

Queer Suicidality, Conflict, and Repair

Morgan M. Page and Sarah Schulman

EDITORS' NOTE: Queer Conversations has been a staple of the journal since its inception. On October 10, 2016, *QED* hosted its first live Queer Conversation at Le Cagibi, in the Mile End neighborhood of Montréal. This conversation featured Morgan M. Page, a Montréal-based trans writer and artist with Sarah Schulman, a New York-based writer and LGBTQ rights activist. In this Queer Conversation, Page and Schulman read the eulogies that they gave at the funeral of Bryn Kelly, a friend of both who took her own life in January 2016. Prior to the event, the Facebook event page included information about several suicide prevention resources including Suicide Action Montréal, Trans Lifeline, and the Trevor Project. Because it was a live event, we decided to purposely include in the published version the engagement among Page, Schulman, and the audience. We were heartened by the turnout and the deeply engaged audience participation that ensued. We hope, as was noted by Schulman and Page toward the end of the event, that this conversation about Bryn Kelly's life and death will motivate us all to reconsider conflict, care, and community.

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MORGAN M. PAGE (MMP): I'm Morgan. I'll more fully introduce myself in a minute. I just wanted to, like, say hello and get the attention of the room and let you all know that this event is Queer Conversations: Suicidality, Conflict, and

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Repair. Obviously, this is a very emotionally loaded subject for probably most of us, right? So, if you feel like you need to leave at any point, don't feel bad, just, you know, do what you need to do to take care of yourself. We've also posted, albeit not a comprehensive list, a small list of resources for follow-up afterwards, if you feel like you need counseling or anything like that. I also wanted to begin by saying by acknowledging the fact that not only is it Indigenous Peoples' Day today, we're also, obviously, I hope obviously, on occupied indigenous land, the traditional territories, I believe but I may be wrong, of the Haudenosaunee and Algonquin, and any conversation that is about conflict on occupied territories really shouldn't ignore the fact that these conflicts are happening on conflicted land, right? That makes sense to everybody? So, I want to make sure that that was kind of the first thing we broached and hopefully it will also continue to be part of the conversation that we have later this evening. So, should we begin? Are we, are we good?

SARAH SCHULMAN (SS): Hi everyone. I just want to say I'm really, really happy to be here with all of you. Morgan and I met in an airport and we clicked like crazy with a beautiful conversation and the beginning of a really authentic friendship that I'm really honored to be part of and I'm so happy that we're doing this together today. Thank you.

TOM NAKAYAMA (TN): Hi, my name is Tom Nakayama. I'm at Northeastern University in Boston, and, with Chuck Morris who is at Syracuse University in New York, we co-edit a journal called *QED*. I'll pass around some information about the journal. One of the regular features of the journal—the journal aims to bring together academics and activists on issues of GLBTQ worldmaking—has been what we call “Queer Conversations,” which pairs diverse queer worldmakers for an exchange of ideas. This evening we are pleased to stage this queer conversation with Sarah Schulman and Morgan Page. And so, to begin this queer conversation, I wanted to ask them about their experiences at Bryn's funeral. Do you want to introduce yourselves first?

SS: I'm Sarah Schulman and that's Morgan Page [laughter].

MMP: So, if you don't know us already [laughter].

SS: So, I thought that I would tell a little bit about—a little background—to the eulogy that I wrote and maybe Morgan would like to do the same and let you in on what was happening for each of us, and then we're gonna share our eulogies

with you. And just to let you know, mine is 17 minutes long, so just keep that in mind. So, let me just start.

After Bryn Kelly killed herself, a group of her close friends—closest friends—who were in New York organized the funeral for her. This group included her partner Gaines, myself, and Kelli Dunham, Anna, Alice—a little bunch of us that organized the event and the decision was to made to have it at St. John the Divine Cathedral, which is an iconic enormous cathedral in New York City because Bryn was a church person. We had gone to some other churches that were more in her religious tradition but they wanted to charge us and St. John the Divine felt that they weren't doing enough to support the trans community and so they gave us the space. So, the decision was made that I would give the central—a large—eulogy and so I wrote the draft and I submitted to the other people who were organizing the event. And we had about three rounds of corrections and comments on the phone and through email and then we met as a group in person to go over the text one more time, and at that point we read the guidelines for people dealing with public events related to suicide and particularly the guidelines for describing the way that people killed themselves and what we felt that the guidelines said was not to give people instructions on how to kill themselves, that the guidelines said do not say, you know, *take this number of this drug and mix it with this amount of that*. But that saying the way that the person killed themselves was not the same as telling people how to kill themselves, and the way that she had killed herself was such a big part of the experience. After all, a number of us spent a long time in her house with her body directly after she died. So, the group went through and changed a lot of things, we all agreed on the text, then a few other people vetted the text. Morgan read the text and also the minister at St. John's, which is an Episcopal church. So, then we had the service and about 700 people showed up, many of whom did not know Bryn and when I gave the eulogy—sitting in the front it was mostly women and then Ted Kerr sitting up in the front. So, there was Ted, there was me, there was Naomi who had been Bryn's roommate, Eva, her girlfriend whose name I don't remember, Morgan, and then Red Durkin. Those were the speakers and we were all seated together in the front. So, when I went up to give my talk—like I said, it was 17 minutes long—and I really couldn't tell, I really couldn't see, the audience, but I could hear Red crying while I was talking. And when I came down from the podium I passed her and she was going to the bathroom and I could see that she was crying. Then I went back and sat next to Naomi and when the service was over Naomi turned to me and hugged me and said *thank you for your words*. Her girlfriend, Eva, and her girlfriend hugged me. Morgan I knew had already read it and told me that that was exactly what she wanted from the service. So as far

as I was concerned, the people that were closest to Bryn, this was something that they could feel good about.

There was one person who felt that it wouldn't be good for Bryn's family to hear the way that she killed herself, and he was opposed to me describing that. However, after the service, Bryn's sister said that it was the most powerful thing she had ever heard, so it turned out that that was something that was meaningful to them. Anyway, I got about ten messages from people telling me that they appreciated the honesty, and a few people telling me that they had recommitted to staying alive. But the next day there were people online and on Facebook, who were not close to Bryn but who really objected to my eulogy, and very, very, very much so objected. So, I just wanted to say how I understand the objections, what I understood them to be, and how I processed them or understood them.

So, one of the biggest objections was that people said that they had come to the funeral to feel better, and for me, one of the things I realized, what I should have realized before, is that I come from the AIDS generation, I come from the ACT-UP generation, and I have been to many, many political funerals. And the concept of the political funeral is present in my mind. It never occurred to me that there are one or two generations that had never experienced a political funeral, and didn't recognize it for what it was. Now that I realize that I should have contextualized that at the top. This was a misunderstanding on my part. The other thing was that I think there were a lot of people who are not used to being live in a room with 700 queer people. I think there's a generation of people who have not had that experience before and that's very overwhelming. And I also think that there were people who were so young—and also that because they haven't had the AIDS experience—even with the level of suicide that is present in our community, there were quite a few people there who had either never been to a funeral at all, or had only been to, like, an elder relative or something like that and they were used to a kind of nicety of a formal, traditional funeral, so that thing that for me is very natural, which is to use the funeral as a gathering place to talk about the things that are really going on in our lives, some people felt that that was inappropriate. So that, I would say, was the major arena of objection.

Another arena of objection was the assumption that some people made that I had just gone rogue, that I had just gone up there and just said all this shit. People didn't realize that we had all vetted it, that it had been discussed, that the minister had read it in advance. It was interesting that this assumption was made. Not one person asked me, *what was the discussion, what was the prep?* Nothing. So, there was just this assumption that I had done something terrible on my own and all of that, which is also something that—this has to do with the book I've just written, which is *how come people don't ask questions*. Why do

we just assume the worst? Why don't we just ask the person? You know, and part of it has to do with us not being in person with each other and I think that's one of the reasons we don't ask.

The final objection had to do, I think, with religion. So, I'm Jewish, and I'm very culturally Jewish, but I'm not religious. This was in an Episcopal church and there's this concept of ascension. Bryn was religious. And so, one of the criticisms was, *why did you have to say her death was a waste? Why couldn't you say: "Bryn you did the best you could"?* And the reason I couldn't say that is because, for me, Bryn is not addressable. Because, for me, her death means that she's gone. I do not have a religious concept of her looking down on us or hearing me. And this is something that is really—and this is something that I didn't understand until I heard the objection—and it's just a cultural, religious framework that we each come from. Some of us have rejected them, some of us haven't, and for some people that was very offensive on those terms.

