

# recognition

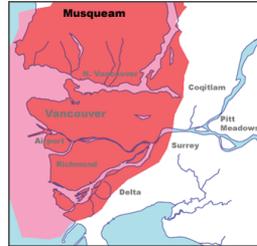
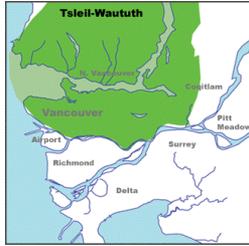


**trans and queer writing  
on sexual harm**



**WAVAW**  
rape crisis centre

# you are here



This zine is produced on the stolen, unceded, and ancestral lands of the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam peoples. We will not live in a world free from violence until Indigenous people have sovereignty in their own lands, and there will be no queer liberation without decolonization.

## recognition

*"Recognition" means to re-cognate, or to re-know something from a long time ago. Trans and queer people know from our ancestors what it means to be safe, valued, and seen. We know that we are capable of hurting each other, just like all humans are, and that our communities deserve deep healing and liberation from systems of oppression. We know that we hold the key to breaking cycles of violence in ways that will change the world.*

*"Recognition", the zine, is a challenge to the antiviolence sector to learn from and be changed by what trans and queer people know about sexual violence. It is not enough to recognize our identities and to include us in the status quo of service provision; to truly recognize us is to join us in re-imagining what healing justice can look like.*

*You are holding in your hands the work of eleven trans and queer artists, and the collective wisdom of our communities. This zine is a labor of love, it is a tribute to resilience, and it is a call to action for a future where no one is disposable.*

*-Felix Gilliland, Community Engagemet and Inclusion Coordinator at WAVAW Rape Crisis Center*

# Forward by Adele Barclay

*"The two of us never more alone  
than when together."*

– Brenda Shaughnessy, "Why I Stayed, 1997-2001"

When straight folks romanticize queerness, imagining queer and trans spaces as an enlightened collective utopia free from the pitfalls of heteronormativity, I try to steer them away from this dangerous line of thinking, to make visible what shame and abuse make invisible.

Queer and trans people not only experience harm but also do harm to each other.

It's something we feel and know and yet still need to say aloud. Our communities are steeped in misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, racism, classism, colonialism, ableism, fatphobia that we dance around and into any time we gather. Our desires furl and unfurl while our ghosts tend to the gaslights.

The writing and art in this zine recognize how intimacy and violence enmesh, how desire, fear, and power underpin our daily interactions, how the frameworks for abuse we've inherited fail queer and trans folks, how survivors rework the landscapes and languages of love. These artists recognize the malleability, bad love, half-truths, human terms, lost trains of thought, fists that slip, cobwebs, and grey hoodies that emerge as we navigate these traumas. I'm grateful for how the contributors in this zine ask us to learn again and feel our way through.

# she took sleep

from you first, refusing  
to let fights soak

overnight. There's not enough  
room for you both

and the heatwave  
in the bed so you lie

on the balcony, itching  
through the blankets, unsure

where comfort hides in the dark  
house you built

together. No bruises then  
only deep wells under your

eyes that threaten  
to sink you

while you do quiet  
penance for the sin of looking

past her in a crowd to meet  
a sympathetic face.

She named you risk  
and weighed you

against everything  
that came next. The fist

that slips out of her  
so easily. So give yourself

credit for the things you left  
behind, the house

furnished by appealing to lost  
and founds with descriptions

of commonly forgotten  
objects. The collective

noun for thieves  
is a steal. The fruits

of theft's labour?  
A bill of goods.

Nisa Malli

# ghosts

Audrey Wolfe

## Part One

Jimmy gave me his hoodie to wear after he asked me to leave. This hoodie was grey and loose, the colours makes me feel less like 'a boyfriend' when I wore it. The warmth of the material sfelt both foreign and comforting against my skin. Jimmy often wore dark hoodies and baggy pants, mean to hide the cursed hips and curves that were invisible to me even when we lay naked beside each other in bed. It took a long time before we could be naked beside each other, the armour that we wore to protect ourselves from the people outside lay shed on the floor next to the mattress.

That night was a struggle for us, the first of many. Jimmy collected his armor from the floor, shoved his dick back into his pants, and protected his heart. I reach out to hold him, but his body trembled beneath my touch. It seemed like a lifetime since the night that we connected over shared experiences of survival and a mickey of vodka. We watched the ripples escape across the lagoon as we spoke our secrets and allowed them to exist. Our struggles with escaping from gender. The men that touched us so that we could still be alive there on that bench. That night, I slept in three layers, afraid to allow myself to be seen. Jimmy held me from behind, falling asleep with his lips and nose pressed against the nape of my neck.

I was the first person that Jimmy ever allowed inside of him. He had let dates fuck his ass like a boy before, but his cunt was always off-limits. I discovered it one day while we were kissing and touching and I made him come in a way that he had never come before with another person. One night, he asked me to put my cock inside of him and our fucking turned into a subversive act of heterosexuality. When we fucked, he would push himself against me hard as if he was the one penetrating me. He took ownership over my cock. It was no longer attached to me. It was all his.

One night, when we were fucking, he disappeared. I watched as he faded so quickly and I pulled myself off of him and touched his back with the softest of strokes. I wanted for him to return to his body, knowing where he had disappeared to. There have been many times when the ghosts have visited me when I was least expecting it. When I was surrounded with a feeling of love. Their frosty breath would cover my skin with goosebumps and send chills throughout the room. Their lips would try to kiss me, leaving their putrid taste

on my mouth, the stench staying with me for hours.

