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“Being an *acompañante* gave me feminism, life, joy, emotions”: the lived experience of abortion activists from four collectives in Latin America

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ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Feminist abortion accompaniment networks have played a vital role in advancing reproductive rights in Latin America over the last several decades. These collectives engage in political activism through direct action and provide people with support during safe self-managed abortions. While research has explored the accompaniment model of care and experiences of abortion seekers who have been accompanied, a better understanding of *acompañantes'* motivations and perspectives on their activism is needed to build a sustainable accompaniment movement. Developed collaboratively with Ibis Reproductive Health and four feminist abortion accompaniment collectives, we conducted a novel creative reflection inquiry study in three countries to understand the experiences of *acompañantes*. The study involved posing five questions to 39 participating *acompañantes* focusing on their motivations, identities, experiences, and perceptions about the meanings of being an accompanier. Participants responded to each question creatively through the modality of their choosing with an accompanying written or audio recorded description of their art. After the arts exercises, a focus group discussion created space for sharing and collective reflection. Three prominent themes were constructed: the sense of community, identity, and power that accompaniment generates; healing through selfcare and collective care practices; and the challenges and joys of supporting self-managed abortions in contexts of stigma and criminalization. This study highlights accompaniment as a transformative feminist praxis and accompaniment groups as spaces that nurture self-discovery and healing and cultivate both personal and collective power among abortion activists.

SPANISH ABSTRACT

Las redes feministas de acompañamiento al aborto han desempeñado un papel fundamental en la promoción de los derechos reproductivos en América Latina durante las últimas décadas. Estas colectivas hacen política desde la acción directa y apoyan a las personas para tener abortos seguros y autogestionados. Si bien las investigaciones han explorado el acompañamiento como modelo de atención y las experiencias de quienes buscan abortar y han recibido acompañamiento, para construir un movimiento sostenible también es necesario comprender mejor las motivaciones y perspectivas de las *acompañantes* sobre su activismo. En colaboración entre Ibis Reproductive Health y cuatro colectivas feministas de acompañamiento al aborto, desarrollamos una novedosa metodología de investigación de reflexión creativa que aplicamos en tres países. El estudio consistió en plantear cinco preguntas a 39 *acompañantes* participantes, centrándose en sus motivaciones, identidades, experiencias y percepciones sobre el significado de ser *acompañante*. Las participantes respondieron a cada pregunta de manera creativa a través de la modalidad de su elección, y acompañaron su respuesta de una descripción escrita o grabada en audio de su obra. Tras los ejercicios artísticos, un grupo focal creó un espacio para el intercambio y la reflexión colectiva. Se construyeron tres temas: el sentido de comunidad, identidad y poder que genera el acompañamiento; la sanación a través de prácticas de autocuidado y cuidado colectivo; y los desafíos y alegrías de apoyar los abortos autogestionados en contextos de estigma y criminalización. Este estudio destaca el acompañamiento como una praxis feminista transformadora y a las colectivas de acompañamiento como espacios que fomentan el autodescubrimiento y la sanación, y cultivan el poder tanto personal como colectivo entre las activistas.

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1. Introduction

The history of the fight for abortion rights in Latin America and the Caribbean can be traced back to the 1970s, when women organizing through unions, political parties, and national liberation fronts brought the idea that female sexuality should not be limited by reproduction into the public discourse (Lamas, 2008; Tarducci, 2018). However, it was not until the 2000s—when misoprostol had already been used off-label to induce abortions for roughly two decades in the region (Coelho et al., 1991)—that a new branch of Latin American feminism advocating for abortion rights emerged. This feminist strategy, characterized by its pragmatic approach to the issue of abortion (providing information and practical support while facilitating safe abortion access despite restrictive laws and conservative social norms), has evolved into its own social movement (Braine, 2023). Moreover, it has inspired activists around the world to take abortion rights into their own hands (Braine, 2023; Duffy et al., 2023).

This movement is comprised of a growing number of individuals and activist collectives with different levels of institutionalization expanding abortion access across the region. These collectives often run hotlines attended by either volunteers or staff who conduct intake and connect abortion seekers to an *acompañante*—a volunteer with extensive training in abortion protocols and how to navigate the country's laws—who will provide them with information and support throughout their abortion process (Bercu et al., 2022). These *acompañantes* support abortion seekers through various models of care—from in-person to virtual accompaniment—and also help people navigate both self-managed and in-clinic abortions (McReynolds-Pérez et al., 2023). They work in a variety of legal contexts, from total abortion bans in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, to the decriminalization of abortion up to 24 weeks in Colombia. While accompaniment collectives span over 19 countries in the region, a recent study found that the profiles of *acompañantes* are similar across contexts with the majority being between 29 and 35 years old, living in urban areas and having higher education, and more than half identifying as lesbian, bisexual, or pansexual (Atienzo et al., 2023; Planning Committee, 2022).

Authors that have studied abortion accompaniment as social activism agree that this movement embodies direct action and a quest for feminist justice amid patriarchal and misogynistic oppression (Braine, 2023; Drovetta, 2015; Duffy et al., 2023; Larrea et al., 2021; McReynolds-Pérez et al., 2023). Braine analyzes this branch of feminism as an Autonomous Health Movement—a movement that “emerg[ed] from larger social movements to address stigmatized and/or criminalized health issues that affect their population/constituency, engage in direct action that involves the demedicalization of knowledge and/or technology previously controlled by medical institutions, and [a willingness] to work at the margins of the law when necessary” (Braine, 2023, p. 11). Beyond offering practical solutions for a health issue, accompaniment is a political strategy that also works to create systemic change and dismantle oppressive systems (Vacarezza & Burton, 2023).

Care systems and practices are core to the accompaniment movement. Practices of *acuerpamiento*,¹ mutual aid, and community solidarity shape the work these organizations do, both for abortion seekers and for fellow *acompañantes* (Braine, 2023; McReynolds-Pérez et al., 2023; Vivaldi and Stutzin, 2021; Doria, 2025). McReynolds-Pérez et al. (2023) argue that accompaniment is a “unique and innovative feminist praxis based on an evolving and reflexive feminist theoretical model that centers care”, while Bercu et al. (2022) and Duffy et al. (2023) highlight how *acompañantes* build alternative infrastructures of care that are independent of legal regulations and medical systems and are grounded in

feminist ethics. However, in contexts such as Mexico and Argentina, *acompañantes* collaborate—or seek to collaborate—with health care systems and other institutions, recognizing that such partnerships could improve access to and experiences of abortion, while also making the work of all involved more impactful (Burton & Peralta, 2016; Veldhuis et al., 2025).

In this paper, we aim to contribute to a growing body of research aiming to understand this type of feminist collective action by focusing on *acompañantes*' lived experiences. In phenomenological qualitative research, the concept of lived experience refers to the meaning that participants attribute to a particular experience of their lives (Wertz, 2011). Grounded in feminist epistemologies (Blazquez, 2010; Harding, 2010), our study was born from a long-lasting collaboration between researchers and activists and centers feminist abortion activists' perspectives on the social movement they have created.

