

# The Power of Decolonizing Research Practices



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Decolonial research helps us move away from extractive research methodologies that maintain the *wounded subject position* and legitimize oppressive practices. Additionally, decolonial research challenges dominant Eurocentric paradigms that have historically shaped the counseling profession. Thus, we offer this article to demonstrate an approach to decolonizing research practices. This article discusses (a) the limits of traditional research approaches, (b) a demonstration of decolonized research methods in action, and (c) considerations for counselor educators and researchers. In alignment with our goal of shifting the research paradigm away from dominant and often oppressive practices, we use a collective and relatable voice that speaks to both our personal identities and our unity as a team working toward the decolonialization of academic research.

**Keywords:** decolonizing research, research paradigm, oppressive practices, wounded subject position, counselor educators

Research, particularly within the counseling profession, has historically perpetuated oppressive structures, contributing to the pathologization and marginalization of non-White communities (American Psychological Association [APA], 2021; Singh et al., 2021). Traditional research methodologies often reinforce these power imbalances, reducing marginalized individuals to their experiences of trauma and oppression. In response, there is a growing movement toward decolonial and liberatory research practices that aim to center the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, fostering empowerment and healing (Goodman et al., 2015; Neville et al., 2024; Shin, 2016).

As an example of this, we presented and discussed a photovoice exhibit at the 2024 National Board for Certified Counselors Foundation (NBCCF) Bridging the Gap Symposium, which sought to share the healing experiences of nine queer womxn of color (QWoC). Grounded in intersectionality theory and photovoice methodology, our presentation aimed to highlight the strengths and resilience of QWoC, moving away from deficit-based narratives. This article will discuss the background of our decolonial research approach, the overview and positionality statements of our presentation, the reflections of presenters and attendees, and important considerations for counselor educators and researchers committed to decolonizing their practices.

## History of Harm Caused by Research

Mental health research has, directly and indirectly, contributed to hegemonic science, harming marginalized communities by pathologizing anything that has strayed from White, Eurocentric standards (APA, 2021; Singh et al., 2021). Examples of this pathologizing range from the inclusion of homosexuality as a mental disorder in the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* to the fictitious diagnosis of *drapeteomania*, a type of “mania” that drove enslaved persons to run from their oppressors (Auguste et al., 2023; Ginicola et al., 2017). Mental health professionals used

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psychological research to support the segregation of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and the “civilizing programs” that attempted to eradicate Indigenous people’s culture (APA, 2021; Auguste et al., 2023). The mental health field continues to use psychological assessments formulated by and for White cisgender heterosexual men, which in turn contributes to the pathologization and oppression of BIPOC communities and other marginalized groups (Auguste et al., 2023; Lee & Boykins, 2022). All research operates within oppressive structures, some of which include the influences of White supremacy and heterosexism, which impact how we design, conceptualize, analyze, and disseminate research that often informs our clinical and teaching practices (Goodman et al., 2015).

### **Moving Away From the Wounded Subject Position**

Similarly, most of the existing literature on LGBTQ BIPOC solely focuses on the pain and trauma of discrimination and oppression—inadvertently keeping research attendees in the *wounded subject position* (Brown, 1995). The wounded subject position reduces LGBTQ BIPOC to their experiences of discrimination and oppression. Furthermore, the wounded subject position promotes oppression by reinforcing existing power relations (Hudson & Romanelli, 2020) and deficit-based narratives. Consequently, our work moves away from deficit-based research questions and methodologies that reinforce oppressive and extractive research practices. Our work infuses the work of various Indigenous, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, liberatory, and decolonial scholars (e.g., Audrey Lorde, Dr. Jennifer Mullan, Paulo Freire, Dr. Zuri Tau) to intentionally move away from extractive research methodologies.

