

But in that moment just being there and not disappearing and then, of course, I had that urge to disappear and to never hang out again and not do our midnight walks and just pretend I don't see them and I just recognized it and I thought okay what's my exercise how do I be decent here how do I be the human being the full one, not just the part that's hurt.

Hi there. My name is Steph Olsen I use she/her pronouns and I'm a public educator with the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton also known as SACE. SACE offers free support and services to people and communities impacted by sexual violence this includes counselling, the One Line for Sexual Violence, court support, and public education. SACE is located on amiskwaciwâskahikan Treaty 6 territory and Métis Region 4. You are listening to lacuna, where I interview anti-sexual violence advocates doing important work on consent.

The word "lacuna" means gap or missing part. SACE started this project because we are interested in uplifting people who are filling the gap, or lacuna, between where we are currently and a true consent culture where everyone has the knowledge skills and support to practice consent to be accountable to our impact and to treat one another well.

This interview is with Karen BK Chan, who is an award-winning sex and emotional literacy educator based in Toronto, Canada. BK's work helps fill the gap between knowing what consent is and actually having the skills and awareness to practice it. BK explores why consent education needs to go beyond just providing information like definitions or laws and must also include skill-building and emotional literacy to ensure folks can actually practice consent in real life with other people.

Today the majority of our conversation focuses on one concept in particular called rejection resilience. We explore this concept from three perspectives: how do we build our capacity to receive and respond to rejection well even when it's activating painful or embarrassing; we also discuss how to deliver rejection without getting caught in feelings of guilt or over responsibility, and we look at how to support our friends and loved ones when they experience rejection.

As you will be able to tell in our interview I am really excited to talk to BK because their work and insights have profoundly shaped how we do consent education at SACE. You'll also notice that BK is an incredible and generous storyteller and I feel so grateful for how they bring this conversation to life. I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did. Without further ado, here it is.

Today on lacuna I am pleased to be in conversation with one of my personal role models in the field of consent education, Karen BK Chan. BK uses she and they pronouns and is an award-winning sex and emotional literacy educator in Toronto, Canada with 20-plus years of experience. Trained in creative facilitation, productive thinking, and non-violent communication, BK's favourite ways to learn and teach

are through stories, metaphors, diagrams, and things that make people laugh. Above all BK is dedicated to having difficult conversations that are real, transformative, and kind.

Welcome BK! Thanks so much.

Thank you, thanks for having me, Steph.

I would love to start this conversation off by just getting to hear a little bit about your work and how you got into the field of teaching emotional literacy as a consent skill.

For sure! So I'm 44, I'm queer, I'm in Toronto and I'm an immigrant. I immigrated when I was 11 from Hong Kong. My current work involves emotional intelligence um and I do all of my work through that lens and some of that work is around sexuality. How I got into consent work from an emotional literacy point of view is that I was actually just asked to do consent work as a sex educator quite a bit. Maybe starting about 10 years ago, folks in schools, for example, colleges, universities were looking for presentations on consent and how to get students to practice consent, sexual consent specifically. And then I would go and give talks but then I realized it felt a little bit disingenuous because I was there to tell them to do stuff that I knew personally were really hard to do and that I wasn't there to support them at all in the hardest part of it, which is you know in the moment when people feel ashamed or embarrassed or awkward or so self-conscious or have no idea how to formulate the words so that got me um starting to do work around the emotional barriers and emotional challenges of consent. And now that I do work on sex and feelings both together in retrospect it becomes really obvious.

First, I got into sexual health and sexuality work because I needed healing in that realm. And now I do more and more work around feelings and emotional landscapes because I also need a lot of healing in that realm. So I think ultimately it ends up being about what healing I'm trying to you know manifest in my own life too. The first part of my conversation with BK focuses on something I care about very deeply, consent education. Something that's really interesting about BK's work is that it departs from traditional models of consent education which tend to focus on providing information like definitions of consent, laws about consent, and what it means to have an affirmative standard of consent in Canada. This approach has lots of benefits and providing accurate information about our rights and responsibilities when it comes to sexual relationships is really important. And information is not always enough to change behaviour or to elicit the self-reflection and accountability necessary to actually practice consent. BK's work acknowledges that even when a person does have information about consent, there may still be emotional barriers like fear of rejection, that get in the way of them actually asking for consent in their relationships. For this reason, BK focuses on building skills and strategies to help people withstand these emotional barriers so that they can practice consent even in the face of rejection, vulnerability, emotional pain or awkwardness. I ask BK what they think could be added to consent education to better prepare people to practice consent in real life.

