

FROM ME

to

YOU

to

US

**a zine on self-discovery +
navigating social impact spaces
as your most authentic self**

**created by:
Thea Gay**

vol. 01

When we love, we always strive



to become better than we are.
– The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho

Editor's Note

First and foremost, I want to express how grateful I am to be in community with you all. I've always been passionate about leading change, and only up until recently have I thought **"Well what does that mean for someone like me?"** As a Black Queer Womxn, I've struggled to differentiate how I view myself and how society views me. I've lived my life in a body that across time has continually experienced surveillance, oppression, criticism, and appropriation. And this has greatly shaped my understanding of myself and the world for better and for worse.

There have been many moments where I've had to define what my identity has meant to me and I am appreciative that today I can say my Blackness, Queerness, and Womxnhood are not monolithic, but multi-dimensional. I can shape it to honor my experiences and that of others. And it's not static but an ever-evolving reflection of who I am. With that said, my experience is that of my own and I am using my story, along with my deepest inquiries + wonders about life as a basis to help myself and others build empathy while thinking deeper about the work we are doing.

This zine is a collection of dreams, stories, and shared knowledge meant to foster hope + creativity. My desire is that you walk away with the tools, resources, and information to wonder about all the potential and greatness that lies within you. And while I haven't lived an extraordinary life I can acknowledge that I have experienced immense privileges. And I want to use whatever platform I have to champion social justice, critical thinking, and meaningful action.



WHAT IS A ZINE?

with J Wu

Zines are self-published DIY-inspired independent publications, usually created in small batches, inspired by a willingness to authentically create content.



There are no rules to zine making and zines are not limited to any topic. Historically zines have been an innovative platform to circulate ideas outside of traditional systems allowing people to share their work with others for little to no cost.

J Wu (they/them/他) is a zine maker, illustrator, woodworker, and musician. J is a trans multidisciplinary artist from Taipei, Taiwan, currently based on unceded Ohlone land, Oakland, CA, where they care deeply about documenting queer life through art and zine making. Here is their take on the importance of zines especially in centering marginalized identities and experiences:

"Zines are a great tangible and accessible platform to connect people. Anyone can make a zine, and anyone can submit to a zine. It can be fancy and polished, and it can be messy and punk. Right now I am making a zine that invites QTBIPOC friends to come together and create collaboratively, and it's been exciting to hear all the ideas that folks have to make art with their friends. I love creating a platform exclusively for queer and trans BIPOC, to share and be vulnerable and free."

Check out J's work at <https://www.mixedricezines.com> and @mixedricezines on Instagram. Source: <https://www.binderymke.com/what-is-a-zine>

ABOUT NATIONSWELL

NationSwell is a social impact company that provides purpose-driven leaders and organizations with the support they need to take their impact to the next level. The NationSwell Fellowship provides the network, support, and knowledge to help young leaders level up their environmental and social impact. During the program Fellows are tasked with creating an individual social impact project, connecting with established leaders in their field, building upon their expertise in environmental and social issues, and co-designing the program in its inaugural year. The seven young leaders chosen as Fellows in the first year of the NS Fellows program are Uma Agrawal, Thea Gay, Sophia Kianni, Saadhvi Mamidi, Sarah Miller, Sydney Claire Neel, & Safiyah Zaidi. This zine is the individual social impact project of NationSwell Fellow Thea Gay.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thea Gay recently graduated from the University of Florida with her B.A. in Sociology with a passion for bridging the gap between climate + social justice and DEIB. She is an advocate for intersectionality and greater representation of marginalized communities in social impact efforts. She will use the Fellowship to find creative solutions that tackle the compounding effects of colonization, racism, the patriarchy, and other oppressive systems, particularly when it comes to how learning how issues like climate change disproportionately affect historically marginalized groups.

WHAT IS SOCIAL IMPACT?

Social impact work (SIW) is the use of an organization or collective of people that works against societal disparities, gaps, and ills. Whether you're working in private, public, grassroots, non-profit, or foundational spaces, taking action against inequality + inequity is an empowering and important line of work.

My experience

SIW has given me the ability to think critically about myself and the world around me. Within this exploration, it cannot be overstated how much I have thought about my social position especially working within spaces meant to serve others.

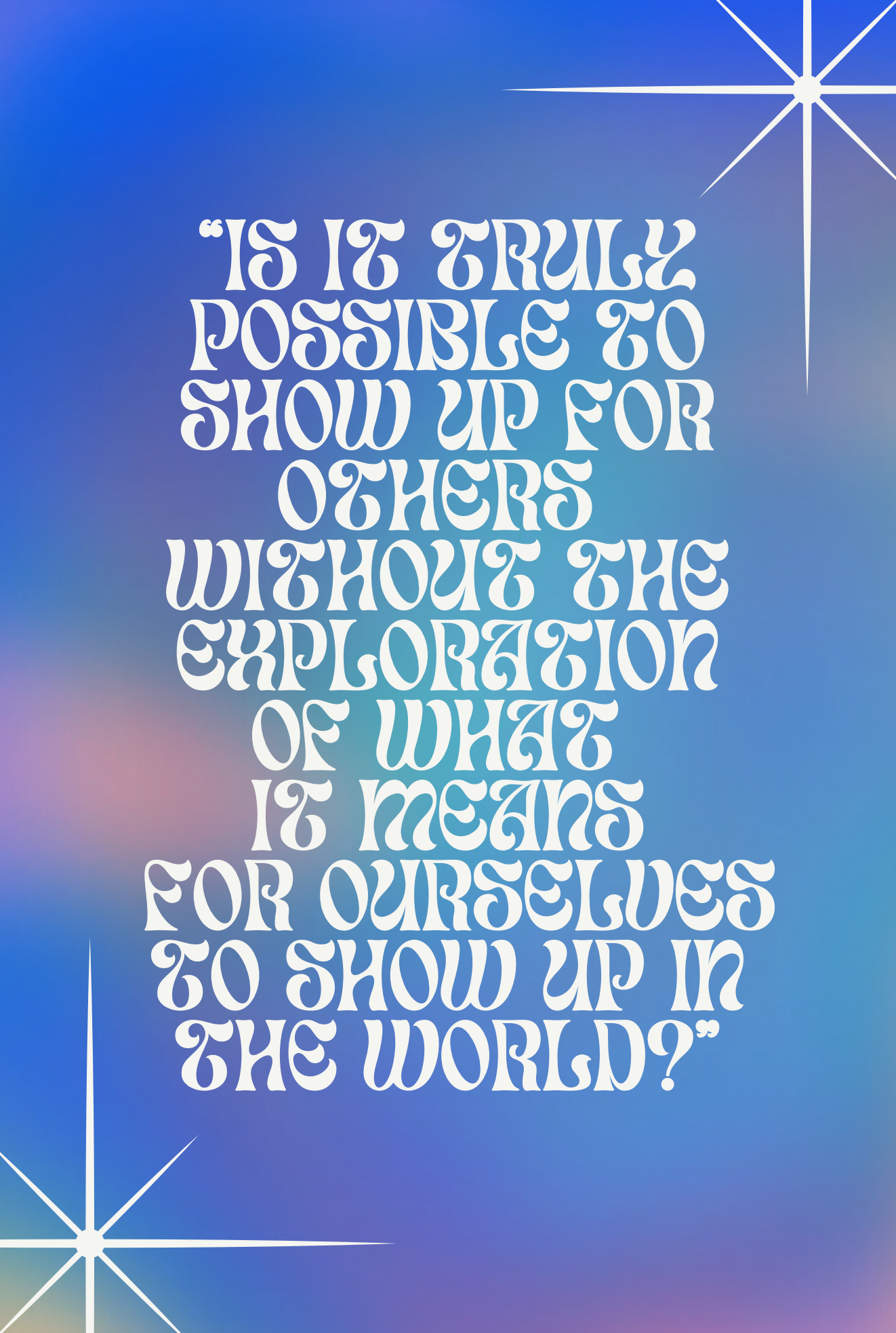
Changes over time

Over the past few decades, access to information regarding social justice and the significance of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) concerns has become more and more accessible to the general public and embedded into organizational strategies. Along with the rise of social media, increased visibility of marginalized communities (and the issues they face), and resources centering around the importance of DEI have contributed significantly to this shift.

The Need for Self-Exploration

One question that always comes to mind for me is,
**"Is it truly possible to show up for others
without the exploration of what it means
for ourselves to show up in the world?"**

In seeking an answer to this question I believe oftentimes we are inclined to want to make a difference without examining our own biases, opinions, and access to resources. We all show up in different ways, and because of this even in social impact spaces, it can be easy to replicate the same power structures and hierarchies we are trying to fight against. Unless we are intentionally aware of the pervasiveness of discrimination and exploitation at the individual and collective level even people who aim to have a positive impact can perpetuate harmful behaviors. So by exploring what it means to show up as your authentic self, one can better understand their own identity and better champion the issues they care about.



