Master's Project: Moving Toward Responsible Power: Cultivating Belonging, Meeting Shame, and Returning to Presence as a Process of Realignment

MASTER'S PROJECT: MOVING TOWARD RESPONSIBLE POWER: CULTIVATING BELONGING, MEETING SHAME, AND RETURNING TO PRESENCE AS A PROCESS OF REALIGNMENT

A Capstone Project Presented

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ABSTRACT

This Capstone project was born from a desire to increase my capacity to move in alignment with intentions to create conditions for all life to thrive, particularly in moments of perceived stress, tension, or discomfort. In the months leading up to this project, I became more aware of a misalignment between how I longed to show up in these moments–rooted in love, embodying my power responsibly–and how I actually showed up in these moments–coming from a place of fear, abdicating my power in ways that support and perpetuate systems of domination. I sensed that my own relationship with belonging shaped my ways of being in these moments, and, rooted in the teachings of somatics, I longed to cultivate new embodied patterns within myself so I could inhabit my power in ways that support systemic transformation. My methods of embodied practice, exploring my lineages of belonging and power, truthspeaking, and paying rigorous attention to my life and relationships revealed the centrality of shame in my embodied patterns. Over a six-month period, I witnessed and became familiar with my conditioning of shame and the ways it supports qualities of systems of domination such as binary thinking and individualism. In bringing awareness to this pattern and committing to create conditions of belonging within myself, I began to grow my capacity to hold complexity, receive feedback, and relate from a place of authenticity and humanity–capacities that are integral to my practice as a leader who desires to inhabit my power responsibly.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I entered the Capstone process holding this question: What is the connection between belonging and power (see Appendix A for a deeper exploration of my relationship to these words) in my own leadership practice? How can I cultivate a sense of belonging within myself and the communities I'm a part of so that I more skillfully inhabit and wield my power to catalyze transformation, rather than collapsing into conditioning in the face of discomfort, stress, or change? What are the implications of these questions for how I show up in home and coalition spaces (Johnson Reagon, 1983)?

This Capstone was born out of two important noticings. First, I noticed many moments in which there was a gap between how I wanted to show up and how I actually showed up, particularly in the face of perceived tension or urgency. Much of this misalignment, I observed, was driven by a deep desire to belong. Rev. angel Kyodo williams teaches, "When you are pushed up against the wall, you will reach for the weapons that have been given to you" (a. K. williams, personal communication, August 17, 2022). Through this project, I desired to begin to disarm myself from the weapons of empire that I have taken up and unconsciously wield. Though I profess to hold values of love, belonging, and solidarity, I often show up with punishment, exclusion, aggression, and appeasement–often subtle, and often directed at myself as well as others. In doing so, I play the "politics of disbelonging" (williams, 2021) and reinforce the very dynamics I claim to want to transform. Rooted in the knowing that "a person has transformed when their ways of being, acting, and relating are aligned with what they most care about–even under the same old pressures" (Haines, 2019, p. 35), I desired to move beyond intellectual understanding of systems of domination and cultivate new embodied patterns

within myself in moments of discomfort. How could I cultivate the soil of my body so that it was fertile ground for this transformation?

Second, I noticed a desire to reject my own advantaged positionality–specifically my white-bodiedness, my upper-middle class background and the privileges, like access to higher education and holistic health care, these identities have afforded me–to avoid guilt, shame, and other uncomfortable feelings about power. I did not know how to be in right relationship with myself or my power, given that I have been deeply shaped by and within spaces where power is often accepted and embodied as domination and control, within the larger context of working for social change with people more directly harmed by empire's violence. This rejection of myself thwarts my ability to channel my sovereign power–the power rooted in my dignity as a human being–toward creating conditions for all life to thrive.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Point practice, as taught by Rev. angel Kyodo williams (see Appendix B), was a core method of my Capstone work. As I engaged with the ideas of embodied belonging and embodied power, I needed to have an embodied practice. Nearly daily sits, often in collective as part of the No Big Deal Sit, became a method through which I grew my capacity to return to presence and began to cultivate a sense of belonging and power within my body.

I engaged with various sources to support an exploration of the beliefs about belonging and power I carry. Sources like White Awake's "Before We Were White" (2023) course, "Belonging: From Fear to Freedom on the Path to True Community" (2021) by Rev. angel Kyodo williams, and *The Politics of Trauma* (2019) by Staci K. Haines helped me better understand embodied patterns that felt misaligned but persistent and offered practices to begin to shift to new ways of embodying my power.

Truthspeaking was an important method in this process, as it countered familiar patterns of staying silent and abdicating my responsibility in the face of systems of domination. My original intention for this method was to practice wielding my power by naming harmful dynamics in spaces with little reflexivity. Though this was part of my process, my understanding of what it means to both speak the truth and to embody power evolved throughout my learning process (see "Results" and Appendix A).

Perhaps the most subtle but most fruitful method I engaged with was one of paying rigorous attention to my life and practicing with what was there. This project unfolded on the scale of micromoments–moments with customers and coworkers at the bookstore where I worked for much of this project, moments with my roommates and

friends, moments with neighbors. Power is relevant everywhere. So, too, is how I use my own–or not–for the sake of creating conditions for all life to thrive. Every interaction became an opportunity to practice new ways, and every interaction mattered because, as the wisdom of fractals reveals, "what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system" (brown, 2017, p. 53). In paying rigorous attention to my life, I sought to root my project in emergent strategy: "'Transform yourself to transform the world.' This doesn't mean to get lost in the self, but rather to see our own lives and work and relationships as a front line, a first place we can practice justice, liberation, and alignment with each other and the planet" (brown, 2017, p. 53).

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

In asking what is required to create conditions of belonging within myself and my communities, I came face-to-face with a deeply ingrained embodied pattern of shame. Shame, I believe, is the antithesis of belonging. Shame says, "I am bad," while belonging says, "I am loved and cared for." Driven by deep neural pathways of shame, I have often been hypervigilant in spaces working for justice (often coalition spaces), more focused on staying "within belonging" than listening and being receptive to the learning required for me to move toward right relationship and solidarity. My shame hijacks my intentions for participating in social transformation responsibly and initiates a flight or freeze response; in this way, my desire for belonging often gets in the way of the work needing to be done to create conditions of belonging in community.

Shame has been pernicious in this process, creeping into moments I thought I was showing up in my "own-belonging" (williams, 2021). Though I knew shame was relevant to my inquiry as I began this project, our second Capstone slam illuminated the centrality of shame as an inhibitor of my ability to cultivate an authentic sense of belonging within myself and with others. Though I sincerely tried to show up to the slam grounded in my belonging, I could only receive feedback, offered lovingly, from professional affiliates from a place of my own "badness." My shame felt like a weight dragging me down into a trench I didn't want to go into, but I couldn't stop it from happening. Consumed by my shame, I couldn't be present to the feedback being offered. Particularly as someone who holds multiple advantaged identities, my ability to receive feedback is critical to my effectiveness in working with others for social transformation; I cannot use my power

effectively to transform systems of domination if I cannot stay present enough to hear what is being asked of me.

