

The Real Work: A Podcast About Theater Culture and Transformative Justice

Episode 4: Living Accountably

TIERRA: The Real Work, a podcast about theater, culture and transformative justice. What does it really mean to practice transformative justice? Could doing so heal patterns of oppression, violence, and abuse, and grow communities where everyone thrives or about in the theater community? Where would we even start?

This six episode audio series tells the story of 27 theater practitioners on unceded Lisjan Ohlone territory, who gathered regularly for one year to explore using transformative justice for TJ and our creative spaces in our lives. We were guided by one of the founders of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, Mia Mingus.

This podcast is a report back and an invitation. May we invest in the real work it will take to end and heal all levels of violence for ourselves, our communities, and our future generations.

Episode four, living Accountably. Greetings, y'all. It's Tierra here. Welcome back. Thank you so much for returning once again. Let's continue the work. Another ritual that began each TJ workshop was to collectively read through the values, principles, and practices that guide the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective.

AMANDA: Values. Interdependence.

RAY: Integrity, and authentic connection.

JAMILA: Trust.

NIKKI: Compassion.

VALERIE: Humility and courage.

SK: Healing.

SARAH: Responsibility and accountability.

SARAH ROSE: Sharing and sustainability.

EMILY: Transformation and growth.

LEEANN: Liberation and possibilities.

FENNER: Principles. Value-based work.

KIM: Personal and systematic transformation.

LEONTYNE: Building through relationship and trust.

CLIVE: Taking accountability.

UNIDENTIFIED: Building relationships in service of liberation.

RADHIKA: Showing up for each other out of duty and choice

J JHA: Practices. Proactively taking accountability.

TIERRA: Prioritizing our relationships with ourselves and each other over actions or goals.

ERIC: Encouraging decentralized growth.

AMANDA: Holding the humanity and dignity of everyone.

RAY: Holding contradictions and complexity.

JAMILA: Practicing transparency while holding confidentiality.

NIKKI: Engaging in personal growth and healing work outside of a group.

VALERIE: Collective action and collective leadership.

SK: Challenging oppressive dynamics in the service of connection and trust.

SARAH: Engaging in conflict openly and honestly.

SARAH ROSE: Putting the work first, keeping it moving forward.

EMILY: Individual and collective reflection and adaptation.

LEEANN: Expressing gratitude and appreciation.

TIERRA: We were encouraged to try on these values, principles, and practices throughout the training year and to reflect on [00:03:00] what it was like to try and embody them

SARAH: In our group, kind of the conclusion we came to at the end there is that many of the values and principles and practices that we feel we are really good at or that we consistently practice well are things that we also find can be areas where we struggle.

MIA: Yes.

SARAH: And that it's kind of like this constant work that we're doing, that nothing is just like I'm inherently good at trust. It's like, *[laughter]* I work really hard to make sure that I am trustworthy or that I trust others. When I spoke at least of a value that I feel like I, I practice well, and here's how I practice it here, here's how it manifests, and to see the reaction from my group members, I had to be like, "Oh, but it's not like this is just me being amazing at everything." Like let's talk about the work that it took to get there and how we had to take the time to kind of reflect on, this isn't just like I roll out of bed in the morning and I'm really good [00:04:00] at this.

MIA: You woke up like that.

SARAH: I didn't just wake up like this, ok. Only Beyonce. . . *[laughter]* Yeah.

MIA: Thank you. It seems very intuitive. I'm like, duh of course I practice my values. But then, when you actually take the time to sit down with them, you're like, oh, maybe I actually do a little bit better job with that one. Or, how am I able to practice that one. Yeah.

CLIVE: Another thing that we spoke about that we seemed to all experience to one degree or another was being able to practice a value or a principle in one area of our life quite well, and then struggling with it in another.

MIA: Yes.

CLIVE: You know, work versus personal versus creative work like that.

MIA: Do you wanna say more about that? Cause I think that's such a great point.

CLIVE: Okay. Engaging in conflict, however that is worded up there. Not good at it at work, great at it with my partner after both 20 years.

MIA: Totally.

CLIVE: Because there's been a lot of practice.

MIA: Yeah, that makes sense. And there are different dynamics, power [00:05:00] dynamics going on, right?

CLIVE: Most certainly

MIA: Absolutely.

CLIVE: Yes.

SK: I'm the complete opposite, like conflict at work. I'm like, let's talk about it! *[laughter]* Like deep relationships where like, you know, there's like much more intimacy at play is like a totally different one, right? I'm like, oh, that thing happened four years ago. Maybe. *[laughter]*

EMILY: A really interesting thought that came out of our group that I'm sort of still ruminating on is, it was specifically in regards to conflict, but I'm thinking about it in terms of a lot of these. It's like when you talk about some of these things with your friends and when you're processing versus how you actually attempt or not in putting it into practice and like how do those two things relate? Are they building off each other? Is your brain thinking that you're getting the work done and just talking about it, versus how do you get the tools to make some changes in the practice of it?

MIA: Definitely. Thank you.

TIERRA: I noticed, or some things I struggle with that I also like, like respect that I struggle with them. Like trust. I'm like, not everyone's trustworthy. So *[laughter]*, so it's like, makes a lot of sense that it's like this, you know, world, like these particular, like oppression, you know?

MIA: Totally. Totally. Thank you.

TIERRA: We learned that building the capacity to practice transformative justice took immense and consistent personal work. I'm talking the basics of being human, like self-reflection and how to communicate.

MIA: How do we do active listening? What does that mean? How do we practice that well? And then how do we do accountable sharing? And how many times does that happen if somebody just runs up to somebody else and just starts unloading, doesn't check in with them if they're ready, are they okay? Right? And you feel like maybe you can't stop them? So we wanna practice as much as possible. So these are some of the

reasons we [00:07:00] talk about communication and practice is because we wanna get to the place where we have generative conflict. Conflict is good and necessary. We wanna be able to use conflict as an opportunity.

So when it comes up, we wanna be able to say, great, this is another opportunity for me to practice because I can only practice generative conflict when I'm having conflict, right? I can only practice courage when I am afraid. We want our generative conflict to deepen our relationships, bring us closer together. We also want it to expand what's possible. And that's a big impact of trauma is that it impacts what we believe is possible. And so for a lot of us doing social justice organizing, for example, working on our trauma is actually really key because it makes it so that we can't even imagine that something else beyond what we know is possible.

So people will say to me like, oh, well, you know, they never wanna talk to me again. No. I'm sure they don't wanna talk to, or, you know, well, I can reach out. But I'm sure they just would respond. Well, [00:08:00] that may not be true. It might happen, but also maybe something else might happen. Right.

We also are going to practice feedback. Feedback can be especially useful to practice about communication practices because it lets us go through the motions without actually having to do it when the stakes are really high. Again, muscle building, right? We can practice things when the stakes are low so that we can build in that muscle memory so that when the stakes are very high, let's say you're holding a theater company accountable for their racist behavior, for example, that's not the moment when you wanna practice giving and receiving feedback.

And also in those kind of moments, you need to be able to communicate to people very quickly and directly and clearly and say, Hey, what you are doing right now is not helping. Right? Or you are escalating things, you are causing more harm. And you have to be able to have that kind of communication with people and you have to be able to receive that kinda feedback.

Practice of communication is also about accountability, because if you constantly talk and talk and talk and talk and talk to people and take up all the space and all the air, that is not being accountable. And then what we know about accountability is accountability only happens in relationships, and so we wanna practice in small ways accountability as much as we can. Trust and vulnerability again, right? One of the reasons we talk about trust so much is that when violence happens, trust is one of the first things that gets broken. And the way we build that trust, the way we practice vulnerability is through our communication, through what we do and don't do. And I'm talking about verbal communication, non-verbal communication, all of it, right?

The energy that we bring into these conversations is also part of it. If you're there, and I'm sure have this experience, right? Somebody who's like, well, I'm here, I'm talking to you, aren't I? It's like, but your energy is so foul and rank right now. Healing is another piece because honestly, in my experience, so many people just [00:10:00] need to feel like they are heard and they are seen and they matter.

So much de-escalation can happen just by somebody knowing someone has listened to me, they can see me, they know that I'm mad, they believe what I'm saying. And you can just see the softness come back to them. Right? You can see that fist just begin to soften. And that's what we wanna get to, like whether you're a formal healer or not, and we can all tap into cultivating a healer inside of all of us if we just fucking listen sometimes and just say, tell me more about that, Valerie.

You know, Lindsay, I would love to hear more. Just the more that you wanna say about that. And you just hold space for someone. You have to communicate well if you're going to build healthy, quality, solid, reliable relationships, period. Period. Identifying priorities, aka what's important and what's not, as we'll talk about in these exercises. Part of what we're gonna do, especially around accountable sharing, what is important for me to share now, and I'm speaking especially for the people who are verbal processors in this room, what is important for me to share?

What is not important for me to share? What do I need to hold back and actually maybe do some processing on my own before I bring it to this person or the group? Right? And also, as you're listening, you need to be able to pick out what is important. If I ask any of you all, for example, to even just tell me about the history of your family and the kinds of family dynamics that happen. You would be able to talk to me well over an hour. I have to figure out what in there is most useful. These are all skills that we're gonna practice. And then lastly, reactions. Wanna move again when you were talking down there, out of our reactions, which are usually informed by our trauma responses, not all the time, but oftentimes. We wanna be able to move into intentional response.

