THE SAFETY NET: TROUBLING SAFE SPACE AS A SOCIAL JUSTICE AIM

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ABSTRACT

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The contemporary debate over "safe space" has inspired a multitude of news editorials, blog posts, and passionate commentary, presented along a hard binary of proponents and opponents. Defenders of "safe space strategies" including trigger warnings and call-outs contend that these practices benefit a larger social justice project, while opponents insist they reiterate past "political correctness" movements and constitute censorship. This project strives to situate the contemporary safe space debate within a broader historical and critical context through a textual analysis of the defenses and critiques published between 2011 and 2016. It considers three key themes that recur in that discourse, namely the belief that "safe space" takes identity politics to an extreme, the belief that safe space strategies create a population of hypersensitive victims, and the belief that calls for safe space constitute a form of violence or policing. Each of these themes is examined in comparison with another "safety project" (e.g. women's only spaces, domestic violence shelters, and public safety or policing). This method complicates the deterministic view of the contemporary safe space movement as a result of the rise in social media. It also challenges the binary that links safe space with progressive politics and opposition to safe space with conservatism. Ultimately, it allows for insights gleaned from the examination of previous safety projects to inform recommendations for effectively pursuing safety as a social justice aim.

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CHAPTER I. THE SAFE SPACE DEBATE

According to a growing chorus, the new danger in online and academic discourse is "safe space." Over the past few years, the push to make Web and classroom exchanges "safe" – primarily through the use or avoidance of specific linguistic markers -- has inspired a multitude of news editorials, blog posts, and passionate commentary, presented along a hard binary of proponents and opponents. A 2014 *New York Times* op-ed, by University of California-Santa Barbara student Bailey Loverin has become a metonym for the push to include "trigger warnings" – alerts "to readers that that the material following may trigger a post-traumatic stress reaction" (Filipovic) -- on college syllabi. Loverin's piece and others like it have inspired responses in a wide range of publications. Likewise, "calling out," – a related trend which comprises "the tendency among progressives, radicals, activists, and community organizers to publicly name instances or patterns of oppressive behaviour and language use by others" (Ahmad) – has inspired ardent defenses from feminist websites including *Ravishly* and *Shakesville,* even as other feminists and bloggers insist it represents "the most toxic aspect of blogging" (Dzodan) and contributes to a culture of "revolutionaries who are eating their own" (Cooke).

Much of the defense of safe space relies on its purported connection to the social justice movement. Trigger warnings, an intervention that originated as a means of alerting rape and assault survivors to discussions of those topics (Filipovic; Smith; Medina; McEwan "Triggered"), are now painted as an intervention that benefits all members of oppressed groups. According to this logic, marginalized individuals – such as those in sexual and racial minority groups – experience cultural trauma as a result of these identity markers. The use of trigger warnings – and of call-outs for those who fail to use them or who otherwise harm these

populations – purportedly alerts not only trauma survivors, but rather all marginalized groups, to potentially "triggering" content, which they can then consensually engage or avoid.

Supporters of trigger warnings and other safe space practices contend that "creating a space in which we center safety and frank communication about difficult subjects [...] means that we have meaningful and constructive conversations, in moments where everyone has the emotional wherewithal to have them" (McEwan, "Triggered"). Opponents, meanwhile, view the measures as a restriction on free speech. Thus, queer theorist Jack Halberstam states, "Let me be clear – saying that you feel harmed by another queer person's use of a reclaimed word like tranny and organizing against the use of that word is NOT social activism. It is censorship" (Halberstam). Attorney and *National Review* contributor David French, likewise, suggests that a resurgence of political correctness has resulted in "many on the left [...] suddenly realizing once again that free speech has some value" even as the standards they fought for "[exact] a dreadful cultural and professional toll — stifling debate, ending careers, and eroding the intellectual foundations of liberty" (French).

The resulting din – an "uproar" according to the *New York Times*, elsewhere a "fray" (Leff; Cottom "Trigger Warned Syllabus") – relies primarily on hard-lined opinions that depict safe space as either the downfall of public discourse and higher education or their fundamental saving grace. This debate, which *Vox* executive editor Matthew Yglesias describes as "navel-gazing journalism" largely utilizes personal anecdote and opinion; more widely informed or situated analysis of the subject is rare. Scholarly work is currently limited to fledgling discussions, primarily in higher education, medical/ allied health, and arts fields, about potential applications of trigger warnings, call-outs, and other "safe space strategies." In contrast, this

analysis questions not simply how safe space can be achieved, but rather why and how it is being proposed, and whether the purported social justice benefits are actualized.

