

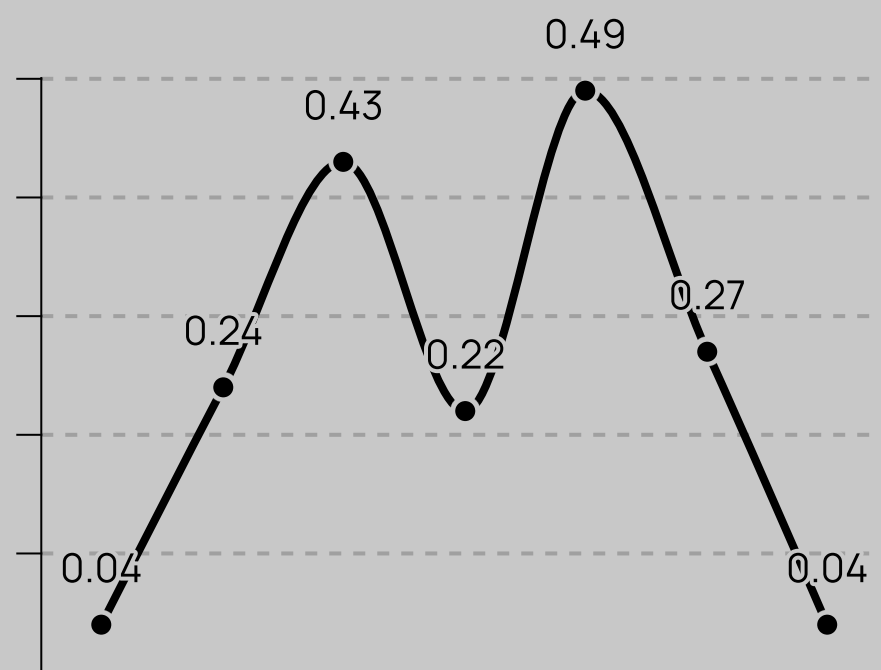
CECILIA MEZZI
PGCERT ACADEMIC PRACTICE
ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT (ARP)

PREFER NOT TO SAY

AN EXPLORATION OF AGENCY, PRIVACY AND
CARE IN POSITIONALITY PRACTICES

In higher education, students are routinely asked to locate their practice through personal narrative, drawing on background, identity, and lived experience. While this work is pedagogically valuable, it is often facilitated in ways that assume willingness to disclose and do not adequately account for privacy, emotional labour, or uneven power relations in the classroom.

