

GENDER- AFFIRMING PIERCING PRACTICES

**Rochelle Montagne
& Jennifer Shields**

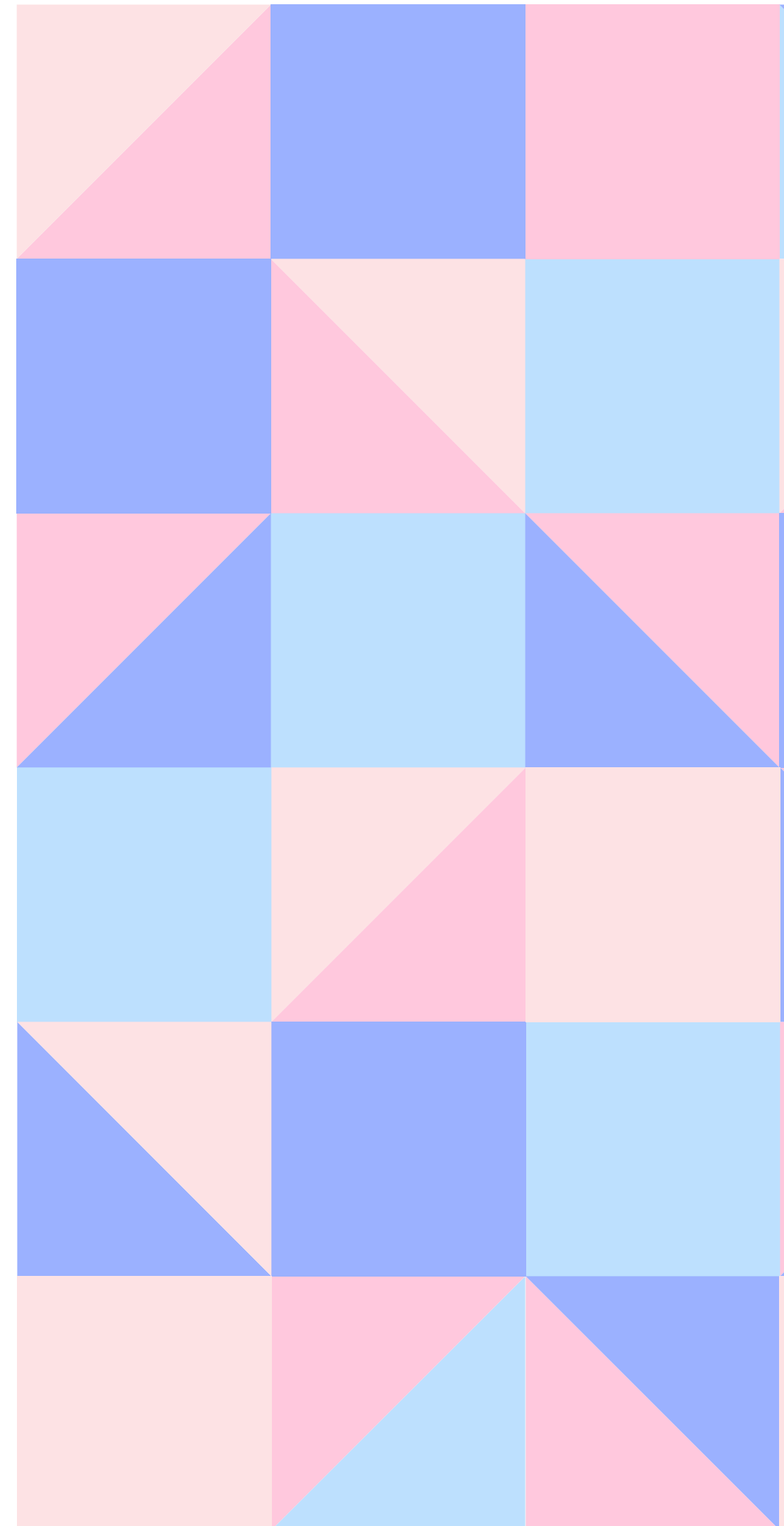
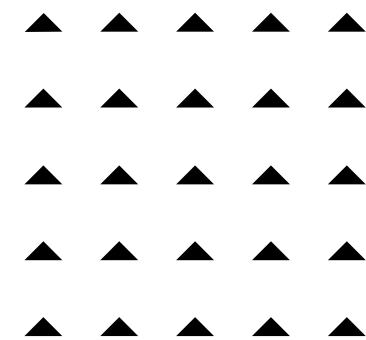
WHO ARE WE?



Jennifer Shields (*she/they*)
Trans health advocate,
President of PATHA, actually
only has her lobes pierced

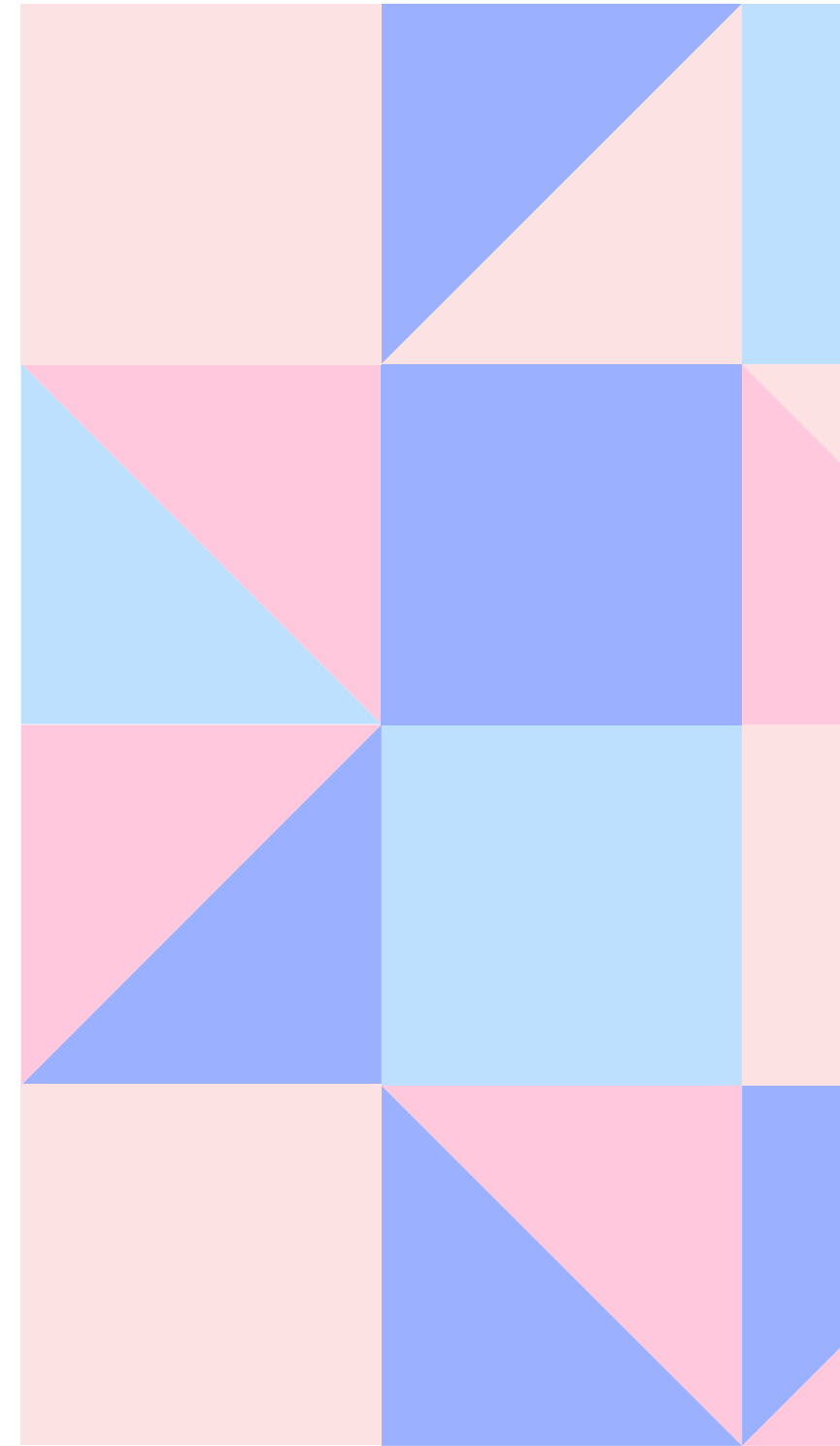
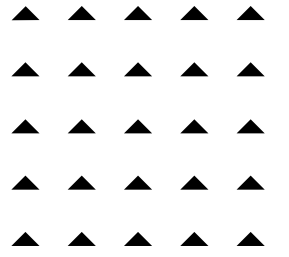


Rochelle Montagne (*she/her*)
'Just a piercer'





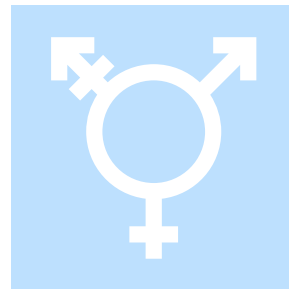
Girlfriends :)



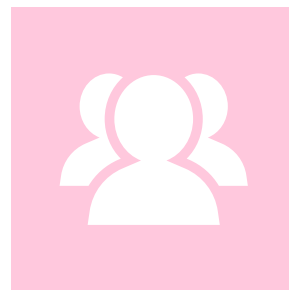
GENDER AFFIRMING PIERCING PRACTICES



We do this work to help people express themselves and feel good about their bodies.

