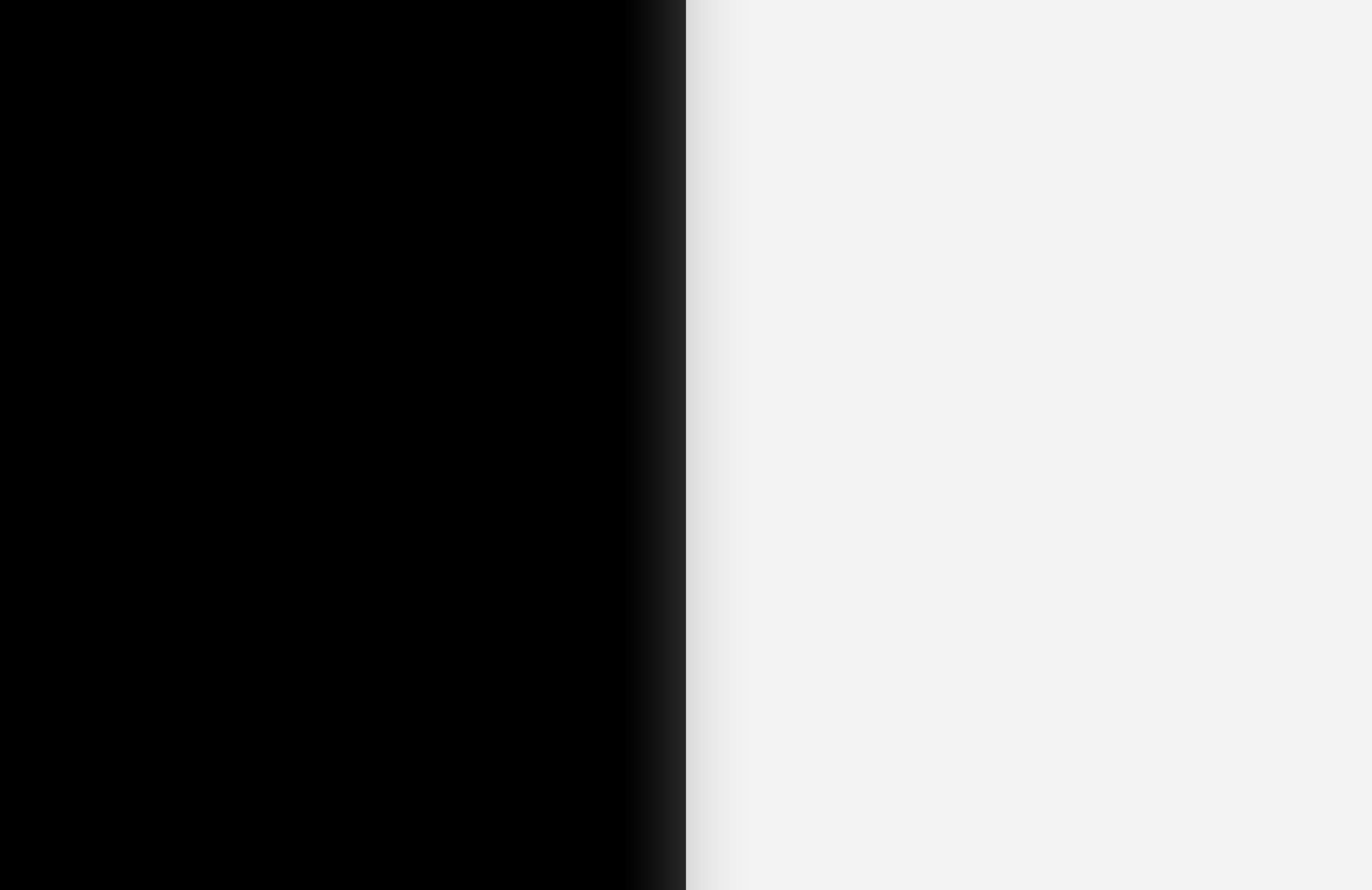




YES, AND

A PERSONAL
PRACTICE
IN COMMUNITY
CENTERED
DESIGN*





My deepest thank you,
to all my friends, community, chosen family, and family,
for your patience, optimism, and faith in me + a better world

School of Visual Arts
MFA Design for Social Innovation
Thesis 2022
New York City
May 2022

Designer: Jenny Winjoy Lin
Advisor: Mari Nakano
Community Partner: NYC Service Design Studio

HOW ARE WE NO
LONGER
COMPLICIT IN THE
HARM, BUT
COMPLICIT IN THE
HEALING? ²⁶

— LIZ OGBU
DESIGNER, SOCIAL INNOVATOR, AND URBANIST

Yes, And –

a response: a way to acknowledge what mental models are present in the room while moving a conversation forward.

a framework: to not only focus on desired outcomes, but the journey and who you are with. work with surprise, experimentation, and play.

a practice: over time, that may bring us to new processes and ways of being together.

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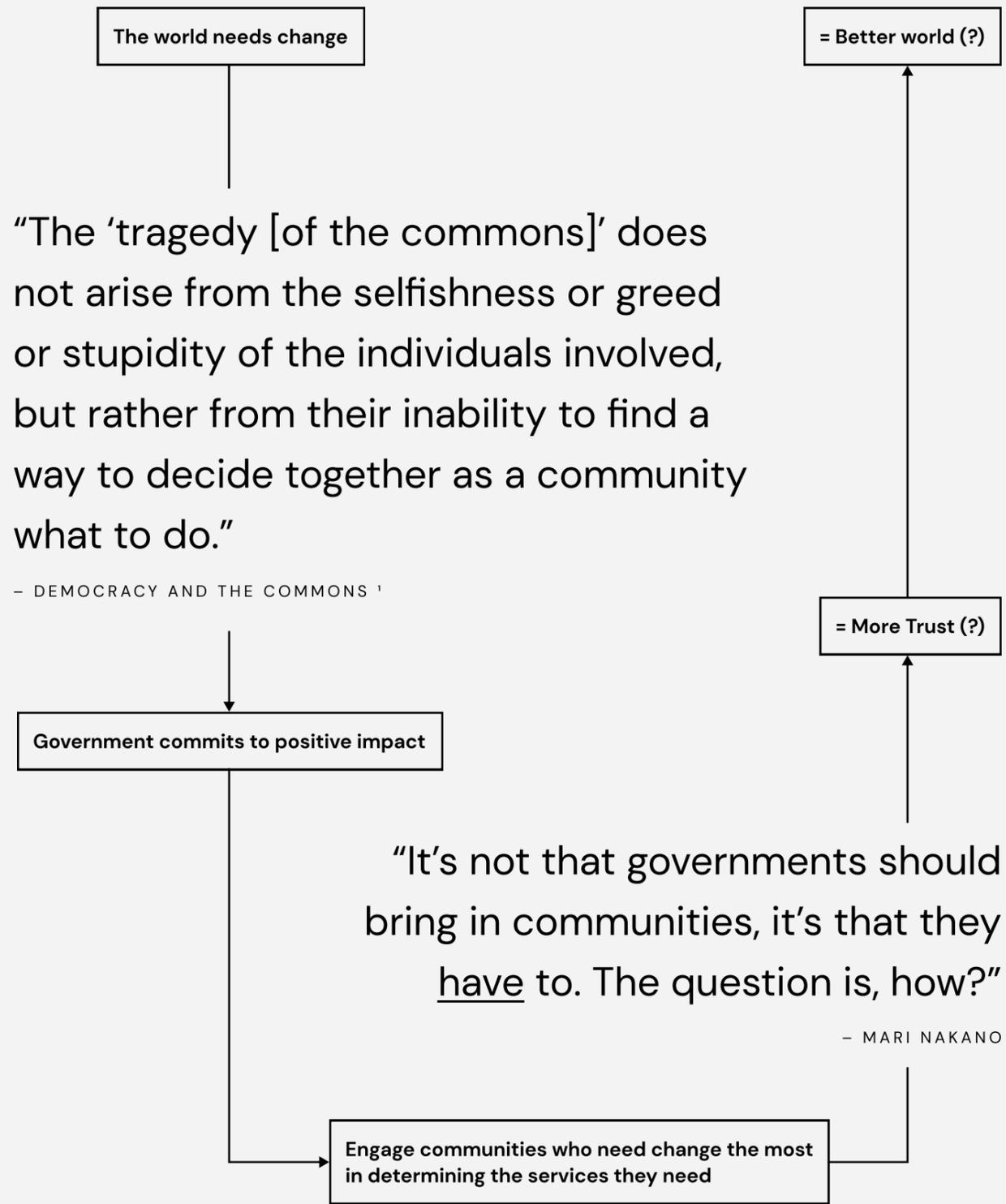
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ABOUT

→ THIS PROJECT

→ THE SOCIAL ISSUE

→ JENNY WINJOY LIN



About This Project

The year I started Design for Social Innovation at SVA, the world had just entered the COVID pandemic, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were murdered, people were having to choose between paying for rent or food, wildfires were abundant in California, stock markets were crashing, and America had a narcissistic pig for president. A lot of crises were happening, and it was hard to know how to fix it. Who was to blame? What systems created this dysfunction? What cultural failures and expectations have shaped society? And what happens if we keep going down this way? I felt overwhelmed. All of this happened as I was stepping into the realm of social design. What, if anything, would help make the change we want and need to see?

In the midst of this, people were organizing for change, and have been for a long time. Many of our movements today are built off of the generations before us – who gave us the words, methods, and visions for critical feminist thought and abolitionist transformation. Today, community organizing continues to shape our public narrative. In 2020, the New York Times named Black Lives Matter as possibly being one of the largest movements in US history.² As a former community organizer myself, I felt the power and importance of gathering community to empower and advocate for the right to be treated with decency and respect.

I was curious about the connection between design, social change, and how they bubble up. If power was top-down, what happens if it could be truly bottom-up? What happens if people in power

were willing to truly share power with communities who are asking for change? I wanted to learn about participatory design practices such as co-design, and ways we could practice this in government. In *Beyond Sticky Notes*, a book about co-design, it is defined as “an approach to designing with, not for, people... where people with lived experience, communities and professionals work together to improve something that they all care about.”¹⁹ I saw co-design as a unique opportunity to bring democratic practices even deeper into government methods.

As such, I started exploring the connection of design in government and policy change. I worked with the City of Los Angeles in 2021, and the Internal Revenue Service the summer after. Both experiences helped me understand the landscape within government, and the need for internal process changes that would ultimately shape how communities could interact with the government. From research to service delivery, every touch point either built or eroded trust.

I believe that there is potential for design to foster new opportunities for equitable relationships, and that it can help create processes that facilitate a generative exchange between communities, organizations, and governments. By centering on the lived experience of people moving through the systems, I believe that governments can play a role in supporting those in need, in the ways they need it.

My initial questions were: does co-design create equity? Will it lead to justice? Can co-design help democracy?

About The Social Issue

“The issue is that American benefit programs are, as a whole, difficult and sometimes impossible for everyday citizens to use. Our public policy is crafted from red tape, entangling millions of people who are struggling to find a job, failing to feed their kids, sliding into poverty, or managing a disabling health condition.

Many programs meant to aid the poorest of the poor have demeaning, invasive, and time-consuming screening requirements. [...] We know that millions of Americans do not receive the credits or benefits they qualify for. [...]

But choices made by design can be undone by design, and if Democrats in Washington want to make the tax code fairer, expand the safety net, extend health insurance to everyone, and end child poverty, they should start with making what already exists work better.”³

– THE TIME TAX, THE ATLANTIC

Service Design is a process that pays attention to various ecosystems and contexts in order to deploy a product or a service. In social change, it exists at the unique intersection of government and the public. How a service is designed in government impacts everyday people – from mandatory tasks like getting our driver’s license updated, to defining our life’s trajectory like applying for a green card. In some cases, it may be an unintentionally burdensome process, when in many others it may be operating exactly as intended. History shows that our policies do not always reflect what is just, but rather the social atmosphere of the time and methods to exert control.

On the other hand, terrible government processes might be the result of an accidental oversight. During COVID-19, when the government needed to act quickly to aid the most vulnerable communities, it rolled out programs like the child-tax credit extremely efficiently. While the tax credit was directly deposited for many families, unfortunately “many families were erroneously left out [...] apparently for one reason: They are “mixed status,” meaning that one spouse has a different citizenship or immigration status than the other.”⁴ While this was quickly resolved and may have seemed like an edge case, there is an estimate that “nearly 1.7 million U.S. citizens have a spouse who is undocumented.”⁵

When designing services in government, every choice will quickly and directly impact the communities it stands to serve. It can be designed with the marginalized in mind, or it can operate on the myth of the average American – an inaccurate melting pot of medians and generalizations.

In order to address these oversights, as designers we must account for the complexity of human experiences, particularly those who are marginalized and/or may need public benefits.

Apart from inclusive processes however, the extent of traditional research and “designing *for* communities” have their limits. According to *Next 100*, “people of color and individuals from low-income households bear the brunt of policy choices, but [it also] matters who is making those choices. And the undeniable truth is that those who make our policy choices are disproportionately white, male, and wealthy.” Additionally, 1 in 4 young adults don’t trust the federal government, nor do they feel like they are a “full and equal citizen in this country.”⁶

The power to influence the decisions and processes within government are key to building a trusting relationship, which builds the basis for a functioning democracy. Power sharing is the foundation to a successful co-design practice. As the design field continues to evolve – including the role of the designer, and the need to facilitate processes – designers may have the opportunity to slowly begin to shift processes from “design for” to “design with”, and eventually “design by.”

However, in order to avoid diluting co-design processes into a simplified community engagement workshop, we must take a critical lens to the designer in question. For “if we fail to understand our own power in relation to our partnerships in community, and power relations within the group with which we work, we are unconsciously reinforcing the same divisive structures.”²⁴

The journey is complicated. Every project is contextual, and all communities are made of multiple communities and even more individuals. As such, my thesis focuses on design practitioners themselves, to help designers develop their personal practice and framework to create equitable co-design systems. In the end, the purpose is to ensure that our society doesn’t leave behind people in crisis.

By creating more shared models of governance, I believe we can shift our society towards more trust and healing.

WHEN OUR PROCESSES ARE GUIDED BY INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF STRUGGLE & ADVERSITY, OUR SYSTEMS WILL FUNCTION IN TIMES OF STRUGGLE AND ADVERSITY.²⁷

– JUTTA TREVIRANUS
INCLUSIVE DESIGN RESEARCH CENTRE

The government has a hard time talking to the public.

