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Practicing



Distance

gathered + scored by jeff kasper

This guide is adapted from the ongoing development of art and design-based tools used in peer-to-peer care circles, workshops, and social spaces for queer and disabled folks, survivors and allies, from 2016-present.

Jeff Kasper also leads workshops for art students, universities, and organizations based on this work. He develops curriculums and interactive projects on related topics of care, conflict, consent, collaboration and creativity, from a healing-centered lens based in disability justice and trauma support culture. Three iterative social practice projects which relate to this guide are *wrestling embrace*, *Relational Athletics*, and *Give & Take Care*.

Readers are welcome to adapt this material for their own use with an appropriate honoring of origins. Share your adaptations: jeffkasper.studio@gmail.com

Jeff Kasper is an artist and Assistant Professor at University of Massachusetts Amherst. He teaches integrated design, studio foundations, creative technologies, and seminars in studio pedagogy and disability studies. His artistic work is multi-modal traversing design and media, conceptual environments, public pedagogy, publications, and social practice.

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2/100
June 2020
Artist Edition

Practicing Distance is a multi-part guide for preparing for our futures together post-quarantine. Each part offers a series of short practices* beginning with an introduction to the four proxemic distances: intimate, personal, social, public. What follows are guided creative exercises to engage with solo, with a partner, or a small group, in imagined physical proximity during the time of the pandemic and beyond.



What is a practice?

A “practice” is the actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to theories relating to it. It is an act of rehearsing a behavior over and over again, for the purpose of improvement or mastery. For me a “practice” is a learning method that is linked to cultivating social, nonviolent, and secular spiritual development.

Is this for me?

Maybe or maybe not. The content of these exercises may not be for you at this time. The practices offered are not created from a clinical perspective, therapist, or counselor, and instead have been developed by artists for peer-support, community building and educational purposes. Some require comfortable participation in intimate conversations, guided reflection, and consent-driven closeness with another human. As mindfulness activities can be deeply challenging for many folks navigating the potential of dysregulation, please note that these activities are based in guided—rather than unguided—methods grounded in trauma sensitivity. Opt-out of any interactive or contemplative material that feels unfit for you, at any time. Come and go as you please. You are the expert of your own bodymind.

An introduction to Practicing Distance: measuring the distance between us

This guide uses the field of *proxemics*, the study of the human use of space within the context of culture, to organize conceptual exercises along specific imagined physical distances.¹ As the term “social distancing” has gained popular currency in the United States and beyond during the recent proliferation of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), each part of this guide will give attention to the distances which have been effectively suspended in everyday life. Staying away from each other has become crucial to slowing the spread of the COVID-19. Public health and medical officials have instructed the public to practice social distancing, stay home, avoid crowded areas, and refrain from touching one another.²

During this time of “social distancing”, what many of us really need and want most is a connection with others. Each part will consider care, conflict, and accountability, as renewed rituals of interdependence to soften isolation.

As the pandemic grew into a daily reality, I remained quite unfazed by the experience of isolation and violence so many, including myself, now have to endure. It was not that this did not also upend my world and move me into a freefall of fear and unknown in all vectors of life. It equally had nothing to do with the reality that I am a part of those seemingly sacrificial “risk groups” with existing conditions that would likely be unable to fend off the virus and likely not chosen to be treated in crises.³ It had all to do with what I felt in my body. The risk that this could bring up the specter of interpersonal abuse that being shuttered in would unveil. I was, and I still am terrified by these facts. The matter remains, frankly, I had been here before.

Consistently navigating intimacy while living through legacies of trauma and anxiety, medicalization and medication of my body, and systemic oppression by heteronormativity, race, and chronic conditions led me to seek more information about the underlying social mechanics of personal space that seemed to consistently inform my interpersonal barriers. So, while the signage throughout the pseudo-public places, markets, and civic spaces of my current hometown were novel, I already had the language of social distance scored into my vulnerable body.

As the pandemic persists, capitalism predictably proceeds to fail us. Underscoring the failure is the emphasis put on individualistic responses. Sick and disabled folks know this all too well. Sins Invalid, a Bay-Area disability justice-based performance project led by queer disabled artists of color, could not have articulated it better,



In some ways, it isn't so different from how many of us live our lives every day as crips, with long stretches of time at home, limited access to community or touch or social engagement, engaging in mutual aid, sharing meds & home remedies. Many of us who are immunocompromised/suppressed or chemically injured have had to think about how many people we will encounter on any given day, what that will expose us to, and how it could impact our health. It's an irony that the whole world is talking about and problem solving with us now. It's painful that able bodied/minded people evidence their ableist privilege with frustration that air travel is inaccessible, that their schedules are impacted by others' schedules, that they can't do their normal social routines...Welcome to our world! ⁴