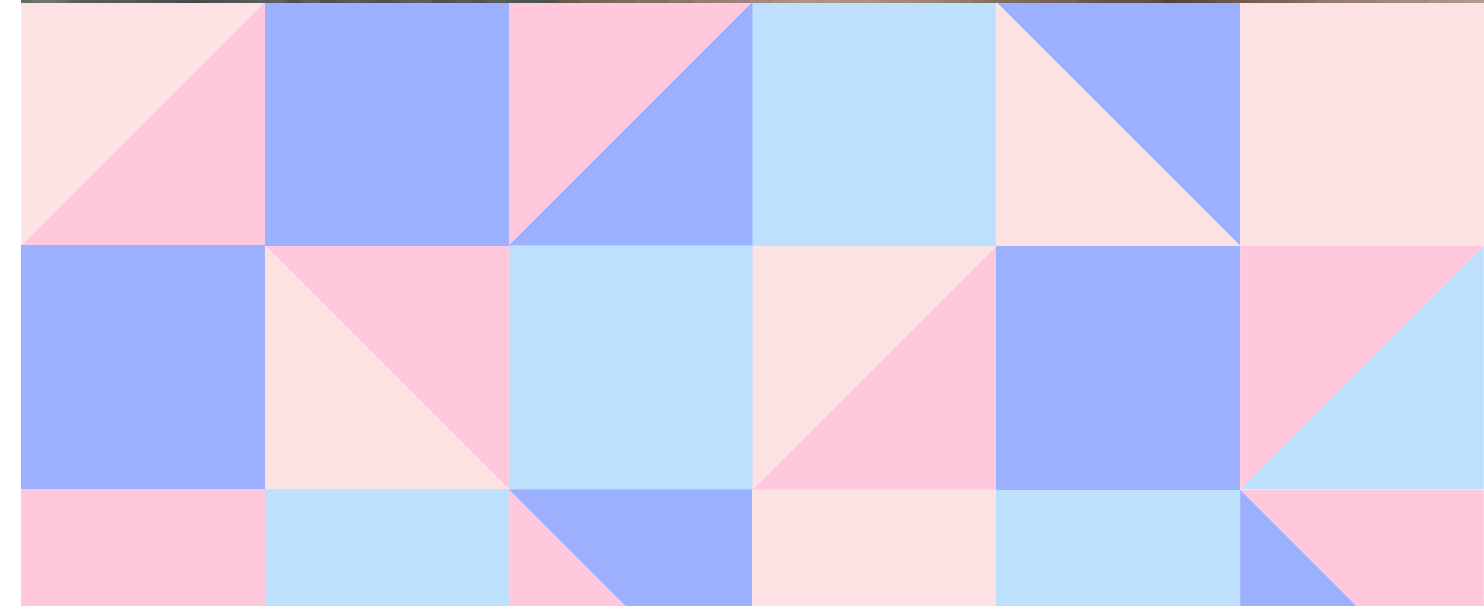
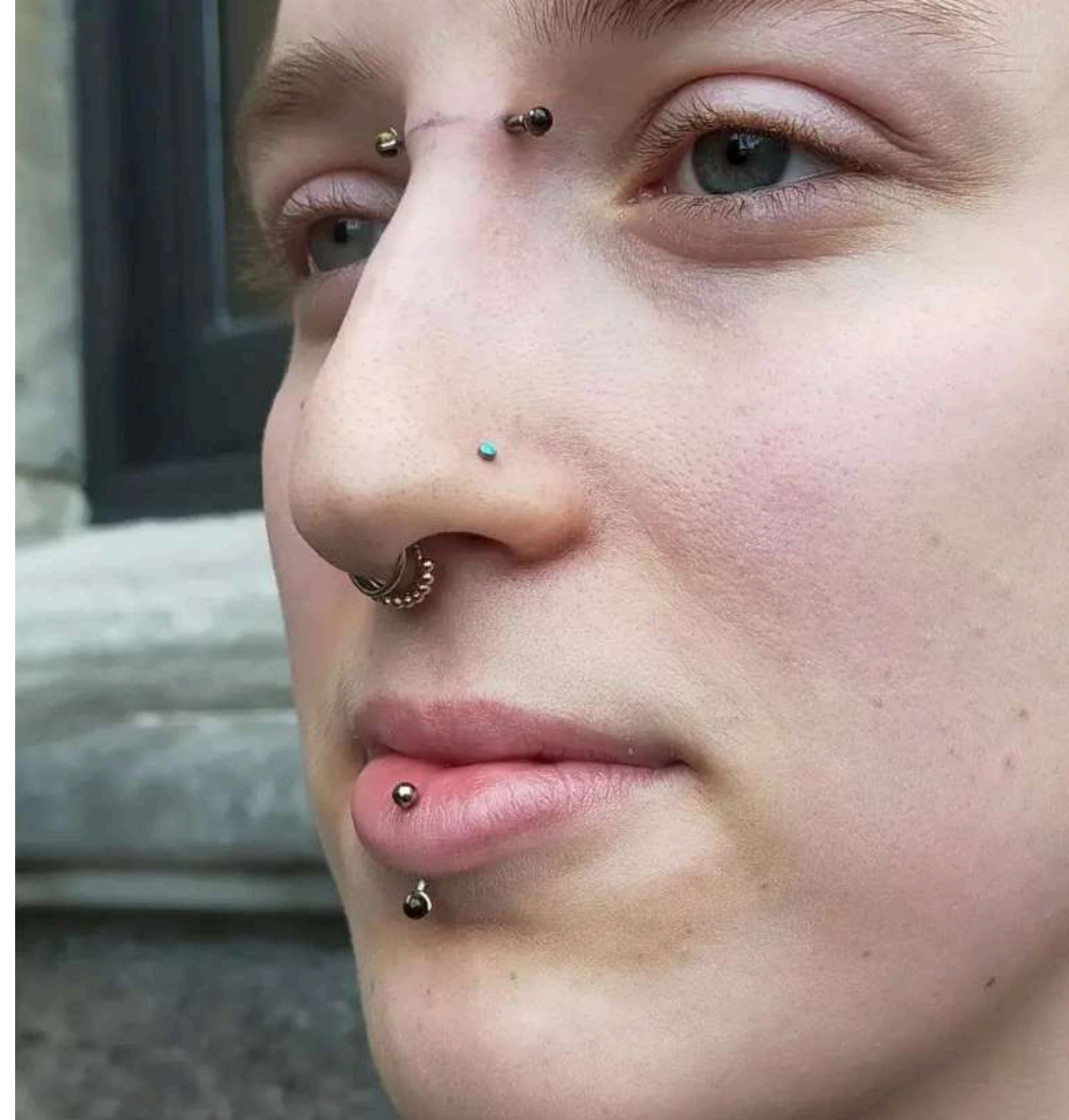


This is especially relevant for trans and non-binary people!



Trans and non-binary people have specific needs & access barriers

Importantly, this isn't specific to genital work - when we say "gender affirming", we're referring to our whole approach and context.



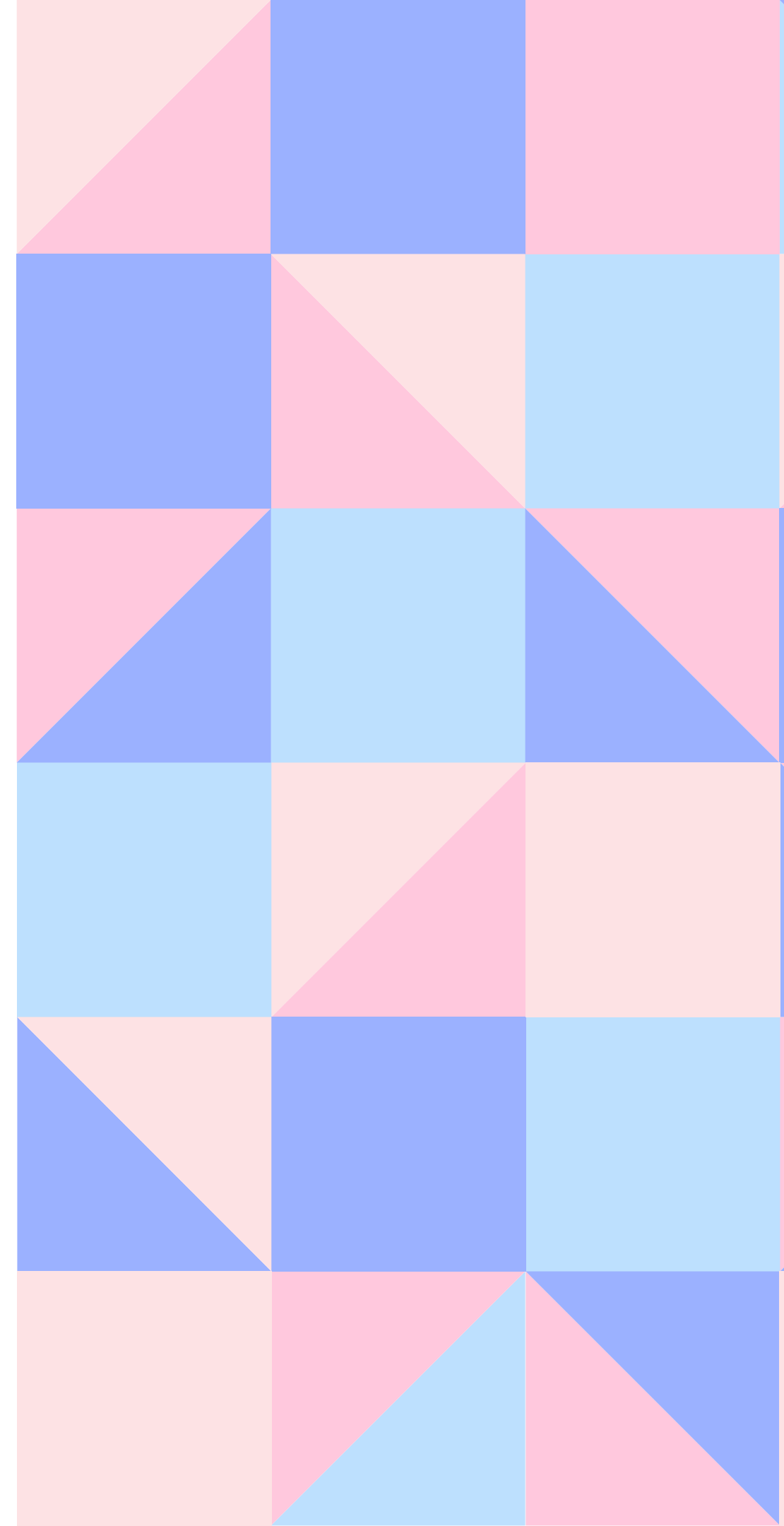
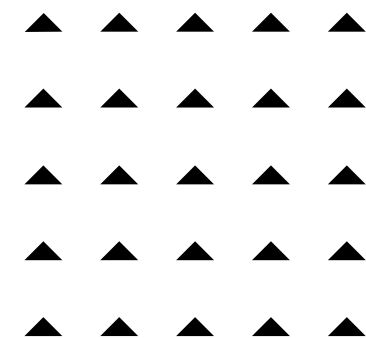


THE HISTORY OF MODERN BODY PIERCING IS QUEER

The very building blocks of where modern body piercing comes from is the queer community

Indigenous people all over the world also have a long history of body piercing, as well as a long history of diverse gender and sexual identities.

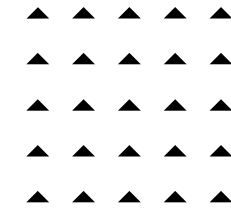
#WEWEREALWAYSHERE



PIERCINGS ARE GAY?

