

COLORIZING CIRCLE PRACTICES

Naming the Silences

Call for Contributors of Color and Indigenous Peoples

Living Justice Press (LJP) invites abstract submissions

Circles are the most salient expression of restorative justice and restorative practices. In Circle gatherings, a talking piece—along with scripted Circle processes—is used to ensure that all voices are heard, valued, and respected. From these understandings, restorative practices or restorative justice Circles convey a universalism—the assumption that Circles build on common human elements—in which all voices and experiences in any Circle carry equal weight.

However, beyond Circle mechanics or procedures, scripted can also mean group-appropriate social roles and behaviors, which we learn from birth. We are informed from birth by our experiences as members of groups and in relation to groups not our own. We carry group scripts and histories inside us. Scripted racial and other marginalizing realities are as present in racially-mixed Circles as they are everywhere else in our lives, however unrecognized or unnamed by participants, white or non-white.

Put differently, racially-mixed Circles reflect participants' social identities, which in turn reflect our positionality in settler institutions and society. Whenever we enter Circles and share our stories with others, our racialized and colonized experiences come with us; they cannot be checked at a Circle's entrance. The “color” of our experiences outside of a Circle profoundly shape the dynamics we experience inside a Circle and inform what we take away.

We know these dynamics, and yet they stay shrouded in silence. Staying silent about the larger framework keeps Circles running in service to the colorblind, settlerblind framework. It hurts people by excluding profoundly consequential parts of who we are. When this happens, the silences about race and other marginalizing factors impairs the capacity of racially-mixed Circles to build transformative relationships and communities, which is what we want and need Circles to do.

We, as Black, Brown, other People of Color, and Indigenous Peoples, face these social-racial-settler complexities every time we step inside a Circle. Among ourselves, we talk more freely about race, settler colonialism, and other oppressions—and find it liberating to do so. With this call, we invite a naming to break the silences: How can naming the silences (e.g., about white supremacy's workings) open spaces for honest, authentic transformation? For example, we can consider various questions:

- How can we evolve Circles into practices that are less likely to cause the kind of harm to us, our children, and our community that we also experience in wider settler society?
- Does race matter in Circles? Does settler occupation matter in Circles? According to what framework do they matter or not?
- Whose cultural norms or worldviews operate within Circles?

- Do the norms of all participants operate equally or carry equal weight?
- What impact has naming of the silences had in Circle dialogues in your experience?
- What community understandings do we, as Black, Brown, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalized people, bring into Circles?
- Are these understandings—white and non-white, settler and Indigenous, and so on—complementary or at odds and likely to cause us to talk past or at each other? That is, which understandings promote greater relationality within Circles?
- What might “colorizing Circle practices” mean and look like—in theory and on the ground?
- What non-white socializations become marginalized before, during, and after Circles?
- What Circle dynamics determine whether we either self-police or promote authentic dialogue? What would I want to tell fellow practitioners—of color and white—about how I colorize my Circle practices?
- Are we left to carry alone the burden of unspoken racial realities, which includes the added job of negotiating these realities with people and institutions vested in keeping them unnamed to preserve a white-serving status quo?
- In our experiences, what harms have been, or are, caused when people or institutions attempt to practice Circles in colorblind, racially insensitive, or settler-dominant ways?
- What has been the effect of not naming the silences?
- How do Circles practiced in colorblind and settlerblind ways reinforce racial and settler power imbalances? How do they make participants complicit in keeping white supremacy going?
- What practices might we develop for making Circles less colorblind, less colonized, more racially sensitive and settler-dynamics aware, and hence more likely to hold a space for transformative dialogue within the racial and colonized realities we experience?
- What challenges have you faced or observed around naming silences?
- How might Circles become more responsive to positionality and the power-imbalances and legacy narratives that go with positionality?
- Mindful of these dynamics, what kinds of community practices do Black, Brown, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalized communities engage in to promote either the inter- or intra-group intimacy and safety necessary for transformative Circle dialogues to occur?
- If colorblind and settlerblind Circle practices don’t work for us (or indeed anyone, insofar as ignoring such consequential realities as race and oppression is not good for relationships), what Circle practices work better by inviting Circle participants to face the racial, settler realities we confront every day?
- Circles hold tremendous potential for building relationships and communities. How are

Circle relationships and a sense of community impacted when racial and settler insensitivities surface during Circles? When this happens, what responses help us experience the transformative potentials of Circles to address the deeper roots of harms, born of a society steeped in patterns of racial oppression?

- If our experiences as non-white, Indigenous peoples are a central reality in society (as we know it), how can Circles incorporate this awareness of harm-based patterns in our midst as an integral part of Circle work, so that Circle practices might support deeper levels of transformation?

Colorizing Circle Practices is a book project that privileges restorative practitioners and RJ/RP generalists of color and Indigenous Peoples. It holds a space for those of color to write about what, from our experiences, we believe will make RJ/RP Circles reflect our authentic selves in Circle and therefore make Circles deeply meaningful across racially mixed Circles as well as affinity Circles.

We envision this book as one that front-line practitioners and RJ/RP generalists can use in their work, in their communities, and in their relationships. We are looking not only for insights and experiences concerning Circle practices but also for ways to apply and work with them. To this end, discussion questions, sample Circles activities, models, or approaches included in a manuscript are desired. Acceptable manuscript formats for the book include articles, essays, or transcribed and edited interviews or dialogues. The length for the final manuscript is 3,000–8,000 words.

Abstract Submission Guidelines

1. Between 300–500 words.
2. A PDF header labeled: CCP_Last Name_First Name.
3. Deadline date for abstract submission: **1 April 2022 (5:00pm CST)**.
4. A brief biography, including, in the words of Ella Jo Baker, Black freedom activist, “Who are your people?” Please include your contact information.
5. Send to LJPress@aol.com

Please share this open invitation for abstracts with your friends, colleagues, organizations, and communities of color and Indigenous communities involved with the restorative work. Thank you for considering being a part of this movement.



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