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Co-Creando Rituales / Co-Creating Rituals to Hold Our Work as Anti-Oppressive Counselors and Researchers

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Abstract

Counselors and qualitative researchers have the honor of hearing peoples' stories and thus have a great responsibility to explore and use clinical and research methodologies that are anti-oppressive, liberatory, and healing. Therefore, in 2019 we began a photovoice project alongside seven queer womxn of color (QWoC) that collaboratively explored their experiences of microaggressions in counseling. Through this journey, we recognized that to be fully present with the "co-researchers" (participants) narratives and experiences, we needed to remain attuned and grounded. We engaged in what we now call "rituals" before research team meetings to support our work as counselors and anti-oppressive researchers throughout this photovoice project. These intentional, emotional, embodied, and spiritual practices allowed us to be open with ourselves and with the co-researchers during the research process. In this article, we discuss several rituals we created that helped us engage in critical reflexivity, [un]learn extractive research practices, and explore our intentions, thus allowing us to connect with our embodied experiences and co-researchers' narratives in a deeper and more meaningful way.

Keywords

anti-oppressive research, participatory action research, ritual work, presence, reflexivity

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Co-Creando Rituales / Co-Creating Rituals to Hold Our Work as Anti-Oppressive Counselors and Researchers

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Counselors and qualitative researchers have the honor of hearing peoples' stories and thus have a great responsibility to explore and use clinical and research methodologies that are anti-oppressive, liberatory, and healing. Therefore, in 2019 we began a photovoice project alongside seven queer womxn of color (QWoC) that collaboratively explored their experiences of microaggressions in counseling. Through this journey, we recognized that to be fully present with the "co-researchers" (participants) narratives and experiences, we needed to remain attuned and grounded. We engaged in what we now call "rituals" before research team meetings to support our work as counselors and anti-oppressive researchers throughout this photovoice project. These intentional, emotional, embodied, and spiritual practices allowed us to be open with ourselves and with the co-researchers during the research process. In this article, we discuss several rituals we created that helped us engage in critical reflexivity, [un]learn extractive research practices, and explore our intentions, thus allowing us to connect with our embodied experiences and co-researchers' narratives in a deeper and more meaningful way.

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Introduction

I (the first author) am a descendant of people who refused to lose themselves and their ways of knowing, whose languages, customs, and ideas I am still (un)covering and (re)membering. Turtle Island, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic are the lands that raised me. I am the smell of *romero* (rosemary), *canela* (cinnamon), *jengibre* (ginger), and *alcanfor* (camphor), a beautiful blend *que tiene el poder de curar casi todo malestar* (that has the power to cure all ailments). I am the sounds of drums, the Spanish guitar, y *la güira* (a percussion instrument from the Dominican Republic). *Mis padres* (my parents), *mis ancestres* (my ancestors), my spiritual practices, and my commitment to collective liberation guide my work as a counselor and anti-oppressive researcher. *Mi nombre es Ana Guadalupe Reyes*. My name is Ana Guadalupe Reyes (the first author). Figure 1 shows me spreading *romero* (rosemary), along with other dried herbs, and flowers, into a small cove to honor my father's passing, a ritual of love and remembering.

Figure 1*Honoring my Father*

I (the second author) am a descendant of people who were moved out of their home countries in hopes of more opportunities, including safety, for the generations to come. The Pacific coast and San Gabriel mountains, where the smell of salt and dirt mixed the air, were the lands that raised me. I am the smell of Sicilian gravy, including tomatoes, onions, oregano, parsley, rosemary, basil, and thyme marinating for two days. I am the sound of big belly laughter at large family gatherings, the type of laughter that makes you start crying. My family, my ancestors, the land, and all her beings that live here, as well as the unspoken somatic experiences we share, guide my work as a counselor and anti-oppressive researcher. My name is Alexandria Elizabeth Capraro. Figure 2 shows me fishing in the alpiners of Colorado, a connection with nature and beings that my soul longed for.

Figure 2*Responding to the Call*

I (the third author) am a descendant of a people whose land was invaded, but their Spirit and voice never conquered. The birthplace of Tejano music all the way to the dry deserts of Coahuila, México were the lands that raised me. I am the smell of the brilliant sun beating down on the soil that feeds the *nopales* (prickly pear cactus), *cempasúchil* (marigolds), and agave. These plants, who have sustained life or honored the dead, are part of my reconnection with practices that my family had to abandon when coming to the States. I am the sound of the blaring drum, proud *gritos* (cries), and quiet whispers from my ancestors. My family, *mis antepasados* (my ancestors), my community, and my resistance guide my work as a counselor and anti-oppressive researcher. Mi nombre es Mónica Rodríguez Delgado, a name that includes my mother's last name. My work will always have her handprint. Figure 3 shows me returning to México after a long absence. I stood to admire the view and to breathe in the air that I had missed so much.

