

The Racial Justice, Inquiry, Discourse and Action Initiative: Practicing Racial Justice through Connected Disruption

In June of 2020, a [Call to Action on Anti-Blackness](#) was sent to members of the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) Executive Committee (EC), a decision-making body for the organization, and its broader membership. It was a letter that was created in the context of the grief, pain and anger felt in the wake of the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police officers while in custody; it was a letter that was responding to the enduring legacies of colonialism and racism; and it was a letter that named the ongoing violence of white supremacy and anti-blackness reflected in SCRA itself.

The letter did not ask for affirmations or for simple recognition. It was intended as a provocation for transformative change within SCRA, a transformation of its structures and its practices. It presented four demands:

1. Put tangible resources back into Black communities.

2. Acknowledge our complicity and maintenance of white supremacy and white supremacy culture in SCRA.

3. Develop a deep and critical understanding of anti-Blackness and White supremacy.

4. Engage in collective action to dismantle anti-Blackness and white supremacy in SCRA and Community Psychology.

Under each of these demands the letter called for specific actions, from “[funding] critical race work done by Black scholars and scholars of colour in [Community Psychology]”, to “actively [dismantling] structures of anti-Blackness in Community Psychology programs (and developing tools that can be used to build capacities of faculties and students to actively do this)” (SCRA Call to Action on Anti-Blackness, 2020). In reaction, commitments to broader change efforts were made by the EC through a response letter, and a team of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) consultants were hired to support the change process.

Many other groups within SCRA also sought to respond to the Call to Action by leveraging their own capacities, resources, and spheres of influence. Among these, in December 2020, the [Council on Education](#), a group within SCRA tasked to “help create, support, and advocate for educational settings that actively embrace those from every background – especially those who have been historically excluded from educational participation,” submitted a budget request to the SCRA EC to fund a graduate student practicum that would support the Council’s work to bring to fruition some of the commitments in the EC response letter, including development of anti-racist curriculum and training practice guidelines, and a racial justice “self-assessment” for community psychology programs. Ultimately, this request was expanded to include a wider range of student perspectives and embrace a student-led agenda, rather than simply fulfilling the EC’s commitments. The expanded project was titled “the Racial Justice Inquiry, Discourse and Action (RJIDA) initiative” to reflect a desire to use “Inquiry” about the status of racial justice in CP education through surveys and assessments to generate change through dialogue and advocacy.

Learning within RJIDA was fruitful in many ways, some unintended. Not surprisingly, the initiative itself became a site of tension between visions of what constitutes an anti-racist praxis and the familiar power dynamics within the culture and structures of a volunteer organization rooted in academia like SCRA (Beals et al., 2021; Mingo et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2021). Coming into the practicum, the roles and outcomes of RJIDA were framed as open to being shaped and directed by us students. However, we came to feel that our agency within the practicum, both across our internal processes and in the direction of the initiative itself, was constrained. The initiative’s budget proposal to the EC had outlined a set of required “deliverables” that placed limits on what we could shape. The scope of these deliverables, and the limited timeline of the initiative (ambitious for three students let alone for one as

originally conceptualised) sat in tension with the time we believed was needed to engage more relational processes in RJIDA. These tensions would lead to ongoing challenges that would acutely arise after our first gathering with the collective, significantly shaping our experiences and relationships throughout the practicum.

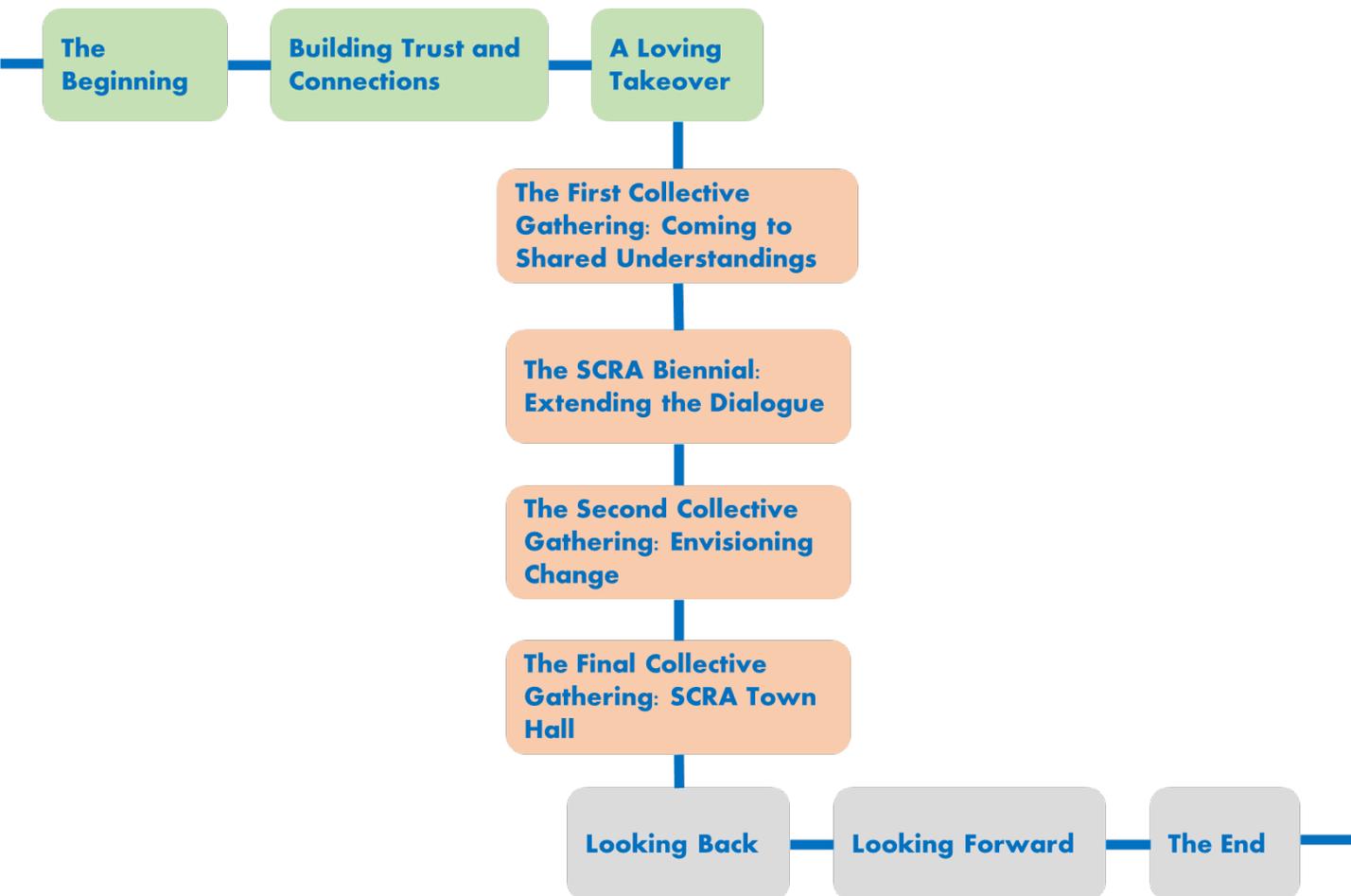
This is a recounting, from the perspective of the author, one of the RJIDA practicum students, both of what was achieved, and the tensions and constraints that were encountered. It was from these tensions that some of the most valuable learning was distilled, transforming RJIDA from a vehicle for, to a site of racial justice inquiry, discourse, and action.

The recounting is structured in three parts that serve as a rough timeline of the RJIDA initiative. The first charts the beginning of the practicum, introducing those involved and the processes that began to take shape. The second part shares some of the key work that emerged from the practicum, a series of dialogues to form shared understandings of racial justice and a collective vision for change. The third part shares the work of those involved in RJIDA to make sense of their experiences, and our desire to then build on them.

Throughout you will find examples of the various artefacts that were produced are shared. These include videos, images, and links to documents that capture the processes and products of RJIDA. To conclude each section of this recounting, there are also sets of questions that arose for us within RJIDA and that have been useful to in understanding our experiences. We hope that these questions help provoke critical reflection and learning for those who engage in similar work.