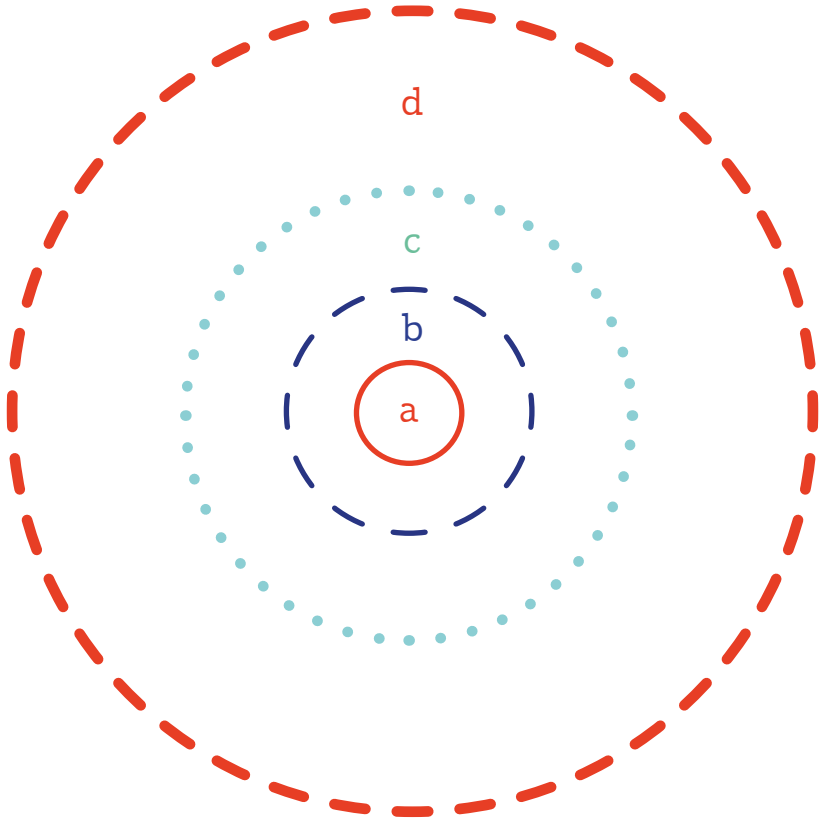


While “social distancing” is our strongest tool to help flatten the curve—outside of widespread testing and contact tracing, which have yet to materialize in many locales—it will only be effective if we value each other and practice social solidarity and mutual care. The pandemic clearly demonstrates that only by deeply supporting each other and taking action will we actually be able to lessen the amount of death and despair, not to mention the unilateral blow to mental and emotional health. Unless everyone works together, the virus will continue to spread.

Proxemics

Proxemics is the study of what brings us together and keeps us apart, literally and figuratively. For me, the insights of proxemics have long become creative tools for survival. They became the structural basis for social scripts I used in ongoing recovery and community building. The activities in the following parts are part of this ongoing creative work.

The term proxemics was coined by researcher Edward Hall in 1966. Proxemics has to do with the study of human use of space and how various differences in that use can make us feel more relaxed or anxious. Hall argues that human perceptions of space, although derived from sensory apparatuses that all humans share, are molded and patterned by culture. Hall's concern was that closer distances between two or more persons may increase visual, tactile, auditory, or olfactory stimulation to the point that some may feel unsafe or uncomfortable and react negatively. Today we are worried that physical closeness will expose us to the virus.⁵ These tools became ever present in our lives throughout the late 20th century in fields such as architecture, environmental psychology, and building sciences, and now they are ever more relevant to the field of public health during the time of COVID-19.⁶



The practices that I offer in part 1 through part 4 of this guidebook reflect all of Hall's proxemic distances. Though the pandemic relegate us to home life, this moment of solidarity does not close out imagining what it means to be together in physical proximity.

Let me briefly outline the four areas of proxemics known as the “personal territories”; public, social, personal, and intimate, that we intuitively respect and use. Hall’s most famous innovation has to do with the definition of the “informal”, or “personal spaces” that surround individuals:

a. **Intimate space** [0-18 inches]: the closest “bubble” of space surrounding a person. Entry into this space is acceptable only for the closest friends and family members.

b. **Personal space** [1.5-4 feet]: the region surrounding a person which they regard as psychologically theirs.

c. **Social space** [4-12 feet]: the spaces in which people feel comfortable conducting routine social interactions with acquaintances as well as strangers.

d. **Public space** [12 feet+]: the area of space beyond which people will perceive interactions as impersonal and relatively anonymous.⁷

Sources

1. Personal territories, however, can vary (sub)culturally, geographically and ethnically. You can imagine how these distances would change depending where we are and who we are interacting with.
2. See the CDC's protocol for social distancing, quarantine, and isolation as a method for slowing the spread of COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>
3. Ari Ne'eman, "I will Not Apologize for My Needs," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2020, Accessed: April 18, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/opinion/coronavirus-ventilators-triage-disability.html>
4. Sins Invalid. *Social Distancing and Crip Survival: A Disability Centered Response to COVID-19*. Accessed: March 19, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/news-1/2020/3/19/social-distancing-and-crip-survival-a-disability-centered-response-to-covid-19>
5. Edward T. Hall. *The hidden dimension*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday. 1966.
6. George Szasz, CM, MD, "Social Distancing: Its Origins and Effects," *British Columbia Medical Journal*, April 9, 2020, Accessed: April 18, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.bcmj.org/blog/social-distancing-origins-and-effects>
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Part 1: Intimate distance noticing what it means to be close

Intimate space [0-18 inches]: the closest “bubble” of space surrounding a person. Entry into this space is acceptable only for the closest friends and family members.

At this distance of interpersonal interaction, you would usually expect to be very close to another human, usually within one foot and sometimes touching. Intimate distance is reserved for those we are intimate with, for example a loved one, and if anyone else enters that space, it feels like a very disturbing violation. One’s reaction will be visceral and immediate. If someone attempts to intimidate you—moreover, by using intimate space—the result is deeply uncomfortable.

Cooperation has to be about building on the reality that we're all interconnected and intertwined in networks of care. So how do we actually start to expand our capacities for collective care? These practices of deep attention are a place to start.

I recommend practicing these activities alone or with a partner (2 players). Complete them separately and then sit 6 feet apart, or schedule a video call to participate. You may also want to invite a facilitator or care keeper, someone you trust, to work with you.

wrestling embrace (20-30 mins)

These exercises are adapted from *wrestling embrace* - an artwork-tool (some refer to them as “games”) used in arts-based care circles, peer-support groups and public facing social spaces, exhibitions, courses, and workshops.

