

## When Resilience Becomes Resistance

### Recultivating Intimacy through Relational Mindfulness

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What forms of our pandemic adaptation have also become barriers to connection? In this wildcard session, around 40 EPIC attendees collectively examined the aspects of resilience that support — and sometimes hold us back from — the intimacy and safety we seek to create as ethnographers.



Researchers have faced many barriers to building connection and compassion remotely as the stress in our communities piles up from the COVID-19 pandemic. When people share their pain, how do we protect the integrity of our work while also showing care? What are we doing to ensure our own resilience? How do we show care and connection again in person after time spent adapting to screens?

In this session, the presenters began by sharing and deconstructing their own personal experiences of navigating this tension as researchers working in mental health through three lenses: connection, protection, and comfort/discomfort. Working with Headspace meditation teacher Samantha Snowden, they then led the participants in a group and partner mindfulness exercise to explore these themes and offer space to connect and listen.

After an opening meditation to ground participants in the five senses, attendees divided into groups of three. Workshop attendees then each shared with two partners about a moment when they felt in *awe*: an emotional response to something so perceptually vast that it defies our habitual frame of reference. Participants were either sharing or listening but

could not interrupt to talk or ask questions, keeping the sole focus on the individual sharing. A form of resilience is required from the individual who is listening who has to maintain focus on the sharer while also feeling and at times resisting the urge to respond. Similarly, the speaker has to display a form of resilience as well in continuing to share without the normal level of feedback and affirmation we usually receive through conversation. The end result is a form of intimacy forged uniquely through the awareness of one's words, voice, and physical presence.

We closed with a guided reflection on the experience and the role of interpersonal connection, deep listening, context, and the physical environment in our practice. Participants shared about how the mindfulness exercises provided inspiration for new ways we can foster a similar degree of safety and connectedness with our research participants and their stories as we resume our in-person practice in various forms.