



“Not to fix anything, but just to offer a millimetre of relief or breath or humour or companionship”

A collective document about caring for trans community

Collected by Tiffany Sostar following community conversations and consultations in 2022 and 2023.

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What is this document about?

This document is, at its heart, about caring for trans community. This care might take the form of quiet friendship, vocal advocacy, public support or private support. It might be as simple as using someone's pronouns or as involved as advocating for policy change. These actions of care might be understood as solidarity (though you'll find some reflection on the limits of this framing in this document). These actions of care might be understood as compassion, companionship, connection, as movements towards justice and liberation, as love. They might be personal and private or very public.

This document is about actions of care, whatever they are, however you understand them, towards and with and within trans community, by which we mean, the vast expanse of gender expression and identity that is not cisgender (cisgender is when the sex you were assigned at birth aligns with the gender you know yourself to be).

We are sending this document out into a world that is increasingly hostile to trans community, especially to trans youth, trans women, racialized trans people, and disabled trans people.

This hostility is not new, and no injustice exists in isolation. Hostility towards trans community has always impacted different groups in different ways at different times, and always intersects with other systems of power and control. Legal protections only go as far as other hostilities allow.

We hope that one action of care that extends from this document and these conversations is an interest in and invitation towards connecting with trans communities across difference, finding each other and caring together.

There are so many communities, including trans people who are racialized, who live in rural contexts, who are incarcerated, street involved, or otherwise disconnected from structural supports and "legitimate" trans identities and experiences. These are communities that governments fail to serve, and that have been left or pushed out of queer spaces.

In times like these, I think we can lose connection with the reality that trans folks and our allies have been supporting each other's mutual existence forever. And maybe it's hopeful to know that communities that have had less structural access have developed a richness of resources and conversations, skills and knowledges, networks of mutual aid and care to support one another in getting our needs met. There's possibility in connecting to and working to strengthen these mutual aid systems because maybe this loosens our attachment to institutions and strengthens our connections to each other.

I hope that disconnected communities will be motivated to repair or build connections, and allow us to orient ourselves towards the movement, honouring the work, knowledges, and lineages in these communities. I hope we can remember that our liberations are

collectively bound, and that this isn't the start of something new, but it is an opportunity for connection. – Aakhil

Trans community includes people from every community. Every community includes trans people.

This document is a collective action of care extended from everyone involved in this project to every trans person who may come across this document, and we hope that it invites you, beloved reader, whoever you are, to join us in caring and in being moved to action by that care.

“Bearing witness to how many people want to do right and want to make active change and be supportive, it does inspire hope.” – A contributor, about reading this document. We hope you feel the same.

A note on language and culture

Here on this continent [Australia] that has always been Indigenous, there are over 250 First Nations languages. And so, I think a lot about, you know, when taking on this role of educating or sharing with people about gender and sexuality diversity, I'm also thinking about how even the term "trans", and the term "queer", is still a very colonial way of understanding gender. And so there is something imperfect about it, particularly if I'm talking with folks where English is an additional language, and they may have their own cultural understandings around gender... I don't want to take an educational role, or I want to take a different positioning in how I am speaking with people about gender, because I don't want to be recolonizing, and I also don't want to be telling people about what's right and what's wrong, because that may completely discount their own cultural experiences and understandings. – Frankie

This document uses the term "trans" throughout. This is not because this is the right or best or only word to describe the communities we are hoping to be in solidarity with. These communities include transgender men and women, non-binary, two-spirit, intersex, agender, bigender, and gender diverse community members, as well as community members who use words to describe themselves that we have not listed here.

What this document means when it says "trans" is any person, *any person*, who knows or feels or wonders if they are outside the cisgender, binary norm. One participant described the "vast expanse of the in-between spaces" and the experience of "walking through a doorway." On one side of that doorway is the dominant idea that says you're a woman if you're born with certain visible sex characteristics, and a man if you're born with others. And on the other? Possibilities beyond imagining.

This is imperfect and imprecise language. It is colonial language, and the use of "trans" invokes the gender binary, which is a colonial construct and does not exist in the same way in many non-colonized cultures.

"Trans is a very colonial concept ... but it is a place-keeping word. And I want to know all of the different words my ancestors used to venerate and celebrate their two-spirit kin." – Kay

Why are we here?

You've come to this document for your own reasons.

Maybe you are a trans person wanting to know that people care about people like you. We hope you find some evidence of care in these words!

Maybe you are wanting to know that you're not the only one who cares. We hope you find a sense of community and a connection to a lot of people who are caring and acting on that care, in a lot of different ways and for a lot of different reasons.

Maybe you want to know what kinds of care are possible, what actions you might take. Maybe you're witnessing the escalation of hostility towards trans community, and you want to be part of resisting that rising tide of harm. We hope you find some inspiration here, and that you know, more than anything, that it is about doing what is possible, and that this can be so many different things.

We hope you will join us in "doing something, not to fix anything, but just to offer a millimetre of relief or breath or humour or companionship," as one participant put it. It is not on any single set of shoulders to fix this mess, to be the hero or the saviour (and actually, as we hope you'll see in these pages, this is not even a preferable goal!). But we can show up in our own ways. We can do what is available to us. We can be in our relationships. We can love. And we hope that you will join us in that.

Maybe you want to know why we, the many people who contributed to this document, are here. Here are some of our reasons.

In honour of cherished people who are no longer living

This project took a winding path in its creation, and along the way, we lost some beloved trans community members. People who we love. Who we cherish.

Keeping these cherished people present in our lives and in our relationships and actions feels important.

I think about how for trans people, much like disabled people, our movement is built of our living and dead, you know, in a more present measure. It's not that the dead don't come to play in other movements. It's that in our communities, we have to think about death in a different and more present way. And, when I think of The Movement (singular), as being comprised actually in much larger proportion by a living dead, and animated by a living dead, then I feel more in right relation to it. Like, if I don't think of it that way, I think I'm not doing enough, I'll never do enough, I have too much. I get in that vortex of 'it's all impossible, plus the planet is dying.' But when I keep death at the centre, then it's like, 'okay, this, this is the way that I can inhabit the movement in my tiny, tiny way, in my little body with my resources.' It allows me to just be in the now of what I can do. We can consider being a single leaf in autumn, or being a single drop of water in an ocean. We can consider ourselves to be important and a part, and simultaneously not all that necessary, in that The Movement has always been and will always be. – Nathan

Bekett Noble

Bekett cared deeply about queer and trans community and advocated for inclusive spaces and supports, especially within their faith community.

In November 2022 Bekett died. And part of the context that contributed to their decision not to go on living was that there were a lot of spaces where they were not seen or acknowledged. Their pronouns weren't used. Their name wasn't used.

Their decision was, in part, an action of hope that things would change as a result of their choice – that it would push people to do better in caring for trans people. This happened three days after the shooting in Colorado at a gay nightclub, and at a time when we have more and more vocal anti-trans statements being made by people with power and platforms.

Elliot and Tiffany spent some time talking about how visible some of the mistreatment of trans folks is, how easy it is to see the spaces where we are being misgendered, spoken about in degrading and dehumanizing ways, where we are encountering hostility and harm. We wanted to find a way to make it visible that there are people who do care and who are trying to use our names, to use our pronouns, to stand with us. We also wanted to honour Bekett's deep care for trans community, and to create a collection of work in their honour, that responded to the contexts that were important to them. This is the first piece in that collection of work, and we hope that it extends their legacy of caring for their community and acting on that care.

Their Catholic faith was a very important focal point of their life. That's the number one important thing that needs to be included about them, is their strong relationship with their faith.

And also, who they were as an individual, which was one of the ballsiest mother*ckers I've ever met. And that's the reason why I fell in love with them.

Before we met, they were dating my ex, and working at Starbucks. One day I walked in, and I'd never met Bekett before. I order my drink, and I say my name is Elliot. And I go down to the other side of the bar to wait. All of a sudden, my drink is slammed on to the counter, and I turn and I see this stunning individual with fire-engine red hair, shocking blue eyes and the look of "I will end you" on their face. I grabbed my coffee, and I thought, well that's interesting, because I don't know you, so you have zero reason to treat me like that. So, I turned to Bekett and said, "Well, that's an interesting response to have to somebody you don't know."

Bekett's like, "I've heard enough."

I said, "I'll tell you what. What time are you off work? I live 5 minutes down the road. When you're done work, come to my house, and hang out with me, and you tell me after hanging out with me for half an hour if I'm that much of a jerk."

Bekett said, "Fine, I'll be there."

And at 8:15 that night I heard a knock on my front door, because that mother*cker had the balls to show up to a complete stranger's house, to check out the story to see if I really was a jerk or not.

Bekett and I became best friends in the matter of about an hour and a half. Because who the f*ck walks up to my house and actually does that?

To have that kind of audacity, the sheer force of will... I looked at them through my front door and I thought, that's it, I'm gonna love you. And that's it! That's how it started! We became best friends. We became siblings.

And that's just the way that they were. For all the shame they carried, they had such pride in who they were. They were just so stalwart in their desire to pursue the things they wanted to do, regardless of what was being told to them about doing it. And I think it's just a really resoundingly beautiful thing, that no matter what, who they were pre-transition was the same person they were at my wedding, was the same person they were at their death.

Just iconically Bekett, from day one until the last day.

Everyday I try to make active changes in my life that positively impact the community that I'm a part of and other communities that I'm not a part of, you know? And when I think about remembering Bekett, I think about remembering the impact of what their final hours were, final months and years, and thinking of how to do my best to help that be prevented for other people, you know? And for myself. – Elliot

Theodosia Markarian

Theda also cared deeply about queer and trans community, and was, as Nathan names her, a *living generosity*. Theda died in April 2023, and the collection of work that begins with this project has been extended to include her legacy, too.

My role has always been to be her mother and that will never end. I just find ways to do it differently now. I will be trying to make those babkas this year. I will continue to support her and her community, and I will continue to model to the world how I want her to be treated.
– Mary



Theda would make [a chocolate babka] every year at Christmas. She would actually make one chocolate version and one cinnamon/brown sugar version, based on a recipe from one of her favourite chefs, Yotam Ottolenghi. People in our family fought over them, they were so delicious. – Mary
(Theda's babka recipe is from Yotam Ottolenghi's *Jerusalem: A Cookbook*.)

[I used to do this for] the collection of us. But for the last several months, in thinking about Theda specifically and in trying to mobilize my resources and access to immense privilege that she did not have... in order to bring about into the world something of a world in which she might have been able to remain living with any amount of dignity. And also to, in some ways, try to do that in what I imagine to be her ways. If I were to reduce her ways to being a kind of way, I would say that she was and remains a living generosity, that the most well developed procedural tendency she had, and in that way continues to have... her response to pain was always in that ride-along way, like "here is a cake I baked, and yes, let's do this thing, and also let me affirm, and..." you know? – Nathan

HER RESPONSE TO PAIN WAS ALWAYS IN THAT
RIDE-ALONG WAY, LIKE "HERE IS A CAKE I
BAKED, AND YES, LET'S DO THIS THING, AND
ALSO LET ME AFFIRM, AND..."



