Way, N., Ali, A., Gilligan, C., & Noguera, P. (Eds.). (2018). *The crisis of connection: Roots, consequences, and solutions.* **New York University Press.**

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I open with a reminder to the reader that considering the time in which a writing is produced provides a crucial lens for understanding the meaning and potential value of the work. *The Crisis of Connection: Roots, Consequences and Solutions* (2018) was written prior to the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, yet it will likely have more value as we navigate, and eventually emerge from, this crisis.

Introduction: Aims, Themes and Story

For quite some time, most of us have been aware, or were developing an awareness, that our society is stuck in a disconnect between our aims for human well-being and the outcomes that emerge through violence, loneliness, and despair. For those seeking an explanation, or those sensing that human connections may be at least part of the problem, *The Crisis of Connection* is a good place to start in the sense-making process. For those already aware of the missing parts and misdirection in human connection, this book provides some solid suggestions for sparking
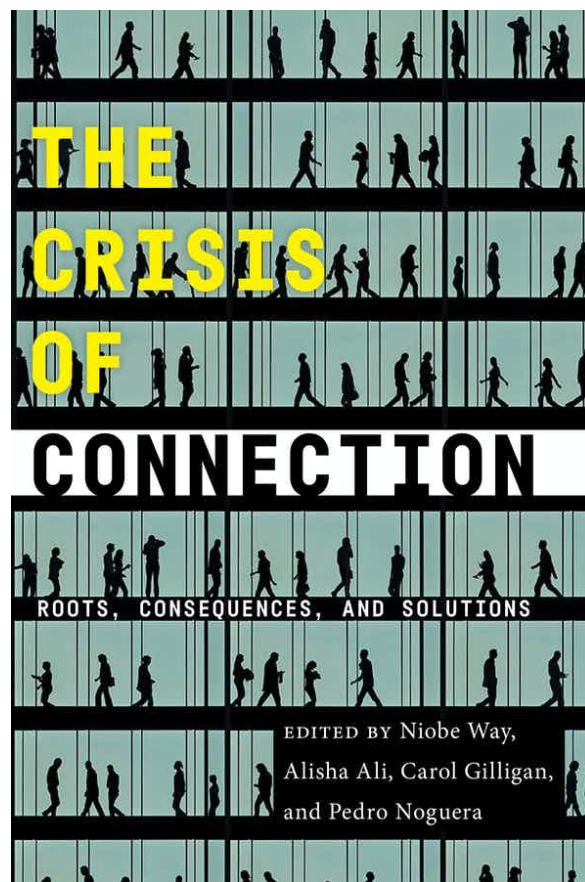
meaningful improvements. The book considers the question: How can we make connections across differences that will uplift the individual and humanity as whole?

The authors' interdisciplinary approach supports a thorough evaluation of crisis issues within specific contexts, particularly education. Editors Niobe Way, Alisha Ali, Carol Gilligan, and Pedro Noguera contribute their own interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing from psychology, education, gender and race studies. With their well-represented expertise in the study of adolescence, the editors open the text by explaining the importance of adolescence as a significant period of development and socialization. They use this stage as a common theme to highlight the complexities of navigating human connections. To balance out the lengthy 20 chapter book, the editors effectively include essays drawn from insightful academics and community activists representing a cross-section of various disciplines including masculinity studies, human development and education; these include Michael Kimmel, Janie Victoria Ward and Dana Edell.

One strength of this book is its framework, which addresses systems of social inequality, including the ongoing themes of patriarchy and racism. The authors' attention to social inequality and injustice provide platforms for understanding how human social disconnections have resulted in tangible, widespread social problems. The authors' focus on these issues provides a necessary starting point for their suggestions on restructuring how we develop, and become part of, the human group.

The title of the book itself captures some of the key framing concepts. The use of the term "crisis" points to the magnitude of the issues at hand. It also argues that collective human agency can either guide us towards a positive shift or enable our downward spiral. Crisis reminds the reader that, even with the

current circumstances, there is hope for change that humans can initiate. The book crafts a clear position that we are at one of those pivotal moments, and through bringing together this collection of essays on diverse topics, *The Crisis of Connection* brings to light specific social outlets through which transformation can be made.

In the introduction, the editors lay out the aim of their "five-part story," which is a well-thought explanation of human needs and employable solutions for repairing human connections, and emerging with a stronger society (p. 19). First, being human means we need connection. Second, social systems based on injustice have hastened disconnects within society. Third, much evidence of the crisis exists, and the authors provide examples. Fourth, there are consequences; particular ones of note include loneliness, depression, and violence. Fifth, there are clear solutions, which the contributing authors integrate from existing social action initiatives.