I think in addition to all that good stuff of the classic consent education model, we need a little bit more nuanced because sexual experience is actually quite nuanced. Another part of it would be around sexual scripts and social scripts because our social scripts are already full of indirectness and assumptions so often people don't say they do or do not want a cookie and they won't say "is it one of those healthy cookies that you made? I don't like them." um they'll just say "I'm full. I'm good" and so social scripts are already nuanced and indirect. Sexual scripts on top of that have other you know you know gender expectations and taboos around sex on top of that right so so if we can actually represent these scripts um as they are I think it allows audiences to think we know what we're talking about and that you know we're not just these unicorns out there who are detached from their reality. I think also adult learning principles are important um even if we're talking to young adults thinking about motivation and what matters to them ultimately sometimes actually I think I'm I'm selling something. I'm selling consent. I'm selling the idea of consent I'm selling uh that is cool and it brings them closer to the person they want to be. And ultimately I feel like that is what helps people change behaviour, you know, that something is right and good should shift people's behaviour towards it but unfortunately if people are preoccupied with other things like being cool or being safe or being secure or having a sense of belonging all of those things make the first motivation of like doing what is right and doing what is good less important, so that piece of it I think is also um important. And then you know overall I think we're in a moment in history where this is still very much the beginning of talking about some things that we have not been allowed to talk about like the rampant normalization of non-consent and in this moment of beginning to talk about it we do have to take a more black and white approach, we do have to take simpler messages and amplify them so that the conversation the other conversations um all the noise can quiet a little bit so that more and more people are listening. And once more people are listening, I think then we have the platform to say the stuff that is more nuanced, that is more gray, that is that requires a little more attention to be paid before people really listen and get it. So I can see how all these things can be added to classic consent education models and it can enrich the conversation and at the same time, it's not always the time. It's sometimes it's a little bit dangerous to bring these up if people are not carefully listening it can sound like we are you know victim-blaming for example.

I mean and also Steph, I also don't know what to do with this sort of culture of greed and abuse and revenge taking and advantage taking and self-interest that it does get again normalized right. Like we see that in a sort of global political realm. We see that in many online spaces and it's really hard at that as those things become more and more commonplace, that the sexual private intimate realm is not also affected you know so I feel like sometimes it's we're advocating for something that is almost counter-culture.

Yeah, something I've really been ruminating on lately that I think you're doing such an insightful job of highlighting when you talk about you know there's so much nuance in the area of sexuality and sometimes there are spaces that can hold that nuance and sometimes it's better to maybe start at a more black and white place and it just it makes me think about how yeah I've just been feeling like we really need to have more language to talk about sexual health and to talk about sexual liberation because I think right now so much of what we have is the language of consent and I also noticed that

when so much gets funnelled through the language of consent, it can make it seem like sexual health is a hair away from sexual assault but really there is so much sex that might meet the standards of consent but it's still not empathetic or communicative or someone's needs and desires are being prioritized in ways that weren't explicitly negotiated. But when we use that language of consent to talk about this incredibly vast realm of sexuality, I think we can run the risk of opening it up to this conversation that consent is gray or like look how complicated it is how will we ever know what really happened? But I think when there is a real question of consent violation you're getting pretty close to the bottom of that hill at that point and that you know consent isn't really the midway point between a horrible experience and great sex yeah like it's a low bar from which to evaluate.

And it's funny right it's hard to decide between like do I put all my efforts into getting everyone to pass and cross and be over this low bar or do I want to shoot you know for loftier goals? Yeah, it's just it's a fine balance.

I would love to dive into a particular concept that you talk about which is called rejection resilience and I'm wondering if you can tell us what that term means and why it's important to cultivate as a consent skill.

