a larger longitudinal study of Canadian youth's social cognition and communicative skills. Ages ranged from 11-18 years, Time 1 (2015), age M = 13. 5 years (SD = 5.43); Time 3 (2017), age M = 15.6 (SD = 2.67). Participants were from a European-Canadian, middle SES backgrounds within south central Canada.

2.2. Measures

Socio-communication (Year 3) and Self-understanding (Year 1-3) Interview. Perceptions of conversational experiences and identities. In the third year of the study, we assessed participants' perceptions of their conversational experiences and identities with their family and friends. This semi-structured interview included questions regarding their roles in conversational patterns and their perceptions of talking and listening (Bosacki, 2013). Example questions included the following: "When talking with your friends/family, what do you like to do better, talk, or listen? Why?" "How do you feel when you are talking/listening with your friends/family; what are you thinking?" and "Do you think of yourself as a talker or a listener with your friends/family?" Based on past research (Bosacki, 2013), the final section of the socio-communication interview asked participants to describe how they felt when communicating with others as well as when they were silent. Questions were repeated for family members and friends.

Self-Understanding Interview. Each year of the study, adolescents participated in a semi-structured interview on self-understanding such as continuity with questions such as (e.g., If you can change from year to year, how do you know it's still you? What stays the same? agency (e.g., how did you get to be who you are?), and distinctiveness (e.g., what makes you different from everyone in the world?) (Bosacki, 2013; William & Daniel, 1988). Together, the social communication and self-understanding interviews took approximately 30 minutes to complete and, upon permission of the participant, were audiotaped and transcribed at a later date for analysis.

Self-description Writing Task (Y1-Y2). In the first two years of the study, participants were asked to write a list of words that describe themselves to a stranger who has never seen them or looking into a mirror. There was no limit to the number of their responses; most participants provided between 6–15 self-descriptors (e.g., brown hair, brown eyes, pleasant, funny), with the maximum number of self-description words used as 22. The overall average time of completion of this task was approximately seven minutes.

2.3. Procedures

Once the participating university ethics research office provided ethics clearance, written informed consent was obtained from the participants, teachers, and school principals. Once participants provided written consent and verbal assent, the same cohort of participants were interviewed in November – December 2015, November -December 2016, and November -December 2017. The interview procedure remained consistent across all three years. Trained graduate students collected the data in school classrooms (writing task only) during ordinary school hours. Before the measures were distributed to students, researchers explained the procedure and assured the participants that the study was conducted purely for research purposes. The individual interviews were held in a quiet room outside of the classroom. After the completion of the study, all adolescents received a debriefing, thank-you letters, and mental health education resources.

2. Results

All six participants reported mixed findings for their perceptions of being either a 'talker' or a 'listener'. The majority of participants (4/6) reported that they were talkers with their friends and family, 2/6 reported that they identified as talkers with their family members but as 'listeners' with their friends. Some participants stated that they felt lonely and bored when they were silent, but others said they felt nice, peaceful, and relaxed. Some participants also mentioned the importance of listening when quiet and 'staying low.' In sum, the results suggest adolescents were more alike than different in their experiences of and preferences for being alone. Below, we describe the research questions in terms of how the participants responded to each of the questions illustrated with participant's quotes to provide the voices of the participants.

Research Question 1: What are adolescents' perceptions and understandings of themselves as people? Do their self-understandings/descriptions reflect their communications with their family and friends? How does this change over time?

In their responses to describing themselves to another person, in the first year of the study, the majority of the 13-year-old participants (5/6) included physical descriptors (e.g., hair, eye colour, height) as their first descriptor. One 13-year-old girl (124) used the psychological descriptor of "easy

to get along with." In year two, 5/6 self-descriptions (one participant did not complete the task in the second year) illustrated similar descriptions with more detail. For example, three participants (one girl, 024, two boys, 039, 130) focused on physical descriptions across both years of the study. Physical self-descriptions also represented self-evaluative or judgemental comments such as one 13-year-old boy referred to himself as "having long hair and a round face (039), and one year later, included terms such as strong, bold, a hockey player and loyal. In contrast, three participants (all girls) (067, 070, 124) used mainly psychological traits to describe themselves. For example, one girl (070) referred to herself as 'jokeful' then continued to describe herself as 'I'm pretty smart - not to be full of myself….".