While several Latin American feminist scholars have questioned the concept of “social movements” and its analytic value in the context of feminist struggles in the region (Bertolaccini, 2023; Emmerick & Assis, 2016; Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015), we use the term here to highlight some basic characteristics of this type of collective action. Following Diani's conceptualization, we understand a social movement as a network of informal interactions among interdependent actors that share a political identity and are committed to a cultural and political issue (Diani, 2015). This idea gives space to the internal diversity of a transnational movement whose shared identity can be expressed through multiple names: *aborteras*, *abortistas*, *acompañantes* or *socorristas*,² while sharing political and cultural strategies and narratives regarding not only abortion but also patriarchy and social justice (Doria, 2025; Vacarezza & Burton, 2023). This definition of “social movements” also underscores the importance of a commitment to structural change, in contrast to a liberal understanding of activism that frames social participation as sporadic and limited to engagement with the nation-state.

Being part of a social movement generates a sense of belonging, integrity, and personal and collective power, as well as a feeling of contributing positively to society (Cox, 2011; Friedman & McAdam, 1992; Forman & Slap, 1985; Harré, 2007). Specific research on how abortion accompaniment shapes activists' lives has shown that *acompañantes* often face episodes of violence, discrimination, isolation, and stigmatization, and that symptoms of burnout are relatively common (AAPAAS-CLACAI, 2021; Braine, 2023; Veldhuis, Sánchez-Ramírez, & Darney, 2022). At the same time, accompanying abortions allows activists to live their feminist values, bringing purpose and meaning to their lives and generating feelings of pleasure, joy, intimacy, and a sense of belonging to a feminist community (Kimport et al., 2024).

This article is the first academic publication to highlight qualitative findings from the *Activismo* project, a collaboration between Red Compañera, a network of 21 Latin American feminist abortion accompaniment collectives in 15 countries, and Ibis Reproductive Health. Here, we present findings from the first phase of the study, conducted in Argentina, Mexico, and Chile, focusing on the meaning *acompañantes* attribute to their accompaniment work. Other articles will present results related to care practices and systems within this social movement and include data from collectives in seven additional countries. Art pieces resulting from this process have also been published on the <https://acompanandoabortos.org/> website.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design

This arts-based qualitative study was collaboratively designed by

¹ Following Central American feminist traditions, we understand *acuerpamiento* as embodied solidarity, as mutual aid that passes through the body, or as placing the body in the act of solidarity and mutual aid. See Cabnal (2017) and Méndez (2023).

² All these names are used in different places of the region to name the political identity of *acompañantes*. The diversity of these names reflects the linguistic and ideological diversity of Latin American and Caribbean feminisms.

members of four different accompaniment groups—one in Argentina (*Socorristas en Red, SR*), one in Chile (*Con las Amigas y en la Casa, CAC*) and two in Mexico (*Las Libres, LL* and *Fondo MARIA, FM*)—that form part of the Red Compañera, and researchers at Ibis Reproductive Health, a non-profit organization based in the United States. In 2020, five individuals from these organizations formed a Planning Committee (PC) that designed a previous quantitative study (Atienzo et al., 2023). Since then, the PC has met regularly, co-creating new study protocols that aim to deepen the understanding of *acompañantes'* experiences.

This study was designed to create space for *acompañantes* to share their first-hand perspectives on participating in their collectives. Initially, the research team considered conducting in-depth interviews; however, the PC wanted to create opportunities for participants to share their experiences through various forms of personal expression, not just verbally. The PC ultimately created a unique research methodology called Creative Reflection Inquiry (described further in a forthcoming paper) that combined elements from the solicited diary method (Israel, 2005; Milligan & Bartlett, 2019), art-voice (Barwin et al., 2016), and an adaptation of the photovoice research methodology (Nykiforuk et al., 2011).

All study participants were active members of an accompaniment group represented in the PC, and participants were recruited through one-on-one communication with their respective PC member. Data collection began in August 2022 with a pilot study of eight participants, two from each accompaniment group. Members of the PC purposely selected pilot study participants; each PC member selected one *acompañante* who had been with the group for less than two years and one who had been with the group for more than two years. These participants were asked a series of seven questions (Appendix 1) over the course of seven weeks and participated in a focus group discussion (FGD) that primarily aimed to gather feedback on the study to adjust it for a larger group of participants. As a result of pilot participants' feedback, the research team eliminated one question, combined two questions, and reformulated other questions to make them clearer and ultimately shorten the data collection process (Appendix 2).

The main study began in January 2023. Participants were recruited through their accompaniment networks and *acompañantes* with varying tenures with the collectives were invited to participate. In Chile and Argentina, the accompaniment networks participating in the study are nationwide; thus, *acompañantes* were also invited based on their region of residence to ensure a range of experiences were represented in the study. A total of 39 *acompañantes* participated in the pilot or the main study: 10 each from three organizations and nine from one organization. Most participants answered all the questions; there were only two responses missing.

This study asked one question per week over the course of five weeks, plus one optional question on week six ("Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?"), which only two participants answered. The study questions were:

1. What motivates your activism as an *acompañante*?
2. Since becoming an *acompañante*, what is no longer a part of your life? Is there anything you miss about your life since becoming an *acompañante*?

3. We'd like to know about a significant experience that you've had as an *acompañante*. Why is it meaningful for you? Thinking about it now, what emotions do you feel?
4. We'd like to know what you think about the assertions some *acompañantes* have made about accompaniment being "an art" and a practice of love. What do you think of these ideas? Choose one to respond to.
5. We'd like to know more about your identity. Do you think being an *acompañante* impacts your identity? Why? In your case specifically, what does that identity consist of?

Participants responded to each question with an original production (a photograph, collage, painting, poem, etc.) as well as a written or verbal (audio recorded) description of what their piece represented to them and how it related to the weekly question. At the conclusion of these arts-based exercises, participants joined a FGD in which they shared a piece of art created during the study with the other participants from their accompaniment group and had space to reflect collectively on the impact of the art, the study itself, and the future of the accompaniment movement. FGDs were facilitated by two members of the Planning Committee and recorded. All focus groups and audio recordings were professionally transcribed.

2.2. Study setting

Participants of this study work in a variety of legal contexts. In Argentina, abortion has been legal on demand up to 14 weeks of pregnancy since 2021. In Chile, the law allows abortion only in exceptional circumstances: when the life of the pregnant person is at risk, the fetus has a lethal impairment or when the pregnancy results from rape. In these cases, abortion is only legal up to the 12th week of pregnancy, with an extension of two weeks only for girls under the age of 14. In Mexico, where the Supreme Court ruled in 2021 that the absolute criminalization of abortion is unconstitutional, a fragmented legal landscape persists: abortion is regulated primarily at the state level, and state regulations range from legalization to very restrictive laws similar to the one in Chile. Despite the differences in their contexts, all collectives provide supportive, person-centered care and information throughout an abortion experience, both to people self-managing their abortion and to those who need or want to abort with support from allied health professionals. They all also operate publicly as organizations that provide information on safe abortion, and several are registered non-profits or civil society organizations in their countries. Founded in 2000, Las Libres is a feminist civil society organization based in Guanajuato, Mexico, that provides accompaniment support and training within Guanajuato and across Mexico. Fondo MARIA was established in 2009 in the wake of Mexico City's historic legalization of abortion up to 12 weeks of pregnancy with the aim of reducing the gaps in access across states; since then, it has offered both accompaniment for health system abortions within the city and support for self-managed abortion. Socorristas en Red is a national network of feminist collectives that, since 2012, has worked to provide accompaniment for self-managed abortions in addition to generating evidence and advocating for safe and compassionate abortion care within the formal healthcare system across Argentina. Con las Amigas y en la Casa is a national network of feminist *acompañantes* in

Chile supporting people seeking information on self-managed abortion.