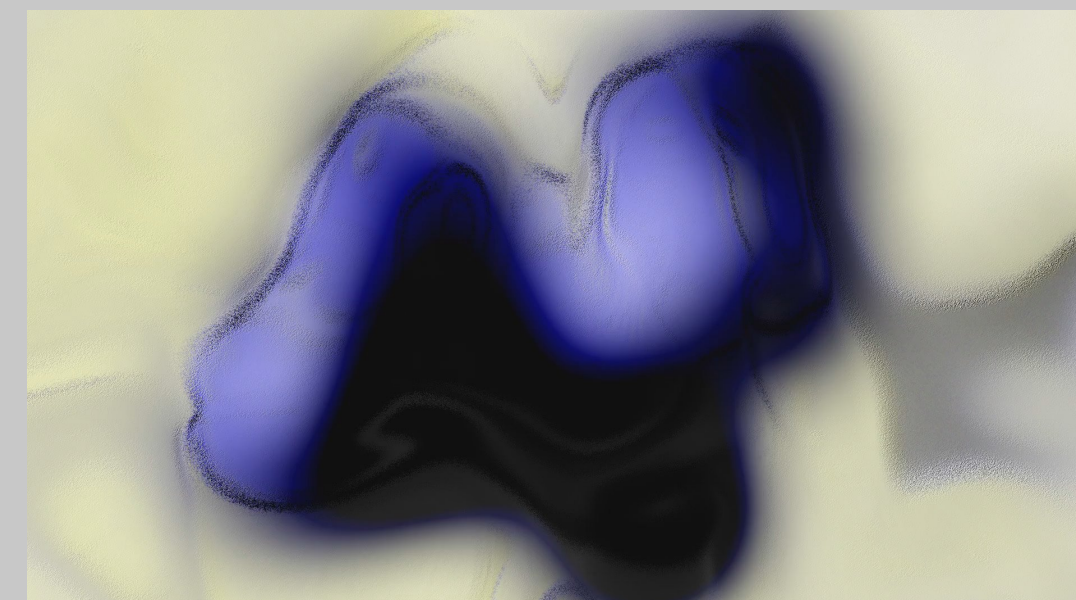
**POSITIONALITY IS OFTEN
TAUGHT AS REFLECTION, BUT
EXPERIENCED AS EXPOSURE.**



FW Fashion Week / Fashion War



European Press Future



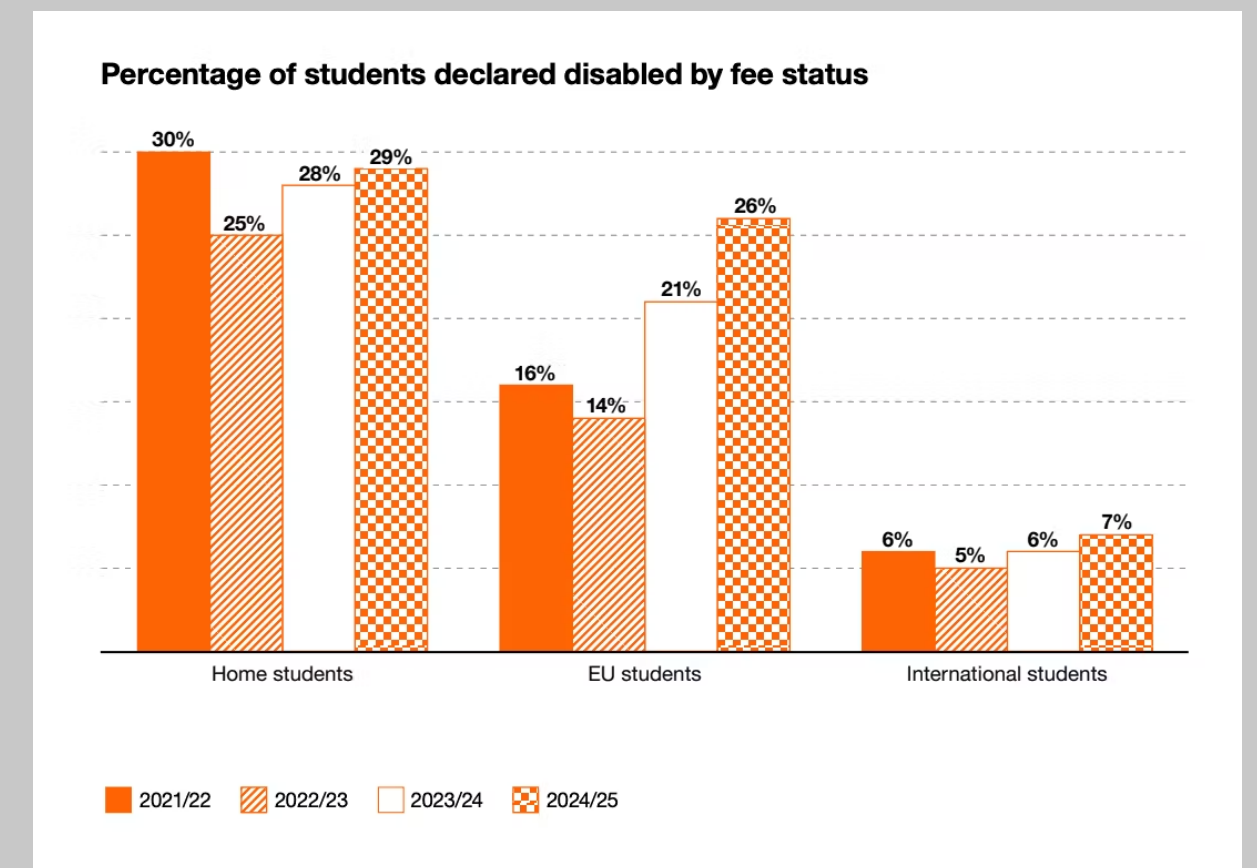
Cloud.io

An efficiency model treats equality, inclusion and diversity as measurable outcomes. 'What does it mean to be good at equality or diversity, or for equality or diversity to be a measure of the good?' (Ahmed, 2012).

Education's shift to an efficiency model has involved a cultural and technical shift: the introduction of a set of disciplinary technologies for judging the efficiency and accountability of educational organisations. (Lyotard, 2005).

UAL Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Data Report (2024):

- Sexual orientation: 20% of students declared 'Prefer not to say' under this section.
- A substantial difference between Home and International students who declare they are disabled.
- 34% of students with a disability declare 'other or multiple impairments'.



EFFICIENCY MODELS IN DEI

Storytelling is not only about understanding one's identity but also about actively engaging in the politics of representation and visibility (Jones & Harris, 2019).

Selfhood can be understood as narrative: we come to know ourselves through stories told to and with others. These narratives are not formed in isolation but emerge relationally, shaped by social norms, institutional conditions, and expectations. Personal narratives within academic discourse serve as a powerful method of addressing the lived realities of marginalised, racialised, and gendered groups, ensuring that these experiences are represented and validated (Green, 2025)

Extractivist models, when applied to research and data practices, describe situations in which knowledge is taken, decontextualised, and repurposed without reciprocity, disproportionately benefiting institutions or researchers while disempowering those from whom the knowledge originates. (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012).

