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To cite this article: Anusha Kassan, Suzanne Goopy, Amy Green, Nancy Arthur, Sarah Nutter, Shelly Russell-Mayhew, Monica Sesma Vazquez & Halley Silversides (2020) Becoming new together: making meaning with newcomers through an arts-based ethnographic research design, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 17:2, 294-311, DOI: [10.1080/14780887.2018.1442769](https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1442769)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1442769>



Published online: 30 Apr 2018.



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## Becoming new together: making meaning with newcomers through an arts-based ethnographic research design

Anusha Kassan, Suzanne Goopy, Amy Green, Nancy Arthur, Sarah Nutter\*, Shelly Russell-Mayhew, Monica Sesma Vazquez, and Halley Silversides

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### ABSTRACT

This article proposes an arts-based ethnographic research design as a means of engaging in ethical, meaningful, and culturally sensitive research with newcomer communities. Moving away from the manner in which culture has traditionally been defined and studied in psychology, this research design uses cultural probes and subsequent qualitative interviews to collect data about newcomers' everyday experiences in Canada. Cultural probes are sets of creative items (e.g., cameras, diaries, maps, paint supplies, postcards) that are given to participants to prompt them to document their lives in their new environment. These cultural probes are later unpacked and discussed in individual qualitative interviews. Results are disseminated and archived in ways that are meant to engage and empower communities. Specifically, the process of creating a cultural exhibit collaboratively with participants is discussed.

### KEYWORDS

Arts-based ethnography; culturally sensitive research; cultural probes; ethnographic tradition of inquiry; newcomer communities; newcomers; qualitative interviewing; qualitative research

If a picture's worth 1000 words then why can't I paint you?  
The words will never show the you I've come to know.  
(Lyrics from "If" by David Gates)

Scholars have described the arts as one of the most powerful forms of expression and communication for centuries (Wikstrom 2000). If you have ever admired a painting, listened to a piece of music, or watched a dance performance and felt moved beyond words, then you, too, will agree with this statement. However, it is not just the viewing of an art product that has the power to move us; it is also the process and experience of creating art. Fraser and al Sayah (2011) stated that, in addition to the communication and expression of thoughts and feelings, the arts can be used to reflect on lived experiences. Artistic expression in its many different forms—from

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photography to drawing to the written word—has also been described as becoming part of the creator’s autobiography (Fraser & al Sayah 2011).

Over the past half a century, many psychology researchers have integrated art into their inquiries as a means to generate new information and knowledge (Leavy 2014). We propose that arts-based research can be especially useful with groups who have been disenfranchised, such as newcomers (i.e., individuals who migrate, seek refuge, or claim asylum in a new country) who may have been silenced or overlooked by traditional forms of research in psychology. Richardson (1992) wrote that in typical forms of writing in social science, researchers use authority and privilege to talk about their research participants and that “as we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them” (p. 131). Through the utilization of art, we may be better able to represent the experiences of individuals and/or groups who have been oppressed and/or marginalized by dominant discourses in psychology, allowing them the space to create art and talk about their experiences through it (Connelly 2010). Arts-based research allows a more direct expression of lived experience particularly in areas, and with people, that might otherwise remain invisible with mainstream approaches (Walsh, Rutherford & Crough 2013).

The purpose of this article is to outline how an arts-based ethnographic research design can engage newcomer communities in the research process. Specifically, we will explore the manner in which cultural probes add a “-” multipurpose items (such as cameras, maps, and art supplies) given to participants to creatively document their everyday experiences add a “-” can be used to conduct ethical, meaningful, and culturally sensitive research with newcomer communities in Canada. Through challenging traditional psychological approaches to studying culture and newcomers, we argue that co-creating processes can provide legitimate and accessible spaces for representing the experiences of individuals from this group. We believe that an arts-based ethnographic research approach will (1) provide a more meaningful representation of the lived experiences of newcomer individuals, (2) allow researchers to privilege the participants’ representation of their lives in ways that may be more important and accessible to them, and (3) transform our current understanding of the ways in which we conduct research with newcomer communities.