“IS IT TRULY
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In order to find a solution to this problem...

we must go on a personal intimate journey focused on how no matter who you are, the connections and knowledge you have are incredibly valuable. And understanding the importance of your contribution to society is necessary to using your power for revolutionary change. This zine guides you in 3 key pathways as a means to address the question at hand: **Me, You, and Us.**

In Me, you will think deeply about who you are and how that relates to the work you are doing.

In You, you will delve into how you can best position yourself to make positive social change for those who will be most impacted by your work.

Lastly, in Us, you will think about creating a more equitable + just future while reflecting on your journey so far.

Along the way, you will also read stories from social impact influencers who have graciously shared some of their wisdom and best practices.

Thank you for joining me on this path to self-discovery, let's begin!

Me



taking the time to listen and care for myself
as I begin the inner self-work needed to care for others

SHOWING UP AS YOUR MOST AUTHENTIC SELF

"The one person who will never leave us, whom we will never lose, is ourself." – bell hooks

Before diving into what our role can be in social impact space let's take a moment to individually reflect on our lives through these guiding questions and exercises. I do want to note that continuous self-exploration is key to understanding who we are across our lifetimes. But it is not easy and may evoke many feelings inside you. Please be gentle with yourself and know that at any point you may skip any of the guiding questions + exercises if you need to. This is just a resource meant to help you along your journey of self-discovery so please utilize it as you see fit. You can answer the questions and go through the exercises throughout the zine using a journal/piece of paper, out loud, or in another expressive form.

Guiding Questions:

- How do I view myself and how does that compare to how society views me?
- In what ways does my identity influence how I approach life?
- How can I connect the contributions of my ancestors and future generations to myself?

AUTHENTICITY DEFINED

Prior to starting this journey let's ground ourselves in a shared definition of authenticity. When you are your most authentic self you are connecting with your soul and tapping into the universe. And you are aligning your values with your actions, words, and expressions. This self is ever-changing and is not the same self that society pressures you to be. Staying true to who we are creates a genuine sense of joy and appreciation.

practice daily self care

However, this is not an easy process and will be different for each and every person. My lived experience as a Black Queer Womxn, most certainly informs my ability to be able to show up authentically. Depending on your social location, and where that positions you in terms of society's hierarchy of privileges and disadvantages, self-authenticity can not only be a challenge but part of a larger series of systemic barriers fostered by a culture of whiteness and a rejection of marginalized identities.

let go of perfectionism

There is a lot of work that needs to be done to make sure everyone can fairly access authenticity. But that is not to say it's not possible or not worth exploring. It is a life-long active choice and effort to be who you are even if that means sacrificing how others see you and even how you see yourself. In doing so we give ourselves and those around us the opportunity to love us for who we are and as we are. Which in turn allows us to better serve those we want to support through genuine representation and commitment to truth.

SUGGESTED EXERCISES



MY PERSONAL NARRATIVE

One way to think more in-depth about your life experiences is to write your own personal narrative. Take some time to consider your past, present, and future. You may also want to consider shifts in your relationships with your friends and family, your ancestral lineage and their wisdom, your underlying fears and dreams, moments of joy and sadness, and any events that have impacted your life. You don't need to write a perfect memoir, instead focus on how you are able to use your words to illustrate how you felt, feel, and are hopeful of when it comes to your life. Remember that this is your story and you get to tell it.



THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION + ME

The Sociological Imagination is a concept coined by Sociologist C. Wright Mills. In his book titled by the same name, Mills asserts that this concept allows individuals to see how their own life is connected to larger social forces and historical contexts. For instance, use your personal narrative to think about any issues in your life that you have experienced or are experiencing. Mills would characterize these as “personal troubles” (e.g. feelings of imposter syndrome). Instead of stopping there, Mills encourages us to think beyond the personal and see our troubles as “public issues” that are actually the result of widespread social problems. In the example of imposter syndrome someone like me may feel this way due to the discrimination those of us with marginalized identities face. In my case being a Black, Queer, Womxn with each of these intersections posing different implications alone + together. In this way, I am able to better understand how my personal experience has universal elements while also being influenced by political and historical trends. Reread your personal narrative and see how the Sociological Imagination connects to your life.

3

INTEGRATING INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is a concept coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate, and scholar. The concept can be defined as a “metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking.” Intersectionality gives people a framework to think critically about their own identity in relation to privilege, oppression, and power. And we can thank the work of Black feminist intellectuals like Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, the Combahee River Collective and so many more for creating spaces for marginalized identities such as Black womxn^s to be considered important and necessary. Use what you have learned from your personal narrative + sociological imagination exercise to think deeper about how your individual and collective experiences are rooted in different aspects of your overlapping identity.

4

NEEDS AND VALUES ASSESSMENT

In this last exercise, we will finish off by centering ourselves on what we need and value when it comes to our personal and professional lives with the Needs and Values Program assessment by Cheryl Weir and Associates (available online or you can print it). One of the best ways to utilize the information we gathered from the previous exercises is to connect it back to what you must have in life to be successful (your needs) and what fuels you to stay motivated and engaged (your values). This will help you align yourself with your passions and understand how you can uniquely add to the work you are doing.

REST AS RESISTANCE

with Ananya Gouthi

Hi, I'm Ananya! I'm from India, I moved to New York two years ago for a graduate program and today I work in the city at NationSwell, a social impact agency. So far in my career, I have worked at the United Nations, in public relations, advertising, and in academia. At UNESCO, in the aftermath of the MeToo movement, I was leading a research and advocacy project called Media Action Against Rape. I worked with journalists across India who reported on rape and sexual violence, trying to understand their approaches, lived experiences, and challenges to build recommendations for best practices in newsrooms. In New York, as a graduate student, I read and wrote about class, coloniality, gender, caste, and race as I tried to learn more about my positionality in the world around me. At NationSwell, I work with the most brilliant team as we design effective, inclusive, and mindful solutions to drive sustainable impact.

Building my mental health as I strive to build a career in the impact space has afforded me many opportunities for self-discovery and growth. Here are some things I've learned that allow me to better serve myself and others:

#1 Learning what is truly restful for me

I learned about the difference between meaningful rest versus simply turning my brain off in a workshop on impostor syndrome and burnout with Dr. Lisa & Dr. Richard Orbé-Austin, authors of the book [Own Your Greatness](#). Earlier, when I would get deeply burnt out it was hard for me to do anything other than rewatch comfort tv shows. I'd stop reading, meeting friends, going for walks or cooking my meals—things that are usually rejuvenating and healing for me. While I used to very excitedly plan my 'rest days' (the itinerary included spending the day in bed, drinking tea, rewatching tv, and doom scrolling), I rarely felt too much better at the end. After the workshop, I tried to practice what I learned—I took myself out for a short walk and read in the park or made myself quick banana chocolate pancakes or asked a friend to drop by for...

evening chai—and I felt so much better. Learning this about myself, what makes me feel truly happier and rested, has been life-changing. Meaningful rest and rejuvenation, Dr. Richard shared, requires you to build habits (exercising, hobbies, building solid friendships, and so on) that you can tap into even when you feel burnt out. A gentle push to revert to the habits that are truly refreshing when I feel unable to do much else—balanced, of course, with an adequate amount of doing nothing—has given me so much more agency over my well-being.

#2 Finding my own community of 'impostors'

This one is pretty simple: it helps when you see all your brilliant, insightful, hard-working, and objectively currently killing it friends also suffer from impostor syndrome. You think wow, can't she see she's amazing! And then it hits you that this is exactly how she feels about you. Shared experiences with a community you feel safe and seen around are empowering. Navigating insecurities and impostor syndrome with friends I trust and respect has opened my perspective.

#3 Building my capacity for hope and imagination

Reading intentionally to learn more not only about what's wrong in the world but also about our enduring ability to change has been crucial for me. I rely on the thinkers and writers that were and are able to imagine new, better, radically unrecognizable worlds. When I struggle to imagine what a world without a carceral system or capitalist exploitation or climate crisis looks like, turning to those who are more creative, incisive, hopeful, and knowledgeable than me helps.

AUTHENTICITY + CLIMATE JUSTICE

With Arielle V. King (she/her)

In the climate justice space, what does authenticity mean to you and why is it so important?

I think everyone has a role in the environmental movement and I think the more that we're grounded in our individual rationale and reason for getting involved in this work, the more desire we have to keep going. And I think that's part of being an authentic advocate in this space. You have to find the things that bring you joy in this movement in order to sustain your action and advocacy. I also believe that as an advocate in the environmental justice and climate justice movement, you should never be taking up too much space. For example, I come from a community that has been impacted by environmental harm. It was a food desert up until December of last year, there are multiple different sources of pollution that were impacting and are continuing to impact the lives of my neighbors, and my neighborhood has the highest asthma rate in the entire city. But these things did not impact me as severely as they did many of my neighbors.

As a result, I never want my story to overshadow someone else's truth. As an advocate, I think it's really important to talk to people and to be able to be a microphone or an amplifier for people's lived experiences. In addition to the unequal distribution of philanthropic dollars in the climate movement, with organizations led by Black people and other people of color being the least, there's also inequity and access in who gets to lead climate communication and tell their stories to large audiences. Yes, we all have a role to play, but a key part of environmental and climate justice work is allowing people on the frontlines to be able to have a platform, opportunities, access, and be involved in decision-making processes in order to develop self-determination. A crucial element of environmental justice is togetherness and community, which necessitate authentic connection with one another and with the earth.