### **Decolonizing Research**

Colonization is foundational to many existing research practices that extract from marginalized communities to systemically stratify the value of knowledge based on dominant narratives and structures such as White supremacy. These colonial practices are highlighted by research that benefits from exerting authority and enacting an expert position to extract knowledge from marginalized communities without reciprocity and advocacy (Tau, 2023). Further examples of colonization in research and academia include the use of diagnostic criteria, normality, and baseline behaviors informed by White cisgender heterosexual men to pathologize BIPOC communities; there is also the issue of the predominance of Whiteness in academic spaces, including editorial staff in publication journals (Mullan, 2023). Research and academia also play a role in maintaining colonial and oppressive structures by legitimizing oppressive practices under the guise of various savior narratives (Smith, 2021).

A decolonized research approach may include many practices and values, such as critical reflexivity, dialogue, and catalytic validity (Lather, 1986). One example of critical reflexivity is writing a positionality statement, which involves critical reflection on the various domains of our lives in which we have or lack privilege. Dialogue includes conversing on how our identities impact our work and interactions with community members; in doing so, researchers recognize the power dynamic between researcher and co-researcher and try to centralize consent, mutuality, autonomy, respect, care, and relationships. Additionally, catalytic validity refers to the degree to which collaboration with community members energizes, revitalizes, and fosters the development of critical consciousness. This sociopolitical concept involves the ability to identify and analyze oppressive social, economic, and political forces, and to take action to address them (Freire, 1972; Lather, 1986). By emphasizing catalytic validity, researchers are held accountable to the underlying goals of decolonial and liberatory work.

Further examples of decolonial practices in research include advocacy, power sharing, and rituals (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019; Reyes et al., 2024; Zavala, 2013). Research has the potential to serve as a platform to elevate advocacy and support existing grassroots efforts, creating spaces for and by the

community (Zavala, 2013). Researchers can also share their findings with stakeholders and others with the power to make systemic changes to create more equitable conditions for marginalized communities. Researchers who intend to work with marginalized communities must also examine the power differentials between researchers and the populations they hope to learn from. Power sharing is an important practice in decolonial research, in which researchers involve community members in various points of the research process and continually consult and check for their consent while encouraging and honoring autonomy (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019). Decolonial research and advocacy efforts can often be very draining; thus, Reyes et al. (2024) recommend engaging in rituals to remain attuned and grounded and to help connect to material more deeply.

## **The Liberatory Research Collective**

We are an innovative and collaborative research collective, dedicated to pushing the bounds of traditional research methodologies by advancing liberatory, anti-oppressive, and decolonial research in the counseling profession. We started as a university research lab, but chose to honor our growth as a collective of folks dedicated to decolonial and anti-oppressive work by operating independently of any institution that might uphold or be influenced by oppressive and colonial structures. We evolved into the Liberatory Research Collective, comprised of scholars, educators, counselors, and community members from across the country. We aim to co-create a space where anyone interested in research, particularly with marginalized communities, can develop the skills needed to engage in transformative and decolonial research. We challenge the status quo and ask critical questions like: 1) Who has the power to design and conduct research? 2) Who are the researchers? and 3) What qualifies them to engage with marginalized and targeted communities?

## **Demonstration of Decolonized Research Methods in Action**

Our dedication to decolonizing the counseling profession through clinical and research practices is a profound testament to our integrity and purpose. It is a beacon of hope and inspiration, demonstrating how research can be a powerful tool for healing and resistance. One notable example of our impact was a photovoice exhibit, “Through Our Lens: Queer Womxn of Color’s Experiences of Healing and Liberation,” which we curated and hosted in honor of National Coming Out Day (October 11, 2023). This exhibit was part of a photovoice project where we partnered with nine QWoC to explore and celebrate their experiences of healing inside and outside of counseling. The exhibit highlighted and celebrated the diverse ways in which QWoC find healing and resist dominant narratives, both within and beyond the realm of counseling, through the lens of QWoC who beautifully captured their personal stories of resilience and healing, illustrating a narrative often overlooked—a narrative that celebrates their strength and wisdom. We believe this exhibition touched the hearts of all 169 guests and broadened our collective understanding and appreciation for the experiences of QWoC.