So, that's what happened there. But in the end I felt like our community of people who were closest to Bryn were united by the service, and I do feel good about my participation, so that was my experience there.

MMP: Just to back up a little, before I go into my little spiel, for those of you who don't know, Bryn Kelly was a prominent trans woman artist living and working in Brooklyn, New York. She was 35 years old, she was a theater maker, she was a fantastic writer. You may have read some of her blogs without even knowing it because she often used anonymity and constructed characters as an online form of writing, so she's the Hussy online, which if you've ever gotten to read is incredible, one of my favorite pieces of writing ever. She also wrote about her experiences as an HIV-positive trans woman accessing social services through another blog called Party Bottom, which was also wildly popular. You may have seen posts from it a couple years ago called "How to Be a Good Roommate to Someone with HIV" that went viral, it was quite large.

I guess I'll start by acknowledging that we are in the middle of a suicide epidemic within queer and trans communities that reaches across all segments of our community and has very disproportionate impacts on the most marginalized in our community, particularly indigenous people who often cross over with our communities and in Canada have the highest suicide rates of any group as well as black and other people of color. It is a large and extremely sensitive topic that we can't possibly hope to unravel in one evening but we're hoping that through discussing one person's suicide this can be fruitful as we move forward to future events which, hopefully, there won't be too many of. I've been very active within the trans community within the past

ten years and Bryn's suicide was not first suicide of someone close to me that I've seen. Suicides happen very regularly within the close community around me. Whether they're friends I have, coworkers, or community members I've shared space with, they happen with an astounding regularity that contributes to many of us who see this happening feeling hopeless and ourselves feeling suicidal ideation, right? So on January 14, when I heard about Bryn's death, I was actually on the tail end of one of my deepest periods of depression and suicidality that I've ever gone through in my life, which was about four months long and was the cumulative effect of grief and trauma including seeing many of the bright and incredible people that I know take their own lives through suicide, and also including the sudden death of my boyfriend, Jack, in 2013, and the deaths of about half a dozen people since then that I've been close with. Bryn's death and the pain caused for so many, particularly her close friends and partner, were a wakeup call to me about my own suicidal ideation and escalating behaviors. In fact, when I read Sarah's eulogy for the first time—I was part of the organizing committee for the memorial but I was living up here in Montréal and Gaines, Bryn's partner, emailed it to me and said "What do you think of this?" I didn't know that there were conversations happening about this piece. I was just like, oh, what do I think of this? So, I read it and the effect on me was very immediate, that I felt that it dissuaded all of the suicidal ideation that I'd been feeling for me personally and I really respected what a bold statement it was as you all will hear shortly. I did have some objections whereas you know, like, while I think this is great and I support you on this with going forward on this, however . . . [laughter] there are, like, one or two little things that I think may be not appropriate for this space and this time so let's, you know, edit. [laughter] And that's when I was told about the conversations that were happening and contacted by all the other people in the organizing committee that was doing this and we had a lot of intense discussions about the purpose of what Gaines, Bryn's partner, called a "political sermon." He kept referring to us to stop calling it a eulogy and to start calling it a political sermon because that's what it is, which is, I think, a really smart way of summing it up.

Anyway, through all of this process, I was travelling down practically every couple of weeks to help with the organizing and just be supportive and I was asked by other people in the organizing committee if I would write a eulogy myself so that there would be a more "traditional" eulogy that would happen, and so that's what I did, and I'm gonna read it to you in a little bit.

I think the—I also want to say about the event, so for those of you who haven't been there, the cathedral of St. John the Divine is the third largest Christian Church in the world. It's gigantic. If you look up at the ceiling there's practically clouds, like it's so big and it was full, as Sarah said, with 700 people,

many of whom didn't know Bryn, which was a very interesting thing to negotiate emotionally to be in a place of mourning and to have to interact with people who were mourning someone that they didn't know. But something that was very, that wasn't new to me because in 2012 I was also involved in the organizing for the funeral of trans activist Kyle Scanlon in Toronto, who, I don't know if any of you are familiar with his work, but basically if you're a trans person in Canada, you owe him so much in terms of how you're able to access hormones, how you're able to access shelters, very basic things that, in some ways, we're still fighting over today. We wouldn't be as far without Kyle, and I felt that the situations were very similar. Anyway, it was a big, weirdly alienating, large event that was very anxiety producing in the ways that queer and trans events are often are anxiety producing. I'm sure there are some of you today who are having internal freak outs because someone you had an argument with on the Internet two years ago is sitting in the back of the room, and you can just feel their presence. I know I feel that way. [laughter] Just me? Ok.

But um, anyway, I think one of things I found really interesting to the response to Sarah's piece—and we'll probably get more into it after we actually go into the pieces—was that those who were reacting to the piece online who had not seen it being read in person had missed an incredible amount of nuance and tone to how the piece was actually delivered. In person, when I walked up to Sarah in the cathedral, there were tears in her eyes from the moment that I walked up and throughout the entire eulogy, or as Gaines called it, political sermon, it was very emotional. And to me that—I really felt like those emotions were hard to discount and that they were important to the experience of the eulogy. Of course, the words are very important and words matter but also an idea of where it was coming from felt very important and really affected me. My speech went off without a hitch. People loved it [laughter]. People still share it on the Internet. [laughter] Not to rub it in. [laughter] But I guess those are my introductory thoughts on this exciting topic that we have to share with you in a moment.

TN: OK, so why don't both of you read your eulogies.

SS: OK, and then we can open it up.

MMP: Would you like to go first?

SS: Sure. Relax. [laughter]

I had the honor of being Bryn's creative writing teacher at the Lambda Literary Retreat. As a writer, she was an organic intellectual, funny, deep and her

work grappled with things that matter. Our relationship evolved into a loving, enriching friendship—I called on her a number of times and she was always there for me. She knew that I loved and respected her.

I am not a religious person and I do not believe in an afterlife. Instead, it has been my experience that heaven and hell take place on earth. And so, our lives provide us with opportunities for depth of meaning and understanding IF we face and deal with difficulties honestly. It is that uncomfortable, sad and overwhelming work that can bring us to the revelations we need to survive, thrive, and be accountable to others. For this reason, I approach this earthly catastrophe with openness. This tragic waste of our beloved friend, Bryn, is a challenge we have to face. Many people today will tell the story of her life. Bryn Kelly's warmth, her genius, her deep, soft beauty, and kindness. But I want to take this time to talk, in detail, about Bryn Kelly's death. I want to make a contribution to this ongoing conversation about how to end the terrible idealized fantasy of suicide that has overtaken our community. A falsity of distorted thinking, that has become, not only an option, but in fact an expectation.

Several suicide attempts ago, Bryn ended up in a terrible Brooklyn hospital where she was told that they only had room for her on the men's ward. They also confused her HIV medications, endangering her ability to continue her regimen. And instead of administering her hormones, they gave her Depo-Provera, a long-lasting form of birth control. These kinds of cruelties, and acts of hostile, dehumanizing indifference do not make a person want to ask for help. In fact, like all forms of shunning they exclude people from help. Then, about a year and a half ago, Kelli Dunham called and told me that Bryn had taken an intentional overdose, and that Gaines and Nogga—ever loving and vigilant—had found her checked into a flea-bag hotel in Bushwick. Arguably a better choice than a men's ward at a bad hospital.

Gaines and Nogga and I agreed that they would take her in a car and meet me at the NYU emergency room. I stood outside with a wheelchair, they pulled up, and we swooped into the ER with Bryn groggy and hovering on unconsciousness. In addition to the pills, she had drunk a lot of beer. NYU triaged her in eight minutes. She was treated with kindness, decency, and care. Her friends and partner were respected and engaged with support and care. They brought her to a beautiful private room, placed a full-time nurse in the room. And we—her community—started the process of repair.

A few events: Gaines wisely asked the doctor if NYU had a Trans Patient Advocate. Bryn became very upset. "Gaines," she admonished, as though he had done something wrong, when actually he did exactly the right thing. She was angry that she had been revealed as trans—even though she had just tried to kill herself—because she'd already learned the hard way, many times over, that this

exposure, in an institutional setting, could lead to more pain than she could bear. The doctor, with recognition and responsibility, acknowledged that NYU did not have a Trans Advocate, but that they should have one.