Methodology

In current usage, safe space rarely references a specific, bounded area -- such as a shelter or sanctuary. Rather, existing spaces are marked as "safe" based on the actions of those within them. For example, the LGBTQ safe zone projects currently proliferating across college campuses use decals to mark the offices and dormitory doors of faculty, staff, and student body members who have undergone training in LGBTQ issues and pledged to serve LGBTQ students through specific behaviors, such as being non-judgmental, fighting homophobia, and maintaining confidentiality (Minnesota State University). Thus, the safe "spaces" in question in this project are largely figurative. Even in those instances when material safe "zones" are invoked, the use of the spatial metaphor in fact obscures a primary focus on behavior.

This trope may, in part, stem from the popularity of safe space strategies in online discourse. After all, as media scholar Payal Arora notes, the Web has -- since its inception -- been understood in spatial terms, as evidenced by the "clear mission to architect social media spaces through experienced and experiencing physical structures such as chat*rooms,* electronic *frontiers*, *home*pages, and information *highways*" (Arora 12, original emphasis.) However, despite the recurrent use of metaphors to "explain, argue, and normalize" emerging networks, Arora argues that these devices are "often engaged in a peripheral manner" and that "[s]cholars rarely delve deeper into how [spatial metaphors] are created, sustained, and transformed into social action" (Arora 13). The realities explained through metaphors necessarily exceed the existing terms of comparison; thus, Arora compels scholars "to attend to these debates and the points of departure where the metaphor fails to explain the novel phenomenon" (Arora 13). In

this case, examining the use of the contemporary safe space metaphor, online and off, works to explicate when the term effectively describes current practice and when the gap between metaphor and reality obscures important facets of these strategies.

This project strives to situate the contemporary safe space debate within a broader historical and critical context. Specifically, it relies upon a "close reading" of the defenses and critiques of safe space published over the past five years, and examines three key themes that recur in that discourse:

- the belief that "safe space" takes identity politics to an extreme

- the belief that safe space strategies create a population of hypersensitive victims

- the belief that calls for safe space constitute a form of violence or policing

Each of the following chapters examines one of these themes in comparison with another "safety project" (e.g. women's only spaces, domestic violence shelters, and public safety or policing). This methodology intervenes in the existing discourse in several ways. It challenges the binary that links safe space with progressive politics and the opposition to safe space with conservatism, by examining the strengths and weaknesses of safe space as a social justice aim. It challenges the deterministic view of the contemporary safe space movement as the result of the rise in social media, by linking it to older activist projects and social programs. Finally, it applies the insights gleaned from previous safety projects to develop recommendations for pursuing safety within social justice movements.

<center>Safe Space as Extreme Identity Politics</center>

Critics of safe space claim that the model's proponents have taken identity politics -- "formations [that] typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context" (Heyes) -- to an unworkable extreme. For example, by

pushing to limit the use of certain terms to those they have historically been used to demean, or to have speakers identify their position and biases, safe space proponents purportedly value the identity of the person speaking above the content of the speech, making a person's point matter less than the group or groups to which they belong (e.g. Chait, Schlosser "I'm a Liberal").

Others, including defenders of safe space, insist that identity matters and point to its centrality both in experiences of oppression and in social organizing for justice (Yglesias, Young). They insist that consideration of identity is key to establishing both safety and justice.

In response to this debate, this chapter considers an earlier identity-based safe space project: the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (Michigan or Michfest) organized by lesbian feminists from 1976 to 2015. Michigan, which involves women in a literal place-making project, clearing land and building infrastructure to create a temporary women's-only space, serves as a model for separatist feminist politics and also for the critiques such projects incur. Michigan specifically received substantial critique -- and at times condemnation -- for its "womyn-born womyn" (WBW) policy that sought to exclude transgender women. Considering safe space in the context of defenses and critiques of Michfest highlights the possibilities and pitfalls of defining social justice around identity politics.