Um yeah, I think of it as well literally being resilient in the face of rejection uh or perceived rejection or anticipated rejection uh which for me involves being cognizant and present and able to transform and move through rejection being able to make choices that may bring about rejection like asking for consent and then ultimately to cultivate a kind of self-compassion through rejection. So with rejection versus often what is said is how do I you know how do I live a life that is removed from rejection that's without rejection and then in a greater community kind of way to have a little bit more collective support around rejection. You know rejection is closely related to insecurity and as much as we might be well-meaning, I think culturally and socially there is a kind of a "yuck" effect around insecurity and so especially if it's insecurity that comes from experiencing rejection in the consent world there is not a lot of room to you know be kind to that insecurity that results. But I think if we could be kinder to a very human experience uh of insecurity if we are less "yuckified" by it then the people feeling it might be more likely to stay in rejection as opposed to move on to like revenge or anger or ignoring you know somebody's boundaries.

I remember when I first encountered BK's work, I was so struck by their insight that as consent educators we are actually asking people to open themselves up to something pretty vulnerable. Because asking for consent invites the possibility of hearing "no, I'm not interested" "I don't feel that way" or whatever that rejection might look like. We do a real disservice to people when we pretend that asking for consent is always easy or sexy or whatever slogan might sound good. Sometimes that's true, but sometimes it's awkward or vulnerable or embarrassing. As someone who works at a sexual assault centre, I spend a lot of time thinking about the dynamics of sexual assault and I wanted to hear from BK how they see an emotion like entitlement fitting into this conversation.

Is entitlement sometimes a factor in why someone might struggle to accept rejection?

I think very much so that there is a connection and the dynamic is that they're tangled. um, I think some of the gender privilege that comes with, for example, masculinity. You know that kind of privilege is connected to not knowing you have it, thinking you deserve the privilege as well as what it comes with um that you feel cheated when you don't have the ease and access that comes with that privilege and so that to me is very much connected to entitlement and how it works. And so uh rejection or the entitlement to not be rejected I think is part of the entitlement that we might see connected to sexual assault and sexual violation of all kinds. Entitlement would not expect rejection it's not in other words you know entitlement to someone else's body necessarily exists without the possibility of rejection. I think those two things are like very much connected.

The other piece is that entitlement comes with I think the framework of sex as a commodity, as something that for many people they actually may have been conditioned to believe that sex you know, is something you get, you take and you steal and you take advantage of from somebody else. And so that's a relationship to you know something you want but you'd have to pay for normally or you have to exchange something for you have to work for and so forth as opposed to something else altogether that is not commodified, where it's a conversation of people participating an experience together. But when sex is a commodity it means that if I give something in return, I can have it and that thing I give may be something also tangible but maybe that thing I give is paying for dinner or my time or my willingness to be seen as your partner and so forth. And the other rule that comes with capitalism is uh you can make an exchange for it or if you're smart enough to take it when somebody is not guarding it, then you can also have it. So you know theft and taking advantage is all part of sort of capitalistic ideas that we have. And I mean I'm a deep participant of capitalism, I'm not outside of the system myself at the same time I know that it really shapes my brain and how I think things work. So I think sexual entitlement is very much tied to both capitalism and how we acquire something that we want as well as sort of an insulation away from rejection.

Yeah and I think also what I'm hearing you say is that entitlement basically breeds fragility and that fragility makes it even harder to face rejection or vulnerability. So cultivating cultivating rejection resilience is a way to intervene on entitlement.

That's just so beautifully said yes yeah because entitlement deprives you of the opportunity the expectation and the opportunity to weather through discomfort, to weather through rejection and insecurity. So it does breed fragility, absolutely.

And of course, I also want to acknowledge that rejection is a hard experience for most people I think I don't think it's just a question of like oh rejection is hard for you it's because you are harbouring a sense of entitlement. I think that across the board that's a really vulnerable experience and it's one that we don't get a lot of practice moving through in ways that aren't just kind of like "get over it" like "plenty of fish in the sea" "maybe it'll work out next time" but to really sit in the sort of the comfort and disappointment and vulnerability of that we're not encouraged to do.

So at this point, BK has shared a lot of very good reasons for why everyone could stand to get more comfortable with rejection. But this is easier said than done. For most of us, rejection is a scary feeling that we instinctively try to avoid. I ask BK if they can share some practices that can help a person develop their rejection resilience.

