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## We become gardens: intersectional methodologies for mutual flourishing

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, members of the Re-creation Collective offer key methodological practices that nourish us and our work together. These include deep visiting, intersectional praxis, (re) visiting accessibility, and accountability revisited. This methodological sharing is not intended to be prescriptive: there is not one 'recipe' for doing this work. We offer an emergent collection of hows, rather than a predictable list of whats. Nor is this sharing intended to be descriptive of all of the methodological choices we have made. Rather, we intend this sharing as inscriptive: some of the most profound ways our processes have marked us; a way to leave traces of our learnings for others; an offering of approaches for carving out methodological spaces that are capacious and profound enough to bring our many selves into.

### RÉSUMÉ

Des membres du groupe Re-creation Collective proposent des méthodes d'épanouissement personnel et de collaboration, notamment des visites approfondies, la praxie intersectionnelle, ainsi que la redéfinition de l'accessibilité et de l'imputabilité. Comme les méthodes de partage de ce travail sont nombreuses, il ne s'agit aucunement d'une prescription méthodologique ni d'une liste détaillée de choses à faire, mais plutôt d'une collection de nouvelles façons de faire, car nous ne souhaitons pas décrire tous nos choix méthodologiques. Nous souhaitons plutôt partager les changements profonds causés par nos processus, proposer une façon de laisser une trace de nos apprentissages au bénéfice de ceux qui nous entourent, en plus de proposer des approches de mise en place d'un environnement méthodologique assez vaste et fouillé pour permettre de nos divers soi.

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## We become gardens: intersectional methodologies for mutual flourishing

We began our days together.,<sup>1</sup>

Deep breath in. Hot tea or coffee.

Mouth full of warm steel-cut oatmeal and fruit.

Early-risers trickle into the wood-panelled kitchen.

Eyes feasting on the writings of the others, still sleeping . . .

Whispered learnings, wonderings, and good mornings creep into the quiet.

Awakenings.

*I see you. I (want to) know who you are.*

(McGuire-Adams et al., 2022)

The above collaborative auto-ethnographic poem brings the reader into the first days of our research project: a 4-day deep visiting (Gaudet, 2019) retreat in a cabin in the woods designed to create time and space to think, feel, and be together in ways that deepen our knowledge and understanding of each other and the social issues in which we are embedded (McGuire-Adams et al., 2022). As Tillmann-Healy (2003), Castrodale and Zingaro (2015), and Ponocná (2021) have eloquently described: collaborative research entails a building of relationships through shared emotions in order to build answers, questions, theories, and actions. Even amidst Covid-19, as we gather online, the space seems to fill, as if by magic, with swaying trees, hot drinks, and collective meals. It offers a reprieve from the microaggressions, the tokenizations, the self-justifications, the contortions, and the auto-dissections of nearly every other work and movement space we enter.

*This research project, and these people, are my cabin in the woods.*

The Re-creation Collective is a gathering of researchers and practitioners united in a desire to create and enact strategies for how sport, recreation, movement arts, and leisure (what we collectively refer to as *movement cultures*) could become more inclusive and affirming in what is colonially known as Canada. All of the Collective members bring academic and/or years of professional knowledge, as well as lived experience of at least one form of systemic oppression, alongside multiple vectors of privilege (most notably, class and access to higher education). Many of us draw on our lived experiences of how barriers manifest simultaneously across multiple social identities—what Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989; [1989] referred to as intersectionality—and from our knowledges of the ingenious theories and practices

developed by communities who are similarly situated. This work draw specifically from our varied experiences with the sharp ends of White supremacy, settler-colonialism, ableism, sanism, fatmisia,<sup>2</sup> transmisia, homomisia, heteropatriarchy, islamomisia, and capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout this paper, we speak from the collective ‘we’ for ideas around which there is consensus and collective resonance. This is not a consistent, omniscient third-person narrator voice, but rather a third-person plural. Like singing together, the collective sound that emerges shifts, swells, and quells; different voices take more of a lead, or take a break, a breath. But we do not always write in collective voice. A core belief of the collective is: there is no meaningful consent or consensus without invitations and affirmations of dissent, discordance, and divergence (Eales & Goodwin, 2015).

Drawing from the epistemologies, theories, methodologies and organizing traditions of our various communities, we sought to co-create prefigurative ways of being, thinking, and doing together. As Piepznasamarasinha (2018) offers, ‘prefigurative politics is a fancy term for the idea of imagining and building the world we want to see now. It’s waking up and acting as if the revolution has happened’ (p. 149). Prefiguration, for us, is not the creation of a single, collective, future utopia, that we mapped in detail and set out in solidarity to accomplish: it could never be that solidified, nor singular. Indeed, as our Collective member, Chen, points out:

We cannot even assume that each of us are wanting, or even able to imagine, the same world. What if as Tuck and Yang (2012) noted, our ‘worlds’, regardless of our best intentions, are somewhat ‘incommensurable’ (p. 31)?

