THE GOOD GUISE PRESENT:

Loving Accountability

The Guise Guide Vol.2

OUR CONTEXT

In December 2020, amidst multiple simultaneous pandemics (COVID-19, white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism) the Good Guise, a collective of Black, Indigenous, Brown, Latinx, racialized men and non-binary guys sent a call-out to guys like us to participate in a several months-long experiment. We invited guys to reach out to other guys they were close to, and to create a "pod" or a "KEEPSIX", a small group of guys that got our back, committed to mutual support, creative inspiration, and honest communication.

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Jahmal Nugent

Every one of us had engaged in harm and every one of us had been harmed. Every one of us had witnessed harm and every one of us knew someone who had been harmed. Accountability was synonymous with punishment, and that meant we were disposable.

...we started with care

Violence and oppression had taken root in our bodies and weakened awareness of our interdependent bonds, growing fear, trauma, and distrust. Most of us did not know how to be vulnerable or how to give and receive care. So, we started there.

I believe that our ancestors laugh, cry, hurt, rage, celebrate with us.

What this is and is not

This guide is intended to be a starting point for Black, Brown, Indigenous, Latinx, racialized men and non-binary guys who have been harmed and who have caused harm -- who are longing for something more than survival.

We propose this longing as a place of connection, one where we can learn to break cycles of harm by building stronger relationships through vulnerability, re-imagining care as a collective responsibility, and moving towards accountability as a practice of love and understanding that sees ourselves and others as Future Ancestors.

This is not a how-to on accountability processes. There are several amazing resources, mostly by Black and brown queer women and femmes, that explore possibilities for accountability processes, examine real-life scenarios, document strategies and stories from the transformative justice movement, and even codify some of the best practices, guiding questions, and principles learned in this work. We've included some of those resources in the Gratitude and Acknowledgements section at the end of this guide.

Most importantly, I believe they learn as we are learning,

Beyond the Binary

The polarizing labels “survivor” and “perpetrator” have sometimes been used to erase our stories and histories. In a world where accountability and justice are rooted in an ideology of punishment and disposability, these terms have sometimes been used to leverage power and deny our worth and dignity.

Our stories as Black, Brown, Indigenous, Latinx, racialized men and non-binary guys are more nuanced than simply bad or good, powerful or vulnerable. While this is not an excuse for any harm we have caused, it is necessary to move beyond such a frame, if meaningful dialogue that moves toward healing is to occur. Nonetheless, we start from a place that wants to acknowledge the harm we’ve caused and to understand its impacts.

Jahmal Nugent

If we are to move towards a place beyond punishment and survival, we need to understand these stories. Our stories and the stories of those we’ve harmed. These stories help us understand the conditions that have enabled harm and violence. These stories help us understand what resources and skills are needed to transform harm.

just as we learn from them.

Perspectives on Accountability

In an organizing meeting of The Good Guise, Jah Grey, award-winning photographer and researcher who focuses on Black masculinity and Black joy, spoke of accountability for him as “always changing” and dependent on the resources and tools he had at the time. Those resources were often his relationships and close friends.

At one of our Good Guise monthly pod meets, we asked, “What words do you associate with accountability?” ‘Responsibility’, ‘strength’, ‘consent’ and ‘respect’ were some of the words said. Others were ‘eye of the beholder,’ ‘perspectives,’ ‘public’, ‘private’, and ‘negotiation.’ Shared understandings and tensions were present.

In her essay,'**Dreaming Accountability**', author, educator and trainer in disability and transformative justice, Mia Mingus, writes of accountability not as an event or a destination, but as a skill we can build and practice. Accountability can be re-imagined from something that was once “scary” to something we can long for, “a practice of love and liberation”, and to “practice the kinds of people, elders-to-be, and souls we want to be.”

In ***Beyond Cancel Culture: How to Hold Each Other Accountable—With Love***, reproductive justice activist and scholar Loretta J. Ross, speaks of accountability that resists disposability and exile. Accountability is about “build[ing] a culture that invites people in, instead of pushing them out.”

