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01. PREFACE

We both came into DSI with a love for people, stories and a deep desire to contribute to social good, rooted in values of care and relationships. Understanding histories, people and communities authentically is something that has been central to us in our personal lives as well as in our practice as professionals and something that we often hear from our friends, mentors and families is that we are two thoughtful, poetic and empathetic individuals. We honor these values and we wanted our thesis to be a reflection of what we see and what others see in us.

Though we value the traditional design thinking process, we also understand that it is rooted in white supremacy and a culture that does not value or prioritize people nor understands the implications of design on communities. Throughout this one year, we have made attempts to stop, reflect and modify the process to align with our values. Our thesis is thus not just our final intervention, but our process as well.

As Enneagram 9s (peacemakers), we tend to see the world from multiple perspectives, sometimes this shows up as a strength and sometimes as a weakness. Going into the project, it was critical for us to keep centering survivors. Initially this meant and looked like building relationships and working with survivors only, creating an intervention dedicated to them. However, as we unfolded the ecosystem, we started seeing multiple actors and influencers that can support the survivor in healing. We understood that centering the survivor could also look like centering the needs of those that are capable of supporting them instead. From this point onwards, our thesis took a turn into an unprecedented and uncharted land, that we hope to keep building on.

This journey has been one filled with joy, love, tears, care, and surprises and is dedicated to each other and our beloved community.

Alyson & Nishita
02. BACKGROUND
This process book is a year long culmination of survivorship, community, friendship, reflection, and joy.

The Humans Behind Side by Side

Alyson Fraser Diaz

Alyson is a communications designer, strategist, and visual artist working in the social impact sector. She combined her lifelong love of art and design with years of experience in the nonprofit sector to pursue a career in social design. Alyson has a diverse educational and professional background which has inspired her multifaceted perspective on how design can be used to create better outcomes. She approaches everything with humility and compassion which helps her to find common ground across difference. In addition to Alyson’s design practice, she loves reading dystopian novels, printmaking, and trying new coffee shops.

Words that remind me (Nishi) of Aly:
Sunshine
Laughter and joy
A wall plastered with Riso prints

Nishita Chheda

Nishita is a researcher, strategist, and visual sense-maker from Mumbai, India, committed to working towards gender equity, environmental reclamation, and education. With a background in Sociology and Communication Design, and experience working with under served communities in the global south, her work strives to center around care, compassion, and creativity. When not working, her weekends are spent pursuing patches of soil in this concrete city, trying out zero waste recipes, and exploring illustrations and the written word.

Words that remind me (Aly) of Nishi:
Wisdom
Gentle and thoughtful
Plants growing everywhere

To Our Friendship:
A friendship and project designed across oceans and timezones.

We believe that at the root of our thesis is our friendship. Side by Side bloomed and thrived because of the conditions it was nurtured in and we owe a lot of it to the care and love we have for each other, endless joy and laughter and a lot of “We’ve got this!”
Glossary

**Survivor**

Someone who has experienced sexual violence. Not everyone identifies with the term survivor however we have chosen to use it throughout our project. Survivors come from every gender, race ethnicity and age.

**Co-Survivor**

A co-survivor is someone who was a part of the survivors life before, during, and/or after the traumatic event has occurred. Can be friends, family, co-workers, or loved ones. Anyone who has also been impacted by the violence that occurred.

**Sexual Violence (*trigger warning*)**

Sexual violence is when someone has forced or manipulated someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Sexual violence is a term used to include the many types of sexual harm including (but not limited to) sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, alcohol facilitated sexual assault, and sexual harassment

Those who commit sexual abuse can be acquaintances, family members, friends, trusted individuals or strangers. Contrary to popular belief, 8 out of 10 people know the assailant.

**Trama**

Substance And Mental Health Services Administration describes individual trauma as resulting from “an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is defined by RAINN as “an anxiety disorder that can result from a traumatic event.” The symptoms include: re-experiencing the trauma through flashbacks, dreams or intrusive thoughts, avoiding things that remind you of the event, sever anxiety and depression.

**Triggers**

A trigger is when the brain registers a sight, smell, sound, taste, or sensation that is connected to a traumatic event. When a traumatic event is experienced, our brains activate our nervous system ("fight, flight, or freeze" reactions) to help us survive. We stop processing information and storing it in our brains as linear memory. For people who have experienced trauma, the brain is unable to assign a sense of time, making someone respond to the sight/smell/sound as if the traumatic event were still occurring. This can feel very debilitating.

**Disclosure**

Disclosure is when someone tells another person about an incident or experience of violence. In a survivors life, disclosure is pivotal as research suggests that when survivors experience negative or dismissive responses when disclosing their experiences for the first time, they often decide not to seek further support.

**Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a public health problem that affects millions of Americans. The term “intimate partner violence” describes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse.
So much work has been done to lay the foundation for Side by Side. We are grateful for the people working in communities every day who have created helpful frameworks that guided us. Below are three that we feel are important to mention.

**Trauma Informed Care, Design, & Relationships**

The principles of trauma-informed care, according to Substance And Mental Health Services Administration, include safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment, voice and choice, as well as cultural, historical and gender issues. For Design this means making sure that our research practices and interventions take all of these principles into consideration. We attended multiple trauma informed design workshops before working with survivors and were inspired by the work of Sarah Fathalla and her teachings on Trauma Informed design.

In an article on Medium, titled Trauma informed Relationships, the author, Kiki, discusses how these principles of trauma informed care could be applied to interpersonal relationships. Within our partnership with each other and with the relationships we build with all the survivors and co-survivors we worked with we aimed to practice these principles.

Being trauma informed determined everything from how we facilitated our interviews to our final intervention.

**Transformative Justice**

“Transformative Justice (TJ) is a political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm and abuse. At its most basic, it seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence.” Early in our research we knew that reforming the criminal justice system was not the direction we wanted to take. TJ practices focus on community, healing, and people with marginalized identities and this is central to our work.

