

Research Article

BEING IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE: A REFLEXIVE CASE STUDY OF ANTI-COLONIAL RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AT THE CREEK AND THE UNIVERSITY

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This reflexive case study examines two university-situated scholars interested in supporting under-resourced communities' access to resources and sociopolitical power. In our Participatory Action Research (PAR) work with children in the US, we face paradoxes and tensions while marshalling university resources to support our under-resourced community partners while also supporting the development of university students involved. Using the frameworks of infiltrator experience, accompaniment, and desire-based research, we critically reflect on our positionalities and research team operations. This analysis provides insight into how we might work against coloniality of the US-based academy while maintaining a connection to it.

Keywords: university student development, Youth Participatory Action Research, anti-colonial research, tensions

1. Introduction

Given the history of the academy and the use of formal education as a tool of colonization, it is no surprise that coloniality continues to influence education and knowledge production. Yet education, formal and alternative, has also been a mechanism for liberation (Freire, 1998; hooks, 1994). As two university-situated scholars interested in supporting under-resourced communities' access to resources and sociopolitical power – not as saviors but because our fates are intertwined with that of our community partners' – we face tensions in marshalling university resources to support under-resourced communities and their desires for community and social change. In this reflexive case study, we engage with those tensions, describing our collaborative knowledge-creation and community-change work with children and our engagement with academia via Participatory Action Research (PAR).

A note about language: We use anti-colonial rather than decolonial to describe our work (Langhout et al., in press). This is important to us because we are from differing and intersecting positionalities, strive to be in solidarity with those most directly impacted by coloniality and recognize our interconnectedness. Together we commit to work against coloniality despite our differing relationships to it (Langhout et al., in press).

In our work, we highlight decolonial scholars of color in the US to better understand our collaborative project of solidarity across difference. By using the term anti-colonial to describe our own work, we problematize the use of some decolonial concepts by Erin who has benefitted from settler colonialism. We feature this because our participatory project builds upon decolonial

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ways of being and knowing. We also acknowledge the structure of this paper may reflect academic imperialism. The style highlights knowledge verified through the peer reviewed publication process, reifying colonial structures. This format could be taken to suggest some forms of knowledge (i.e., scholarly) are more valuable than others (e.g., experiential, practical). Nevertheless, we intend this paper to surface tensions experienced in the academy and provide insight for faculty engaging in anti-colonial practices alongside students and community members from various social locations. Even choices about writing illuminate the tension of enacting the anti-colonial project of being in two places.

One way we try to enact an anti-colonial orientation in research is by working against epistemic injustice and centering epistemic justice. Epistemic injustice is a feature of some research in which communities, especially those experiencing oppression and marginalization, are dismissed as knowers of their own experiences (Fricker, 2007). To resist and transform this colonial legacy, epistemic justice is a radical reformulation of knowledge production to interrogate and expand who counts as a knower and what counts as knowledge (Dutta et al., 2023; Quayle et al., 2016).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be an approach to epistemic justice. PAR illuminates collective lived-experiences and shared histories, promote dialogue and action, and democratize knowledge creation (Montero & Sonn, 2009; Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2022). PAR positions community members as agents in knowledge construction and action to disrupt injustice in local contexts; participants are researchers and change agents related to topics that impact their lives and communities. PAR has liberatory and anti-colonial potential because it challenges what counts as knowledge and who can produce it. PAR can question canonical and hierarchical knowledge structures, suggest academics do not have a monopoly on knowledge nor sole control over its production, and value community members as experts (Vaccarino-Ruiz, et al., 2022; Dutta et al., 2023). Community members, children especially, are typically excluded from the power to create knowledge (Langhout & Thomas, 2010).

PAR (YPAR when with youth) is notable for its potential for sociopolitical and personal development (Lykes et al., 2018; Thomas & Rappaport, 1996; Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2022). Often operating as a partnership among university-situated (i.e., university faculty and students) and community-situated researchers (i.e., participant researchers or co-researchers), PAR can prove to be a powerful learning experience for all involved.

PAR can be an important professional development activity for undergraduate- and graduate-level scholars when used as a pedagogical approach and training opportunity (Dancis et al., 2023). Students experiencing PAR in their formal education learn with and from community co-researchers. As such, PAR practitioners concerned with disrupting power dynamics likely experience tensions around development. We should ask: Whose development is prioritized, how balanced is the focus on capacity-building for university-situated scholars and community-situated scholars? To what degree is the critical, liberatory, and political nature of PAR lost when there is an intentional focus is on development for university students? When providing PAR as a learning opportunity within the university curriculum, are we prioritizing university student learning outcomes over community power-shifting opportunities? Indeed, US-based participatory scholars and others have been concerned about the co-optation of PAR via the university, warning of the dangers of diluted, de-politicized participatory inquiry (Fine & Torre, 2021; Peralta, 2017; Ritterbusch, 2019).