It was raining outside. Jimmy handed me his grey hoodie. I told him that I loved him. His ghosts followed me down the darkened stairwell. They locked the door behind me.

An hour has passed since I came. The stained white walls closing in around me like a box. The hot smell of his wetness filling the room as he continuously pushes himself over and over again on the top of my cock. The sheets beneath me sticking to my skin in spots as I angle my body closer to him in a failed attempt to get this to fucking end. His frustrated whimpering fills the emptiness of the room, mixing with his smell and concealing my silence. His dry muscles scrape and bite at my flesh. He stops fucking my and the cold slick of lubricant quickly coats my skin before he slides me back inside of him and fucked me more. I think about the movie that we are going to miss, the dinner that we shared earlier, anything that has existed outside of this fucking box. He stops.

I stare at the stained walls. My damp hair soaks the pillow. Jimmy's arms tuck around me, just under my nipples. I listen to his words:

"I had forgotten who you were."

"I had forgotten where I was."

"I fell somewhere."

"I just needed to come."

Just needed to come. To be reminded that he is safe. To keep himself in this room. Away from their cars. The motel rooms. The shadows of the trees in the park nearby. To tell himself that he was fine.

That he was fine.

Fine.

He named it rape.

## Part Two

I remember rape. Being a child and walking to Kobi's apartment building. The windows staring down at the Saturday night crowd. The paint peeling raw colors around the panes. The door almost hidden, blending in beside the entrance to the pizza house, painted the same dark brown as the wall. I could just disappear into it. I use the key that Kobi gave me and climb the dark stairs. I pass by the bathroom with the old clawfoot bathtub, ratted shower curtain, and stand-alone sink that is shared by three suites. I reach the apartment door, turn the key in the lock, and turn the knob. Lights and color stream past the creaking wood. The kitchen is painted green and the walls are plastered with posters from shows, album releases, and demos. The dishes from breakfast wait for me at the table by the window. I listen to the voices of the people outside and smell the mixture of baking bread and cheese as I carry the bowls to the sink. I place my bag onto the mattress on the floor in the bedroom, surrounded by clothing scented with sandalwood oil. I pull my journal out of the bag and curl up on the mattress and begin to write.

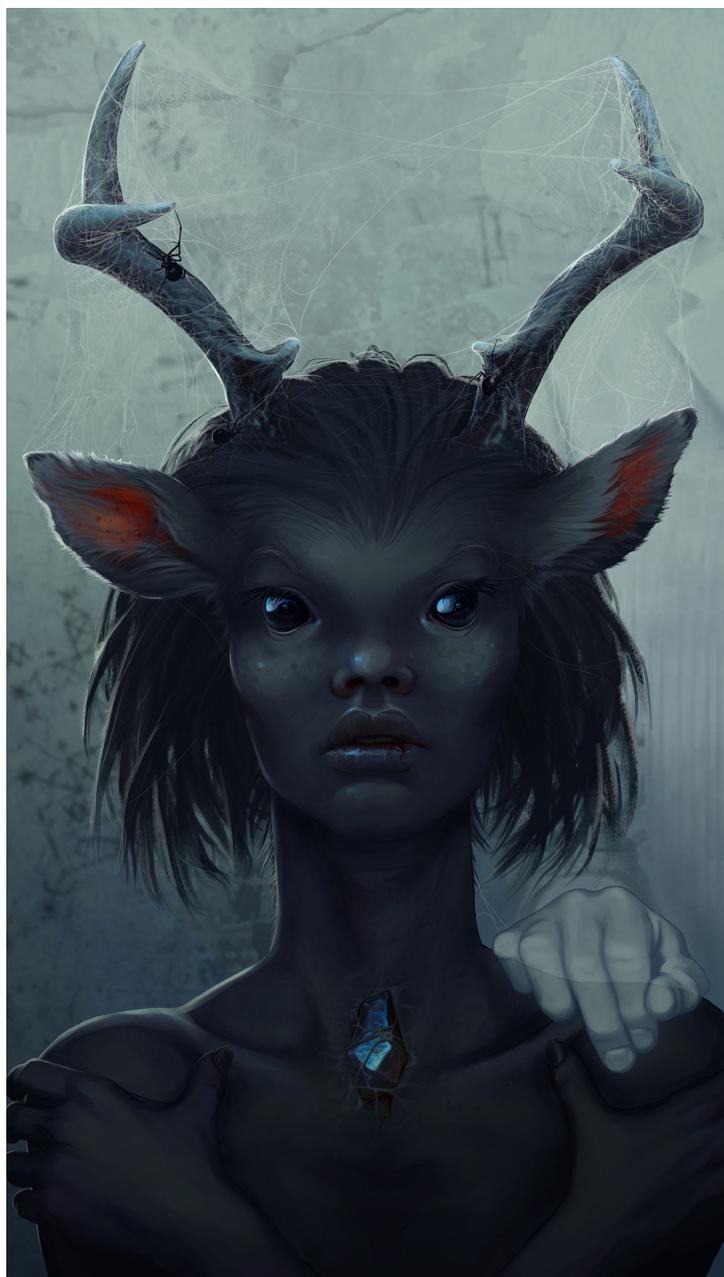
That night, I woke up with Kobi's mouth on my cock and then on my mouth. I could taste a night of heavy drinking on his lips as I pushed him off me. The next night, I woke up with him on top of me.