It is important to also note that this recounting draws on the ideas, experiences, and labour of many of those collectively involved in RJIDA. Some of this is captured across the artefacts that are shared,

and in the narrative text reflecting the thoughts of those who generously provided a critical lens to help shape the piece. As the narrative moves past “the beginning”, describing the key components of RJIDA, it adopts a collective “we” as it shares a set of experiences from the vantage point of the graduate students involved in the practicum. This narrative is formed through reflection and dialogue together among the practicum students and others involved in RJIDA; however, while the use of “we” suggests a uniform set of experiences, it is important to note that this piece is authored by one member of the graduate student practicum and is thus shaped by this particular perspective.



The Beginning

The RJIDA initiative was at first intended as a practicum for a single student to assist the Council of Education in their work to support the EC Response to the Call to Action. The practicum was envisioned as a short-term (less than eight months), 10-hour per week position to advance objectives assigned to the COE by the EC. In recognition of the prominent role that ideas of decoloniality had been playing in SCRA's Call to Action Response, the practicum was named the ["Practicum to advance Racial Justice and Decoloniality in CP Training and Education."](#) Despite this aspirational title, the original scope of work for the practicum was largely in support of SCRA's existing plan of action, tied to conventional ways of knowing in academic contexts.

After receiving 12 applications from students that had strong backgrounds with DEIA initiatives and anti-racist work, the Council of Education re-envisioned the practicum to encompass a broader range of objectives and include more students. The Council successfully advocated for additional funds to support three students to, in addition to completing the tasks laid out by the EC, engage the membership in dialogue regarding the products of the initiative, and building from these products and dialogues, advocate for change in the organization. In addition to working with the Council, these students were to receive ongoing guidance from supervisors of their choice – academics with considerable knowledge and experience in racial justice and decolonial work. The remaining nine students were asked to participate in an Advisory group so that the work would include a wider range of student voices.

The three students that would be selected for the practicum roles were Hannah Rebadulla, Rama Agung-Igusti and Jamilah Shabazz.

They were introduced to the membership through an article in The Community Psychologist (Haber, 2021) through the photos and brief bios below.



Mabuhay and hello, everyone! My name is Hannah Lintag Rebadulla (she/her). My family is from Pampanga and Visayas, Philippines. I was born in Pohnpei and raised in the CHamoru lands of Guam. I currently live and work on the land of the Dena'ina (Anchorage, AK). I am a second-year doctoral student at the Clinical-Community Psychology Program at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Our program has an emphasis on Indigenous and rural issues. Broadly, my academic interests include decolonization, oppression, settler colonialism, militarization, and liberation psychology. My people's history of colonization and resistance is a source of great inspiration to me. I hope to continue to draw inspiration from them as we work on the Racial Justice Inquiry, Discourse, and Action (RJIDA) initiative. I am very honored and humbled to be part of RJIDA. I am also grateful to Dr. E.J.R. David for his support as my practicum supervisor for RJIDA. I look forward to the collaboration, learning, and growth that is to come from this initiative!



Hi folks! My name is Rama Agung-Igusti (he/him) and I was born on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia, to white settler and Balinese migrant parents. I'm currently a third year PhD student at Victoria University and my thesis project sits within the area of Critical Community Psychology, and further draws from decolonial, post-colonial, black feminist, and critical race and whiteness theories. I have been interested in the ways individuals and communities respond to and resist racialisation and structural and institutional racisms, how identity and belonging is negotiated in the context of Australia as a settler colonial nation, and ways creative practices are mobilised for social change and the radical imagining of new ways of being and doing. I, alongside my supervisor Dr. Christopher Sonn, am extremely excited to get to work with and learn from a group of amazing and passionate people, sharing in valuable knowledges and experiences, and creating important spaces for change and racial justice.



Hello! My name is Jamilah Iman Shabazz. I am a California native with much experience traveling the globe. I am 34 years young and currently live in Los Angeles. I am a 3rd year doctoral student studying Depth Psychologies of Communities, Liberation, and Indigenous Ecologies. As a scholar, educator, world traveler, and transformational leader, I am committed to empowering Black and Brown youth and adults to heal from trauma and embrace radical Black joy in order to live out their wildest, most authentic dreams and lives. My life's work is filled with joy, service, community, liberation, and exciting Afro-Adventures globally. My passions are travel, experiential education, interconnection, African cultures, African Indigeneity, and the various modes in which communities coexist. Personally and professionally, I strive to live a life which is free flowing, authentic, artistic, guided by spirit, and closely connected to beautiful energies.

I am very grateful for the transformative opportunities of personal and professional development which the Racial Justice Inquiry, Discourse, and Action (RJIDA) initiative will offer. I am also honored to have been referred by my Supervisor, Dr. Nuria Ciofalo and selected by the RJIDA selection committee. Using this experience as a framework and launching pad, I hope to successfully create meaningful relationships, make a powerful impact, work with many BIPOC communities, and grow tremendously.

They were each supported by their chosen supervisors, [E. J. R. David](#), [Christopher Sonn](#) and [Nuria Ciofalo](#).



The “advisory group” (later renamed the “Collective”) consisted of Shanya Gray, Jeny Rae Vidal, Bobbi Young, Rachel Tache, Laurel Weiss, Krista Grajo and Jordyn Beschel.

And lastly [Mason Haber](#), the chair of the Council of Education, and the coordinator for the RJIDA practicum.



In broadening the scope of the initiative, the Council on Education described three “pillars,” of Inquiry, Discourse and Action, each assigned to a student based on their interests and experiences. Each area would reflect the student’s different experiences, capacities, and knowledge. Alongside these pillars the role of the advisory group was also outlined. While these various outcomes had been envisaged for each pillar, the three practicum students were invited to help shape the practicum, its outcomes and products, and the approach they took.

Inquiry

- Development and implementation of a racial justice assessment survey for CP programs
- Development and revision of anti-racist competencies
- Scan of racial climate literature
- Co-development of a self-study resource for CP programs

Discourse

- Organize broad dialogue with program directors and students to facilitate co-learning among programs participating in the RJIDA initiative
- Scan of anti-racist pedagogy literature
- Facilitating action planning among CP programs for curriculum development

Action

- Chair the student Advisory Group and help guide RJIDA methods
- Engage in participatory research and action across multi-level structural problems in academic contexts
- Scan of barriers/facilitators to racial justice literature