PAR is impactful when it works to understand and address injustice, centers epistemic justice and promotes goals of social transformation (Dutta et al., 2023). Thus, the political nature of PAR is crucial and must be held alongside efforts of development and capacity-building for both university-situated and community-situated researchers. This way of knowing and doing can be consequential at individual, relational and collective levels when collaborative knowledge-creation is centered, and learning and action remain politicized (Dancis et al., 2023).

Developing the capacities of university-situated and community-situated researchers while also centering transformative knowledge creation that addresses the legacies of coloniality is no small task. This is especially true when operating from the field of psychology, considering mainstream psychology's commitment to hegemonic ways of knowing (i.e., post-positivistic research designs; Keast, 2020). Thus, working within academia and against coloniality via a non-dominant epistemological stance (i.e., PAR) is another tension surfaced while engaging in social justice-oriented work from that position. Decolonial frameworks including infiltrator experience (Tran, 2023), accompaniment (Sonn et al., 2024; Watkins, 2015), and desire-based research (Tuck, 2009) can help us better understand tensions and think strategically about how to disrupt colonial legacies from within the university. The next sections take these frameworks in turn.

2. Infiltrator Experience

Infiltrator experience refers to experiences of underrepresented students and faculty in US-based university settings. Drawing on W.E.B. DuBois' double-consciousness, Nellie Tran (2023) reframes the idea of imposter phenomenon, moving away from deficit constructions assuming the individual has not yet fully assimilated (i.e., has not yet been welcomed into) to the Eurocentric academic setting and instead positions the underrepresented scholar as agentic and savvy (Tran, 2023). The infiltrator maintains a double-consciousness allowing them to navigate the academy and its intersecting systems of oppression while maintaining positive self-regard towards the ends of transforming oppressive systems, including academia (Tran, 2023). Rooted in experiences as an African American man in the US during the late 1800s, DuBois' double-consciousness suggests that oppressed people understand themselves as valuable and worthy human beings while recognizing this is not affirmed by the structures through which they move and by which they are oppressed (Tran, 2023). The skill and psychological fortitude involved in maintaining this duality can be strategically employed for self-preservation, mutual aid, and/or social change.

Double-consciousness theory persists into the present US context, influencing popular and academic literature (e.g., Coates, 2015; Collins, 2013). Working both "against and within" oppressive systems (Attalah & Dutta, 2022; de Sousa Santos, 2018; Tran, 2023), the infiltrator resists assimilation and maintains their true self; this helps sustain wellbeing and build power within oppressive systems while strategically working to disrupt them (Tran, 2023).

When considering mainstream psychological approaches to knowledge production, the infiltrator framework may suggest that infiltrators gain competency in the dominant epistemological stances and therefore methodologies that valorize control, detached observation, objectivity, and purported universal Truth. The infiltrator framework does not necessarily devalue contextualized, local, engaged, and change-oriented knowledge (e.g., PAR) in

the way that dominant, mainstream psychology may. The infiltrator framework applied to epistemology might suggest underrepresented scholars learn and apply multiple paradigms of research and their attending methodologies strategically.

3. Accompaniment

The infiltrator framework was forged out of experiences of those most impacted by coloniality: people of color. For example, Tran writes from the perspective of the daughter of Vietnamese refugees in the US. Thus, the infiltrator experience, however helpful for those interested in anti-colonial efforts in the academy, may not apply to white academics in the US, regardless of our feelings of exclusion in the academy based on other axes of difference (e.g., social class, gender, sexuality). The framework of accompaniment may be useful to illuminate anti-colonial practices and pathways for those of us with white skin privilege.

Accompaniment can be understood as solidarity, a way of being alongside those most impacted by oppressive forces. The idea emerged from Liberation Theology in the Latin American context (i.e., Goizueta, 1995). Accompaniers must decenter their safe and privileged position to journey with those experiencing poverty or other conditions of coloniality (Watkins, 2015). Accompaniment “can produce solidarity between community and those positioned within the academy, across hierarchies of race/class/gender/ethnicity” (Sonn et al., 2024; p. 6). In youth-adult partnerships (e.g., YPAR), age is another hierarchy to consider. The accompanier can be outside of the group and occupy a position of more privilege and freedom than those they seek to accompany. Horizontal relationships characterize this approach; it requires the professional to decenter their position as the expert, and to decenter hegemonic ways of knowing broadly.

Accompaniment suggests that university-situated researchers, especially those in a tenure-track or tenured position, loosen ownership over the role of the knower. University-based scholars (i.e., faculty, students) must listen closely, witness oppressive conditions, offer support, and put their resources behind community-defined solutions rather than define solutions themselves (Watkins, 2015). Accompaniment harmonizes with PAR approaches in that the accompanier(s) can travel alongside and share resources with community members who seek to make changes in their community through collaborative research. This approach destabilizes the mainstream role of the expert and expands the kinds of research that is produced within, outside of, and against the academy. Accompaniment applied within academic and community settings has transformative potential because it shifts power in terms of who counts as a knower, who provides solutions, and the actions that follow.