I was once a person who believed that rape meant stranger. That rape meant he did not use a condom. That a rapist did not tell you that he loved you afterwards.

I was the one who named it rape. I named it rape to my youth worker, to my mother, and to my friends. I was told not to report it, to forget it, and that I was a liar. Kobi found out that I told someone and threatened to kill me. I wanted to call the police, but the police would never believe that a person with boy-parts could be raped. Not when they shared a bed with the person for the past month.

I was holding a stuffed toy in my arms when he raped me. The toy became my daemon. It held my soul. The daemon went with me to all of my twelfth grade classes. It followed me when I dropped out of school due to fear of Kobi finding me. It slept on my bed when I left my family home after being labelled as a 'slut'. It protected me for years, until disappearing in a house fire when I was twenty-one years old.

# We Are Our Own Mythology



*This piece was loosely based on my own experiences. I was assaulted repeatedly by a female friend who I trusted when I was thirteen, and it complicated the understanding of my own sexuality (which includes attraction to women) and gender identity for many years afterward. I was already struggling with feelings of dysphoria around being treated as feminine, and for a while afterward it was impossible to disentangle my dysphoria from my trauma. I avoided women, scorned all things feminine, and could not bring myself to contemplate intimacy with a woman until my late teens. I didn't feel like I could reach out to the queer community until my twenties, after I had finally accepted that I was trans. Only then could I begin to unpack all the misogyny and toxic masculinity that I had used as coping mechanisms: ironically, I couldn't make peace with femininity until after accepting that I wasn't female.*

*The image is meant to discuss the ways in which we reconcile the experience of assault with how we see ourselves within our own life-stories and identities. The hand represents abuse and control. The stone in the character's throat represents obstructed voice, and the deer-like characteristics represent a feeling of paralysis in the face of danger. The hand is not immediately obvious to the viewer, and requires a second take before it becomes apparent, because trauma is invisible from an outside perspective. The cobwebs show the passage of time: this happened years ago, but the wounds haven't closed.*

**Eran Fowler**



# Denial

Tell you a secret if you promise not to tell anyone. It's a memory from childhood. Nothing about it is mild so wondering if it actually happened, maybe to another, but then why is this mind not free? This crisis of abuse, did it really happen? No, it couldn't be.

Recalling him between legs doing goodness knows what, but remembering the pleasure felt when he began to take down pants. Recollecting him pulling closer the fragile body and sticking his tongue in mouth, down throat, grandmother in the kitchen making something, it might've been roast. Shame. Blame. Guilt. Denial. What gratification is gained in such action? Was it fiction?

Sometimes, in fact, mostly thinking that this did not happen. Would not make sense. Not that dense. Nothing is clear, its all just a blur. But then, asking self how does child-become-twenty-year-old woman just think of that as an incident which might have happened unless...

No, not to me.

Nyarai Tawengwa

# Little Me, The Flowers Are For You

I am unearthing graves in myself,  
Where things long dead have been buried.  
Things I was too young to understand and say goodbye to.  
I am unearthing graves in myself,  
Looking at these bare skeletons of memories  
And saying prayers to myself so I learn to let go.  
I am unearthing graves in myself,  
Graves where the stench fermented until it was putrid,  
And I'm planting flowers instead; then  
Looking up to see the little girl in her yellow dress that she loved so much, with  
the black bell-bottom pants, and kiddie heels. I have apologies in my eyes. "I'm  
so sorry I took so long but I'm here now. He touched you and that wasn't  
supposed to happen, but it did and I'd like to apologise for taking so long to  
bring the sunlight." We look at each other, my younger self and I. She doesn't  
quite understand but she takes my hand anyway and stands beside me.

I have unearthed graves in myself,  
So I could look at my past and place seeds on these empty bones,  
And watch as flowers bloomed to embrace the warmth.  
Little me points to the sky and I see the sun coming out.  
And this little me says the bravest thing to me.  
She says, "You'll be okay."  
And I believe her.

This was a much different poem a year ago.

Nyarai Tawengwa



# aries season thirst

Jane Shi

It's early April. I'm on my period and can't stop thinking about mushing my face between someone else's legs. It's an embarrassing thing to admit, because while there are a few people I might be secretly thirsty for, the feeling itself, an untethered, unwieldy horned creature from some other geological epoch, sits awkwardly in my roommate and I's shared living-kitchen room. The skin of this creature creates stretch-marks on our cream-coloured walls. The vibrations of its friction make a hungry growl against the paint. There's a toasty chestnut scent in the air—mini potatoes packed inside the body of an overgrown cashew.

When I hold my hands up to our walls, I remember that while many have tried to scoop out its ice cream side-chink contents, this skin is still mine.

I say to my roommate, though really, eyes darting away, to our TV, "I'm really gay." I'm not...that horny. I'm just gay.

I haven't had sex with anyone in... [skdjhfaksjdfh] months. It's been the first time in a few years I'm letting this feeling stay. The last time I wanted it, doors I ensured were locked each night were repeatedly broken into from its hinges. But now, with time and distance and the hard work of healing, it's like relishing that moment when the last bus has passed after a friend has come over for a slumber party. Like dumplings finally floating to a boil. I want to bang pots together in celebration.