## **Part I: background information**

### ***Studying culture in psychology***

During the past century, the study of culture in psychology has evolved alongside social beliefs and assumptions about the nature of psychological phenomena. Trends in research are relevant for an examination of current approaches to psychological research with newcomers. For example, prior to

the 1960s, research samples reported in professional psychology journals were primarily European Americans, and researchers tended to consider this group as the norm and psychological phenomenon as universal (Ponterotto 2008, 2010). The civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States corresponded with a shift in research into groups that were culturally distinct, primarily aimed at research with African American communities. During this era, the extensive use of between-group designs perpetuated racist and oppressive practices through which members of the selected culturally distinct population were compared to the dominant population, “or the group to be emulated” (Ponterotto 2010), typically white, male, and middle class.

During the past 30 years, researchers have expanded their interests to incorporate the within-group experiences of culture and psychological phenomenon (Ponterotto 2008). Correspondingly, research intensified around a broader range of minority groups, although race and ethnicity continued as the key markers of culture (Betancourt & Lopez 1993). Currently, debates continue about “who counts” in psychological research on culture, although clearly there is a trend toward opening the scope beyond dimensions of race and ethnicity, to incorporate aspects such as gender, sexual/affectional orientation, age, religion, and ability and their intersections (Arthur & Collins 2010). Examining the intersectionality of people’s experiences considers multiple forms of oppression and marginality that are ascribed to people’s cultural identities and social locations through power relations in our society (Bauer 2014; Rosenthal 2016).

### ***Research with newcomer communities***

Research with newcomers is influenced by a larger social narrative that reflects the politics of migration and views of individuals from particular countries. Researchers are exposed to such narratives and are encouraged to engage in deep reflection about their stereotypes, biases, and presuppositions (Birman 2006). The history of research from the dominant group, often white researchers investigating the experiences of racialized newcomers, calls into question power dynamics between researchers and newcomer communities (Helms et al. 2006). Researchers may not have explored their sense of privilege, or in the case of the majority of academic researchers, what it means to be white and how personal identity is relevant for professional roles (Spanierman & Soble 2010). Psychology research on groups of newcomers has tended to be problem-focused, including preoccupation with trauma, deficits in domain such as health, education, and employment, and a myriad of problems related to adjustment to the destination country. Unfortunately, such a focus has tended to obscure indigenous forms of knowledge and the experiences of newcomers themselves (Schweitzer & Steel 2008).

Researchers need to consider what it means to ethically engage in research with newcomers, particularly subgroups such as refugees and undocumented migrants, who may have additional risk factors that contribute to their vulnerability (Birman 2006; Hernández et al. 2013). The ethical responsibility of “do no harm” is complex when research with newcomers involves different cultural contexts and often occurs amidst different levels of language proficiency. For example, recruitment challenges have surfaced in response to historical practices in which relative strangers make inquiries into details about highly personal aspects of newcomers’ experiences. Fundamental to research success is the major issue of how to engage newcomers, across diverse ethnocultural communities (Renert, Russell-Mayhew & Arthur 2013). Issues of privacy, suspicion and mistrust of authorities, or acquiescence to the requests of people with perceived power and status need to be considered in navigating the partnerships required for research. Many newcomers, and specifically women, are overtaxed with managing multiple demands of home care, seeking or managing employment, as well as family and community responsibilities (Arthur 2015; Goodkind & Deacon 2004). Access to newcomer communities is often conditional on building positive relations with gatekeepers, such as community or religious leaders, or staff in settlement agencies, whose influence on participation, implementation, and future research relationships should not be minimized (Renert, Russell-Mayhew & Arthur 2013; Trimble 2010).

