at-oneness

restoring community, flourishing people

brielle mariucci   mfa thesis '24

"We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty."

—Maya Angelou

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How might we repair the social fabric?

Consider:

Who is responsible for repairing this?

What tools might you use?

Who would be an expert in this?

What material would you use to repair this?

What methods or techniques would you use?

What is Public Safety?

In 2020, National Innovation Service and the NYC Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety partnered on a year long process to speak directly with the communities most directly affected by violent crime, police violence, and neighborhood disinvestment.[2]

Residents describe safety as a multidimensional phenomenon, spanning everything from access to housing and employment to internal psychological factors. **For residents, psychological safety is grounded in a freedom from fear, as well as the cultivation of community connection and trust.[3]**

Public safety is both a moving target and subjective experience based on who is defining it and maintaining it. Historically, it is the state that determines and enforces this concept through policies, laws, police, and incarceration. However, it is well documented that the same New York City neighborhoods most targeting by law enforcement and impacted by mass-incacercation are also the same nieghborhoods lacking adequate schools, housing, mental health and substance use treatment, healthcare and social services.[4] Traditional methods like increased police presence often fail to create safer communities, and often make communities feel less safe. Questioning the purpose and hierarchy of authority on matters of public safety becomes a critical step in understanding, and implementing new solutions to build a safer society.

According to a recent report conducted by the Vera Institute of Justice titled, The Social Cost of Policing[1]:

Policing can cause increased physical and psychological harm to both communities and individuals

Educational development can suffer in neighborhoods with a heavy police presence, even for students who are not stopped by police

Arrests and street stops can undermine engagement with local government and disrupt informal community problem-solving

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is a values-based philosophy and process, inspired by indigenous practices, used to respond to conflict. It brings together those directly affected by a conflict, including family and/or community members, to repair the harm. The goal is for the parties to come to a mutual agreement as to how to make things right based on an understanding of the conflict and its impact.

Restorative justice circles are a healing ritual, and approach that centers storytelling as the basis for knowing, and connecting. Circles host a dialogue regulated by a facilitator which allows for everyone to have equal space and time to speak, listen, and cultivate deeper understanding. Circles are collaborative, and values the experience of everyone involved in conflict.

- Circles build on the premise that every human being wants to be connected to others in a good way. We don't thrive in isolation.
- Circles operate from the premise that everybody shares core values that indicate what connecting in a good way means.
- Circles assume that being connected in a good way and acting from our values are not always easy to do, especially when conflicts arise.
- Circles presume that, given a safe space, we can rediscover our core values, and that as we do, we also uncover our deep-seated desire to be positively connected.[6]

Restorative Practices are a set of tools and techniques used to build relationships and strengthen community bonds. They foster open communication and shared a sense of community. When used consistently, restorative practices can prevent conflicts. When conflicts arise, the practices allow groups and individuals to respond to harm more effectively.[7]

Differing from the preventative nature of restorative practices, Restorative justice is **reactive** to conflict after it has occurred. Though restorative justice can be considered a restorative practice, not all restorative practices are restorative justice.

The roots of restorative justice remind us of our inherent interconnection. This is why a vast majority of the practice is focused on **community building– creating common values, developing social emotional skills, promoting a sense of belonging, and developing healthy relationships.** Without this foundation, real accountability, and repair after rupture is not possible. In this way, restorative justice is an antidote to the isolation that conflict both creates, and is pre-determined by. It is an antidote to the current "justice" system which is designed to continue cycles of isolation and rejection, thus fueling, rather than mitigating conflict, both violent and not.

5%
Reintegration
Accountability
Rebuilding relationships

15%
Responding to Harm
Resolve differences
Prevent harm
Social emotional learning

80%
Community Building
Common values
Social emotional understanding skills
Promote sense of belonging
Develop healthy relationships

Adapted from New York Peace Institute Tier I Training Manual
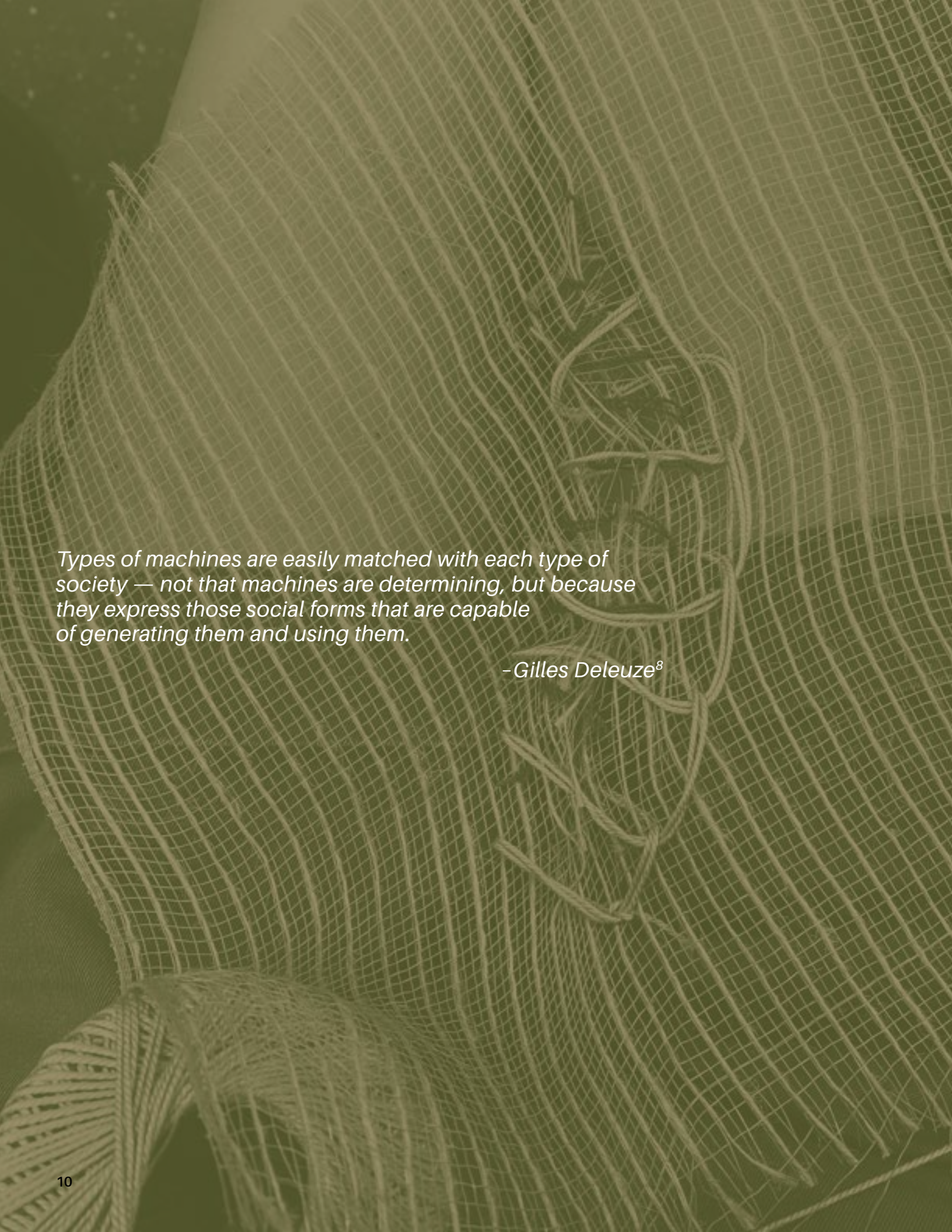
Types of machines are easily matched with each type of society — not that machines are determining, but because they express those social forms that are capable of generating them and using them.

–Gilles Deleuze[8]

Cultural Fractals

There is a deep connection between the systems that govern our lives, and the ways that we treat ourselves and others. A system that functions by simply removing people from society who have caused harm ultimately robs us of the transformative capacity for real accountability, both with the self and with others. Zach Norris, former president of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, in his book *We Keep Us Safe: Building Secure, Just, and Inclusive Communities* describes the difference between punishment and accountability:

> *"Punishment involves control over someone, by fear or coercion, denying their fundamental dignity and rights. It is done to someone. Accountability, by contrast, occurs with someone...When respect and basic dignity are present, accountability takes on qualities of a partnership, where those who made mistakes engage as agents in their own transformation, rather than having things done to them or for them...Punishment cuts people off from society and from participation, from the opportunity to thrive in the future. Accountability is about creating a future in which people change their lives as a result of learning from their mistakes, and the whole fabric of society is stronger for it."*[9]