What follows are some props and rules used in the activity, and their meaning:

The exercises:

Each partner selects an exercise. Each exercise starts with imagining a distance to negotiate between two bodies. You may sit, stand, or situate your body in any way that feels comfortable. Decide who goes first and begin acting out what the exercise says. Only share the exercise with your partner if the exercise says to share it. Otherwise it is up to you.

The bell:

I recommend using a bell (or bell recording on your computer or smartphone) to denote when the exercise has started or ended. If a bell is used—that is a safe-word for STOP.

We use safe-words to signal if something is no longer comfortable. At that moment, everyone must stop and resume only if the air is cleared. You may also decide with your partner a nonverbal cue for STOP instead of using a bell or sound.

Time keepers:

Use an external marker of time such as a timer, stopwatch, clock, or hourglass. Start the exercise with a defined, measurable amount of time. Sometimes the exercise will denote a time other times you should select one with your partner. When the time runs out, so does the exercise.

Consent culture:

Always ask for consent before engaging with another bodymind. You may do this verbally or with an invented non-verbal symbol. No always means NO. None of these exercises are prompt for inappropriate or unwarranted sexual behavior and/or power based dynamics. If you are playing with others in the room, please prioritize each other's safety by not watching or recording them in an intimate moment. The space is confidential and not a spectacle.

Participants are welcome to observe others playing with permission. This permission can be taken away at any moment, for any reason.

Choose one of these exercises per player:

a.

[imagine close contact in silence]

Share these directions with your partner and follow these actions together.

Sit facing each other, back-to-back, or side-to-side. Imagine holding each other's hands or brushing against each other's shoulders or mid-back. You may choose to rest your eyes.

Maintain this position for 5 minutes. Stay with each other in silence. Don't speak. Feel free to fidget or stim. Breathe at an ease that works for your body.

b.

[imagine holding a close distance]

Read to your partner something that is meaningful to you at this moment. This could be something that you personally wrote or read, or you may return to a text that you found earlier in the day. If you do not have the resource easily accessible, recall what you remember out loud.

c.

[imagine holding a distance no less than two feet]

Think about doing something that you know will indefinitely humiliate your partner. Before you do that thing, do the exact opposite.

d.

[imagine keeping a distance of no more than one foot]

Be still. Don't force stillness if you cannot resist sudden jerks and movements. Follow the subtle movements and gestures of your partner. Carefully scrutinize every inch of their body from head to toe. If you are not in physical space together this may involve positioning a video camera in a way that the whole body can be sensed. This may involve imagining that person's body from memory and jotting down descriptive notes. Keep this up for at least five minutes. Let your mind wander naturally before returning to your partner. If you need to ground through the sense of their breath or your own, do so.



What is a choreography?

The sequence of steps in dance or other movement-based arts. A choreography can also be the written or graphic notation for a movement sequence.

Part 2: Personal distance choreographing care

Personal space [1.5-4 feet]: the region surrounding a person which they regard as psychologically theirs.

We monitor strangers and even intimates when they come into our personal space. It's a matter of safety and our hard-wiring for survival. Engaging at personal distance requires vulnerability. In personal proximity, care must not always mean what is given or taken but what is sustained in negotiation between the two.

In *The Ethics of Care, Dependence, and Disability*, Eva Feder Kittay describes how personal dignity is closely related to independence, and the care that disabled people receive is seen as a way for them to achieve the greatest possible autonomy. She notes that, although it runs counter to how Western culture prioritizes independence

and taboos dependence, human beings are subject to periods of dependency. All if not most relationships involve some form of dependency. For example, we could think of the family-unit as one such example.

Certain family members are the main economic support system for another who may focus on domestic labor that maintains quality of life for more than oneself, forming a reciprocal dynamic where one instance of support informs the next. Widening the scope of our economic example, we could also say, those who claim to be most independent are in fact dependent (i.e. the capitalist is dependent on the exploitation of his workers' labor in order to gain profit.)⁹ Instead of viewing assistance as a limitation, we should consider it to be a resource at the basis of a future society that is able to account for inevitable dependency relationships between "unequals" ensuring a fulfilling life both for the carer and the cared for.¹⁰

SCORE FOR LIFT AND TRANSFER

“Ready?”

“Ready.”

Work to deliver your bodies safely from platform to platform, surface to surface.

Hold yourself; stand.

Stand and hold yourself while holding someone else.

Learn how the you of your body and me of mine work our mutual instability together. Learn how the instability of holding while moving is a moment.

Learn that to move is to hold a we.

When we are crossing, dressing, lifting, rounding, it reminds me how rarely I share this kind of coordinated unstable touching, these routine experimentations, with others besides Amalle. What contexts, proximities, and spaces permit the sharing of these simple actions?

— Park McArthur and
Constantina Zavitsanos¹¹

In the score above, the reader encounters a widening scope of what can and should be considered to be the varying nuances of intimacy and dependency. The artists Park McArthur and Constantina Zavitsanos remind us that those of us in the midst of care, navigate dynamics of closeness that complicate the utility of actions and gestures most often associated with sexual intimacy.

They question:

“

“What might be the consistency of this intimacy if the main caring action of care collective—wrapping arms around each other to lift and transfer bodies—weren't so reminiscent of a hug? There are many ways to lift and transfer someone, one of which involves leaning forward so that the person lifting can grab around the liftee's waist, pivoting from surface to surface. Really, how much of this is that we are often cheek-to-cheek in acts of care, head on shoulder? Should reasons for being this close be intimate ones?”¹²

”

In reflecting on McArthur and Zavitsanos' critical consideration of the offerings of their care collective, I am moved to act through the possibility that the activities of care, its constant rehearsals and routines can produce intimacy without becoming fixed. Can the intimate actions and bodily movements of care work coordinate themselves in terms of the event that moves beyond exchange and towards a recognized and maintained spirit of mutuality?