If you, or a friend, are having a hard time, here is a cake from Theda (original recipe from *Wild Sweetness* by Thalia Ho).

Nathan says, "It is a delicious cake. It is the best cake I have ever had. And it's so easy to make. And also, it's such an interesting cake, because you make it in a way that is not conventional for cake making."

Chamomile tea cake

Ingredients

For the Cake

½ cup + 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened at room temperature, plus extra for greasing the pan
1½ cups all-purpose flour
¼ cups white spelt flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons chamomile tea
¾ cup + 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Zest of an orange

½ cup + 1 tablespoon sour cream

For the Frosting

½ cup unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
1 cup icing sugar
3 tablespoons honey
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
A pinch of salt
½ cup mascarpone, at room temperature

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 180° C (350° F). Grease and line a 21 x 11 x 7 cm (8 x 4 x 3 inch) loaf pan with parchment paper, leaving a slight overhang on both sides.
2. To make the cake, whisk together the flour, baking soda, salt, and chamomile tea.
3. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter and granulated sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes. Pause to scrape down the bottom and side of the bowl. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well to incorporate each addition, then beat in the vanilla and orange zest. Set the speed to low. Beat in half the dry ingredients, followed by all the sour cream, then beat in the remaining dry ingredients until aerated. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan.
4. Bake for 45 to 55 minutes, until golden brown. A skewer inserted into the middle should come out clean. Let cool in the pan for 15 minutes before lifting it out and onto a wire rack to cool completely before frosting.
5. To make the frosting, put the butter, icing sugar, honey, vanilla, and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment.
6. Beat on medium speed until creamy, then add the mascarpone and beat until fluffy. Slather the frosting over the cake then serve soon after.

In honour of specific friends, family, and community

Some of us are here on behalf of particular people, or on behalf of a wider community that we care about. For family members (especially for children who are trans or non-binary within our families), or for the family members of friends, or for community members we care about.

I wanted to find a way to make it visible that there are people that do care. I think there needs to be protesting and there needs to be resistance to harm. And I also think we need some spaces where we can see the care that's also happening. I'm here for Bekett and also Elliot and for Theda. And the rest of my trans community. I want to make something that shows the care and the fact that there are people putting effort into being with us. – Tiffany

A close friend of mine has been an inspiration in making efforts to properly gender people, but since learning more, I try to make an effort for every person who has ever been misgendered, bullied because of their sexual orientation or who have been afraid to express themselves as the gender they are. - Allie

The people I have worked with in the past, my non-binary and trans colleagues, and the cis allies who have shown me how to stand for justice alongside our loved ones. – Charlotte

My boys both have long hair and are often misgendered (10+ years now). Then about 3 years ago my sister came out as transgender. Also, my oldest child is non-binary, my youngest has Turner syndrome, which is considered an intersex disorder. Most of them present as female, but there are a lot of feelings of inadequacy/not being feminine enough in the adult community. It feels really important that people respect what they tell you their gender is rather than what their DNA says. –

Anonymous

I guess I would call him...like, he's a queer platonic partner, who is ace and aro, who feels very ostracized from the queer community in general. Since he came into my life and we talked about this, that has changed my view of solidarity. – Samantha

I hope Theda knew that... it was important to me to get it right for her. I carried my pride in her forward to advocating for getting it right for everyone. – Mary

Because we are also part of the community

Many of the participants in this project are trans, non-binary, or two-spirit ourselves. We are here, in this project and caring for trans community, because we matter, too. We are part of this.

For myself; and for every queer and trans person I have ever loved, known, or not been lucky enough to know. – Sam

[I am here for] the Kay that just wanted to wrestle with their uncle and was told that they weren't allowed to. When I was told that I needed to put on a shirt to play football with the boys in my neighbourhood. I wanted my hair short constantly, [but] my mom would force me to grow my hair long... and me in high school too, because I was so fearful, and rightfully so. And then also... the drunk me, the me that uses and is not sober, because that me was holding all of those mes, clutching them tightly and hiding them. Those are all the different mes that I am doing this with, and on behalf of. – Kay

Because it makes a difference

Some of us are here because it aligns with our values and connects us to larger questions of justice and care.

I think for me, it's important because I do believe there's a direct connection to harm, and that when we stand up, when we are active allies or participants for communities, it does make a difference. I think it's important for supportive voices to be heard. And for the spiral not to continue, because an act of misgendering can be seen by itself, but really, it's part of a much bigger cycle. – Maile

I didn't have one specific person, but it just felt like the right conversation to be a part of right now. Resisting violence and hostility, and the way that it's really all connected to so much other violence and hostility feels important. And the emergent strategy idea that "small is all", you know, this conversation can have ripples. – Lindsey

I think just in my personal relationships, whether it's close family or friends or people I meet, or folks that I work with, I just want to continually be working towards being a safe person and a safe space. I have messed up before and witnessed the harm and don't want to repeat it. I feel like identity goes to the very core of who we are, and I never want to underestimate just how important it is that we matter and our identities matter to those around us. – Lori

What is this document not about?

There is a performative piece for me sometimes. I wanna follow all the rules, and I don't wanna get it wrong, 'cause that feels really scary, and I don't wanna cause more harm. [Sometimes] I'm more focused on the checklist rather than the relationship and the people that I'm trying to support. – Anonymous

In creating this document, I [Tiffany] felt an urge to “focus on the checklist rather than the relationships” and one version of this document pulled in a lot of content from outside the conversations in the project. As the document came together, the gaps in representation became more obvious. This is an intersectional feminist project that attempts to address multiple intersections of social location. This intention sits alongside the fact that this document does not check every box. It does not reflect every intersection of identity. And in the final version of this document, I have kept most of the content to what was shared in the conversations and responses. This does not mean that those missing intersections aren't important. They are! They are critical.

I hope that this is a living document, with the potential to grow and change in response to the conversations that go forward from it. If you see a gap and you want to add a story of care into this gap, please get in touch!

What's next?

We hope that this will be a living document, with future editions that reflect the community of people who have read and engaged with these stories and shared their own stories in response.

We would love to hear from you, and we particularly hope that the next edition of this document will include art. You can get in touch with us at trans-lives@proton.me.

Stories of care

Stories of supportive elders

“Rather than a swear jar, it was a validate Elliot jar.”

My dad's side of the family when I first came out... I mean, they knew me as a woman until I was about 26 years old, and I went over. I'd come out to them by then, but they hadn't seen me, 'cause I was living in Calgary and my family lives in Ontario. We did a big dinner, my grandma did a big dinner, and everyone kept using she/her pronouns, which like, you have to be patient at the same time, people are learning, you know what I mean? But it still sucks.

My grandma would've been about, geez, probably 76 or 77 at that point, and she was like, “Well, that's enough. That's it.” She went to her kitchen and grabbed a mason jar, some sort of a swear jar. She said, “Every time somebody misgenders Elliot, or calls Elliot by the wrong name, you have to put a dollar or toonie inside of it.”

So all of my uncles were like, “Well, I don't wanna [mess] this up,” so they just put a \$100 bill in right away. They were like, “I'm gonna do my best, but I don't want a refund. Just know that I'm gonna screw this up.” So all night long, people'd be like, “Ohh!” from across the room. And it ended up being, it was actually pretty funny in the end, like that's a personal thing.

My family was fully supportive. It was just the first time that all of the Trimbles had been in one room together and to my face. It's one thing to type it over text, because you can correct that, but when it's triggered by memory, I think it's a little bit more challenging, and when you've got that person in front of you.

It never happens now, but this would've been over 10 years ago that it happened, and I just thought it was funny in a positive way too, because everyone was showing like, they're gonna get this right, but they know they're gonna screw it up, so you know. Everyone was like, rather than putting a toonie in every time it happened – not that they even needed \$100 – by the end of the night, everyone was doing okay, it was just a gesture, but I thought it was pretty funny.

Rather than a swear jar, it was a validate Elliot jar. [laughs]” – Elliot

“I don't care, let them be mad at me.”

Bernice Laurel Nelson (née Bancroft) had some struggles with knowing that a bunch of her descendants were non-straight and trans. (Unsurprising given that she had nearly 50 living descendants when she died in 2021.) I don't think she was a perfect ally, a long-time member of the queer-antagonistic LDS¹ church, but I'm not going to speculate what her real opinions were about queer identity, because I was nonetheless impressed and inspired by her zeal for supporting and loving her grandchildren.

My grandma took an interest in making me feel loved and supported, in a way I rarely got from any of my other family members. One of my favourite memories of her is from a few years after I came out as non-binary to my family. I was at her house for our family Christmas party, and presenting very feminine and visibly queer. It was something I was nervous about that day. My grandmother came up to me and said with a shimmering smile, “Well hello, my beautiful Grandson.”

Despite her getting it wrong, as I was no longer her grandson, I could see that she was truly happy to see me there, living openly and honestly, and I felt seen. My grandma thought I was beautiful, which is pretty much exactly what I wanted to hear, and it didn't matter to me that she couldn't quite understand that I was no longer her grandson. Of course, part of why it's a favourite memory for me is that it's funny how she could get it so wrong while genuinely trying to get it right. (And she eventually learned to get it right.)

A few years later, in 2018, my grandma showed herself to be a genuinely strong, bold ally when she agreed to help me contribute a story of mine to her family newsletter. For many years my grandma published a newsletter to a growing email list: all my aunts, uncles, and cousins, but many extended family members I didn't even know were on there. She wrote the emails monthly and was dedicated to sharing stories from the family, and making sure everyone knew of upcoming birthdays.

In 2018 I had a story I thought was more than worthy of sharing in her newsletters. I got invited to travel to Edmonton to help the Alberta government announce x-markers on IDs. I was basically one of the queer props for the announcement, I got to make a speech in front of news cameras, and I was very proud and excited about my advocacy work. I was nervous about including a queer success story like that in my family newsletter, knowing the recipients would have various opinions about it, but when I spoke to my grandma about it, she said “I know that I'm going to get a few people emailing me back, angry that I would include your story in the email. **I don't care, let them be mad at me.**”

So often, people will be only fairweather allies, willing to have our back only when they don't think they'll face much pushback. I'm forever grateful that my grandmother was willing to put herself on the line to help me share my story with my family. – Quinn

¹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is also known as the Mormon church.