This exhibit is an example of our work as researchers committed to pushing the bounds of traditional research methods that have historically oppressed, weaponized, and erased the experiences of marginalized communities. Our work is our love letter to all marginalized communities and an invitation for counselors and counselor educators to practice decolonial and liberatory approaches.

## **Photovoice Methodology**

Photovoice, introduced by Wang and Burris (1997) and grounded in critical consciousness, feminist theory, and documentary photography, extends Paulo Freire’s (1972) notion that visual images can foster critical community reflection. The objectives of photovoice are to showcase the strengths and concerns

of marginalized communities, stimulate dialogue about community issues and strength through group discussions of photographs, and spur engagement in advocacy by reaching policymakers and other key stakeholders (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice invites marginalized groups to articulate their perspectives through photography, fostering autonomy and enabling self-advocacy for political and social reforms that address their communal priorities.

Following this philosophy, our research collective advocates for collaborative partnerships with co-researchers to define and address salient identities and issues affecting them. The term “co-researcher” is used here as an indicator for the individuals or community members who are conducting the research with us. The use of this term is a liberatory and decolonial approach, where the power is held not solely by the researcher but also by the community. We continue to define and redefine the terms queer and womxn of color to connect varying perspectives of these terms that are central to our work. Queer is a term with a harmful history that many within the LGBTQIA2S+ community have reclaimed to define someone who lives outside the margins of the socially constructed confines of romantic, sexual, and gender identity, as well as gender expression (The LGBTQ Community Center of the Desert, n.d.). Some members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community also use the term queer as a political stance. Womxn of color refers to people of the global majority who identify with the socially constructed womxn identity; the “e” in “women” is replaced by an “x” to include transgender, genderqueer, non-binary, genderfluid, gender non-conforming, and/or gender expansive people (Kendall, 2008; McConnell et al., 2016).

### **Through Our Lens Photovoice Project**

In June 2023, we started recruitment for the photovoice project to find between eight and 15 self-identified QWoC who were willing to actively participate in this project by 1) meeting with researchers to build rapport, discuss their participation in the project, and obtain verbal consent; 2) taking between eight and 15 pictures that represent their experience(s) of healing inside and outside of counseling as a QWoC; 3) completing the Photovoice Reflection Form and Interview Reflection Form, and participating in three meetings (two of which were required and a third which was optional if they were interested in providing researchers with additional feedback); and 4) actively identifying and listing ways to take action and/or advocate and support with the exploration of how we shared the research findings.

### **2024 Bridging the Gap Symposium Presentation Overview**

Our presentation at the 2024 Bridging the Gap Symposium, titled “Through Our Lens: Exhibiting Decolonized Research and Clinical Practice in Action,” was created as a means to bring our photovoice exhibit to the 2024 NBCCF Symposium while allowing attendees to explore the healing practices of QWoC inside and outside of counseling from a decolonial perspective. By encouraging attendees to explore the experiences of QWoC in our exhibit, we hoped to shed light on how taking a decolonized and liberatory approach to research fosters healing and empowerment for BIPOC co-researchers and researchers. This presentation was intended to showcase the transformative power of decolonized research and provide tangible insights for integrating these practices into counseling. Attendees had the opportunity to engage in a gallery experience and discussions surrounding decolonized research and positionality, as well as how insights gleaned from our partnership with QWoC can be applied to counseling and research practices.

### ***Our Rationale***

Traditional counseling methods often fail to address the unique tapestry of cultural, societal, and personal challenges faced by BIPOC individuals, particularly QWoC (Reyes et al., 2022). By integrating a decolonial framework, counselors can create more inclusive and effective healing environments.



Our presentation explored various strategies used by QWoC to navigate their healing journeys, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, community support, and personal empowerment.