What is mutuality? (write notes below)

lessons (vol. 1)

stand side-to-side

000.
Error.

001.
Hand-in-Hand:
Place your hand over your partner's.

Negotiate.

002.
Slide.
fingertips across the palm.

Glide.
with a slow, undesired grasp.
Slip.

Release.

003.
Repeat.

004.
Closer yet.
Pull your partner towards you.
Wrap your arm around theirs.
Bring them even closer.
Guide their inner bicep towards your chest.

005.
Repeat.

006.
Together now.
Bring your partner closer.
At the same time.
Inseparable.

Release.

000.
Error.

007.
Palms outward.
Inward.
Get your partner's attention.
Grab their pinky finger.

Hold on just long enough.

008.
Once more.
This time—a little slower on the release.

009.
Almost without notice,
grasp your partner's forefinger.
Hold on
only as long
as the gravity
of patience
allows.

010.
Notice.
The forefinger should
slide
across
the palm only to be grasped,
then released.

Notice.

011.
Palms together.
Fingers laced.
Hold.
Release.

012.
Palms together.
Try not to think.

Feel.

013.
Once more.
Intertwined.
It's all in the release.

*stand a short distance, shoulders aligned,
with chests in opposition*

014.
Point your chests towards each other.
Reach.
Grasp,
with forefingers extended,
ever so slightly.

015.
Again. This time,
rest fingers in a delicate grasp.

000.
Error.

016.
Practice.
Hold your distance.

Closeness is in the loss of embrace.

Release.

000.
Error.

017.
Guide your partner closer.

018.
Repeat,
until you feel it.

An example of a care choreography written by the author

scoring care

(20-30 mins)

track ideas on paper for 5 mins.

What do we mean when we say “care”?

Is care a “choreography”?

How do choreographies impact behavior?

In this exercise you will create
'choreographies for care'.

Take a maximum of 15 minutes to
complete the following steps:

1. Start with 5 minutes of free writing. Think about a time when you either offered or received care. If you can't remember a time like that, make up a scenario. Describe it in great detail.
2. Create a numbered choreography where you break down each moment of care into little moments, bits, pieces, and gestures. You can use the space in this guide or make your own on a separate sheet of paper.
3. Take 5 mins. to share your choreography with a partner, or read it back to yourself.

001

009

002

010

003

011

004

012

005

013

006

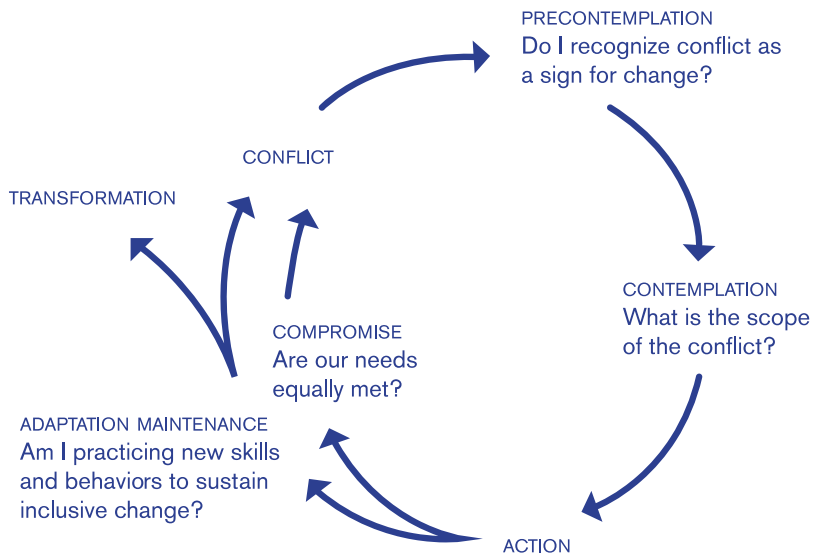
014

007

015

Sources

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10. Eva Feder Kittay, “The Ethics of Care, Dependence, and Disability,” *Ratio Juris*. Vol. 24 No. 1 March 2011 (49–58).
11. Park McArthur and Constantina Zavitsanos, “Other forms of conviviality,” *Women & Performance*, October 20, 2013.
12. Ibid.



“cycle of relational transformation” Jeff Kasper (2020)

Part 3: Social distance being together doesn't always have to mean compromise

Social space [4-12 feet]: the spaces in which people feel comfortable conducting routine social interactions with acquaintances as well as strangers.

Have you wondered why public health officials are using the term “social distancing” even though it seems like a bad choice of language and sends a negative message, as opposed to the more accurate “physical distance”?¹³ We are more familiar with the term “quarantine” which, in modern memory, was a prevalent practice of the restriction of the movement of people during the 1918 influenza epidemic. The term “social distancing” was most recently used by governments in 2003 during the SARS outbreak, almost as if attempting to lighten the appearance of a carceral or punitive state with strictly “neutral” scientific language.¹⁴

The resulting use of social vs. physical distancing wrongly suggests a suspension of sociality instead of a more logical re-emphasis on widening spatial proximity to avoid spread of illness. The term comes directly from social science of proxemics.

Social distance as a literal physical distance is used in business transactions, meeting new people and interacting with groups of people. Though we are familiar with the demands to “stay six feet apart”, 4 to 12 feet, is the large range of distance that physically constitutes “the social” in proxemic social distancing.