**Equity Based Design**

“Equity-Centered Community Design (ECCD) is a framework developed by the Creative Reaction Lab that acknowledges and utilizes the role of people + systems + power when developing solutions or approaches that impact "the many” within different communities. It is a unique creative problem solving process based on equity, humility-building, integrating history and healing practices, addressing power dynamics, and co-creating with the community. This design process focuses on a community’s culture and needs so that they can gain tools to dismantle systemic oppression and create a future with equity for all.”

**Shame Resilience Theory**

Shame resilience theory is a grounded theory developed by Dr. Brene Brown and is based on building resilience to shame by connecting with our authentic selves and growing meaningful relationships with others. Shame resilience involves moving towards empathy when we are experiencing shame and moving away from it. The theory is built on 4 principles:

- Recognizing shame and understanding our triggers.
- Practicing critical awareness.
- Reaching out and telling our story.
- Speaking about shame and communicating our experiences with our trusted loved ones.

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“If we don’t deal with shame, we can’t get to healing.”

-Tarana Burke (Founder of Me Too)

Sources

Books
The Body Keeps the Score - By Bessel van der Kolk M.D.
Beyond Survival - Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
Turn This World Inside Out: Emergence of Nuturance Culture - Nora Samaran
Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds by adrienne maree brown
Dear Sister: Letters to Survivors of Sexual Violence - Lisa Factora-Borchers
Queering Sexual Violence - Jennifer Patterson
All Along You Were Blooming - Morgan Harper Nichols
Trauma and Recovery - Judith Lewis Herman
Beyond Harm: Toward Justice, Healing and Peace- Derek R. Brookes
Believe Me: How Trusting Women Can Change the World - Jessica Valenti and Jaclyn Friedman
The Sexual Healing Journey - Wendy Maltz

Trainings, Workshops, Conferences
Survivors Agenda- Black Femme Town Hall
YVN Event Day One - Ping Chong Secret Survivors Sarah
Video series on Interviewing survivors
National Sexual Assault Conference
Me Too: Survivors Agenda Summit
Trauma Informed Design Research
Supporting Survivors Workshop- Cassandra Corrado
Trauma Informed Care Principles- Jamie Harper, CPRS
Allied Media Conference
Restorative Design Conference (Sarah Fathalla Workshop)
Boundaries Workshop- Wellcium

Podcasts
Unlocking Us- Brene Brown and Tarana Burke
Interview with Elizabeth Clements
The Youth Voices Network (YVN) unites adult survivors of youth intimate partner violence by creating opportunities for survivors to connect, speak about their experiences, and raise community-wide awareness of the issue – all while fostering personal growth and healing.

YVN is committed to building a safe and non-judgmental space for a diverse community of survivors of teen dating abuse, including individuals of any gender, race, class, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, or sexual orientation.

Youth Voices members join a community of fellow survivors who are building their public speaking, advocacy and leadership skills by taking action against dating abuse. Member’s experiences have the potential to save lives by raising knowledge about domestic violence and resources for help. Their advocacy with legislators and leaders impacts attitudes and creates policy change.

YVN exists as a program under Day One, a New York City Non profit that partners with youth to end dating abuse and domestic violence through community education, supportive services, legal advocacy and leadership development. Alyson has been part of YVN which created an open & trusting partnership.

Learn more about their work: https://www.dayoney.org/

VĪV promotes survivors, or anyone who has experienced intimate or sexual harm, to exist, thrive, and live in any way they deem necessary. We work in tandem with public services, such as therapy and legal aid, but we are distinctively different from such services as we prioritize alternative modes of healing that are otherwise inaccessible. Due to our creative approach to support, VĪV grows and changes with its communities.

Learn more about their work: https://survivorscreate.org/

Yours, Rio offers three avenues of trauma-informed coaching tailored to your individual needs. You can pick one or combine all three programs — TALK, MAKE, and ORGANIZE — to empower yourself through communication, creativity, and interior design. Whether you’re growing in mental health or pursuing new goals, Yours, Rio is for anyone ready to take leadership over their healing.

Learn more about their work: https://www.yoursrio.com/
Extended Community

A Note on Covid-19:

Due to Covid 19 this project was created virtually, across time zones, and with many amazing people! While we would have loved to host our facilitations in person, especially for such a sensitive topic, we had to get creative translate to fully digital.

Sharene -Connect NYC
Catalina - Reciprocate Healing
Hala -Psychologist and Author
Rio - Yours, Rio and VIV
Michele - (Formerly) Day One
Joanna - Day One and Curl Up with Books
Justine - IDEO and Ensoma
Denise Shanté- Denise Shanté Brown
Brian Gorman- Hidden Water

Survivors & Co-Survivors
CB DC
CM RD
MB ZS
MF LM
MG DS
EJ
Embodying Trauma Informed Care Principles

Safety
Throughout our process, we practiced safety by ensuring that our community felt secure and comfortable in our presence. We took time to build relationships giving ourselves, each other and our community the space, patience and understanding that was necessary to nurture feelings of safety.

Trustworthiness
An important aspect of our process was to build trust by being transparent about our intentions, processes and methodologies. We made attempts to practice open and honest communication at all times, to ensure our words reflected our actions.

Mutuality
We practiced mutuality by practicing co-creation and collaboration. We also made sure that at each step, we were giving back something to our community that was valuable to them and that they desired such as tools, artifacts and feelings of community.

Empowerment, Voice and Choice
More than 90% of our process has been participatory in nature. We truly believe that the tent is so much bigger than all of us and made active efforts at building relationships with our community, listening to their experiences and giving the power back to them to take control over their process. Additionally, we made sure to give people a chance to reflect privately before sharing and choose what they wanted to share. It was important that everyone participating felt that they had control over their story and a choice in what they shared.

History, Culture and Gender
We took active attempts at understanding historical, cultural and gender nuances that are embedded in our topic. We did this by going through an extensive literary research phase, accompanied by interviews and conversations with experts in the field. We also made effort to create a space where everyone’s lived experience was valued regardless of their gender expression, culture, or history.
03. DISCOVERY PHASE
70% of survivors experience PTSD at some point in their lives.

80% of survivors know the person who assaulted them.

37% experience family/friend problems, including decreased trust.

RAINN
How might we re-imagine long-term healing for survivors of sexual violence.
TENSIONS & INSIGHTS
Loved ones may struggle with their own emotions...  