4. Desire-Based Research

Accompaniment applied to research aligns well with a desire-based framework. US-based indigenous scholar Eve Tuck (2009) criticizes damage-centered research, understood as research that focuses on harms sustained by communities via oppression. The critique suggests this type of inquiry, although employed with intentions to leverage resources, reinscribes a disempowering, deficit view of communities (Tuck, 2009). These approaches are often ahistorical

and focus on the problems of individuals and families, as opposed to addressing oppressive structures (Tuck, 2009). A damage-centered approach implies that community members are broken and cannot contribute to determining solutions or imagining collective futures (Tuck, 2009). An alternative to damage-centered research is a desire-based framework; these approaches take contexts of racism and colonization into consideration while also documenting expert knowledge, wisdom, hopes, solutions, and dreams of community members (Tuck, 2009).

This desire-oriented approach suggests epistemologies and methodologies that represent a fuller, embodied human experience that includes the many contours, complexities, and contradictions of being human (Tuck, 2009). It affirms local community members have dreams for their communities, valuable wisdom to share, and should have a say in the research process, aligning with PAR paradigms and disrupting dominant ones. Desire-based research should be mutually beneficial for community and university partners alike.

Taken together, these frameworks provide a basis for critical inquiry into our roles as university-situated researchers working in collaboration with community-situated co-researchers in a YPAR project. Using frameworks of infiltrator experience, accompaniment, and desire-based research, this paper describes our experiences in the YPAR research process, illustrates how the research process operates, and highlights some of the complexities of our approach.

First, we provide context on the YPAR project that is the setting of this reflexive inquiry. Then we provide author positionality to call attention to who we are in this contextualized collective project, which we connect to accompaniment and infiltrator experience. Next, we describe the structure of our research team. We consider desire-based frameworks as part of the context and intention of our collective work. We also discuss the overarching tension of how we approach YPAR from two places: with a desire-based PAR framework as well as more mainstream social science data collection to support community change and infiltrator capacities, discussing how an approach of two layers of research helps us achieve our dual goals of university student success and contributions to community change. Examining these experiences through the lens of decolonial and anti-colonial frameworks, we offer insights relevant for university-affiliated researchers seeking collective liberation and disruption of colonial structures.

4.1 YPAR Context

Rooted in critical, liberatory and anti-colonial research paradigms, we collaborate with predominantly Asian American and Latine fourth through sixth grade children in Citrus Creek¹. The Creek, a waterway and central feature of the neighborhood, is the beating heart of this place-based project. After a series of community organizing and environmental justice campaigns (i.e., defeating a gas company's attempt to store natural gas beneath homes, reinstating a closed bus route), neighbors decided to organize for their desires, resulting in a plan to restore the Creek and develop a pedestrian and cycling path. Improvements to low-income areas contribute to potential displacement, thus, a neighborhood coalition spearheaded by the local Community Land Trust (CLT) is working to prevent it. Using Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), our collaboration contributes to these ends in the form of child-generated knowledge, public communication about

¹ All proper names have been changed in the interest of confidentiality.

the needs and desires of community members, strengthened relational ties, “people power”, and stewardship of the Creek.

4.2 Author Positionality

This paper examines how we are in two places at once, literally and figuratively, which includes being within the academic structures of our university, and working alongside community members, thus our positionality is crucial to understanding this inquiry. Erin is a tenured professor and white woman from a working-poor background, and Melissa is a post-master’s scholar and Mexican American woman who grew up in a bilingual low-income family. The following presents our reflexive narratives as related to the YPAR project, and being in two places.

Erin

I am a white woman from a low-socioeconomic background. Being raised in poverty shapes my approach and lens to scholarship that focuses on wellbeing, power, race, gender, and class. My background, as well as my current perceived socio-economic (i.e., middle class) and professional status (i.e., professor) undoubtedly influences the ways in which I interact with students and co-researchers in the research process.

My social class background, in some ways, helps me connect with historically underrepresented students, first generation students, Pell Grant eligible students, and others who come from financially precarious backgrounds. We have (some) shared lived experiences shaped by a lack of financial resources and meritocratic false narratives about low-income people in the US that suggest poor people are responsible for their position. Pell eligibility, a proxy for very low-income status, is used by many higher education institutions in the US to illustrate the economic makeup of their student body (Steinberg et al, 2009); our university reports 48% students were Pell-eligible in 2024 (CSU Sacramento, 2025). I was drawn to my university, within the broader public system often called “the people’s university”, precisely because our student body reflected a similar social class background to my own but also a cultural and racial diversity aligned with that of California. Notably, the faculty population is less reflective of the cultural and racial diversity of our students (CSU Sacramento, 2025); our administration is taking steps to resolve this, however hampered by state and federal law. Since faculty social class background data are not collected, we can only assume that there is also disparity in representation along class lines, however no steps are being taken to expand social class representation among faculty. As a formerly Pell-eligible student, I find lines of similarity and difference, and work to be in accompaniment with my students now that I have achieved a higher income-level.