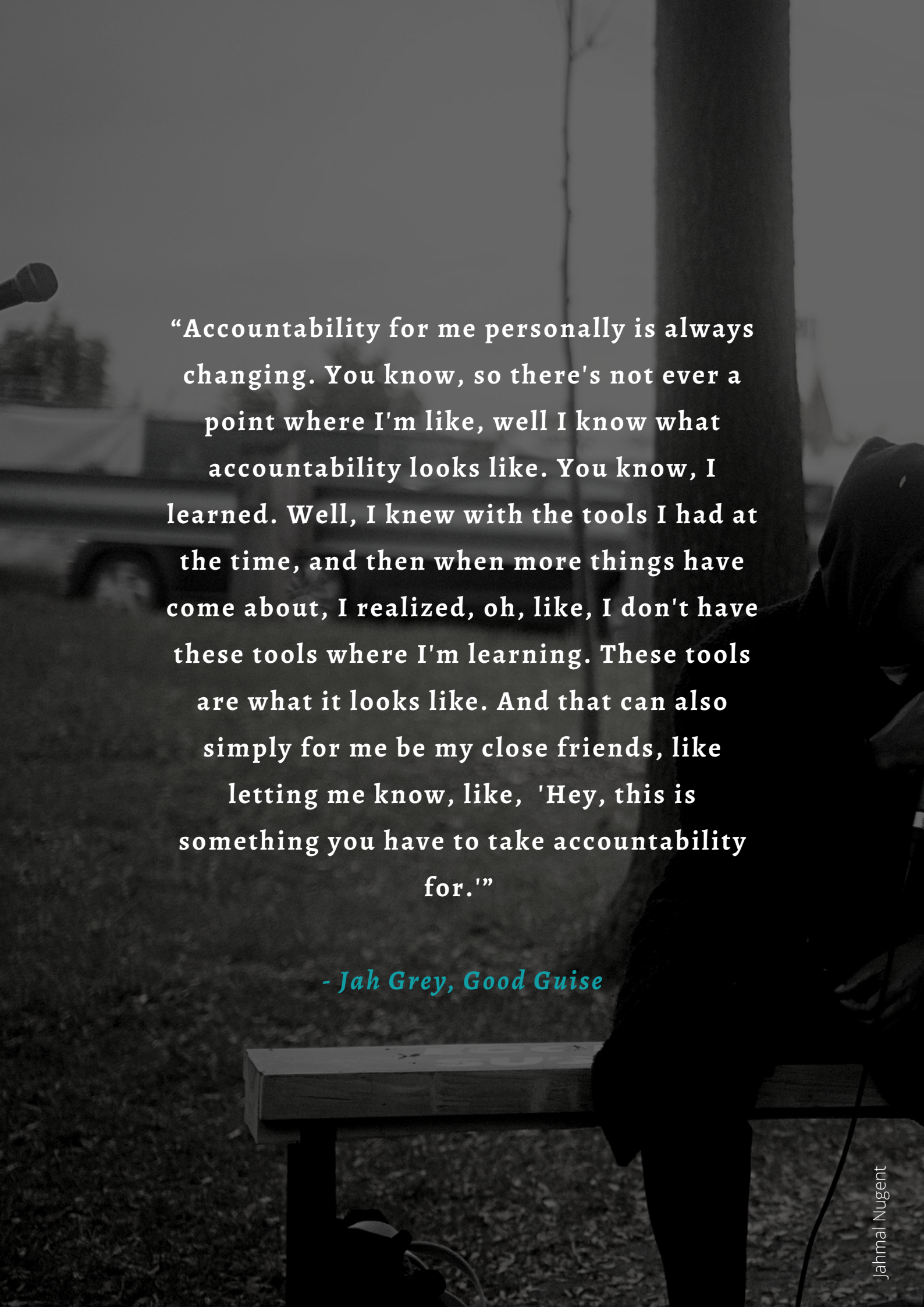
We grow knowledge and movements with them.

Other Perspectives on Accountability

In Mariame Kaba's abolitionist guide, ***We Do This 'Til We Free Us***, accountability is expressed through a transformative justice framework: changing the conditions in which we work, play and live so that violence and harm cannot be sustained. An organizer, educator and practitioner in prison abolition, Mariame Kaba is also practical and realistic, recognizing accountability as a goal with achievable outcomes, but one that can also look messy.

In ***Beyond Survival - Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement***, some specific examples of what accountability might look like are provided: "stopping harmful behaviour, naming harmful behaviour, giving sincere apologies, stepping down from leadership roles, developing daily healing and reflection practices to address root causes of harmful behavior, building a support pod, providing material repair, contributing to community efforts to end intimate and sexual harm…"

In her conflict resolution workbook ***So You're Ready to Choose Love***, award winning author, conflict-resolution practitioner, and somatic healing coach, Kai Cheng Thom, suggests dividing the term "accountability" into two parts: "account" and "ability." We can think of "account" as the story: understanding what happened and why from multiple perspectives. And, we can think of "ability" as our capacity to do something: the skills, resources and relationships we have and those we can strengthen and seek support for.



