

Loneliness and social isolation

Guest: Tia Larkin

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Meagen Gibson - [00:00:10]

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Relationship Super Conference.

Today I'm speaking with Tia Larkin, a queer cis European descendant and registered clinical counselor in British Columbia, Canada.

She has a passion for working with LGBTQ, non-monogamous, kinky and/or sex working individuals. Through a critical theory lens and community activism she prioritizes creating safer spaces for those who have to disclose a part of themselves to their wider community by working with them directly or through advocacy and education at the community level.

Working with these communities in this way has given Tia a perspective on loneliness and social isolation for all people, which is what we'll be talking about today.

Tia, thank you so much for being with us today.

Tia Larkin

Thanks for having me. I'm excited.

Meagen Gibson

So, in the context of a relationship conference, I'd like to acknowledge the challenges presented by loneliness and social isolation. So how do these experiences show up in your work?

Tia Larkin

I am a counselor for many reasons, but one of those being obviously, that there are quite a few struggles that people don't have the safety or the freedom or the privilege to share with their wider communities, or sometimes the confidence. And sometimes that's what my job is to help build people up and create some of that confidence so that they can share those parts of themselves.

So if I'm doing my job well, I might be one of the first or only people, persons for people that they're sharing these struggles with, or their pieces of identity with, or the work they're doing, or these sorts of things.

So how that can translate to loneliness and isolation is that they're in these communities, and they feel like they have to conceal a really pivotal part of who they are. And I think we can all, maybe we can't all, but some of us can really relate to feeling lonely in a crowd. So I get to have the privilege of having these beautifully vulnerable conversations with people on a regular basis. And it's really, really awesome to see people start to own those parts of themselves.

Meagen Gibson - [00:02:26]

And I imagine, I know that I've experienced the kind of loneliness in the crowd that you're talking about. I know that I've had that in my deepest, most intimate relationships where sometimes I feel extremely lonely. And through working with somebody just like you, I've been able to break through that isolation and learn how to approach the person that I care the most about and break through that loneliness in my relationship.

And some of the things that you learn on the other side of that, where you were creating that story, where the other person wasn't creating safety and they didn't have the language or the discourse to make you feel safe when you were disclosing or to be accepting of what it was that you were saying. It's not all made up in your head. There's just a lot of interpersonal communication that happens in relationships and communities. So I'd love it if you could talk a little bit more about that.

Tia Larkin

Well, I think the secret to therapy, especially if we're just talking one on one therapy or couples therapy, is that it is intrinsically relational. So I am a person. I am somebody who through multiple sessions, I also do a consultation with folks so that they can meet me and get my vibe, essentially, to see if I'll be a good fit, is to know, oh, I'm going to share this with a person who, just by virtue of the agreements that we have in this space, is going to hopefully be a safer person.

And that relationship and just that dynamic is 70% of the work. It's not the tools I give. It's not the ways in which we're like, okay, how would you phrase it? It is literally oh, this is a person. I told them this thing and they were safe or they still accept me or they hold that space for me. And in that there's something visceral that can land in the body that's like, this is okay.

And actually it's hard to unsee that once you are like, oh, I can share this part and it felt really good. And then you go into other spaces and you're like, oh, and I don't share. It feels really distancing. It's like, I'm physically with you, but spiritually, psychologically, emotionally unable to be with you. And there is a big disconnect that folks can have.

Meagen Gibson

And I can imagine that, especially people in the marginalized communities that we talked about when I did your intro, that you're the first safe person that they've disclosed something to. Or the first place where they felt like you were a safe person that they've disclosed to.

Tia Larkin

Sometimes, I really do love working with the folks who are questioning those parts of their identities. So I work within the mental health concerns with folks who have those identities, and they're like, I don't want this to be a thing in my therapy. Is that okay? I'm like, absolutely. Your sex work is not part of the work that you want to do in therapy. It's not something we have to discuss.

But I would say that therapy is kind of taking over this role that community used to have. So when we used to live in community and we had elders and our families were close by and we had a lot of close relationships with the people we were in physical proximity with, we would be able to go to those folks and say, I need you to hold space or I need some advice or what's our cultural understanding around this thing that I'm feeling? And just with the huge change in Western society anyway, with capitalism and the huge value of being an individual and independent, a lot of people are losing their sense of connection to those communities.

