



queer attachment:
an anti-oppression
toolkit for
relational healing

by leah jo carnine
and fizz perkal



We dedicate this zine to all the folks who are on their healing journeys amidst the oppressive systems we live in. We want to thank our friends and dear ones for your patience, love, and support. We especially want to thank those who read, edited, and gave us feedback on this writing.

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Art by Leah Jo Carnine

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Why We Wrote this Zine:

We came to this project with a love of tools for self-growth that was born out of our own pain and pain we inflicted on others, as well as a desire to heal. So often this meant submerging ourselves in the deep and generally problematic waters of “self-help” books. While these writings led us to epiphanies and gave us a greater understanding of ourselves, engaging with them meant that we often had to filter out frameworks that didn’t fit us. Generally, the authors of self-help books are straight, white, cis folk who rarely acknowledge the larger structures within which our nervous systems and attachment systems exist. There aren’t many good how-to’s that substantially account for queer identity and provide an anti-oppression lens. So we decided to write something!

This writing weaves together what we have learned through more mainstream white attachment theorists, study of trauma and the nervous system, and radical queer Black, Indigenous, and people of color practitioners of this work. We are deeply grateful to the people we cite and reference directly and also for the movements and visionaries who have shaped and inspired our analysis more broadly—especially the brilliant queer women and non-binary folks of color within the healing justice and transformative justice movements.

We bow down to the writing, organizing, and intervening on generational trauma that, in the words of Cara Page, “transform the consequences of oppression on our bodies, hearts, and minds.”¹ We credit the disability justice movement for modeling how to center practices of community care, mutual aid, and interdependence. Whether explicitly named or implicitly present, these lessons are

foundational in a politicized and comprehensive vision for relational healing. We are so grateful for all of the writings, conversations, and reflections that make up this zine. This is a project of gathering wisdom that has been shared with us.

We live in a web of systems of oppression and domination. Oppression is traumatic. Our bodies and nervous systems are not isolated individual entities untouched by the world. We are connected and related beings who are constantly impacted by each other and the larger systems that we exist in. We fundamentally believe that we are all harmed by systems of domination, albeit very differently depending on identity and experience within the historical and current contexts of settler colonialism, slavery and anti-Black racism, capitalism, ableism, and heteropatriarchy.

We offer this writing to help connect the work of self-reflection and growth to political practices of accountable, deep, transformative anti-racist, anti-colonial, and feminist work. We’re coming from a place of believing that change must happen on many levels: personal, interpersonal, cultural, and structural. The same personal and interpersonal patterns we struggle with in our intimate relationships can play out in harmful ways in our organizations and movements, so we see this self and interpersonal work as intimately connected to social change work.

Trauma is relational, so healing must be relational. Despite the conditions of trauma and oppression in our society, we are adaptive and resilient beings. This sentiment guides this writing as an aspiring road map to relational healing through the lens of nervous system regulation and (l)earned security.

Who is the We?

We are two white, queer, european settlers currently living on unceded Pueblo territory in New Mexico. Leah Jo is a community organizer, artist, and harm reductionist family medicine provider. Fizz is a non-binary community organizer, abolitionist, and full-spectrum doula. Leah Jo identifies more with anxious attachment and Fizz with avoidant attachment tendencies.

We are not experts on attachment theory or the nervous system, nor therapists with extensive experience professionally supporting people in attachment related healing. We are two queers who have found these frameworks incredibly useful on our own healing journeys and in supporting friends navigating relational challenges (romantic, platonic, and in organizing for social change). We also acknowledge that because of our privileged identities, we will inevitably miss things and make mistakes in this writing. We aim to be humble about our shortcomings; we are eager for feedback and dialogue!

Who are we Writing for?

- Queers
- Folks who are invested in politicized healing
- White/settler folks, cis men and other oppressors or folks from privileged identities wanting tools for personal work to be more fully accountable for the ways that systems of oppression exist within our bodies and relationships
- Anyone who is interested in better understanding nervous system regulation and attachment theory

What to Expect (Roadmap):

We start with trauma and the nervous system. We then explore attachment theory and the four attachment styles. We end with several tools to help us build towards security in our relationships and regulation in our bodies.

love and justice are not
two. without inner
change there can be
no outer change.
without collective
change, no change
matters.

- rev ange | kyodo
williams

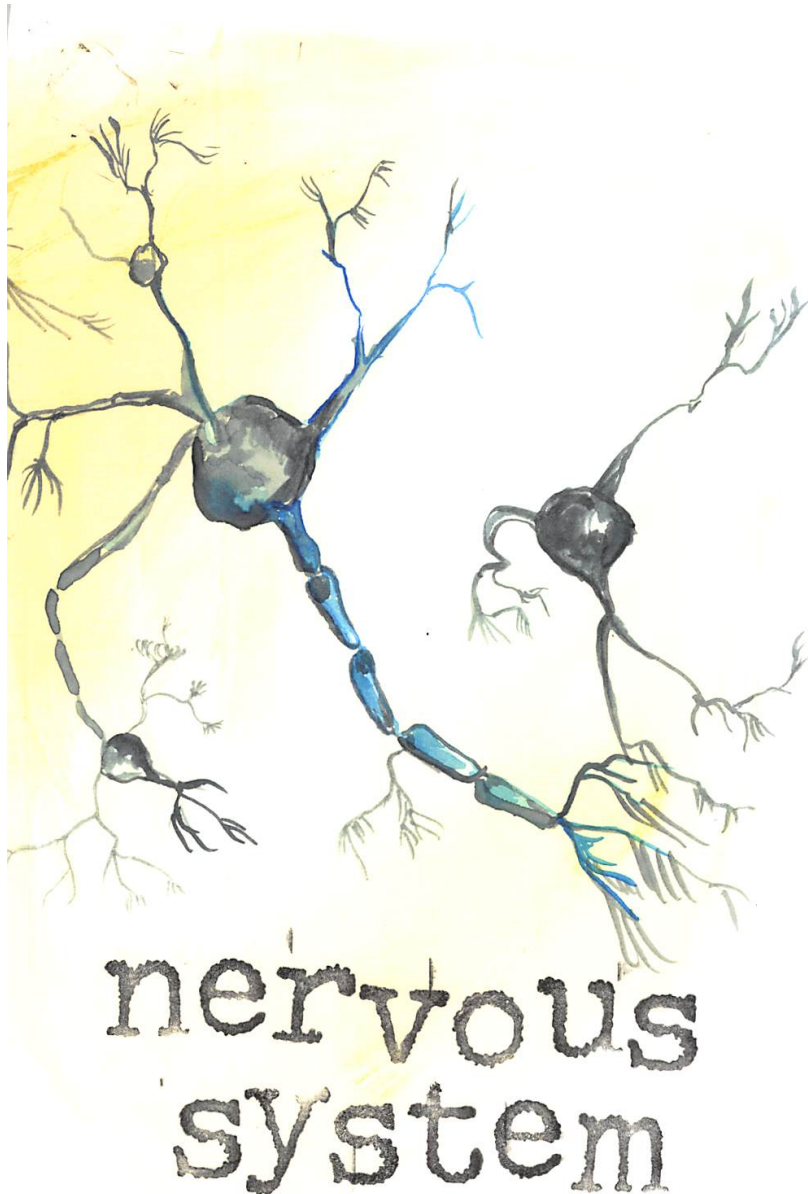
Trauma & the Nervous System

There is a direct relationship between the development of our attachment styles, the social systems we are raised in, and the development of our nervous system. We're going to talk about the nervous system, and how it relates to trauma and to our survival and coping mechanisms (including our attachment style, which we will get more into later).

