



PREVENT. RESIST. SUPPORT.

Episode 14: Embodiment & Community Care

with Shaiden Keaney



University
of Windsor

Office of Sexual Violence Prevention,
Resistance, and Support

Prevent Resist Support Podcast

Season 2 Episode 14: Embodiment & Community Care with Shaiden Keaney

Anne Rudzinski: Hi everyone, I'm Anne and this is Prevent Resist Support, a podcast by the Office of Sexual Violence at the University of Windsor.

Music: I got your back my dear and I know that you got mine. I feel that hope and fear but I know we'll hold the line. Keep your head up. Keep your hand out when your breath is feeling short. Prevent, Resist, Support.

Anne: So our guest today is Shaiden Keaney. And we're going to be talking about embodiment and community care. Shaiden has already visited our podcast once early in Season Two, the episode is about the 2SLGBTQIA+ self defence course, Acts of Resistance. So if you would like to hear more about self defense for queer identified folks and community, you can check out that episode. It's really great. Today we're going to be chatting about embodiment and about community care, which is especially important, given how things are in the world right now. So I'm really glad that you joined us today. And let's get right into our chat with Shaiden.

All right, so welcome, Shaiden we're so excited to have you here today to talk about TDOR, and also some of the content around our community gathering event for remembrance and survival. So welcome.

Shaiden Keaney: Thanks so much for having me here, Anne. I'm very excited to be talking about this topic today.

Anne: Yeah, and this is your second episode with us. So I'm just gonna kind of [inaudible] for folks, if you want to go back and listen to our first episode with Shaiden, there's another one in this season. And you can find that on our Anchor site, or wherever you're listening to your podcasts. So please give that one a listen too because that was also a really wonderful episode. So you are hosting an event with us for TDOR called Community Gathering for Remembrance and Survival. Can you tell us a bit about the importance of TDOR?

Shaiden: TDOR stands for Trans Day of Remembrance. And it's an annual event that takes place on November 20. And it serves a number of functions. First of all, it's to raise awareness about the violence that's experienced by trans, non binary and gender expansive individuals, the world over, it's to come together to support one another, to connect in terms of grief. And to encourage people to move towards action, when we're talking about what it is that creates the conditions for trans people to experience disproportionate rates of violence, both in terms of interpersonal, and intimate relationships, and as well as in terms of acquaintance or stranger experiences of violence. It's absolutely disproportional. And this points to how it is that we are organized as a society, and points to the changes that need to be made in all arenas, it also is an opportunity for us to pause and to slow down. And I know that we'll be talking more about this throughout the episode and the importance of slowing down. And on a spiritual note, and not all listeners will have a spiritual connection. And I totally respect that. And for those who do, on a spiritual note, it can be a time to connect with spirit and the spirits of those who have passed to let them know that they're not forgotten, and to maintain connection in terms of ancestors and transcestors, right, the fact and even in terms of a material lineage. And by material, I mean, you know, like the non spiritual or, or whatever, whatever it is that we can touch in terms of the realities and the advances, quote, unquote, that that have been made for trans folks, this is all, everyone standing on the shoulders of those who came before us. And to take a moment to recognize that trans folks are not in this work alone, are not in this lineage alone, are not in these lives alone, is really

key to understanding what TDOR stands for. It's also an opportunity to publicly mourn, right, to publicly grieve and the concepts of visibility and invisibility are complicated when we're talking about trans communities but also, when people's lives have been erased, to make those lives visible, once again, is quite radical. So it's a call to come together. And it's also a call to action, and in terms of calling to action, to ensure that transcripts are included in anti violence spaces and initiatives and to recenter those who are most marginalized within our work.

Anne: I love just like the fulsomeness of that answer. I feel like there's so much in there. But one of the things that I really love about chatting with you is the very purposeful language that you use around these topics. And so I was wondering if we could just, like really quickly talk about some of the phrasing that you used, because I think it might be nice for our listeners to kind of just take a moment with some of it. So I love the phrase gender expansive, that's when I haven't heard before. So what is the purpose behind using that phrase?