<center>Safe Space Creates a Victim Culture</center>

Many commentators (e.g. Filipovic; Smith) trace the origin of "trigger warnings," specifically, as well as the safe space debate more generally, to interventions used to warn survivors and victims of sexual violence about content related to rape and sexual assault. Advocates for trigger warnings contend that advance knowledge of the content of a particular text allows survivors to make active decisions about when and whether to engage with material that could "trigger" flashbacks, panic attacks, or other trauma-linked responses. They promote

the strategy as a method of "harm mitigation" that can protect against secondary victimization (McEwan, "Triggered"; Loverin, "Trigger Warnings Avert").

Naysayers question the usefulness of such warnings, citing psychological research that promotes "exposure" to triggers and arguing that warnings encourage avoidance (Filipovic; Chait; Stone). Additionally, many critics contend that the proliferation of such warnings will create a culture of victims, in which hypersensitivity becomes the norm, at the expense of strength and resilience (Lukianoff and Haidt; Brooks).

Chapter Three examines these claims in conversation with the history of the shelter movement, and the varying theorizations of victimhood and survivorship that occurred among domestic violence activists. Pulling from critical trauma studies and medical models of post-traumatic-stress disorder (PTSD), this chapter ultimately argues that the safe space model does not encourage hypersensitivity but does run the risk of oversimplifying nuanced models of trauma and ignoring the crucial contexts in which those traumas occur.

Safe Space as Violence and Policing

Many critiques of safe space describe it through the use of (additional) metaphors, such as "policing" and "accusations" (e.g. French, Chait) drawn from the criminal justice system. Like the contemporary strategies outlined in this thesis, the criminal justice system employs the rhetoric of safety -- e.g. public safety, homeland security, et cetera -- to encourage certain behaviors and justify punishment for others. Critics of trigger warnings, call-outs, and other safe space strategies suggest that these tactics similarly prescribe and proscribe action and mete out punishment.

The metaphoric reference to criminal justice is especially important to unpack given the breadth of research that suggests that system unfairly targets marginalized populations, including

poor people and people of color (Martinez, Meeks, and Lavandera; Better Together). When the tactics of activism elicit comparison to the tactics of oppression, those tactics are necessarily called into question. Thus, this chapter examines the metaphors of policing and violent crime among activists, in comparison to their use in a more literal danger zone: the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, following the 2014 murder of Michael Brown. This analysis reveals the ways that criminal justice metaphors can be employed to obscure literal acts of violence, ultimately agreeing with critics that "policing" does not serve the cause of social justice, while troubling contentions that conservative and privileged persons are the targets of such tactics.

Finally, this project offers some considerations for pursuing safety in the name of justice, based on the insights gleaned from these analyses. Having considered safe space in relationship with women's-only spaces, shelters, and policing, it employs recommendations from standpoint theory, critical trauma studies, and restorative justice models to reimagine the possibilities for safe space. In so doing, it reimagines the possibilities for justice as well.

CHAPTER II. SAFETY AS SAMENESS: IDENTITY POLITICS AND "MICHIGAN"

The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival ("Michigan" or "Michfest") was a cultural and political project born from the lesbian separatist politics of the 1970s. Long controversial for a "womyn-born-womyn" (WBW) policy that limited participation to cisgender women, Michigan provides an informative case study regarding boundaries and identity politics in activist projects. Although the "spaces" defined by trigger warnings and call-outs are rarely as literal as the Michfest "land," the processes, challenges, and pitfalls of Michigan can and should inform current debates. Any safe space, after all, is in part a separatist project. Attempts to define safety from danger and insiders from outsiders are separatist by definition, and -- as Michigan reveals -- are fundamentally political.

The following chapter outlines some of the themes Michigan participants and protestors explored, including the political implications of boundaries, the limitations of identity politics, and the implications of conceptualizing safety as a "participatory" concept. Each of these themes, in turn, offers further insight into the problems and possibilities of contemporary safe space projects.

Michigan's "Womyn-Born-Womyn" Policy

The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival began in 1976 and was, from its inception, imagined as something far more elaborate than a concert series. Participants ("festies") describe the site as a "space outside of space," an otherworldly zone of utopian experimentation (quoted in Cvetkovich and Wahng 141). The festival's website describes Michfest as "part music festival, part community happening," a celebration of "cooperative living," "community," and "common ground" (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, "Michigan Community").