In what ways does your identity influence how you show up in the world for yourself and for others?

As Black women, historically we have not been prioritized, centered, or uplifted in any movement. Except for the ones that were created by us. For this reason, it took me a long time to realize this, but the best thing that I can bring to any space is myself. My lived experience coupled with all of my years of education and the people I've learned from outside of academic institutions along the way has created a very unique experience that allows me to empathize with people and speak to problems in a way that many other people cannot. I feel very grateful for that, and that's why I try to just be myself in any space I enter, even when it makes people uncomfortable. The mainstream environmental movement has not adequately represented or included Black people, yet we have an ancestral connection to the land that was taught out of us by colonization. Sustainability is an important element of who we are as a people, even if that's not the title we gave it. As a people, we have always had to make the most of what was given to us and make it stretch to provide for many.

All of my higher learning institutions have been predominately white, and I was frequently the only Black person in my environmental classes, especially once I got to law school. That experience was extremely difficult and often felt isolated, but I made it my mission to learn about environmental leaders who looked like me and have tried my best to connect and learn from as many of them as I can. There are so many people of color, especially Black people, in the environmental legal space, who have been doing this work for a long time, and so, I definitely always look to them for guidance. They are an example, and they made the path easier to walk on for myself and others who come after them. Because of them, I didn't need to break the glass ceiling or be the first in most instances. But that doesn't mean that as I was going through that glass ceiling they broke through I wasn't getting battered and bruised on the way up. There wasn't a perfect opening that was created, I still had to break a little glass of my own to get to where I am. As such, I walk into predominately white environmental spaces with a sense of belonging, because people paved the way for me to feel that way.

I enter those spaces with the knowledge that my presence there might make a difference in the way a decision is ultimately made, or at least what language is used at the moment since my presence there can serve as a reminder that the environmental movement and its needs are diverse. These days, I'm really focused on making sure that Black women, Black girls, and Black non-binary folks feel seen and validated so that we can feel empowered to take up space in the environmental movement, especially through my work leading programming at Black Girl Environmentalist. I feel like my work is helping to create a movement of safe spaces in the environmental world for us to convene, learn together, laugh, and celebrate. And I feel incredibly honored to be able to help create and facilitate spaces like that. But, there are levels. In certain settings, I feel so comfortable taking up space because that space was never guaranteed to me. And then in other arenas, I feel like my place is to convene; to take a step back, and just create spaces for others to feel safe and empowered.

Given the way our society is currently structured authenticity is not accessible to everyone. How do you think we can break down those barriers and what would that world look like?

On social media, I think, people receive a certain amount of followers, and then they automatically are considered experts, which doesn't always mean that they are. And that's not at all to discredit people or their work. Sometimes I think to myself, how can you be authentic if you are like, being lifted up on this pedestal you didn't ask to be on? I feel like deciding that one person is the spokesperson or representative for entire movements tokenizes people, and that's one of the dangers of social media. It's also extremely lazy and diminishes the value, contributions, and work of all the other people who create and sustain movements. And in the academic world, it's all about status, rank, and credentials, which isn't beneficial either. For example, when I did my senior thesis on the Flint Water Crisis in 2016, I learned that parents were complaining about the quality of the water for over a year and going to elected officials with little to no response.

Their lived experience was invalidated until scientific research was conducted to authenticate what they were saying. It took a local doctor publicizing trends she was noticing in lead blood levels in children, coupled with a group of researchers who traveled from Virginia Tech to do water testing for these parents' complaints and calls for help to lead to any level of action. That shouldn't be. We need to find pathways to incorporate community science into environmental enforcement and accountability. I think we would have a very different environmental landscape if we listened to people who are living in places impacted by environmental harm, and didn't just wait until government officials come to do their own testing. Being authentic in the environmental space, to me, means shifting the status quo to ensure that this movement is more inclusive.

Arielle V. King is an environmental justice advocate, educator, and consultant passionate about making environmentalism and the law inclusive and accessible for all. She is currently directing programming at Black Girl Environmentalist, an intergenerational supportive community dedicated to empowering Black girls, women, and non-binary people across environmental disciplines. You can find her @ariellevking on all platforms.

MENTAL HEALTH, VIDEO GAMES, + REPRESENTATION

With Roshelle (she/her)

In the conversation around mental health awareness, what is missing?

I've noticed there is still a lot of stigma and shame involved in admitting when you need help with your mental health. Specifically, I would encourage everyone to examine the media & information they consume and how it plays a part in controlling the narrative about mental health in their minds. Some very backward and outdated ideas about therapy and mental illnesses are transmitted by our media and our entertainment.

We have characters like The Joker – a "criminally insane" murderer, and his associate, Harley Quinn, a former Psychologist, now also "criminally insane" murderess. There are entire horror games devoted to abandoned, creepy asylums where deadly experiments happened on their patients and other games that make light of mental illnesses and even paint the characters who live with certain conditions as evil, as the bad guy, as...you know, not the Hero™.

Many times in games, and other stories mental health is used as a plot point – it's a scaffold to create a very simple, black and white, hero & villain archetypes & conflicts without doing the depth work to create nuanced characters & representations of these experiences. I think our creation & consumption of these types of harmful stereotypes contribute to the larger stigmas that exist in society, and make it harder for folks to accept their own personal struggles.

What is a video game that brings you joy + keeps you motivated and why?

A game that I love and I'm deeply devoted to, even after 12 years, is Skyrim. It's not free from some of the harmful stereotypes about mental health that I listed above (just look up Sheogorath and you'll know what I mean), but it remains a top favorite for me because of the stories. All people play games to feel something. Whether that's a feeling of satisfaction for completing a dungeon...

or defeating a boss by yourself, a feeling of competition to be the best in a match with other players, or in my case, feelings of curiosity and exploration. I can explore places & times I could never visit in my real life, I can meet & interact with unique individuals and I can learn lore and contexts, and cultures of this new world I'm visiting. Skyrim was one of the first experiences I had of a game where I was the only living brain inside. I had experience playing games like Runescape & Neopets, and those had a lot more involvement with others. Skyrim on the other hand, offered a unique world, a plethora of stories & lands to explore, yet I was the only person in the room. I was skeptical it could really keep my attention, but boy did it! Even to this day, I am still uncovering new books with new bits of lore in random buildings, or new items or new mini-quests in-game that I didn't complete in any of my other playthroughs. I love the capacity for stories & exploration in games, and Skyrim is one of those that I'll probably replay for years to come (or until I've discovered everything & the stories finally become stale).

Roshelle is a researcher & project management professional with 10 years of XP in leading cross-functional teams, generating actionable insights from research and delivering high-quality customer service. As a human-centered researcher & designer, her core values are empathy & emotional intelligence. With these, she is able to wield the power of impactful stories to effectively facilitate important conversations with teams, clients and stakeholders. [Linkedin.com/in/roshelleantoinette](https://www.linkedin.com/in/roshelleantoinette)

HEALTH EQUITY

With Uma Agrawal (she/her)

Why do you care about health equity and how does this shape how you see the world?

Health, well-being, and care ecosystems are at the forefront of the human experience. We rely on our bodies and our care ecosystems to support us as we manage life's stressors and challenges. However, health and well-being are not one-size-fits-all, even though healthcare systems and experiences are primarily designed with white, 70 kg, able-bodied men in mind. As a future healthcare professional, I see a clear need for health services and experiences that meet communities where they are both in and out of the exam room. On a broader scale, I believe this can be achieved by integrating human-centered design thinking, health, and technology, to promote equitable outcomes for historically marginalized communities. As a health educator working for a free clinic for uninsured Latine patients in Sacramento, CA, I had many patients who had type II diabetes but struggled to manage their diet and exercise because they had limited disposable income and lived in food deserts.

I was able to see how systems of exclusion perpetuated their chronic diseases and prevented them from accessing the resources they needed to manage their conditions. I clearly saw how the healthcare system was failing my patients on multiple levels, and how fragmented their care journeys were. I firmly believe that leaders that think beyond the silos and boundaries of their fields can work alongside the BIPOC communities to improve and expand care ecosystems. I hope to be one of these leaders in the future!

What is missing in health equity?