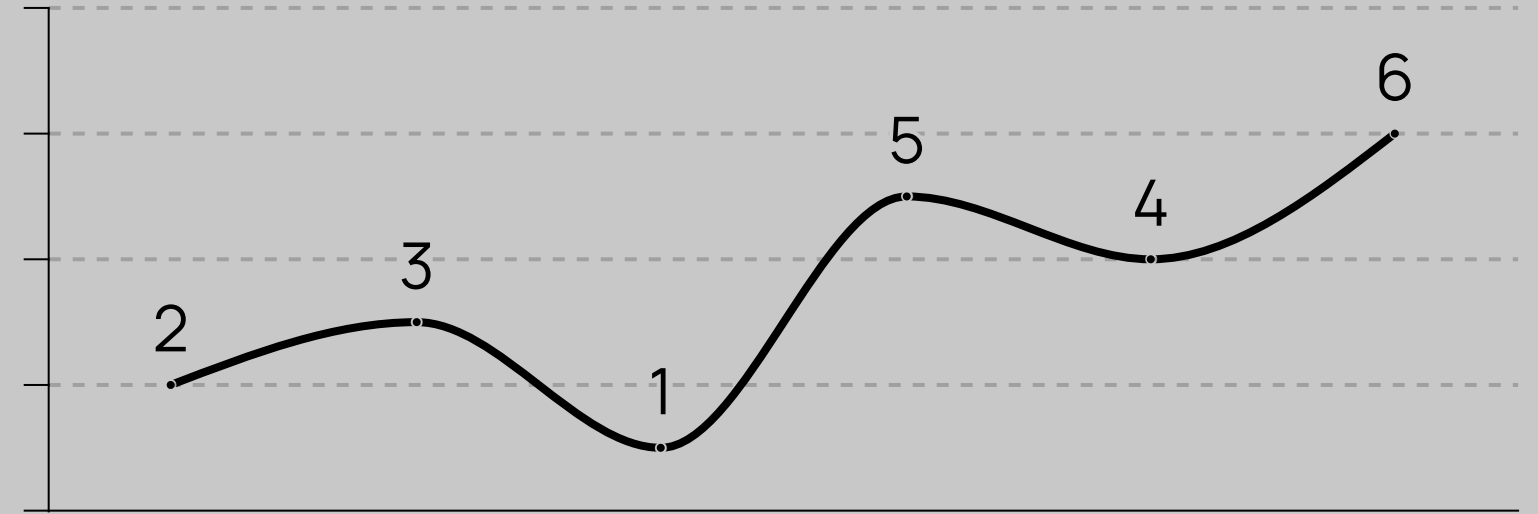
SELFHOOD & EXTRACTIVIST MODELS



How can choice-based and abstracted approaches to positionality enable students to engage critically without being compelled into disclosure within institutional DEI frameworks?

Students will be translating their own personal narrative into an emotional trajectory.

1. **Snapshot opener:** A single charged scene that hooks readers
2. **Roots:** Family, place, origin myths
3. **First big choice:** Conflict & decision
4. **Crash or turning-point:** Adversity and growth
5. **Now:** Present identity, values, routines
6. **Forward glance:** Hopes, unfinished business



Then, they will score the events between 0–6 based on the emotional valence.

Individual scores are added anonymously to a shared spreadsheet.

5	0	2	1	3	5
2	2	3	0	2	5
3	4	3	4	5	6
6	5	6	2	1	0

INTERVENTION PART 1

Students will collectively reflect on their own experiential knowledge and the context of institutionalised education. They will look at the information they would be requested to fill in into a UAL DEI monitoring form and compare compare it with the life story from Part 1.

They remove from the heatmap the parts that the DEI monitoring form doesn't cover. Do they see themselves represented in that information? Do they feel seen as they see themselves? What would they like to share that is missing?

0	5				5
1	6				
2	5				
4	1		1		
5	2				
5	1				
0	0				
3					

INTERVENTION PART 2

Intervention Part 1

Intervention Part 2

Post Testing

DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS
Creative Autoethnography	Narrative Analysis
Collaborative Autoethnography	Narrative Analysis Visual Analysis
Document Analysis	Narrative Analysis Visual Analysis
Field Notes	Thematic Analysis

RESEARCH METHODS

MA Applied Imagination – Central Saint Martins

13 students; in person; delivered during class hours.

Student	Snapshot opener	Roots	First big choice	Turning-point	Now	Forward glance
A	2	3	5	0	5	3
B	3	5	1	4	0	5
C	4	1	2	3	4	5
D	5	2	5	4	4	4
E	5	5	5	3	6	6
F	5	0	4	5	5	5
G	6	6	6	6	6	6
H	2	6	3	1	5	0
I	6	5	6	1	5	3
L	6	3	2	4	4	5
M	6	4	3	4	4	5
N	4	3	4	3	4	5
P	6	6	6	6	6	6

Highest mean score: Snapshot opener
 Lowest mean score: Turning point

Student	Snapshot opener	Roots	First big choice	Turning-point	Now	Forward glance
A		3		0	5	3
B		5				
C		1	2	3		
D	5				4	4
E		5				
F		0				
G						
H						
I		6				
L	6	3			4	
M		4		4		
N						
O						
P		6				

- Nationality
- Sex
- What best describes your gender?
- Do you consider yourself to be trans?
- Age range
- Ethnic origin or racial group
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Do you consider yourself to be disabled?
- Nature of disability
- Caring responsibilities
- Do you have any unspent criminal convictions?

INTERVENTION 1

General considerations

- DEI forms capture limited information and over-emphasise past identity categories.
- Roots' capture origin, not direction.
- Starting points are not always felt as continuously defining.
- Students expressed a desire for agency and change.
- Filling in DEI forms can create a sense of otherness.
- Students feel seen through an institutional lens.
- Tension between lived experience and categorisation.