So we wanna be able to move out of reactions into TJ, right? So instead of just reacting however I might react cuz of what my trauma tells me to do. I wanna be able to say, Okay, how can I respond right now in a way that helps meet immediate needs and moves me closer to where we ultimately wanna be? TJ, basically, how do I do that well?

And again, that's something that you need to practice and practice and practice. It's a lifelong thing. You're never gonna be perfect at it. Cause there's always gonna be something that gets you right and then, but then you know, you're like, okay, that's really good information. I need to work on that more.

So self-reflection first and foremost, instead of, "you need to do this." Self-reflection. What can I be responsible for? What do I have control over? It's really only my behavior, my actions, my thoughts, my energy. And we have to practice, staying present. Again, if a survivor is telling you a story, for example, of what happened to them, you have to stay present for that time.

If you can only stay present for like 30 minutes, you need to build up your capacity. In the [00:13:00] same way that we built up our capacity to be able to sit at fucking computers for six, eight hours a day. We can build up our capacity to be present for each other and ourselves. So we're gonna practice active listening, we're gonna practice building trust, understanding, and curiosity.

So again, we wanna stay curious. When these typical responses are happening, we wanna say what might that be taken care of? Where might that be coming from? I wonder if we do this, if this might work to loosen them and soften them and move them to a different place. How do we get them to move to a different place? How do they even get to where they are? If we're intervening in some kind of harm that's happening that maybe has escalated, we can get curious about it. How did it even get to this place? Where were the other interventions that could have been made along the way, way before it got to the place where it's completely spinning outta control now? What are small things that we can do?

Connection with self and others. This is a big one. A lot of us only know how to do one or the other. And that's cause what trauma does is it usually makes us choose between safety or connection. That we can either be safe, but we are alone and isolated. Or we can be connected, but we are not safe. And what healing does is we wanna bring those two things together and say you can be safe and connected at the same time. How do you practice that though? How do you practice being connected with ourselves and each other? So not that I'm connected to myself and I'm just zoning all of you all out, and that should be red flag.

You have to zone everyone else, even be able to feel connected to yourself? Probably something you need to work on, right? If you can be connected to everybody, but you have no idea what's going on in here, also should be a big red flag. When we do grounding, I know a lot of people close their eyes. I want us to get to the place where we can ground with our eyes open.

When we can ground when we're in the car driving somewhere, when we can ground when we're in the middle of a conversation, right? Again, muscle memory. We don't [00:15:00] have to think about it.

MUSIC BREAK

People on the outside circle do not show your partner your drawing. You are allowed to look at it. Partners in the inner circle and on the outer circle, you're not allowed to look at each other, but you can listen to each other. I'd like you to tell your partners on the inside what colors they will need and let them go and get their markers.

People on the inside, you are not allowed to say anything. Just listen. You are not allowed to share. People on the outside, what I would like you to do is you are going to describe to your partner the picture that you have and get them to draw, okay? You will have [00:16:00] about 10 minutes to do this. People on the outside, do not ask your partner questions. They cannot answer you, okay? *[laughter]* People on the outside, do not show your partner the drawing. People in groups sitting next to each other, don't try to help the other group. I don't wanna have to say these things, but I have to say them because it always comes up. Okay, Eric, you have to turn the other way. We're gonna get there. By the end of this, we're gonna communicate well, I promise. I meant the year, not today. Okay everybody, we have 10 minutes. People on the outside who welcome to start talking. People the inside do not talk.

STEPHANIE: Okay, so we're going to kind of look at this like it's a clock, right? So you're gonna start from your bottom left, where if you're holding the paper start from your bottom left. Yeah. From your bottom left. Yeah. Yes. So then take your red marker and in the quarter of the bottom left of your piece of paper, you're going to draw three lines right next to each other that kind of go halfway up to the page. So just halfway up. So you're making three lines, kinda like a graph.

And after those three lines, you're going to do another two lines that are in the middle of those three lines next to it. So two more lines, like another graph, the middle of that, those three lines, oh my God, I'm not making any sense.

SHARON: It begins like a centimeter under the cloud. And it'll be sort of a drawing, like a horizontal line, like a straighter swirly line. And then once you get to the end, the right side, it kind of swirls in and it does like a little spiral.

J JHA: And all the medium size pink, blue mountains will have a medium size pink mountain. The difference between pink and blue is pink is not connected to each other. They are just filling the mountains in between. Oh my God, it's so hard to explain this, but literally you are tracing your blue mountains with pink mountains in the inside of the blue mountains. So basically it will be small pink mountain, medium pink mountain, small pink mountain, medium pink mountain, small small pink mountain, big pink mountain, small, small, medium small, small, small, small.

RADHIKA: Make three yellow lines that will go from the top -will go from the purple star on the top to the purple star on the bottom, and they can emanate from the bottom triangle of that star, three yellow lines that are gonna almost shed light on the bottom purple star.

MIA: Alright, Emily, do you have anything that you wanna share [00:19:00] about how that went?

EMILY: I think Eric is a great communicator for all his making noise at the beginning. He really broke *[laughter]*, he really broke it down. He really, really broke it down in a way that like he was clearly trying to see how I was gonna be seeing it and be very detailed, but not over - not so detailed that I got overwhelmed.

ERIC: That said, I kept checking if she was done or not.

EMILY: And I was like, I can't answer! *[through clenched teeth]*

MIA: Do you remember what said at the beginning? Do not ask your partner questions! How was it for you Eric?

ERIC: I love games like this! *[laughter]*

MIA: Great. Anybody else? Any other part of that?

KIM: I think the hardest part was, yeah, being like, should I continue? Should I not, I dunno. Are you done? I have - okay, well I'm gonna keep talking.

LEONTYNE: When I didn't get the information that I needed, I couldn't listen to anything else. Like, they didn't tell me the color of the pen. So I, so [00:20:00] then I would be like, I can't, I don't know what, should I invent, just pick a color? Cause I was like, and that's yellow. *[laughter]* My inability to process the information without getting the piece of information that I felt was vital was an interesting thing. And then is it vital to them or is it vital to me? And which one do you pay attention to in process?

SK: One thing as the drawer I noticed, and J was actually really like methodical and like really set up the concept before, like giving directions, it was nice to orient myself around. But like this, I was just thinking about me. I was like this like fucks with you. There's like a plant coming out of a mountain. When J was describing stuff, I found myself like not believing them, like, oh surely they must mean... And then I had to check myself and [00:21:00] be like, no SK, just follow those directions. *[laughter]*

MIA: So if you look at your paper, this is a script that we're gonna use and it's a script just so that for the purposes of this activity, so you can actually have something in front of you. So you have to get anxiety about what you're gonna say. So one person's gonna be the sender, one person is gonna be the receiver, we're gonna pair up and we will practice a lot of communication stuff throughout the year, so you get to hopefully practice with more than one person, I'm gonna give you a prompt of what to talk about. This intentional dialogue script was created for like conflict or misunderstandings, you know, and things like that. Like if you're in a fight, right? And you're trying to get some more understanding about what's going on.

But this is just, I'm gonna give you a prompt just to share like a story. Just you can practice the skill of mirroring. I've used mirroring on a lot of you in this room and you probably didn't even realize it. And again, you wanna get to the place where you're doing it so that it [00:22:00] doesn't feel like mirroring, right?

And a lot of this language might sound familiar, things like, so what I heard you say was... what I hear you saying is this... well, let me just see if I got that right, right? Or simply even just repeating back to people, what they said can be so huge in terms of communicating to them and illustrating to them that you are listening to them, that you're present, that you've heard what they are sharing. That you are listening to them and hearing what they're saying in the way that they're saying, right? So if somebody's like, I'm so fucking pissed at them, and you're like, so what I hear you say is that you're a little bit upset with what's going on? That's not mirroring. You wanna capture the spirit of what they're saying also, right?

If someone's naming themselves as a victim and you keep calling them a survivor, no. This is not a time for you to put your interpretation in it. This is time to really, like, if I'm doing this with Nina like to really hold space for Nina, whatever Nina needs, right? To really listen [00:23:00] to what Nina is telling me, because that is Nina's truth, and there -yeah, there are multiple truths that exist, but when you're mirroring, it's really a time for that person.

So somebody's gonna be the sender, somebody's gonna be the receiver? And there are many, many skills that are inside of just this, that we are going to practice. So the sender is going to say -we'll just go through this, from left, right- I would like to talk with you about X, Y, and Z, or I'd like to share with you whatever. Is now okay? The sender is going to ask for consent. We don't do this. Most of the time, we just start talking to people. You're gonna ask for consent, is now okay? And the receiver, you're gonna either say you're available now or if you're not, just good practice is, I'm not available now, but what about this? Always suggest something because you don't wanna put all the labor on the sender, right? And all the emotional labor. So, [00:24:00] the other

thing, the sender is going to practice is taking their time. As the sender, you should, again, take your time, figure out what it is you wanna say, what's most important to share, what is most important for this person to hear? What is most important for you to share?