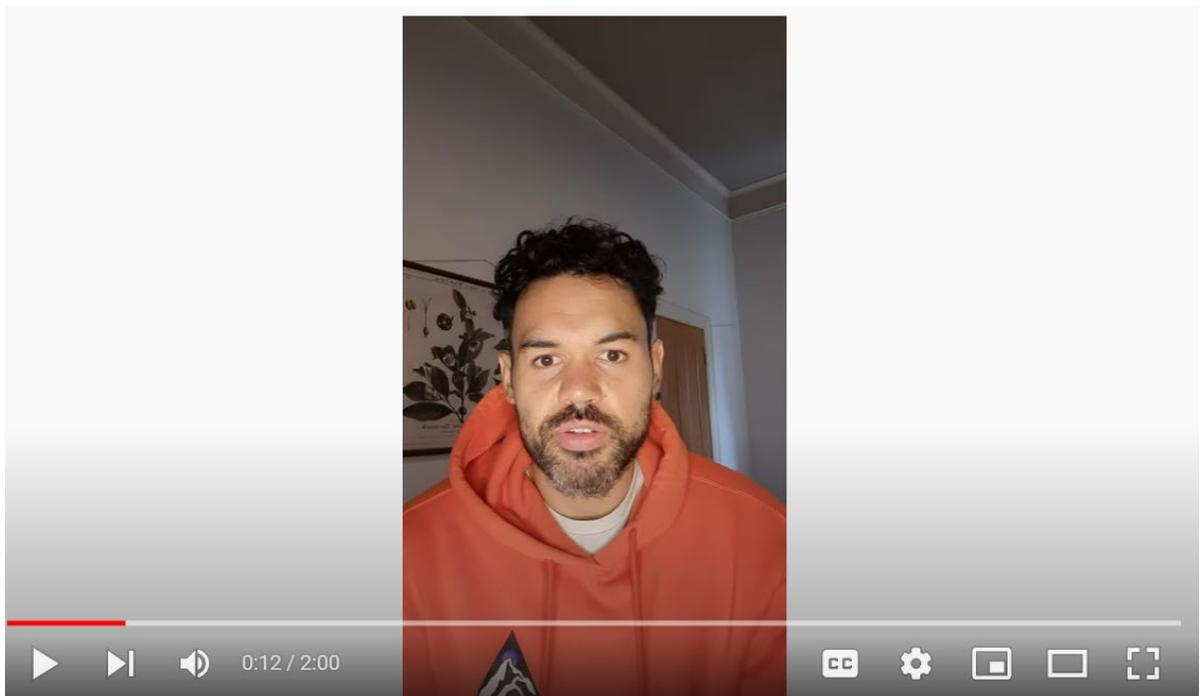
Advisory Group

- To convene across 3 meetings to assist in planning and providing feedback on the initiative
- Connect with students and advisors engaging with the racial justice assessment survey on regular basis for ongoing consultation
- To develop RJIDA activities at their own programs
- Co-design a mini-grant program and budget request

Building Trust and Connections

We three practicum students begun to meet with each other, our supervisors, the practicum co-ordinator, and the students of the advisory group. As few of us shared the same city (let alone country) the collaborative work of RJIDA had to be done entirely online, which made establishing rapport and connection potentially more challenging. We were especially concerned with connecting with the advisory group, given that their formal role was limited to three meetings over the course of the initiative. In addition to standard tools of Zoom, google docs, etc. the students used chatting apps and videos to unsettle the formality of emails and bring a greater sense of humanness in our interactions.

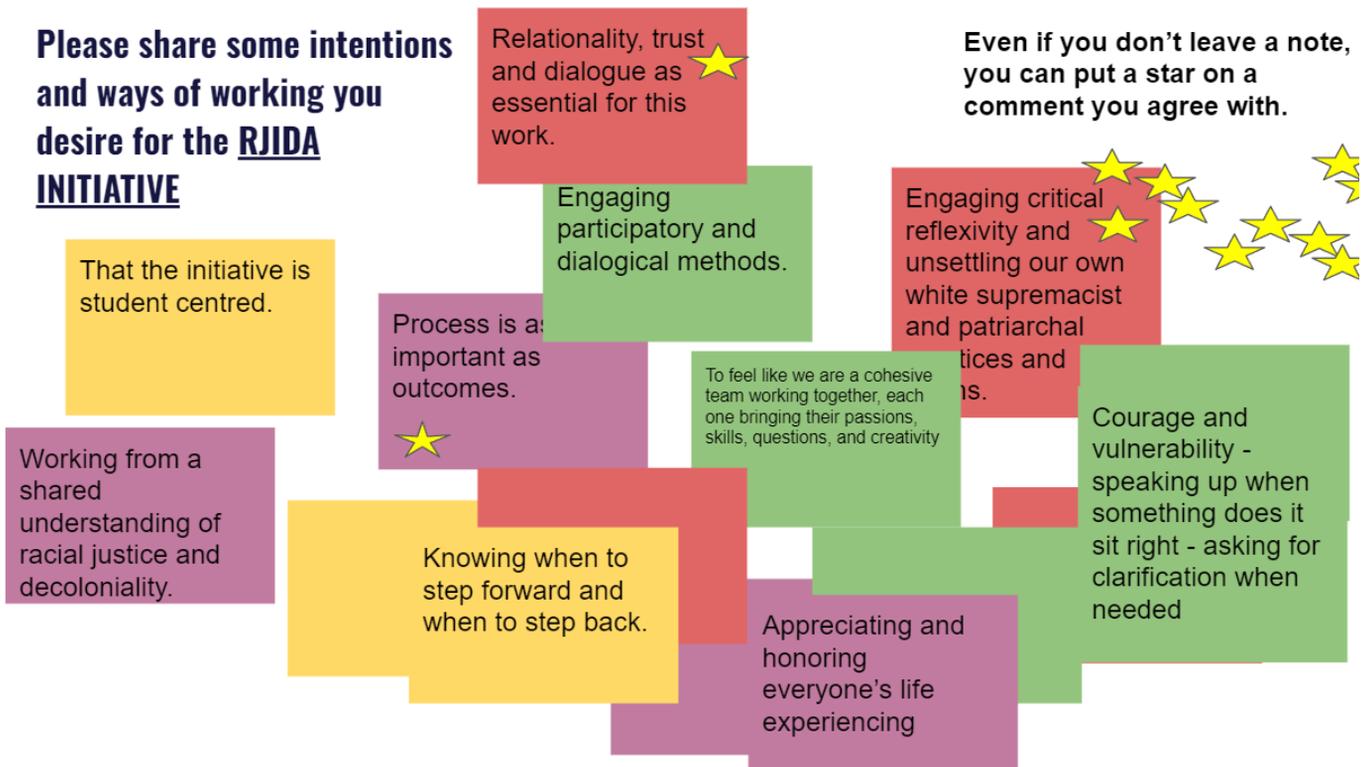
[Introduction Video to the Advisory Group](#)



We worked towards creating a setting that was shaped by the ways of working we collectively imagined. This was an iterative process, prompted by a desire for the connectedness that we felt and sensed was needed to do our work meaningfully. As we met with one another and the advisory group, we invited contributions to a

collaborative post-it wall (a tool that we would use often across our collective dialogues) asking everyone to share intentions and desires for RJIDA in the hope we could create a setting that centred care and mutual accountability. What became evident was a strong desire to “[engage] critical reflexivity and [unsettle] our own white supremacist practices”. Importantly these ways of working were not static, but emergent and responsive to our changing contexts and relationships.

Please share some intentions and ways of working you desire for the RJIDA INITIATIVE



It would soon become clear that for such a space to emerge it would need to be relational, dialogical, and participatory; a space that was student-centred; that was attentive to power; that valued different knowledges; that was process driven; that was critically reflexive; and that was built on a foundation of trust. Many have written on the importance of relational and dialogical ethics as essential to working in ways that value diversity and difference (Hopner & Liu, 2021; Montero, 2011). These ethical orientations focus on the interdependence of people, our commitments to one-another of mutual respect and engagement (Montero, 2011). However, some of these principles felt like they sat in tension with some of the normative ways of working and assumptions of knowledge and