...yet feel guilty seeking help.

Expert Interviews: Who are Co-Survivors?

Going into this topic, we were aware of our strengths and shortcomings. We were aware of how sensitive and harm inducing our actions could be if we went unprepared. We were also clear on our role as designers and knew that we lacked a formal understanding of the physiological and psychological impact of trauma on survivors and their communities. Moreover, we did not want to reinvent the wheel, we wanted to leverage existing expert and community knowledge. As designers, our strengths lied in facilitating this trans-disciplinary knowledge building, in building relationships and connecting the dots and, so we did. Our first step was to read existing literature and validate the information we were gaining through experts on-field and gain a more practical understanding of the same. To do this, we spoke with multiple social workers, community organizers, and trauma experts working in New York City with survivors of sexual violence. The insights we gained from each of these conversations were rich and nuanced and highlighted the importance of an expert-led lens. We did not stop here, at each step ahead, when we started immersing ourselves with the community, we were backed by the support of social workers and experts, whom we are ever so grateful for!
Co-Survivor: someone who was with you before, during, and/or after the traumatic life changing event.

What We Heard:

“One of the biggest things that people can do to support for folks, is to actually read about sexual violence...Sometimes the best ways that people can support is also by knowing what is their job and what's not their job.”

M.P. Social Worker

“But I think the very few times I've really talked to co-survivors about these things from my professional role, they just feel sometimes like they don’t know what to do but also sometimes like it’s selfish to take a service or a support. People perceive it as a zero sum like somehow if I’m getting support my partners is losing something “

Hala Alyan, Psychologist

What We Learned

Co-survivors lack comprehensive, actionable resources on Rape culture, boundaries, empathy, self care, consent) and the effects of trauma. Additionally, they lack an informal community/network to learn with and feel validation from.

Co-Survivors/ support people feel unprepared to support survivors and fear what unpacking trauma may bring up for them personally yet they may often feel selfish for seeking help

It is important for Co-survivors to have boundaries. Everyone has a role to play in the healing system but it is not a co-survivors job to be a therapist or "fix" their loved one.

When survivors do expect too much from Co-survivors or co-survivors take on more than is their responsibility, that puts a lot of stress on a relationship and is not healthy. We learned that our intervention would need both party to acknowledge/learn their role and boundaries.

Most resources are dedicated to survivors and not to building up support. This lack has a lot to do with lack of understanding about how to engage the support system and also the lack of funds available. Because of this, creating something within the non-profit system that supported co-survivors was unlikely.
Survivors need to be centered in the healing process...

...yet co-survivors also have their own journey to healing.

Journey Maps

The focus of our initial discovery stage was to gain a deep understanding of survivors’ feelings, behaviors, and their healing journeys. We learned that though each survivor’s journey was unique, they shared patterns in where they were in their healing journey and the support that was accessible to them during that phase.

Based on these learnings and insights, we created 4 survivor personas: the avoidant one, the resurgent one, the motivated one and the secure one. As a survivor navigates their journey, they may see themselves transitioning from one persona to another. Understanding these different identities and the evolving nature of their journey was crucial for us to make sure that our intervention was accessible to survivors wherever they were in their healing journey.

As a disclaimer, this is just a mapping tool that helps make sense of complex data and by no means a comprehensive representation of their experience.
“There is a feeling of helplessness of not really being able to support [my partner] in certain situations. I’m supposed to be her partner but there’s really nothing that I can do at this point, besides just being there. And that really pains me.”  

— Jay* Co-Survivor

*Name changed for confidentiality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-Survivor Personas</th>
<th>Inactive Co-survivor</th>
<th>Occasionally Supportive Co-survivor</th>
<th>Active Co-survivor</th>
<th>Overly Active Co-survivor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feelings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness, confusion, disengagement,</td>
<td>Concerned, angry,</td>
<td>Empathetic, encouraging,</td>
<td>Empathetic, loving,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apprehension, fearful</td>
<td>sympathetic, fearful</td>
<td>compassionate, appreciative,</td>
<td>caring,</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>loving, caring</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Boundaries</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Speaks supportingly when the</td>
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<tr>
<td>conversation comes up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is busy in their own life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remembers and checks-in occasionally.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding of Trauma</strong></td>
<td>Very low.</td>
<td>Low.</td>
<td>Medium.</td>
<td>Medium.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding of Their Role</strong></td>
<td>Very low.</td>
<td>Low.</td>
<td>Medium.</td>
<td>Very Low.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsure if they even play a role in</td>
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<tr>
<td>the system.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Photo by William Fortunato from Pexels
"I wanted to put the experience away in a box and not think about it ever again."

- Shay* Survivor

*Name changed for confidentiality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survivor Personas</th>
<th>Avoidant Survivor</th>
<th>Resurgent Survivor</th>
<th>Motivated Survivor</th>
<th>Secure Survivor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Denial, shame, Stress, anxiety</td>
<td>Hopeful, encouraged, courageous, hesitant, vulnerable, distrust, shame, stress, anxiety</td>
<td>Strong, motivated, healthy, stress, anxiety</td>
<td>Balanced, stronger, healthier, assertive, empowered, in control, stress, anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviors</td>
<td>Disconnects with themselves and others. Develops defense mechanisms that distract them from the harm. Is hyper-vigilant and cautious at all times. Has uncontrolled emotions and bouts of severe anxiety.</td>
<td>Reflects and identifies on the experience and the impact. Seeks support. Attempts to make small lifestyle changes towards their physical and mental well being. Is faced with distrust and difficulties with communication and relationships. Has lower bouts of anxiety.</td>
<td>Continues to reflect and unpack the experience and it's long-term impact. Identifies and builds a multiple avenue support circle. Identifies healthy care mechanisms. Starts building trust and relationships. Starts forgiving the self for self-blame. Has occasional triggers and stress.</td>
<td>Has gained independence. Maintains healthy care mechanisms. Has started to engage in activism/awareness work. Grows their identity outside of the incident. Has lowered reliance on support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with Support</td>
<td>Feels distanced from them. Hasn’t openly spoken about their experience with them.</td>
<td>Starts speaking about their experience and health with friends/family.</td>
<td>Forms stronger and closed bonds with specific friends/family that becomes their circle of care and support. Begins to build new connections and relationships.</td>
<td>Has an established support circle. Builds new connections and relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience with Support</td>
<td>Is unsure of who to open up to. Feels hesitant because of the underlying shame and stigma.</td>
<td>Feels supported occasionally. Is often met with negative reactions. Is facing difficulties communicating about their experience.</td>
<td>Feels supported and cared for. Is starting to feel equipped to have healthier conversations. Is still occasionally met with judgmental and negative reactions.</td>
<td>Has established healthy communication routines. Has established boundaries. Builds trust and intimacy.知 how to manage and respond to negative reactions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survivors are encouraged to go to the police or hospital for help...