"I've had 66 years of learning to unlearn"

I screw up pronouns all the time. One of my biggest difficulties is when I'm talking about [my non-binary child], and I'm working on it, with people of my generation and older, where it's not common to them, to refer to someone in a plural when you're talking about one person, I feel can confuse them. So a lot of times now, I just try to say "my oldest child", "my oldest", "my youngest", and not try and put any gender into it, but still let the other person know that this is my child. So I'm working on it, but it's slow. I mean, I've had 66 years of learning to unlearn, and adjust. – Sue

Q: I was just wondering, why do you keep trying?

A: Because you're my child, and I respect you as a person, and I love you, and it means a lot to you, that you are seen for who you are.

[She] helped me white-knuckle my way through family gatherings

My sister passed away in August, and one of the things that she did for me was she, upon learning about my identity, committed to using my pronouns and my name, and getting it right... When she committed to something, she committed to something, and it was something that grounded me and helped me white-knuckle my way through family gatherings. She's amazing, and I miss her. And when she died, I scream-cried, because I was afraid that no one would ever use my name again in my family...

And after Stacia died, I realized that I wanted to honour her by being brave the same way that she gathered all of her courage and faced down pain that I have never known and tried different therapies. I wanted to embody that bravery and let my family know that my name is Kay. I told them, and they use it.

My baba, who is almost 90 years old, wrote my name on my birthday card and also included my legal name on the cheque for her birthday money that she so generously shared with me. So she knows that I inhabit and have many names and it's hard to describe the amount of expansive joy.

I feel exultant that I was able to do that for myself and show up for myself in that way. So yeah, that was a really incredible moment with my baba. She was very confused, but she also said that she didn't need to understand. That was amazing. – Kay

"...how much more grandmothers could be involved in speaking out to the love they hold for their trans grandchild."

I had a very close and loving relationship with my mother-in-law, Mary ... she was quite religious and had some of the attitudes of her generation, but when the first of her grandchildren came out as lesbian, Mary had a bit of a cry but then took on homophobia in the broader family and her larger networks. She was a bit of a warrior really.

Speaking of the influences of grandmothers, in one of the big demonstrations against Australia's invasion of Iraq, Mary joined us in the march ... Young people would come up to her and say how lovely it was to see an older woman (I guess she was in her 80s by then), and ask her her thoughts ... she'd never had much opportunity for education but was the dearest of people ... She'd answer saying something like, "I don't understand all the arguments, Love, but I do know I've seen too many young men march off to war and not come back, and we need to stop this." It was so apolitical but heartfelt, and people just loved her.

On a colourful note, we were all in trepidation when facing the one-year anniversary of her eldest son's death, and it turned out to be her granddaughter's roller derby debut that evening, so we all went. Mary had a walker thing that turned into a seat, she was in her 90s by then, and she held up a sign that said "Skate or Die"! I could try to find you a photo. Roller derby was newer then in Adelaide and it was quite astonishing to see so many of these wonderfully strong, tough, fierce young women, in their outfits, gather and sit at Mary's feet, wishing they had a grandmother who could accept them.

[Elliot's] story inspired me to think how much more grandmothers could be involved in speaking out to the love they hold for their trans grandchild. – Beth

Stories of supportive community

I remember I was at a restaurant with my mom, my grandma, my sister, and an aunt. And the server, every time they came to the table, said “Hey ladies”, “What can I get you, ladies?” It happened about, well, honestly it felt like it happened at least twenty times. And my sister looked over at me and saw my face and then she pretended to go to the bathroom and found the server, away from our table and said “Hey, my sibling actually uses they/them pronouns. Could you not call us a table of ladies anymore?” And the server didn't. They stopped. And so that was two really meaningful actions on the part of my sister doing that for me, and the server being willing to hear that and respond in such an accepting way, and not make a big deal out of it. 'Cause I wouldn't have said anything. – Tiffany

So there's been this recent kind of community group of allies or accomplices who are called Rainbow Community Angels², who have been turning up to our local libraries when the drag time stories have been targeted by Nazis, and some of the work that they've been doing – I mean, we talk about fun – they come dressed in rainbows with huge angel wings, and they dance to disco music at the front, you know? That form of being an accomplice, is like, how can I be useful to you right now? What's gonna put you in less danger? What's gonna be a distraction, so you can do the work that you need to do? How can I tend to the Nazis so that you can do the work that you need to do? [laughs] 'Cause I'm more safe to kind of dance on the ball right now to be a distraction. I think those are really great, and that's not possible for all of us, but I think that I've been really interested in watching how these Rainbow Community Angels have been turning up to different events and taking this really beautiful, very localized approach. And very based on what the community needs, and relational. – Frankie

One really important action is just making it visible that you know trans people exist, you believe that they are real... because I think there is a way that these rising discourses of hostility assume that anyone is a default supporter of the gender binary, until proven otherwise. So one way of being in solidarity with the community is talking about people in respectful ways, bringing trans folks into the conversation as a real and valid and cherished thing. It does put a bit of a target on you for people to be angry about it, but that's often safer for someone who is not in the community, or for me as a white, non-binary person, I have a lot more safety in some spaces than a racialized person who is facing interlocking experiences. – Anonymous

Y'know, prior to transition one of my anxieties was around taking on a lesbian identity. Can I possibly do that or is it like... “invading women's spaces” like the TERFs say. Having every cis lesbian I have met since coming out be fiercely protective of me has been a blessed relief. – Bree (on social media)

² <https://www.rainbowcommunityangels.org.au/>

I went to go see a friend in Toronto, their name is Osden. A very dear friend of mine. I asked them, like, "Do you think I could be non-binary or trans?" And they were like, "Hell, yeah! [laughs] Does it feel right? Yes! You are how you feel. Trust yourself and lean into it." And so when I came home, I told my now spouse, Brandon, that I wanted to use they/them pronouns and that I am non-binary. And I'll never forget the way it felt when I heard him use my pronouns on the phone. He was calling a taxi cab, it was just the most banal thing, but I don't know... I'll never forget that it was a taxi cab call, because it was one of the most powerful witnessing moments that I've experienced in my two-spirit identity and in my transness. – Kay

My child tells me that I help them feel included and like they belong, and I imagine that is what these acts [of using people's names and pronouns] do for a lot of people. Most people tell me they feel seen when someone uses the pronouns and name that align with their gender identity. For me I just feel aligned with my values and that feels good. – Courtney

I know that [using her name and pronouns] makes my sister feel more like her true self. – Anonymous

Avoiding misgendering is about so much more than "not hurting someone's feelings" in an individual moment. It's something that creates safer spaces, healthier relationships, and a more honest understanding of an individual; and it's also something that supports values of autonomy, self-determination, honesty, vulnerability, accountability, and more. – Sam

I think that [paying attention to gender and pronouns] has made me far more aware of the assumptions that I have made and that a lot of people make about gender. I hope that folks feel more at ease around me. – Agnieszka

DOES IT FEEL RIGHT? YES! YOU ARE HOW YOU
FEEL. TRUST YOURSELF AND LEAN INTO IT.



Reflection: What helps you take action?

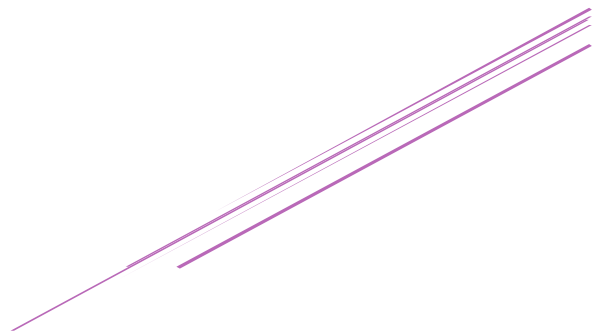
One of the goals of this project was to invite readers to take action with us, to join us in acting on care for trans community. We wanted to make visible the actions of care that people are taking with and for trans community, and the effects of these actions, but we also want to extend the community of care, to make our connections stronger and brighter. So, we are curious about your relationship with actions for care. We wonder:

- What are some actions of care that you have taken with and for trans community?
- How did you learn to take these actions?
- Who knows that you have taken these actions?
- What difference have these actions made in your life or the lives of others?
- What helps you to take these actions?

It is helpful for us to know that you are out there, also caring.

We also wonder, has it made a difference to you to read our stories?

IT IS HELPFUL FOR US TO KNOW THAT YOU ARE
OUT THERE, ALSO CARING.



It feels like maybe grace is a mandatory precursor for trans people to being able to access this type of imperfect support and something that is demanded, stolen, presumed and bleeding out from me and trans people so much because this Grace goes so unnamed in the world as it stands. – Aakhil

Stories of care that might “ease the weight”

Some of the early responses to this document highlighted how complex it can be to receive care, how tiring it can be to be so frequently misunderstood, misgendered, to be treated as too confusing or too demanding. We added this section to honour and dignify the weight of this, and to think about ways that we might respond, and what might be useful when the weight gets to be too much.

Theda had a tough time at her workplace when she transitioned. They were horrible, using her deadname, misgendering her regularly, other aggressions and put downs. I described this as “her pockets being filled with rocks” by the constant mistreatment. We would talk almost every day, and I would listen and try to support her, and we would sometimes do things together to “take some of the rocks out of her pockets”, to distract and comfort, to support, to validate her, to undo some of the weighing down from all those rocks. – Mary

Something that helps to ease the weight a bit is just having a gentle presence around who uses the pronouns that feel good for me. For example, in my biological family, my brother is always using they/them for me. This being seen and respected happens alongside other who are constantly “she-ing” me. Knowing that my brother is there, and kind of holding this with me, that I don't have to be in this experience alone, makes a real difference. And there's something else that I've been reflecting on since I read this beautiful collective document. I was very honoured to learn about Theda through the rich stories told about her through Mary, and with the recipes shared. After our meeting, I studied the chamomile tea cake, and felt so much warmth knowing that this was something she made for others with love. That evening, I baked this cake for a friend of mine who is trans, for whom, like many of us, life has not been easy. I felt very part of a trans web of care in that moment, across thresholds of continents, and between the living and the dead. So maybe a spiritual connection with other trans people, that is what eases the burden of these rocks. That there's probably another trans person somewhere in the world also feeling this weight, and that we don't have to be alone in our experience, and that this company can help us keep going. – Frankie

To me, support is having the conversations I'm too tired to have... I think people don't realize or think about the fact that I have had the same conversations 100s of times and that it gets old for them to be centring their experience of struggling to get my pronouns right, instead of centring my experience of being gendered correctly. - Aakhil

Stories of care in specific contexts

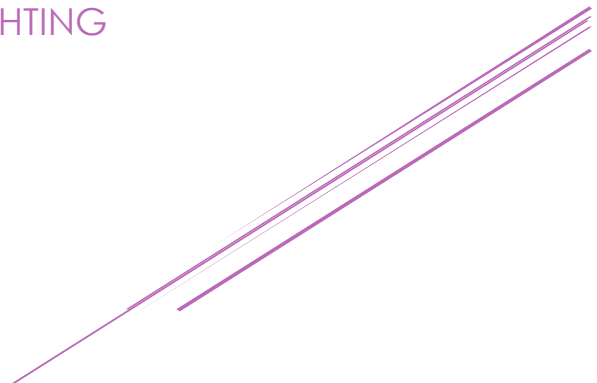
We each take action within our specific context, and those contexts make different actions more or less possible. Here are some context-specific stories of care.