What is Trauma?

We hear the word trauma a lot these days. With trauma, we are talking about the way the body responds to and holds onto stressful and harmful experiences. Whether a one-time incident or a sequence of wounds, trauma is a form of disconnection, an experience of overwhelm so big it is stored in the body to be processed later. As there is often not an opportunity to deal with it later, this becomes survival patterning in the body. This can look like anxiety, nightmares, panic attacks, disproportionate/strong emotional reactions either to small daily incidents, (a loud noise, getting cut off in traffic, a comment) or to something for no visible reason.

Trauma is experienced both individually and collectively. Oppression is traumatic, and oppressive systems prevent many of us from being able to process or resolve trauma. In the case of the US, these systems of oppression—historically rooted in genocide and land theft of Indigenous peoples and the system of chattel slavery—have been present for 500 years. This means 500 years of unresolved collective trauma. Today, people are living under the direct threat of policing, immigrant detention, the decimation of Indigenous sacred sites for extraction, and the chronic stress of surviving under capitalism. In these conditions, there often isn't the



physical safety and space to collectively process or resolve trauma.

The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) study helps us understand the way that collective and individual trauma impacts us from a young age. The ACEs study, based on 17,000 patients, confirms what many people have known experientially: that early experiences of violence and trauma are harmful to health in a myriad of ways. Through a 10 point adverse childhood events checklist, the study demonstrates the direct correlation between severe childhood stress (such as neglect, abuse, intimate partner violence, a mentally ill or substance-using parent) and various impacts on health.

The study found that a person with four or more adverse experiences is five times more likely to be addicted to alcohol and 46 times more likely to inject drugs, has a doubled risk of being diagnosed with cancer, and four times the chance of having emphysema. A person with six or more adverse childhood events is 30 times more likely to attempt suicide and has a risk of their lifespan being shortened by 20 years. When it comes to collective and intergenerational trauma, we see this reflected in the fact that the lifespan for Native people in Arizona is, on average, 20 years shorter than the lifespan of white settlers. The *Racing ACEs* publication expands on the original ACEs study by explicitly naming racism—personal, structural, and historical—as root causes of modern trauma.

As Resmaa Menakem helps us understand in *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, our racialized trauma impacts how we interact with each other. He states that people of color and white people all carry and reproduce a tremendous amount of racialized trauma in our bodies around the myth of race. Specifically, he expands on the way that Black bodies carry trauma from the recurrent wounds

caused by the exoneration of cops and citizens who murder Black people, daily aggressions, discriminations, microaggressions, and over-policing and over-sentencings of Black communities. For white people, on the other hand, he describes an implicit or unconscious, and often immediate, fight, flight, or freeze response that is triggered by seeing a Black person, or even hearing the word “race,” or “white supremacy.” This physiologic or body-based response—which has been passed down through many generations—is the foundation of what we understand as white fragility.

Manakem states how harmful racialized trauma is to all of us, regardless of race, albeit in different ways. Understanding the layers of both individual and collective racialized trauma is imperative to changing how trauma shows up in our bodies and lives, as well as how we can work on individual and collective healing. Many social movements and public health interventions are orienting towards resilience and nervous system healing, in conjunction with challenging systemic oppression, to bend us towards collective healing and liberation.

What is the Nervous System?

When we talk about how trauma shows up in the body, we are talking about how it impacts the nervous system. The nervous system is an intricate network of nerves and chemical communicators that run through and connect our brain, organs, and really, our entire being. Our nervous system is organized into some big-word categories, but here we're going to talk about it in terms of “survival” and “sustainable” physiology (a word used to describe the function of the body). Our survival physiologies are the states of our nervous system that help us fight, flee, or freeze. These are old and adaptive states that serve a function when engaged appropriately, but because of generations of trauma and systems of oppres-

sion, many of us are chronically stuck in our survival physiologies.

Two visible and well-known survival physiologies are fight and flight. Fight and flight (hyper-activated) can feel like heart racing, sweaty palms, and like all of our energy is directed towards our muscles to fight or to escape. This is activated in times of threat, but if we are unable to mobilize to fight or flight, we go into freeze which is a state of shutting down, checking out, or disassociating. Freeze (hypo-activated) is an energy conservation state, an “I can’t,” immobility state where we might feel numb, fuzzy, or slow our breathing and movement. In our survival physiology—fight, flight, and freeze—we don’t have as much access to our prefrontal cortex where we make thought-out decisions and access compassion for ourselves and others.

In addition to our survival physiologies, we also have access to sustainable physiologies. Steven Porges developed polyvagal theory, which has taught us more about our biological responses to safety and danger, as well as approaches to healing that focus on strengthening the body’s system for regulating activation and overwhelm. One of the contributions from polyvagal theory is an understanding of the ventral vagal complex which, when stimulated, is an important part of our sustainable physiology: states of social engagement, safety, connection with others, and a sense of engaged calm.

Supporting our individual and collective sustainable physiology is connected to how we grow resilience. It’s really important that we understand sustainable physiologies because our nervous systems are always communicating with each other through our mirror neurons, subtle body cues, facial expressions, and other bodily emotional reactions. This constant and sometimes invisible layer of communication and engagement is part of how we are wo-

ven together in a collective nervous system. As a society, individuals impact each other constantly in ways that are often dys-regulating or dis-organizing. However, we have the capacity to collectively shape our society by spending more time being in sustainable physiology, thus impacting one another in increasingly regulated and balanced ways.

Our nervous systems are constantly weaving in and out of various states of fight, flight, freeze and sustainable social engagement. Depending on many factors, including our relationship to systems of domination and experiences of individual, collective and historic trauma, we develop habits of survival physiologies. Our survival physiologies allow us to respond to threat. While we honor the self-protection of these survival states and resulting coping mechanisms, we aim to build new patterns and practices that help us access more sustainable pathways to feel joy and connection. Survival physiology patterns show up in our intimate attachment relationships, in our friendships, and in our work for social justice. Freeze can look like not speaking up or not interrupting oppression, fight can show up as defensiveness, flight can look like avoiding conflict or evading accountability for harm done. We aim to acknowledge these survival states as physiologic fragility, while committing to build and broaden our resilience and sustainable physiology.

As healing justice reminds us, the first step in healing is ending violence. In this writing we hope to honor the ways that we can build individual and collective resilience, safety and sustainable physiology. We hold that intention within a larger understanding of the ways that state violence and systemic oppression prevent healing and safety for so many communities. Building security in our attachment systems while supporting our own and others’ access to sustainable physiologies is part of this larger work.

What is Attachment?

Attachment styles are unconscious coping mechanisms, or relational adaptations, that we develop at a young age based on our early caregivers. Our attachment styles go on to impact how we behave in our intimate relationships and relate to attachment figures in our adult lives. The terms and definitions we synthesize here are simplified, though we acknowledge that to attempt to simplify something as complex as the human experience within attachment relationship is slippery. We encourage folks to read and learn more if interested, and there are many books, podcasts, and writings available. Further, we acknowledge that attachment theory is a U.S. and euro-settler centric framework, which comes with all sorts of shortcomings (including a disproportionate amount of studies being based on straight white people).

Our intent here is to share some simplified definitions, and help others access what we feel is another useful framework to better understand ourselves in connection to others. We investigate some of the ways that our attachment styles are informed not only by early nuclear family-based relationships, but also by intergenerational trauma, and the isolation, disconnection and chronic stress of capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy that create an almost systemic attachment wounding in our society. Lastly, we aim for this framework to help folks build towards (I)earned security inside of ourselves, our relationships, and our organizations. By (I)earned security, we are referring to the ability to resist anxious or avoidant patterns that we've inherited and instead to cultivate secure, safe, and connected tendencies in our relationships. We use this spelling because we see this as both something that we work for (earned)

attachment



and that we teach ourselves and each other (learned). So let's get into it!

