

Theory of Social Change

Change is impossible without relationships, as “relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality” (Wilson, 2008, p. 7) and I believe in this unequivocally and wholeheartedly. This notion is foundational to my theory of social change. A mentor of mine once told me that “relationships move at the speed of trust” (brown, 2017). My theoretical framework illustrated how I navigated my relationships with the youth throughout my research. My theory of social change is meant to expand on this, and further highlight my own thinking around changemaking; I even outline my action plan later on in this section, which I enacted with the youth throughout and beyond my research process.

I am inevitably inspired by past mentors, both in and outside of an academic context and the way I conceptualize change draws largely upon my identity as a queer person and how I take up space in and interact with the world around me. Just as human beings aren’t easily defined, art isn’t easily defined, bringing to mind a quote from Shawn Wilson’s book *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008), which says “the closer you get to defining something, the more it loses its context” (Wilson, 2008, p. 8). When you define something, you are putting it in a box with no windows, with seemingly no way out, immobile. When you *don’t* define something (or someone) so rigidly, you are allowing it/them to exist wholly, you are giving it/them mobility and autonomy, and you are giving it/them community, and community (along with collective care) is a central tenet to my theory of social change.

Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson posits that “relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality” (Wilson, 2008, p. 7), and I repeat this here to emphasize it further. We are constantly in relationship, with people, with nature, with food, with art, with everything around us. Unfortunately, where we live (known as the global north, among other things)

promotes a culture of individuality and isolation, and our geographic circumstances reflect that, with the United States being built around cars and not people, with urban green spaces diminishing in quantity and size, and public spaces/services becoming extremely privatized and inaccessible (i.e. anti-homeless architecture and expensive public transport), for example.

Even the public spaces that don't appear to be privatized and inaccessible at first glance actually are, because they have an invisible, predetermined set of rules to follow that people only know if they fit into that space, and the people who know these rules are often cis white folks of a high socioeconomic standing, also known as those who benefit the most from (and play the biggest role in upholding) the "system of imperialist white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy" (hooks, 2009, p. 8). Oftentimes, arts spaces (digital, tangible, and especially, physical), and academic research spaces, uphold this predetermined politic that dictates who can enter the space and how they have to act once they're in it. I want this project to disrupt and abolish this limiting precedent, allowing the space to be molded by the participants in its communal creation, with all of us learning (and unlearning) from each other.