MUSIC BREAK

TIERRA: Mia brought us back to the discussion about values with a follow up question. What do we do when we act out of alignment with our values? That is, what do we do when we make a mistake?

ERIC: I say, sorry.

MIA: You say sorry.

ERIC: Really fast.

MIA: Why do you say it really fast?

ERIC: I think it's a family thing, maybe a cultural thing.

MIA: Maybe. Like, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm [00:25:00] sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

ERIC: *[laughs]* Yeah, yeah, sorry, sorry, sorry.

KIERAN: I think I do both extremes. I think I either respond far too quickly or take far too long to respond where it's either like, if I realize that I have made a mistake, I either like panic and try to rectify it without taking the proper time to think about what an adequate, appropriate response is, or I obsess over it for the next six months.

KIM: When I make a mistake, immediately having me like, okay, well I've come up with a solution, so I'm sorry, but also here's how to fix it. It's done.

MIA: Totally.

LEONTYNE: I try to apply objectivity to the issue and determine whether this is objectively a terrible mistake, or whether it's just a mistake because that person feels like it is.

GROUP: Oooooo.

MIA: How's that working out for you?

LEONTYNE: Hmm... *[nods]*

MIA: Yeah.

FENNER: Just like make some jokes about it.

MIA: Like what?

FENNER: Like if [00:26:00] I make a mistake, it could be like self-deprecating joke or it could be a joke about the situation.

RAY: I know that the pattern that I often fall into, and I'm trying not to, but especially when I was younger, was trying to hide the fact that I had made a mistake.

MIA: Yeah.

RAY: And trying to fix it before anybody else saw. So now I'm trying to acknowledge the mistake and what I'm trying to do is shorten the time in which I'm doing that. So make it more immediate. It's an ongoing practice. And yeah, and trying to like send compassion and separate the mistake or the way that I messed up or whatever from me being like a bad person or a dumb person or like making it less about me as a person.

MIA: Cause you feel bad and dumb.

RAY: Yeah.

MIA: Feeling guilt and shame. Yeah.

ANNE: I tend to beat myself up a little less than I did when I was younger. And, engage in some [00:27:00] shoulda, woulda, couldas.

MIA: Mmhmm, yeah, if only's, yeah.

AMANDA: Asking what I can do to solve it, even if it's like a self reflection of what I can do, or the other, the person I've, you know, made the mistake with. What, I'm sorry, what can I do to fix it?

MIA: Do you do that immediately?

AMANDA: No.

MIA: No. How long does it usually take you?

AMANDA: I think it depends on the mistake. I definitely go internally first and like reconcile it and like pep talk myself and like try to make myself feel better and like come up with the script and all the things. And so it really does depend on like how big the mistake is.

MIA: Yeah.

AMANDA: And who it is that I'm dealing with. Like depending on what my relationship with that person is.

MIA: Yeah.

AMANDA: Cause sometimes I think it's more painful with certain folks. But I think that there's almost always a gap before that.

MIA: Yeah. What are the feelings that come up when you make a mistake or when you maybe get caught [00:28:00] doing something you know you weren't supposed to be doing?

UNIDENTIFIED: Shame.

MIA: Shame.

UNIDENTIFIED: Embarrassment.

MIA: Embarrassment.

FENNER: My gut's just kinda like drop. This like hole.

MIA: Yeah.

FENNER: Start to brace yourself.

SHARON: I think just even the thought of it right now, like this conversation is making my heart race a little bit.

GROUP: Yeah.

MIA: Totally.

SHARON: Yeah.

MIA: Anxiety.

TIERRA: Sometimes I feel grief, especially like when the conversation is about not being in alignment with our values. It's quite impossible to fully embody the values in this culture, in this present time. And I feel grief around that when I feel like I don't, I can't make the choice I want to make.

UNIDENTIFIED: Getting really self-reflective, like, why did I do that? And like going back into my, you know, remembered self-history and seeing all the other like problems and mistakes that have seemed to [00:29:00] like lead to this yet another failing.

MIA: Yeah. Does anybody experience spinning? Like where they start spinning out either thinking things or yeah, a lot of people. Do people here isolate or just freeze?

CLIVE: I notice that I can also dither. And I spin around in my head asking myself, is an apology for this mistake going to make it worse for that person? Is it going to like re-harm them?

MIA: Yeah.

CLIVE: And is the apology gonna make it all about me and not about them? You know, like, oh, I'm so sorry, you know, won't you forgive me? Kind of thing. Like, I'm wondering whether or not it's even appropriate -

MIA: Yes.

CLIVE: - to do so.

MIA: Absolutely. What are the thoughts that run through y'all's heads when you fuck up?

NINA: At first, I usually deny it or I make up a hundred excuses, like, oh, well I did cause that, well I did it cause they did that like that and then eventually like slows down to being like, No, [00:30:00] that was me. . .Yeah.

MIA: Like after it kind of pitters out.

NINA: Yeah, first definitely like denial or any excuse to like excuse myself from it.

SHARON: I find a lot of the time it is not really clear to me if the other person I think that I've affected really perceives it as a mistake. Like that something serious really happened between us, or if it's like me kind of spinning it and coming up with my own like story around it, and so then if I like vocalize that or if I tell them about it and they're

like- I don't know, I guess I like fear their reaction of being like, what? I didn't see that at all. Maybe I like hide a little bit just behind that feeling.

LEEANN: Like the flip side of that coin is like when I made a mistake that I didn't notice and it's pointed out to me later, all of the replaying you do. Like going back and like how, I totally missed that. What should I have noticed? Or, yeah, trying to retroactively analyze and or justify or dismiss [00:31:00] or whatever, but like that process of, it's just like the feeling of my gut dropping.

MIA: Yeah.

LEEANN: And someone's like, you know, you did this thing and I just not being aware of it at all.

CAT: In moments like that where I didn't catch that I made a mistake, I think I totally freeze and almost like as though my, from my neck down like disappears and my head's just like, like zooming and almost like I can feel like my scalp got really tight and like I just, I go into like a panic state or something like that.

On the flip side. If it's a mistake I know I've made one thing that I've been experimenting with, kind of along what Clive was bringing up, is considering who and what benefits with any particular action made[00:32:00]

MUSIC BREAK

TIERRA: These personal inquiries into how we live our values and how we respond to our inevitable mistakes felt to me like portals into the heart of TJ , into what it would take to support myself and others in living accountably every day for everything we do and fail to do.

Each session, Mia gave us discussion questions to deepen our study of work created by anti-violence organizers from across the country.

Here you'll hear small groups digging into an excerpt from the Creative Interventions Toolkit, a Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence, and an article by Aya de Leon called "Reconciling Rage and Compassion: the Unfolding #MeToo Moment for Juno Diaz".

JOSH: What information or parts stood out to you the most? Were there any things that surprised us or challenged us?

SHARON: There was one thing that stuck with me that was kind of a challenge, I [00:33:00] guess, to evaluate like in my own life. But this term, aggressive self harm and self harm as a form of violence.

WANDA: I have never heard of that before either.

SHARON: Totally. I can just read it. We consider these acts or threats to be forms of harm to others if they are primarily meant to manipulate or control others in the ways described above, which are all of these forms of self harm. Some ways that aggressive self harm can be used are to coerce someone to come back into a relationship, to pressure someone to maintain contact or communication, to get someone to take actions that someone would otherwise not want to take and that may hurt them, and to distract people from looking at the abuse or violence one has taken against others.

That just like was kind of eye opening to me because I've had relationships with friends that have done these things. Also, like right here this is a big part. I didn't read [00:34:00] this caution. Of like, also keeping in mind that sometimes people are not doing it with a motivation of actually harming you, but it's like a form of defending themselves or it's a defense mechanism or they're feeling hopeless and for whatever reasons. So keeping that in mind as well, the compassion part of it in that situation, I guess. The biggest challenge for me is like, how do you try and mend that relationship or point something out that somebody may be doing? Like, do you notice like this is harming other people? Like, I don't know. It's really tricky.

JOSH: Yeah, I found it pretty surprising too. It was kind of like, oh yeah, so that does count as violence. Like when it gave all those like descriptions and like details, it made me think like what narrative have I been taught to like always tolerate that violence, like so many things count as violence.

CAT: It was [00:35:00] helpful for me to think about how harmful self-talk or like invisible violence against ourselves is also helpful to articulate that as violence.

WANDA: When it talked about how the community was responsible for the violence, even because the community -in our part of the community- let it happen. So how do we as community create spaces where this is not possible? I like that.

SHARON: What can make someone more vulnerable to violence?

SMALL GROUP: Oh, yeah, yeah. That...

SHARON: Gender, sex, race, class, income level of education, immigration status, sexual orientation, age. Your physical or mental ability and your physical appearance

and all of these things. And also vulnerability to the criminal justice system and immigration authorities. So that can actually be used as a manipulative tactic like, oh, like you better not speak [00:36:00] up about anything because I'm gonna call ICE on you. For example, you know, I could call like Child Protective Services or if you're a like undocumented immigrant, you know, that sort of thing really can keep you silent.