Social distance may be used among classmates, co-workers, or acquaintances.

Generally, people within social distance do not engage in physical contact with one another. People may be very particular about the amount of social distance that is preferred. Some people may require much more physical distance than others. This also varies widely across culture, subcultures, and contexts.

Whereas other cultures might include the possibility of physical contact within comfortable social distance.

In some cultures, (think of an uncrowded sidewalk in New York City, or a common commercial space) if a person comes too closely, the individual is likely to back up and give themselves the amount of space that they feel more comfortable in.

Social stories for navigating conflict

Though many of us learned that conflict is bad or that it is universally unsafe or a negative experience—avoiding conflict undermines cooperation, collaboration, and mutuality. Moving through conflict with honesty—prioritizing care for our needs and feelings and the needs and feelings of others—can bring us closer together. We learn to avoid conflict as a strategy for surviving instances when we are powerless. In order to shake this, we need to imagine and practice new strategies, so that we can get our needs met, be honest about how we feel, and build deep relationships (of all kinds) with others.

“Social stories” and interaction scenarios are not just techniques used in conflict mediation, participatory storytelling and design, they are a learning tool used often by neurodivergent youth with their caretakers, parents and educators. They are an exercise in concrete thinking and a survival strategy—an example of crip ingenuity in a disabling world. Social stories can be important tools in articulating one’s personal boundaries and approach the context of physical distance and giving and receiving care—especially during conflict.

**Try out writing and playing-out
a conflict story.**

practicing conflict

(1 hour, 15 mins)

In 2 sets of pairs (4 players), create and practice a common conflict scenario by following these steps:

1. Invent a scenario where there is a common conflict within a small group of four. Spend about 15 minutes coming up with your story. (See example scenario on pages 38-39.)

2. Choose a role.

role 1:

played by:

role 3:

played by:

role 2:

played by:

role 4:

played by:

3. Now decide who will initiate the group conversation to address the conflict, and work together to come up with a script. The objective is to seek a cooperative solution that is transformative and inclusive—a solution that does not generate an unwanted compromise. (25 minutes)

In a cooperative environment, each person finds out what the other needs, and both work together to meet those needs. Like in any relationship, parties may decide to enact a compromise.

Without collaboration and a spirit of mutuality, compromise involves someone leaving the conflict with only partially fulfilled needs. In other words, this is not about coming up with a solution that benefits only one person—it should feel right to everyone involved. If you are struggling, don't forget you can pivot and move in a direction that seems unexpected.

Imagine yourself in-role by answering the following questions:

How do I feel?

Why do I feel this way?

What do I need to move past these feelings?

What are the goals or intentions of each character in-role? (think of these as shared goals or important details that transcend your needs and are articulated for collective good.)

Here is a script that will help you get started:

I feel because I want to know
.....?

4. Now for 25 mins, listen to your group's point of view, and transform the conflict from there! Discuss with your partners possible transformations. List them below and circle the best choice:

Notes and Reflections:

Did you compromise?

If so, how do you feel about the compromise? Did it benefit your needs and your partner's?

What was the end result?

Scenario Example:

I once encountered a scenario that illustrated the difference between good and not so good compromise beautifully: Two art students had access to shared art materials, namely a pad of bristol paper left over from last semester, and each of them wanted it. The second year drawing student claimed she should get it because she's more likely to use it for her works on paper. The third year sculpture student thought they should get it because they had spent more money on tuition being a year older, and should get first priority because of lack of income. They decided to split the pad of paper in half, and both were pretty happy at the decision. However, after they parted, one of them used the paper for a drawing project and threw away the front cover. The other used the back cover for a sculpture base and threw away the loose papers. They both ended up running into each other at the art supply store to get the remainder of material needed and wasted. Had they just talked about what each of them needed, they could have fulfilled their needs entirely and not had generated any trash or need to purchase more materials.

This is an example of compromise—each person walks away with their needs partially met, so as to end the conflict. But, wouldn't cooperation be better? In a cooperative environment, each person finds out what the other needs, and both work together to meet those needs. So, remember this the next time you're tempted to compromise without finding out what the other person REALLY wants. Who knows? You both may leave with fulfilled needs. And, wouldn't THAT be the best option?

Space for writing

Sources

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Content Warning

In this part the author discusses practices for navigating conflict and harm in relationships. There is mention of **intimacy violence, partner-based violence and abuse.**

Please note that the following exercises are used outside of clinical spaces of medicine and are not created by medical professionals but instead center the perspectives of queer-disabled-survivors-of-color. Seek the advice of professionals if you need help. If you experienced or witnessed violence, or are you concerned about someone who has,

The Anti-Violence Project (AVP) has a 24 Hour English/Spanish Hotline: 212-714-1141, or call the **National Sexual Assault Hotline** 1-800-656-4673 (HOPE). Feel free to use and adapt these activities as part of your arts-based community building work, self-care, and peer-based support.



What is *transformative justice*?

Transformative justice is a way of addressing an individual act of harm that relies on community members instead of the police, the law, or the government (also known as the State). It is a response to the racism, ableism, and gender-based oppression that shapes contemporary life. All Transformative Justice models reject the criminal-justice system, choosing instead to rely on community support networks that cultivate violence prevention, healing, accountability, resilience, and safety for all.

Part 4: Public distance when proximity means harm

Public space [12 feet or more]: the area of space beyond which people will perceive interactions as impersonal and relatively anonymous.