Academic contexts

One goal that I have, is thinking about pathways to being able to express one's thoughts and ideas, to inhabit one's projects in academic spaces, in ways that are academically validated for folks who haven't met all the academic prerequisites, like the traditional academic prerequisites. And how we might consider on-ramps to networks, to resource bubbles of opportunity and community, that are plentiful in university contexts, but not accessible. And not even accessible to many students who are attending these universities, but certainly not accessible to folks who, for many, unfortunate, and actually, not just unfortunate but by design, specifically by design, are systemed out of access points.

I got this language from Danielle [Peers], who got it from a very famous Indigenous legal activist, Cindy Blackstock. It's the idea that in movement work, you do upstream work, which is like working on eroding institutional norms, and then downstream work, which is working on opportunities and community. And how one of them is with the flow of the river, and one of them is against the flow of the river, and how for her, she talks about how it's very important to find the right balance, because very easily, all of your resources can be co-opted into paddling upstream. And that is a real specific danger, by design, again. If all of your attention can go there, then you can get burned out as an individual, and that will nullify the power that you have. And so if some of your attention can turn downstream and be in the witness of community – not witness but *witness* – sharing a resource, and then there's more people turning upstream. So that academic piece is a bit upstream institutionally, but it's in this nice balanced space for me of being both, because I can do the things I care about with folks who need the work, because I also need the work. I also need it. And then together we can at least rival the threadbare place of being the individual fighting the system. – Nathan

TOGETHER WE CAN RIVAL THE THREADBARE
PLACE OF BEING THE INDIVIDUAL FIGHTING
THE SYSTEM.



Birth work contexts

I've been doing a lot of thinking and work in birth spaces around language, and there's a huge amount of backlash within maternity services against linguistic inclusion of trans and non-binary people. It's so pronounced to me how much this is an expression of lateral violence and patriarchy just massively winning, when women and trans people are pitted against each other. To me, the notion that trans rights and women's rights are mutually exclusive is just bizarre nonsense. And I think that watching that play out in a lot of birth-related spaces, the pregnancy and new parent related spaces, I just really see the silencing effect of people actively speaking out against inclusive language, in a space where already, there is absolutely no queer or trans visibility, and that's oppressing everyone. I witness so many straight mum friends being harmed by these same forces of biological essentialism and aggressive binary gendering, and being left to do all of the domestic labour and it's like, um, let's join some dots. – Zan

Care provider contexts

Often, in my [context] the conversation is much bigger than “What are your pronouns?” It is “What pronouns do you want to use when it is just you and me? What pronouns do you want me to use when we talk to your provider? What pronouns do you want me to use when your family is involved in a conversation with your provider?” Names also change. Some nicknames need to be earned through relationship. Some names associated with different genders need to be earned through trust and building safety. Often the conversation is not just “What are your pronouns?” but “Where are we in our relationship? How do you want me to honour your name/pronoun/gender in our relationship when we are working with other relationships too?”

[And also] it is so hurtful (and deadly) to call pronouns “a game.” Locally there have been some leaders who refuse to share their pronouns or use correct pronouns by calling it “a game they refuse to play.” I think this leads to so much isolation and fear, especially for young folks. Politics in the US are scary right now for trans/queer folks too and every bit of stand for safety is important.

I work for a huge health insurance company and I believe it really makes a difference for this company to have policy and culture around pronoun use. We have the ability to set an example. We are tied to federal money and policy that we can't change, but we can create an environment that others can model. It means so much to me when folks tell me this is the first place they have worked where they can use their correct name/gender/pronoun. – Charlotte

Clients in one-on-one sessions don't often hear me refer to them by third person pronouns or their name so it is not usually until we invite someone else in that they experience me actively gendering/referring to them in the ways they have requested (some who are not yet out request I use pronouns/name that are not necessarily preferred but what they are using with parents). I usually check in about

this and the effects of hearing me use the name/pronouns I was using. Clients have expressed appreciation for me centring their choice in those moments. - Courtney

Substance use contexts

Well, first things first: I offer a complete acceptance of whoever reads this and needs this. I see you and want to tell you that your experiences and relationships with substance are valid. You do not deserve any judgement or disparagement that might come into your life (sometimes in very unexpected and disheartening ways).

My relationship with Substances is a tricky one. I started using when I was young, and it lines up perfectly with when I was starting to feel a discomfiting tension between my Self (my spirit, identities and body), how the world perceived my gender, and how I was treated (by myself and others) as a result of the societal clusterfuck known as the [white-supremacist, fatphobic, ableist, heteronormative, saneist] gender binary.

I liked the way most substances quieted the constant stream of anxious, critical thoughts racing through my head. Substances were a primary relationship of (self)care, a welcoming and warm group of friends. A lot of my self-directed judgemental thoughts drifted away and that feeling of tension dissipated when I used, and for a long while, that is how I survived. As time went on, I began to outgrow my old friendships with Substance.

In my case, engaging with Substance has gone "sideways" before: in one instance, I mixed contraindicated substances, the resulting combination affected me poorly, and I went into "psychosis." Several contextual factors resulted in my detention, which included isolation and physical restraint. Detention can be very unpleasant, terrifying. I say that as a white, mentally ill, transgender, neurospicy Indigenous Creature³. If I had called a trained support person or made a consent-based plan with a loved one, things could have gone in a preferable direction.

When my pal picked me up after I was released, they didn't ask a single question other than "Would you like something to eat?" That was such a loving gesture!

After that I started to call my husband instead. We developed the kind of relationship where sometimes he would sit on the other side of the door or accompany me out while I did what I had to do. He was supportive when I was actively using, and he is very supportive of my ongoing sobriety adventure as well. His witnessing saved my life. I almost didn't make it.

Several years after that, I chose to end my 15-year relationship with Substance in 2019. It was a hard road getting to "my sobriety." I stopped drinking, then I quit using, and then a couple years later, I found a structured plan/program for recovery. After I quit using, I was shocked when those parts of myself that I had tucked away in order

³ It is important to me to share the intersecting planes of my identity and privilege, and my entire experience would've been different if my privilege of whiteness hadn't protected me.

to survive slowly started to grow! I planted those seeds deep, protecting parts of me beneath rich soil, and when the time was right, I began to bloom.⁴

Sometimes all it takes is one person seeing you, hearing you, and loving you in all of your humanness, to survive.

Everybody deserves to live their life in the way that they want. If anyone reading this feels a resonance, a vibration, that's me, in the TransgenderTransformationalTransdimension. – Kay

A NOTE FROM KAY ON HARM REDUCTION

Harm reduction for those of us who use substances has to be “grassroots” at this point, organized by folks who use and allied kin, folks who have experience in harm reduction, people resonating with substance use on a non-judgemental frequency. Grassroots because we have seen the way politicians push and declare the “war on drugs.” The number of drug poisoning fatalities is astronomical, and every single one of those deaths could've been prevented.

Politicians and policy makers often don't want to change the status quo or pay attention to what we actually want: Decriminalize substances and substance use, decriminalize sex work, stop destroying our communities (encampment “raids”) and build dedicated community centers for support.

We will continue to resist these injustices and dehumanizing narratives foisted upon ourselves and kin. Kin whose stories are being silenced and discarded, whose lives are stolen because of drug poisoning. Give us safe spaces to use, allow us access to a consistent, safe supply, and celebrate our dignity.

We all deserve those things, regardless of whether we use, and of what we use.

⁴ It is important to state that this is MY experience with gender identity, substance use, and sobriety. There are countless people out there who can (and do) use in their preferred ways, reaching preferred outcomes, an example of this could be experiencing gender euphoria while high.

Actions of care within colonialism

A conversation with Heather Morigeau and Michelle Robinson

It is important to know that in North America, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and other Indigenous communities sometimes use the term “two-spirit” to describe non-colonial sexualities and genders. Specific Indigenous communities have their own terms and definitions for genders and sexualities that pre-date the colonial imposition of the heteronormative cisgender binary.

Heather Morigeau is a two-spirit, Indigenous artist. Their heritage is Cree, Red River Métis, Ktunaxa Nation, as well as French, Celtic and German settler.

Michelle Robinson is a Sahtu Dene mother, wife, activist, political organizer, and has “Indian Status” imposed by the Canadian Government. She has a two-spirit child and trans family members.

This interview has been edited.

Tiffany: Thank you both for speaking with me. If I look in the Calls for Justice⁵, “trans” is referenced 52 times in that document. To me, that is a practice of solidarity and care that’s being extended from Indigenous community to include all trans folks. And so in this conversation, I would like to, if we can, articulate some of what can be shared back, how we can take actions of care in ways that are anti-colonial, and why that matters.

Michelle: So, as a cis person, as an Indigenous woman, obviously I focus on those Calls to Justice that are very specific to the queer community. One of the signs that I’ve seen going around recently that I love is “two-spirit were here first.” And I think that the most important concept to really understand is that we already had these languages and understandings and roles for folks who identify in colonial terms as trans. So, from my point of view, we have to work harder at understanding colonialism and how that gendered violence, that misogyny, was imposed here. The straight agenda, I call it. Because there was no straight agenda prior to colonialism. And, you know, even two-spirit is a constructed English term to help the non-Indigenous... And it’s not necessarily reflective of just sexuality. It’s so much bigger than that. I just wish people understood

⁵ In so-called Canada, the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls provided a list of 231 Calls for Justice. Trans inclusion is woven throughout the document. If these Calls for Justice were implemented, not only would this be an act of care towards Indigenous communities, but it would be a significant step towards care for all trans, non-binary, intersex, gender creative, two-spirit, and other marginalized genders. You can read the Final Report here - <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/> and see a PDF of the 231 Calls for Justice here - https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls_for_Justice.pdf

the gravity of that. I just think it's really important to acknowledge that two-spirit, Indigenous trans, Indigenous lesbians, Indigenous bisexuals, Indigenous gays, they were always here. They've never not been here. And it was only colonialism that tried to erase that.

Heather: Michelle made an important reference to, you know, we've always been here. What occurs to me is we're reclaiming that existence.