Framing all of these issues is a fundamental ethical responsibility to move beyond doing no harm, to making the case for how research enriches the lives of newcomers and their communities (Lyons et al. 2013). Also, moving beyond the benefits for researchers means closely examining approaches that can enhance, empower, and inform practices with newcomers (Mackenzie, McDowell & Pittaway 2007). These research approaches need to respect the diversity found within newcomer groups, honor their rich cultural contexts and identities, and give voice to their experiences of psychological and social phenomena. Essentially, we need to shift from research *about* newcomers to research *with* newcomers. To that end, we invite readers to consider the use of arts-based ethnography as a promising method for engaged research with newcomers to foreground their knowledge and experiences of culture.

## **Part II: research design**

### ***Arts-based ethnography***

With its roots in cultural anthropology, ethnographic research aims to understand the social and cultural meanings of a phenomenon to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals within a specific

group (Creswell 2013). Further, its goal is to produce a description and make interpretations about the values, beliefs, and language of this specific group. Attention is also paid to the complex ways in which social position and identity shape people's experiences and the research endeavor (Suzuki et al. 2005). Ethnographic research has been praised for a number of reasons, particularly for the depth of understanding that can arise through its results (Wolcott 2012). However, it is not without limitations.

Kontos and Naglie (2006) argued that qualitative inquiry is "textually biased" and that even knowledge generated through ethnography, an intensely interpersonal and participatory methodology, "is ultimately figured visually as text (field notes, transcribed interviews, and written interpretations)" (p. 301). As such, many scholars (Degarrod 2013; Kontos & Naglie 2006; Schneider 2008) have encouraged ethnographers to utilize arts-based approaches, which have been defined as "ethnograph[ies] in which art is used in both the acquisition and the transmission of ethnographic knowledge" (Degarrod 2013, p. 403). The utility of arts-based ethnography was highlighted by Degarrod, who stated that:

If one of the aims of ethnographic research is an understanding of the other, art making has the potential of becoming the means by which the participants, and the artist, and research can become aware of their views and understanding of each other. (p. 410)

Indeed, arts-based ethnography can expand research endeavors by transmitting knowledge beyond what might be facilitated through textual-based methods alone, creating an experience that is sensory, embodied, and experiential (Sutherland & Accord 2007). This type of knowledge generation may be particularly meaningful when conducting research with newcomer groups, where the limits of discursive and textual communication are challenged even further. For example, for individuals for whom English is not a first or fluent language, or for whom cultural nuances may be difficult to express verbally or textually, art can be used to embody an understanding of lived experiences. In her research with traditional Bedouin women undergoing cultural transition during their migration to Israel, Huss (2009) found that using arts-based research offered "the opportunity to express alternative perspectives and hybrid identities that challenge dominant paradigms, often in a way that is perceived as less threatening than words" (p. 613). We propose the use of cultural probes as a tool within arts-based ethnography to elicit creative representations of participants' experiences. This approach represents a means to gather depth and layers of data, which would be sought in a traditional ethnographic research design.

## ***Cultural probes in arts-based ethnography***

### ***Fit with qualitative, ethnographic research***

Cultural probes are sets of multipurpose items (e.g., diaries, post cards, stationery, maps, drawing paper, painting supplies, cameras, smartphones) that are given to research participants in order to help them document their experiences in creative ways (masked reference A, masked reference B, masked reference C). The use of cultural probes as an investigative tool was first proposed in the late 1990s (see Gaver, Dunne & Pacenti 1999). Although originally used within the field of design (e.g., Fulton Suri 2003; Gaver, Dunne & Pacenti 1999), over the past 10 years, cultural probes have been used in a number of areas ranging from marketing (Kaden 2012) to nursing (masked reference B) to social science (Robertson 2008) research.