One of the ways that I work to accompany my students, typically with shared social class backgrounds and across cultural and racial differences, relates to (mis)conceptions about research. Many students I see in office hours are interested in becoming therapists because they want to help people. They see themselves possessing good listening skills and like to work with humans. They want a clear path to professionalization to become upwardly mobile. When we talk about their interests in terms course selection and creating a portfolio that will help them achieve their goals, almost all the students I speak to have zero interest in research. Our curriculum, however, requires a sequence of two lower-division courses in statistics and methods, an upper-

division course that incorporates both statistics and methods, and another upper-division course (from a selection of courses) on methods or advanced statistics. I speak with them about methods courses that might be of interest, my program of research and that of some of my colleagues. I encourage them to get involved in credit-bearing research experiences for the capstone requirement. When they tell me why they are not interested in research, their stories almost always parallel mine.

When I was an undergraduate student, I understood “research = statistics”. I understood methods as highly controlled, lab-based and/or number-crunching enterprises that are context-stripped and dehumanized. I envisioned researchers as much different from myself. I wanted to be involved with people and promote change. After 4 years in a career of youth and community development via school and community settings, I joined a master’s program where I learned about community-engaged research, action research, evaluation research, and PAR. I was floored! I could listen to peoples’ stories and center their desired solutions to community problems. I could remain involved with community members and produce knowledge. I could support community organizations and accompany young people in their social justice agendas and development. I could have fun and be around people who I felt were a lot more like me than some of my classmates and professors. This was so impactful that I went on to pursue a PhD and made it part of my mission to change (mis)conceptions about what counts as research, what forms of knowledge are worthy, who can be involved in producing knowledge, and how fun and impactful for the community research can be. Since engaging students in my program of research, I have heard many stories like mine, suggesting I have been successful in this regard.

Another way I approach accompaniment in working with my university students and our child co-researchers connects to how the world sees us. This has changed for me as I aged and professionalized, to be sure. Coming from a low-income community and as the daughter of a single mother, I remember being treated as a potential problem to be prevented, or a current problem to be fixed. I received food subsidies (i.e., free and reduced lunch, FRL) at a public elementary school that had segregated lunchrooms (i.e., children on FRL went to one room, other students to another). I was labeled by school authorities as a troublemaker and was sent to the social worker. I internalized the shame of being poor, thinking there was something wrong with my family and me, yet felt righteous indignation and worthiness. I had something to contribute to the world. When I had opportunities to engage in solving community problems, I thrived. Since becoming involved in youth and community work, I have aligned myself with strengths- and desire-based approaches that center the expertise of local community members. I bristle at research that pathologizes people, their families, and communities, or positions the university-based scholar as the sole expert.

I choose to identify my path as one of accompaniment and feel reluctant to claim an infiltrator experience because my relationship to coloniality is predominantly one of privilege. My middle-school years were formative, marked by a change to Catholic school where Franciscan sisters taught us about Liberation Theology, the preferential option for the poor, and that people of meager means (like many of us) were not to be blamed for our circumstances and indeed could have agency, meaning, and impact through projects of social justice. My cultural upbringing was heavily influenced by my Irish heritage. I was interested in the colonial relationship of Ireland and the United Kingdom, captivated (and continue to be) by stories of Irish liberation. I wrote about the Troubles in Northern Ireland (ongoing at the time) for my high school senior thesis. My

interest in human rights, anti-colonial efforts, decolonial ideas and action, community organizing, and grassroots peacebuilding emerges from this trajectory.

My position as a white woman now coded as middle-class in the US means that I also benefit from colonization. I currently live on the unceded ancestral lands of the Awasas-speaking Ohlone people, and work on the unceded traditional land of the Nisenan, Southern Maidu, and Miwok peoples. My relationship to the land, and the ways of knowing and being I embody, are not indigenous to the places I inhabit, yet I have no fear of being deported from it. My European heritage puts me in alignment with dominant epistemologies of the academy; even when I bristle at extractive and pathologizing methodologies, I am still centered in university settings as a white person, an expert, a knower. I have assimilated to the academic writing styles expected of me, and my contributions are verified through peer review publications. My access to resources as a tenured faculty member further instantiates this relationship. I benefit from and have become a representative of an institution that I critique and want to transform. I am standing in two places.

There are many ways in which my students and I, and the children we work with, differ, which offers opportunities for me to develop skills of accompaniment. Students and children are integral to my program of research on community wellbeing and empowerment because as co-constructors of knowledge, they provide insights based on their experiences in the social world. I learn with and from them, my learning enriched because their experiences often differ from mine. This promotes an expansive and inclusive learning experience that is more impactful relative to social change. Although I do not claim infiltrator identity, I accompany my students on their infiltrator path by providing opportunities for them to develop mainstream and anti-colonial, desire-oriented research skills.

Melissa

I entered the YPAR setting as a graduate student researcher and coordinator of the university team leading the program. With access to university resources such as degree credit and pay for doing this work, I earned an advanced degree. Although my childhood and current neighborhoods are similar in some ways, I am already on the path to upward mobility with an income and level of stability beyond that of my parents. This is a trajectory set into motion by sacrifices made by my parents.