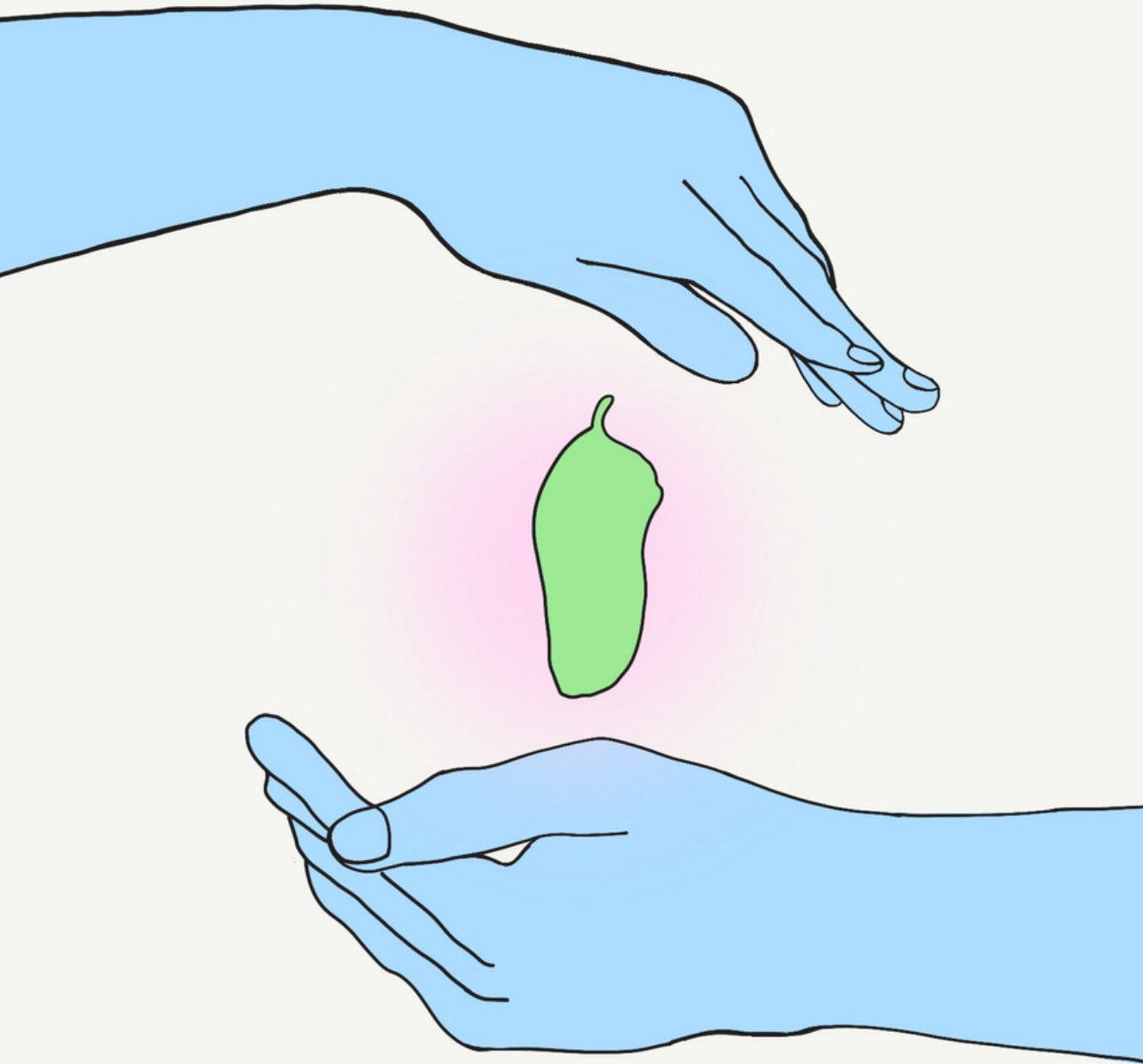
- **Education:** The healthcare system and the wider public need more awareness and education regarding the links between redlining, politics, trauma, and white supremacy, and how and WHY these disproportionately affect the health outcomes of people of color.
- **Tech:** Digital health companies, start-ups, and industry leaders need a clear playbook on what reaching equitable health outcomes...

look like when they design their health products and experiences.

- **Business case:** In the past few years, especially after the pandemic started, “health equity” became a buzzword. This helped propel the momentum that trailblazers had been pushing for years, and many companies created dedicated positions (Chief Health Equity Officers). Recently, there has been a shift away from investing in these positions, as the “hype” has died down now that there are economic pressures. Many people still believe that the word “health equity” is a proxy for designing for low-income Medicare and Medicaid patients and that investing in health equity is “charity work.” However, Black and Brown individuals who have significant buying power are often looking for alternative methods of accessing care (such as digital healthcare products) at higher rates. There is a clear gap between what health companies and healthcare systems are designing, and what the need is for these communities.
- **Alternative care methods:** Health equity leaders can continue to advocate for non-white, non-eurocentric health practices that have been used in other countries and cultures for generations. For example, we can integrate more awareness around food as medicine, Eastern medicine, and indigenous practices.
- **Mindset shift:** The end goal is for health equity to become the norm, not the future state.

Uma Agrawal is informed by her roles as an innovator, teacher, and health advocate. She is the Program Coordinator at Health DesignED: The Acute Care Design + Innovation Center at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta, GA, where she works at the intersection of health, technology, and business to develop new and equitable care pathways. She also works as a Design and Innovation Fellow at RockHealth.org, where she supports the Equitable Design Initiative and collaborates with the ecosystem of digital health leaders dedicated to creating inclusive health experiences. She was a board member and health educator at a free clinic where she provided culturally sensitive primary care and resources to uninsured Latine patients in Sacramento, California. She plans to start medical school this Fall, where she will continue to serve immigrant and refugee populations.

You



understanding the frameworks +
best practices I can utilize to be there for you

SELF-AUTHENTICITY IN OUR WORK FOR OTHERS

“No level of individual self-actualization alone can sustain the marginalized and oppressed. We must be linked to collective struggle, to communities of resistance that move us outward, into the world.”– bell hooks

SIW gives individuals the power to influence and lead creative solutions that go on to change lives. If you chose to do this type of work as I did, let's think about what might have led you to make such a choice. In this section, we will also think about who your you(s) are a.k.a the person or people you want to help.

Guiding Questions:

- What does social impact mean to me, and how did I get involved in this type of work?
- Have you thought about what it means for you to enter social impact spaces? If yes, why did you consider this? If not, what do you think you should consider?
- When thinking about your you(s) who are they and what do they mean to you?

HOW TO BEST POSITION OURSELVES

When it comes to positioning ourselves in social impact spaces we have to consider the intention behind the work we are seeking to partake in. It's not enough to just want to be in this space; there needs to be an actual desire to engage. Engaging fuels critical thinking, self-exploration, and creativity. It pushes you as an innovator to imagine and dream of a more equitable society or seek out the perspectives of those whose stories have been deliberately erased. Being aware of the issue you are trying to solve, who is the most impacted by the issue, and how you can advocate for the most marginalized people within that issue is a key component of this work. Additionally, it cannot go without saying any work aimed at a specific community must center their perspectives, knowledge, and full humanity. Communities should not solely be defined by the systems that oppress them. Instead, honor the viewpoints of those who have been historically excluded by creating a path for reconciliation, healing, inclusion, and respect. Celebrate their traditions, culture, and ancestral knowledge. And find ways to uplift and increase their representation whether that is through compensating people for sharing their lived experiences or building trust with grassroots community leaders.

AUTHENTIC ALLYSHIP



Allies can be defined as people who do not belong to a group experiencing marginalization but who are opposed to the oppressor/oppressive systems causing their injustice while seeking to use their privileges to create positive change. Privilege can be defined as advantages, capital, or benefits that one is granted for being in a particular location, part of certain groups, or within a designated hierarchy. Privilege can not be relegated to just one aspect of a person's identity, rather it is multi-dimensionality and it intersects with many other factors (race, gender, sexuality, nationality, etc.) to determine one's social position.

In order to be considered an ally one must be willing to actively contribute and participate in a community's fight for justice. Allies should also work to center their you(s) and use their privilege to uplift representation, resources, education, rights, and information that will help communities fully initiate and participate in their liberation. Allies should always ask themselves what their role in social impact work is and how they can productively contribute towards social justice. Continuous reflection is necessary and needed to ensure that allies take the most advantage of their privilege, work to grow as individuals with the people they are serving, and build honest connections that are aligned with their values and motivations.

Lastly, it cannot go without saying that allyship is inherently connected to an ally's own liberation and well-being. When we advocate for others we are advocating for ourselves + we are building the world that we wish to see. A reality where self-care is collective care, and a future where all people and our planet can finally be free.

A NOTE ON ANTI-RACISM

Anti-racism is a commitment and active process to end racist practices and policies. This is especially important in the social impact spaces as it influences our ability to have a meaningful influence on the people we work with and our you(s).

Some key things I've learned about anti-racism are:

- We have to approach our work by measuring success through the presence of positivity, joy, and kindness. Instead of extraction, competition, and fear. In this capitalist society, it can be really hard to feel seen for who we are. So giving people the space to flourish + grow is essential to dismantling racism at all levels.
- DEI must consider how broader White culture shapes our feelings and actions while isolating marginalized identities. White culture as it relates to factors considered normal behavior such as vernacular, appearance, and personality.
- Anti-racism is rooted in action as a means to challenge and dismantle systems and policies that perpetuate racist outcomes and ideologies. To lead these actions we must do so with grace and empathy. Abundance must be emphasized instead of scarcity. If people feel like they are going to lose something then they will be fearful and not want to do it so we must ensure that anti-racism is not seen as a zero-sum game but rather a winning strategy that benefits everyone.
- When it comes to creating safe spaces we need to make sure that everyone can actively participate and show up as their full and present selves. With that in mind, we must be willing to promote intentionally respectful, and impactful environments. We need open dialogue that allows for vulnerability and awareness of other people's lived experiences. But most importantly we need spaces that meet the people within it, where they are, and allow them to help contribute to the expectations around the group conversation and etiquette.