3.2. Developing a sense of self – Roles of parents, friends, self-agency

One 15-year-old boy (039) stated that when he talked with his family, he " feels like I can like, do more things and I talk differently with my family than with my friends". When listening to his family members, he also feels "Um, I am really tuned into what they are saying and like I care on what they are saying." His favourite part of the family conversations was that he liked 'hearing about their day and like how their workday went and stuff like that."

Within one's family, many adolescents noted that when they were in conversation, they felt comfortable and that they could trust their family as explained by this 13-year-old boy (130), "I have my family around me and I will be like, I can trust them and, they are with me, so what matter they would say, they will be with me, so I feel comfortable." Further, what he liked best about talking and listening with his family members was that "I can trust them than anything, they are my family, I know that they will always be with me, so no matter what I would say, they are not letting me down for".

Trust also played a role in talking with and listening to one's friends as one boy (130) outlined, "When I am with my friends, I will be comfortable around them, I not really scared to say anything with them because they are someone who understand what I would say." Talking with one's friends also helped adolescent to share their perspective as outlined by a 13-year-old girl (070), "They can help you, understand things better and yeah you see their point of view, everything and just how the world is." Additionally, one girl (024) stated that she liked talking with her friends because "I know I can tell them whatever and they will understand what I am saying and always be there for me." Finally, another girl (124) replied "I like to hear what they have to say what they're going through personal experiences kind."

3.3. Self-creation through social interactions and communication

In response to the question "how did you get to be the way you are, or how did you learn how to be you?,' in the first year of the study (age 13), participants listed parents and peers as their main influencers. However, this changed over the following two years when they were 14 and 15 years of age, as their responses became more multidimensional and complex. For example, one 13-year-boy (130) reported that he became the person he was mainly because of his friends as he stated, "Just like the way I am now is just like my friends and how they're like, what they're doing to me, like they're changing me or keeping me the way I am." He continues to focus on how his friends shape his way of being one year later when at age 14, he claims that he became the kind of person he was today by "learning and like well a lot of the things I learn from what I am now is I'm a really big sports player and just from learning guys new skills everything in there and they just taught me how to, act and how to just." One year later at age 15, he states he became the person he was because had experienced "Um, a lot of parenting. A lot of just experiences throughout life to kind of just like put me in the right place I'd say, and a lot of challenges because you can't really get anywhere in life if everything is just kind of hand fed to you. You need to learn in order to succeed better."

Similarly, this weaving between self-agency and social support in identify formation was reflected in a 13-year-old, girl's (070) who explained that she learned to be who she was "From my friends and family. I kind of just learned from them how to be myself. "She also referred to her own self-agency by "Just by being myself and trying to express who I am and not care what anyone else thinks of me." Social interactions were included one year later at age 14, as she learned to be herself with "my family and school…like interacting with people. Finally, at age 15, she reiterated the importance of social context in her self-development by "interacting with friends and family and school experiences and how, like we live and everything, just made me who I am."

3.4. Self-definitions within social context

In term of their self-understandings, the participants described their communication with others as an integral part of their identity. For example, some youth defined themselves in terms of their social actions and communications with others. For example, one 14-year-old boy (130) explained that he was different because "I'm definitely a person that stands out for everyone - I'm just really open and I'm just a really likeable person to everyone." As the youth travelled through high school, two years later, the 16-year-old boy explained that he was different because, "Like I'm the one who, I don't want to follow the pack. I just want to do things that make me stand out in other ways that doesn't make other people stand out. I just want to do things that make me seem like different from everyone else rather than trying to be like everyone else."

