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Contents

From the Editor

Written by Dominique Thomas, Central New Mexico Community College

Dominique Thomas, Editor

Hello everyone! We are excited to bring you the Spring 2026 issue of The Community Psychologist!

The United Nations voted last week to recognize the trans-Atlantic slave trade as the greatest crime against humanity, specifically the trade in Africans, and urged reparations. Ghana was the nation that led the effort through proposing the resolution. Most of the world's nations voted in favor of the resolution with notable exceptions including United States, Israel, and Argentina voting No; the United Kingdom and the European Union abstained. Represented among these dissenting nation-states are the settler colonial states which profited from the trade as well as the subsequent colonization of Africa. Each of these entities has justified imperialist and colonial theft through some combination of white supremacy and

theology, placing white Europeans as the rulers of the "free" and "civilized" world.

Much of the evidence for this resolution comes from the continued persecution and marginalization of Africans across the continent and diaspora. This was one of the driving factors behind the 2020 Call to Action, especially with the emergence and explosion of the George Floyd protests that year. For the few months prior, Dr. Ciann Wilson and I were planning a book project on the mechanisms through which colonialism, imperialism, and racism recycle algorithmically. After the protests, this book shifted into an AJCP Special Issue, *Imperial Algorithms: Contemporary Manifestations of Colonialism and Racism* (Thomas & Wilson, 2024). We intended to expand the canon of anticolonial and critical scholarship in community psychology. We asked authors to explore themes with an explicit decolonization imperative. Using ideas from Afrofuturism and African epistemology, we thought the idea of the algorithm was a potent metaphor and symbol for the ways in which structures of domination operate both in the current information age and historically.

An algorithm is a step-by-step process to solve a problem or perform a specific task. The algorithm could be a specific mathematical formula (the original meaning) or it could be an instruction booklet for assembling furniture. Imperial algorithms are the structures, patterns, processes, and procedures that perpetuate imperialism. Across the special issue, authors discussed imperial algorithms as neo-colonialism, surveillance, social engineering, carcerality, contemporary racism's warping of reality, exacerbation of health disparities by COVID-19, and environmental grids. Authors also discussed methods to deprogram these imperial algorithms through healing intergenerational trauma, restoration, and speaking truth to power as consciousness raising. The year 2020 further exposed the imperialist and colonial nature of western nation-states; in 2026, we see what happens when imperial algorithms are allowed to keep running unimpeded: governments invoking holy war while building imperialist ethnostates.

Last issue I brought up the Haitian Revolution because the history of Haiti is a model for understanding many of the imperial algorithms and restorative rhythms highlighted in the special issue and currently running in the background of global conflicts. Some of it is not even background anymore when government officials quote religious scripture to justify war and land theft. The same nations that invaded, destabilized, and stole wealth from Haiti are the same nations that either voted No or Abstained in the UN Vote.

Figure 1. Sekhmet, Egyptian deity, or neter, of war, destruction, justice, and healing. Photo of statue taken by author at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia

Figure 2. UN Resolution Vote Results. Photo credit to Manuel Elias. Retrieved from https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/03/1167199

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Spring 2026

The Spring 2026 issue features articles on both new and ongoing work within the field of community psychology. This issue also has additional updates within the SCRA organization as well. Below is a preview of what to expect in the current issue.

- From Our Members
- International Committee
- Practice Council
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- SCRA News

Book Review Submissions

We are soliciting submissions for book reviews! If anyone is interested in having their book being reviewed and wants a review published, please reach out to us at TCP@scra27.org and let us know so we can talk about it. If you have a potential reviewer in mind, please send their name and contact information along with the book to be reviewed. Please include the title Book Review Submission in the subject line of the email.

Editors' Note

Opinions expressed in The Community Psychologist are those of individual authors and do not necessarily reflect official position taken by SCRA or the Editor and Associate Editor of The Community Psychologist.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

Dominique
TCP Editor

From Our Members

Edited by Dominique Thomas, Central New Mexico Community College

Prophetic Refusal as Decolonial Love: A Reflexive Inquiry into Community Agency and Accommodation

Written by Michael C. Bell, MA/PhD student, CLIE Specialization, The Pacifica Graduate Institute

Integrating into a Burning House

My research inquiry began with a tension articulated by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: the fear that integration without radical reconstruction is merely integrating into a burning house. My current work has focused on the African American Prophetic Tradition (AAPT) as a critical site of community psychology—a distinct, historical praxis of refusal against the colonially constructed moral measures of the dominant society, as resolved through observation of a scholar practitioner of this tradition. The central question driving my inquiry is whether the values of openness and accommodation, often championed in mainstream Community Psychology (CP), inadvertently subvert the agency of marginalized groups by demanding acculturation rather than liberation. As Sonn and Stevens (2021, p.6) argue, we must engage in a "decolonial turn" that critically interrogates Western modernist thought to prevent what I term axiological mutation.

The Trap of Accommodation vs. The Decolonial Rhizome

A pivotal moment in my research process was the feedback regarding the work of Prilleltensky and Nelson on 'accommodation injustice.' I initially critiqued Reimer et al.'s (2023) presentation of 'openness' as a potential vector for coloniality, concerned that it demands marginalized groups negotiate their agency. The feedback clarified that critical CP scholars indeed critique psychology when it perpetuates oppression through accommodation. This aligns with Ciofalo and Watkins (2022, p.12), referring to Escobar,

asserting that we must delink from colonial ideologies normalized by the academy to create "pluriversality" rather than the universal "Only-One-World" (OWW) framework erasure that persists.

I learned that the African American Prophetic Tradition acts as a "decolonial rhizome"—an underground, interconnected root system that survives despite the concrete of institutional erasure. Butler et al. (2020) describe this rhizomatic work as operating in the "cracks and crevices," a "shadow syllabus" that is often illegible to the academy (p.129). This metaphor validates the AAPT of the Black Church's historic role not as a separate silo, but as a fugitive network of survival that refuses the "abyssal lines" that render Black knowledge invisible (Ciofalo and Watkins, 2022, p.4).

Refusal as a Competency

The readings and scholarship within the existing canon of CP decolonial praxis challenged me to reframe "refusal" not as negativity, but as a generative competency. Ciofalo and Watkins (2022) argue for a defined "decolonial community psychology praxis" that rejects universalizing theories (p.3). My research in this discovery of the AAPT as such a site, highlights how the Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley's viral sermon, as a public prophetic praxis, refused to eulogize the values of white supremacy following the murder/assassination of Mr. Charlie Kirk, as an act of conscientization. Freire, cited in Ciofalo and Watkins (2022, p.9), defines this as the critical reflection on oppressive structures to transform them. The feedback of numerous practitioners within this tradition and readings confirmed that maintaining 'closed boundaries for specific purposes' is not segregation, but a necessary protection against epistemicide.

Literature Review: Integrated References to Discover AAPT Hermeneutics

To ground this inquiry, it is necessary to place the African American Prophetic Tradition in dialogue with both decolonial studies, CP literature, and Black emancipatory thought. Ciofalo and Watkins (2022) define decolonial praxis through "affective conviviality" and "decolonial solidarity" (p.3), warning against the "white savior complex" (p.13), which is anchored in coloniality. They emphasize the need to listen to "epistemologies of the Global South" (p.3) to counter the "epistemicide" (p.4) perpetuated by Western universalism. Butler et al. (2020) provide the framework of the 'rhizome' to describe work that is 'off-radar' and interconnected, essential for understanding how marginalized communities survive outside dominant institutions. They argue that decolonization is "embodied, active work" (p.130), particularly for African Americans managing legacies of slavery.

Sonn and Stevens (2021) describe the 'decolonial turn' as a critical interrogation of Western modernist thought, validating my critique of the 'values of openness' found in mainstream psychology. The values of openness perpetuate a vulnerability and negotiation of agency, which propagates again, what I've termed axiological mutation. Axiological mutation in my definition is the subversive acculturation and accommodation of views, values, and ethics that align with a dominant people group's framework, e.g., modernity, rather than the intuitive or 'other' epistemological frameworks of indigenous or marginalized groups as native frameworks of these communities. Furthermore, the concept of 'practice-based evidence' (Gone, 2016, p.320 as cited in Ciofalo and Watkins, 2022, p.5) supports my argument for prioritizing community-generated knowledge over external evidence-based practices.

West (1984) articulates the "Prophetic Tradition in Afro-America" as a unique space for survival strategies that must remain 'counter-cultural' to be effective, warning against the 'aggressive pessimism' that can arise without a higher moral plane. Myers (1988) offers in her book "Optimal Psychology," which provides an optimal alternative to external acculturation, arguing for a shift in consciousness rooted in African cultural perspectives.

Atallah and Dutta (2021) explicitly frame 'refusal' as a decolonial praxis, arguing that rejecting Eurocentric norms is necessary for 'rehumanization and healing justice'. This supports the work of James (2023), who discusses

‘revolutionary love’ and the ‘plantation bloc,’ warning that inclusion into dominant structures often commodifies Black suffering. Finally, the foundational anxiety of this project rests on King’s warning against integrating into a "burning house" without a commitment to justice for the disenfranchised.

Methodological Shifts: Ancestral Praxis and Yoruba Traditions

The feedback received and the deepening of my inquiry have revealed that the ‘burning house’ Dr. King warned against is not merely a political structure, but an epistemic one that demands the elimination of the erasure of African indigenous spirituality. My initial focus on the African American Prophetic Tradition within the structure of the Black Church must be widened to include the ‘underground’ root systems that nourish it. Therefore, in further study, I will expand my methodology to explore research within the context of Yoruba traditions, utilizing ancestor reverence/veneration and ritual not just as subjects of study, but as modes of rhyzomatic inquiry.

Ancestor Reverence as Decolonial Praxis

I will adopt a methodology that views ancestor reverence as a critical ‘sovereign act’ of refusal against Western academic norms. Butler et al. (2020) highlight the work of Shylah Pacheco Hamilton, an Afrosurrealist filmmaker and Chair of Critical Ethnic Studies, who explicitly “situates decolonial praxis in her curriculum, showing how embodied practices, such as ancestor reverence, and the interdependence of the physical and metaphysical realms of existence are acts of resistance” (p.135). Hamilton’s work, which engages with the Ifa Orisha tradition and the insights of Iyanifa priestesses, demonstrates that connecting with the ‘Divine Feminine’ and ancestral lineage interrupts the "Western practices and training" (p.135) that dominate institutional spaces. By integrating these practices, my research will mark the refusal of the demonization of Hoodoo and African indigenous expressions of spirituality that I observed in the reaction to Dr. Wesley’s sermon.

Ritual and Sentipensar (Thinking-Feeling)

In alignment with Ciofalo and Watkins’ (2022) definition of Indigenous Psychologies, I will move beyond rhetorical analysis to "understand and consciously participate in Indigenous Knowledge Systems... including understanding of relationality with nature and spirit, and participation in cultural practices, ritual and ceremony” (p.19). This requires the application of sentipensar (thinking-feeling with the Earth) to bridge the divide between the intellectual and the spiritual. Just as Hamilton’s work wrestles with how to support students through ‘ancestor veneration and ritual’ to promote deeper connection with unexplored individual cultural heritages, my praxis research will explore how Yoruba-derived rituals within the Black Church (often coded or suppressed) serve as a ‘shadow syllabus’ for community survival.

The Rhizome of the Undercommons

Finally, exploring Yoruba traditions allows me to map the ‘decolonial rhizome’—the underground, interconnected root system that populates the ‘Undercommons’. Butler et al., (2020) suggest that decolonial work often operates ‘off-radar’ and ‘below the institutional surface’. By engaging with the "Iyanifa Woman of Wisdom" (p.141) and the priestesses of the Ifa Orisha tradition mentioned in the literature, I will investigate how these spiritual technologies provide the ‘optimal alternative’ to acculturation described by Myers (1988), ensuring that the community's agency is rooted in a cosmology that predates coloniality.

From Observation to Ecopsychosocial Accompaniment

Ciofalo and Watkins (2022) describe "ecopsychosocial accompaniment" (p.3) as standing with the oppressed majorities in liberatory movements rather than helping them accommodate to pernicious structures. In further praxis research, instead of merely interviewing leaders about their views on integration, I will engage in ‘accompaniment’ by participating in the creation of the ‘Undercommons’ spaces mentioned by James and Lorenz (2023). This means being present with the community as they construct their own meanings rather than imposing external metrics. The readings emphasize sentipensar—thinking with the heart and feeling with the mind—to bridge the

divide between culture and nature. My initial approach relied heavily on rhetorical and axiological analysis. To deepen this research, I will incorporate methodologies that honor the affective dimensions of the AAPT. This involves documenting not just the words of the sermons, but the embodiment of the service. This aligns with Butler et al.'s (2020) focus on "embodied, active work" (p.130) that manages the legacies of slavery and promotes liberation.

The Rhizome as Method

I will adopt a rhizomatic approach to data collection. Rather than a linear set of interviews, I will map the 'underground' connections between the scholar-practitioners I interviewed. How do their acts of refusal connect to one another to form a safety net for the community? This shift respects the 'shadow syllabus' of the Black Church and moves away from the 'tick-a-box' competence assessment criticized by Dzidic et al. (2013), which perpetuates the status quo.

Conclusion

The feedback and readings from this term have solidified my resolve that 'openness' without the power of "refusal" is a trap. However, I have learned that refusal is not an end, but a clearing of space for *Buen Vivir* (collective well-being). By applying the methodologies of accompaniment and sentipensar, as a researcher, my future research will not just critique the "burning house," but actively participate in building the fire-proof structures of the 'Undercommons,' ensuring that the agency of the community is preserved not through isolation, but through a sovereign, decolonial love.

The journey through my Community Praxis I research, in the CLIE program at Pacifica Graduate Institute, has fundamentally reoriented my research inquiry from a critique of integration to an affirmation of prophetic refusal. The feedback received, alongside the engagement with the 'Undercommons' of the literature, has validated my foundational anxiety: that without radical reconstruction, the values of 'openness and accommodation' interpreted as acculturation, often championed in Community Psychology risk becoming what I have termed "axiological mutation"—a distortion where liberatory intent devolves into acculturated acquiescence (Bell, 2025). I have learned that the "burning house" Dr. King feared is sustained by the "OOW mentality, which creates 'abyssal lines' that render Black epistemologies invisible or invalid (Ciofalo & Watkins, 2023). Consequently, my work has shifted from seeking validation within dominant psychological frameworks to exploring how the Prophetic Tradition functions as a 'decolonial rhizome'—an underground, interconnected root system that survives in the "cracks and crevices" of institutional erasure (Butler et al., 2020, p. 131).