Cultural probes represent an ideal means of collecting data within a qualitative research paradigm, as they provide participants with multiple tools for documenting and later sharing their experiences. At its inception, qualitative research emerged as a means of producing an informed understanding of a topic based on the exploration of close, often intimate, experience of a given phenomenon based on a text or verbal information (Platt 1996). However, pairing cultural probes with more traditional forms of qualitative research, such as semi-structured interviews, allows for more depth of information to be gathered. Within the context of ethnographic research, where the aim is to unearth the social and cultural meanings of a phenomenon to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals within a specific group (Creswell 2013), cultural probes become the tools with which participants gather information about their everyday experiences. The cultural probes allow the researcher to tap into participants' experiences through different pathways (artistic, experiential, verbal). Thus, when conducting research with newcomer groups, the use of multipurpose tools for data collection allow a more suitable way of understanding experiences. That is, the combination of cultural probes and qualitative interviews can transcend some language barriers and open the door for more culturally fitting means of expression.

### ***Intentionality of cultural probes***

Cultural probes are carefully selected based on the aim of the study and the group being invited to share its experiences. Furthermore, cultural probes require considerable time and effort in their design, and the researchers involved need to come together to design the cultural probe packages. Such a practice is common to the ethnographic tradition of inquiry, where researchers invest a considerable amount of time conceptualizing their study and preparing how they will enter the culture of interest and collect observational



data (Creswell 2013; Wolcott 2012). Unlike participatory action research, where the entire design of a study is co-created between participants and researchers (Creswell 2013), the development of the cultural probe packages is guided by specific research questions, which have been developed based on existing gaps in the literature. Such questions are typically broad and open in nature (e.g., what are participants' experience of integration into Canadian society?), as is common with ethnographic research (Creswell 2013).

For cultural probes to be effective, they must be designed to meet the needs of the research, and to help the researchers find out what they want to know. More importantly, cultural probes need to be designed with the ages and interests of the participants in mind, in ways that are culturally and ethically responsive to that particular group (see masked reference C). As such, they need to be sufficiently interesting to stimulate participants to think about the questions being posed in ways that are creative and perhaps even "outside the box." For example, a non-lined journal might be used instead of a lined one to stimulate a space where both writing and/or artwork can occur. Thus, there is an intentional, interactive, and creative element to the use of cultural probes. Packages of cultural probes can take on many variations and combinations that can be molded to the topic of study and group under investigation. In this way, the use of cultural probes encourages both documentation and creativity. Subsequently, in discussing the collected cultural probes (which become participants' artifacts) through semi-structured qualitative interviews, the meaning, descriptions, and significance of the artifacts come to light.

### *Use of cultural probes*

When using cultural probes, participants are asked to use familiar tools in unusual ways; as such, the probes encourage participants to respond to and reflect on certain everyday practices and experiences in new and unexpected ways. At the same time, cultural probes allow participants to gather their experiences at their own pace, using the tools that work best for them. Thus, cultural probes give participants scope beyond the direction of the researcher, yet the researcher can still give guidance and invite the recording of particular activities or temporal moments, depending on the aim of the research and the participants in the study. The guidance given by the researcher is less about prescription and more about encouraging individuals to capture any and all of the elements that impact, direct, or determine their experience of a given phenomenon. Applying this method of data collection to inquiries with newcomer participants (or any group) requires specific, deliberate, and careful planning.

Generally, cultural probes are given to participants with a specific set of instructions. For example, participants may be given the following script:

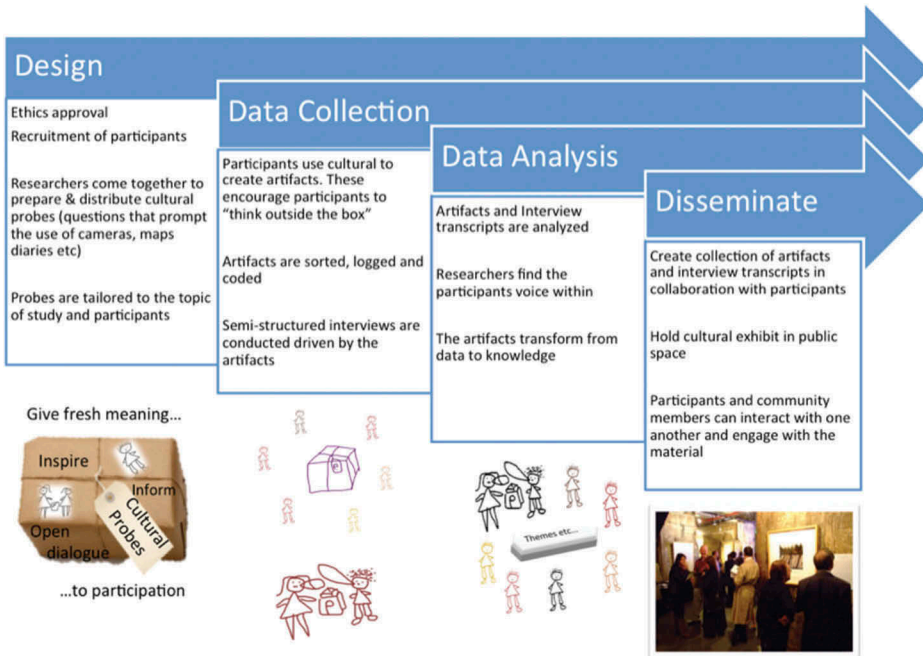


“In this package you will find several items that are called *cultural probes*, including: (1) a camera, (2) journal, and (3) three maps. There are also pens, a pencil, and an eraser included, but please feel free to use other tools to work with your cultural probes. We encourage you to be creative, and to use these cultural probes to say something important and meaningful to you about your experiences of being a newcomer woman in Canada. Each cultural probe will also have its own set of additional instructions. Enjoy, and have fun!”

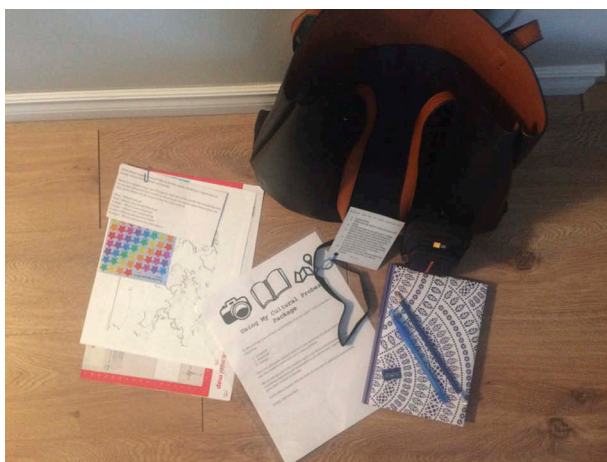
As indicated above, each cultural probe comes with its own set of instructions. For example, the camera may be accompanied with the following statement: “We would like you to use this camera to document your experience of being a newcomer woman in Canada. Please use me to take photos of: (1) a typical day, (2) where you go and/or what you do to feel good, (3) if there are places you go and/or things you do that do not make you feel good, and (4) anything else that you think is important about being a newcomer women in Canada. Enjoy!”

Please see Figure 1 for an overview of the research process.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the research process, and Figure 2 illustrates a visual depiction of the cultural probes’ package described above. The cultural probes are typically given to the participants for a



**Figure 1.** Overview of arts-based ethnographic research design. Image: Goopy, S 2007, Opening of *My Home My History* Exhibition at the Visy Gallery, Brisbane Powerhouse, Brisbane, Australia (private collection).



**Figure 2.** Designing cultural probes for newcomer communities.

two-week period, but the range can vary depending on the nature of the project and the participants' needs. Once the participants have completed using the cultural probes, they become their artifacts. These artifacts are remitted to the researchers and will be used to elicit conversation about the topic of study.