“Accountability for me personally is always changing. You know, so there's not ever a point where I'm like, well I know what accountability looks like. You know, I learned. Well, I knew with the tools I had at the time, and then when more things have come about, I realized, oh, like, I don't have these tools where I'm learning. These tools are what it looks like. And that can also simply for me be my close friends, like letting me know, like, 'Hey, this is something you have to take accountability for.'”

- Jah Grey, Good Guise

Jahmal Nugent

Challenges to Accountability: What is the Patriarchy?

1. Patriarchy had a beginning. That means it's made up. But it also means it can have an end.

2. Patriarchy has taken different forms in different times and different cultures, but the one constant is that men are always seen as inherently dominant and more valuable than anyone else.

3. Patriarchy assigns roles and stereotypes to each gender and makes them seem universal and natural.

4. Patriarchy supports and intersects with other systems of power and control, like capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism. (These terms are defined in the three glossaries we like: 1. ***The Anti-Violence Project***; 2. ***Racial Equity Tools***; and 3.Toronto's own ***The 519 Glossary of Terms***).

The Patriarchy

Challenges to Accountability: What is the Patriarchy?

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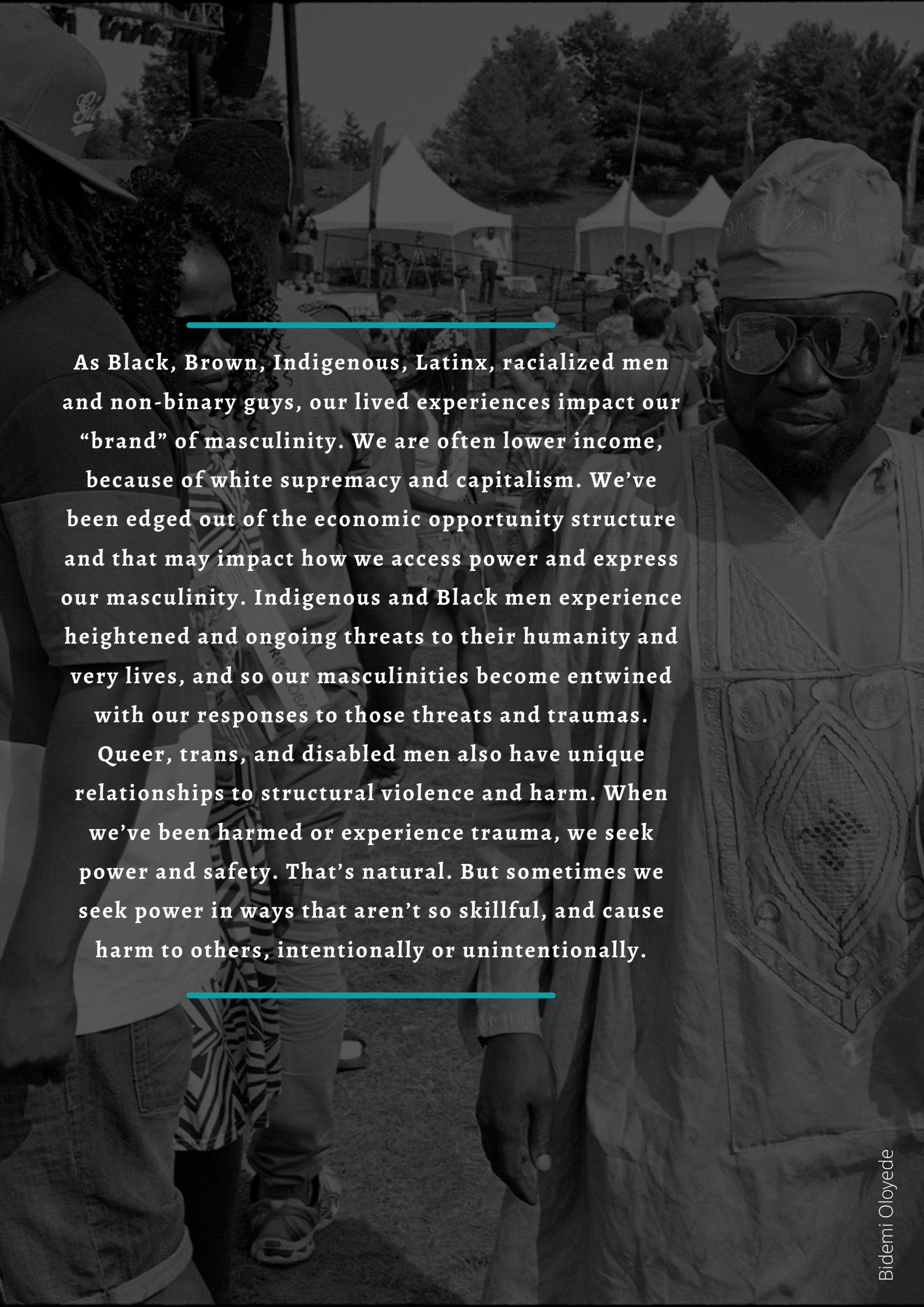
5. Patriarchy is made of up institutions that give men power, and in particular straight, cisgender men, who are also white, not and not disabled. You get the idea.