Moving into the future research of Community Praxis II, this theoretical realignment necessitates a distinct methodological pivot. I must reject the 'tick-a-box' competence assessments that perpetuate the status quo (Dzidic et al., 2013, as cited in Ciofalo & Watkins, 2022) and instead embrace a praxis of "ecopsychosocial accompaniment." As Martín-Baró (1994) argued, the choice is between accommodating the oppressed to a pernicious system or accompanying them in their struggle; I choose the latter (Ciofalo & Watkins, 2023). This means my research will no longer position me as a detached observer analyzing the rhetoric of sermons, but as an accompanist engaged in "affective conviviality" (Ciofalo & Watkins, 2023, p. 12). I will employ sentipensar—thinking-feeling with the community—to document not just the intellectual content of prophetic speech, but the embodied, affective regulation provided by the Black Church's "shadow syllabus" (Butler et al., 2020, p. 129).

Ultimately, the goal of my forthcoming research is to articulate a community praxis that refuses the 'plantation bloc' of commodified suffering (James, 2023). By mapping the 'fugitive movements' of these scholar-practitioners, I aim to demonstrate that their 'closed boundaries' are not acts of segregation, but 'sovereign acts' of protection (Serrano-García, 2020, as cited in Ciofalo & Watkins, 2023). Community Praxis II will thus be an exercise in 'revolutionary love'—a love that accepts the vulnerability of refusal to ensure that the community's agency is not consumed by the fire,

but preserved in the fertile, rhizomatic soil of the Undercommons.

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Safety, Mental Health, and Social Dynamics in Sex Work: Street-Based Versus Online Platforms

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Sex work is present on social media, in narrative storylines, news outlets, and on platforms like OnlyFans. Sex work is any exchange of consensual sexual services for monetary compensation and ranges from erotic displays without physical contact to intercourse (Stutz et al., 2024). Strip clubs, brothels, hotels and OnlyFans are indoor settings of sex work, while outdoor locations take place on the streets in public locations. The setting of sex work is related to the types of risks that shape workers' experience. Women in sex work experience significant harm due to entrenched male power imbalances. Male clients often exert control over negotiations, directly affecting women's safety and economic security (Farley, 2004; Weitzer, 2009). Law enforcement and policymaking structures are both male dominated, reinforcing these vulnerabilities by

criminalizing sex work, further restricting access to legal protections (Platt et al., 2018; Sanders et al., 2009). This intersection of direct and structural power leaves women sex workers exposed to systemic marginalization (Shah, 2001).

Street-based v. OnlyFans

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional mediums of sex work, particularly affecting street-based workers due to social distancing requirements and economic hardships (Daniel et al., 2023). As a result, many sex workers increasingly turned to online platforms. OnlyFans provides various options in the world of sex, such as subscription-based content, webcam modeling, and virtual interactions, allowing sex workers to engage with clients asynchronously (Gaikwad, 2023; Daniel et al., 2023). While online work offers greater autonomy, financial opportunity, and physical safety, it is not without risk; virtual sex workers are susceptible to harassment, stalking, and other forms of abuse (Gloss et al., 2025; Dorsey, 2024).

Research shows that street-based sex workers face elevated risks of violence, exploitation, and policing, which negatively affect mental health and social inclusion (Platt et al., 2018). Chronic exposure to these risks contributes to the high prevalence of depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Martin et al., 2023; Stutz et al., 2024). Personality traits and financial pressures also influence entry into sex work and transitions within the industry, increasing vulnerability to risk-taking behaviors (Bandurski et al., 2025).

Clients

Men play a dominant role in the sex industry as clients, shaping its demand, pricing, and power dynamics. Research shows that men constitute most consumers in both street-based and online sex markets (Monto & Milrod, 2014). Their motivations are not merely sexual but also social and psychological, often linked to loneliness, control, and gendered entitlement (Sanders, 2008). Studies reveal that white men comprise the largest group of buyers, reflecting both disposable income and racialized perceptions of desirability and dominance (Farley et al., 2011). These patterns intersect with systems of inequality where wealthy white men exploit the vulnerabilities of poorer, racialized women. As the primary consumers, men define what kinds of bodies are profitable and what behaviors are rewarded, reinforcing existing hierarchies of gender, race, and class within the sex economy (Bernstein, 2007). Men not only consume but also enforce the violence against women sex workers to control them.

Enforcers

Men also occupy the role of enforcers, including pimps, traffickers, and law enforcement officers who regulate and often exploit sex workers. Historically, men have used coercion and violence to control the labor of women in the sex trade, treating their bodies as commodities within underground economies (Miller & Schwartz, 1995). Even within systems of supposed protection, such as policing, male officers have been documented engaging in sexual coercion, harassment, and exploitation of sex workers under the appearance of enforcement (Kerrison & Cobbina, 2021). These dual roles, both as perpetrators and protectors, illustrate how patriarchy sustains itself through cycles of domination and hypocrisy.

Policymakers

At the highest structural level, men dominate as policymakers who create, fund, and enforce sex work legislation. Their decisions often reflect patriarchal and moralistic views of sexuality, positioning women as victims in need of rescue rather than autonomous agents deserving labor rights (Weitzer, 2018). Policies criminalizing sex work reproduce social hierarchies rather than dismantle them, particularly harming poor and racialized sex workers who lack safer alternatives (Anderson, 2023). and the rise of platforms like OnlyFans, a new tiered hierarchy has emerged: those with access to technology, stable housing, and digital literacy disproportionately white and middle-class women can profit in relative safety, while others remain in offline, high-risk environments (Jones, 2020).

Stigma

Despite the evolution of sex work, it is still a highly stigmatized profession in the contemporary world (Hart et al, 2023). The type of sex work you

are affiliated with contributes to the level of stigma, for example, a street-based sex worker has less access to healthcare, increased arrest, and is more likely to be denied social services (Hart et al, 2023). Hart et al argue that stigmas sustain social inequality with its association with reduced life chances, lack of education, employment, and housing and social relationship (Hart et al, 2023).

Sex work has a myriad of dimensions that intersect with mental health outcomes (Abel et. al 2009). A 2009 study finds that sex workers experience elevated rates of trauma, anxiety, and depression, particularly in street-based work where violence, exploitation, and social marginalization are prevalent (Abel et. al, 2009). Conversely, the rise of OnlyFans represents how the online setting is framed as safer. The platform allows creators to set boundaries, while seemingly reducing physical risk and introducing new psychological challenges such as parasocial exploitation (Abel et. al 2009).

Society has long demonized sex workers because, as historian Ruth Rosen observed, sex workers threaten patriarchal control because they demand payment for sexual services that men often expect for free (Overall,1992). Sex workers face stigma not only from men but also from internalized misogyny, which happens when women adopt society's negative beliefs about women and sexuality (Swim et al., 2001).

Further, Solomon et al. (2015) argue, "our first line of psychological defense against those whose conception of reality is different from our own is to denigrate or belittle them, diminishing the threat their beliefs pose to our own". The whore stigma is attached to women and only women. For men, calling a woman a whore or slut is a way to exert control over her, to remind her of how she is defined and what she can be reduced to within the patriarchy (Overall,1992).

Trans women are a visible and marginalized population within the sex industry. Research shows that trans women engage in sex work at higher rates than cisgender women, often due to economic marginalization, discrimination in traditional employment, and barriers to healthcare and housing (Logie et al., 2022). Trans women also face compounded stigma from both society and within the sex industry itself. They are dehumanized due to misconceptions about their gender, unequal pay, and exclusion from safer work environments. In online sex work, trans women may experience harassment or fetishization from clients while having fewer protections and less visibility than cisgender female creators (Litam, 2021).

Mental Health

Personality characteristics and economic pressures shape entry into sex work and mobility within the sector. Research indicates that street-based sex workers experience heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and surveillance. These elements impact mental health and social participation (Platt et al., 2018). These determinants can heighten susceptibility to risky behaviors (Bandurski et al., 2025). Despite these adversities, sex workers resist stigma by constructing favorable identities through performance and self-expression (Stutz et al., 2024). Economic shifts, including market liberalization, may lower the cost of sexual services. This increases exposure to physical and emotional harm (Purim, 2024). Wennburg found higher rates of PTSD compared to the general population. Sex workers are involved in repetitive exposure to trauma (2021).

Many sex workers occupy the shadows of society. Sex workers experience disproportionately high levels of physical and psychological harm. We need to address historical patterns of violence and criminalization of women by shifting from reliance on a flawed criminal justice system and toward models that emphasize community support and social inclusion. Men in the roles of policymakers, clients and enforcers have a role to play in reducing stigma by acknowledging their contribution to the demand for sex work, advocating for safer working conditions, and supporting the rights and dignity of sex workers. We can institute social interaction and crisis intervention affirming sex workers humanity. These actions will challenge assumptions and remove the scars etched on sex workers' canvas.

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Strategic Plan Implementation Taskforce Updates

Written by Aaron Stewart Baker Cervantes, Sharon Wasco, & Leo Wilton

Strategic Plan Implementation Taskforce Updates by Aaron Stewart Baker Cervantes

Greetings, SCRA!

I cannot believe that a little over a year has gone by since we launched the implementation of SCRA's current Strategic Plan: *advancing toward a network-driven model*. Since January 2025, I have served as chair of the Strategic Plan Implementation (SPI) Taskforce. In this role, I primarily work to support and advance the ongoing efforts of the SPI Taskforce, which includes 3 teams, each focused on 1 pillar of the Strategic Plan:

- Build: Establish a vibrant community of changemakers through collaboration, digital platforms, partnerships, and outreach
- Enable: Empower changemakers by providing training, mentorship, and fostering collaboration
- Scale: Grow our impact by expanding engagement, securing funding, and sharing success stories

Each of the Pillar Teams are led and made up by SCRA members, volunteering their time and labor to this implementation effort. Without the active involvement of these Stewards and Partners, the SPI Taskforce would not function (to join the SPI Taskforce, see the Strategic Plan Implementation Engagement Form at https://scra27.org/strategic-plan-2025-2027/). In addition to the Pillar Teams, the SPI Taskforce includes a Core Team that brings together the Pillar Team Stewards and the current SCRA Officers to ensure alignment and coordination between current SCRA operations and programming and the implementation of SCRA's Strategic Plan. Truly, many (if not basically all) decisions related to the implementation of the Strategic Plan's Priorities happen within the Pillar Teams. As chair, I try to help coordinate the Pillar Teams' efforts with each other, with the SCRA Officers, and with the Executive Committee. I also try to provide support and resources to reduce barriers to the Pillar Teams' efforts in order to build and maintain momentum in their work and in the overall implementation project.

Since our last update in the Fall 2025 Issue of The Community Psychologist, the Pillar Teams have been hard at work. For updates regarding the **Build Pillar**, please check out the update submitted by the Build Pillar Stewards Sharon Wasco and Leo Wilton. On behalf of the **Enable Pillar**, I am happy to report they have made significant progress towards Initiative 6 ('Platform as a core enabler for SCRA strategy') of the Strategic Plan's Priority 3 ('Build capacity and empowerment'). With the focus of implementing a community/networking. platform, the Enable Pillar Team defined organizational needs, curated a requirements and feature wishlist, vetted multiple vendors, and recommended a community/networking platform (see Networking Platform Recommendation). We have begun the process of implementing Higher Logic's Thrive Community platform and learning management system. More information will be shared as we get further into the implementation process. The **Scale Pillar** Team has been focusing heavily on Initiative 10 ('Increase international membership and program participation') of the Strategic Plan's Priority 5 ('Foster interdisciplinary and international collaborations). This has included working to

develop a baseline understanding of individuals, organizations, institutions, communities, and associations doing SCRA-aligned work. Moreover, this team has been working to develop formal and informal partnerships with universities, associations, and SCRA committees and interest groups. I am very excited about the momentum the Scale Pillar team has built around how we, as an organization, should shift our mindset around what it means to be a networked-organization globally.

One effort I have been working on (in collaboration with Amber Kelly, Executive Management Consultant) is to build out the Strategic Plan section of the SCRA website. This includes curating a SPI Taskforce Dashboard (https://scra27.org/spi-dashboard/). If there are any specific data points that you would like to see included in this dashboard or any other information or resources you would like to see included on the website, please let me know (asbakercervantes@gmail.com).

With gratitude,
Aaron Stewart 'Ace' Baker Cervantes
Chair, Strategic Plan Implementation Taskforce

BUILD Pillar Update: Laying the Groundwork for Leadership, Transparency, and Growth by Sharon Wasco and Leo Wilton

From April through December 2025, the BUILD Pillar focused on strengthening the foundation needed to carry out SCRA's 2025–2027 Strategic Plan. Key accomplishments included clarifying the core skills and experiences needed for SCRA leadership, researching adjacent fields and institutions to inform future outreach, and advancing early leadership development concepts in collaboration with other pillars, student leaders, and SCRA MALs. The BUILD team also made meaningful progress on governance and transparency, including completing a revised process for member-initiated public statements and improving workflows to support policy updates and Executive Committee decision-making. Together, this work emphasized thoughtful sequencing, cross-pillar coordination, and a commitment to building systems that are clear, accountable, and sustainable. One "facilitation tip" that the BUILD team would love to share for SCRA members is the use of "Magical Questions" at the beginning of each month's meeting. This ritual has centered connection and deepened members' relationships with each other.

Looking ahead to 2026, BUILD priorities center on turning this groundwork into visible engagement opportunities for members. This includes piloting leadership development efforts, such as sharing the Leadership Journey Workshop through SCRA Chair Check-Ins and at the Midwestern Psychological Association meeting in Chicago, as well as continuing policy revisions and dissemination to support transparency and member involvement. The BUILD Pillar will also advance plans for gathering meaningful member feedback, ensuring that future surveys and engagement efforts are purposeful, inclusive, and actionable. Together, these next steps position SCRA to grow in ways that are values-aligned, member-centered, and built to last.

Belonging Oneself to Place: Locating Our Relationships and Responsibilities in the Places our Feet are Planted

Written by Stevie J. Guiol, Pacifica Graduate Institute, Embodied Ancestral Inquiry

Introduction

Last spring I moved from Southern California, the place I was born and raised and have many generations of history on my father's side, to Olympia, Washington. The move happened for many reasons, primarily because of rent hikes, political harassment in the rural area I lived in, and multiple climate disasters. It was becoming undeniably clear that it was time for me to leave California, my one true home. I understood this wasn't a decision I could make alone, and one snowy, freezing night in late January during a power outage, I said aloud to my spirits, *"I am*

seeking land that is seeking me" and asked for a dream that would help me understand what direction to look towards. That night I dreamt of mossy trees, river water, and mud. There was no narrative, but I woke up understanding that I'd dreamt of a place between Portland and Seattle. Two months later I moved to the southern-most tip of the Puget Sound, first called *"whulge"* by the Coast Salish people for the way the waves sound on the shore (Williams, 2022).