2.3. Analysis

In this paper we draw from phenomenological research and feminist epistemologies to answer our primary research question: what is the lived experience of *acompañantes*? We conducted thematic analysis of the data using MAXQDA qualitative analysis software. A team of four researchers developed a codebook through an iterative process in which codes were designed based on the weekly questions and the FGD guide, as well as on several collective reviews of the data. In this process, at least two researchers applied the codebook to a selection of each type of material (i.e. FGD transcriptions and questions answered by one participant from each collective) and then met to discuss the coding process. After several rounds, the team had a final codebook that was applied to all participant responses: imagery, written text and transcribed audio recordings, including FGD transcriptions. During analysis, we coded both the images and participants' accompanying written or audio-recorded descriptions. As coding progressed, we observed that our interpretations of the images frequently differed from participants' own explanations of their work. Recognizing the risk of imposing researcher interpretations onto the visual material, we chose to prioritize participants' descriptions as the primary source for coding and thematic development, using the images to contextualize and enrich these narratives, and applied limited codes to the images. The art included in the

manuscript was selected by the authors as a representative image for each theme, while also trying to use images from all collectives and countries. Given the complex and layered nature of some of the material, some responses were coded by two members of the team, who then discussed their analysis. As a result, all FGD transcriptions and around 10% of the participants' responses to the weekly questions were double-coded.

While the pilot data included additional questions that were not asked of all the main study participants, the researchers felt that the data from the pilot phase were still valuable and helped us better address our research question. Therefore, data from the pilot study was included in the analysis.

After the coding process was complete, the researchers met to produce thematic maps of the relationship among the codes and then drafted code summaries, which included imagery, on all the themes. Summaries on the following themes were included in the analysis for this manuscript: "Accompaniment is love," "Helping others," "Emotions and feelings," "Models of care," "Personal growth," and "Accompaniment as rebellion/resistance." We then used the summaries to build three main themes specifically related to the meanings participants' attributed to their lived experiences as *acompañantes*, as presented in the next section. To showcase the voices and views of the study participants, we selected exemplifying quotes and translated them into English for the manuscript and kept the original form in Spanish as footnotes. We also added descriptive text and an explanation of our own interpretation to each image as a caption under each image.

2.4. Ethics statement

We adhered to the Ethical Principles for Human Research defined by the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. The study was approved by the Allendale Investigational Review Board (Study: LAC_MAB_2020). The PC members that recruited participants obtained participants' consent over an encrypted messaging platform (WhatsApp or Signal). First, information about the study was texted or emailed to prospective participants. Participants sent their consent either verbally in a voice note or through written text.

2.5. Reflexivity statement

Grounded in a phenomenological perspective, our analysis aimed to prioritize the meaning that *acompañantes* themselves give to their experiences, rather than trying to fit the data into preconceived theories and ideas (Wertz, 2011). However, as feminist researchers with a long history of involvement in the fight for abortion rights, we recognize that our analysis is also influenced by our own experiences and by the principles of feminist epistemologies that we incorporate into our work, including centering *acompañante's* experiences, considering how different axes of oppression interact to create specific subjectivities and experiences, and aiming to create knowledge that supports social change (Blazquez, 2010).

The PC—formed by researchers and *acompañantes* from the same collectives we studied—was established to overcome the limitations of traditional scientific structures where researchers are distanced from their study subject and to center *acompañantes'* knowledge and experiences. The PC provided significant input throughout the study design and implementation, supported interpretation of results, and authored this manuscript. Pilot study participants provided input to help reshape the study's main phase. By developing a study design that enlists meaningful participation from *acompañantes* throughout the study, we attempted to challenge imbalanced power relationships perpetuated by existing research and funding paradigms, and to strengthen the team's ability to understand and contextualize the data. However, we acknowledge that, despite our efforts, imbalanced power dynamics persist both between researchers and *acompañantes* and among *acompañantes* themselves. In terms of the data collected, these dynamics may



Image 1. CAC, Participant 4, Question 3. Two hands reaching for a flowering plant and for each other; one has a green scarf around the wrist with an image of people holding hands, a house, and the words "Free Abortion" around a heart. **Researcher interpretation:** The green scarf—or pañuelo verde—is a symbol of the pro-abortion movement in Latin America. Here, the words "Aborto Libre" (Free Abortion) embody its message as a call for expanded abortion rights in the region. The two hands meeting over a verdant plant convey the accompaniment movement's emphasis on community and collective power, particularly in the face of patriarchal oppression. For the participant's narrative description of the image, see <https://acompanandoabortos.org/1-a-gran-contencion-de-una-nina>.

have compromised our ability to capture the challenging aspects of abortion activism.

3. Results

Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 53 years old and included students, teachers, artists, musicians, engineers, sociologists, anthropologists, lawyers, and social workers, among other professions. We constructed three themes based on our data: Accompaniment as a locus for building community, identity and power; accompaniment as a space to cultivate self and collective care; and accompaniment as a source of challenges and joy.

3.1. Accompaniment builds community, identity, and power

Being part of an accompaniment collective impacted the lives and identities of *acompañantes* in multiple ways. For many, being an *acompañante* evoked a deep sense of fulfillment and belonging—of being part of something greater than themselves (Image 1). Accompaniment actively builds community around those accompanying and those being accompanied, creating an environment that uplifts, enlivens, and nurtures each individual. Many participants described their experience as *acompañantes* as a way to combat loneliness and feel like part of a group.

Participants also highlighted tangible ways that they care for their peers or cultivate a setting in which to nourish one another: cooking together, eating together, laughing together. While one dimension of accompaniment is “fighting” for liberty and autonomy, respondents also emphasized shared pleasure as an important part of their work.

“It was a significant experience to be an *acompañante*, in matters of belonging to a collective that supports me and that also accompanies me as an *acompañante*, as this part of collective care.”³ (FM, Participant 5, Question 3)

Others emphasized the joy of bonding with the people they support and knowing that their work “makes a difference”:

“I feel really good knowing that I am contributing in some way to making [abortion] a safe process, and when the girls tell me that [the abortion is] complete, it reassures me a lot, because I know that there will be no more risk. We give our time and effort, and we do it at no cost.”⁴ (LL, Participant 6, Question 3)

Recognizing that their efforts can transform the lives of others, *acompañantes* feel a sense of empowerment and control over themselves and their destinies. For many, becoming an *acompañante* has illuminated feminist ways of living that rebel against conservative and patriarchal norms, enabling *acompañantes* to explore new ways of loving others and themselves, free from the constraints of heteronormativity. Their collectives also give them a safe environment to grow, express themselves freely, and embrace their identities, including identifying as lesbians or non-binary people.