### *Preparing for Our Presentation*

In preparation for our presentation, our group met in one of our hotel rooms to assemble easels while reflecting on our salient identities, emotions, concerns, and hopes for the session. During this meeting, we practiced our positionality statements and reflected deeply on what it meant to present the healing experiences of nine QWoC when members of our research team had insider and outsider identities related to the QWoC label. We discussed what it meant for some of our White and cisgender male identities to influence the presentation material and potentially impact presentation attendees. For example, my (sixth author Michelle Pollok) reflective process included dialogue with my colleagues on what our privileges mean and how they can serve or harm the communities we work with. Much of this dialogue focused on the process of being a vessel for QWoC to share their creative methods, showcasing their experiences of healing. For me, this was a crucial piece of this project, as I was cognizant of speaking for, or over, our co-researchers, knowing that I do not understand their experience as BIPOC. I spoke with my colleague (fourth author Grace Schroeder) about our Whiteness in relation to this project and our goals of de-centering it while also sharing our queer identities with our co-researchers and reflecting on what that connection means to us.

We also took the time to acknowledge and explore our insider (shared) identities, some of which are Queer, womxn, and BIPOC, through positionality statements, identity work, and dialogue. For example, I (second author Tiffany Perry-Wilson) consist of multiple minoritized, intersecting identities, such as being a Queer cis-woman within the African Diaspora. I share commonalities with our co-researchers who identify as QWoC themselves, but it is important for me to keep in mind that we are not a monolithic group; we are a beautiful mix of diverse beings. This shared identity is undeniable, but our interpretations or the meaning that we provide to our experiences will forever be uniquely ours as individuals. Maintaining this awareness was part of my reflective process to be sure that my understanding did not override the experiences of our co-researchers.

Our conversation also included how our areas of mixed privilege intersect with our work. Although I (first author Jessi Pham) may share identities such as bisexual and Asian American, I often reflect on how my cisgender male identity impacts my interpretation and influence on our work. I question what it means for a cisgender man to present material created alongside QWoC and find it important to draw from shared commonalities while acknowledging when my privilege may stand in the way. I recognize that even with shared and unshared identities, there are experiences that I can only hope to understand through listening and empathy. As my colleagues state above, the identities I share in common with co-researchers are not monoliths, and I am also merely a vessel through which we share our collective and unique experiences.

Additionally, from a mentoring standpoint, I (fifth author and faculty lead Ana Reyes) encouraged us to explore and release colonial and White supremacist ideals regarding how we should “present as professionals” by asking how and from whom we learned to present and how to dress for “conferences, symposiums, or professional events.” The invitation to release internalized colonial and White supremacist ideals empowered us to present in a way that felt authentic to who we are and the co-researchers whose stories and wisdom we were sharing. We stressed the importance of taking a non-expert role, emphasizing that we are merely the vessels of knowledge and information shared by co-researchers.

### ***Materials Used***

Our presentation materials consisted of several poster boards and easels set up in various areas around the room. Each poster board displayed a physical print of a co-researcher's name, photo, caption, title, and image description. Other materials included pride flag stickers, mini bubble wands, letter-writing materials and envelopes, various crystals and stones, and burlap sacks for attendees to create and take home a blend of herbs with myriad healing properties, including lavender, rose, rosemary, and eucalyptus.

### ***Our Symposium Presentation***

We began our session by sharing our positionality statements, broaching our intersecting identities, and centering our relationships with ourselves, each other, and as presenters in academia. We engaged in dialogue with attendees regarding our intentions as researchers, the presence of Whiteness in decolonized research, and our varying queer identities. Opening our presentation with positionality statements allowed us to set the tone for a conversational presentation style that encouraged people in the room to voice their thoughts, experiences, and takeaways.

Moving further into our session, we presented a set of slides to discuss the origins and rationale of photovoice methodology, provide an overview of our study, share the definitions of various key constructs, and give our recommendations for decolonizing counseling research and practices with QWoC. Although the slides served as a guide for our presentation, the core of our session derived from attendees' feedback, reflections, and observations. Attendees were given time to explore the exhibit and engage with the poster boards thoughtfully and intentionally. We then opened the floor for further reflections and observations connected to their experience engaging with the exhibit. Overall, attendees discussed their feelings, connections, and impressions of the photos that resonated with them. The debrief also included feedback on our process and approach to research, with many attendees expressing their excitement about decolonized research in action.