The ground, in this case, is actually literal. "The land" constitutes a central feature of the festival and its politics, and members of the "long crews" spend four to six weeks prior to the festival clearing land and building infrastructure for attendees to pitch tents, attend performances, and work (Collas 1, 352-353). In keeping with the connection to the land and the festival's overarching "do it yourself" (Browne 250) ethos, each attendee, in addition to purchasing a ticket, serves as a member of a work crew, directly contributing to the processes that allow the festival to run. They manage recycling and waste, cook and serve meals, and provide first aid and other necessary health services to other festies (Browne 250). These contributions constitute what the Michigan website terms the "participatory ethic" that has shaped the festival for the past four decades (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, "Welcome to Michfest").

Participation, however, has been a constant issue at Michfest over that time. The festival's WBW policy, which seeks to limit attendance to individuals assigned a female identity at birth, has been a continual point of contention for at least three decades (Morris; Burkholder; Koyama, "Frequently Asked Questions"). Allowances made for cisgender male children under five years of age suggest some flexibility to this policy; however, that flexibility has rarely -- if ever -- extended to transgender women, who have vocally opposed the policy since its inception (Sandstrom 126).

Supporters of the policy suggest that the WBW stipulation does not actually prohibit the attendance of transgender women, given that "nobody is asked about their gendered herstory as a condition of entry" (Browne 2010). Instead, they suggest, the policy functions via an honor system, through which "respect for one week of womyn-born womyn space is requested" (Browne 2010). In the context of a patriarchal mainstream, they argue, the decision to restrict attendance to the festival effectively "challenge[s] historical constraints on women's roles and on

the ways a woman has been expected to perform her gender" (Collas 75). Work crews in the alternative space of Michigan manage the necessary "white-collar and blue-collar" tasks -- such as construction, plumbing, and electricity -- traditionally relegated to men. The participation of men -- or transgender women, whom the organizers do not view as women -- would disrupt the creation of an expanded women's role that lies at the heart of the Michigan project. In this manner, the WBW policy fundamentally shapes participation, defining the experience of the festies, while preventing an experience among excluded groups.

The "requested" absence of transgender women, however, has bred substantial controversy for Michigan since at least the early 1990s. In 1991, festival organizers ejected one transgender woman, Nancy Jean Burkholder, from the festival in the middle of the second night (Morris 1). The event resulted in the codifying of the WBW policy the following year and in protests from a portion of festival attendees, including Burkholder, who distributed literature on transgender identity, distributed "Where's Nancy?" buttons, and held workshops to discuss the policy (Burkholder). The protestors were expelled from the festival (Koyama, "Frequently Asked Questions). By 1994, organizers -- including trans activist and author Leslie Feinberg -- had gathered opponents of Michigan's WBW policy to participate in "Camp Trans" (Koyama, "Frequently Asked Questions"). A protest event held outside Michigan's boundaries, Camp Trans created a space "[t]o promote an understanding of gender from a variety of perspectives and to address issue of disenfranchisement in the women's and lesbian communities" (Cole). Protestors redoubled their efforts in following years, and in 1999, "Transgender Menace" or "Son of Camp Trans" participants -- led by trans activist and writer Riki Anne Wilchins -- entered the festival grounds and took showers in one of the camps (Cvetkovich and Wahng 131-

132). The event inspired strong support and opposition, but did not affect the existing policy. Protests continued through the final festival in the spring of 2015.

Announcing the end of the 40-year experiment, Vogel did not specifically invoke the controversy around the WBW policy, the cultural shift from lesbian separatism toward queer and trans politics, or the increasing visibility and support for transgender identities. Instead, she declared the unnamed "struggles" inside the festival "part of our truth, but […] not […] our defining story" (quoted in Ring). She suggested that the "[f]estival has been the crucible for nearly every critical cultural and political issue [faced by] the lesbian feminist community" and termed that fact a sign of participants' "collective strength" (quoted in Ring). In keeping with longstanding rhetoric connecting Michigan to earth and spirituality, Vogel suggested that the "life cycle of the Festival was coming to a time of closure," (quoted in Ring). In spite of her longstanding defense of the festival's status quo, Vogel welcomed change -- in this instance -- even terming it "the ultimate truth of life" (quoted in Ring).