While the task of public engagement may seem relatively straightforward, there are many processes that need to be taken into consideration. The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) is one example that utilizes checks and balances in an attempt to pursue fairness, but may unintentionally create hurdles and obstacles to methodologies that are necessary for collaboration. Essentially, the PRA is a law that controls how much the government is allowed to interact with the public, such as individuals, nonprofit institutions, and small businesses. The aim is to lessen the burden on the public. The process requires a proposal to be submitted and approved, so that the government can be good stewards of the public's time, and the data collected is high quality and accurate.⁷

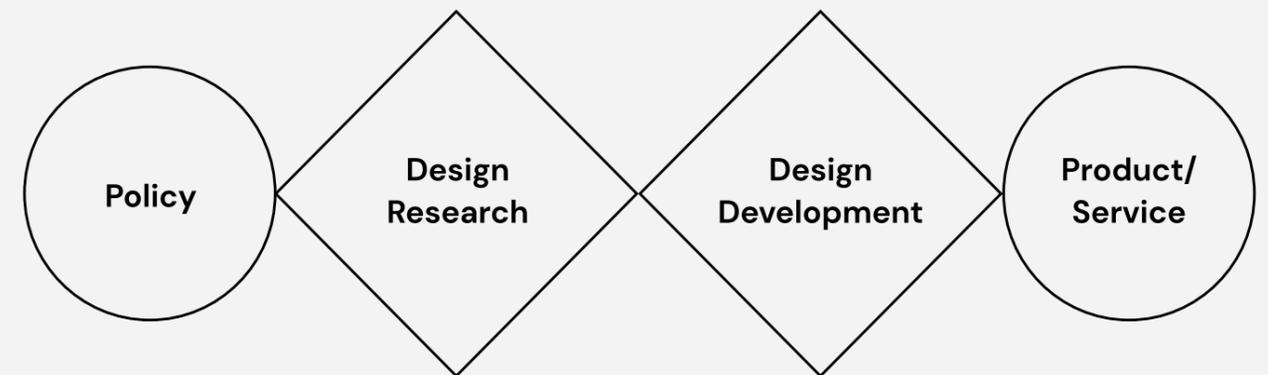
Unfortunately, the PRA process is lengthy and runs counter to the philosophy of agile design, which is to quickly iterate by getting direct feedback from users. The PRA impacts the entire design process, from budgeting and procurement, to the research and development phase. All of these challenges may lead to a less-than-desirable designed product.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is another organization that has been designated by government to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects.⁸ When conducting research, the IRB may require submitting the research process for approval. The research in question can be considered the collection of qualitative or quantitative data, surveying people, conducting focus group, and observing group behavior.

While this process usually includes academic research studies, IRB reviews are not necessary when conducted as part of a quality improvement for a program, or data collection for administrative purposes. However, the line can be blurry at times, and potentially extend a design research process.

While the IRB is critical to ensuring humans are not harmed in the process of research, the additional hurdle makes it more difficult to access public feedback in the design process. This can be particularly difficult under tight government deadlines that require efficient implementation.

Example of the Design Process impacted by the Paperwork Reduction Act



Initial Policy

- Policy might have a specific timeline goal or suggest a need for quicker implementation
- Does not allocate for the time it takes to develop and implement services
- Multiple ways of interpreting Policy and compliance
- Government needs time to gather funding, create strategy, and implement strategy

Design Process

- Design team is brought on during the strategy or implement strategy phase
- Apply for research approval, which may take months to complete
- Research questions must be extremely specific, as any changes would require a resubmission
- Research needs might have changed, or products may have changed, while waiting for approval
- Team needs input on product/service
- The design team may make up for crunched timeline by skipping outreach and testing

Impact on Outcome

- Underdeveloped or misaligned products/services
- Does not address originally stated needs
- Difficult to use/navigate
- Bad interaction with government, generating lack of trust from public

The government doesn't have a good reputation for rolling out technologically savvy services.

While government services are undoubtedly created by individuals who care deeply about society, we've seen the unfortunate impact of bad design in government. From politics to service delivery, our interactions color our personal relationship to the civil institution. From the highly documented folly of George Bush's election in 2000⁹ to Obama's healthcare website disaster in 2008, the visual and systemic delivery of government services have huge impacts on our perception of government and its capability to provide adequate services for all.

Additionally, design has historically been utilized as a craft to create artifacts rather than a process for strategic thinking. In my personal experience, designers are typically brought in towards the end of a project, to visualize a report or to create an identity around a campaign.

However, the design field has changed dramatically since the popularization of design thinking by IDEO in the early 1990s.

Now, design has been a central tool in technology's mass adoption and scale, and has evolved to split into many avenues of control, including service design, experience design, and community design.

There has been a shift from output to process, and since then many methodologies that incorporate strategy, facilitation, and collaboration have been developed. Parallel to this developing field, the rise of feminism and critique of intersectionality has created a strong analysis on power and privilege, bringing to surface the ways in which collaboration has been historically white, ableist, paternalistic, colonialist, and extractive. These histories intersect to create a notable shift that moves away from the traditional model that hoards power, to a collaborative model that shares power.



– WHY THE GOVERNMENT NEVER GETS TECH RIGHT, NY TIMES OP-ED ¹⁰



Priority 2 Delivering excellent, equitable, and secure Federal services and customer experience

Every interaction between the Government and the public is an opportunity to deliver the value and competency Americans expect and deserve.

People are at the center of everything the Government does. In their daily lives as well as in critical moments of need, people rely on Federal services to help support them through disasters, advance their businesses, provide opportunities for their families, safeguard their rights, and aid them in rebuilding their communities. That is why the Federal Government must center its services around those who use them—delivering simple, secure, effective, equitable, and responsive solutions for *all* who the Government serves.

When individuals and organizations interact with any part of the Federal Government, they want that interaction to work seamlessly.

Understanding existing barriers to public services is a crucial part of this work. Human-centered design research will drive the management of Federal programs to develop a comprehensive understanding of how individuals interact with Federal services. Through this process, agencies will identify barriers to service delivery and how those barriers create undue burdens on those the Government serves, in particular for underserved communities.

Image: President's Management Agenda

To improve the federal government's operations, Biden released the President's Management Agenda which prioritizes Human Centered design research to drive better service delivery.

The President's Management Agenda (PMA) is a framework created to publicly prioritize the ways in which the government can improve how it operates and performs. This includes internal work processes like allowing federal employees to unionize and focusing their hiring practices to support US markets.¹¹

What's particularly interesting about the 2021 PMA is that it names the need for government to create better services and customer experiences for the public. As you can see in the image above, it actually names Human Centered Design Research as a critical piece in understanding the needs of the public today, particularly those in underserved communities. Generally, this is great news. It shows an understanding in government that there needs to be a systemic shift towards centering people and their lived experiences as a catalyst for change.

When we imagine the positive impacts, we may see activities such as direct conversations with people, creative collaboration, in-depth user journey mapping, and team work making the dream work. But one thing we've learned about responsible design and working with the most vulnerable populations, is that empathy does not equal compassion. Simply understanding a feeling is not enough. If government is to practice Human Centered design at scale, how can we ensure proper training and approach to vulnerable communities that may be sensitive to sharing their experiences and potential trauma? And how can we maintain the integrity of the participant throughout the process? We need to ensure that community members will be treated with respect and care, in ways that do not further complicate their levels of trust and security when interacting with the government.

With civic government workers mandated to work more directly with the population, how do we make sure communities or residents feel good about it?

As I dive into my thesis and develop a deeper understanding of government processes, I am thankful to learn from the community of civil servants, professionals, and community members who have been dedicated to the practice of co-design long before me. My research benefits their labor, as well as legacies of community organizing and art of Participatory Action Research from the 1940's.

Even today, there are a growing number of resources around community co-design available by various institutions. The end of my process paper will have an extensive list of resources and references, but a few that were central to my work include:

- Beyond Sticky Notes¹⁹
- The Relationship Is the Project²⁰
- Participatory Practice²⁴
- Creative Reaction Lab³⁴
- Design Justice Network³⁵
- Chicago Beyond³⁷
- Community-Led Design Wiki³⁶
- Liberatory Design⁴⁰

All of these methods, frameworks, and theories investigate a way to give people more power to help shape, mold, and take action in the processes that are supposed to be designed for them. This includes initiatives directly led by communities and organizations that have been actively challenging traditional models of research. The work continues to evolve as the design field advances to incorporate more community-led frameworks, and designers build nuanced skillsets that become attuned to social and community design. Below are a few that have been particularly inspiring.

Design Justice Network is comprised of activists dedicated to “uplift liberatory experiences, practices, and tools, and critically question the role of design and designers.” Their principles deeply inspired me as a young designer, and they have continued to push engagement through an online community of practitioners.

Creative Reaction Lab’s Field Guide named “History + Healing” as a central part of the work. Naming Healing as part of the work inspired me to inquire beyond the scope of work itself – and into the wellbeing of community members to ensure their safety, voice, and agency throughout the design process.

Beyond Sticky Notes speaks to the transformational approach to co-design, and outlines practical tips to engaging with community members throughout the process.

Chicago Beyond tackles the question of autonomy, agency, control, and respect of communities that are always being researched. Their toolkit provides a deep look at the intersections between organizations, researchers, and funders.

These mindsets and frameworks help designers focus on building relationships versus processes alone. I encourage all practitioners to keep attuned to the developing landscape of wins, failures, lessons, and experiments in order to keep learning best practices. By building our reflective muscles towards deeper relational understanding, we may build equitable relationships that incorporate a plurality of voices in our designs.

“There is no co-design without co-deciding.”¹⁹

– KELLY ANN MCKETCHER
BEYOND STICKY NOTES

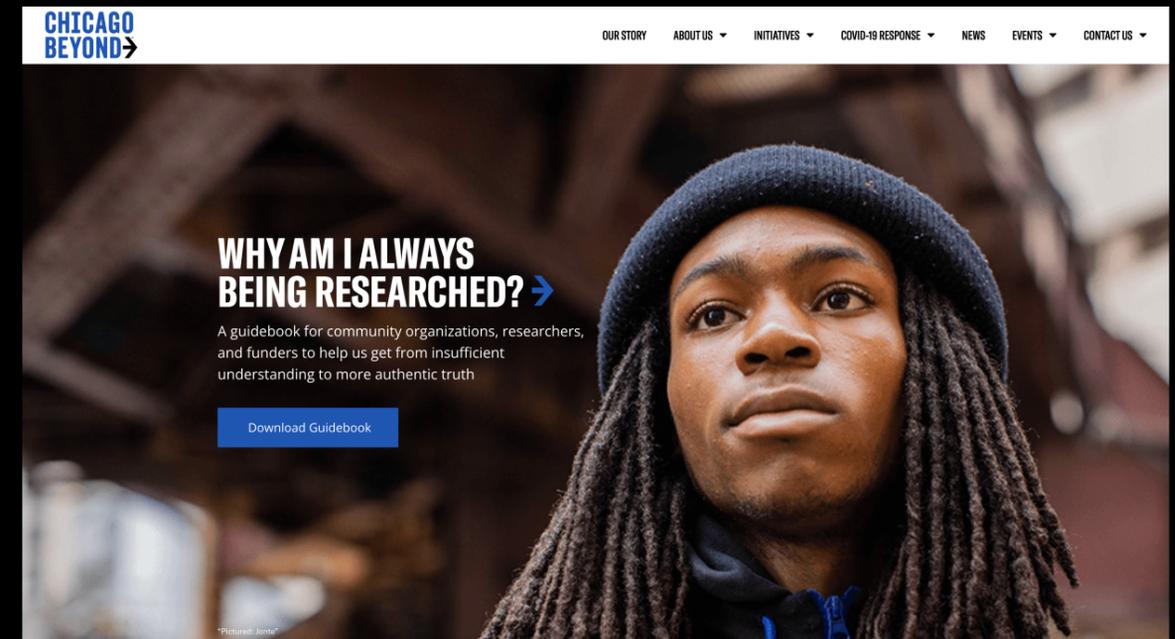
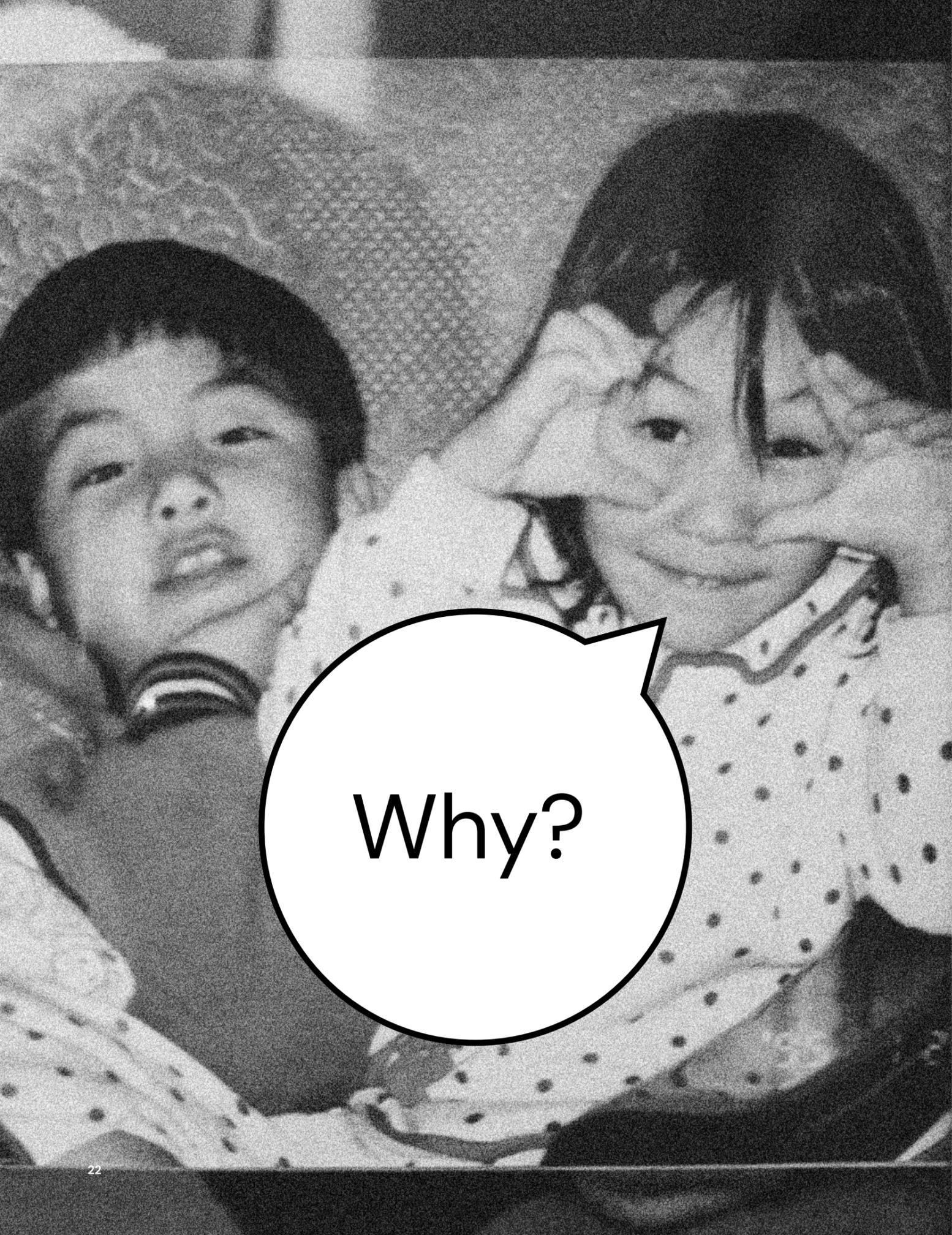


Image: Chicago Beyond, Why Am I Always Being Researched?