### ***Our Positionality***

Because of the nature of how our identities interact with our work, we decided to start our presentation with positionality statements to demonstrate our reflexive process. Having attended presentations at other conferences with introductions very focused on academic and professional achievements, we decided to stray from that structure in hopes of introducing ourselves in a way that felt more authentic, personal, and related to our work. Here are deeply personal positionality statements with which we center our experiences contextualized through our lineal histories and some of the identities that influence our work as researchers, clinicians, and educators.

**Jessi Pham.** I am a descendant of ancestors who continue to pass down rich cultural values and guidance accompanied by rituals, incense, and offerings. I dedicate my educational privileges to their sacrifices and perseverance. My experiences as a queer/bisexual, second-generation Chinese/Vietnamese cisgender man underscore my research approach.

**Tiffany Perry-Wilson.** I am a descendant of powerful and resilient peoples stolen from their lands consisting of wealth, melanated skin tones, and storytelling. Their sacrifice then and now is the foundation of my existence. My experiences as a QWoC within the African Diaspora roots and guides my comprehension and approach to research and clinical work.

**Kevlyn Holmes.** I am descended from people I do not know and because of this, I often feel unmoored. In my journey to connect to the parts of myself that have been lost to White supremacy culture, I've found I am making peace with and understanding words such as White, genderqueer, White woman, disabled, and demisexual. These parts and the desire to learn from the harm of my White ancestors drive my work. I strive to listen and honor every story I witness.

**Grace Schroeder.** I am the descendant of fierce and strong-headed advocates. I am also a mound of clay, shaped by the hands of my colleagues, co-researchers, and the various folx who share their stories and perspectives with me. My experiences as a White queer womxn underscore the need for me to serve as a platform in which I uplift BIPOC, providing context to how I approach my research and counseling theories.

**Ana Reyes.** I am a descendant of wise ones who, against all odds, survived and passed down their wisdom. My experiences as a queer, non-binary femme and a child of [un]documented immigrants of Afro-Latinx and Indigenous roots underscore my anti-oppressive and decolonial approach to research, counseling, and teaching.

**Michelle Pollok.** I am a descendant of strong womxn who walked against the grain, paving the path before me and instilling a sense of justice. As a White, cisgender researcher, I serve solely as a vessel for these unique stories of reclamation and healing.

In sharing these individualized positionality statements, we seek to honor the progression of our lineages and how they interact with the colonial and oppressive systems around us. These declarations are not just personal narratives but also critical reflections that guide our work. They illuminate the diverse perspectives and experiences that shape our collective approach, fostering a deeper understanding and commitment to anti-oppressive and decolonial methodologies. Through this practice, we aimed to co-create a space at the 2024 Bridging the Gap Symposium that acknowledged and respected the complexities of our identities, encouraging others to reflect on their own positionalities and the impact these have on their work and interactions.

### *The Healing Experiences and Responses of Our Attendees*

Our attendees shared many insights with us, ranging from their connection with the material to the impact of our session. We are grateful that our intention behind various aspects of our presentation (i.e., introducing ourselves with our positionality statement and then leading with the exhibit) created an environment where attendees were willing to share their thoughts and critiques. One participant shared their hesitation toward attending our presentation on QWoC because the main presenters were White individuals who would be speaking about the experiences of QWoC; after hearing our introductions, they noted feeling more comfortable openly sharing their hesitation because of how we positioned ourselves in this work. This comment reified the importance of our critical reflexivity and our ongoing commitment to exploring how our identities impact our work. Another participant shared their connection to the first author, who introduced himself as a bisexual person—she revealed that, as someone who has experienced biphobia and bi-erasure, she felt seen and validated by the representation of the bisexual identity. Our introductions, one simple (yet powerful) portion of our presentation, impacted the flow of the presentation in a way that highlighted the importance of reflection and identity work in the realm of research, academia, and professional spaces. Coming into this symposium, we intended to build community and encourage collaboration, and by the end of our presentation, we felt very connected to the people in the room with us.

