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**What was your RESEARCH QUESTION? (15-25 words)**

How can school culture address loneliness amongst boys in order to develop a sense of belonging?

**What led you to this AREA OF STUDY? (100 words)**

*(e.g. the history - what had you noticed, worried about, hoped to try, wondered..)*

We have been involved with a lot of work at the school regarding belonging through the affinity groups, house system, and leadership team at Crescent and have noticed how important a feeling of belonging is to academic and social success. We are fortunate to have close friends and family members to provide us with a sense of belonging, allowing us to help those who do feel lonely or isolated. This project gave us a unique opportunity to understand how prevalent loneliness is at the school to be able to collaborate with administrators on solutions for future years.

**What does RESEARCH TELL US about this topic? (300 words)**

*(a short synopsis of at least THREE readings, APA formatting.)*

The lingering pandemic has objectively been one of the most divisive events of the 21st century forcing everyone to sacrifice the connections they had for online, less intimate relationships. A study conducted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education in early 2021 (a time where Ontario was still in lockdown), found that 43% of young adults who participated in their survey reported increased loneliness and isolation compared to before the pandemic. Consequently, there have been drastic increases in reports of substance abuse, domestic abuse, and even earlier mortality rates for that same population. To address the issue, this article has listed three actionable items for communities to undertake: providing people with mental health information and coping strategies; rebuilding the US social infrastructures in medical, academic, political, and commercial environments; and encouraging people to make commitments to themselves to emphasize strengthening their mental state.

Another valuable piece of research to understand and address loneliness in the United States is the book *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a*

*Sometimes Lonely World* by Dr. Vivek Murthy, the US Surgeon General. He highlights that one of the most difficult aspects of loneliness is that people hide their feelings to the best of their abilities due to the negative stigma of being socially insufficient or "likeable" that loneliness carries with it. As people continue to hide their feelings, it becomes harder for professionals and loved ones to step in and provide support where needed. He also highlights the three critical types of relations needed for one's well being: intimate (one's best friend or spouse), relational (one's circle of friends), and communal (the institution, community, or school one resides in). If these facets of one's social life are fulfilled, loneliness can be addressed through a much more natural process.

A book titled *When Boys Become Boys: Development, Relationships, and Masculinity* written by Judy Chu and Carol Gilligan discovered the finding that universal characteristics of boys are affected by adaptations to social norms of masculine behaviours, due to boys' wish to belong to the group or conform to adult assumptions. This study further provided us information on loneliness in boys when we were conducting interviews in our school, and the results further supported our hypothesis that loneliness are often hidden.

**METHODS: How did we investigate my question? (200 words)**  
*(brief narrative description of your action/procedures. Include who your participants are and how you collected data. How did you ensure anonymity for participants in your reporting? How did you obtain permission? (to participate, interview, take photos, videos)*

The two primary methods of data collection consisted of one small focus group and one Upper School-wide survey. The survey was sent out one week before the focus group was conducted and allowed us researchers to gather mostly quantitative data focusing on broader topics such as extracurricular participation, school culture, and how the pandemic has affected the lives of Crescent Students. Once this data was collected, the team worked on establishing correlations between groups of data to find if loneliness was related to any of the broader fields above. Once we analyzed our quantitative data, we worked to construct focus group questions to dive deeper into the correlations we found in the quantitative data. Using a sample of Grade 9 students at the school, we were able to conduct a group interview of about 8 students with our team recording the conversation, analyzing body language, and asking follow-up questions. These follow-up questions prompted some of the most useful qualitative data we collected throughout our process. After conducting the focus groups, we then received a transcription of the focus group so we could try to draw more correlations between the vast types of data we collected. With these data, we were able to form three key takeaways as well as three measurable action items.

## **What did we discover? (400 words)**

*(FINDINGS - through analysis, 3 main takeaways)*

First of all, we found that boys don't feel comfortable being vulnerable in front of others. In our survey we asked whether or not students felt they could reach out to others for advice. About 83% of students felt like they could but 17%, almost a 5th, say they disagree or strongly disagree and that they feel they can't reach out to anyone in the school for advice. In the focus groups many people said that they feel like they can reach out and speak about their feelings; they just don't feel comfortable being the first to do so. One of the students mentioned that it's normal [to be vulnerable] when you are younger, but they said that they honestly couldn't remember the last time they cried. As mentioned earlier, boys are not taught and sometimes are even discouraged from showing vulnerability (At least around others).