There are four primary attachment styles. Categories and labels can help us understand ourselves and each other in the world, and we know they are often complex and nuanced rather than fixed and simple. With that, understanding these four distinct attachment styles can be helpful, and we are holding that there is a lot of messiness and complexity in the lived experience of attachment. There are lots of different words that attachment theorists use to talk about these styles—or patterns and tendencies—of attachment. We decided to use the terms anxious, avoidant, disorganized, and secure. These are common, but not the only terms you will see if you dive deeper into attachment studies.

Attachment can be viewed as a spectrum of how we relate in close or important relationships. Anxious, avoidant and disorganized are all within the spectrum of insecure attachment, meaning that close relationships to another human can bring up a variety of anxious or non-secure feelings and tendencies. While these tendencies can present very differently—from push away and avoid to pull and cling, or both—they can all be identified within the umbrella of “insecure” because closeness brings up some level of non-security and lack of ease. Secure attachment, on the other hand, is a way of relating intimately with others that is characterized by ease and calm in both closeness and autonomy.

Some people read about attachment styles and clearly self-identify as one of the four common styles. Others have a less clear leaning, identify with characteristics from each of the styles, or find them entirely un-relatable. Attachment theorists often say that everyone has a base-line attachment style, but that each relationship or context can bring out different tendencies within us.

Others believe that there are parts of all of us that are anxious, avoidant, and secure, and that the conditions and relationships we are in define what style is dominant in any given configuration. We are not advocating for people to select an attachment style label to 100% identify with, but rather to use the framework of attachment to identify contextual patterns and tendencies that are characterized by certain emotions and behaviors. This framework can provide some shared language to learn about ourselves more deeply and to engage in relational healing with lovers, partners, friends, and comrades.


One of the shortcomings we've come across in attachment theory is that it is often written about exclusively in a nuclear heterosexual romantic partnership context. We find attachment frameworks to be useful and relevant to all sorts of intimate relationships, including close friendships, community, and organizational dynamics. We try to speak to the multiplicity of where attachment shows up in our lives, and queer the way that (I)earned security can be a project of personal, relational and social transformation.

Another shortcoming we've found in much of the attachment writing is a kind of gender essentialism that often equates men as avoidant and women as anxious. One's gender does not determine one's attachment style. Rather, gender socialization within a patriarchal society fosters all kinds of insecure attachment. Nora Samaran in *Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture* explores more fully how patriarchy encourages insecure attachment. She shares how in a patriarchal society, men are raised to betray their true selves and are taught to see their healthy attachment needs, like emotional safety, connection, and nurturance, as a weakness and something to repress. As a result, she says, men “may be less able to experience women as whole people with intelligible

needs and feelings... [and they] may be less able to make sense of their own needs for connection.”²

Gender socialization for women and femmes within patriarchy encourages insecurity and dependency. Further, patriarchy systematically belittles the wisdom of attuned connection that is available to all of us, but often more accessible to women and femmes. This is dangerous because as a society this enables rape culture and misogyny. All systems of domination undoubtedly impact attachment, but not in a linear or predictable fashion. So within these musings on attachment we encourage curious investigation into the different ways that identity, power, privilege, and oppression inform and shape our attachment tendencies.

Much of attachment theory is based on parenting and caregiver-child relationships, and so we want to acknowledge the ways



when we heal ourselves,
we heal our ancestors
from wounds that run
deep in our family.
when we heal our
ancestors,
we heal wounds
that run deep
in humanity.
- miriam rose

that the systems of domination that govern our world undermine so many people’s ability to be safe, well, and present while parenting. We don’t want to shame parents and caregivers for the shortcomings that lead to insecure attachment, but rather acknowledge the ways that trauma and insecure attachments are passed down in families within the larger context of systemic oppression. Ultimately, it should not solely be the responsibility of individuals to heal attachment wounding, but a collective responsibility to heal and transform our economic and social fabric to allow all of us to live, love, and play with dignity and joy.

Lastly, a word about shame. For those of us who relate to avoidant, anxious, and disorganized attachment tendencies, learning about attachment can bring up shame. These relational adaptations that we’re about to dive into are cultivated from an early age and also informed by many factors in the context of systemic oppression and trauma. That said, we are all doing the best that we can. It doesn’t serve us to shame ourselves or others for the coping strategies that we’ve developed. Instead, we find it helpful to use these frameworks to learn about ourselves so that we can develop better, kinder, and more easeful ways of relating to ourselves and our loved ones.

Secure Attachment

For folks who tend towards a secure attachment, being warm, receptive, and loving comes easily. They are generally able to be emotionally intimate and are not easily upset over relationship matters. This doesn’t mean that relationships are always easy, but rather that people who experience secure attachment have enough trust in themselves and their relationships to honor their needs, communicate their needs, be vulnerable, hold space for others’ needs, and remain empathetic. They often feel comfortable sharing

their successes and being open about their struggles. They can be in tune with the needs of others and respond appropriately. When faced with threat, folks who tend towards secure attachment are often able to stay grounded without getting riled up (like folks who tend anxious) or shutting down (like folks who tend avoidant). As a result, people who tend towards secure attachment can have relationships that appear somewhat tame or less intense because they are not peppered with drama, push/pull dynamics, and unacknowledged anxiety.

Secure attachment is built in early childhood with emotionally available caregivers. Infants are unable to regulate their own emotions independently so a secure attachment relationship with a caregiver is one where the caregiver is consistently attuned and regulating the infants emotions, as well as meeting their physical needs. Attunement is noticing and responding appropriately to the needs of another, which can include honoring another's developmentally appropriate need for space, or offering comfort. As an infant grows into a toddler, secure parenting involves allowing for healthy exploration and providing a secure base to return to without smothering or anxiety.

Throughout development, secure attachment is built and grown in relationship to an available, supportive, attuned, and adaptive caregiver. It is important to note that even in the absence of these ideal early caregiving dynamics, individuals can be secure. While early attuned dynamics are powerful contributors, they are not the only pathway to secure attachment in relationships. Further, due to traumatic events or insecure partnering, folks raised with a secure, attuned caregiver can still struggle with insecure attachment as adults.

Avoidant Attachment

While anxious and avoidant attachment styles are both fundamentally insecure attachments, they look very different. For folks who tend towards avoidant attachment, there can be a strong investment in maintaining one's independence and ensuring that they can always rely on themselves. For those with avoidant tendencies, this can create a conflicted dynamic because, even though humans are relational creatures, this closeness can feel threatening, uncomfortable, suffocating, or just uninteresting.

In order to preserve an often unconscious need for independence and avoid a sensation of suffocation, these folks might avoid situations that create closeness or long term reliance. On the other hand, people with avoidant attachment tendencies might be in close or long term relationships, and the avoidance can manifest in more subtle ways such as discomfort with connective eye contact, not responding to petitions for affection, or not easily sharing intimate life details and emotional vulnerabilities. People who tend towards avoidant can struggle to be consciously aware of or honest about their needs and feelings. Not fully showing up in a relationship like this is a common self-protection mechanism for avoidant folks.

Caregivers being inconsistently reliable and emotionally unavailable can lead children to internalize the message that relying on others is not safe. This can look like caregivers who are overly busy, not home, emotionally avoidant or neglectful, or at the other end of the spectrum, caregivers who are smothering and controlling. When children have a need and reach out to a caregiver only to be ignored, or have their needs for autonomy and exploration stifled, they can learn to associate connection (attachment) with pain. For young children, this mis-attuned response can send the painful message that their needs are not important and should not be pri-

oritized. When this happens repeatedly, people with this childhood experience can learn to suppress having needs at all and might feel safer keeping people at arm's length or avoiding situations of true relational vulnerability.