JOSH: Yeah.

SHARON: Violence is related to power. That's totally a way to keep like causing harm and to have the person, the survivor, victim, stay silent also is very complicated. You know, calling Child Protective Service is not always the best thing to do. It actually is even more, yeah, it will create even more harm.

WANDA: This list has shown up a few times and there was another one where it talked about what the different kinds of violence looked like and one was, you know, taking someone's documents. That was violent. Or to threaten someone's housing or, you know, livelihood, that was violent.

SHARON: Taking someone's transportation

WANDA: Right. When the [00:37:00] two people were both violent toward each other. So how to tell who started to fight, like using violence as self defense is not the same as using violence to gain or maintain power and control.

SHARON: Yeah.

JOSH: The next question on here is what were we taught about violence and what have we learned? Or what do we not believe anymore now about violence after reading this? So I wanna say like, I was kind of taught that violence is like visible. It's hyper physicalized. You can like see it, you can prove it. It's like this traditional action movie form that you can pinpoint, is violence. And it's like something that people do to you, not necessarily how they make you feel. So I think now I'm learning it can be like just about how somebody makes you feel as well. And those are so many nuanced forms that it takes.

SARAH ROSE: I completely echo that thinking about it not only as physical but also emotional. It's been pretty transformative. Yeah.

SHARON: The smaller, more invisible things [00:38:00] can have a longer lasting impact. Like these emotional, verbal ways that you get someone to feel like they're wrong or they're crazy, like gaslighting somebody that also creates a lot of harm. How to

address and how to mend that takes a lot more deeper work. The psychological aspect of violence.

JOSH: And it seems like with that comes all these like unspoken social rules about like what we're allowed and not allowed to like talk about openly. I feel like that's why it takes so long to talk about these things is cuz we're just so like caught up in reinforcing the status quo of like, what is okay to talk about in public? What's not, what's like taboo?

KIM: Of course there were moments like we were just talking about on that other page of like, oh, I'm like learning from this, which is great, but there were a lot of more just like triggering moments as well.

SARAH ROSE: Part of this work is confronting our own [00:39:00] triggers and biases and like basically knowing where those pain points are.

NINA: It's also like so strange, like talking about how nobody ever talks about it but we all experience it every fucking moment, like it's just so bizarre. It's so apparent, but we just sort of like, "how are you? Fine thanks. How are you? Fine."

KIM: Well, and even if somebody mentions some like small thing that happens in their life, but they're like, oh, but it's fine. It's not a big deal. Like, well, whatever. And like we are literally like-

NINA: - conditioned

KIM: -conditioned. Yeah. To be like, okay, great. You're life, like fine. Not gonna be like, no that's wrong. You know? Unless maybe like a close friend. But like the general response is to, to close off.

NINA: Absolutely. Or do the, like you guys said earlier, like the oppression olympics.

KIM: Yeah. Minimize.

NINA: Yeah. Of like, oh, it's not the worst thing that could possibly ever happen. So you know what? I'm actually fine. Hashtag blessed it wasn't worse. Like when it's like really serious, it all can bad, we can hold space for all of it, thank so much. It doesn't have to be levels.

KIM: Well, and from what we talk about here a lot like that actually, like those are the moments that we should [00:40:00] be talking about and addressing because that's where we can stop it before it actually gets worse. And if we always stop and are like, actually no, that really small thing shouldn't have happened.

NINA: Yeah.

KIM: Then like we're gonna hopefully stop the like, you know, giant violence that happens later.

CLIVE: Our personal biases and experiences can influence how we understand a situation of violence in good ways and bad. There were a lot of really interesting things in this section, the common confusing questions: what if I find the survivor or victim annoying or unsympathetic? What if the harmer reminds me of somebody that I like? Like I love Kevin Spacey's acting. I love his acting. You know?

UNIDENTIFIED: Yep.

CLIVE: And that's a hard thing to hold for me right now.

EMILY: I think because of the #MeToo movement, really grappling with the idea of being mad at yourself for being a victim. This part of, are you angry at yourself for being a victim? Are you angry at others for being a victim? And that is just so in [00:41:00] every way that we talk about, or we have until this point talked about just the culture of victim blaming or what were they wearing? Or your behavior was wrong, and so it's your fault instead of the harmer's fault. And really having to grapple with an automatic thought and then putting a block in front of it to be like whoa, whoa, whoa. Slow down. Something else is going on here. Also really relating to like, how do I feel about this person? And later on, in the later paragraphs of this page of like, the way that violence affects a survivor, as that is perpetuated in some of the aftermath of certain systems of dealing with violence, that can affect their behavior in a way that is unappealing to society, and that we then shun them more. That really, I'm still ruminating on that part of, if you're not likable. Talking about Christine Blasey Ford, and how she was the perfect person. She was calm and [00:42:00] likable and white and a doctor and could speak about, you know, everything. And how Anita Hill being Black and having to contend with the racism of that time and the sexism, just the perception of the victim and how that affects whether we like them and whether we believe them.

CLIVE: Yeah.

MIA: Just ask you guys if there's anything you wanna share that came up in your group? Any tension or questions?

UNIDENTIFIED: One of the first things that was said in our, in talking about how do we deal with our own rage was we're coming here. That was such a like, oh yeah, that is what I'm doing with my rage. I'm trying to learn what to do with it.

MIA: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED: Got five more sessions to figure it out.

MIA: Did anybody figure out a TJ response to- *[laughter]* no. Nobody. Alright.

CLIVE: We kept saying "in an ideal world" which obviously we're not in, but that it seems that in an ideal world, [00:43:00] a truly transformative justice approach to that situation would be that it would be a survivor group for the survivors of the harm that he caused. He would have an accountability group for that harm that he caused, that he would have a survivor group for the harm that was done to him, and that there would then be an accountability group for the people who had done harm to him. That would be a full 360 degree transformative justice approach. In an ideal world. *[laughter]*

MUSIC BREAK

TIERRA: One of the most profound pieces we learned from was a documentary called *Hollow Water*. *Hollow Water* documents how a small community of Ojibway near Lake Manitoba in so-called Canada drew from their traditional practices to [00:44:00] address child sexual abuse outside of the settler colonial criminal-legal system. I had never seen anything like it. The film showed me that decolonization is key to healing intergenerational trauma, that there are ways for survivors and those who have caused egregious harm to heal, and for families fractured by violence to reunite.

RADHIKA: I'm mad at the fact that I can't even see this happening, you know, here. And it's not about theater for me, it's about just society, you know, that everybody's just quick to jump. As humans, I don't think we understand that. We can't look at somebody who's done even a little bit of harm and see that they might have goodness.

AMANDA: Yeah, I agree.

RADHIKA: Or the capacity to change.

CLIVE: I think another one of the conditions, if you will, that allowed for that response to take place for them was such a deep-rooted and collective distrust of the state.

AMANDA: I keep asking myself like, what do you do when someone [00:45:00] has caused harm? And you're like, we're gonna do a TJ process. And the person's like, no.

RADHIKA: I mean, getting back to theater, I feel like that if somebody's unwilling to work in this way and take responsibility and do the work that needs to be done to heal,

then I'm sorry, you're not welcome. You're not welcome to be cast in a show or to be an artistic director of the show.

AMANDA: By whom?

WANDA: Maybe the elders in the community.

AMANDA: The TJ group, or?

WANDA: Maybe the elders. Cause they have a counsel.

CLIVE: In one of the early story examples that we read, the harmer's name was Tom. And one of the consequences that was put forward to him if he did not participate in an accountability circle was that the word was going to get out.

SMALL GROUP: Oh. Yep.

CLIVE: That they were just going to put the word out that Tom was a harmer and that people needed to know about it and take that into account if they were gonna choose to work with him or not.

CAT: The other thing I just remembered, it was the family tree.

SMALL GROUP: Oh yeah.

CAT: Right? For so many of us, we've got trauma going back and that informs how we show up. And if we can do that [00:46:00] work, like how we can be helping future generations.

AMANDA: And for the harmers to make that chart as opposed to

CAT: Yeah.

AMANDA: Like as a victim to say, I can see it backwards and it stops with me.

CAT: Yeah.

AMANDA: But instead for the harmer to say, it stops with me, like I can see the future healing of my kids and I can see it. And I can see that I come from a legacy of harm.

WANDA: Yeah. It's really something when it's something like that is systemic to your community. So then it's like an infection, right? It's like something's happening to make this so commonplace. It's not normal. Something happened.

CLIVE: The culture of American theater has been infected by sexual harassment, abuse, misogyny, patriarchy forever. Right?

AMANDA: I do believe it is normalized. Cause it's the only way we can cope with it. Right? [00:47:00] Like, oh, well it, it happens to everyone. Or I'm sorry you feel that way, but you're actually wrong. This is totally normal. This is okay. You know, so it's like, as a harmer I'm normalizing it. Or as someone who has to like, get up every day and deal with my own harm, I normalize it. It's okay. It just happened that one time and it was, well, I kind of played my part or I did, you know.

CLIVE: Or I need the next job.

AMANDA: Yeah. But you are right. It is not normal.

WANDA: Yeah. You think about adaptation, right? How we can get used to anything. Yeah.