Second, we connected loneliness to co-curriculars. In the small focus group that was conducted, there were students who were not aware of all of Crescents co curricular opportunities. However, 93 percent of students in the room already had an interest. By finding others to share the same interest with them, they are able to feel like they belong. Shared experiences, especially during high stress situations like an academic competition, a regional sports championship or events like this make it easier for students to form strong bonds or feel at least some connection with the others in that group. That is why Co Curricular activities are so important to the relationships that students will find themselves forming, it makes it easier to form connections as well as deepens bonds.

Last but certainly not least, the pandemic only made the situation worse. Personal experiences during the pandemic have impacted how people communicate and connect with one another. Ontario was the worst affected province in Canada and this directly reflected onto the students. In our survey we asked a question asking students when they felt the most alone and 72% responded that they felt the most alone during the pandemic and in online schooling - this is huge as we work so hard at Crescent to avoid this feeling of isolation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN (400 words)**

*(implications for future practice and/or study, including intent to track impact next year)*

We developed three different recommendations or action plans that would address our three main takeaways. The first one being a further emphasis on mentor groups. Currently Crescent School has a program called Mentor Group. Mentor groups are usually built out of 8-10 upper school students with 2 teachers acting as their Mentor. The purpose of this is to give students the chance to interact with other students

outside their grade and build a closer connection with a teacher. Together they talk about current events or topics surrounding the school. Unfortunately the quality of mentor groups has declined especially when it comes to student participation. What we recommend is a system that would allow for more 1 on 1 interaction between mentor and student. Along with a more interactive system that includes other grades so that younger students will have an earlier experience with students older than them.

On the topic of enhancement involvement within the school it brings us to our next topic of students' connection with co-curricular activities within the school. As established earlier, students find that it is easier to build connections when they are with someone who shares the same interest. Relating to clubs we want to encourage students becoming more engaged with clubs within Crescent School. Currently the reason why many students don't join clubs is because they simply don't know the current clubs. What we propose is a "Club Day" at the beginning of the year to showcase some of the clubs that are available here at Crescent. Crescent has a plethora of clubs to choose from. All they need is the proper attention and people can find one that they are interested in.

Finally, we would like to talk about the Brotherhood program. Originally started in 2018 by a student named Julian Rosenheck, it was created with the idea of helping new students transition into the school environment with the help of senior students. Unfortunately the idea was stopped short due to the pandemic. We propose a reviving of this program with a few additional steps. In our research we found that students, especially those coming in during the pandemic felt a sense of loneliness due to transition from online to physical. Hopefully the chance to interact with someone who has been in the school for a long time will help with the uneasy transition between schools.

## Team Biographies

Name	Bio
Tehseen Dayha	Came to Toronto (and Crescent) in Grade 7 after moving from Charlotte, NC. Initiated the South Asian and Middle Eastern Student Union at Crescent to foster a sense of community amongst students at Crescent to work against loneliness and isolation at the school.
Hong Duc Cheng	I was born in Toronto and started in Crescent in Grade 10. Currently initiated in the Business and Diversity Club aiming to help others learn and talk about topics I feel passionate about. I joined SPARC in order to discover and make change within the school for the future generations.

Jason Teng	Born in Toronto and moved to China at two months old, staying there until Grade 3 and arriving at Crescent. Past and ongoing participation in robotics and art at Crescent. Joined SPARC with the aim of gaining research experience and addressing school issues to improve the community for future students.
Allan Yu	I came to Crescent in grade 9 during COVID situation, and because my family couldn't return to Canada, I stayed on online school for that whole year. I felt rarely connected with the community and that's why I wanted to join SPARC this year to make the school community a better place for everybody.
Kareem Soliman	I joined SPARC not only because I wanted to gain experience on several skills such as research and public speaking, but to better my community and the people around me. Arriving at Crescent in grade 9, I found it very hard to navigate my way through year 1, and therefore getting the opportunity to make it easier for future kids that come into crescent in grade 9 is something I wanted to do as well.
Jeremy You	I came to Crescent in grade 3 and have been there ever since. I have seen the school before and during the pandemic as well as the semi-open state it is now. Before this I have done most plays and joined the cross country team and the track team. I joined SPARC because it seemed like a good opportunity to get to know more people and do an academic club. I got more interested when we chose our topic as I was very fortunate to have had a solid group of friends that I knew over these last few years, but I know many are not as lucky.