So, the Roman Catholic Church knew that it is easier to control two genders and one sexuality than it is to control the multitudes, right? And so imposing that on cultures around the world that were diverse and inclusive and welcoming was a very clever control tactic. And it worked to dismantle a lot of the knowing and connections that we, I myself, have about two-spirit identities. So there's a lot of reclaiming that's happening right now, and I think a lot of what I appreciate is when people understand that I'm still learning. My journey is such that when I learned the term two-spirit and the concept of it in my adult life, after I had been out since age 13, it resonated in a deep, spiritual way that I did not expect to find.

One of my trans exes said, "You're still discovering *your* trans identity." And... how do you explain that to somebody, because to a lot of people, I just look like a cis woman who is in a lesbian relationship. And that's easy to understand for most people. But when I also have this trans expression of my gender that is not easily visible or understood, you have to nuance my personality to pick up on some of the "divergences" from the heteronormative cisgendered narrative. And I'm still discovering that.

So, for allies and for anyone, giving us space to not have to define ourselves is really important, because for me that's still in flux. I can say I am two-spirit, but a couple weeks ago, I attended an event, and the speaker was an Elder, and I went up and talked to him afterwards. He had this holographic pride inclusive sticker on his luggage. I'm like, "Thank you so much for that sticker!" Because Red Deer has a culture where even the Indigenous community is like, we're not ready yet for talking about two-spirit. There's still a lot of discrimination within our own community towards us. And then this Elder said to me, "Well, normally I wear a bracelet that says 'contrary'." And I had not encountered this specific concept before. I wish I had had tobacco so I could ask him questions. Because there's something in that that connects with two-spirit. Because two-spirit is a word that tried to bridge understanding across many nations, so is "contrary" part of that understanding of two-spirit? Maybe? I don't know. Or is it its own thing? I don't know the answers to those things, and as I discover those things, you know, I might shift. I might discover that what I currently interpret as two-spirit is also something else. So, it's constantly shifting...you know, think of it like a tree, as constantly growing, shifting, new leaves, new seasons, and not expecting us to quantify it and stick to that as a hard and fast role. That's the first thing I think allies and supportive people should know.

Part of what's difficult right now is that we're still figuring out what the language and what the protocols for interaction are. Part of the solidarity, the actions of care, has to do with being willing to be in that uncomfortable space of recognising that things need to be deconstructed, and also acknowledging that that tree is still growing and we don't know what will come out at the end. And that is uncomfortable. The answers are there, in respectful engagement, but the answers are not there when it comes to all of the fine details of what new protocols will look like.

Michelle: I want to amplify Heather's message that many Indigenous people have been taught so much hate from the church... And so it is very dangerous for two-spirit to be anywhere.

One of the things that we as a family are doing is trying to use they and them pronouns more to decolonize. And it's been incredibly freeing, when you look at western imposed beauty standards and western imposed ideas of binary gender, to be more authentically Indigenous. And even for myself, as a straight cis mom, to realize that I don't have to conform to western standards because that's not my thinking. I'm decolonizing my thinking and trying to Indigenize my point of view. I've seen a really great meme going around saying "I'm not trying to decolonize, that's a western construct, and that still centres the colonizer. By Indigenizing, I'm centring Indigenous ways of thinking." And I really enjoyed that meme to kinda articulate in a really quick moment, the struggle of reclamation that we're going through.

Heather: What happens when we reframe transness and two-spiritness and those experiences as a sacred identity? That was so empowering for me to think, you know, I'm double sacred, you know? I'm Indigenous and I'm two-spirit.

And it's hard to say that humbly, right? Like hey, you should venerate me because I'm two-spirit. It sounds pretty arrogant. But when I have met two-spirit Elders, that's the feeling that I get. How lucky am I that this two-spirit Elder will take the time to teach me about "contrary," right? How lucky am I, that this two-spirit sweat lodge is allowing me to be a part of this? Because I, within me, understand how sacred it is and how special it is, you know?

Michelle: I just think that Indigenous people are sacred in the sense that we're undergoing genocide... I try to tell non-Indigenous that every person is a treaty partner. The only reason why you're here in Canada is because of that treaty. And we are still not seen as equal, when that was the intention of that treaty. Then take our two-spirit, I mean, these are the most sacred people that we have, and they're not held in the highest regard. They're purposely put at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. They're purposely not included in these white organizations that identify for Pride. And that's really problematic, because the racism is so clear and it's so deeply embedded in

this white-supremacist world, so there's no room for a two-spirit to be authentically themselves and understood as sacred.

And, you know, having two trans family members, and just seeing the lack of real support for them, it bothers me within my own family, for sure. And then, Samantha, my child, they are working really hard to decolonize their thinking, and to Indigenize their way of being.

One other thing I really wanted to say, you know, how Heather has tried to say we almost come across as arrogant. Well, I just do and I'm okay with that. And I don't mind coming off as arrogant, if that's the English terminology to use, because I have a community to advocate for. And because of [colonial] arrogance of patriarchy, I'm just going to bring it right back with my Indigenous matriarchy. And I don't see it as arrogance. I just see it as the polar opposite of whatever it is they're trying to do with their patriarchy. And in this conversation of gendered violence, I mean, that's ultimately what we're fighting, is this patriarchy and colonialism.

Heather: I just wanted to say thank you, Michelle. I needed that reminder. I had a fellow artist tell me, you know, once upon a time, when warriors would meet each other for the first time, prior to colonization, they had all the regalia of their battles, and the things that they had endured, and the scars from what they had given for their people, and they were proud to show that, because it was of service to their community. And when the colonizer saw that, they saw it as arrogance and pride. And you reminded me to be that proud for my community, because those are the warrior spirits that keep being of service in a profound way to the people. So thank you.

Michelle: Because of Heather, we had a Goose Garden⁶ as a whole entire city. Because of Heather, we have a Medicine Garden in my area of Greater Forest Lawn. The thing about two-spirits is that because they aren't within the box that we mould all of the other kids, they think outside the box. They think bigger than what we are trained to do... It has taken two-spirits to decolonize me. It has taken two-spirits to help me Indigenize my thinking. It has taken two-spirits' example of me thinking, well, that's crazy, but then understanding no, you've just been conformed to this small concept of what so-called normal is, and there's nothing crazy about decolonizing, there's nothing crazy about Indigenizing and there's nothing crazy about thinking bigger than this colonized box of patriarchy. The work that a two-spirit brings to this earth helps us all in a way we can't even understand. They take it to a whole different level of spirituality than what we can even comprehend in the moment. So the role of two-spirit is not just sacred, it's practical. It helps us all remember who we really are and re-grounds us in a better way.

⁶ <https://www.calgary.ca/arts-culture/public-art/goose-garden.html>

Calls for Justice for all Canadians

From the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

We call on all Canadians to:

15.1 Denounce and speak out against violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.

15.2 Decolonize by learning the true history of Canada and Indigenous history in your local area. Learn about and celebrate Indigenous Peoples' history, cultures, pride, and diversity, acknowledging the land you live on and its importance to local Indigenous communities, both historically and today.

15.3 Develop knowledge and read the Final Report. Listen to the truths shared, and acknowledge the burden of these human and Indigenous rights violations, and how they impact Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people today.

15.4 Using what you have learned and some of the resources suggested, become a strong ally. Being a strong ally involves more than just tolerance; it means actively working to breakdown barriers and to support others in every relationship and encounter in which you participate.

15.5 Confront and speak out against racism, sexism, ignorance, homophobia, and transphobia, and teach or encourage others to do the same, wherever it occurs: in your home, in your workplace, or in social settings.

15.6 Protect, support, and promote the safety of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people by acknowledging and respecting the value of every person and every community, as well as the right of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people to generate their own, self-determined solutions.

15.7 Create time and space for relationships based on respect as human beings, supporting and embracing differences with kindness, love, and respect. Learn about Indigenous principles of relationship specific to those Nations or communities in your local area and work, and put them into practice in all of your relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

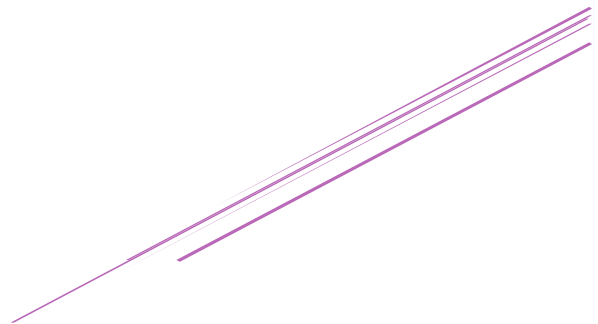
Reclaiming in community

There's an incredible two-spirit knowledge keeper, ceremonialist, and Sun Dancer, Talenny Heavyhead, and they were so welcoming to me and helped me when I had a friend that was in dire straits – they opened up their sweat to us, and barely knowing me, three, four years ago, they dropped everything and just gathered me and my friends at the sweat and had a sweat, and became family.

I find that one of the lies that I still sometimes am prone to believing is the scarcity myth, that there's not enough Elders to go around. Our languages are dead. There aren't enough spaces at the table. There aren't enough grants. And there aren't, but I can fit. There is room for everyone. There is space. So, being generous with those connections and introducing people and sharing your loved ones and your stories ... [it's] this beautiful, interconnected web of queer Indigenous people, two-spirit people, Indigenous trans and GNC – gender non-conforming – individuals.

If not for Talenny actually having the space and the generosity to share their land and to share their stories, their lived experiences as a two-spirit Elder in Blackfoot territory... There are no words. And we have Elders that come from Treaty 6 [to the two-spirit sweat] and it's really cool to see that there are you know, not just one Elder that's being held at the top of everything, but there's many. So there's not just one specific lived experience of transness or Indigeneity or the intersection of those two things or two-spirit identity. It's just... it's great to not have one story. – Kay

THERE IS ROOM FOR EVERYONE. THERE IS
SPACE.



Care in complicated contexts

Between the first community conversation for this project in December 2022 and the second conversation in July 2023, the intensity of anti-trans rhetoric, public protests, and even legislation escalated significantly.

This has brought conversations about how people make choices about when and where they make their preferences and identities visible in communities that may not have had these conversations previously. As things become more overtly hostile to any gender non-conforming folks (and it is important to acknowledge that this rising anti-trans hostility will impact every gender non-conforming person, whether they are trans or not), more of us are becoming aware that we need to rethink some of the things we might have been invited to believe, such as ideas that “being out” is the best way to be trans, that solidarity means supporting people to “be out,” that correcting a deadnaming or misgendering is always the best action. Some of us are becoming more aware that we need to start really actively centring collaboration, communication, and consent in our actions of care.

When we're in a position of trying to be in solidarity, it is possible to put someone into the spotlight in a dangerous way, while trying to be a good ally. This has always been the case, but it hasn't always been part of the wider conversation. Some of us might be starting to realize that it is important to be mindful of checking in or talking with someone before going into a space together, but for other trans people, especially for racialized trans people, this has always been part of the conversation. People are the experts in their own experiences, and they will know best what care will look like in any given context.