Some youth also referred to use of voice and language to help to distinguish themselves from their peers. For example, one 14-year-old boy (039) in response to the question of 'How are you different from other children in your class?' stated that "I don't talk much in class and everyone else screams across the classroom." (participant laughs). In this boy's view, his ability to remain silent represented an important quality and part of his identity within the social context of the classroom. This same boy one year earlier at age 13, responded to the same question with the statement "I am different because I don't really like to get out there and I like to like stay back with other people that don't really get the chance to do what they want. However, at age 15, he replied to the same question, 'The kids in my class are really quiet and I'm not a quiet person, and I'm loud and I'm not just…I like to make people laugh." Across the 3 years, such response reflects the boy's changing views of himself and his classmates in terms of communication practices and where he sees himself within this context.

Another boy at age 13 (130) also referred to his communicative identity in response to being different from others in his class: "I guess I could say that I'm quieter than some other kids in my class but everyone's different. I'm, well I'm quiet and I don't really talk that much – maybe just with my friends but I don't really talk to people that I don't really know too well so I don't know. I'm more independent than other kids in my class – I guess I could say than some other kids. But I don't know, that's it."

In general, all participants from 13 to 15 years of age included more references to psychological and social-moral experiences during their times alone and with others, and their self-definitions became more refined in terms of their interactions and communication with others. As explained by a 15-year-old girl (067), "I got to be the way I am Probably from like different people around me like I learn things from people and like the experiences that I've had and just those kinds of things make me "me" ". The same 15-year-old girl stated she was different from others in her class, "I guess personality. You know, I look different, I speak different, you know? I act different in certain situations or maybe how I would react if uhm, let's say, some sort of situation came up or… or how I think about things. You know everyone has different opinions and stuff like that."

Research Question 2: What are their social-communicative experiences, communicative identities (talker/listener), and experiences of silence (i.e., not talking), as well as being ignored, or not listened too?

Most of the 6 participants referred to how their communicative experiences with peers related to emotionally close family relationships and friendships. For example, one 15-year-old girl (024) stated that when she is listening to her friend she feels, "…I can relate to them and it's good to communicate with them because I feel like that brings us closer as friends." Similarly, when she is listening to her friends, she states, "...my friends have funny stories to tell me. So, listening to them and um just I guess just communicating with them, like I said it just brings us closer and makes us really good friends." The same participant describes interacting with her family, particularly the act of listening as also a positive experience as she claims, "I feel like they enjoy listening to what I have to say, and they are really interested." She described the benefits of listening to her family members as she states, "I like listening to things my family has to say especially my parents, because like just like if they are talking about their work or something its interesting because its full of different stories and atmosphere compared to what I am used to at school. And my sister is a little older too, so I just like listening to everything they have to say and like how their day is going and such."

The majority of the participants reported positive emotions when engaged in conversations with their friends. As participant (024) describes that when she is talking with her friends she feels, "like they are good friends, and that they are listening and understand what I am saying." Some participants, however. preferred listening to their friends compared to talking. For example, one boy (039) stated that he preferred listening to his friends because, "I don't like to explain the way that I feel and stuff like that and like I am a better listener and like problem solver than I am a talker." He goes on to describe his affinity for listening as the act of listening to his friends allows him to "hear other people's problems certainly, and stuff like that." In contrast, his views on talking are less positive, in that he explains that when he talks with his friends he doesn't "usually tell them how I feel - like what I am feeling, I just like talk about other stuff."

From the perspective of another boy (130), although he sees the social and emotional benefits of both talking and listening, he prefers to talk over listening. For example, when he talks with his friends "he can give my side of the story, I can really have people understand what I am trying to say." He continues to explain how he feels when he's in conversation with his friends as he states he "will be comfortable around them, I not really scared to say anything with them because they are someone who understand what I would say." However, he also enjoys listening to his friends and can see the benefits of being a good listener as he explains, "I can hear their side of the story, whatever they are telling me, I can just gonna understand and listen to what they are saying." He continues to explain that when talking to his friends, he enjoys best the act of talking "it's basically the same thing (as listening – italics added), but reversed."