And so my conspiracy theory is that therapy is actually taking the place of a lot of what we used to have in community. So it can be really, really tricky. But also, I'm very honored to be in that position when it does happen.

Meagen Gibson - [00:06:24]

I love everything you just said. I'm just thinking about that. And it brings true. Absolutely. And especially even the relationships that we had beyond our family with, not only extended family, but close family relationships, the friends of our parents and other trusted adults and people in our lives that we could rely on for help, for guidance, for wisdom in a bevy of different topics. Whether it be parenting or education or professional lives. We always had someone that we could call, but now we live much more isolated, island like lives, even when we're raising families or in our careers. That Venn diagram doesn't have a lot of overlap anymore.

Tia Larkin

Right. Even if we look back to the popularity of religion and how that's also declining, that also was a huge scaffolding for the choices and how we made decisions in the world. So we're losing those plugins to our community, especially if we're moving far away to pursue work or something like that. It can be very, you know, there's an understanding and a rationalization as to why we do that, but there are some consequences to that that I think might show up as loneliness and social isolation.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. So who might be more at risk for social isolation and loneliness?

Tia Larkin

This question for me is really important because I do want to definitely uplift the voices of those who might be at higher risk for sure. I work with folks who have to disclose parts of who they are, which means they're going against the norm of what was expected. So we live in this cisgendered, heteronormative world where anybody who doesn't kind of fit in that description has to then take this huge vulnerable step to sharing with people, and that can be very difficult.

So the folks I work with, LGBTQ folks, questioning folks, non-binary folks, people who are kinky or non-monogamous or poly. And then, of course, our sex working population.

And then we have folks who are unsheltered or have housing insecurity, aging populations, folks with disabilities, people of color. And then when you overlap those identities, like if there's multiple, if we have a disabled queer person of color who is unsheltered, those intersections of identity can really lend a lot of difficulty for accessing community or just basic resources. So I really want to highlight that because I think it's super super important.

Meagen Gibson

But obviously, social isolation, loneliness is a universal experience. I'm not taking anything away from those populations of people, because I completely agree with you and I know that the evidence indicates that as well, that it's much harder to find support to get social services, to get the things that you need when you are part of those populations. Absolutely no argument there.

But social isolation, loneliness is definitely something that all people can experience.

Speak to me about how you might know that that's what you're struggling with. What might it feel like?

Tia Larkin

Yeah. Absolutely. Because you're right. It applies to any of us. And especially when we talk about COVID, that really had a global implication.

So, for example, something that we can all face is mental health concerns. Anybody can have their mental well being kind of diminished.

And so, sometimes when folks come in and they have anxiety or depression, for example, and they're like, I don't know why. One of the biggest questions I'll ask is around their values or what is the life you want to be living? And what is the life you are living? And if there's a big discrepancy there, anybody can fall into that trap. We can very subconsciously go through the motions and end up somewhere and then be like, oh, that's actually not what I want to be doing. How did I get here?

Meagen Gibson - [00:10:49]

I ended up in a life completely designed as the antithesis to how I actually want to be in the world.

Tia Larkin

How my values actually aligned with the way that I want to be putting myself out there in community, in relationship, in my work.

And so, we might start to get this feeling. And it's really hard to describe because everybody's kind of somatic or visceral understanding of what that is going to be extremely unique to them. One of the most immediate examples that come to mind or, like, in *Eat, Pray, Love* the book, the movie. She just wants to blow up her life. And she doesn't really know why. And there's just a sense of, there's a knowing, there's a deep knowing of something isn't right.

And so in my work, I'm doing a lot of figuring out what that is. But really, all it takes is somebody's coming to me and they're like, I don't know. I don't know if I need counseling. I don't know what's really going on with me. But if they're coming to me, there is something that brought them there. There is a feeling that's saying I need help.