Motivations for Selecting “Prefer Not to Say”

- Privacy concerns.
- Fear of rejection.
- Lack of a straightforward or accurate option.
- Discomfort around disclosure.
- Absence of suitable alternatives.
- Risk of exclusion from opportunities.

Why is there such an emphasis on background?

- DEI forms act as benchmarks for and from the government.
- Background is perceived as defining identity.
- Statistical representation feels reductive.
- Low recorded numbers highlight limits of categorisation.
- Background checking is implied.

INTERVENTION 1: STUDENTS OBSERVATIONS

Revised Plan: Adjustments

- Some students experienced difficulty accessing the spreadsheet on their phones; ensure all participants have access to a laptop.
- If a student does not have a laptop, they should borrow one from a peer or from me, ensuring they are not sharing personal data.
- Further consideration is needed on how to collect data from those not participating in the discussion without over-engineering the intervention.
- It is also important to avoid over-extracting information from students.

INTERVENTION 1

BA Critical Practice in Fashion Media, Year 3 – London College of Fashion

4 students; in person; voluntary participation; close to assessment.

Student	Snapshot opener	Roots	First big choice	Turning-point	Now	Forward glance
A	5	1	4	0	4	4
B	5	3	4	2	1	4
C	3	5	3	1	2	5
D	5	4	3	3	3	4

Student	Snapshot opener	Roots	First big choice	Turning-point	Now	Forward glance
A						
B		3		0		
C	5	5		1		
D		4				4

PROS	CONS
The small group created a highly intimate setting	The small number of participants weakened agency around privacy and disclosure.
Discussions were extremely personal, layered, and nuanced	Students may have felt an implicit pressure to disclose personal information.
All participants actively contributed	Participation was limited by timing, excluding students with work, caring, or other extra-curricular responsibilities.

INTERVENTION 2

BA UX/UI Design, Year 2 – Ravensbourne University

18 students; online; delivered during class hours.

PROS	CONS
Dataset of appropriate scale.	Anonymity was partly compromised
Time management was more effective	Discussion was more limited,
The chat function	The online format felt in tension with the deeply personal nature of the exercise.
Greater variation in emotional scoring	Many embodied or affective cues were lost.

Student	Snapshot opener	Roots	First big choice	Turning-point	Now	Forward glance
A	5	2	5	0	4	6
B	5	3	4	1	4	3
C	4	5	5	1	5	1
D	3	5	4	3	3	5
E	6	0	3	4	5	6
F	6	3	3	2	5	5
G	5	4	5	5	4	4
H	4	5	5	2	4	5
I	3	6	6	2	3	5
L	2	3	1	2	1	4
M	5	3	3	2	2	5
N	5	3	4	5	5	6
O	4	2	3	5	5	1
P	6	5	2	4	6	5
Q	6	4	5	3	1	4
R	5	4	5	2	6	5
S	4	1	3	0	5	3
T	2	1	3	6	3	2

Student	Snapshot opener	Roots	First big choice	Turning-point	Now	Forward glance
A		2				
B						
C	4	5				
D		5		3		
E		0				
F		3				
G						
H					4	
I						
L		3		2		
M	5	3				
N						6
O						1
P		5				
Q		4				
R		4				
S		1				
T		1				