Figure 3

Homecoming



Before we get to the heart of the article, we want to thank Tau (2023) for inspiring us to introduce ourselves through poetry. We also want to acknowledge the countless people who have supported us through our development as counselors and researchers, including our parents, ancestors, teachers, and clients.

Anti-Oppressive Research

“The master’s tools will not dismantle the master’s house.” - Audre Lorde

Who has the power to design and conduct research? Who are the researchers? What qualifies them to design and conduct research with marginalized communities? Research has typically been something a privileged few have the power to design, conduct, and disseminate, mainly white academics with formal training, access to the ivory tower, and institutional and systemic power. Yet, anti-oppressive researchers and anti-oppressive research cannot exist within the bounds of traditional research methodologies that relegate the power of creating knowledge to some while actively excluding marginalized communities from having ownership and a say in the research process (Savage et al., 2021).

Traditional research methodologies have harmed, and some continue to harm, marginalized communities by dehumanizing the research process (Savage et al., 2021; Voith et al., 2020). Historically, researchers have placed marginalized communities in harmful and sometimes deadly situations (e.g., Willowbrook hepatitis experiments, Tuskegee syphilis

study, Nazi human experiments; Voith et al., 2020) in the name of research. Consequently, research practices have substantially changed to avoid the infliction of serious harm, especially to marginalized communities (Voith et al., 2020). While ethical research practices helped to reduce significant abuse to participants, subtle harmful practices still exist (Voith et al., 2020). Therefore, researchers must intentionally and deliberately work toward facilitating anti-oppressive research practices that honor and centralize participants' experiences (Voith et al., 2020).

Although anti-oppressive research has no commonly agreed-upon definition, Lyons et al. (2013) identified common characteristics of anti-oppressive research practices, including egalitarian relationships with research participants, sharing decision-making power with research participants, and sharing power by including feedback from community stakeholders. Several research methodologies decenter traditional Western and colonial views of researchers by creating egalitarian relationships with co-researchers, sharing power with co-researchers, and an intentional focus on action and advocacy (e.g., participatory action research (PAR), community-based participatory research (CBPR), and course-based action research (CBAR; Johnson, 2017; MacDonald, 2012).

Some suggestions for practicing and integrating anti-oppressive research methodologies include: anti-oppressive researchers commit to critically examining their positionality, ontology, epistemology, and methodology. In addition, anti-oppressive researchers should familiarize themselves with research methodologies that decenter the traditional role of the "researcher" to move beyond oppressive and extractive research practices (Savage et al., 2021; Voith et al., 2020), which diminishes participants to mere subjects of studies versus co-creators of knowledge and co-conspirators in the research process. Thus, some qualitative researchers are shifting from doing research on people to working with people as "co-researchers" to co-create knowledge and increase critical consciousness (Pope, 2020). To honor the work and contributions of research participants, we use the term "co-researchers" instead of participants. We believe that all co-researchers are active collaborators throughout the research process. Thus, we use co-researchers to note our intentional shift from research that is done "unto" instead of "with" marginalized communities (Baum et al., 2006; Latz, 2017; MacDonald, 2012; Pope, 2021; Smith, 1994; Smith et al., 2012). Therefore, throughout this article, we use the term co-researchers. We also recognize that to be fully present with the co-researchers' narratives and experiences, we need to remain attuned and grounded. As such, we engaged in what we now call "rituals" before research team meetings to support our work as anti-oppressive researchers. In this article, we discuss our experiences enacting these rituals.

Anti-Oppressive Researchers

We define anti-oppressive researchers as researchers who are committed to social justice and liberation for all and those who intentionally conduct research that decenters the traditional role of a researcher (Pope, 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). We believe that anti-oppressive researchers value and practice a relational approach to research. Anti-oppressive researchers engage in ongoing reflexivity and demonstrate intentionality throughout the research process. They actively seek ways to involve co-researchers in the research process and engage in mutually beneficial research that extends out to communities and key stakeholders. Anti-oppressive researchers engage in research that has the power to impact systemic change and co-create research in partnership with communities in ways that are transformative. Anti-oppressive researchers are committed to doing research with, co-creating knowledge with, and acting with co-researchers (Holtby et al., 2015; Pope, 2020). Below, we provide an overview of our writing process and the process of co-created rituals to support our work as anti-oppressive researchers.