A few I think of the things that I find helpful are quite simple. So one is to expect it, to expect rejection. And that speaks directly to what we've just talked about around entitlement you know um it can happen and it can happen in moments even that they don't feel fair you know to name it and to notice rejection for rejection. And so you know the "plenty of fish in the sea" is often about redirecting your focus somewhere else or saying well you know it's their loss, who wants that anyway um is also to change the story is to say "I'm not actually being rejected! I'm rejecting them because I never liked them in the first place" um and so to not do that instead to name it "I have been rejected. I really wanted that. I was really hoping" and then to have very practically an exit plan.

So an exit plan for when things don't work out. It could be something small like you know walking up to someone and asking for their number and it not working or something huge right. You're applying for a school that you've wanted to go to for your whole life. What is the plan if you don't get it? Now some people for fear of changing their luck or something don't want to think about the possibility of rejection, but it does make that moment of being rejected easier. And the reason is in that moment most of us our brains go into a kind of fight or flight experience because we're feeling threatened.

A rejection that actually touches us, will send us into the so-called panic zone. And in the panic zone, it is very hard to come up with a plan and decide what to say and what to do that are aligned with our values and how we want to be in the world. And so having some sense of what you might say or do helps. And then also to discern between what rejection is and what you might fear it means right. So having somebody tell you that the sexual experience that you just had for example with them and you thought it was amazing and they were like "actually, I didn't really like the x and the y that you did." It does not you know negate every pleasurable experience that you two did have together right. And sometimes we take a small piece of rejection and make it much bigger because it is our greatest fear and so to have a moment to discern that and sometimes that discernment uh needs to be written down for yourself you know getting rejected does not mean like my entire self and my whole life is being rejected. If this is one moment, this moment hurts.

Sometimes I work with clients and I have them repeat that as a verbal cue "this moment hurts" to keep them in this moment. And then the other piece is actually around getting care and receiving care. Those two are two steps: Getting care means you know actually reaching out for help, which is very hard for many of us. And receiving it when it actually comes is also very hard. And some of us have done without receiving care for a very long time. And so receiving care can actually feel extra embarrassing. Many of us will block that but in order to transform it in order to heal because it does hurt after you're hurt um healing is required. Healing often requires receiving that care. So those are some practices.

BK just shared such a practical roadmap for cultivating rejection resilience. I heard six steps that I just want to reiterate to make sure we all got them.

Step one: expect rejection. Rejection is always a possibility because it is a normal part of life.

Step two: be honest and name for yourself when you feel rejected and acknowledge that it sucks.

Step three: have an exit plan. I love BK's point that rejection throws our nervous system into the panic zone and that is a very difficult place from which to make decisions about how to respond well. So have an exit strategy that you can reference in that hard moment.

Step four: right size your perception of rejection this moment hurts and this is just one moment.

Step five: reach out for care and support. Talk to a friend or a loved one about how you're feeling and

Step six: actually be available to receive the support that is offered.

There you have it folks six steps for building rejection resilience in our own lives.

Speaking of practice I know I learn best from hearing stories that illustrate what a concept looks like in real life. BK is a generous storyteller and that is a big part of their education style. I asked BK if they would be willing to share a story that demonstrates what practicing rejection resilience might look like.

Yeah absolutely um I remember not that long ago, maybe you know maybe 10 years ago. So I'm an adult I've been doing consent work I've been doing sex ed for at that time maybe 15 years so I feel it's super comfortable you know around sexual consent stuff I teach it and I work at a camp for the summer as one of the coordinators so I'm supervising counsellors and I'm creating programs and things like that and while at this camp I have a massive crush on another staff member. And we really hit it off and we talk you know any chance we get and at night um after all our work is done, we actually end up walking for hours walking around the camp and sitting on a hill and you know looking at the moon. And this happens all week for a full week.