I then tried to phone her therapist. The public clinic she attended for therapy was a disorganized bureaucracy with no provision for emergency contacts. I was given an endless run around, for hours. Finally, Kelli Googled the whole staff list until she found someone's home phone, and in that manner I got to talk to the therapist directly. It did not take long for me to realize that she was completely inadequate to the task. She was young, inexperienced, had never had a suicidal patient before, and didn't even bother to come to the hospital. The situation was clear. Despite all the love in the world from her friends and partner, Bryn Kelly had not been getting the quality of professional care that she needed in order to solve the pain of her life enough to fully live it.

Some hours later, Bryn beckoned me to her bedside. She was soft, vulnerable, and open. She held my hand. "Why did I do this?" she asked. "Why did this happen?" We started talking. She told me that she had become so angry that she couldn't think of anything but hurting the people close to her. As she described it, she experienced small events: normative conflict or normative frustrations in close relationships as these hugely threatening, catastrophic assaults. This anger was not focused on hostile institutions, inadequate services, or incompetent and indifferent practitioners. It was tunneled into anger at the people who loved her and a desire to punish them. I would call this process "cumulative pain"—a combination of anxiety and oppression. Where the pain of one's life becomes focused onto the person or people right in front of you, the ones who are there to be blamed because they love you. And therefore the pain gets expressed by destroying these people, these relationships and ultimately one's own life, thereby leaving the exterior structures of oppression fully intact, unburdened, and unaddressed.

After recovering medically, Bryn spent some time on the psychiatric service at NYU. I visited her there and she seemed to feel it was a beneficial experience. But when she was discharged, I was concerned. Bryn's doctors wanted her to go into a program to deal with her substance use and she did not want to go. That is when I knew, truly, that this cycle was not over.

This time, when Bryn finally took her own life, the path to destruction engaged these same unresolved issues. She had been doing very, very well. The last time I saw her she was energetic, engaged, caring, fun. We danced outside Saint Mark's Church to a Christmas band. Just two days before her death we planned a group dinner at my house. Friends were commenting on how happy she seemed, that her medication seemed to be working. How well she was doing,

Then, as in every person's life, Bryn had a normative conflict with her partner. But the pattern of trauma combined with anxiety, and long experience with depression, of course kicked in. And because no method had been developed in her life of what to do when it kicked in—she became very distressed and began to destroy. She drank a bottle of vodka. And I want to say here, that no one I know has ever killed themselves sober. She wrote an extremely angry and punitive suicide note that expressed a kind of tunnel vision of rage at the people closest to her. And the note was so focused on hurting other people that it contained no real recognition that she was actually ending her own life. Her note showed an interior logic, way out of sync with what events were actually occurring in the exterior world. Many times I have wished that she could have spent the day in 12-step meetings, called her sponsor, and asked her friends and doctors for support to hospitalize herself back to the positive environment at NYU. But, because of alcohol and depression, the fact that these conflicts were entirely resolvable eluded her completely. That there were many options eluded her. While she did invoke the many suicides and deaths of trans and queer women in recent years, listing their names in her letter, it was only to momentarily claim in her rage and pain, that ultimately these deaths had no impact—which is the opposite of the truth. These deaths have devastated us and, clearly, they contributed to Bryn taking her own life.

No, the drunken, anxious, tunnel vision of her letter was a singular, one-note designed to hurt a few people. The ones who loved her the most. In fact, the note assumed that when Gaines came home from work, and found the door barricaded, and discovered her dead, he would call the police, who would be the ones to deal with her body and the death scene. But in fact, Gaines forced the door open, saw that she had hung herself, and then he and Nogga cut down the body, cut off the noose, and tried to resuscitate her through chest compressions and mouth to mouth. But she was dead. Then they called the paramedics who laid her out on the floor of the front room.

For the rest of the night, those of us who came over were confronted by Bryn's corpse on the floor of the apartment her arms extended and her hands open. I sat with her body for hours, dealing with the police, the detectives, the medical examiner and then the transport workers. Identifying the body. At each interview level, to the officer, to the homicide detective, to the medical examiner, I said that same sentence. "She was a wonderful person, with a beautiful partner and many caring friends." "So, what happened here?" the police would ask. "She didn't have a system for tolerating frustration," I said. I signed the body identification form. And in that time, I spent most of the night looking at her lying dead on the floor. This was not her suicide fantasy—lying on the floor with a police detective scotch taping her noose to her leg, her loved ones crushed, her

sisters and community threatened by her example. The policeman stepping on her bed with his shoes.

There were many acts of kindness that night. I particularly remember Elias volunteering to call Bryn's mother, and tell her what had happened. He had a deep, caring sense of responsibility, kindness in the way he communicated this terrible information. I saw Nogga and Jax gently clean up after Bryn's body had been removed by the police transport workers. Nogga's loving mother and sister, making tea. Dr. Zill Goldstein, who Bryn called "the only doctor who ever listened to me," giving her history, privately, to the medical examiner. And all the friends who came to love Gaines, to hold him, to be truly with him and to give him all the love that he well deserves. This is what we do when our friends take their own lives. These are the details of those consequences. This is what suicide really does. It causes nothing but despair. It does not get revenge. It ends a life filled with love and promise. It deprives the world, and it causes more death. Just as the suicides of queer and trans women before contributed to Bryn's death, we must make sure that Bryn's suicide does not continue to cause the deaths of others. Please stop this idealized fantasy that suicide will satisfy any need, when all it does is cause more pain. We must stop killing ourselves. It is an act of violence, helping to create a violent future.

After her body was finally removed, we started the well-worn, modern ritual—now habitual—of calling people around the world so that they would understand what had happened, before they saw it on Facebook. We all spent the next day taking care of people, letting them know gently, and in person, that Bryn had taken her own life. As I had this multitude of conversations, each one causing pain, I kept thinking back to that time in NYU, Bryn in her hospital bed, holding my hand, asking "Why did this happen?" Finally, late in the day, I talked to Morgan Page on the phone, and she illuminated something very important for me. Morgan pointed out that Bryn had never stopped seeking a solution. That she had repeatedly attempted to find treatment. She went to many different kinds of clinics, and engaged a wide range of therapists and doctors. She tried enrolling in many different kinds of classes. She constantly tried to find a way out of the problem and into her own real and rich life. And then I realized the obvious. Bryn Kelly died, not because of a lack of community—she had a wealth of community. She died because she was poor and could not afford the sophisticated level of treatment and support that someone so intelligent and complex needed in order to fully live her life.

I now believe that Bryn Kelly died of poverty, of lack of services. That had she been able to be sure of secure housing, had she been able to enter an immersive, individuated, full-service environment that recognized and valued

her, as we here all recognize and value her, perhaps her life could have been saved. But without it, she could not get to a place where the frustration provoked by normative difficulty did not become an emblem of all the grotesque institutional oppression and erasure and burden that she had been asked to bear.

I do not view Bryn's death as a failure of our community, but rather as a wound on our loving, caring yet fragile community assaulted regularly by a punitive and indifferent system. We must stop destroying ourselves, while letting the institutions that are hurting us, stand, unopposed. In this case, our love could not overwhelm that institutional cruelty and abandonment. But that does not diminish how much we all give each other, and the beauty and the power and the wealth of how much we all love and care. We have to stay alive, and fight like hell for the living.

MMP: So here's my eulogy. Much easier to get through, I promise.

Of all the hussies in this whole rotten, hussified world, this Hussy was my favorite. Even before I knew her personally, I was obsessed with Bryn. Her pseudonymous writing struck a chord of recognition in me that I'd never felt before. It was as though she were writing directly to me, a feeling I think many of us here shared in one way or another.

Bryn and I were, in her words, "pretend rivals/frenemies or whatever." I've never met anyone else I felt so directly in competition with, not only artistically, but also often for the attentions of the very same trans mascs. The first time we dated the same man, I was green with envy. I thought, in horror, "she's prettier than me." In a short, two-year fit of jealousy I even grew out my undercut to compete with her voluptuous locks. And by her own admission the jealousy was a two-way street. I was the Eve Harrington nipping at her heels. But for all of this, our friendship never turned sour, as it so easily could have.