Why?

About Jenny Winjoy Lin

My journey into social design stemmed from my natural curiosity to develop a deeper understanding of the people and society around me. Since I was young, I believed the world would be a better place if people could understand each other better. I didn't have the words at the time, but practicing empathy and compassion felt critical to my being.

I explored my role as an artist, photographer, community organizer, non-profit worker, curator, and product designer. Each position fed my natural disposition to explore human behavior, culture, and systems through the objects, narratives, and relationships. I developed my practice to tell stories through visual poetry. I learned the act of mutual making towards collective action. I felt the power of shared healing thanks to deep vulnerability. Most importantly, I learned to lead with optimism and thoughtful collaboration.

All that to say, I also had a really difficult time navigating my many roles, especially in times of conflict and ambiguous social change. I witnessed my limitations through failures and lessons learned, and felt my capacity strained by my lack of clarity and purpose.

As such, I came to SVA DSI to learn and reflect on my practice as a designer. I needed to see the big picture, and realign myself and my values to the work I wanted to do.

What became clear in my work and thesis process is that we all benefit from a deep reflection of our own personal practices. Social change relies on our ability to understand the humanity in ourselves – through trauma, conflict, joy, and meaning. I'm still learning.

I am deeply thankful that I do not do this work alone. I have a wonderful community of people who also care, and are willing to be patient and teach each other. They are also fierce fighters for change, and teach me how to embody different ways of being. I'm inspired by these people every day. In the end, I'm trying to enact big change in small ways. That's why I think all community-centered design is personal practice at work.

If you ever meet me, you'll see that I love life, connection, curiosity, and joy. I am constantly asking why. I believe understanding is within reach, and my goal in life is to embed this energy in all that I do.

DESIGN

→ PROCESS

→ GOALS

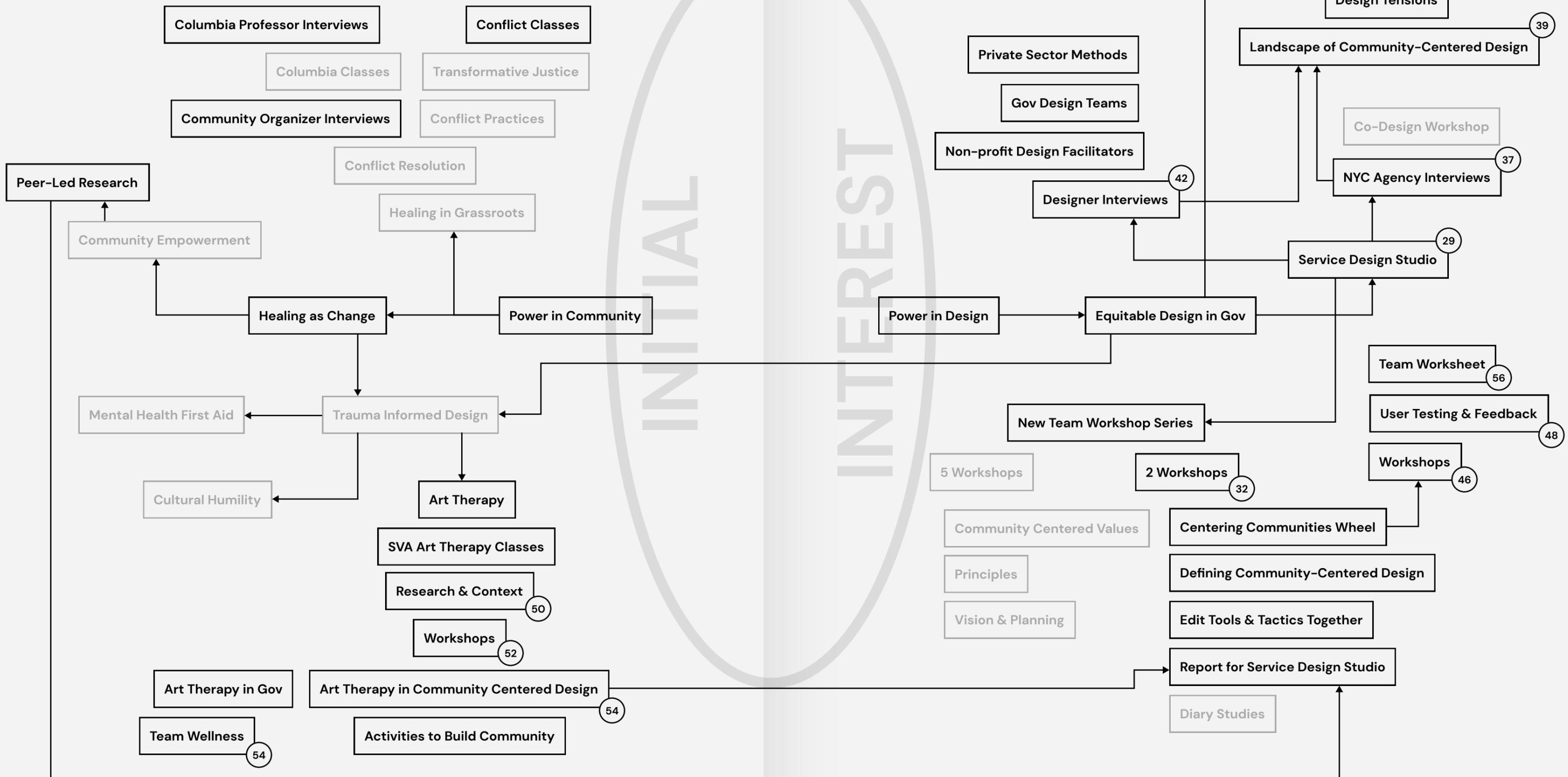
→ ACTIVITIES

→ OUTCOMES

→ IDENTITY

Design Process Mindmap

Legend Unaccomplished Activities Accomplished Activities # Page #



Design Process

My design process was not clear or linear. It had a lot of cul-de-sacs, pivots, and dreams that have yet to be realized. The map on the previous page starts with my interests in the center: power in community and power in design. The rest of the process was emergent. As the project evolved, I was pleasantly surprised at the interconnectedness of both branches, especially as they seemed to grow further away from each other.

Across eight months, I was able to work with three organizations, interview over twenty designers, non-profit workers, and civil servants, and facilitate or coordinate five workshops. My main community partner, NYC Service Design Studio, was critical to this process. In the next few pages, you'll see my various workshops and activities conducted to explore the space of community design within government.

3 Organizations 5 Workshops
5 NYC Agencies 6 Concept Testers
23 Interviewees 8 months

COMMUNITY PARTNER

NYC Service Design Studio



NYC Service Design Studio sits under the New York City's Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, who "uses evidence and innovation to reduce poverty and increase equity." The Studio's "approach begins by trying to understand the needs of people who use and oversee public services, and designing the service to meet those needs. With that knowledge, our team works with City agency partners to shape services that are effective, user-friendly, sustainable, and scalable."³³

Since their official launch in 2017, Service Design Studio has grown to become nationally known for advancing service design practices within government to be more human centered. The Service Design Studio is also a free resource for Agencies, which allows service design to be more accessible to Agencies by removing procurement and contracting hurdles.

Amongst its multiple services available to Agencies across New York City, it's main publication is the Tools & Tactics resource. Their free Tools + Tactics toolkit showcases their philosophy and processes, and invites government employees and the public alike to utilize these methodologies.

I was extremely interested in working with the Service Design Studio as they wanted to develop a Community-Centered framework that would expand on their current Tools + Tactics. The goal was to encourage NYC Agencies to elevate the service design process to co-design with people who have lived experience.

The opportunity for scale and impact was clear: by integrating more voices into the service design process, community members may have more impact on the outcomes of said services. It was a gracious invitation that held many possibilities.

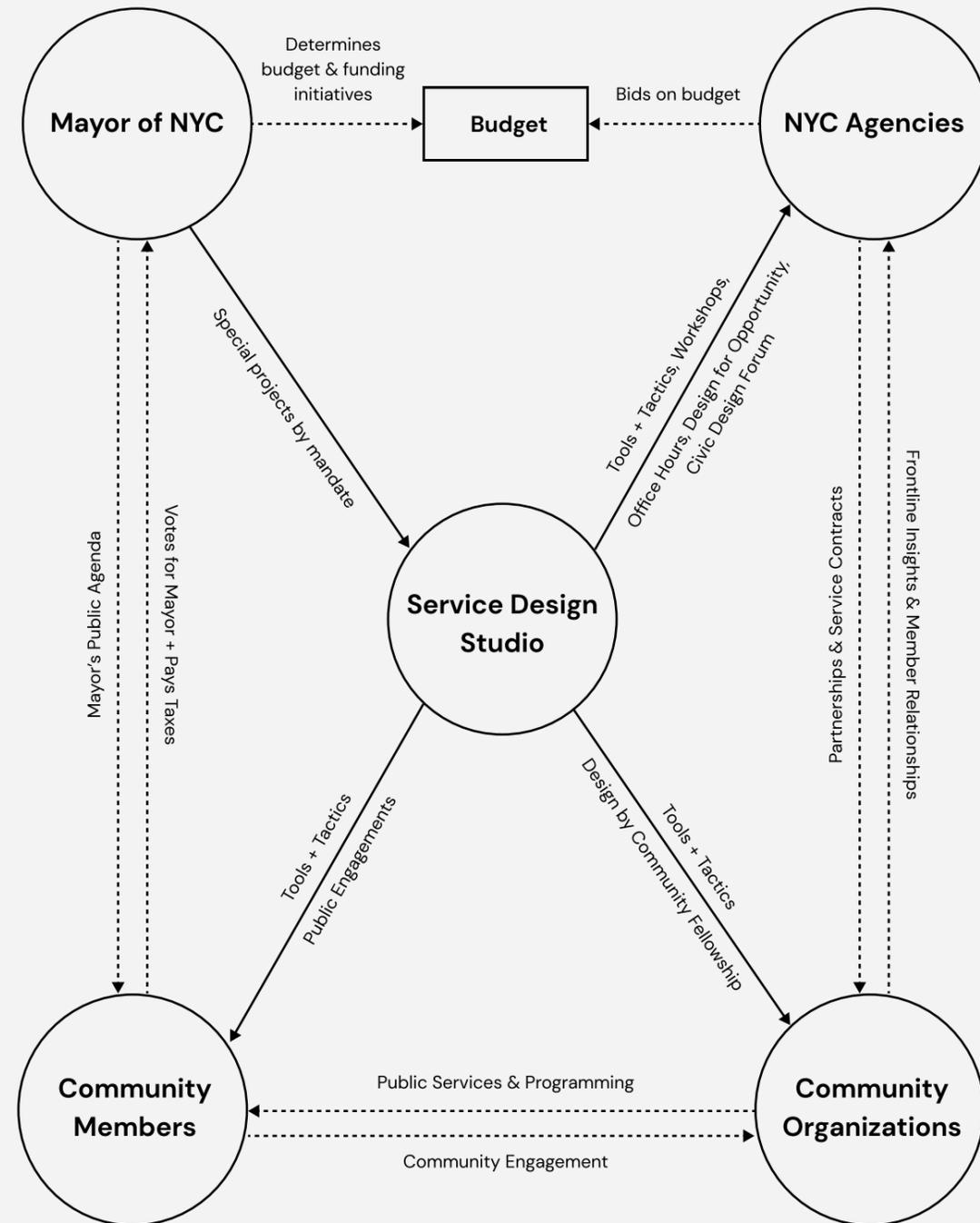
NYC Agencies were already interested in doing Community-Centered work, and have been doing versions of community engagement for a long time. A few questions that would come to the Studio include:

- When should we think about including communities in our process?
- How do we include them?
- What participatory research methods should we use?
- How do we engage communities when developing RFPs?
- What is co-design, and how can we facilitate the process?

Service Design Studio was also undergoing a dramatic team shift. Five brand new team members were onboarded between December 2021 to January 2022, all of whom had various backgrounds and varying degrees of experience with design, civic design, and community engagement.

The team was smart and motivated; many of whom had worked with communities before and felt comfortable doing so. In my collaboration with them, I would help facilitate the translation of their community expertise into their Tools + Tactics offering.

NYC Government Stakeholder Map



This map is an extremely simplified view of the relationships and exchanges between each stakeholder. The purpose of the map is to illustrate entity relationships and Service Design Studio offerings.

Design Goals

How might we use co-design to strengthen democracy?

My initial design goal was to help Service Design Studio expand their Tools + Tactics framework to include Community-Centered processes. However, as I dove further into the systems design, it became clear that I would have multiple design goals for various intersecting parts of my thesis and interests.

These three questions summarize my main topics, and have guided me in identifying the points of intervention. In this Stakeholder map, I show an extremely simplified relationship diagram between Service Design Studio, the Mayor of NYC, NYC Agencies, Community Organizations, and Community Members. I've outlined a few ways in which these various entities engage to deliver public services. Additionally, I've listed the multiple offerings given by Service Design Studio to develop service design processes and capacity within NYC government.

Each of my design goal questions interacts with a different audience within the system.

QUESTION 1

How might Service Design Studio build a collective framework around Community-Centered Design?

QUESTION 2

How might NYC Agency staff feel prepared to facilitate Community-Centered activities?

QUESTION 3

How might designers develop trauma-responsive ways of engaging with community members to foster relationships and trust?

QUESTION 1

How might Service Design Studio build a collective framework around Community-Centered Design?