As I tracked my shame across various contexts of my life, two important learnings emerged. First, I realized that shaming my shame was not the way forward to cultivating more belonging. Rooted in the Framework for Liberation's pillar of Liberatory Path (see Appendix C), I committed to "going to get" (williams, 2016) my shame and offering it belonging within my own experience. This changed everything. I softened, gained a deeper capacity to hold my own complexity, and began to make space for parts of myself that I have marginalized within my own experience. This making space in my internal conditions, I found, also increased my capacity to hold space for the complexity of other people, situations, and relationships. In being able to hold complexity with more awareness, I am able to relate to others more authentically, more responsibly, and from a place of more presence and receptivity. I've noticed this with my new team at CODEPINK; rather than seeking to categorize our differing orientations to our work as "good" or "bad," trying to find the "right one," I'm instead holding the complexity of our differing orientations together, curious about how we've each been shaped, how that impacts our ability to relate to each other and align our efforts in our work, and the learning available about the gifts and limitations of my own orientation as I encounter that of others.

Second, I came to better understand the way my shame is undergirded by binary thinking and rigidity–hallmarks of white supremacy culture (Okun, 1999) that support hierarchy and domination. When I'm dragged down into the ditch of my shame, the possibilities for how to move feel extremely limited. In this place, I abdicate my

sovereign power and defer to whoever I perceive to be an "authority," relating from a place of hierarchy rather than humanness. I noticed throughout this process that my perception of authority morphed depending on who was present, as I often flattened people, including myself, to their positional identities and "flipped the ladder" of hierarchies dictated by systems of domination (Hemphill, 2020), putting myself at the bottom, perceiving myself as powerless. In these moments, I shrink, defer to positional power, and neglect my own sovereign power. From this place, I cannot show up authentically, with my gifts, or with accountability. As Peter Block names, "...the language of accountability as it is used in a retributive context is code for 'control.' High control systems are unbearably soft on accountability" (Block, 2018, pp. 74-75). I, in being driven by my shame and rigidity, have been a high control system.

As I reflect on the last several months, there are many micromoments within relationship that speak to the change I'm witnessing within myself regarding how I show up in relation to belonging and power. I share two here to illustrate the difference I am noticing, acknowledging that my growth is iterative, non-linear, imperfect, and in process. I have not "arrived," nor is that the goal. I am practicing. These moments are small, but in a leadership practice rooted in relationship, their implications ripple out and impact what is possible to build together.

About midway through this process, a friend, who holds multiple marginalized identities, made an ask of me to help them get to a protest event. I wrestled with their ask, as it felt like a stretch for me at the time, but also was keenly aware of the ways our different social identities led to a dynamic in which I had access to resources and abilities that my friend did not at the time. As I grappled with how to respond, I related to my

friend from a place of shame–"I am bad because of my privilege and must earn my belonging, and this requires me to ignore my own needs and limitations." I flattened us both to our positional identities, which limited my ability to relate to my friend on a human level and have an honest conversation about the various power dynamics and needs present. In this flattening, I thought I was trying to be accountable for my power, but my actions were still rooted in domination; in coming from a place of shame and control, true accountability, and therefore solidarity, was not possible.

At the end of my Capstone journey, I found myself sharing a justice-oriented space with a black man with deep organizing roots in the south. Our different life experiences became glaringly obvious during conversations over the course of several days together. Without practicing belonging within myself, I likely would have moved through the familiar embodied experience of falling into the ditch of binary thinking, flattening each of us to our positional identities ascribed to us by empire, relating to him from a flipped hierarchy, and engaging in the relationship from a place of shame. Instead, I was honest about what I could see I did not know and spoke the truth about my experience with my own whiteness, with the ways I observe myself carrying danger given my proximity to power. He expressed gratitude for my honesty, and though I cannot know his internal experience, I believe we both felt, and at times were surprised by, the connection we began to form. This connection held each of us in our distinct experiences without defining us by them or bypassing the power dynamics present and the responsibilities attached to them. Entering Capstone, I thought my method of "truthspeaking" would be useful in disrupting home spaces perpetuating empire, and at times it was. This relationship helped me understand in an embodied way that speaking

the truth about my own experience, in its messiness and the ways it's attached to patterns of domination, responsibly and attentive to impact (Dr. S. Pinto, personal communication, August 9, 2023), is a method of disarming myself and is required for real responsibility and solidarity in spaces of coalition.

CHAPTER 4: EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

To assess my learning, I tracked my experience and observations in written and audio forms. Tracking specific data points helped reveal my learning edges. These data points included: my experience receiving feedback, my experience introducing myself in new spaces, my way of relating to friends I met at Radical Dharma Camp, my somatic response to perceived "authority," and my ability to apologize and offer opportunity for repair.

I engaged in monthly calls with my coach, Ryun Anderson, who provided important feedback and insights about my learnings. I also had several conversations with Dr. Heather Laine Talley, the steward of the Capstone year. Conversations with both Ryun and Heather continued to return me to practice and to my stated value of authenticity–my desire to root my practice within the context of my life, as it existed in the six months within which this project occurred.

I shared bi-weekly conversations with a fellow MLS student, Sarah McIlvannie, about our research, as we found we were working along similar learning edges. Sarah was a critical mirror for me during this process, as witnessing her learning journey through consistent conversations reflected new edges, questions, and orientations back to me.

I asked for specific feedback from two of my anchors and mirrors, Isaac and Sage, regarding how they experienced me show up differently, if at all, in relationship to belonging and power over the course of this project. Isaac and Sage experience me within the context of my life and community and could offer feedback from this perspective.

Their feedback can be found in Appendix F, and my reflections about integrating feedback and meeting my learning edges can be found in Appendix G.

CHAPTER 5: KEY LEARNINGS AND NEXT STEPS

As the formal process of Capstone comes to a close, I'm sitting with the ways the central words of my project have shifted. I began with an inquiry about "belonging" and "power." These words tumbled into "shame" and "complexity." As I conclude this process, I'm holding the words "responsibility" and "relationship." My learnings in this process, I've realized, are ultimately about centered accountability:

> Centered accountability is what we want to develop through the healing shame process, and continue to deepen and practice throughout our lives. Centered accountability can hold complexity, both be accountable and know what is *not* our responsibility, and stay connected and in relationship. No small thing. These embodied skills can make a decisive difference in intimate, community, and organizational relationships and dynamics (Haines, 2019, p. 312).