Or if they are in relationship and they come away from those relationships. And they're like, I don't feel close to this person yet, or my partner or my mother or my sibling. And they're just questioning, why don't they feel close to them? There's no reason. There's no explicit reason as to why I wouldn't be. And so, I'm always really curious about those experiences and what that's trying to tell us.

Meagen Gibson

I think lots of us have, especially in the last 18 months to 2 years with COVID, either experienced ourselves or known someone who's gone through some of this social isolation. I had such trouble with that phrasing. We're just going to all acknowledge it and look past it.

Social isolation and loneliness. Marriages are splitting up. Partnerships are splitting up. I've had friends who have gone through a fear of going out of the house and have stayed in the house for months and months at a time. There's different ways that this kind of, it's self imposed because of necessity. What we're seeing scares us so we're going to create a protective boundary.

And so, I do want to talk about technology. How is technology either helping or hurting these two things?

Tia Larkin

So technology is really interesting. I'm 32 so social media really started to pick up when I went to University. And so, I have a particular lens, and I just want to name that, because there is a whole generation of people who are growing up now that have had it while their brains were developing the entire time. And so, there's differential impacts there.

But I mean, to put it on, to talk about the benefit and the power of it is, we have been asked to quarantine, to isolate in a very tangible way. And so we had to really lean on social media. Some of us

still have jobs because of technology. Otherwise we would have lost our jobs or employment. Our connections. We may have been using FaceTime or Skype or Zoom for friends and family from afar, but we even had to do that with our friends who live down the street.

So we did have a huge leaning on it through COVID. And we have for a long time been super beneficial to staying in touch with people we don't live in proximity with or those acquaintances in our lives who are sharing the photos of their engagement and their wedding that we weren't invited to but we get to see. Like, oh wow, that looks like it was a really good time.

Meagen Gibson - [00:14:43]

So it can foster connectivity on this removed situation.

Tia Larkin

And that's the thing. It's removed. So the flip side is that our brain sees our loved ones, and it's like, oh, we are connected to them. And we can get a little bit of a rush from that. We can get some dopamine and serotonin, it's like, oh, this is somebody I really love, but there is a disconnect because we don't have that body feel. We don't have that, like, over in the same space and we're missing that in a lot of ways. So we can kind of have this...

Meagen Gibson

Correct me if I'm wrong but that's where the oxytocin comes in. It's the skin to skin contact.

Tia Larkin

Yes. That cuddling.

Meagen Gibson

You're getting a lot of it but not all of it.

Tia Larkin

Not all of it. It can be like, it's almost like a little bit of a rush, but not the entire thing. We don't get the full effect. It's like drinking green tea instead of coffee. I don't know if that's a fair metaphor, but it's kind of like that.

So we can have the sense of being connected, but not being fully connected.

As well, I just want to name that social media is a highlight reel. I'm not sharing when I have a bad cry, like I've been crying for 5 hours a day on my Twitter feed.

Meagen Gibson

At least if you have healthy boundaries you're not.

Tia Larkin

Well, for some people, it is a way to connect to an online community. So when we talk about how to stay connected, that is something we can do because there are these beautiful communities. Like, I know, for example, the borderline community does have this way of, there's Facebook groups that are memes that make fun of being dramatic or overly emotional. And people have a connectivity of somebody gets it. And we can laugh about it. There are still some.

Meagen Gibson - [00:16:28]

This place for us to be safe and be our fully expressive selves without the judgment of someone like me that says you don't have healthy boundaries.

Tia Larkin

Well, when I look back on, when Facebook came out, I think it was 2006, but I was posting the meals I was eating, I was like, I just ate a sandwich and milk or something. And I was like, what, why did I need to do that?

Meagen Gibson

What's appropriate and what's not?

Tia Larkin

Yes, right.

So the highlight reel is very real because we think we're getting the full picture of somebody's life. We're seeing them going to, their travel stories, their relationship. And then we are comparing that against the fullness of our own life, which does include shadowy parts or low moods or bad news or break ups or these sorts of things. And so there can be this compare and contrast, which can feel further isolating. Like, these people don't get it. Their lives are perfect.

Meagen Gibson

Right.