Our Writing Process

It is important to share some of our writing processes. Initially, when we wrote this manuscript, we used the terms “the first author,” “the second author,” “the third author,” and “research team” when referring to our experiences and felt the distance of our language – how the space between us and the article grew. As space grew, our experiences felt foreign, like we were reading the experience of another researcher instead of our own. Thus, we decided to use “I” and “we” as we spoke about our experiences.

To honor our process as anti-oppressive counselors and researchers, we engaged in critical dialogue as we wrote this article, which allowed us to encounter each other more deeply and in profound ways. This article was inspired by a photovoice research project where we partnered with seven QWoC to collaboratively explore their experiences of microaggressions in counseling (Reyes et al., 2021) from June 2019 to June 2020 using photovoice methodology. Wang and Burris developed photovoice methodology in the early 1990s as an approach to participatory action research that blends storytelling with photography to explore community issues, needs, and strengths (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). Seven QWoC courageously captured photographs of their experiences of microaggressions in counseling and contextualized their photographs through titles, captions, and individual interviews (Reyes et al., 2021).

In 2021, we decided to reflect on our experiences of my (the first author’s) photovoice dissertation and our intentional reflection and integration of emotional, embodied, and spiritual rituals to support our work as anti-oppressive counselors and researchers, resulting in this article. Since December 2021, we had eight meetings to discuss our experiences and support each other through the writing process of this article. As we write, we take breaks to check in with each other and how we are experiencing our writing process. We also reflect on what is missing and how our training as counselors and counselor educators allows us to make space for our emotional experiences while actively exploring them. Additionally, we explore how our training as counselors and researchers impacts our ontology and epistemology. For example, we reflected on how our Western training has valued and centered white-dominant narratives and knowledge while pathologizing other ways of being and knowing (Dominguez, 2017; Ramos, 2019), which led us to seek other ways of being and knowing that culturally and spiritually aligned for us. This active inquiry started in 2016 and continues to this day as we’ve learned about pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 2015), participatory action research (Baum et al., 2006; Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; MacDonald, 2012; Stringer, 2014; Tandon, 1981), community-based participatory research (Johnson, 2017; Muhammad et al., 2017), liberation psychology (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020; Martín-Baró, 1994), and decolonial and anti-oppressive practices in counseling and research (Brown & Strega, 2015; Comas-Díaz, 2022; Gorski & Goodman, 2015; Lincoln & González y González, 2008; Shure et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2020; Smith, 2001; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021; Wilson, 2008).

We also engaged in collaborative writing and asked each other questions such as: How can we write more critically and honestly? What does it look like to write in ways that honor who we are? How can we honor our process as anti-oppressive counselors and researchers? This article is the product of where we come from, who we come from, all our teachers, clients, and mentors, years of exploration, numerous revisions, and critical questioning. Thus, throughout this article, we will share our stories and the rituals we’ve engaged in to support our anti-oppressive and liberatory research practice. We hope that by sharing our stories and rituals, we inspire other qualitative researchers to explore ways to create their own rituals to support them throughout the research process. We invite you to read the following sections and engage in reflection and dialogue. Gently explore how what we share resonates for you and

what challenges you. Honor what resonates with you as it comes up and lean into what challenges you, exploring what is underneath that sense of unease or discomfort.

Preparing for the Work Ahead: Co-Creating Rituals to Support Our Work

Before beginning our work with co-researchers, we focused on building relationships with each other as researchers and colleagues characterized by mutual respect and care. To build mutual and caring relationships as a research team, we participated in several research team meetings to check in with each other, review the research protocol, and share meals. We often engaged in expressive arts activities to aid with reflexivity. We began referring to these intentional, experiential, spiritual, and self-explorative activities as rituals. We define *rituals* as intentional, emotional, embodied, and spiritual practices and norms we co-created and repeated regularly to support our work. We engaged in several rituals that allowed us to be open and authentic with ourselves and our co-researchers throughout the research process. The rituals included but were not limited to intention setting and creating sacred space, connection with self and different elements to support our work, cooking meals or eating meals together, and a release ceremony. For example, Figure 4 was taken as we shared coffee and engaged in dialogue to honor each other's experiences and needs as we prepared to engage in critical reflexivity using photovoice methodology. Behind the first and third authors are several pieces of flip chart paper with photographs and captions that we strategically posted around the room to help us collectively explore our positionalities and embodied experiences as we prepared for the photovoice project with QWoC.