“[...] I feel powerful, I think that providing support and being with other women allows one to generate moments with a lot of energy, at the same time it breaks down the limits, I think that in the desire to not be a mother there are no limits, in the end it can always be achieved, and that activates me like a little fire [...] it seems to give me a kind of conviction and confidence in myself as well, in the

wisdom that I can transmit, in the confidence that the women I meet also generate in me.”⁵ (CAC, Participant 7, Question 2)

Many respondents expressed that accompaniment represents a fundamental part of their lifestyle and identity, with many declaring that being an *acompañante* gives meaning to their lives and they cannot imagine life without it. One reason accompaniment is such an important part of their identities is that it strongly intertwines with their sense of being a “rebel”⁶ against the oppressive status quo:

“Being an *acompañante* profoundly impacts my identity. My identity, which, in large part, lies in the struggle for freedom, in resisting oppressive systems, in the search for tenderness, in emphasizing caring for others. And this identity has been forged thanks to the women I've seen struggle, resist, speak up, cry out, care for, and accompany.”⁷ (FM, Participant 8, Question 5)

Accompanying people during their abortions is a “prefigurative practice of the socialist world” (SR, Participant 10, Question 1) that allows *acompañantes* to embody their feminist values through direct action. In turn, this practice reinforces a rebellious collective identity and amplifies a sense of collective power (Image 2). Many *acompañantes* expressed the desire to use this collective power to create a more just present and future based on ethics of care rather than extraction and oppression.

“[...] it is through accompaniment that I can participate in or spread this desire to be part of living in a world that is more dignified for everyone. And in that sense, understanding the interwoven nature of what this accompaniment practice represents for me, which is freedom, which is access to justice, which is knowledge, which is collectivity, which is autonomy, but also that this exercise stems from indignation, from not having access, and from taking those rights into my own hands and starting to share them.”⁸ (LL, FGD)

The experience of being an *acompañante* integrates activists into networks of collective care that foster meaning, mutual empowerment, and joy. One participant poetically summarized the many gifts that being an *acompañante* has brought into her life:

“Being an *acompañante* gave me feminism, life, joy, emotions.

Being an *acompañante* gave me new forms of love, affection, new constellations, friends.

Being an *acompañante* gave me stupefaction, indignation, rage, and collective anger.

³ “Fue una experiencia significativa el hecho de ser acompañante en temas de pertenecer a un colectivo que me acuerpa y que también a mí me acompaña como acompañante, como esta parte del cuidado colectivo.”

⁴ “Ya que me siento realmente bien al saber que estoy contribuyendo de alguna manera en que sea un proceso seguro y cuando las chavas me dicen que ya pasó todo, eso me tranquiliza muchísimo, porque sé que ya no tendrá algún riesgo. Ya que brindamos de nuestro tiempo, esfuerzo y se hace sin costo alguno.”

⁵ “[...] me siento poderosa, creo que los acompañamientos y estar con otras mujeres hace que una logre generar instancias de mucha energía, al mismo tiempo se rompe con los límites, creo que en el deseo de no maternar no existe ningún límite, finalmente siempre se puede lograr, y eso igual me activa como un fuegoito [...] como que me da una especie de mucha convicción y de confianza en mí misma también, en la sabiduría que puedo transmitir, en la confianza que también me generan las mujeres con las cuales me encuentro.”

⁶ rebelde

⁷ “Ser acompañante de abortos impacta profundamente en mi identidad. Mi identidad que, en gran parte, recae en la lucha por la libertad, en la resistencia a los sistemas opresores, en la búsqueda de la ternura, en el énfasis en el cuidado a otras. Y esta identidad ha sido forjada gracias a las mujeres que he visto luchar, resistir, hablar, gritar, cuidar, acompañar.”

⁸ “[...] es a través del acompañamiento como participar o extender este deseo de ser partícipe de vivir en un mundo más digno de vivir para todas y todos. Y en ese sentido entender cómo se va entretejiendo lo que para mí representa ese acompañamiento, que es libertad, que es un acceso a la justicia, que son los saberes, que es la colectividad, que es la autonomía pero que también este ejercicio deviene de la indignación, de o sea pues sí, de no tener acceso y como un poco de tomar en mis manos esos derechos y pues nada, como empezar a compartirlos”.



Image 2. FM, Participant 2, Question 1. The image is a collage of photographs and brightly colored graphic elements on a black background. The photos on the left represent pregnancy and childbirth and are framed by the words “Birth is not questioned, it’s not judged, it’s accompanied, it’s demanded”; in the middle are a group of fists with green scarves raised in protest and a hand holding a mirror with the reflection of a face, framed by the words “Abortion is questioned, it’s hidden, it’s all of us, but it’s talked about as if it’s none of us, abortion is fighting and questioning”; the photos on the right also show hands outstretched and reaching toward one another. **Researcher interpretation:** The theme of community is embodied by the images of people gathering around each other during childbirth, as well as the fists with green scarves around their wrists, raised in the spirit of protest and collective power, and the hands reaching for one another. The single face in the mirror at the center evokes reflection, positioning the artist as someone whose identity is shaped by the surrounding community. For the participant’s narrative description of the image, see <https://acompanandoabortos.org/la-dualidad-de-la-terminacion-del-embarazo>.

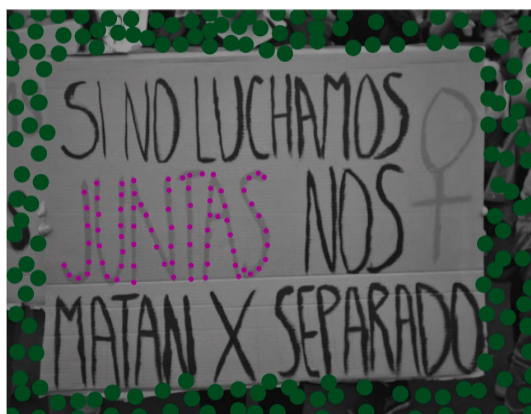


Image 3. FM, Participant 9, Question 2. The photo is of a sign likely used at a protest, with black lettering and the gender symbol for woman (a circle on top of a cross), that reads, “If we don’t fight together, they will kill us separately.” The sign is framed in green dots and the word “together” is highlighted in a pinkish purple. **Researcher interpretation:** The colors purple and green are often used to symbolize solidarity with the abortion rights movement. The message communicates the importance and power of collective care, while also highlighting the risk of patriarchal violence against women. For the participant’s narrative description of the image, see <https://acompanandoabortos.org/saber-que-luchamos-juntas>.

Being an *acompañante* gave me a collective home and a better economy.

Being an *acompañante* gave me patience, conversations, new thoughts.

Being an *acompañante* gave me distant horizons, wonder, passion, and lessons about listening and speaking.

Being an *acompañante* gave me the conviction that thinking about myself in a community is a risk, but one of the best risks!

Being an *acompañante* gave me sensitivities, sometimes extreme ones ... it gave me wisdom, knowledge, a desire to write and tell stories. It gave me travel.