6. Patriarchy is a system of domination that reinforces men's power and is maintained through violence and control. It is taught and reinforced by men, women, and people of all genders.

7. Patriarchy has restricted our imaginations and what we believe is possible for our world and each other.

We demand and entice the world to change the way things have always been done, with them.



As Black, Brown, Indigenous, Latinx, racialized men and non-binary guys, our lived experiences impact our "brand" of masculinity. We are often lower income, because of white supremacy and capitalism. We've been edged out of the economic opportunity structure and that may impact how we access power and express our masculinity. Indigenous and Black men experience heightened and ongoing threats to their humanity and very lives, and so our masculinities become entwined with our responses to those threats and traumas. Queer, trans, and disabled men also have unique relationships to structural violence and harm. When we've been harmed or experience trauma, we seek power and safety. That's natural. But sometimes we seek power in ways that aren't so skillful, and cause harm to others, intentionally or unintentionally.

Bidemi Oloyede

Creating Connection: Taking on the Patriarchy

Patriarchal masculinity, the kind of masculinity that is valued and accepted under patriarchy, also governs our spirits and minds, and the ways we seek help. In general, when we adhere rigidly to the kinds of norms that encourage us to not name and share our emotions, to be relentlessly self-reliant without seeking the help or support of others, this cuts us off from the connections and support necessary to get us through difficult times. Because we can't do it alone. It's not how we're built. We were born to connect.

We are racialized men that know that silence promotes denial and that we cannot change or heal what we cannot name. Under patriarchy, we have been harmed and we have caused harm.

bell hooks in The Will to Change (probably the best book on transforming patriarchy we've ever read), encourages us to choose a creative and loving response to patriarchal masculinity, rather than a reactionary one. If we, as racialized men, are to reclaim our wholeness and embody our interdependence, we must envision loving alternatives to patriarchal masculinity, not organized by dominance but by partnerships.

We change ourselves with them.

Understanding the stories of those we've harmed.

In a love letter to men, called relinquishing the patriarchy, adrienne maree brown, provides concrete steps and example for men and masculine folks, particularly those who are straight and cis, to begin taking what she refers to as “fractacal accountability,” which involves the healing of “each unit of masculinity.”

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She provides three examples, directed mostly to cis straight men, that are specific and powerful. We believe these examples are useful in each of us beginning to understand the stories of those we’ve harmed:

1. if a woman tells you she is tired, that the dynamic of labor between you is imbalanced, it means you have been carried without realizing or honoring it. in naming this, she is reaching for interdependence with you.

2. if a woman tells you you are scaring her, you are. and you have been - it usually takes us a while to gather the words of our fear. she is saying this because something in your behavior has become physically or emotionally unsafe.

3. if a woman tells you she needs boundaries, step back immediately, and listen to her. respect the lines she draws between you. if she needs space from you, don’t antagonize her…consider offering her space. and silence.

They learn through us.

Challenges to Accountability: What is Shame?

According to Brené Brown, a researcher at the University of Houston, shame is an “intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging.”

When we were children, shaming may have been used as a patriarchal tool of control by many of the adults around us. Shame hindered our connection to our emotional, tender selves while we were expected to put on a mask of control and dominance or to play it cool, be stoic, and unaffected.
We may have learned to create a false self as a way of asserting a dominant masculine presence to cover up our rage, our shame, our powerlessness, and vulnerability. Some of us have asserted our domination and power as acts of manipulation, control or violence over men with less power, women, trans, non-binary folks and even children, or to unskillfully meet our trauma-based needs for safety and power through supremacy.

Our communities and those around us may have also used shame as a tool to “hold us accountable” for the harms we’ve caused, leading to our social withdrawal, isolation or even exile. But shame is often an obstacle to real accountability.

Challenges to Accountability: What is Shame?