Figure 4

Exploring Our Lens



As a research team, we were aware of the various ways that some research participants, whom we refer to as co-researchers in our study, have been marginalized and oppressed in society and through research. Despite our intentionality, we feared reenacting cycles of oppression and potentially retraumatizing co-researchers during their participation in the study. Therefore, we engaged in several modes of self-exploration inside and outside of our research team meetings, paying compassionate attention to how our identities and experiences would emerge throughout the research process and how we impacted the research process.

Queering Reflexivity

As the lead researcher, I (the first author) felt responsible for role modeling liberatory and anti-oppressive practices, creating meaningful learning opportunities, and providing guidance and support to research team members. During the photovoice study, I was a teaching fellow for a large counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), where I co-taught graduate-level courses and taught undergraduate courses focusing on multiculturalism and diversity. As I prepared for a diversity course, I came across *The Power Flower* activity (Bishop, 1994) to help students visually explore their social locations as we learned about different socially constructed identities. After integrating *The Power Flower* activity in multiple classes and clinical supervision, I noticed how it could support my work as an anti-oppressive researcher and how I could use it to explore my positionality. Thus, during one of our initial meetings as a research team in 2019, I facilitated *The Power Flower* activity to help us as researchers explore our social locations and positionalities in the context of the photovoice study with QWoC while considering how our social locations and positionalities could impact the research process. Figure 5 is an example of a research team member's *The Power Flower*. During our meeting, we focused on exploring what our social locations meant for us and how we navigated the tapestry of our experiences as counselors and researchers. We also explored how our social locations could impact the research process and identified strategies to help us engage in reflexivity. Below, we discuss how we integrated the exploration of our positionality throughout the research process.

As a queer, non-binary, femme-presenting Afro-Latine person and counselor, I (the first author) shared some identities with co-researchers which helped me to co-create safety, build rapport, facilitate discussions, and encourage critical dialogue with co-researchers. However, I did not assume that my insider status as a queer, non-binary, femme-presenting Afro-Latine person would guarantee that co-researchers would experience me as a trustworthy researcher and counselor. Although I wasn't in the role of a counselor during the study, I was transparent about my identity as a counselor and counselor educator. Thus, I deliberately worked to establish rapport and shared my social location with co-researchers during our initial encounters (i.e., phone screenings and first meetings). I also actively engaged in reflection on my positionality and power in the context of my relationship with each co-researcher, including similarities and differences in race, gender, gender identity, sexuality, romantic identity, ethnicity, nationality, and spirituality (Holtby et al., 2015; Latz, 2017). Additionally, I reflected on how I used my power as the lead researcher throughout the research process through peer debriefings, reflexive journaling, expressive arts, photo journaling, and critical dialogue with research team members and co-researchers.

I (the second author) identify as a bisexual, cisgender, multiracial first-generation person. At this point, I was out and comfortable with my identity; however, I had never looked at my identities from an intersectional and wider lens outside of my race and sexuality. This was a unique opportunity to really explore my impact on this research and how my positionality expresses or doesn't express itself with co-researchers. I engaged in a lot of exploration around my passing privilege through this activity. My interest in joining this research team was driven by the fact that I could have been a co-researcher in this study because I met the criteria for participation. I felt pride in my racial and sexual identities. I remember, however, grappling with some of the more nuanced identities, such as my class status growing up versus my current class status as a graduate student and my body type. In these domains of my identity, my level of privilege really fluctuated and shifted. The intersectional aspects of this activity really broadened my understanding of how privilege and power can look so different when I start to include more identities. This is also an activity I continue to use in current research projects,

and it's always so fascinating to see how my power flower has shifted and changed over the past 5+ years.

I (the third author) identify as a queer, cisgender Mexicana born in the United States. I knew reflexivity and presence would be critical, particularly because I was not “out” in many of my personal circles. When engaging in the Power Flower activity, I spoke to the research team about my internal conflict regarding my level of “outness” and the risk involved with exposing my sexual identity. I knew that my intersecting identities and personal struggles would impact my relationship with the co-researchers, and I wanted to process these concerns with the research team. Additionally, I had some beliefs about my own worthiness to claim my queer identity, as I was aware that I possessed passing privilege and had been in several heterosexual relationships. During the reflexive dialogue with the research team, I realized that co-researchers would be experiencing several similar risks. Co-researchers could risk their safety by “outing” themselves or their stories. The co-researchers’ courage and vulnerability allowed me to also take risks and share some of my identities with the co-researchers. This mutual sharing was a transformative experience for me and gave me the courage to own my authenticity. At the same time, I was cognizant that my positionality as a researcher could still lend itself to a power differential. I participated in ongoing self and community reflection with the research team to mitigate any shifts in power.