**ALWAYS
HAVE BEEN**

CONTEXT & HISTORY



Non-binary people are the largest demographic within trans communities

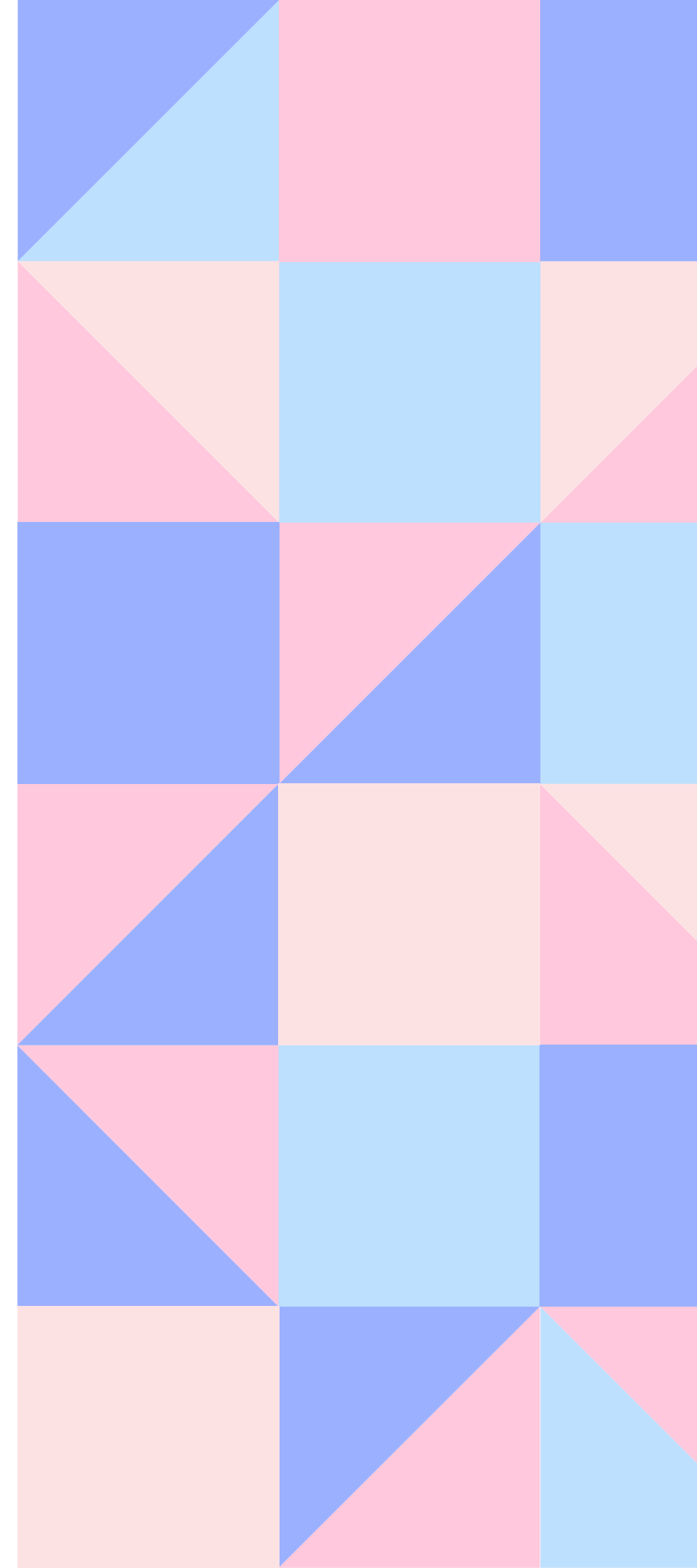
In Australia in 2018, 53.5% of trans people identified as non-binary. In Aotearoa in 2018, it was 45%.

We're living in a context of hate and disinformation

Disinformation about trans people is on the rise internationally and has been described by experts as reaching “genocidal levels”. We’re looking for safe spaces to exist.

Trans history is filled with gatekeeping & a lack of bodily autonomy

For decades and decades we were not able to make decisions about our own bodies. Now, that bodily autonomy is also at risk.



Respecting autonomy

Empowering our clients to make their own decisions about their own bodies.

Creating safe[r] spaces

Creating spaces where our clients can be themselves without holding their identities back.

Affirming identities

Acknowledging and respecting our clients for who they are.

Trauma informed approaches

Understanding the whakapapa of our clients - their histories, experiences, and everything they bring into the room.

WHAT IS GENDER AFFIRMING PIERCING?

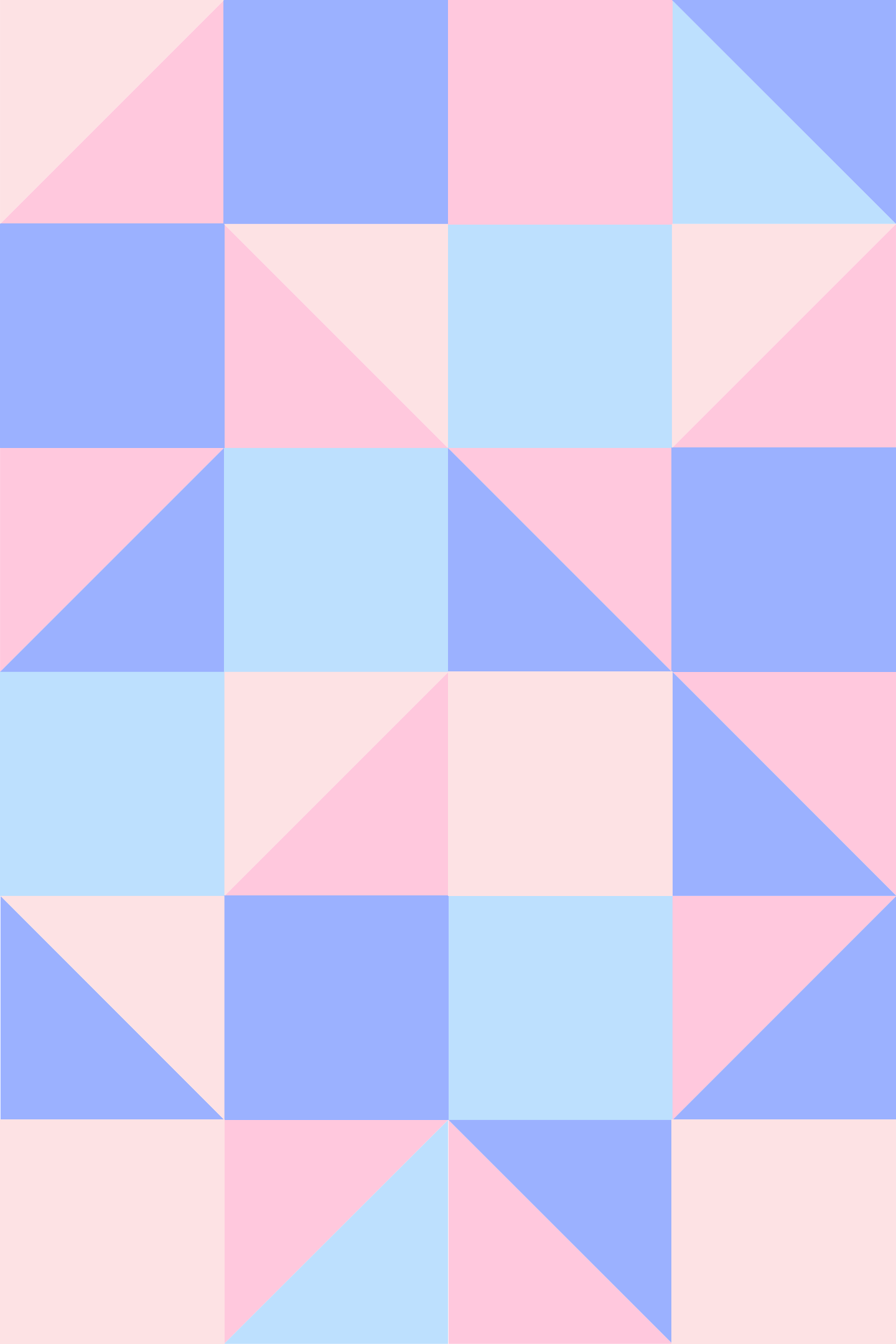


“Piercings for me, have been **a way to make my body my home**. I’ve always felt a disconnect between the way I see myself and the way others see me, which has manifested in bone deep discomfort.

Being pierced has, over the years, alleviated some of that discomfort.

I started getting pierced before I had the words to describe my experience of gender and personhood. The piercing consent form at absolution has a pronoun section which includes they/them. When I first filled out this form I was quietly shocked, i’d never had that option presented to me in such an open manner before. It was lovely, and **I count it as a significant part of what helped me accept my queer self**. The **staff diversity** has also made absolution a safe space, knowing the people who surround me in that room are a part of my community or are educated on the different ways people can exist is pretty cool.

Finally, **not having any assumptions made about my gender or pronouns** based on my physical expression alone is a huge positive for me.”



LIBERATION & COMMUNITY WORK

Te Whare Takatāpui

An indigenous model of wellbeing, developed by Dr Elizabeth Kerekere. When all these values are acknowledged and put into practice, this whareniui can shelter and nurture all gender diverse peoples and their whānau.

Mana
(authority/self-determination)

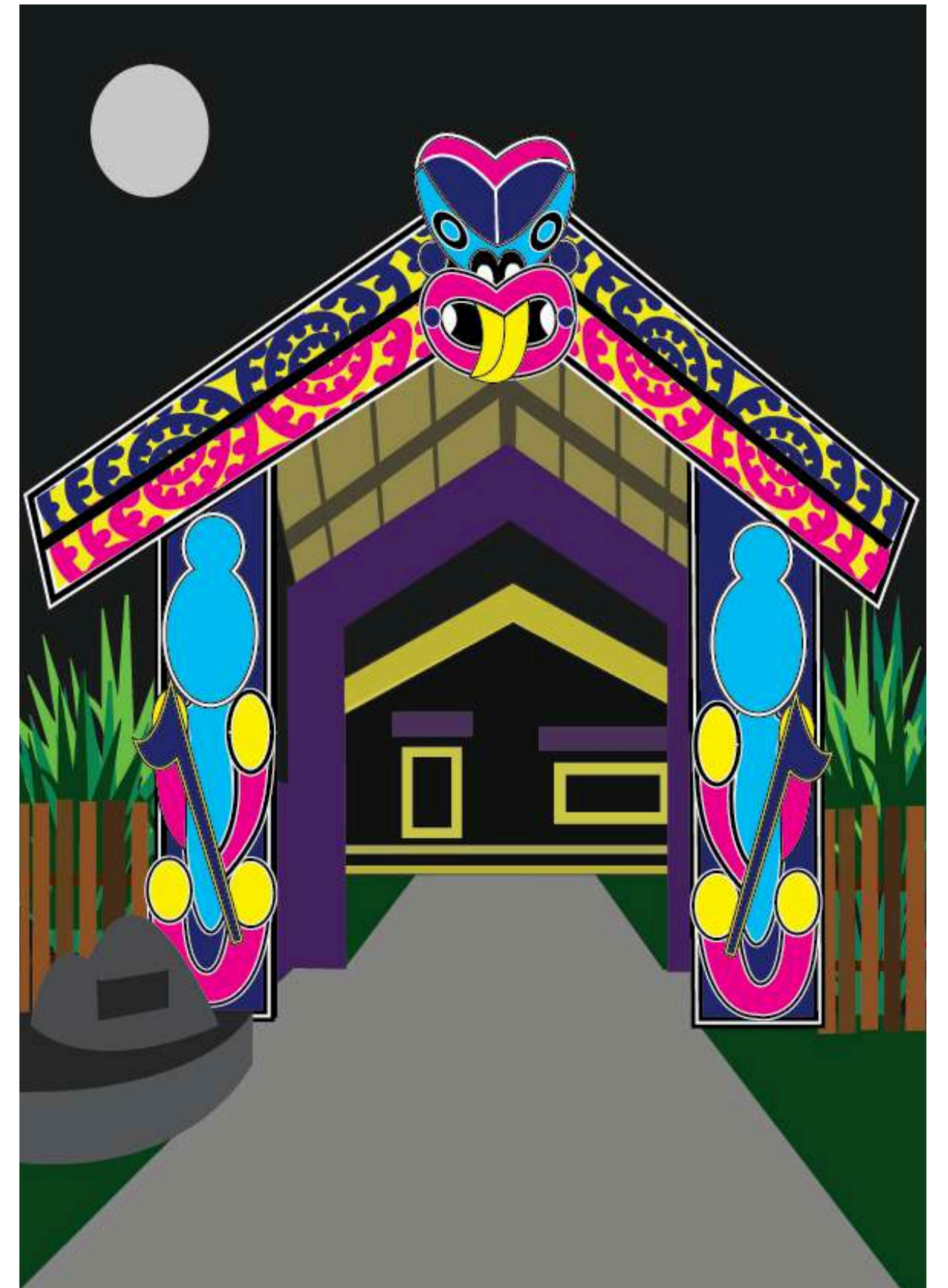
Mauri
(lifespark)