This question was the foundation of my work with the Studio. Seeing that they had a brand new team, I wanted to ensure that their voice laid the foundation for their Community-Centered Design vision. As such, my goal was to facilitate a workshop series that built a Community-Centered Design framework that embodied everyone's skillsets and interests. I believe this was the right pathway towards change, as a strong foundation could allow the team to move more quickly and confidently in the fast-paced environment of the Mayor's Office. This series would also provide an opportunity for the team to learn more about the each other, their roles and positions in the studio, share their skills, and create a collective vision for the upcoming couple of years.

I worked with Abigail Fisher, Ashley Cortez, and Mari Nakano to build the series of workshops. Abigail facilitated workshops 1, 3, and 4, and I facilitated 2 and 5. From the collective workshops, the team was able to complete the following:

- Define Community-Centered Design
- Build studio vision in 2022 & 2032
- Brainstormed T+T opportunities for more equitable approaches
- Develop a timeline for launch of their new website

The workshops were spaced out approximately two weeks out from each other. Surveys were sent out pre and post workshop sessions to understand the impact this series had on their onboarding experience with the Studio.

WORKSHOP 1

Getting to know the studio

WORKSHOP 2

Community-Centered Design

WORKSHOP 3

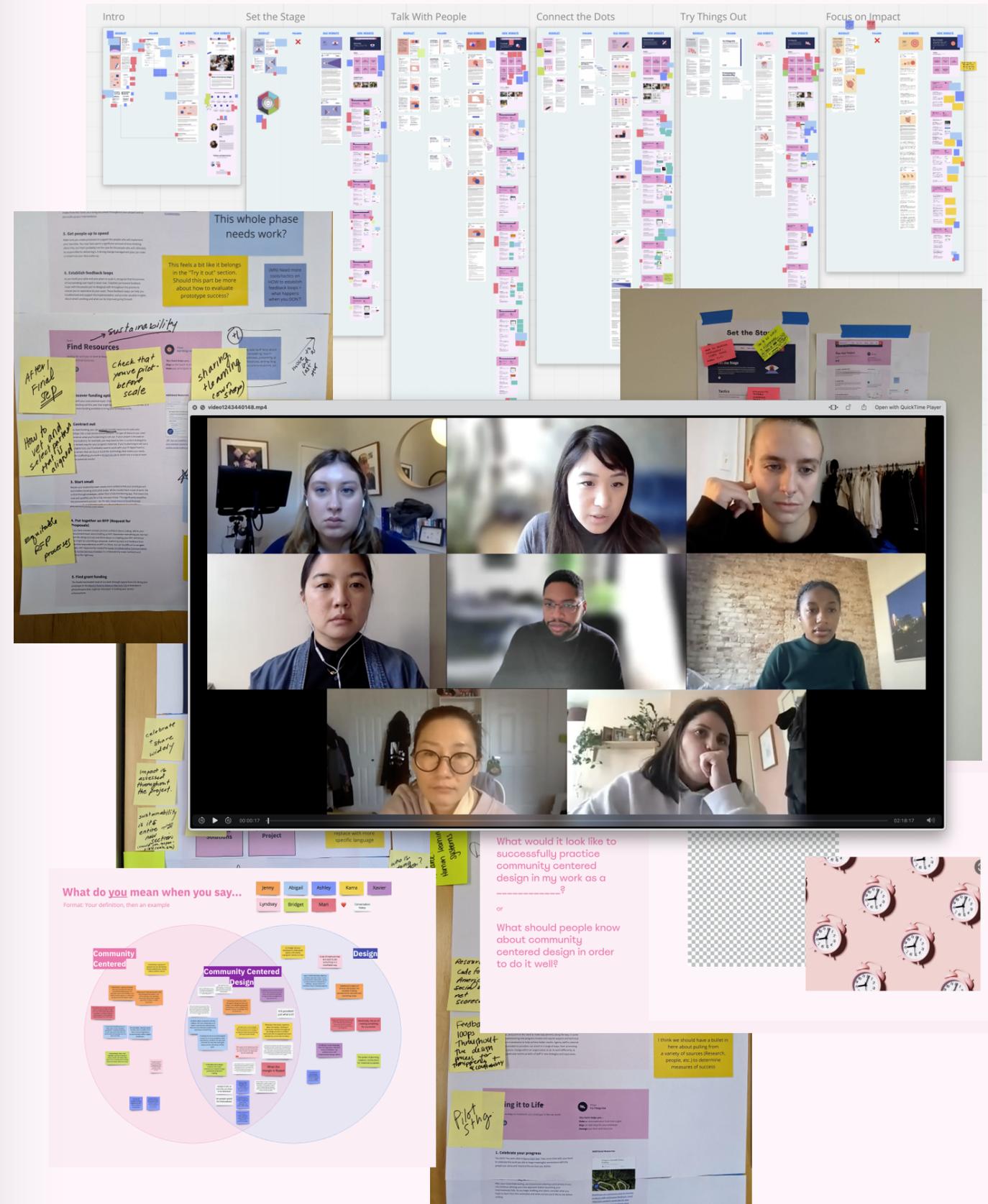
Planning for the Future

WORKSHOP 4

Putting it All Together

WORKSHOP 5

Tools + Tactics



Feedback from the Studio

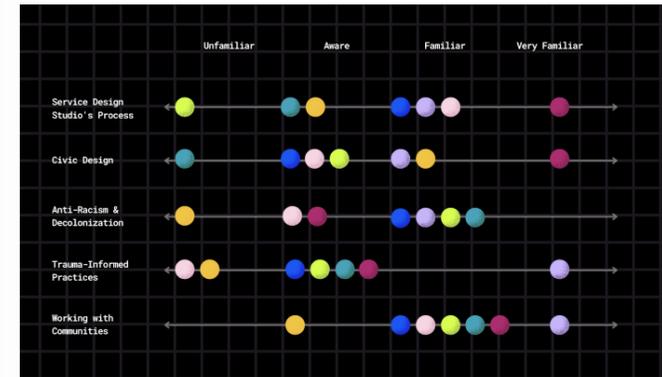
I appreciate the space the workshops series created for the team to consider the ethics and importance of centering community. I feel that over time we understood the offices positionality and capacity more deeply and honestly.

I enjoy these sessions bc I learn so much about my teammates and have a space for self-reflection with the team. It's hard, but it's necessary if we want to do this work.

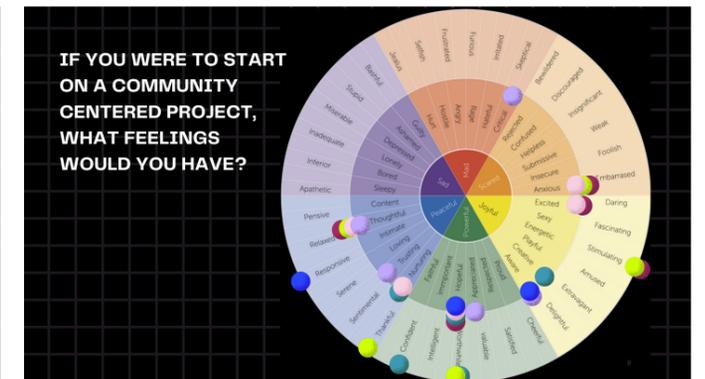
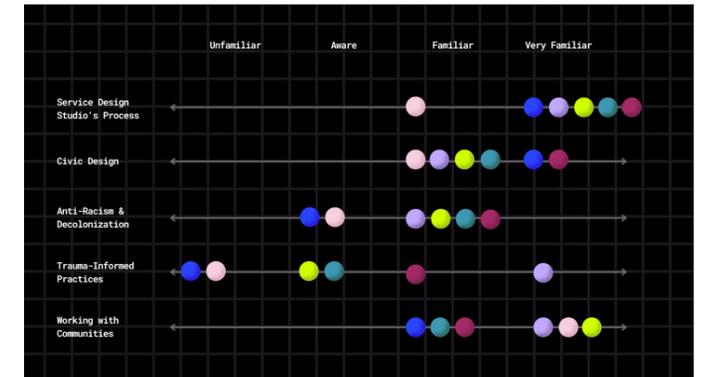
I think these sessions were really successful in creating the understanding that the work we do is created by and through us. I think they gave us more a sense of self-determination and consensus across the team.

I would like to consider myself as a community design advocate moving forward.

Before



After



Overall, the studio series was a success. All participants strongly agreed that the workshop series helped their Studio onboarding process, and either strongly agreed or agreed that they feel aligned with their team members around the vision for Community-Centered Design practices. Staff also reported that the workshop series helped them think about the Studio's Community-Centered Design strategy, and that they have a vision of growth for both themselves and the Studio.

While some members of the team were highly experienced in the field, the sessions were beneficial in aligning new and senior teammates alike to the Studio's overall vision and goal. They provided an opportunity for collective strategic thinking, which help the team orient themselves to each other. For example, Abigail hosted a visioning activity for the the next year and ten years, which

integrated the vision for Community-Centered Design. I helped facilitate a definition activity that questioned the role of Community-Centered Design in government. As stated on the previous page, staff members appreciated the time and felt the workshops "gave us more a sense of self-determination and consensus," as well as a time for "self-reflection."

Additionally, the charts above show a shift between people's knowledge around Service Design Studio's Process, Civic Design, Anti-Racism and Decolonization, Trauma-Informed Practices, and Working with Communities. There was a large shift towards better understanding in the Studio's Design Process, Civic Design, and Working with Communities over the past few months, which points to a much stronger and confident team. As the workshops were conducted over the series of a few months, the passing of

time also contributed to the positive development. Anti-Racism and Trauma-Informed Practices were more lightly discussed in connection to the work, and the team expressed interest in further developing this in the future.

I had also asked the team what feelings they would feel to start a community centered project. The staff was able to choose from a wide variety of words on the feelings wheel, shown above.

Notable changes include an increase in feeling hopeful, thoughtful, and nurturing. Negative thoughts, such as insecurity, anxiety, and guilt, went down.

This data shows an overall positive trend in the Studio's collective feelings to execute work in and with communities.

Lessons in Workshop Design

My time with the studio ended with the workshop series. While the topic of Community-Centered Design just began, I believe that the series was well-timed and built momentum towards a new version of their Tools + Tactics to embody elements of community-centered practice. Below are the lessons I learned in my own practice as a facilitator and thought partner.

Building shared language also builds shared foundations.

When asked to individually define Community-Centered Design, the staff had very similar definitions to each other. This was a pleasant surprise, and led to thoughtful questions and responses that allowed for deeper reflections on the word and practice in context of the studio. I believe that exploring shared language together allowed for discussions that built collective ownership, and that these conversations were cathartic and helpful to team bonding and alignment. The team continued to build out the working definition over the next few months.

Validate the expertise in the room, while making room for curiosity.

The team had a strong foundation in community work prior to joining the studio, which felt extremely important to validate throughout the series. I tried to approach every topic with sensitivity and inclusivity of all experiences. I wanted people to feel supported and not overwhelmed in their new positions. The workshop series also allowed for other knowledge gaps to be brought to surface, such as a deeper dive into Service Design, hosted by Mari.

Be extremely clear with workshop goals, while also extremely flexible.

While my goal was to approach the series more broadly, there was constant feedback to focus, clarify, specify, and tune. I learned that an open-ended activity may breed more confusion than exploration, especially with an extremely busy team working on multiple projects at once. I worked hard to incorporate feedback to include goals and purpose for each activity. This helped staff members understand their role at each stage. I also practiced pivoting throughout the workshop to accommodate the mood and flow of conversations in the group.

Highly capable teams still need time to slow down and align.

I was nervous that these workshops would feel insignificant, and assumed that the Studio was already high performing and thereby could be functional without a workshop. However, I learned that slowing down allowed for more intentional conversations, which was helpful to build a collective strategy. This workshop series allowed for more focused exploratory thought that might not have been easily achieved on the day-to-day, and acted much more like a retreat.

NYC Agency Analysis



I also conducted secondary research with NYC Agency staff to understand how they currently practice collaborative research and development, what hurdles they might face, and how centering community practices might impact the way they work.

My hypothesis was that NYC Agencies currently have difficulty implementing collaboration in their practice, but would like to develop the skill set in their teams and project lifecycle. I understood that they currently faced many road blocks, from lack of funding, time, and leadership buy-in, to changing team cultures that adopt a service design and community centered framework for change. The Tools & Tactics platform could help Agencies develop initial buy-in and processes that prepare them for longer sustained design work, such as Design for Opportunity and Design by Community initiatives.

The service systems within each Agency is complex and may not always have a designer. Additionally, they all have different levels of maturity around their process. Some may have incorporated versions of service design and feedback loops early on, and is now functioning as a well oiled machine. Others are still learning, iterating, and developing new practices, and look to Service Design Studio for guidance on expanding their offerings.

My interviews were extremely helpful in understanding the landscape of design in government today. They provided an insight with regards to the interest of Community-Centered Design within NYC Agencies, as well as the culture around collaboration and service programming. While I was only able to conduct a small sampling of interviews, I learned that many Agencies were undergoing their own versions of Community-Centered work. Others were highly interested, but unsure about how to approach a community partnership.

My original intention was to co-create a series of Community-Centered Design tools with Agency members, but given the timeline of my thesis, I was unable to pursue this collaboration. However, there are plenty of examples, as collected on the next page, that outline the processes currently implemented within NYC Agencies. By collecting this information, I can provide Service Design Studio with a stronger reference point for the activities happening within government, and highlight which practices could be built upon. On the next page, I share a few of my observations from these interviews, while a more comprehensive analysis will be given to Service Design Studio over the summer.