People with avoidant tendencies can present as calm and low maintenance, while internally (whether conscious or not) they are suffering as they withdraw into themselves and repress their needs and emotions. They often use deactivating strategies, which include repelling body language, facial expressions, and other attempts at putting up walls to keep even loved ones at a distance. This can look like turning away, arms folded, scowling, not registering excitement upon seeing a loved one, shutting down, or refusing to acknowledge that anything is wrong.

For a variety of complex reasons, including old caregiver patterns and resulting stuck relationship dynamics, avoidant and anxious people are frequently attracted to each other. In an intimate relationship with someone who tends anxious, an avoidant person might feel that the other is needy and demanding, unaware of the ways that their own deactivating strategies contribute to an insecure dynamic.

Anxious Attachment

Anxious attachment is often a more visibly insecure attachment presentation that can be characterized by desire for closeness, fear of space, clinginess, or non-security in relationships. People with anxious attachment tendencies often have a great capacity for intimacy and love to be very close to romantic partners or other friends. Folks who experience more anxious attachment can have difficulty self-soothing and often rely on partners or close friends to be soothed and reassured. Anxious attachment actually

shapes the limbic system (emotional brain) to have less easy access to a felt sense of safety and security. Therefore, people with anxious tendencies often need more reassurance to feel connected and secure. They tend to be highly aware of others' reactions and moods. This combination creates ripe conditions for anxiety, insecurity, jealousy, and fear in relationships. People experiencing anxious attachment can engage in protest behaviors, which are strategies ultimately aimed at reconnecting. Protest behaviors can look like becoming upset; distancing and subtle punishing to get attention; crying, pouting, or clinging.

In childhood, someone with anxious tendencies likely experienced an inconsistent or mis-attuned caregiver, someone who could meet basic needs and be appropriately warm at times, but who could also be emotionally cold or absent at others. In response to this unreliable or inconsistent nurturing, an infant's survival brain is activated and they learn to cry, grasp, or scream because that sometimes allows them to get the attention they need.

These learned coping techniques from childhood can carry into adulthood and play out as big emotions, demanding attention, and pouting when emotional needs are not perceived to be met. The fear or insecurity triggered in anxious attachment, and the resulting body sensations can feel so vivid and compelling that it can feel as though their loved one is making them feel this way, rather than emotions being internally generated (albeit in connection and response to others). Because of the ways that anxious attachment shapes the limbic system from an early age, people with anxious attachment tend to have a more external locus of control. This means they are more inclined to see their experiences and emotions as being a response to external factors or other people, rather than internally driven. This can lead folks with anxious attachment ten-

dencies to require more external validation and reassurance. Anxiously attached people also have a need and capacity for autonomy and self-regulation, and this can become more visible as they (l)earn increasing security.

Disorganized Attachment

In the 1980's attachment researchers noted a fourth category that didn't meet the criteria for the first three attachment behaviors. They coined this category disorganized attachment. Disorganized attachment is often left out of attachment theory, but is brilliantly outlined and expanded upon in *Nurturing Resilience: Helping Clients Move Forward from Developmental Trauma* by Kathy Kaine and Stephen J. Terrell. They say that disorganized attachment can present as a disoriented and inconsistent push/pull way of relating to loved ones. Disorganized attachment can manifest as some of the more extreme behaviors associated with avoidant and anxious attachment systems, sometimes with those behaviors playing out simultaneously. Through their research, they found that people with disorganized attachment can appear to have fewer coping skills.

Unresolved developmental trauma in a caregiver's life is the best predictor of disorganized attachment between caregiver and child. These caregivers might have early experiences of severe neglect, abuse, or unresolved trauma that reduced their ability to regulate their own threat responses, often leading to a lack of impulse control. These behaviors present as frightening to the child which can result in a child having to learn to manage internally an ongoing state of fright and terror. Intergenerational trauma can be passed on through disorganized attachment dynamics of unresolved trauma between generations of caregivers and children. Folks with disorganized attachment tendencies can, with skilled support, self-work,

love, and nurturance also (l)earn secure attachment.

Attachment & Polyamory

Since many of us queers are in non-traditional and non-monogamous relationship formations, it feels important to ask the question of where non-monogamy and polyamory fit into all of this. As most traditional attachment theory focuses on straight, monogamous, nuclear romantic and family formations, we haven't found much on how attachment styles and tendencies impact relationship styles as far as monogamy, non-monogamy, and polyamory. From what we've read, and what we've experienced personally, it does seem that people who tend towards avoidant attachment tendencies, or folks who are secure are more likely to have ease with non-monogamous relationship formations for a variety of reasons.

This is not to say that folks who tend anxious can't do non-monogamy or polyamory. However, the way that anxious attachment can shape the limbic system towards experiences of insecurity, fear and feelings of bodily un-safety poses some additional hurdles that often can't be rationalized. Attachment styles are not fixed entities and different tendencies are brought out in different relationship conditions. So, avoidant with avoidant tending folks or secure with avoidant or even perhaps secure with anxious pairings might be more equipped for the additional challenges that non-monogamy can bring than anxious with avoidant pairings.

We believe that no relationship style is inherently better or more radical than another. Sometimes the most radical thing is to be honest with yourself about your needs. For some, this means accepting the fact that polyamory isn't for everyone. For those who are committed to practicing polyamory, it can be useful to understand the body experiences and non-verbal cues that are part of

our attachment systems so that we can build in practices to intentionally create more secure relationship containers. We hope that the lens of attachment theory can be one useful framework for people to reckon honestly with their needs, goals, boundaries, and desires when it comes to navigating the complex terrain of relationship styles.



Tools

In this section, we will explore some of our favorite tools and frameworks for (I)earned security and nervous system regulation. We are using the term (I)earned security as an umbrella for various strategies and approaches to relational healing, or the healing that we do in relationships. Nervous system regulation includes different tools and approaches to help regulate our own biology and emotional states. Put simply, (I)earned security is more about co-regulation and nervous system regulation is more about self-regulation.

In *Nurturing Resilience*, the authors talk about regulation as our bodies' ability to manage our emotional state and to calm ourselves when we experience heightened emotions such as fear, anger, and frustration. They explain that regulation is a learned process that we integrate by observing others and through attachment with our early caregivers. Nervous system regulation relies on co-regulation and self-regulation skills. Co-regulation is the way in which our nervous system is settled through the support and soothing we get in attuned relationships with others. We can learn co-regulation early on with attuned caregivers if they soothe us when we are upset, and let us explore in developmentally appropriate ways.

Mainstream attachment theory exclusively focuses on the ways that attachment wounding arises in monogamous romantic relationships. The container of intimate romantic relationships is particularly ripe for early attachment wounds to be triggered as we unconsciously seek out and reproduce familiar unhealthy caregiver dynamics in order to attempt to heal and transform them. We want to acknowledge that attachment wounding can also be triggered in

platonic and community level relationships, but not usually to the same degree of intensity.

Attachment healing work in romantic partnerships can be tremendously powerful and transformative. However, too often this work happens in isolation and separate from community support. We feel that the most powerful potential for interpersonal transformation within romantic partnerships is when they are held in community. When we build resilient communities with many layers of secure relationships, we create more space for mirroring, accountability and deep love within romantic partnerships. We hope these tools will be helpful in both attachment healing within romantic relationships, and on a community level.