What might our relationships look like without shame, and instead with effective communication?
What might our communities look like without violence, and instead with collective healing?
What might our state look like without incarceration, and instead with accountability?
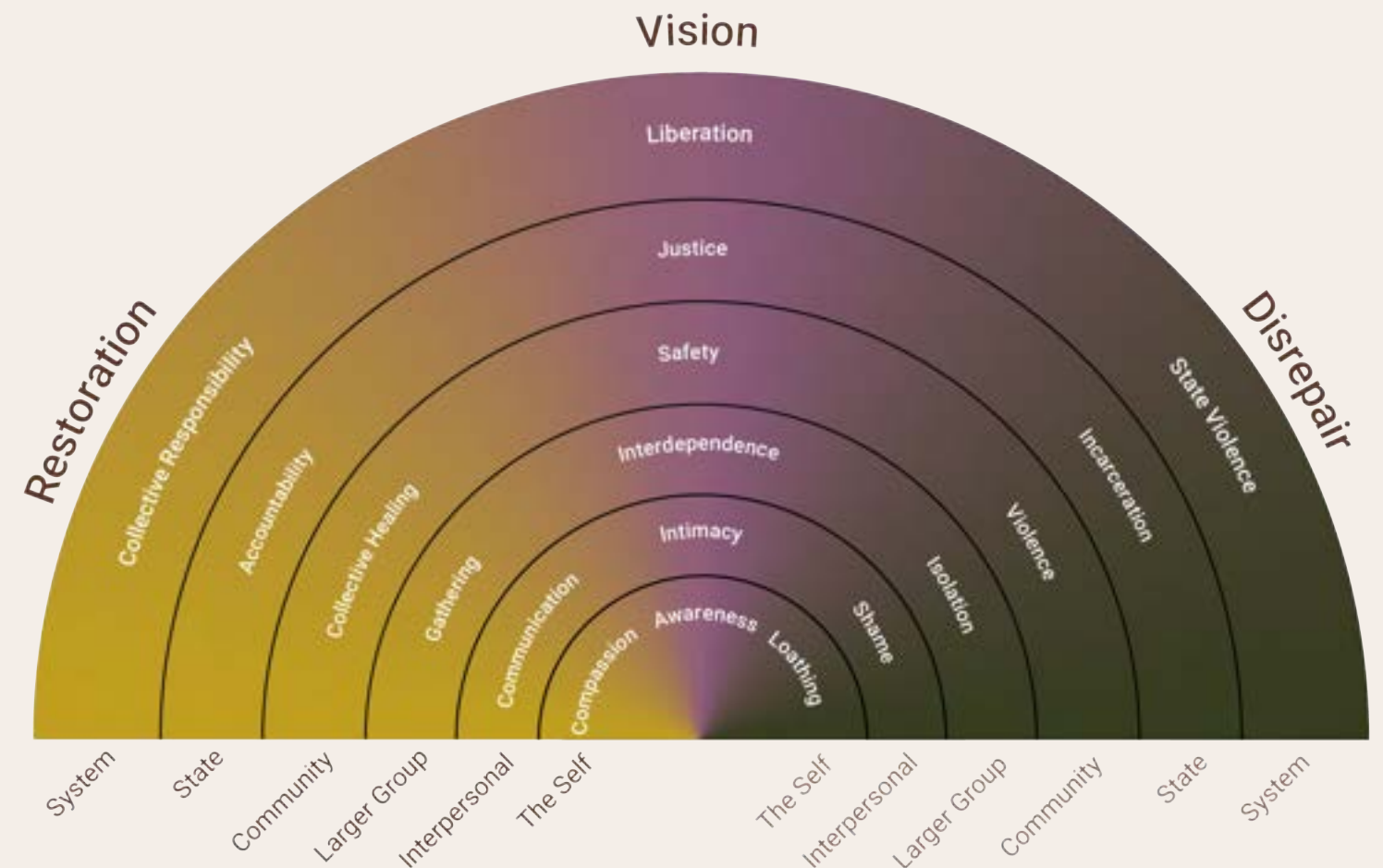
Thesis Statement

To increase public safety and wellbeing in communities experiencing disproportionate crime, community autonomy– the ability to take independent initiative in managing it's own social affairs– **must be strengthened.**

My theory is that by developing skills learned through restorative practices, communities can effectively take more autonomous action towards wellbeing and safety.
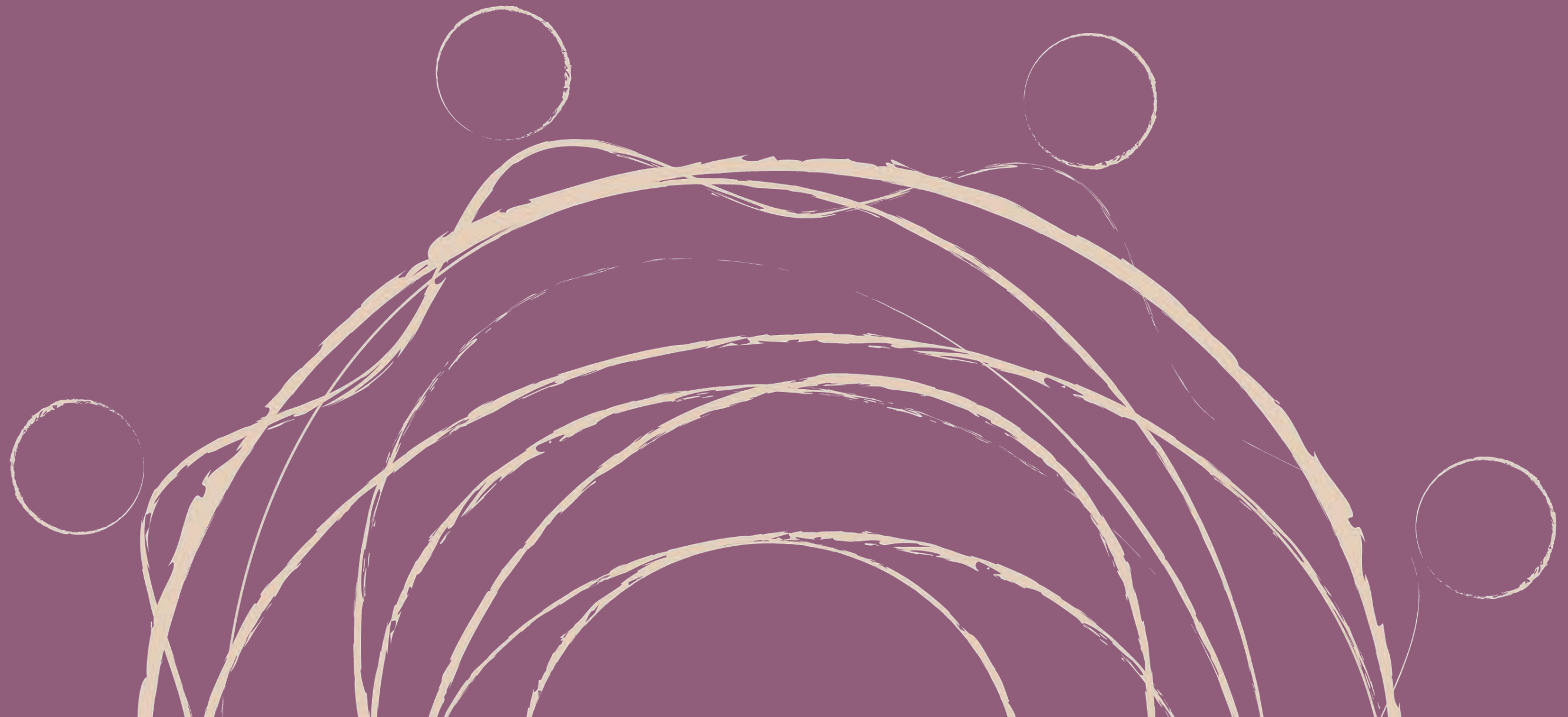
Participatory Action Research

Whose knowledge do we value? What counts as knowledge?

Participatory Action Research is an approach to research that seeks to create new pathways for knowledge production in response to these two deeply political questions. It is a framework that positions those considered the subject of research as the researchers themselves... In this way, participation in knowledge production is opened up to those traditionally excluded—via history, via the achievement gap, via underfunded education, via White supremacy—from being knowledge producers within the academy."[10] This form of 'Research justice' illuminates how the hierarchy of what types of knowledge are valued and legitimate shapes power and policy because it marginalizes the voices of people holding the less valued forms of knowledge.[11]
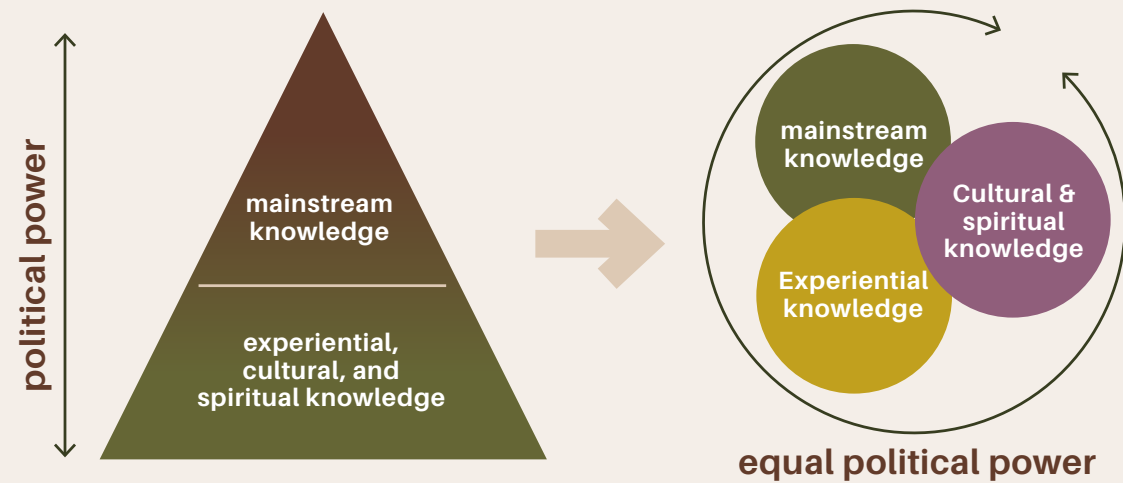
Adapted from Research Justice by Dr. Andrew Jolivette[14]

...and Restorative Justice

Participatory Action Research is about multiple *transformative cycles of Expression & Action and Listening & Reflecting* with the self, with a team's shared experience, with the larger network's experience, and with a city-wide experience.[12] In this way, PAR mirrors the orientation to inquiry, transformation, and collaborative resolution of **Restorative Justice** (**RJ**). Adapted from Othering and Belonging Institute's toolkit for Transformative Research, these four levels of transformation are exhibited in both Participatory Action Research and Restorative Justice[13]:

Individual Transformation	Group Transformation	Institutional Transformation	Structural Transformation
Experience can increase sense of agency, awareness of one's place in the world, and power in shaping outcomes of one's community	Experience can transform relationships, shared purpose, and power in relation to institutions	Experience can result in new solutions designed and led by people directly impacted by the work, and can reform policies	Experience can shift narratives and norms, and change how systems interact with people and communities

"...many describe restorative justice in terms of its practices rather than its values... The practices we employ are designed to express and implement the values that are at the core of restorative justice and must always be centered in our design and evaluation."

- Alisa Del Tufo[15]

Common threads of PAR & RJ:

- Focus on community engagement and participation

- Emphasize relationships and communication

- Recognize the importance of lived experiences and diverse perspectives

- Are committed to collaborative decision-making and problem-solving

- Emphasize accountability and responsibility

- Recognize and address power dynamics

- Focus on addressing root causes and underlying issues

- Emphasize building trust and creating a safe space for dialogue

- Represent the collective "we" as a learning community

Circles ask...