This important critique brings Danielle to reflect:

If the eugenic implications in so many utopian visions, and the utopian rationale behind so much eugenic action (Kafer, 2013) can teach us anything, it is that our imaginaries and prefigurations are as much in need of intersectional anti-oppressive engagement as any contemporary materiality. This makes it all the more vulnerable, and yet imperative, to imagine these worlds, to critique these imaginaries, and to engage with the emergent, alongside each other.

The labour of prefigurative imaging lies both in the exuberance of the future-as-present, and holding hope through the ongoing dialogue between one’s vision for justice and our deeply interpolated critics of just movements. Kelley, Robin (2002) highlights the post-colonial context where even after the official government apparatus has been removed, the same old colonial thinking about what is good, civilized, or advanced, prevails. Though there are attempts to eliminate the artists and intellectuals who dare to dream of a new society, it is vital to envision what is possible with collective action, to invent the marvelous of a new world within the shell of the old. Imaginations are essential to a world without colonialism. To build the worlds we aspire to with enactments of those worlds today demands

engagements with cycles of praxis involving reflection, theory, action, and practice, a process noted by Mingus (2018) as a decolonial *otherwise*.

Ev: As I read this, now, elsewhere and nowhere seem closer together. There was no preconception of what this would be. Sort of like speculative fiction meets grounded theory.<sup>4</sup> We were and are making the road by walking (Horton, 1990), and wheeling, or more specifically, visiting. I believe the underlying ethos of Horton's teaching here is that by being deeply together with the questions/problems/shared and lived experiences of being in this world we come to make the path of engendering more just worlds. 'Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar/Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks' (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002, v)

*We come to make the path*

*As if by magic*

*Imaginations are essential*

### **Deep visiting as methodology**

[A seed tended by Tricia, and nourished by many others].

Our Re-Creation Collective visits, while occurring in shared time and space, are ever present. We continue to tend the seeds that were planted when we were together. As we return to our conversations and praxis, we learn a bit more, growing a bit more from the seed in the soil that grounds us. In the tradition of community that organizes itself in relation to ideas and knowledges, which have existed through time: ideas that simultaneously draw people into their orbits, we devote ourselves in service to the space(s) between. Our writing and our relationships are the sunshine, the rain. spring after spring, time and again. We continue to visit, to tend new seeds and old. We become gardens.

We weave together our respective voices, and our intellectual and embodied knowledges. For Tricia – who is an Anishinaabekwe, Turtle Clan, belonging to Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek – this means enlivening Indigenous research methodologies as we visit, think deeply, and co-write. This process is not singular or static, but weaved into the fabric of our past visits. Like seeds that hold the past, present, and future in the same place at the same time. We require 'an academic culture with fewer sharp edges and rattlers and more supportive guides to assist in negotiating the divide' (Kovach, 2021, p. 9). Our voices, which are a medley of past and ongoing identities, experiences, harms, and joys. We are crafting a supportive space, taking a breath together, gathering an ethics of care and joy. Creating methodological and personal transformations.

Some might wonder why and how non-Indigenous folks are engaging with Indigenous research methodologies. Kovach (2021) emphasizes the rationale for inviting others into our praxis,

The influence of Indigenous knowledge systems, which are relational at their core, within research methodology discourses has the potential to transform a normative homogeneity and the nature of the academy itself [...] above all, one must simply care. As Indigenous researchers, our responsibility is to assist others to learn our ways; however, the burden is not fully ours. Allies have a role in pushing back against an all-consuming Eurocentrism. In reaching towards healing and unity and turning away from polarization and divisiveness, society has the capacity to form relationships that are respectful, equitable, responsible, and healing. (p. 13)

Additionally, and importantly, Indigenous research methodologies are ‘founded upon Indigenous knowledges and are guided by Indigenous people’ (p. 16) and are not to be swappable practices of participatory action research (Gaudet, 2019), where the focus is often deficit-orientated. Rather, Indigenous research methodologies lean deeply toward inner worlds, self-reflexivity, to then build reciprocal relationships; one such method to create these relationships is visiting.

*We come to make the path*

*As if by magic*

*Imaginations are essential*

*The seed in the soil that grounds us*

*We become gardens*

Relationality, a core practice of Indigenous research methodologies, invites relationships to be nourished by visiting. As Gaudet (2019) explains, ‘... visiting creates and fortifies connections that unify and build community from the ground up. It is how humour, silence, news, concerns, pain, knowledge, ideas and arguments are disseminated at a grassroots/ground level’ (p. 53). The relationships, in a research context, then grow into a flourishing of intelligence (both intellectual and embodied) based within trust-building and relational obligations for each other and our Collective.