An Anti-Oppressive Approach to Data Collection and Analysis

We sought to practice an anti-oppressive approach in our data collection and analysis process whenever possible by engaging in community and group reflection, practicing presence, engaging in exploration and dialogue, and co-creating rituals with one another. In the following section, we will illustrate our process by highlighting some of the rituals we co-created and engaged in throughout the data collection and analysis process. Although we share our processes and rituals sequentially, it is important to note that we do not see our rituals as separate from one another. Our processes and rituals were interdependent and interconnected. Furthermore, we believe our relationships with one another and with co-researchers allowed for the co-creation of rituals that helped us honor ourselves, each other, and our environment throughout the data collection and data analysis processes.

Practicing Presence

Presence is an intentional practice of awareness, focus, attention, and softness in the present moment, allowing for a sense of connection with self, others, spirit, and the world (Baer, 2003; Brown-Johnson et al., 2019). We practiced presence with ourselves, as a group, and with co-researchers. We started every research team meeting by creating space to quietly process anything we brought into the meeting. We took the time to ground and reflect to bring ourselves into the here and now. Typically, one of us would lead the meetings with a reflection, and we would then share our experiences with each other. Before analyzing the data, we explored different ways to connect with co-researchers, whether it was by revisiting the data sets, experiencing their pictures, or discussing how their stories impacted each of us as researchers. These rituals allowed us to connect with co-researchers psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. I (the first author) weaved in various somatic, mindfulness, and energy healing rituals to aid us in practicing presence to slow down, honor and access our inner experience and wisdom, and anchor into the core of who we are as we prepared to be with co-researchers in a relational and heartfelt way. Throughout the data analysis process, we co-created opening and closing rituals to set our intentions and practice presence.

We frequently used the elements of fire, water, earth, and wind to center ourselves. For instance, as an opening ritual, we went outside to find a leaf. We all wrote our intention for that research meeting with paint, pen, or marker on our leaf. We then shared our intention with each other and placed it on our altar. If anyone on the research team had difficulty with the data or the narratives or engaging with each other, we would gently remind ourselves of the intention. For our closing ritual, we went outside and burned our leaves to signify our release.

We also invoked our senses with our ritual work by including food, music, movement, and essential oils. In one of our rituals, we listened to several songs that were sung in multiple languages. We focused on the instruments, the melody, and the lyrics. We also paid attention to how our bodies felt and our thoughts or emotions. One song captured my (the third author) attention. The song spoke about resistance in the face of oppression while recognizing the purpose of our own existence. The song encouraged us to use our voices and take up space to fulfill our purpose. It helped me reflect on my purpose within academia and specifically within research. What is my own purpose for engaging in research? Why do I exist in this research space? How am I taking up space in a system that was not meant for someone like me? I was able to form some answers that guided my work within the photovoice study. My existence in academia was a community effort, and through their sacrifice, I now get to engage in processes that were not afforded to them. My purpose is to continue to honor their voice by challenging ridged research standards that perpetuate oppression and further marginalize communities. This was my goal and intention when I engaged with our co-researchers. To maintain my commitment, I wrote a portion of the song lyrics on a sheet of watercolor paper that was made with natural paint and plant material (see Figure 6). I kept it with me throughout the photovoice study.

Figure 6

Yo no Naci sin Causa (I Wasn't Born Without a Cause)



Before we met with co-researchers, the two interviewers would meet for approximately 15-30 minutes before the interview to ground with each other and discuss our intention for the interview. We created space for ourselves to be present, focused, and in the moment so that we weren't feeling rushed with co-researchers and could expand that ritual with co-researchers. During the meeting with our co-researchers, we would take time to connect with them before starting the formal interview by asking them how they were feeling and what was going on for them. We would also use presence to build rapport and establish relationships so co-researchers felt seen and fully accepted. Throughout the interview, we would take moments to pause and check in with them, especially during moments of catharsis. We wanted to ensure that we had

enough time to be with them and weren't causing any potential harm throughout the interview process.

