



Podcast Transcript, June 2023 Unapologetically You: Finding Your Authentic Self

Presented by Mo, Advocacy Specialist, and Aspen, Survivor Advocate I

ASPEN: Hello and welcome to the Women's Center's CONVO, a podcast hub that shares helpful insight for survivors, community members and service providers alike, formerly known as Wednesday Workshop. CONVO stands for Creating Opportunities for Non-Violent Outcomes, and we invite you to learn more about this initiative on Instagram at [@convo_twc](https://www.instagram.com/convo_twc).

The Women's Center is based out of Waukesha, Wisconsin. We welcome and serve survivors of all ages, races, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, nationalities, and immigration statuses. The mission of The Women's Center is to provide safety, shelter, and support to empower all impacted by domestic abuse, sexual violence, child abuse and trafficking. Each episode will feature instruction on a healing topic. Today, our topic is **Unapologetically You: Finding Your Authentic Self**.

MO: June is Pride Month, where we recognize and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community while acknowledging the unique challenges that LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic and sexual violence face. Every day and always, all genders and sexualities are welcome here.

For the second year in a row, we had the honor and privilege to participate in Milwaukee PrideFest through their Health and Wellness Initiative earlier this month.

Abuse doesn't discriminate, so support should not either—that said, what does **healing, resilience, safety, and pride** mean for LGBTQ+ survivors? We asked PrideFest attendees these questions, and we are so excited to share these with you later on in this episode.

As we begin this discussion, we will contrast four emotional impacts that domestic and sexual violence may especially have on LGBTQ+ survivors—repression, insecurity, hesitancy, and shame—with those four glimmers I mentioned earlier. What are glimmers? They are things that ground us and bring a sense of comfort, and they're often described as the opposite of triggers.

We started these conversations in our 2021 and 2022 Pride podcasts, *DV/SA in the LGBTQ+ Community* and *Healing in the Queer Community*, which are available on our website if you are interested in learning more. These topics can impact all survivors, regardless of if you identify within the LGBTQ+ community.

As we say at the end of each podcast episode, we know that all forms of oppression are ultimately connected, and when we center individuals most impacted, we are also supporting survivors who have faced any form of violence.

ASPEN: I'd like to start this CONVO by discussing repression versus healing, specifically as it relates to identity. According to Psychology Today, identity encompasses the memories, experiences, relationships, and values that create one's sense of self. In other words, identity is who we are, where we've been, what we believe in, and how we move throughout the world. Identity often can fluctuate as we grow and reflect (we call this "fluidity") but typically, identity remains a steady sense of who we are.

When experiencing abuse, someone else may be trying to actively change or control who you are and the choices you make. A way that an abuser may try to do this is by repressing or subduing your sense of identity. You may feel like you can't be yourself, that you've lost your voice and/or your sense of strength, or that you have to hide who you are in order to be loved and respected. An abuser may try to convince you that they know you better than you know yourself, and though at first glance this may seem romantic, it oftentimes is a tactic used to make you question your sense of judgement and reality, making it easier for the abuser to exert power and that they know you better than you know yourself, and though at first glance this may seem romantic, it oftentimes is a tactic used to make you question your sense of judgement and reality, making it easier for the abuser to exert power and control. In LGBTQ+ relationships, an abuser may coerce you into hiding parts of yourself as a means of "staying safe," which Mo will get into a bit later on.

When we've experienced repression, how do we begin to heal from this? Let's hear some of the responses given to us by people who stopped by our table at this year's Pridefest, read by some of our Advocates.

***ADVOCATES:** Letting go of the past. Success. Finding and accepting you and your past. Loving yourself fully. Being healing. Healing to me means to help someone. Moving forward. When it doesn't hurt you anymore. Introspection. Living. Meditating in your room alone. Overcoming things that have caused you hurt or pain. Finding yourself. Overcoming challenges. Realizing you can be happy again. Getting better. Taking the time to do your favorite things. Knowing when it's okay to relax.*

MO: There were many answers that were echoed by festgoers, like **being free, forgiving yourself, and finding peace.** You always know yourself best, you should not have to hide parts of your identity to make yourself worthy of love and respect, and your voice always deserves to be heard.

Let's talk about **insecurity and hesitancy**, as they relate to safety and resilience. I want to first remind listeners that if ever you have questions about safety planning, The Women's Center is here to help you. We have a few podcasts about safety, and we are always available via our 24-Hour Hotline at 262.542.3828 to answer questions and offer support any time you need it. Our services are always free and always confidential.

Insecurity can mean a few different things—it can be feeling like your trauma isn't valid or that the abuse you've experienced is deserved because of who you are, it can be the tangible insecurity of not being able to access resources you need to move forward or to make decisions about your life, or experiencing ridicule based on your identity, especially if you belong to a marginalized group like the LGBTQ+ community.

This may make a survivor from within the community **hesitant** to reach out to get help, feeling like the abuse may be safer and more predictable than speaking out as a queer survivor, and unfortunately this could cause a survivor to remain in a dangerous situation even longer.

As we've mentioned in previous podcasts, our community partner Room To Be Safe (a program of Diverse & Resilient) conducted a survey at Pridefest in 2019 that showed that 87% of respondents would feel most comfortable getting support from a LGBTQ+ organization rather than a mainstream organization if they were seeking support due to domestic or sexual violence.