SUGGESTED EXERCISES



1

CHECK YOUR BIAS

We are all susceptible to bias and being aware of that is the first step in taking control of minds, and working to deconstruct harmful narratives about ourselves and others. A helpful tool to educate yourself on the pervasiveness of bias and how it intersects with society and identity is Project Implicit's Bias tests. Their tests can help you measure your attitudes and beliefs regarding different groups of people and how these biases may be influencing your ability to think or make decisions.

2

EXAMINE YOUR POSITION

Another good resource is It's Pronounced Metrosexual's Taking Up Space or Contributing To A Space Quiz. As people working within social impact spaces, we must always recognize how we could be contributing or detracting from a space. The juxtaposition between the fact that we aren't just our social identities and yet we also represent our social identities is not an easy thing to process. You can use this quiz to think about how you are showing up and what this means in terms of your unique value add to the space.

3

ADOPT A BEGINNER'S MIND APPROACH

This concept rooted in Japanese culture and Zen Buddhism encourages us to have an open mind and to employ active listening through nonjudgmental awareness. It is incredibly useful for recognizing the humanity of ourselves and our you(s), developing creative solutions for dealing with different situations, and providing a space for continuous reflection on how we can build enough knowledge and skills to maintain a beginner's mind without becoming limited in our imagination.

Sources: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/aboutus.html>

<https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2017/02/taking-up-space-vs-adding-to-a-space-questions-to-consider/>

COMEDY, JOY, + JUSTICE

with Syd Goin

My name is Syd Goin, I work as a Senior Associate with NationSwell, a social impact company dedicated to helping change-makers tackle our world's most urgent challenges. I'm also a comedian and perform stand-up and improv at small local theaters around Austin, TX. I'm new in my comedy journey, but I've found it showing up in my social impact work in interesting ways. Right now, a lot of my comedy involves sharing unique and unexpected perspectives. When I write jokes, I start by writing my personal philosophies on things, like why hot sauce is a meal requirement and not an option, or why I have to leave empty glasses all around my house to prove that I did drink water today, or how scrolling through TikTok while I'm in the bathroom is actually the truest form of self-care. Writing about my experience as true and genuinely as possible, and noticing those perspectives I know people will find surprising, helps me realize I have a specific set of experiences that don't always apply to others. This encourages me to interrogate what biases I might be bringing to my work. While I'm not perfect, and will inevitably leave a bias unchecked until it's brought to my attention, I always start each project thinking through and acknowledging that I have assumptions about things based on my personal history and set an intention to be open to clearing those assumptions as they come up. Comedy also shows up in my social impact work by allowing me to find humor in things. When you work to move the needle on social issues, it can wear you down. It might seem like things will never change, things will change but in the wrong way, or things will change but still leave the most vulnerable people out. This work is mentally and spiritually challenging. Sometimes, finding a small moment in the work that's laughable, can ease the tensions you've been building up. More importantly, humor can be a tool for change. So many comedians use their comedy for social impact. I haven't quite found my social justice voice in my comedy yet, but it's something I'm working towards. Comedians might not be able to change people's minds, but they can open them up a little.

QUEER IDENTITY + SOCIAL IMPACT

With Kaila Pedersen (she/her)

Tell me a little bit about yourself, your upbringing, and how you got involved in social impact?

I grew up quietly queer in the suburbs of NYC to a mixed-background, mixed-religion family. My mom is the daughter of Korean immigrants with relative class privilege and my dad is from a working-class, white, Irish Catholic background. I grew up feeling very lucky and privileged in my education and higher education journey – including the chance to go abroad four times, fully funded. I initially wanted to work in global social justice work, but after working and studying abroad, I realized how much more I had left to learn about how the US works and how that shapes my own identities.

In what ways did working in social impact shape your perspectives on yourself?

Working in social justice and adjacent spaces, the question of, wait ‘what role should I be playing now?’

can be so hard to tease out, whether that’s trying to be a bridge builder, a fighter, a healer, an advocate, or something else. For me, finding community is a huge part of being able to accept where I’m at – if I know I’m working alongside other people, I won’t feel like I’m supposed to be everything at once. I’ve also been working on reminding myself that perfectionism is a tool of white supremacist culture, and that feels connected to the community thing too. So for example – in my own experience, deciding whether to take a corporate role in the social impact space felt like a huge moral dilemma. I was asking myself questions like ‘am I selling out?’ ‘will I be doing harm to communities by being part of the capitalist machine of the non-profit industrial complex?’ and ‘who am I to make decisions like that?’. I was – and still am – afraid of getting comfortable in the corporate world and forgetting community rootedness, and I almost wanted to step away completely.

But it can also be so valuable and important to have a seat at that table and then be able to be a bridge – especially when I can remember that my role is just as one piece in a puzzle. The more that I can accept that a perfect way doesn't exist in any role, then the fact that I will mess up sometimes shouldn't stop me from engaging. Plus I have people around me to work from other ends and even to check me if need be!

What are some things you had to navigate when thinking about authenticity in your work?

When I started my current role as a funder, I had an extremely strong sense that if I were to fund queer-specific issues, I would be bringing way too much self-serving bias into the role. I kept telling myself 'you have to think of things neutrally!'. But of course, and it feels so obvious looking back, neutrally ended up being accepting a (cis)heteronormative default. It took a conversation with another LGBTQIA+ colleague to see that nobody at work was talking about issues faced in our LGBTQIA+ communities. We were like, wait a second, if we're a funder focused on closing equity gaps, why is this absent?

And that got me to really start questioning. Was I going to wait for someone else to say that we should do queer-led work, or is this maybe part of the reason I was hired, you know, to bring my perspectives to the table? If so much is interrelated when it comes to inequity, is the bias of my queerness really a problem in comparison to the bias of the status quo? So that conversation was an aha moment for me that I don't need to wait for permission to bring my authentic self to my work, and that showing up with authenticity actually adds a lot of value the work I do.

Kaila Pedersen is a Community and Social Impact Strategist at the American Family Insurance Institute for Corporate and Social Impact, where her partnership portfolio includes housing, mental health, birth justice, and youth-led activism. Her work is focused on supporting movement builders and innovators by building bridges, shifting power & resources, and investing in community ownership.

ADVOCATING FOR OTHERS

With Sarah Miller (they/them and she/her)

Why do you care about advocating for others and how do you do so?

My advocacy work has evolved over time – like many, the events in 2020 with the rise of a global pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, the rise in our conscious awareness of social injustice still permeating throughout our society left me with a lot to grapple with. I started by reading, and consuming as much material as I could. Davis, Baldwin, Brown, Agyeman, kept me company during this time. I consciously explored race, gender, LGBTQIA+ theory, social movement theory, racial and economic inequality, and restorative justice work in a multitude of spaces. This learning continues to this day, because there is no finish line with social progress, it is an intentional effort to show up consistently. Humans and communities are not disconnected from the natural world, but we live (or should) in mutual symbiosis with one another. For both people and nature to thrive, we must ensure that our community members, and our neighbors are

intentionally rooted to their community, that they are thriving, that they have access to their basic needs (food, water, housing, safe air to breathe etc). We must each collectively do our part to leave our communities, our people better than we left them, we must use our voices for collective positive change to ensure that all humans in a community are thriving, not barred from inequities, discrimination, systemic oppression, or othering.

How do you incorporate intersectionality and equity into your life?

Becoming consciously aware of intersectionality and equity in my work became incredibly important, to really help me unpack and understand the motivations behind my actions and my desire to pursue social impact and climate work. Getting past the ego and moving towards collective liberation for my community required understanding how social impact and climate work must be done with the community to prevent further harm.

To me, advocating for others and allyship means:

- **Continually learning and unpacking for personal growth, and the desire to do and be better.** Reading, listening, and ingesting content from diverse and BIPOC voices, from different backgrounds than me, to ensure that I do have cultural competency and that I do have an understanding of how societal systems and identities lead to intersectional experiences in the community today. Continual learning also ensures that I understand how historical injustices through policy, action, events, and systems still permeate and exist in the world today and how that affects my friends, colleagues, and neighbors from underrepresented and marginalized groups. This helps me understand the differences between our lived experiences so that I can better understand how to show up for these folk.
- **Listening.** This is simple, and so important. Being an ally I think most importantly is learning when to listen and use your platform to uplift other voices, especially when being involved in social impact and climate work. When working directly with communities, with people, listen to them. Listen to fully understand what they are trying to tell you, and trust their traditional knowledge and expertise within their communities, their work. This is so important and fundamental to engage in work with others. Hold spaces for others to speak, and intentionally make space for others to join the conversation.
- **Speak Up.** Hold space for others, invite others into the conversation, and uplift voices from marginalized and historically underrepresented backgrounds. AND if you see or experience bias, injustice and/or inequity, say something, do something, figure out ways to use your voice for the good of others. Examples – if you notice a colleague from an underrepresented group does not get called on during a work meeting, address it, bring attention to it, allow space for others to show up fully and authentically. Find ways to operationalize equity into your work and projects, incorporate diverse voices and perspectives into your work, invite collaboration and opportunities for feedback from diverse audiences.