Tapu
(sacredness)

Tikanga
(rules & protocols)

Wairua
(spirituality)

Whakapapa
(genealogy)



Liberation work

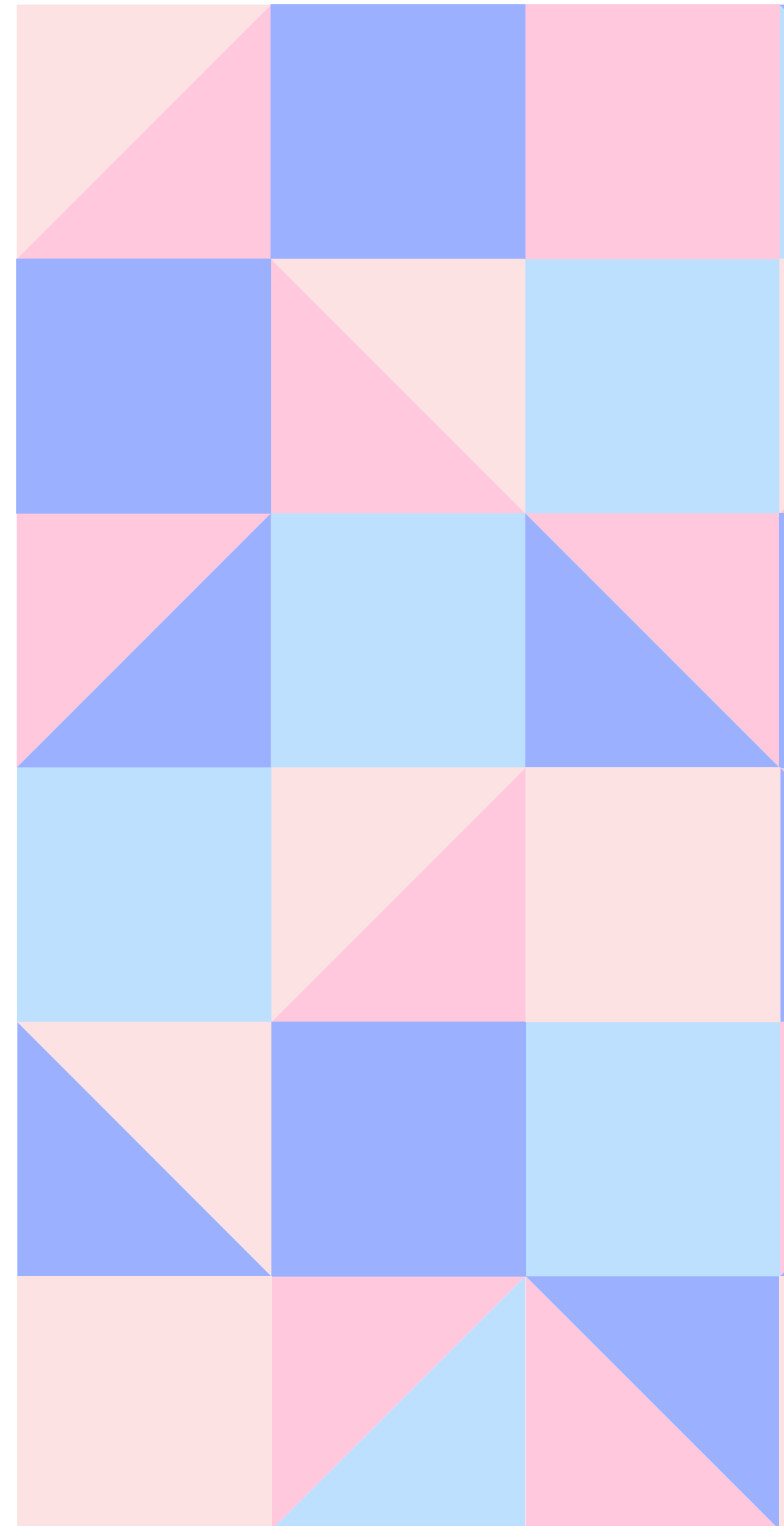
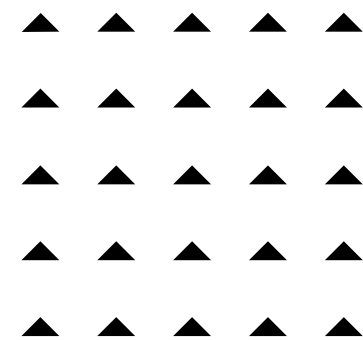
“any effort towards a more free, just, and equitable world... more wholly encompasses the practices that we may not always think of or credit as community organising or activism.”

- **Tamara Santibanez, Tattooing as Liberation Work**

Community worker

“an inclusive description of all people, regardless of academic qualifications, doing relational change work in relationships that dignify and help the client make preferred changes”

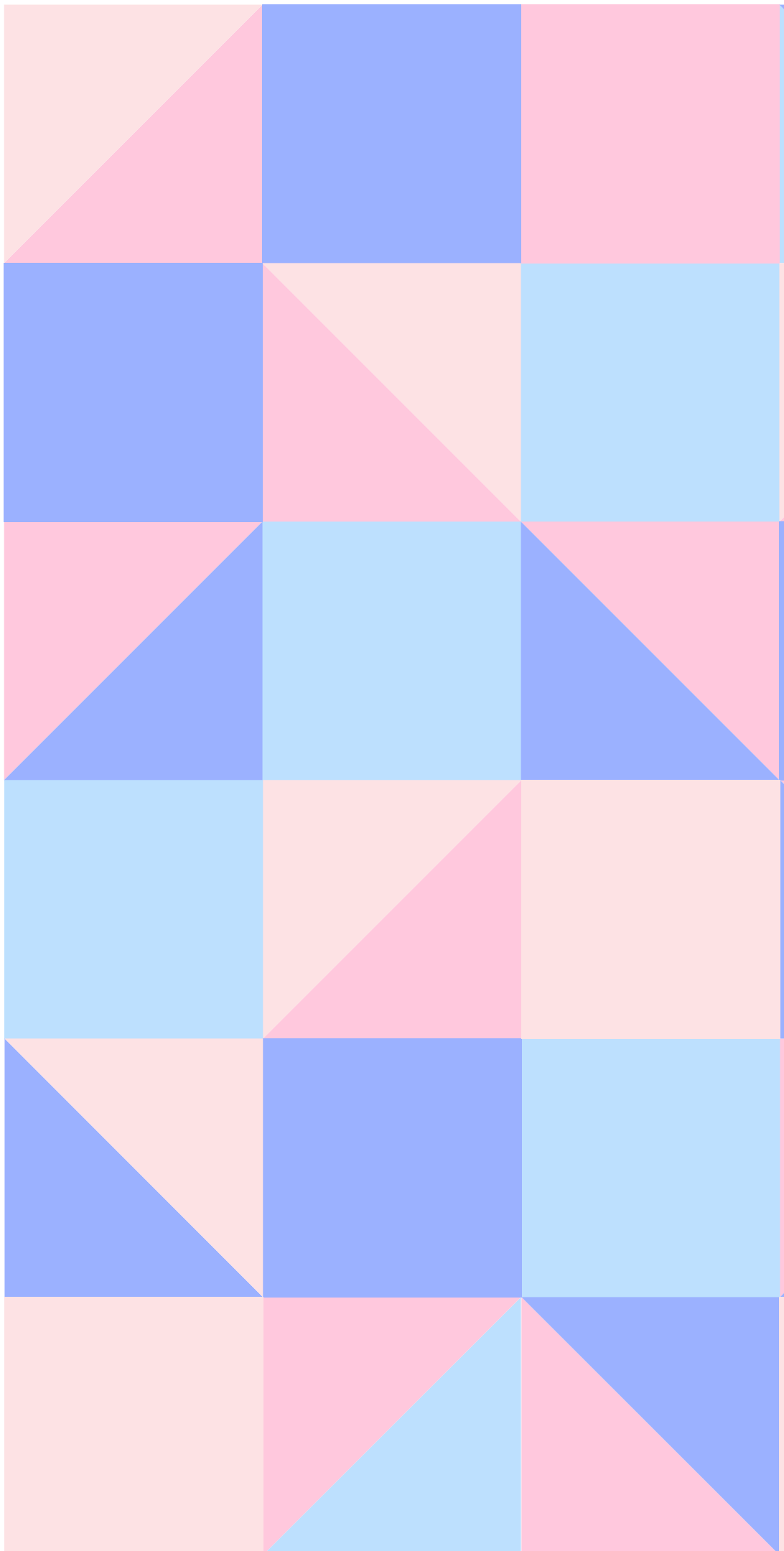
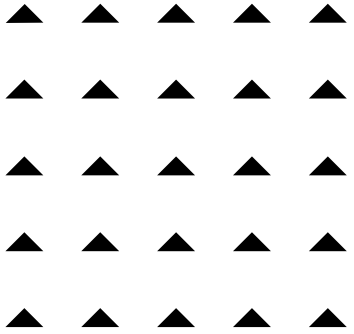
- **Vikki Reynolds, Doing Justice as a Path to Sustainability in Community Work**