Again, this makes sense from a safety standpoint—due to social and cultural stigmas, it oftentimes can be difficult to feel believed as a survivor of abuse, and queer survivors may especially feel worried about being seen or acknowledged as who they are without threat of additional harm. This is why, as a mainstream organization, we make the choice to speak up and work to ensure that all survivors feel safe seeking out support. Being able to show up at Pridefest for the past two years has been an incredible honor, especially as the only mainstream organization for domestic and sexual violence survivors in the Health and Wellness Area.

Here's what festgoers had to say about what **safety** meant to them:

***ADVOCATES:** Care free to be yourself. Happiness. My gender identity being respected. Protection. Feeling comfortable in any environment. Being respected as well as being respectful to others. No judgement. Feeling secure. Pure intent. Safe places to be. Not being in survival mode 24/7.*

ASPEN: Answers we heard multiple times as well were **being able to say no and have it be respected**, as well as **feeling comfortable, supported, and loved**. Like Mo mentioned, The Women's Center makes a point of emphasizing in our mission that we support everyone that is impacted by interpersonal violence, and that is why all of our services, including shelter, are available to all survivors no matter your gender or sexual orientation.

As survivors move through the healing process and find their authentic self, they may start to recognize their own strength and resilience for getting through the abuse and **surviving**.

That said, **strength and resilience** can be complicated for survivors, as we often show those traits in situations that never should have had to happen in the first place.

Resilience, especially for survivors, comes with its ups and downs. Experiencing pain or difficulty doesn't make you any less resilient! Even the strongest people deserve to be supported and release emotions during difficult times, beyond the platitudes of "you're so strong/brave/courageous/etc."

You deserve to be heard, you deserve to allow your vulnerability to process your emotions, and you do not owe anyone the perfect survival story. One of our favorite responses to the question about resilience was, "staying soft—don't let the world harden you," and it made us a bit emotional as we read through all of the responses we received.

Another response you'll hear in a moment compared resilience to the character of Poppy from the movie *Trolls*, whose official biography states that she is, "Relentlessly upbeat, [and that] Poppy wields her positivity like a super-power! The heroic leader of the Trolls, Poppy always encourages her friends to believe that, with a song in your heart, you can do anything. Because when it comes to life, why say it when you can sing it?" We also heard multiple people share that resilience meant "**bouncing back**" to them—what else did festgoers say about resilience?

***ADVOCATES:** Believing in yourself. Being alive. Resilience is the ability to keep going even when things get hard—it's like a superpower and feels so refreshing. Having courage to get help. Being able to push through even the darkest of days. Comfort in knowing that you can be you. Staying soft—don't let the world harden you. You get right back up. Being with my cats. Being myself through everything. Poppy from the movie Trolls.*

MO: Lastly, we want to talk about finding your sense of **pride** even in the face of **shame**. Shame is a common tool within abuse, causing survivors to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable talking about what happened to them, perhaps feeling like the abuse is their fault. Within the queer community, there may be additional fears of contributing to social stigmas and cultural narratives about them; we often hear that survivors have felt nervous coming forward out of concern for not reinforcing the stereotype that queer people are harmful and abusive, something we know to be untrue.

The community itself may even feel too small to comfortably disclose their experiences of abuse, fearing that others may know their abuser and either not be believed and/or become cut off from their own community. Again, this may prevent survivors from accessing the support they need, getting the safety and peace they deserve, and ultimately moving forward.

I want to reiterate that **you deserve to be unapologetically you, to find and be your authentic self, to find support within community, and to feel proud of who you are**. When we asked festgoers about what **pride** meant to them, we got many responses that echoed those points.

As we wrap this topic and share our last set of responses, I want to again thank all who visited our table at Pridefest and lent their ideas to this podcast episode. We say all the

time that your voice has power, and these responses certainly moved us as Advocates and hopefully are impactful to our listeners:

***ADVOCATES:** Feeling good in your skin. Celebrating yourself. Carefree. Not caring about what anyone says. Being a part of the community. It means everyone is loved and it won't matter what your birth gender is or who you were before. Pride is what you stand for. Being in love with yourself enough to live. Loving and accepting yourself. Getting to see family be their true selves.*

ASPEN: You deserve all those wonderful **glimmers**—you deserve to **heal**, you deserve to have **safety** and to feel **resilient**, and you deserve to feel a sense of **pride** in your identity. These are not special privileges that can be taken away or controlled by an abuser, these are the basics of what we *all* as people deserve access to.

If you would like to talk with an advocate about your own experience with abuse, please call our 24-Hour Hotline at 262.542.3828. Learn more about The Women's Center at www.twcwaukesha.org, and find the resources mentioned on this episode by clicking Resources, then Podcasts on our website. Stay tuned to our website for future episodes, and feel free to take a look at our past episodes too.

The Women's Center focuses our work in partnering with clients to overcome barriers and gain a life free from violence. Our work is grounded in equity, upheld by inclusion, accountability, self-reflection, and continual growth.

We believe that it is important for survivors to feel seen and heard. We believe that Black Lives Matter because we cannot end violence without addressing the distinct injustices that Black and Indigenous People of Color face. We know that all forms of oppression are ultimately connected, and when we center individuals most impacted, we are also supporting survivors who have faced any form of violence. While we are not experts in anti-racism work, we aspire to be allies in this movement; we all have a responsibility to contribute to unlearning racism and intersecting forms of oppression that take place in our communities.

If you're in the Greater Milwaukee area, we also host an in-person Wednesday Workshop on the second and fourth Wednesdays of every month. That is by pre-registration only, so please call the Hotline and ask to speak with one of us for more information.

Thank you so much for listening, and be well.