Bryn's wit was a rapid-fire mixture of high and low brow—a complex bricolage seamlessly pairing Dolly Parton with Preciado, Halberstam with Stevie Nicks. Around her more than anyone else I felt like I needed to keep on my toes—to step up my game as an artist, as an activist, and as a fellow MTF4FTM masc hunter.

Many knew her as a party girl, as a performer, as a hairstylist, and as a writer—an aloof and sometimes capricious social butterfly. But to some of the luckiest of us, Bryn meant so much more. Her presence in the world, as the first trans woman I've ever met whose whole thing was so close to my whole thing, made me feel like it was possible for me to exist in the world uncompromising.

To those who were close to her, Bryn was not just the brilliant raconteur and beautiful artist. She was a keen listener and emotional support. In 2013, when

my boyfriend died suddenly, it was Bryn who called the ambulance and stayed up for hours dealing with both the cops, who didn't want to take the call, and my own shell-shocked reaction. Throughout the most painful thing I have ever experienced, she showed me incredible kindness. It takes a lot of hurt to make high-riding bitches like us, but that same hurt endowed her with a deep well of compassion.

When all was said and done that night, she wrote these words to me, which I think are relevant for all of us here this evening. "So, this is going to be hell, I can assure you. But you will get through it, because you are strong. End Oprah-talk." Thank you.

TN: What we would like to do next is to open the conversation to all of you, if you have questions or comments you want to ask either or both of them.

MMP: Or just want to say.

TN: Or just comments you want to say.

QI: This is for Sarah. It's Sarah, right? There's a couple of things that you mention in your political sermon that I understand your point of view—I understand what you wrote—from your position or from the other side, like as a friend so close from Bryn and for so long, and I've been helping her for so long, I can understand what you went through yourself and what brought you to write all of that.

I've been suicidal for 25 years—actually right now I'm going through a crisis, with the help of some friends. And I think it's interesting what you said, but if I may, I think there's a misunderstanding about what being suicidal means. Some people have it as an obsession, some people it's revenge, some people it's sickness, but it is more than—you said she didn't have a system to deal with frustration. It's true if we see it at a binary level, but it's so much more complex for some people, like myself. It's an obsession. It's like I live with it every day. Every day if you give me the choice between death and life, I will choose death. But I stand up and live because that's the option that I think is relevant, because it's the good thing to do. But this doesn't mean that this is something that my soul is torn about. Sometimes it can also be physical, it can be cognitive. It can be something that I'm missing from the youth that I cannot even . . . ah, my English is not perfect so I don't have all the words to say so. I think it's way more than that for Bryn. I understand the revenge that Bryn had, that somewhere it was just a way to yell this suffering that she couldn't explain or express and that the only way that she found was to hurt because she was so hurt

but I don't think it was just because of the system. And I understand the goal is to discourage youth to kill themselves, and it's true it's a violence process but I do think that the love—I really, really think that Bryn could not make it to 25 years old if she did not have all that love. I already told a best friend before a suicide attempt I wanted to do, “if I did please cry, but remember I'd been successful to get through that until that time.” Because for me, I didn't even know I could get to that point. And since that day, I'm still alive, and I'm like “oh, I'm alive, whoa that's awesome.” But for a suicidal person it's like a sickness, it's like cancer. Every day you make it, it's wild. So, I don't feel like it's a waste—it's not a giving up. It's the end of a battle, yes, and it's hurtful for everyone around, but that person had fought for so many years, that person had failed and succeeded but that 35 years? She made it. And that for me, it's awesome. So, every time someone dies from suicide, I cry because it's like, “man this is the end of a battle,” but me I'm still standing up so I'm going to continue to battle until I fall myself. But we continue fighting, and that love that you've all given to her? That's what make her get to there. That's the way I see it.

SS: Thank you.

MMP: Yeah, thank you for that. I really agree with you that it's not a failure of a person, that it's the end of a very long struggle, generally, and that is the community around a person that enables that person to continue going on. I think that's very, very true, and I think one of the things that I think a lot about because so many of the people that I know have committed suicide is the responsibility we have to each other to provide that kind of love and that kind of support, even, and especially, when, as Sarah speaks about in the eulogy, or political sermon, even when there are no services available or when the only available services are transphobic or racist and inaccessible because they're expensive and all these things I think that's why I think as a community we need to be showing people love and helping people through extremely difficult times, you know? And I think this is one of the things we wanted to get to, that part of that responsibility is not just when someone comes to you and is like “I'm feeling suicidal.” It's a responsibility that carries through all of our interactions with each other where we, I feel, you may not feel this way. Your mileage may vary. But I feel we have a responsibility to each other all the time to deescalate all kinds of conflicts that a person is having. When someone is having obsessive thoughts or suicidal ideation, for example, to be that sounding board, to help bring that person back into a way of looking at the reality of their life, or the reality of whatever situation is going on, and making responses that are equal to that reality, you know? And this goes beyond when someone is having suicidal ideation, when

we're having community conflict. Queers love, we love yelling on the internet and we love going on Tumblr and tearing each other apart. One of the things—I have this friend who is a poet. His name is Stephen Ira; he's a trans guy poet, he's super brilliant, you should follow him on Twitter. He's @supermattachine on Twitter. And he says that—I'm loosely quoting him—because we're in a suicide epidemic, it's irresponsible of us to, essentially, try to destroy each other. The responsible choice for all of us, since we're all at risk, is to actually have the difficult conversations, where we sit down with people and try to deescalate conflicts and try to respond with responsibility and accountability to each other in ways that are fair and equitable for all parties involved, you know? That's some of the things that came up when you were speaking, so thank you.

Any other thoughts people want to dive into? I can talk all night. I have, like, pages of things I can talk about. Been makin' notes for days [laughter]. Yes.

Q2: My question's for Morgan. I just wanted to dig in a little bit more to your initial reaction to the draft that you first read. I've known Sarah for a while. I've always known her to be a considerate person who is about the conversation, so I guess the most disturbing thing that came out of this for me, as someone who didn't know Bryn but who did know a lot of the people who were very much affected by this suicide was that somehow she was using this as a political line to centralize herself within a situation that no one would want to center themselves in. And so when you guys talked about the difference between political sermon and eulogy that was really striking to me because perhaps there's an irreconcilable chasm between those two concepts, like, would it be more appropriate for Sarah to talk at someone's funeral if she were trans and that was the political sermon and would it be more appropriate as someone who was very close to Bryn to only talk about what was good about her as a person rather than as a part of the larger socio-cultural matrix. And so, I guess my question is for you because you're central within those matrices as someone who really cared about this person and as someone who hews so closely to that identity politic, that sense of who can speak for whom. I guess I wanted to know what were the things you thought were inappropriate and, like, what was your take—if you don't mind sharing them.

MMP: Totally. Um, so when I first read Sarah's speech, I read it and my eyes just like opened like "whoa, that's a lot." I thought it was a very, very powerful piece of writing, which is unsurprising because I've been a follower of Sarah's writing, I generally find it to be quite powerful. There was only one thing—well two things, really—that I objected to that I asked to be changed. And one of them was—it was just one sentence. It was kind of a gruesome

sentence about the state of Bryn's body, and I understand why Sarah would include this because the point of this is to dissuade suicide. One of the conversations we were having as the organizers were going back and forth about whether or not this is appropriate and who should be saying what was the idea of suicide contagion and suicide clusters. So as some of you may know, but perhaps some of you don't, when a person commits suicide—particularly a prominent person—it tends to trigger suicidal ideation in many, many, many people around them and because Bryn was so prominent we, in particular, wanted to take pains to make sure that a suicide cluster as it's referred to in the literature did not occur, and I felt like the rest of Sarah's speech without this one line that was kind of gruesome could adequately convey that. That was kind of the consensus we had as organizers. I mean, I can't speak for everyone else but this is the impression that I got. You know, we asked Sarah to change it and she did.