We started our project with a 4-day visit in a rural cabin, then later a rented house, then later conference rooms, and zoom rooms. We began in places where our full bodyminds could feel at home: around tables, on couches, from bed. Acknowledging that comfort is a common need, even when we do not hold our comforts in common. The smells, textures, and kinesthetics of comfort compose choreographies of vitality over sterility; fermentation over sanitization (Fawaz & Eales, in progress). We chose to create an environment where connection, vulnerability, caring, and reciprocity could be fostered. We sought spaces for making ourselves a(t) home,

calling ourselves and each other home, on our way to learning how to bring our collective homes elsewhere.

Chen: Overall, the way that the ‘research’ space was intentionally and collectively constructed was new and generative to me. The process of (us taking turns) cooking (and caring) for the collective was a methodologically meaningful highlight. It is an example of epistemically refusing the binaries of research/non-research activities, of formal/informal, productive/unproductive work that separate ‘research’ from the other embodied experiences of living in the world. Thanks for cultivating that!

Every gathering, in person or online, begins with folks sharing where they are at. Joys and harms are witnessed and held. This is not a time-limited ‘check in’ of the requisite ‘how are yous’ before the ‘real work’ begins. Why be nice when we can be kind? Why be perfect when we can be imperfectly vulnerable? This is how visiting works through us. It takes the time it takes: sometimes a full gathering of sharing personal stories, laughter, hurt, mundane moments and musings, sometimes weaving this with turning our collective thoughts towards planning and analysis. Our primary ‘research agenda’ is our collective witness, survival, and sustenance:

Danielle: This project has helped me understand the difference between when I am understood as ‘adding value’ due to my ‘identity’ and when I am valued. It has taught me to recognize the violence and drain of doing justice work as not inevitable. It awoke in me the learning that not only can I sustain this work, but that this work could be sustainable, and it can actually offer sustenance. This work can sustain us.

This kind of research is exceedingly complex and requires care. Not the predatory, benevolent, and deficit-oriented ‘care’ often offered to ‘vulnerable populations,’ of which many of us are a part; not the careful fragility of researching upon the whitest of eggshells, fearing discomfort, disruption, and imperfection (see, Eales & Peers, 2021). Movement culture researchers who treat ‘the person(s) whom they serve as objects and themselves as infallible tools rather than embodied humans’ miss the opportunity to ‘entertain humility and not-knowing . . . perceiving the unevenly distributed social power of self and other, questioning ones’ actions, and expressing care as essential in forming relationships free of exploitation and violence’ (Joseph & Kriger, 2021, p. 9). Visiting as a methodology invited a far more complex, consensual, embodied, and co-created way to be with, and think with, each other across complex power relations.

Even prior to our first gathering in space, we invited each other to visit with our ideas. Each of us offered two or more pieces of our own writing, or writing that has deeply influenced our thinking, at least one month prior to the gathering. These were uploaded into a shared dropbox with an invitation to try to read at least one from each person before (or during significant downtime at) the first gathering. Folks were invited to share notes, questions, or impressions in the dropbox or in person. Much of the reading took

place in slow mornings before our 10 am starts, sparking generous and generative breakfast conversations. This proved an incredibly meaningful approach, as many of us are used to being invited into research spaces to tokenistically represent entire identities, and are often (only) asked to offer general, introductory level teachings. To counter this, each of us took time to visit with the specific research interests of our collaborators, so that we could each begin visiting with each other's ideas and words from a place of greater depth, complexity, and specificity.

Danielle: The questions and reflections fielded from others, about my work, made me feel witnessed and welcomed in a way I have rarely experienced. The writings of my collaborators, and my deepening understanding of them through a weekend of visiting, transformed my thinking and praxis more profoundly than my 5-year PhD.

This is how visiting works through us. We make the time it takes.

### **Intersectional praxis: connecting with each other's bodies and bodies of scholarship**

[A seed tended by Janelle and nourished by many others].

We are on a path to disrupt heteronormative, and ableist, and sanist, and settler-colonial, and racist movement cultures. Resistance against one aspect of oppression is incomplete without resistance against all. In our visits, we strategized ways to uproot these systems and structures without resorting to non-simultaneity. Intersectionality, described by Crenshaw, 1989; see also, Hill Collins, 2015) is: the understanding of race, gender, class, ethnicity, age, and other empirically relevant categories as mutually constitutive of identities and social inequalities, and helps to clarify how we must work against multiple oppressions at once. Though Crenshaw is typically honoured with coining the term, intersectionality has formed the bedrock of decolonial theorizing (e.g., James Baldwin, Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. DuBois) since at least the early 20th century.

Within sport, the whiteness of colonial projects that problematizes bodies of colour is not separate from the male supremacy that prioritizes men's sports or the ableism and heteropatriarchy that pathologizes athletes across disability and gender spectrums. Many of these 'differences' targeted and segregated in sport come together in the same bodies and lives – which are rendered largely illegible (and inelible) within sport and beyond because of the reductive singularity of identity-based categories. Some of our selves are marginalized and others are not, or not in every context; some of our structural environments help us, while others hurt us.