For some of us, what is happening in public discourse and legislation is a threat on a new level. For many, this may be an escalation of threat but it is not new at all, and these complexities and conversations have been happening for a long time. Some of the discourses that we're talking about resisting in this section have already been causing harm to trans folks, and there are already rich histories of responding to these complexities.

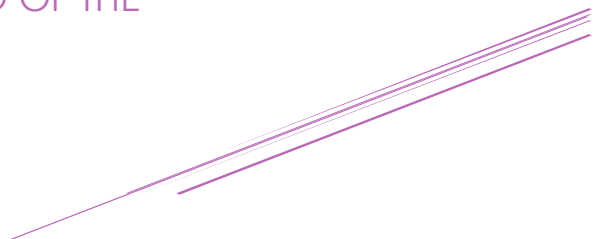
Only some people have ever been protected by the government, by laws... [Racialized queer communities] have been having these conversations for a long time, about how to navigate hostile communities, about misgendering, about our friends knowing which names and pronouns to use based on who is in the room.

There have been ways BIPOC have been made unsafe by discourses about how not being out to our families made us less trans, and that there was less space for us in queer spaces. – Aakhil

To be in solidarity with my partner, I mean, his transness... we don't talk about it with other people, just with our "in" people. But then being in solidarity with the community on a whole, I have to change my language and how I associate, and then I for a while was really torn, because he has the privilege of doing so [passing], and not everyone can. Not everyone wants to. That's a specific privilege that he has, and then we can pretend it's not part of our life. But not everyone can. And so it gets... navigating each and every interaction depending on what needs to be done for that context, gets heavy. – Domini

The only way that I can hold on to the notion of solidarity is to give up the idea of solidarity, and to understand that I actually cannot make of my living meat body a solid enough self to hold any kind of line in any kind of war, but I can make a cake. I can send a little heart emoji to my friend Jake on Facebook, who I've never met in real life. I can, you know, send a little bit of money to Chase Strangio, or Dean Spade's legal efforts. I can call [someone] for tea and tarot. I can just continue to live. I can play video games with my kids. I can walk my dogs in the forest. But I actually had to abandon the notion of solidarity, because I was using it to hurt myself. And it was shortening my life, because in holding firm to the idea of solidarity and my responsibilities to solidarity, meant that I could never do enough. I could never do enough as a settler, I could never do enough as a trans person, I could never do enough as a parent, as a Muslim, as a dyke, as a...like, any of it. I could never do enough. And because I could never do enough, there was just never space or time for me to be. And without that connection to being, there was no nourishment from which to do. So I had to metabolize of my own vitality, like, a movement beyond possibility that I was resourced for. And that fits in so compellingly with how we idolize and valorize and heroize, you know, these very public figures doing public frontline work, and we forget about Theda, who baked. And I'm not interested, I'm not interested in being a hero of the movement. – Nathan

I'M NOT INTERESTED IN BEING A HERO OF THE MOVEMENT.

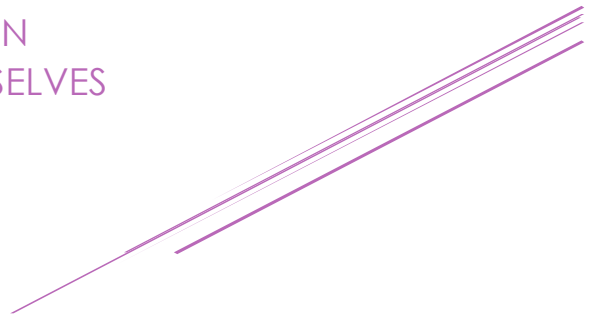


Getting pronouns, names, and genders right doesn't mean they are the same across places. Plenty of people use one set of pronouns, names, and genders in certain relationships and not others. I am thinking of people who find it safest to use their name/pronoun/gender assigned at birth with their family and maybe with their doctor, but have different pronouns, names, genders in spaces where they feel safe/seen/heard. Part of getting pronouns/names/genders right is "reading the room" and learning which pronoun/name/gender a person wants in that room with those people. – Charlotte

[During a group event] I really distinctly remember, we had invited people to put their pronouns on their name tags, and you know, this thing of doing pronoun rounds in a space where not everyone's familiar with them and the way that you introduce them. And my friend said to me, "You know, it actually makes me feel really uncomfortable when we put our pronouns on our name tags, because it's so much more obvious when people are disregarding them." And that has just stuck with me since, and I've seen it play out time and time again. I guess it has me thinking critically about even the actions that we think of as being the right actions don't always create the space of inclusivity. – Zan

I can say for myself, I am non-binary, I use they/them pronouns, I have quite a few trans friends, including multiple trans partners, and I still find myself in some spaces, hesitant to be too vocal about that, because I'm worried about having to answer a whole bunch of questions, I'm worried about receiving backlash. And the way that I have found around that is to do as much as I'm able to do in any given moment. It's not a binary that you're either in solidarity or you're not in solidarity. I just think that there are so many actions available, and we don't always have access to all of them all of the time. But there's something about doing that little assessment. Like okay, this doesn't feel possible, even though it might be what I would want to do in an ideal situation. And then just leaning a little bit in and asking 'is there anything that does feel possible? Is there anything here that I can do?' If I can't, you know, really publicly speak up in this family gathering full of people who are not on board, can I send a text to the only other cousin here that I know is on the rainbow with me? Can I send a text to someone else in my community? How do we push open a little bit more space, just a little bit, rather than expecting perfection from ourselves every time, which can be so immobilizing – for me at least. – Tiffany

HOW DO WE PUSH OPEN A LITTLE BIT MORE
SPACE, JUST A LITTLE BIT, RATHER THAN
EXPECTING PERFECTION FROM OURSELVES
EVERY TIME



I guess one thing I was thinking of is this idea that it's a formula and that you need to do it the same way every time. Even though I use they/them pronouns and feel like the gender binary is a farce, I don't personally identify as trans. My partner does and being in a loving relationship with a trans person throughout an experience of where this stuff was really acute, to now where we are just like "ugh, background noise, whatever." It's so fluid, what solidarity will look like. It depends on the day, it depends on the energy, it depends on who we're with. And you know, in the early stages, it would be constant checking in about "what does this look like today?" And "Do you want me to say something? Last time I didn't say something, was that not okay?" Having lots of conversations around it, being tuned in... it's never, ever been only one thing. And in some ways that can feel intimidating, 'cause you're like, oh gosh, that's a lot more work to constantly be figuring out, rather than finding the right answer and rolling with that. And you don't always have the relationship with people to know what's going to work best for them, but I guess that can kind of create space for fluidity and compassion. – Zan

A friend of mine who is a mother let me know that she took her stroller to a counter protest in support of trans lives, because she knew that I was two-spirit and I am non-binary two-spirit. And she's like, "I can't help but think of you and your experiences in your life, and that light, and the world would be without it. I will go to this protest with my cherished life and I will stand there in support of your right to exist as a non-binary, trans parent." And it is terrifying. But then there are wild acts of care that kind of are just, again, relational, but completely unexpected. That blew my mind. I was like, you are so sweet. I never would have ever asked anyone to do that. I would, if I'm pretty pissed, I'll absolutely demand it of the world. But, you know, I'm not gonna go to individual people and be like, you show up and you show up. [laughs] Just...it is worse than I could have ever imagined. It's pretty rough out there, which is what makes this [work] so generative and important. – Kay

BUT THEN THERE ARE WILD ACTS OF CARE



How we learned to take these actions (and how we're helping others learn)

The piece that also had me show up today was thinking about early days of misgendering, the dysregulation and the sweat I was experiencing, and how that tightness has eased over time, but it's with community and learning. – Lindsey

[I learned to take certain actions] mostly through people who I care about explaining reasons they were not connected to larger communities or larger parts of the community, and having that come up in conversations with me, again and again and again, with different people. Human beings are social creatures, and if you take away community, we die. It's fundamentally what it is. And these are people who are being refused their community. It might not kill them right away, but that's a major complication in early death, is not having a community of people. It just felt like it was more important to start making an effort to include people or push back on exclusionary views in spaces that I'm in. [And] be like, "this is a new thing I'm doing, people, watch out" – just taking a course correction in my actions. I know for a fact that I am easier to be around for people who maybe were more guarded with me before. For me it is an act of building a discipline, is how I would put it. – Samantha

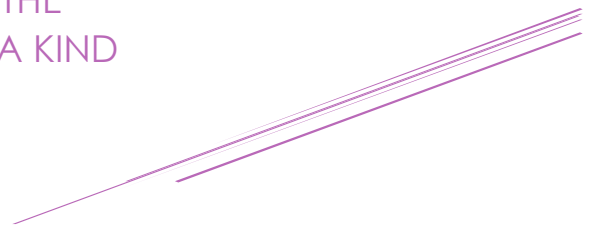
At the moment I'm having this really privileged experience of being able to have these conversations around the baby, because people are gendering my baby, and we have the opportunity to decide whether we're gonna have a conversation with them about that. Sometimes we don't, and we just let them use whatever random pronoun they choose, usually based on their outfit. And that's totally fine. It doesn't feel like selling out. It feels like, you know, we're at the cash register, we're never gonna see this person again. But other times there's something amazing about talking about a baby... people are a lot less likely to be hostile. And having the opportunity to practise and say, "well, actually, this is what we're doing, and we just call this baby they/them." And it's always awkward, and I'm always sweaty, and it's been actually fine every single time. There's privilege in that [and] I'm sure there'd be a lot of places in the world where that wouldn't be the response every time, but I have also read about people having these conversations in some of those contexts and a lot of the time it going well. Starting from a place of believing the best in people, and that invitation being an expression of care that I think you can do better, and this is an opportunity for us to collaborate around that. – Zan

A close friend helped me learn about misgendering people and explained to me how hurtful it can be. When I later met people who told me their preferred pronouns, names, or genders, I made an effort to be inclusive. – Allie

I learned about avoiding misgendering through listening to people talk about the pain of being misgendered. The listening of these stories over many years allowed me to see things about injustice that I cannot unsee. I came to see misgendering as so much more than getting the gender wrong. It represented a lack of caring or privilege to not need to care. It represented being a part of a whole system that doesn't see (or over-sees) trans people. I learned a lot about the many ways of being seen across a spectrum from being made invisible (or seen and hated) to being exoticized/tokenized. Misgendering came to represent a very complex variety of ways of being viewed in extremes. Getting the gender correct is a huge political statement about care, but it is also very simple. I think a lot about gender as just a way of being or doing oneself - nothing fancy or special that needs any kind of attention, just the way someone shows up to the relationship. I learned about this from many, many conversations with trans and non-binary folks. – Charlotte

I started to care because I recognized that it was one of the smallest and easiest ways to be a kind person in the world. My care grew as my understanding of gender experiences grew, and as my understanding of gender-based rights and violences grew, and then further expanded as I got to know more people who were actively affected by this. – Sam

I RECOGNIZED THAT IT WAS ONE OF THE SMALLEST AND EASIEST WAYS TO BE A KIND PERSON IN THE WORLD.