How can we move toward healing?

What can be done to repair the immediate harm and to prevent further harm?

What wounds and circumstances—past and present—prevent us from having healthy relationships, both with ourselves and with others?

What steps can we take to understand these wounds and to aid healing? [16]

The learning circle

Restorative justice is a practice inspired by indigenous ceremony and ways of being. Thus, to better understand how RJ and and PAR intersect, I have looked to Indigenous research methodology.

Indigenous ways of conducting research value storytelling as a legitimate way of knowing, as a way of healing together, and building capacity for transformation. They challenge the objectification of communities being researched, and **"encourage action-based knowledge that is useful on the road to self-determination."[17]**

Research as a "learning circle" is a process that generates information sharing, connections, builds capacity, and seeks balance and healing. A learning circle also facilitates the remembering process and re-membering of individual experiences into a collective knowing and consciousness. The idea of re-membering as a research method and process facilitates a full reconnection, which is also healing to our recovery process. Re-membering facilities recovering stories, experiences, teaching, tradition, and connection."[18]

Indigenous methods for conducting research are process oriented, as opposed to goal oriented since researching is a verb, and human life is always changing. In this way, these methods respect human life by cradling what it means to be human and in relation with each other and the world. When valuing human growth is at the center of what it means to research and design new futures, there is a reorientation towards what it means to be a part of change, and how change actually happens.

"Values that honor relationships are important for cultures that value the journey as much as the destination."

Margaret Kovach[19]

"It is clear that the way to heal society of its violence... and lack of love is to replace the pyramid of domination with the circle of equality and respect."

—MANITONQUAT
Elder of the Assonet Band of the Wampanoag Nation

This image is AI generated, please excuse the extra limbs and fingers :)

Mapping frameworks

Both Restorative Justice and Participatory Action Research are part of long lineages and intersecting movements. At both of their core, they are means to community building, and are beholden to values of dignity, belonging, and safety. This map is only a piece of the entire network of liberative justice frameworks, but represents the areas that I engage with most deeply and that have shaped my understanding of how Restorative Justice and Participatory Action Research reflect and compliment each other.
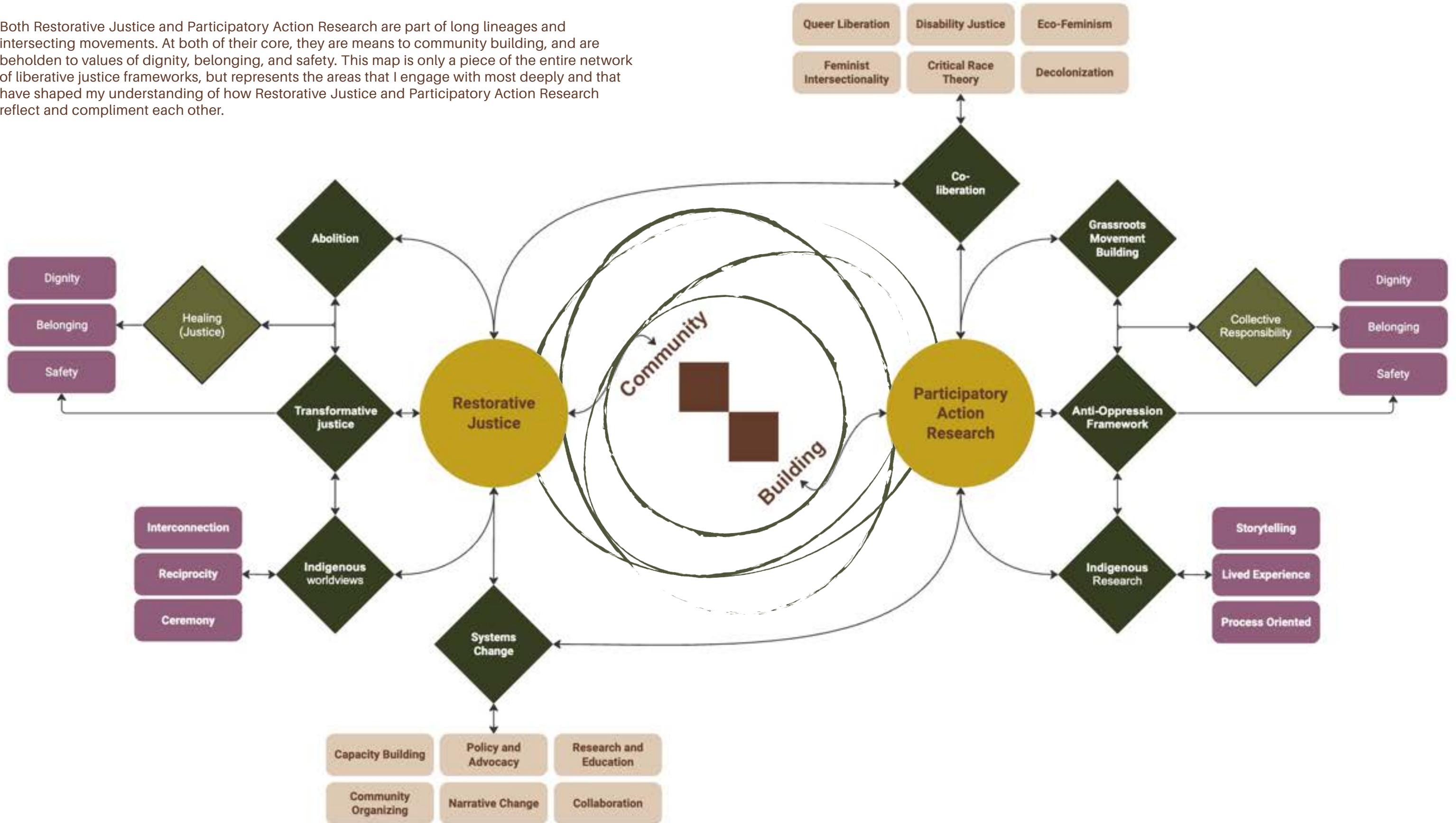
Partner

Center for Justice Innovation

The Center for Justice Innovation works with communities and justice systems to advance equity, increase safety, and help individuals and communities thrive. Their work touches all stages of the justice system, from arrest through reintegration into the community. Their work goes further by seeking to reduce the need for justice system involvement in the first place.[20]

Neighborhood Safety Initiative

Neighborhood Safety Initiative resources and train residents from New York City public housing (NYCHA) in organizing, participatory methods, and human-centered design, so as to implement their own place based initiatives to improve community wellbeing, and public safety in their communities.

Brownsville Community Justice Center

The Brownsville Community Justice Center is a multi-faceted initiative that seeks to prevent crime by investing in local youth and improving the physical landscape of the neighborhood. The Justice Center also seeks to forge better responses after crime occurs, offering meaningful alternatives to incarceration.[21]

NYCHA Residents

Boulevard Houses

In the fall of 2023, an intergenerational team of 12 East New York residents surveyed their community and decided to design a youth program centered around health and nutrition as a response to food insecurity in their community.

4K Harvest takes a cohort of youth ages 12-18 to gardens, culinary workshops, and a media training at BRIC so they can document their experience on social media. The vision for this project is to educate youth on healthy living so they can make healthier choices, advocate for more fresh foods in their neighborhood, know the basics of growing their own food, and make more sustainable food choices.

This team is made up of community leaders that are involved in social work, socail services, education, and even politics. The youth are committed to contributing to positive change in their community.

...and me

During the planning phase of their project the past three months, I have spent Tuesday evenings with this team of community change makers. Each meeting, I have hosted a 30 minute activity and reflections to bolster social emotional learning, create more equitable dialogue, and align the team in values, goals, and vision. My role as a team member, project support, and social designer in this project has largely manifested through facilitation and program research and design. My intention was to support the personal development of the team in their collaborative individuality.

Generating community wellbeing is an antidote to the historically degenerating approaches to increasing community safety. It is well-documented that communities that lack adequate schools, healthcare, and housing, also have less access to healthy food, and are also most impacted by policing, and mass incarceration.

East New York

Food security means having consistent access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food[24]. The majority of households that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are food insecure. In East New York, 31% of households receive SNAP benefits, higher than New York City overall (21%).[25]

East New York has a higher prevalence of child and adult obesity, diabetes, and higher blood pressure as compared to NYC overall.[26]

The youth on the team spoke about the lack of knowledge amongst their peers around why healthy foods are important for both physical, and mental health, and that choosing processed foods is far more common.

Although 48% of residents live within a 5-minute walk from fruits and veggies[27], the resident team's research and observation indicates that the produce being sold is not fresh or enticing. That being said, **East New York is home to many community gardens, emphasizing this neighborhood's commitment to food sovereignty and economic development.**

Crime is a complex issue stemming from, and perpetuating a lower quality of life. Addressing this requires holistic approaches that look at root causes. Improving health outcomes through food education improves both individual, and community outcomes, and contributes to the overall wellbeing of neighborhoods by fostering healthier, and safer environments for all residents.

"[Incarceration] directly and indirectly affects the health of individuals and communities, increasing rates of illness while simultaneously undermining the supports that contribute to community health and well-being. As such, incarceration is a critical social determinant of health."

–Jim Parsons[22]
Vice President Research, Vera Institute of Justice

Jail Incarceration (per 100,000 adults ages 16+)[23]

787- Brownsville

509- East New York & Starrett City

- - - - - Brooklyn
- - - - - New York City

Source: NYC Department of Corrections 2019-2020

Wellbeing & safety

Generating community wellbeing is an antidote to the historically degenerating approaches to increasing community safety. Projects like 4K Harvest which allow historically silenced communities to design their own initiatives illuminate how misguided and rudimentary our current responses to crime are, and creates space for more generative solutions grounded in lived experience. Similar to restorative justice, this approach is transformative on the individual, group, institutional, and systemic level.