To be effective, resistance against overlapping systems oppression requires collaboration among people devoted to anti-oppression, so that we use our energies against systems rather than each other (Lorde, 1984).



This is the power of an intersectional methodology and a diverse research team. Drawing from their particular standpoints, and the authority inherent in testimonies of experience, feminists Crenshaw (1991), hooks (1989a), and hooks (1989b), 2002), Hill Collins and Bilge (2016), and Davis (2015) clarify collective identity as a tool for social action, calling for more inclusionary practices and complicated theorizing within groups to advance collective interests. Specifically, hooks (1989a, p. 23) notes that marginality is not only a site forced into by oppression, but also a site of resistance chosen as a

location of radical openness and possibility . . . formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle . . . and [through] that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity.

Working intersectionality is collective work. The Combahee River Collective (1986) is a prime example of an activist-academic group committed to challenging singular issue activism. The Re-creation Collective follows their lead in collaborating across difference, acknowledging intra and inter-group differences and common interests, and ensuring that the gaps left by single-issue movements (e.g., anti-racist or feminist activism), are addressed, specifically in movement cultures.

Intersectionality is an imperative methodological stance if we are to transform any axis of oppression (Hill Collins, 2019). Some people believe there is no possibility of fighting ableism alongside racism and within a homophobic culture. They ask, 'How could we possibly do everything?' and so they focus on only one issue at a time. We ask, 'How could we possibly do, or be, just one thing?' Just as there can be no singular priority among nutrition, sleep, or movement for wellness, there can be no priority given to a singular axis of oppression. Few scholars have clarified an intersectional method that addresses the complexities of identities and oppressions beyond race-gender, with women of colour as a classic case study, or the complexities of merging disparate critical paradigms such as creating deeply feminist, crip, decolonial scholarship (Cho et al., 2013; Nash, 2008). Our engagement with deeply intersectional methodologies emphasizes that they are iterative and emergent because we are learning and changing as we are sharing and connecting with each other's bodies and bodies of scholarship.

Refusing a hierarchy of oppressions means to address multiple axes at once, however not always in the same configuration. Black, queer, and disabled performance artist Barak adé Soleil (2019) counters dominant practices of 'centering' particular axes of oppression while sidelining others. Soleil offers the practice of 'giving weight': moving weight into an elbow does not decentre other body parts, it necessarily shifts how the entire body

moves. So, too, with resistance movements. For example, shifting our collective focus, for some time, towards the ongoing violences of settler-colonialism supported a transformational understanding of how ‘safe sport’ interventions reproduce carceral logics and leave ableist and racist systems unchallenged. Giving weight moves our thinking about other axes of oppression, it does not ask anyone – or any parts of ourselves – to move aside.

Our desire for a deep intersectionality is one that is driven not by merely including diverse voices in mainstream conversations, but by building new (forms of) conversation, from the specificities of each of our embodied experiences, and from the generativity of our communities’ intersectional responses to oppression. Our mapping of barriers and oppressions in sport and recreation also included specifics of joy and resistance, and strategies for carving out spaces for freedom. In this way avenues of possible intervention began to emerge.

*We come to make the path*

*As if by magic*

*Imaginations are essential*

*The seed in the soil that grounds us*

*We become gardens*

*How could we possibly?*

*and and and and*

### **(Re)visiting accessibility**

[A seed tended by Danielle, and nourished by many others].

It might surprise some readers how often neurodivergent and disabled scholars show up to ‘equity’-related events only to find our body-minds had never been imagined, let alone accounted for, in the design. Stairs up to the stage. 12-hour days, followed by ‘the real work’ in inaccessible, overstimulating, hetero-bars. But (in)accessibility is not just a disability issue. Many of us are tired of exhausting, diminishing, hiding, and otherwise harming ourselves by trying to fit structures that were never designed for us; in being told implicitly or even explicitly that we are not ‘a good fit.’ Our research structures—as much as our movement cultures – have been built on ‘supposedly universal ideas of what a “healthy” body is/can do and this colonial thinking endures today’ (Joseph & Kriger, 2021, p. 3).