I spent the summer belonging myself to place through my Community Praxis project through Pacifica Graduate Institute. Distinct from notions of ownership or automatic acceptance, "belonging" in this context is a practice of being in service to; a co-creation of relationship with the places we live which includes land as a sentient being, the inhabitants of place including human and more-than-human, history of place and people, and the work needed to support life-sustaining futures. I felt a lot of discomfort being new to a place while also being asked to engage in community research; it felt important not to rush into relationship for the sake of research, and through staying with that discomfort, I found my focus. For me to understand how I fit here, I must first have an embodied relationship with place. Tangibly speaking, the scope of my Community Praxis was to begin building relationships with the land and the people of this place. This includes the geography of this area (encompassing the city, the suburbs, and the rural spaces), the history of the land, the land itself, the waterways, the trees, people in my neighborhood, and people that are organizing community around relationship with place. Early on, it became clear that an undercurrent of this praxis work is directly engaging with the fact that I carry Euro-settler ancestry with me. It would be easy for me to insert myself into a community space in an attempt to reach for a sense of belonging, but this risks a perpetuation of coloniality in that this kind of insertion can be a form of gentrification, at best, and/or a replication of settler logics**.** My European ancestors did this when they moved to Turtle Island. In trying to find a sense of home in a new place, many of them inserted their ideas of what "home" and relationship to place meant. This produced violent outcomes onto the original people of the land as well as the land itself. The inquiry of "how to be here in a good way" considering this reality is one of great importance. While many Euro-descended settlers in the States are talking about connection with nature, rarely is there a critical discussion about whiteness, ongoing coloniality, and our/their responsibilities as people with settler histories living in Land that we/they don't directly come from.

Dialoging with the Literature

Jeanne A. Lacourt writes in *Coming Home: Knowing Land, Knowing Self* (2012) about how Vine Deloria suggests that it's not been possible for non-Indians to build a profound relationship with their environment because they haven't been on this continent very long, nor do they tend to settle in one place for a considerable amount of time; the consequence of this is that non-Indians have "not accepted *responsibility* for any of the places in which they have resided" (emphasis mine) (Lacourt, 2012). We, human beings, have a responsibility to the places we live. This is something my European ancestors who settled here on Turtle Island, and Euro-descended settlers in general, have not done well. It is time to set this right, for "a proper relationship with the land, including the animals and other living beings, is essential for our survival" says Lacourt, paraphrasing Deloria (2012). This notion also holds hands with Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's articulation of the Agenda for Indigenous Research; in deeply learning land and sense of place, there is a stewardship towards the "reindigenizing of consciousness" (2012) and that "the agenda connects local, regional and global efforts which are moving towards the ideal of a self-determining Indigenous world" (2012). This transforms the role of the community researcher from the clinical observer into the steward or shepherd. From this position, the researcher gets to midwife something that is already happening and find ways to support the emergent transformation of "a self-determining Indigenous world" (2012). In *Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson shares that knowledge comes from the land and

learning happens with the land (2014). She says that “coming to know is the pursuit of the whole body intelligence” and “when realized collectively… it generates generations of loving, creative, innovative, self-determining, inter-dependent and self-regulating community minded individuals” (2014). The thread of self-determination as informed by relationality is present here just like in Tuhiwai-Smith’s work. While Tuhiwai-Smith’s work helps me understand approach, Simpson’s theory is pointing me towards what “coming to know” place looks like in practice; something that’s given lovingly through a relationship with land and spirit (Simpson, 2014).

Belonging Oneself to Place

With the above scholars and thinkers in mind, my approach at the outset of this Community Praxis was to begin with the land and practice being in connection and communication with the land through a blend of Felt Sense practice and *sentipensando con la Tierra* (Escobar, 2016) or “thinking/feeling with the Earth”. I first introduced myself to the land here by going to the water, a stretch of the Deschutes River in the city, with an offering and sitting with the river for a few hours. The meeting felt sweet but melancholic. After my visit to the river, I kept dreaming of floods; the kind that seep up slowly from the ground below. I was curious about why my dreams showed me this image and wondered if it had something to do with the land here. I did a lot of historical ethnographic analysis as my methodology for learning details about the history here and learned about our local estuary, the 5th Ave dam impeding the estuary from flourishing and preventing the Deschutes River from meeting the sea, and about how the formation of the city of Olympia included dredging the estuary and building on top of it with fill to create more city blocks and easier access for ships and trade (Deschutes Estuary Restoration Team, 2025). No wonder I was dreaming of floods! The waters here are dammed and trapped! While dreaming wasn’t explicitly a research method I set out with, dreaming with the land seeped in and became part of my relationship with land and the way the land communicated. On another walk I visited the mudflats which were once a thriving estuary; an overarching sense of “it’s not supposed to feel this way” was present and I felt a surge of righteous anger and advocacy, very similar to how I’ve felt in birth rooms as a former birth doula. I felt a strong pull to visit a part of the watershed that hadn’t been so interrupted. For this, I traveled southeast to a part of the Deschutes River that flows very freely; it felt strong. It felt like it was communicating that all water is connected and the balance will be restored. On the way back home, a wildfire broke out by the river and the town next to it had to be evacuated. The backdrop of climate crisis is ever-present; no place is untouched from this. Between these and other visits to specific places with the land, I held a number of interviews with people doing land-based community organizing work; I’ve found that land reaches for people and people here organize around sustainable futures, protection of land, and ecological revitalization and have built a network of collaboration with each other.

Closing

After a flurry of human connections and interviews, there was a sudden slow down; upon taking that to the land, I felt a sense of completion. That night I dreamt of herons. The next day I visited the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife and Estuary Refuge, named after Nisqually activist Billy Frank Jr. who was instrumental in the Fish Wars in the 60s and 70s and is remembered as a bridge between Western and Indigenous people in regards to environmental sustainability (Neilson, 2017). The entire day was like a dream as I walked towards the estuary boardwalk that extends out for a mile over the estuary and into the Puget Sound. The walk began in wetlands with lots of mossy trees, blackberry bushes, and birdlife including an eagle perched at the top of the highest tree who seemed to watch over the area. Already I was enchanted, but then the landscape changed. The trees thinned out and I could smell salt water. The view opened up to mudflats with beautiful ribbons of water carved into them. The tide was coming in and I was flooded with emotion by the beauty of this place. Every few feet the landscape showed itself differently in all of its beauty and gravitas and I felt welcomed home even as the figures and shapes of this place are so new to me. Many tears happened

here and I felt deep devotion and completeness as I watched the herons forage on the shore.

Through my time in my praxis work, I have come to understand that land communicates differently to different people. If many of us can develop the skill to listen and to honor land as a teacher, then a more complete tapestry of the needs and desires of land can be woven together through our communal efforts. This commitment to listening has become part of my responsibility here, alongside a devotion to our local estuaries, and a support of Indigenous water rights; all of which I was able to build a relationship with over the summer I began belonging myself to this place.

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Poverty and the Individual

Written by Jossie Ramirez, Roosevelt University

Significant early intervention is critical in combatting the mental and behavioral crisis children are facing. As a young woman of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent, living and studying in Chicago, I've seen the impacts of a deficit in early intervention firsthand. The vision I bring to research is informed by both my identity and my perception of the early intervention process through a variety of lenses.

American schools must implement the use of clinical psychologists and create intervention programs for children with behavioral issues. To implement this, the United States government needs to take significant action at a systemic level to fund more mental health and behavioral facilities for children**.** 1 in 3 (31%) youth ages 12-17 had a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral problem in 2023. Along with that, suicide is still a leading cause of death among adolescents (National Survey of Children's Health; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Mental health has become an increasingly acceptable part of public discourse.

Current mental health strategies are not sufficient to address the escalating mental health crisis. Therefore, a change in intervention strategies is needed. Within the United States and other countries, there are educational roles that have been implemented due to the urgency of this matter (McGinty et al, 2024).

Over half of all public schools in the United States have reported a rise in the number of students seeking mental health services. While only 52% reported that they are effective in providing mental health services (McGraw Hill, 2025). Not only is there widespread public concern, but health professionals from the American Academy of Pediatric (AAP), American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), and Children's Hospital Association declared a National Emergency in 2021: "Children and families across our country have experienced enormous adversity

and disruption. The inequities and injustices that result from structural racism have contributed to disproportionate impacts on children from communities of color American Academy of Pediatrics et al., 2021).

The increasing scale of the issue is supported by AAP, AACAP, and the CHA which have joined together to declare this a national emergency called on policymakers at all levels to address the issue: “Fully fund comprehensive, community-based systems of care that connect families in need of behavioral health services and supports for their child with evidence-based interventions in their home, community or schools” (American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children’s Hospital Association, 2021). Childhood abuse and complex trauma is at the main root of developmental issues that children around the world face.

Complex trauma during childhood shows high significance in public health challenges and in the development of trauma disorders. Chronic maltreatment interferes with the neurological development and the abilities to conceptualize sensory, emotional, and cognitive information (van der Kolk et al., 2005). There are many diagnoses that can arise from these kinds of circumstances. Knowing the scope of each individual diagnosis and how it is affecting a child can go unknown for a prolonged period. When dealing with extreme cases of trauma, “The sympathetic response activates the limbic system of the brain, shutting down the prefrontal cortex and with its one capacity for critical thinking, and higher reasoning” (National Library of Medicine, 2024). It is important to consider the perspective that adolescents have on their own mental health. The perspectives adolescents have on mental health and depression is critical. Profoundly understanding this perspective can help improve the way we promote mental health and intervention strategies. Children and adolescents engaging in mental health interventions have a higher chance of success. This can contribute to the advancement in the way mental health care is organized. Grasping the perspectives and the knowledge adolescents have can create high impact in our communities and population-level interventions (Beket et al., 2025).

“Over half of all diagnosable mental health conditions manifest before the age of 14, underscoring the critical need for early intervention” (Kessler, 2005). Successful intervention would amount to changes within our macro-system, including our legal and political systems. According to a 2022 study, 48% of all schools report they do not have enough funding to provide adequate mental health services (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services elaborate on what parity laws consist of and its relevance to mental health access. MHPEAS fundamental purpose is to ensure that individuals in group health plans or by themselves that are seeking treatment do not face any greater burdens (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2024). Additionally, “More than half of public schools lack a full-time school counselor. Fewer than 20 percent of 13–16-year-olds with mental health issues receive the help they need” (Conrad, 2022).

A 2022 study stated that: “ Since schools are not designed to navigate the complexities of health care billing, the technical assistance center created through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act could prove to be a significant factor in translating federal intention into systemic change and funneling much-needed ongoing revenue into schools for mental health services” (Conrad, 2022). This acknowledges the issue of insufficient funding within our schools and the potential of systemic change through federal acts. It is important to focus on innovative solutions to mental health funding. Current research supports the urgency of early intervention of mental health assistants for schools in Ontario, Canada (Kenney et al.). Similarly, Ukraine has made training available to teachers online to combat trauma for these students (“Ukraine: 15,000 School Psychologists Trained by UNESCO”). Likewise, strengthening systems for children and young people’s mental health could use multi-sectoral school-based intervention approaches. Research supports this as a growing demand from several countries. The initiative recently published by the World Health

Organization and UNICEF- Mental Health of Children and Young People outlines how countries can develop context-specific approaches for accessibility to quality mental health support. This includes quality care standards and creating networks linking health care and cross-sectoral services. (WHO-UNICEF, 2024).

It is projected that the assessment data including a national overview of children's mental health will spark policies and service dialogues to inform programming and allocations by national stakeholders. This project is supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada, Botnar Foundation, and Iconiq amongst other areas. Following through with a plan like this by national stakeholders is part of the grand solution (World Health Organization, 2024). On the topic of inequity, there are children who unfortunately are bound to systematic issues and being raised in unfortunate situations. There is a principle of pre-existing advantage in certain identities, locations, and resources. A scholarly journal, Barriers and Facilitators to Mental Health Services for Black Youth covers the disparities and its shocking rates. Considering these youth are vulnerable to multiple risk factors and barriers; there are no direct factors correlating the age of Black youth experiencing compromised mental health. The correlations are tied to different complex environments on micro, mezzo, and macro levels (Brown, 2022). On mental illness, there are entire qualitative investigations that have already begun; the socio-environmental factors that play a part into this are included. Poverty, neighborhood conditions, and family environments have been statistically proven as substantial risk factors to children's mental and behavioral health (Abraham & Walker- Harding, 2022). Establishing facilities and services will positively help the public health of our future leaders; action is needed. In reality, geographic advantage allows healthcare accessibility and prompt diagnoses. Anxiety, depression, and ADHD are highly prevalent in the topic of mental and behavioral issues in children. These disorders need attention and treatment.

The review of this literature emphasizes the need for intervention at a systemic level. Data supports the prosocial development of children who are in states that have implemented early educational intervention programs (ProCare Therapy, 2025). Further research is needed to better understand this subject. Action is equally necessary for the benefit of innocent children who may continue to suffer without early intervention.

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The IC column includes authentic contributions from members that represent their experiences, decolonial work, frustrations and hopes.

A Taste of Ayn Karim: Social–Ecological Memory and the Work of Returning Together

Written by Shirin Zarqa-Lederman, PhD, Founder, The Diaspora Psychologist

Readers may contact the author at shirin@thediasporapsychologist.com to continue this dialogue on Indigenous healing, social memory, and community resilience.

Severed from Land

The first time I returned to my father's village of Ayn Karim was in October of 2025, when I was in Jerusalem to attend an olive harvest. Before 1948, Ayn Karim was a Falastini village shaped by Muslim, Christian, and Jewish life, organized around agriculture, stone homes, and seasonal rhythms. My father spoke of a village where religious difference was practiced together: eggs dyed with black currant and onion peels for Easter, families sitting in Sukkot waiting for rainfall, and Ramadan evenings that ended in shared feasts before Eid. These religious calendars were also agricultural calendars, tied to rainfall, harvest, and the shared responsibility of tending land across seasons.

In 1948, Ayn Karim was depopulated of its Indigenous inhabitants, and the village's Falastini presence was largely erased from public narrative, even as the physical structures remained. Today, its cultural framing reflects its current population, while the knowledge systems that once sustained it have been severed. Standing there for the first time, in the place my father was exiled from 78 years ago when he was just twelve years old, I understood that return would carry material consequences. It exposed neglect, revealed ecological collapse, and demanded responsibility. It was a reckoning with what remains when people are removed but land endures.