Tia Larkin

Or when I see a curated Instagram grid. Wow. They really have their stuff together. But they aren't always telling the full truth.

Meagen Gibson

And it's hard. You're getting that hit of connectivity and partial hormone release. But if you haven't left your bed in a couple of days or you don't have a lot of nutritious food in the refrigerator, the people that are close to you and love you aren't close enough to see that or realize that or know that they need to reach out. And if you're in a stuck place where you're feeling disconnected and lonely you're not going to reach out.

Tia Larkin

Yeah.

We can selectively choose what information we share on social media, whereas when you are sharing space with somebody, anybody who has kids or anybody who has a partner that they're really related to, it's like, I know something's up. You're not saying it is but I can feel that something is up. Something isn't right or something feels distant or just off. And then you can check in. But through computer screens and through our phones we can't always do that.

Meagen Gibson

And it takes a lot, it takes a bit to dig into it. I notice you're irritable. Here's my assumptions or here's my story about why you're irritable. And they're like, it has nothing to do with that, it's because the

plunger on the toilet is broken. And you're like, oh, I had a whole list of things that were up for submission of why you would be irritable.

Tia Larkin - [00:18:55]

I call that emotional Sherlock Holmes-ing. It's like when we're looking, we have the clues, and we're trying to put together the case. I would say that folks who are socialized female typically have more of a tendency to do that, and it's actually been very adaptive to deeply empathize. And that's not true for everybody. Obviously, it's a socialization process of, this is a skill that you can have, so depending on how you were raised. But I always call it emotional Sherlock Holmes-ing, which is exhausting and emotional labor. So I just want to name that.

We can put forward a hypothesis and I can be like, no, it's actually this, but it's the feeling you get, which you may not actually have through somebody's social media.

Meagen Gibson

And I imagine, I was talking to someone the other day who is a dating coach for marginalized communities, and he was just saying that technology has been great and that you can meet people on dating apps in other cities in town. And COVID has actually forced people to do more long distance relationships. They're more open to exploring that type of relationship and virtual dates and things like that.

But at the same time I imagine that the same thing is true, that you were just speaking of that we're doing this long distance thing or we're exploring safe communities online. We're exploring dating apps or virtual dates. But there's still not that feeling of, I'm sitting across the table from you, our toes accidentally bump into each other under the table, all of the rush of connection or just the feeling of, I remember I was, just a few weeks ago, met up with a friend at 6 o'clock in the morning and took a walk, and we ended up on a park bench. And she was sobbing. We couldn't have done that over Zoom. We needed to be, even masked 6ft away on a park bench. That was better than what we would have been able to do or what we would have felt safe to create between us on a park bench.

Tia Larkin

Yeah, absolutely. Even that in itself makes my heart break a little bit that you weren't able to physically console that person. If that was the kind of relationship that you have. Like, that just hit me because that's even tricky.

But you're right to just talk about dating apps, there's so many people, especially for my queer clients, it's really hard to know who's queer or who's safe enough to date, if we're talking about folks who are trans or non-binary and they want, the distancing of technology actually creates a level of safety.

We can ask questions without the physical, our queer LGBTQ folks are more at risk for violence. There is a huge benefit there, not only knowing who is queer, because we're swiping on people who have indicated.

Meagen Gibson

Who we've chosen. Who has opted into this conversation.

Tia Larkin

Yes. Absolutely.

And then from there, we get to do a little bit of testing around what are some things that I need to know before I actually physically meet with you. And COVID specifically, that was an equalizer where

that isn't just for the LGBTQ and kinky, non-monogamous folks who need to be like, I'm poly, is this okay? Or I'm trans. Are you comfortable? Are you a safe person?

Also just the risk assessment that people have had to do because of COVID. Where do you work? What are you doing for social distancing?

Meagen Gibson - [00:22:27]

Do you wear a mask? Are you vaccinated? What's your work exposure? Do you live with other people? What are their work exposures'?

Tia Larkin

Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

And all of those things combined, I mean, I'm just literally feeling constricted as we're talking about it. All of those limitations, even with all of the ways that we've had to create and constantly reassert safety for ourselves this year, no matter who you are, I think all of us are actively doing that over and over and over again, so that even if...