Both community wellbeing and public safety require addressing many different facets of social life. As a values based practice, restorative justice and the more adaptable practices that stem from it strengthen the threads that connect people who are working to address the root problems of crime and harm.

community wellbeing

education   housing

healthcare
services   **restorative justice**   economic
                                                                development

food access   social services

public safety

Setting the stage

Stakeholder (Accountability) Map

This map serves as a way to see where accountability flows between stakeholders in this project. Designing a stakeholder map about who is accountable to who emphasizes the many threads by which state-funded participatory initiatives are woven. It highlights the importance of collective responsibility, and keeping those who matter at the center of the work. My direct relations are highlighted in yellow.

Neighborhood STAT
NYC Office of Neighborhood Safety
state government
Families
NYCHA community
DSI
Neighborhood Safety Initiative
city government
resident teams
me, brielle
theoretical sources & lineage
project leads
Center for Justice Innovation
advisors
donors & funders

key
● is accountable to
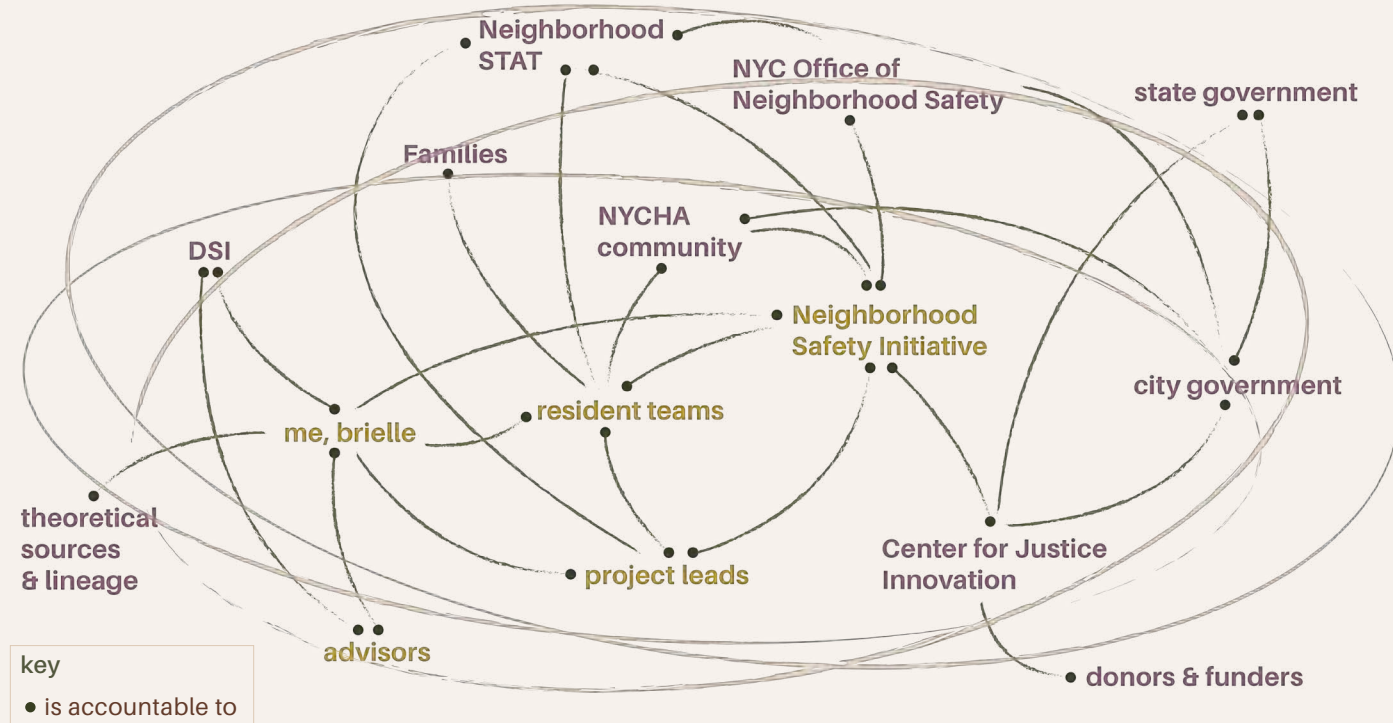
Pre-Survey

From an initial survey I conducted at the beginning of my partnership, I found that resident participants from two separate teams found restorative values to be very present in their participatory action projects with the Neighborhood Safety Initiative. This finding underscores the restorative nature of community-led action projects, and served as a launching point to more explicitly integrate restorative practices and activities that directly correspond to restorative principles and values into the design process.

Restorative Values Present in PAR
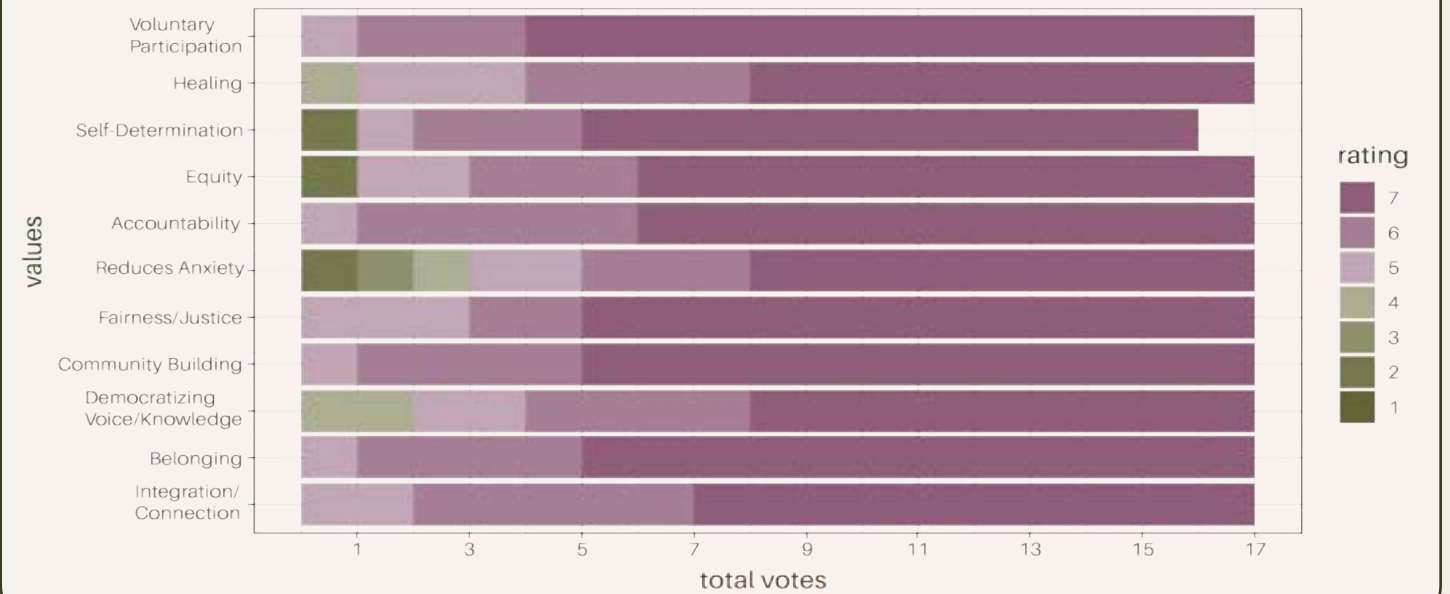
My journey to this work

In 2020 I joined the YCore Network in the Bay Area. This organization hosted a program that gathered teams of young professionals in Silicon Valley to work for five months in partnership with local non-profits on a project of the non-profit's choosing. The program was my initiation into systems-thinking, synthesis, and community-centered work. I was placed on a team that worked with the **Ella Baker Center for Human Rights** designing strategy and marketing for a new initiative to transform donors into leaders of the prison reform movement. I learned so much about movement building, and the importance of creating a sustainable community of practice.

In 2021 I rejoined YCore to work with **Restore Oakland**, a collaborative initiative with the Ella Baker Center, and other CBO's in Oakland to build a restorative community hub in Fruitvale, Oakland. This project, which was creating a retrospective report, introduced me to participatory methods for research and design, and solidified my love for multi-stakeholder collaboration. I explored the woven eco-system of CBO's and partners necessary for a just transition away from prisons and punishment. *To me, restorative justice is a powerful manifestation of true social design and building new futures, together.*

As someone who is incredibly drawn to personal and collective healing modalities, being introduced to restorative justice expanded my understanding of and desire for more skills in practices for liberation. I am a trauma informed yoga instructor, a conflict mediator, and community building circle facilitator. I am deeply influenced by abolition feminism, harm reduction, transformative studies, indigenous methodology, and critical theory on race, gender, disability and sexuality. I believe in the truth of our interconnectedness, and although I hold a positionality of privilege in many regards, I understand that our liberation is all tied together, and none of us are free, until we all are free.