I walked the paths between stone homes built to breathe with the seasons, shaped by water, soil, and daily care. These homes were not merely dwellings. They were ecological structures designed to be maintained through practice and inherited knowledge. The absence of that knowledge was immediately visible.

Disinheritance Made Visible

The homes were clearly deteriorating. Vegetation had overtaken stone walls. Fruit hung rotting on trees, unharvested. Stones once carefully reset and maintained across generations were slipping. One local resident admitted that she and her neighbors did not know how to care for the homes. The stones needed resetting, she said, but no one knew how. Rain leaked through the walls, creating mold. Outside, cisterns used for centuries to collect water and sustain village life sat unused because no one knew how to draw from them or manage the water they held. This was not simple disrepair.

Drawing on the work of Geoff Wilson, the deterioration of Ayn Karim reflects a collapse of social ecological memory following forced displacement. Wilson argues that resilience depends not on physical structures alone, but on the intergenerational transmission of place-based

knowledge and practice. In Ayn Karim, the removal of its Indigenous Palestinian inhabitants severed the knowledge systems that sustained agricultural cycles, water management, and the care of stone homes, producing a landscape that remained inhabited but no longer functioned as intended. The village was not abandoned. It was disinherited. The structures remained, but the relational knowledge that sustained them had not been passed on.

I returned to the United States unsettled by what I had seen. About a month later, a photographer who had joined me in Ayn Karim sent photographs of the village during a heavy rainstorm. The images showed what I had witnessed was worsening. The ground was washing away from unchecked stream erosion. Soil collapsed downhill. Tree roots were exposed. Neglect was no longer static; it was accelerating under pressure.

Erosion is often framed as a natural process, yet the damage unfolding in Ayn Karim reflected relational failure. Water was no longer guided. Roots were no longer protected. The land was responding predictably to the absence of care. Returning felt imperative. A month later, I returned again, this time with my children.

Returning as Reactivation

We arrived in December, during the rainy season, after an unusually dry period. The land was unprepared for the volume of rain it received. The damage had intensified. Stone walls lay in the streets. Roots were exposed where water had carved away their protection. The village showed signs of collapse not because it was old, but because it was unattended. This erosion was systemic. It is what happens when social ecological memory is severed and land is treated as static rather than relational.

In preparation for this return, I coordinated with “Tastes of Palestine” to create a shared land and food experience rooted in movement, foraging, and collective care. Tastes of Palestine is a community-based initiative that centers Palestinian agriculture and cuisine through embodied engagement with land. The collaboration was intentional. Rather than approaching Ayn Karim as a site of instruction, restoration, or observation, the visit was structured around conditions that allowed for hiking, foraging, and eating in relation, emphasizing attentiveness to seasonality, terrain, and use rather than explanation or performance.

Within this shared framework, my children weeded where crops were flourishing and worked to rebuild sections of the stream, pushing boulders back into place to redirect water and cover exposed roots so the trees would survive. No one instructed them formally. They moved with attention and care, responding to the land as if they already knew how to listen to it, even though this was their first time there. The work unfolded within a collective ethic of care, supported by others who understood the land not as an attraction, but as a responsibility. The purpose of our return became increasingly clear. This was never about reclaiming homes we were exiled from decades ago. It was about repairing a relationship with land grounded in stewardship and responsibility, a relationship broken by displacement and sustained absence.

The most striking moment came while watching my children eat as they foraged. They trusted the land. They cracked almonds open with stones and tasted them immediately. They picked olives and experienced their bitterness fresh. They made lemonade with water and *humayda* (sour grass) mixing what the land offered with what their bodies needed. They found mushrooms beneath the brush. Hesitation never surfaced. Safety was

not questioned. Their trust was not naive; it was relational.

As a psychologist, I am trained to notice how quickly children assess risk. Their ease was not reckless. It reflected attunement. The land functioned as a co-regulator rather than a threat. This kind of trust cannot be taught abstractly; it emerges through embodied interaction. Trauma research has long demonstrated that memory is carried in the body as well as the mind, shaping how people move, respond, and engage with their surroundings even without conscious instruction (van der Kolk, 2014). Social ecological memory was fully visible at that moment. As Sara Barthel demonstrates, memory persists when ecological practices are enacted, even after disruption (Barthel et al., 2010). Watching my children forage, eat, and work made memory transmission visible without language. History was not being taught. Belonging was being practiced.

Indigenous scholars offer language for what I was witnessing, not as metaphor but as a lived process. Kyle Whyte describes resilience as an ethical relationship with land that unfolds across generations, grounded in responsibility rather than possession (Whyte, 2018). In this view, resilience is not the ability to endure harm, but the ability to sustain relationships that make care possible over time. That framing clarifies why the erosion in Ayn Karim mattered. The land was not failing; it was responding to the absence of a relationship.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson names land itself as pedagogy, where knowledge is transmitted not through instruction but through participation (Simpson, 2014). This was evident as my children moved through Ayn Karim, responding to what the terrain required. They knelt to weed where crops were flourishing, distinguishing what needed to be removed from what needed protection. No one corrected them. They learned by paying attention. Robin Wall Kimmerer emphasizes reciprocity as the foundation of ecological knowledge, reminding us that land teaches through relationship rather than extraction (Kimmerer, 2013). What my children practiced was not consumption without responsibility, but exchange. They took food, tended soil, and redirected stones to protect roots. Ayn Karim was not a passive setting for memory. It responded to care. It offered feedback through consequence.

In Wilson's framework, resilience is a collective inheritance sustained through social memory, learning, and adaptive practice. Social memory does not reside only in stories or identity, but in repeated actions that teach people how to live with land over time. When these practices are interrupted, memory does not disappear; it becomes inactive until it is enacted again.

My children did not participate in restoration as a project. They participated in reactivation. Memory moved through their hands and attention rather than through instruction. The land responded not because it was being managed, but because it was being met in relationship. Familiarity replaced dominance. Attention replaced possession. This is how resilience takes form in Wilson's framework: quietly, through practice that allows memory to move forward rather than remain fixed in loss.

Seen through this lens, the interruption of land-based practice is not only ecological or cultural. It is psychological and intergenerational. Displacement did not simply remove the indigenous population from land; it severed the rhythms through which care and belonging were transmitted. What is carried forward is not only grief, but disorientation. When land-based practices are interrupted, trauma is transmitted not only through stories, but through bodies denied continuity of relationship. In Ayn Karim, repairing land and interrupting generational trauma were not separate acts. They were the same work.

The erosion I witnessed was not only geological. It reflected the breakdown of relationships that once guided care. My children stepped into a lineage of stewardship that predates exile and refuses erasure. They redirected stones by hand, pressed soil back around exposed roots, and weeded where growth needed space. These were ordinary practices that brought memory back into action through doing. In Wilson's terms, this was social memory in motion.

The land of Ayn Karim remembers us. Even when we have never been there before, we

remember how to care for it. Memory survives not because it is preserved, but because it is practiced.

The land did not teach us how to return to it. It had been waiting for us to arrive.

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From Gaza to Sudan: Global Dialogues on Liberation, Mental Health, and Grassroots Resistance

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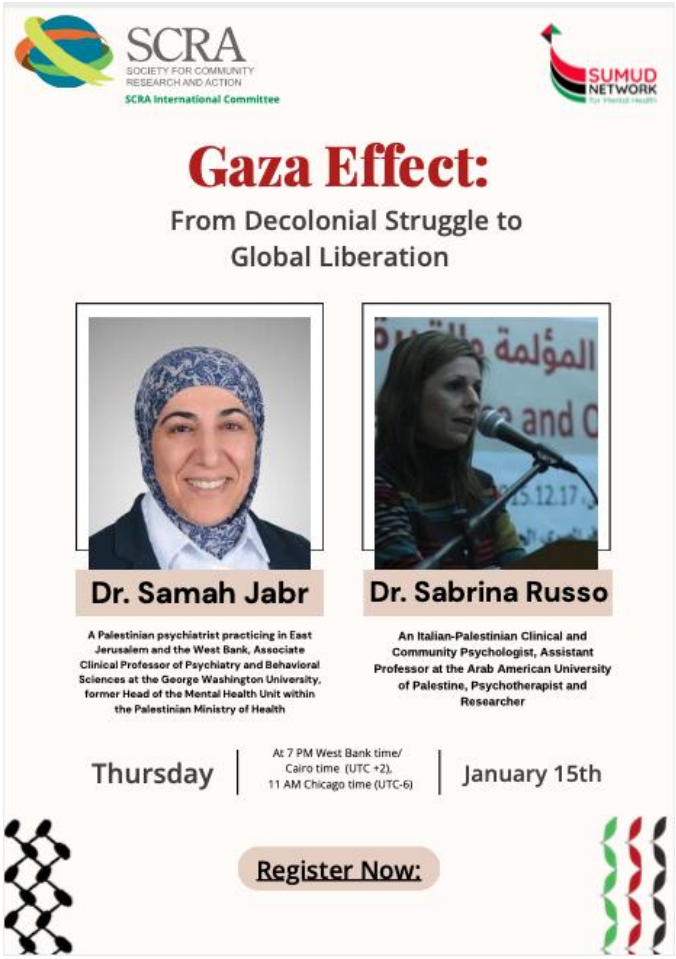
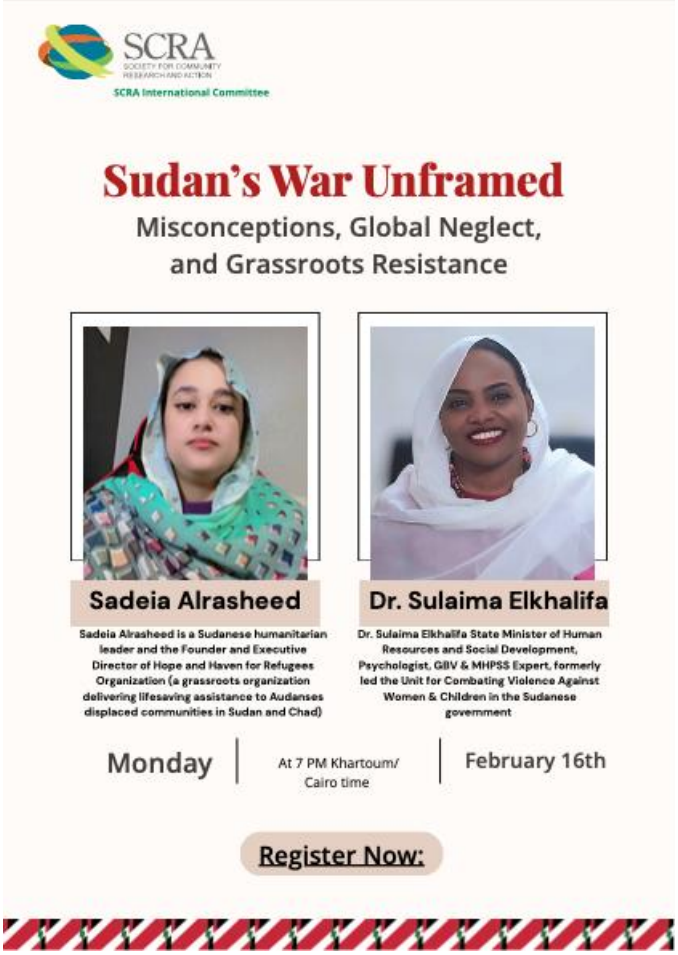
As part of the International Committee's new online dialogue series centering global struggles, liberation, and community-led responses, we convened two critical conversations in January and February that brought together scholar-practitioners working at the intersection of psychology, resistance, and social justice.



In January, the International Committee hosted an online dialogue titled *"Gaza Effect: From Decolonial Struggle to Global Liberation."* The conversation examined the psychological, political, and collective dimensions of the ongoing assault on Gaza, situating Palestinian resistance within broader decolonial and liberation frameworks. Dr. Samah Jabr, Palestinian psychiatrist practicing in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at The George Washington University, and former Head of the Mental Health Unit within the Palestinian Ministry of Health, spoke powerfully about the weaponization of mental health narratives, the psychological impact of occupation, and the role of collective dignity in resistance. Dr. Sabrina Russo, Italian-Palestinian clinical and community psychologist, Assistant Professor at the

Arab American University of Palestine, psychotherapist, and researcher, reflected on community-based healing, intergenerational trauma, and the importance of global solidarity grounded in justice rather than charity. The full recording can be viewed on SCRA's YouTube channel: [The Gaza Effect: From De-colonial Struggle to Global Liberation].



In February, the Committee convened a second dialogue titled *"Sudan's War Unframed: Misconceptions, Global Neglect, and Grassroots Resistance."* This discussion moved beyond surface-level humanitarian narratives to examine the war in Sudan as a collapse of social systems, mental health infrastructure, and international accountability. Sadeia Alrasheed, Sudanese humanitarian leader and Founder and Executive Director of Hope and Haven for Refugees, highlighted the lived realities of displaced communities in Sudan and Chad and the essential role of grassroots, community-led responses in filling critical gaps left by international actors. Dr. Sulaima Elkhalifa, State Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, psychologist, and GBV and MHPSS expert, provided structural analysis on women's leadership, mental health as a peace intervention, and the urgent need to fund and sustain local women-led initiatives. The full recording can be viewed on SCRA's YouTube channel: [Sudan's War Unframed: Misconceptions, Global Neglect, and Grassroots Resistance].

Can Radical and Mainstream Community Psychologists Build Together a Planetary Sense of Community?

Written by Donata Francescato, Professor of Community Psychology, Co-Director ASPIC.

Robert Putnam (2020) documents that in the last 120 years there has been in the United States alternation between: "the society of I", strongly individualistic, socioeconomically, politically polarized, that promotes private and public narcissism and the "society of we", more egalitarian, more collaborative, that values social responsibilities more than individual interest.

Today we should deal with planetary problems, such as climate change, diminishing huge economic and social divides, but excessive individualism has decreased our sense of community. Community psychologists of all theoretical and political backgrounds should build bridges to develop a planetary sense of community. I underline how critical, liberation, decolonization activists of the South of the world and American and European moderates working together could foster brighter futures and help heal our polarized societies.

Critical, Decolonization and Liberation Community Psychologies

Critical theory emphasizes the role of cultural and psychological factors in creating constructed realities that can increase or challenge oppression. Oppression can be internal and external. When oppression is felt internally, a person may become the worst critic of his or herself and feel guilty and powerless. When one understands that perceived problems are created by external social structures, this new awareness fosters resilience and hope that one can fight dominant ideas and enter a path of liberation from oppression.

Building also on feminist theory, critical community psychologists challenge traditional ways of knowing and emphasize the importance of diverse voices and experiences in knowledge production. They highlight the intersectionality of oppression and the need for inclusive and participatory approaches to social change (Stevens & Sonn, 2021).