Integration of Themes

While the overall argument contains the aforementioned five parts, the book itself follows a different organizational pattern. The book layout consists of essays that overlap across the five themes. The arrangement of chapters focuses more heavily on solutions, with part three centered on school-based solutions and part four on community-based solutions.

In the first section, "The Crisis of Connection in Human Development," the authors collectively focus on how youth actively navigate developmental stages and how opportunities for connection may be lost versus fostered. In chapter one, Gilligan, Rogers and Noel highlight how youth actively engage in interpretation and meaning making processes that occur when forming and breaking connections. This offers up an important perspective on the agency of youth. A few chapters later, Ward builds on this idea

of youth agency by noting that adults may equip young girls with the tool to "Read it, Name it, Oppose it, Replace it" (p. 123). This empowering strategy encourages youth to rewrite the cultural script and resist disconnection. The authors also interweave the importance of identification with groups and identity development as crucial pieces of the connection process. These early chapters firmly root the rest of the book within crucial considerations of race and gender.

The Crisis of Connection responsibly addresses traditional approaches to methods of research and their roles in providing a solid platform for understanding the crisis of connection. The authors take the time to delve into the realm of method as a necessary and refracting layer of authenticity of social science-based work. The second section of the book, "The Crisis of Connection in Society and Science" discussed science and method. In "Humanizing the Scientific Method" by Ali and Sichel, the authors investigate the traditional concepts and methods underlying approaches to scientific work. Highlighting that objectivity needs to be reframed, they suggest that researchers' attention to cataloging and analyzing subjects' deficiencies must be left behind and replaced with a focus on seeing the assets that are intertwined with both individual and structural factors. Most importantly the power dynamic within research must be overturned to nourish a more authentic approach; researchers are fallible humans that infuse some level of subjectivity and participants are insightful, co-creators of the research process and findings (p. 219). While method is the focus of section two, this theme is also notable in section one. In their chapter, Gilligan et al. share a relational and reflexive qualitative interview method applied in their own work with young girls. They explain how a standard process of interviewing loses the depth and accuracy of the work, and they advocate for interviewers to be open to questioning by their young interviewees. This

approach to delving into young girls' psychological processes of distancing and silencing provided the researchers with a deeper understanding of the struggles of young girls. It also sheds light on the challenges faced by adult women in the community, in this case the researchers, who begin to see their own past struggles that create barriers to community building across generations. The authors' brave unveiling of this inclusive method strengthens and humanizes the information shared with the reader.

The text also brings the topic of empathy front and center in conjunction with the crisis of connection. Empathy is intertwined with various chapters. A chapter of note is Noguera's "Pursuit of our Common Humanity: The Role of Education in Overcoming the Empathy Gap and the Crisis of Connection" in which he clarifies that the empathy gap is not new; it has fueled many horrific human atrocities and systems of oppression. But Noguera also makes it transparent that we must consider the many ways that we are similar, and that there are far more similarities than differences. He brings to the forefront that we are more one than a series of others, and he asks, "What if we saw the 'other' as a member of our community, our tribe, our family, or our interest group, and acted on that premise?" (pp. 156-7). To emphasize the importance of shared humanity, Noguera provides convincing examples of the power of trust; noting that trust can be fostered beyond traditional systems such as education, and that educating the populace on trust may make improvements in lowering violence levels and curbing the spread of highly communicable diseases. These notions align with other recent works on eliminating social polarization (Klinenberg, 2018; Rushkoff, 2019).

For those interested in education, the third section "School-Based Solutions" elucidates how empathy and trust can be used

as a foundation for individual empowerment and educational improvement. Arguably, it is challenging to grapple with some of the ideas presented. How does an educator reach a distanced student? Connect with a student who is acting out? Draw in a student who does not care? In line with the message of the book, the authors argue that we must build connections. The chapter, "Love Pedagogy: Teaching to Disrupt," Arrastia insists that as teachers we get to know our students, to care about them and to love them. Arrastia embeds similar themes that are found in foundational works such as Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* (1998) and Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974). Arrastia opens by seeming to insist that we focus less on the performance measures that create hierarchy in the classroom. That was a tough one for me to grapple with: Is our educational system prepared to completely oust these measures? Should we ever do so? I don't think so. And I was relieved to see that Arrastia considered both the importance of educational measures and the caring approach to achieve those aims. As an educator, I was relieved when Reichert and Nelson addressed the broader topic of school culture. In "I want to learn from you: Relational Strategies to Engage Boys in School", they cunningly interweave a call for change to school cultures that support educators. Sharing examples of how teachers can connect with boys so as to enhance the boys' educational experiences, the authors also demonstrate that school culture shifts are crucial for supporting teachers as well.