Through clients I learned about experiences of dysphoria and witnessed the distress that misgendering could cause. I think I also have held the belief that people own the rights to their identity, no matter their age. This is not something that is socially promoted, at least not in my experience in the US. - Courtney

If I'm meeting someone new, sometimes I will ask them their preferred pronouns. If a friend lets me know ahead of time I'm going to meet someone with a preferred name or pronoun I practice it in my head before meeting them. Over time, my speech has changed from using he/she pronouns to preferring to use they/them. – Allie

I try to really look at a person, instead of taking one superficial thing (like hair). For my sister it was a bit of a challenge because there was 40 years of brother memories before that. It has helped a lot to see her regularly on zoom. - Anonymous

It's actually just practice

One thing we wanted to share in this document is encouragement that, just like in Elliot's story of his family learning to use the right name and pronouns, it is, in many ways, about just practicing. Just actually practicing saying a new name or pronoun. Practicing not guessing. Practicing not knowing. All of these actions are skills, and we learn the opposite skill of categorizing people into binaries and assigning binary pronouns to them... we learn that skill very early on, and have it reinforced aggressively for many years. So in this section, we want to invite you to join us in thinking about the skill building activities that help us unlearn and relearn something new, because it does matter and it does make a difference.

"Practice practice practice. Repeating to myself, writing as a form of memorizing, caring because it is important." – Mary

Whenever I think about that person, or I talk about that person, I make sure to get [their name and pronouns] right, and then I go over it in my head. It takes mental effort, but by being present with it when it's not important, it is effortless to be present with it when it is important. – Samantha

I love pronouns.org and practicewithpronouns.com because they have resources on why this is important and active tools to practice different pronouns. I've used them for years as a way to educate myself on experiences that differ from my own, and to practice things I don't have the hang of. I also make sure to practice people's names and pronouns when I meet them, so that their self and their identifiers are linked in my brain. – Sam

In the beginning, before I would have a session with a client, I would repeat the pronouns over and over in my head and sometimes out loud. Writing my session notes I think also helped me really get used to pronouns because of the visual support and cognitive repetition. I don't need to do that anymore. I am pretty quick with any pronoun changes and using he, she or they. I have not had as much experience with neo-pronouns so that might still take some practice. Also with my child, my partner and I really took up the practice of holding each other accountable and reminding one another which really helped. My child also attends a Spanish immersion school which has been another layer since Spanish is so gendered. I practice gender-neutral Spanish in a class I attend and when speaking with my child. - Courtney

I think it's important to know that the unlearning and relearning is a process that even trans and non-binary folks have to go through. I still misgender people. I still make assumptions about people's gender. I think I'm much faster than I used to be at catching that, and I don't think it happens nearly as often, but it does still happen. - Tiffany

Sometimes people think, "Oh, you're queer, you're just so good at this pronoun thing." [But] I wasn't born mastering they/them. I never knew how to do this! You know, I remember running a workshop, as I used to run workshops on homophobia, as a young person to young people, a decade ago, and I remember being asked about talking about trans experiences and saying, "I don't think we could talk about that, 'cause young people's heads would explode!" You know, obviously, we've come a long way collectively, but also me personally, and I think that what I always feel is so important is it's actually just practice. And yes, as a queer person, you possibly have the privilege of being more connected to and spending more time with people who use pronouns other than you might expect, or other than they have in the past. You have more opportunity to practise. You might also have a deeper sense of caring connection that motivates you to do the work. But, I just firmly believe that it's possible for anyone to do this work and to become really skillful at it, and that doesn't mean getting it right all the time. But it does mean, you know, being able to manage a pronoun slip up in a way that doesn't do further harm. It's just magical when people do that well, without creating a whole bunch of extra emotional labour. – Zan

One thing that my friend did, I was introducing them to someone who uses they/them pronouns, and since they had never met them before, but they have a very relatively gendered name, before they met them, just kept saying "the name/they," "the name/they," so that their brain never made the association with the gender previously associated with that name. Just did it for like, a week before meeting them. And never made a mistake. – Domini

Through a lot of practice, mistakes, and making apologies for my mistakes. I practice by referring to all people I do not know by using "they" until I've had a chance to confirm their preferred pronouns. – Agnieszka

One thing I have found helpful when I'm given a workshop on this topic, on how to be more gender inclusive, is to let the introduction of using non-binary pronouns be something a little silly. So, I have often worn really bright, goofy socks to give a workshop like that. My mom can take credit for my love of socks. But then it gives the opportunity to, early in the workshop say, check out my socks, now turn to the person next to you and practice saying "Wow, they have wild socks." So there's something light there. But there is something about just saying the sentence, sometimes for the first time, and learning that it can feel okay, you can use non-binary pronouns in the same way that you use binary pronouns. – Tiffany

Practicing not knowing

We talked about the way that not knowing can really trip people up.

We wanted to be clear that it takes practice to become comfortable with not knowing, even for those of us who are trans or non-binary ourselves, or who have family members and beloved community members who are trans.

My partner, who also uses they/them pronouns, had started at a new workplace recently, and they were speaking about their partner, who's me, using they/them pronouns. And they were kind of sharing with me that they were watching – and this workplace is I think quite a cis hetero workplace – and so watching people kind of having this process of really wanting to know, what is “they”? And part of that is, I think, learning and education and language, but also just kind of not allowing them into that kind of that privacy, I think, which is the question of like, what genitals does your partner have? [laughs] And I think sometimes it's just a mirror back to people's curiosity. Why is it that you need to know [that]? What's that interest for you? Is it so you can determine my sexuality or what my gender is, or what kind of sex we're having, or – all of these kinds of things. Which are kind of like, ah, maybe that conversation would happen if we were friends and we were sitting around having cups of tea. But not when we're just meeting each other and we're beginning to relate to each other. – Frankie

I found myself one time, someone was talking about their non-binary kid, and they kept saying “kid,” and it felt like, why are you being so intentionally vague about this? [laughs] And I was like oh, you're not! I'm just missing the point, that I don't need to assume what I think your kid dresses like, looks like, behaves like, does. I don't need to know any of the *Things* that I think I need to know about your kid, 'cause they're just your kid. [laughs] And it took me longer that I would've liked to get there, and I was getting like, synapses frying... it's like... what is happening? – Domini

Reflection: Turning curiosity inward

It can be helpful to just start noticing when the curiosity arises, and turning that curiosity inward. When you get curious and want to ask what might be an intrusive question, consider first asking yourself:

- What do you want to know?
- Why do you want to know it?
- Do you really need to know it, or do you just feel like you should know it because most of the time you do know it?
- Will the knowing change anything in the relationship? If so, why?

What we had to unlearn

Sometimes the things that are normalized in our cultural context really get in the way of actions of care. For example, the idea that gender is a binary was dominant for a very long time, and sometimes still influences people. If we've been recruited into this idea, then we might not recognize what caring actions for non-binary people might look like, and we might feel that care involves pushing someone towards a binary gender or we might think that if a non-binary person wants to medically or surgically transition, then they're "really" a binary trans person (we might even think we're being supportive when we do this!).

Often, we don't even realize that something has been normalized because it just seems *normal*.

We might be wary of trans women because we're being influenced by transmisogynist ideas without realizing it. We might view trans men as "women life" without realizing it, and only recognize this when we realize we're more comfortable with trans men in women's spaces than with trans women in women's spaces. We might have an idea that non-binary people are white, thin, and assigned female at birth, and we might not even realize that we've been influenced by this discourse unless we really stop and examine it!

This isn't because we're "bad people"; it's because we are all, constantly, surrounded by ideas that shape how we view the world. And some of these ideas are quite hostile to trans folks. But the cool thing is that we can examine these ideas and their effects and then make choices about the position we take on any given idea. We can choose to keep an idea that aligns with our values, and to question and even discard an idea that doesn't.

A major theme in many of the conversations that inform this document is that it's not possible to be "perfect," to know everything, to always get things right. Mistakes happen, and learning happens. So, we want to invite you, and ourselves, into ongoing practices of learning and unlearning. We want you, and ourselves, to know that we do not need to be 'experts' in order to act with care towards trans community. We can care, and act on that care, *first*, and then we can continue to learn.

Reflection: Deconstructing discourse

We can “deconstruct” the dominant stories, or discourses⁷, that we've been taught about the people we want to show care toward, and this process can open up more possibilities for action.

You can ask yourself questions about what you've been told about anything, and it's worth pausing to check in with yourself about where your ideas come from. Sometimes we don't even realize that we're being influenced by dominant discourses until we take a moment to reflect. You could consider asking yourself questions about the stories you've been told about:

Trans women	Social transition
Trans men	Medical transition
Non-binary people	Surgical transition
Two-spirit people	Trans kids in schools
Intersex people	Trans people in sports
Young trans people	“Passing”
Trans parents	Anything else!

- What commonly accepted “truths” or ideas have you encountered about X?
- Do these commonly held ideas match your own experience with X, or with community members who have lived experience?
- Where have these ideas come from? Are there any voices missing from the shaping of these ideas?
- Based on these ideas, what might someone think about someone in X community, or with X experience?
- Who is impacted by these ideas? Do you think the impact of these ideas is helpful, harmful, or both?
- Who benefits from these ideas?
- What do these ideas make possible in terms of available actions, ways of speaking about people, or understanding ourselves and each other?
- Are these ideas in line with your values?

⁷ There is another project in this collection of work specifically related to discourses about trans people, and inviting participants and readers into more complex and nuanced understanding of these discourses and their effects. This project is currently (as of late 2023) underway.

Here are two stories of discourses from our conversations.

I had to combat all of these different fears that I had, and unlearn the hateful discourses that had been showered on me from the very beginning, all of these different forced and enforced roles. I feel like there [were] a lot of penalties in my life if I didn't conform to being a quiet little girl who did what she was told. It's so hard to even say those words.

I remember saying to my friend, they were like, "I don't actually know that I am either gender. I don't know!" And I was like, "pick a side." I said that! I said that. Because of fear. Even my love for my friend was obliterated in the face of being scared and not understanding what was going on. I tried to repress. I did repress my friend because of what I didn't know. So, being generous and loving towards that part of myself and loving them deeply, even though they're very human. That was something I needed to learn. I'm still working on it. Some days I feel really proud of how far I've come, and sometimes I feel a little bit despairing because of how far I have yet to go. [laughs] Which is kind of a hopeful thing too. There's work to do.