The only other thing I asked her—I didn't ask her change, but I talked to Gaines about was the mention of Bryn and Gaines having what Sarah calls a normative conflict, essentially a big argument. Because I had a really tricky experience when my boyfriend died and the reactions I received particularly from people who didn't know him, of like blame in these weird ways, which makes no sense. He died of an unexpected medical condition. You know, it was a very weird experience. So, I was like, "just as your friend who want to protect you, Gaines. Have you thought about the reaction people could to hearing that you had a fight with Bryn?" Because as we all know, sometimes queer community is a really intense game of broken telephone, where one phrase can suddenly be drawn out of proportion and suddenly two weeks later we can hear, like, "Gaines hit her! And the police were called!" And all this, which none of this happened and none of which is at all the root. So, it was more of a like, "let's think carefully about this." But to me, one of the reasons I—it was Gaines and I who were so fiercely and strongly advocating amongst the others for the inclusion of this. One of the reasons of this was that Bryn and Sarah were close, closer, I think, than I was to Bryn, and Bryn held Sarah's, what I've called her steel core of moral fiber and her insight really on a very high pedestal in her life. And Bryn was not a person to mince words if she had something to say and I felt in reading the speech that this was something Bryn would defend if she heard this being read at somebody else's funeral. I felt like it was something in line with her own thoughts. So, I felt like that was good.

Some of the reactions that happened centered around the fact that Sarah is not trans. And I found that really interesting because they all came from people who were not close to Bryn, which is always interesting to watch, when you're close to a situation and then you see people who you don't even know reacting to a situation that you're actually a part of. And, for us, Bryn's whole life wasn't

just being trans. She was a very active member of the queer femme community in Brooklyn. She was—even though she did not identify as a lesbian—very active in the lesbian community. In fact, she once judged lesbian fiction at the Lambda Literary Awards, and she posted about it on her blog. She was like, “my favorite activity is judging lesbians.” [laughter] And so, to me, I think sometimes we fall down a bit of a rabbit hole where we think that only a person who is exactly like this person can talk about this person and I think that doesn’t talk about the truth of who that person’s community was. You know, it doesn’t talk about the many different communities that a person can be part of. You know, God forbid I ever succumb to my various thoughts, but I don’t think that it would only trans people saying interesting things or difficult things at my funeral if that happens, god forbid. In fact, one of the things that I posted in response to Sarah is that, well, I hope when I go, Sarah has something really intense to say about it! [laughter] But that’s my punishing impulse deep inside my head and the fact that I think her insight is so valuable. I don’t know, does that answer your question?

Q3: Sarah, so I wanted to thank you for posting your eulogy online, because that’s where I read it. And it really, and fairly dramatically, changed the rhetorical relationship I have with rhetoric of suicide. Like it really helped shift the frame for me. And one thing that was really quite powerful and awesome about hearing about your conversations with Bryn’s partner was that it really felt to me that the act of that eulogy and the way you built the service was that you really wrapped love around Gaines at a really crucial moment. So, I wanted to hear you talk a bit more about that, the community act of caring for someone in such a difficult position.

SS: I don’t think I can say anything as articulate as what Morgan just said. I mean, you know, queer people, our culture, we’re locked in blame. We’re locked into finding out who is the bad person, finding out who they are and making sure that they get punished. And I wish we could change that to trying to understand what’s happening. I just think that trying to understand what’s happening will help us a lot more because I’m old—I’m 58 years old—and I’ve never seen punishment do anything positive. I just don’t think punishment works, and I don’t even understand what the goal of it is, to be honest. And so, that was part of the—and also Gaines is very, very young and it’s very traumatizing, and we just wanted him to feel the love that is there for him.

MMP: To piggyback off that a little bit, right before we jump into you. Actually, no, I’ll just let it go.

Q4: Actually, it's kind of along the lines of the last question, but kind of, and I guess it's for both of you, there's just been a lot of talk, like, outside this talk there was a panel on Black Lives Matter and one of the speakers was talking about how we should be shifting from a space of self-care to a space of collective care. And I guess in talking about this, especially from your positionality, being so close to this person, but also having to do this work in thinking about it as a political sermon rather than maybe as something for yourselves as the people who were close—maybe my question's getting a little bit off—but just in talking about the idea of self-care versus the idea of collective care and what that means to you.

SS: I haven't gotten to the self-care part yet. I've never gotten there. No, you know, it's because I'm coming from AIDS. That's influencing everything, and, you know, I do experience Bryn as an HIV+ person and I think that is part of her death. This was my instinct, was to do it this way because this was the way everyone I knew in ACT-UP or whoever who died of AIDS that was how we handled their death. When a person dies for reasons that are social as well as personal, and you're talking about an oppressed community, it's my natural impulse to articulate both of those moments.

MMP: I think, in terms of self-care versus community care, I think it's really difficult for people in my age group, not that I can speak for all of us, but I think it's very difficult for us to understand generationally what the AIDS crisis was like and the very different way that people were interacting with each other in care relationships. One of the things that a lot of people don't know is that the lesbian community in particular stepped up to be in-person caregivers for so many people before better medications were available. And I think this is something we can learn from, in terms of suicide and in terms of so many other things going on in our community, that we can step up for each other in ways that can affect the outcome. And that stepping up doesn't just mean—though it does mean—showing up to the hospital. It also means being a patient advocate, and it means taking that advocacy even further to ensure that someone like Bryn isn't put on the men's ward ever again, not just in her case, but in all cases, you know? I think, to me, that's what collective care looks like, when we not only show up on the actual day, we don't just show up on the night Bryn dies to take care of Gaines, we also continue to show up to make sure that the social conditions that Sarah outlines so eloquently are not reproduced, that we do everything in our power to stop them.

I think one of the other things about Sarah's political sermon that I so valued and also found shocking was how political it was. You know, I've been to so many funerals. I'm 29 years old and I've been to 14 funerals and that's not all the people

I know who have died. That's just the funerals I could get to. And I've never seen something like this happen before, where people were willing to stand up and say what actually happened. Especially for, I don't know how it is in other communities, but I feel like in white communities we have a very delicate way of speaking about tragic events that have happened so that no one gets upset anymore and we can slide it back under the rug where we keep the racism and all the other things we don't want to talk about, and I feel that what Sarah is to take away the rug and make us not look away, you know? She describes the scene that night so that you're not idly imagining it, so that you have a concrete idea of the effects that your loss, in my case—I'll just speak for me—I had a very strong idea, then, of what would happen if I did the same thing, which in the four months preceding Bryn's death I had been thinking about every day, you know? And to me, that made me stop and think, as much as sometimes life feels unbearable to me, I can't bear to put the people that I love, even if I'm in a mood where I'm like "I want them to feel pain and I want them to know how bad they hurt me." Even in that moment, I can't imagine putting those people through that. Like knowing the details of that takes the wind out of the sails of that for me personally. Again, I can only speak for my own experience, but that's what comes to mind.

Q5: So, I just wanted to echo back the brutal honesty of describing suicide attempts and suicide and how much that helps the community to talk about what's happened. And the next thing that I want to say is that I feel that I'm hearing two conversations here. I'm hearing a main conversation about suicide and what that looks like and how that affects our community and another conversation is sort of like one that we're all laughing at about conflict and how everybody at one point in their life has had a conflict with someone in this room. And I want to know if you two can connect those two. I know that when I came to this event, I did a lot of thinking on that and I realized that every suicide and suicide attempt that I've ever witnessed has involved alcohol and also a normative conflict while somebody's in a mental health crisis. So, my question is specifically for both of you: How can people in the framework of knowing that everybody is possibly suicidal and trans or oppressed or anxious or just bad at conflict can support each other in a collective way that prevents suicide, that prevents eviction from housing, that prevents all these things going in the community every single day.

SS: Well, I mean, you can't fix all those things, right? A lot of people here know that you can't control people's alcoholism and their addictions, right? However, we can make things worse for each by, I'm gonna quote myself here, *overstating harm*, which is the subtitle of my new book, by acting as though things that are

difficult, uncomfortable, and upsetting are cataclysms and crimes of the highest order, when they are not. And if we can take down the accusations, and the condemnations, and all of that, we can make each other's lives a little easier. We have control over that.