3. 5. Communication identities –talker or listener

All 6 to 15-year-old youth revealed distinct perceptions of how they viewed themselves in conversation with their friends and family. Most participants (4/6) reported fixed communication identities with their family and friends, as two participants (1 boy, 1 girl) reported the same identity across both social contexts. Multiple identities (i.e., talker/listener) was reported by two adolescent girls (124, 070) as both girls reported that they were talkers and listeners with family and friends. In contrast, two participants (one boy, 130, one girl 067) reported variable communicative identities, as their identities differed according to whom they were engaged with.

To illustrate, out of the two variable communicators, one 15-year-old (130) boy identified mainly as a talker with his friends as he explains "Just because when I am talking, I can give my side of the story, I can really have people understand what I am trying to say." However, with his family, he viewed himself as a listener as he explained, "Because in my family, they all are close with me and generally they have a lot more to say, they would just deal with the most comfortable themes and when I am listening to them I can really just connect with them or I would say."

In contrast, the girl (067) who revealed mixed communicative identities viewed herself as a listener with her friends as she explained "Because I like listening and I get your response to know one while talking." However, when asked about how she viewed herself with family members, she thought of herself as a talker as she explained, "I'm, kind of the funny one in the family, I like to talk lots.".

3.6. Experiences of silence and quietude with family and friends

The six youth in this study articulated their experiences of how they felt and thought when being quiet and silent in the company of their friends and family. For example, a few participants reported positive feelings, some reported mixed or ambiguous feelings, and some mostly reported negative. For example, when asked how do you feel when you are silent or being quiet, one 15-year-old girl (124) stated, "I guess, it depends who's talking to you. If it is one of my friends then I would feel like I'm helping them kind of like when they're talking to me cause it's kind a like you know interaction and kind a like listening to them so it kind a feel the same as I feel when I am talking. However, when silent or quiet with her family, the same girl claimed "I feel like I'm being educated kind of like I may need their advice or umm telling me about their days which have more experiences and stuff like that." For this adolescent, she felt a supportive role in being quiet with her friend, whereas she felt more as a learner when remaining silent with her family members.

Positive feelings were also expressed by another girl (070) when she stated with her friends and being silent "I feel good, it makes me understand other people's points of view and how they feel and how things are with other people's points instead of just knowing what I think myself." Similarly, with her family and being silent, she stated, "I feel like I am in place like even if I am in just in a silent

mood with my parents or my sister, I still feel like I have someone to interact with even though small verbally.”

In contrast to experiencing positive emotions, another girl (067) when being silent with both her family and friends, she felt ”like I should be better speaking with them, in conversation.” And ”like I should be contributing.” In both cases, the girl felt that being silent or quiet was not the same as contributing to a conversation.

Not all adolescents discussed emotions when reporting on their experiences of silence. For example, one boy (039) stated when with his friends “Usually when I am silent and quiet, I’m like observer or something.” Similarly, when silent with family members, he also felt like an observer who doesn’t “have anything to say.” Another boy (130) focused more on his thought process when silent with friends as he claimed, “When I’m or quiet I am generally thinking a lot about, what is going on through my head. When I am listening to someone then often times, I am just trying to understand and go through my head what they are saying.” When with his family, emotions played a larger role in his response as he claimed when silent he felt “Um good and bad I guess, because when I am silent, I will be thinking about a lot of stuff and I will also be trying to listen to what another person would be saying when I am not talking.”

3.7. Silenced by family and friends: the act of being ignored (not listened to)

In the third year of the study, at 15 years of age, participants were asked how they would know if they were not being listened too. All participants referred to facial expressions and eye contact as the main signs that would make them feel that they are being heard and listened to. For example, one girl referred to “‘if they are not looking at you or are distracted.” (024). “Sometimes they may be listening but do not give their full attention as they reply with short answers and do not really engage in conversation.” (024). Similar thoughts were reported by one boy (130), when he elaborated on the signs of not being listened to. He claimed he would know his voice is being ignored if “they are not focusing on you, they will be playing with the fingers, they will be on their phone, they will be looking at something or just not really paying attention to you, they just, deal like they are distracted.”