Current Engagement Difficulties

Power Dynamics

- Traditional delivery expectation to “do what the government says”, and oblige by government contracts
- Community views scope of work as rigid versus flexible

Expectations around Work

- Designers are OK with gathering feedback, while community members might feel burdened
- Workflows might be different than originally outlined

Political Tension

- Activist organizations may be actively critical of the government, and may feel difficult to navigate with civil servants
- Need for open dialogue between constituents to build trust, safety, and accountability

Moving at the speed of trust

- Work is not clear-cut and may be highly relational. They require mindfulness, attention, and care
- Collaboration needs to feel open, honest, safe, and meaningful

Learnings from Interviews

Strong Desire to Engage

- People want to work with more radical groups that are justice-minded
- Interested in looking beyond service only
- Not sure how to start, would want to work with community partner

Already Building Frameworks

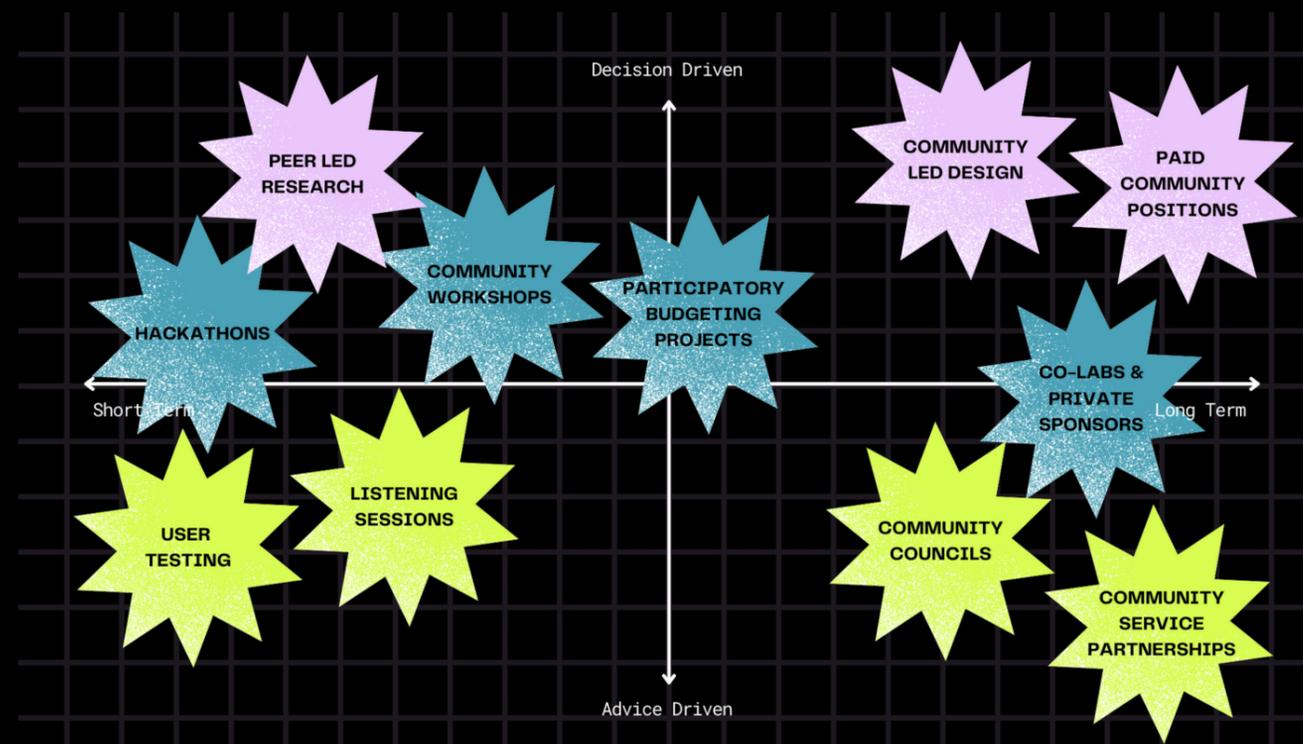
- Each Agency currently develops their own trauma-informed framework, but it's not formally structured
- Indirectly talks about power and privilege, but hire for diverse culture

Working under Scope & Budget

- A lot of work is predetermined before it gets to the Agency, so the work schedule and goals do not offer much flexibility
- Civil servants are time-starved to do the work they want to do because they work in a heavily reactive environment

Traditional Service Delivery Processes

- Many service delivery processes are still very traditionally modeled after focus groups, advisory boards, and user testing sessions



The current landscape of community engagement activities

Community design is not a new method, and public institutions have been doing it for a very long time. However, through my interviews, I have determined two main axes which dictate the type of activity an institution should solicit.

Decision Driven vs Advice Driven: this is important because not every community engagement actually gives community power to enact the change they seek. Many of the institutions that solicit feedback often get a barrage of information about services outside of their control. Therefore, it is critical to understand how you are inviting community into the process. This level of transparency is important for following through and maintaining the trust of community participants.

Short Term vs Long Term: this is another determining factor because it would establish the amount of investment both government and community members would need to commit. The length of time also determines if you will need to focus on building relationships that will last and require trust over time. If an Agency is on a shorter timeline, they may think about short but meaningful activities that would garner focused and relevant feedback. When an activity is long term, collective goals may need to be established, along with community agreements, data policy, and deeper conversations of equity in the workplace.

The Service Design Studio will continue to grow and leverage this set of data to help navigate the complex terrain of community engagement.

Design Tensions

My last reflection regarding government design aims to recognize the tension between institutional practices and community-based practices. However, even when there is tension, they are not mutually exclusive. Below are my initial thoughts capturing a high-level summary of my observations inspired by the multiple conversations within the Studio, Agencies, practitioners in the Design field, and with my peers and teachers at DSI.

This mapping is a reflection of my personal framework, and does not reflect any other perspectives. I would have loved to continue breaking and rebuilding this structure with others, but I was unfortunately constrained by time. In the future, I would like to continue shaping these tensions into a reflection exercise that help designers and teams create intentional processes that recognize and incorporate more community values.

As designers who are individuals within systems, we are both conforming to the system and shaping it at the same time. How do we learn to acknowledge the pressure of power-structures while investing in more dynamic, sociocratic, reciprocal relationships? How do we recognize our own power within the system, and find ways to share our power without feeling overwhelmed or disempowered?

To imagine the pressures of navigating institutional versus community-based design, I encourage you to preface the beginning of each card by imagining leadership figures, telling you to "Design for..."

Institutional Practices	Inbetween Design Practices	Community-Based Practices
<p>All</p> <p>Design for all individuals across needs</p>	<p>People, Communities, Systems, and Context</p> <p>Design for specific situations of power and scale</p>	<p>Humanity</p> <p>Design to uplift standards of humanity with benevolence, care, and dignity</p>
<p>Structure</p> <p>Clarify scope, goals, timelines, and roles</p>	<p>Transparency & Clarity</p> <p>Manage expectations around capacity, ability, power, time, and influence</p>	<p>Emergence</p> <p>Embrace fluidity with creativity and an open-mind</p>

Institutional Practices	Inbetween Design Practices	Community-Based Practices
<p>Efficiency</p> <p>Operate leanly to maximize time and resources</p>	<p>Speed of Trust</p> <p>Trust as a necessary operational measure for action and decision making</p>	<p>Relationships</p> <p>Reciprocal kinship and mutual benefit</p>
<p>Solutions</p> <p>Solving a difficult problem</p>	<p>Interventions & Experiments</p> <p>Small-scale trials that stretch possibilities</p>	<p>What's Already Working</p> <p>Funding grassroots and local initiatives</p>
<p>Data & Trends</p> <p>Quantitative, Evidence-based Data that shows trends</p>	<p>Diversity & Marginalized Groups</p> <p>Prioritizing equity-based initiatives</p>	<p>Intersectionality & Plurality</p> <p>Allow for nuance, as an identity is not a singular or monolithic experience</p>
<p>Good Intentions</p> <p>Desire to create positive impact</p>	<p>Conflict & Conversations</p> <p>Recognizing potential negative impact and need to navigate through conflict with conversations</p>	<p>Accountability</p> <p>Prioritizing impact over intention, and one's own responsibility in the situation</p>
<p>Now</p> <p>This moment in time</p>	<p>Community's History</p> <p>Recognizing historical impact in shaping the now</p>	<p>Seven Generations in the Future</p> <p>Sustainability and impact for generations to come</p>
<p>Meetings & Buy In</p> <p>Stakeholder management and power</p>	<p>Meaningful Engagement</p> <p>Explicit contributions with clear impact</p>	<p>Play & Rest</p> <p>Activating the imagination and resting our bodies</p>
<p>Do No Harm</p> <p>Our actions should not expose people to additional risks</p>	<p>Trauma-Informed</p> <p>Building processes that treat traumas and triggers with care</p>	<p>Healing</p> <p>Collective practices that transform consequences of oppression</p>

QUESTION 2

How might people within NYC Agencies feel prepared to facilitate Community-Centered activities?

My previous experience in community organizing and social sciences gave me a specific lens to understanding power and privilege, especially in community spaces. To be in a community meant recognizing your positionality in relation to others, and actively working to create equity through daily interactions, programming, procedures, access, and more. It also meant deepening your relationship to your personal history, and taking ownership over your own privilege and choice. In this way, you build yourself and movements towards more liberatory practices that challenge structural and systemic oppression.

When talking with NYC Agencies about their current community-centered practices, one interviewee mentioned that they hire people who understand the dynamics of power and privilege, because it's important to doing the work well. However, they realized that it is currently difficult to talk about it in the context of everyday work. I saw this as an opportunity to create a tool that allowed us to have these deeper conversations, so that we could build alignment around our purpose and place in community-centered work.

My activity was also built off of conversations inspired by Leslie Ann Noel (DSI Guest Speaker, Spring '21), Laura Ceron Melo (DSI Alumni, '21), and Shawn Harris (DSI Designer in Residence, Fall '21).

It's counter to the idea of professionalism to talk about ourselves, our identities, our lived experience, our limits, and our power. But it's about plurality of voices, so that at the end, it's not about meeting their needs but giving them more power than they've had before."²⁸

– ZAHRA EBRAHIM
PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGNER

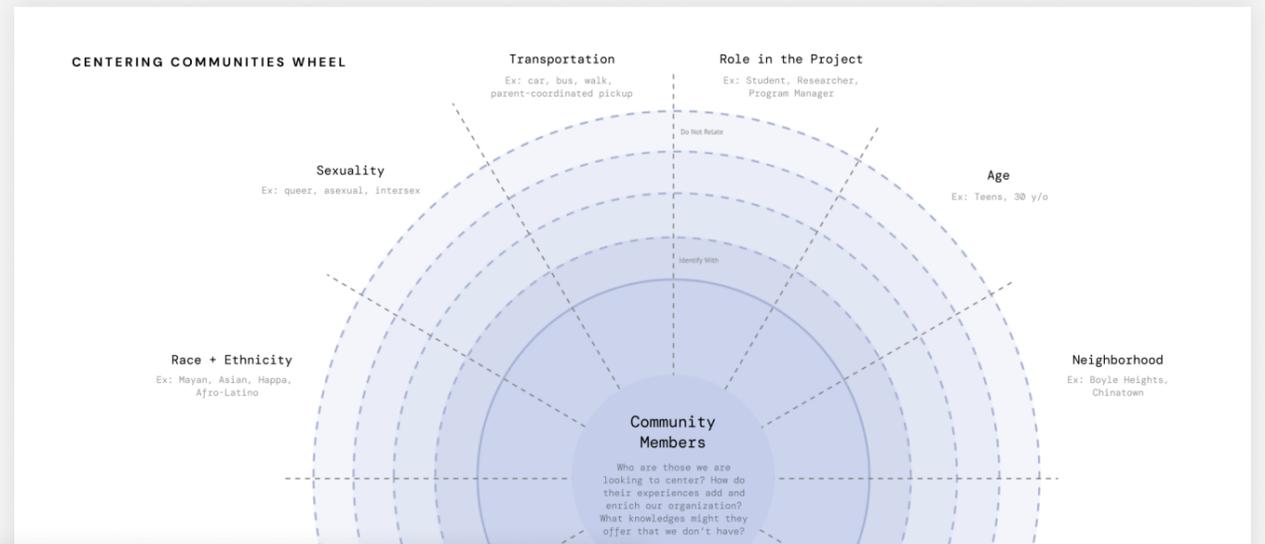
My hope is that by proactively engaging designers in the process of unlearning biases, we may engage with communities more authentically.

In addition, understanding power and privilege can be seen as cultivating cultural humility. Cultural humility helps acknowledge that everyone comes from diverse backgrounds, and that we are in a constant relationship that learns from each other. Building cultural humility also allows us to recognize biases, and actively challenge them.

According to the American Psychological Society,¹⁹ there are three main factors to cultural humility:

- Lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique
- Fix power imbalances were none ought to exist
- Develop partnerships with people and groups who advocate for others

Building our muscles of cultural humility in the context of power and privilege is helpful to building a process-oriented design approach.



Purpose of this activity...

- build a collective framework around power and privilege, and how we may build responsibility and accountability in affirming ways
- discuss the lens in which our own experience influences how we see and arrive at our work
- name our own positionality in relation to the communities we are looking to center
- reflect on ways in which we can share our power in our position

Goal of this activity...

- define who we think our audience is and our responsibility as the org to meet our audience where they are
- name "what we don't know" to inform project strategy discussions at ACS
- identify opportunities to strengthen how we bring people into the process

Instructions

First: On the next page, review the categories along the outside of the Centering Communities Wheel, and replace any categories that you deem more fitting to the organization.
For example: Replace "Justice System Involvement" with "Religious Affiliation", or "Internet Accessibility"

Second: In the inner-most Lived Experts circle, write your assumptions of who your "target audience" is.

Third: Place your own experience along the outer rings of the wheel in proximity to how close or far you relate to these "target audiences".

Role in the Project
Ex: Student, Researcher, Program Manager

Do Not Relate
Designer, I have never interacted with ACS outside of my job. I take these ideas and get to make decisions

Identify With
Community Org Member from family who has interacted with ACS before. They get to ideate ideas in a workshop

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR IDENTITIES ON THE INNER RINGS OF THE CIRCLE

Free write - What can we do to ensure your mental health when working with this population closest to you? What do you need in order to support yourself in this time?

Free write - How can we recognize our own experience/assumptions about our community? What can we do to hold complexity in all of our experiences?

The activity I created focused on flipping the matrix of domination, as shown in the "Wheel of Power/Privilege" illustration on the right. The activity was crafted into two parts. First, you define the target community members per category of privilege. Then, you map yourself in proximity to those at the center, where you either relate or don't relate. The goal of this activity was to build cultural humility and recognize the importance of understanding lived experience. It was also to highlight "what we don't know," and identify opportunities to bring community members more in the design process.



THE ABILITY TO IDENTIFY
AND ADDRESS INEQUITIES
WITHIN A WHOLE PERSON
FRAMEWORK IS WHAT
DEFINES INTERSECTIONAL
COMMUNITY-ENGAGED
PRACTICE...

DIVERSITY WITHOUT
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
OF INEQUITY IS USELESS.
IN GAINING AN UNDER-
STANDING OF INEQUITY, IT
IS VITAL WE HEAL THE
HARM AND RECTIFY THE
IMBALANCE.²⁰

– THE RELATIONSHIP IS THE PROJECT

Las Fotos Project Workshop

To continue testing the Centering Communities Wheel activity, I partnered with a nonprofit organization, Las Fotos Project, for a three-hour workshop. The organization's mission is to build up youth voice through self-expression, community, and career development. It was an opportune time for the organization to discuss these dynamics, as they were about to create their strategic plan for the next five years. I collaborated with them to create a workshop that explored how to define the community they serve, and the staff's personal intersections of power and privilege. The goal was to develop ideas for more inclusive community engagement in their program design and development.