As Naomi Ortiz says in *Sustaining Spirit: Self Care for Social Justice*, “The reflection for growth and transformation, the work we have to do inside of ourselves, is not quick or efficient. The greatest transformations happen when we make time to reflect on what is possible.”³ We don't want to downplay how challenging, long term and deep this work of (I)earned security and nervous system regulation can be—and yet, we fundamentally believe that humans are resilient and have the capacity to be on the non-linear, messy, beautiful journey towards relational healing. One of the outcomes of this work is that we get to live our best lives.



We begin by sharing some frameworks that radically reimagine how attachment theory can be applied to social change work. Next, we explore (I)earned security and some more tools to build secure relationships. We then finish with a few tools for self-regulation and nervous system healing.

Distributed Dependence

In episode 37 of Healing Justice Podcast, Lucien Demarius shares his framework of distributed dependence as a way to build resilience and healthy relationships by connecting authentically and intimately with at least five people.⁴ Distributed dependence allows us to build internal stability by co-regulating with others, not just romantic intimate partners. We like this framework because it expands traditional attachment theory from the nuclear relationship to the community.

We live in capitalism which breeds individualism and isolation to the point where one in five Americans identify as chronically lonely. Johann Hari in *Lost Connections: Why You're Depressed and How to Find Hope* explores research on the impact of loneliness on health and depression. He writes about surveys in which social scientists have asked people in the US how many close friends they have. Decades ago, the most common answer was three, and by 2004 the most common answer was none. When cortisol (stress hormone) levels were measured in people experiencing intense loneliness, it rivaled cortisol levels present when being physically attacked by a stranger. It's deeply stressful to be lonely. Hari explains that what is needed to counter loneliness is not just being around others, but being in mutual aid and protection-based relationships with others. Within this context, distributed dependence is resistance to capitalism and necessary life-saving medicine.

By choosing the framework of distributed dependence, we are sharing the responsibility of learning to practice healthy co-regulation on a community level. Further, Demarius says that distributed dependence allows us to create a container where we can approach diversity and difference not as a threat, and instead sustain complexity and inclusion in our communities. In practice, distribut-

ed dependence looks like actively cultivating intimate, secure, mutual, and vulnerable relationships beyond romantic intimate relationships.

Nurturance Culture

In *Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture* Nora Samaran explores how attachment theory can help us connect on a larger community level and heal from the consequences of systemic oppression. She proposes nurturance culture as the antidote to masculine rape culture and uses the lens of (I)earned security as a path to get there. On nurturance culture she says, "What we need is a model for slow self-love that brings shame into the light and finds reality checks with those who accept you unconditionally, hold you accountable, and aren't going anywhere."⁵

We see this sentiment as a blue-print to using the frameworks of attachment theory and (I)earned security to do powerful and liberatory community-based resistance work. Like distributed dependence, nurturance culture prioritizes creating a container of secure attachment and connection on a community level. This creates more space for important and often deeply challenging political work like countering white fragility, transforming toxic masculinity, and working across differences in race, class, ability, etc. The current practices in many queer and activist communities is harsh critique, call out culture, and canceling people when they make mistakes or do harm. Our society and, in turn, our movements are punishment-oriented (think time outs, think call-outs, think prisons).

As transformative justice organizers Mariame Kaba and Mia Mingus remind us, it understandably often doesn't feel good to be accountable. Mia Mingus asks us, "What if accountability wasn't scary? It will never be easy or comfortable, but what if it wasn't

scary? What if our own accountability wasn't something we ran from, but something we ran towards and desired, appreciated, held as sacred?"⁶ Nurturance culture and transformative justice practices counter some of these tendencies by fostering true accountability with patience, love, and moving us towards secure attachment.

Reflection Questions:

1. In times of crisis, who are your people that you rely on?
2. Where do you see distributed dependence in your community? Can you identify one or two people to expand or deepen relationships with?
3. How do you already practice nurturance culture in your relationships? In your organizing or in community more broadly? Where are places that you could bring more patience, unconditional love, and support?



(L)earned Secure Attachment:

Regardless of the attachment tendencies we've learned from our early caregiver dynamics and adult coping mechanisms, we all have secure parts in us and the capacity to grow them. Attachment theorists talk about earned security as the ability to come to terms with childhood experiences, develop a coherent narrative about the past and its impact on how we are in the world, and learn to feel safe in connection and in autonomy. There's not a simple algorithm for (l)earned security, but there are various practices that can help us get there. Some of these overlap with self/nervous system regulation practices, and some are done in the container of intimate relationships with friends, partners, or lovers. Practices for (l)earned security likely look different for people based on what attachment tendencies dominate.

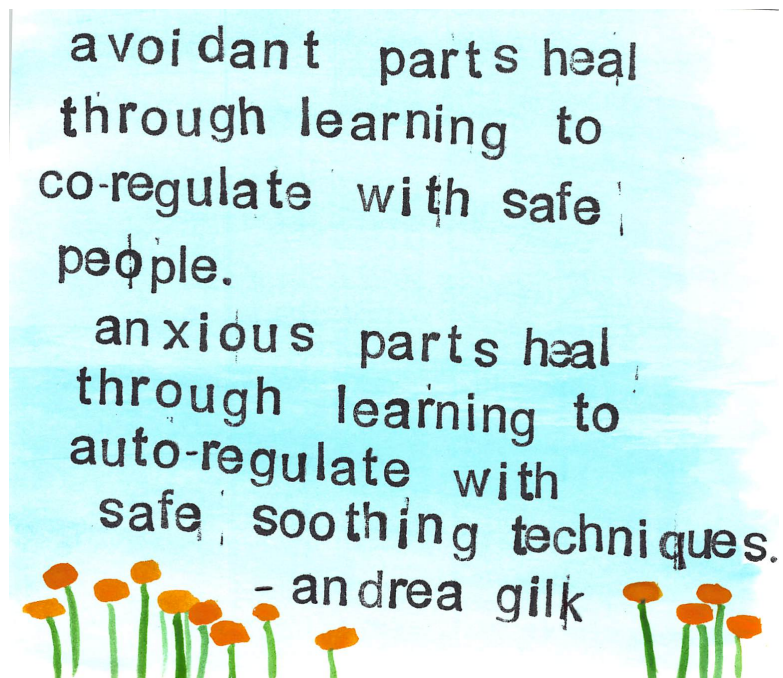
People with more anxious tendencies often rely pretty heavily on co-regulation and connection with close people in order to feel okay. When anxious parts are up, this can trigger all sorts of insecurity and anxiety that can feel like the responsibility of the other person to fix, but ultimately (l)earned security is built when anxious parts learn to self-soothe and self-regulate in addition to co-regulating and being reassured by close people.

Folks with anxious tendencies might focus on self-regulation and self-soothing practices to get out of survival physiologies. These can include a number of tools we talk about here, like mindfulness, loving kindness meditation, and orientation to pleasure. Part of the work for anxious parts is about noticing sensations and emotions that arise in our bodies when relating to our close people, and noticing the reactions that come from them. From there, it's easier to identify needs, and figure out how to ask for what we need. Often-times that can be asking for reassurance, which is especially useful

once we've done the work to self soothe and regulate enough to take that reassurance in.

For folks with more avoidant tendencies, the practices might be about learning to connect to close people and stretching to stay in connection in spite of impulses to pull away and self-soothe alone. Identifying and acknowledging childhood wounds, as well as tending to young, hurt parts of self can be especially helpful for folks with avoidant tendencies. Practices can include noticing avoidant tendencies as they arise without shame or blame and letting go of old narratives that they are self-sufficient and don't have needs.