As recently reported in The New York Times, and in reports issued by SAMHSA, there is a concern that the numbers experiencing intimate partner violence and family-based abuse will dramatically rise as a result of social distancing and quarantine during COVID-19. Not everyone's home is the safest location during "shelter in place." Before the pandemic, a survivor or victim could flee a violent situation and seek help in the public sphere or from others in their social environment. For many, such options aren't easily available right now. A stay-at-home order can force people to stay in a dangerous situation.¹⁵

“Prevention (CDC) defines Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as “physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression (including coercive tactics) by a current or former intimate partner or family member.” These types of behavior can happen concurrently, vary in frequency and severity, and range in lasting impact.”

People surviving violence in their partnerships, families, and most close-knit relationships, may be experiencing increased isolation and danger caused by social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite relative anonymity, public spaces can increase opportunities to participate in communal activity. Public space plays a vital role in the social life of communities. In the best of instances, social relations at this distance act as a shared resource in which experiences and value are created and safety is maintained between members. Think of those acts of neighborly “eyes on the street” and mutual aid that can characterize some public encounters.¹⁶

For many, the opportunity to “be in public” fosters a social effect much in reverse to what

the proxemic definition of “public” suggests—publicness can support solidarity through privacy. It feels kind of off that public space would offer what we most often think of as reserved in the private sphere—the sector of social life in which an individual enjoys a degree of authority, unhampered by influence by governing institutions.¹⁷ The parameters separating public and private spheres are not fixed and vary a great deal across culture, place, and time. For some, public space can provide the functions of privacy—autonomy, emotional release, self evaluation, and protected communication—especially when our most intimate domestic spaces and the relationships associated with them are marked with abuse, harm, and violence.¹⁸ People seek support in public for matters most close to home. Retreat from public contact, added stress and financial strain can negatively impact survivors and create circumstances such as further isolation, fear of retaliation and shame, further compromising the situation. People need the option to be in public distance in order to maintain safety. Pandemics illuminate how this is just not always possible.

With this in mind: What are the tools that we can use to mobilize our networks of relationships to prepare for when harm occurs in private?

The Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (BATJC) notes that many people who experience violence, harm or abuse that is close to home (or who have committed acts of harm or abuse) often turn to their closest social networks before they consult external state or social services. Most people don't call the police or seek counseling or even call anonymous hotlines. If they tell anyone at all, they turn to a trusted friend, family member, neighbor or coworker. In considering this BATJC wanted a way to name those currently in your life that you would rely on (or are relying on) to respond to violence and harm.

The term created was called: "pods."

"During the spring of 2014 the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (BATJC) began using the term "pod" to refer to a specific type of relationship within transformative justice" work. A new term was needed to describe the kind of relationships between people who would turn to each other for support around violent,

harmful and abusive experiences, whether as survivors, bystanders or people who have harmed. These would be the people in our lives that we would call on to support us with things such as our immediate and on-going safety, accountability and transformation of behaviors, or individual and collective healing and resiliency.

Prior to this, many had been using the term “community” but found that, not surprisingly, many people do not feel connected to a “community” and, even more so, most people did not know what “community” meant or had wildly different definitions and understandings of “community.””

— Written by Mia Mingus for BATJC,
June 2016 ¹⁹

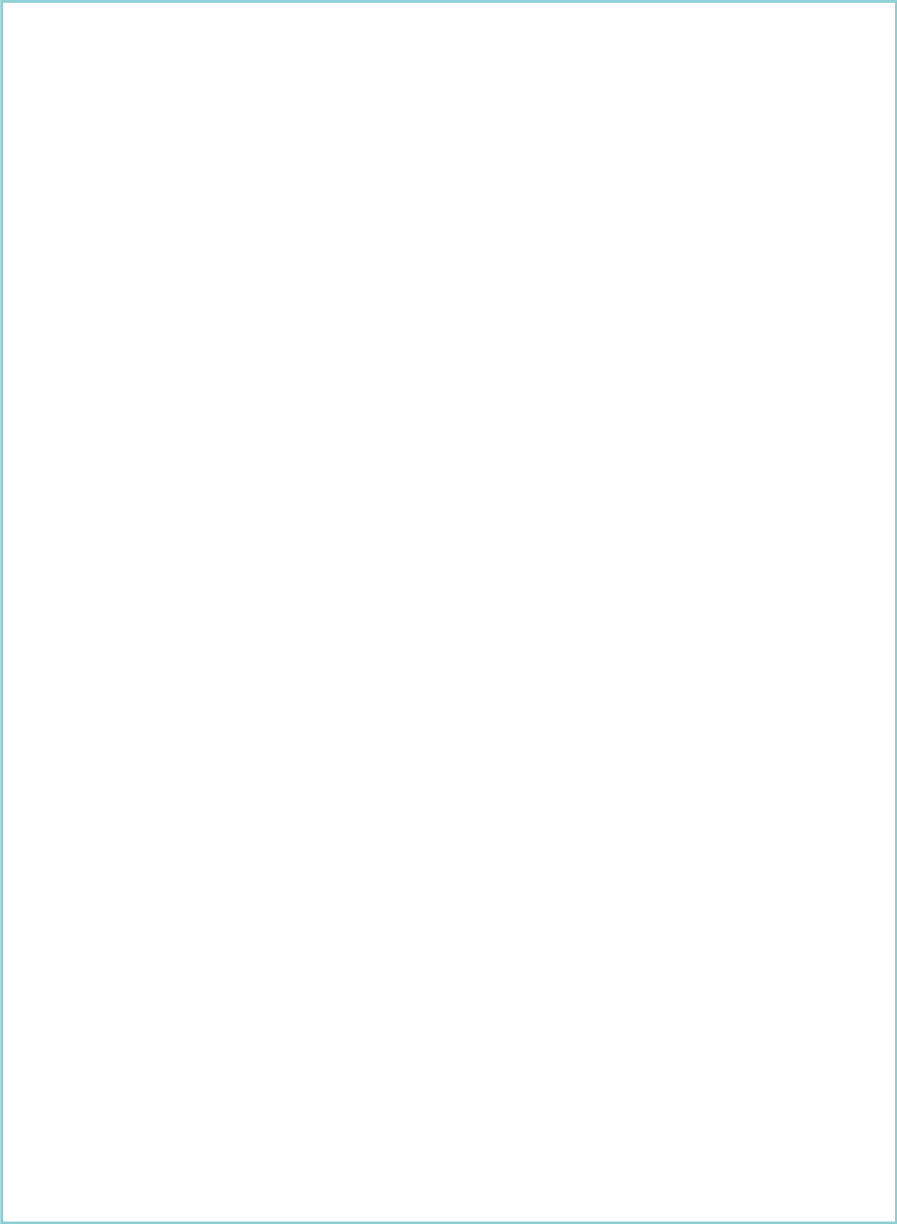
In the following practice, adapted from the work of Mia Mingus for BATJC, we will use a map template provided to start to identify who could be in your “pod(s)”—the kind of relationship between people who you would turn to for support around violent, harmful and abusive experiences, whether as a survivor, bystander or person who has committed harmed. A “pod” is a microcosm of “community.” Since it’s more concrete than the vague notion of community, it’s easier to