I (the second author) was a master's student at the time and felt overwhelmed in some respects because I was new to the qualitative research process and was not sure how the process flowed. When we engaged in co-creating presence, I felt grounded and connected with the other researchers. For example, we engaged in collective meditation at the beginning of each coding meeting to ground and center. There were times when we incorporated incense, candles, nature-based items such as leaves and water, and music to help us center before engaging in the coding process. Utilizing these components allowed me to engage in reflexivity as I noticed how I was experiencing the co-researchers and how I was affected by their stories. My engagement with the research team also brought me closer to them as I was able to share my experiences and be impacted by their experiences. Practicing presence allowed us to both co-create space for and experience vulnerability.

To help with emotional grounding, I (the third author) practiced presence and co-created rituals with the research team in various ways. One of the most impactful moments of practicing presence was with a co-researcher. It solidified my commitment to facilitating research alongside co-researchers rather than on co-researchers. During the timeframe the photovoice study was conducted, a traumatic community event occurred. We (the research team) intentionally asked a co-researcher how they (pronouns) were doing and how they were impacted by the event. We self-disclosed some of our own thoughts and emotional experiences. The co-researcher seemed surprised that we inquired about their emotional well-being. After a few moments, the co-researcher began to talk about their feelings and experiences. Mutual sharing began as we disclosed our "in-the-moment" feelings. The co-researcher mentioned how important this project was for their own validation and healing. For example, in Figure 7, entitled "Cracked Open," Olympia (co-researcher) mentioned, "There's just as a way that it [photovoice project] has cracked some stuff open, like in this photo." They continued, "The biggest takeaway from this meeting is that I am surprised by how much I needed to tell these stories and by how heard I felt...I think I really wasn't expecting to feel so empowered by the experience of narrative sharing." As I listened and heard these types of phrases from multiple co-researchers, I realized how important it was to slow down, take the moment in, and honor the person experiencing a multitude of feelings in front of me and who was willing to tell me their story. Not only did they share how the study impacted them, but they also gave us their trust in the process.

Figure 7

Cracked Open

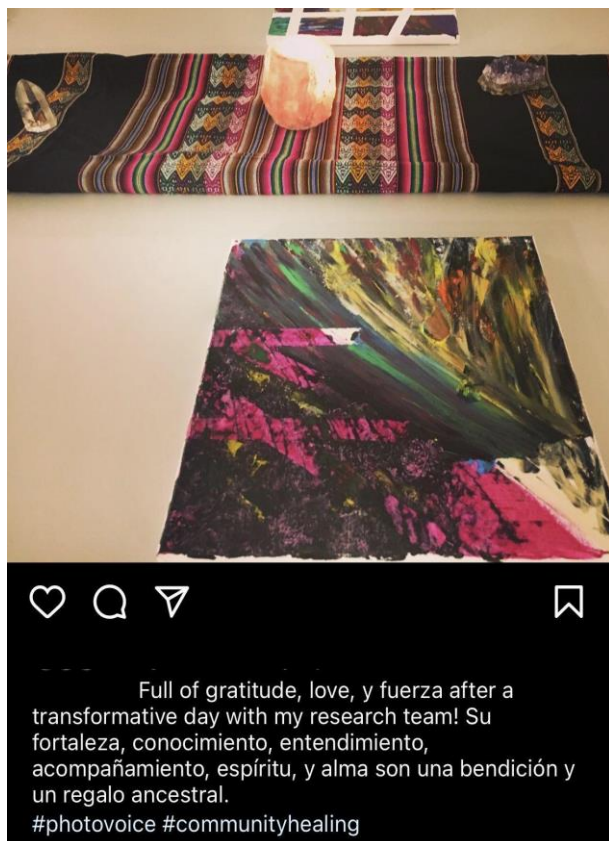


Notes. Photograph taken by co-researcher, Olympia.

During our first data analysis team meeting, we started by setting up our altar with elements that supported our work, such as a Himalayan Sea salt candle holder, amethyst crystal, a quartz, on top of a mesa altar cloth. We then set our intentions and light a tealight candle inside the Himalayan Sea salt candle holder. As we started the data analysis process, it was important for us to be as open and present as possible to co-researchers' experiences. A few days before this meeting, Grace, a co-researcher, emailed me (the first author) a video of her being followed by a white woman who followed her to the train, screaming racist and homophobic remarks.