I feel like I'm super super lucky. I get to work from home. I'm very much in control of my environment and who I interact with. And yet I still get a ton of anxiety around my safety and reasserting it and the choices that I'm making in future planning. How hard is planning for the future right now?

Tia Larkin

Absolutely.

Meagen Gibson

So anybody with a lot less control over their circumstances day to day, it's just, I can feel myself getting tense. So I just wanted to name it. It's hard.

Tia Larkin

Yeah, it is. It absolutely is hard. And it's really great, it's interesting for me because I'm part of the poly and kink community and they've been doing that forever. They've had to.

So in our poly relationships there's so much sexual safety that has to be negotiated. So, are you using barriers? How many people are you sleeping with before testing? And then making those decisions. And same with the kink community, if we're setting up a scene, there's a lot of talk that goes into that. It's not spontaneous. There is planning and conscious and intentional efforts that are being put forward.

So it was very interesting for everybody to have to also get on that wavelength to be like, oh, there are risks. There are big risks. And I need to negotiate my safety in this context.

And I don't wish that upon anybody, but it does increase interpersonal communication in a really effective way for us to advocate for what we need. And also just to hear, you said this, it doesn't land well with me, so I can be assertive and maybe put a boundary here because it's actually not something I'm comfortable with that you do this sort of work and you don't wear masks at work, so we're only going to hang out outside if that's okay.

And that's like, a really beautiful skill set of negotiation. Yeah.

Meagen Gibson - [00:24:52]

So I love that you just named it. You're like, here's a community that was way ahead of the game in asserting and establishing safety. Here's our advantage that we're gonna brag about.

Tia Larkin

Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

Here's our humble brag.

I love it. There were so many communities with similar situations, whether it was, health care workers were like, we know how to handle this, but there's a lot of other aspects of health care work that have been traumatizing and difficult to deal with and isolating. For health care workers, I don't want to say that they all, it's the opposite, but as far as establishing, knowing what to do had an advantage, things like that.

Tia Larkin

Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

Right so, let's say we acknowledge our own social isolation or loneliness. What can we do about it?

Tia Larkin

Absolutely. And so I do have some practical things, but also I just want to name that we need to meet ourselves. So that feeling that something isn't right or when we come away from an interaction and we notice, I really wish they knew this about me. I don't know, or if you're questioning are they safe enough to share this with? That is something that a lot of us push away and rationalize away or think isn't valid. And it literally breaks my heart because there's so much wisdom in that curiosity or in that kind of body wisdom is what I like to call it.

So COVID really had us slowing down. We had to slow down. And there was an uptick in my services because so many people were forced to meet with that wisdom because they didn't have the coping...

Meagen Gibson

The usual let off valve.

Tia Larkin

If you can just work 80 hours a week, then you can run away.

Meagen Gibson

Go out, socialize.

Tia Larkin

Yeah. Absolutely.

I think when we talk about it, like going back to normal, I don't think there is a normal because so many people were met with the things they were running from for a really long time.

And so, what I encourage folks to do is to slow down and to hear those signs as much as possible. I have a couple of guided meditations I've created to help people get acquainted with what those signs look like in them, because we all have different ways of feeling, seeing, sensing what that is. So just maybe even finding meditations around how to create a relationship with your intuition.

If meditation isn't for you, then I just encourage kind of a regular check in with yourself. And that can be just through journaling. So free writing is something I really like where you don't care about the spelling or what it looks like or what it says.

Meagen Gibson - [00:27:43]

We're not editing for publication here. We're just expressing ourselves.

Tia Larkin

Just expressing. And some people don't want to commit to that much writing. So even if you just do a sentence a day, that's a really nice practice I like to, where at the end of your day or the beginning of your day, where you just write whatever is on your heart and mind, you just kind of, oh, cool, like, a year ago today this is what I was thinking about. Wow. What a change. And just being able to tap into that relationship with the self. So I think that that's really important.

And then, of course, we're talking about loneliness so relationships are going to be really important. Therapy is a great option, but it's not always accessible for folks, and it's also not something people are super comfortable with. And that's okay.