I conducted a survey prior to the workshop, asking about the staff's comfort level with these topics. Two-thirds of respondents said they discussed power and privilege within the past month, and just the rest within the past 6 months. Two-thirds of them also said they felt comfortable talking about power and privilege at work, while one-third of them reported neutrally.

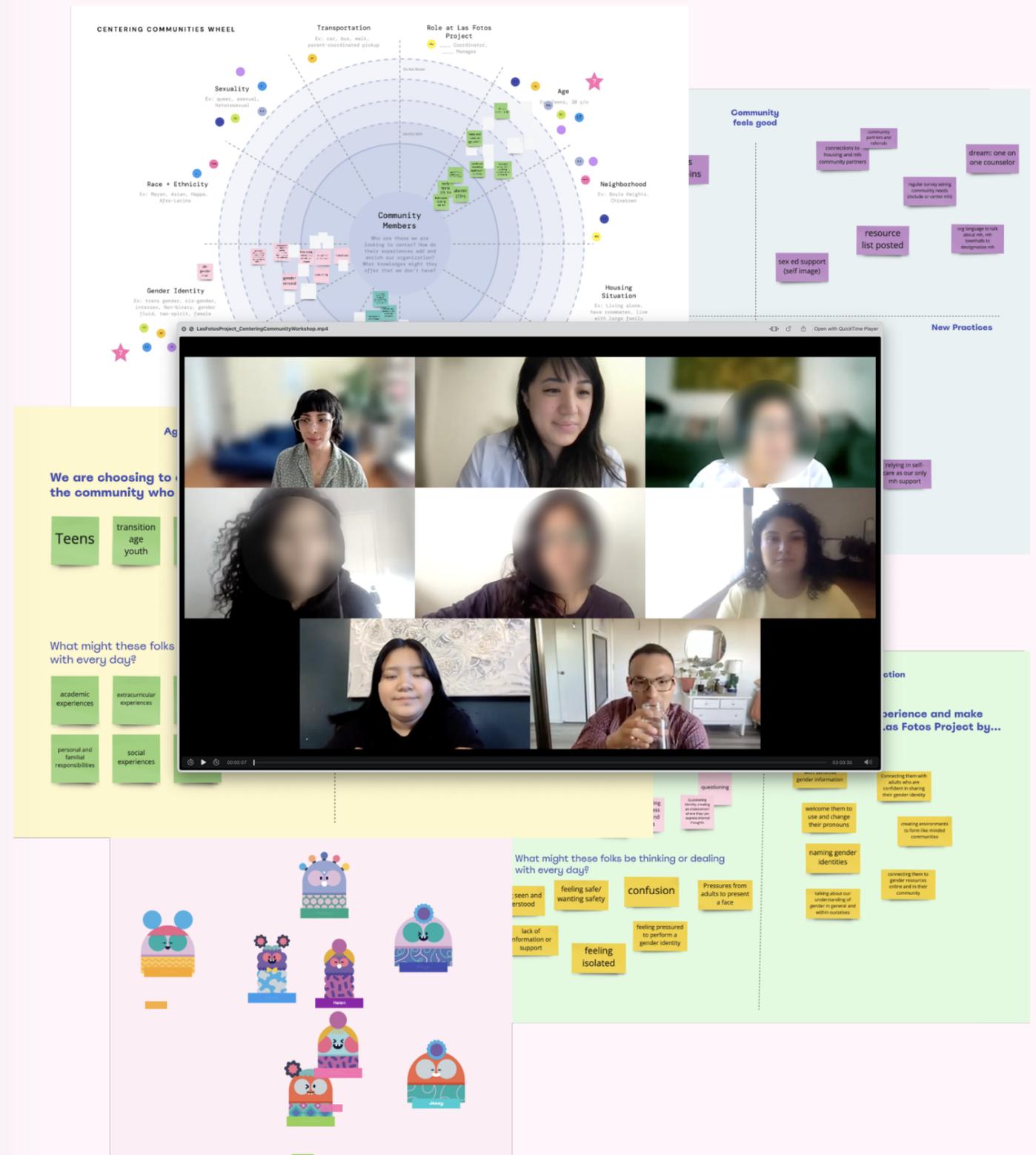
While the time was limited to three hours, we had plenty of discussion around our own understanding of it in our lives, and how we define it. When reviewing the wheel, we prioritized the categories Age, Gender Identity, Citizenship + Immigration, and Mental Health. The participating staff then split up into multiple teams to discuss action steps they could include in their programming, to make sure their students felt honored and seen in the space.

In one activity, I asked if people agreed or disagreed that "having privilege is a bad thing." Two disagreed, five slightly disagreed, and one was more towards the center. The following conversation that ensued covered two points. First, privilege is not inherently good or bad, but it's what prevents people from achieving equity. When you think privilege is bad, you push it off of yourself and think it's something to be ashamed of. But if you can recognize your privilege, you can share your resources. One person said:

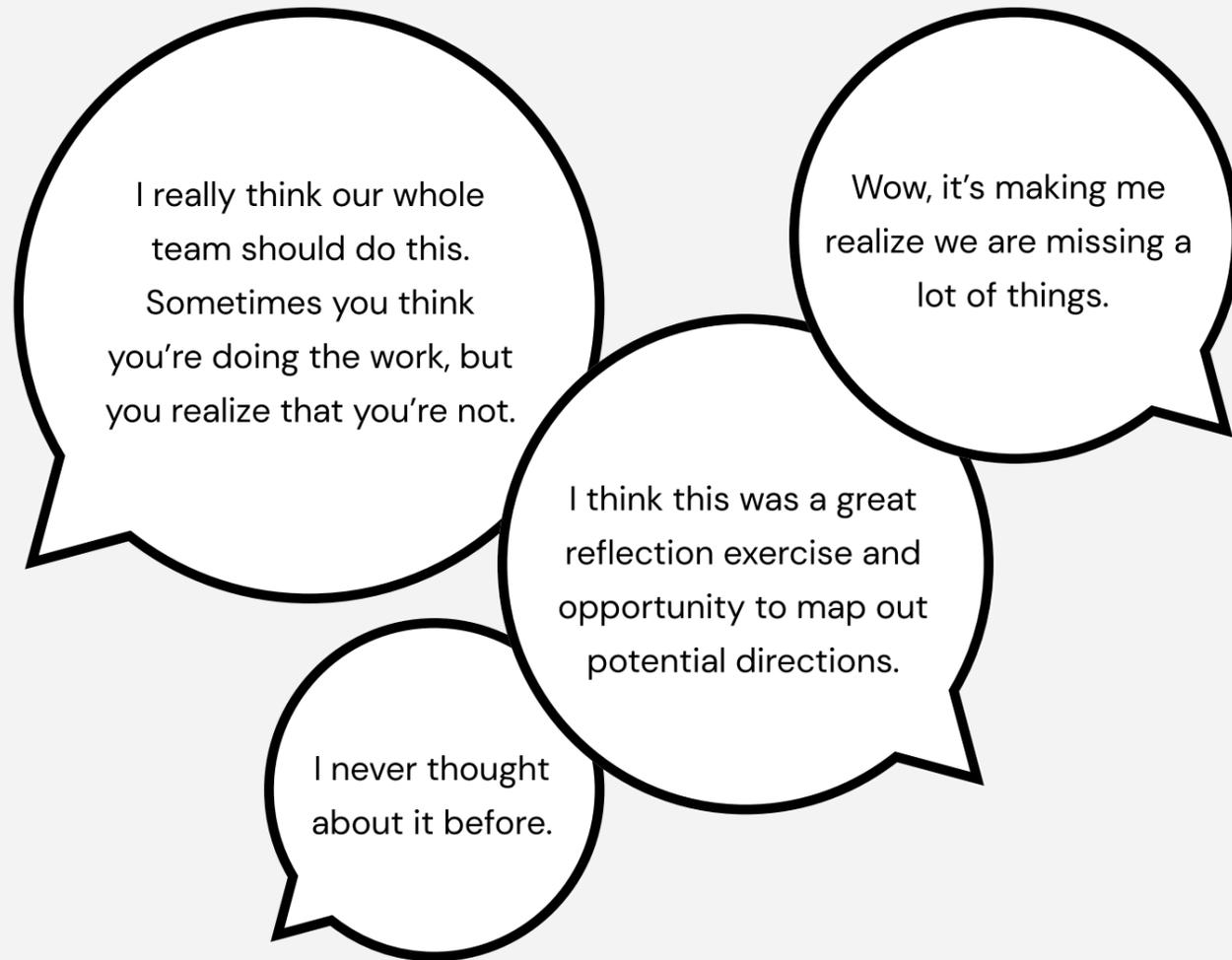
"It's about how we use our privilege to create equity that matters."

Second, privilege can feel dirty when it ostracizes you from the community you came from. This is especially difficult when working with communities you are close to. Many people struggle with accepting privilege, even some of their students when deciding whether or not to go to college. It's a very inbetween feeling, and can be very uncomfortable.

This conversation felt important in the context of this workshop because it created a space for introspection, relation, support, and acknowledgement of the difficulty in this work. It set the tone for accepting their positionality to create room for others in the space, and to commit to programming that created equity. I was extremely humbled by their wisdom and dedication to the work, and learned a lot from their experience.



Testing Feedback



Individual Concept Testers

I also conducted a few concept tests with six individuals who were designers or civil servants working on projects that sought to center community. While I did not conduct a full workshop with all of them, I sat with each of them to review the activity, discuss the categories and concept of proximity, explore reflection questions, and frame the overall applicability of this tool. The conversations helped me realize what was working well and what wasn't, and what content might have been missing.

Overall, the feedback was extremely positive. Many people were familiar with the concept of power and privilege, but it helped slow people down to think about who their target audience was for each category. A few of them wanted to do a full workshop and explore it further with their team. Others breezed through the activity, which helped me build out further reflection questions in case the conversation lacked the depth I was aiming for.

Centering Community Wheel Facilitation Lessons

I was happy that I could test across a wide range of users. From civil servants, to non-profit workers, to designers, the Centering Community Wheel tool felt like a centerpiece that could align teams across equity initiatives. While I believe this tool would need further development to be released for mass consumption, I believe it has potential to continue. In my next stages, I would like to build a deeper connection between the reflection activity and government project applicability and impact.

Movement building is not an asynchronous activity.

In the series of concept tests, I observed how people approached the activity. It helped me understand what instructions were clear or unclear, but it also became obvious that discussions were necessary to help guide people towards the takeaway. The activity alone doesn't build knowledge. Rather, it is a reflection tool that can only go as far as one's own knowledge. As my goal is to build action towards equitable relationships, I realize the worksheet alone isn't conducive to the change I wanted to foster, and should be in conjunction with an educational element.

The facilitation requires careful steering and clear calls to action.

The current activity was too open ended, and there were many factors that I had not accounted for. For example, what if someone identified with the community in every single category? Or what if someone didn't want to design for low-income access? While I recognize it was not my place to dictate the scope of the project, it made me wonder how this tool would be used in a context that might not prioritize who I personally imagined should be prioritized. While I believe this tool is helpful for reflection, it might need a stronger call to action from my perspective.

Power and privilege literacy is a pre-condition to deep engagement.

It's important to spend time digesting power and privilege as a group before moving to the Centering Community Wheel. This was extremely helpful during the workshop, as I had stated on the previous pages. The same momentum was not cultivated when the worksheet was done asynchronously. I realized there was an opportunity to build a stronger lens prior to the wheel activity, and I should also provide examples or additional framings and references. Additionally, I would need to build a clear relationship to the work, equity, and systems design.

Connect people through shared values.

One point of feedback I received from Miya Osaki (Chair of DSI), is to elevate the conversation beyond a group of people, and to center a goal instead. Upon reflection, I realize that naming shared values could greatly help connect what might feel like a disconnecting or shameful discussion about privilege. I thought that this was a valuable addition to the work as it allowed for the cultivation of altruism, and could help prevent tokenization of people. While this would need to be tested further, it added an encompassing element.

How might designers develop trauma-responsive ways of engaging with community members to foster relationships and trust?

Trauma-informed and trauma-responsive care are newer concepts in the field of design that comes from social work and mental health fields. The importance of understanding mental health in design research is critical to a healthy interaction with community members who may be discussing extremely sensitive and potentially traumatic events. My work is particularly inspired by Rachael Dietkus, who founded *Social Workers Who Design* and is pioneering the importance of trauma-informed design research.

Her work is inspired by the paper *Practicing Without a License: Design Research as Psychotherapy* by Tad Hirsch, where he states “Inviting participants to engage in a reflexive project may lead to the revisiting of unhappy experiences, and in extreme cases, may retraumatize participants... It is therefore incumbent upon qualitative researchers to develop mitigation strategies for addressing the emotional risks undertaken by participants. This need is particularly urgent when working with people who may have experienced traumatic events.”¹³

As traditional design research often involves cultural probes and creative activities, I believe that the field of Art Therapy may positively overlap to help develop trauma-responsive practices in design. By nature, Art Therapy focuses

on the needs of the participant and not research, but I believed it could assist design research in potentially interesting ways. Here are two ways I’ve learned in my research about how art practices can be applied in design:

Team Wellness: When working with vulnerable populations, it’s possible that the design team can undergo mental stress that results in compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary trauma. Additionally, for those who have close lived experience to the populations they are engaging with, interactions may trigger their own historical accounts. It becomes extremely critical then, for the team to be well equipped to maintain team health. It’s also important to note that trauma shows up in the body differently for everybody, and a check-in could help a team work through an individual’s experiences. Other organizations, such as Code for America, have implemented team wellness check-ins such as *Friday Feels* to help teams manage mental health and wellness. While it isn’t Art Therapy, there is growing recognition for team wellness when working with trauma.

Community Co-Design: I believe a part of addressing inequity and building cultural humility is finding ways to explore the whole person, not just the person in relation to the project or work. While I do believe there is an appropriate

emotional level for the group and project at hand, I see potential in utilizing Art Therapy directives and practices to break away from an outcome-oriented process into a relational one. This is not to say that there are no relational aspects today, but that a slower process allows for trust building. Trust is critical to building a healthy collaborative atmosphere where a plurality of voices can be seen and heard.

This aligns with one experience I heard during my interviews with NYC Agencies. A community designer mentioned that he always tries to bring a healing practitioner when working with community. This is important because he often works with a youth who may hold a lot of trauma, and needs to work through grief and recovery in order to become creative and energized.