For me, being unambiguously Horny on Main feels kind of triumphant—a little bit like when the protagonist of your favourite YA novel realizes that they don't need to become one of the bullies to be accepted. It's like going back to your own poetry after years of toiling over papers about John Donne and John Keats and John Ashbery. Nothing wrong with those papers, but damn.

Your own poetry.

I consider my blurry reflection on the black screen. A blob of skin and hair sculpted into the shape of a person. I think about the things I let slide in my early twenties, when I had long hair and a smaller body. On Tinder, where I admit I top, some guy whose favourite author is "Dr. Suess" grovels at the

possibility that I step on him. He first messages in July, and then, after no response, prompts me again in August. The other week, some other guy asks me to do the same while reposting one of my photos.

They'd have to pay to get that, I want to say. Instead, I tell the first guy I really like Dionne Brand, and he doesn't message back.

For the past four years, I lived in an East Van teardown with around seven or eight other queer folks and a very senile cat. Our home looked like a cross between Skylar and Jess' respective homes before Fairy Godmother Bobby wheeled in his somewhat uniform-looking bougie magic on *Queer Eye*. The other month, I finally hauled my stuff out and moved into a clean, two-bedroom basement suite. I left behind a haunted mildew-mould-mouse palace where a smorgasbord of sex and flirting and roommates-dating unfurled as quickly as excited blooms of mid-April tulips. There was always too much stuff in the living room (albeit, mostly mine) to properly take in such abundance.

With just another person in my living space, I feel like I'm allowed to thirst. I feel like a slightly more grown-up gay whose body is now ready. Ready to tackle all the dishes. Ready to talk about boundaries. Ready to write my own dang poems. More importantly, I no longer share a shower with several other humans and ghosts. My roommate's Umbra shower drain makes plopping out stray hairs as easy as sharing family stories and recipes in our living room.

But even so, going through the motions of hooking up with someone seems as distant as the possibility of publishing a successful novel when you primarily write poetry and non-fiction.

First, there's the practical limitations of a small basement suite where every creek and sneeze and cringe would become part of its symphony. Not even blasting my favourite Nine Inch Nails album would, I imagine, be able to block out the horns section. Then there's the everyday circumstances of Vancouver's queer millennial population more generally. Every other cutie and their partner

- a) lives in a basement suite or collective house,
  - b) knows each other through working at the same non-profit,
  - c) has already planned their decade through impeccably detailed birth chart calculations,
  - d) is too busy with staying alive and school and work and coping with trauma and finding secure housing and dousing fires of the latest sociopolitical emergency,
- and
- e) gossips.

While I am not any less bisexual than I was a few years ago, I can't go back to the easy, boring kind of sex I grew so used to with straight white men. Before moving into that teardown four years ago, a potential landlord who was offering me a dump of a corner closet as a bedroom asked me to be his girlfriend. The guy I was hooking up with at the time huffed and puffed, asked me if I was going to go live with that landlord and be his sex slave.

What's more, I'm tired of recommending books to men who only read Ayn Rand, Joseph Boyden, and Haruki Murakami. I want to write my own books.

It seems like an inevitable by-product of Vancity's economic class structure that we make hook-up decisions based on who can access a big bed or studio apartment or drawer of swanky leather toys or mansion-sized sex dungeon. It always involves someone asking to be in another's domain and space in what is already an incredibly vulnerable act. It always involves—especially for settlers like myself—occupying land that has been forcibly taken through ongoing theft, rape, and disappearance.

Can any of us truly have a good time here? Is safe, consensual sex even possible in Vancouver?

In "Romantic Love is Killing Us: Who Takes Care of Us When We Are Single?," Caleb Luna asks readers whether we can keep one another alive despite our sexual capital. Speaking from the perspective of a fat, brown, and femme person, Luna is acutely aware of how being singled and excluded from romance deprives marginalized bodies of the care they need to survive. For me, a demiromantic survivor, unapologetically wanting to hook-up with someone is my version of wanting a safe, caring intimacy that keeps all of us alive. What seems banal and frivolous for some means something much different for me: to want sex means that I am moving past the fear of sexual violence, and to move past the shame and guilt that has been foisted on my body at a young age, a secret white elephant heirloom claiming space everywhere I go.

It's not really, after all, about hooking up. It's about retracing the path to desire on my own terms.

In *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground*, Tuscarora writer Alicia Elliot writes a love letter to her white settler husband called "Boundaries Like Bruises" that begins, "Our love was a process of unlearning the bad love we'd been given" (117). Bad love is like only being able to see yourself through the reflection of a TV—blurry and nearly absent—and never being able to see your whole body through a full-length mirror. While the rest of the world sees you, you forget

what you look like and who you really are. You disappear into what everyone else says about you and what you want. You become someone else's blob of flesh, someone else's bones.

I love Elliot's letter because it imagines the boundaries between two people not as bruises but as strength. For me, it takes strength to get to know who you are again after violence. And sometimes, that strength also means release. Like letting the strange, fragrant creature of your desires stay. It means witnessing its delightful, sometimes awkward magic.

I can have everything I want in a platonic, nonsexual friendship. But I also like and want sex. I want a safe, paper dairy-entry kind of sex. Not xanga, nexopia, or livejournal hook-up-in-a-car that comes with an audience. Not subtweets-on-twitter booty calls or call-out-post-on-tumblr kink parties that leave a bitter, racist taste in your mouth, either. I want a secret petal bookmark bang in a favourite poetry book. I want something that prying eyes can't glean from my written words, constructs that cast illusions in strangers' minds. Is it selfish to want something good, something private, something safe, and therefore, something sacred?