### ***Rethinking the qualitative interview***

In this arts-based ethnographic design, the qualitative interview protocol is specifically devised based on the artifacts that participants bring to the research encounter. As such, it is recommended that the researchers collect the artifacts in advance of the qualitative interview to sort and code them and set up the semi-structured protocol for the next stage of data collection. For example, if a participant submits more than 20 pictures of the same location, a natural question to ask during the qualitative interview would center on the nature and meaning of the space portrayed in the photographs. Hence, unlike in many other traditional qualitative research projects, the skeleton for the interview cannot fully be determined in advance. While a broad interview protocol may be conceptualized at the onset of a study, based on the overarching research questions (e.g., considering experiences of integration, adaptation, and transition among newcomers to Canada), specific open-ended questions will be added based on the artifacts of each participant. This process allows the researcher to follow the participants' lead and creative means of sharing their experiences.

### ***Additional considerations***

While the primary focus of this manuscript is methodological in nature, there are additional considerations that need to be put forth when using this

particular research design, including recruitment, data analysis, and rigor. Although an extensive discussion of these topics is beyond the scope of the manuscript, a brief overview ensures this methodology does not get misused.

When thinking about recruitment, it is important to consider that, with this type of design, participants may not readily come to the research. Similarly, it would be naïve to think that researchers can simply enter a community and advertise research (Mackenzie, McDowell & Pittaway 2007). Carrying out these studies takes a great deal of time investment, consultation with experts in the community, and openness to feedback from potential participants (Lyons et al. 2013). In this way, the research (e.g., the choice of cultural probes) can be tailored to the emerging needs of participants. With regard to data analysis, following the qualitative interview, transcripts and accompanying artifacts are analyzed for each participant separately, in line with the ethnography tradition of inquiry. Furthermore, this information is synthesized for common and unique themes. Readers are directed to authors such as Creswell (2013), Fetterman (2010), and Wolcott (1994), for more information about analyzing ethnographic qualitative data and artifacts.

As with all qualitative research, ensuring a study's rigor is critical. As such, it is expected that researchers consider the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of their study (Creswell 2013). Moreover, managing researcher subjectivity is of particular importance when using cultural probes and qualitative interviews to elicit participants' experiences about a particular topic. Given that researchers have an important role in developing the research questions and cultural probes for the study, the role of reflexivity through memoing, journaling, and peer debriefing becomes particularly important. As suggested by Morrow (2005), it is important that the researchers determine rigor based on paradigm specific criteria and the epistemological roots of the study.

### **Part III: implications**

#### ***Knowledge mobilization***

The results of research studies that use cultural probes are typically disseminated in a number of ways. More traditional means of knowledge mobilization include scholarly conference presentations and publications (masked reference A, masked reference B, masked reference C). Through these outlets, creativity is at the forefront when using cultural probes, as participants' artifacts can be shared visually with the audience members and/or readers. Moving beyond such typical outlets, Gaver (2001) and Hemmings et al. (2002) demonstrated that these artifacts could also be used to create interactions among groups of people. For example, in social and cultural research, these interactions, at their primary level, are found between researchers and

participants as well as amongst the participants themselves. Through these interactions, opportunities for less traditional means of knowledge mobilization are created.

One proposed activity is the creation of a cultural exhibit, where researchers and participants collaborate in displaying their artifacts. Multiple forms are possible here, for example, a collage of photographs and interview excerpts and/or an audio-visual display of artistic materials. Of key importance to knowledge mobilization is the use of the trans-media approach (multiple modalities; not simply text) to better engage the public (Anderson & McLachlin 2015). Visual materials as a tool for knowledge mobilization (Abell 2015) imbue the audience with the capacity to reflect on the self, their social identities, and commonly held values (masked reference B). Thus, the cultural exhibit represents a reflective practice that is important to the research process, where findings are shared in an impactful and engaging way within the broader community.