Therefore, I believe it may be beneficial to partner with an Art Therapist during design research. It may help emotional processing, creative exploration, and trust building, which is critical to a collaborative space. Doing so could potentially be beneficial both for the designer and community participant alike.

My hope is that when communities engage with Service Design Studio and government in community practices, they feel welcomed, seen, encouraged, and safe. The goal is not to therapize participants, but that there will be a little bit of healing in sharing, and being seen.

IF PEOPLE AREN'T BELIEVED OR TREATED WITH COMPASSION WHEN SHARING THEIR STORIES AND FEEDBACK, THEY STOP.

WOULDN'T YOU?¹⁹

— KELLY ANN MCKERCHER

AUTHOR, BEYOND STICKY NOTES

ALMOST NOTHING CAN HAPPEN IN A LARGE GROUP WITHOUT TRUST.¹⁸

— ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN

AUTHOR, HOLDING CHANGE

The Art Therapy Project at Service Design Studio



To explore the potential for Art Therapy in design research, I collaborated with The Art Therapy Project, a “nonprofit mental health organization providing free group art therapy to adults and youth affected by trauma.” I worked with Lindsay Lederman, ATR-BC, LCAT, ATCS, Joshua “Josh” Brancheau, ATR-BC, LCAT, and Mari Nakano to discuss the topics of interest to Service Design Studio. Our main priorities for the workshop included:

- Art Therapy 101
- Ethics of Art Therapy
- Neuroscience of Art Therapy
- Case Studies in relation to Gov
- Intro to Art Experiential
- Application of Art Therapy

After the workshop, I sent out a survey to the Service Design Studio team asking for their thoughts. I was curious about their takeaways, and wanted to understand if there were any reservations or concerns. As Art Therapy dives deeply into mental health, the team was naturally cautious about the topic.

In general, I received a wide spectrum of responses. Some were more hesitant to utilize Art Therapy and did not see its applicability in the Studio. There were questions around its appropriateness for coworkers, as well as concerns for community members being asked to engage in emotional work. Not everyone would be comfortable sharing.

Others saw possibilities in future collaborations, as long as there would be a trained mental health practitioner accompanying the activities. People also thought it would be helpful for team wellness, bonding, and checking in with themselves and each other. However, Art Therapy activities should not be practiced without a therapist in the room. The team also discussed suggesting Mental Health First Aid training for designers working with vulnerable populations. This would aid in building emotional literacy and trauma-informed design practices.

The team was curious to learn more about the ethics of the practice, and seeing more case studies relevant to their work in government. Additionally, one staff member said they were “interested in ways art therapy can evoke hopefulness, optimism, or creative thinking.”

Overall, the conversation continues. Service Design Studio will be meeting with The Art Therapy Project to discuss the potential for future collaborations.

I debriefed with Josh after the workshop, and we discussed the potential for collaboration from his perspective as well. He saw huge potential for therapists to be in the room, as they could act as conversation activators for designers that were unfamiliar with mental health. We

agreed that there was much to be explored, but the presence of an Art Therapist doesn’t have to equate traditional therapy practices. There are other beneficial skills that may benefit designers and community members, such as building wellness practices and emotionally safe spaces. However, the programming would have to be determined by the project specifics itself.

Additionally, Art Therapy is a growing field that recognizes its utility across practices. In particular, Josh referenced Jordan S. Potash, who wrote *We the Art Therapists: Democracy Through Creative Action*. Potash wrote, “looking more specifically at art therapy, it may be obvious how art promotes democracy by visualizing invisible injustices, providing a forum for representational voices, offering spaces to bring people together, and facilitating activities to imagine new solutions.... [it is] because psychotherapy is built on democratic ideals that it has lasting power; otherwise, helping is merely advice-giving or consolatory affirmations that do little to effect change.”⁴

In this way, we can imagine the empowering impacts of Art Therapy in our relationships, and ability to imagine together. The individual’s wellness becomes critical to success of our democratic system.

SVA Art Therapy MPS Program at DSI

I wanted to continue exploring the applicability of Art Therapy in design, so I asked fellow DSI students about their interest. I reached out to the SVA Art Therapy program for an introductory Art Therapy workshop, and I invited 1st and 2nd year students to explore the connection between art making, sharing, and sense-making. Fifteen students were interested in attending.

In a survey asking students where they believed Art Therapy could fit into their work, 80% of students believed that Art Therapy could provide trauma-responsive care, 73% in community specific work, and 60% in workshop facilitation and general practice. As many DSI students were exploring mental health and trauma in their theses, they were interested in learning about Art



Image: Artwork created by Krutika Galgalikar and Pallavi Rawla

Therapy’s ethics, impact, process, and relationship to healing. Many showed up to this workshop in support or curiosity of the topic.

The workshop was hosted and facilitated by Stephanie Gorski (SVA Professor), Erin Bivens (2nd year), Elizabeth Boyer (1st year), and Valerie Sereno (Special Programs & Projects Coordinator). We began with the neuroscience behind Art Therapy, and how the process shapes the brain differently than traditional talk therapy. Rather than potentially reinforcing traumatic neural pathways, the Art Therapy process allows for stories to create new, healing pathways. This allows for the participant to “re-visit” rather than “re-live” an experience. We also earned how our bodies often know how we feel before

our brains do, and when it is difficult to know what to do or say, exploring the images that come to mind help us navigate the energy stored in our bodies. This helps participants work through their fight/flight/freeze response, and become more attentive and emotionally stable.

The takeaways were that the process of artmaking itself was expansive and soothing, which was surprisingly helpful in processing emotions. One student stated, “It provided clarity and affirmation that there is something to being creative and transforming your emotional/mental self.” Another student suggested thinking about the cultural context, and providing culturally relevant materials to aid processing. All in all, the workshop was a great success.

Potential Opportunities for Art Therapy Partnerships

The following suggestions on this page reflect my current thoughts for Art Therapy collaboration as a potential trauma-responsive tool. These are merely speculative, and should not be considered an official recommendation. However, I do encourage anyone to continue the exploration with a trained medical professional. Most importantly, gain consent and understanding from your community members that they would like to pursue this emotional work.

It feels important for me to also ground this work in Tad Hirsch's analysis, as design research is already undergoing therapeutic-like processes. It is the designer's role to account for the impact of said research:

"This paper is not a call to stop doing qualitative interviews or to cease working with vulnerable people. Nor do I think it possible to avoid therapeutic effects of research encounters by effectively drawing "neat boundaries" around empathy, congruence, or other techniques that may lead to inadvertent disclosures or emotional distress. Indeed, feminist scholars and participatory design practitioners alike might question

whether such boundary-drawing is even desirable, preferring instead a more egalitarian social science that encourages collaborative approaches to knowledge production that blurs boundaries between researchers and participants.

However, recognizing that participants may experience interviews as therapy and acknowledging the attendant ethical issues suggests that we approach our practices differently. In particular, it suggests that we rethink how we engage vulnerable participants in reflecting on sensitive topics, particularly when those participants may have experienced trauma. It also suggests we reconsider our approach to consenting participants, and our approach to training and supervision."¹³

To summarize, here are two ways in which I can see Art Therapy benefitting design processes that allow us to be more responsible and ethical practitioners:

Team Wellness

- **Recognize inequity** within diverse teams and how trauma can manifest differently in everyone's body
- **Help teammates check-in** around sensitive topics, especially while conducting user research and working closely with trauma-impacted folks
- **Prevent burn-out**, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma
- **Help build trauma-responsive frameworks**, which are necessary in an organization to conduct trauma-responsive processes

Community Co-Design

- **Build trust** and practice of vulnerability into a community space, where appropriate
- **Providing safe spaces for vulnerability:** People will be carrying emotions from outside of the design project. How can we honor that in a contained activity so we don't over-or-under-step?
- **Building care spaces for each other**, and offer opportunities to explore solutions creatively
- **Build cultural humility** by providing space to listen and honor the stories people share with you
- **Engage in collective sense-making**, and expand consciousness and awareness of people in the room

Brainstorm Checklist

- Complete Mental Health First Aid Training
- Receive Art Therapy 101 introduction from an Art Therapist community partner
- Discuss the goals of your project with your team, see if there is intention to build relationships with community in a healthy way
- Discuss the timeline of your project, assess if it allows for fluidity and time
- Discuss with an Art Therapist to collaborate on an appropriate plan and goal
- Get feedback from your Community Partners to see if they're interested and believe it would be beneficial

Potentially Appropriate Scenarios

- You are with a group that would benefit from processing artistically, for example groups that are multilingual, young, old, disabled, neurodiverse, etc. Bring culturally relevant materials and programming
- When you are working with a new group that is interested and invested in sharing their personal and potentially emotional experiences
- When you have a mental health professional aiding you in the process, resources to build a safe space, and time in a project to build relationships

Potentially Inappropriate Scenarios

- When you and/or design team have not yet received trauma-informed training
- When you have no prior experience holding space for people in their experience (not therapy related)
- When you have short term engagements with little-to-no follow-up
- When you don't have a protocol for what gets shared back out with the public

Design Outcomes

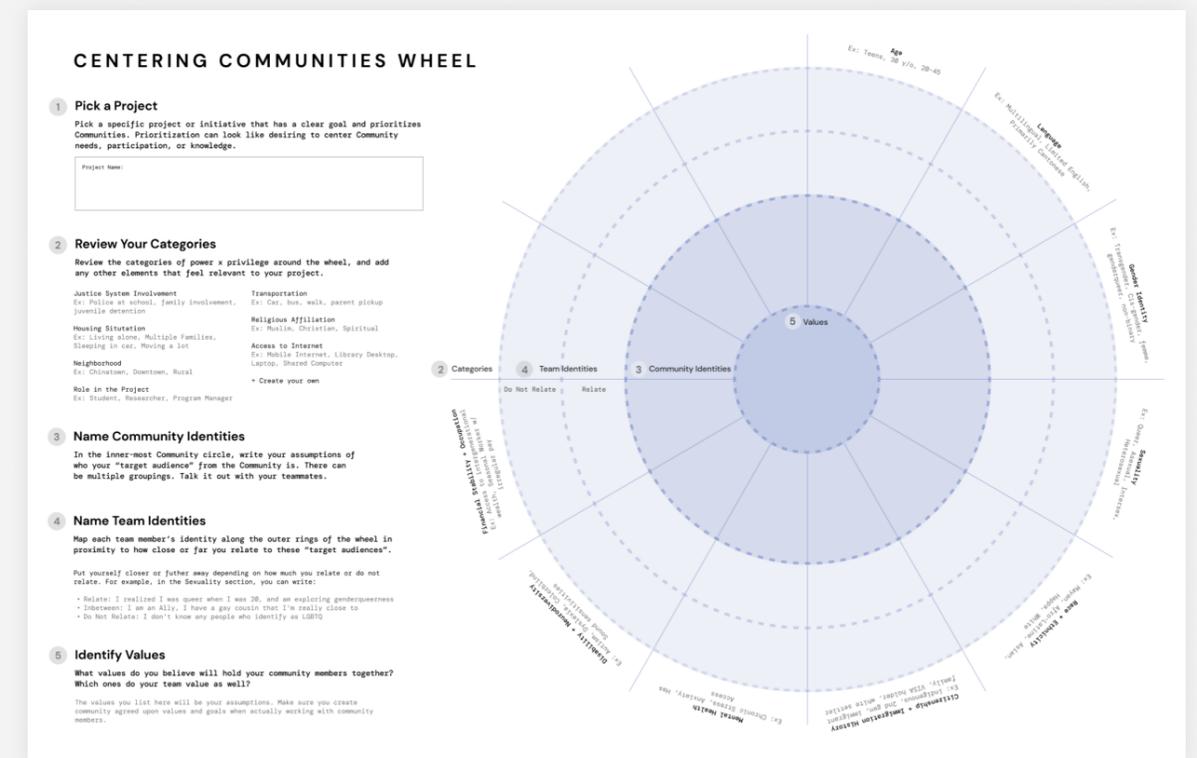
Service Design Studio

In my final handoff, I will create a report for the Service Design Studio reflecting on my interviews with NYC Agencies. It will include the landscape analysis of current community engagement activities, as well as any case studies that have surfaced, and lessons learned from the process.

A majority of my work was also contributing to the team's momentum towards Community-Centered Design. In this way, my work was not an intervention but a supplement to their process. As of now, they are continuing the work I was a part of, and are exploring potential Art Therapy partnerships with Art Therapy Project.

yesand.design

yesand.design is a website that will host the Reflection Worksheet series, which includes the Centering Communities Wheel. The resource will be available open source for anyone to download. I also plan on providing a way to send a large format version for the price of mailing the packet, as it is uncommon for people to have access to printer paper at home. I also hope to build an online version of this tool for teams to brainstorm online, with a potential walkthrough of the activity. I hope to continue exploring the content for future facilitations, and will be open to opportunities.



Final Thoughts

I started this project knowing that I was interested in social change through connection, healing, and community. I was not sure where my partnerships would lead, nor was I sure how my work would be received. Still, I had high expectations for myself and wanted to make a big impact. Like all things in life, however, I was put on a path that forced me to grow, shift, and reimagine.

Instead of creating an intervention, I added to growing conversations. Instead of creating a technologically advanced tool, I ended up with a simple printout. I've realized that the resources I create are only as good as the conversations they generate, and that change must exist within yourself before it can be shared with others.