Centered accountability, I've learned, requires rigorous practices of awareness and honesty. It also requires unconditional belonging within myself so that I can show up with a lens of love rather than shame and punishment–both towards myself and the people with whom I'm in relationship.

I believe that shame is a significant way systems of domination show up in people who carry the conditioning of white women. In my experience, shame, untended, compels me to continue embodying qualities of these systems–not just binary thinking, but also urgency, perfectionism, individualism, and thinking there is one right way (Okun, 1999). I will be walking with patterns of shame, binary thinking, and rigidity for a long time (specific practices to work with these patterns beyond this project can be found in Appendix D). Shame has continued to come up throughout this process, and it has been

a humbling reminder of the non-linear nature of growth. I will still fall into the ditch of rigidity and shame at times, but, because of this project, I can more readily witness this pattern and return to presence–so that I can listen for the learning needed to move toward solidarity. There will always be more to learn as I find my way to right relationship. I am grateful for the opportunity this Capstone project has given me to bring rigor to the micromoments of my life so that I can continue to learn from them, wherever I am and whatever they bring.

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Appendix A: Orientations Toward "Belonging" and "Power"

Belonging

My orientation toward belonging was deeply informed by Rev. angel Kyodo williams' work on belonging. In "Belonging: From Fear to Freedom on the Path to True Community" (2021), she speaks of the desire to belong as a deeply human desire–that we are wired to have a need to belong because that is how we survive. Belonging, she says, is a sense that we are safe and can survive beyond our own means, beyond the skills we bring–and that this is how belonging has formed in our bodies, in our nervous systems. Yet, within systems of domination, our "belonging" is often conditional; there are rules that we must follow in order to belong–and following those rules can actually diminish the wholeness of who we are. In this context, it is important to be able to feel into our sense of belonging wherever we are, so we are not beholden to the rules that do not serve our thriving (2021).

This, to me, is what it means to be situated in my "own-belonging" (williams, 2021)–to be grounded in the knowing that I belong unconditionally (not to a particular space or group) and therefore can move in alignment with my values, regardless of the prescribed norms or rules of a group with whom I am interacting. Being grounded in belonging in this way is not permission to simply do what I want and ignore feedback but rather a home I can return to and move from in the face of spaces, including "home spaces," that perpetuate systems of domination–where making a choice in alignment with my values might threaten my conditional belonging within that space. My own-belonging is also a home to which I can return when I make mistakes and missteps as I try to move toward solidarity; my belonging is not contingent on my perfection as I unlearn the conditioning I have received from empire. I carried this orientation toward belonging into my Capstone inquiry, longing to cultivate an embodied sense of my own-belonging so that I can stand more steadfastly in my values and move from that place, rather than continuing to move through embodied conditioning that perpetuates systems of domination.

Throughout my project, I continued to rub up against a sense of individualism. When I asked for feedback about this pattern during a Capstone slam, Dr. Sayra Pinto recommended *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (2018) by Peter Block to me as a supportive resource. Belonging, she said, cannot be cultivated alone or individually, and Block's work explores this reality further. At times, this idea, and Block's orientation toward belonging, seemed to be in tension with williams' work on belonging. While williams' orientation toward belonging continued to be a north star, I aimed to hold the complexity of this tension as I explored my relationship with belonging throughout the project. Ultimately, I do not think they are mutually exclusive and together speak to the internal and external conditions needed for belonging amidst oppressive systems.

Power

When I originally named "power" in my Capstone question, I was speaking of sovereign power–the power I have as a being with dignity, the power I have to be in choice and to shape change through my choices. This way of relating to power has emerged over the

past two years and is largely informed by my learning about sovereignty and creating conditions in the first year of the MLS program, my embodied response to reading *A People's History of American Empire: A Graphic Adaptation* by Howard Zinn (2008), and witnessing the way leaders I admire, particularly Rev. angel Kyodo williams, as well as the faculty and professional affiliates in the MLS program, embody their power. This power, I believe, is rooted in the body and ultimately cannot be taken away by any force attempting to dominate. In this process, I longed to connect with and cultivate my sense of embodied power so that I could use it to create conditions for transformation in the face of dominating forces.

The word "power," however, also refers to the constructed yet very real power dynamics present within systems of domination. Effective leaders must be willing to examine these power dynamics and ultimately shift them. My exploration of power in my Capstone, thus, was an exploration of what conditions support my capacity to more skillfully inhabit my sovereign power for the sake of contributing to conditions for life's thriving in the face of power that moves to dominate.

I used the word "wield" in my original Capstone inquiry when referring to how I longed to use my sovereign power. Towards the end of my Capstone process, several professional affiliates asked me about my choice to use that word, noting that it has etymological roots in ideas of "control." I originally chose to use the word "wield" because it invoked an image of "intentionally picking up and using"–a shape I wanted to move toward in relation to power, rather than abdicating my power, irresponsibly throwing up my hands and letting myself be thrashed about by the power dynamics dictated by systems of domination. While this image of "intentionally picking up and using" is still useful at times, my learnings in Capstone have revealed a different shape of power that feels useful–one of "channeling" rather than "wielding." To me, channeling invokes an image of "passing through." I long to embody my power in a way that allows me to channel it to community in ways that are needed and supportive. I am still learning how to embody this shape, but one practice of power that has emerged from my Capstone project is a consistent practice of asking myself and responding to the following three questions: Who am I in relationship with? What gifts and resources (beyond, but sometimes including, money) do I have? How can I participate in the passing through of those resources? This practice has supported me in paying rigorous attention to my life and relating more responsibly to people I encounter. It provides a guidepost to recognize when I am moving from "helping" or "fixing" conditioning–a way to use power that I want to move away from–and mirrors when I am withholding resources from a place of scarcity or hoarding, which, I believe, is a withholding and hoarding of power that supports systems of domination.

Appendix B: Instructions for Point Practice

The following are the instructions given by Rev. angel Kyodo williams for point practice. Point practice has been an integral embodied practice for me throughout my Capstone work. The sitting practice itself, as well as the touchpoint and sharing/listening practice that follows in the No Big Deal Sit space, have been consistent sites of bringing awareness to how I am relating to my own belonging and power and cultivating a sense of belonging and power in my body.

4-line Instruction for Centering Meditation
w/ framing & japanese origin
adapted from Fukanzazengi by 13th century monk Dogen

sit upright - SUNAWACHI SHOSHIN TANZA [set attitude]

sit bones and knees rooted, creating a stable foundation. in-breath crown presses towards the sky, naturally causing the chin to tuck slightly. on out-breath, release muscles downward for an upright and flexible, steady, comfortable seat.

ears against shoulders - MIMI TO KATA TO [widening]

take up your full width, reaching into community, with dynamic tension, full breadth and an open heart, soft belly. facing the world with vulnerability. on out-breath...

nose against navel - HANA TO HESO TO [lengthening]

take up your full length, expressing your dignity. dynamic tension connecting heaven and earth. center of attention, weight, gravity rested — abiding — in your core on out-breath…

give one full out-breath - KANKI ISSOKU [trust release]

always begin with giving rather than taking. ride the out-breath to the very end, expelling all that is stale and no longer needed until no more out-breath. then simply releasing and allowing the vital life-force carried on breath to return to fill you and energize your life. (williams, 2020).