Shaiden: So full disclosure, part of my work is in child and youth mental health, and I specifically work with children and with teens, when we're talking about children, and this is a bit of an aside, but also connected to what we're talking about today, when we're talking about children, the term gender creative is often used to talk about children. That isn't a term that children have, like self defined, it's something it's a term that adults have created for them. And I think that that can in a way, euphemized the experience or transness, for parents to say, "Oh, they're, they're not a trans trans child, they're their gender creative child." And so how that can make things more palpable for adults around them. So I stay away from gender creative, that that was a term that was developed in the CIS community. And so gender expansive was developed within the trans community to talk about pushing the boundaries of what is considered to be gender or gendered norms. And I think that it also makes space, not all trans people identify as gender expansive or non binary, right. But also, not all non binary or gender expansive, people identify as trans. And yet there are and can be common experiences. And so there's an effort there just to include

people who, who are in that space of wondering where it is that they might belong. So that that's the purpose behind gender expansive,

Anne: Thank you so much for that explanation. I think that's a really wonderful phrase that I would like to start using now in some of my work. So, happy you were able to kind of give us a moment to focus on that. I also really love the term transcestors. That's a really lovely concept. And I think we'll come back to some of that as we talk about community grieving and grief through the rest of the episode. Yeah. So our next question is around some of the work that you do, because I know that some of the work that you do is about embodiment. So how does embodiment relate to grief? And how can embodiment practices help us during times of remembrance and grief?

Shaiden: Our emotions have space within our bodies, and our physical and emotional experiences, we create words for them, we give them names. And it can help to talk through what we're thinking and feeling. And at the same time, emotions are an experience. When I talk about embodiment, or when I practice embodiment, it's about exploring what is alive for me right now. And I also want to acknowledge that for a lot of us who have experienced chronic stress or trauma, it can be really difficult to connect with what's present in the body right now. So when I talk about embodiment, I also think about it as wanting it to become more of a choice, all of us have found ways to navigate stress in our lives, some of us navigate stress by moving away from it. And that can be by dissociating or finding coping mechanisms. And I want to make space for that, because I think that's okay. Sometimes being alive really is just a lot. And also, when we can create more and more capacity within our bodies for the physical and emotional experiences that we're having. I believe that we create more capacity for all of our experiences and emotions, we create more capacity for life. And so when we cultivate space for grieving, and support one another, to hold that grief, I think that's a necessary part in terms of building community resilience, when our communities have been marginalized, right when we've experienced chronic stress. And so now I want to sort of bring us to what I know that we're going to talk about next, which is around community grieving. And what's the role of holding that together? Because I think that embodiment is important for me as an individual

practice is also important for me as a community practice. And so, when we come together to hold experiences of grief together, again, we can become more capable of growing capacity together, and on a scientific and biological level. What this can do is it can activate our mirror neurons to see ourselves literally reflected in the person in front of us. We can feel the other person's pain, they can feel our pain. And we can look for what are the resources that we have to support ourselves in one another in that moment. So if I'm showing up, and I'm generally like I have capacity to hold, I can help to hold my own experience and the experience of somebody else. And thus, we're contributing to a collective nervous system, both metaphorically and literally, to build that capacity together. Also, in terms of my my training and background in somatic therapy, and so thinking from the polyvagal perspective, and so for listeners out there who are interested in polyvagal theory, this might be interesting to you. We have basically a nerve called the vagal nerve that travels through the entire body, and helps us to experience and regulate our biological processes. It's, it's a lot to get into, but there's a part of the vagal nerve that is focused around the face, and around the heart, and that's called the ventral vagal, the ventral vagal nervous system. And when we connect with another person, and we're experiencing empathy with another person, our ventral vagal system gets activated, that in itself supports the rest of our nervous system to be okay, and to help us deal with and cope with the stress and the feelings that we're having. So, you know, grieving as an individual process is important, and grieving and community is important.

Anne: Yeah, I just love the idea of a collective nervous system. I think that's so beautiful. And I think, you know, when I think about the ways that we talk about self care and about healing, and you know, it's usually very individually focused. And so I love the shift that we're seeing, especially around your work and the things that you're sharing with us around thinking about individual as one piece of it and community as another piece of it and some of the regulation that happens with communities. That's just so lovely to hear about. One of the focuses for our Community Gathering for Remembrance and Survival is on creating space for community care and community grieving. So what is community grieving? And why is that important? I know we've talked a

little bit about this in the previous question. But I would love to get a little bit more into that.