Participants were also asked about how they would think and feel if no one was listening to them. All participants reported feeling some version of negative emotions and wondered why they were not being listened to. For example, when asked why she thought others were ignoring her, one 15-year-old girl (024) stated, “I’m thinking, maybe like they are distracted by something more important or that they are not in the mood to talk or something.” When she was asked what she thought the other person (non-listener) would be thinking, she responded “they could be thinking about something totally different… and don’t really worry about what you say.”

Another girl (124) explained that when she knew she was not being listened to, she felt ”kind of unwanted, kind of because they’re not paying attention to you or like that person doesn’t like you very more, cause they’re not interested in you what you’ve to say. In terms of thinking what the non-listener was thinking, she claimed that they would think “that it is a very boring topic that you’re talking about.” She claimed that the non-listener probably “didn’t care about what I was saying.”

In another case, one boy (039) stated that he would “feel like upset that was just like a big way to save some more time saying how I felt because they didn’t really listen to me.” Further, he would think, “I am not gonna to tell them anything else anymore because they didn’t listen to first time so make something that they will listen to second time.” Negative emotions were also described in another boy’s response (130) as he explained when he knew he was not being listened to, “I feel a little offended because I am trying to talk with them and even I am, they are not trying to talk back or they are not trying to listen to what I am saying, so they are a kind of rude...” Similar thoughts were reported from another girl (067) who stated that she would “ kind of feel sad, it’s not letting you want to be there. She would also think that ‘when they are not listening, it’s a kind of disrespectful when you initially feel listening towards somebody saying if they are talking to you.”.

3. Discussion

In this 3-year, multiple-case study, we examined the longitudinal links between adolescents’ perceptions of themselves as human beings and their conversational experiences with their friends and families. One of the strengths of this study is that it followed a research design of a relatively small-

scale, multiple-case study, longitudinal qualitative study (Creswell, 2011). We examined in-depth adolescents' concepts and feelings about their identities, as well as their perspectives on talking and listening within friend and family conversations. Accordingly, the main findings are discussed in terms of our research questions.

4. Main Findings

In terms of our first question that asked how adolescents understand themselves within the context of others, and whether their self-definitions change over time, overall we found that the adolescents' sense of self remained more similar than different. We found that across the 6 participants, their self-perceptions and understandings remained relatively stable across the three years in terms of their emphasis on physical appearances and psychological traits. Across the three years, all participants referred to a combination of social influences such as peers and family and their own role in self-development or self-agency. The participants' explanations of their self-growth also illustrated how the role of self-agency and accountability increasingly differentiated themselves from others. Such findings support past studies that show adolescents' sense of agency or how much control they believe they have in directing their life path changes throughout adolescence and develops within relationships (Nunes et al., 2023; Schoon & Cook, 2021).

To answer our question of how their social-communicative experiences and communicative identities (talker/listener) changed over time, we found that the adolescents in our study reported divergent feelings when talking and listening in the company of their friends and family. Although most of the participants' communicative identities remained consistent across contexts (friends and family), two participants' communicative identities were dependent on whom they were talking with, as they found that they were more likely to be talkers with their families and listeners with their friends.

To explore the question of how they experienced silence (i.e., not talking) with their family members or friends, as well as being ignored or not listened too, results showed that being silent with friends was a more negative emotional experience than being silent with their family members. Results illustrated the importance of being sensitive to another person's experience and being heard by friends and family (Tilton-Weaver & Rose, 2023). Most participants felt comfortable in their silences with family, which suggests the importance of emotional connection within an accepting and warm home environment and promotes the value of learning through listening (Han et al., 2023; Hihara et al., 2022).

Overall, our data suggest that the way youth define themselves develops in complexity over the years of 13 to 15, and changes from physical to more psychological terms (William & Daniel, 1988). Responses also become more complex in terms of their interactions with their friends and family and larger school context. Their responses also reflect the importance of emotions and thoughts during times of talking, listening, and being silent or thoughtful. The in-depth responses of how the youth perceive themselves as either talkers or listeners relates to their definitions of themselves within communication.