Several theoretical constructs and frameworks guide both decolonial and liberation practices.

1. Critical consciousness: Rooted in Paulo Freire's work, critical consciousness involves raising awareness about power dynamics, privilege, and oppression. It encourages individuals and communities to analyze and challenge social structures and ideologies critically.
2. Postcolonial Theory: Postcolonial theory explores colonialism's enduring effects on societies and cultures. It underlines the importance of recognizing and addressing colonization's legacies, including power imbalances, cultural hegemony, and epistemic violence.
3. Indigenous perspectives: Indigenous scholars highlight the intersectionality of oppression, emphasize the importance of listening to marginalized voices and experiences, and value local indigenous knowledge. They prioritize understanding and respecting diverse cultural worldviews and knowledge systems. They challenge Eurocentric norms and promote indigenous and community-based ways of knowing.
4. Feminist insights. A special place is also given to both decolonization and liberation approaches in feminist ideas about males' domination over women and the use of violence to force women to submit to patriarchal rules. The feminist theory highlights the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and other identities, emphasizing the importance of addressing multiple forms of oppression simultaneously, since individuals may experience multiple intersecting forms of oppression that shape their experiences and identities (Marcomin & Cima, 2018; Vandana, 1988).
5. Community Empowerment: Both decolonization and liberation efforts often focus on promoting community empowerment and self-determination. This involves supporting communities in reclaiming control over their narratives, resources, and decision-making processes. This approach focuses on building the capacity of communities to identify and address their own needs and challenges, promoting self-determination and collective action. (Carolissen & Duckett, 2018).

Both liberationists and de-colonialists have created pedagogical, political programs to favor liberation from prejudices and to promote the full development of oppressed persons and groups. Moreover, they both favor a "relational epistemology" where individual freedom is less important than caring relations. Indigenous people have always practiced, promoting mutual aid and a sense of community. They argue we should follow these indigenous ways of life, of caring and of accompanying the other and being responsible for the growth of the relationship instead of the ontological separation of human beings, that our "selfie" consumer society preaches through media and socials to convince us we should pursue the beauty of competing with one another (Montero, Sonn, & Burton 2017).

Original viewpoints of decolonization and liberation that we Westerners can use

Decolonization community psychology has explored in depth the consequences of colonialism, which used the concept of race to justify the oppression and discrimination of natives, whose dark skin was a visible sign of their inferiority. They underline that colonial experiences and prejudices still influence contemporary social and psychological dynamics. Colonial experiences are transmitted through collective memory to other generations and they shape the identity and the conscience of colonized people.

Decolonization has underlined the importance of healing historical traumas and fostering reconciliation between colonized and colonizer communities. This requires acknowledging past injustices, addressing intergenerational trauma, and working towards healing and reconciliation processes (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

Liberation theories focus on empowerment promotion, social justice, and liberation from oppressive structures through social action and active participation of community residents. Liberation community psychologists favor the promotion of the rights of women and the demolition of patriarchal norms as a crucial part of social liberation. They fight racism and promote the empowerment of people of color. Moreover, they promote sexual freedom and dignity to people who have different sexual orientations, gender identities, and modes of loving. They aim to achieve a planetary liberation and to rehumanize persons considered inferior and nonhuman in different parts of our world (Montero, Sonn, & Burton, 2017).

We need to dissolve the duality of metaphysical philosophy between body and soul because it is the body that feels, enjoys, and suffers. We need to caress our bodies more to make life bearable in spite of all the suffering that our bodies experience.

The guiding principles that we Western community psychologists can adopt from critical, decolonizing and liberation viewpoints are: epistemic justice, humanization of oppressed people considered less than humans, a relational ontology that promotes care of self and other, conscientization that reveals the tie between social struggles and empowerment, the role of narratives that can promote generative communities, the need to examine historical origins of a problem, giving more voice to narratives of marginal groups, and plan interventions pinpointing at what levels can desire changes be promoted (small groups, territorial organizations, local communities, regional, national, European Union, planetary level).

Recent textbooks confirm that critical community, decolonization, and liberation ideas are now discussed and compared within European and American community psychology literature. Carolissen and Duckets (2018), for example, criticize European and American epistemologies and make a long list of good ideas coming from decolonization literature: refusal to pathologize marginalized persons, rediscovering forgotten historical events, creation of new archives, promotion of new narratives and especially of Indigenous knowledge, using reflexive and ecological modalities.

Other authors (Fernandez et al. 2021) underline the importance of promoting epistemic justice, universality, inclusion of indigenous traditional knowledge, promotion of ethical and historical awareness, and critique the subjective bases of power and privilege, but they especially recommend that we should focus of problems which have worsened in this new 21st century: increasing worldwide racism, class and gender inequalities; the widespread use of violence, and the surge of migrants escaping climate change disasters and armed conflicts.

Manuela Tomai and I (2025) underline in our introduction that in the last decades, a plurality of factors, including the Covid pandemic and spread of media and socials, have increased a global cultural rise of narcissistic individualism at the expense of relational connectedness. We, as clinical community psychologists, think that we need to promote relational ontology that builds care for self and others, downplays the merits of individual freedom, and enhances the values of caring relations, promoting mutual aid and a sense of community.

The power of small groups

Community psychologists are mostly members of small groups who believe very strongly in what they are doing and share their ideas and experiences worldwide. We, as clinical community psychologists (Francescato & Tomai, 2025) believe so much in the power of small groups that in our last book, all the methodologies we proposed were based on small group work: empowering individuals and groups; improving associations and institutions; developing communities; building social networks to increase social support; empowering training for young people who dream for a better future ; promoting affective educations for kids and adults who need to enjoy more positive emotions and deal better with negative emotions like rage, jealousy, envy, which increase episodes of violence against women, children, and migrants.

Putnam (2020) also found that in all historical periods, political alternances have been brought about by small groups, who create experiments from below and build networks to spread the desired changes. Nowadays, many are tired of living in a society that is unequal and violent against women and minorities. Small groups in the United States are organizing large street protests against violent deportation of immigrants, creating a new sense of community. In Europe: Arcidiacono et al. (2021) document how small teams of researchers have found how social sites like Instagram, or other online platforms can also promote a sense of community. They have examined projects that use the web to reach men who tend to use violence against women or use the metaverse to have men become aware of what causes them to lose control of their emotions. Menegatto and Zamperini (2018) investigate the problems of detention and security; Gatti and Procentesi. (2020) explore how Instagram use develops a sense of community in open neighborhoods, and again, Gatti and Procentese (2022) examine the social added value for neighborhood-related social media. In the last two chapters of our last community psychology handbook (Francescato & Tomai, 2025), about forty community psychologists narrate their professional history. Some work with women victims of violence or women forced to become street prostitutes, others bring local volunteers in retirement centers for poor elders. Some innovators create well-being among fighting tenants of condominiums. Most of these projects have been done by small groups of students, supervised by one or two community psychologists.

Several European academic community psychologists have formed international groups in common projects to help the homeless through Housing First (Ornelas, 2008) to improve mental health (Ornelas, Vargas Moniz, Duarte, & Jorge-Monteiro, 2019), to assist persecuted migrants (Esposito, 2017); in fighting climate warming and creating energy communities (Francescato & Tomai, 2025). Other community psychologists try to diminish school dropout, drug abuse, bullism and cyber bullism and promote democracy through circle time and other effective strategies to prevent violent political radicalization (Meringolo 2020).

In Italy we are also promoting Community homes (“Case di Comunità”) in every neighborhood to foster psychological well-being and caring relations. Doctors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists will promote health but also wellbeing, offering a variety of workshops, from yoga, meditation, affective education, and empowering training to forge new futures. Moreover, I proposed these homes could also have actors, musicians, and singers who will run theatrical, singing, and dancing courses. Various studies have confirmed that these workshops promote well-being and a sense of community and develop caring and generative relations (Lavanco & Novara, 2013) that nourish the “we” needed to balance the individualism and the “society of I” that separates us from others.

Moreover, these community homes could diminish the polarization that now prevents people from even listening to different viewpoints. They could be places where citizens, diverse in age, gender, class, and political orientation, can develop the art of feeling well together and create a web of caring relationships among each other. They can be inspired not only by what Indigenous communities have done for centuries but also by what self-help groups and feminist groups have promoted in the last decades (Vandana 1988),

(d'Aubonne 2022). Only if we build places where everyone is welcome, people with different values can begin to talk and listen to each other and take care of both themselves and their communities. In these community homes citizens can find ways to acquire new members for community projects; share different narratives, discuss local issues and global problems like climate change, developing a planetary sense of community that diminishes antagonism among rival identity groups, reminding us of our common humanity and of the frailty of our small planet. Actually, only one community home in Genoa has a singing chorus, and they got started after many people died after the collapse of a bridge.

Do you think activists and mainstream community psychologists can build bridges together? How should we start? Let me know at mc0938@mclink.it

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Practice Council

Edited by Sharon M. Wasco

Community Psychology in Practice: Spotlight on Rev. Dr. Jennifer Hosler

As the inaugural profile in a quarterly feature highlighting SCRA members who are putting community psychology into practice, I am excited to introduce the Reverend Dr. Jennifer Hosler—a pastor, activist, and scholar whose work bridges psychology, ministry, and public advocacy. When I reconnected with SCRA through participation in the Practice Council (PC) in 2022, I had the good fortune of meeting Jenn. While I served as Acting Chair of PC, Jenn was our PC Secretary. In addition to collaborating on PC priorities and supporting the Society's broader practice-focused efforts, we served on a special committee during Dr. Tonya Hall's presidency—the Healing Committee. This work included receiving counsel from community practitioner Dr. Tasha Parker to clarify a vision for next steps. Through shared work in the Practice Council and the Healing Committee, I came to appreciate Jenn not only as a thoughtful colleague, but as a practitioner who embodies community psychology values in deeply grounded and generative ways.

Hosler's work bridges community psychology, ministry, and public engagement. Serving as a pastor in Washington, D.C., she brings psychological insight into spaces not typically associated with the field, combining scholarship, pastoral care, and advocacy. Her leadership has been recognized nationally: *Sojourners* named her one of "12 Christian Women Shaping the Church in 2025" for her work in peacemaking, justice, and public witness (https://sojo.net/articles/12-christian-women-shaping-church-2025). She has traveled to Palestine on a solidarity delegation in 2024, witnessing the effects of displacement and advocating for Palestinian Christian liberation theology. In January 2025, she spoke at the People's March in Washington, D.C., affirming that "justice and dignity are connected, because migrant lives, Black lives, Palestinian lives, trans lives, Jewish lives, Muslim lives, all of our lives are connected, beloved and precious, worthy of dignity and care." Most recently, she traveled as part of a group of national faith leaders to Minneapolis in January 2026, standing with local communities to monitor ICE activity, support neighbors facing federal enforcement, and demonstrate the power of persistent presence. These experiences illustrate how community psychology principles—

empowerment, collective care, and social justice—can be enacted across local, national, and international contexts.

Within her congregation, Hosler models how psychological concepts can support community reflection and resilience. She fosters critical engagement with systems of power, violence, and displacement, encouraging communities to recognize connections between personal, structural, and collective wellbeing. Whether through preaching, mentoring, or organizing, she emphasizes presence, accompaniment, and solidarity over saviorism, translating theory into tangible practice.

Hosler's public engagement extends beyond her congregation. In addition to her program evaluation work, she leads nonviolent civil actions calling for peace and the protection of civilians, supported congregations welcoming asylum-seeking families, and joined interfaith efforts to protect vulnerable communities. In Minneapolis, she witnessed federal agents targeting immigrants while organizers delivered grassroots medical care, coordinated food distribution, and maintained communal safety practices. Reflecting on the experience, she noted, "Much of resistance is mundane, keeping persistent presence amidst ordinary life, until crisis comes… but there are miracles each day: grassroots medical care, congregational safety practices, community food deliveries, and so much more." By embedding herself in these moments, she amplifies voices, supports community-led solutions, and demonstrates the real-world enactment of community psychology values.

Rev. Dr. Jennifer Hosler exemplifies the potential of community psychology in action: integrating scholarship, faith, and public advocacy to accompany communities, resist injustice, and cultivate care and hope. As the first in this new quarterly feature, her leadership reminds us that community psychology is defined not by setting or title, but by how we show up, amplify community strengths, and act with courage and compassion in the world.

Click here to see Jenn in action (https://www.instagram.com/revjennphd), learn about her practice (https://revjenn.phd), and to read a selection of her recent sermons (https://washingtoncitycob.org/tag/jennifer-hosler/).

Prevention and Promotion Interest Group

Edited by Susana Helm, University of Hawai'i

IG Co-Chairs: Toshi Sasao, Aomi Kuwayama, Shizuka Yanagii, and Susana Helm

The Prevention & Promotion IG column of The Community Psychologist highlights P&P resources as well as the P&P work of community psychologists and allied professionals, including students and community members. Please also visit our PP.IG webpage on the SCRA website.

In this issue, we introduce the incoming column editor Dr. Priscilla Dass-Brailsford, and the 2026-2027 assistant editors, Abeera Chaudhri & Kayla Rogan (Table 1, self-introductions below). Abeera

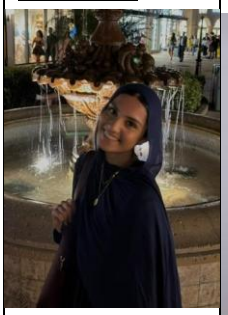
is bilingual in Urdu, so please feel free to submit in that language, too.

Please email incoming column editor Dr. Brailsford with your column submissions – a brief report on your prevention and promotion activities, P&P resources we may list here, or other column inquiries and ideas.

In addition to introducing the incoming column editor & editorial assistants, we are including a brief article on the "Relational Design" process for establishing and supporting community partnerships and collaborations.

Incoming Column Editor and Assistant Editors.

Table 1. Incoming column editor and editorial team.

Dr. Priscilla Dass-Brailsford 2026 Incoming Column Editor	Abeera Chaudhri 2026-2027 Editorial Assistant	Kayla Rogan 2026-2027 Editorial Assistant
		

Priscilla Dass-Brailsford, incoming column editor

I am a clinical psychologist and faculty member in the Department of Psychiatry at Georgetown University. My work is grounded in community-engaged and action-oriented scholarship that examines the psychological and social consequences of trauma, violence, abuse, and structural adversity, by particularly focusing on how individuals and communities from historically oppressed or stigmatized groups experience trauma, navigate culturally specific stressors, and mobilize resilience and healing practices. Prior to entering academia, I coordinated collaborative, community-based responses in the aftermath of community violence and collective trauma in Boston MA. This applied work continues to shape my participatory research approach and commitment to translating research into practice.