In discussing our presentation, we reflect with profound gratitude on the opportunity to present research we are passionate about with receptive and introspective attendees. Bearing witness to how attendees opened up and engaged with our presentation and research was incredibly rewarding for all of us. The way attendees embraced our decolonial approach and committed to engaging in vulnerable discussions underscored the importance of co-creating spaces where diverse voices are not only heard but celebrated. This experience reaffirmed that community is everything; it is the cornerstone of healing, growth, and social transformation. The interactions and connections formed left us feeling deeply nourished and inspired, reminding us of the transformative power of collective engagement and support.

We were reaffirmed that positioning ourselves authentically helps create a genuine connection with session attendees. The feedback we received highlighted the importance of showing up authentically and continually questioning how we show up in historically White spaces, reinforcing our commitment to decolonial work. Our experience is a testament to the critical role of introspection, camaraderie, and humility in the way we navigate academic, counseling, and healing spaces. There is significant power in showing up as we are and engaging in vulnerable conversations in academic settings such as presentations, knowing that someone in the audience will resonate with our authentic selves. These lessons will guide us in our ongoing journey to foster inclusive and transformative spaces.

Throughout this journey, we experienced a whirlwind of emotions—fright and excitement intertwined as we prepared and presented our work—yet the love and support we provided each other created a foundation of strength and dependability, allowing us to face our fears with courage. The process was filled with joy, gratitude, and excitement, moments of laughter and even tears, as we shared our feelings and experiences, allowing us to connect on a deep level. We were inspired by the courage to challenge existing systems, driven by our shared commitment to decolonial work and the belief that our authentic presence could inspire change. These feelings collectively enriched our experience and solidified our bond as a team. We hope that session attendees left feeling as enriched and nourished as we did and that, as a reader, you are inspired by this article to engage in critical reflection and decolonial practices.

## **Considerations for Counselor Educators and Researchers**

Implementing decolonial practices in research can be challenging because of existing structures and systems that perpetuate colonized, oppressive, and racist ideologies. These norms have inevitably penetrated academia, clinical practice, and research methodologies, making the task daunting (Goodman et al., 2015). However, with commitment, intentionality, and a willingness to alter internalized theoretical and methodological frameworks, counselor educators (CEs) and researchers can integrate decolonial practices into their respective fields. Applying decolonial practices within academia and research involves significant challenges, necessitating unwavering dedication. This practice requires replacing previously used colonized methods, systems, and structures with decolonial ideologies and practices (Castañeda-Sound et al., 2024; Fish & Gone, 2024; Neville et al., 2024; Quinless, 2022; Tate et al., 2016).

Although this process involves de-centering the self and stepping away from traditional pedagogical approaches, CEs and researchers should build self-awareness through critical reflexivity. This lifelong commitment pairs well with the radical decolonization of oneself, academia, and research approaches. Critical reflexivity is a collaborative practice that involves internal work by



CEs and participation from students and colleagues. For instance, Goodman et al. (2015) discussed that providing mentorship and supervision to incoming and current CEs assists in fostering a collaborative approach to critical reflexivity or critical consciousness. This could involve weekly and monthly required meetings to provide support and communal engagement in the self-reflective process. Collective commitment to decolonialize shifts from individualism to collectivism, prioritizing community, and holding each CE accountable within their critical reflexivity process.

Critical reflexivity is best done with an intentional approach. Purposeful selection of course materials, construction of syllabi, and application of research methodologies embedded with decolonized approaches, ideologies, and concepts exemplify intentionality (Castañeda-Sound et al., 2024; Fish & Gone, 2024; Goodman et al., 2015; Neville et al., 2024; Quinless, 2022; Tate et al., 2016). Intentional application of critical reflexivity was evident in our collaborative discussions while preparing for our presentation, where we practiced vulnerability by discussing our fears and worries and how our positionalities inevitably influence how we show up in academic spaces. Challenging inherently colonized frameworks requires commitment and intentionality in dismantling oppressive norms perpetuated in the counseling profession.