PRACTICE

point/other than point is the practice Rev. angel is sharing. she developed it in response to the excessive doing that seems to take over being. it's also super portable. anything can be the point. for this experience, however:

point = *breath resting in belly*

other than point = *everything that is not breath resting in belly*

upon finding one's attention-awareness other than point, simply, gently but firmly, come back to point.

then again.
and so on.

and so on.

no. big. deal.

(and very profound) (williams, 2020).

Appendix C: The Framework for Liberation

The Framework for Liberation, as taught by Rev. angel Kyodo williams, guest faculty in the Roadmap to Liberation 2022 program, and the Transformative Change team, has been integral to my Capstone work. In many ways, my Capstone is a personal exploration of the five pillars in the Framework for Liberation. In general, Rev. angel Kyodo williams' work and her orientation towards personal and collective transformation led me to my Capstone inquiry and has been foundational to my learning throughout this process. I hope to honor her teachings with my Capstone work.

The Framework for Liberation was "reverse-engineered" by Rev. angel Kyodo williams and Dr. Jasmine Syedullah from their co-authored book (along with Lama Rod Owens) *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*. As Rev. angel Kyodo williams is a Black woman trained in the Buddhist tradition and ordained as a Zen priest, her teachings are rooted in both the Black experience and the Zen Buddhist tradition, as well as the context of U.S. history and social dynamics. I participated in Roadmap to Liberation, a six-week program that supported people in living the five pillars of the framework in their own lives, in the fall of 2022–the same period I was discerning what question I wanted to explore in my Capstone work. My learning in this program therefore deeply informed my Capstone question and methods and continues to inform my leadership practice. A basic outline of the five pillars that comprise the Framework for Liberation is below. I include this here to provide a reference for readers, as I mention the Framework for Liberation in my report; I am by no means an expert on this framework or authorized to teach it, and there is much more substance to it than the information I provide here. The quoted text for each pillar comes from worksheets provided in the Roadmap to Liberation program.

The Framework for Liberation

Pillar 1: Contemplative Approach

"Practicing a contemplative approach enhances your ability to meet whatever arises with presence, spaciousness, and curiosity. Contemplation supports finding the space between experience and insight, slowing down enough to investigate patterns and deepen awareness" (williams, 2022).

Rev. angel Kyodo williams often says that Contemplative Approach is about creating the conditions to be "quiet enough to hear yourself and still enough to feel yourself" (a. K. williams, personal communication, October 24, 2022). Cultivating awareness in order to be able to better observe my embodied patterns is critical to my ability to begin to shift away from shame and practice new ways of being and relating. The pillar of Contemplative Approach invites me to slow things down so that I can be present to what is happening in my internal experience and in my relationships, so that I can move from a place of choice rather than familiar patterns that are not aligned with my intentions to create conditions for all life to thrive.

Pillar 2: Embodied Practice

"An embodied practice is one in which we inhabit the body fully to listen and find awareness in the soma. Where breath, body, belly, gut, and groin are sources of knowledge about the way we engage with others and the world. Embodiment is like submerging our awareness beneath the rough surface waters to uncover and observe the source of turbulence, encouraging us to discern, acknowledge and develop a relationship with it.

"Embodied practice is presence. It is developing the skills to be present, which enables us to interrupt our reactions and habitual patterns so we can embrace–and own–how we show up. It is seeing, knowing and accepting the information within our bodies without suppressing or overlaying our rote narratives onto each experience. There are many practices that cultivate this state of internal presence: for example, those involving repeated movement coordinated with breath (e.g., yoga, tai chi, meditation, dance, noting one's feet, body scans, etc.)" (williams, 2022).

Through this Capstone process, I desired to cultivate *embodied* belonging and *embodied* power–a more steadfast, somatic experience of my belonging and power so that I did not collapse into the power dynamics set out for me by empire. Point practice is a core embodied practice for me and hones my ability to notice my embodied experience outside of formal practice, in the context of my everyday life. Together, Contemplative Approach and Embodied Practice supported me in bringing rigor to my tracking so that I could learn from the micromoments of my life.

Pillar 3: Prophetic Praxis

"Prophets name the truth of now. This truth is often one that remains hidden or unrecognized, so the message can seem like a prediction. Prophets are often so attuned to the truth of the present that it seems like they are foretelling what is to come; we do not recognize that what they name is already present. As individuals and as a society we tend to hold onto the past with a hollow nostalgia.

"The practice of Prophetic Praxis orients us to what is, invites us to see and name the now and through this action, offers transformation. This is difficult inner work, and by naming what we notice, we develop the capacity of our own inner observer & the courage to tell the truth of now–starting by telling the truth to ourselves" (williams, 2022).

Prophetic Praxis undergirds and inspires my method of truthspeaking. Leading up to Capstone, I noticed a pattern within myself of staying silent in the face of forces of domination. I wanted to begin to transform this pattern through the work of my Capstone. Truthspeaking is one way that I channel my sovereign power. Within the context of Capstone, Prophetic Praxis often took the form of speaking the truth to myself through tracking, naming dynamics I observed that perpetuate empire (particularly in home

spaces), and being honest about the messiness or complexity of my experience with others.

Pillar 4: Liberatory Path

"A Liberatory Path, by nature, includes Rev.'s aphorism, 'Liberation wants nothing but liberation for everyone and anyone else.' That means that as you journey on your path of liberation–and as a direct expression of Prophetic Praxis: telling the truth of now, it is paramount to confront where liberation has been withheld or thwarted, so that we can move toward creating liberation for all.

"The measure of liberation for all is the state of those most marginalized by the systems and structures of the operating (controlling) paradigm. Hence in the context of globalized white supremacy and racialized capitalism, a liberatory path is always inclusive of, but not exclusive to Black liberation" (williams, 2022).

The pillar of Liberatory Path is the beginning of an invitation to "go get ourselves"–the parts of ourselves we have marginalized–and bring them back into the whole of our experience. As described in the "Results" section, Liberatory Path became a central element of my Capstone process, as it offers a framework through which I can relate to my shame, and the privileged identities I have attached to my shame, and come back into right relationship with myself–so that I can lead from that place and move toward right relationship with others.

Pillar 5: Collective Process

"As we emerge from working with the pillar of the Liberatory Path, we are clear that there is no liberation for anyone without liberation for everyone. Every voice must be heard, centering those that are marginalized and altogether disregarded. The Collective Process is a space generated and regenerated by a diversity of voices where all is welcome and each can show up just as they are. Each shows up for themselves in the company of others, trusting to come as we are, leave as we must, get what we need and mind our business as we do.