My background informs my leadership, design and research practices in many ways. I am seldom conflict averse, and see conflict as an opportunity for growing closer with others when everyone involved is willing, and able. I shift away from individualism and towards collectivism. I prioritize human dignity and flourishing, and seek to create spaces for truth telling, sharing feelings, and bringing our full selves to the work. I believe in consensus over majority and equity of voices, knowing that we all have different experiences, customs, and practices that make our collective growth more sustainable.
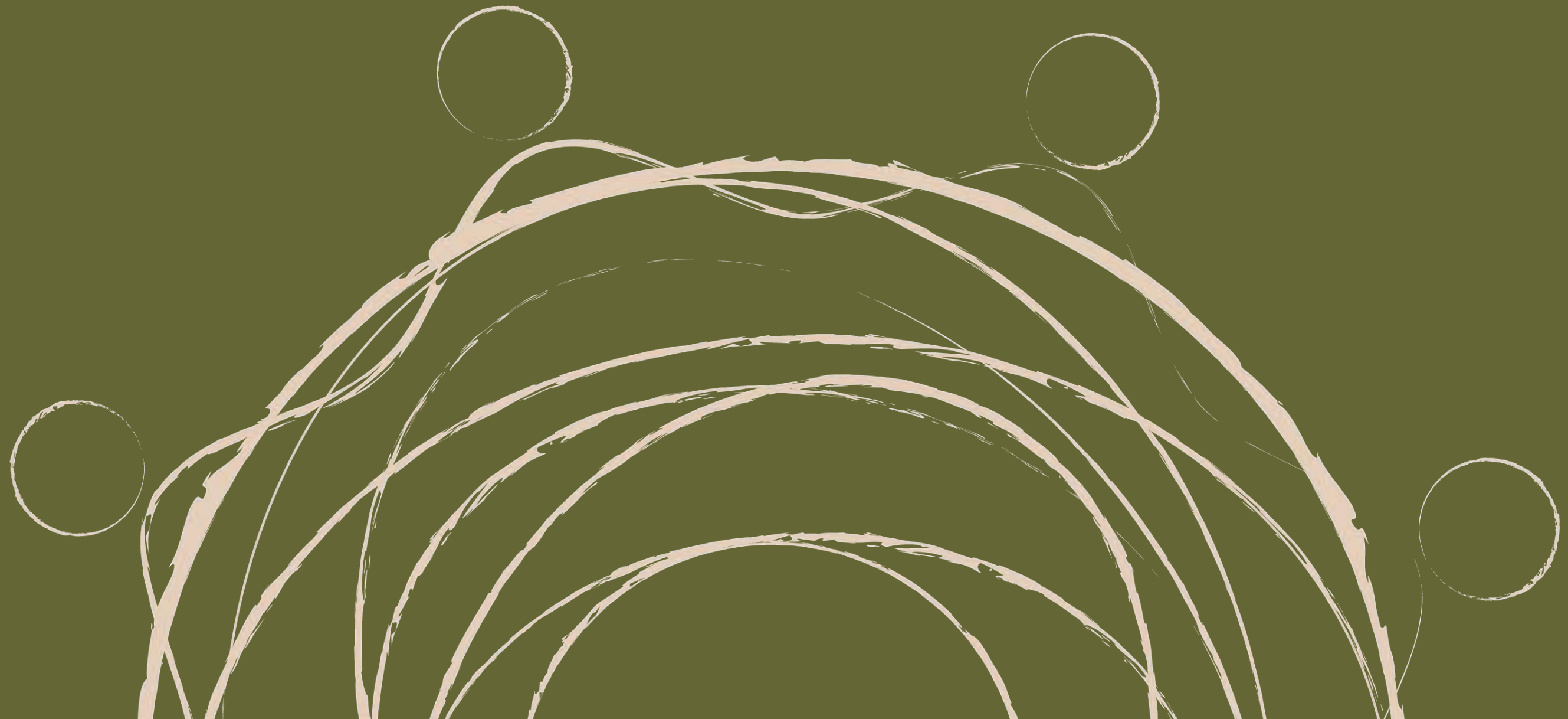
Repairing the social fabric

Over the past year, I have created prototypes using thread to physically create connections during structured dialogues, I have torn fabric and asked my classmates to repair it and take notes about their process, and I have also cultivated my own art, creating nets, tearing nets, fixing nets, teaching myself how to braid 15 strands together, practicing through a book on knots, and writing about my process and insights to sense make in conversation with the material. Complex problems simply cannot be understood or solved through a single medium. To research, write, weave, rip, and repair has been my own multi-disciplinary approach to a multi-dimensional social issue. I have immersed myself in conversation with the intangible themes of restorative justice and systems change work.

Systems change work starts with the self, so much of this craft has been self-study. Here are some things I have learned through the culmination of my work and healing journey:

- There are as many ways to heal a wound as there are humans on this planet. Some methods are better than others, but everyone's experience and practice is unique.

- In repair, you start with gently sewing the material to its original shape, and then reinforce the strength. Stabilization is the first step towards future visioning.

- Sometimes you have to use patchwork, but it is rigid and mostly disingenuous. If bringing the net or material to its former shape is unrealistic or unintended, then:

- Braiding new threads together between the rip is an adaptive way to provide responsive reinforcement.

- Single threads are weak but many threads are resilient.

- The vertices at which threads cross each other are critical connections for the structure of the net/fabric.

- Working with what you already know and what you have is a constraint that yields your most creative solutions. Instructions suck also.

- In weaving networks of collective responsibility, hierarchical binaries will not function amidst the range of stakeholders needed to restore any social disrepair.

- The nature of positive transformation is not a single thread between point A and point B. It is mostly a mess of many that takes a good faith effort to untangle.

- The personal and social transformation is in the process, not the outcome.

"We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. In this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of 'critical mass.' It's always about critical connections."
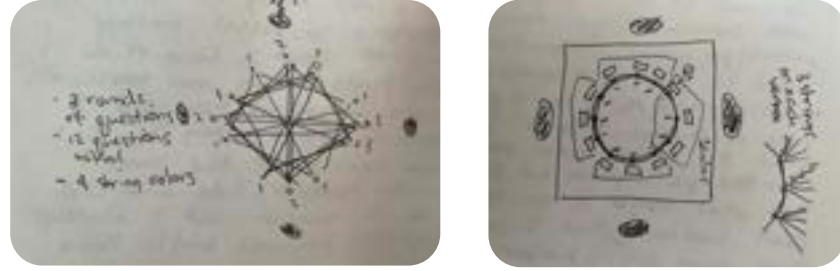
- Grace Lee Boggs
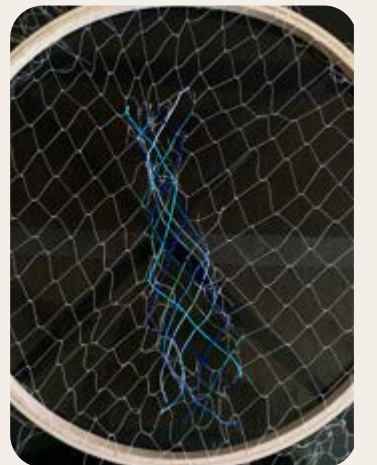
Prototype 1

Weaving Together

In this prototype I wanted to understand how connections could be made into an artifact during a focus group or ideation session. Does a physical manifestation of connection build stronger bonds, and enhance the dialogue and experience?

My vision for this prototype was to have 4 people sit in circle, each having 3 question prompts to share and answer themselves. In the middle of everyone is a circle with string attached at 12 spots. If something that a person says resonates with you, or you connect with the story, you join your vertex and their vertex with string. By the end, we will have a physical archive of connection and relationship building through storytelling. I used Healing Justice as our topic for this prototype. Some sample questions:

- *What might justice through healing look like? Do you have a personal example?*
- *Is community important for healing? Why or why not?*
- *What may be beneficial from creating together? Is there justice in it?*
- *How important is environment for healing? What conditions are most important?*

Laura, Dasha, Brenneis, Amy

Surveys

Group Reflections:

1. This was a metaphorically beautiful piece and experience

2. Wanting to see how it could be leveraged in spaces where there is conflict

3. What would this look like at a large scale with people walking to tie their string to the other persons space?

Prototype 2

Weekly Prompts

For this prototype I made in the Fall of 2023, I wanted to know if weekly self-reflections, and self-assessments were a useful way of encouraging folks into a resotrative mindset.

I tested it with DSI students, with undergraduate students at Bennington College, and two professors that work at the intersection of Restorative Justice and Participatory Action Research.
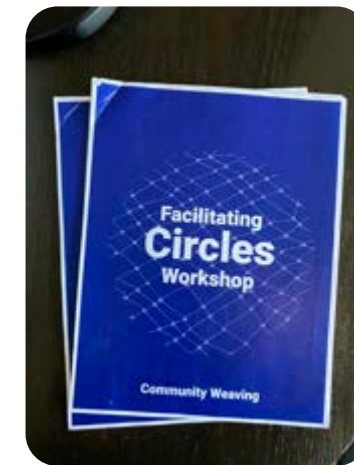

Lessons learned

I learned that weekly self assessments made people feel like they were being researched, instead of being a part of the research. I also learned from the professors who had done a lot of PAR work with youth, that this is not something you can rely on teenagers to complete, especially if it is something they take home.

Prototype 3

Circle Facilitation Training

I created a Facilitation Circles training for the Boulevard resident team. I worked with the New York Peace Institute on the training material, and also included exercises from my conflict mediation training. My hope was that by training the team in circle keeping, they could hold weekly circles for all of us.
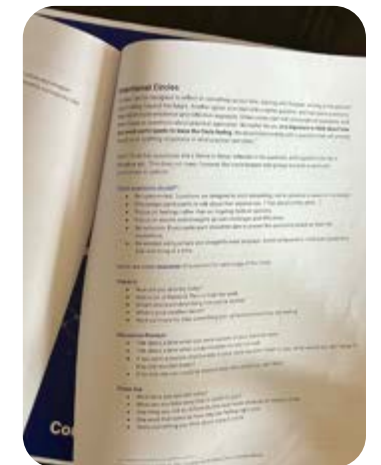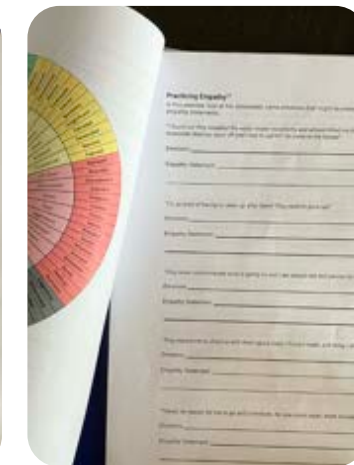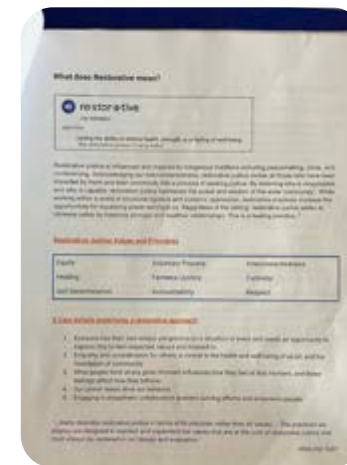
Lessons learned

The training was not well received by some team members, while others were eager. This experience prompted me to reflect a lot on my positionality while working with this team. I realized that it was wrong of me to expect this team to engage in this program, when it was not something that they asked for or had any say in, which is not but the whole point of these participatory projects. This was a moment of accountability for me. Even still, some of the training material made it to my final intervention.

