

Case Study – Community Accountability

Your friend/housemate Leo has reached out to you and your other 2 housemates (who are also close friends) about wanting support in having a conversation and attempting to have an accountability process with his friend, Tomas.

Tomas is a 25 year old cis Latino man who is currently living in the Bay Area. He is heavily involved and well known in the political organizing scene in the area. Leo is a 26 year old cis Black man and grew up in the Bay Area. He is also an organizer and a popular musician. The two often find themselves in similar organizing spaces and even do musical performances together at times. You and your housemates also know Leo and Tomas through the community organizing work you do in the Bay Area and often times are at one another's homes either cooking together, holding meetings, or partying. Leo and Tomas have a complicated relationship, since Leo has often times found himself being emotionally hurt by Tomas. There have been several occasions where Leo has asked Tomas to support him either with planning events or with getting through a difficult moment in his life, and Tomas has not shown up for him. Leo has also heard that Tomas has often talked negatively about him to other mutual friends. Even through the complications, they still love one another and continue trying to work on their friendship.

Recently, one of Leo's best friends, Cecilia, disclosed to him that she felt that Tomas had been emotionally and mentally abusive towards her. Cecilia is a 26 year old queer Black woman, who is also a well known organizer in the Bay. She grew up in San Francisco, thus has her family and childhood friends close by. Her family is very supportive of her and many of her family members have also historically done a lot of community organizing in San Francisco. Leo, Cecilia, and Tomas all met while in college at San Francisco State. After graduating, Tomas decided to stay in the Bay Area, but he is originally from Los Angeles. The majority of Tomas' close friends had grown up and continued to live in the Bay Area. Even though he was part of many social circles, Tomas considered Leo and an ex partner named Tamara, to be the people he had the closest and most intimate relationships with.

Cecilia and Tomas had been having a non-monogamous relationship for a few months. They had open conversations about this decision and there was a mutual understanding about their boundaries. Recently, Tomas had begun to talk to Cecilia about wanting a more serious relationship with her. They began to explore the possibility of transitioning into a monogamous relationship and began spending a lot of time together. Tomas had a reputation of being "promiscuous" and this made Cecilia

nervous about engaging in this sort of relationship with him. Since the organizing community in the Bay Area was close knit, Cecilia also knew many of the people that Tomas had romantic relationships with. Since people began to see them together more and more, a total of 4 women have approached Cecilia to disclose their negative experiences with him. Cecilia knew all 4 of these women. They disclosed having felt lied to by him, having had their physical boundaries crossed by him, and that he constantly refused having conversations with them about the abuse. Two of the women also disclosed to Cecilia that he was still attempting to contact them and asking if they were interested in seeing him.

Cecilia decided to confront him and listen to what he had to say. He denied all of the accusations and refused to take accountability for having hurt these women. He also was dishonest with her about continuing to see other people, even when attempting to transition into a monogamous relationship with her. She felt that he had disrespected her boundaries and felt hurt about him not being considerate about the countless conversations they had. Cecilia decided to distance herself from him.

As time progressed, Cecilia continued to hear about the ways Tomas had been violent towards women in the community, as well as towards his close friends. He chose to hide behind his image of a strong organizer and community leader, and consistently refused to take accountability when folks would approach him to talk about the ways they had felt hurt by him. People began to publicly and outwardly have conversations about his behavior and exposed him on several occasions. The exposure was mostly happening through social media, where people were posting statuses about his behavior and mentioning him by name. On a couple of occasions people were approaching him and speaking about it loudly at parties that he would show up to. It was during this time that Cecilia decided to approach Leo, since she knew that he also knew Tomas well and had a complicated relationship with him. Together they decided that even though exposing Tomas publicly was allowing folks the space to tell their stories and hold him accountable for his behavior, it was not enough to get Tomas to change his behavior.

They quickly understood that the public shaming was mostly causing Tomas to retreat and he was continuing to engage in toxic and violent relationships. People have approached Tomas before, and he has always denied and/or excused his behavior. Leo's hope is that this time folks other than those he has harmed will talk to him and support him in exploring the harm he has done. This is why Leo reached out to you and the other housemates, he knows that you have often times shared intimate space with Tomas and that all of you have an investment in social justice work. Leo is hoping to

create space for Tomas to talk about the cycles of trauma that might exist in his life and to explore what he can do to hold himself accountable to his community and the women he has harmed. Leo wants Tamara and himself to be the ones to first approach him this. Leo wants to also continue to give talking and healing space to the countless women who are coming forward about having been hurt by Tomas.