As an adult in this adult-child partnership, I grapple with being an authority figure while understanding and learning from the children's perspective; I grapple with the potential for research being extractive, or taking from communities, even though we work to reduce power asymmetries. When I say something in the YPAR setting, I know I will be heard, but I want the children to hold that power when they share their perspective.

My cultural and class background, as well as my gender, impact my interactions, access, and research in this setting. As a first-generation Mexican woman, I grew up in a multiracial neighborhood from a low-income family in Southern California. Like many of our child co-researchers, I grew up in a low-income neighborhood and a dual language household, learning English and Spanish at the same time. My Spanish fluency gave me the opportunity to engage Spanish-speaking children in conversation, translate, and support their involvement during weekly YPAR discussions. These activities are related to infiltrator experience and accompaniment. Scaffolding co-researchers' involvement in participatory research

(accompaniment) can contribute to disrupting academic structures that may make people like me, and our Spanish-speaking child co-researchers, feel unwelcomed in academia (infiltration). By providing a supportive culturally responsive relationship with an adult, I scaffolded their access to the power of knowledge construction. Indeed, Spanish-speaking child co-researchers seemed more inclined to discuss in groups when a Spanish-speaking adult was nearby. Supporting child co-researchers is a form of accompaniment; given my position of relatively more power and access to rights and resources, I can work in solidarity with children and support their desires and dreams.

As a child, I was told that *calladita te vez mas bonita* [quieter, you look prettier]. I was not given a chance to be heard or be asked for my opinion to benefit any space that I was a part of. As an adult, I have carried this with me to change my own narrative that *educada me veo mas bonita* [educated I look prettier]. I have actively sought out and created opportunities where my voice can be heard and where I am invited to share my expertise. This has been particularly important as I navigate spaces of higher education, where I continuously strive to affirm my presence and contribute to meaningful conversations.

In higher education this has been a challenge. When I became a graduate student after being out of school for a few years, I felt out of place. This changed over time, and I began to recognize that, although the university was not designed for people like me (i.e., a first-generation Mexican American brown woman from a low-income background) I could envision a reason to persist. I engaged in practices that reminded me of my purpose. I thought, in the future I could teach someone like me, and they might feel like they belong because they see someone from their background in an academic space. I realized I was not the only one feeling out of place and found people who would become my academic family in my cohort and research team. We challenged and supported each other, and helped each other stay true to ourselves, our commitments and why we were there in first place (i.e., resist assimilation). For me, that was to develop professionally and find career opportunities and contribute to change within higher education in the US. I thought of myself as intentionally coming into the system to disrupt a space that I did not see myself in to begin with, to change it for others for whom my story resonated. I pursued this path for my family and culture. No one from my family nor anyone I knew who looked like me had done it. Why not me? As a child, I learned community-building through food and discussion. I imagined myself as a *profesora* who invited students into my office hours with a welcoming spirit, engaging discussion, and *pan dulce*.

Doing research in collaboration with community members, I felt like our research team was positioned as outsiders within the graduate program. There were rarely other researchers (students or faculty) who understood our approaches. Sometimes I felt the need to over-explain to be understood. The coursework was quantitative-heavy; the introductory methods seminar had one chapter on qualitative methods on the reading list. Some classes assumed access to quantitative data sets to complete the coursework. It was clear that qualitative methods were on the margins, and decolonial and/or liberatory methods (e.g., participatory methods) were even further afield.

These experiences impact how I work with our co-researcher children because my commitment to inclusive and diverse perspectives has helped me to create a supportive YPAR learning environment. Moreover, my own re-written narrative *educada me veo mas bonita* has

led me to seek opportunities to support children in growing their confidence to speak and be heard. I hope the children will find spaces that are conducive to re-writing their own narratives.

The infiltrator experience resonates for me. I believe we enacted infiltrator activities on our research team, through transforming and reclaiming research. We actively worked to transform what is called a research laboratory in our department; Erin named the team the Collab to position us as co-researchers with communities. We shifted viewpoints about research, showing different ways of knowing, and that research can intentionally foster liberation and wellbeing in our communities. As a team we contributed to reclaiming research by respecting and centering the knowledge communities have about their own challenges and solutions. By understanding that children, too, can create knowledge, we celebrated their expertise as knowers.

I recognize my experiences make up who I am and how I read the world. I aim to be reflective and critical of my perspective while contributing to the space co-created with the children. I am not perfect, and this might mean that I miss details that do not stand out to me, or I might interpret what a child understands as more (or less) than what they understand. In my thesis research, I focused on including different viewpoints and socio-cultural contexts acknowledging the variety of experiences that were included as well as my own in my interpretation and analyses. The ability to hold this kind of richness in my thesis was supported by the experience of being in two places.