How might we adapt restorative principles and practices to aid in personal and community growth in neighborhoods experiencing the negative impacts of mass incarceration?

How might restorative skill building be integrated into community action projects seeking to address root causes of crime in their neighborhoods?

Theory of Change pt. 1

Assumptions

- City elections will not affect the funding for these projects
- All NSTAT residents are on board with these additions to programming
- Future project leads are willing to facilitate the intervention in the future

In order to increase public safety and wellbeing in communities experiencing disproportionate crime, **community autonomy**– the ability to take independent initiative in response to it's own social affairs– **must be strengthened**. My theory is that by developing skills learned through restorative practices, communities experiencing disproportionate crime can effectively take more autonomous action towards wellbeing and safety.

An autonomous community has four main preconditions of the community members that I am addressing:
- a community of leaders
- shared power and influence between community members
  and between communities and the city
- connection and trust between community members, and
- capacity for accountability with the self, community, and the city.

In order to achieve **cultivated community of adaptive leaders** the following outcomes must be in place:
- improved ability to resolve conflict effectively amongst the community members
- increased capacity for advocacy efforts towards intended goals
- Cultivated individual and collective agency and self-determination
- developed relationship building skills

In order to achieve **shared power and influence** the following outcomes must be in place:
- increased community-driven advocacy efforts
- developed skills for reciprocal relations

In order for **connection and trust to be built between community members**, the following outcomes must be in place:
- increased capacity for community advocacy and collective action
- developed skills in respectful, reciprocal, resilient relationships

In order for **increased accountability with self, community, and city**, the following outcomes must be in place:
- improved ability to resolve conflict effectively
- developed skills for reciprocal, resilient relationships
- cultivated agency and self-determination of both individual and collective goals

In order to achieve **increased capacity for community advocacy efforts** the following outcomes must be in place:
- aligned community guiding values with their actions
- operate interdependently and collaboratively to engage every person of the collective
- effective communication amongst members of the collective
- engagement with the root problems– barriers to safety and wellness– to guide initiatives towards lasting solutions

In order for **community members to achieve cultivated agency and self-determination of process and outcomes** of safety and wellness initiatives, the following outcomes must be in place:
- alignment of personal values and actions in support of the initiative
- ability to communicate opinions and feelings effectively
- self awareness and emotional intelligence to understand one's own opinions and feelings driving them
- understanding of root problems to orient one's own position and abilities to create change

Continued...
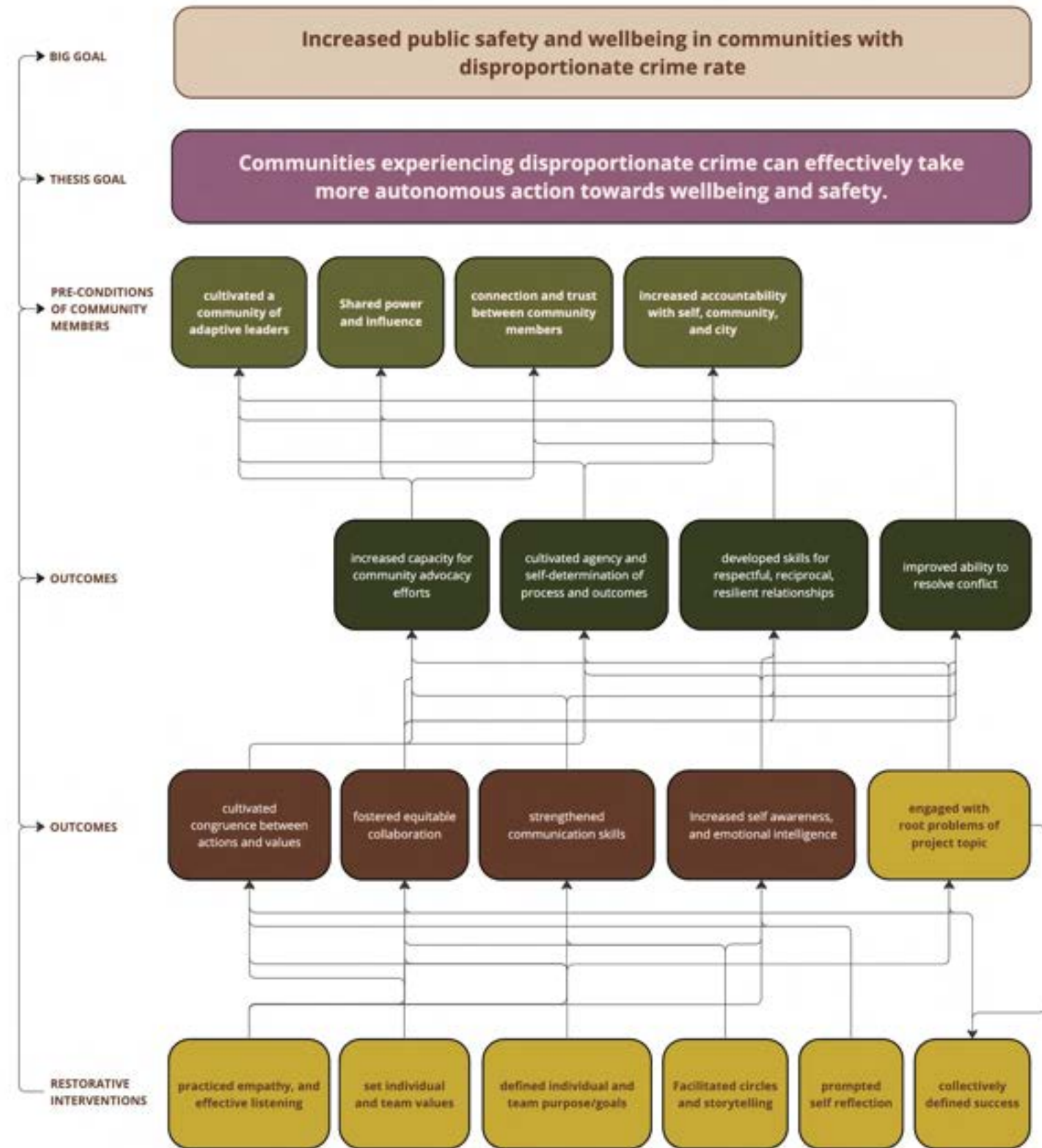
Theory of Change pt. 2

In order for **individuals to have developed skills to maintain respectful, reciprocal, resilient relationships,** the following outcomes must be in place:
- fostered equitable contribution and collaboration between individuals
- adequate communication skills to deepen understanding of each other
- self-awareness and emotional-intelligence to show up authentically and supportively.

In order to have **improved ability to resolve conflict,** the following outcomes must be in place:
- equitable collaboration in processes of accountability
- skills to express one's experience, and communicate understanding and a genuine apology if necessary
- self -awareness and emotional intelligence to reflect on contribution to conflict
- ability to engage with root problems in order to understand necessary behavior changes, and external contributors

In order to have **cultivated congruence between values and actions**, the following interventions must take place:
- defined values
- defined purpose and goals to influence action
- time for self reflection
- understanding of vision and success to apply values and guide actions

In order to have **fostered equitable collaboration**, the following interventions must take place:
- practiced empathy and effective listening
- individual and team values to create a supportive and compassionate space
- defined purpose and goals to create space for individuals' skills and contributions
- conversations held in circles to facilitate equity of voice
- defined vision and success to integrate individuals' skills and contributions

In order to have **strengthened communication skills,** the following interventions must take place:
- practiced empathy and effective listening skills to speak tactfully
- space for storytelling

In order to have **increased self awareness and emotional intelligence**, the following interventions must take place:
- practiced empathy and effective listening skills
- engaged in circles to share and empathize with the stories of others
- prompted self reflection

Engaging with root problems is both an intervention and an outcome of other interventions. The following interventions must be in place in order to engage in root problems with purpose:
- individuals and members of the community must be able to define their purpose, and goals to create direct links between barriers and vision
- an ongoing dialogue between what success looks like, and what the issues are.

Restorative interventions mapped by restorative principle and practice.
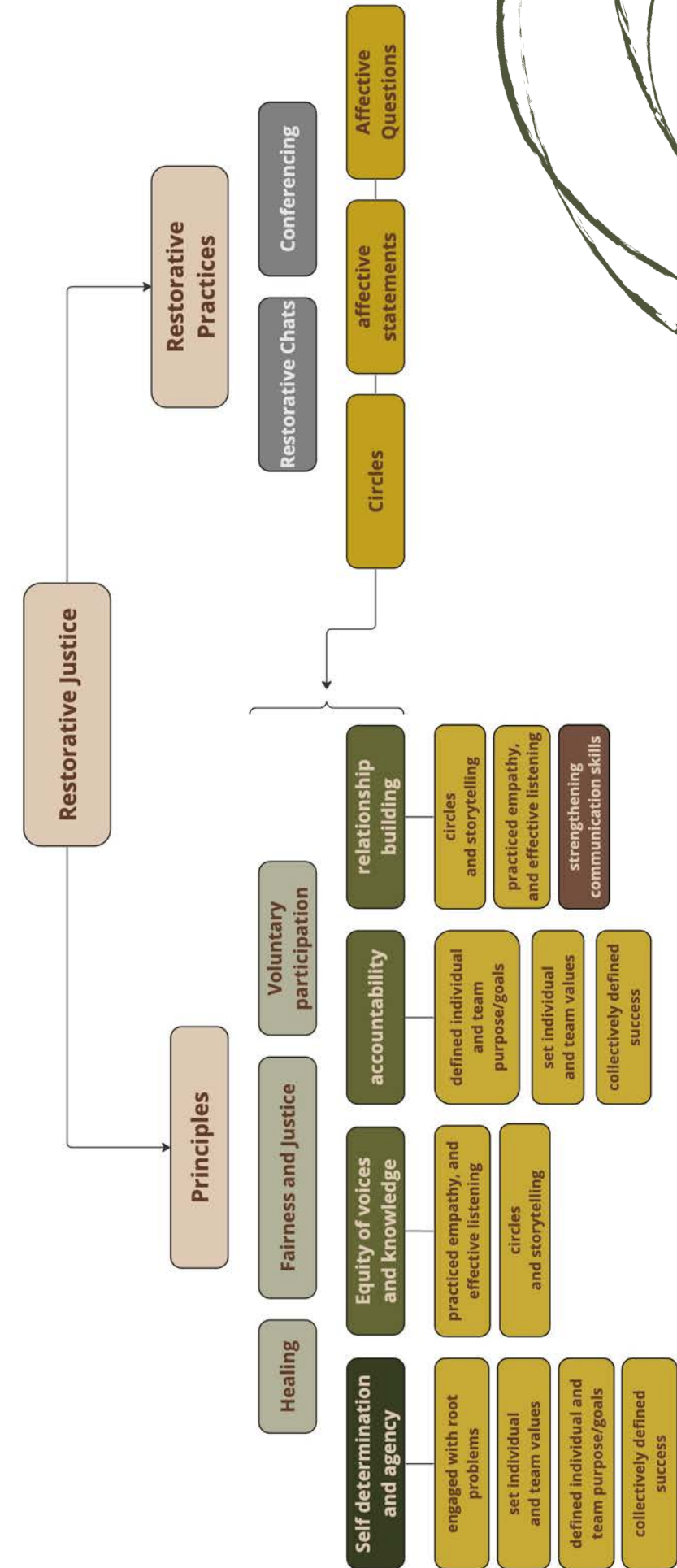
Weekly activities

Community Building Circle 1: Values

During this circle we got to know each other by learning about each other's values, and then creating a list of team values.

