Interrupting Intergenerational Silences between Indo-Caribbean Women and Gender Non-Conforming People Through Participatory Oral History and Digital Archiving

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Abstract

This study used participatory oral history and digital archiving to explore two interrelated questions: How do the stories that Indo-Caribbean women and gender non-conforming (GNC) people tell challenge dominant narratives of resistance to historical oppression which represent women and passive and non-confrontational, and fail to represent GNC people at all? How might oral history and digital archiving be used to work against the historical erasure of women and GNC people? In the first phase of the study, twelve Indo-Caribbean women and GNC people across generations participated in an oral history workshop where they were trained in oral history methods, co-created an interview guide, conducted oral history interviews of one another, and engaged in collective reflection about processes of storytelling. In the second phase, four co-authors of a community-owned digital archive participated in semi-structured interviews about the possibilities and challenges of working to construct alternative histories and genealogies of resistance.

In this dissertation, I explore how Indo-Caribbean women and GNC people practice resistance by breaking silences in their communities around gender-based oppression, shifting norms through producing analyses of their own stories, and reshaping community narratives. I argue that participants practice resistance relationally, demonstrating that healing happens in community through collective remembering and storytelling. Furthermore, I explore how oral history participants and co-authors of a digital archive understand the risks associated with sharing stories, ultimately arguing for a decolonial feminist storytelling praxis grounded in the values of redistribution and reciprocity.