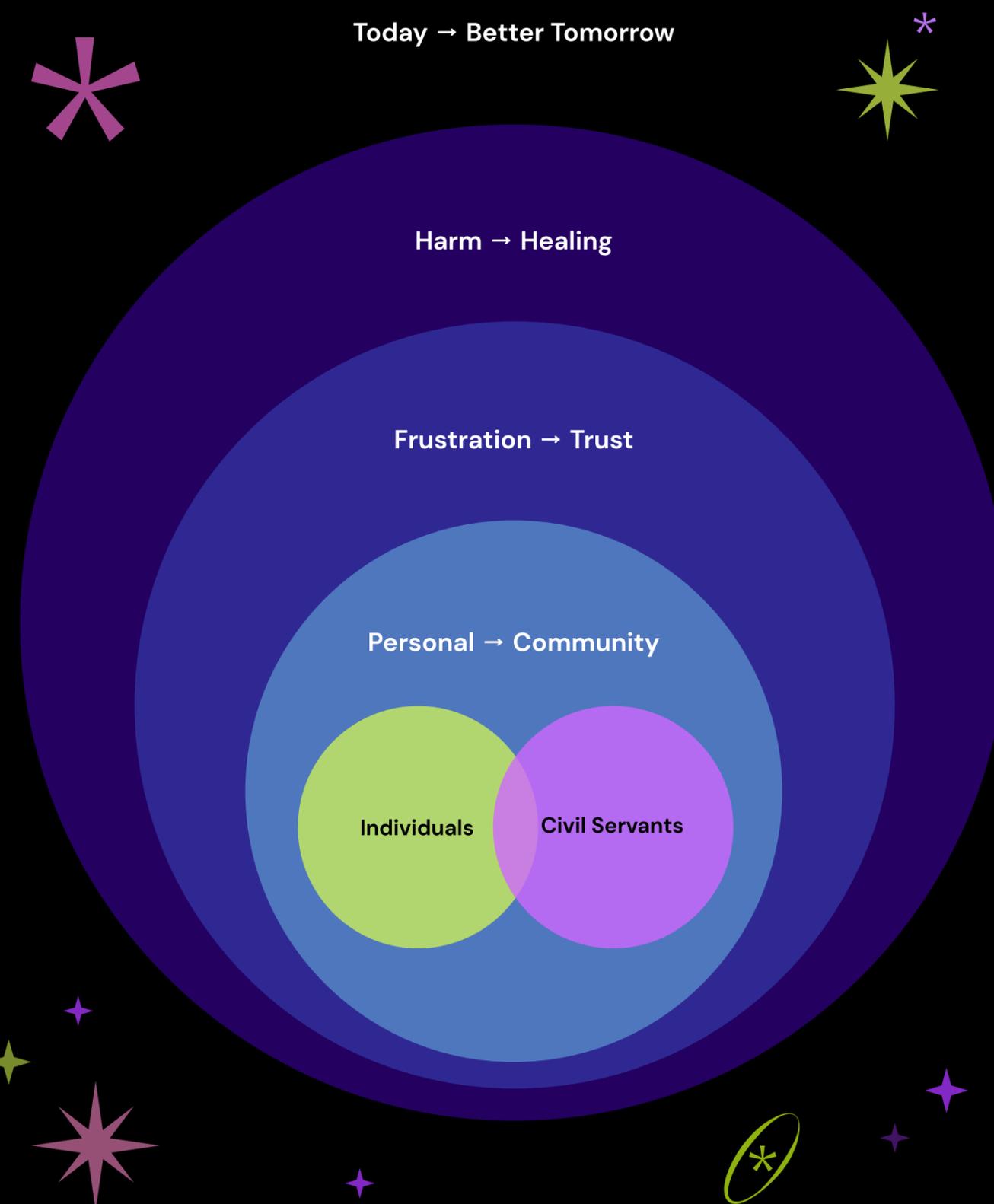
In the end, my work continues to build off of what I've learned from the feminists and abolitionists before me. My contribution today, is to make critical conversations around intersectionality, power, privilege, and community more approachable and accessible.

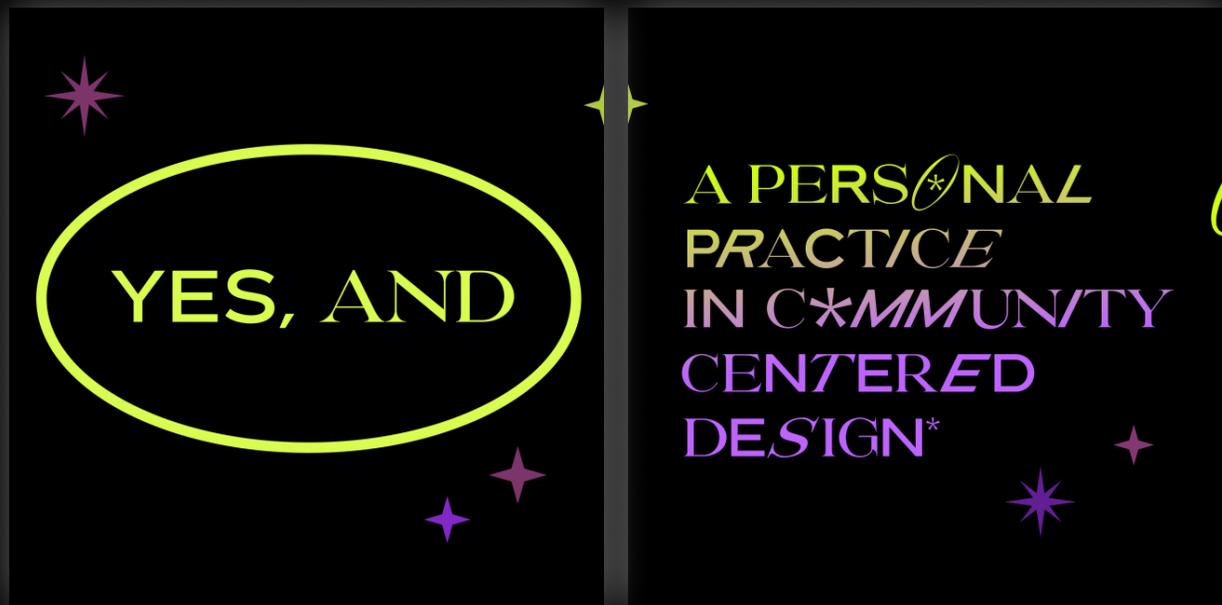
This process paper is a culmination of my work thus far, but I know that this work is a practice. Equity, justice, and community require commitment through daily action. We won't get it right every time, but every day holds new opportunities with multiple truths. However, no matter our positionality in life, we have the choice to say "Yes, and...".

While this response should not excuse us — as designers, civil servants, organizers, and agents of change — of the powers we are complicit in, I feel that it is important to name the various group dynamics in order to address them. Only when we see and notice what is happening can we bring people closer to the real conversations that are required of us, for deep and meaningful change.

My hope is that we understand our personal identity and it's relationship to community, recognize frustration and turn it into trust, move from harm to healing, to intentionally build today for a better tomorrow.

Today → Better Tomorrow





Design Identity

I titled my work "Yes, And: A Personal Practice in Community-Centered Design" because it captures the idea of fractal relationships. I am inspired at how small actions can scale to become our culture, norms, and expectations. While design might not be able to change large systems in one day, we can change our own design practices now. If we practice equity in our everyday relationships, can we build the foundation for equitable community co-design?

"Yes, And" is a hopeful response to potentially difficult conversations.

- Yes I have privilege, and I commit to...
- Yes the institution wants one thing, and it would be valuable to also practice...
- Yes the past was harmful, and we have the tools to shift our relationships by...

My design aesthetic embodies the following themes:

MULTIDIMENSIONAL

As designers become facilitators of design processes, it's important to recognize how one's own practice is grounded in everyday personal choices. The reasons behind our choices may be influenced by historical events or modern day movements, all of which are present in shaping today. The primary font, Future Histories, combines serif and sans serif into one typeface, playing with the visual tension between contemporary and traditional design.

CHANGING

Our personal practice is always shifting, and the gradient colors speak to the possibilities of change. The change is not finite, nor is it static. Between two colors can exist an million different combinations. Between two truths, are more opportunities.

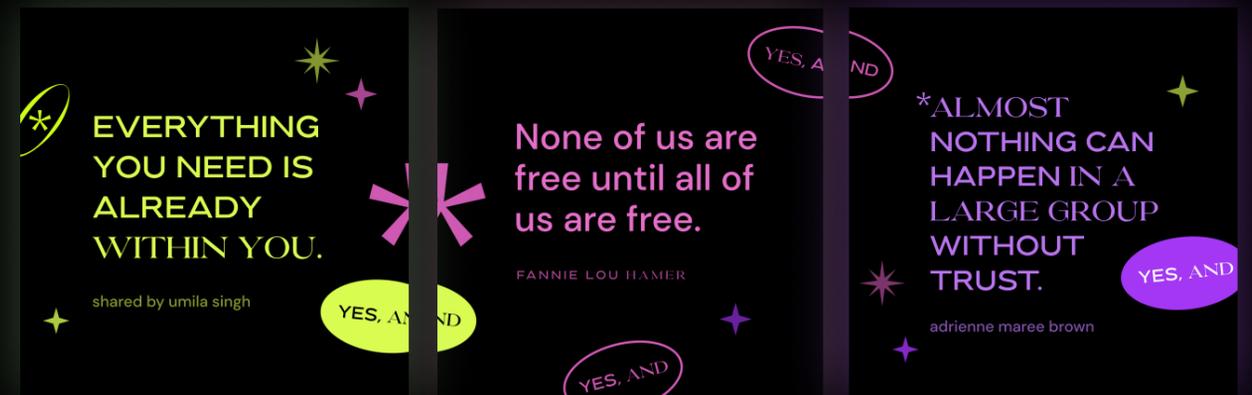
FUTURISTIC

I wanted to create a future aesthetic that is bright, energetic, and rich in complexity. I do not want the future to feel removed, cold, minimalist, or stoic, as we often see in dystopic sci-fi films of the future. I use warm and bright colors against a black backdrop to balance the playfulness with more mature and dynamic themes.

OPTIMISTIC

My commitment to the future includes joy, care, and love. I refuse to invest in a future that does not imagine our humanity at the center. I choose to value optimism in my work, and believe it is an essential component to transformative and liberatory worlds.

Design is...



Personal Practice

The star symbol here represents a planet in the universe, with its self-centered rings. It represents our internal orbit, and how our own bodies and systems are extremely complex.

This quote was meaningful to me as it was told me in a moment of vulnerability. It was the beginning my thesis project, and I was trying to furiously learn more about community design in government. I asked Umila at Administration for Child Services (ACS) what was important to learn in order to practice design responsibly in government. Her response, "Everything you need is already within you," challenged my fear of inadequacy. It helped affirm that my practice, at the core, would lead me as I continue to grow. There isn't a fixed state of knowing. I needed to nurture my talents, rather than seek external validation.



Community-Centered

This larger star represents the sun, and how each galaxy has a sun that grounds the orbit of each planet. It is a reminder of our collective values and interdependence with each other.

The quote by Fannie Lou Hamer symbolizes the design work that takes from community organizing. As designers continue to permeate throughout government to craft society, we must become aware of the systems we continue to uphold or try to abolish.

Our work does not exist in silos, and requires deep collaboration to ensure equitable design. It is our responsibility as designers to keep in mind the broader community as we develop our personal practice.



Contextual

The tiny star acts as a traditional aesterisk, making note of additional context to be considered. It reminds us that everything is dependent on the situation, people, and goals.

The quote by adrienne maree brown comes from the book *Holding Change*, which talks about facilitating social change. This book felt extremely grounding to me, as it dives deeply into the dynamics of relationships as a critical agent of change. In order for collaboration to be successful, the group must trust each other. It is with trust that we can become more sociocratic, democratic, independent, and thriving. It is a reminder to pay attention to what is happening in the room, and acknowledge the emotional aspect of gathering.

POWER

→ IN WORDS

→ IN RESOURCES

→ IN THANKS

Power in Words

Definitions are usually misunderstood to be firm or fixed elements of our world. However, language is a deeply social phenomenon. As the world's context changes, definitions, too, are subject to change, reinterpretation, and reimagination.

Abolitionist

The belief that slavery, and all forms of incarceration, should not exist. Abolition today is tied closely to modern social justice movements as it recognizes the intersectionality between race, power, and systemic oppression. It is grounded in using creativity to reimagine new forms of safety, community, justice, relationality, care, and education. The practice embodies a possibilities mindset over a scarcity one.

Collaborative

The mindset to engage multiple voices when working together to influence an outcome. A healthy collaborative relationship requires cooperation, communication, engagement, flexibility, and trust. The aim of a collaborative relationship is to accomplish a common goal.

Cultural Humility

The ability to recognize the diversity of multicultural experiences, and the lens in which it shapes our world. It requires an attitude that remains open to another individual's cultural identity, as well as constant self awareness and self reflection.

Framework

A framework is a mental model in which you approach a situation. It can include a set of rules, ideas, beliefs, or values that help you decide what to do. It is often conceptual and can be very theoretical.

Civic Design

Civic design is a human centered design approach within the civic, civil, and public sector realms. Civic Design can impact various areas within government, including operations, services, products, programs, communications, data collection, and delivery. Often times it includes public participation and engagement in research processes.

Co-Design

Co-Design is an act that intentionally engages multiple stakeholders in the design process to help make collective decisions. It moves designing "for people," to designing "with people." It comes from the roots of Participatory Design.

Equity

Equity is an act that seeks to balance the impacts of systemic oppression. It recognizes that individuals have different needs due to inequality, and aims to distribute resources according to those needs. The aim is to achieve a fair result for everyone.

Inequity

Inequity is the absence of fairness or justice. It often points to avoidable injustices that was caused by poor governance, corruption, or cultural exclusion. It is often caused by systemized values and biases.

Intersectional

Intersectionality is a concept that recognizes overlapping and compounding impacts of race, gender, sexuality, ability, etc. to benefit or oppress an individual in society. The concept of Intersectionality was published by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1990s, who outlined the consequences of singular identities and their false narratives.

Participatory Design

Participatory Design is an approach that stemmed from Scandinavia in the 1960s, that sought to democratize research and learning processes. It stems from an interdependent model of learning, engaging, and deciding together.

Privilege

Privilege is a given advantage based off of assigned societal values and beliefs. It operates on individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels, and offers exceptional access, resources, favoritism, and benefits to those who have it. Privilege is often invisible to those who hold it. Privilege is not personal choice, but an assigned societal perception of value.

Trauma-Informed

Trauma-Informed is an approach that builds in processes that create safety, consent, trustworthiness and transparency, support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural, historic, and gender issues for participants.

Liberatory

Liberatory is the adjective to describes the act of setting or being free. To liberate is to be free from a situation in which restricted or disempowered them. A liberatory framework is an approach that seeks to dismantle dominating and oppressive powers and structures to seek new possibilities.

Power

Power is the ability to impact an outcome. How we use it can contribute to equity or inequity. Power can be shared, redistributed, or removed. Acknowledging one's power also creates accountability and responsibility for action.

Service Design

Service Design is a process that pays attention to various ecosystems and contexts in order to deploy a product or a service. It can pertain to internal services in an organization, as well as the services given to an external party. Service Design helps outline operational, relational, programmatic, and delivery procedures to improve an experience.

Trauma-Responsive

A trauma-responsive framework anticipates the potential existence of trauma at all levels of the organization, and becomes integrated into organizational operations. It becomes holistic in its approach and a natural way of operating.

Power in Resources

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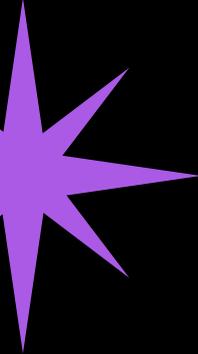
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Thank you, reader, for your time.
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