Figure 8

Co-Creating a Sacred Space to Hold Co-Researchers and Each Other



Grace asked us to witness her pain, so I decided to watch the video and share it with the data analysis team during our first meeting as an invitation to reflect on our responsibility to co-researchers, in this case, QWoC, beyond our work as researchers. As I watched the video, I felt my stomach and jaw tighten, my heart started racing, and tears started caressing my cheeks. Thus, after setting our intentions and co-creating a sacred space to hold co-researchers and each other's experiences, I played the video for the research team so that we could process our experiences and explore our responsibility as researchers and counselors to QWoC beyond the "scope" of this study. To help us engage in this process, I facilitated an expressive arts activity where we collectively painted two canvases to explore our experience bearing witness to the anti-Black racism and homophobia displayed in the video and our experience of the datasets we had read thus far. Figure 8 is a screenshot of an Instagram post that I (the first author) shared after the first data analysis meeting. This screenshot shows our altar, supportive elements, and one of the paintings we co-created, along with the short caption that reads, "Full of gratitude, love, and strength after a transformative day with my research team! Their power,

knowing, understanding, accompaniment, spirit, and soul are a blessing and an ancestral gift. After processing our experiences and responsibilities, we started the data analysis process with Grace's dataset to honor her. By reflecting on the video and engaging in a collective expressive art activity, we deeply connected with Grace's story during the data analysis process.

Releasing Ceremony

All data analysis team members were mental health counselors, and some of us identified as queer and/or people of color. We recognized that we shared identities with the co-researchers and their counselors, who had caused harm and created a culture of fear and pain. Because we were exploring microaggressions committed by counselors towards QWoC, there were moments where we experienced sadness, pain, and anger that had the potential to impact our ability to engage with the co-researchers' narratives. Through our group reflection, we recognized the need to acknowledge our emotions, sit with them, and release what was not helpful for our process. The release ceremony was designed to facilitate emotional expression and catharsis. This release allowed us to have space to re-engage, be present, and take in co-researchers' experiences. The release ceremony was facilitated by a fellow research team member (who wasn't involved in this article) during a data analysis team meeting.

The facilitator brought in a crystal bowl with water and tissue paper. We then took turns wetting the tissue paper and throwing the tissue paper against the wall while sharing our individual and collective pain. As we threw the tissue paper, we verbally shared our experience and, at times, cried to release. We took turns throwing tissue paper and sharing to hold and honor each other. After the release ceremony, we shared our collective experience of feeling seen, held, and supported as we transmuted our pain into healing and loving energy.

I (the first author) recall experiencing a great deal of emotional anguish and physical pain before the release ceremony due to some interpersonal trauma and an emergency cholecystectomy. So, I welcomed the release ceremony as an opportunity to engage in community care and healing. I remember my hands feeling nourished by the water as I dipped the tissue paper into the crystal bowl, and my fingers started ringing the excess water from the tissue paper. These movements prepared my body to throw the tissue paper as I shared my experience and released the sorrow residing deep in my soul. Voicing my pain repeatedly as I threw the tissue paper felt freeing and allowed me to (re)connect with my body and research team. The release ceremony was a life-affirming and sustaining experience.

I (the second author) recall feeling the most authentic and congruent throughout the release ceremony. I felt anger and anxiety while engaging in the coding process and was having a difficult time processing those feelings, especially because the anger felt so embodied and intense as we focused on the codes. As a Latina, I have a difficult time feeling safe to express my anger. Being connected to community through this process and trusting my fellow researchers allowed me to lean into my experience of anger. The release ceremony further permitted me to express anger and allow those feelings to be experienced and move through me. The release ceremony was a powerful moment for us to connect and heal.

Our Learnings Through Ritual Work

Through ritual work, we learned several lessons that we carry with us into our work as counselors and anti-oppressive researchers. The following section summarizes what we learned as a research team, with co-researchers, and the research process.

As a Research Team

I (the first author) was reminded of the importance of slowing down and being intentional. As I recall our ritual work, I can still feel a deep connection to spirit during the research process that I interpreted as a reminder and affirmation of the importance of this work and that anything can be a sacred and healing process if we release Western dominant ways of thinking and being and take the time to connect with ourselves, each other, and the universe. Furthermore, I learned how to co-lead an anti-oppressive research team collaboratively and the importance of trust and mutual connection. This photovoice project was a beautiful reminder to release time-orientated processes and step into research from a heart-centered and curious space.

I (the second author) was reminded of the importance of community, especially healing in and with community. Our research meetings felt more than checking the box or getting things done. It was a communal experience where we cooked, held intentions, cried, and held sacred experiences together. This process brought out the importance of the collective rather than individualism. We were working together through sharing space.