"As we work with Collective Process on our personal roads to liberation, we take this pillar for the framework inwards. Ask yourself, what are the voices that have been marginalized within your own being? Which parts of you have not been given a voice by keeping them silent or hidden or disregarded?

"Our personal collective process is a response to the call to 'go get ourselves'. By acknowledging all the selves that are within you, in all of your complexities, including your shadow selves, 'other' selves and even the selves that do the othering, you begin to create the conditions for your integration, healing and wholeness. In the practice of returning to and sitting with the whole of your being, again and again, you create the space for your own Collective Process. Which is then reflected in how you show up in

collective spaces and in relationships with other folks. How you relate with your wholeness (or not) is how you relate with everything and everyone" (williams, 2022).

Collective Process, in my experience, is deeply connected to Liberatory Path and is the unfolding of the Liberatory Path process into my relationships. Collective Process supports me in understanding the connection between being in right relationship with myself and being in right relationship with others; in coming to know my own complexity, including my shadow selves and my shame, I grow my capacity to hold others' complexity rather than moving from a rigid and shaming orientation. Collective Process, thus, speaks to the conditions needed to cultivate a sense of belonging both within myself and the communities of which I am a part.

The pillar of Collective Process also speaks to responsibility and centered accountability amidst power dynamics dictated by empire. Who has been marginalized by these dynamics, and how do I center their needs from a place of my own wholeness, or own-belonging, which includes the ways I am privileged and shaped by empire? Collective Process invites me to be in inquiry about my responsibility to the whole and how I situate myself in relation to the whole so that I can listen for what is mine to do. This pillar became increasingly relevant throughout my Capstone process, as I realized that much of the work I was doing was about learning how to relate to myself and others in a way that allowed me to be present enough to listen for what my role is within the whole as we collectively work for social transformation.

Appendix D: Practices for Moving Away From Shame and Rigidity Toward Complexity and Receptivity

As I named in my project report, I experienced a pattern of being dragged down by my shame over and over in this process. My shame felt like a weight, dragging me into a ditch that was narrow, dark, and had high walls that were hard to climb. In experiencing this pattern repeatedly–and I very much still experience it–I am learning practices that help me out of the ditch of binary thinking, rigidity, and shame. I name some of the practices that have been supportive in returning me to my ability to hold complexity and be receptive to learning here:

Touching Into Belonging and Power

As I felt into my own belonging and power iteratively, supported by somatic practice and resources like Rev. angel Kyodo williams' "Belonging: From Fear to Freedom on the Path to True Community" (2021), I often found myself bringing my hands to my heart and my gut, two points on a throughline in my core where I have begun to feel into my embodied belonging and power. When I move out of alignment or collapse into old conditioning, this is an embodied place to which I can return. This simple practice grounds me in my body, in my belonging, in my power, in my intention to show up with an open heart, and helps me remain open to listening to and learning from what the moment is teaching me.

Connecting and Relating

Reaching out for connection is another simple but important practice I am leaning into in order to move out of rigidity, binary thinking, and shame. Rigidity and shame, in my experience, feel deeply dehumanizing. When I'm in the trench of my shame, I isolate and cut off the possibility of being able to take in any new information, particularly information speaking to my growth edges. Connecting with another trusted person when I'm in a place of shame helps me feel into my belonging in that relationship, as well as my complexity as a human being trying to find my way home to loving solidarity (Dr. S. Pinto, personal communication, August 9, 2023). From this place, I can open to direct or indirect feedback that will support me in moving from a place of alignment. Conversations with my anchors and mirrors, including Ryun Anderson, Dr. Heather Laine Talley, and Sarah McIlvennie from the MLS program, continued to return me to and reground me in my humanity and intentions for this project during moments of feeling stuck in the ditch of rigidity and shame.

Practicing Power as Reciprocity

Practicing power as reciprocity, as described in Appendix A, helps move me from places of rigidity back into the present moment. In asking these three simple questions (Who am I in relationship with? What are my gifts and resources? How can I participate in the passing through of those resources?), I return to the present moment and am invited to

channel my power for the sake of collective wellbeing rather than remaining in a freeze response rooted in shame.

Grieving and Being with the Unknown

Grieving and being with the unknown–and grieving the reality of not knowing–are emerging practices for me to move from binary thinking and rigidity into alignment and receptivity, particularly as I'm in more explicit conversations in my professional work about the war economy, capitalism, and the American empire. These conversations are bringing up so much for me about my own positionality and proximity to empire and power, the ways I've attached my own identity to it, and my responsibility given my positionality. In these conversations, it is easy to move into shame, rigidity, and even feelings of despair. As I deepen in this work towards the end of this Capstone process, I'm experiencing a lot of grief for feeling lost, for the ways my conditioning has deeply limited my ability to see how to move in ways that do not perpetuate domination, for ways my conditioning has left me ill-equipped to deal with issues around power. This is not necessarily a new learning, but I am cycling through it again in a way that is calling for a deeper grief and a greater surrender to the unknown. Like connecting with others, grieving and surrendering supports me in moving away from shame and rigidity by returning me to my humanity and my complexity, as well as the complexity of the world of which I'm a part.

Appendix E: Further Reflections on Reorienting Toward Power

These essays, originally written as part of my program synthesis (a graduation requirement of the MLS program), speak to further methods for and orientations toward my leadership practice beyond the content in the main section of my Capstone report. My reflections below explore ways I am re-relating to my power across various contexts of my life as this Capstone process comes to a close.

How is your leadership inspired/influenced by the wisdom of nature?

During my time in the MLS program, I've begun to wade my way into what many people would call "birdwatching." Though I don't like the staticness of that word, it's the most succinct word English has to communicate to others what it is I'm talking about. Perhaps a less succinct but more accurate description would be "being with the birds."

There is a way of birdwatching that mirrors acquisitive, colonial dynamics–setting out to "capture" as many birds as possible, or as many birds I've never seen as possible, or perhaps rare birds that are "special" to spot. In this way of birdwatching, I can learn and memorize specific qualities of birds in a book so I can more readily identify them in the wild. I can track each of my bird sightings on a list. When I see a bird, that bird is "checked off," as if seeing a bird once constitutes some sort of achievement or equates to knowing that bird.