Discussion Rounds:

1. Tell us one value of yours and how it shows up in your life and relationships.

2. Share a value that you believe should be upheld by this group.

3. What is one value, from the team values, or one that is unique to you, that you can commit to prioritizing more?

Engaging with root problems

Our project lead and I lead a session looking at the health data on East New York. Using the core questions of Restorative Justice to facilitate the reflections.

Reflection Questions:

1. What circumstances, past and present, prevent us from moving towards a healthier future?

2. What steps can we take to understand the effects of this harm and to aid healing, both individually and communally?

Community Building Circle 2: Defining success & sharing stories

During this circle we learned more about how each team member would imagine success for 4K Harvest. People told stories of past projects they they believed were successful and we were able to come up with some metrics for evaluating 4KHarvest.

Discussion Rounds:

1. Where do you witness or experience the impact of past projects done through NSTAT?

2. How will we know there was impact or success because of 4Kharvest?

Ideas for measuring success:

Immediate:
- Getting more than 12 sign ups
- Youth showing up and committing
- Asking questions during program

medium:
- Youth challenging parents and expressing desire for healthier food
- Youth starting conversations
- "know better, do better"
- Participants come back next time
- Youth perception and enjoyment of the program

long term:
- Better restaurants and markets — fast food out of business
- More community leaders joining NSTAT

Story of Us, Story of Self: collective purpose & shared vision

This activity was designed to help team members connect their own stories and goals to align the greater vision of the team. Personal reflections, were followed by small group collaboration, and finally an all team collaboration.

Reflection Questions:

1. Why were you called to this project? What are your personal goals? How might they be activated through this work?

2. Who are you as a team? (consider values) What are your shared purpose, goals, and vision?

3. What are the current challenges/social issues that we are addressing? What challenges can we begin addressing right now?
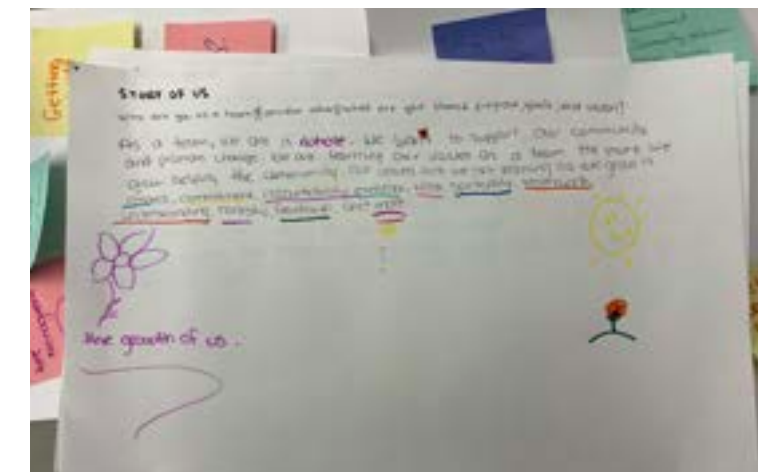
Measurement + Evaluation

By integrating restorative practices into participatory projects, outcomes can better reflect the deep restoration of communities we want to achieve. This means using metrics that prioritize long-lasting positive changes in both ourselves and our community projects: healing, self determination and agency, accountability, voluntary participation, equity, fairness and justice, the democratization of voice and knowledge, and relationship and community building.

Pre-assessment

I began with a self-assessment of 11 residents on their ability to live out restorative skills on a scale of 1-7. There was a general trend for the older folks on the team to rate themselves higher overall, but this survey highlighted various areas for opportunity in capacity building.

Ability to show up authentically *avg: 5.6*

Self awareness *avg: 5.5*

Emotions *avg: 5*

Communicating my story *avg: 5.7*

Listening deeply *avg: 5.6*

Asking questions *avg: 4.8*

Many perspectives *avg: 5.5*

Difficult conversations *avg: 5.1*

Values that drive me *avg: 4.8*

Feeling safe *avg: 5.5*

Being enough *avg: 6.5*

In order to effectively influence community change, groups must be capable of change. In order for groups to be capable of change, the individuals in them need to be capable of personal change.

- Leadership For a Better World[28]

Angela, Karen, Audrey, Jamel

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Takeaways

When I retested at the end of our 12 weeks together, I was only able to gather responses from 8 participants. Some scores went up, and some went down. This could have been due to any number of reasons, circumstances, or external factors. The data is inconclusive due to sample size, variation in response participants, and also due to limitations of the survey method and scale.

I hope to iterate the research methods for measuring positive change overtime in the building of restorative skills on these teams, as well as retest with all of the teams hosted by the Neighborhood Safety Initiative during the next cycle of projects.

Retrospective assessment (8 participants)

Over the last two months...

I have gained an awareness of the values that guide me. *avg: 4.7*

I have felt more aligned with my team because we have team values. *avg: 5*

I have improved my understanding of what motivates me in this project. *avg: 5.6*

I have improved my understanding of what motivates my team in this project. *avg: 5.7*

I have gained a better understanding of what my team's collective purpose and goals are. *avg: 5.7*

I have gained confidence in my voice, and my story. *avg: 5.6*
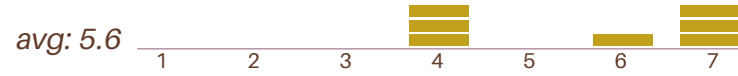
I have improved my ability to collaborate with others towards a shared vision. *avg: 5.7*

I have improved my ability to communicate effectively with others. *avg: 5.5*

I have acted with leadership more often. *avg: 5*

I have grown closer with my team. *avg: 5.2*

I have gained a better understanding of the social issue guiding our intervention. *avg: 5.6*

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Takeaways

Overall, there was an above average response for the time that I was collaborating with the resident team. This was again also an incomplete participant pool, and further monitoring in the next cycle will be important.

> *I have really enjoyed our time together. Brielle's ability to guide our team to explore social issues from different perspectives was great. She was able to work with the youths to help them communicate their thoughts on their community strengths, weaknesses and future prospects.*
>
> *- Karen*

Finally I asked residents to select which activities they believed were beneficial during our time together.

Circle 2: Defining success, sharing stories *71%*

Circles as a method for creating equitable sharing, and space for listening *42.9%*

Engaging root problems: Community Health Profile for East New York *57.1%*

Conflict skill building: listening and empathy *57.1%*

Circle 1: Defining personal and team values

Story of Us, Story of Self: collective purpose, and shared vision

Personal stories reflection

Takeaways

It was pleasant getting responses that indicated the most closely tied activities to restorative practices such as engaging root problems, conflict skill-building, and being in circle ranked the highest.

In the next iteration of this work, I intend on planning the activities for specific times during the project, instead of as I am noticing its opportunity come up during the time together.

Outcomes such as behavior change, cost savings, reduction in time spent in court, and reduced suspensions and arrests are not unimportant when measuring changes in public safety. However, if these are our only measurements, we run the risk of being co-opted by the interests of funders and institutions whose values don't align with the values of either participatory action research or restorative justice.[29]

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at-oneness

I have created a public platform for organizations, and leaders interested in weaving restorative approaches into their projects. This platform provides a database of books and resources, and relevant research on the three guiding frameworks of this intervention: Restorative Justice, Participatory Action Research, and Indigenous methodologies. I chose a database to work along side a programming map so that organizations may begin to incorporate restorative procceses into their community action work. There is no one right way to do this, which is why all the guides are tagged with their corresponding restorative principles. Overall, this central database offers organizations a way to incorporate healing-centered methods into any community lead projects. Overtime, this integration will exist naturally, and systems change work will become more explicitly about personal growth and community building.

"We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make, which, oftentimes, add up to big differences we cannot foresee."

—*Marian Wright Edelman*

Samples

A facilitating guide for a values activity at the beginning of a circle, and a circle template for a conversation about values.

Handout on listening and empathy that includes an exercise worksheet.

Implementation

This database will first be shared with project leads at Neighborhood Safety Initiative (NSI) to use voluntarily during the project cycle, and will be shared with their teams at their own discretion. To help guide the implementation, I created a map based on the Neighborhood Safety Initiative project cycle to recommend moments for these interventions and activities to take place.

NSI and I will share this tool with all of their project leads for 15 different resident initiatives. For the next cycle of projects, we can implement these practices, and get a better understanding of the effects of this intervention. My vision is to see more restorative methods used in community action work, and so hope to find ways of sharing this with other organizations doing similar work to NSI.

Grounding principles for Restorative Projects

Community-Centered

Those who have been harmed are at the center of the work, allowing them to lead on what it is they need to feel a reclamation of agency and dignity. This approach repositions those at the center of research as subjects, opposed to historic objectification by traditional research.