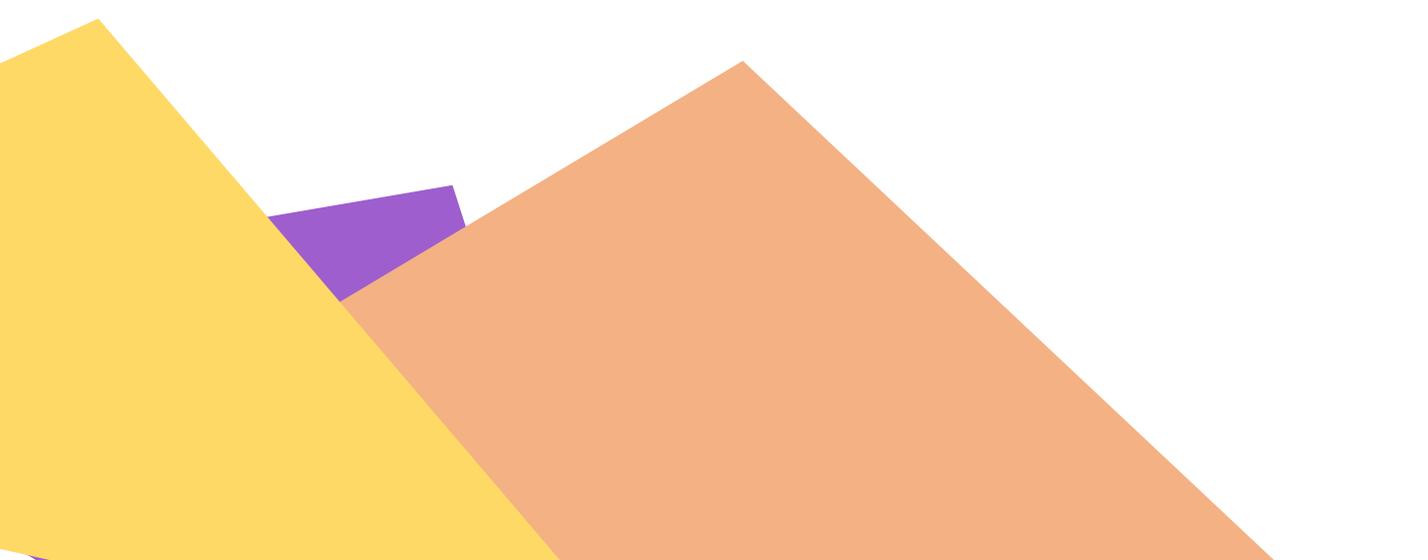
practice in hierarchical structures of academia favoured by institutions – for example, the primacy of academic knowledge over other ways of knowing and of those situated higher within academic hierarchies over others within and outside of academia, or a focus on products and efficiency at the expense of relational work and reflexivity.

Bond (1999) speaks of connected disruption as a necessity for transforming settings in ways that are meaningful for those who are marginalised and historically oppressed. It entails a disruption of dominant organisational arrangements, but through processes that foster respectful connection as well as conflict. Disruption occurs through an unsettling of dominant power structures and cultural norms through the elevation of minority perspectives. Connection is essential to this process, as “some assurance of disruption may be necessary to allow marginalised groups to risk connection; while some assurance of connection may be necessary to allow majority groups to risk disruption” (Bond, 1999, p. 351). Central to connected disruption is proactively recognising the presence and challenges of differential privilege and power, listening to marginalised perspectives, and engaging in mutual learning. Connected disruption was central to the emergent praxis of RJIDA. As taken-for-granted norms were challenged, important relational work was needed for both RJIDA participants and stakeholders who were differently positioned and invested in the initiative. For example, members of the student advisory group, in their initial encounters with the initiative, felt wary about the lack of relational and participatory processes in RJIDA. This required efforts to build trust through reciprocity and demonstrate a commitment to disrupting the norms of academic institutions which informed structure and approach. Reciprocity entails shared respect for one another, but also a resistance to extractive relationships through valuing the knowledge, labour (including hidden affective labour) and time that people generously share. Rather than transactional, reciprocity in

this sense constitutes a mutual accountability and co-intentional solidarity (Fernández et al., 2021). It is important, however, to note that participatory processes were constrained by limited funds within the project. Participatory approaches require time and recognition of power inequities, including how time is valued and remunerated.

Another important example lay in to negotiated relationship between the initiative coordinator and practicum students, as structures, approaches and key components of the initiative were challenged. However, throughout this negotiation, efforts to build connection and listen to marginalised perspectives engendered generative learning and ultimately allowed the initiative to take new forms. Negotiating relationships across differing positionalities and positions of power is, however, not easy work and there are affective costs for all involved. At points a lack of connection and dialogue strained capacities for generative learning, and it felt like more resources were needed to navigate challenges within the initiative, drawing away from engaging in the work of RJIDA itself.

Questions

- What relational and participatory practices could I be drawing on?
 - How am I building trust and reciprocity in my relationships?
 - What identities and knowledge am I privileging over others?
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A Loving Takeover

The tensions that emerged led us, the practicum students to pause and reflect on the kind of space that we felt was needed to engage in decolonial and racial justice work that would allow us to respond to the Call to Action on Anti-Blackness in a way that we found meaningful. This meant heeding the Call to Action's demand to "acknowledge our complicity and maintenance of white supremacy and white supremacy culture in SCRA". For us, this meant reflecting on how white supremacy culture (Jones & Okun, 2001) was shaping the setting of RJIDA and the practices and processes we were engaging (Agung-Igusti, 2021). We drafted a letter to voice our vision and articulate the principles and values we felt needed to be embodied more strongly in RJIDA. This is not to say that RJIDA had not aspired to these principles and values, but rather, that there were incongruences with what was intended and what we had been experiencing the setting. Furthermore, we felt that a desire to address white supremacy culture in community psychology more broadly, would need to start first with us, and the settings that we were creating.

[A Letter for Change](#)

This letter, we hoped, would provide the impetus for a "loving takeover" of RJIDA that would make it more responsive to the demand of the Call to Action to acknowledge – and in turn, begin to undo – our complicity in white supremacy culture. In pausing our work creating outputs and products, we could reorient and take the time we felt was needed to build meaningful relationships and processes for collaboration. We emphasised that RJIDA should be student-led -- that student voices and experiences should drive the work. Importantly, we would transform the language and the nature of relationships within RJIDA, decentring hierarchies, and emphasising collective action. Rather than working separately on

“pillars,” we would work together, building a shared vision and supporting each other where needed. Recognizing the importance of language in shaping experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), we retitled the advisory group a “collective,” and our supervisors, “mentors.” This change of language both reflected and shaped how we thought of these relationships as horizontal and relational. While it has been suggested that a mentoring relationship is also vertical and imbued with status, the distinction lay within the interpretations of one as sharing knowledge and the other as directing labour. While these may have carried different meanings across contexts, for us it represented a less formal and more equitable relationship. These changes were grounded in our desire to unsettle the institutional hierarchies of academia and CP, and recognition of our mentor’s desire to work alongside, and “accompany” us on this journey (Watkins, 2015). As for the advisory group, we wanted to build solidarity with this group of students who we believe shared our vision. Any action we engaged in through RJIDA we felt must only emerge through dialogue with this group of students who occupied various positions and experiences. These shifts meant that we would focus our efforts on exploratory dialogues that we would expand to different groups and would ultimately guide our work and inform what we produced.

Questions

- What are the values and principles that underpin my praxis, and how do I ensure that these are realized?
 - What assumptions do I hold about “best” ways of to collaborate and understand roles among people from different backgrounds, settings, and preferred ways of working?
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The First Collective Gathering: Coming to Shared Understandings

Our first gathering would be with what had now become the Student Collective. Previously this would have constituted a first convening of the advisory group, where we would present some initial ideas and prototypes for the RJIDA deliverables, such as a program self-assessment survey. Instead, our intention for this gathering was to arrive at a set of shared understandings of what racial justice was to us collectively. It felt important for us to collectively share a vision of how we might work towards racial justice, and what tools and approaches we might use. We also invited each collective member to share in their experiences within community psychology settings, what their frustrations were, and where they felt community psychology and its structures had fallen short. We invited each person to articulate their understandings of racial justice, to begin to shape our collective resources toward meaning-making and action. One opening activity asked people to share what kind of super-hero racial justice would be:



Seemingly a “playful” activity, it offered meaningful insights into some of the qualities we each attributed to racial justice and opened up broader dialogues to further develop a shared vision. Fernández et al. (2021) highlight the importance of identifying the “roots” in forging a “route” for developing a decolonial community psychology praxis. Similarly, we reached back through our histories and experiences to imagine how we could begin to move forward together. We took these conversations and were able to begin to articulate a set of shared understandings that were useful and meaningful for us:

[Video Summary of the First Collective Gathering](#)

what racial justice means to us

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To reach this shared set of understandings we wanted to avoid flattening our collective experiences, obscuring the nuances of our varied positionalities. Rather, we sought to find a “unifying beat” and let the bounds of what we could imagine together fall away, to peer beyond the drawn curtains that limit our radical imagination (Freire, 1970). Together we articulated a vision of racial justice as equity, healing, love, vulnerability, and humility. These qualities are fundamentally relational and they are humanising (hooks, 1990; Maldonado-Torres, 2017). They recognise the mutual accountability we must hold to each-other (Fernández et al., 2021). We articulated a vision of racial justice as reflexive, this meant unsettling comfort and complacency that power offers those who inhabit dominant positionalities. We also held a vision of racial justice as intersectional in recognition of the multiple identities and social locations we hold and that recognises the complex ways we are interconnected (Fernández et al., 2021; Sonn & Stevens, 2021).