In the name of ‘demonstrating flexibility,’ research cultures demand contortion on the part of individual scholars in order to fit ourselves into the few access points available. This system of demand is not good for

anyone, but its deleterious effects are disproportionately borne on the backs of disabled, deaf, neurodivergent, Indigenous, racialized, queer, and trans scholars, as well as scholars who bear primary responsibility for caregiving roles. More insidiously, there is a performative uptake related to the language of access that has been increasingly deployed by individuals and institutions related to ‘acknowledging land’, ‘honouring diversity’, and ‘duty to accommodate.’ Pantomimes of inclusion, without the ongoing and careful labour necessary to disrupt systems of exclusion, distort the liberatory potential of such enactments. This distorted potential is then deployed in ways that again problematize individuals and demand perpetual unpaid labour to access our rights. Looking to resist performative accessibility, and desiring to engage in affirming, collective resistance to the unsustainability of demand cultures, our Collective’s engagement with accessibility drew from disability justice notions of radical access, which are intertwined deeply with commitments to intersectional, interdependent flourishing (Berne, 2015; Mingus, 2018; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018).

From our first gathering, Danielle and Tricia wanted to be sure that we built the space and methodologies around the bodyminds of those we had invited. This project’s purpose is best described by dales laing, a collaborator in Lindsay’s PhD work, who articulated that their political commitment is to act ‘so that more people can bring more of themselves more of the time’ (in Eales, 2019, p. 124). This quote became a motto for not only the movement cultures we wanted to help redesign but the foundational aspiration of every methodological choice. It took some time for us all to learn how to enact this, as much for each other as for ourselves. How could we curate spaces, and methodological practices, where we did not have to expend so much energy trying to make ourselves fit? Where precisely those things that had been extracted, excoriated, exoticized, excluded, or deemed excessive would ‘fit in’.

Danielle: Several months before our meeting I sent an email with the prompt: ‘Please email me if there is anything we can do to make meetings more accessible, safe, or welcoming for you.’ No one emailed back. I knew many of those we had invited, and that many often experienced barriers to full participation. This is when it occurred to me that most folks had only engaged with access through labour-intensive accommodations: formal procedures that require a verifiable, objectified pathology to make a legitimate claim. When everyone is so bent out of form there is no possibility for breath, let alone flexion, silence is a hallmark of contortion. The invitation to unfurl needed explicit, specific, and care-filled unpacking in order to restore the notion of accessibility to its intended generosity. In my follow up email, I wrote:

Is there anything we can do to make meetings more accessible, welcoming, safe, or enable you to do your best work? I will share that these exist but will keep them anonymous unless you are comfortable sharing. Things we would like to know include:

1. Food allergies and preferences
2. Body safety and comfort
3. Environmental allergens and sensitivities
4. Trauma and addiction triggers
5. Supportive structures (e.g., pronoun reminders, consent-structures, stim activities)

Is there anything else that you would like to share that might help us make the space and activities more accessible, welcoming, and affirming?

In response, nearly all participants weighed in with hopes, fears, suggestions, and offerings that not only enabled their full participation but also supported others. Emails started with phrases like ‘it never occurred to me to ask for that’; ‘this would make such a difference for me’; and ‘I have never been in a space before where I didn’t have to worry about . . . ’ The oatmeal love of numerous people has turned them into a staple of our collective gatherings. We have learned to share affection through afternoon popcorn. We have each learned to craft meals that pleasure mouths without hurting bellies and bodies. We learned about the need for breaks, for snacks, for regular body movement, for warmth, for later starts, for comfortable furniture, and for alone time. We learned about the impacts of cussing, the importance of pronouns, and the need for processes to deal with emergent micro-aggressions.<sup>5</sup>

Tricia: I had never been asked what my access needs were. Nor had I asked anyone else. This was a huge learning experience for me, one that I am deeply grateful and accountable too. I didn’t realize until I was asked that I do have access needs when meeting as a group. For example, I need to build in some quiet, alone time during the days where we are busy visiting and enacting our research.

Janelle: For me, as a person who does not identify as disabled, radical accessibility meant acknowledging that I too have needs.

Bethan: Even with the re-framing, I could not envision how else it could be.

*We come to make the path*

*As if by magic*

*Imaginations are essential*

*The seed in the soil that grounds us*

*We become gardens*

*How could we possibly?*

*and and and and*

*I too have needs*

This brings us back to prefiguration. There is something necessary about what cannot (yet) be imagined. There are choice-points that arise in this work which invite us each and collectively not to imagine, but to move; to speculate on a course of action, act, and then feel, think, and live into the ways in which a given action resonates physiologically, emotionally, epistemologically, ontologically, and axiologically.

In its most (em)powerful form, access is not transactional, it is relational. It is creative and co-creative. It is invitational. It is generous. It is intimate. It is care-full. It is express, explicit, dynamic, joyful, reciprocal. In visiting, we attend with 'humour, silence, news, concerns, pain, knowledge, ideas and arguments' (Gaudet, 2019, p. 53). Accessibility is all these things because it is underscored by a politics and poetics of accountability to ourselves, to each other, to our individual, intersectional, and shared values through attention to our personal, collective, emergent, and divergent needs, in order to produce what we know to be our best work so far.