...yet survivors prefer help from friends and family.

Support Ecosystem Map

Our project began by trying to understand what types of support are available to survivors, and what support is most utilized by survivors, and what support is available for long term healing. What typically comes to mind for people is going to the police to report the crime and going to a medical center. We also looked into services from non profits and other places where survivors might find help like books or social support. Non-profits and crisis centers tend to provide education programs, immediate crisis intervention, and/or short term support (in the form of support groups) (*) but few places provide resources or support for the longer term healing that survivors may require. This leaves the survivor with limited options, either going to therapy long term or having to navigate the healing process with little support if therapy is not accessible to them. This is compounded for BIPOC survivors, Queer survivors, and other marginalized groups who do not trust formal supports of have been harmed by formal support like medical system and criminal justice system in the past. Their accounts of trauma are often denied or seen as questionable making them even less likely to seek formal support or even disclose to friends and family.

“We knew that across the board, people who experience violence, harm and abuse turn to their intimate networks before they turn to external state or social services.”

- Mia Mingus

“Ideally, anyone who has been forced into a sexual act should be seen within 24 hours at a hospital emergency room where a specially trained team provides medical care and counseling, collects high-quality forensic evidence and supports often terrified victims who may — or may not — choose to pursue legal action.”

- Jane E. Brody

“My deepest desire is supposed to be incarceration for my abuser. I’m supposed to want him to suffer, to pay for what he did. But I’ve never wanted that. I wanted some healing. For me and for him”

- Blyth Barnow

Learnings & Synthesis

Many survivors reach out to friends and family (intimate networks) looking for validation and support before going to systems. This emotional and material support can be pivotal in the healing journey and positive response decreases risk of PTSD later on.

Trust is essential for healing and is learned and built in relationships. It is often assumed people have trust within their support systems but it can be hard for survivors to learn to trust again.

Traditionally survivors form isolated networks with each other however this can create further alienation from other “everyday” support.

Healing cannot occur in isolation- We are wired for connection.

Trauma is often viewed as a personal and private matter but needs to be treated holistically as collective and systemic harm.

Long term changes are being made in policy, sex-ed and consent education and prevention. Unfortunately, there are few comprehensive tools to help current survivors navigate healing.

System is focused on healing through criminal “justice” but many survivors have no desire for criminal punishment. The system does not prepare survivors or practitioners for support beyond the legal system or enable survivors to take the time they need for healing.
Sexual violence affects not only the survivors but the communities that they are part of. However, it is treated as a private issue instead of a systemic one, with the burden being placed on survivors’ shoulders to heal themselves. This is reflective of the systems that are currently in place:

**Ecosystem**

Sexual violence affects not only the survivors but the communities that they are part of. However, it is treated as a private issue instead of a systemic one, with the burden being placed on survivors’ shoulders to heal themselves. This is reflective of the systems that are currently in place:

**Institutional Support**

The outermost ring is institutional support. These systems are set up to address immediate needs. In NYC especially, the focus is on housing security and formal prosecution. Though essential, survivors need more sustainable forms of support to process long-term trauma impacts. Additionally, for marginalized communities, these are inaccessible and oppressive, furthering the harm.

**Communal Support**

The second layer is community support. Many of these organizations are underfunded compared to institutional support and are often tied to short-term models of 12 weeks or less. While some communities are more flexible and can provide some nature of social support (ex: faith based communities), many times the person who committed the assault is part of the survivors close community. Because of this, people may be unlikely to share or face backlash when they do.

**Relational Support**

The next layer is relational support. Many survivors reach out to friends and family looking for support before going to systems. This emotional and material support can be pivotal throughout the healing journey, and early positive responses decrease the risk of PTSD later on.

**Self Support**

When survivors seek to heal and ask for support, they are often met with judgment and disbelief from both, formal and informal support systems, creating further feelings of isolation. Because of this, many survivors choose to navigate the healing journey on their own—relying on self-help, the internet, and other resources to process their harm.
The majority of institutional support is not designed to last the duration of a survivor’s healing journey. With the exception of social workers, therapists, and treatment programs, the majority of institutional support falls into immediate or short term support. We believe the most long term and sustainable support system has elements of all four. Each playing a unique role and coming together to support the work of the survivor.

Opportunities for Each Circle of Support

The first circle of support is support from a practitioner. We consider anyone with a trained understanding of trauma and processing to be in this category, like therapists, trauma informed yoga teachers, and healers. They provide support unpacking trauma, offer tools for managing triggers, and support in navigating relationships post-trauma.

The second is the Survivor-survivor support. These are shown to be vital because of the shared understanding of experience, information sharing, and help in feeling you are not alone.

The last is support from friends and family. This group has a lot of potential but there is not much traditional research about them. In interviews with survivors and experts, we found that these relationships are important sources of support but come with many challenges, especially when it comes to parents and romantic partners.

Lastly is self support. Sexual violence is incredibly isolating and healing cannot happen alone. However, no matter the avenue of support, survivors will still need to do the hard work of acknowledging the impact the harm has had on them and continue to practice self care throughout the healing journey.

While our project focuses on building up relational support, we have incorporated elements of self work, relational support, community support, and therapeutic support into our final intervention.

“Healing cannot happen in itself, we don’t live in a vacuum, so healing cannot happen in a vacuum. There can be individual stuff that happens by yourself, but you have to be connected to other people - best friends, support group, family, whoever!”