Sarah Miller's work and passion lie at the intersections of community and personal resilience, inclusive placemaking, and climate preparedness. As an intentional lifelong learner, Sarah works to continually explore how our communities, people, and planet can better prepare for impending climate, economic and social related challenges, while also seeking to empower and uplift our most vulnerable neighbors. Sarah currently works in United Way of Central Indiana's Sector Support initiatives and serves as their Program Manager of Sector Support. At United Way, Sarah leads a "Green United" affinity group that works to tackle community challenges like poverty alleviation and climate adaptation more holistically. Currently enrolled in a 200-hour yoga teacher training, Sarah is excited to take the skills in stress relief, mindfulness and mind/body/breath connection on the yoga mat, to the world of social impact and climate action, helping others in these spaces to build personal fortitude and longevity in this work. Prior to United Way, Sarah worked with the McKinney Climate Fellows student fellowship programming out of Indiana University's Environmental Resilience Institute. There, they led student and partner recruitment, and helped design and co-lead professional development opportunities and trainings for Fellows and organizations working to address the climate crisis in Indiana. Outside of work, Sarah enjoys anything to do with food (cooking, baking, gardening, growing it), camping and hiking, practicing yoga, and spending time with their fur babies.

PRIVILEGE + ALLYSHIP

with Maddy Allison (she/her)

What does allyship mean to you?

To me, allyship requires knowing your positionality in relation to those most impacted by a given issue and taking action to center them, support them, and balance centers of power, even and especially when that requires giving up some of your own power.

What frameworks have been useful to you as an ally?

One of the most helpful frameworks for me as an ally is understanding the difference between equality and equity. I understand equality to mean that everyone receives the same resources, access, and rights to a thriving life, whereas equity means that everyone receives what they need. I also like to think about allyship within the context of the ally to accomplice spectrum, where allyship is standing with a community, and being an accomplice requires actively dismantling systems that perpetuate harm. Allyship is solidarity in action, and I find that understanding my privilege and power is one of the best ways to intentionally enter into solidarity.

One of my favorite quotes is by Lilla Watson, and I think it sums allyship up well: "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

What resources would you recommend for those committed to using their privilege for social change?

A few resources that I have found helpful are:

- [Pyramid of Accountability](#)
- [We Want to Do More Than Survive](#)
- [Undoing Racism Workshop](#)
- [White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)
- [Barriers to Organization Between Anti-Racist White People](#)

Maddy Allison is a Senior Associate of Institutional Membership at NationSwell where she supports senior leaders at corporations in taking their impact to the next level with confidence and credibility. She has a dual Bachelor of Arts in American Studies and Spanish Language & Literature from Fordham University.

Maddy also has experience in facilitation, anti-racist community disrupting-racism. She works part time at SoFar Sounds, creating spaces where music matters through intimate performances at unique locations throughout New York City.

An illustration featuring several hands of different colors (pink, yellow, orange, red) reaching towards the center. In the center, a light blue butterfly is held gently by two hands. The background is composed of large, overlapping, semi-transparent colored shapes in shades of pink, yellow, and orange, creating a warm and collaborative atmosphere.

Us

how me and you
can imagine + create
the world we want for us

CREATING THE WORLD WE ENVISION

“The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is
–it’s to imagine what is possible.”– bell hooks

We need people like you willing to do the work, willing to show up, willing to make mistakes, and to continue the movement. It requires all of us to imagine the possibilities of an equitable + just society. And as the visionaries, dreamers, and artists of this work, we can use our creative contributions to make that reality possible.

Guiding Questions:

- What do you think is needed to build the world that you envision for us?
- How can you bring various parts of yourself into the work that you are doing to make this happen or make something new?
- After reading this zine how do you now view yourself as an agent of change?

WAYS TO APPROACH SOCIAL IMPACT FOR CHANGE

Here are some suggested approaches principles, resources, and disciplines to consider in your work

DISCIPLINES

- **LOVE:** "is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust." – bell hooks, *Communion: The Female Search for Love*
- **HOPE:** "is a discipline... we have to practice it every single day." – Mariame Kaba, *We Do This Till We Free Us*
- **RADICAL IMAGINATION:** "is a tool for decolonization, for reclaiming our right to shape our lived reality." – Adrienne Maree Brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*

PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Access
Participation
Equity
Diversity
Human Rights

GROUNDING RESOURCES

- [The Combahee River Collective Statement \(1977\)](#)
- [Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing](#)
- [10 Principles of Disability Justice](#)

USEFUL APPROACHES

- Human and Community Centered Design
- Abolition
- Bottom-Up Approach
- Mutual Aid

Sources: https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1536532.Adrienne_Maree_Brown

https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/10697.bell_hooks

<https://sanitybytanmoy.substack.com/p/-special-edition-hope-is-a-discipline>

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-justice.asp#toc-main-principles-of-social-justice>

SOCIAL WORK + SOCIAL IMPACT

With Austen Zoutewelle (she/her)

How did you know you wanted to learn more about social work and how did that lead you to NationSwell?

My first job out of college was at the state office of Habitat for Humanity in Texas. We were lobbying for affordable housing policies at the Capitol, applying for statewide grants to support multiple local Habitat offices (affiliates) in the work they were doing, and better understanding challenges & success stories across over 80 local affiliates in Texas. I loved sitting at the birds-eye view of change & knew I wanted to learn more about systemic impact work. I decided to get a Master's in Social Work so that equity would be at the forefront of all I did in my career. Whereas most social workers take a clinical route & become therapists or case workers, I completed my degree in 'macro social work,' which is a focus on public policy, research, and administration. After working in nonprofits, research institutions, and City government, I decided I wanted to work at the intersection of multiple sectors. Which led me to look into social impact consulting.

NationSwell provided a vehicle to work with cross-sector leaders on driving change together, breaking silos & echo chambers.

What aspects of social work have been valuable to you (professionally and personally)?

Professionally, my degree has provided a tangible foundation for social justice & equity. With everything I do, I strive to put the community it affects at the forefront – this doesn't mean I get it right all the time, but it is an explicit intention I have for this work that I believe everyone working in the social impact space should have. Also, it provides real knowledge of systemic influences & how to create change so I feel more equipped talking to partners about what might be possible for their work. Personally, my social work degree has improved my understanding of therapy, communication, and relationships. I was able to learn so much about different kinds of therapy so I can help loved ones identify services they would like & call out tools that can improve my relationships. Also now I'm friends with social workers all across the country doing such amazing work!

Any other personal experiences?

I was initially drawn to social impact when I noticed the different experiences my younger, twin brothers had going through the education system. One of my brothers has Down syndrome and navigating through services & supports was extremely time-consuming & archaic, and my family was fortunate enough to have resources & time to dedicate to navigating this process with help. So many families are pressed for money & time, let alone navigating a confusing system with other challenges like a language barrier. I felt passionate from a young age about increasing the system at a high-level to support individual people.

Austen Zoutewelle is a systems-level social worker focused on driving impact for purpose-driven organizations by building cross-sector partnerships, providing strategic support, and sharpening knowledge through applied research. At NationSwell, Austen serves as the Associate Director of Strategy on the Studio team, where she works with corporations, foundations, and nonprofits on elevating their impact through transformational strategy, events, & campaigns. Before joining NationSwell, she worked in nonprofit program administration, grant writing, academic research, and public policy & procurement - providing an understanding of how to weave together the constellation of stakeholders in the impact space. Austen values social justice, equity, creativity, teamwork, and excellence.

SOCIAL IMPACT IN ACTION

With Ayo Oti (she/her)

What does social impact mean to you?

I define social impact as engaging with societal issues in meaningful ways that move us forward. I think there is this idea that in order to have an impact you must do direct action, like being on the ground protesting, volunteering, building, organizing... I believe learning and sharing information are just as important in defining what social impact is. Without storytelling, we aren't always compelled to act or improve the ways we engage with an issue. Maybe you aren't on the "frontlines" of a cause, but you are learning about what is going on and you pass that information along to a family member, a friend, a colleague, and that can have a ripple effect on how they then choose to navigate the world. My point is, everyone has a role in creating social impact and nothing is insignificant. Yes, there might be some actions that have a more immediate or direct impact, but it doesn't mean that every action was for nothing.

How do you incorporate authenticity into your work?

I am a Black cis-woman on the asexual spectrum who has two disabilities.