Being an *acompañante* allowed me to know that I can help those who need an abortion. Those who have a life dilemma.”⁹ (SR, Participant 4, Question 2)

⁹ “Ser acompañante me dio feminismos, vida, alegrías, emociones. Ser acompañante me dio nuevas formas de amor, afectaciones, nuevas constelaciones, amigas. Ser acompañante me dio conmociones, indignaciones, rabias y enojos colectivos. Ser acompañante me dio una casa colectiva y mejor economía. Ser acompañante me dio paciencias, conversaciones, nuevos pensamientos. Ser acompañante me dio horizontes lejanos, asombros, pasiones, aprendizajes sobre la escucha y la palabra. Ser acompañante me dio la convicción de que pensarme en comunidad es un riesgo, ¡pero de los mejores! Ser acompañante me dio sensibilidades, a veces extremas ... me dio saberes, conocimientos, deseos de escribir y de contar historias. Me dio viajes. Ser acompañante me dejó saber que puedo dar ayuda a quien necesita un aborto. A quien tiene un dilemma de vida.”

3.2. Accompaniment cultivates self and collective care

Acompañantes frequently mentioned several types of collective care and described how it manifests both in their work and everyday lives (Image 3). In an accompaniment context, collective care takes many nuanced forms. These participants primarily described it as 1) care between *acompañantes*; 2) care of and for accompanied people; and 3) care between women generally.

When discussing care among *acompañantes*, two respondents from the same collective acknowledged the importance of “filling your comrade’s glass,”¹⁰ a metaphor that highlights the reciprocal nature of collective care among *acompañantes* and the importance of looking out for, supporting, and holding each other accountable as part of their work.

“The constant sharing of knowledge among comrades, the patience and the pedagogies. The way we acknowledge our own mistakes and those of others. Lifting our heads as we march to check on each other, refilling your comrade’s glass of beer when it’s empty. There’s love and care there.”¹¹ (SR, Participant 3, Question 4)

Many respondents acknowledged the inextricability of self-care, love, and healing from collective care, love, and healing, with sentiments like “I am because we are”¹² and “by healing one, we heal us all”¹³ appearing in various forms throughout their responses. While some *acompañantes* struggle to maintain a sense of individuality while forming part of a collective, several described an almost revelatory ability to “accompany themselves”¹⁴ as a result of caring for others—and vice versa.

When describing accompaniment as an avenue for personal healing, many connected this sense of healing to their own abortion experiences. Some decided to be *acompañantes* to prevent others from having to have abortions in conditions of loneliness, misinformation, shame, and guilt, as they had done in the past. Those who accompanied from this perspective tried to provide others with the care they would have liked to receive. Others chose to accompany to ensure others had access to the care they received when they had an abortion, or because they want to create conditions for people to perceive abortion as a positive experience.

“As a woman who has lived through the process of an abortion, as a woman who is grateful to have had the opportunity to make decisions for myself, my body, and my life. As a woman who enjoys the opportunity and happiness of having the option to decide, I also enjoy the experience of other women having the same ability to

choose. May the possibilities for each and every woman be infinite.”¹⁵ (LL, Participant 9, Question 1)

Participating in other people’s abortions in this way also allowed *acompañantes* to redefine their own abortion experiences. In some cases, participants reflected on joining their organizations as a step that helped them overcome existential crises, “leave a dark place”¹⁶ and even get rid of “their own miseries”¹⁷ (SR, Participant 5, Question 2). Others reflected on abortions as practices that traverse the body:

“... I have healed the wounds that patriarchy has left on my body, where I experienced an [abortion] process in isolation, at the hands of illegal vendors, and without any guidance or information about it. That’s why I try to provide peace and love at all times. What I seek most is for no woman to ever feel alone or distressed again, and what I feel is not only a motivation, but a duty—the duty to help every woman who wants to make decisions about her body, because motherhood must be desired.”¹⁸ (CAC, Participant 4, Question 1)

Many participants also discussed the idea of healing their ancestors—mothers, grandmothers, and other relatives, as well as predecessors in the feminist movement—through accompaniment. They described how their experiences and motivations are informed by those of lineages that came before, and how *acompañantes* today are part of a movement that neither started with them nor ends with them—how the collective care enacted and embodied by “the [accompaniment] network”¹⁹ extends back and forth through time:

“By accompanying abortions, I’m healing my lineage. I’m embracing my grandmother, who didn’t have the same opportunities and had to hide from her husband and family to get abortions in clandestine places where the procedures were undignified and posed a danger to her health.”²⁰ (FM, Participant 6, Question 4)

Through this idea of legacy, participants acknowledged how accompaniment frees their ancestors—and future generations—from a world where abortion is illegal or clandestine, and where people do not have autonomy over their sexual and reproductive choices. Respondents also described the concentric impacts of accompaniment in the present moment, beginning with *acompañantes* themselves and radiating outward to the people they support.

“Knowing that I’m part of a struggle that didn’t begin with me and won’t end with me, and that isn’t just my struggle, but a collective one that has been sustained historically, and that I find impactful. And I find it incredibly satisfying to know that collective care is also an important part of this struggle, and that part of that collective care is shared when I accompany someone to have an abortion, and that

¹⁰ “llenarle el vaso de tu compañera”.

¹¹ “La transmisión de conocimientos constante entre compañerxs, las paciencias y pedagogías. La forma en la que reconocemos nuestros errores y los de lxs otrxs. Levantar la cabeza en la marcha y mirar que estemos bien, llenarle el vaso de cerveza a tu compañera cuando este se termine. Ahí hay amor y cuidado.”

¹² “soy porque somos”.

¹³ “sanando una nos vamos sanando todas”.

¹⁴ “acompañarse a sí mismas”.

¹⁵ “Como mujer que vivió un proceso de aborto, como mujer agradecida que tuve la oportunidad de decidir para mí, mi cuerpo y mi vida. Como mujer que disfruto de la oportunidad y felicidad de vivir la opción de decidir, disfruto también la experiencia de que otras mujeres tengan también la misma capacidad de opción. Que las posibilidades para todas y cada una de las mujeres sean infinitas.”

¹⁶ “salir de un lugar oscuro”.

¹⁷ “Despojarme de algunas miserias propias”.

¹⁸ “... he sanado heridas propias que ha dejado el patriarcado en mi cuerpo, donde viví un proceso [de aborto] aislada, en manos de vendedores ilegales y sin ninguna indicación o información al respecto, por ello trato de proporcionar tranquilidad y cariño en todo momento. Lo que más busco es que ninguna mujer se vuelva a sentir sola o angustiada y lo que siento no sólo como una motivación, sino como un deber, el deber de ayudar a toda mujer que quiera decidir sobre su cuerpo, porque la maternidad tiene que ser deseada.”

¹⁹ “la red”.

²⁰ “Al acompañar estoy sanando mi linaje, estoy abrazando a mi abuela que no tuvo las mismas oportunidades y que debió esconderse de su marido y de su familia para poder ir a abortar en lugares clandestinos en donde los procedimientos no eran dignos y resultaban un peligro para su salud.”