get organized—to connect, make a plan, and follow through if and when it’s needed. There may be certain qualities you look for in the folks in your pod(s): maybe they’re really reliable, well-resourced, generous, committed, kind. Maybe they have certain skills that you don’t and need. Maybe they live nearby. This practice is grounded within a transformative justice* philosophy.

Your pod(s) may shift over time, as your needs or relationships shift or as people’s geographic location shifts. Have conversations with your pod people about pods and transformative justice, as well as to actively grow the number of people in your pod and support each other in doing so. Growing one’s pod is not easy and may take time. Measure successes by the quality of relationships with one another and invest in the time it takes to build things like trust, respect, vulnerability, accountability, care and love. Building pods is a concrete way to prepare and build resources for conflict transformation.

Note: ‘Pod Mapping’ is not a solution to abuse and harm but only one tool for building up one’s capacity to navigate harm when it occurs. I recommend that you learn more about transformative justice and community accountability resources that can expand your repertoire while dealing with harm in our collective and social spaces.

Space for sketching



who is in your pod?

(30-45 mins)

Please re-draw or fill out multiple worksheets for different pods. Pages 56-57 offer a basic template. You are welcome to create your own pod maps.

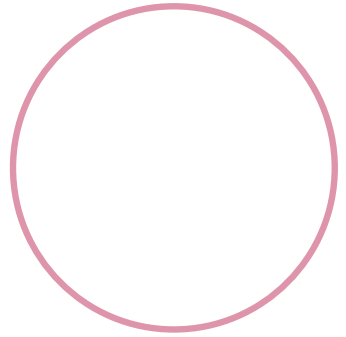
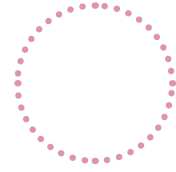
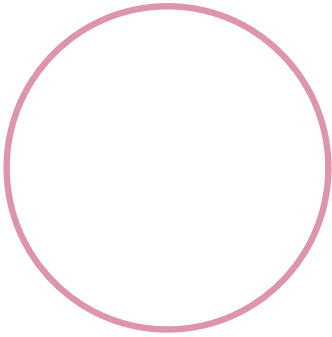
1. Write your name in the middle circle.
2. The surrounding bold-outlined circles are your pod. Write the names of the people who are in your pod. Write the names of actual individuals, instead of things such as “my church group” or “my neighbors.”
3. The dotted lines surrounding your pod are people who are “movable.” They are people that could be moved into your pod, but need a little more work. For example, you might need to build more relationships or trust with them. Or maybe you’ve never had a conversation with them about abuse or intimacy violence.

4. The larger circles at the edge of the page are for networks, communities or groups that could be resources for you. It could be your local domestic violence direct service organization, your cohort in school, or your place of worship.