Not sacred as in monogamous man-woman-church. But sacred as in being able to negotiate trust in a world that has routinely scorned it. Sacred like finally being able to come home to yourself.

When we leave bad love behind, what comes in its place?

I sometimes worry that because I am demiromantic and bisexual, people see me as sex-crazed and shallow. But just because I very rarely want a romantic relationship, doesn't mean that I don't crave a love that lasts. A love that stays. A love that cooks through our excesses and warms our bellies.

I'm trying hard to unlearn the shame of wanting that. Good love. Like something soft with someone soft. Like a hookup that turns into a lifelong friendship. Like knowing where you end and someone else begins. Like the satisfying crunch of opening freshly toasted chestnuts with your teeth. Like holding tight to each other to keep one another alive. Like sharing secret recipes. Like wanting someone else, and hoping they want you. Liking a spontaneous fantasy that might just be that.

I'm slowly learning that it's not selfish to want something just because I want it. I am not the mirror of what the world wants from me. The narrative of what my body wants is not a side chink but the centre of a universe.

This lesson is a very hard one to learn. It's about what sexual intimacy could look like without violence. It's about good love.

Who will hook-up with me? Who knows, maybe no one.

Who will love me? Me I guess.

But I want you to, too.

#### Works Cited

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AFTER THE ASSAULT, I WAS MESSED UP FOR A WHILE (OF COURSE).  
I COULDN'T STAND TO BE TOUCHED, ENCLOSED SPACES MADE ME STUTTER  
AND LOSE MY TRAIN OF THOUGHT.



MY CHOSEN FAMILY ACCOMMODATED TO TRAUMA SYMPTOMS  
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW I WAS SHOWING. NO ONE ASKED WHY  
I STOPPED WEARING FEMINE CLOTHES FOR A YEAR- BUT THEY DID  
UNDERSTAND WHEN I SAID I FELT ALIENATED  
FROM MY OWN BODY.

SO MANY OF US ARE ON JOURNEYS  
OF SELF-EXPRESSION OR HEALING OR BOTH,  
AND THE REASONS WHY  
AREN'T ALWAYS SO IMPORTANT.



kierra  
morgan

# Cacophony Of The House

"Why tell me what They Think they think?"  
she thought she had thought

and the thought she thought they had thought

forms micro-beads along the crests;  
forms crochet grit knots in her chest;  
second-guessing what she knows best--

"The Thought they thought", she thought,  
gets bound and caught in her throat;  
she starts to cough,  
and laugh,  
and distress;

"Why are my thoughts such a frustrating mess?"

Marion Lefevre

# The Last Piece Of The Puzzle

Keane Wiseman

I spent most of my life hating 'being a woman'. It made perfect sense to me why I would hate being a woman. I grew up in an incredibly misogynistic, abusive household where women and girls were treated as servants whose role was to cook, clean and unquestioningly serve men in all things. We were never taught we had rights, or that there were some parts of our bodies and our lives that were private and to be respected and left alone.

I began being sexually abused before I was even old enough to understand what sex was. When I began dating in junior high school and boys would try touching my 'female parts' I wasn't surprised at how uncomfortable it made me feel. Despite having never heard of PTSD or 'triggers' I instinctively understood that it would of course feel a lot like the abuse. I decided to be patient with myself.

That was a lot easier said than done. I hated my body, I hated the experiences that went with being 'female'. I hated menstruation and the idea of getting pregnant and having children. I hated having breasts and I hated being referred to as a woman. I hated it when people would try to dress me up in feminine clothes, and I'd joke that I felt like I was in drag.

From the time I was very small I was always 'one of the boys'. All of my close friends were male and I was drawn to traditionally masculine activities. I knew when I grew up I wanted to be like David Bowie or Clint Eastwood or Sherlock Holmes or Mark from Battle of the Planets. I didn't want to be like Madonna or Molly Ringwald or Wonder Woman or Nancy Drew.

As I grew older and reflected on those feelings, it all made just as much sense to me as my dislike of being touched sexually. I'd had a pretty terrible experience of being a woman. It made perfect sense that I would identify more strongly with men, even go so far as wanting to actually *be* a man.

In fact, in my angsty teen years I went through a phase of living as a man. I wore masculine clothes and hung out with a group of brooding, trouble-making guys and made everyone call me by a made up name and treat me as male. Even though I thought it was all a symptom of how messed up I was from the abuse, I stuck with it because it felt good. During those years few things did.

As I moved into adulthood I began therapy and worked hard on my issues. I made a real effort to step out of my comfort zone and began having successes. I came to terms with so much of what I had been through. I was able to form meaningful relationships with men and have a somewhat enjoyable sex life. I pressed charges on my abusers and worked through the fallout from that experience as well. I read everything on PTSD that I could get my hands on. I did years of cognitive behavioural therapy and meditation and made personal accountability and self-care my mission in life, and found myself becoming happier and more fulfilled.

But no matter how much healing I did, no matter how much I grew and evolved as a person, my central issues refused to fade or to be conquered. I still hated being a woman. I still hated it when anyone would touch my 'female parts' or draw any attention to them in any way.