We also shared together our understanding of racial injustices that exist in our shared disciplinary community – community psychology and centres of community psychology education, almost all of which are found in traditional academic institutions. There are moments in our classrooms where people’s communities are rendered academic objects and their lived experiences cast as inferior forms of knowledge. Transformative and emancipatory ideas never seem to leave the pages of our textbooks, never seem to be wholly embodied in our settings and relationships. We never feel entirely safe and feel suffocated in our attempts to create opportunities to heal and affirm identities. We labour endlessly to teach, resist, and be heard.

The moments where we had felt most excited about the potential of RJIDA was during and after each gathering we held, as we shared ideas and experiences with one another and saw a broader vision for change articulated. Sharing space and engaging in dialogue in

the first gathering with the Student Collective had felt invigorating and affirming. However, it would also precede a set of challenging encounters that would shape the practicum. During this period the initiative coordinator had met with the EC to update them on RJIDA and had shared with us concerns expressed by the EC about the shifts that were being made, and that it was possible that the deliverables that had been outlined in the proposal might not be met. The coordinator had been apprehensive about sharing this meeting with us and felt that perhaps he should serve as a buffer between us and the pressures the EC was placing on the initiative. However – as the coordinator recognized, in sharing the meeting despite his reservations – while a buffering role can be an important support to those navigating institutions that hold less power, it can also constrain agency in paternalistic ways. Rather than be buffered from the EC, we wanted to be able to engage with them directly in dialogue and to share with them what we had envisaged within RJIDA and why, and in turn, understand perspectives of EC members about the role and obligations of the practicum. However, the EC meetings were typically attended only by EC members and had full agendas that made having a direct, meaningful discussion in that context challenging. Attempts by the coordinator to arrange for a separate meeting with the EC or an EC subgroup were refused, but by pushing hard through the coordinator for an opportunity to speak to EC members directly, we were allowed a short timeslot in the regular monthly meeting to present an update on RJIDA. The two practicum students who attended ultimately felt supported by the EC in the work we had been doing and the intentions we shared. Key concerns, however, lay with how this work would radiate outwards and benefit SCRA, and a need for this to be articulated more clearly. An email response from the EC following this meeting summarised and affirmed their understanding that we would create a product that reflects:

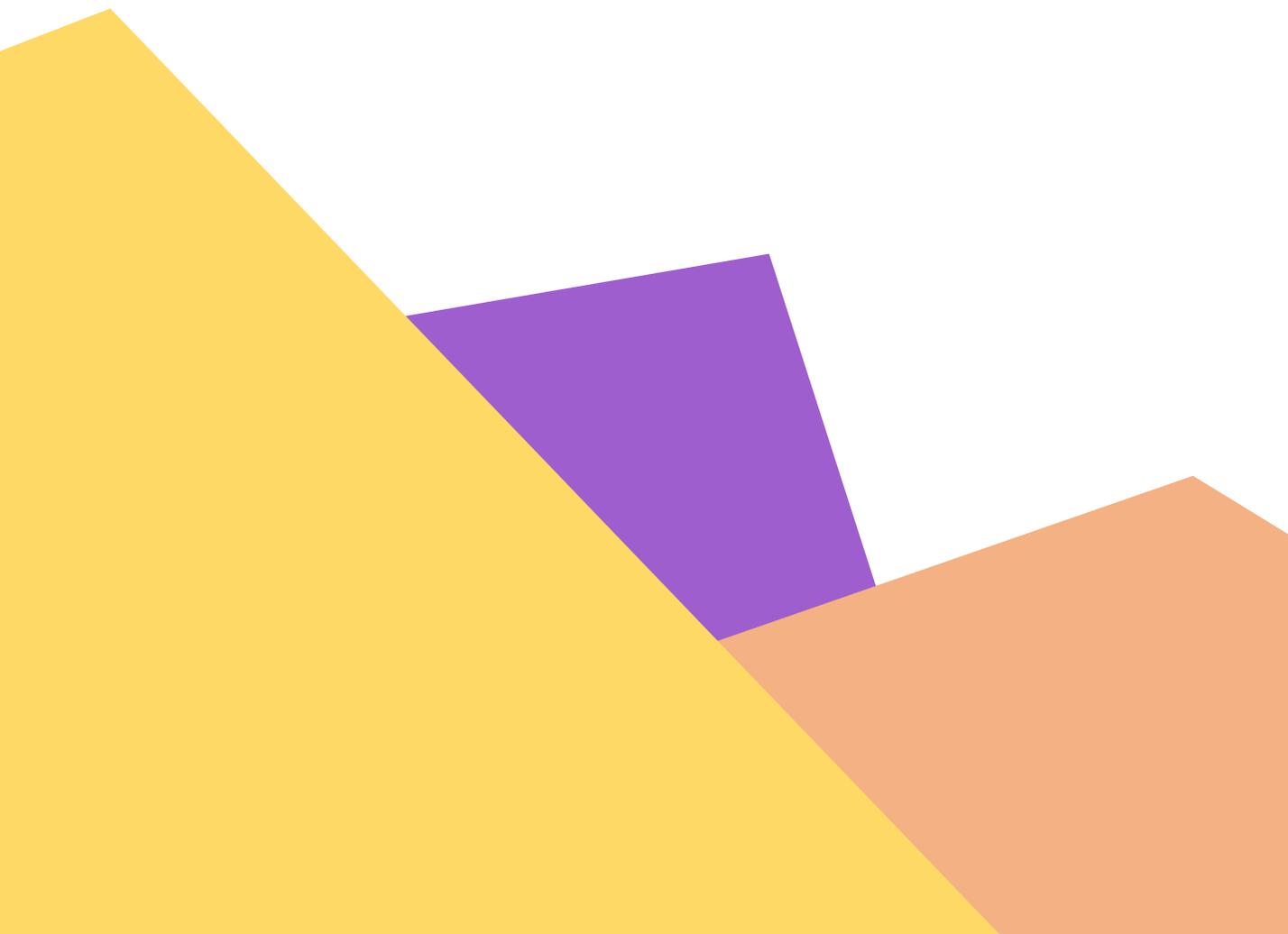
- Connection to contributing to assisting SCRA with improving the organizational culture

- Addressing the EC response to the Call to Action on Anti-Blackness
- That the product expectation should reflect our preference for creation and delivery

However, this would be the beginning of a negotiated relationship that would at times feel like the central focus of the work that we were doing. A tentative agreement was made that we would resume our dialogue with the EC once the upcoming SCRA biennial had ended.

Questions

- What does racial justice and decoloniality mean to me? What does it look like? What does it feel like?
- Are there ways in which I may use social justice language that serve to maintain unjust systems?



The SCRA Biennial: Extending the Dialogue

In June of 2021 the 18th SCRA Biennial Conference was held virtually due to restrictions on in-person events and travel as a response to the global COVID-19 crisis. While the format was a departure from previous Biennials, it was an opportunity for us in the RJIDA practicum, who had already been collaborating virtually, to connect with community psychology scholars and practitioners more broadly. Two abstracts were submitted: one to create a student-centred space through which we could connect and engage in dialogue with more students and grow the membership of the Student Collective; the other to present alongside members of the COE in a symposium entitled “Decolonizing the Council of Education”, to speak about the RJIDA initiative, some of the shifts it had undergone, and hopes for building on these experiences to make changes to the Council and advocate for change in CP education more broadly.