THE STUDIO CAN BE A SAFE HAVEN

Clients seek out specific people, often with shared experiences

Queer folk talk to each other and we flock to safer spaces



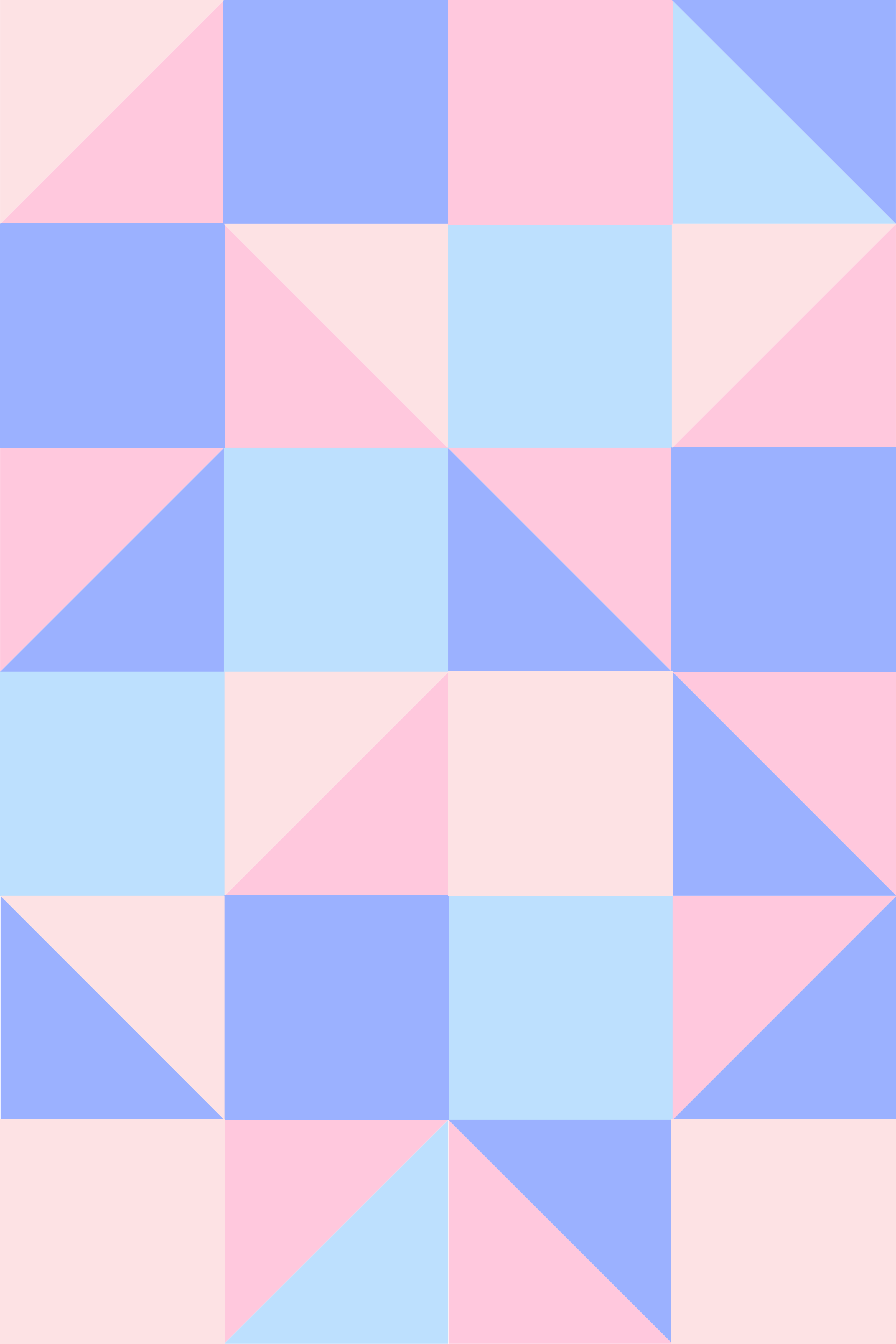
“Having been pierced throughout transition ive felt nothing but acceptance from y'all, especially since **body mods have been a form of reclamation of my body**, having piercers who are caring and accepting has made a world of difference to mood and wellbeing there were even moments where i found out that y'all had done research on healing during HRT and if there were difficulties and having a studio that is willing to do that makes for such an awesome experience!

It's probably helped that as a group, piercers and such tend to be queer or similarly an 'outsider' themselves which really fosters the accepting community feelings i've experienced

Piercings have been my outlet when control of my body felt unobtainable and adding new jewelry in itself gives a sort of gender affirmation that i never expected”.

“Honestly, getting my nipples pierced was a big game changer for my dysphoria relating to my chest. It changed looking at my chest from an uncomfortable, out of place thing, to seeing a fun choice I had made to alter myself. **That choice reminds me that my body is not a problem to be solved, but a part of me that I can change when and how I want to.** The ability to modify my body helped me feel more comfortable with the idea of having a big surgery some day (top surgery) that would be irreversible.

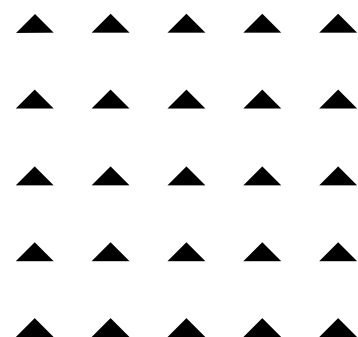
I also chose to see you after being recommended by multiple trans people, which made me feel like I would be in a safe environment (which I was!)”



SOMETIMES PIERCERS ARE TRAUMA COUNSELLORS

We're not therapists, but we can't control what clients bring to us. We need to be able to respond when someone shares something.

Because of minority stress, trans and non-binary folk experience higher rates of mental health issues, so we need to be extra certain of our competency.

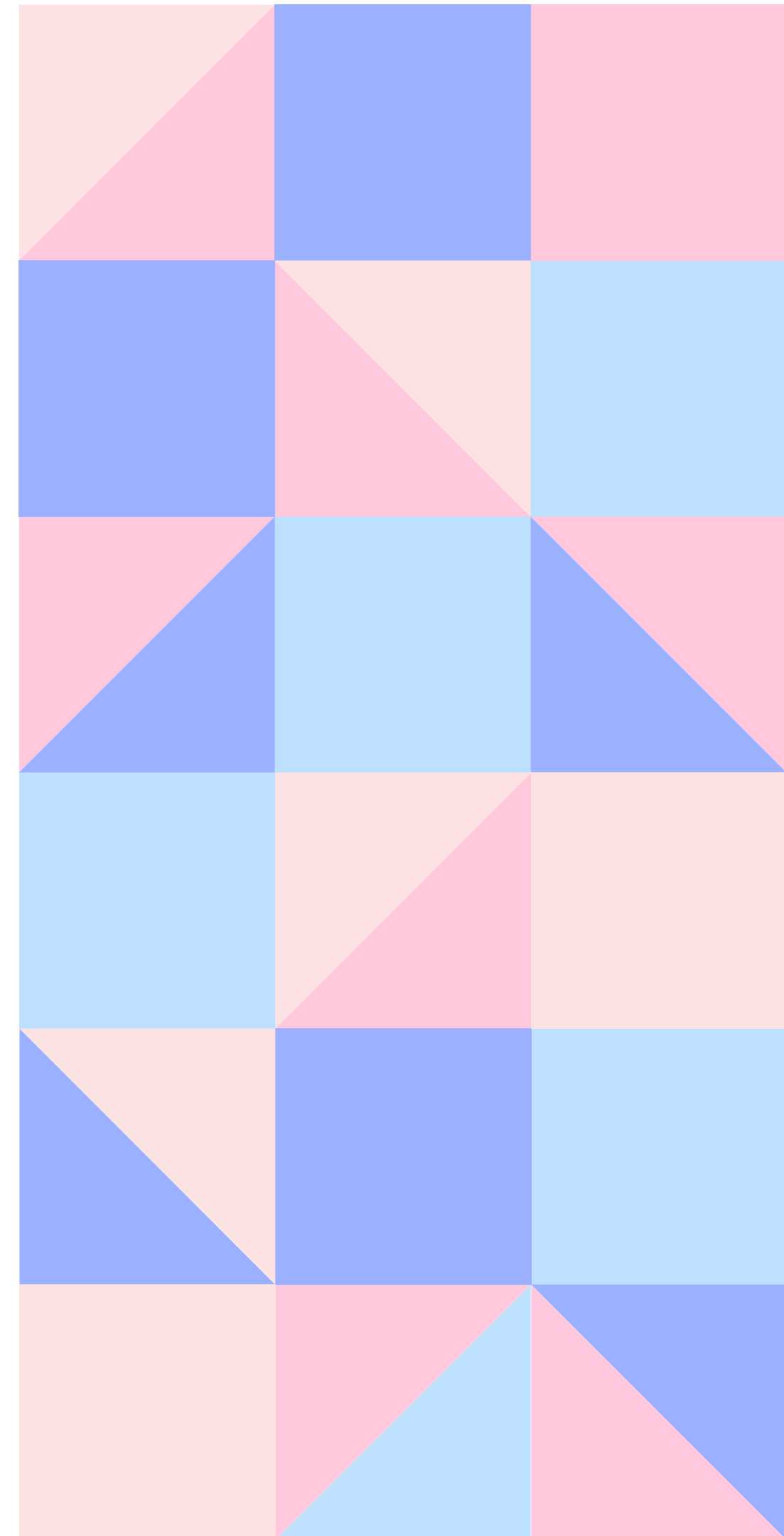
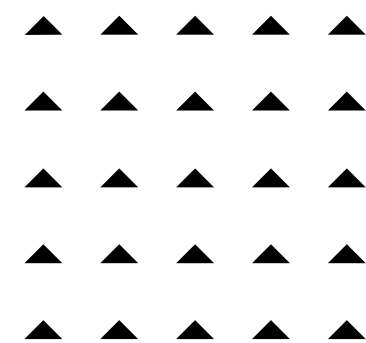


SELF DETERMINATION & BODILY AUTONOMY

Critical, especially for those whose autonomy is restricted in other areas - this is particularly true for trans people, and especially trans young people.

Piercing can be a way for them to affirm their gender **and** exercise self-determination and bodily autonomy when the medical system restricts them.

For some folks - not just trans people - body piercing can be a harm reduction tool for self-harm.