I felt like an incredible failure, like all my healing work had gotten me nowhere. I felt doomed, utterly doomed, to live a life burdened by the abuse. Deep down inside I knew there was nothing that would ever enable me to find peace with being a woman. I thought I was so thoroughly damaged and broken that I would never find happiness, never really enjoy sex, never really love myself.

The first moment I fully realized I was transgender I was with my therapist. I never cried so hard in my life. I was terrified. I didn't want to be transgender. I had a vague idea that being transgender was a fate worse than death. People would target me for abuse, friends and family would abandon me, everyone would think I was a freak and a pervert. But even as I quivered amid all those fears I knew in my heart that I had hit upon something that was deeply, deeply true. I am not a woman. I have never been a woman.

As I look back now I realize that my lifetime of hating being female – it was never really about the abuse. It was about gender identity. The discomfort with being touched sexually in my 'female parts' was dysphoria, not an incurable discomfort with sex. I am not doomed, I am not beyond healing.

I've also begun to come to terms with how the impact of the sexual abuse was exacerbated by my gender identity. I can see now that a big part of the trauma for me came from the extreme gender dysphoria I experienced when people focused on parts I didn't want and targeted those parts for gendered violence. It added another layer to the trauma for me.

Now that I know who I really am, I am finally in a place where I can heal.

I won't pretend that being transgender is a picnic for me. It's not. But for the first time in my life I have been able to put to rest some of those last painful remnants from the abuse. I no longer hate who I am. I have been able to experience, for the first time in my entire life, euphoria around sex and sexuality. All of my ordeals and frustrations are suddenly beginning to make sense, and while I still struggle and still experience grief and symptoms from the PTSD I feel like I finally have all the pieces of the puzzle. I finally have the tools I need to find peace with myself and my life.

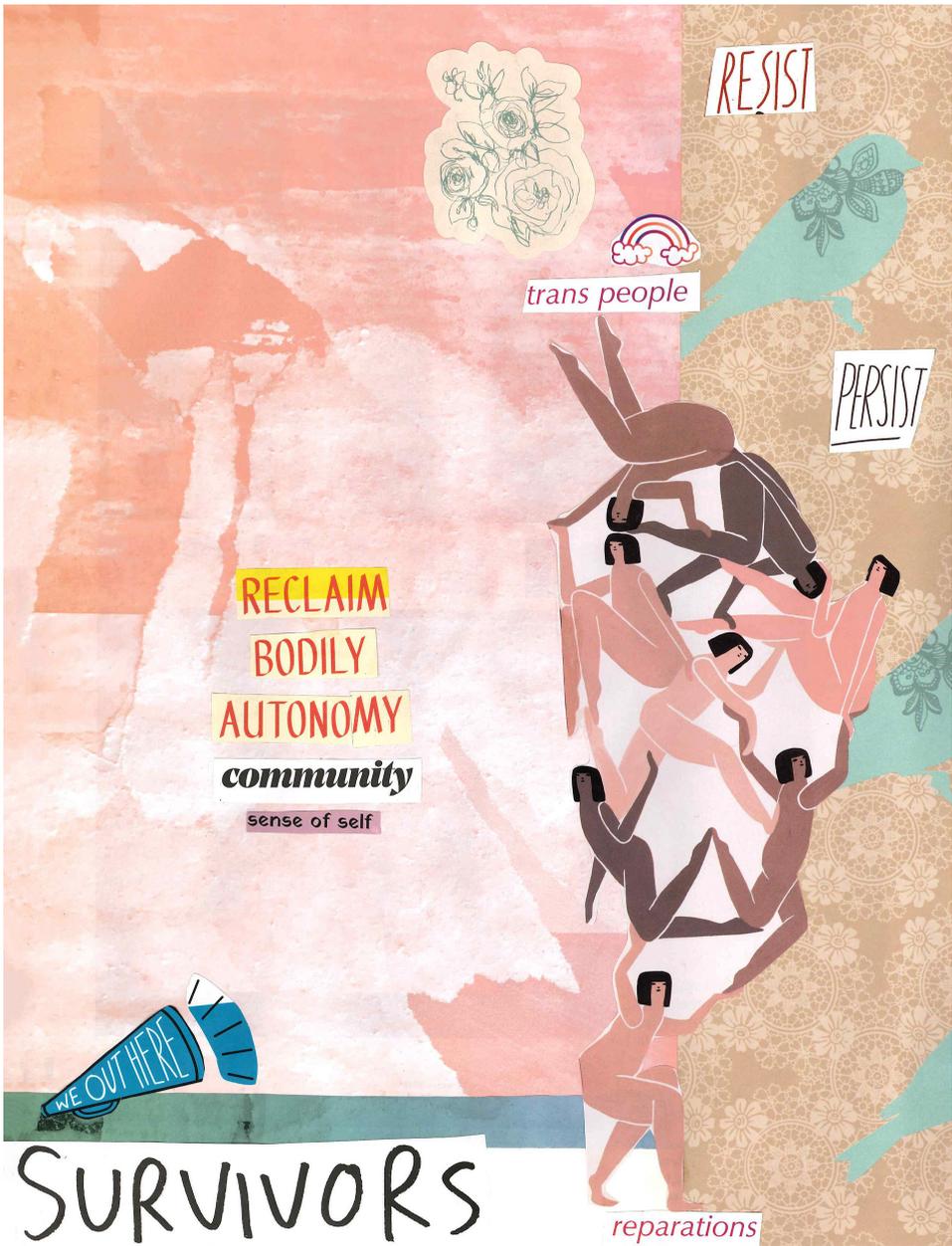
When I look back I sometimes feel so angry and so cheated. The abuse wasn't even the worst part for me. What I really feel ripped off about is all the decades of being pushed into a box I didn't belong in. Of being told I was a woman, and never having any opportunity to learn otherwise. And for that, I really blame my abusers. I think if I hadn't been sexually abused I might have figured everything out a long, long time ago. They robbed me of a lot of things, but I think that is the most painful and destructive.