[SCRA Biennial Conference Abstract](#)

[“RJIDA: A student-centred space of transformative education, community and liberation”](#)

[SCRA Biennial Conference Abstract](#)

[“A loving take-over: A BIPOC student-led approach to decolonizing RJIDA, SCRA, and CP education”](#)

In planning the student-centred space, we decided that the session would not be recorded and would not be open to non-students, to allow students to feel able to share their experiences and frustrations and contribute and speak openly. We drew on the questions and reflective activities that we had put to the Student Collective in our first gathering and asked for further insights for how folks envisioned deeper racial justice change work.

how can we decolonize CP education + SCRA culture?

Many of the experiences shared in this space echoed those which were shared in the first gathering of the RJIDA Collective. But perhaps what resonated strongest was the desire of students to have more critical and dialogical student-led spaces within SCRA and within their community psychology programs. Spaces to share experiences and to collectively imagine ways otherwise. We intended to open the Student Collective to others who wanted to participate and create a space (separate from the core planning work of the RJIDA initiative that the original collective members were tasked with and remunerated for) where we could continue to engage in critical dialogue and support one-another to advocate for change in one another's programs. However, while we were able to connect some new students into the Student Collective, the ongoing space we had imagined wasn't able to be sustained as we practicum students grappled with limited times and capacities to foster the structures and processes that were needed.

The symposium presentation enabled us to share the journey of RJIDA up until that moment with a broader audience of members of the Council of Education, the SCRA EC and other interested parties. We spoke of how we had begun to conceptualise our emerging iterative praxis, drawing on the metaphor of a palm tree and its ecological cycles:

[Presentation Video](#)



Our understanding of praxis had been shaped through the creative joys of crossing disciplinary boundaries, ideas from black feminist thought, and liberation and decolonial theory that emphasised dialogue, relationality, and reflection. Shaped by our ties to community psychology and groundedness of early community psychology theory in ecological metaphors (Kelly, 1968), we sought to identify a natural process through which to communicate our ideas. Building on dialogue among the practicum students, the RJIDA coordinator suggested the metaphor of a tree, which later became a palm tree. The presentation also provided an opportunity for the coordinator of the practicum and the COE to share some of their reflections on the changes that it had underwent:

The “Loving Takeover”

- **New Role of the COE**

- While the COE continues to assist with mentorship and administration of and advocacy for RJIDA, our role and objectives are no longer at the center of the work.

- **Impact on the COE**

- I expected that we would learn a lot from this initiative; we did and more, but in a different way than I expected.
- Much DEIA work is product and deliverables focused rather than transformation focused.
- In their reworking of RJIDA, the students have sought to establish a more grounded project, better aligned with principles of decoloniality, with greater transformative potential.
- For the COE, this “pivot” has also spurred us to consider some of our challenges in a different way than we had before.

The symposium presentation and student-led space were very different settings, each engaged different audiences, and served different purposes. Initially we practicum students resisted presenting at the Biennial. The timing of the conference conflicted with various responsibilities that had arisen in our roles as students, family members, friends, and employees. We also reflected on the paradox of a conference as a space that enables you to connect easily with a broader community, to share your thoughts and hold a dialogue; yet, a conference also places you in a competition for attention and places restrictions on the format and structure of engagement. There was a sense of necessity to include our voices in this space, a greater legitimacy afforded by the norms of academia, yet perhaps at a cost as we rushed to produce these two outputs.

Questions

- How might we create opportunities for authentic and meaningful dialogue?
- How might we turn dialogue into action?
- How might dominant structures and norms constrain collective action?

The Second Collective Gathering: Envisioning Change

As the Biennial Conference came to an end, we felt it important to gather with the Student Collective once again, bringing in new voices from the students who joined us for the student-centred space at the Biennial. In our previous gathering and the student-space within the conference, we had focussed on developing shared understandings of racial justice and decoloniality, and collectively deconstructing our experiences as students (many of us identifying as Black, Indigenous or Persons of Colour) within community psychology programs. In the second gathering, we hoped to begin to craft together visions of change, what was needed in our programs, and who needed to support meeting these needs.



Change was seen to be driven by collective action, not the responsibility of one group over the other. Students were envisioned as mobilising and agitating for change, and faculty and administrators as supporting student-led movements. It was seen as important to connect organising efforts from within community psychology to movements and activists outside of our institutions, in

order to support new perspectives, practices, and approaches and decenter the privileged position of academic knowledge and structures. Overwhelmingly, there was a desire to see borders broken down, a blurring of the lines that set apart community psychologists from their communities, and a recognition of the multiple belongings of students, faculty, scholars, and practitioners. Furthermore, there was a desire for participatory practices to be embedded in our community psychology programs. For this border crossing to occur, reflexivity and attentiveness to power were seen as necessary. However, there were many barriers recognised at multiple levels. Resources for individuals such as time and energy, or resistance by educators who are unwilling to change, the broader structural limits that shape how funding is allocated, and the ways institutional administration tends to reproduce neoliberal and white supremacist practices and norms.

Who needs to be involved?

- Students (from undergraduate to post-graduate)
- Faculty
- Administrators
- Community organisations and activists

What changes do we need?

- Greater reflexivity, attentiveness to power
- Building community within our programs, and crossing boundaries to draw in the communities within which our programs are situated
- Reflection on the diversity of knowledge and experience - and problematization of "taken for granted" knowledge in the academy
- Becoming co-learners and co-creators of knowledge through relational and participatory practices

What barriers exist?

- Lack of resources, individual or structural (time, energy, funding)
- Conceit of, presumptuous use of expertise by educators resistant to change at program, institution or field levels
- Pushback from administrators at program, institutional or field levels

After the Biennial, the SCRA officers contacted the coordinator and our mentors wanting to meet to be updated on our work and discuss issues of “accountability,” “expectations,” “deliverables,” “timelines,” and “dissemination.” We were not included in the communication, and the officers also expressly stated – and then, after the coordinator requested that we be involved, insisted – that that the students should not participate. After our push to be given the opportunity to speak for ourselves in our previous encounter with the EC, being excluded from the emails communicating this request and the opportunity to represent ourselves, we again felt like we were being devalued. Our mentors were placed in a position where we needed to brief them about what we had been doing and the direction we were taking so they could speak for us – an arrangement that made us feel like children that were being supervised. The mentors and coordinator agreed to meet with the officers but at the meeting, expressed concerns about the fact that we had been excluded, and successfully advocated for a follow up meeting with the President Elect that we would attend. The President agreed that unlike the meeting with the EC, the expectation would be that this meeting would be an opportunity to brainstorm and engage in generative dialogue around possibilities for what we had imagined for RJIDA. The meeting with the President Elect did in fact follow this plan, and the intent of all involved was to continue the dialogue through further meetings, but exhaustion with the process of negotiating demands of the organization as well as events in our personal lives intervened.

Questions

- How might community psychology education better value and include the knowledge and lived experiences of those who have borne the brunt of coloniality and white supremacy?
- How might we trouble the boundaries between academic institutions and the communities they are situated in?
- What practices might nurture critical reflexivity within community psychology education for both students and faculty?

The Final Collective Gathering: Community Psychology Town Hall

One of the key tensions that had arisen for RJIDA was the short timeframe that was available to complete the work that had been initially proposed. This, for example, constrained the time we felt we could allocate to relational processes and became difficult when members of the student practicum had to contend with events and responsibilities in their lives outside of RJIDA. It was also exacerbated with some of the challenges that had arisen, negotiating our relationship with the Coordinator and pushing to feel more agentic within the practicum, and navigating our relationship with the EC. At times it felt that a large part of the work we were doing was navigating these relationships and the tensions they had presented. We were able to shift perspectives, as the coordinator saw the value of the process and relational focus we were advocating, and we were able to hold generative dialogues with members of the EC. Yet these also came with high costs to the affective resources we had available for the rest of the work. Responding to our initial concerns over the work that needed to be completed, within the timeframe that was available, compounded by changes and setbacks in the initiative, the Coordinator was able to extend the end date some months from August to October. However, the excitement and possibility that we had experienced early in the practicum had lessened, as did the time we had available to spend together. For us, RJIDA had begun to evolve from an important opportunity for us to engage in radical decolonial and anti-racist work within SCRA to a set of deliverables that we had to acquit. Spaces that we would come together in that once felt affirming, generative, and joyful, had begun to feel constraining as our relationship to RJIDA itself changed. The dialogue that we began with the President Elect was discontinued after she abruptly resigned from her leadership position in the weeks following our meeting with her. These changes, coupled with important events in

our lives that occurred at this time (e.g., being sick with COVID, relocating to a new city), meant that the final gathering that we had planned did not occur until October.