I am simultaneously first-generation and somewhat second-generation. I am a southerner raised by a northerner (Brooklynite!) and an African immigrant. To deny these and other facets of my identity would mean not being authentic, and honestly I don't know how to be that way. In the work I do now—telling and curating stories—I am always incorporating an intersectional lens because of my identity. I don't think you can be impactful in this work without considering how every social issue is interconnected so you must expand your perspective.

In your opinion, how has having such a versatile career in social impact helped you stay aligned with your values and goals?

I was once interviewed by my alma mater while working for a social enterprise that did Salesforce consulting for nonprofits. I told them my goal was to make the world just a little less shitty in whatever I do; that is still my goal. Our world can be beautiful but it is also frustratingly complex with a lot that is not great. When I first started my career, you couldn't have told me that storytelling was equally as important as program implementation....

or that building and administering a database was as critical as field work. I now know there are a myriad of ways I can show up for the things that I care about, or that people in my community care about, thanks to my experience doing all those things. A versatile perspective can help you have longevity in a career where a lot of people burnout. My diverse experiences have made me more empathetic, which is an important value for doing this work. Being versatile means there is always a way to live my values and achieve my goal.

Ayo Oti is the founder of Unofficial Social Chair, a social impact storytelling consultancy and impact production company currently focused on podcasting. Under Unofficial Social Chair, she produces the newsletter and upcoming podcast Sounds Like Impact, which helps readers discover the best in social impact audio along with actions they can take to affect change. Prior to founding her own company, Ayo had a varied career in social impact working across the nonprofit, government, higher education and private sectors. Instagram: @unofficialsocialchair

The Art Section



Artwork courtesy of Roshelle (she/her)

A section to highlight the work of BIPOC artists and creatives!

This is a revolution,
but violence is not our resolution,
we need to recognize it begins with the educational institutions,
with the mind being the only contribution,
the singular instrument of execution,
that is powerful enough to stop a nation.
Yet, the inflation of corporations,
as governmental mutations,
cause the people frustration,
vexation and the duration
of our accusations will only increase,
while the obese and secret police
hold live press releases.
I'm speaking live to the audience,
this will not be televised,
and you are well-advised,
to kill the cable and if you are still able,
barricade yourself, flip a table, bar the door,
block your mind from the debris and jetsam
its time to get ill mannered- no more yes ma'am
its a grand slam against the suits and skyscrapers
we become the shapers of the future,
taking back stifled voices from the vacuum
and picking up the pieces from the newsrooms,
we've got the truth,
in all four dimensions,
its time for the people to lose all pretensions,
the partisan politics, polls and popularity contests are outdated jaded
and the cause for constipated capitalism, and systemic syncopation.

Writings courtesy of Roshelle (she/her)



Artwork + Writings courtesy of
Rashida B. (she/her) a 21-year-old
Black female artist based in Florida
Social Media: @Rashidaablair

I'm a pretty structured person with a free spirit. More free than my life allows me to be and that's okay! Through my life I've learned to accept things as they are. That doesn't mean I'm complacent though. I strive for excellence in all that I do but I don't feel pressure to be the best just to do my best. I love the life given to me and try to appreciate all that is around me. Nature, family, friends, and everything in between. I wouldn't categorize myself as an artist but I do use art as a medium for expression. Im not an Uber talented illustrator but I love my Art because it's mine. I can't say if my art reflects all I've said previously but I hope it does!



Artwork created by Thea Gay

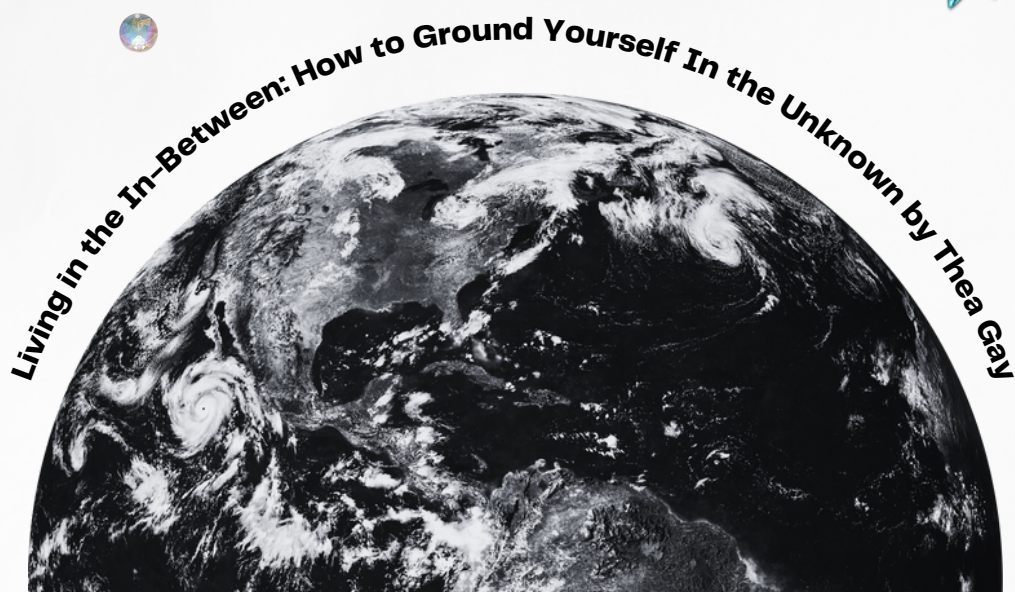
One of the best things I ever did for myself was getting my Bachelor's degree in Sociology. I say this because Sociology gave me the tools to critically question why things were the way they were and what that truly meant for society. It forced me to grapple with my identity, my lived experiences, and my dreams. And it gave me the realization that change is possible and we just have to be willing to do the work to get there. My studies undoubtedly pushed me into the social impact space, and ever since then I've been grappling with an even larger predicament than I anticipated.

Now that I am here

(here meaning in a space where I can have a positive impact on the lives of others, here meaning I am doing the inner self-work so I can best show up for others, here doing the work to create the world I envision)

In the end....

I am still here coping with the fact that systems like patriarchy, capitalism, and racism are alive and well and I am living within them. It's a whole lot to think about but I am sure many of us involved in this work have questioned how to dismantle the same systems we fight against, yet participate in whether we want to or not. I often wonder what living in this in-between space will mean for me and what I can learn here on my path toward social justice.



I saw this great tweet by @anglosenegalese that roughly said certain texts in this case the work of Karl Marx (a required read for Sociology majors) should come with a content warning. This is because once you understand it, there's no stopping you from analyzing all the institutions and forces you interact with (like gender, work, pop culture, police systems, the environment, etc.) with a critical lens. You feel so powerful knowing there is an endless amount of the social world that can you critique. And yet it can feel so powerless as well. There is so much to think, learn, and know about. Leading me to feel overwhelmed and ultimately to a sense of loss + confusion. How do I move forward when these oppressive systems are so vast and interconnected in my life and society? Where is the path to liberation and will I ever know how to get there?

In grappling with these questions I have to remind myself that the United States as Dean Spade puts it is deeply rooted in a "capitalist, patriarchal, white supremacist culture that encourages us to compete, distrust, hoard, hide, disconnect, and confine our value to how others see us and what we produce." Our neoliberal tendencies have created a highly competitive and individualistic society that is fixated on the success of a few rather than the entire group. This helps foster the self-help myth that so many of us including myself fall into. This myth that we are somehow capable of doing all the work by ourselves and can find the answer if we just work hard enough will never be the case. This myth is intrinsic to the American Dream (or in this case another myth) that is rooted in domination and control. In fact, being so focused on ourselves rather than on our collective well-being means that we are not focused on working together to dismantle oppressive systems and create new equitable ones.

I also have to remind myself that I don't need to have all the answers, I shouldn't, and I am not to blame for society's ills. Many of these issues happened before I was born and will be here when I die. And real transformative work is not done alone but together. Recognizing that we are all unique human beings and we are valuable and worthy of contributing to this society is key to change-making. It starts with me knowing my worth, knowing myself, and knowing that I don't need to be perfect to be enough. Being human is hard. I mean we all grow up within a culture where we are conditioned to believe certain things about who we are and the world around us and there really isn't an effective way to fully remove ourselves from that after we experienced it.

At some point we just have to accept this reality, and instead of second-guessing ourselves, we have to be comfortable with the discomfort that comes with striving for a better society in an imperfect world as an imperfect person.

What I know for certain is that at this moment, in our history, and in our future the trauma, pain, and violence of these systems persist and evolve over time. I am here in the midst of all these forces with a layered consciousness, that I will never be immune to their impact just because I know they exist. Even though it feels like I should be allowed to exist separately from them; they are all I think about in my work, I study them, I avoid them, I don't want them and yet they are still here. My knowledge can't save me nor should it. That's a false promise that feels too good to be true. My mind might be on the path to decolonization, but the world around me is elsewhere. But while others may not see my full humanity that won't stop me from demanding what I deserve: Black joy, freedom, and liberation.