The dynamics that can arise and be perpetuated between people with anxious tendencies and those who tend avoidant in intimate relationships are known as the "anxious-avoidant trap." As we discussed before, folks with anxious tendencies and folks with avoidant tendencies are often drawn to each other. We see this as



the result of a complex combination of familiar, unprocessed caregiver dynamics, suppressed parts of self, and ultimately our brilliant desire to heal and transform. By unconsciously recreating inherited relationship patterns we create the potential for transforming them into new ways of relating.

The ways that anxious parts and avoidant parts trigger each other relationally is no joke. That said, we believe that relationships with all kinds of attachment tendencies can succeed and become secure with enough mutual commitment, self, and relational work. We don't have a simple how-to for how to get out of the common and understandable anxious-avoidant relational ruts, but a couple things we think can be helpful are:

1. Build a secure container from the beginning: secure answers to insecure questions, avoid conditions that lead to insecurity (e.g. indefinite long distance), address power dynamics early and often, and communicate directly.
2. Use the framework of attachment to gain greater self awareness of anxious or avoidant parts and tendencies, as well as their triggers.
3. Cultivate awareness of how those tendencies show up in our bodies and behaviors.
4. Investigate with curiosity, love, and without judgment.
5. Co-commit to shifting those tendencies within the relational container they are arising.
6. Seek body-based or somatic-informed couples therapy when available and desired.
7. As with any relationship, know when/if it's time to leave a relationship.

Relationally, some qualities to strive for in building (I)earned secure relationships include being available, practicing direct communication, asking instead of assuming, engaging in conflict without defensiveness or punishing. People in secure relationships are willing to make mistakes, to change, and willing to assume best intentions in order to forgive and move on. They will treat friends and partners with love, respect, and adoration.

There's no one right way to build (I)earned security. For some people, intentionally and explicitly practicing some of this with a close friend can be helpful. It can also be helpful to spend more time with folks who you have a secure relationship with since that can help balance insecure dynamics that might be playing out in an intimate partnership. We see distributed dependence as an exciting framework to explore practices of (I)earning security.

Direct Communication

Whether it's in the form of suppressing needs and therefore not asking for them to be met, or a reliance on others to guess our needs and meet them for us, insecure attachments of all kinds often foster unskillful communication. For this reason, we see direct communication as a useful tool in helping build (I)earned security. Direct communication is an approach to communication that involves active listening and directly stating one's needs, thoughts, and feelings in an honest and compassionate way. Active listening involves giving one's full attention to the speaker (turning your body towards the speaker, not multitasking, etc.), being open to what they have to say (letting them finish speaking before formulating your response, not cutting them off, etc.), and expressing that you've heard what they've said by repeating it to confirm full understanding ("I hear that you're saying X, did I get that right?"). Directly stating one's needs requires

first being in touch with one's thoughts, desires, feelings, and needs (to the extent that you are able), and then sharing that information with another. This can also look like stating that you are struggling to identify your needs and asking for a set amount of time to figure it out.

While one person can be a direct communicator, direct communication is most effective when both or all participants commit to it. As a survival strategy, many of us learn to communicate indirectly. This can look like protest behaviors (for example pouting and hoping someone knows it's a cry for attention) or deactivating strategies (for example crossing our arms and turning our body away hoping that someone knows it's an ask for alone time). This can also look like asking "do you want to leave?" rather than saying "I want to leave."

It is understandable why we may have developed indirect communication strategies but they are less effective to generative relationships and often put our loved ones in the position of having to be mind readers. This places an unfair burden on others to guess how we are feeling rather than doing the (hard) work of directly stating our needs and openly listening when others state their needs. When all participants are committed to direct communication, there is a collective agreement to try to not engage in mal-adaptive coping mechanisms like protest behaviors and disconnecting behaviors. This commitment helps to create a container where safety, trust, and (I)earned secure attachment can grow.

One of the tenants of active listening is taking another's words at face value. This means believing what the other person is saying is true and only stating things that are true for us. So if my partner says "I'm fine, I don't want to go to the party" and I have some skepticism that this isn't true, I get to ask once "are you

sure you don't want to go to the party?" and if they respond, "yes, I'm sure" then I need to trust their "yes." This is another reason why it is helpful to have all parties committed to working toward direct communication, so that my partner knows that I won't engage in a cycle of repeatedly asking them, "are you sure?" even if their behavior implies that they're not sure. For people who struggle with anxious tendencies, one of the most useful tools for direct communication can be to identify when anxiety is high and to ask for reassurance. For those in relationship with folks with anxious attachment styles, we can see those asks as a gift and support the courage it takes to ask for reassurance.

With direct communication some of the key ingredients are honesty, empathy, and patience. Even if all parties are committed to direct communication, we don't learn it in a day and sometimes we fall back on old patterns. This is why it is important to acknowledge that healing is not linear and slipping into old coping mechanisms is not reflective of failure or lack of growth. Instead, it is helpful to celebrate the wins and to be patient and understanding with our loved ones and ourselves when we make mistakes.

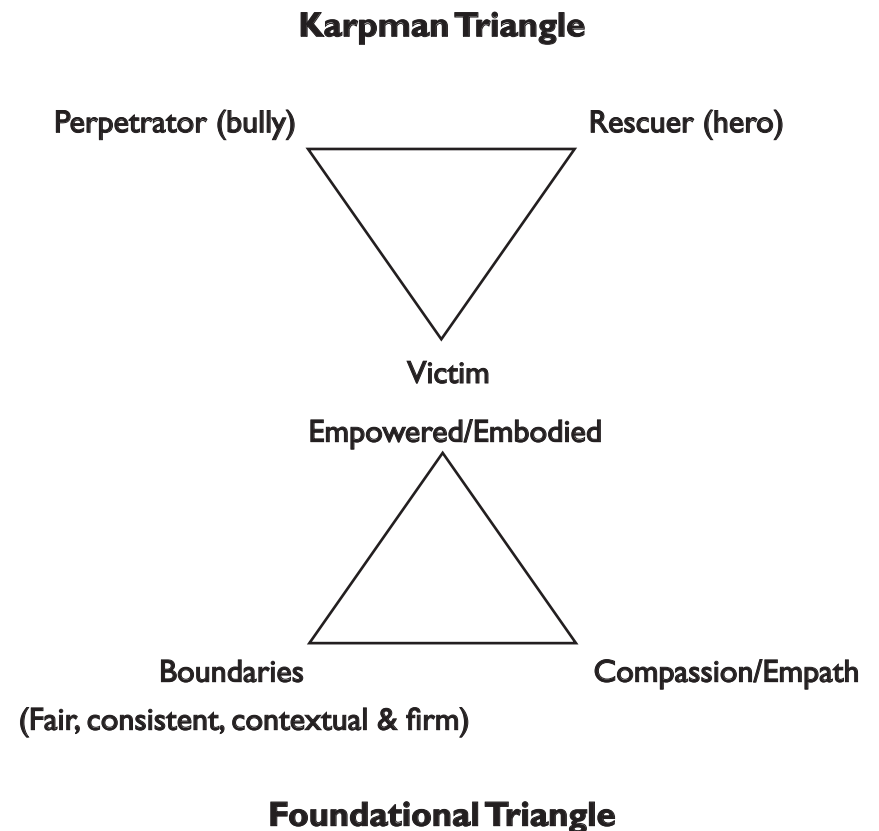
The Karpman Triangle & Foundational Triangle

The Karpman Triangle describes polarized relational habits that can occur between two or more people when there is stress and conflict. It can serve as a map since it outlines potential destructive interaction that can occur relationally. If in a person's early experiences with family and society, "rescuing" behavior was "what felt right" and was reinforced, that person will take the learned behavior of rescuing into future relationships. Early learning and reinforcement of this can lead that person to interpret others as

1.) a person needing rescuing; a *victim*, or 2.) a person who is "causing someone to need rescuing"; a *perpetrator* or *bully*.