I (the third author) recognized how difficult it was to intentionally slow down and be mindful of my own meaning-making throughout this photovoice project. While writing this article, I had a conversation with a friend who recently moved to the United States. She said, “everything moves so fast here, it's hard to breathe.” I was reminded of how I was, and in some cases still am, centralizing Western ideologies that value production over people. My connection with the research team and our rituals created a counter-space that challenged these constructs by allowing me to slow down, build mutually supportive connections, and identify feelings that could potentially hinder my growth as a counselor and anti-oppressive researcher. I learned that research could feel authentic and validating to who I am as a person, researcher, and counselor.

With Co-Researchers

I (the first author) was able to experience the gift of connection and the importance of having an ethics of care as a researcher. My interactions with co-researchers were pivotal in my development as an anti-oppressive researcher, as each interaction provided an opportunity for growth, healing, and transgression of what I was taught as a qualitative researcher and counselor educator. Interactions with co-researchers were opportunities for relational depth, greater understanding, mutuality, and critical reflection regarding their experiences of oppression and discrimination in counseling, and my responsibility to support the creation of counter-spaces that are affirming and liberatory for and with QWoC.

When I (the second author) first joined the research team, I did not conduct any interviews. I was transcribing and coding the interviews, so I did not initially have face-to-face interactions with co-researchers. Because of the intentions we held before coding and the space we created as we were coding, I felt the presence of those interviews. The co-researchers' stories came alive. They were not just co-researchers in a research study. They are people with lived experiences that have been impacted by colonization and oppressive spaces. The research project became more than a means to an end; it was a space for liberation and social justice. This process invited me to engage more deeply with anti-oppressive research practices and influenced my research approach.

The co-researchers gave me (third researcher) the gift of trust and confidence. They trusted me with the most vulnerable parts of themselves while allowing me to witness their in-the-moment experiences of healing. The more I shared space with co-researchers, the more I became aware that my trust and confidence in myself as an anti-oppressive researcher was

growing. This parallel process reminded me of how we are all connected, how we all impact each other, and how research can facilitate these healing connections.

The Research Process

Our rituals created cohesion, reflexivity, and consistency throughout the research process. Before engaging with co-researchers, we would connect with our personal and collective intentions as a group. We were able to settle and focus during our interactions with co-researchers and each other and during the data analysis process. By engaging in the rituals we created, we ensured that we engaged in the reflexivity process and practiced embodied awareness. I (the second author) felt the cohesion between the research team and the intense care we all had for co-researchers.

Our rituals also created safety as we knew what to expect when we were starting the coding process. We faced and wrestled with our biases and assumptions head-on and in a space where we felt safe to express, explore, and release those biases and assumptions. This level of openness and cohesion brought a level of safety to us and our co-researchers. Our rituals also allowed us to have real and honest reactions to the data and show up for the data analysis process in authentic and genuine ways. We were able to grapple with the nuances and difficulties of co-researchers' experiences because of the safety and container the rituals created.

The photovoice study was conducted in a creative and sacred manner, where we held co-researchers' experiences with the utmost respect and care. We felt the full range of emotions because we were able to express them through our rituals. This experience has shaped how we conduct research and how we teach the next generation of researchers. This research experience influenced the second and third authors' dissertations and their co-researchers, creating a beautiful ripple effect. The community we built as a research team and with co-researchers continues to inform how we show up in our roles as educators, counselors, and researchers.

Reflecting on what we can do differently in the future, we all agree that building intentional time for ritual work and slowness is necessary at the beginning of a research project. Although we integrated rituals and slowness into this research project, it wasn't something the first author intentionally built into the research process at the beginning. At the time, I was a doctoral student (the first author) trying to make sense of the research process and leading a research team for the first time. Despite my lack of formal experience leading a research team, I had several years of informal experience being a research lab member or co-leading a team, and these experiences often taught me best practices while highlighting practices that were unsettling for me or invited me to dig deeper into indigenous, decolonial, and anti-oppressive research practices. Thus, this photovoice project paved the way for us to conduct research in ways that honor our ancestors, elders, communities, wisdom, and the wisdom of the communities we partner with as we co-create knowledge.

Conclusion

We thank all our teachers who have supported us in becoming anti-oppressive counselors and researchers. Most of all, we thank the co-researchers we have had the honor of working alongside for their wisdom and invitations to grow. We hope this article has served as a starting point for readers interested in integrating rituals to support their work as anti-oppressive researchers. Integrating rituals into our work as anti-oppressive counselors and researchers aided us in practicing presence, mutuality, critical reflection, embodied exploration of our experiences, and connection to each other, co-researchers, and our work. There are no set guidelines for creating rituals. We invite you to explore what fits you and the people you

work with, what holds you, and what allows you to feel a sense of groundedness and expansiveness to support your approach to anti-oppressive research.

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