AMANDA: Well then how powerful it is to break it. I mean, we see in this film, you know, it could have just perpetuated for generations to come. Right? Cause we don't talk about it. We normalize it. And I do wonder, like for the theater community, like what are our, like healing practices or, you know, that would allow for us to be able to like collectively move the work forward in a healing kind of way? I would say like in the theater community, it's like maybe there's [00:48:00] more work around like us identifying those intersections so that we can build those stronger bonds, you know, that instead of being like, well that happens there, but it doesn't happen here. Or, you know, we don't have a shared history, so I can't really identify that. Instead it's like, well, let's find that shared history so that I, yeah. Yeah. So it's like, how can we deepen our connection because then it makes the work necessary, you know? That we have to cause I'm too connected to you to let, allow you to suffer.

SMALL GROUP: Right.

RADHIKA: I think TJ provides a frame. I mean, I think we inherently understand how gray things are because that's what we do, we play everybody on the spectrum of human experience. So I think we have that as a principal to know that anybody can do anything and has that ability. We sit in circle often we're talking. Like in theater a lot of people who commit harm, in my personal experience, are people who have power.

AMANDA: Right.

RADHIKA: And so we need them and we need them, and that's how people don't [00:49:00] speak up. And so that's my concern moving forward. Is like, wow, how do we address that power so everybody has to be involved?

RAY: I thought it was so generous of the individuals in the community to like show this history and the processes that they were going through. And I thought it was so interesting that what they did is they brought in these elders and elders from other Indigenous communities to bring back these traditions that had already been in place for sort of these specific things and then they had been lost. And pairing that with sort of that family tree that they outlined that had I think three or maybe four generations of people and sort of outlining the different abuses and harms that they had gone through. And it made me wonder like when was the time when those healing circles stopped because of fear of repercussion from state and government? They weren't allowed to practice culture. And I was like, I wonder if that correlates when all of these things started spiking because the [00:50:00] systems that were already in place were like specifically squashed and stopped.

RADHIKA: Lloyd's character, in a way, no one could have done that work but him, because he was once in that position. And so just the purpose and how that came full circle and how it gave him back dignity too, and he was able to be strict. And that's just amazing to me in terms of that circle of justice.

MIA: Absolutely. And we need Lloyds.

RADHIKA: Yeah. We need Lloyds.

MIA: You know, like, I mean, I think that's the key about TJ, is that we're not gonna end violence by only working with survivors. What does that even mean? Survivor? You know.

SK: One of the moments that stuck out to me was when he was like, well some, somebody's making me regress. Someone's making me fall back. And how Lloyd was just like, didn't even give that any space you know? And was just like, it's about you. You know? And just like returned directly to the issue.

FENNER: We talked a little bit about like how long it takes, right? This process takes years and years, but at the same time it's like, well, how long is that person gonna keep living in [00:51:00] that community. And if you look at it from that perspective, it's like, it's actually not that much.

MIA: Yeah.

FENNER: You know, they're gonna be alive for, you know, another 50 years, it's a 10th of the time that they're gonna be in that community. And then as I was thinking about how, you know, that community is small and intimate. And like maybe in the Bay Area we have a, I would say, a pretty intimate theater community, but it's like constantly in flux and constantly changing with like, who is coming in, who's out, and how deep in it you are. And I think that's one challenge that is challenging *[laughter]* is this idea of like, I think it's really difficult. I know for me, it's very difficult for me to imagine myself being in this community for five years cause it's so precarious.

MIA: Yeah, and five years is nothing in the scheme of things, you know. I mean, it's a lot. But in the scheme about what it would take [00:52:00] to actually build something that could be sustainable and ongoing. Yeah. And five years is a drop in the bucket. And if you think about not just the person's lifespan, but also the generations of harm that, that, the harm that they could start, that then has effects through generations, it just ripples out.

Absolutely. It's not just the theater community. This is like in every place that we're trying to do, people wanna do TJ, I'm always like, okay, well how long are you invested and committed to this? Cuz also everyone who's part of that process had to also be invested in that family. Right? And that's the thing about accountability, is it requires a commitment and an investment from everybody to that person's accountability. Right?

How many of us even have those relationships in our intimate relationships, let alone our communal relationships? But I think your question about the theater community is a great one, right? Because even if you can find like a handful of people who are willing to [00:53:00] commit and stay and like build something and like ideally then grow that pool of people, it could happen. It doesn't need a ton of people, but you need at least a little bit of a, you know, a steady seed if you will. Yeah.

FENNER: It feels like things are so precarious. I wonder like you, all these case studies, it really seems like everyone has been there from start to finish and I wonder like how do you mitigate the fact that like things change so fast and people lose their housing, they lose their ability to stay in the community?

MIA: Well, this is one thing that separates TJ from RJ, restorative justice, is that it includes the systemic pieces. And so it's like, right, then if we're gonna do TJ, that means we have to also be concerned about gentrification and that has to be part of our work. Absolutely. Absolutely. It's very difficult.

LEEANN: I think it's really powerful. This idea keeps coming up in a lot of the videos and the readings we're doing, but [00:54:00] was really especially clear in this. Harkening back to what came before and like an acknowledgement that the things we need are here. The people who need to be involved are the people in the room. The knowledge that we need to access is knowledge that we already have. That approach feels very powerful to me and I'm excited for when we can start having that conversation about theater, like the theater community and what is the knowledge that we have already.

MIA: Yeah, definitely. And what are the ways, even that people are already keeping themselves safe? Are some of those things transferable? Yeah. The small interventions that people are doing right now in terms of like lessening harm, reducing harm, addressing harm? Are some of those transferable or can you build on those? Absolutely. Absolutely.

And you know, like I think about it, even if, let's just say like eight of you from this like 20 something cohort, decide to really dig in, that's more people than most people have around the country. Even though the big names of [00:55:00] like TJ work that you hear, it's really just one or two people doing that and like moving that forward. And so like, I think also for you all to start thinking concretely. Like what would this take? What am I willing to contribute? And like what are sacrifices we're willing to make? Not sacrifice in a capitalist way of like, oh, everything should be enjoyable. I should never have to sacrifice anything. Everything is about pleasure and fun and blah, blah, blah, but like sacrifice in this spiritual way. It's like there's actually a spiritual transformative component to sacrifice that's not terrible, that's actually honorable, and that we all sacrifice things all the time, even just to be here.[00:56:00]

MUSIC BREAK

TIERRA: I remember Mia writing four words on a large sheet of white paper: punishment, criminalization, reconciliation, restoration. She asked us, What is punishment?

JOSH: Punishment as a form of deterrence.

RAY: Isolation. That's part of state system is to isolate people in solitary confinement or like moving people further away from their families, but also being isolated from more informal communities. Like you can't come back here [00:57:00] cause you've done this.

VALERIE: Isolation is even like getting a time out, being sent to a corner.

TIERRA: Supposed to be like a negative consequence to your actions.

ANNE: Reciprocal harm, you've harmed me, I'll harm you.

MIA: Like an eye for an eye.

FENNER: Like a loss of privileges or loss of status or access within a community. Limiting your access.

LEEANN: Ideally lesson learning.

RADHIKA: There's a moral, like if you're higher up, if you punish somebody, lower down. There's a power dynamic, or a moral dynamic.

MIA: Absolutely. You want it to be bad enough that they don't wanna do it again. What about criminalization?

CLIVE: Jail time.

MIA: But how's that different than punishment?

CLIVE: Oh, because it's enacted upon you by the state.

ERIC: Institutionalized.

MIA: So you mean that criminalization is the thing that institutions do, like institutionalized? I would argue that we criminalize our each other too.

JOSH: It creates like a personhood or like, it's like the idea of a type of person. I think that's the goal of it.

MIA: Almost like an identity, [00:58:00] right?

JOSH: Yeah.

MIA: You are now a criminal.

RAY: There's also a legacy that follows. It's not like you do your time and now you're done. It's: you're on a registry, like a sex offender registry, or you have lost your right to vote. You're on like felony probation. Like there's these things that follow you and prevent you from opportunities.

KIM: It's like a binding like legacy that's going to be attached to your name. Like as you move forward.

LEEANN: It pathologizes you.

MIA: Yes.

LEEANN: It makes you like you are a bad person.

LEONTYNE: Taking an action that could be handled outside of an institution and making it something that needs to be dealt with by the heavy hand of the law and all that that entails.

MIA: I like that voice for "the law." *[laughter]*

SARAH: With criminalization, it feels like there's a value judgment as well.

MIA: Yes.

SARAH: Someone in power gets to decide that something is bad and so therefore there's like this value placed on [00:59:00] whatever it is that we're choosing to criminalize, regardless of whether it actually is good or bad.

RADHIKA: Yeah. Just dehumanization, that you're a criminal or you're not a human being.

SARAH ROSE: It also implies entrance into a system from which there is very little escape. So kind of the ongoing relationship with the system.

MIA: Yes.

SARAH ROSE: Throughout your entire life, essentially.

JOSH: It like implies that there's like a set of bad people out there, like the criminals are already out there and those people are gonna inherently commit crime.