In Chapter 21 of Beyond Survival - Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement, Nathan Shara writes that shame “creates an identity: I am bad.” Shame often keeps us “stuck, isolated, and hiding,” and we utilize a number of strategies to escape this state

1) HIDE

2) OVERCOMPENSATE

3) DEFEND

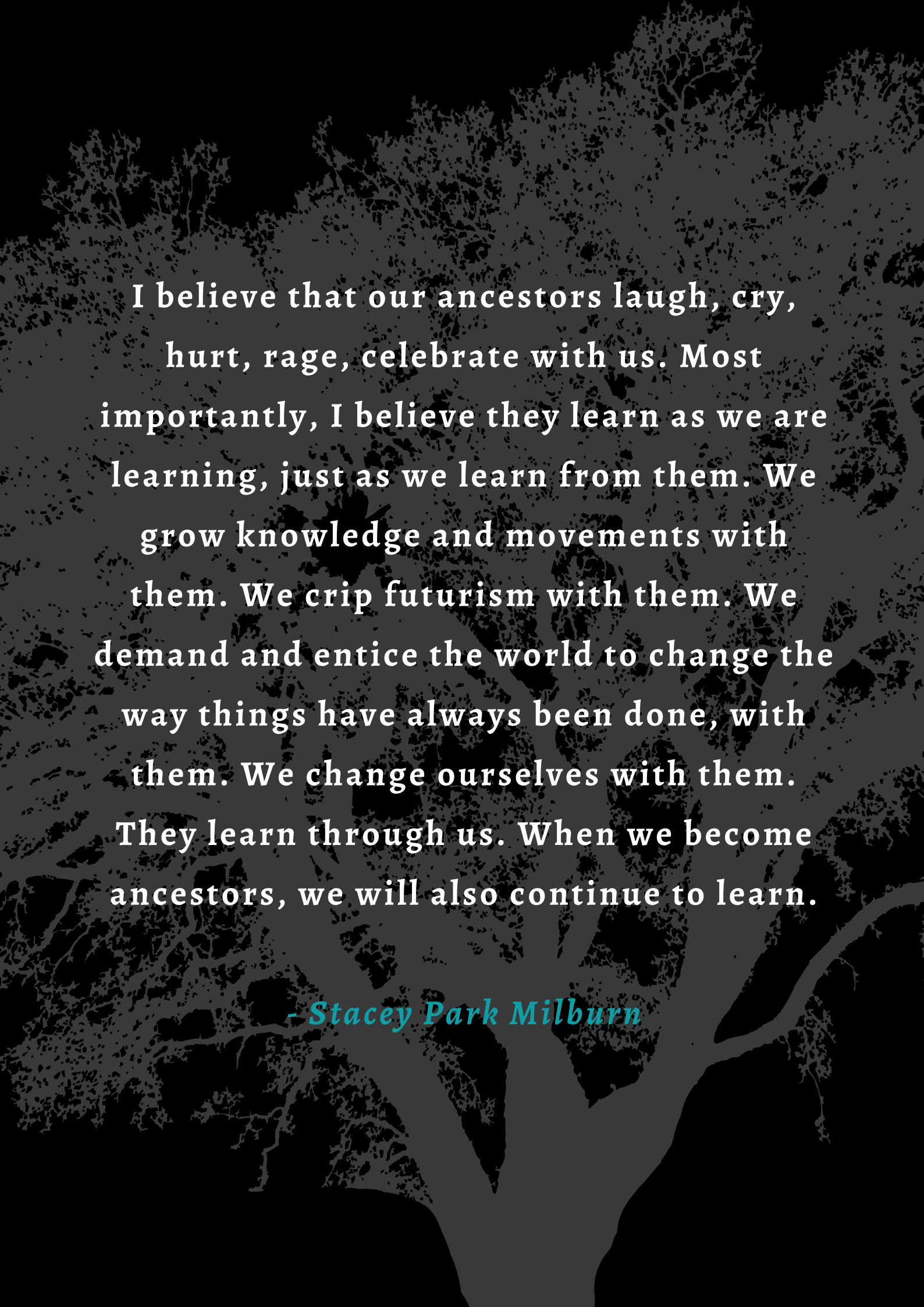
4) BLAME

5) ATTACK

6) NUMB

Jahmal Nugent

we will also continue to learn.


I believe that our ancestors laugh, cry, hurt, rage, celebrate with us. Most importantly, I believe they learn as we are learning, just as we learn from them. We grow knowledge and movements with them. We crip futurism with them. We demand and entice the world to change the way things have always been done, with them. We change ourselves with them. They learn through us. When we become ancestors, we will also continue to learn.
- Stacey Park Milburn

Confronting Shame

Building supportive, trusting and intentional relationships with other Black, Brown, Indigenous, Latinx, racialized men and non-binary guys that encourage vulnerability can reduce feelings of shame.

Jahmal Nugent

Courage, connection and compassion experienced and expressed in intentional groups of support and vulnerability can act as a loving alternative to shame, and create space for us to listen to and understand the stories of harm and take an audit of our capacities, resources and skills to address harm and move towards loving accountability.