And we're up to like 3 or 4 just connecting and it feels amazing, it feels magical and it feels so mutual that you know the sexual tension is building and it was beautiful. And so at the end of the first week, I thought you know I would really love to kiss you and that's what I was thinking and then I thought okay if and when the chance is right when we go sit on the hill tonight, I will ask. And I did and because we'd been doing this all week it was so clear to me that uh we had the same feelings and I was expecting like yes and I was expecting kisses to happen soon after this and to my great surprise the person said "um no, I'm not really into that" and I was really taken aback. This was low stakes because I was so sure the answer was going to be yes um so I was super taken aback I did the uh..I kind of laughed a bit because I was amused at how surprised I was.

And then I realized you know my armpits were so sweaty and I was kind of shaking. I felt like just a fool I felt like such a fool and then I had all these you know messages to myself in my brain saying "you think you're all that" you know "who do you think you are?" all these fears started coming through that have I been acting like a fool all this time. So I breathed and I just waited and I said "okay um thanks and I'm sorry if that made you feel uncomfortable" and they said "no it didn't make me feel uncomfortable are you uncomfortable?" and I said "no, no...actually yes, I'm uncomfortable." And that really helped to actually say I'm uncomfortable. Now with this person who was quite comfortable in themselves, I could share that I don't know if I could have shared it you know whoever it was um but in that moment just being there and not disappearing and then, of course, I had that urge to disappear and to never hang out again and not do our midnight walks and just pretend I don't see them. I had that urge and I just recognized it and I thought okay what's my exit plan? Well, how do I be decent here? How do I be the human being that I want to be the full one, not just the part that's hurt? And then it really transformed over the next couple of days you know I still thought they were an amazing person but the sting went away and we continued being friends beyond that.

So that was a low stakes one but I've had high stakes ones too where with an intimate partner that I was you know in love with and wanting to be held after sex for example and not knowing how to say I want to be held when because I felt so vulnerable and so I became belligerent I still remember being becoming quite belligerent and saying and you know using actually my position as a sex educator as somebody who is very articulate around sexuality to say you know "nobody does that. Obviously you're not interested in connection the way I am" and I just came at my partner with all these accusations out of shame again that I needed something that I was ashamed to need and I couldn't receive it even later when she offered it and at that moment I was like "no, I don't need your pity. I don't need it, I'm good" and that took a lot of work. So I talked to a therapist, I wrote, I talked to my friends. I planned a different script. I tried again, still couldn't do it. Did it a few times I'm saying I think I still want to be held and then when it was offered I started to let it in and when I finally actually let her hold me but um not just sort of go through the motions of being held but actually feeling it, something broke and I remember crying because it was just painful to heal us a certain part of me that was tender and hurt and I don't think it was hurt from her, I think it was hurt from a long time ago maybe throughout my life. Anyway, so all that is to say like from that I really learned that healing can be painful and healing is often painful. It's not just you know bubble baths and lavender and you know eating chocolates all night. It really was

trying to go to a place that was scary and trust that I would be okay. So those are two little stories, maybe big stories.

Yeah, thank you so much for sharing those stories and role modelling what it looks like to be in that process and also that it is complicated and messy for everyone and it reminds me of a quote I heard once and I'm so sorry that I can't remember who said it but that you know healing isn't about feeling good, it's about feeling more. Yeah just about a healing experience it can be to let in vulnerability like rejection but how that also paves the way to let in experiences like connection like having your needs met like intimacy in the same way that numbing out one side of that equation is probably going to numb out the other one too. This sentiment was actually shared by Prentis Hemphill, a somatics practitioner with the organization Generative Somatics.

I just want to pause here. Wow BK has offered such powerful analysis, practices, and personal stories to demonstrate why building rejection resilience is an essential skill for healthy, respectful intimate relationships. However, rejection is not a one-sided experience. It requires another party to be courageous and to name their truth and their boundaries by doing the rejecting just like BK's friend did in that first story. And this could be really hard especially when we live in a culture where rejecting someone is often equated with being mean or hurtful and especially when gender socialization teaches feminine folks in particular that they are responsible for taking care of other people's feelings and for being nice. I asked BK about how we might build resilience to feelings of guilt when setting boundaries or delivering rejection, and where that oversensitive guilt reflex so many of us have comes from.