Abeera Chaudhri, incoming editorial assistant.

I am an undergraduate student studying Global Public Health and Forensic Health at Binghamton University. On campus, I serve as President of the Muslim Student Association and am the founder and former president of the Global Public Health Association. My research focuses on the cytotoxicity and proliferation of epithelial cell lines exposed to various biofilm-releasing agents. Outside of academics, I work in an emergency department and volunteer at a methadone clinic. I have a strong passion for understanding the intersections between healthcare accessibility, addiction, and community health.

Kayla Rogan, *incoming editorial assistant.*

I am a student at Binghamton University studying Biological Sciences and Health and Wellness. From my 1st semester to 3rd semester at Binghamton University, I was part of Binghamton's First-Year Research Immersion (FRI) program, which allowed me to gain research exposure within the field of Community and Global Public Health. I now serve as a Peer Mentor for the FRI program. On campus, I am the secretary of Binghamton Aiding Hearts, which is a volunteer organization dedicated to supporting the elderly community and patients at hospitals and rehabilitation centers and the events coordinator for the Biological Sciences student organization. Through my academics, research, and leadership experiences I have developed a strong passion for prevention and promotion, with the goal of improving health awareness and education at the individual, community, and global levels.

Brief Report

Relational Design: An Overview for Prevention, Promotion, and Healing Systems

Written by Susana Helm, Jane Onoye, & Tai-An Miao, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Department of Psychiatry

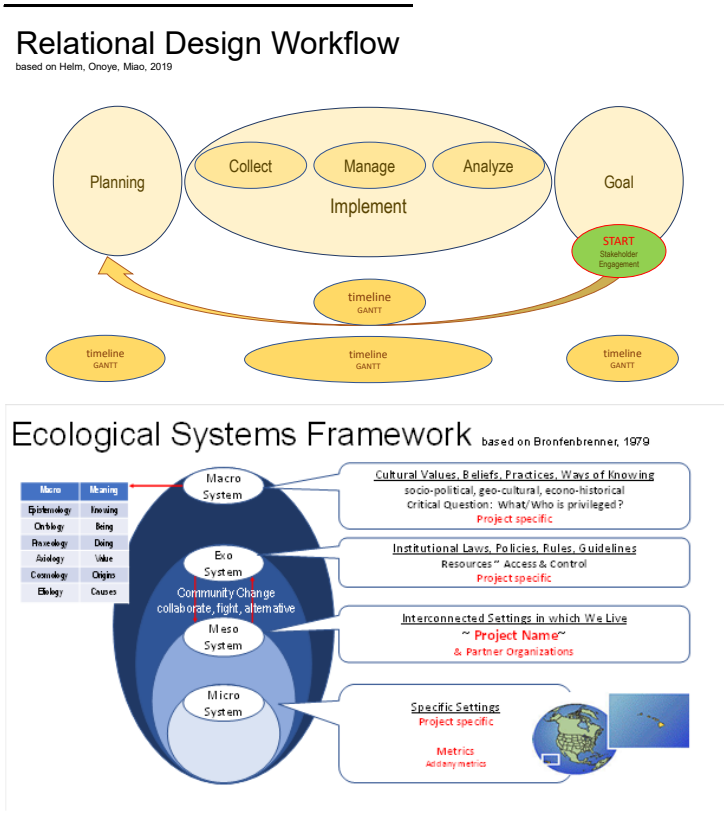
Relational Design (RD) is a process we developed as a three-member team of academicians in a medical school research division, which uses an entrepreneurial business model for partnering with organizations beyond campus in our efforts to improve prevention, health promotion, and healing in Hawai'i. Broadly, we are/have been contacted by public agencies and non-profits in our state to assist them with a variety of research, evaluation, grant-writing, and other organizational development activities aimed to improve public health practice and policy. In 2018, in an effort to improve our business model we conceptualized Relational Design. Essentially, RD is a way to explain that our partnership will be based on establishing and maintaining relationships grounded in our collective work. We wanted potential clients to know that our work style involves significant engagement, in the true sense of partnering. In other words, we want to ensure that our partners' goals are met; while also meeting our own professional goals and aligning with our principles of practice. We further explain that to do this, we develop a mutually beneficial understanding of our respective goals prior to formally agreeing to partner. This type of engagement continues throughout the prevention, promotion, and healing systems project so that we all may remain dynamically flexible as contexts change throughout our progress.

While this process may be obvious to community psychologists, it is not de rigueur for community-academic partnerships. In fact, in the inaugural issue of *Progress in Community Health Partnerships*, the editors emphasized the importance of partnerships due to the (then) recent rise in community-based participatory research (Tandon, *et al.,* 2007). As most community psychologist are familiar, CBPR is both participatory and action oriented. Traditional academic research strategies that are not participatory jeopardize durability and relevance beyond the study period when initiatives move into the real world of everyday application. *PCHP* journal was established to uplift CBPR as strategy in public health, particularly when academics partner with communities. Relational Design is one way of initiating and maintaining the tenets of CBPR.

Our relational design team business model was to conduct community based participatory action research and related activities, not only by engaging stakeholders potentially impacted by the action, but also importantly by doing the work in partnership with the client (state agencies, non-profits). For Relational Design, we have identified at least three sets of stakeholders. The first stakeholder is the client, in our case, that usually refers to the entity that has hired us, i.e. state or county agency, or a local non-profit organization. The second stakeholder is the community or communities impacted by the action desired by the client-partner. In this way, the community are the intended participants in CB/PAR. And the third stakeholder is the relational design team. There are a number of possible Venn diagrams of these three stakeholders, such that client-partner and the community-participant may overlap, and there may be overlap with the relational design team and either or both of the client-partner and community-participant. In any case, for relational design, it is important to make these three stakeholder distinctions. Partnership and participation are not the same thing. However, often in community engaged prevention the concept of partnerships and participation are conflated or used interchangeably, and this can be confusing, misleading, or disingenuous.

In Figure 1, the focus is on engaging the potential client-partner. The starting point is for the potential client-partner and the relational design team to clarify the goal through a series of conversations. These conversations highlight a variety of client-partner resources, such as timelines, funds, and scale-scope of project; as well

as sharing a broad view of ecological systems thinking embedded in relational design (Figure 2). These conversations lead to a relational design plan. In our case, the plan often is mixed methods, tiered to include community-participants representing a variety of interests, and includes workshops and other forms of engagement and participation of value to community-participants. We map the design plan onto the ecological framework to make further distinctions about complex issues. Upon sharing the relational design plan with the potential client-partner, additional points of clarification are made, and a formal agreement (partnership) is established (e.g. grant, contract, service agreement). Planning continues during a start-up phase, so that the relational design team may prepare materials, organize staff, and coordinate other resources in consultation with the client-partner, and often also in consultation with the community-participant. Ideally, our relational design team may hire staff from (or representative of) the community-participant stakeholder.



Next, the project is implemented, with distinct periods for collecting prevention, health promotion, and healing focused data; managing data; and analyzing data with an ecological backdrop. We have found that it is helpful for client-partners to understand that their engagement will align with our workflows, and vis versa, across each of the three data-oriented aspects of the specific research, evaluation, grant writing, and other organizational development initiative.

Finally, we often are hired to produce written reports to signify the client-partner goal has been met, or because it is a required document for the client-partner's internal work. As academicians, where professional currency may be narrowly defined as peer-reviewed publications, we clarify our intentions for peer-reviewed publication during the initial goal-setting phase of relational design so that it may be included in our formal partnership agreement. At this point, collectively we clarify the parameters for peer-reviewed publication. Similarly, we also emphasize our stance in CB/PAR, in that the work is returned to the community-participants in formats they want. This may include workshops, webinars, curricula, community intervention grant writing, among others.

Conclusion. We have found that Relational Design is useful beyond community-academic partnerships. For example, we have used it internally for allocating departmental resources, such as staff time, for helping students to develop their dissertation and thesis proposals, and for faculty-initiated projects. We also promote the use of Relational Design among private consultants working with public and private clients who endeavor to engage in prevention, promotion, and healing systems with community groups. Our RD strategy may be usefully applied by community organizations or public agencies when seeking a partner for research, evaluation, grant making, or other organizational development initiative. Our relational design strategy may be useful for community coalition boards, such as that described by the Morehouse School of Medicine Prevention Research Center (Piper, *et al.* 2025).

We welcome feedback on how you may use Relational Design in your work, and we are particularly interested in evolving the model as it is

used in other contexts: please contact Susana, Jane, or Tai-An with your ideas.

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Student Issues

Edited by Michael Pandu Patria, Sanata Dharma University; Emmanuel-Sathya Gray, National Coalition of Independent Scholars

Closeness, migration, sibling bonds, storytelling, and body mapping: 2025 Student Grant recipients share progress on community research & action projects

For this Spring 2026 issue, we share grant reports composed by the student recipients of the 2025 SCRA Student Thesis/Dissertation grants. Each year, Student Representatives petition for funding to go to student research projects to provide opportunities for career advancement and support the excellence of emerging community scholars. Ultimately, we offered awards to six excellent critical proposals, several of which focus on the experiences of women of colour (including Black women specifically), and other marginalized populations inclusive of Venezuelan migrants, trans and non-binary youth, and children of incarcerated caregivers. Students report preliminary findings as well as challenges, including hiccups with ethical review approval, funds held up in institutions, and fraudulent responders. They met each challenge in turn, staying in communication for ongoing support or flexibility. Collectively they document experiences of post-carceral relational closeness, experiences of treacherous migration and new life, sibling bonds with trans and non-binary youths, and the use of storytelling and body mapping to understand Black women's experiences.

Please join us in celebrating this year's cohort of student grant recipients— a snapshot of the future of the field. We encourage students seeking funding for thesis or dissertation work (whether undergraduate, master's, or doctorate), to join the SCRA student listserv to stay abreast of future opportunities. Email us at StudentReps@scra27.org to request to be added! Additionally, check out the call for proposals which will be updated when new funding is approved: https://scra27.org/who-we-are/students/student-research-grant/.

We will be looking for submissions again for the Summer 2026 issue (theme to be determined). This is a great opportunity to publish, build your CV, as well as gain publicity for your work. The soft deadline for the Student Issues column of the Summer issue is April 15th.

Rebuilding Bonds Family Communication and Parent-Child Connection During Reentry

Written by Erin Vines, University of Florida

Background and Research Questions

My dissertation builds from an ongoing youth participatory action research (YPAR) project

conducted in partnership with youth with lived experience of parental incarceration (Abraczinskas et al., 2022). In their project, youth identified a key gap in support: the need for better family communication across all stages of incarceration, including reentry, when a parent returns home from jail or prison. Through surveys and focus groups, youth spoke about wanting better communication with their families, emphasizing the importance of honesty, building trust, and developmentally appropriate conversations about incarceration (Taddeo et al., 2024). They also talked about how communication affected their wellbeing and family relationships–both positively and negatively–and how, since every family's experience is different, there is no one-size-fits all approach.

Guided by these insights, my dissertation centers youth voices to better understand how family communication shapes parent-child relationships during the reentry process, a key transition that presents both opportunities and challenges for parent-child connection (Gottlieb & Mahabir, 2022). Although communication-focused interventions and programming for incarcerated parents exists (Lovell et al., 2020), they rarely focus on reentry and often frame communication as a problem to be fixed instead of recognizing the potential communication strengths families already have. Additionally, most research in this area centers parents' perspectives and experiences (Venema et al., 2022), leaving their children's experiences largely unexplored. As a result, programs and interventions to facilitate successful reentry rarely reflect the needs and insights of the children of formerly incarcerated individuals. My dissertation addresses these gaps and asks:

1. How does parent-child communication promote or inhibit parent-child closeness as they navigate their parent's reentry?
2. How does communication within the broader family system (including the non-incarcerated parent) promote or inhibit parent-child closeness during parental reentry?

Methods

To explore these questions, I used the retrospective interview technique (RIT) and turning point analysis (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Golish, 2000) to explore communication around key moments that shaped youth's (ages 18-25) relational closeness with their formerly incarcerated parent. Sixteen of twenty interviews have been completed to date. Each participant created a turning point graph to map key events, conversations, or experiences that shaped their relationship with their parent, starting right before reentry and continuing to present day. These visual graphs served as a data source, elicitation tool, and guide for the interviews. Each participant engaged in a semi-structured, 60-90 minute interview (via Zoom or in person), describing each turning point and reflecting on the communication dynamics involved. The attached images show examples of participant turning point graphs. These graphs show a wide variety of relationship trajectories and have been powerful tools for reflection during interviews. The data was analyzed using grounded theory approaches and constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Straus & Corbin, 1998), with themes developed based on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984).

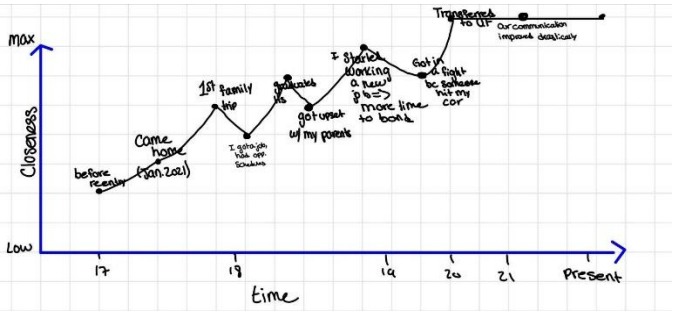
SCRA Grant Support

Support from the SCRA grant has been absolutely vital to this work. Aside from a small subscription to Otter.Ai for transcription, all funds have gone directly to participants to compensate them for their time, insights, and emotional labor–something I view as an ethical imperative. Remaining funds will be used to compensate youth during member checking interviews to review

findings and ensure that themes are grounded in their experiences and represent them accurately.

My main challenge has been institutional barriers. Because my funding went to participant payments, it needed to go through my university so that I could use their participant payment system. However, my university accidentally deposited the funds into my personal bank account, which led to a bureaucratic maze of reimbursement. As it turns out, it is surprisingly difficult to send money back to a university! This led to delays, but I was ultimately able to figure it out, with the help of many amazing staff members at my university.

Preliminary Findings



Analyses are ongoing, but preliminary findings reveal four key themes around parent-child communication patterns that shape closeness during reentry. Communication served as a way to build (or strain) trust, renegotiate roles, and make meaning of the relationship after incarceration. Youth reflected on communication that helped them feel close to their parent, and what got in the way. These were not usually big or dramatic moments—oftentimes it was the small, everyday interactions that became turning points.

Across all themes, two key insights emerged. First, youth agency was critical. Closeness grew when youth had control over what was discussed, how fast reconnection happened, and what boundaries were in place. Second, structural factors shaped communication. Barriers like addiction, mental illness, and economic hardship often disrupted communication, highlighting that supporting family connection must also mean addressing the broader conditions families face.