In the fourth section on "Community-Based Solutions," the volume journeys into a collection of community efforts that can build connections including creative arts, military veterans, immigration, religion, and parenting. A solid example of community work comes through in Edell's chapter, which explores how girls are encouraged to be co-creators in the theater production process, and how this reaffirms the power and agency of youth. The project is founded on the need to build trust,

share stories and encourage collaboration between girls to infuse a new energy into our current climate of mean girls. The book also included a focus on the role of family in enacting transformation. Barker's chapter, "Letting Men Care: Supporting Engaged Fatherhood to Radically Disrupt the Gender Binary," spurs deep thought about the importance of family, parenting, systems of gendered distinctions, and the very important role of men as fathers. He insists that we need to reduce binaries that disconnect fathers from children and tap into the wider social benefits of upending that aspect of culture to enrich the entire social group, "promoting men's caregiving must be about the collective us" (p. 395).

Critique and Application

The back cover of *The Crisis of Connection* highlights the themes of crisis, connection building, and the creation of a better world; it oddly does not highlight its prominent themes of youth nor education-based solutions. For many readers, who are already familiar with the work of editors, the focus on education and youth will not be a surprise. Others may feel the book has an imbalance with its advertising.

Additionally, *The Crisis of Connection* makes a convincing argument for altering systems that separate, isolate, and disconnect people from one another. It does a solid job of persuading the reader that we need to focus on empathy and revise systems that stratify. And while the book creates a cohesive story, it falls short in clearly presenting the five-part story that was laid out in the introduction. Understandably there is an overlap of themes; yet in the absence of clearly highlighted story components within each of the chapters, the storyline was muddled.

As an educator with 20 years in the classroom, and a mother of 19 years, I feel comfortable saying even the best dynamics between youth and adults can be tricky. I was

pleased to see the book's hopeful yet rational approach to youth agency and power sharing between people of different generations. At various points throughout *The Crisis of Connection*, the authors note that adults still have to play different roles. Adults have to thoughtfully structure the programs, curricula and interactions that enable youth to open up, express themselves and mutually co-create. And, as noted in the chapters by Edell and Reichert et al., when things break down, adults must be the ones to step in and step up.

An added strength of the book was the indication that responsibility for resolving the crisis is multi-level. Teachers must redesign their pedagogical approaches, yet overall school culture must shift as well. Fathers must reconnect with families, but the deepening commitment must be part of a more intentional social justice commitment in society; using parenting connections to expand ideas that break down systems of inequality (p. 395).

Another win is that being human is at the core of this book. The authors allow room for humans to make errors. They integrate this theme into the discussion of research methods; as seen in the chapter by Gilligan et al., showing that young girls have the capacity to detect the flaws in otherwise well-founded research techniques. This theme of being human is also evident in Edell's acknowledgement that well-structured community programs, such as theater experiences, will not always produce the amazing outcomes as described. I value that these authors see that humans and human plans are fallible, but also deeply worthwhile endeavors.

The Crisis of Connection could be an asset to people representing various community development and education efforts that are seeking transformation for social justice and community growth. This book could also be considered for collegiate level courses in the areas of education, community, social problems and civic engagement. The volume could be paired with various other texts, depending upon the needs of the reader. For those seeking to round out a reading list on education, Paulo Freire's *Education as Critical Consciousness (1974)* and bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) can add additional insights about inequality and empowerment through the classroom. For those needing guidance on how to sustain the spirit of teachers during transformational practice, Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* (1998) can be an asset. Readers who want an extended exploration of how to foster human connections through community outside of the classroom, should definitely look to Eric Klinenberg's *Palaces for the People* (2018) or David Rushkoff's *Team Human* (2019).

Final Thoughts

Although *The Crisis of Connection* was written in an arguably different moment in our not-so-distant past, it can be a valuable asset for all moving forward. As we navigate these new waters, with heightened concerns about global health, economic stability and educational restructuring, we all need to reconsider the importance of human connection. We need to re-evaluate the ever-deepening systems of inequality and determine how to collectively support mechanisms that connect people across differences. We as a society of individuals must be ready to face the crisis of today, employ empathy, build trust, and design social systems to support our fellow humans. *The Crisis of Connection* may be an unanticipated tool to assist humanity in thinking through these processes.

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