Image 4. FM, Participant 9, Question 1. The image shows three people at a protest with their backs painted in red and purple with white text. From left to right, the text reads, “Abortion or not; that’s for me to decide; Abortion due to rape.” The artist added intersecting purple lines in the space above and between the people. **Researcher interpretation:** Throughout Latin America, feminist movements for reproductive rights intersect with activism against gender-based violence, which is widely represented by the color purple. Purple is also broadly associated with the fight for gender equality, often paired with the green of the pro-abortion movement and/or pro-abortion messaging, as seen here. The purple lines added by the artist illustrate the complexity of this activism and the interconnectedness of these movements. For the participant’s narrative description of the image, see <https://acompanandoabortos.org/la-dualidad-de-la-terminacion-del-embarazo>.

we also accompany other *acompañantes* so we can have these processes in an empathetic, beautiful way, because abortion, yes, has to be understood as something beyond what society tries to impose on us.”²¹ (FM, Participant 5, Question 1)

3.3. Accompaniment brings challenges and joy

Being an *acompañante* does not come without personal challenges and added responsibilities. The strain that accompaniment places on time is significant, and most *acompañantes* have to strike a balance between paid labor and unpaid activism as they struggle to make ends meet for themselves and their families. Accompaniment absorbs much of their free time, even seeping into vacations, and while it brings *acompañantes* joy, it is also work.

“Unfortunately, because we live in this capitalist reality, we don’t have much time to spare. The precariousness of life increases. We spend a lot of time working to have the basics we need to be okay. So, I do believe that activism spaces compete for “free” time, time that could be used for leisure and recreation. Because, aside from the joy, activism is work. Are we trying to build other ways of working? Yes. But it’s still work. It’s a personal challenge (and, I believe, also a political one) to figure out how to allocate that energy. How, for example, to be able to say no to carrying out a task knowing that in

that “no” lies self-care. I don’t feel like activism takes up my time, even though many people from the outside perceive it that way. Time is taken up by poor public transportation, low-paid work, absurd waiting times for doctor’s appointments, bureaucracy.”²² (SR, Participant 3, Question 2)

Participants highlighted the time commitment needed to be an *acompañante* and how that has shaped and added stress to their lives, including not being able to fully step away from their phones for fear of leaving someone alone during their abortion. For many, this intensive time commitment was exhausting and detracted from the things that bring them joy in life outside of accompaniment.

“One of the things that have been missing from my life since I decided to accompany abortions is extended moments free of technology and having time to move around without responsibilities. I’ve never been that fond of my phone, and not being able to disconnect has meant putting myself aside. By dedicating myself to being an *acompañante*, I’m letting go of a little of myself, accepting a double

²¹ “Saberme parte de una lucha que no empezó conmigo y que no va a terminar conmigo y que no solamente es una lucha mía, sino es algo colectivo que ha sido sostenido históricamente y que me parece impactante. Y me parece súper satisfactorio saber que el cuidado colectivo también es una parte importante de esta lucha y que parte de ese cuidado colectivo se comparte cuando yo acompaño a alguien a que pueda realizarse un aborto, y que también nos acompañamos entre acompañantes para poder tener estos procesos de manera empática, de manera preciosa porque el aborto, pues sí, tiene que significarse como algo más allá de lo que la sociedad nos trata de imponer.”

²² “Lamentablemente, por vivir en esta realidad capitalista, los tiempos no nos sobran. La precarización de la vida aumenta. Pasamos mucho tiempo trabajando para tener cosas básicas para estar bien. Entonces, si creo que los espacios de activismo disputan tiempos “libres”, tiempos que podrían estar destinados al ocio y esparcimiento. Porque, al margen del goce, el activismo es trabajo. ¿Intentamos construir otras formas de trabajar? Sí. Pero, se trabaja igual. Es un desafío personal (y por eso creo también político) ir viendo cómo disponer esa energía. Cómo, por ejemplo, poder decir que no a llevar a cabo una tarea sabiendo que en ese “no” hay un autocuidado. No siento que el activismo me quite tiempo aunque así ven muchxs desde afuera. Tiempo me quita el transporte público deficiente, el trabajo mal pago, las esperas absurdas en los turnos médicos, la burocracia.”



Image 5. SR, Participant 1, Question 7 (Pilot study). The image shows a sign likely used in a protest that reads, “The struggle is a collective poem called freedom, we are writing it,” accompanied by flowers, greenery, and a pink wig. Some of the flowers are contained in a “mate de calabaza,” the gourd cup people use to drink mate, a traditional beverage enjoyed in different parts of South America. **Researcher interpretation:** Protestors in Argentina often wear pink wigs at feminist demonstrations. The flowers and greenery represent the beauty, tenacity, and growth of the accompaniment movement, which is being constantly and collectively developed and adapted to changing contexts. The inclusion of the mate de calabaza highlights the specific experience of this movement in Argentina. For the participant’s narrative description of the image, see <https://acompanandoabortos.org/aborto-libre-es-vida-elegida>.

life. I miss having my phone off. Getting lost in the mountains for days without thinking about the charger. And speaking freely about who I am and what I do. Feeling like a person beyond my role.”²³ (CAC, Participant 8, Question 2)

To provide accompaniment is to provide emotional labor to strangers. Each person traverses a unique and complex emotional landscape during their abortion experience. Some people are sure of their decision and are certain they will receive the care they need, others arrive with fear and anxiety, some have experienced gender-based violence, rape and incest, and others are in vulnerable social or economic circumstances (Image 4). *Acompañantes* listen and take on the role of providing comfort and support before, during, and after the abortion—a role that can sometimes be a “mental burden.” This emotional care work can be both absorbing and gratifying. Many *acompañantes* acknowledged the need to decenter themselves in order to prioritize the needs of the people they accompany. This might involve ignoring or minimizing their own emotions to maintain a sense of calm or reassurance for the aborting person.

“Being an *acompañante* means not putting yourself first anymore. Always being available for the women and girls we accompany. Changing your plans to support another woman [...]”²⁴ (CAC, Participant 5, Question 2)

²³ “De las cosas que han dejado de estar en mi vida desde que decidí acompañar son los momentos prolongados libres de tecnología y disponibles para moverme sin responsabilidades. Nunca he sido tan amiga del teléfono y el no poder desconectarme ha significado dejarme a mí. Al entregarme a ser acompañante abandono un poco de mí misma, para aceptar una doble vida. Echo de menos tener el teléfono apagado. Perderme en algún cerro por días sin pensar en el cargador. Y hablar libremente de quien soy y que hago. Sentirse persona más allá del rol.”

²⁴ “El ser acompañante es dejar de ponerte en primer lugar a ti misma. Estar siempre disponible para las mujeres y niñas que acompañamos. Cambiar tus planes para contener a otra mujer ...”

One participant shared how accompanying is an emotional risk, both through the intense love and connection they feel for the person they are accompanying and because living a life with passion is inherently risky.