Counseling and counselor education programs are part of power structures and systems that contribute to continued inequities, oppression, and colonialism (Castañeda-Sound et al., 2024; Goodman et al., 2015; Shin, 2016). Goodman et al. (2015) emphasized the value of decolonizing traditional pedagogies within counselor education by applying tenets of liberation psychology, such as critical consciousness. They discussed how practices like the banking concept perpetuate colonialism in counselor education programs. This concept positions educators as the sole source of knowledge, depositing it into students, thus maintaining power imbalances and stifling independent thinking and questioning. Consequently, students are not empowered and are forced to rely on the professor, with their perspectives viewed as inadequate if they do not align with Westernized frameworks. The banking concept also applies to research settings, where researchers are seen as the sole providers of knowledge and considered experts on the lived experiences of the populations they study, which can be problematic (Goodman et al., 2015) and often supports the continued use of extractive research methodologies.

Cultivating a space of community and shared learning can nourish not only the students and co-researchers but also the CEs and researchers themselves. By approaching education and research with humility and openness to learning without assuming expertise, the likelihood of causing harm to the communities that we serve significantly diminishes.

## Conclusion

Our photovoice exhibit and presentation at the 2024 NBCCF Bridging the Gap Symposium provided session attendees and us with a unique platform to share and reflect on the healing experiences of nine QWoC. By utilizing photovoice methodology in our research and grounding our approach in decolonial and liberatory principles, we were able to conduct and present research in a way that represented the diverse narratives of our co-researchers authentically.

Our work moves away from traditional deficit-based research that often reduces minoritized communities to the wounded subject position (Brown, 1995), thus diminishing queer people of color to their experiences of trauma and oppression. Instead, we focus on the strengths, resilience, and healing

processes of QWoC. This shift is informed by intersectionality theory, decolonial scholarship, and participatory action research, inviting us to center the voices and experiences of our co-researchers in a meaningful, empathetic, and socially just manner.

Our presentation at the Bridging the Gap Symposium was not just a display of research findings but a call to action for counselors, researchers, and CEs alike to integrate decolonial practices into counseling and academia. Through an interactive gallery experience and open dialogue, we demonstrated how decolonial and liberatory research methodologies can foster empowerment and healing for all involved in the research process, including those who witness or read the findings. The feedback and reflections from attendees brought focus to the importance of co-creating spaces where diverse voices are heard, honored, and celebrated.

Implementing decolonial practices in research and counseling requires a commitment to self-examination, camaraderie, and humility. It involves challenging existing power structures and embracing authentic connections with the communities we interact with as counseling scholars and fellow human beings. As CEs and researchers, we must continually question how our identities and positionalities influence our work and strive to create inclusive, validating, and supportive environments for all. Our experience at the symposium reaffirmed the transformative power of community and collective engagement. The support and courage we found in each other allowed us to face our fears and present our work with pride.

In conclusion, this photovoice project and our subsequent presentation have not only enriched our understanding of healing experiences but also strengthened our resolve to continue engaging in decolonial and liberatory research. We hope that our work inspires others to embrace these methodologies, challenge oppressive systems, and support the healing and empowerment of minoritized communities.

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## Appendix

### Recommendations for Self-Directed Learning

Counselor educators can familiarize themselves with liberatory, decolonial, participatory, and action-focused research methodologies that intentionally decentralize their role as researchers and encourage students to do the same. We suggest the following resources to support counselor educators on their journey:

- Books
  - *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* (1st ed.) by Ada Maria Isasi-Dias and Eduardo Mendieta
  - *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith
  - *Photovoice Research in Education and Beyond: A Practice Guide from Theory to Exhibition* by Amanda O. Latz
  - *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* by Shawn Wilson
  - *Research as Resistance: Revisiting Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-oppressive Approaches* (2nd ed.) by Leslie Brown
- Websites
  - Power Shift Network Resource Bank:  
<https://www.powershift.org/resources/intro-research-justice-toolkit>
  - Liberatory Research & Evaluation Intensive through Liberatory Research:  
<https://www.liberatoryresearch.com/e-course>