4.3 Two Layers of Research

Our research team, mostly first-generation students at a large public university, facilitates the YPAR project, meaning we create the conditions necessary for 4th through 6th grade children (approximately 10-12 years old) to generate knowledge and share their solutions for neighborhood issues. This reflects frameworks of accompaniment in that our work destabilizes the role of the expert and positions children as valuable knowers. This work can also foster infiltrator experiences by providing training in both mainstream and anti-colonial, anti-canonical, disruptive research methodologies. Our work reflects desire-based research because we use Photovoice, which is a participatory approach using photography to focus on community desires, dreams, and solutions (Wang & Burris, 1997).

In Photovoice, participants take and discuss the meaning of photos and how representations are linked to structures of power, build relationships and develop shared understandings of community life (Langhout et al., 2016; Wang et. al, 2000). Participants examine lived experiences and create change with the goals of representing community strengths and concerns, promoting discussion and knowledge about community desires, and sharing this knowledge with other community members and decision-makers (Wang & Burris, 1997).

In our ongoing Photovoice² project, we meet with children weekly to make knowledge creation accessible. During year 1, sessions included relationship-building, setting community agreements, and 8 sessions on how to take photos using digital cameras, tell stories with photography, and read photos. Another 2 sessions prepared them to take photos outside of the program, training them on ethics and disposable cameras they took home for a week. We created an activity book that provided prompts for taking photos, which included “what are your hopes and dreams for

² Photovoice was chosen by the children during a 6-session pilot.

the Creek?” and “what do you want to change about the Creek?”. They returned with meaningful photos, but requested access to the Creek, so we had a Photovoice data gathering field trip. The children then chose photos to discuss and analyzed them over 7 sessions. Analysis was done using the SHOWED method: reading the photos for meaning and discussing community issues and desires in collective dialogue (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988), and the 5 Whys: discussing root causes, supporting structural rather than individual analyses, and brainstorming appropriate solutions, also in dialogue (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012).

This process centers children’s lived-experiences, knowledge, and insights into solutions for their community, which represents a desire-based framework, as children’s self and community knowledge play an important role in the research process, and their desires for their future are centered. This process does not see the children as problems to be solved, nor does it focus on the pain of oppression and the legacy of colonization. Indeed, our work is joyous and vibrant because of the approach and the energy of the children and university students who collaborate with them.

We do this over the course of approximately 22 sessions an academic year, ongoing for 3 years (so far). Up to 20 children meet with us weekly. This requires a high level of labor from our university team, as we scaffold their activities, develop relationships and provide continued engagement with the children during these sessions. Along with the children’s attention and contributions, this produces important knowledge that is useful for our community partner, the Community Land Trust. The YPAR children have created knowledge about their community through photography, narratives, artwork, community mapping activities, and dialogue-based data analysis, issue determination, and solution creation. They have presented this work in two stakeholder showcases aimed at the CLT, other grassroots organizations, and policymakers in the city. The CLT plans to use the research products, with permission from the children because they own this research, in their neighborhood organizing. This will be further assisted by a partnership with university-situated social practice artists who will package the research products in a way that maximizes community interaction and visibility while centering the children’s voices and research products. This highlights accompaniment with the CLT and community members, as well as the use of desire-based research, by amplifying children’s dreams for their community in support of CLT campaigns. Importantly, this connects with accompaniment and the infiltrator experience because we are strategically leveraging institutional resources to support the work of community partners. We get to stay true to ourselves as anti-colonial beings, benefit to some degree within the structures of value in the academy, while diverting university resources towards some of the most impacted and oppressed members of our local community.

Undergraduate students led by master’s level graduate student coordinators design weekly 1.25-hour sessions to scaffold research activities. They create facilitation guides that outline activities, which typically include: a fun warm-up, small group activities related to the participatory research work for the day (e.g., analyzing photos about neighborhood experiences and community hopes and dreams), large group report-out about what happened in the small group, and a closing participatory evaluation for the session. Sometimes there is a second fun activity, and there are always snacks. Because of these activities and the teamwork involved, university students often develop skills that are useful in the helping fields, especially in youthwork and other settings where facilitation skills are valued.

Children develop skills and competencies, such as creating narratives, analyzing images, developing community or policy solutions, engaging in public speaking, and being persuasive in their advocacy. In any case, significant focus is on the development of skills related to community inquiry, community work and social action. This represents a tension regarding whose development is centered in these activities: is it the children's development or the university students? It may be the case that university student development opportunities are required to justify diverting university resources to the community. For example, it would be hard to offer course credit to recruit university students to the project if university approved learning outcomes were not possible. Ideally, it is mutually beneficial, and the development activities are co-constitutive, meaning that the children's development fosters that of the students, and vice versa. This is an area for future critical research, to be sure; the process of co-learning highlights the anti-colonial possibilities of university-community partnerships and aligns with desire-based research, which suggests that expert knowledge (i.e., local wisdom) is documented and acted upon, and that research activities are mutually beneficial for community- and university-situated researchers alike.

The community co-research activities (i.e., Photovoice) alone could occupy a research team for years, and indeed Erin often considers what a research team experience would be if we only focused on the children's research and supporting their ideas for community change. Yet due to academic structures and requirements - tenure and promotion, undergraduate learning objectives, and graduate training - this project includes another layer of research in which university-based adults engage in knowledge production that is legible to the academy.