But I won't lie it's hard. It's hard to live in this space not knowing what my efforts will mean when it's all said and done. Or to know how much pain I as well as so many others are experiencing now. However, there is a sense of belonging and passion found in struggle and solidarity that should not go unnoticed. One way to channel that is by using the disciplines of love, hope, and radical imagination internally and externally. Even then know that there will be times when I or you may feel hopeless or that the world has no hope. That's okay and those are real and valid reactions. We should not fear these feelings, as the systems we are working against are incredibly overwhelming. So give we must give ourselves the space and time to process reality and then return back to our disciplines when we can.

If you believe in the possibility of change expect that your attachments to this work will fluctuate in both good and bad ways. If you lose your sense of passion, ask yourself these three questions: what are you then left with? how can you gain a new understanding of yourself and the world around you in its absence? And how can you use this knowledge to center yourself again? This can lead to renewal, self-discovery, and realignment in your work. Change may not always seem possible, but every day that we practice self-authenticity and create spaces for others to experience it as well is progress that should not go unseen. In the words of Austin Channing Brown in this struggle "we may never see the realization of our dreams" but we can still show up. We can continue to honor the legacies of those doing this work before us and fight for a "world unseen, currently unimaginable".

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

As our journey comes to a close let's bring it back to our overarching question to help center us: **Is it truly possible to show up for others without the exploration of what it means for you to show up in the world?"** In my opinion, there is no way to truly achieve social impact if our work doesn't align with who we are, and what we truly care about. People can tell when you are not an authentic leader. To build trust with the communities we are serving (especially ones that have been continually exploited) we need to be authentic and aware of how we show up. Being aware of how we show up will help us to shift power to best meet the needs of the situation. Power in the sense that people can advocate and have the autonomy to do what they need to do to get things done without being limited. Especially when those who are disproportionally impacted get to define reality for themselves and how their story is told.

My only ask of you is that you take as much as you can from this zine and apply it back to yourself and in your work with others. When you believe in your worth and are able to use your unique talents to build solidarity with others you can go on to create the world we need for all of us. I used the butterfly life cycle in this zine, to symbolize the importance of our continued evolution. But also to show that in order to even get to the butterfly stage we need nurturing and care not only from ourselves but also from those around us. Lastly, another metaphor called the butterfly effect teaches us that even the smallest action can have a huge impact on society. We are all on this journey of self-discovery and will be for as long as we live. And I hope we don't become fearful of failures or mistakes because as long as we have the desire to move in the right direction and make positive change that is enough. So if there is one thing you walk away from after reading this just know, you are enough, you are worthy, and you are needed. I thank you for joining me on this journey and I can't wait to see all that you become.

INTENTIONALITY

Thank you for reading this zine! I have done my best to consciously create this project especially when it comes to centering a BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ lens and considering the environmental impact. I would like to highlight some of those efforts here. This zine utilized the font Marsha by Vocal Type. Vocal Type is a Black-owned foundry created by Tré Seals that uses typography as a way to increase diversity and empathy. Marsha is a typeface inspired by the vertical sign that once hung outside of Stonewall, and named after Marsha P. Johnson, an African-American, transgender woman from New Jersey who was a prominent activist during the 1960s and 70s. This zine was printed using Newspaper Club on 80gsm bright recycled, a bright white, fully recycled, uncoated paper. It is 100% recycled post-consumer waste pulp, EU Ecolabel, FSC and Carbon Balanced certified.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

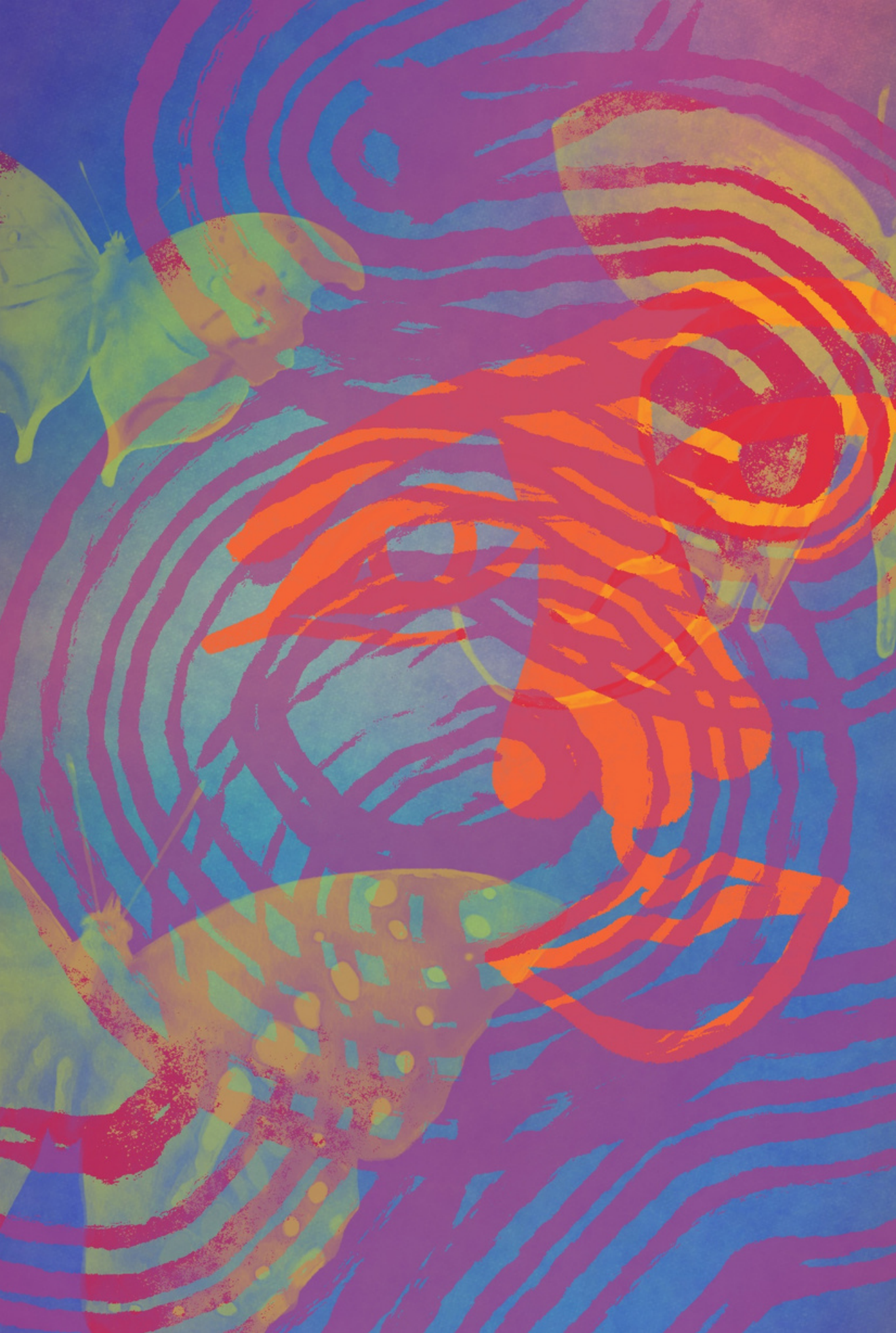
Thank you so much to NationSwell for giving me the courage and platform to create this resource! I'd also like to thank American Family Insurance Institute for Corporate and Social Impact for sponsoring this program as well. Special thanks to my amazing NationSwell fellowship team and strategist Minna Son for helping me conceptualize my ideas, create this passion project, and share it with the world. As well as a BIG thank you to all the contributors with J Wu, Ananya Gouthi, Arielle V. King, Roshelle, Uma Agrawal, Syd Goin, Kaila Pedersen, Sarah Miller, Rashida B., Maddy Allison, Austen Zoutewelle, and Ayo Oti. And lastly, I have to give a huge thank you to my family, friends, ancestors, and the traditions/legacy of Black Radical Feminists. Without your continued belief, love, and support for me, I wouldn't be the Thea I am today.

Digital Version: <https://fmytytu.wixsite.com/zine>

RECOMMENDED READINGS

With Austen Zoutewelle (she/her)

- Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela
- Women Who Run With the Wolves by Clarissa Pinkola Estés
- No Future Without Forgiveness by Desmond Tutu
- Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire
- Net Positive: How Courageous Companies Thrive by Giving More Than They Take by Paul Polman
- It's What I Do: A Photographer's Life of Love & War by Lynsey Addario
- The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander
- This Will Be My Undoing: Living at the Intersection of Black, Female, and Feminist in (White) America
- Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot by Mikki Kendall
- I'm Still here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness by Austin Channing Brown
- So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo
- Conversations with RBG by Jeffrey Rosen
- Emergent Strategy by Adrienne Maree Brown
- We Should All Be Feminists by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- Bad Feminist by Roxane Gay
- The Art of Gathering: How We Meet & Why it Matters by Priya Parker
- Parent Nation by Dana Suskind
- Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction by David Sheff
- She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement by Jodi Kantor
- Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture by Roxane Gay
- Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood by Trevor Noah
- Just Mercy: A Story of Justice & Redemption by Bryan Stevenson
- Between the World & Me: Ta-Nehisi Coates



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