

Love & Harm Reduction: looking to bell hooks for guidance in Communion

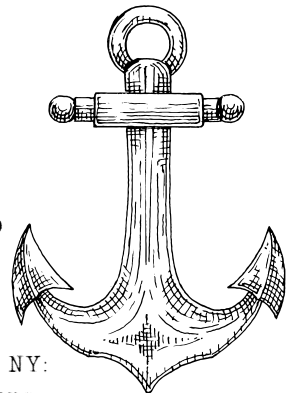
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They are wedged into the corners of neighbourhoods and city pockets where those in power and their followers rarely option to travel. Granted as little visibility as possible in the landscape of a seemingly thriving metropolis, though the survival of its population depends on what they stand for. Safe Injection Sites, they're formally called, but to their community all that's heard is "safe."

Safe spaces created by the hands of harm reduction, tucked away and kept by the community for the community, are the heartbeat of love and communion in an otherwise individualistic society. Where folks come together in physical space to unravel fully, in whatever form they may take on any given day and surrender in unapologetic humanity to the trust in the safety of the walls that separate this space from the blissfully ignorant rest of the world.

Trust is the heartbeat of genuine love. (1)

Love lives here, in its most raw, unconditional form. Here, we do not hold love, support, compassion, as exclusive, but rather as a free and infinitely abundant resource rightfully accessible to every member of our community. A cornucopia contributed to by all.



(1) hooks, bell. All about Love: New Visions. New York, NY: William Morrow, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2018. 135.

Love is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust. (2)

Here, we learn that love is not something to be expected, a noun, to be given and received as currency and then left to tend to itself in a corner of our well lived-in, under-funded spaces. Love is a verb. It is something we must actively do, every day, for and to and by one another, with the goal of nurturing one another's growth and wellbeing.

Being part of a loving community does not mean we will not face conflicts, betrayals, negative outcomes from positive actions, or bad things happening to good people. Love allows us to confront these negative realities in a manner that is life-affirming and life-enhancing. (3)

Love does not hold grudges or resentment, judgement or fear. When we love, there is no space for fear.

(2) hooks, bell. *Communion: The Female Search for Love*. New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2016.

(3) hooks, bell. *All about Love: New Visions*.

Enjoying the benefits of living and loving in community empowers us to meet strangers without fear and extend to them the gift of openness and recognition.(4)

Love forgives, moves forward, recognizes the humanness, the wisdom, in the eyes of each person, and opens to the potential to learn from one other, how one may honour the needs of the other, regardless of their foundations. Without question. To do love, is to recognize the “serve” in “survive.”

Service is another convention of communal love. (5)

To do love is how we survive.

To love as harm reduction is to recognize the agency and worthiness of each individual with care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust. In harm reduction love is unconditional. Love is safe space for the fullest, most raw, unfiltered, messy, unkept, beautiful versions of each and every member of our community. We celebrate the intimacy inherent in these spaces, these shared, open, constructed spaces - we recognize and honour the vulnerability here. To love as harm reduction is to see and be seen by those who surround you.

(4) hooks, bell. All about Love: New Visions.

(5) ibid.

Community cannot take root in a divided life. (6)

To love as harm reduction is to recognize each crucial role in a community as filled by its members, to recognize the sameness amongst each of us, the mutual permeability of self and other, the weaving of oneness that happens when communion is given the space to grow. To love as harm reduction is to maintain faith that our efforts will trickle outward, upward, into the structure of the society at large.

If we remain unable to imagine a world where love can be recognized as a unifying principle that can lead us to seek and use power wisely, then we will remain wedded to a culture of domination that requires us to choose power over love.

It is not just for frontline workers and substance users, but the entirety of our culture. Love on a mass, structural scale must be present in order for communion to occur in the fabrics of our towns and our cities. Our survival is directly dependent on our communion; on communal love.

There is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community. (7)

(6) Palmer, Parker; hooks, bell. All about Love: New Visions.

(7) Blackstone, Judith. Trauma and the Unbound Body: The Healing Power of Fundamental Consciousness. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2018.