1. **Open Communication:** When parents engaged in honest, youth-centered conversations about the past, struggles, or incarceration, it often helped rebuild trust and deepen understanding. In contrast, when families avoided difficult topics, youth were left to process things alone. Openness, however, needed to be on the youth's terms. Some described feeling overwhelmed when parents over-disclosed, pushed too hard, or shared distressing details before youth were ready.
2. **Relational Role Behavior:** Closeness often increased when parents stepped into everyday parenting roles—teaching youth to drive, helping with problems, or even just sending them home with food. These moments, even when small, made youth feel cared for and supported: "She would send us home with a bunch of food…Even though I wasn't seeing her throughout the week, there were many ways that she was still caring for us, so I felt very close with her." On the other hand, some youth were not ready for their parent to immediately jump back into a parenting role, especially after years of absence. Others found themselves needing to taking on a lot of emotional or logistical care for their parent during reentry, which led to a complicated closeness that could strain relationships: "the relationship was close, but only because I was filling a role that wasn't mine, like, parenting my parent…And as I got older, I started to get burnt out from it, and I started to realize this isn't normal."
3. **Emotionally Supportive Communication**: Youth described moments of emotional affirmation, including expressions of pride, acceptance, or comfort, as especially powerful for rebuilding connection. These did not need to be grand gestures--it was about consistency and presence:

"It's like cliche, but just like, I feel like being able to have someone, specifically your mom, to be able to just call whenever being like, Hey, mom, like this happened to me. Like, it's just really nice. For a lot of my life I couldn't do that…And even if it's just like stupid things and small problems that aren't a big

deal like she'll be like, yeah, tell me what's going on."

4. **Relational Maintenance and Repair:** Relationships were actively maintained and repaired through shared rituals, forgiveness, and simply showing up. At the same time, youth also emphasized the importance of boundaries. For some youth, maintaining closeness required less communication, not more. For others, distance was necessary to protect their wellbeing—especially when the parent was still struggling: "I definitely think for my mental health, it was good when I didn't talk to her…it's still the good choice because she's still not sober, she's still making bad decisions"

Stay tuned for themes around communication behaviors within the broader family system that impact parent-child closeness! I am deeply grateful to SCRA for supporting this work and to the young people who have generously shared their stories.

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Wellbeing, Resilience, and Trauma During Migration: A Mixed-Methods Study of Venezuelan Migrants in Transit

Written by Margaret Port, National Louis University

When the United Nations was established in 1948, representatives from around the world collaborated to develop the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR; OHCHR, 2023). This document identifies several human rights determined to be deserving of universal protection. One of these is the right to seek asylum in another country if an individual faces persecution in their home country (United Nations, 1948, art. 14). This inalienable human right is just as relevant today as

when the UDHR was developed in the aftermath of World War II. At the end of 2024, nearly 125 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of persecution, violence, and disasters (UNHCR, 2025). Of these, nearly eight million were from Venezuela (R4V, 2025).

Venezuela is experiencing a widespread humanitarian crisis that has occurred because of a combination of factors such as economic mismanagement, hyperinflation, and an authoritarian government. This has forced many Venezuelans to leave the country. Although most Venezuelan migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers (henceforth referred to as migrants) initially fled to neighboring countries such as Colombia, many began migrating further north to the United States. Venezuelan migration to the United States has increased dramatically in the past decade, peaking in 2023 with nearly 500,000 migrants arriving in the U.S. (USCBP, n.d.). This is notable due to the difficulty of the migration from Venezuela to the U.S. Spanning about 3,000 miles and seven countries, migration through the Darien Jungle and Central American migration corridor is fraught with physical and psychological challenges that could negatively impact individuals' post-migration outcomes.

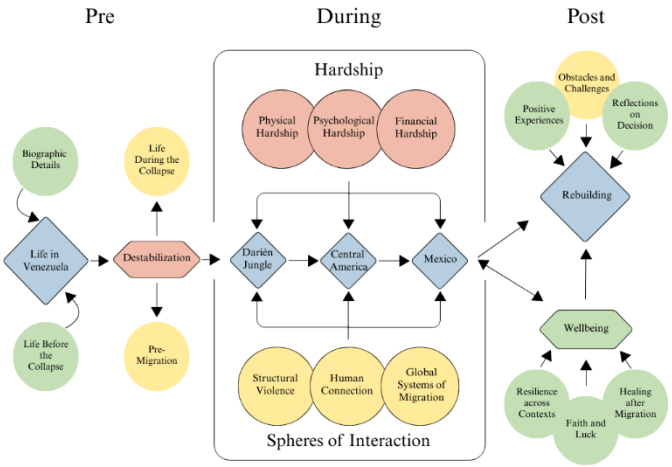
Although a significant body of research exists on the psychological impact of experiences preceding and succeeding migration, little research has been conducted on the psychological toll of the migration experience itself. Additionally, due the relative novelty of the Venezuelan migrant crisis and the migrant community's arrival in the U.S., the impact of their unique migration was not well studied. Thus, I felt that it was critical to better understand their migration experience and how it might have affected their wellbeing. This could inform the support and resources the community needs to reach a state of flourishing in their new home.

My dissertation project had four research aims, two of which were qualitative in nature and two quantitative. This report will focus solely on the qualitative portion of my research. The primary aim of my dissertation research was to gain a robust understanding of the migration experience of Venezuelan migrants, focusing on the migrant community in Chicago, IL. I also examined what the global community can do to support migrants during their migration.

Methodology and Data Analysis

My study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, beginning with a quantitative survey followed by a qualitative interview. All participants were Venezuelan adults who had recently arrived in the U.S. I received complete surveys from 202 individuals and completed interviews with 14 of these survey participants. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and were recorded to ensure accuracy. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and translated into English using Sonix.AI. I analyzed the interviews for themes using a grounded theory approach to coding. I had three distinct phases of coding (open, axial, and selective) which ultimately yielded six themes with 16 subthemes.

Results



The themes identified in the participant interviews can be conceptualized as shown in the included Migration Experience Model. Participants often described a peaceful life that was destabilized by Venezuela's economic crisis and societal collapse, leading to them choosing to leave the country. Participants encountered physical, psychological, and financial challenges throughout their long and arduous journeys along the Central American migration corridor from Venezuela to the United States, often made worse by elements of structural violence. They interacted with the global community through receiving services from aid organizations and experienced moments of human connection with other migrants and locals alike. After months or years spent migrating, participants entered the United States and begin rebuilding their lives and making meaning of all they had endured. The themes are described in greater detail below.

Life in Venezuela: When asked about their lives before the collapse in Venezuelan society, participants often described a peaceful and quiet life, one from which many had never before desired to leave. They also shared information about their backgrounds, such as what jobs they held and where they were from.

Destabilization: Participants often identified that life began to change shortly after Nicolas Maduro succeeded Hugo Chavez as president of Venezuela, beginning around 2014. Participants described deteriorating conditions in everyday life and many recounted instances of political violence. Others noted how traumatic it was to not have the food and resources they needed, particularly if they had children who they struggled to feed. This led to individuals ultimately deciding they had to leave Venezuela. Though many knew things were becoming increasingly unlivable over a period of time, the ultimate decision to leave was often very quick, typically because there was an extortionate demand for money from police or government workers that they knew they could not meet.

Hardship during migration: Participants universally told their migration story chronologically, beginning with their arrival in Colombia and preparation to cross the Darien Jungle. They discussed a seemingly endless list of challenges. The physical hardships were inextricably intertwined with psychological challenges. In particular, many participants mentioned the trauma of seeing dead bodies or witnessing others die, the pain of making one's children suffer, and the demands of migrating across Mexico. Finances were a constant concern, as the migration cost money every step of the way. Participants borrowed money, worked jobs along the migration route, and begged to raise the money to continue.

Spheres of Interaction: Participants spoke about their interactions with other communities and systems. Many described being exploited or extorted along the way, a common occurrence due to corruption and the connections between cartels and migration authorities. At the same time, they also described positive encounters with other migrants and locals, receiving support even in the most challenging circumstances. They discussed their experiences with aid agencies, particularly the UN, the results of which were mixed. The impact of CBP One appointments was apparent, as this largely dictated the experience participants had when entering into the U.S.

Rebuilding: Participants with school-aged children almost invariably said that the best thing about being in the U.S. had been their children's experiences in school. They also mentioned how quiet and peaceful life was in the U.S., echoing the way they described their lives in Venezuela before the Collapse. However, life in the U.S. was not all positive. The primary challenges mentioned were still living in a migrant shelter and not being able to make enough money or being allowed to work.

Despite these challenges, most participants said they had no interest in returning to Venezuela and felt that their migration was worthwhile despite everything they had endured.

Wellbeing and meaning making: When asked if they were familiar with the concept of resilience, participants gave mixed responses. However, all understood the concept once a definition was provided. They quickly brought up examples of how they have been resilient because of what they have persevered through. It was clear they conceptualized resilience as an outcome rather than a predictor, saying they had not been resilient before because they had never been challenged as they were during their migration. Participants spoke about their faith frequently, mentioning their reliance on God and trust in his plan. This was intertwined with their understanding of resilience, as trusting in God and continuing on no matter the hardship they encountered was a common sentiment**.** They discussed ways they are making meaning of their experience so far, mentioning feeling blessed to be able to send remittances to Venezuela and seeing their children thriving. Very few had spoken with a therapist, but many expressed a desire to do so because they had been through so much and needed to begin to move forward.

Overall, the information shared by participants provided a rich and detailed understanding of the migration experience of the Venezuelan migrant community and offered insight into how the global community can better support migrants along the migration route.

Research in Context

I began my data collection in January 2025, shortly before the presidential inauguration, and completed it in June 2025. This was a time of great uncertainty for many immigrant and migrant communities in the U.S., and the trust, generosity, and willingness that members of the Venezuelan migrant community afforded me was greatly appreciated. I hope that through my research I can be a responsible and impactful steward of their stories. Thanks in part to the SCRA student research grant, I was able to compensate the individuals who participated in my research, which felt ethically necessary and morally right in light of all that they gave me.

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Exploring Sibling Support for Trans and Nonbinary Youth

Written by Noelle Martin, Michigan State University

For trans and nonbinary (TNB) youth, a safe and affirming family and is associated with lower levels of depression, fewer suicide attempts, and higher life satisfaction (Campbell et al., 2024; Gower et al., 2018; Price & Green, 2023; Simons et al., 2013). In fact, familial support may be more influential on TNB people's health and well-being than support from peers or one's community (Puckett et al., 2019). However, much of the current research on family support for TNB youth is incomplete, failing to encompass sibling relationships (Barras & Jones, 2023; Pflugeisen et al, 2023; Puckett et al., 2019; Ross-Reed et al., 2019; Weinhardt et al., 2019).

Siblings are universally important members of the family system across cultures (McCandless-Chapman, 2024; McHale et al., 2013), and in the US, approximately 82% of youth under 18 live with at least one sibling (McHale et al., 2012). Sibling relationships are often the longest lasting relationship a person has in their life (Cicirelli, 1995). This bond can be vitally influential across the lifespan, and when these relationships are supportive, they can produce enduring socioemotional benefits (Cicirelli, 1995; Howe & Recchia, 2006; Milevsky, 2005). TNB youth can potentially benefit from this relationship, but siblings are not guaranteed to be supportive. Therefore, it is vital to investigate the sibling relationship from the perspectives of both TNB youth and cisgender siblings, to understand the factors that result in supportive bonds.

There is limited understanding of how sibling relationships may act as a system of support or social safety for TNB youth (Klepper et al, 2024). Therefore, for my master's thesis project, I chose to explore this sibling relationship through the lens of participatory focus groups with both cisgender and TNB siblings. The purpose of this study is to use Youth Generate Organize (GO), a participatory modification to typical focus groups (Stacy et al., 2018), to answer the question: what do safe and supportive sibling relationships between TNB youth and cisgender siblings look like? Additionally, in a scoping review of the limited research on sibling support, Klepper and colleagues (2024) noted that many cisgender siblings do not feel like they have access to the information or resources they need to best support their TNB siblings. Therefore, a secondary aim for this research is to inform the creation of resources for cisgender siblings of TNB youth about how to support TNB siblings. A second research question that guides this study is: what information do TNB youth and cisgender siblings wish was available to support their relationship?

Accomplishments and Challenges

One accomplishment of this study was successful engagement with my team's community advisory board (CAB), composed of local TNB individuals. I led a meeting with my research team and our CAB in which I explained my project, asked people to attempt to answer my initial prompts, and then suggest edits or feedback to the prompts. I incorporated all the CAB feedback to finalize the prompts I would use for the focus groups. By involving community members in early stages of the research process, I was able to ensure that my prompts were relevant and understandable.

Following the finalization of my materials, I ran into my first challenge for this project: getting IRB approval. For this project, I requested a waiver of parental consent for any 16- and 17-year-old participants, because this can be a barrier for many TNB young people who may or may not be able to talk about their identity with their caregivers. It can often be difficult to get IRB approval for this wavier of parental consent. Additionally, the IRB had concerns about protecting people's confidentiality in the context of a focus group. In response to their initial concerns, we made our privacy protections clearer, requiring the use of pseudonyms and verifying that participants were joining the video call from a private place. We originally submitted this study for IRB approval in June, and after months of communication back and forth, we eventually got IRB approval in September. This long waiting period severely changed the expected timeline for this project.

From the start of this project, I planned to recruit up to 70 youth from across the US to participate in focus groups. I planned to conduct 10 sessions with a goal of seven participants each. Half of the sessions will be conducted with TNB youth (ages 16-24) while the other half will be held with supportive cisgender siblings of TNB youth

(ages 16-30). Five focus groups with each of the siblings groups should be sufficient for ensuring data saturation (Hennink et al., 2019). To recruit these youth, I have implemented a broad and multifaceted recruitment strategy, sending emails to LGBTQ+ organizations to ask if they would be willing to share my study, posting flyers up in person, and sharing flyers in private Facebook groups. Unfortunately, within a week of opening my screening survey, I received hundreds of fraudulent responses. This caused an immediate roadblock in my recruitment. Fraudulent responders are a common experience when recruiting online, but hinders outreach to marginalized groups especially who may be hard to reach via other methods. To mitigate this problem, I created a new version of my screener to share in future recruitment efforts, and asked organizations I contacted to refrain from posting on social media. Due to this obstacle, and the fairly specific population I aim to include in my study, recruitment has been slow. I have received 1,187 screener responses to date. Through a rigorous screening process to evaluate the legitimacy of responses, which has taken an extensive amount of time, 55 responses were judged to be potentially legitimate. I contacted these individuals and 33 responded as interested in continuing forward in the study. Due to the age range of my participants, many of them are in school and have been recently dealing with final exams, causing many of them to reschedule their focus group participation. Despite these challenges, I have thus far conducted two focus groups with a total of 10 youth, using 100% of the funds distributed to me by this grant. I am in contact with the 23 other young people to schedule them for a focus group in January. The two groups that we held ran smoothly.