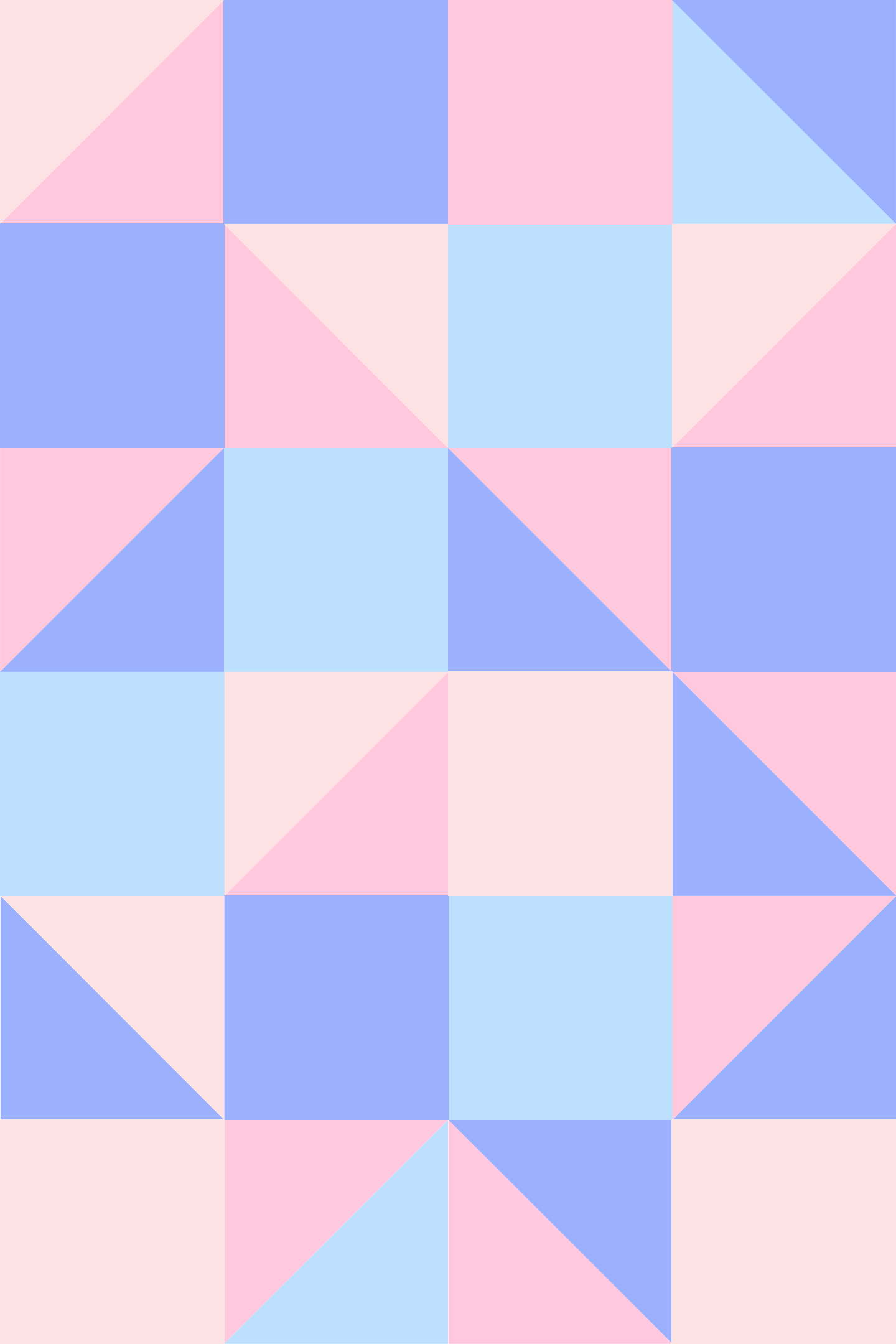


“I am non- binary and have been out as non-binary a little over a year. Piercing for me has been a journey. Started as most do with my first lobes when I was nine and things just went from there. **There is a feeling of euphoria that piercings bring to me.** But the euphoria feeling is complicated because there is also pain, but there is a fulfilling pain.

Piercings make me feel complete in my body and comfortable in my skin.

I also have experience with self harm, which I am not proud of, but I found piercing a positive release for that.

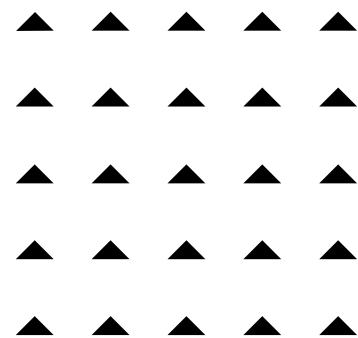
Piercings have made me more confident as a gender non-confirming person and having access to safe and properly done piercings, for me has saved my life in a sense. You meet an amazing community through piercings and it’s a really good conversation starter, it’s a community that i’m proud to be part of.”



TAKE A HOLISTIC APPROACH

While it's important to keep all this context and history in mind, we need to see the whole person in front of us.

We can acknowledge all their parts - their trauma, their identities - while still looking after them as a whole.

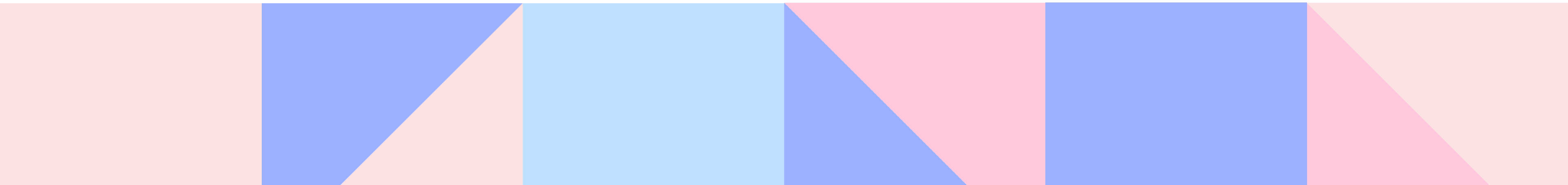


“Getting pierced has really helped me **feel more comfortable in some aspects of my transition**, with feeling more comfortable with myself both socially and personally. Having a piercer who **respected how important the piercings they were giving were to my identity** helped me feel much more comfortable trusting them.”

YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST PIERCING

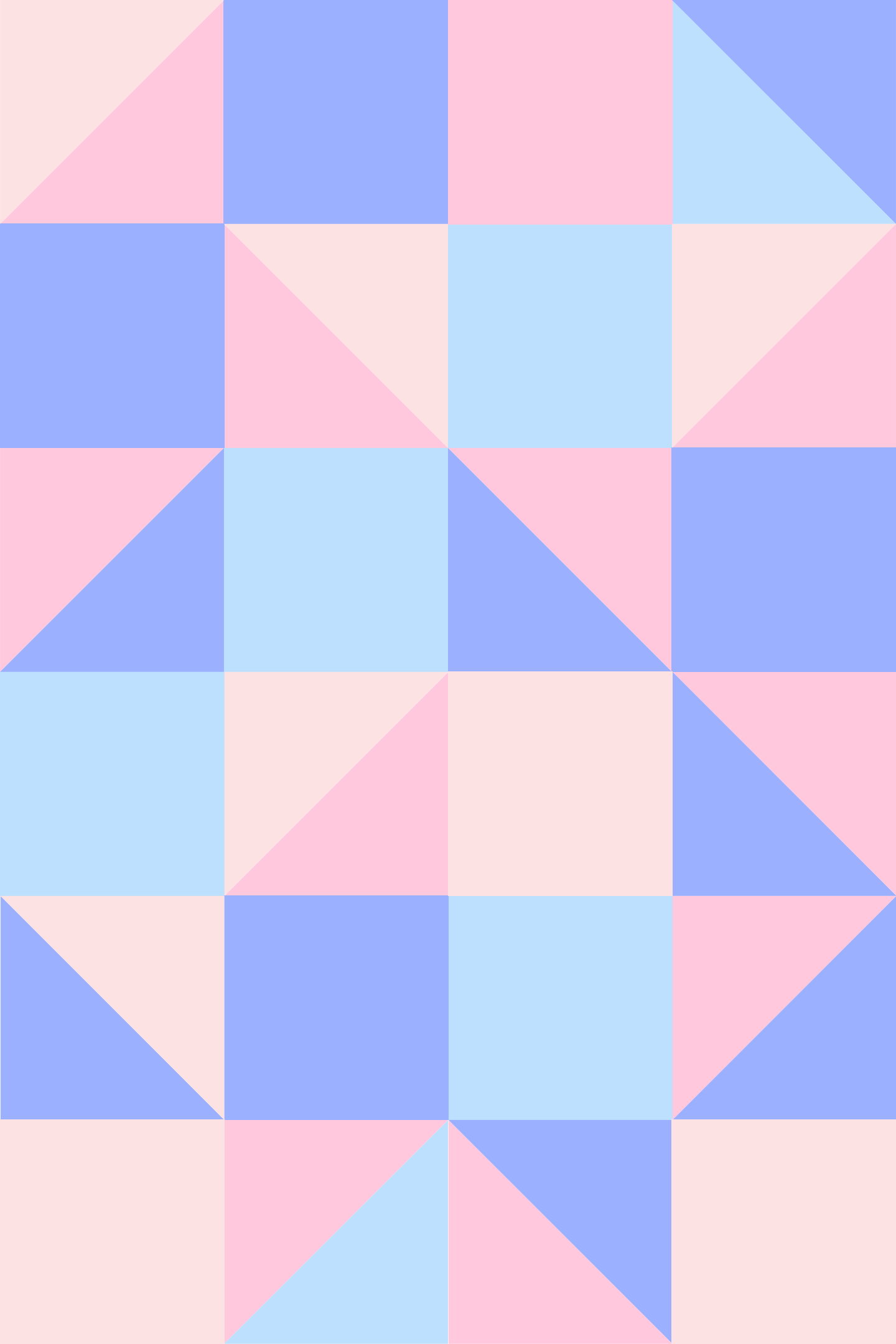
Remember that although this is your all day,
every day, the same isn't true for your clients.

For the majority of your clients, they will
remember this day forever - so we give the same
level of care to everyone, as if it was our first.

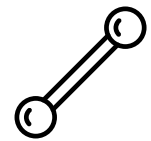


“My experience of piercings in the context of my gender has actually a lot of interplay. **I feel getting my lobes pierced was very gender affirming as a trans woman as I had been brought up by my parents to think that only women got ear piercings.** Beyond that I grew to love getting piercings as an **expression of my rebellion from typical societal norms** as I felt not only was I building further on from my parents limited view of only women get piercings, but I was also pulling a middle finger to all the conservative people who disapproved of body modifications. Especially as the trans experience is often seen as an irreversible and trendy body modification by those who don't really understand it, I enjoyed further modifying my body in a way those people wouldn't have approved of in order to solidify my departure from classical gender norms.

Furthermore, **women are often told that they need to be dainty and feminine and especially trans women are often invalidated if they don't fit a specific subset of women and femininity.** By getting many facial piercings and other piercings, I felt that not only was **I expressing my rebellion to my assigned gender at birth, but also the stereotypes associated with the gender I identified with.** It symbolises to me that femininity need not be long hair and sundresses but can be metal and non-standard, if you will.”

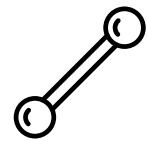


PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ALLYSHIP



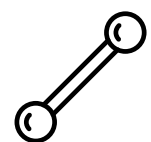
RESEARCH & EDUCATE

Learn as much as you can - be aware of the current climate - you don't have to be an expert



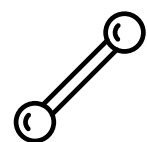
GET THE LANGUAGE RIGHT

Make sure you've got space for pronouns on your consent forms, and make stickers or badges with pronouns available for your team. Mirror the language your clients use.