Ignacio G. Rivera
Founder
The HEAL Project

Heard at the Me Too Survivor’s Agenda Summit Workshop: Queer and Trans Perspectives on Violence and Abuse
Survivors desire depth in their relationships...

...yet find it challenging to communicate.

**Participatory Design Research with Survivors**

We started our primary research by doing individual survivor interviews and informal conversations where we heard that many struggle in their personal relationships. After initial conversations with survivors, we felt that participatory design research would be the best method moving forward because it would enable us to incorporate more trauma informed practices. We did not feel it was not right for people to share something so personal and for us to have to treat it as an interview. At the same time we are not therapists and know the boundaries of our work as designers. This led us to learn more about survivors’ experience through a facilitation. We worked with the social workers who run survivor support groups at Day One, our community partner, to create this facilitation. The facilitation started with a getting to know you activity, then we facilitated a social support mapping process based on Pod mapping where people can map out the close friends, as well as acquaintances and generally community that are there to support them. Pod mapping tool created by the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective for people who are experiencing intimate partner violence. We changed the activity a bit to be more focused on long term support and more general care needs. We then asked the follow-up questions to understand how the support they desire is different from the support they receive. Lastly we ended with an imagination activity asking participants to create something that would address the gap reflected on. We then shared together.
What We Heard:

“This made me realize there are a lot of people in my life I can turn to for support”

“I really opened up to my friend but her response made me question...is this person really even my friend?”

What We Learned

This workshop confirmed that survivors do desire support from friends and family and also want to be a good friend to the people in their lives. We learned that survivors desire reciprocal relationships with depth and honesty however frequently struggle with communication. Participants conveyed they wished their partner could know what they were thinking and when to leave them alone or that they wish they had a tool that could communicate for them. We also learned that times of disclosure are pivotal and if a friend or family member responds with judgment then that may cause a break in trust or even an end to the relationship.
Loved ones understand in theory what it means to support... yet find it difficult to apply in practice.

Supporting Survivors Workshop

Early in our conversations with our community partner considered how people could better support survivors and realized that problems arise as early as disclosure. When someone shares their experience and is met with a negative response, it can have a very negative impact. We wondered if that could be prevented and if early education (whether people know of a survivor in their life or not) would be helpful. Our community partner was really happy with the workshop we ran for survivors and asked us to facilitate a similar workshop at their annual conference. The conference is geared towards young people (aged 18-24) as well as guidance counselors, parents, and trusted adults.

We wanted to be understanding to the fact that there could be survivors as well as support people in attendance. We incorporated the pod mapping from our first facilitation as well as a few more activities to prompt reflection for how to be a good support person. The majority of education about how to support a survivor currently comes in the form of a do’s and don’t’s list. We wanted to explore how this could be more engaging and also practical so that when someone in their life did disclose, participants could remember what they learned. We chose to play a spoken word poem and have reflection questions to promote critical thinking and through storytelling.
How might we prepare support people with more than a list of “do’s and dont’s”?

“Sometimes what you need isn’t what your friend needs”
- Jen* Participant

What We Learned

What came up for you as it relates to supporting someone who has been through an experience that is different from your own?

Time for personal journaling and reflection

Opening activity was a spoken word poetry video where the two poets shared the other person’s experience instead of their own. The moral was that allies have a role but it is not to take over someone else’s experience.

Activity where participants were able to add what they thought were qualities of a support person. Everything in blue was added by participants.

YAK 2021 Schedule

Welcome: 10:30-10:40am
Opening: 10:40-11am
- Movement Exercises w/ Gibney Dance
Workshop Slot 1: 11-11:45am
- Say It Like You Mean It
- Resilience, Resistance, Healing
- Couple Goals...Really?
- Seeing Through Sexism
Break: 11:45am-12:45pm
Performances: 12:45-1pm
Workshop Slot 2: 1-1:45pm
- Upstander through the screen
- “Read the Room”
- “All About Aliens”
- “Bought/Broken VR”
Workshop Slot 3: 1:45-2:30pm
- Here to SLAY
- Supporting Survivors
- Racism, Family Violence, and Culture
- Liberating Gender
Closing: 2:30-3pm
Survivors seek support from co-survivors and co-survivors desire to help...

...yet both need the tools to get there.

Synthesis and Opportunity

The premise of our work and our model of change is a positive reinforcing loop. By increasing support for co-survivors, they are better able to support survivors which lessens the burden survivors feel to heal alone and decreases the shame and stigma they encounter.

The less stigma they encounter, the more trust is built. With more trust, comes more open communication, enabling them to identify and communicate their needs, feelings and boundaries, leading to healthier and stronger relationships with themselves and each other.

One healthy relationship can be a catalyst for the survivor to build more trusting and meaningful relationships with others, in turn reducing the burden on the co-survivor to be the sole support system for the co-survivor.

When both survivors and co-survivors feel less burdened, they are able to open up, learn and grow, while contributing to a safe and brave world.
Increasing support for co-survivors lessens the burden placed on survivors to heal alone and decreases the shame and stigma felt by them.
To build healthy relationships

Survivor
- self-awareness
- communication

Co-survivor
- trauma education
- understanding their role
I AM surrounded by love

I AM whole
I AM healing

04. MAKING PHASE

INDIVIDUAL REJECTION
EARLY CONCEPTS

Concept 1: Empathy through Stories

The first concept leverages storytelling to build self-reflection for the survivors and empathy for co-survivors. This could take both digital and physical forms where we touch upon the nuances of this relationship such as shame, grounding, and stigma. Storytelling is a great way to identify feelings, build self awareness, and provide a safe distance for survivors/co-survivors to reflect.

Concept 2: Role Play for Preparation

The second is a series of workshops where we would prepare people who currently support or want to support survivors. We will help them practice having uncomfortable conversations through role-playing.