MMP: I see it as the critical importance of de-escalation in our lives. Again, I'm very influenced by this book Sarah keeps referring to which just came out. It's called "Conflict is Not Abuse" and if you want copies, we have copies you can buy later. But I feel like we have these conflicts, and this is very true of my own suicidal ideation, I have what I would describe as normative conflict—like, someone disagrees with me, or someone yells at me on the internet, or a boy broke up with me and was a dick about it. I have these normative conflicts and then my mind spirals out of all reasonable scale of what has happened. So, for example, someone dumps me for a cis woman and I lose it. And I'm calling my friends and I'm like "he's the worst person who ever lived, I hate him, I'm so mad." And I'm just like freaking out to everyone I know, when in reality it's just a break-up. It's not the end of the world; it's not like we have children together. Which even then would not necessarily be the end of the world but might be a heightened thing compared to two people around thirty who don't have children and don't live together who, you know, were just seeing each other for a few months. But I think that it's really important for all of us to step in and de-escalate these conflicts including when we see people blowing up at each other and when we see ourselves blowing up at each other we need to be able to step in and be like, "what is the actual problem here?" Like if a person made some political faux pas which no one is saying is a great thing, just that justify socially isolating them? I think this is one of the big problems we have in queer community. We pay a lot of lip service to prison abolition but we don't actually internalize that in our lives and how we interact with each other. The logic of the prison is isolation, and the number one danger to queer and trans lives, other than outside violence is social isolation. I work in the social services, I've provided services for trans people for many years, and every one of my funding applications the number one thing we're trying to reduce is social isolation, because when you're isolated you become hopeless and you despair and you also have no access to resources and people who care about you. In queer and trans community unfortunately right now in this moment we have a tendency to, as Sarah says, catastrophize small conflicts which, again, no one is saying there's no bad things happening, but often we're taking very small conflicts and catastrophizing them and calling for the removal of this person from community spaces and saying, oh, you can't come to this queer space anymore because you said something transmisogynistic and that was hurtful to

us so you're not allowed to come. Often, this isolationist move comes without terms, so there's no terms for repair, there's no room for nuance about what each party thinks is happening, so, for example, recently someone didn't know I was a trans woman and exploded at me on Twitter for making a joke about trans woman stuff because they thought I was being transmisogynist and they, like, blocked me and made all these horrible jokes about me and photoshopped pictures of me. It went completely berserk and there were all these other people feeding into it, and I was like, "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not cisgender. I am in fact transgender, and I'm pretty sure that means I can say whatever I want about my own body." And I feel like this is one particularly ridiculous example, but there are examples where there are genuine conflicts going on where a person has done something shitty, or has been accused of doing something shitty whether or not they understand it as something that's shitty, and things just spiral out of control. I think, again, I would just call it the importance of de-escalation. We need to be able to step in and say to our friends, "I see that you're having a huge blow up with this person. How are you? Can we talk about this? Can we meet in person and talk about this? Can I help the two of you sit down and talk about this?" I don't know what we can do, but we all have to deal with each other. I don't know if you've noticed, but Montreal is a small island. It is a very small island and you're going to run into these people at events like this for the rest of your life.

SS: Morgan, you recently wrote on Twitter, and you suggested that we reintroduce the word "heartache" and I think that's right, you know, instead of saying, "that person did this terrible thing," just say, like, "my heart is broken. I feel really sad. I feel really upset. I feel really frustrated."

MMP: Before we get to another, I just want to talk about this specific one. What I was thinking about when I tweeted that was that I see every day, especially on Tumblr, people who are having normative conflict with their partner—again, abuse is very real and that is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about people who have break-ups, and I'm implicating myself in this because I feel the same way when I go through a break-up sometimes, where you break-up with someone and the only terms we have to talk about it are that this person has done something to me, when in reality it's just a break-up. Sometimes, I'm like, "what would straight people call this?" Oh, right, it's breaking-up. That's what it is. I feel like there's a resistance to talking about our own psychology when talking about conflict in queer community, because we are very, very invested in only looking at things on the kind of identity politics or socio-political levels. We're not often willing to talk about thoughts and feelings and how they

influence situations, because everything is so politically clear cut and is only political, including our break-ups, which are always political, that we can't really talk about, oh, I'm really upset or this really hurt my feelings, I am mad at this person, I feel disrespected by this person. We can't ever talk about that, so we always—it's almost like a distancing technique where we step outside of it so we that we can just deal with the anger part of it and the punishment part of it, by being like, "this is the biggest political crime that has ever happened!" This trans man dumped me for a cis woman and he's clearly being the biggest transmisogynist who ever existed and he should never have friends ever again! Which is not really a reasonable expectation when you step back and look at it a little more objectively. And I think it's the role of friends of community members to sit us down and be like, OK, let's look at the order of events, let's look at what happened and figure out a response that's in scale to those events, you know? That's just my thought.

Q6A: What I was going to ask, in regards to what you were talking about before, I feel like I see a lot of queer activism type stuff in my surroundings of basically white university queers that feels very etherealized almost or like—I guess if we're talking about the distinction between political and personal stuff, I guess it's almost more personal than political. I feel like I've heard you talk somewhere, Sarah, about how we talk about it about in terms of personal stuff rather than the structures that exist which is kind of to an extent what you were getting at in the sermon. And that's something that I think about a lot going around Concordia or whatever—it's like no one ever talks about AIDS, you know? Like ever. So, that's what I was thinking in terms of how I feel like it's almost too personalized or like detached from, like, structures and whatever that suck. But then on the other hand, I agree with what you just said about how when we talk about our personal conflicts we make it very political so it's like, on the one hand, when we should be talking about the political structures that make things hard we instead talk about the personal, or not necessarily personal, but like less concrete stuff, like we don't talk about this law sucks, we talk about . . . I don't know! I just feel like I see so much Concordia queer stuff that just very, like, airy and like, I don't know, I feel like you get what I'm saying. Like, not to do with an actual concrete thing you can do. But on the other hand, when we talk about, like everything you just said: When we talk about personal conflicts, they get super highly politicized, so it's like a weird . . . so anyway, I guess the question here is, like, do you have anything to say about this seemingly opposite direction or movement between activism and personal stuff or between political and personal stuff?

MMP: Small question! Sarah, do you have any immediate thoughts? Well, sometimes I think we displace what's going on in our lives and I think this is part of the root of this catastrophizing of normative conflict where we walk through the world, especially those of us of particularly marginalized identities, where we are dealing with so much garbage 24/7—we're dealing with it from people on the street, we're dealing with it trying to access medical institutions, from trying to deal with the government on any level in any way, and we have basically zero power to change that, or at least we feel that way, most of the time. And then in our personal relationships, and this is part of what Sarah talks about in her speech, is about how we move all the pain and anxiety of that onto the people closest to us because we know we have an effect on them, because you can see the hurt in someone's eyes when you tear into them, and there is some part of our lizard brain that finds that very satisfying in a way that we will never find trying to deal with an institution satisfying because you can't hurt an institution. You can't get an institution to understand that you felt pain. You can't get an institution to empathize with you. And you rarely can get an institution to apologize to you, and when you do it's always like Stephen Harper trying to apologize to indigenous people. It just comes of real awkward and does not address the real problems and does not come up with real solutions, you know? So I feel like sometimes our politics can be very vague in terms of what to do because we honestly don't know most of the time, especially—you're talking about people at Concordia, people on campus who are like 18–22 mostly, there are some people who are older, but mostly 18–22 year olds who are very smart and very earnest but who do not have often access to an older generation and a legacy of activist tactics that could be used to change these situations, right? Like it takes a long time to meet the Sarahs of the world who tell you, "OK, now this is what we're going to do," or, like, "let's brainstorm about what we're going to do to change this bwaah horrible thing" or whatever, you know? When you're like 18–22 and you're like a first-year university student, who's just become politicized, you don't have access to those tools yet. It takes a while to make those connections and get those tools. I don't know. I'm just rambling now.

Q6B: Yeah, I'll be fast. I think basically, what I realized as you were talking, was that I was phrasing it as if it were an opposite movement thing, but I think it's more of a thing, as you were saying, where we want to unload the political stuff onto the personal stuff, right? In both activism, in like talking about immaterial things, and in like conflicts in terms of like unloading the political stuff . . . anyway . . . yeah, sorry.

[audience deciding who will ask a question next, and in what order the questions will be asked]

Q7: Yeah, what I wanted to say was, going off of what you were saying, Morgan, about how we're socialized into a prison-industrial-complex culture where punishment and punitive measures are the go-to, and that for me means that these aren't really skills we're born with, and, in fact, our human compassion towards each other and our lovingness and our kindness get sort of clouded over by all of the trauma and exploitation and oppression that we're experiencing. I live and work in Ottawa, and one of the things I've been trying to do and a bunch of us are now starting to do are gaining skills around conflict mediation and conflict coaching and affirmative listening, getting to what's actually going on underneath the content and conflicts, and then we are bring them into the queer community so we've paired up with a conflict community conflict mediation organization that is now doing a training for just queer and trans people and that will give us access to practice nights with them and long-term we have a goal of building a queer conflict mediation team. A bunch of us are going to do like respectful confrontation training. Basically, what I'm trying to say is that it's actually really hard to put these de-escalation skills into practice especially because there's so much personal involvement. Like when people that I know and love are in conflict, I'm really stressed out. Sometimes, the skills that I do have just go right out the window because I'm in my feelings and not able. Basically, what I'm trying to say is encouraging people to say, like, "I don't have these skills and that's OK," because none of us are born with them, and as part of a community practice of strengthening our community and strengthening our relationships with each other, that should be something we intentionally invest in.