The same is true for the person for whom bullying or being "an aggressor" was learned early as a way to survive and then reinforced in the family. However, this person will tend to see others as a victim or rescuer.

The Karpman Triangle, which came out of psychiatry in the 1960's, is now utilized as the keystone concept for the 12 Step program of Codependency Anonymous or CODA. A friend and Somatic Experiencing Practitioner, Barbara Collier, has developed a corresponding triangle that we find very useful for better understanding our relational triggers and how to step off the Triangle. She



uses the Karpman Triangle as a map/guide to help people understand what they might be experiencing during relational conflict.

Her corresponding triangle, the “Foundational Triangle,” offers people other tangible ways of being in relationship without staying in the roles that arose and were reinforced in early years by family of origin and imposed societal expectations. She finds the graphic visual of the Foundational Triangle, when used with the Karpman Triangle, offers people a way to get back to their authentic relational capacity.

This tool can be used to identify where in the Karpman Triangle we might fall during a relational dynamic. For example, if I find myself falling into the role of rescuer/hero in a triangle dynamic, I can lean into the compassion and empathy for the person I see in the victim role with boundaries and without overextending. Over time and with ongoing work, we can learn to identify our triggers (our survival mechanisms that we learned relationally), and use the Foundational Triangle to cultivate new ways of relating with boundaries and compassion.

Shame Resilience

In recent years, shame research has exploded and people like Brene Brown have brought awareness of shame into popular culture. It is helpful to see shame as existing on a spectrum with pro-social shame on one end and toxic, maladaptive shame on the other. Pro-social shame allows us to understand how our behavior impacts others and when we’ve transgressed social or interpersonal boundaries. On the other hand, when we spend a prolonged time in a toxic shame state it becomes isolating and we internalize the message that we are bad, we are unlovable, we are incapable, and therefore that we don’t deserve to belong in community. Chronic

shame becomes a toxic state of repression, self-blame, and collapse. If we are repeatedly shamed for normal petitions for intimacy and connection as children—either through neglect, abuse, or overly controlling and smothering caregivers—we can get chronically stuck in shame states.

It is dangerous to be in a chronic shame state because it prevents us from being accountable. Unlike with pro-social shame, there is no possibility for growth, change, or accountability that can come out of toxic shame, because we are essentially in a freeze state. This state of shut down inhibits self-reflection and therefore any kind of transformation or change. In their video “How Shame Blocks Accountability” Stas Schmiedt and Lea Roth talk about the ways that shame shuts us down and prevents true accountability.⁷ Knowing this helps us have a better understanding of how to move out of chronic shame states and towards accountability.

The antidote to shame then is shame resilience. We see shame resilience as nurturance culture, showing up for each other with empathy and unconditional positive regard, and creating a culture where people feel that they belong. This allows us to create the conditions for pro-social shame and to move away from toxic shame. If there is a sufficient container (i.e. it’s short term and ultimately ends with connection and validation) to hold this in a supportive way then we can come out of this shame state with greater learning and understanding of how our behaviors impact others. In this container, we can see that it’s our behavior that’s the cause, but that having made a mistake doesn’t mean that we aren’t worthy of belonging and connection.

As humans living in this society we are flawed and are prone to making mistakes. This means that we sometimes harm others. Shame resilience on a community level is weaving a web where

people can make mistakes and be called in with compassion and love. A collective shame resilience is useful to countering harmful tendencies like white fragility. For white folks specifically, honing (or developing) shame resilience is vital to countering white supremacy and any liberatory work. White fragility—a white person’s discomfort and defensiveness when confronted with information about racism—is a physiologic shut-down, a shame state that ultimately reinforces white supremacy by inhibiting a white person’s ability to address and change harmful behaviors. Understanding how shame works and committing individually and on a community level to work towards creating more nurturing containers for self reflection, accountability, and change work is part of shame resilience.

The Window of Tolerance

Being able to identify our bodily sensations and reactions when we are in different nervous system states can be used as a tool for self-regulation. Learning to recognize when our bodies go into hyper-activated states (fight, flight), hypo-activated (freeze or collapse) states, and when we are in our sustainable physiology can help us move towards spending more time in our sustainable physiology. Some somatic practitioners talk about sustainable physiology as the “window of tolerance.” We have found this framework, and the below graphic, useful as a chart to visualize where our bodies and nervous system is at any given moment.

Things often move very fast when we are in our hyper-activated states of fight and flight, so slowing down enough to notice when we are activated can help us settle and return to our window of tolerance. Things can move very slowly and get fuzzy when we are in freeze, so noticing those sensations that tell us we are in freeze can help us increase our awareness, try different

practices to help feel safe, and return to the window of tolerance. When an emotion or bodily response comes up it can be helpful to be specific when exploring, “where am I in regards to my window of tolerance? Am I slightly hyper-activated but in that energizing grey space between, or am I totally popped off and over my threshold (triggered)?”

Hyper-activated

Fight, flight

Window of Tolerance

Sustainable physiology

Hypo-activated

Freeze

When we are really over threshold, or triggered, physiologically it’s like pressing on the accelerator (hyper-activated, fight and flight) at the same time as the brakes (hypo-activated, freeze). This bodily experience can be really intense and hard. When we are in it, it’s often not possible to rush out of it to a more regulated state. However, just identifying what’s going on and understanding that it’s a temporary state can be useful for moving through it, as we wait for the storm to pass. As we engage in nervous system regulation work over time, we might notice that we spend an increasing amount of time in our sustainable physiology. Noticing this sends positive feedback into our system that is in itself reinforcing of this sustainable state.

Window of tolerance can be a useful framework for people who experience privilege to unlearn internalized oppression and work on showing up with integrity in social justice work. We discussed how shame states are a physiologic shut-down or freezy experience where transforming harmful behaviors is often difficult if not entirely out of reach. We can use window of tolerance as a sort of compass for our own self work, and for supporting others to challenge oppressive behaviors. When we are called out or called in for making a mistake from a place of privilege, locating our embodied responses and where we land on the spectrum of window of tolerance can be useful to intentionally address the mistake we made without falling into a shame spiral or shut down state. Further, if we are calling in a friend or comrade for a mistake or microaggression, reading their body cues or asking them about their body experience can be helpful in identifying how and when to dive deeper in conversation in a genuine attempt to support change in behavior or accountability.

Importantly, the window of tolerance is not the same as comfort. In fact, we have to experience discomfort in order to change and transform. The window of tolerance framework can help us find that sweet spot of discomfort that is still within proximity to sustainable physiology where one can take in information, reflect, stay connected, and actually change behaviors or take accountability for harm done.

Lessons from Buddhism, Mindfulness, & Radical Dharma

There is a lot out there on mindfulness and meditation as far as research on its benefits and resources for practice. Here, we are going to reflect briefly on a few specific tools and teachers

within this vast body of work that we have found especially helpful. Radical Dharma is a queer, Black-led meditation and spiritual revolutionary praxis. One of the authors of Radical Dharma, Rev. angel Kyodo williams, in an interview for an online trauma summit, articulates how mindfulness and meditation practice connect to ending white supremacy and broad social transformation. She recognizes that collective wounding from structures of oppression impact us by disconnecting us from our own inner knowing—that relationality between the core, the gut, the heart and the head. She encourages us as a first step in the Radical Dharma tradition to connect to our bodies and take daily moments to be present with what is, to sit with what comes up, and to be with the discomfort. When we survive the discomfort and move through it, we are made more whole. This framing and all of the writing and teaching coming out of the Radical Dharma tradition inspire us for what is possible with Black-led contemporary Buddhist practice.