Practicing Accountability: Negotiating Consent

Harm and violence are the result of violations of consent, both individual and structural. If we are to prevent harm and violence, and meaningfully address it, we need to understand consent, and our roles within a patriarchal system we did not consent to that values domination over negotiation, control over partnership, independence over interdependence.

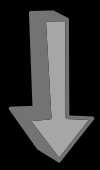
For many of us, the pandemic has increased our tolerance for uncomfortable conversations and enhanced our awareness of boundaries, both ours and others, and our abilities to set them and respect them. This is really about negotiating consent. Think of all the conversation we've initiated or had around the following questions: How close is too close for this person to stand to us? Do we hug a friend or greet them in some other way? If we're going on a date, is it online? Are we comfortable meeting someone for a walk outdoors? Do we stay masked or unmasked? If we're home with multiple family members and some of us are working virtually and some of us are in school virtually, how do we negotiate space and technology resources? And for some of us, questions around prioritizing rent and food and places to sleep have required even more difficult conversations and decisions that shouldn't have to be had by anyone.

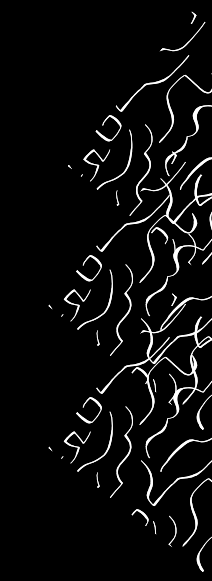
We invite you to check out the video ***Consent is Accountabilty***, created by Project Nia and the Barnard Centre for Research on Women. In this video, consent is presented as a concrete tool and skill necessary in negotiating power dynamics and preventing harm.

More on Consent . . .

The article "**How to Form a Pandemic Pod**" uses the following definition for consent: “Consent is an ongoing collaboration between two or more people in constant verbal, physical, and emotional dialogue about what each person needs to willingly, safely, and pleasurably engage in an interaction together”.

Here’s a framework for consent from the same article, which they’ve borrowed from San Francisco Sex Information. Quality consent practices meet six criteria. Consent must be:





- ➔ Affirmative
- ➔ Competent
- ➔ Informed
- ➔ Unpressured
- ➔ Specific

➔ Affirmative

There is clearly expressed agreement to participate in an activity. We're looking for the presence of a "yes," not just the absence of a "no."

➔ Competent

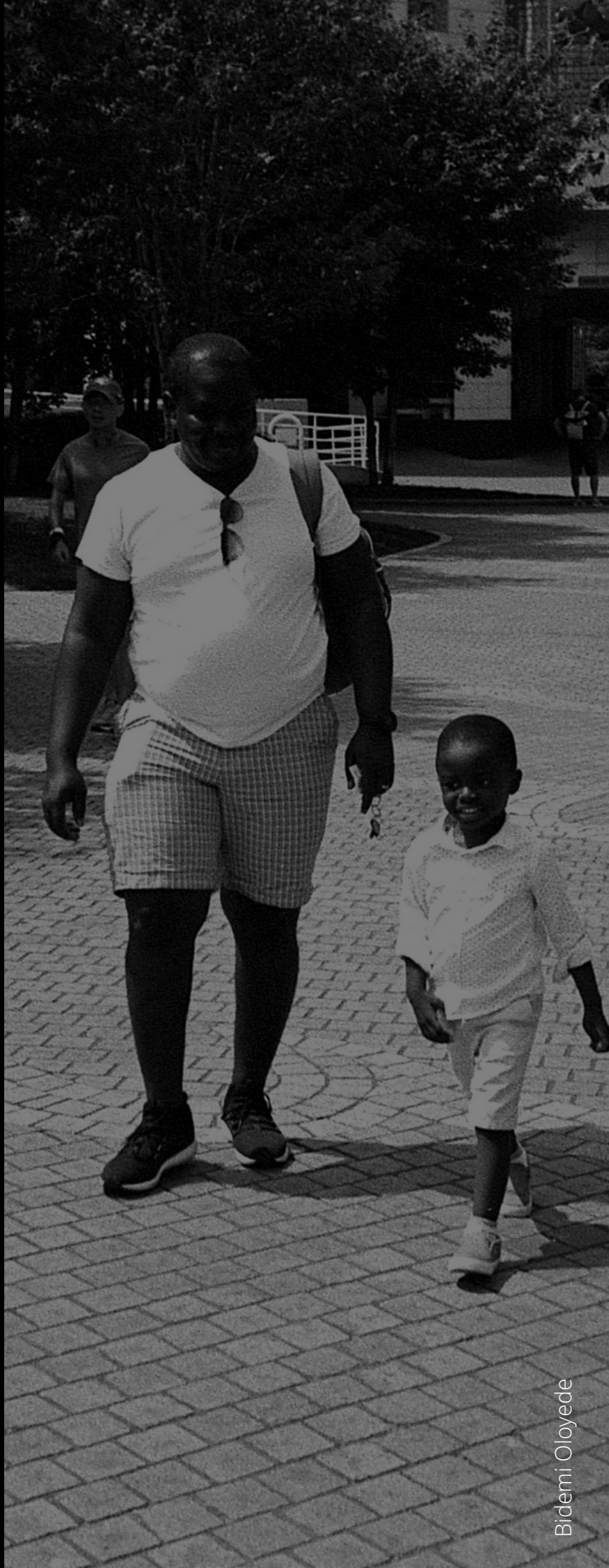
All parties have the unimpaired ability, knowledge, judgment, and skill to have the agreed-upon interaction.