Concept 3: Sharing Needs

The third is a sensory tool for communication that can be used by both survivors and co-survivors to ground them in tough conversations, inspire curiosity about the other person’s feelings, and prompt open communication. Partners would toss the ball and do the activity together or ask their partner the question as a starting point.
DESIGN PRINCIPLES

01. Ensure a variety of support is available and accessed, both formal and informal.

02. Create a holistic model including individual, communal and working alongside someone with formal experience.

03. Design moments for survivor of both connection to self and togetherness with the co survivor.

04. Ensure participants have flexibility and autonomy to go at their own pace.

05. Build and foster a sense of self awareness and safety before they come together.

06. Create moments of education and of joy!
FINAL INTERVENTIONS
To address our last insight on the need for both survivors and co-survivors to do individual self work before they come together, the first piece of our intervention are healing guides that we co-created with our community partner as well as survivors and co-survivors.

At some point in their healing, it is essential for survivors to gain skills to communicate the full extent of their experience. Often their story has become a rote narrative over time, edited into the form least likely to provoke rejection. The experiences of co-survivors are unique and complex too. Many co-survivors go through secondary harm, however their experiences are not acknowledged and taken into account, leading them to neglect their own healing journey.

Research suggests that through the creative arts, through talking, writing, art, music, dance, and other forms of self-expression, people can begin to tell the real story. That also may be one reason these art forms have been practiced in cultures around the world for millennia, helping individuals and communities come to terms with what has happened to them.
We need to use both, physical and digital mediums in an integrated manner, to our advantage.

Through our intervention, we want to address the specific need within relationship building, around healthy communication while redirecting them to existing resources on education.

How it Began: Prototype 1
From our original concepting we came up with our first prototype. We hoped to create a box of items a survivor and co-survivor could get with a journal and a set of activities they would do together. We created a storyboard for how it would go and below is the explanation.

1. Survivor is getting support from a formal setting and post 12 weeks, the Circle keeper/community worker gives resources to survivors to help in their long term healing journey.
2. Survivor checks out side by side and is ready to get more people involved in this process.
3. They invite a friend.
4. They go through the process - the value and intention setting, individual learning and reflection & repeat.
5. They grow closer and continue to nurture their communication.
The first draft of our journal was more of a workbook created for our book brunch members. (See next section for more on book brunch.) We began with the activities we created with Day One Social workers for our Participatory design workshop. Everyone gave us such good feedback and hoped we would make it available for more people so we knew we wanted to include it. We also wanted to make sure that before talking about past experiences, people would be equipped with a self care plan. We added an activity to improve self awareness around how emotions show up in the body as well as an activity to make a self care plan.

Co-Creating with an Expert

We wanted to make sure our work was trauma informed and appropriate for our population so we connected with Day One about the possibility of creating a journal. She connected us to the Director of Programs who would know more about the needs of her participants. It turns out that she is actually an expert at creating journals! She worked with youth to make Journals in the past and wanted to partner with us more deeply outside of her professional role at Day One. Our collaboration with Joanna helped us to build a set of parameters that we needed to consider before designing, such as the frequency, interactivity and length of our healing guides. We then collaborated with survivors and co-survivors to develop a framework and create prompts and activities that reflected their needs and desires. We considered creating it double sided; one side for independent journaling and one side with collaborative activities.
Co-Creating with Survivors and Co-Survivors

Co-creating with our community was as important to us as it was to collaborate with an expert. So having learned about the benefits of journaling and about creating a structure, we proceeded to collaborate with survivors and co-survivors to develop a framework and create prompts and activities that reflected their needs and desires. Once we had a drafted list of questions as a foundation, we shared the document with survivors to get their feedback. We left a note for them at the top and created a document for each person to reflect on and add feedback. They also added some new questions they were reflected on. We did the same with a set of questions for co-survivors.

Co-Creating Together

From their feedback and a few more meetings with survivors and co-survivors we realized that this was a massive undertaking. We scaled down to focus on one topic area with the intention of continuing to build out the full journal in the future. We made the framework for the full journals and then decided to focus on the section that most directly relates to social support.

Journal Final Draft

From their feedback and a few more meetings with survivors and co-survivors we realized that this was a massive undertaking. We scaled down to focus on one topic area with the intention of continuing to build out the full journal in the future. We made the framework for the full journals and then decided to focus on the section that most directly relates to social support.

“Things will come out that you didn’t even know were there. The inner critic quiets down as words spill out onto the page, as the pen or keyboard seems to channel whatever bubbles up from inside. Through writing, we can connect parts of the brain that don’t normally speak to each other, without worrying about what anyone will say.”

Bessel van der Kolk, MD., Body Keeps the Score
Two Complimentary Guides

Our healing guides help survivors and co-survivors acknowledge the reality of their experiences and then gain the necessary tools to communicate the same with each other and the people in their lives. For the survivor, this guide focuses on self-empowerment and how their past connects to their present.

The co-survivor guide is more focused on education around trauma and support, as well as understanding the boundaries of their role as a loving supportive presence and not a therapist. The healing guide uses creative journaling and educational activities as a tool for healing and reflection, allowing people to process without worrying what another person might say.

Way Forward

Our path to sustainability is for the guide to be a published book. We believe this is also the way to make this more accessible and are currently looking into both self-publishing and independent publishing. Until now, we have had an initial discussion with Homie House Press and attended a workshop titled 'Pitch Your Passion' by Wise Ink to learn more about how to contextualize our idea within a larger movement, and pitch it to publication houses.

Benefits

1. The guide allows the survivor and co-survivor to take ownership of their own healing and the work that needs to be done individually.

2. Builds vocabulary to better communicate personal experiences.

3. Creates a trusted space where both parties can grow and learn together in a facilitated way.

4. It is flexible and accessible to people regardless of where they are in their healing journey.
In alignment with our principles, we felt that the traditional design process of prototyping and testing was not trauma informed and went against our intuition. So, in order to get feedback on our healing guides, we invited a small group of survivors to participate in a gathering. Our intention with the first gathering was for everyone to get to know each other and to co-create the form it would take moving forward. The experience was really warm and fun and together we co-created a book brunch where survivors could be in community with each other, while reading and reflecting.

It was also important for us to facilitate feelings of being in a community, create opportunities for dialogue, and provide and get feedback on reflection tools that we had begun to design. So, in order to create an experience around the book and community, we sent the selected book, our reflection journal, and also included some fun things like tea, a stress toy, and affirmation cards.