### ***The process of archiving***

The significance of archiving data from arts-based research, particularly artifacts from the cultural exhibit, cannot be understated. These artifacts are crucial in developing both memories and narratives for groups that may otherwise be forgotten in traditional historical records. Cook (2013) suggested that memory can be “notoriously selective” and as such certain records are continuously privileged and others potentially marginalized. In a practical archival context, it appears that dominant narratives (or those considered politically important) have been protected for posterity while those from historically vulnerable communities have been neglected and hence erased. According to Cook (2013), as researchers become better oriented to social justice values, decisions about what type of data needs to be archived have expanded to include greater diversity and complexity. This shift in attitude parallels the growing sociocultural landscape of a particular country or context.

Researchers contribute to building these memories and narratives by collecting materials that may otherwise go uncreated or unnoticed by traditional documentation and archival processes (Ketelaar 2001). With the collaboration of researchers, historians, and archivists, experiences from groups who have often been disenfranchised, such as newcomer communities, can be carefully appraised and represented in historical record. With this in mind, archiving arts-based research materials can provide an invaluable resource to both communities and future researchers. In this way, archiving becomes a symbolic and highly visible place for protecting the recorded cultural heritage of various groups, both marginalized and privileged (Cox 2011). Given the current dearth of rich data on newcomer participants,

archiving also allows for the possibility of future secondary analyses. Researchers could benefit from using existing archived data sets, as new angles, themes, and questions may arise with specific groups. This data may include artifacts with or without coded themes from the original research (Corti & Thompson 2007).

### **Community engagement**

The most significant aspect of disseminating research results is its ability to increase community engagement. Mathur and Clark (2014) defined community engagement as “a planned process with a particular purpose where identified groups of people representing various agencies [or groups] work together to address issues affecting their community” (p. 713). However, to further strengthen community engagement, it is critical to involve participants in the planning and dissemination of their experiences. This process allows them to have agency in terms of what is included in the cultural exhibit and provide a space for them to engage with other members of the community about similar or different experiences during the event.

To facilitate engagement and help communities dialogue about some of the issues that may be affecting them, the aim of the cultural exhibit is to open communal spaces where people can see, touch, talk about, read, write on, interact with, or reflect on the artifacts being displayed. This approach avoids suggesting, informing, educating, or imposing ideas on people about what they have or what they need, as can be the case with some more traditional research methodologies. Ahmed and Palermo (2010) stated that community engagement in research ought to be an inclusive, participatory process that encourages “respect of values, strategies, and actions for authentic partnership of people affiliated with or self-identified by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of the community of focus” (p. 1384). Cultural exhibits include the initial participants as well as many other individuals and stakeholders who were not involved in the research. Thus, the community is engaged in multiple forms. As a result, the community will be able to co-learn, co-create, and co-make meaning on what implicates being newcomers in Canada. As such, “we all” might know better together, by exploring or generating problem-solving strategies as a collaborative team. In this way, our vision as academics on responsive ways of disseminating knowledge would accomplish its purpose.

We propose that this arts-based ethnographic research design challenges traditional understandings of research with newcomer communities. While most research with understudied groups makes valuable efforts to give voice to the silenced or make them visible, less has been done to include the community as part of the process or involve them in the representation of

their own everyday cultural lives. Kruss (2012) emphasised three concepts in community engagement: partnership, responsiveness, and reciprocity. When studying the community, researchers (particularly from universities) must first consider collaborating with the community to increase their well-being. Second, researchers' responsiveness is important, since they should not be indifferent to what is happening in the community; thus, community engagement increases researchers' accountability. Third, researchers can be reciprocal with the community by giving back after having the honour of knowing them better and having access to their lives; academics can be appreciative of the community's willingness to share their stories and experiences.

Much research with newcomers is at risk of having only a minimal impact or a lack of ability to influence change for the communities involved (Birman 2006). In this context, using cultural exhibits and archiving are ways of defying this lack of research impact. Ahmed and Palermo (2010) argued that community engagement entails researchers "to become part of the community and community members to become part of the research team, creating a unique working and learning environment before, during, and after the research" (p. 1384). Cultural exhibits and archiving could represent effective means to achieve these goals. Both strategies will inform researchers about the priorities within newcomer communities. The authors further argued that research needs meaningful community involvement to address challenges faced within communities. In their view, it is critical to address community needs and urgencies in culturally sensitive ways (Ahmed & Palermo 2010).

