



# Creating a Healing Community to Promote Racial Justice

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Colour Between the Lines (CBTL) is a collective of five creative practitioners from the African diaspora in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia. CBTL and the spaces they create are self-determined, collective spaces designed to navigate race relations within Australia. CBTL enacts racial justice to respond to the structural violence experienced by communities of the African diaspora.



Figure 1 The CBTL collective and Next in Colour logo. Images by Aisha Trambas. Printed with permission from the author.

"The formation of CBTL is a resistant and emancipatory action. Critical scholars have long shown the benefits and functions of homeplaces and alternative settings in the lives of oppressed communities. It is in these settings that people can come together to imagine alternative ways, affirm community cultures and histories, provide mutual support, and craft alternative visions."

Working with the CBTL collective is an example of community-engaged ways of working anchored to a desire for self-determination and racial justice. These ways of working shaped the research and the collaborative relationship between university-based researchers and the collective.

## Highlights

**Alternative settings, like CBTL can provide relational healing spaces grounded in collectively held values of care, recognition, and reciprocity.**

**CBTL exists within contexts of race and coloniality.**

**Yet, CBTL seeks to form solidarities, broader practices, and ways of relating within creative industries.**

Through our work together, we have documented the stories of the struggle for racial justice by the CBTL collective. Many settings which racialised communities and individuals encounter replicate structures and symbols of white supremacy. The creation of new and alternative settings creates a safe and healing space for these communities and individuals. New spaces can also foster radical approaches of racial justice and can create powerful counter-stories. Thus, documenting the formation of CBTL as a setting, the values they hold, their ways of working and relating, and the narratives which sit at the center of their initiative, provides us important insights into the dynamics of oppression and resistance.

## HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Community Psychology offers a useful way to understand the ways racialized communities engage in resistance and struggles for survival through the creation of alternative settings. We were able to examine the social processes, resources, and the way those resources were organized in ways that fostered healing and resistance to oppressive racist structures.

### ***Methods***

We identified important personal stories through in-depth interviews with the collective. These stories, organized into themes, create meaning from our complex social worlds and explore how we shape our social identities. Personal narratives can be used to examine power and resistance. The narratives shared by CBTL members clarify how the initiative is a response to structural violence such as racism and racialization as well as the enactment of hope and desire for safe and healing spaces for community making.

### ***Results***

- Documenting and sharing the narratives from collective members can be a powerful form of counter-storytelling.
- The collective "named racism as structural violence", detailing the specific ways it is experienced and manifests culturally and materially with psychosocial consequences.
- Resistance strategies led CBTL to create alternative settings, called "home-places and healing spaces", for themselves and their communities to "declutter".
- From these settings, CBTL can engage the decolonial actions of "counter storytelling, authentic visibility and building solidarities", and work together to "radically reimagine relationships and ways of working".

## What Does This Mean For?

**Research and Evaluation:** The outcomes of this research have contributed to our understanding of the methods and contexts that emerge from the knowledge and labor of racialized individuals and communities and foster racial justice.

**Practice:** The work alongside the CBTL collective provided new insights about crafting university-community research practice. While we have taken guidance from the long tradition of Community Based Participatory Action Research, our activity has further blurred the boundaries between research and practice and the researcher and researched. We have opened a dialogue that makes possible mutual and co-constructed processes of meaning making.

**Social Action:** The research shows the importance of supporting and sustaining settings such as the CBTL collective and the spaces they create. It is through such settings that people come together to imagine alternative ways, affirm community cultures and histories, provide mutual support, and craft alternative visions. This is essential for sustaining solidarities and mobilizing communities towards collective action and enactments of racial justice.

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