Janelle: We all deserve to ask for what we need from our environment. In fact, it should be set up for everyone. 'We knew you were coming' is the message everyone wants to hear. For my own research lab, I learned that part of being a good 'host' is creating as many entry points as possible, varied ways of communicating, multiple chances to check in with feelings/people not only projects and outputs, and several opportunities to move.

Accessibility means breaking down a false binary between the 'person' and the 'worker'. And recognizing it as a privilege, on one hand' to be able to 'forget' the body, but, on the other hand, forgetting the body is one of the patriarchal, white supremacist, ableist limitations of our culture. Many of us have spent too much time in movement academic and writing practices in which it is expected that we 'leave out sh\*t at the door.' In other words, you cannot enter the space if you cannot find a way to shed your less-than-affable affect, your trauma (even/especially those triggered by the space), your other roles and dependents, your needs, and non-normative embodimentments.

### **Accountability revisited**

[A seed tended by Danielle, and nourished by many others].

In forming the Collective, we sought to bring together folks who already had practice with the complex mutual learnings, and personal unlearnings, at the heart of intersectional work. In some justice communities, such processes of (un)learning fall under the rubric of accountability. However accountability is also often wielded as a normative and normalizing weapon. It is often disciplinary: wielded to (con)form our bodyminds without our consent around the terms and shape of such reformations. It is often

punitive: the hammer of accountability comes down when you cannot make your bodymind and kinship commitments fit into ‘professional’ expectations and decorum. Accountability is often individualizing: targeting ‘bad behaviour’ at the expense of challenging structural systems. Accountability—its related expectations, surveillance, and consequences – are often differentially distributed in accordance with oppressive structures: some of us get encouraging pats on the back, some get slaps on the wrist, some get thrown under the bus.

Many of these uses of ‘accountability’ contradicted key values of our Collectives, so we sought out tools that helped us put our values into practice. We were drawn to Daniel Heath Justice’s (2018) notion of accountable kindness: ‘we can and must have the hard conversations if we have any hope of a better future . . . but still return to the conversations and to our relationships when we are done; in other words, we can hold each other to account as we hold each other up’ (p. xxi). With this intention of accountable kindness, we spent the first 3-hour working session together co-creating genuine commitments we wished to make to each other and to the group, as well as some early practices to embody those commitments. Below we unpack a few of the practices of accountability that have emerged for us, and that have had the most impact on our work together and beyond.

### ***Tending trust***

Tricia: Some (or all) of us often experience a variety of harmful experiences in academia. I have felt the jolt of harm caused by microaggressions, tokenism, and appropriation. Through these experiences, and in order to protect myself, I choose to not trust people who embody uncritical whiteness and a merely performative ethics of care. I have learned that in many academic spaces, my trust must not be unconditionally given, it must be reciprocal: a curated space built upon *visiting* and *demonstrating* ethics of care, reciprocity, and anti-oppression.

In our meetings we focus on *tending trust*, not demanding or expecting trust. So often we are commanded/demanded into faith relationships with our oppressors, relations of deep risk which (of course) result in deep harm. In the context of research, many of us are often invited into spaces tokenistically, because our identities add credibility or fundability to a project.

Within trauma-informed practice, enabling ‘safety and trustworthiness’ are key principles for avoiding retraumatization and supporting flourishing (Fallot & Harris, 2009). Trust is assumed to be a correct, healthy, or adaptive state of being. However, radical and feminist trauma researchers have argued that it is not maladaptive to distrust a world that is consistently and often violently untrustworthy, in particular for those experiencing oppressions (Burstow, 2003; Quiros & Berger, 2013). A reality for many of

us is that distrust is a vital strategy of survival, one that we must draw on over and over when we are brought into spaces that have not been crafted by us.

We start from the assumption that distrust is a learned, appropriate response within the kinds of work that we do, and to the kinds of work we seek to undo. We also reject the capitalistic metaphor of ‘earning trust,’ which is too often ‘research ethics’ speak for a transactional, means-to-an-end, set of duties one performs (or hours ‘in community’ one amasses) in order to lure or guilt people who are rightfully weary of research(ers) into ‘repayment’ through participation. ‘These kinds of parasitic mobilizations of ‘trust’ reinforce the deep untrustworthiness of Western research(ers), and are among the many reasons that, as Linda T Smith (1999) suggests, “Research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary’ (p. 1).

And at the same time, developing trust within our collective has enabled us to take risks together, learn from each other, and engage in deeply creative and personal research journeys.

Deep engagement with consent and consensus, and the affirmation of ‘call ins’ (to be discussed next), are some of the practices that tended the conditions in which trust could emerge. The emergence of trust among us is incremental, multidirectional, vulnerable and intimate – unfurling still.