Doing both layers of research, or being in two places, is labor intensive and requires a psychological resilience that simultaneously values the aspects devalued by the academy, and is strategic about how, when, and where to use the skills associated with both places. This highlights potential for an infiltrator experience. Although non-academic knowledge and community change efforts (i.e., anti-colonial activities) are important to our research team, we also employ mainstream research methods (i.e., ethnographic) that have colonial entanglements. Erin chose this for the purposes of funding, student advancement via research that is more widely accepted in university settings, graduate student thesis opportunities, and broader publication opportunities.

Students are trained to write ethnographic fieldnotes, expanding their skills as researchers, observers, and writers. Students follow conventions of ethnographic fieldnote writing, including using pseudonyms, avoiding assumptions and conclusions, writing their observations and identifying when meaning is made in the setting, and completing these within the 72-hour validity deadline (Emerson et al., 2011).

Through open participant observations (i.e., broad fieldnotes that collect rich, detailed descriptions of interactions in a setting by a participant, not targeted observations nor dispassionate and non-involved observations) our team collects data to examine the processes involved in co-creating knowledge with children. Ethnography is the appropriate method for the research questions for this layer of research. Students write fieldnotes to answer setting-level process-oriented questions about collaboration, empowerment, and other phenomena related to the processes of YPAR. Thus, our university-situated, documentation-oriented data is ethnographic (e.g., fieldnotes, interviews, artifacts, etc.), which contrasts with the children's more action-oriented data and presentation (e.g., photographs, dialogical analyses, showcases, etc.).

Although ethnography is not common within our psychology department nor the discipline broadly in the US, ethnographic skills are legible to university scholars, and helpful in professionalized settings (e.g., writing case notes).

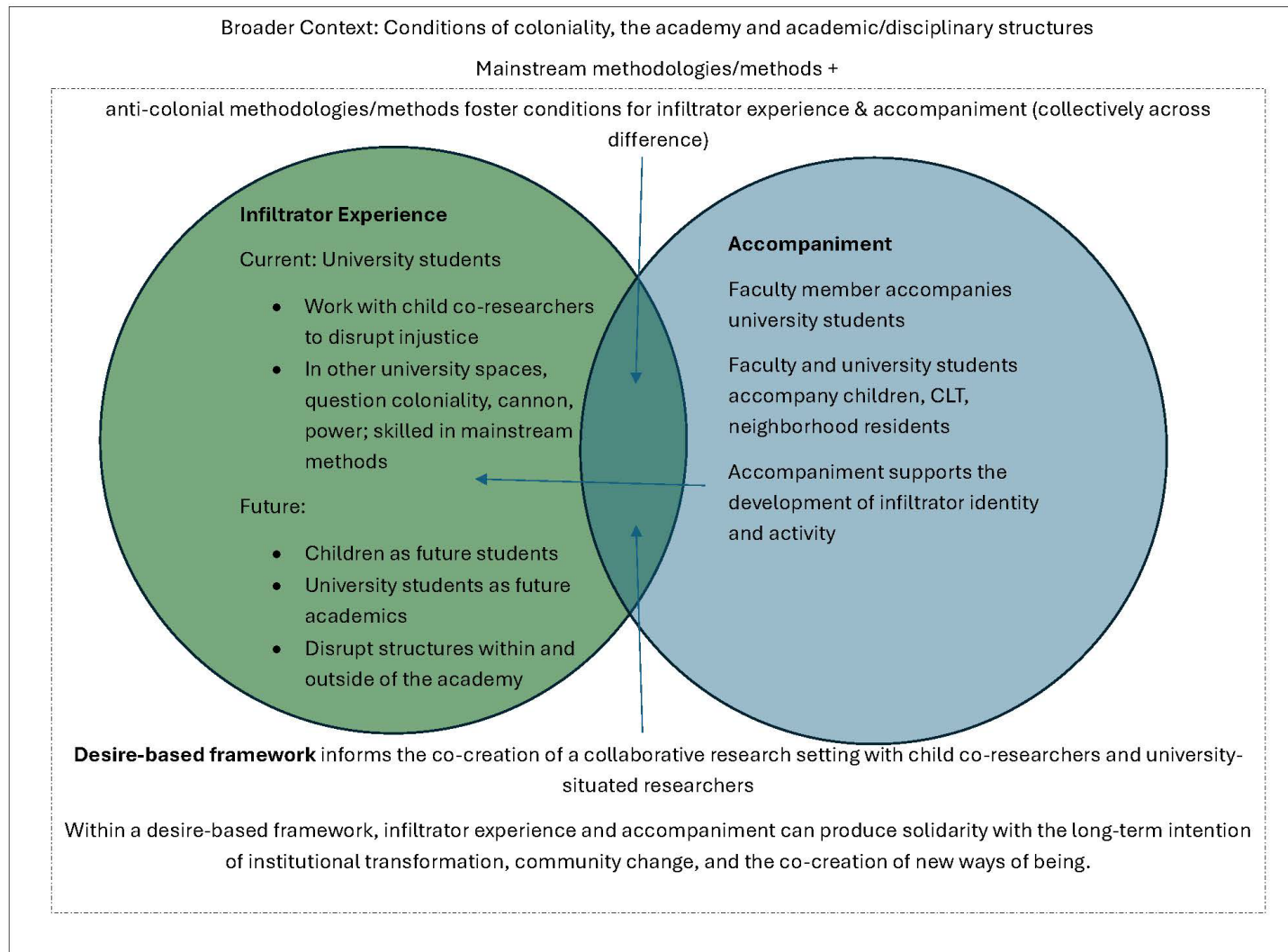
The purpose of engaging in the second layer of research is for the development of the faculty member and students relevant to colonial understandings of what counts as knowledge. Early in Erin's time at this institution, graduate students on the research team reported feeling frustrated with their seminar because none of the methods represented what our team does. One student came to Erin's office in tears because classmates stated that our work did not belong in psychological research. Subsequently, Erin sought counsel and learned from a senior member of the department that some colleagues agree. More recently, Erin was nominated for a community service award by a well-meaning colleague because they thought her research was service. Accepting the nomination would undermine our research; research is more valued in tenure processes and graduate school applications than service. These incidents illustrate how anti-colonial epistemic justice approaches can be devalued in academic structures. Unsurprisingly, our department strongly identifies with post-positivism, experimental methods and statistics, although expanding in interest and faculty expertise in qualitative and mixed methods, a stated value of methodological pluralism and an undergraduate qualitative methods course. When Erin began this project, she was still untenured, and Melissa was a rising master's student in need of psychological research training and a thesis project. Students on the research team, most of whom are first generation and students of color, are expected to learn how to conduct research, and that research ought to be legible to their chosen discipline.