Voluntary Process

Formally educated researchers and managers must consent to this process of understanding power and positionality, historical structures designed to maintain hierarchy and oppression, and how their work may perpetuate this system.

Building Group Cohesion/Trust

This process dismantles power structures that have upheld inequity and caused generational trauma and community disconnect. Establishing group norms, values, and and guidelines is foundational for community building and trust.

Circles

Using circles regularly to provides a container for equitable community storytelling, relationship building. Circles allow for a re-membering of history to assess the future.

Healing-Centered

High level questions: How can we move toward healing? What can be done to repair immediate harm, and prevent further harm from happening? What wounds and circumstances prevent us from having healthy relationships with the community and ourselves? What steps can we take to understand these wounds and aid healing?

A Reflective Process

Each person is encouraged to continuously self reflect in order to understand one's strengths and goals, their unique perspective within the group, and habits or patterns inhibiting them from being fully present and authentic.

Relational Accountability

Every stakeholder is clear on their connections of accountability with the rest of the community of stakeholders. These relations are acknowledged and strengthened through the process.

Growth and Learning

See every instance of mistake, wrongdoing and conflict as an opportunity for growth and learning.
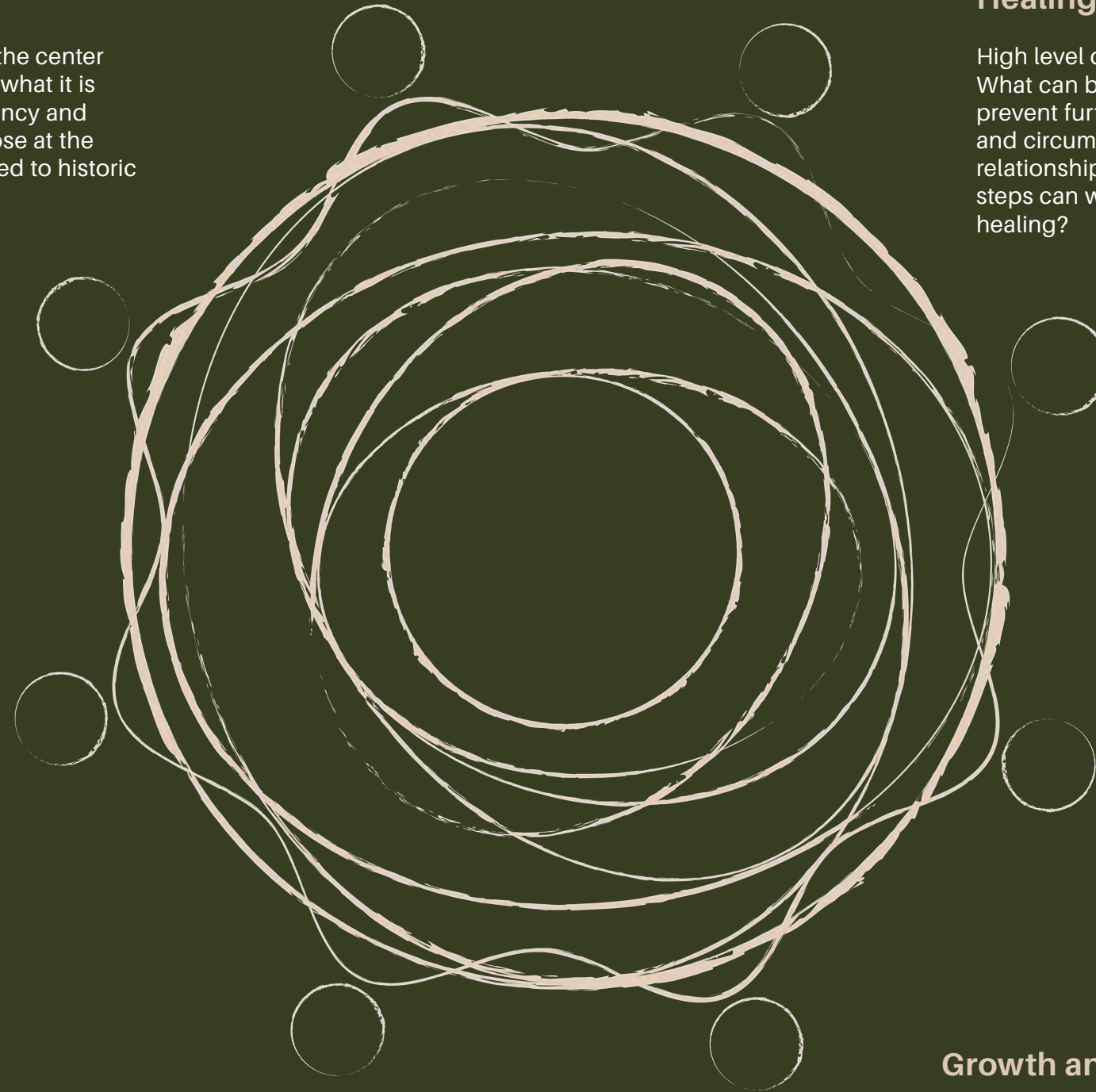
Resources

Please visit
at-oneness.notion.site
for the full list of resources

Books ...

Aa Name	☰ Author
Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches	Leslie Brown (editor), Susan Strega (Editor)
Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants	Robin Wall Kimmerer
Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods	Shawn Wilson
The Little Book of Restorative Justice Program Design: Using Participatory Action Research to Build and Assess RJ Initiatives	Alisa del Tufo, E. Quin Gonell, Michelle Fine (Foreword)
Restoring the Kinship Worldview: Indigenous Voices Introduce 28 Precepts for Rebalancing Life on Planet Earth	Wahinkpe Topa (Four Arrows), Darcia Narváez
Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past and Reimagining Our Future	Patty Krawec, Nick Estes (Foreword)
Healing Justice Lineages: Dreaming at the Crossroads of Liberation, Collective Care, and Safety	Cara Page, Erica Woodland, Aurora Levins Morales (Foreword)
We Keep Us Safe: Building Secure, Just, and Inclusive Communities	Zach Norris, Van Jones (Foreword by)
Are Prisons Obsolete?	Angela Y. Davis
We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice	Mariame Kaba, Naomi Murakawa (Foreword)
Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care	Kelly Hayes, Mariame Kaba
Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity in This Crisis	Dean Spade
Freedom is a Constant Struggle	Angela Y. Davis, Cornel West (Foreword), Frank Barat (Introduction)
Saving Our Own Lives: A Liberatory Practice of Harm Reduction	Shira Hassan
Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making	Sam Kaner, Sam Kaner, Lenny Lind (Contributor), Catherine Toldi (Contributor), Sarah Fisk (Contributor), Duane Berger (Contributor)

Research/Essays/Talks/Other

Aa Name	∅ URL	+ –
The Four Guiding Principles for Making Our Cities Safer - YouTube - Common Justice	youtube.com/wat... t=222s	
Invest in Black Futures: A Public Health Roadmap For Safe NYC Neighborhoods by Brooklyn Movement Center - Issuu	issuu.com/bkm...ort_v5	
Community-Driven Crisis Response: A Workbook for Coordinators - CSG Justice Center - CSG Justice Center	csgjusticecenter.org/... b...story/	
Op-Ed	We want safety and healing, not harsh punishment	amNewYork	amny.com/opi...732706	
Movement Generation Just Transition Framework Resources	movementgeneration.or g/mov...urces/	
Dismantling traditional approaches: community-centered design in local government	tandfonline.com/do... 157128	
NYC Connected Communities Guidebook	file.notion.so/f...ok.pdf	
An Ethic of Care for Research Participants as Trauma Survivors	medium.com/@sf... bbd920	
The criminal justice system is broken. Restorative justice can help fill the gap.	vox.com/fut...room	
On Research, Art, and Transformation: Multigenerational Participatory Research, Critical Positive Youth Development, and Structural Change	file.notion.so/f...31.pdf	
Circulating Critical Research: Reflections on Performance and Moving Inquiry into Action	file.notion.so/f...ct.pdf	
Literate Bodies: Multigenerational Participatory Action Research and Embodied Methodologies as Critical Literacy	file...ic.pdf	
From Restorative Justice to Restorative Culture	ilrp.edu/ima...re.pdf	
A Call to Connection: Rediscovering the Transformative Power of Relationships	einhorncollaborative.or g/cal...ummary	
Closing the gap between user experience and policy design	designmuseumfoundati on.org/clo...e-gap/	
Transforming Our Systems, Transforming Ourselves: The Pivotal Role of Healing in Social Change Work	nonprofitquarterly.org/t ra...work/	

Environmental reflections

Food sovereignty is defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."[30] In the case of the Boulevard Team's project, educating youth on the food system and how to live healthier lives directly improves food sovereignty in their community. Participatory projects, as well as restorative justice gives power back to communities, and therefore localized systems development, leading to sovereignty of commerce, and health through more circular models. My work with this team contributes to the community's ability to move towards independence and ownership. When communities have what they need, whether it is a grocery store, or health services, there is less of a need for far travel to other places, and leaves less space for conglomerates with massive environmental footprints.

Historically neglected communities are often threatened by pollution, toxic waste, and other forms of ecological degradation due to environmental racism. This systemic problem is not only limited to the outside world but also extends to the prison system, where incarcerated individuals are exposed to harmful substances with devastating health consequences long-term. A 2022 report by Prison Policy Initiative states that "one-third (32%) of state and federal prisons are located within three miles of federal Superfund sites, the most serious contaminated places requiring extensive cleanup."[31]
If public safety improves, incarceration rates go down, and police presence wanes, less people, particularly black and brown people, will suffer the consequences of systemic irresponsibility, and oppression when it comes to environmental degradation.

Thank you

The most consuming feeling I have about this experience is gratitude. The first thing that we learn at DSI is that **you cannot do any of this work alone.** When I look back and think of all the people who have helped usher me towards this moment, I feel overwhelmed by the tapestry of collective care and justice we have created.

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I am indebted to you for seeing potential in me before I even knew if I was ready to pivot my focus in life. I am grateful for your ability to push us into new perspectives, and expand our imaginations of care.

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