### ***Affirming critique and call-ins***

Inspired by Tracy Lindberg’s concept of kind mistakes (CBC, 2015), we explicitly offer invitations and affirmations to not be perfect, to ask questions, and to (un)learn. In our opening meeting, each person enthusiastically consented to being critiqued or called into new (un)learnings. We made clear that it was not required labour, but rather, should anyone feel generous enough to offer insights, the labour would be valued, affirmed, and dispersed amongst the collective. Lindsay offered a practice of calling in that gained traction in our gatherings. During a workshop by Donna-Michelle St. Bernard and Cole Alvis of the Ad Hoc Assembly, participants were invited to intervene around harm or triggers in the middle of a discussion by declaring an ‘itch’ or an ‘ouch’. Janelle was one of the first to call out an itch, at our first gathering:

Janelle: We had a discussion about those who are ‘blacklisted’ in sport and society and what that has to do with their race and other characteristics. I initially worried about calling out ‘blacklist’ as a word that reinforces negative associations with ‘black’ (black sheep, blackmail, blackball). Was I ‘too sensitive’? Would the others be offended, or worse, reject me? Once I felt it was a safe environment, one where relational integrity was valued, we talked about it. Beyond talking, we conceived an art-based research



project representing excluded Black people/athletes. This conversation left me feeling energized. It made me recognize the importance of naming the ‘ouches’ and ‘itches’.

Chen was the first to bring forward an itch/ouch during a writing process. In a comment attached to a discussion of musical sharing that had been meaningful to some members, he wrote:

Chen: I personally did not feel included during a (informal) collective discussion about ‘80’s music’. I don’t have knowledge about or necessarily am interested in 80’s music produced in these first-world bourgeoisie societies’ cultural industry, but it does not mean that I cannot be an engaged listener. It is colonialism manifested in a cultural, aesthetic realm. I would have appreciated if someone could have introduced the context or the content of what was being discussed.

We mobilize itches and ouches to flag (felt or potential) microaggressions either when they emerge or in retrospect. They can then be unpacked when they are flagged, at a later time, or not at all: whatever feels safest and most affirming for the person flagging.

### ***Temporal flexibility***

Some of the most harmful demands for ‘accountability’ relate to Western, capitalist (austerity-driven), normative and normalizing time: being on time, submitting in time, working all the time, taking the time (from . . .). All these demands require consistent, predictable bodyminds and personal lives that can contort around the needs of every project and productivity-oriented demand. Instead, we build our projects on alternative conceptions of time. This includes intergenerational and interrelational notions of time at the core of Indigenous visiting methodologies (Gaudet, 2019). It is not that our time together is unproductive (we do, as this work attests, sometimes publish). Rather, we consciously craft our time together to counter the logics of maximizing productivity, and instead, tend spaces and relationships for collective generativity and flourishing. We are tending soil so that mutually affirming ecosystems of understanding may emerge; we are not calibrating a (colonial) factory farm for maximizing research outputs, leaving the soil bereft. We also embrace anti-productive and anti-normalizing learnings from *crip time* (Kafer, 2013), which accounts for and affirms deeply embodied, subjective, fluctuating, and interdependent temporal experiences and needs. We co-create temporal flexibility in our processes, with and for each other, to undermine inequitable and harmful temporally-driven contortions by Collective members. We unpack some of these enactments, below.

Chen: One important thing that I learned and benefited from being part of the collective is generosity, the generosity towards each member who might be in different places (and facing different challenges and sources of stress) of their lives



during the pandemic, being generous around not always showing up and not rushing to complete work before a previously agreed-upon ‘deadline’. This counters the exploitative culture of the neoliberal academy and the false sense of urgency created therein. For me, this does not equate to the lack of accountability; rather, this type of generosity is a process of highlighting the real priorities that have immediate, material consequences to peoples’ lives. It may never show up on a published manuscript, but it is nonetheless crucial for sustaining critical, liberatory work and keeping the communities healthy and viable.

The term and concept, *deadline*, introduces a false sense of urgency.

Ev: This is the paradox of urgency: ideologies that exploit ‘urgency’ often foreclose the urgent need to take the time for deep thinking, conversations and care.

Nathan: I was thinking that the refusal of false urgency comes, in part, from living through so many emergencies. Things can be urgent without urgency. Emergent without emergency. The space between is mediated by care. Urgency and emergency seem to involve fusing to a very narrow (fatal) outcome. Demand culture is what it is. I am learning how to be in choice, where choice is available, and discovering with delight and surprise: within this axiological context, choice is almost always available.

Instead of urgent deadlines committed to by project leaders on behalf of the Collective, we work with ‘project holders,’ ‘spoons,’ ‘start lines’ and ‘target dates’. Each of these are constantly talked about, and consensually negotiated. None of these are one-time checklists, these are perpetual practices.

*Project holder(s)* are those who have put their name forward to navigate the development of one of the Collective’s projects, such as a presentation, publication, or grant. Holders need not be ‘leaders,’ they need not be the most knowledgeable or do the most writing, and they are not ‘in charge’ of what happens. Rather, they curate the work spaces, conversations and consensus-making about the project. They can consensually pass off the project to other holder(s) when they no longer have enough ‘spoons’.