These experiences, the underrepresented nature of the students on the research team, and the devalued treatment of our work as primarily service rather than research, position our work as less-than when evaluated by mainstream (i.e., colonial) academic structures even when more mainstream methodologies are used. This is an opportunity for our team to strategically develop infiltrator identities and experiences that we hope will one day contribute to a shift in US-based university structures. The faculty member works in accompaniment with the students who are learning to hold onto their true selves, ways of knowing and being that are valued among their home communities, and their ethical commitments to the children while also navigating colonial legacies of the university that seek to limit what counts as knowledge, who counts as a knower, and who maintains a monopoly on the power of knowledge production.

5. Discussion

Taken together, infiltrator experience, accompaniment, and desire-based research can produce solidarity with the long-term intention of institutional transformation, community change, and the creation of new ways of being. In the context of a desire-centered approach to knowledge construction that spans academic and community settings, infiltrator experience and accompaniment work together for collectives that include individuals with differing social locations, such as a diverse university research team working in collaboration with children and other community partners with sometimes shared and sometimes differing relationships to coloniality. Figure 1 is a conceptual model of how we see these ideas functioning together.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Being in Two Places



Holding these stories of our research team alongside infiltrator experience, accompaniment, and desire-based frameworks, helps surface tensions within US-based academia. What counts as knowledge is an important tension. Children's knowledge, and action-oriented knowledge are important to our team and efforts, as well as that of our community partner the CLT, yet this approach not currently valued as research in our psychology department or the broader discipline. Attention focused on the political, transformative, action-oriented work, and the development of children's capacities in this case, must happen alongside university student development.

The two-layer system has drawbacks with regards to the labor-intensive nature of doing two types of research and carrying out divergent ways of knowing and doing simultaneously. Yet it is an opportunity for the faculty member to engage in accompaniment with the university students and children, and for underrepresented students to foster an infiltrator identity. It is also an opportunity for students to engage in accompaniment with children. It is an opportunity for us all to engage in desire-centered research and push back at the colonial academy.

In conclusion, we are doing both anti-colonial practices and practices that uphold coloniality, especially as related to academe. The skill development and academic achievement based on rubrics of coloniality makes our work legible to mainstream academic structures positions students to complete their degree and be competitive for professional employment and/or positions in graduate programs while also being disruptive to it. Taken together, we see this as an anti-colonial approach to – collectively and across different social locations – disrupting legacies of coloniality and building the world we desire. This is one path and we are honored to share it.

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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

Community Land Trust. In this project, the local Community Land Trust is a key organizational community partner. The community land trust model is an approach to preserving and expanding affordable housing and/or small local business property. In most community land trust (CLT) approaches, the CLT is a non-profit organization. Through the CLT process, the ownership of land and the buildings on it are made distinct entities, the organization maintains ownership of the land (i.e., ground) and regulate housing rental or sales prices through ground leases.

Latine. Latine refers to the ethnicity of people of Latin American heritage in the US. We choose Latine because it is a gender inclusive term, and because we do not know the specific heritage countries represented within our research setting. We know many of the children in this collaborative research project are Mexican American, meaning they have heritage or are recent immigrants from Mexico, but some of the children have heritage or are immigrants from other countries in Latin America.