Preliminary results

After conducting these two initial focus groups, I have rewatched the recordings and completed analytic memos about both the content and process of the focus groups, tracking my original assertions about the data and reflecting on my facilitation skills (Saldaña, 2021). Some of the extremely preliminary themes generated during our first focus group encompass the idea of autonomy laying at the intersection between support from siblings within social dynamics and support demonstrated on a closer relational level. Our second group highlighted how cultural differences impact their relationship and type of support people receive from their siblings. As I run the remaining groups, my next analysis steps are to start the creation an overview grid, to summarize the main findings from each focus group, to allow for comparison across groups, and to foster the development of assertions about the data (Knodel, 1993).

Impact and Significance

This grant has allowed me to pay my focus group participants. One of my core values as a community psychologist in training is valuing the time and expertise of the individuals who participate in my research, and this is especially vital when working with members of trans and nonbinary communities, who have been historically (and presently continue to be) exploited by researchers. Valuing the expertise of participants is even more important within the context of these focus groups, because the participants are involved with the data analysis of their own experiences. Involving participants in the analysis of their own responses is an important strength of the Youth GO method, because even within community-engaged participatory research, community members are rarely included in the analysis step of the research process (Jacquez et al., 2013). The immediate impact of this study is that participants so far reported enjoying the focus groups and received adequate compensation for their time.

I anticipate the results of this study will illustrate what the support and informational needs are for TNB youth and cisgender siblings within the context of their sibling relationship. Additionally, I think the results of this study will demonstrate the spectrum of sibling relationships across different facets of intersectional identities and family characteristics. I believe these findings will be useful for revealing how the sibling relationship between TNB and cisgender siblings could be reinforced as a source and support and strength.

Following the defense of my thesis, I will present these findings at a conference and publish them in an academic journal. I believe this study

will be useful to future researchers seeking to understand family dynamics and the role of protective factors in TNB people's health and well-being. Furthermore, this work could pave the way for future interventions to promote healthy and affirming sibling relationships. The findings may also be useful for clinical practice, such as helping cisgender siblings to develop affirming relationships with their TNB siblings.

In addition to this, I will use the results of this study to create a resource geared towards siblings of TNB youth who are looking for information online. These findings can be used to foster more supportive relationships between cisgender and TNB siblings, improving family connectedness and feelings of social safety within families, thereby reducing the mental health deficits between TNB individuals and the general population. Without this exploration into the relationship between TNB people and their siblings, knowledge of support systems for TNB youth will remain incomplete.

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Where Do We Go From Here? Black Women's Well-Being At PWIs in a Post-Covid-19 Context

Written by Guerdiana Thelomar, University of Miami

Project Purpose & Aims

The 2020 racial justice movements forced many higher education institutions to issue long overdue and short-lived pledges for greater inclusivity. Yet, systemic inequities in higher education persist, particularly for Black women at predominantly white institutions (Ezell, 2021; Ncube et al., 2022; Patton et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Studies have shown that Black college students are more likely to experience discrimination, isolation, and marginalization compared to their peers (Hurtado et al., 1998; Haynes et al., 2021). Attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) may further exacerbate these experiences (Strayhorn, 2009; Patton & Ward, 2016). Black women have historically faced compounded stressors due to

gendered and racialized marginalization (Rosales & Person, 2003; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these disparities, with Black women reporting heightened psychological distress (Spencer, 2023). Despite these challenges, higher education research often overlooks within-group variations among Black students, particularly women (Patton & Ward, 2016). Emerging studies show that Black students' experiences during the pandemic were uniquely challenging, marked by heightened social, economic, and psychological distress compared to their peers (Douglass et al., 2021; Kalinowski et al., 2022). Black youth experienced increasing rates of mental distress during this time (Kohn-Wood, 2022; Williams & Cooper, 2020). The alarming trends underscore the urgency of addressing how systemic factors within higher education contribute to Black women's mental health challenges.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand what mental health resources and strategies young Black women are utilizing to cope and persist while navigating PWIs as students in a post-COVID-19 context. Centering Black undergraduate women and their narratives, this constructivist study was rooted in the Black feminist tradition of storytelling. By centering the experiences of Black women and utilizing a Community Psychology principles of mattering and belonging, I, as the researcher and a Black woman who has attended a PWI throughout my postsecondary educational journey, aimed explore the ways in which navigating a PWI in a post-COVID-19 context affects young Black undergraduate women's well-being. The Sistah Circles Methodology (SCM) is what was used to give validity to Black women's experiences as primary sources of knowledge and therefore disrupt more traditional forms of epistemic frameworks (Evans-Winters, 2019).

Research questions:

1. How do coping and resilience manifest for Black, undergraduate women attending PWIs? What strategies are being employed by students in this population to navigate their educational journeys?
2. What are the experiences of Black, undergraduate women utilizing the mental health resources available at PWIs?
3. What ways can higher education institutions invest in a comprehensive strategy to better support the Black, undergraduate women in the current educational landscape?

Methods

Participants were Black/African American undergraduate women attending a PWI in Miami, Florida, recruited through non-random sampling via flyers, emails, word of mouth, affinity-based student organizations, and outreach through various campus departments to ensure maximum variation sampling. In total, 33 students were recruited to participate in the Sistah Circles and completed the initial intake form. A total of 19 students ultimately participated across three in-person Sistah Circle sessions, with the remaining students noting their lack of attendance was due to scheduling conflicts, prior commitments with other campus activities and events, and class.

Data was collected using the Sistah Circles Methodology (SCM), a qualitative, African-centered, Black feminist focus group approach that centers Black women's ways of knowing, community care, and collective meaning-making (Johnson, 2015; Jones et al., 2023). SCM is culturally specific and is part of a long tradition of African-centered practices that prioritizes community care, self-care, and spirit knowledge, specifically for Black women (Croom et al., 2017). African-centered approaches of community gatherings to share stories and support one another play integral roles in Black people's overall

mental health (Evans-Winters, 2019). A structured Sistah Circle Protocol was created with semi-structured, open-ended questions and a safety protocol to address participant distress. Sessions were audio recorded with consent, supported by trained research assistants serving as notetakers, observers, and transcribers. A two-step informed consent process was implemented, with confidentiality, data access, storage, and destruction procedures clearly communicated.

Data Analysis

The Sistah Circles were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), informed by coding techniques from Corbin and Strauss (2014), to identify themes that captured participants' lived experiences. Analysis included pilot study transcripts, three recorded Sistah Circle sessions (with data saturation reached after three sessions), intake form responses, and researcher memos. A multistep process of open coding, development of code families, and axial coding using ATLAS.ti. was used along with iterative comparison, reflexive memo writing, collaboration with research assistants and content experts, and member checking with participants. 50 initial codes and 10 axial codes were ultimately synthesized into three core themes aligned with the research questions. The analysis was guided by Black feminist theories of intersectionality and critical race feminism, alongside the community psychology theory of mattering, to center participants' voices, examine intersecting identities, and construct counternarratives that illuminate Black women's well-being and sense of belonging in higher education in a post-COVID-19 context.

SCRA Student Research Grant Support

The SCRA Student Research Grant supported the data analysis phase by funding participant compensation for the member-checking process. After analyzing the data from the three Sistah Circle sessions, emerging themes were shared with participants and they had the opportunity to provide feedback. For their participation they received $25. Grant funds were also used to purchase an ATLAS.ti subscription, which helped in facilitating systematic coding and theme development. Additionally, funds supported the purchase of updated technology used for transcription, qualitative data analysis, and the writing of the full dissertation manuscript.

Study Findings

Three core themes emerged: coping and resilience, experiences with campus mental health resources, and the need for support beyond superficial institutional efforts. Coping and resilience was the most expansive theme, highlighting participants' efforts to navigate a PWI during and after COVID-19 while balancing leadership responsibilities, community care, and self-preservation amid sociopolitical stressors and feelings of being unseen. Participants described a paradox of being highly involved yet feeling undervalued, illustrating how resilience often required managing personal well-being alongside responsibility for their communities. Participants also reported limited use of campus mental health resources due to barriers such as lack of cultural representation, discouraging intake processes, and insufficient cultural competence amongst counseling staff. Instead, they relied on informal support networks including peers, family, and older Black women on campus. The findings underscore persistent challenges of superinvisibility and exclusion, while also revealing participants' adaptability and reliance on community-based support in the absence of affirming institutional resources.

Finally, participants called for meaningful, sustainable institutional change, critiquing performative diversity efforts by their university and advocating for transparent decision-making, increased Black faculty and staff, and stronger support for affinity spaces. Grounded in a Black feminist framework, the study affirms that Black women's well-being matters and highlights Sistah Circles as a culturally responsive approach for fostering wellness, centering Black women's voices, and advancing equity in higher education.

Significance

This study affirms that Black women's well-being matters and calls on higher education institutions to take responsibility for the commitments they made toward pursuing meaningful, systemic transformation that centers

inclusion and support. Researchers can utilize Sistah Circles as a tool for data collection, bridging storytelling as a means for knowledge generation and the practical pursuit of equity within higher education environments. The findings emphasize how social identities such as race, gender, & class, and context shape experiences of marginalization and resilience. Themes like coping, the need for affinity spaces, and the superinvisibility felt at a PWI all echo for resistance. Institutions, researchers, scholars, practitioners, must continue to care about Black women's well-being. Despite the challenges, Black women continue to enroll, organize, lead, challenge, heal, and succeed. And we're not going anywhere. Institutions must commit, now more than ever, to dismantling the systemic invisibility of Black women and girls in education, honoring our existence and ensure that we can thrive without sacrificing our well-being.

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Tracing the Pain, Mapping the Healing: An Arts-Based Exploration Study of Black Women's Lived Experiences with Postpartum Depression

Written by Adelaide Swanston, Wilfred Laurier University

The perinatal period is a very challenging time for mothers as they navigate physiological, psychological and sociological change, subsequently many childbearing women report experiencing postpartum depression during this time. Postpartum depression (PPD) is a non-psychotic depression that can occur any time up to the first year following childbirth, characterized by deep feelings of sadness and hopelessness that mirror symptoms of major depressive disorder (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2016). In the U.S., emerging research on PPD in populations of colour have found that in comparison to white women, the prevalence of PPD in Black women is around 10% higher (Bossick et al., 2022). Medical racism, socio-cultural stigma, and misogynoir have all been identified as factors contributing to these disparities. Misogynoir, originally coined by Moya Bailey and further theorized by Trudy, describes the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience on a personal, social and institutional level (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). There is an amalgamation of negative stereotypes and visual representations of Black women in mainstream media posing a public health concern because of its critical impact on medical treatment practices (Bailey, 2016). As an example, Black women managing PPD symptoms receive 75% fewer referrals to counselling and treatment compared to their white counterparts (Emole, 2023).

In 2018, the Government of Canada released a survey to learn about the mental health of Canadian mothers who recently gave birth. Statistics Canada (2019) found that almost one

quarter (23%) of mothers reported feelings consistent with PPD. However, very few Canadian health agencies collect and report racial data especially pertaining to women's health (Women's College Hospital, 2024). The absence of standardized race-based health care data hinders the ability of Canadian researchers, practitioners and policy makers to identify and address factors contributing to the PPD disparity in Black women (Dayo et al., 2022; Women's College Hospital, 2024). These ongoing issues have resulted in a gap in academic research that highlights the lived experience of Black women managing PPD in the Canadian context.

The purpose of my master's thesis is to raise critical awareness towards the experience of postpartum depression for Black Canadian women via artistic expression amongst the general public, Black focused social service providers, and maternal health researchers. My research aims to contribute to ongoing efforts towards filling the gap in academic literature surrounding the challenges and needs of African, Caribbean, and/or Black (ACB) identifying women with PPD living in the Canadian context. One of the major objectives of my research is to accurately communicate the unique reality of managing PPD as a Black woman. To do this, I plan to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Black women with PPD perceive their depression?
2. What beliefs do Black women have about the way their family, communities, institutions, and larger society perceive their PPD?
3. How do these perceptions relate to the impact PPD has had on their life as Black women?

Procedure

Body mapping is the primary research method for this study. Body mapping is an artistic embodied method in which participants create life-sized drawings of their bodies and creatively adorn them with various images, words, and phrases that tell a story of the emotions and feelings they perceive through their body (Jokela-Pansini, 2021). Participants will engage in five 2.5 hour weekly body mapping sessions facilitated by Adelaide. These sessions will involve group discussion about personal, societal and cultural attitudes towards motherhood and PPD, as well as support systems and social structures that act as barriers to or promote symptom management. Following each discussion participants will be provided time to work on their individual body maps and will be prompted to include reflections relevant to the sessions' discussion.

Ethical Considerations

Over the past four months, this project has undergone a full research ethics board review. Through this intensive process, I've had to think more intentionally about the impact of this research and whether the chosen method is most suitable for the research question. This has raised broader questions for me surrounding the use of arts-based methods in mental health research. It is absolutely necessary to approach this project with a critical systems focused lens given the body of research indicating the prevalence of misogynoir and medical racism Black women encounter during their transition to motherhood. Body mapping has its roots in social justice activism, promoting participants' reclaiming or voicing a new preferred view of their body, thus questioning negative assumptions inherent in dominant western narratives (Jager et al., 2016). For these reasons, body mapping has been the most suitable method for this project in order to develop a strong conceptual framework. In the ethics review process there was extensive discussion on whether the level of reflection that is required of an individual when effectively engaging in body mapping poses a risk to the mental well-being of Black mothers navigating PPD. While body mapping can provide a space for a more critical reflexive approach to mental health research the labour of introspection and reflection required of participants can't be ignored.

Budget, Student Research Grant, and Next Steps

The financial support of the SCRA 3035 student research grant has been instrumental to ensuring this project is ethically sound. Grant funding has allowed me to adequately compensate

participants for their time and labour involved in the body mapping process. Grant funds will largely be allocated for participant compensation while the remaining third will be used to compensate a therapeutic supporter who can assist participants with navigating long-term mental health support resources. As I now begin the recruitment phase of this project, I am eager to understand through the artistic process of body mapping how the perceptions of Black women, who live within the Canadian context, towards PPD have been informed.

For additional conversation and collaboration please reach out to swan0360@mylaurier.ca

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