*Spoons* (Miserandino, [ndnd](#)) is a term that Lindsay brought to the group. It refers to the amount of energy one has for something, acknowledging that certain tasks take more or less energy for different people, and that for many who are neurodivergent or chronically ill, the amount of life energy available after basic survival tasks is either deeply limited or widely fluctuating. We have a collective chart in a shared drive where members can put their names under any project as a holder, or one of these colours:

- Green for lots of spoons for the project, and desire for full participation;
- Yellow for limited spoons, and will only jump in when/if you can;
- Red for no spoons and consent to no communication or decision-making.
- Blue means either you are in a hard space right now and cannot calibrate your spoons, or that a particular work is tender. Project

holders keep blue folks off group emails, but check in periodically, about their spoons for particular parts of the project.

This enables members to invest their spoons where they choose, to match commitment levels to shifting lives and bodyminds, and to be valued and included without requiring prescribed or steady commitment levels.

In a world of moving goal posts, *Start lines* help us consensually stagger our projects so as to not overload people's schedules and commitments. We employ 'soft' and 'firm' *target dates*. Soft *target dates* offered flexible structure to collective working. For example, 'anyone who wants to contribute an autoethnographic story, please send it to me by X date, or let me know if you need more time.' Firm *target dates* are largely outside of our control, such as presentation and granting due dates. They acknowledge and strategically engage with institutional expectations without being primarily responsive to them. We commit to these only with deep consent, with lots of lead time, and with the understanding that we will ask for an extension, or drop out, if needed. We communicate these needs and values in an ongoing, early, and consensual way with editors and event curators. Missing targets is part of any learning process.

Through these practices we make the time it takes to do our work with complexity and care (for the work, ourselves, and each other). We engage with timing and timelines in ways that seek to affirm and support the embodiment, structural challenges, and community commitments that are at the very heart of who we are, and why we need this work.

### **Relational integrity**

Through such practices, we have moved towards thinking of our commitments as more about integrity than accountability. Integrity is not about consistently meeting demands which requires accurately predicting and inflexibly committing to future capacities, it is about reliably enacting our values.

Nathan: I'm wondering if these practices have something to do with relational integrity. Or something to do with the conversation that dignity and integrity have with one another. Being held in dignity by others (often unexpectedly or to a level never before imagined) can offer room for personal integrity and reciprocal sharing to grow.

Janelle: I am loving this, Nathan. Relational Integrity seems to be an important concept. In computer science, this refers to the idea that links work - i.e., when I click on an item in the table of contents it takes me directly to that page. In our case we are being axiologically consistent, and accountable, developing trust through our 'links'.

Relational integrity that is based on a shared value of bringing more of ourselves more of the time, requires a carefully attended ongoing labour. In people, like computers, links need to be ‘live’. Relational integrity is an ongoing and affirming renewal process. In people, like plants, there are no (bio)logics of living by which durability is achieved through stasis or ongoing and increasing rigidification. Relational integrity cannot be hard-and-fast. Rather it flourishes in mutual receptivity, cultivated, slowly and softly—through deeply intersectional and accessible visiting – across what was, what is, and what may yet become.

*We come to make the path  
as if by magic  
imagination are essential  
the seed in the soil that grounds us  
we become gardens  
how could we possibly?  
and and and and  
I too have needs  
seeds  
unfurling still  
I see you. I want to know who you are  
We knew you were coming.*

## Notes

1. To engage with this work in multiple, accessible, and artistic ways (through, for example, a painting, or an audio recording of the work) please visit the Re-creation Collective at <https://www.recreation-collective.com/methodologies.html>
2. The suffix ‘phobia’ (as in ‘fatphobia’) means ‘fear of’ and is often used in psychiatric labelling. As Simmon’s University Library (2021) articulates, using phobia to name oppression contributes to the perpetuation of sanism. It inappropriately names harmful attitudes and actions as individual and fear-based rather than systemic and hate-based. Misia is offered as an alternative suffix, derived ‘from the Greek word for hate or hatred’ (What does ‘misia’ mean? para. 3).
3. See [www.recreation-collective.com](http://www.recreation-collective.com) for more about us and our projects, which include: an anti-colonial collaborative ethnography about movement culture (be) longing; An analysis of Canadian Sports EDI policies; an abolitionist critique of safe sport approaches.
4. This discussion of speculation, as a means of bringing truth and verifiable fact into close orbit where they may seem distant, has been grounded in Nathan graduate

research, in which they propose a methodology entitled *Speculative Non-fiction* (Fawaz, 2019).

5. For a more detailed and growing list of accessibility practices of our Collective see our website: <https://www.recreation-collective.com/methodologies.html>

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