Another practice that we've found particularly helpful include loving kindness meditation. *Metta* or loving kindness meditation is a widely used Buddhist practice of repeating loving phrases directed towards oneself or others. There are many reasons that people in our society are taught not to love themselves, often rooted in systems of oppression and internalized oppression. Loving kindness can be a powerful practice for the difficult work of learning to love oneself.

There are many ways loving kindness can be and has been practiced. We are really into people using it however it feels most helpful. Some typical phrases are along the lines of “may I be safe and protected,” “may I be protected from internal and external harm,” “may I be well in body and mind.” For some people, offering loving kindness to oneself can be especially difficult, and especially

powerful and healing. If it is too challenging to start there, some people suggest starting by offering loving kindness to a beloved pet or an uncomplicated, close person. Loving kindness meditation can be helpful in building shame resilience and (l)earned security, especially for folks with anxious attachments as they learn to self-soothe and self-regulate.

We've also found *Tonglen* to be very helpful. *Tonglen* is a Tibetan Buddhist practice of connecting to a sense of shared humanity by breathing in pain and suffering you are experiencing for all of the beings who have also shared that experience of pain and suffering, and breathing out with thoughts of wellness, love and openness. This can be used with specific experiences such as insomnia, feeling insecure or jealous, and experiencing physical pain.

Lastly, there are a couple white Buddhist practitioners who have an anti-oppression lens and offer free meditation talks online that can be incredibly supportive for using mindfulness as a tool for challenging white supremacy and white privilege. Tara Brach and Arinna Weisman are two of the teachers that have supported and inspired us. We have found these tools and teachers useful to the work of self-acceptance, self-awareness, and presence. These are crucial ingredients to showing up with love and integrity in relationships and organizations.

Orientation to Pleasure

What we have learned from the field of somatics, Organic Intelligence™, and the brilliant pleasure activist adrienne maree brown is about the powerful potential of pleasure in the role of personal and collective transformation. As a vision for this tool, we are inspired by adrienne maree brown's intentions for her book *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*. Among other intentions,

she states that we can “recognize that pleasure is a measure of freedom...create more room for joy, wholeness, and aliveness (and less room for oppression, repression, self-denial and unnecessary suffering) in your life...[and] begin to understand the liberation possible when we collectively orient around pleasure and longing.”⁸ brown explicitly focuses on the importance of pleasure activism and orienting towards pleasure for Black, Indigenous, and people of color who have systematically been oppressed and excluded from experiencing pleasure. We believe it is crucial to collectively center and make space for the pleasure of marginalized folks. And from what we understand about the nervous system, orientation to pleasure is a tool for healing and coherence that can be part of social transformation for folks with all different identities and experiences.

Our nervous systems oscillates through intensity/activation and release/deactivation cycles constantly. For example, in every breath we take, our heart rate increases (intensity/activation) as we breathe in, and decreases as we breathe out (release/deactivation). We live in a society that is filled with trauma, violence, and chaos. Given the state of the world, there is understandably a strong pull towards a vortex of chaos and dysregulation in our individual and collective nervous systems. And, there is the organic impulse towards self and collective organization, or coherence. What we mean by organization or coherence is the body's ability to gravitate towards those organic oscillations as a tool of self-regulation. When there is such a strong and heavy pull towards the intensity/activation due to the imbalance of the world and resultantly our bodies, it can take some intentional effort to re-establish a balance between that intensity/activation and the release/deactivation that we so desperately need. And here is where orienting to pleasure can be a powerful tool.

So often in movement work, we are bonding through painful or traumatic experiences, and orienting to pleasure is a different and perhaps more sustainable way to bond. Relationally bonding with friends, lovers, partners or comrades through daily non-addictive and meaningful enjoyment can help us build increasing capacity for resilience and collective resistance. As we've discussed the ways that our nervous systems are constantly engaging with and informing each other, we can imagine the impact on our organizing spaces, work-places and relationships when we do the personal work of supporting our nervous system in returning to its natural oscillations.

Practice:

Take a moment to let your eyes go where they want. Notice something in the space you are in that is pleasant or neutral to you. Notice the texture, the colors. Take your time with it. If in this process you feel inclined to turn your attention to your body, notice if there are any positive sensations that arise. Is there any warmth, any place you feel the weight or stability of your bones? Take a moment with this, and then let your attention return to the visual. If available, let yourself notice overall any sensations or experiences that feel good and settle in that as long as feels comfortable. This exercise can also be practiced by orienting to a sound instead of visual.

Conclusion

Thank you for coming on this journey with us! The work of relational healing and (l)earning security—just like dismantling privilege and domination inside of ourselves—is a lifelong process. It's hard work and it's important to celebrate the wins along the way!

We are swimming in legacies of our early child-caregiver relationships and reenacting what we learned as children in our adult lives. Because of patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, colonialism, and intergenerational trauma, most of us weren't given the ideal secure attachment and co-regulating conditions in childhood. However, we get to learn and practice secure attachment, and how to regulate ourselves as adults! Investing in nervous system regulation and seeking safety and embodiment in how we show up within our relationships can be part of radical, queer, trauma-informed, joyful, cultural, and social transformation.

Endnotes

- 1 Cara Page, "Healing Justice," <https://transformharm.org/healing-justice/>
- 2 Nora Samaran, *Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture*, pg 18.
- 3 Naomi Ortiz, *Sustaining Spirit: Self Care for Social Justice*.
- 4 Samaran, *Turn This World Inside Out*, page 35.
- 5 Mia Mingus, "Dreaming Accountability," May 5, 2019
<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/>
- 6 Healing Justice Podcast, "37 Relational Somatics with Lucién Demaris of Relational Uprising," <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/healingjustice/healing-justice/e/60856334>
- 7 "How Shame Blocks Accountability," Created by Project Nia and the Barnard Center for Research on Women,
<http://bcrw.barnard.edu/videos/how-shame-can-block-accountability/>
- 8 adrienne maree brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, pg 1.



Booklist

- *Attached: The New Science of Adult Attachment and How it Can Help You Find and Keep Love* by Amir Levine & Rachel SF Heller
- *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* by Eli Clare
- *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
- *Codependent No More* by Melody Beattie
- *Conflict Is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair* by Sarah Schulman
- *Conscious Loving: The Journey to Co-Commitment* by Gay Hendricks and Kathlyn Hendricks
- *Fumbling Towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators* by Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan
- *Insecure In Love: How Anxious Attachment Can Make You Feel Jealous, Needy, and Worried and What You Can Do About It* by Leslie Becker-Phillips

- *Keeping the Love You Find: A Personal Guide* by Harville Hendrix
- *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression And the Unexpected Solutions* by Johann Hari
- *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menakem
- *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* by Marshall B. Rosenberg
- *Nurturing Resilience: Helping Clients Move Forward from Developmental Trauma An Integrative Somatic Approach* by Kathy L. Kain and Stephen J Terrell
- *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* by adrienne maree brown
- *Self-Therapy: A Step-By-Step Guide to Creating Wholeness and Healing Your Inner Child Using IFS, A New, Cutting-Edge Psychotherapy* by Jay Earley
- *Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice* by Naomi Ortiz
- *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* by Bessel van der Kolk
- *Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture* by Nora Samaran
- *Your Brain on Love: The Neurobiology of Healthy Relationships* by Stan Tatkin



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