It's not all doom and gloom. I look around me and I see a world that is finally starting to talk about gender in constructive ways. Communities are beginning to embrace transgender people, and legal and policy protections are being put into place to give us better a better chance of living safe, meaningful, productive lives. It seems that kids who grow up in this climate – even the ones who are abused – will have a lot more opportunities to explore and understand what gender means to them. Maybe they won't go through life beating themselves up for not healing from their trauma.

# karupi

a pigment so dark she couldn't be seen at birth  
her teeth soon lit up the brown skin that dulled her body  
she was placed in a shrinking room  
growing up as the ceiling above her sank downwards  
dim spotlights reflected the shape of her silhouette  
fragmented curves created a faint impression of a girl  
she stands out against the sallow blank walls around her  
trapped in an ivory tower  
infected by the grime that seeped beneath her flesh  
she did everything she could to blend in  
gathering nectar from the Queen's colony  
picking lemons off budding evergreens  
drying orange peels with powdered sandalwood  
scrubbing with black carbon and ash residue  
incubating milk until it turns to yogurt  
painting the juice of beet root on her lips  
coating on a layer of turmeric  
wrapping her body of remedies  
bathing in a pool of impurities  
but nothing fixed her complexion  
nor her slant spine  
hanging gut  
crooked nose  
thunder thighs  
or broken hymen  
she wasn't like the rest  
she was tainted before she could really blossom

Maneesa Sotheeswaran



# SURVIVORS

Luisa Ospina



**Malleability [mal-ee-uh-bil-i-tee]**

the state of being malleable, or capable of being shaped,

Manifesting Malleability has been envisioned to re-imagine what systems of collective care, healing, and regrowth look like. In the context of our contemporary society, there is deep rooted pain, oppression, and continual marginalization that impacts a person's ability to survive and exist. We define "malleable" as the capacity to be shaped or changed, and I view this as a framework for my own existence. I desire to manifest the ideology that our community can conceive a world that holds space for our liberation. This project will begin to explore the possibility of healing and care existing outside of capitalist, imperialist, and oppressive structures.

While engaging with the work: envision

What does caring for yourself, caring for others, and collective care and healing look like to you? What do you envision it could manifest as?

With love,  
Samar



Caring for myself means acknowledging that I have been self-destructive to my body. I must continue to be extremely intentional in how I act towards myself because I know I have the capacity to move toward chaos and self-harm. It is about recognizing my body as a site of trauma, that the heaviness from my experiences will stay with it. Yet through this acknowledgement it is about holding space for myself and learning to view my body as more than what it has gone through. Part of caring for myself begins with simply affirming that I am worth care. Through small things of remembering to drink water, eat when I am hungry, recognizing what my needs are, and learning to sit with myself. I actively try to journal every day as a means of processing and stopping the processes of disassociation. Through these moments of reflection of how I feel about the interactions and things that have happened I disrupt the process of disembodiment. I make time to at least write, doodle, or set personal creative goals because art has always been a form of expression and catharsis. I am also skating a lot more which is a means of channeling some of the emotions I am feeling into something that also forces me to be aware of my body. I love dancing, raving, shoving people in pits, and going to shows. I find that through engaging in the underground arts and music scene I have found spaces of belonging and experiences that have shaped me in ways that I am extremely grateful for. I have gone through phases of addiction, disordered eating, and debilitating mental illness and what I have learned from these painful transitions is that chosen family support is vital. As a survivor of interpersonal and familial abuse, I have learned to set up toxic patterns of keeping myself isolated and detached from people. Caring for myself has become a process of recognizing these behaviors and working to changing responses that have become defaulted into my brain as a defense mechanism. Unlearning toxic patterns, taking accountability for my actions, and setting healthy boundaries are all things that I am actively working toward. Caring for myself is sitting in the grass on quiet days and listening to music. It is about learning that my body is a beautiful space to inhabit and that I am capable of anything I set my desire, intention, and passion to.

Caring for others has been a journey of learning to undo toxic interpersonal patterns, trust my intuition, and recognize that even though it is scary, sharing my love and labor with others is an important part of building healthy connections and the beginnings of reimagining our world. I believe that caring for others is an act of resistance in many ways to the individualistic and capital oriented culture that we live in. Building connections with others through offering care, empathy, and space is a powerful means of destabilizing structures that want to keep people separated. Through things as simple as bringing someone food when I know they have been too depressed to cook for

themselves, drawing or writing affirmations, and making sure that I am thoughtful in considering where people are at and how I can support them. It has become a process of sharing my resources, space, and time whenever possible and to be really intentional about setting healthy boundaries, being present for others, and learning how to form healthy relationships based on care, respect, and love. I have been learning about what caring for others looks like through the process of building deeper healthy connections with people in community. Also, through sharing communal spaces that disrupt the isolating and individualistic feelings that follow existing within these institutions. It is about checking in with people and being aware of my own positionality and how I can utilize it to support those around me. For me, caring for others is the only way we will ever destroy the structures we exist under. Looking at people not as competitors but instead as potentials to explore deeper connections.