➔ Unpressured

A "no" should be immediately accepted without undue persuasion, influence, or intimidation to encourage someone to do something they've expressed hesitation about doing. Any coercive tactics or pressure (are expressly forbidden

➔ Specific

All parties are clear about what they are doing together and the boundaries of proposed activities. Where there is a lack of specificity, participants act with heightened caution and attunement.



Bidemi Oloyede

Accountability can be an extremely intimidating word. It's often used to suggest taking away power or control from us when we mess up. And for those of us who rely on community to survive, it can also mean alienation and being shut out of our networks of support. However, when accountability begins from a place of love and courage, it becomes a way to build connection and fix broken links with others. In taking ownership of the harm we enact, apologizing deeply, and taking steps towards restitution we open space for healing. Working towards a world where all can thrive requires embracing such a legacy as future ancestors. We do not know what this fully looks like, but we do know that care and accountability are necessary steps if we are ever to get there. Here is a possible model of how to work towards accountability.

1. Acknowledge that you have been harmed and that you have also caused harm (even if unintentional). Just like you need healing and care, so do those you have participated in harming.

2. Reflect on and consider if you want to form a pod (support group) to support you on your journey towards accountability.

3. Listen to and recognize the boundaries of the person(s) you have caused harm to. This will be helpful in thinking about what forms of restitution and/or reconciliation may be possible.

4. Come up with an action plan. Are there skills you need that might help you towards restitution/reconciliation? How will you be respecting everyone's (who is involved) boundaries?

5. Connect with your pod (if you created one) as you go about implementing your plan when you need support. Remember that this is not a straightforward process and will likely be frustrating.

6. Reflect on what you've learned, how might your beliefs or behavior change to prevent harm in the future. What conditions have enabled harmful patterns and how may they be disrupted?

Gratitude

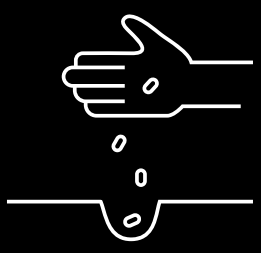
We acknowledge all the queer, trans, women of colour in our lives, including the women of colour on our advisory team, all those we met with at our sessions to build our understanding, and the rich history of wisdom of Black, Indigenous, queer, disability, and sex worker justice movements.

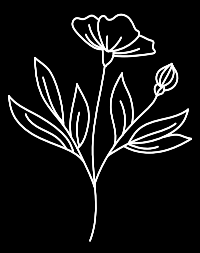
Recommended Glossaries:

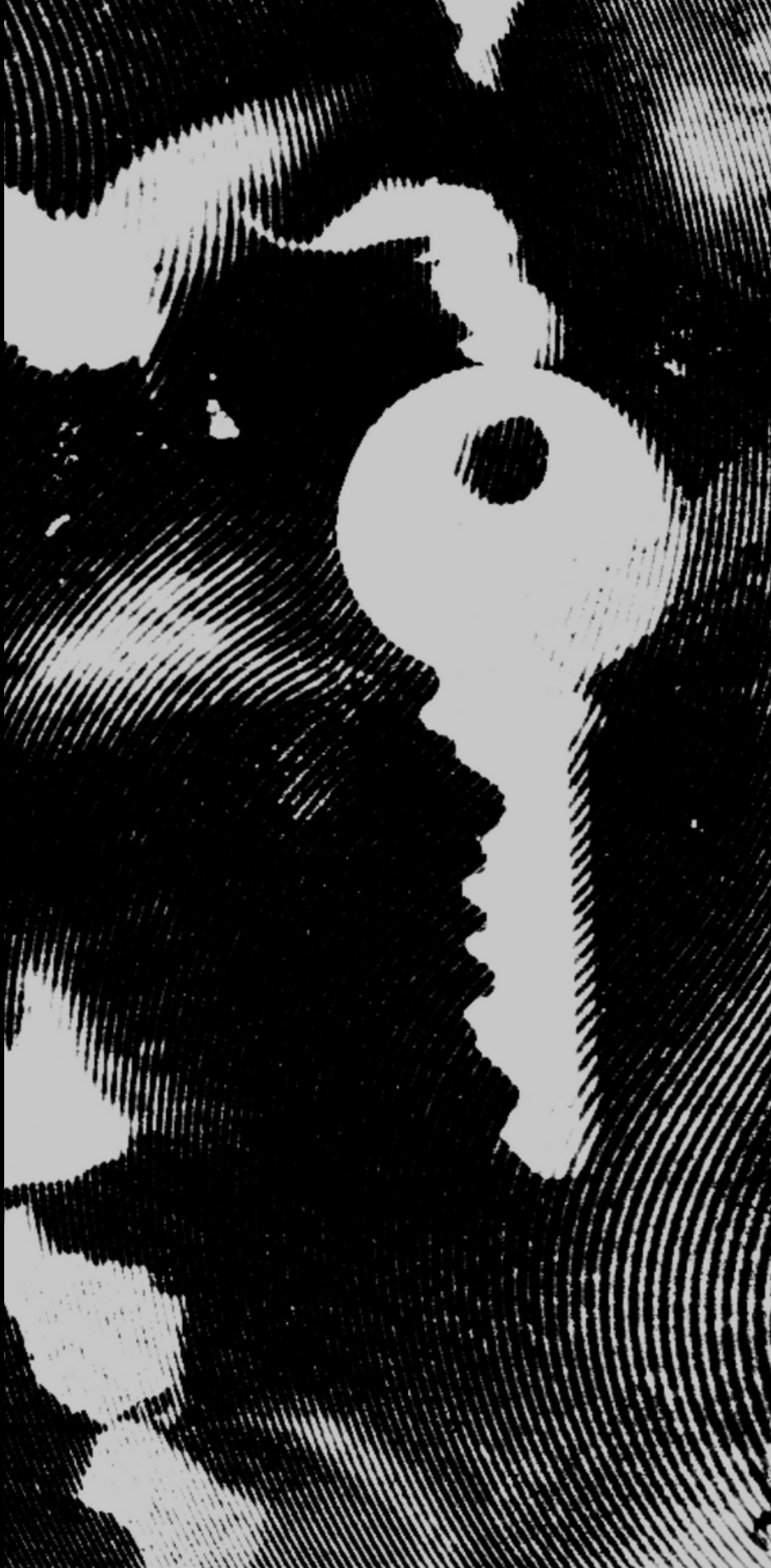
1. The Anti-Violence Project; 2. Racial Equity Tools; and 3. The 519 Glossary of Terms

Other sources:

adrienne, m.b (2019), *relinquishing the patriarchy*// Angelou, M. (2020), *Still I Rise* // *Creative Interventions Toolkit* (2012) // Dixon, E. & Piepzna-Samarasinha L.L (2020), *Beyond Survival - Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement* // Heilman et al., *The Man Box* (2017) // Herzing, R. (2021), Transforming Punishment: What is Accountability Without Punishment, in Mariame Kaba *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* // hooks, bell (2004), *The Will to Change—Men, Masculinity, and Love* // Kolhatkar S. (2021), *Beyond Cancel Culture: How to Hold Each Other Accountable—With Love* // Mehreen, R., & Brunet, P. (2017), *Caring About Thriving, Politics & Care* // Milbern, S. (2019), *On the Ancestral Plane: Crip Hand Me Downs and the Legacy of Our Movements* // Mingus, M. (2019), *Dreaming Accountability* // Mingus, M. & the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (2016), *Pods and Pods Mapping Worksheet* // Project Nia and the Barnard Centre for Research on Women (2019), *Consent is Accountability* & *How Shame Can Block Accountability* // Schulman, S. (2017), *Conflict Is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm, Community Responsibility, and the Duty of Repair* // Sharp, M. (2021), *Future Ancestors Teaching Social Justice, Anti-Racism to all* // Smith, J., & Winters, W. (2020), *How to Form a Pandemic Pod* // Thom, K. C. (2019), *I Hope We Choose Love* // Thom, K.C (2021), *So You're Ready to Choose Love* // *San Francisco Sex Information*







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