Shaiden: I see Trans Day of Remembrance as really holding two truths at once. One, that this is about slowing down, connecting with one another, and holding space for what has been lost, and what continues to be lost. The other part of that the other side of that is to take action, because it isn't enough to just hold the grief, we need to stop the disproportionate experiences of violence that the trans community, the umbrella trans community is experiencing. And I believe that the two are mutual. I believe that in order to take action, we need to have experiences of slowing down to recognize what's happening, and to grieve with one another. We need to be able to balance, thought, emotion, action, and initiative. All of those are key to movements for social justice, and forge creating change. And when we take emotion out of that equation, when we're only only holding space for action that can cause us to compartmentalize parts of ourselves. Again, that can be really important, if I'm at an action, and I need to put my feeling somewhere so that I can continue to be there and be physically present. That's important. And if I'm never slowing down to take stock of what I'm putting on the shelf, again, my capacity for joy, there will be limits to it. If we're only dealing with the after effect of the sociopolitical realities that we're facing, then, eventually, over time, I think that we can be at risk for emotional burnout. Because if we're not acting together, if we're not stoking the fire, then it can limit us in terms of us feeling like we're actually getting somewhere, which is, you know, honestly, in my life very real right now, that need for action feels, feels necessary. I've been connected with different movements for social justice, and the ones that are the strongest are the ones that have space for emotional connection. These are the intergenerational movements for social justice, and the ones where people have chosen one another as family so that it's not just about project based relationships. It's also about how we care for each other in the, in the in between times. And if we're not able to be emotionally vulnerable with one another, it can interfere with our ability to feel safe with one another. When we are experiencing trauma or traumatic stress, the first thing that we do, as humans and as mammals is we look for connection. When connection isn't available, then we start to move through our other strategies. So these times of

coming together and reconnecting is, is so important. So that kind of like comes from a trauma informed perspective, why it is that we do need to slow down, in order to sustain ourselves and each other and our movements for change and social justice.

Anne: I think it's really wonderful to just think about the emotional connection piece, because I've often said to folks, you know, the shift that I'm seeing in a lot of activist communities with COVID, is that the only time we see each other is when we're showing up to the rallies and the marches, then we're not able to have the like, all going for a coffee together or, you know, gathering afterwards to spend some time together in like community spaces. And so I think that that has really shifted how we feel about activism and how we feel about showing up because we're not also benefiting from like the community care pieces that COVID, I think has limited.

Shaiden: And I think they're maybe just want to add in, you know, for those who have read Brene Brown's book, Daring Greatly. And even for those who haven't, I mean, the underlying message in that book is, Am I worthy of belonging here? It can feel very vulnerable to even admit that, you know, I might be worried that I don't belong, particularly for trans folks, trans non binary and gender expansive folks, that feeling that that worry of do I belong? Do I not belong? That that question may have been planted very early on in childhood, right. And so creating those spaces for one another, where we are connecting, and also reaching out to, you know, maybe a new person in the space, or to the person who we don't know so well, like that, in itself can be life saving for the movement and life saving for that person as well. Like, the act of creating belonging within our movements can't be underrated.

Anne: Yeah, that's just so important. And I'm glad we're highlighting that as a piece. I think it's so wonderful to be that person in the space that sees somebody new come in, immediately wants to make them feel welcome and a part of the community and I always really cherish folks who do that work in the spaces I've been in. So yeah, let's talk a little bit more about the community care piece. How can we build this community care into our communities and our friends circles, or maybe

even our activist groups? Or, you know, whatever space we're inhabiting? How do we build that community care piece in?

Shaiden: This is a question that I'm turning over, in my own head. And I think that, that it can't look one way for everyone, you know. When COVID first happened, and a lot of people thought to themselves, Oh, my gosh, how am I gonna get through this? People looked to the crip community to say like, how do you do it? How, when mobility is limited? How do you make it through, right? And I think the book *Care Work* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, would be a good place for people to go with their questions around how to create care. I think for me, part of it is recognizing that community care is political. You know, we've heard the term the personal is political, but also the political is personal, what is political out there affects our lives. And so to recognize that people in our communities are facing challenges, and to strive to meet them with that, in a way that's mutual, I think can be so powerful. So there's a couple of ways that we can think about community, we can think about community in terms of community of interest. So who is it who shares the same interests as me?, Who else is showing up to TDOR?, Who else is showing up to the Pride Centre? Who is involved in the same projects I'm involved in, or in the same field of work that I'm doing? And reaching out to those folks and seeing are there ways that we can support one another help to break isolation, right, texts and phone calls can be really powerful. You know, something as simple as dropping off meals can be really, really helpful. You know, it can literally help someone make sure that they eat that day. And then there's also communities of geography. So that is, who is in my neighbourhood? And so that can include, who is living in tents during this current housing crisis? And how is it that I can show up in terms of supporting my neighbours? What is it if that they need that I might be able to provide? What can I redistribute? Do I have energy to redistribute? Do I have finances to redistribute? And so there's, I think, sort of dance between my internal process of asking like, how do I not hoard what I have, right? And then a material way of how does that translate into what I then offer to the world to the person who lives next door? The person who's living in the tent next door? Or the person who I've just noticed in class is looking pretty rundown, like, is there a way that I can kind of reach out? To build that? I don't know. I think all of all of our