Thus, Vogel supported the WBW policy until the end, arguing that dissent enhanced but did not define the collective experience of Michigan. That "collective," however constituted the heart of thirty-year controversy. Attempts to delineate the "safe space" of Michigan required participants and protestors to make claims about the nature of womanhood and corresponding rights to inclusion. Essentially, supporters of the WBW policy suggested that women who had not been assigned a female identity at birth were outsiders, who threatened the safety of a women-only space. In contrast, the protestors associated with Camp Trans argued for a broader understanding of "women" that included transgender individuals and authorized their right to participate. These incompatible frameworks constitute the crux of the controversy and fundamentally inform any discussion of Michigan as a "safe space." Did Vogel rightly protect

Michigan and its population from dangerous outsiders, or did she and other festival organizers

unjustly banish a large section of the "womyn" Michigan sought to center?

<div align="center">Identities, Boundaries, and the Sameness Model</div>

One of the fundamental questions at the heart of Michigan's WBW debate was who

qualified as a woman and by extension, who had the authority -- in a feminist separatist zone --

to define that space. Opponents of the policy understood it as exclusionary, a refusal of entry to a

subset of women (the very population the space claimed to serve). They noted that the policy

replicated common misogynist practices by targeting trans women, while making exceptions for

masculine-presenting individuals, including butch lesbians and trans men (Serano, *Excluded* 24).

Trans feminist Julia Serano, one Camp Trans participant, has since termed this behavior

"transmisogyny," emphasizing "the way cissexism and misogyny intersect in the lives of trans

women and others on the trans female/ feminine spectrum (Serano, *Excluded* 45-46). Essentially,

protestors argue that Michigan's WBW policy redeploys the oppression it seeks to escape.

Proponents of the WBW policy, not surprisingly, take a different view. They argue that

the women in question are not women at all, but rather are -- on the basis of anatomy or

socialization -- male. This position is increasingly unpopular in progressive circles, which largely

promote respect for self-identification (e.g. GLAAD; Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education

Network). However, in spite of its substantial flaws, the supporting argument does speak to the

logic supporters of the WBW policy deploy in its defense. Unlike other female "subgroups" --

e.g. women of color, Jewish women, et cetera -- who are admitted to the "land" and allotted

additional separate space within its borders (Barber 29-30) -- trans women are not understood as

a faction of women experiencing additional oppression. Instead, they are conceptualized as men.

This concept facilitates more than trans women's exclusion from Michfest. It also interprets their challenges to that exclusion as external threats. The Camp Trans protestors are understood as "men" and, thus, are aligned with the patriarchal power structure that necessitates the creation of a safe space. What might otherwise be understood as legitimate opposition to bigotry (i.e. resistance to cissexism) is instead understood as an exercise of bigotry (i.e. male entitlement).

Such conflicts over membership and authority are not unique to Michfest. On the contrary, they are core components of social movements defined around shared identity. Sociologist Joshua Gamson argues that, within a movement, "particular subgroups battle to gain or retain legitimate *us* standing" (Gamson 180, original emphasis). Women, in the context of Michfest, or social justice activists (in contemporary cases) fight to be understood as such. These conflicts, Gamson suggests, are "often uglier" within groups than they are against uncontested others (e.g. antifeminists or social conservatives) (180). Disputes between "those who might reasonably be considered members or protagonists" (180) often unfold more ardently than disputes "with those who[m] everyone agrees is not a member" (Gamson 179).

The contemporary safe space debate relies upon a specific progressive politics that largely accepts both the existence of transgender identities and the right of individuals to self-identify their gender. Given this context, it is unlikely that protests, such as those enacted through Camp Trans, would be disregarded as the work of "castrated men" (quoted in Gamson 191). This does not, however, imply that the tendency to deflect critiques by attributing them to outside opponents has abated likewise.

Much as recasting trans women as men undermines their authority and their right to inclusion, recasting social justice activists as bigots and trolls undermines the validity of their

claims and their ability to shape the discourse. While an opponent to the specific terms and strategies that currently define safe space might, in theory, be understood as a social justice activist with an alternative point of view, within the terms of "us" and "them," such perspectives are primarily understood as signaling outright opposition to social justice. As author and editor Hanna Rosin explained to columnist Jonathan Chait, "[t]he price" for expressing an unpopular opinion in the current social justice context "is too high" (quoted in Chait). Doing so regularly results in an onslaught of vitriolic responses and the sense that "there might be banishment waiting" for those who misstep. Thus, to challenge safe space as a social justice goal, or to challenge the assumptions upon which that alliance relies, is to "out" oneself -- quite literally -- as one external to the movement.