There is another way of being with the birds–and this way offers me a practice ground to learn how to re-relate–to be in right relationship with other people, with other beings, with myself. The birds offer an embodied experience of shifting from an orientation of definition and extraction to observation and relationship (Dr. S. Pinto, personal communication, August 24, 2021). This orientation was foreign to me when I entered the MLS program. Trained to lead from my intellect, I carried an orientation toward certainty and understanding, toward meaning-making, toward defining and extracting. I was looking for the "right way" to be, for the checklist I had to follow to be a "good leader." As I spend time with the birds, I can feel this familiar orientation come up–wanting to *know* and *understand* exactly what to look for on each bird to be able to identify it. In these moments, I practice pausing, coming back to my intentions and values, and reorienting toward observation and relationship. What am I observing about this bird, even if I do not know its Western name? If I do know its name, what can I observe beyond the facts I can read in my bird guide? What can I learn from what it looks like, from how it is behaving, from what sound it is making, from where it is choosing to reside in this moment? What does this bird have to teach me–perhaps about a specific question I'm holding at the time, or about where I need to grow or transform to be in closer alignment with my values and intentions for creating a more just and loving world?

The wisdom of fractals reminds me that how I do one thing is how I do everything. How I relate to the birds is how I relate to other beings. If I am in an extractive relationship with the birds, how am I also defining and extracting from the people in my community? This definitive and extractive way of relating perpetuates sterile approaches to social

change–ones that dehumanize and ignore relational protocols (M. Kolan and K. Sullivan Two Trees, personal communication, August 27, 2021) in the name of "getting things done." The birds remind me that authentic relationship requires conditions of spaciousness, patience, and a willingness to listen with all my senses–beyond my ears and my intellect, not just to one being but to a whole ecosystem. They remind me that I must slow down my field of perception and broaden what I'm seeing (Dr. S. Pinto, personal communication, June 6, 2022) in order to come to know another or to know a place. The birds ground me in the ways of being I must embody in order to be a relational leader with integrity. As I leave the formal structure of the MLS program, I will continue to be a student of the birds.

In addition to an orientation toward definition and extraction, I also entered the MLS program with an orientation toward specialness. As Dr. Sayra Pinto shared in the first intensive of the MLS program, "Specialness is a hallmark of power over and trauma. It doesn't allow invitations to connection. It enables a move for power" (Dr. S. Pinto, personal communication, August 23, 2021). Nature offers me another way. As I spend time in and with nature as a practice, the wisdom of leadership sourced in humility and interdependence (Dr. S. Pinto, personal communication, August 23, 2021) is reflected to me everywhere I look. The pine tree only needs to be a pine tree, the bee only a bee, and the mushroom only a mushroom. Each plays a specific, necessary role that contributes to the wellbeing of the whole. They do not try to reach beyond the bounds of their roles, and doing so would disrupt the balance of the entire ecosystem. I have learned ways of relating–helping, fixing, saving–that take me out of right relationship with the whole. Helping, fixing, and saving, I've learned, are moves for control and disrupt balance. In order to create conditions for all life to thrive, I simply (though not without much unlearning) need to participate, to listen for what is mine to do and play my specific, limited role (Dr. S. Pinto, personal communication, June 6, 2022). As desires for specialness continue to arise in my experience, I look to nature to reground in the knowing that I am a part of a larger ecosystem, a detail in the whole.

I am still learning how to listen well, and in many ways, I feel like a beginner. Being with the birds offers an opportunity to practice. So, too, does laying my body on the earth and letting my intellect quiet, or walking with a question and listening for what nature mirrors back to me about my inquiry. Amidst a culture that touts urgency and certainty as the way forward, these practices support me in rooting my leadership in the wisdom of Life–of what Life knows about how to create conditions for its thriving.

How is your leadership challenging forces of domination and oppression?

In the final months of my work in the MLS program, I began a new job with CODEPINK, a non-profit organizing anti-war, anti-militarism, anti-imperialism efforts across the U.S. The version of me who entered this program likely would have thought that getting this job indicated some sort of "success," and that my work there was the most important way I challenge forces of domination and oppression. As I prepare to leave the MLS program, my new work feels like a small part of a much larger orientation toward systemic transformation that I now carry.

On the second day of my time in the MLS program, Dr. Sayra Pinto said something that became foundational to this shift in orientation: “The myth of empire is that life depends on institutions. Life depends on community” (Dr. S. Pinto, personal communication, August 24, 2021). This reality calls my attention not to what formal roles I hold but to “how I be” in my relationships. If life depends on community, how am I contributing to my community’s wellbeing? How am I with my friends, with my family, with my neighbors, with the little ones who live above me? How am I with the members of my community who I’m not seeing on a day-to-day basis but am in proximity to, who contribute to my own wellbeing through their love and labor–including the non-human? Forces of domination would like me to believe that these relationships don’t matter–that I am solely an individual, that these relationships are merely sites of transaction, and that “pushing forward” is the way to meaningful systems change. From this place, I remain in my tunnel vision, blind to the abundance all around me. From this place, we miss each other (R. Byrd, personal communication, January 13, 2022). Through my learning in this program, particularly the ways I have begun to attune to the wisdom of fractals in the form of micromoments, I am bringing more attention to these relationships and reorienting towards them as sites of building new ways together, of caring for one another, of supporting each other in being well.

As I’ve begun to sense into what a leadership practice rooted in relationship means within the context of my life and community, I’ve continued to feel the gravitational pull back towards strategies for challenging forces of oppression rooted in reduction and divisiveness. Particularly in my new work at CODEPINK, I’ve witnessed an orientation towards systems change of fighting, of struggle, of reducing the complexity of the systems we live in and neglecting the relational work necessary for their transformation. This has at times been deeply confusing, especially as the people exhibiting these ways of being use language like “love” and “community” and “sustainability.” In my desire to belong–one I’ve become more aware of through my Capstone work–I can feel drawn to support this orientation and its strategies for change. As I navigate these spaces and assess my own alignment with my intentions to center love, relationship, and wellbeing in my leadership practice, I continue to return to a question that has become a guidepost for me in my leadership: is this a move for relationship, or is this a move for power (Dr. S. Pinto, personal communication, August 23, 2021)? This question, when brought with rigor to the micromoments of my life, clarifies if my actions are supporting or challenging forces of domination and oppression. If I am making a move for power, even if I think I am acting in the name of “justice,” I am reinforcing the very forces of domination I seek to challenge.

In this way, my learning over the past two years calls me as a leader not first and foremost to challenge forces of domination by planning the biggest protest or spending hours each week writing letters to elected officials, though these are important methods for change and ones I participate in at times. More foundationally, I am called as a leader to reacquaint with ways of being and relating that support life’s thriving–because any action I take that is not rooted in these ways will ultimately be ineffective in challenging forces of oppression. I have become estranged from these ways of being as I’ve inherited

empire's ontologies through both culture and personal histories of assimilation and trauma. This work of reacquainting requires awareness, reflexivity, humility, and patience as I work to understand how I have been made to forget these ways by "the machinery of erasure" (M. Davis, personal communication, June 7, 2022) and weaponized by empire to perpetuate its violence while practicing new ways of relating– ways of offering gratitude, of slowing down and listening, of moving by invitation and permission, of being real and telling the truth of who I am, of centering connection (M. Kolan and K. Sullivan Two Trees, personal communication, August 27, 2021). This way of challenging forces of domination calls me to fierceness, but it is not about fighting or struggle. It is about paying attention and tending to the ways I carry these forces within my own body, and softening. As Phil Gatensby said during our second intensive, "No struggle. No big effort. Just the willingness" (P. Gatensby, personal communication, January 11, 2022).

