

here's what
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**A Phenomenological Exploration
of Connection for Trans
and Nonbinary People
in Maryland**

a zine based on
research by
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**we
need**

to heal

phenomenologi-what? huh?

a way of asking questions and analyzing stories that helps us understand how particular phenomena (in this case, connection) are experienced and embodied

a phenomenological exploration of connection

why research connection for trans and nonbinary people?
because experiences of connection can serve as critical sites of...

joy
creativity
connection
community

AND

bridging a gap in research

So, this study aimed to explore how trans and nonbinary Marylanders understand and experience connection in their lives

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trans and nonbinary people from 8 different counties in Maryland participated in two rounds of interviews

Participants were ages 21-64 years and diverse in gender race, sexuality, disability, income, education, religion, and employment, including:

Gender: 25.0% transfeminine; 33.3% transmasculine; 41.7% nonbinary
Race: 41.7% White; 33.3% Multiracial; 8.3% each Indigenous, Black, Asian
Disability: 75% disabled; 50% neurodivergent

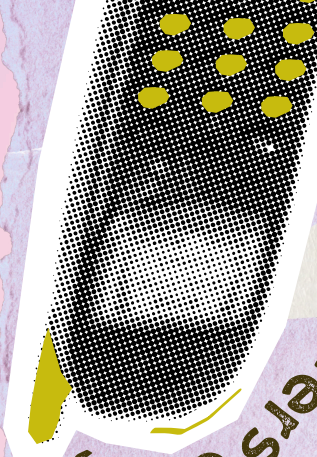
the first interview was about connection and how sociopolitical context in Maryland and beyond influences experiences

6 months later, participants were invited to review and co-construct meaning from initial results

Who did this research?

We are a team of students from Maryland - some trans community members and some allies - sharing a collective belief in taking actionable steps towards the flourishing and thriving of trans and nonbinary people

in the pages to follow, you'll read about our findings divided into four categories - one per page. On each page, we name the category, describe key themes, and present relevant quotes about connection from study participants



I'M THERE.

and if one of my sisters calls,
and if one of my sisters calls,

**I REALLY NEED TO SHOW UP
FOR PEOPLE
POLITICALLY
&
EMOTIONALLY
BECAUSE IT'S HARD OUT HERE**

category one
connection as effortful & intentional pursuit

Connection is a two-way process that requires a intention and effort, involving investment of time, energy, and resources

consistent &
intentional
presence of others

availability of safe
spaces & ability to
reach them

limited time,
energy, &
resources

**THEY'RE
THERE.**

i call them,



"... just because of things that I've seen from people, the grassroots organizations that exist in Baltimore and bigger places in Maryland; [it gives] me a lot of hope"

"... I do feel like Maryland and DC are just some queer-ass, gay-ass places to live in..."

"... there's not, like, candidly many queer people [in rural areas in Maryland] and it can be hard to find queer people..."

"It's something that I never thought I would ever have to face ... actually having someone take over our government to the point where I felt unsafe in my own country"

"there's a [Maryland] legislature that has come out and said a couple of times that they're not gonna sell us down the river to comply with assholes and that's nice"

category 2: connection as provisional sanctuary



tentative security felt
through state policy



bill signing for Maryland "Shield Law"
protections for gender-affirming care
(Senate Bill 119 of 2024)

navigating
collective threats
and oppression-
based trauma



emplaced safety
in the local environment
through connection



category 3: connection as mutual recognition and resonance



“We didn’t have to give a lot of background or explain things; we could just talk and be with each other”

“There’s just never been a question that she sees who I am. I’ve always felt very affirmed by her”

Connection as an intentional process of seeing and being seen completely in one’s full identities and experiences

Alignment in Identity, Interests, and Values

Empowerment through Diversity

Being Seen in Intersectional Experiences

connection is expansive and healing love
resistance and empowerment,
and intergenerational wisdom

"I built this
family myself,
you know? And
that feels
really good"

category 4: a collective
endeavor of mutual care
and liberation.

"They're trying to
erase us, but we're
still gonna pray, we're
still gonna dance,
we're still gonna cook
our food, and that
makes me hopeful"

i ♥ My
Chosen
Family
& They
♥ Me!

DESPITE THE WORLD



I LOVE BEING TRANS WITH YOU

COMMUNITY

NOTES

Connection is an effortful, mutual, creative, and joyful experience that feels like being witnessed in all parts of who you are, healing from harms, and liberating one another from restrictive relationship norms

!!!

Allow yourself to make thoughtful decisions around who, how, when you connect to make connection a sustainable practice

Advocating for in-person spaces, community resources, transportation infrastructure, and healthy workplaces and economic stability for trans communities can all help create opportunities for authentic connection

Acting with care and awareness of power helps avoid harm and gatekeeping in community

TRANSFORMATIVE

Reflecting on Connection

What does connection feel like for you? What are your dreams for connection in your community? What steps can you take to build more intentional connection in your life?

Use this space to write or draw in reflection of your own experience of connection!

**Zine by M Pease, Thalia Añora, Alexa Euceda,
Mannat Malik, Sarah Mizrachi, and Tara Sullivan**

This zine was designed in June 2026 by the research team and funded by the UMD BSOS Dean's Research Initiative. You can contact the research team or learn more about the project and see any updates at m-pease.com/transconnectionmd