INTERVENTION 3

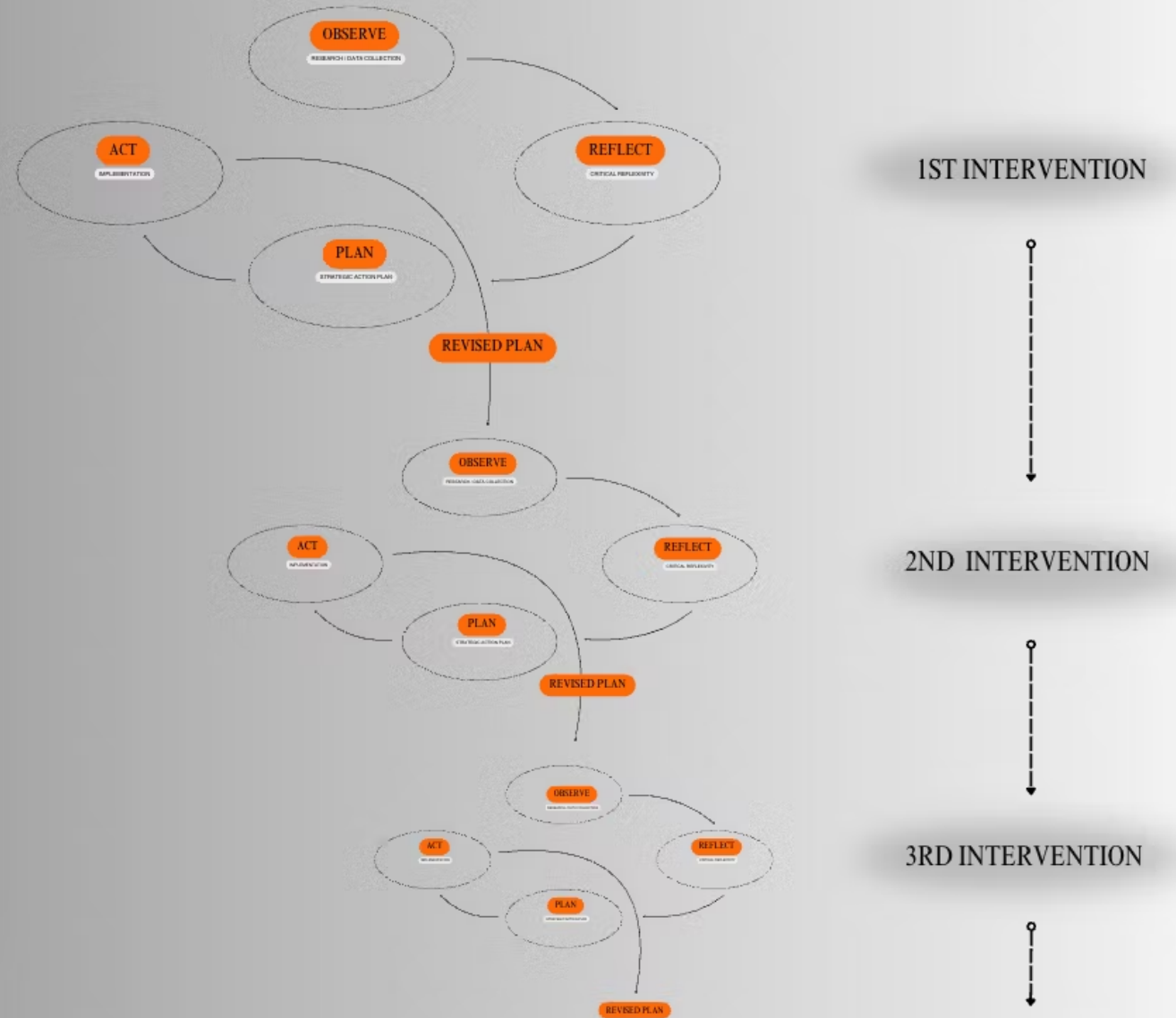
- Choice significantly alters how students engage with positionality work.
- Visual and abstracted outputs reduce risk while maintaining critical depth.
- Data collection is not neutral: it actively produces pedagogical conditions.
- When designed with care, it can support empowerment rather than extraction.
- The intervention reframes DEI engagement from measurement to meaning.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT FINDINGS

ACTION RESEARCH SPIRAL

THE UTILITY OF THE INTERVENTION IS TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE LEARNING BY VALIDATING LIVED EXPERIENCE AS AN IMPORTANT SITE OF ACADEMIC INQUIRY, PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE NAVIGATING INTERSECTING IDENTITIES AND SYSTEMS.