For me collective care, is a process of viewing others as connected to us. It begins through recognizing that systems in place do not what us to care for each other. It is through visualizing a world where we do not view love as something that can only exist in romantic relationships. Where labor is not commodified, and we do not view our peers as competitions but instead as people. For me, collective care is about understanding that we all have our own subjective experiences and pain but that by isolating ourselves from each other, we will never find means to build communities based on love instead of oppression. I want to see care and healing manifest as anti-capitalist frameworks that not only have the power to create institutional change but also envision a softer world that holds space for us.



# contributing artists

**Adèle Barclay** is the recipient of the 2016 Lit POP Award for Poetry and the 2016 Walrus Readers' Choice Award for Poetry and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her debut poetry collection, *If I Were in a Cage I'd Reach Out for You*, (Nightwood, 2016) won the 2017 Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize. Her second collection of poetry, *Renaissance Normcore*, is forthcoming from Nightwood Editions in fall 2019. She is Arc Magazine's Poet in Residence and an editor at Rahila's Ghost Press.

**Nisa Malli** is a writer and researcher, born in Winnipeg and currently living in Toronto. She holds a BFA in Creative Writing from the University of Victoria and has completed residencies at the Banff Centre and Artscape Gibraltar Point. Her first chapbook, *Remitting*, is forthcoming from Baseline Press in Fall 2019.

**Audrey Wolfe** is an eternal student, a feminist philosophy and queer theory nerd, a college radio dj, and coordinates a complex care intervention program for youth with trauma.

**Eran Fowler** is a transmasculine illustrator currently living in Richmond, BC. Eran has always been interested in the storytelling possibilities of visual art, and feels most at home using magical realism to explore what it means to be human. Eran has worked both in-studio and as a freelancer. He continues to look for more opportunities to learn and grow as an artist. His portfolio can be found at [eranfolio.com](http://eranfolio.com)

**Nyarai Tawengwa** is a queer black femme currently living in Vancouver, but was born and raised in Zimbabwe. I came here to study and have since stayed on. I work downtown as a writing tutor and assistant. I enjoy all things artsy and creative, and believe in art as a modality for healing and self-love that can help people embrace their most authentic selves so they can show up as whole in the world.

**Jane Shi** is a queer Chinese settler living on the unceded, traditional, and ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. She wants to live in a world where love is not a limited resource, land is not mined, hearts are not filched, and bodies are not violated.

**Kierra Morgan** is a 23 year old afab bisexual, studying and working in the city. My chosen family has given me a place to grow and recover here, and I am grateful. My art is primarily pen and ink on paper, my art is on instagram: [@changeling.exe](https://www.instagram.com/changeling.exe)

**Marion Lefevre**  
(pronouns: her/royal/majesty)  
trans - poet - musician

**Keane Wiseman** is a Vancouver artist and writer whose work focuses on themes of reclaiming childhood. He is a lifelong activist in support of progressive causes. Keane is happily married and enjoys video games, reading and caring for rescue parrots.

**Maneesa Sotheeswaran** is a queer and non-binary Tamil, Hindu, Sri Lankan, born and raised in Scarborough, living on the Unceded Territory of Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh People. Their work has been published by Room Turtle Island Responds, Juste Milieu Lit & Art Zine, Nuance, and shown at the Duluth Art Institute. At the moment, they're a student, youth educator and interdisciplinary artist who enjoys creative expression and mindful experiences such as, hiking, painting, kneading dough, and lying on flat surfaces or critically consuming cultural commodities.

**Luisa Ospina** is a Colombian artist, art therapist, and trauma counsellor currently living in the Unceded traditional territory of the ḵʷməθkʷəṽəm (Musqueam), selílwitlh (Tsleil-Waututh) and sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) Coast Salish peoples (also known as Vancouver, Canada). Luisa's comprehensive artistic practice emphasizes the relationship between the personal, the public, and systems of oppression. Art making is a vehicle for her to distill her personal experiences by providing the space to dissect, analyze, and re-construct her understanding of them. Her art process further develops her capacity to be introspective and self-reflective, and informs her therapist identity. She is interested in issues surrounding femme-ness, sexuality, and aspects of difference and belonging particularly race, gender, immigration, culture, ability, and mental health. For more information about Luisa, please visit [www.luisa-ospina.com](http://www.luisa-ospina.com).

**Samar** is a healer in progress, community organizer, multi-medium artist, and creator through shapeshifting means, modalities, and mediums born and based in Los Angeles. They incorporate a DIY ethos and trauma informed framework into their work and organizing. They have worked in prison abolition, QTPOC organizing and programming, sexual violence advocacy, founded multimedia art collectives, and continue to host discussion spaces and workshops. They have curated and organized multiple art shows and events including "Cosmic Not Exotic Art Show", "FLORA\* Forgiveness Love Rejuvenation Art Show", and "After #Metoo Understanding Sexual Violence at the Intersections of Oppression". They are currently researching and presenting work on the implications of the Trauma to Prison Pipeline for Queer and Transgender People of Color, developing means of re-envisioning perceptions of healing and care, and hosting the weekly QTPOC space at the LGBT Campus Resource Center. They desire to work toward the vision of a world where the structures of power that allow for imperialism, violence, and other forms of oppression are destroyed.



WAVAW

rape crisis centre