MMP: I completely agree. This is part of why I'm trying to shove Sarah's book down everybody's throat in my personal life. Everybody's who's been around me has heard about Sarah's book nonstop, because I've been like "we have to talk about this!" Not because I think you have to agree with everything that's in it, but because we need to have this conversation desperately, and I think the things that you're doing in your community in Ottawa are incredible and exactly the direction we need to take and it takes a lot of deprogramming to take out these ideas we have that the only conflict resolution we have is punishment, you know? And that's really hard! We've been taught that for hundreds of years, you know? And it's reinforced on every level every day and it's a really difficult but really, I think, fruitful thing to do. I have said on Twitter several times that I have this rule now—several of my friends have started referring to it as the Morgan Page rule, which makes me feel like such a jerk—where I will not talk shit about trans women in public. Period. Because it's not helpful. It's not helpful to anyone. If I have a problem with someone I'm going to go to them and have a conversation with them, and if it's not worth have that really

difficult and awkward conversation, then it's not worth freaking out about. But also, part of the reason I say I will go to that person is because I do not think it is useful to try to mediate conflicts on social media in front of 8 million other people who are not on the same page about conflict resolution. That doesn't end well. I've never seen that end well. So that's what I have to say about that.

Q8: I just wanna say thanks to you guys. I feel a lot wiser but I also think it's really brave to bring forward political eulogies that are contentious and I thought it was also a really brave intervention for you because we don't always agree in our communities and I feel like I really learned a lot from the discussion. But I guess I'm just curious because I'm personally very scared of making political errors when I'm speaking and I wondered how you folks weather when people disagree with you and how you continue to be courageous in bringing forward interventions that speak to when we disagree with each other and hanging in there when we don't, understanding that folks have been really gentle and kind tonight, but it's still kind of feels hard even in those situations and then kind of how do we continue to do that. Because I myself hate to make political errors, or just to say things that people politically don't agree with and that makes it really hard to have difficult conversations in our communities.

SS: I have no fear of in-person conversations. But some stuff online is way too much for me. It's just very overwhelming. But you can get to a point, for example, I'm a very strong pro-Palestine activist and I get in discussions with other Jewish people who don't agree with me all the time. At a certain point it's not worth pursuing. You don't have to keep going until you're screaming at each other. You can see right away that it's not gonna go, so you can let it go, like, I made my point clear. So I know in person when to stop trying to convince the other person, or when I'm not listening anymore. Online it's just so much harder. For me, part of it is, again, this generational thing. My relationship to technology is very different to someone in their twenties, and I find it really dehumanizing sometimes.

Q9: Just on the topic of internet conflicts, and sort of responding to that, and another thing is that, you were talking about how, for you, conflict on the Internet is harder than conflict in person. I just wanted to talk about another chasm that exists between people is that for many people because of things like political status or social capital or race or reputation or body of work, it's really hard, if not impossible, to address people in person. I think the internet is amazing in how it bridges that gap and allows, like, a person of color with comparatively little or no social capital to address maybe the most politically significant and

well-known person in rad queer circles right now and I think that's something to be celebrated and is really amazing, so, yeah.

MMP: I think it can have that power. Where it can have problems, for me personally—where it kind of breaks down—is the kind of “dogpile” effect that happens, where one person has a critique and has something they want to challenge another person, and then 18 million other people who aren't involved in the situation come and escalate. Where suddenly it goes from this person said and did something that hurt me or was politically fucked up, to now, five people coming on in increasingly catastrophic language saying that this person is the worst person who ever lived, or on Tumblr saying that this is a trash person, this is a garbage person, these people should not exist anymore in community. This is why I definitely think the Internet can be—I'm from a different generation than Sarah; I'm obsessed with social media even though it gives me total anxiety all the time but I'm totally addicted to it. I'm surprised I haven't been tweeting right now: It's because I'm concentrated on being present with you all today. [laughter] But I think a problem for me is that these conversations are done for the public, sometimes, more than they're done for resolution, that there are instances where people are trying to make a point to other people uninvolved in the situation rather than trying to resolve a conflict with the other person. I don't blame people for that because sometimes I feel that way too, and I feel we are very encouraged to do that all the time, but I think that this is maybe not the most helpful way to deescalate and resolve a situation is basically my hot take on that. But I do agree with you that it can be a very democratizing force, by ensuring that those who feel voiceless have a less anxiety producing way of getting their voice heard. I think that's really important. I just think it's complicated and difficult.

Q10: You were talking about institutionalization, and you were talking about the health care that Bryn was seeking, and you were talking about collective care. Do you think that there's a way that what you're doing tonight could be a beginning of the renaissance of collective care? Because the truth is we have been fighting for legal rights, and we do have enormous progress socially, and when you come to helping each other, we are not that strong. That conversation right there is a start on a subject we should discuss more often as a whole community. Do you think something can be done—because we cannot change the institution, you know? We are the victims of it. So, what can we do?

MMP: I think collectively, over time, we can change institutions, but I do think that this often begins with changing our personal relationships, the ways that we

react to interpersonal conflict and the ways that we move through the world. I think that's very real. I feel like my head would get very large if I thought that this night was the beginning of a renaissance in the trans and queer community to change all of our ways of interacting. But I do hope that it's the beginning of a conversation here in Montreal for all the people in this room (and our fabulous friends from Ottawa and Toronto) to take these conversations back and try to engage people with them, I guess, to try to continue this conversation.

QIIA: My thing is kind of like picking up on some things that have already been said. I wasn't sure what to expect by coming tonight, but I'm really appreciating how I'm hearing a lot of different things coinciding, because for me, the presence of suicidal ideation in my life and the lives of people around who we're mutually trying to keep alive—it's a lot of things that coincide all at the same time. And it just feels like you're just sitting in this wind tunnel that is life all the time. I really appreciate bringing up the role of alcohol and addiction, particularly in a community where you feel like you have to participate in consumption to be anybody or in order to go to anything that happens you need to drink and if you don't drink, then you're alone or you feel like you can't go to things. And I appreciate talking about how we create or escalate conflict, and I guess that what I'm having all these realizations about as I'm sitting here that the number one thing that leads me to those dark places where I consider suicide is two feelings. One is feeling isolation and when it's combined with feeling overwhelmed. It's like I feel super isolated and I don't know what to do because everything feels like it's too much. And it's not just that my problems are too much. It's that the solutions are too much. It's that everybody's throwing a million solutions at me, fucking online memes about self-care 24 hours a day, or, like, fucking start a Wicca practice and that might make you feel better. And it's like I can't handle the enormous amount of work it would take to solve the problems in my goddamn life and I think that the thing that sometimes makes me feel better is realizing that I'm not really gonna solve the problem that is my life. I guess that's the number one thing that makes me feel better is when I realize that my feelings of isolation combined with being overwhelmed are primarily a symptom of larger systems. For example, I think self-care is a product of austerity, really. I think this moment of self-care comes from austerity, because there's no social services to gain access to any fuckin' shit that's gonna help me and so they're like, "here's a scented candle."

[laughter]

MMP: Take a bath about it!

Q11B: Yeah! Meditate and shit like that! And I'm not saying that none of these things help. I don't mean to tease. If a candle really helps you, then more power to you, but my point is that every time I feel super overwhelmed, when somebody makes that connection to the larger thing, I feel a little bit lighter. Because I realize that I often feel like I'm shouldering everything personally. And having that moment that actually I'm not shouldering it personally, that I'm shouldering it collectively with everybody else who has to deal with life under austerity, with everybody else who has to deal with this world of postcolonial, Christian separation—like all these things. That it comes back from somewhere, I think, helps me and that's why the thing I'm taking away from tonight is that I'm very glad that you did take the risk of doing a political sermon. I know it's a personal risk that you take to stand up in front of people and do something like that. And I think that's valuable, because I think that sometimes being able to connect our personal suffering to larger political frameworks reduces isolation and makes something overwhelming maybe a little more clear. I don't have to agree with everything you say, but I really like that you're saying it.