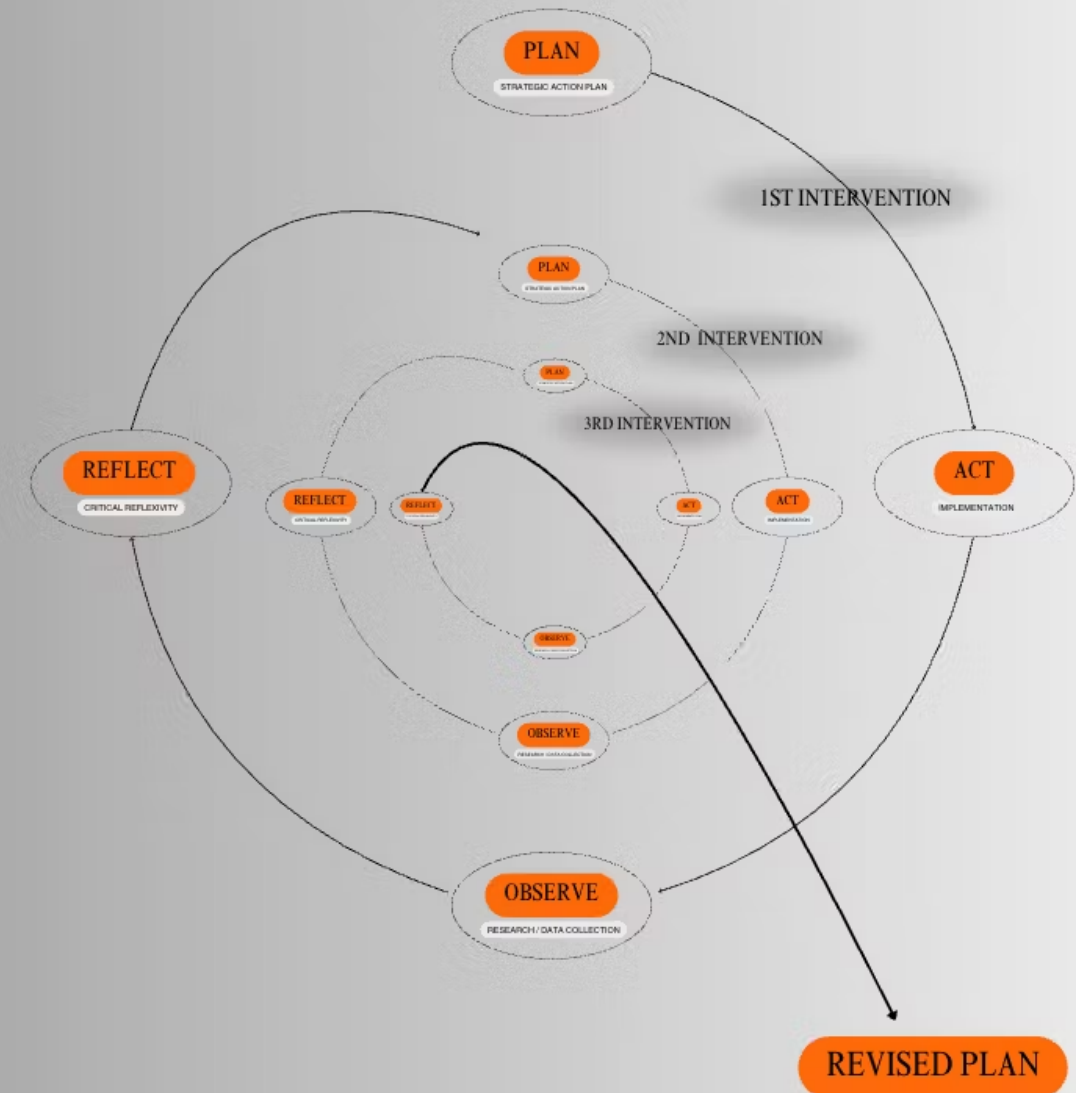
Prefer Not To Say: an exploration of agency, privacy and care in positionality practices.



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ACTION RESEARCH SPIRAL?

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