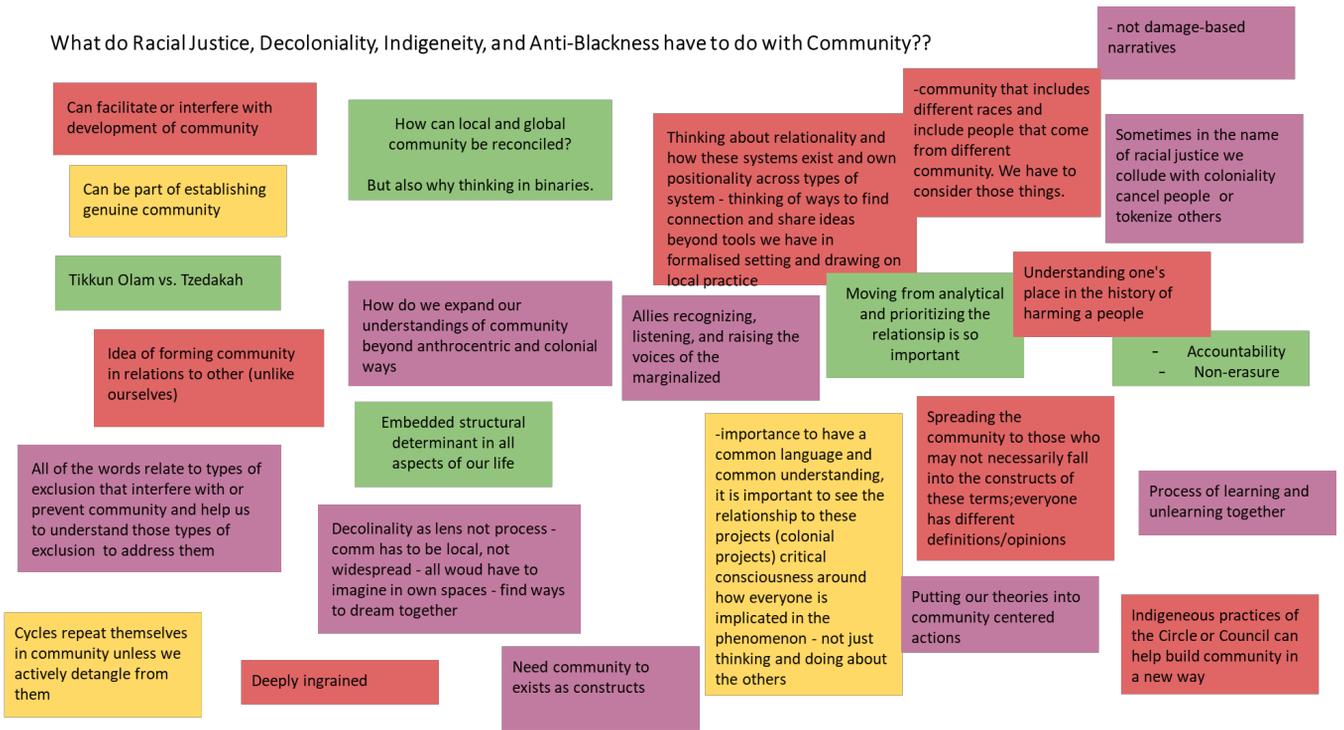
The gatherings that had been facilitated to this point in the initiative had been spaces for students to come together, envision change and share their experiences and frustrations. Yet, our understanding of racial justice and decoloniality was as a collective project that needed solidarity across varied positionalities within the academy. Invitations to the final collective gathering would be extended to community psychology scholars, practitioners, and educators more broadly in a town hall format where the dialogues could be continued. This final gathering would also partly represent a coming to an end for the RJIDA practicum.

Recording of the Final Collective Gathering



Building on the dialogues that were held previously, Jamilah Shabazz alongside Jeny Rae Vidal, a member of the Student Collective, led a rich discussion that asked us to trouble our understandings of community, and to continue to work towards envisioning how to incorporate community, racial justice and decoloniality within community psychology and our academic institutions.

What do Racial Justice, Decoloniality, Indigeneity, and Anti-Blackness have to do with Community??



How do we Incorporate Community, Racial Justice, & Decoloniality into Institutions of Higher Education and Community Psychology?



What support or resources are needed?

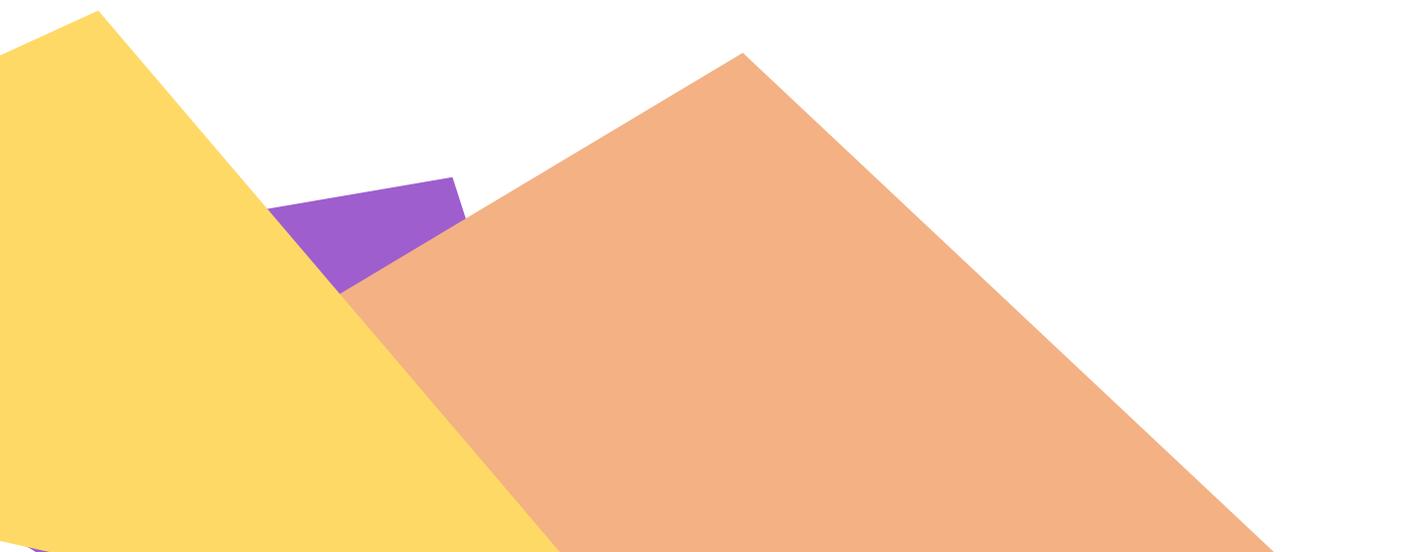
While many of the threads touched on things we had heard previously, such as the inclusion of marginalised voices and non-Western epistemologies, they also contributed new perspectives towards how to shape practices and processes for a racially just and decolonial community psychology. Many offered examples of how we can engage creative modalities to produce knowledge and create ruptures, such as image, sound, and music, as well as integrating indigenous practices into our community psychology programs. This reflects a decolonial principle of indigenisation that emphasises localised and place-based knowledge as essential in understanding immediate contexts of people and communities (Adams et al., 2018; Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective, 2021). Others spoke of the need to embody values and principles. Through that embodiment, trust, compassion, and connection can flow, allowing for the difficult conversations that need to happen generatively and safely – a connected disruption (Bond, 1999). The dialogues also pushed us to trouble the ideas we held about community, consider the ways coloniality can limit our thinking and understanding of the concept, and hinder our ability to imagine alternatives. There have been increasing calls in community psychology to engage in such interrogation of the core concept of community (Dutta, 2018), along with many of the other concepts that define our field (Beals et al., 2021).