Our results also highlighted that the act listening and talking with others was an enjoyable learning experience for youth. All participants stated that they enjoyed talking and listening to others because they could share their perspectives with their family members and friends, and that they learned from these conversations. In sum, the positive and negative emotional experiences associated with the experiences of being listened to (or not) hold educational implications that we discuss in the next section.

5. Implications

Overall, our results reflect the need for programs that encourage youth to engage in self-awareness and reflection to help develop their identity and learn how to communicate with others. As studies with young adolescents suggest, the ability to be mindful and compassionate towards others and oneself may not always be mutually reinforcing (Bayır-Toper et al., 2022). Youth development programs need to address and promote the growth of authenticity, or the ability to become emotionally mature (Proulx et al., 2023). Given that our present findings showed that in addition to psychological traits, the physical self-concept played a role in adolescents' self-definitions, programs for youth need to draw on a humanist and relational approach to development. Such a view claims authenticity is a

network of multifaceted self-processes that incorporates multiple dimensions of the self (Rogers, 1961). Within an inclusive and humanist view of self and relationships, self-skills can be learned and developed in adolescence, including self-awareness, a sense of agency in the world, and inter- and intra-communication skills that are honest and caring ways with oneself and others (Lewis-Smith et al., 2023).

As our findings suggest, programs need to include strategies to improve one's ability to talk with and listen to others in open and non-judgmental ways (Bosacki, 2013; Puchalska-Wasyl, 2023) and learn how to respect others' preferences for personal space and silence and solitude. Such programs can provide solitary activities to promote self-enhancement and psychological and personal growth through meaningful reflection and taking time to be alone with one's mind (Paterson & Park, 2023). Results from the present study also highlight the need for educators to focus on the process of deep listening that honours the importance of silence in that it goes beyond mere talking and listening. That is, this multidimensional, whole-body approach to listening encompasses the hearing of words, sounds, and movements in the body to respect the shared stories of others (Ungunmerr, 2017). These guidelines can help youth to develop self-regulation, mental flexibility, and emotional awareness while providing guidance for kind and compassionate verbal engagement (Malti, 2021).

An additional significant contribution of this study is the focus on adolescents' experiences of silence within conversation. Given the challenge of interpreting the ambiguous meanings of silences within classroom social conversations (Bosacki, 2013), educators need to further explore adolescents' understanding of self and cultural silences (Bowker et al., 2023). As our study illustrates that adolescents construct meaningful representations of their identity within social interactions and dialogue (Loyd et al., 2023; Way, 2013), future researchers should investigate adolescents' psycholinguistic development over time within the context of socialization practices in the home and school.

6. Conclusion

This in-depth 3- year longitudinal examination of the developing sense of self and perceived lived experiences of six adolescents on their social interactions with their parents and friends holds important implications for educators and youth leaders. Our results suggest that programs promote talking and listening skills and the important value of being quiet and silent and listening to one's mind. This study offers a unique contribution to the existing literature regarding self-processes and social-communicative experiences in adolescence because by focusing on a relatively smaller number of participants (as compared with larger-scale quantitative survey studies),

Our study was limited in cultural and gender diversity and lacked a detailed description of participants' language abilities. Despite these limitations, our study demonstrates the need to view communication in adolescence contextually – with friends and family. Our study shows that listening to others and learning from silences are valuable opportunities to learn about other people's minds and relationships. Such skills are crucial for adolescents to develop sacred and safe spaces for trusting, kind, compassionate social interactions, self-reflection, and emotional growth. For future directions, as this study took place years before the event of COVID-19 (2015-2018), the present findings may encourage future researchers to explore the social-communicative experiences of youth after experiencing two years of enforced limited social interaction and increased online communications.

Declarations

Author contribution	:	Bosacki, S. was responsible for the entire research project. She led the writing of the manuscript, data collection, data analysis, and the final

revision. Talwar, V. was in charge of the first draft, collecting and analyzing the data. All of the authors approved the final manuscript.

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