It's something I personally relate to and I hear from a lot of people um who say that consent culture and consent practice is so great and important and they wish the world was like that. Except what that when they try to practice, they feel bad. So it's connected to setting boundaries, stating needs, stating wants, and also tending to your own self. When they do those things, a kind of guilt comes up. And so ideally you know the guilt doesn't arise when it's a situation where you're simply setting your boundaries. But um the truth is for many of us it does. So guilt resilience to me is about being resilient in the face of the guilt that arises with you know goal eventually to have that kind of guilt reflex recalibrated because it was hyper calibrated for a reason for most of us and I don't want to get into too much you know sort of pop psychology but it does have a lot to do with codependence. It does have a lot to do with the school of femininity that many of us have been raised in. You know the idea of taking on what other people are feeling, perhaps even prioritizing them prioritizing other people over our own personhood.

Yeah, absolutely I think that's such a good point. This was another thing like that when I first heard you raised it really made me think about what a big gap that is in the way we talk about consent and the skills that are really needed there.

When I think about rejection resilience and guilt resilience in relationship with each other, I'm wondering if you see there being some normative gender scripts that are mapping onto that interplay or are those things equally present no matter how you're socialized. Yeah, I wonder if you could speak to that a bit.

Um yeah, I do think I do think there's a lot of interplay and that while I talk to many male-identified folks who also feel a sense of guilt that's oversensitive and lots of female-identified folks who say rejection is hard. I think the schools that we go to I like to call it just the schools of masculinity and schools of femininity you know because regardless of what your gender identity is often we're socialized in one of those schools. I think those schools actually breed us and groom us into roles where rejection is more linked to failing masculinity and not being accommodating and not being liked and not being pleasant and not being wonderful i.e not being the person that other people want you to be, being a failure of femininity.

You know school of masculinity teaches its students to be bigger, to appear bigger than they are which means that in the face of rejection, you should not shrink down and feel the rejection. You should maybe puff up and get angry and get revenge and make sure this doesn't happen. And the school of femininity often tells us to shrink down and be smaller in the face of stress right and so the guilt reflex is connected to that you know less of you please and more of other people. Whereas the you know rejection is about more of you and less of other people. So together it's sort of the perfect storm I think and I think the two binary gender options are both limiting you know. They take away some part or full humanity and so the school of masculinity breeds fragility and the school of femininity breeds over responsibility.

So it also tells us that you know the reward of being over responsible is approval. It's approval from students from the school of masculinity especially and keeping masculinity intact is the reward of the school of doing masculinity right. But fragility you know of that comes from the fact that it can always come shattering down and so it's an endless vigilance around keeping masculinity intact. So I think yeah it's deeply connected those two you know normative gender scripts and who has a harder time building rejection resilience and who has a harder time building guilt resilience.

This conversation on guilt resilience reminds me of some of the nuanced and complementary differences between the field of sexual health which is BK's world and the field of sexual violence prevention, which is my world and what we do at SACE.

I'm so moved by this vision for a world where everyone has the opportunity to discover their boundaries and communicate them without fear or embarrassment and I personally feel the value of divesting from the notion that we are responsible for how our boundaries make other people feel. And I am also thinking about the tremendous pressure on femme folks, in particular, to say no well enough or be the

breaks in sexual or intimate situations even when there are dynamics of entitlement, coercion, or abuse of the power at play.

I asked BK how we can talk about guilt resilience in a way that is sensitive to the fact that women and femmes are often unfairly scrutinized for the ways they did or did not express boundaries, especially in situations of sexual violence. BK helps me understand that guilt resilience falls under the umbrella of sexual health skills and is a powerful area for personal growth but it is not a sexual assault prevention strategy. That's because sexual assault does not happen because someone did not set their boundaries well enough, it happens because someone chose to cross the boundaries of another person and that is never ever the fault of the person who was harmed. Here's what they had to say about that nuance.

I think you know I relate to what you're saying in terms of this is something I want to do for myself because the pain of compromising my boundaries, the pain of living with this kind of overactive guilt is not good for me. So yeah I think it's important not to mistaken that to mean if we do this piece then we address you know the causes of sexual assault. This is actually just a companion piece that we all have work to do because of the limiting conditioning that we're all a part of.