So online communities, we talked a little bit about that. My favorite example is here we have a local spoons community, which is a theory that was developed in the realm of chronic illness and disability, where we only have so many spoons in a day. And every task that we do takes away a spoon or 3 spoons, depending on how exhausting it is.

And so, there's this online community that I'm aware of that people can say, I have 2 spoons today, and I need to do this task, and they don't have the spoons to do that. Can somebody help? And so I think when we talk about technology, we can lean on online communities a little bit.

Also, a lot of people are discovering themselves through online communities. They'll see somebody's journey of their transition, for example, and they'll be like, oh, I feel a lot of those things as well. So just kind of accessing those spaces and getting information, but also connecting and starting to make connections through that.

And if we are going to be sharing with other people, I don't say just tell people that you're queer, that you're a sex worker. It's not that easy. It's definitely not that easy. So I encourage safety testing. So if you're with somebody and you have a sense that you want them to know this part about you, just like mentioning, oh, did you hear that Sam Smith uses they/them pronouns and just seeing how they react.

Meagen Gibson

Just drop it in the middle of this topic.

Tia Larkin

And just be like, how does that person take that? And you can do that as much as you need to, and as many times as you want before you disclose those sorts of things. There's no one way to come out. And also, I don't think it's appropriate for us to pressure people to come out or to share those parts of

themselves, because there's many reasons that they aren't, if they're choosing not to. So that's some of the work that I do, why don't you feel like you can share that? But they may also just not want to. And that's cool, too.

And then if you do have privilege and you do have an identity that's a little more isolated or something that is a little more stigmatized, this is something that I often do because I am a queer woman, but I'm also a highly educated, white, able bodied, cis female, so I do not mind taking on a lot of social justice labor because I do have a lot of privilege. So I'm like, cool, I want to not only do work in my paid position with LGBTQ folks, but I am in community doing activism, pro bono education, and those sorts of things. And that's really important to me. That's going to be a huge part of how I exercise my own privilege to uplift the folks who I identify with.

And that's not always accessible. I want to name that's a very privileged thing. And the black community really did name that. We're not doing labor for you. So it's not something you have to do if we're not doing it. But even if you want to partake in social justice initiatives or volunteering, that's also a really great way to stay connected. And you don't necessarily have to identify yourself, but you can have those physical connections or those online connections, and that can be really valuable as well.

Meagen Gibson - [00:31:44]

And since you just named safety testing and you're also a therapist, I would love to talk to you about finding safety in therapists and the checklist that you would recommend people go through. And it doesn't have to be an exact process.

But even myself, again, I'm able to find therapists that work for me. And yet I have not, like I have now, but it took a long time for me to find somebody that truly felt safe. And I am not part of the 95% marginalized communities that we've talked about today.

So if it's hard for me, I can imagine it's exponentially harder for somebody else. And those are super intimate relationships. So I'd love it if you could take us through any recommendations that you have.

Tia Larkin

Absolutely for sure.

I actually have a blog post about this because it is hard. Like, even me, I had to find a therapist myself, and I was like, this is tough, especially if you aren't sure what you want to work on. Like, you have a sense that you want therapy, but you're not sure what you want to work on. If you know what you want to work on I often encourage folks to find somebody who has a passion working with that thing in particular.

So I have a number of tattoos, but they are from tattoo artists who I know love doing the things that I wanted. So that's why I have a number of tattoos from different artists, because I'm like, you like birds. I have a bird tattoo, so I'm like, who likes to tattoo birds? I found that person.

So therapy is the same way. We often all work with depression and anxiety. But who has a passion working with depression? That's going to be somebody who probably has the most tools, has the most enthusiasm about working with something like that.

Meagen Gibson

The most continued learning in that particular area.

Tia Larkin

Yes.

Yeah. And it does have to do with competency, but it also just has to do with passion. There's something that therapy is, I find a very vivacious and invigorating kind of process, but that's how I operate naturally. I do a consultation with people that's free. There's no obligation for them to then book with me because I may not be the right fit, but I show up as myself and how I will show up to the work. And I'm like, this is how it is. These are some things you should know about how it works. They let me know what they're loosely hoping to work on. And then I tell them if that's something that I am really passionate about working with or that I have the competency to work with.