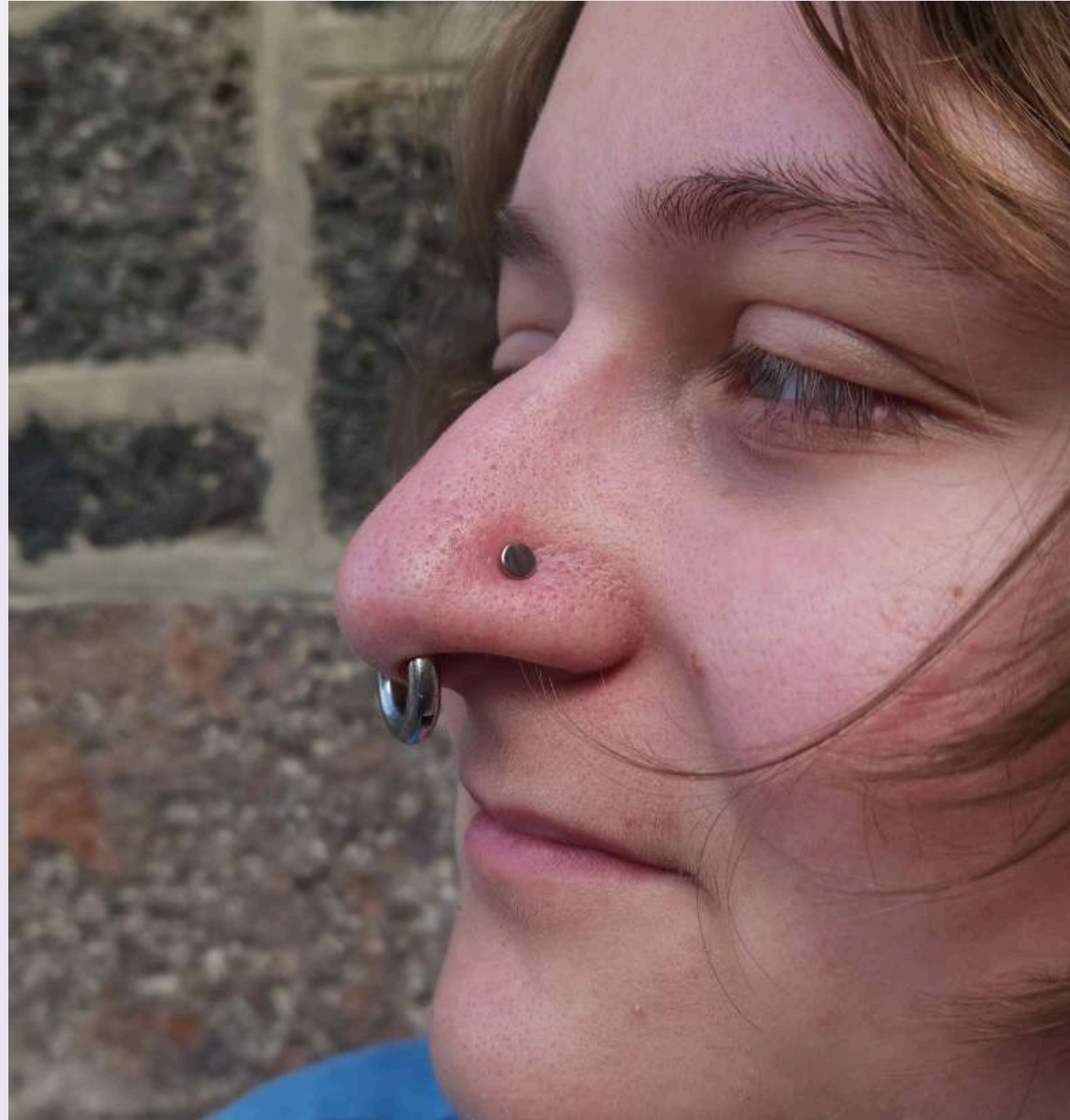
INCLUSION STARTS BEFORE PEOPLE WALK IN THE DOOR

Use your socials for good: share things from local rainbow orgs, go to Pride events, donate, partner with charities, ensure queer people are visible on your socials, and do this **year round**.



DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

We can't tell someone's gender by looking at them. Let them tell us about what they need and what they're looking for - and ask if we need to.



“You know I love large gauge piercings and part of that is how **masc** chunky jewellery feels to me, and I think part of it is feeling like I have some more control on how my body looks and feels. I’ve always felt really comfortable with everyone at Absolution, it’s a super inclusive and accessible space (special shout-out to your consent form asking for pronouns and for having staff’s pronouns on social media)”

Artist
SHE/THEY •
QUEER •
ŌTAUTAHI, AOTEAROA •
@absolution_nz •
DM FOR BOOKINGS • OPEN TO CUSTOMS •



Mieke she/they

Mieke (ME-KEY) is an apprentice and started under Naith's tutelage in 2022

Specialties

Mieke, who identifies as part of the queer community, enjoys exploring queer-themed artwork characterized by striking lines and has a passion for personalizing her flash designs.

Outside of Absolution

You can find Mieke pouring pints at Smash Palace, painting, and designing band posters for Ōtautahi's music scene.

QUIZ NIGHT - WEDNESDAY 20TH MARCH



LOCATION - TI KOUKA, HAERE ROA

TIME - 6PM - 9PM

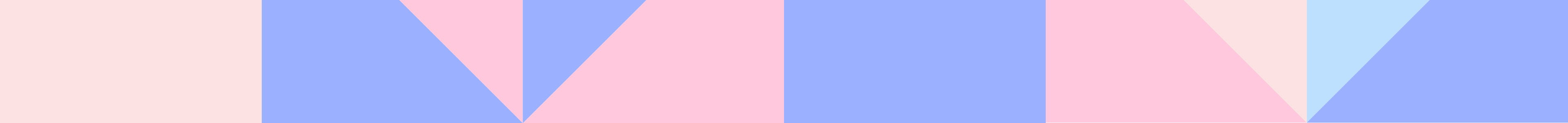
TICKET PRICE - \$5

BRING YOUR FRIENDS OR JOIN FORCES WITH FELLOW QUEER STUDENTS AND ALLIES FOR A FUN NIGHT OF TRIVIA PRIZES TO WIN ON THE NIGHT INCLUDING SPOT PRIZES

@qcanterbury

Happy pride Ōtautahi!
As always we love to be able to support [@chchpride](#) and [@qcanterbury](#) so you should head along to some events and maybe win a wee voucher from us 🥳🌈



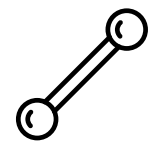


absoluti on x Qtopia

flash day | art show

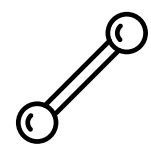
30 Oct - 1 Nov





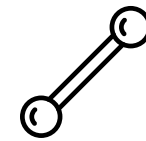
SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING

Call out inappropriate conversations when you hear them. Respond in the moment. Take steps to encourage behaviour change in the future.



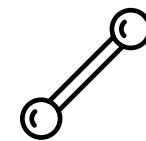
ACCESSIBILITY

Do you have the means to offer a sliding scale model?



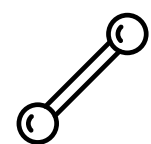
GET THE SETTING RIGHT

What's visible in your physical environment? Would queer clients see themselves represented on your walls? Could anything in your space turn people away?



APOLOGISE, CORRECT YOURSELF, AND MOVE ON

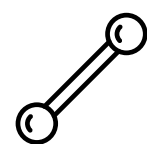
It's okay to make mistakes - it's a part of how we learn. When we do, apologise, correct yourself, and move on.



LEARN ABOUT MEDICATIONS

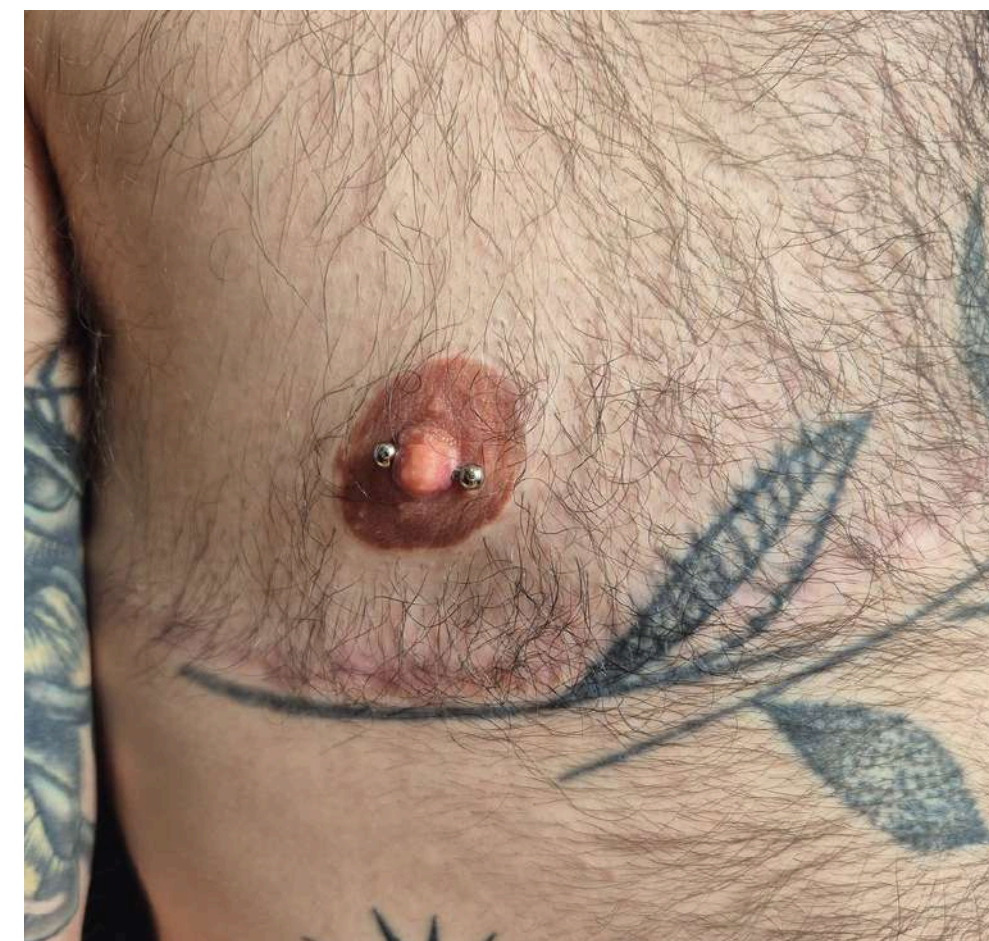
It's important to familiarise yourself with how some medications can affect piercing - particularly GAHT for trans people.

- Skin changes such as skin becoming more oily or dry
- Weight fluctuation
- Bottom growth - genitals changing in shape and size
- Lubrication
- Change of sensation/sensitivity
- Libido changes
- Breast and Nipple changes
- Hair growth



