



DRY RIVER, WET EYES: COLLABORATION CAN HELP

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Background

- Environmental practitioners (AKA environmental workers) face problems such as burnout, eco-emotions, and isolation, which can affect their work and well-being
- Studies have shown that for environmental activists and impacted communities, collective action and communal coping, in which a group works together to solve a problem, can help alleviate these mental burdens
- When considering what could emulate collective action and communal coping in practitioners' work lives, collaboration was considered
- This study sought to examine the facets of collaboration and how it is/can be useful for practitioners, see Figure 1

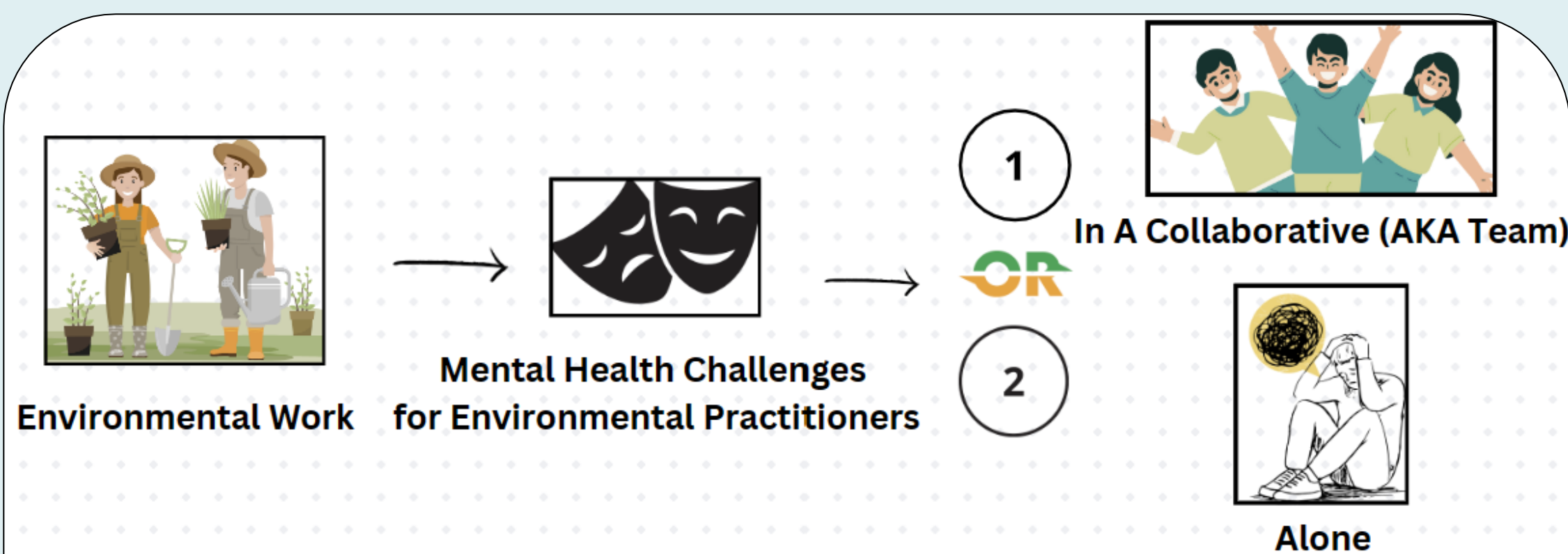


Figure 1. Visualization of my thought process. My hypothesis was that practitioners would be more mentally well in a collaborative (outcome 1) rather than being alone (outcome 2).

Research Questions

What makes collaboration useful for environmental practitioners?