listeners are gonna have different strengths, like, are you, are you someone who does organize gatherings and events? And is there someone new who you can extend that to? Like, it's honestly it's in the small, every day actions that ended up leading us towards a future that hopefully is more connected more socially just. And one of the things that I want to say also is, when I think about marginalization, I sort of think about the circle who's in the circle, and who's on the margin that that circle? One of the things that I think is very important is to think about who's on the edges of the edges? And how can I create a new focal point in the centre of my understanding the centre of my circle, so that those folks who are at the edges of the edges come into the centre of my consideration? if I'm to say, okay, so who's on the edges of my inner circle, can I just expand it a little bit further? Unfortunately, what that can do as I can push people who are already marginalized further to the margins. So to illustrate this, like I am, white bodied, of settler descent, and I really want to take a moment to acknowledge and recognize that TDOR, yes, trans masculine, and white folks are included in the list of people who we are mourning, but disproportionately, this is an event for trans women of colour, and trans women of colour, there's so much brilliance and power and resilience among folks who carry that identity and within that community. And there's a way in which that community is systematically pushed out and bogged down. And the burdens of society get downloaded onto their shoulders, and they're carrying more more than their fair share of the impacts of living in the society that we're living in. And so if I'm going to say that I will want to include these people in my event, but not those people, then I can be growing my circle but creating increasing marginalization, if you're catching my drift. So that I think that is part of creating community care. How can we create radical community care? By shifting who it is that we even understand ourselves to be connected to, because ultimately, we are all connected. And we are, I spoke earlier about being standing on the shoulders of transcestors, like we are standing on the shoulders of people like Marsha P Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, and so many other trans women of colour, who are not named. We are talking about individuals who turn tricks to keep younger, trans feminine people off the streets. That's the type of courage that has led to today. Ultimately, those of the people ultimately have to be at the centre of this.

Anne: Yeah, just like, thank you so much for all of that. I think that's such a fulsome and thoughtful description of the different things we should take into consideration when building community care. So I love that you've highlighted that it's not just one thing for any community, like it's going to look different for every different space, but also thinking about who is in our community? Who are we connected to? And kind of thinking about that in ways that we maybe haven't thought about that before? You know?

Shaiden: I mentioned the small things. But then it's also the big things. It's about how do I redistribute wealth, even to the point of discomfort because reparations are important, and then recognizing our lineages and who it is that we are actually connected to, and supporting individuals, initiatives, and collectives to help us move towards the world that we ultimately want to see. That is that is so key.

Anne: And so I think this kind of relates to some of the things we've been talking about, about how community care, community grieving, and some of the embodiment pieces are difficult during the pandemic or there are new challenges to coming together and having those shared spaces and I love that some of the things that we've talked about, like reparations, are things that can be done at a distance, like you don't need to be in the same space as somebody to engage in that. What are some of the other ways that folks can honour TDOR? Considering you know, where we're at, in the pandemic. Maybe some folks are going out a little bit, maybe there are still some restrictions in some areas. So what are the things that folks might want to consider as ways to kind of take that space, slow down and have that moment to reflect this year?

Shaiden: I invite folks to come out to the Gathering for Remembrance and Survival. That will be on November 18, at 6pm. That is a virtual space. I also do encourage, if it's within your ability, and I know that this isn't this isn't accessible to everyone. But if you can gather even with one or two other people, and light a candle, and hold a space of silence for yourself, and for the moment, you know, on a magical or spiritual level, and for those who have passed, that can be incredibly powerful, you know, and it's, there's also no shame in taking care of yourself. So if you wanted to