MIA: What about, let's start with reconciliation. What do we think about, what is reconciliation? What do you think about it?

SARAH: Like an acceptance to reconcile with like something like how you're feeling is choosing to acknowledge and accept that it even happened in the first place.

MIA: Come to terms with.

LEONTYNE: And there's the coming to terms internally and then coming to terms with whoever it is that you need to.

FENNER: Seems to imply more like cohesive approach [01:00:00] or view of the situation that you are trying to like close all, like get all the loose ends, get all the ends together, and like-

MIA: Closure.

FENNER: Closure, yes, that's the word.

KIM: It feels like it's bringing people back in rather than pushing them out.

MIA: Other people, reconciliation?

LEONTYNE: Healing.

MIA: And also, yeah, if folks wanna jump in on what restoration is.

ANNE: Reconciliation, I think, is making peace. Restoration would be giving back, making it the way it was before.

KIM: For restoration, like this feeling of making things equal again. This feeling of like something bad happened, so let me make it up to you.

TIERRA: Restoration feels like making amends.

WANDA: Taking responsibility.

LEONTYNE: Restoration feels like the healthy version of punishment.

MIA: The healthy version of punishment. Yeah. And then Kieran.

VALERIE: I wonder if in restoration [01:01:00] there's- restoration has more of an ongoing quality and reconciliation maybe more implies like we've finished it.

MIA: Like your uncle who's destroying that car. *[laughter]* Are you done yet? You've been working on it for 29 years!

KIERAN: Restoration seems like it would be used in maintaining relationships. In that if you're trying to restore to previous conditions, then you want the relationships that were in place before to have similar dynamics to what they were.

MIA: Yes.

KIERAN: And to act as if things haven't changed.

RAY: I just wanna offer, like when I think of restoration, like I've done like river bank restoration work, which is where like if a river, like a river like erodes the ground that it's in, right? And so it gets wider and wider and then banks of the rivers fall through, which can cause all sorts of problems. So what you do with like river bank restoration work is you like build [01:02:00] stones or you plant trees and the roots grow and they restore the banks that are there. So it's not- it's like restoring the banks, but you never change the river back to the form it was. It's just like strengthening the new shape of the river to not cause further damage.

MIA: Yeah. I love that. And I feel like there's so much overlap between TJ and EJ, environmental justice. Yeah. Thank you. In nature there is no waste. There is no such thing as waste. Everything is usable and everything has a purpose and a role to play. Yeah. And there is no disposability of throwing away. We've created that.

ERIC: So where does transformative justice- is it more restoration? Is it more reconciliation? Is it-

MIA: I feel like TJ lives with accountability, which is not up there currently, which we're gonna talk about. These are just some of the common words that we use when we are try- cuz whenever we're talking about accountability, these are words that gets used in [01:03:00] replacement of accountability.

ERIC: Oh, I see.

MIA: They're not the same words obviously, but people use them, right? Or these things get done. Right. Instead of having accountability, we criminalize people. Right. Instead of actually- just what we saw in Colorado, instead of actually transforming people's behavior and working to do the deep healing that's necessary for accountability, we just send people away and disclose of them and punish them basically. Yeah. And the same with these other two up here. Because if we restore the relationships to what they were before the harm happened, most of us would say, well, those relationships are part of what allowed the harm to happen, so why would we be restoring them? Right.

Okay. So then what is accountability? [pause] No, seriously I'm asking you what is accountability?

FENNER: Self-analysis and reflection that is geared towards change in behavior?

MIA: I always say [01:04:00] like the short version of accountability is that you've apologized, you've made amends, and obviously done some reflection to be able to do those things, to understand the impact and that you're working to change your behavior.

I feel like you're usually in two pieces. This piece and then this piece, but it has to happen together. Most people have either one or the other, or just one of these things, right? Like, well, I apologized, so I took accountability. I, you know, I'm good. I don't know why you're still upset. Or you just make amends repairs.

I, I see so many people skip this piece and just go right to this and they don't actually apologize. I also hear a lot of people doing apologies without saying, I'm sorry, without apologizing in their apology. Again, this is the Philly stands up quote that we looked at before. I'll read it out loud to you, "Accountability is the kind of simple word for a lot of really complicated ideas, but as close as we can get: accountability is when someone who has perpetrated harm or abuse is able to fully [01:05:00] recognize and accept what they've done, regardless of its intention, and to see all of the ways that it has affected the people who are surviving it, the community themselves, et cetera. By doing so, they're able to recognize and make changes that respect their relationships, support the survivor, and shift their own behavior." This is how Creative Interventions talks about accountability, "Accountability is the ability to recognize and take responsibility for violence." And this is from Incite, "Community accountability: any strategy to address violence, abuse, or harm that creates safety, justice, reparations, and healing without relying on police, prisons, childhood protective services, or any other state systems."

So what we wanna do is we wanna start building out this framework of accountability so that you all have a really clear understanding of what it is that we're talking about when we say accountability in a TJ perspective. And I would just say at large, even though we throw the word accountability around all the time without [01:06:00] actually knowing what it is.

So Philly Stands Up talks about how in their work people can go through the emotions of accountability, but if it doesn't have the spirit of accountability, then it oftentimes just feels disingenuous, right?

So a very common demand or request from survivors is often write a letter of apology, right? Or make a statement about what you've done. Writing letters of apology is

definitely a very common thing in most TJ interventions and processes. And sometimes when you're working with a person who has caused harm to write that letter, they can say all the right things. Like it can technically say all the right things, but it can just feel like almost like a robot said it, or like they're just saying what they think is the correct thing to say and it doesn't have the spirit of accountability in it, right?

If we think about what that is, and I don't know, maybe some of you all have experienced this, right? Like when you've [01:07:00] experienced bad apologies, versus when you've experienced apologies that maybe they didn't even say the right thing, but you could feel the spirit behind it. Right? You could feel their remorse. You could feel how heartfelt it was for them. And have you all had this experience where you've just completely softened and everything that was like you were holding onto just melts away. Right? And sometimes it gives way to forgiveness and whatever, if that's your jam, whatever. But like you can feel that softening and that kind of thawing that happens. Have you all experienced this?

LEEANN: I'm curious about, in a TJ process, is it important that the victim, like that the person who was harmed, says yes, this apology was made with the spirit of accountability and yes, amends were made. Who gets to say like, yes, that was, or no, that wasn't?

MIA: I would say probably first and foremost, the person who was impacted gets to make the decision. But I also think that [01:08:00] if it's gotten to that point, then it's clearly not a good apology for me to keep working on it because it shouldn't be- there's like an alchemy to it. It shouldn't be that, that you're like, yes, that was a good apology. Like it should be something that is felt, not thought through, and I feel like that's where the spirit of accountability comes in. Yeah.

SK: Yeah. I also like, I'm just reflecting and there have been times where I've like read an apology that I've gotten from someone and been like, fuck this and fuck this person, and then I'll return to it in a month and it will have a completely different impact, you know? So I think it also depends on like, if someone is ready to receive an apology too.

MIA: Which is so real. And like, let's be real, a lot of times people come to TJ processes really wanting punishment and revenge. And that's really what they want. They don't want accountability. They don't want healing necessarily. And I'm not saying that as a judgment. I'm saying that as a descriptive thing. Like sometimes that happens. And then we're gonna have to figure out, you all are gonna have to figure out what to do [01:09:00] about that.

AMANDA: What SK said made me also realize for me, taking accountability also, that there's an aspect of like surrendering other people's action as a part of it. Either like if others also did harm that like it's not about whether others are ready to take accountability, like this is about me, or I only did it because you did it. Like it doesn't matter. Like I'm taking singular responsibility, but also some of it is like surrendering. Like if I've done harm, if someone's not ready to hear it or accept it or that, like I still have work to do separate from that, and it's like my accountability is not tied to your acceptance necessarily.

MIA: Yes. Yes. Just like with survivors, what I always say is your healing cannot be dependent on their accountability cause they may never take accountability. Right. You still deserve and get to heal and can heal. Absolutely. And vice versa.

Yeah. And that's really real. Again, this is like the place where it's messy and complicated and. That's why like sound bites of TJ are really, they're [01:10:00] very hard to do because it's not something that we can just message in like cute tweet or something like that. It's like, yeah, sometimes, I mean even "Some Basic Things Everyone Should Know", right? What if you don't like the survivor? What if you're more fond of the person who caused harm? All of these things that get really complicated really fast, and taken out of context can sound like it's reinforcing rape culture. When in reality what we're trying to do is unravel the violent culture that we are in. You know? And like peeling that onion.

When things happen between me and someone else who's in TJ community, it is like night and day in comparison to when things happen between me and someone who's not familiar with TJ, not in TJ community. So I feel like the more we can build shared language and understanding and analysis- and not even analysis, but just like how shared values around like how we want to be with each other, right? The more we can talk about, you know, Fenner and I are friends, so what do you wanna do when we have a fight, before we have a fight, right? I know whenever [01:11:00] I move to a new job, I always ask them, how do you handle conflict here? What does that? I want to know that cuz I may not want to work here if you don't have any way that you do that. You know, know, like, but just starting to have those conversations.