Of course, credentials are going to be important. Counseling and therapy are not always regulated professions in States or in provinces. In Canada, I'm working in a province that actually isn't regulated. So anybody can take the title counselor or therapist. So ask about their education and their continuing education. And if they are registered with a college or an association.

I'm registered with two associations because I have a Masters in counseling, so I have met the educational requirements as well as the practicum requirements to meet those titles. And of course, insurance is more likely to cover my service because of that. So there is that benefit.

But just checking in to see what the regulations in your State or province are to see if the counselor or therapist that you're working with does meet those standards.

And then, yeah, if it's not a fit, if you get into therapy and your five sessions in and you're like, I don't like this or I don't feel safe enough or I don't trust this person or whatever it might be. I encourage people to name that. It's such a wonderful practice because it's something you can translate into your everyday life with somebody who has hopefully the groundedness and the ability to take that and see it as an opportunity for relational repair and also just problem solving. What is it about our work together that doesn't feel safe? Or that you don't trust? Or like, what are you noticing?

And then if it truly isn't a fit, find somebody else.

Meagen Gibson - [00:36:04]

It's such a great opportunity to practice what you're just saying because if it isn't a good fit, you name it, and then you never have to see that person again. You're not in a relationship with them.

Tia Larkin

Yes. Out of relationship. And I mean, it's okay if you don't feel safe enough to even do that. You need to have a certain amount of safety to even do that. But it is this cool opportunity to practice that.

And honestly, when that has happened with me, I've been like, cool. I have been a stepping stone to the therapist that hopefully is a good fit. And that's also super beneficial for somebody to even be able to tell me I'm really angry with you right now. I'm like, cool. That's so fun.

Meagen Gibson

I'm so glad you were able to mean it.

Tia Larkin

I'm really glad you were able to tell me that. Yeah. And I don't take that personally. That's the work, that's the work. A lot of the work that I do is very relational.

I also do disclose that I'm a queer woman and that I'm not monogamous and all of these things, and I need my privileges as well for folks. So when they come in, they can know that and that I'm naming that. And if I'm working with somebody, like a person of color, we even talk about I'm a white therapist, you're a person of color. How does that feel to you as somebody who's inherent in a power position?

And sometimes that is a problem. And that's wonderful. And then I do my best to kind of find them somebody who is a good fit for what they're hoping for.

Meagen Gibson - [00:37:26]

So ultimately what you want is for them to heal and grow in the ways that are important to them. So you're not going to inhibit that from your ego.

Tia Larkin

No. It has nothing to do with me. It has everything to do with...

Meagen Gibson

Exactly.

Tia Larkin

Yeah. Absolutely.

Meagen Gibson

Awesome.

I'm so glad that we spoke about this today. I think that it's one of the small, I don't know if we want to call them gifts, but things that we've been able to take out of COVID is the way in which we've all had this universal experience that looks different for most people, individuals. But we all have a shared glimpse of isolation and loneliness and the stress that it can put on us in the many forms that it has for people all across the world.

So I love that we've talked about this today.

Tia Larkin

Yeah. Me too. Thank you. Thanks for inviting me.

Meagen Gibson

Tia, thank you so much.

Where can people find out more about you and your work?

Tia Larkin

Yeah, so I am not currently taking any clients, but who knows by the time this airs, if that's the case.

So my website is just tialarkin.com

I'm also on [Facebook](#) and Instagram [@tialcounselling](#) counselling with two L's. I think that's how we spell it in Canada. I don't know if you spell it that way actually?

Meagen Gibson

We don't.

Tia Larkin - [00:38:55]

No, you don't.

Meagen Gibson

Neither way is better.

Tia Larkin

So that's where most folks can find me and I try to post as much content as possible, but also social media is a highlight reel. So I also have my own relationship with that, yeah.

Meagen Gibson

Of course. Of course. Boundaries galore.

Alright. Thank you so much. Thanks for being us today.

Tia Larkin

Yeah, thank you.