Q12: I just wanted to thank you so much for the generosity you have about this issue and for me I didn't really know what to expect today as someone living with HIV and actively involved in HIV activism, I've known ten-plus people who have killed themselves in the HIV movement and know more people who have died of killing themselves than have died of AIDS since I've been alive, so connecting that to the structural and political issues, as you did in the political sermon, is really important and has given me some things to contend with, to think through how to connect those dots to a political system which is a lack of care and a lack of support for people. I'm also wondering, because a lot of the people I've know who have taken their own lives have been in these leadership positions, they're stars in the community. Kyle, who was like a mentor to me, and taught me how to be an HIV activist and claim rights for people with HIV was a major person in the trans community in Toronto. And we assumed he has this network of support and care because he was a leader, and he didn't. I just wanted to thank you first of all for this and I was just wondering what you think about this idea, this gap in support for leaders in our community.

MMP: I think I can best express this through what happened with Kyle. So, Kyle Scanlon—I think I mentioned this earlier—was a huge activist in the community for over a decade. He was a gay trans man in Toronto who did an astounding amount of work to make sure that we had the few social services that trans people have today across the country. He was my coworker. We worked

directly beside each other and we talked all day, every day for three years about suicide. We talked about it all the time because we both dealt with it like many, many people in the trans community do, and we had a unique position because we were both in leadership roles. And one of things Kyle talked about that was relevant to him and, I think, relevant also to Bryn was that people in leadership positions and artists and well-known personages are assumed to have access to supports that they don't actually have. In Kyle's case, he couldn't go to any social services because he ran all the social services! There were no counselors for him because every single one of them were his friends and colleagues. He knew, and had to maintain a work relationship with—he didn't have access to the FTM support group that he used to run because he used to run it. He didn't have that access, and additionally, because he was a leader, he was subject to repeated acts of cruelty because we believe that people in leadership positions within the queer and trans community are open season. If you have a problem with someone who is in a leadership position, if they didn't acknowledge you at a party, if they hold a position that you disagree with, or they've legitimately politically fucked up or something like that, we believe that because they are a leader, they must be made an example of. I've had this happen to me. There are a lot of people in this world who don't like me, who have a lot of really mean and nasty things to say about me, some of which are true, and I'm totally willing to take accountability for those things, and I try to move through the world doing my best to not repeat those issues. But that doesn't stop those people from doing cruelty toward me, because they really, really want to see punishment. We kind of put our leaders up on a pedestal. We're like, "Where's the leader? Where's the leader? Where's the leader?" Then we elect someone leader, basically, or someone gets a job—this is the Canadian model—where suddenly they're a leader and then everything about their life is open season. This is literally why when I quit my job—I used to run the trans services at the 519 Church Street Community Center in Toronto, which is the LGBT community center—when I quit my job, I, the very next day, moved to Montréal because I knew that I would never not be seen as the person running that job which means I'd just be doing that work for free for now, which happens. I get called on all the time to do this work, support work, all kinds of work for people in Toronto. And I'm just like there are other people who can do this work for you. Also, having had that leadership position, I was always going to have my personal life and everything I touched be examined with a fine-toothed comb. Through that leadership position, I had people file complaints about or go on Tumblr and write long posts because I was dating someone they had a problem with like three years ago. And I'm like, "I don't even know what's happening. Why are you coming after me," you know? This is all just to say that leaders are in a particularly tricky position because we're often

the ones who are running the services, who are being the supportive people, and so we don't have access to those service. And at the same we justify any act of cruelty against leaders in our community because they're an example of how everyone else should live. I don't know. Sarah, do you want . . . ?

SS: We need to consult about how late we can go. [talks to Morgan] Two more!

MMP: Two more questions.

Q13A: Should I do like a turkey thing and talk up to the . . . ?

MMP: It's OK. [inaudible] Let's light a candle about it. [laughter]

Q13B: Just to reiterate what you are talking about and what Alex brings up, there are two documents called "Living and Serving 1 and 2" that talk about the problematics of trying to access services as an HIV person when you're part of the HIV response. And part of it is definitely I've had difficulty trying to access because it's like I know this therapist, I've sat on a committee with this person, this person's a former lover, but then it's also the shame of having to admit that you need services. So, you get a job, and you get put in a leadership role, and specifically if your work is around social support, then to have social and emotional stuff that you need to work through seems like a particularly personalized emotional failing. That prevents folks from accessing services. I know that it's prevented other people, but I will name that it's prevented me as well. And we talk about—I really appreciate the wonderful humans from Toronto who talked about the work of doing de-escalation and acknowledging that we have a limitation of our skillset, and recognizing that this is a thing that we've been taught to do that harms our communities and our movement building. So, we don't know how to do different, so let's learn how to do different, and that's great! I just wanted to say, for folks who haven't heard before, or wanna do some googling, like restorative and transformative justice are the terms used to talk about to the prison-industrial-complex punishment model. And I would also just say that using restorative and transformative justice models to respond to intimate-partner violence is not always ideal and that it can put a lot of the burden of the emotional labor on the person who has survived an assault. So just being aware that that's a thing?

Also, through this conversation another kind of gap has appeared in some of the—like I work for a community health center and I run a street outreach center for people that are homeless and use drugs—and one of the ongoing conversations that we're having that I feel like has become apparent tonight

is about grief and loss. We're talking about how we deal with complex and elevated emotional states. So, I've been hurt and/or I've been pissed off and/or I'm mourning a loss, so the harm reduction movement is, unfortunately, experts at dealing with grief and loss and multiple loss because everybody fucking dies all the time. So, seeking out training—this is the other thing too. There are just no available mental and emotional health services in Canada, like, it's just not a thing that exists, so we find other ways of coping. But there's also tools that we can learn and we can share with each other about how to unpack and process some of complex stuff that we're handed just by existing.

SS: Thank you! Last one?

Q14A: Super, super psyched about your book. These thoughts have been trailing around for a while. So, I guess I really appreciate the conversations surrounding differentiating conflict from abuse, and also kind of owning your trauma and subsequent reactions. I just sort of wondering, because of the conversations around care and healing that are often happening in Montréal. We often have these circles, particularly queers, that are looking to heal, and we can do so together. And because of the way that trauma functions, and the way that we're recreating our trauma reality, you've got these queers that are basically in the process of retraumatizing each other. And so I guess I'm wondering how to kind of deal and mitigate that while this conversation about community care and accountability is happening and when I'm talking about this I do mean abuse and not conflict. I'm gonna read your book; I'm super psyched about it, so if you can answer [inaudible].

SS: I don't totally understand the question.

Q14B: Yeah, I guess it's like this conversation of like while we're talking about community care and showing up for each other and ensuring that people aren't just [inaudible] and stuff like that when these are happening in our relationships, and especially our most intimate relationships, that stem from trauma and how we often recreate these traumatic pairings within our most intimate relationships and how to deal with both of these happening at the same time. Does that make sense?

SS: It's such a complex construction. I'm having my book launch tomorrow at the Concordia bookstore. It's a three-hundred-page book and I haven't learned how to say "duddle duddle duh," you know what I mean? But tomorrow I'm

going to really lay out a lot of tropes and ideas, so that might help. I just don't have a soundbite answer for something like that.

TN: On behalf of QED, I just wanted to thank Sarah and Morgan. Let's all thank them for a wonderful time. [applause]

SS: I just wanted to say that I've heard a lot of things tonight that I've never heard before, and I really, really appreciate it and I'm definitely gonna think about it. This was very enriching for me. So thank you.

MMP: Thank you all for joining us, and especially those of you who had to stand the whole time, I'm so sorry. Personal apology for that. Also, we have a bunch of copies of Sarah's book, and some of her other books, and some of my books for sale if you're interested in buying them. If not, that's great. You can probably get them from the library. Well, you can't get my books from the library, but I'm sure . . . anyway. Just putting it out there!

SS: Is somebody gonna be selling them?

MMP: Yes. Our fabulous friend Asher is gonna be up here wheeling and dealing with you.

SS: And, Morgan, you're going to be signing yours, right?

MMP: Of course. I like to feel like a celebrity. So, thanks everybody so much!

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