So yeah. I have made many, many, many hurtful mistakes towards myself and towards other people, but the undercurrent through all of that is love and care and relationships can survive those things and us with them. – Kay

There's an Elder in our community who is an older trans woman, and she does a lot of activism and she was speaking about this experience. She has a lot of solidarity going to India, and she was saying that when she's there, she can use the women's bathroom, and never gets never gets looked at, because culturally she isn't supposed to "pass." But when she's in Australia, she gets so much harassment because we have this colonial thing around passing. And that culturally, it's kind of not about passing [in India]... I think in the West, there's this [idea that] you can't be a trans woman or a trans man until you pass. Which perpetuates this idea of gender essentialism and doesn't allow for that rich diversity of the spectrum of gender and sexuality, which is completely endless. – Frankie

I THINK IN THE WEST, THERE'S THIS [IDEA THAT] YOU CAN'T BE A TRANS WOMAN OR A TRANS MAN, UNTIL YOU PASS. WHICH PERPETUATES THIS IDEA OF GENDER ESSENTIALISM, AND DOESN'T ALLOW FOR THAT RICH DIVERSITY OF THE SPECTRUM OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY, WHICH IS COMPLETELY ENDLESS.

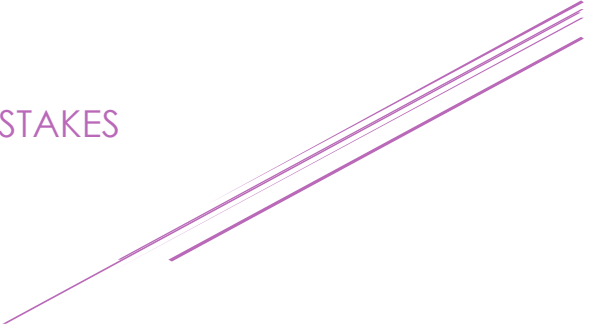


Making mistakes and making repairs

[When I make a mistake] I immediately use the correct terms, name, etc. and move on as that is what Theda taught me. – Mary

You can hurt somebody without realizing that you've done it, without knowing that you've done it. And if they let you know that they're hurting, it's very important that you listen to them. That's what I would say to myself: "take other people's pain very seriously. Honour it. Be honoured that someone is sharing that with you, little Kay." And you can always hope that repair can happen, and you can make efforts to move towards repair and care, but it's important to get the full consent of everybody involved. And usually that means inviting other bodies into it. For me, [I] need witnesses sometimes. I know I've needed people to facilitate conversations with me and a friend when things have gone awry or I've caused harm, and they've been kind enough to let me know that I've caused that harm and they want to work on repairing that relationship. That's a really beautiful feeling. I hope everyone gets to experience something like that. Not that you harm someone. [laughs] I hope everybody gets to experience that kind of love where you're committed to being imperfectly together, understanding that mistakes are just a part of being alive. – Kay

I HOPE EVERYBODY GETS TO EXPERIENCE
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ARE JUST A PART OF BEING ALIVE.



I learned about making mistakes and not taking up too much space with these mistakes. I have many relationships with folks who change their pronouns/names/genders and/or use different pronouns/names/genders in different settings or stages in relationships. This means that either I have to spend a lot of time getting caught up on what the correct pronoun/name/gender is in the moment or be okay with getting it wrong sometimes. I listen carefully for cues and also ask directly, but sometimes I still get it wrong and I have learned to just apologize, get it right the next time, and not make too much of a fuss about it. I have watched people get "called out" or "called in" with misgendering mistakes and appreciate the quick genuine apologies as well as the "thank yous" for having it brought to their attention. I am thinking here of leaders of large work meetings with hundreds of staff listening. I love the ones that clearly are not inside the trans/queer community, but still quickly get it and apologize, get it right, and move on. – Charlotte

I apologize, correct myself, and move on most of the time. Sometimes it makes someone uncomfortable to have attention brought to them so I might mention it to them in private later or just make a mental note for next time. – Allie

I acknowledge that I messed up, I correct myself, and I move forward. Depending on the situation, the person's preference, and my relationship with them, I might also engage in a form of accountability and repair so that the relationship is supported through my error/harm. – Sam

Sometimes someone I have good rapport with and respect stops me in my tracks and tells me I have a pronoun wrong. This can hurt my feelings a little mostly because I'm generally on a roll telling a story and the flow is completely interrupted. When this happens I practice saying "thank you" and then using the right pronoun (obviously) and then getting back to the story. It's embarrassing to get a pronoun wrong especially when I am so deep in this work. I practice not letting the embarrassment stop me from keeping going with the justice work. – Charlotte

One thing I find helpful for myself is when I am trying to be in solidarity, is just really embracing that I will get it wrong, and cause harm, and I still need to care anyway. There's value in acting in alignment with that value of care, even when I get it wrong and then need to repair and try again and learn something different. I find it really liberating, to just know that, for example, my whiteness comes with me into every interaction, and I can't actually get rid of it. So, I just have to do it [solidarity and care] anyway, even though I will sometimes get it wrong. That can feel hopeless. And I know that framing won't work for everyone, but I just find it very helpful [laughs]. – Tiffany

Externally, I very much believe in the acknowledge, apologize, move on sort of method. And internally, later or to myself, I try to figure out if there is something I am assuming, that is causing me to have this stumble. Or if... sometimes it is as simple as I have slept 6 hours in four days. And as hard as it is, and as much as it sucks, accepting whatever the reason is for what it is. If it's just I [messed] up because I'm tired, I have to make space for that to be okay, and it has to be okay that it's a trivial reason that I don't beat myself up around. I try to be proportionate, I guess, in the response, both emotionally and in terms of action. Because sometimes a larger apology afterwards, after everyone has left, is called for. And that's a hard thing to do. That's a hard thing, especially for a queer person to do. – Samantha

A different kind of mistake... Resisting unhelpful practices

There's a scene in Martha Wells' book *Network Effect*, where one character says to another something like, "Tell her you care about her. In those words. Don't say you'll eviscerate anyone who hurts her." It's a funny moment, but it speaks to something that came up in some of the conversations for this document – the way that sometimes we can try to show care by being confrontational towards people who are causing harm to the people we care about.

We recognize why this happens, and how it can come from a place of pain, and also from a place of love and care. We also recognize that sometimes it can be very important to actively confront harm! But we also want to acknowledge that it isn't always helpful. It isn't always the most effective way to show our care.

We also spoke about how sometimes we might be invited to see people who have been recruited into harmful ideas and actions as being the problem, themselves. How we might be invited to think about someone as "a TERF," with the problem located within them, rather than as a person who has been recruited into trans exclusionary ideas and actions. There is an idea in narrative therapy that "the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem."⁸ We want to extend this idea even to the people who are enacting harm, and to remember that we have also had to learn and unlearn in order to learn how to act in care for trans community, even when we are trans ourselves.

There are times when being confrontational in that act of trying to be in solidarity can push the person you're having confrontation with further away [instead of inviting them to reconsider their actions]. And I also think there are times when, if I'm a little more distant from the harm being enacted, maybe I can be less confrontational in my response. If I'm trying to be in solidarity with communities of colour, and I'm speaking with another white person, can I do the emotional work of keeping my response calmed down, so that maybe a different kind of conversation is possible here, so that the people who are closer to that violence maybe don't have to interact with it? There's something about recognizing that even though witnessing white supremacy in action is horrifying, and I want to yell about it, *me* yelling about it is not usually helpful, and there are other ways that I can intervene and keep myself sometimes a little bit more calm to try and have that conversation. (Without ever demanding that someone directly impacted by the violence keep themselves calm – this is only about what is available to me when I have a bit of distance, not about what should ever be expected of people across the board.) – Tiffany

⁸ This is an important idea in narrative practice, and it's also present in other theoretical spaces. The idea that the creation of 'kinds of people' contributes to oppression (both 'kinds of people' like medicalized trans people who are then pathologized, surveilled, subject to 'cures' etc., and also 'kinds of people' like TERF as a category of identity rather than a collection of actions) comes from Michel Foucault, who is an important thinker for narrative practitioners and others in this project.

I think even though I can rant with the best of them and do all the time, I think there [is value] in being compassionate to people who are misgendering, because they're captured by transphobia just as much as any of the rest of us, and they may not have had the privilege of being part of spaces where that language has been available to them. There's nothing more disruptive to social movements than alienating people or making them feel like they've failed, and that can so often be really ableist and classist. And you know - I end up here all the time - but anytime I have myself feeling superior or being less problematic than someone, I think that's really worth examining, because, there was a time I didn't know how to do this either. And the fact that I do now, that's a privilege in a lot of ways, and that speaks to a lot of really generous invitations of people in. I can remember really distinctly the times in my relationship with activism when I've been shamed, rather than invited in, and that has not motivated me to do the work. And, of course, I understand why that happens all of the time, because there's deep hurt and pain. But I think [there's value in] doing what you can and not feeling like there's a right way to do it, but also not feeling like you're in battle with the person that you maybe are trying to invite into a different way of thinking. – Zan

Looking back on a lot of different topics, the way that I have had conversations with people in hopes of being an ally of a particular group, and then thinking about how much potential harm I actually caused by maybe pushing someone even further, or not having it in a compassionate way, for example, or having it in a very confrontational way. – Maile

Reflection: A few questions about resisting harm

How can we stand against harm without standing against people?

How can we resist invitations to view people as the enemy, to create a 'kind of person' who we then feel comfortable discarding or discounting?

How can we resist invitations to feel superior, to see ourselves as 'social justice experts' in ways that distance ourselves from our own histories of being recruited into harmful beliefs and actions?

How can we ensure that our actions of care are about caring, more than they are about punishing?

And how can we hold ourselves with care when we get this wrong?

One helpful practice can be to think about people's actions, and how these actions can be influenced by harmful discourses, and resist the invitation to then assume a single, totalizing story of the person based on those actions. People can make different choices, take different actions, even if they have been recruited into harmful actions in the past.

Charlotte Redway, Courtney Olinger, Zan Maeder, Quinn Nelson, and Aakhil Lakhani. Some contributors wished to be anonymous.

Histories of care

An earlier project, connected to this one and with some of the same contributors, was the Letters of Support to the Trans Community project in 2018. Think of this document as 'volume 2'. Know that this document exists in a long history of care, which extends across cultures and times and into the future. Know that each of us who have contributed to this document are committed to continuing to act in care, to keep learning how to do better, to keep going, to keep trying, to keep moving into a possible future with our trans community alongside.

We also hope for future editions of this document about care, which include new stories and maybe even artwork. If you would like to be included in this or other projects in support of trans lives, you can contact us at trans-lives@proton.me.

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Written by Tiffany Sostar

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The cover photo of this document is a picture of one of Theda's favourite cakes, and was provided by Nathan Viktor Fawaz.

⁹ <https://dulwichcentre.com.au/misgendering/>