A key theme that emerged across dialogues was the need for solidarities to form across social boundaries in the community psychology field – for example, boundaries separating students, faculty, administration, or scholars and practitioners. Racial justice for us, for the collective, for the authors of the Call to Action is a collaborative project. The first gatherings were safe spaces to support graduate students, many who had experienced racialisation and marginalisation within community psychology spaces, in sharing their perspectives and experiences. This sharing and connection also was healing and affirming, as shared by many who attended.

However, it is important to also facilitate spaces that support diverse positionalities to come together, share diverse perspectives and form solidarities through meaningful and generative encounters with difference.

Questions

- How am I enacting solidarity with those engaged in struggles for racial justice?
- In what ways am I leveraging power and privilege to support collective action?



Looking Back

The RJIDA project was a “contact zone,” a place where “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). It was a site that brought together differently positioned people, across varied contexts. We each held different knowledges, different capacities. And whilst we had come to many shared understandings, there were also significant points of divergence for our visions of the project. These differences, in power, in subjectivity, in knowledge, contributed to *choques* across lines of power and positionalities, “moments when perspectives clash, arguments erupt, and tensions boil over” (Fine & Torre, 2019, p. 435). While these *choques* were ultimately generative, they were nonetheless difficult to navigate.

These *choques* emerged as the space we desired to create encountered the hierarchical structures, practices and processes of academia and institutions such as SCRA. RJIDA was an echo of these contexts. While we tried to reshape it, it was still bound by assumptions, and responsibilities to the organisational structure of SCRA as well as the assumptions and responsibilities of the American Psychological Association (APA) to which SCRA is bound. One set of difficult encounters was with the SCRA Executive Committee, which sought reassurance of the “return on investment” of the organization’s resources in the project, given that we had adopted different priorities and goals from those envisioned at the time that the work was funded, goals that, while ostensibly similar to ours, were also wedded to and to some extent, in service of the existing structures that we sought to transcend. These encounters created tensions: between what we each saw as valuable outputs of RJIDA; whether we would be afforded access to the Executive Committee and SCRA officers; and how we were situated differently in hierarchies of power that positioned our voices as less authoritative and legitimate. We tried to make sense of our

experiences and the choques we encountered, both publicly and privately, as individuals, and collectively. For Jamilah, a fieldwork unit with her graduate program offered her the opportunity to describe her experiences of the journey we had embarked on together, a journey of small steps on the larger path that we had imagined:

[Baby Steps towards Decolonizing an Institution: A Fieldwork Experience](#)



Baby Steps toward Decolonizing an Institution: A Fieldwork Experience

Presented by Jamilah Iman Shabazz

Elsewhere, Rama had contributed a short piece to The Community Psychologist publication that briefly summarized the events of the initiative and the processes of reflection that had emerged from it.

[TCP Article](#)

[The RJIDA Initiative: Reflections on Embodied Practice](#)

Shaping choques

We have understood many of these choques as grounded in a [white supremacy culture](#) that shapes the academic institutions in which we are situated. Jones and Okun (2001), whose work is referenced in the Call to Action, share a set of markers that describe this culture, many which are relevant to our experiences in RJIDA.

A **sense of urgency** “perpetuates power imbalances while disconnecting us from our need to breathe and pause and reflect.” Initially, the RJIDA practicum was constrained significantly by a tight timeframe within which key outputs needed to be completed, which also contributed to a rigidity around how each student committed time to the practicum. This would later be shifted so that project timelines were extended and flexibility created in how each student contributed to the initiative, but these were formative constraints that oriented the initiative towards a sense of urgency from the beginning. This created a paucity of time in the early stages to build deep and trusting relationships with one-another (students, mentors, coordinator, COE working group), and created an increasing focus on the products that were to be produced, rather than the processes we would engage in to produce them.

The need to account for the products that we were to produce above all ultimately dominated the work that we did – a focus on quantity over quality that emphasises what can be measured objectively as more valuable than the quality of our relationships. It shaped our relationships and responsibilities to one another, to the Student Collective and to RJIDA and the Call to Action. This is not an argument against the need for accountability, especially for how limited funds are used in an organisation like SCRA, but rather a caution of what can happen if this becomes a central driving force to the detriment of forming trusting relationships, mutual forms of accountability, and values aligned processes that drive racial justice work.

Individualism shaped our first introduction to RJIDA, as we “competed” for spots in the practicum and were given individual roles and responsibilities. This felt incongruent with a racial justice praxis that we had come to understand as collective and collaborative. The “pillars” were intended to celebrate and support our achievements, but because they did so by focusing on us as individuals, they were a barrier to collaboration and collective

ownership, one that we quickly set aside, but nonetheless distracted us from our mutual work.

Perhaps the most challenging encounter was with *paternalism*, and the belief that “there is one “right way” to do things and that, once people are introduced to the “right way,” they will adopt it. Multiple times we were situated within paternalistic sets of relations. Whether these were reflected in impulses to “buffer” us through withholding knowledge and access (albeit, impulses that were not carried out); not being able to represent ourselves within spaces of power, or having the work we had already been engaged in presented back to us as a useful “suggestion” of what we could be doing. We were all adults, at various stages in our post-graduate education, we had a multitude of professional experiences, and lived experiences of marginalisation both inside and outside of community psychology. Yet we many times we acutely felt the way we were positioned within the hierarchies we encountered – many times we felt like children that needed to be pacified.

Many of these markers may not seem remarkable as they reflect the normativity of white supremacy culture. For us, some only become apparent on reflection, while others we were able to name straight away. Regardless, we were able to create things that we were proud of, but it often felt difficult and taxing. Perhaps things would have been smoother if we didn't resist the norms of white supremacy culture and were more compliant. But the resistances we engaged in felt necessary for each of us, each of us who had been specifically selected for this project precisely because of our desire to work in anti-racist and decolonial ways. As community psychology students with racialised identities, we also carried the fear that despite the challenges we encountered, we would carry the blame of any failures of the initiative. That any failure would be used as evidence that initiatives such as RJIDA would require more control and oversight rather than more participatory and relational approaches.

There are many more characteristics than those that are listed above. We encountered others and focused on the most salient ones to us in reflecting on our experiences.

In lieu of a set of questions, we direct you to this resource describing characteristics of white supremacy culture and suggested antidotes: <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/>



Looking Forward

RJIDA was always intended as a beginning. The initiative has provided important insights into how students, scholars, and practitioners experience community psychology programs and their institutional settings. The initiative has also begun to contribute to the myriad voices calling for change in practices, processes, and what things we value and privilege. It provided learning towards creating settings from which differently positioned people work together towards a vision of racial justice and decoloniality. A racially just and decolonial world is a promise of an alternative future, and thus, to embody part of this future in the present, we need alternative settings that are prefigurative and unsettling. With this comes choques, discomfort, tensions, but hopefully they are generative and opportunities for mutual learning that propel us further. Despite different positionalities, all involved in RJIDA shared a commitment to racial justice and decoloniality, and while our visions at times diverged, we hope together we contributed something to the larger journey of change for SCRA. Impact cannot always be measured by the number of outputs it produces nor solely within the life cycle of a project or initiative. It can be cumulative, and it can build over time. It can be a slow burn, and a beginning.

Throughout this recounting there have been questions which have arisen for us across our many dialogues and in our experiences as part of the RJIDA practicum. These are questions that will guide our future praxis as we continue to create and participate in anti-racist settings. They reflect writing and thinking from many within and outside of community psychology, and some of this work has also been shared through this recounting. And perhaps the greatest joy of spaces that bring diverse folks together is that they present an opportunity to share resources. Books, papers, articles, songs, pictures, and film that have moved us, cleared the mists, or lit a fire

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