do a massage circle, or if you wanted to, like go out for dinner, those kinds of actions to help us to hold the grief is okay, right? Sometimes we can internalize this message that we have to stay in the grief, and we have to stay in the action, we also need to orient ourselves towards joy, to help us hold the reality that surfaces for us on TDOR, like it's a painful, painful reality, that we have lost so many and that we continue to lose so many, if we want to be able to keep our eyes and ears open. And if we want to continue to sustain ourselves to be able to make change in our spaces, then we need to also orient towards joy. I think that's maybe that statement is maybe less controversial than maybe it once was. But I think it's key, right? I think that donating to trans focused organizations, [inaudible] into Trans Wellness Ontario, depending on where listeners are, you can look into what organizations are near you, especially if you identify as cisgender or your cis passing or have passing privilege, which is also complex, but it but particularly when you have access to be able to contribute financially, that can be an important, again, like spiritual and also material way that you can stay connected with the community around you. If possible, I do recommend that folks reach out to loved ones who would understand and if it were possible to be connected in person with even again, if it's one or two people. I want to remind listeners that there are also crisis lines available to you. Trans Lifeline is available to you, as well as the one for university students which, Anne, I think you are aware of, but I can also send you the Trans Lifeline link and phone number to include in the show notes.

Anne: Yes, we have that one, I think also on our website. And then there's also Good 2 Talk for students.

Shaiden: Good 2 talk. That's the one.

Anne: We just have one more question. Do you have a couple more minutes?

Shaiden: Yeah, absolutely.

Anne: So the last one is just what is one takeaway message that you'd like to share with our listeners?

Shaiden: Your emotional experience is okay, you are entitled to your emotions, there's no wrong thing that you can feel around TDOR, that would be my number one. And number two would be that you are not in this alone, even if this TDOR, that you're not sure if you're connected to other people, I want to let you know that you're not alone. And there are communities who you can connect to virtually, at the very least, and possibly even near you geographically. So if you're feeling alone, this TDOR, I suggest that you reach out to someone, whether or not that somebody who's in your immediate friend circle. And finally, I don't want listeners to be afraid of taking action. And we've spoken about that sort of abstractly throughout our conversation. And so what action means, I think is looking around you and asking yourself, what's one change that I could make here? So if your workplace could use an update in policies in terms of gender inclusion, or creating gender neutral washrooms for staff who could be working there. That's one thing that you could do in your workplace. If in your classroom there is not content on trans gender expansive two spirit realities and identities, then that could be something you could take up with your prof. If there's a course that you would like to see in your department, you can take that up with the chair of the department, wherever you are, there are ways in which you can advocate. Also, there is a new bill that has been tabled at the provincial level to support access around gender affirming health care. And so I highly recommend that folks go ahead and contact your MPP to and that could be your MPP or your [inaudible], as well as your MPP, where your mailing address is. So in order to advocate that that, trans folks can have reliable, safe, responsive access to health care. As an aside, one of the biggest risks to mental health for trans individuals is not having access to adequate health care. And that could be, you know, health care, generally, but also gender affirming health care. So I recommend that folks go out and advocate there. And also, don't be afraid to slow down. Changing the world is a lifelong project, it is lifelong work. And there need to be those moments to, and and circling back to the first one for all of your emotions, to be present. In order to sustain yourself in making a brighter future for everyone, there has to be time and space for all of you, for all parts of you. I hope that folks come out to the Gathering for Remembrance and Survival. It will be a space of connection and

gathering will be an intentional space where there will be opportunities for grieving and for joy. So hope to see listeners there.

Anne: Yes, I also hope folks will come out to the event, I think it's going to be really wonderful. And I'm just so grateful, Shaiden, that you have time to spend with us on our podcast and you have time to spend with us for our events. I know we're just really glad to be able to bring you into our UWindsor community. So thank you so much for this time and your thoughtfulness you know, and all the work that you're doing on this topic.

Shaiden: I always love talking with you, Anne. And thank you so much for having me here.

Anne: So that was Shaiden Keaney. All of Shaiden's information will be in the episode description for you. And again, that was Shaiden's second episode with us. So if you'd like to check out Shaiden's earlier episode that's on Anchor, Spotify, Apple wherever you're listening to us now you can find it earlier in Season 2. Thanks so much for joining us today, folks.

The Prevent Resist Support Podcast is a part of the Office of Sexual Violence at the University of Windsor. Our full Office title is the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention, Resistance and Support. You can find us on our website which is at www.uwindsor.ca/prevent-resist-support. Or you can email us at our email address which is svsupport@uwindsor.ca. So S V like sexual violence, support, at uwindsor.ca If you are a member of our University of Windsor community and you would like some support around sexual violence or any unwanted sexual experience, you can reach out to us at the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention, Resistance and Support on our website, which is uwindsor.ca/prevent-resist-support. You can also reach out to us by email at svsupport@uwindsor.ca. If you are not a member of our UWindsor community but would like to learn about support resources near you. You can check out the Coalition of Rape Crisis Centers. Their website is sexualassaultsupport.ca.