Aware of the slipperiness and seductiveness of empire's ways, I am leaving the MLS program committed to rooting my leadership practice in rigorous care. It was the rigorous care of each person I encountered in the MLS program that cultivated the conditions for my ever-ongoing transformation. It is care that sterile (V. Jeffries-Logan, personal communication, January 12, 2022) forces of domination and oppression are devoid of. This care does not flatten us to rigid identities, nor does it bypass histories of harm and violence created by empire. As I return to my own humanity in the process of reacquainting with these ways of being, I long to bring that humanity and care into each space I am in, infuse it into sterile, rigid, reductive systems in ways that offer invitations to responsibility. I am still learning how to do that well, but I am committed to learning and continuing on the path.

Appendix F: Evaluation and Assessment

Sage

As part of my evaluation and assessment process, I recorded a conversation with Sage, a close friend and former coworker. Sage has witnessed me in various spheres of my life over the past six months, not only how I show up within our relationship but also how I showed up in our shared work environment with coworkers and customers. In this conversation, we reflect together on my leadership practice in these various spaces in relationship to belonging and power over the course of my Capstone project. I received permission from Sage to share the recording of our conversation here.

Link to recorded conversation: https://drive.google.com/file/d/19-egaADjZYOspaCJlfqjKVHCtvr6Fz5T/view?usp=sharing

Isaac

Below is a written reflection from my dear friend, Isaac, who has witnessed my learning over the last several years, about what they have observed in me during the Capstone process. Though Isaac has not seen my day-to-day over the last six months, they are a frequent conversation partner and have been a consistent anchor in this work–long before I entered the MLS program.

Over the course of this leadership program, I have been witness to a clear and substantive evolution in how you show up in the different spaces of your life, personally, academically, and professionally. I believe you've been successful in this mission by learning to be with and overcome the self-doubt and self-exclusion that I've seen you struggle with over the years as your friend. You would often say that you didn't feel like you could claim identities and forms of self- expression and presentation because of a long list of "shoulds" that cut you off from your own power. I think these psychological obstacles impeded your ability to connect with your own authenticity, creating relational obstacles in building a coalition with people who you can build solidarity with in this work. It is clear to me that you are leveraging these obstacles to understand yourself better and to engage with this larger work with more clarity and integrity.

Earlier on in this venture, I remember you coming to me more frequently with your concerns of not being blank enough to be in this work, that you were too privileged and experientially distant from experiences of oppression to be of any real value to anyone. Specifically, around race and sexuality, being a cis, white woman with an unclear sexuality.

Now you are preparing to fly your flag at Denver Pride. You are giving yourself the space to explore your gender identity and expression as well as inviting queerness into your relationships. You have formed deep friendships with people of the very experiences and identities you othered yourself from, finding in those relationships that perhaps there were meaningful reflections of yourself in your loved ones that you had deemed

previously as being "different" or more worthy to claim certain ways of being in the world.

I think one of the bravest situations I've seen you navigate was concluding your romantic partnership with Gage. You trusted yourself and your sense that you needed to make a big change to be able to fully know yourself, step into your own power, and from that place, create a life that was more congruent to your authenticity. You let go. Took a serious leap of faith. And you are now seeing the positive ripples that daring choice has created.

I think that the self-critical dialogue you were working through was so crucial as I believe it was the forge for you to better accept your positionality, wield it, and not let your feelings of guilt/shame get in the way of contributing to this work of liberation.

I also see how you have practiced accepting that your strengths are at times strengths that are informed by your privileged positionality. It's at times uncomfortable history and context that we carry. I see you accepting the realities of this life path that you have been given and more deeply acknowledging that you have so much to offer to this work. This is evidenced by your deepening engagement with this work through coalition spaces like Radical Dharma, Code Pink, and the needs and offerings circle that you are putting in motion. CodePink, very specifically, needs someone like you- warts, whiteness, and all. You are responding to the suffering in your immediate community with this group that is made possible by your own individual path and vantage point. I see you are finding more peace in your relationship to the home environment, your family, your earlier life, that gave you a strong foundation for the work that matters to you.

That guilt and shame and fear of not belonging had the effect of cutting you off from your own power and tools. Power and tools that are such incredible, uncommon assets to this work. I see you being in a strong position now to sustainably lead this work because of your humility, commitment to self-inquiry, and trust in your own goodness, intention, and the positive impacts you confidently know you have made in the fields of practice you have pursued over the last couple years.

I love you. I'm so proud of you. I hope this helps. And I would love to talk more about it if you would like to dive deeper into any of the above.

Appendix G: Integrating Feedback and Meeting Learning Edges

Many new edges have emerged through this process that I will continue to work with beyond the structure of Capstone, including, as I name in my project report, reorienting and re-relating to: receiving feedback, people who I perceive as an "authority" in some way, and apologizing and offering repair. Below I share more details about what is alive for me at these edges and how I am integrating learnings and feedback about my relationship to them.

Receiving Feedback

I desire to receive feedback as a gift–as a reminder that I–my context, my gifts, my experiences–are important, and belong, in the work of social transformation. As my Capstone revealed to me, this is not how I often receive feedback; feedback, even if neutral, frequently elicits a shame response. Along with my experience receiving feedback in the context of my daily life, a somatic practice outlined in *The Politics of Trauma* (Haines, 2019) helped me better understand my relationship to feedback. In this activity, a partner repeated the statement, "I have some feedback for you" as they stepped closer and away from me at different times. To my surprise at the time, I noticed a stronger fear response within myself when my partner in this activity said this statement while stepping away from me rather than toward me. This activity illuminated more clearly the role of feedback in my own experience of belonging; I can often experience it as a threat to my belonging, particularly if the person giving feedback chooses to distance themself from me as a result of my actions.

So far, and within the context of this project, I have often actively sought feedback within close relationships, in which a foundation of love, care, safety, and belonging have already been built. As a leader committed to humility and listening, however, I know that growing my capacity to receive feedback openly, and without moving into shame (or being able to move through shame and returning to presence more readily), from people with whom that foundation of relational security has not been built is important–simply because I will not have capacity to have a deeply personal relationship with each person with whom I'm in community. This increased capacity requires continued practice of grounding in my own belonging, as well as in my own and others' sovereignty. My ability to stay in the work of social transformation is not contingent upon never making a mistake, nor is it contingent upon each person "liking" me or wanting to grow or remain in a close relationship with me in this work. Growth in this area requires attention to my patterns of appeasement, which I can tend to both with specific somatic practices (I am actively exploring more somatic practices with trained coaches as I leave Capstone) and by practicing touching into my belonging (as described in Appendix D) as feedback arises in the context of my own life.