“Because to accompany is to be at constant risk. The risk of being sad. The risk of listening to what moves you. The risk that shifts the horizon line [the future]. The risk of loving and wanting to care for other bodies. To accompany is to risk passion. Living with passion is not easy. Passion destabilizes those who don’t share it. Passion produces intensity and goes against individuality. To accompany is to open yourself to fragility. Fragility as a new sensation. Fragility not as something close to breaking, but rather fragility as an event of new sensitivity.”²⁵ (SR, Participant 4, Question 1)

In addition to the emotional risks, being an *acompañante* also entails tangible risks like social isolation and criminalization, which some participants feared. Social beliefs about both abortion and accompaniment varied greatly and many *acompañantes* had friends or family who may judge or distance themselves from them if they were to find out about their work.

“I believe and feel that being an activist for women’s sexual and reproductive rights, anywhere in the world, but especially in Latin America, produces stress and a constant state of alert. And that’s quite exhausting. We don’t have ordinary lives. And without a doubt, the world and this capitalist system in which we are immersed is stressful and violent enough on its own. So, if I had to say what I miss, it’s not having to add more worries to my life, not having to feel that little fear that’s always present. That at any moment, any day, I or one of my colleagues could be harmed and punished.”²⁶ (CAC, Participant 5, Question 2)

Because of the fear of social and legal repercussions, some *acompañantes* in Mexico and Chile felt they had to keep their roles as *acompañantes* and abortion activists secret, which meant leading a double life and keeping a part of themselves hidden from others.

“And in my case, I decided to live this work of accompaniment in secrecy, and that has also had an impact on my identity. Now I have to be much more present in interactions with other people because there is information that I don’t want them to know.”²⁷ (CAC, Participant 10, Question 5)

While participants discussed the challenges and added responsibilities they faced, there was an overarching sense that being an *acompañante* was worth the struggle (Image 5). This was attributed to the deep sense of purpose and joy of providing a much-needed service

²⁵ “Porque acompañar es estar en riesgo constante. El riesgo a estar tristes. El riesgo de escuchar lo que conmueve. El riesgo que desplaza la línea del horizonte. El riesgo de amar y querer cuidar otros cuerpos. Acompañar es arriesgarse a la pasión. Vivir con pasión no es fácil. La pasión desestabiliza a quien no la comparte. La pasión produce intensidad y va en contra de la individualidad. Acompañar es abrirte a la fragilidad. La fragilidad como sensación nueva. La fragilidad no como algo próximo a quebrarse, más bien la fragilidad como acontecimiento de nueva sensibilidad.”

²⁶ “Creo y siento que el ser activista por los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las mujeres, en cualquier parte del mundo, pero por sobre todo Latinoamérica, es un factor de estrés y de constante estado de alerta. Y eso es bastante agotador. No tenemos vidas comunes y corrientes. Y sin lugar a dudas el mundo y este sistema capitalista en el que estamos inmersas, es lo suficientemente estresante y violento por sí sólo. Por lo tanto si tuviera que decir que es lo que extraño, es no tener que agregar más preocupaciones a mi vida, No tener que sentir ese miedo que está presente siempre. Que en cualquier momento, cualquier día, yo o una de mis compañeras, pueda ser dañada y castigada.”

²⁷ “También, y en mi caso, yo decidí vivir esta labor de acompañamiento desde el secreto y eso igual ha tenido un impacto en mi identidad, ahora debo estar mucho más presente en las interacciones con las demás personas porque hay información que yo no quiero que ellas sepan.”

that states fail to provide, as well as helping people through difficult moments and supporting them to reclaim their lives and bodies. One participant, when asked how her life had changed since becoming an *acompañante*, created a list of positives and negatives that illustrated why accompaniment feels like it adds more than it detracts from most *acompañantes'* lives.

"What things weren't part of my life before I started accompanying abortions?

- Discussions and planning political strategies.
- Having data in my head about doctors' names and places to go.
- Taking digital security measures, now with good reason, not like before out of simple anti-system paranoia.
- Walking down the street and looking for cameras.
- Eighty thousand meetings a week, all important.
- A huge number of names in my contacts list.
- The collective: being part of a mass that moves and breathes together.
- Crying.
- Calls from unknown numbers that start with "I got your number." Or "Do you remember me? I went to your office a few years ago?" (I don't work as a doctor or psychologist or anything that requires an office). And so on."²⁸ (SR, Participant 6, Question 2)

4. Discussion

In this Creative Reflection Inquiry study, we aimed to understand the lived experiences of 39 activists from four accompaniment collectives in Argentina, Mexico, and Chile. Our findings show how *acompañantes* cultivate community, identity, and collective power through their activism, fostering a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves and strengthening their agency to challenge injustice. Our analysis also shows how care, both collective and individual, are fundamental aspects of this kind of activism, and that, in developing feminist care systems, accompaniment redefines the relationship between the individual and the collective. This explains why, despite the multiple responsibilities *acompañantes* add to their lives when supporting pregnant people through accompaniment—including demands on time, emotional labor and not being able to focus on their own needs—they continue centering the joy and fulfillment they find in this work.

Our findings also highlight the multiple ways in which accompaniment activism is rooted in anti-colonial Latin American worldviews, indigenous and communitarian feminisms (Cabnal, 2010, 2017; Siderac & Cabnal, 2019) and the Central American tradition of integral protection of activists (Méndez, 2023), as opposed to (neo) liberal views on abortion. *Acompañantes* go beyond episodic solidarity and develop infrastructures that enable a systematic practice of *acuerpamiento*, meaning that *acompañantes* consistently *ponen el cuerpo* (put their body on the line), to facilitate abortion experiences for others. This practice is deeply connected to the core concept of body-territory in *acompañantes'* specific form of feminism, represented in this study by participants' artistic creations and narratives. The body-territory concept, long developed by the theorists of communitarian feminisms in the region, and linked to

indigenous worldviews (Cabnal, 2010, 2017), articulates the defense of the land and the body, both subject of spoliation and exploitation in capitalist and colonial systems, and highlights how the body is a privileged "site of resistance and subversion", as Doria (2025) has noted in her analysis of Mexican *acompañantes'* perspectives.

By creating bonds, identities, and communities that materialize new forms of love among women and pregnant people—both between *acompañantes* and people having abortions, and among members of an accompaniment collective—as often highlighted in participants' artistic expressions for this study, these *acompañantes* create spaces where interdependence is accepted and nurtured. Recurrent references to collective and intergenerational healing also imply relational notions of autonomy and agency. This means that in this specific form of Latin American feminism, autonomy and agency are not seen as individual attributes of self-sufficient beings, or as the consequence of the body being a (individual) woman's private property, as is often argued in liberal feminism. On the contrary, in *acompañantes'* feminism, autonomy and agency are rather the desired effects of feminist politics that aim for systemic change while working—here and now—to create the appropriate conditions for pregnant people to make decisions over their lives, not as individuals in solitude, but accompanied with support and care. These relational conceptions of autonomy and agency are also evident in participants' views on collective care, which stems from the legacy of Central American feminist activists that have developed the notion and practice of "feminist integral protection" to sum the four principles of their work: 1) centering care, 2) acknowledging diverse ways of dealing with violence, 3) contextualizing actions and risks, and 4) working in networks (IM Defensoras, 2022).