Cause we just, in the same way that we would do like earthquake drills or fire drills, like we should have preparation around this kind of stuff. Cause it happens way more often than fires and earthquakes. Yeah. So we want people to really understand what they're walking into, to be able to give informed consent. And so we can give informed consent and say, you know what, like if you wanna, if you're like really set up calling the cops and like this, like then this is not a TJ process. We can support you, but it's not TJ. Right?

CLIVE: You had said that Survivor healing is not dependent on harmer accountability.

MIA: Yes.

CLIVE: Is it also true then that harmer accountability is not dependent on survivor forgiveness?

MIA: Yes. What Amanda said. Yeah.

CLIVE: So that leads to this question about [01:12:00] if the reception of apology is not possible, does that then impede the harm's ability to do one, two, and three?

MIA: No, you can. You can have self-accountability processes. So you can do this on your own. I know people who have done self-accountability processes where they've written a letter anyways and worked on it and tweaked it just as they would if they were going to read it to the person. But because the other person refuses to be in contact with them, they've done it on their own. Right. And read it maybe to their accountability support team that's helping them.

LEONTYNE: You had asked earlier what we might add to that.

MIA: Yeah.

LEONTYNE: And one of the things is naming what it is that you believe the harm you've done is.

MIA: A good apology includes that. Yeah. Not just like, I'm sorry for whatever hurt you. Terrible apology. I'm sorry you feel bad.

LEONTYNE: It's not even necessarily always that, that type of thing, but it's, like it could be a genuine apology, but where you're like, I feel that [01:13:00] you really don't understand what it's that I was talking about. Like, like I feel that you genuinely, yes, want to, but I feel like, yeah, you're not quite getting the...

MIA: Yeah, it's like in mirroring, right? When you're mirroring something back and you're like, no, actually the important part of what I said is this part. It's like you said, it's not that they're not genuinely trying and they want to understand you, but yeah, definitely.

SK: Yeah. I just feel like there's a part, almost pre-apology, like actually understanding your impact. How can you apologize if you actually don't know what the impact was, cause then it just is like, it feels like half, like you're just reflecting on what you think you did and where the behavior came from.

MIA: Definitely.

TIERRA: Around forgiveness, I feel like you can hear and like accept that an apology has been made and it's acceptable, but that doesn't mean you're accepting, it doesn't mean that you forgive.

MIA: Absolutely.

TIERRA: And those don't feel the same.

MIA: Absolutely. And I would add though that I think a good apology has the power to [01:14:00] soften people enough and open people enough up that forgiveness is possible, even if people thought it was impossible. But you don't have to forgive in order to make it happen. Like cuz one of the last big circle processes that I did that was a 15 hour circle process, the harmer who had raped the survivor, those were the first words out of his mouth was the name of the survivor and then, I'm sorry I raped you. And you could see just the- somatically, like in people's bodies, you could just see everyone just-like the survivor as well, just like softened. And that people came to the circle, you know, like this, they were ready to be like, you got nothing, you know, let me let you have it. But the fact that those were the first words and that the harmer that we had worked with him so long on what he was gonna say, it just softened everybody [01:15:00] and completely changed the trajectory of that circle.

So I think while we wanna prepare for all different outcomes, we also always wanna, in the terms of our values and liberation of possibility, always wanna leave space for possibility.

ANNE: Do people get hung up with, or how do you deal with the challenge of labeling harms? For example, the words rape, the words violent, the word abuse, where people can acknowledge inflicting the harm, but protest against some specific vocabulary.

MIA: Yeah. Then they're not ready to make their apology yet. That case that I just gave, the example of, that was actually pretty short intervention in terms in the scheme of things because everybody just started transforming, like it [01:16:00] was amazing, on their own. Not just the survivor and the harmer in that case, but all the bystanders as well. But when I started out, it took probably four months to get to the place where the harmer could even acknowledge that what they had done was some type of sexual harm. Took another month to get to say sexual assault. Probably took another two to three months to get into actions to say the word rape and understand that what it was rape.

So when we entered into that process, he was like, I'm happy to be part of this process cause I wanna be accountable, but I don't think anything happened. But I want, you know, I love my community and so, you know, if he said something happened and I did something to him, then I'm happy to be part of this. But I don't think anything happened.

And so we knew that- this is getting deeper into intervention stuff- but like, so we knew that the arc of what we needed to take him on, one of the first thoughts was to get, to be able to actually say those words because you need to be able to name [01:17:00] and reflect back what it is that the person experienced. I feel like that's a big piece of it.

SARAH ROSE: Can you talk a little bit what transforming behavior looks like, cuz it seems to be the most nebulous?

MIA: Just do it. What are you talking about? *[laughter]* It's so easy.

Yeah. So for example, like, let's say that- I think I've used this example here before- let's say that like, you like to go out and drink a lot. Maybe you're not a full blown alcoholic, but you like to drink a lot, you know, you like to have a couple of drinks when you go out, and that drinking definitely is something that impairs your ability to navigate consent, right? And so if we were working with a harmer and the survivor, and we were figuring out what the harm was, we would also harken back to this thing, right? We would also list out, okay, what are some of the conditions that made this possible? So, drinking might be one of them, for example. So we would wanna, in terms of transforming behavior as we work on apologies, and we work on making [01:18:00] amends. So underneath here it says repairing and building trust and relationship and consistency. Because this could take a while, right? You might need to keep reaching out to somebody a bunch of times before they ever reach back to you. We're also working on transforming behaviors, so it might look like, okay, let's start identifying some of the ways, some of the flags or indicators that you can watch for when you're out drinking. It might look like stopping drinking altogether, right? That might be one thing, and then that's just one piece of the behavior. But then we would identify all the other ones and start looking at those. And again, like a lot of that stuff is just practice. A lot of that stuff is consistency and then it bleeds into healing and accountability as well. Right?

Does that help a little bit. It's hard though. Transforming your behaviors is hard, which is what we'll talk about at the end of the day. I'm sure -we've talked about this- everybody here has tried to change their behavior at some point in time and it has not worked right. And oftentimes you need support to be able to do it.

And if it's [01:19:00] really, really deep seated trauma that we might hook them up with or help them find some type of a healer, right? Finding a therapist might be part of the

work that we do here, because being in ongoing therapy might be something that we're like, we need help with that, right? All kinds of things.

Because healing and accountability is so bound up. That's also true for healing when we're supporting survivors as well, right? We might say like, okay, part of this healing work is now we're gonna help support you to find a good therapist, to find a good body worker, whatever type of modality works for you.

So we're talking about accountability. I feel like it is distinctly different from all of these things because it goes, to me, a lot deeper. And the other piece around accountability is that we are talking about all three of these things at the same time. That it's not just as simple as like, oh, Saturday is circle with these people, so now it's over. But accountability is lifelong. The transformation of behavior- I mean, like I know for [01:20:00] me, like I've been able to start a good habit and I've kept it up for a little bit and then it just falls to shit. Like how, you know, how did that happen? And that's true here too, which is one of the reasons why Pods has been such a good model for us because it's one thing if like I'm in a process with Anne, and Anne has called me from the BATJC to work with her, but I'm not gonna be in Anne's life forever. But it's another thing if Anne can work with folks who are already in her life, who she already sees again, right? People tend to have more long-term commitment to people who are in their intimate networks.

And so then they can help Anne. When Anne later may be like, let's say two years later, kind of starts to fall back into similar patterns, right? That they're able to help her identify those things and support her to take accountability.

And again, remember, we wanna move from holding people accountable to supporting people, to take accountability.

Obviously this is where we are. This is where we wanna be. We're not here yet. [01:21:00] We will have to hold some people accountable. That's real. But we wanna try to practice as much with each other, taking accountability, right? So if something happened with these people here throughout this year, this TJ training, that is the framework that I would hope that you all would be operating in.

Does that make sense? So like if something happened between Ray and Kim, right? If Kim did something to Ray that you don't have to wait for Ray to be like, "Hey, by the way, you did this thing," that you would proactively be like, "Hey, I did this thing. What can I do to make it better? Here are some things I've thought of. What do you think about that? I wanna take accountability for it. How can that happen?" Right?

Because ideally the person who did the harm should be the person or people who are leading the accountability process, spearheading it. That's not what happens. But ideally that should be what happens, right? Like if I'm in an accountability process for my own behaviors, I should be the one calling J saying, Hey- who's my accountability team maybe- [01:22:00] "Hey, let's schedule a meeting. Hey, don't forget there's a meeting next Wednesday. Hey, can I bring food to that meeting?" You know, like I should be doing that rather than everybody else doing all the labor around the person who caused harm.

Again, we're not there yet, but that's what we wanna practice, right? And I know, again, like when things happen between me and people in TJ community, that is what we practice. And it's so wonderful because I don't have to worry about it. I know that if something goes down between me and Radhika, that Radhika's gonna come to me and I don't have to chase her and she'll come to me and be like, "Hey, this thing happened. I'm so sorry I did this. What can I do?"

Are there any pieces that were really important in terms of making accountability possible? Things that help? Yeah.

RADHIKA: I think when my sense of self is fractured in any way, or not whole or strong, that it's so threatening for me to see that I made a mistake. Whereas when I'm secure, it's easier for me [01:23:00] to apologize. So again, I'm pointing to like how hard these steps are if you're not working on yourself.