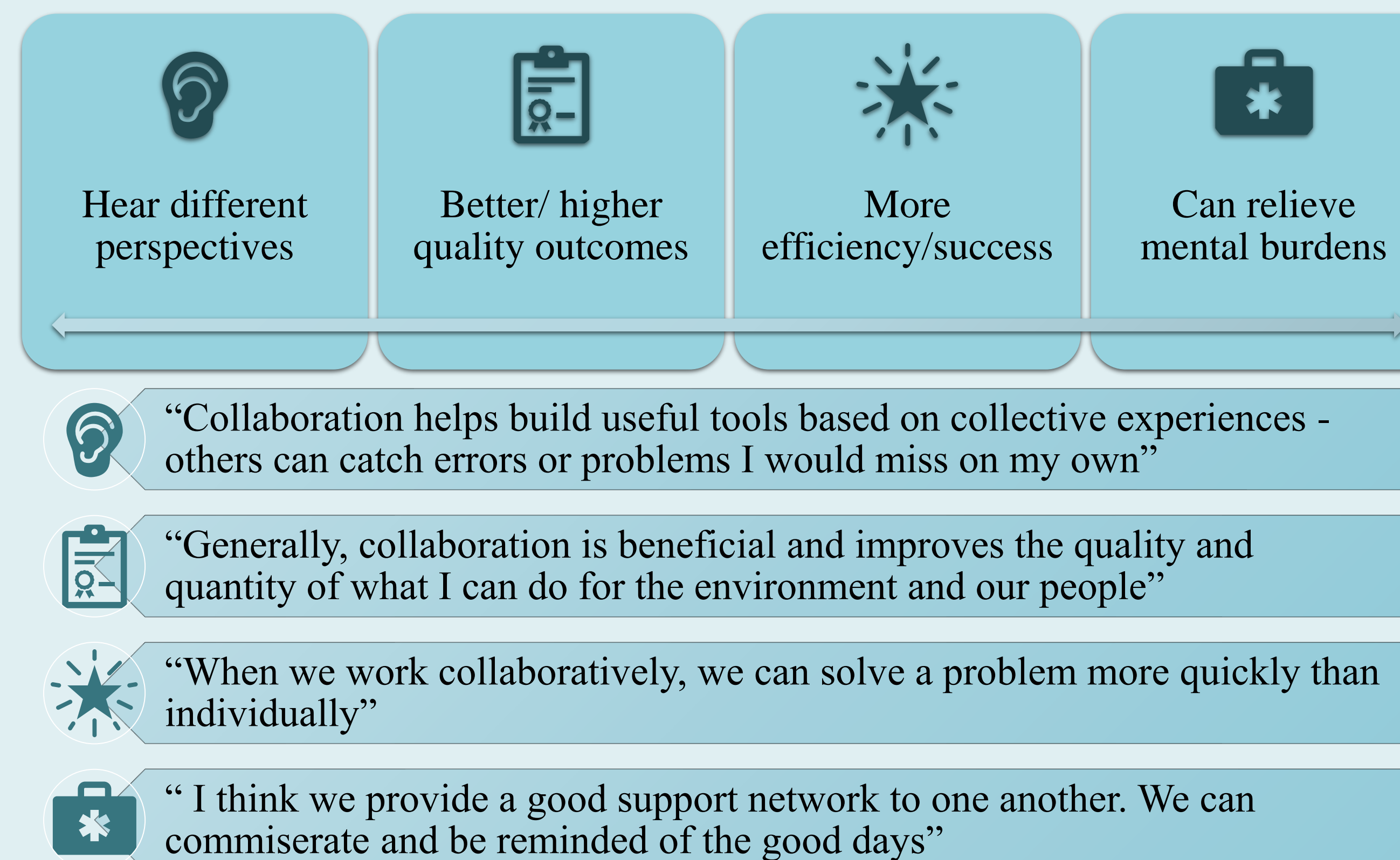
How do facets of positionality relate to barriers to connection?

Internship & Methods

- In the Summer of 2023, I remotely interned with King County STORM
- With them, I conducted;
 - A literature review of collaboration, coping and ecological emotions
 - Seven semi-structured interviews over Zoom with members of STORM
 - An online survey that had 121 qualified participants
 - Note: The online survey was done as a pilot survey for King County, as such I was able to do my own research

Results

The Uses of Collaboration



Barriers to Connection



Age: "People older than me treat me like I don't know anything or that I'm in a position that I don't deserve. It is hard to be respected or taken seriously"



Gender: "I am a young woman who works on teams with mostly older and opinionated men. This can be a difficult environment to feel respected, valued, and secure"



Race and Ethnicity: "Majority upper management were white who felt BIPOC people aren't as educated or smart as themselves"



Work Experience: "Their {the participant's teammates} experience is also a lot greater than mine, making it intimidating at times to ask for help and clarify tasks"



Work Position: "My current workplace is hierarchical in structure, with mid-career white male engineers at the top. Attempts to bring up concerns have resulted in backlash"

Results Continued

Reasons These Are Barriers

- Microaggressions
- Unsafe Working Environment
- Lack of Respect

Suggested Solutions

- Take stock of your thoughts
- Believe others
- Practice conversations
- Assess your situation
- Take part in or implement trainings
- Record everything that happens
- Be professional
- Be polite
- Be transparent

Broader Significance

- Organizations should foster collaboration as well as interpersonal connections between co-workers
- These relations at work can lead not only to higher quality outcomes but can act as a buffer for harmful emotions and feelings of isolation and burnout
- However, to achieve this effect these interpersonal relationships need to be healthy
- Organizations need to take a long look at their people and the work environment they promote to take effective actions toward making a safe and respectful workspace
- If environmental practitioners have better well-being it then becomes less challenging for them to do the great work that they do

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