We also wanted to make sure that these relationships could go beyond our designated meetings so we created an imessage group for everyone to stay connected and talk as we read.
Early on in our research, we learned about the benefits of a support group from a trauma-informed therapist:

“I think support groups for anything that we think of as being shameful or that society has taught us to attach shame to, are huge because the support groups essentially mean there’s more than one person in the room who’s had a certain kind of experience, and well obviously they’re all going to be different. To be able to say, oh, that person also has that experience, that person also feels a shame, that person also feels like it was their fault, that already starts to dismantle some of the shame. In my experience, I’ve seen that three sessions of a group of survivors has done more loosening and softening in a person than a year of individual therapy.”

-Hala Alyan

Benefits

1. Being in a space with other survivors can be extremely beneficial in building confidence in sharing.

2. Creates feelings of validation and fosters belong while learning from one another.

I’ve never had the opportunity to really gather with other people with similar trauma for a healing journey, so that’s been really special for me. The time we’ve spent together has been an incredible reminder that I am surrounded by love. These gatherings have almost given me the permission I thought I needed to feel the love that is around me. It was so nice to have community in this isolating time, and especially to have a safe and open sense in it, where people were accepted as they were and their strengths and triumphs were celebrated. And that there wasn’t pressure to be anyone you weren’t or share anything you didn’t want to.

The activities and strategies I’ve learned have enabled me to engage in deep reflection regarding how I really feel and what I really need while I’m on this healing journey. Our time together has given me space to grow and has given me language to better express myself and talk about my experience with myself and others. Thank you for all your work. I can’t wait to continue this journey with you all. I feel like I’ve gained support and love that I didn’t imagine at the start of these gatherings.

The work that you’re doing is so needed. For years I thought that working through and interrogating my experiences (positive and traumatic), feelings, and needs wasn’t worth while work, and that I didn’t have time for it, because I had better things to do with my time.
Side By Side Brunch

Hello friends! We are so grateful for the time that we have spent together so far and cannot wait to see how we can shape it moving forward. This is a short survey to understand more about your experience so far so that we can better understand what has worked for each one of us better!

100% of participants strongly agree that they feel better able to reflect on how their past experience is impacting them today.

100% of participants strongly agree that they feel better able to reflect on how their past experience is impacting them today.

100% of participants strongly agree that they feel better able to manage their emotions and practice self-care.
During our initial research phase, we attended a 12 week healing circle at Hidden Water, NYC. Along with a survivor circle, they also facilitate circles for co-survivors, where we connected with a participant who said that though the 12 weeks of support were helpful, he desired a more sustainable support model where he could get continuous support as and when things arise and have a space where he could be in community with other co-survivors.

We also learned from survivors and experts that one of the biggest reasons behind negative and judgmental feedback from co-survivors came from their lack of understanding of trauma and their role in the system of support.

This gap was validated in our research with co-survivors. We also learned that they desired a space for their questions to be answered and a space where they could find community. Taking this feedback from our community, we created a digital resource platform called Side by Side Support where co-survivors could send a message to a trauma therapist, receive a response with additional resources and also learn from the experiences of other co-survivors.
We originally wanted to create an educational platform so people could learn about trauma and support in a more engaging way.

What We Did

Prototype 1: Educational Platform

What We Learned

- People found it overwhelming
- Just wanted the answers to their questions
- Very low understanding of trauma language

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Prototype 2: Answer to Questions

What We Did

- Researched different question and answer vs chat formats
- Got feedback from Co-survivors about what format works best and if they needed an immediate answer

What We Learned

- Do not feel the need for an immediate answer (did not need a chatbot)
- Like being able to submit their question and give context
- Some preferred expert advice, some preferred hearing from another co-survivor
We spoke with the Trauma Life Coach that we know to hear from their perspective about a platform like this. They have experience running a suicide hotline and also being a trauma life coach.

What We Did
We did the following:

- Co-Creating with Trauma Specialist
- IDE-SIDE
- SEND A MESSAGE
- Final Side by Side Platform

What We Learned
- People found it overwhelming
- Just wanted the answers to their questions
- Very low understanding of trauma language
Therapy is good for being more vulnerable but I don’t think my therapist has the full context to help me in this area of being a partner to a survivor. It would be great to have a resource or someone I could reach out to for advice as things arise.

- Jay Co-Survivor

“Hearing other peoples stories and realizing that they are going through similar struggles in their relationships gave me the courage to be more open which gave me the confidence to speak to my partner.”

- Henry Co-Survivor

Benefits

1. It provides them with a space to learn and grow, without judgment. This also reduces the strain on survivors because it relieves them of the burden from them having to explain themselves.

2. Provides them with a reliable source of information and answers, decreasing further harm from misconceptions.

3. It is a community space where they can feel seen and heard and where their experience is validated without feeling guilty.

Way Forward

Our sustainability plan is to continue building out our relationship with a trauma specialist, Rio who said that they would be interested in co-creating this platform with us in a way that is mutually beneficial to both co-survivors and practitioners.

Feedback

“I love the message feature. Everything seems so warm and inviting.”

- Henry* co-survivor
Catalyst to decreasing shame.

Shift mindsets in relationships

Disclosing sexual violence is less stigmatized

Awareness and societal change
To engage more with our community and those that advocate for this fight against sexual violence, we created an Instagram account: @healingsidebyside. Our hope for this page is to build relationships with our growing community and begin to set a foundation for talking about healthy and supportive relationships for people who have experienced sexual violence, loved ones, ally and the larger community.

Because the community of survivors we are working with is a mix of people who identify as women and non-binary, and the group of co-survivors we are working with is a mix of people who identify as men and women, we designed our visual language to be neutral. It is our desire for Side by Side to not only reach both survivor and co-survivor communities across the gender spectrum but also make them feel welcomed and so we felt that this decision was important for us to make.

So far, we have gotten some engagement and interactivity which has been fun for us to see. We think that this space also gives people an opportunity to learn from each other and process their own thoughts about a variety of topics in the comfort of their own homes and screens.
**Theory of Change (TOC)**

**GOALS**

**MACRO GOALS**
- Survivors of sexual violence have increased access to long-term support.
- Reduced feelings of shame, stigma and isolation for survivors.