MIA: And that's where we wanna, again, build up that muscle memory.

RADHIKA: Yeah.

MIA: You've done apologizing so much that even when you're like thrown off guard, you've practiced. You can only practice the skill of reorienting when you're disoriented, right? When you're not in- like a coming back. And so we wanna practice that skill as much as possible. And that can be for any type of trauma response. It can be for any type of like feeling not supported or unsecure, whatever. Definitely.

SARAH: Something that's really helpful for me in this conversation is the idea that someone who's been harmed, their healing isn't dependent on the harmer's accountability journey and vice versa. Because I think what I've been seeing in life and kind of struggling with is like if people can't take accountability for something on a really low level scale, then like I can't even imagine when really intense level situations [01:24:00] happen. And so kind of disconnecting the parties in a way is helpful for me and seeing how like, progress can actually be made where it's not like so intertwined all

the time that like if one person doesn't choose to do it, this other person can't move forward. So that's really useful for me.

MIA: Yeah. Thank you. And to complicate that a little bit-

SARAH: Absolutely.

MIA: I would also add that I actually feel like that, yes, absolutely. And I think that exists cause of the current historical moment and conditions that we're in, that hopefully if we build a little bit more, let's say in like 40 years maybe what, like 50 or 60. We could get to a place where that doesn't have to happen. Where we're so invested in each other's healing and each other's wellbeing cause that's my wellbeing too, right? Cause we're so interconnected and interdependent that you realize how much your [01:25:00] accountability is actually part of somebody else's healing, or can help facilitate somebody else's healing. And so you're like, whatever I need to do, Kieran, I will do. Right? That it is not a situation where you're like, well, I tried once and they didn't wanna do anything.

It's both/and. And that part of what you shared exists now because we're so steeped in punishment and criminalization and revenge.

SHARON: You asked what would make accountability more possible. I think part of the answer is to not look at it like it's punishment. Like it is something that's negative or scary or is harmful to myself, but instead as like a skill. Like it actually is something that you can get better at the more you practice.

MIA: Because punishment is not accountability. It should not be. What I always say is like, what if accountability wasn't scary? And that it's actually a gift to the person who did the harm? Like, [01:26:00] I mean as well as the other people obviously that you're being accountable to, but like, I think that we think about it as this thing of just like, I don't wanna get caught, right? Like-

RADHIKA: Yeah.

MIA: Even if you did something bad, you kind of hope that like nobody notices or that it's not that bad. But one thing I realize is that we all want to make amends, I think on some level. Because even if we don't end up making amends or apologizing, or taking accountability, we will punish ourselves to make up for that often times. And then the second piece is that you can only practice accountability really when you need to be accountable. Like you can only truly practice when you need to be accountable. You know, like the analogy that I keep using with the athlete who's practicing free throws for

example, but he can't really practice that three point shot unless he's in the game. But he does that over and over so he doesn't have to think about it so that when he's in the game, what he can practice, there's actually other things, that its not just about like how do I dump this ball into the basket, right? Then I can practice things like my peripheral vision and all that, right? That's what we wanna get to that, that you apologized so much so well that when it happens you don't even have to worry about this part. Right? You worry about all the triggers that might be coming up for you, that you're able to practice your new practices around that.

RADHIKA: What if like the other person says, this is what I want you to do to make amends, and I'm like, that's not what I'm up for. You know? And in TJ work how does that get-

MIA: Then we negotiate and that's all dependent on the trust that we've been able to build and that we diligently built over the time. Yeah.

I think part of it is that we wanna shift and transform what we desire, so we don't just desire the easy and the comfortable, that we actually are excited about the challenging and the growth and the transformation -transformative things. But how do we shift or transform or queer those desires so that what we desire is actually changing as well, right?

So that we're actually desiring hard conversations, right? Instead of running away from them. We might still be scared at the same time, but again, that's another skill that we can build out, right? Is it Audre Lorde who says we can learn to work when we are afraid in the same way we've learned to work when we are tired or hungry, right? We can build up those skills.

MUSIC BREAK

SHARON: I'm Sharon. I'm a theater artist. I am 25. I am based in the Bay Area. I love doing what I do. I'm also struggling. I'm a struggling poor artist. And a lot of my days are spent just like figuring out how to like make a living doing this. But I'm proud to be on this journey at this stage of my life.

So we had two exercises with a series of questions that were asking us to evaluate mistakes and reflect on how I reconcile a mistake and how I make amends. And when I notice that I'm not in alignment with myself, what does that look like? And that really just like launched me into, this whole world, this thought process of like, gosh, I don't even know, like I know what I believe in and what I value, and the principles that I wanna stand by. But I think the hardest part- and this bleeds into the second exercise, they

were so in conversation with each other- the second exercise, which was to evaluate how am I consistent to my principles and values and practices?

And I'm not sure that I fully know that I'm putting my principles to practice. And I feel really like conflicted about like the self work versus the greater whole, like the larger like systematic kind of like work. That I wanna be there, but I'm also having a really hard time in here, like working through personal things and like yeah, stopping the shame and the self-judgment.

I think that's like been this whole past year or two, like that's the train of thought that I keep reverting back to. It's like, ugh and here I am again, and once again, like as an artist, I think that's just like a theme for us all. It's like, when am I gonna stop just like saying I can't do things and I can't, I'm not allowed, or I'm not ready yet.

You know, I think like part of our, my group discussion was about, "Oh, I can't really start putting things into practice or like envisioning a better world until I'm a better person first, until I'm like self actualized and in check." It's like, wait, but that's impossible and actually comes up against a value on the board, which was liberation and possibility and compassion.

All those things of like, but how, yeah, I have to also forgive myself and like be kind to myself as I'm trying to hold everything accountable. So, and it's all very emotionally like affecting me.

At the end of every session, I think I come back to that sense of like, the community, like this is powerful. This is very powerful. All of these thoughts that I'm having right now, I could never have had, I couldn't even imagine having on my own, you [01:32:00] know, without like truly this container, this professional container. And I'm already thinking of ways that I can bring this out into my world. Like, how can I hold parties, get into this talk, is that allowed? Is that too, you know, like how do you invite other people to be vulnerable with you? You know, and like set up that like almost professional level of like, of this container elsewhere or in other theater or art spaces or any other community.

TIERRA: May we make the spaces to hold the work to create a liberated world.

We'll be preparing to shift from theory to practice in the next episode. See you then.

MUSIC BREAK

TIERRA: For this episode's optional take home exercise, consider taking a moment to get clear on what are your values? What are the guideposts, the compass points you seek to live your life by? Consider making time to journal about them, talk them through

to yourself in a voice note, or revisit them if you've done something like this in the past. Which values do you find yourself practicing consistently? Where do you notice you struggle? And for the places you struggle, consider making time to dream up what might support you to practice that value more consistently.

And if you want some optional extra credit, I've got something else for you. On Mia's blog *Leaving Evidence*, she's written an amazing piece on how to give a genuine apology. She writes, "Apologizing well is a fundamental part of accountability." Consider making time to scope out this piece and, either solo or with the folks you're journeying through this series with, reflect on what it brings up for you. What might you apply from Mia's piece the next time you're in a position to need to apologize.

MUSIC BED

TIERRA: Thank you for listening to *The Real Work: A Podcast About Theater Culture and Transformative Justice*. Please check out the show notes for the transcript and for plenty of links and resources to tide you over til the next episode drops. And please consider sharing this work with your communities.

Thank you to the Center for Cultural Innovation's Investing in Artists Grant, the City of Oakland's Cultural Funding Program, and to Cal Shakes for initially incubating this project.

Our theme music is by Zanda of DiaspoRADiCAL. This is a collaboration with We Rise Production, and we'd love to hear from you. Connect with us at We Rise Production at pm [01:35:00] dot me, on the socials, and at weriseproduction.com.

MUSIC FADE OUT

TIERRA: Do we wanna close with a collective breath?

SARAH: Sure.

SK: Sure.

TIERRA: All right. That's a wrap.

Show Notes

Sogorea Te' Land Trust: <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/>

Save the West Berkeley Shellmound: <https://shellmound.org/>

Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence:
<https://www.creative-interventions.org/toolkit/>

Aya de Leon, “Reconciling Rage and Compassion: The Unfolding #MeToo Moment for Junot Diaz”:
<https://transformharm.org/reconciling-rage-and-compassion-the-unfolding-metoo-moment-for-junot-diaz/>

“Hollow Water,” directed by Bonnie Dickie: https://www.nfb.ca/film/hollow_water/

Mia Mingus, “The Four Parts of Accountability & How To Give A Genuine Apology”:
<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/12/18/how-to-give-a-good-apology-part-1-the-four-parts-of-accountability/>

Mia Mingus: <https://www.soiltip.org> & <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com>

Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective: <https://batjc.wordpress.com/>

For additional resources, including this episode’s ASL video:
<https://www.weriseproduction.com/therealwork>

zAnda of DiaspoRADiCAL: @diaspo.radical on Instagram &
<https://soundcloud.com/diasporadical>

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