These examples of the specificities of *acompañantes'* feminism showcase the ways in which this activism also constitutes what Álvarez (2014) calls discursive spaces of action, explained by Seabra and Assis (2016) as spaces where feminisms simultaneously build theory and practice by living, practicing and embodying ideas. In her analysis of communitarian and indigenous feminisms, Alvarado (2022) also underscores indigenous women's standpoint as a privileged site of knowledge creation, because it builds on embodied experiences that become partial, relative and contextualized knowledge and discourses. As other authors have argued, one of the distinctive features of *acompañantes'* feminism has been its contribution to the creation of medical knowledge and practices centering pregnant people's bodies and experiences around self-managed abortion (Braine, 2023; Burton & Peralta, 2016; Larrea et al., 2021). *Acompañantes'* feminism does not constitute a form of indigenous, communitarian or anticolonial feminism in itself, given its white-mestizo origin.²⁹ However, our results demonstrate that these feminisms have permeated *acompañantes'* thinking and praxis in different latitudes of the region, further developing and disseminating feminist epistemologies that, in Alvarado's words, are "detached from the Euro-north-centric logos" (Alvarado, 2022; Seabra and Assis, 2016).

Historically, abortion has been stigmatized and associated with feelings of fear, guilt, and shame (Hanschmidt, 2016). Traditional medical and legal abortion activism continues to focus on the drama associated with its clandestinity, including preventable maternal deaths and unfair incarcerations, which in turn fuels negative cultural and social views around abortion (Vacarezza & Burton, 2023; Vivaldi & Stutzin, 2021). In this study, *acompañantes* centered feelings of joy, connectedness, belonging, and integrity in their activism, creating new narratives from intimate reflections on their experiences. These results are an important addition to the growing body of research aiming to

²⁸ "¿Qué cosas no formaban parte de mi vida antes de acompañar? Las discusiones y planificación de estrategias políticas. Tener datos en mi cabeza sobre nombres de médicos y lugares para asistir. Tener cuidados digitales, ahora con razón, no como antes por simple paranoia antisistema. Andar por la calle y mirar dónde hay cámaras. Ochenta mil reuniones semanales, todas importantes. Grandísima cantidad de nombres en mi agenda de contactos. Lo colectivo: formar parte de una masa que se mueve y respira todas juntas. Llorar. Llamadas de números desconocidos que empiezan con "me pasaron tu número". O "se acuerda de mí, yo fui a su consultorio unos años atrás" (o no trabajo de médica que ni psicóloga ni nada que requiera de un consultorio). Y así."

²⁹ In Latin American decolonial feminism, the expression *blanco-mestizo* (*white-mestizo*) is used to highlight the link between the social position of urban, educated, middle class women and their ethnic origins as white colonizers' descendants. Far from being an expression of "identity politics", this term sheds light on the imbrication between the colonial matrix and current social structures in the region.

understand the positive implications of abortion and counter stigmatizing and essentialist narratives around the issue (Kimport et al., 2024; Wollum et al., 2022).

Additionally, *acompañantes* expressed that their activism and participation in feminist collectives directly contributed to their well-being, personal healing journeys, and the healing of others. As a relational feminist practice, abortion accompaniment reclaims abortion as an act that promotes wellbeing—both for those seeking care and those providing it (Bercu et al., 2022; Coast et al., 2025). In reimagining abortion access, accompaniment collectives attempt to decrease the effect of social, political, and economic barriers that often constrain abortion access and offer *acompañantes* a pathway to transform their own experiences with systemic violence into sites of knowledge and agency. These collectives serve as spaces for deep relationality, where *acompañantes* can cultivate a stronger connection with themselves and others, engage in self-discovery, and experience a sense of emotional and political liberation. In addition to functioning as part of an Autonomous Health Movement (Braine, 2023), our results show how accompaniment collectives also serve as communitarian feminist spaces (Cabnal, 2017) that promote psychopolitical wellbeing, a Global North concept that recognizes individual healing as inseparable from collective empowerment and structural transformation (Prilleltensky, 2003). Within these feminist ecosystems, *acompañantes* confront and release internalized stigma around abortion and sexuality, challenging heteropatriarchal impositions of maternity in pursuit of individual and collective liberation and wellbeing.

The many challenges abortion *acompañantes* face call for a reflection on the sustainability of the abortion accompaniment movement as well as broader movements for social justice. In social movement studies, personal and organizational sustainability refer to the conditions (social, economic, emotional, and contextual) that are needed to maintain a movement over time. Previous studies have found that features such as the willingness to take on social, emotional and legal risks, constant awareness of social problems that the state is not solving, and intensive time commitment, selflessness, and isolation from the 'outside' world, are also present in other movements' cultures and may be conditions for activist dropout and burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Cox, 2009; Cox, 2011). Despite evidence that providing practical abortion support may come with increased risks to activists' wellbeing (AAPAAS-CLACAI, 2021; Braine, 2023; Veldhuis et al., 2022), *acompañantes* in this study systematically focused on the many positive aspects that activism brings to their lives. The ways in which accompaniment collectives helped create a sense of community, collective identity, and personal and collective power among their *acompañantes* may hold lessons for other social movements, as well as for other health care sectors, particularly those that are underserved or staffed by low-paying or volunteer positions. However, *acompañantes* and their collectives continue to experience risks to their wellbeing and the sustainability of their movements brought on by unsupportive legal contexts and organizational cultures that rely too heavily on personal efforts. In a recent study, *acompañantes* highlighted self-care strategies such as political training, collective wellness activities, group evaluations, and dedicated reflection days (Atienzo et al., 2023). More research is needed to better understand how *acompañantes*' wellbeing can be supported and how these strategies can be effectively incorporated to improve the movement's sustainability.

This is the first study to document the lived experiences of abortion accompaniment activists using an arts-based approach, specifically the Creative Reflection Inquiry method, and with the participation of a large number of *acompañantes* from diverse collectives. Therefore, our results contribute new perspectives to the study of Latin American feminism and abortion activism, in a study that not only centers the voices of its protagonists but also included their meaningful participation along the way. The primary limitation of this study is its focus on a small number of collectives situated in contexts where the abortion accompaniment movement has a longer history and greater visibility. Further research is needed to understand how *acompañantes* experience their activism in

other contexts.

5. Conclusion

Community, empowerment and collective identity are among the most important features central to the experience of participating in accompaniment collectives and networks. These features bring *acompañantes* feelings of joy, pleasure, belonging and integrity, even while recognizing that their activism also comes with significant burdens like intensive time commitment and emotional labor.

This movement constitutes a discursive space of action where *acompañantes* develop feminist theory while practicing it in everyday life. Aside from the practical value of their feminist work—which enables abortion in the best conditions possible—another important contribution of the movement is how it develops a contra-hegemonic feminism that opposes (neo)liberal views of abortion, reproduction, and gendered bodies. By creating and sustaining abortion care infrastructures and defining them in ways that are deeply rooted in communitarian and other Latin American feminisms, these *acompañantes* are developing feminist theories and practices that have the potential to improve abortion care globally.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Sara Larrea: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Sofia Braunstein:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Project administration, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Leah Scott:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Project administration, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Chiara Bercu:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ruth Zurbriggen:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Milena Meza:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Sofia Garduño Huerta:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Verónica Cruz:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Alexandra Wollum:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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