Through cultural exhibits and archiving processes, the community will recognize how other members within the same community, or members of a different cultural group, represent their feelings, values, views, and experiences. Cultural exhibits and archiving provide a variety of opportunities for researchers and communities to start collaborative conversations. Such strategies encourage new ways to relate, communicate, interact, or understand each other. This dissemination design helps to decrease barriers among researchers and communities (improving social benefits outcomes) or different groups within the same communities (increasing their understandings of the issues at hand).

### **Potential limitations**

Some caution is needed when using cultural probes as a means of data collection. Specifically, it is important for researchers to consider the financial and time commitments required of this method, which may limit feasibility in some settings. While research questions and cultural probes are purposefully selected based on the literature in the field and the needs of participants, researchers maintain a degree of power in any given study. As



such, they need to ensure judicious reflexivity and ethical decision making. Moreover, while cultural probes allow for more creative means of participant expression, the qualitative interview plays a central role in the collecting data process. Thus, the research relies a great deal on verbal communication of experiences, which for newcomer participants may mean that they are expressing themselves in their second or third language. Conversely, some participants may not be comfortable engaging with arts-based means of expression and hence not want to take part in such a study.

## Conclusion

It has been well documented within the field of psychology that the manner in which culture has been defined and studied has been problematic in research with newcomers. Moreover, even when research is tailored to investigate the experiences of newcomers, researchers can fall short in terms of engaging them in the research process, for example, when they do not take into account power dynamics in the research process (Birman 2006). Rather than limiting an examination of ethical practices to a traditional perspective of doing no harm, we advocate that research with newcomers deserves to be embedded in their experiences and knowledge about culture, and inform policy and practices to improve their lives. When nested in an ethnographic tradition of inquiry, we argue that cultural probes offer a means to this end, and are ideally suited to conduct research that is ethical, meaningful, and culturally sensitive to newcomer communities.

Given the multiple challenges that newcomers face when integrating into a new country as well as the possible mistrust in psychology, it is critical that researchers rethink their approaches to recruitment and partnership with newcomer communities. Beyond learning about the perspectives of newcomers, engagement needs to occur at a deeper level through which research can be attentive to cultural context and to social justice (Lyons et al. 2013; Mackenzie, McDowell & Pittaway 2007). Hence, cultural probes (used within an arts-based research design) may represent a better fit for many newcomer research participants since these probes allow for a multidimensional creative process, transcend some language barriers, and lead to various forms of knowledge mobilization, including community engagement.

McLeod and Bandenhorst (2014) argued that researchers are in a constant state of becoming and that becoming is a series of actions. In ethnographic research, the distinction between the researcher and the participant is fluid (Creswell 2013). Similarly, arts-based approaches offer an equalizing process to the research encounter (Walsh et al. 2013). We argue that cultural probes within an arts-based ethnographic approach with newcomers creates space



and place for what is significant in the process of becoming for both researchers and participants. Applying this idea to the opening quote, both the researcher and participant contribute in collaborative and various ways as the painter, the painted, the words, and the song.

## Notes on contributor

**Anusha Kassan**, PhD, is a registered psychologist and an assistant professor in counselling psychology at the University of Calgary. She is also the Chair of the Section on Counselling Psychology of the Canadian Psychological Association. Influenced by her own bi-cultural identity, Dr. Kassan's program of study is informed by an overarching social justice lens. Currently, her research focuses on migration experiences across different groups (e.g., newcomer youth, newcomer women, same-sex binational couples, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer newcomers) as well as the area of teaching and learning, investigating the development of cultural and social justice competencies from the perspective of graduate students and field supervisors.

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