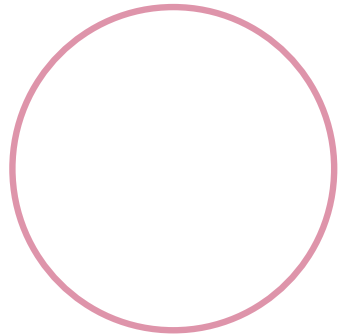
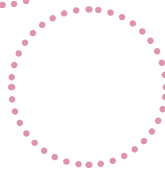
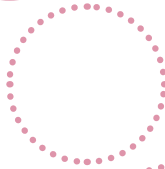
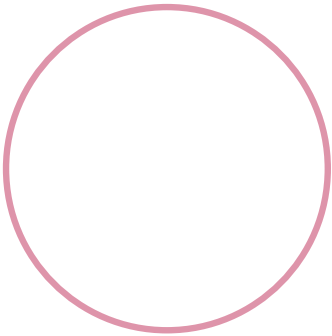
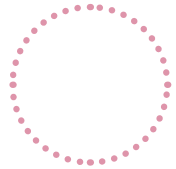
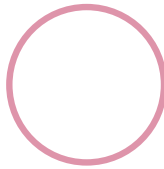
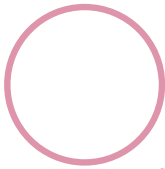
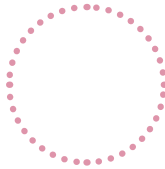
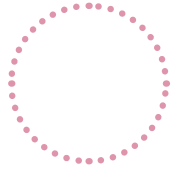
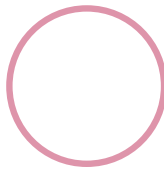
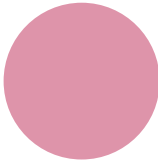
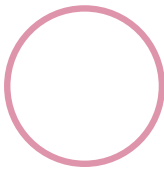
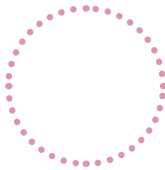
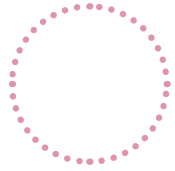
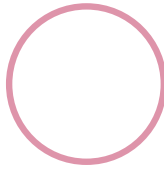
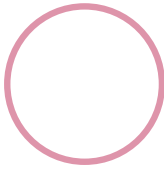
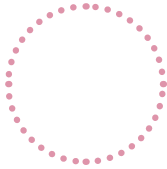
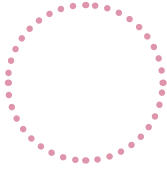
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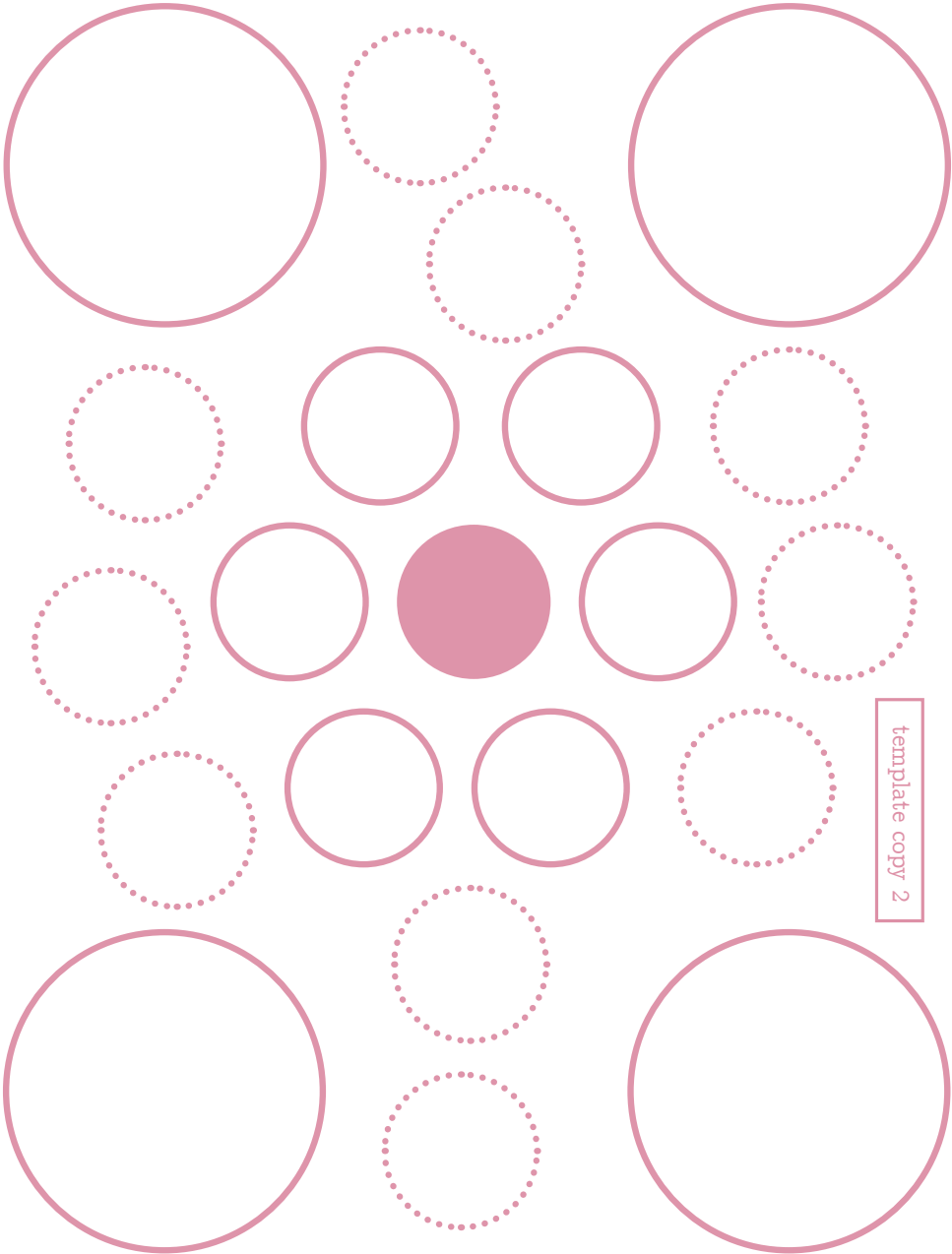
Sources

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16. Jane Jacobs. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.
17. “Public” and “private” space are highly gendered and classed concepts. Learn more: Jurgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger; Frederic Lawrence. Massachusetts: MIT Press. 1989; Christopher Wells. “Separate Spheres”. In Kowaleski-Wallace, Elizabeth (ed.). *Encyclopedia of feminist literary theory*. London, New York: Routledge. 2009.
18. A. F. Westin. *Privacy and freedom*. New York: Atheneum, 1967.
19. I learned more about this practice by Queens-based artist and activist, Ro Garrido who led a workshop at Downtown Art as part of my 2019 residency series Give & Take Care. Learn more about Pod Mapping on the BATJC website: <https://batjc.wordpress.com/pods-and-pod-mapping-worksheet/>



template copy 1





template copy 2