This conversation has got me thinking about the role of community in helping one another cultivate resilience in the face of vulnerable experiences like guilt or rejection. I'll admit that there have been times where a friend has told me that they were rejected, maybe by a romantic prospect, or a friend, or a job opportunity, and I've said things like "well it's their loss" "you're so great" "forget about them, they obviously don't know a good thing when they see it." And this comes from a place of good intention and honestly believing that my friend is awesome but listening to BK, it occurs to me that these responses actually don't really help anyone grow or develop the skills that we've been talking about, instead, they kind of blame or diminish the party who was just being honest and setting boundaries. And these responses also don't hold my friend in their pain and disappointment.

So I ask BK how we can support each other to build resilience in the face of difficult experiences like rejection.

Yeah, I think quite simple a) to tell the truth you know um because the other ones are less than truthful. So the truth might be you were rejected, you're in pain, you failed, you're disappointed, you're hurt. So tell the truth somehow and pair that with "I care about you, I love you, I'm here" um "I know how much you wanted that and I will sit with you through this moment." And so sometimes the the the impetus around you know "you're better off without them" or "they weren't good enough for you" or any sort of thing that puts something else down and changes the narrative is not only about the friend we're supporting it's also about our own discomfort with sitting with somebody who's in pain and how simple it is to say "you're not in pain, you're better off! In fact, let's go celebrate!" So it's about for us you know it comes down to the same sort of guidelines as a holding space right for somebody so you can be aware

of your own discomfort and put that in one box but also create another box. In that box, you are just there for your friend and so the two things that I mentioned have to be paired right? The painful truth and the love. And so often our friends know that they're lovable when they achieve and they're accomplishing great things and we're happy for them and it's easy to know our love and our care in those moments.

And for many of us, some of the earlier life trauma actually is around "I'm not lovable unless I do great things" or "I'm helpful or I'm amazing and everyone loves me that's the only time my friends or anyone else will also love me." And so pairing the hard truth with the love is the way to go.

Hmm yeah, that's such a profound point that so often these platitudes that we might offer telling ourselves that it's for our friend are actually projections of our own discomfort with rejection and vulnerability in these experiences that we too are probably quite afraid of. It makes me think of this little animated video that Brene Brown made on empathy. And the point of the video is that we can rarely fix each other's problems, but what can alleviate that suffering is just connection and that's something we can offer in that moment.

This conversation really has me wondering what it would look like to live in a world where everyone was comfortable with rejection, failure, and vulnerability and where we supported one another through those experiences. I asked BK what kind of future these practices could lead us to.

I think I mean aside from being kinder to ourselves and kinder to each other, I think ultimately the beautiful thing is it would be more modest and what honesty buys is a sense of peace because then there's less need to project, there's less need to present in a certain way or to front in a certain way. You know it's kind of like that feeling that folks have when they can stop performing you can let out some air and to know not only that it's okay to not perform but you're still all right. You're still loved, you're still worth something, you're still embraceable when you're not performing. I think it's just it's sort of a collective sigh, a collective shoulders down kind of moment.

I just got such a powerful image when you talked about it being a sigh, shoulders down moment. <Laugh> It makes me think of that just that ability to be like right-sized in our experience not like inflated not deflated but just moving through the world with like an authenticity.

Well BK, I could just talk to you forever. Likewise, I really enjoy talking with you. I also want to be respectful of your time, however. So I wonder if before we wrap this up, you could just let folks know like where they could learn more about you or how they could follow your work.

Absolutely. I can be found always at fluidexchange.org or g and feel free to reach out. I always reply and I pride myself on making great referrals if ever those are needed. Yeah, that's how I can be found.

Okay well yeah thank you so much for being in this conversation today and your approach to all of this work is just so stimulating and exciting and expansive.

You're so welcome thanks for having me and have a great day you.

Thank you, listeners, for tuning in to this conversation I hope you learned as much as i did from BK. You can learn more about their work by visiting their website www.fluidexchange.org.

You can learn more about SACE and the work we do around consent education and supporting those impacted by sexual violence at www.sace.ca.

I'll put both those links in the show notes.

This project was made possible by editors Kendra Cowley, co-producers Saba Kidane, Annette Klevgaard and Lena Betker. And our music was created by the talented Bobby Prescott.