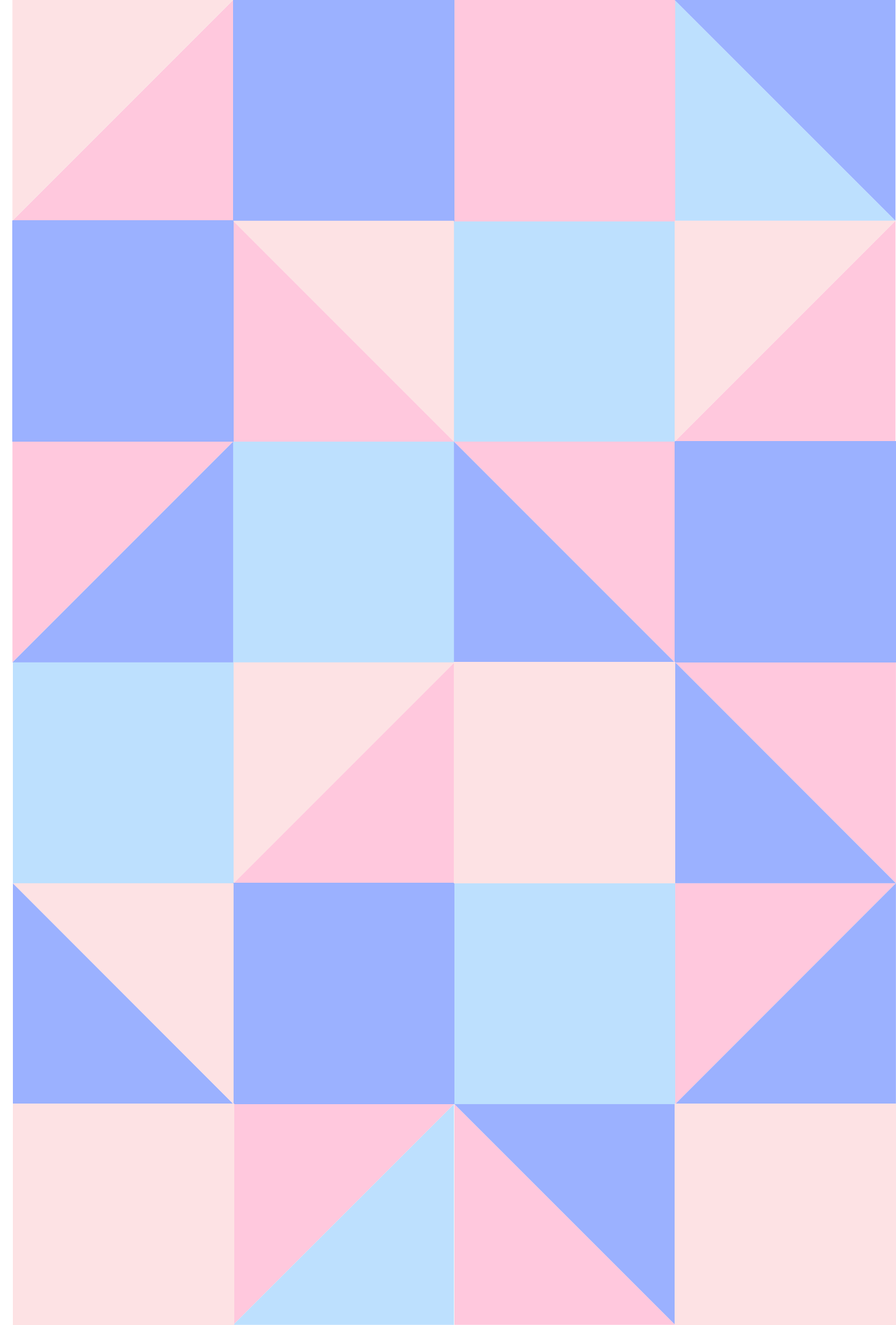
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

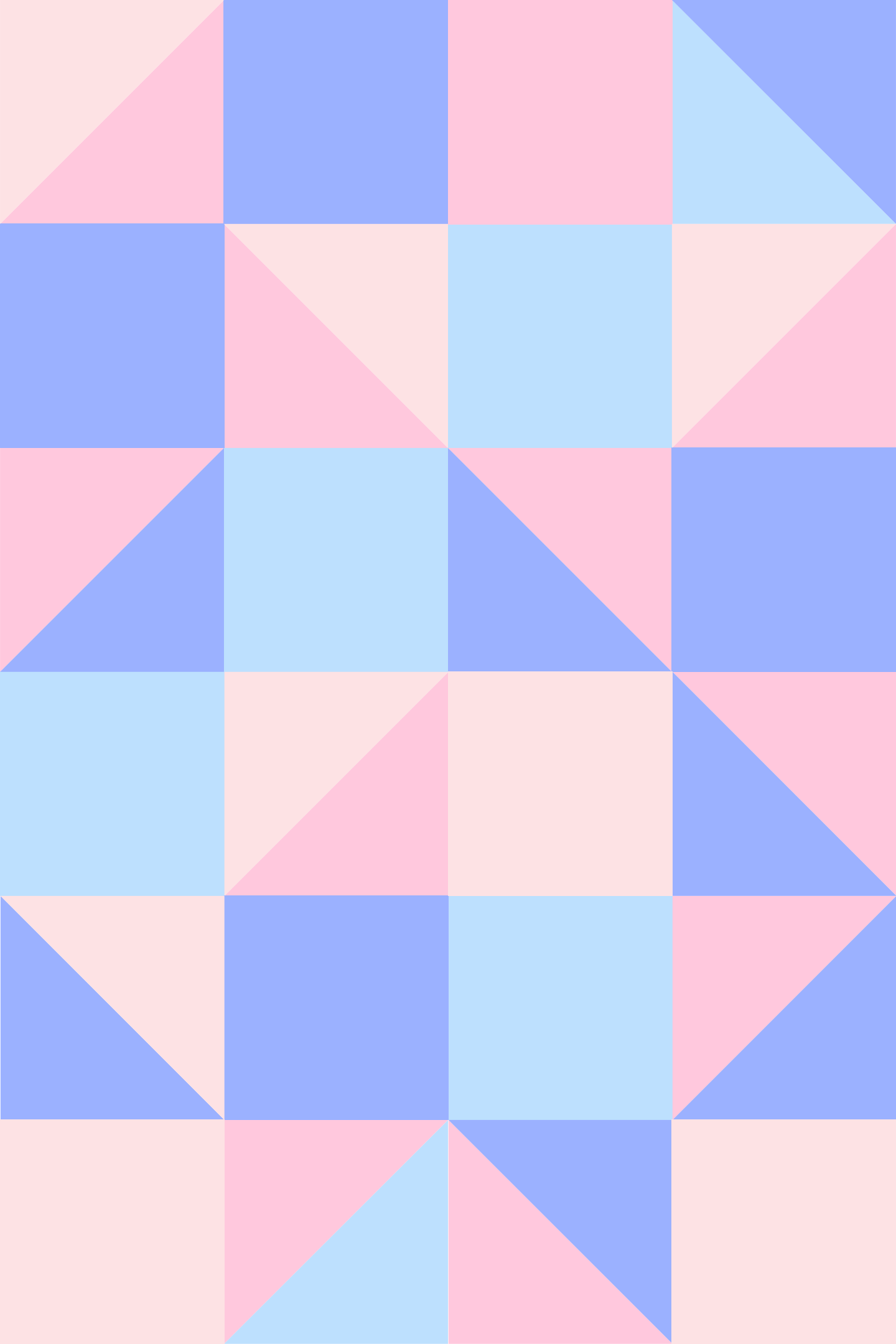
- Does your client wear a binder?
- How long have they waited post-surgery?
- Do they have plans to have any surgeries?
- Menstruation and product alternatives
- Packers



BEING AN ALLY IS FREE

But we know your local queer orgs would appreciate your support :)





QUEER&A?

RESOURCES & WHERE TO GO NEXT

‘Could This Be Magic? Tattooing as Liberation Work’,
Tamara Santibanez

Aotearoa

rainbowsupportcollective.nz

patha.nz

genderminorities.com

Australia

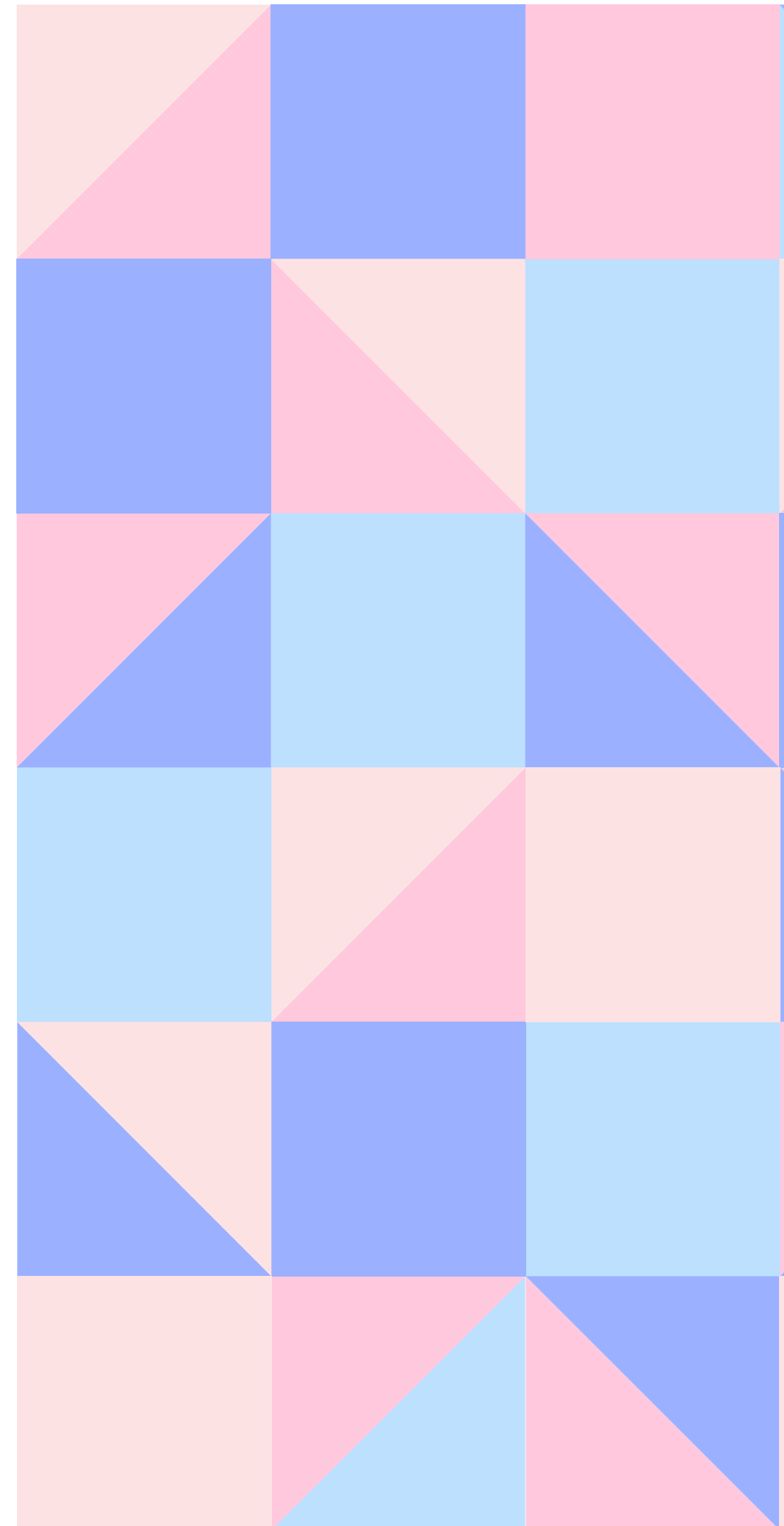
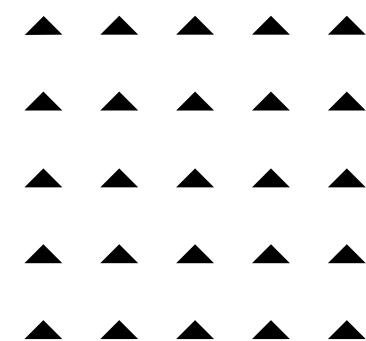
transhub.org.au

tgv.org.au

transjustice.org.au

transcend.org.au

auspath.org.au





THANKS!

Huge thank you to every single client who gave feedback! We couldn't have done it without them!

@absolutionpierce

@skitlypierces

@jenkshields