**MICRO GOALS**
- Survivors of sexual violence have healthier relationships with themselves and the people in their lives.
- Co-survivors have an increased ability to support their loved ones in their healing journey and maintain a healthy relationship.

**OUTCOMES**

- Decreased shame and stigma.
- Increased feelings of trust.
- Increased empathy and understanding.
- Improved ability to support the survivor.
- Increased self awareness.
- Strengthened understanding of the support ecosystem and the role each person can play by survivors and their loved ones.
- Increased ability for survivors and co-survivors to communicate wants and needs with each other.
- Increased understanding of trauma and its impact by survivors and their loved ones.
- Increased ability to understand and identify feelings and needs by both survivors and co-survivors.
- Increased understanding of the benefits of support.
- Increased understanding of who is in the support system for both survivor and co-survivor.
- Increased understanding of what each person needs to feel supported.
- Improved understanding and respect for communication boundaries.
- Increased support and comfort to have hard conversations.
- Trauma 101 information.
- Understanding and mapping the support ecosystem - Pod mapping.
- Who is a co-survivor and what role do they play?
- Increased access of co-survivors to experts to ask specific questions and concerns.
- Checking in with one’s feelings.
- Checking in with one’s needs.
- Communicating feelings and needs script.
- Reflecting on one’s experiences.
- Reflecting on how those experiences have shaped behaviour patterns.
- Reflecting on those patterns show up in healthy and unhealthy way in relationships.
- Agreements on when and how often to meet.
- Agreements on how to engage with each other in their time together.
- Active listening activity.

**INPUTS**
- Individual reflection prompts.
- Individual activities.
- Community agreements.
- Conversation prompts.
- Coming together activities.
- Educational resources on trauma.
- Community gatherings for survivors.
- Platform for co-survivor questions and concerns.

**INTERVENTION**
- **SIDE by SIDE**
  - SURVIVOR JOURNAL
  - CO-SURVIVOR JOURNAL
  - BOOK BRUNCH
  - SIDE BY SIDE SUPPORT (ONLINE PLATFORM)

**ASSUMPTIONS**
- Survivors are seeking support in their healing journey.
- Support person is wanting to play a role in their loved ones journey.
- Survivors recognize that this is not immediate crisis care.
**Goals**

Through Side by Side, we aim to leverage the potential of loved ones in a survivor’s long-term healing journey by improving their ability to support survivors in reducing feelings of shame, stigma, and isolation.

Side by Side achieves this goal by providing educational tools and resources, increasing a sense of community, and helping people build healthy relationships. All of this will help survivors to feel more supported in their long-term healing journey and their support people to feel more equipped to participate in this process.

**Outcomes**

In order to support our goal, some pre-conditions need to be designed, supporting both survivors and co-survivors. Our intervention specifically focuses on building a better understanding of trauma and its impact, increasing self-awareness, and improving the ability to communicate with each other.

**Inputs**

**Education:** Throughout this journey, education is integrated by providing engaging and relevant information on trauma and its impact.

**Self-awareness:** Individual and relational capabilities are built by reflecting on prompts and engaging in activities. These aid survivors and co-survivors to understand themselves and their experiences better.

**Communication:** At the end of each section are facilitated activities for survivors and co-survivors to come together and communicate their needs, feelings and boundaries.

**Intervention**

Our intervention is Side by Side- a system of tools and resources that support survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones to heal together. Currently the system is composed of a survivor healing guide, a co-survivor healing guide, a survivor-survivor book brunch gathering and an online educational platform.

The Healing Guides: Both guides use creative journaling and educational activities as a tool for healing and reflection, allowing people to process without worrying what another person might say. At the end of every section there is an activity for them to come together and discuss.

Side by Side Book Brunch: The book brunch is a creative, safe space where survivors could be in community with each other, while reading and reflecting using the healing guide. Survivor-survivor relationships are central to healing and foster a sense of belonging.

Side by Side Support: The educational platform is primarily a chat based platform where co-survivors can talk to a practitioner and ask any questions that come up for them. The goal of this is to relieve burden from the survivor having to educate the co-survivor or field potentially harmful questions. It also provides a place for co-survivors to get support and care for themselves as they care for the survivor. Additionally there will be some information about trauma and resources for learning in the journal and on the platform.

**Assumptions**

Our project lies on three assumptions. Firstly, that survivors are seeking support in their healing journey, second that co-survivors desires to lend support to the survivor and play a role in their healing journey. Lastly we are assuming that survivors recognize that this is not immediate crisis care. As part of our resources, we will be providing a disclaimer to call 911 or the RAINN hotline if they are in need of immediate care.
THANK YOU

Thank you so much to everyone who made this project possible! Thank you our community and collaborators for sharing your time, wisdom, and experiences. Thank you to Book Brunch participants—we have so much love for you and thank you for creating such a beautiful space with us! Thank you to our friends and family for all of your love and support. And special thank you to our advisor Sahar for being our therapist when we needed and our biggest cheerleader!

Alyson:
Thank you to my parents for giving me and this (crazy!) program a chance. Thank you to my husband, Roberto, for being by my side the whole time, cheering me on and pushing me towards my dreams, and loving me unconditionally. Thank you to my therapist, Natalie, for being the biggest catalyst to my growth and healing. Last but not least thank you Nishiboo! I cannot imagine going through this experience with anyone else! So thankful that we have been able to learn, grow, and heal together. Can’t wait to see what the future holds.

Nishita:
Thank you to my lovely parents for trusting in me, having my back, for reminding me to take care of myself, and being stress busters whenever this journey got overwhelming. This would not have been possible without you two, without the countless facetime calls, and without the comfort of home. Thank you to my beautiful sister, Dhvani, for being my rock, for always being there for me, for being so much more than anything I could have ever asked for. Even across seas, our bond only gets stronger, each passing day, and I am so grateful for that. Thank you to my sweetest friends, Hely, Nidhi, and Zubin, for the laughter and love that y’all surround me with. And lastly, to my soul twin, Aly, for a partnership that goes so much beyond this project. I have learned so much with you and from you, and am so touched by your happy light! I cannot wait to see what’s next for us! Thank you for this bond, and for truly being Side by Side!

We couldn’t have done this without you all!!