Cultivating community with others who share many of my advantaged positional identities is also important in growing my receptivity to feedback, as these relationships provide a place to continue to feel my belonging and dignity amidst missteps, as well as a place to learn together how to integrate feedback in a way that supports us in moving

toward solidarity with people more directly and violently impacted by forces of domination. I am continuing to cultivate relationships with friends and family members who are also white-bodied and assigned female at birth–specifically Sonya, MaryEllen, George, Becky, and Emma–in which we can process our experiences and wrestle with questions of what it means, and what it takes, to be in right relationship, given the identities and conditioning we carry in the world.

This edge of receiving feedback outside of close, trusting relationships without moving into shame has been particularly alive for me at the end of my Capstone process, in my new work with CODEPINK. As I receive feedback on my work, I have been practicing grounding in the following statement, particularly in moments in which I know I will be receiving feedback: *I am a commitment to being a learner so that I can show up in better alignment with my intentions to create conditions of belonging in the world.* Being committed to being a learner, rather than to being perfect, has begun to help me take in feedback from colleagues with more receptivity and openness.

Relating to Perceived Authority

Through this Capstone process, I learned that I often take a shape of "bracing for punishment," particularly in moments of stress, tension, or conflict. As a result, I often shape my actions around what I think is the "right" thing to do–not according to my own values, but according to people I perceive to be in positions of authority (because of institutional and/or social identities)–to avoid punishment. This pattern is one of compliance and often upholds "status quo" dynamics. Like shame, it can also shapeshift across contexts and hijack my intentions to move from my own embodied power. In bringing rigorous awareness to how I'm relating to power in the micromoments of my life, supported by anchors and mirrors who can help me see what I'm missing, I am practicing regrounding in my own sovereign power and showing up more authentically, rooted in my own experiences. This also requires me to cultivate a sense of safety within my own body, through somatic practice, to support me in moving from my own knowing rather than feeling compelled to comply with authority in order to avoid punishment or preserve (conditional) belonging.

A consistent piece of feedback I received from my coach, Ryun, was that "people are just people." I continue to return to this statement, particularly in moments in which I feel myself abdicating my sovereign power, and appreciate its simplicity and levity. It reminds me that we are all trying to find our way together, and, somewhat ironically, helps me open to potentially challenging learnings from others and respond to them from a place of choice rather than automatically deferring to them unquestioningly. Automatic deferment is rooted in a mechanistic, perfectionistic orientation toward leadership; I can only authentically and meaningfully begin to shift my ways of being from a place of choice.

In some ways, this edge of grounding in my own power rather than automatically deferring to perceived authority feels in tension with my edge of receiving feedback more openly. Both are necessary leadership capacities and together speak to the discernment

and practice required to listen well. As I work with these edges in my own context, I am noticing a new edge: discerning if discomfort I feel is a signal that I have met something within myself that needs to be worked with and transformed in order to move into deeper alignment with my intentions or that I am abdicating my own knowing, and therefore my own power, and deferring to authority for the sake of appeasing and avoiding conflict or punishment. I am more actively wrestling with this question now, especially in my work with CODEPINK. There, I work with bold leadership with wisdom supported by years of experience, and I know I have a lot to learn in my own leadership practice. At the same time, there have been moments in which I question my own alignment with orientations toward change present in that space. I am working to hone this discernment for what is called for in each moment, and this will take time, experience, and a willingness to be in the messiness, including making mistakes.

Apologizing and Offering Repair

In several conversations with Dr. Heather Laine Talley throughout my time in the MLS program, she pointed me toward trusting my ability to repair as a core leadership capacity and as an important guidepost in my leadership practice. For much of my life, I used binaries of "good" and "bad" as my primary guideposts to direct my movement in relationships. Would this action keep me within the realm of "good," or at least maintain others' perception of me as "good"? This was the underlying question I asked myself, consciously and unconsciously, in discerning my path forward. These binaries, as I have begun to explore in this Capstone project, are not supportive of moving toward right relationship within complex systems and underpin ways of being that support forces of domination, like urgency, perfectionism, and the belief that there is one right way (Okun, 1999).

My reliance on binaries as guideposts for my actions began to shift as I grew my capacity to hold complexity–my own and others'–through the work of my Capstone. As I began to cultivate a sense of my own-belonging within my complexity, I began to trust more in my capacity to repair. To me, taking responsibility for my actions and apologizing when needed is an expression of truthspeaking and a way to practice moving with integrity. As Dr. Heather Laine Talley shared with me, "Integrity often looks like being able to boldly claim the spot where we're still mired" (personal communication, June 3, 2022). Apology and repair is a specific and potent site of being in my integrity in this way and requires courage and trust in my own-belonging.

Three specific moments throughout Capstone come to mind as sites of practicing integrity in this way. In each of these situations, I used my power in ways that left another feeling unsafe or unwelcome, specifically in relation to their experience of race or gender. Shame arose for me in each of these experiences; I noticed, however, particularly in the latter two, my own greater capacity to hold it within a larger whole, within a wider web of belonging within myself. From this place, I could take responsibility for my actions and offer opportunity for repair in these relationships. These experiences felt very different from past experiences of apology; rooted in shame, it was difficult for me to take authentic responsibility, and often my apologies contained bids for

affirmation of my "goodness" and continued belonging. As I cultivate the internal conditions of belonging within myself, my apologies are rooted less in shame and more in a trust of myself. Here, I am better able to show up in my integrity, take responsibility for my actions, and take the steps needed to build trust again in the relationship. Moving forward, I know that I may return to shame in these types of moments, but this project has given me an opportunity to sense into other ways of relating to myself amidst mistakes–ways that support alignment with my intentions to create conditions of belonging in the world.

In two of these instances, my apologies and offerings for repair were met by the person I had hurt with overt openness and gratitude. They expressed gratitude for my willingness to take responsibility and listen to how it had impacted them, and our repair led to a deepening of the trust present in the relationship. However, I know that my apologies will not always be met with a desire to connect and deepen, and this will likely bring up feelings of shame. Continuing to cultivate both my sense of my own-belonging and honest, loving relationships with people who share my positional identities are important ways for me to remain connected to my sense of dignity and belonging in these situations. Remaining connected to my dignity and belonging supports me in staying in the collective work of social transformation and listening for what is mine to do next after a misstep, particularly if repair isn't wanted or possible. My learnings in this Capstone process, including methods to return from shame to presence (see Appendix D), can support me in navigating these moments with intention, integrity, and love for myself and others.