There are, of course, many opponents of safe space for whom such a characterization is apt. Like the antifeminist men against whom Michigan was defined, these anti-safe-spacers are invested in maintaining the status quo, which they choose to defend against progressive reforms or revolts. American Enterprise Institute president Arthur C. Brooks, for example, ties calls for safe space on college campuses to complaints about Starbucks cup designs as part of a "culture of victimhood," which "makes it more and more difficult […] to resolve political and social conflicts" and "makes for worse citizens" overall (Brooks). Greg Lukianoff and Jonathon Haidt make similar claims in the *Atlantic*, arguing that safe spaces result in "the coddling of the American mind" (Lukianoff and Haidt), by creating environments "where young adults are shielded from words and ideas that make them uncomfortable" and "anyone who interferes with that aim, even accidentally […] face[s] charges of insensitivity, aggression, or worse" (Lukianoff and Haidt).

There is a fundamental difference, however, between those who oppose safe space out of a desire to perpetuate the status quo -- and the systems of oppression it includes -- and those who challenge "safe space" as a means of dismantling those systems. Challenges to the pursuit of safety as a social justice goal, concerns about whether trigger warnings and call-outs can achieve that goal, and questions about the unintended consequences of the safe space project are not necessarily in opposition to progressive action. On the contrary, these stances may arise from activist communities out of the same commitments to social justice, which inspire proponents to defend safe space.

Recall, for comparison, how the activists who challenged the "safety" and inclusivity of Michfest did so from a feminist understanding that included trans women among patriarchy's victims. Essentially, Camp Trans organizers pushed for an expanded definition of the feminist movement, the populations included in that movement, and the "women" it needed to serve. Among contemporary activists, similar "insider" critiques trouble the ideologies that guide action and the forms such actions take. These calls often take the form of critiques of calling out, and the "politics of disposability" upon which many current call-outs rest (Trần). Writer and justice worker Ngọc Loan Trần, for example, argues that the singular use of call-outs as a social justice strategy prematurely expels would-be activists and allies from the movement, and -- in so doing -- "is preventing [activists] from actually creating what [they] need" (Trần). Feminist commentator Flavia Dzodan, likewise, suggests that safe-space strategies such as the call-out effectively silence their targets, in part because these strategies are "perceived as being '*owned*' by the oppressed, in the sense that the people initiating these call outs will, of course, do so because '*they are being oppressed*'" (Dzodan). This perception becomes its own issue, particularly when "recurring names in regular and persistent call out episodes ALSO make […]

bigoted and deeply prejudiced statements" but remain inoculated against criticism because of their alignment with "the good guys" and "the oppressed" (Dzodan). Similarly, the understanding of Michigan organizers and festies as "feminists," in opposition to the "anti-feminist" Camp Trans protestors effectively limited the feminist ideology that defined the festival and excluded participants from the Michfest project.

This refusal to recognize Camp Trans activists as women, feminists, and potential co-contributors undermined Michigan and arguably helped facilitate its demise. Yet Camp Trans hardly represented a unique critique of the lesbian separatist model informing the festival. In addition to social conservative, anti-feminist, and homoantagonistic challenges, the lesbian separatist model drew substantial critique from within the feminist movement.

In particular, the separatist model drew critiques from women of color and queer feminists, who took issue with the framework not only for its exclusionary practices, but out of concerns that separation was not, in fact, a means toward justice. Women of color theorists, including the Combahee River Collective and Alice Walker, argued against lesbian separatist projects that pushed feminists to absent themselves from men, noting their ties to men of color, and refused to cede anti-racist efforts in the pursuit of white feminist goals (Combahee River Collective 267; Walker 81).

Feminist theorist Julia Serano also critiques the separatist model, noting that it tends to be "centered on sameness rather than difference, on closed, insular communities rather than open ones" (Serano, *Excluded* 60). Serano notes that separatist projects tend to be rather "prevalent" in queer organizing (*Excluded* 60). Ironically, given the longstanding association between queerness and anti-normativity, these "queer people who prefer closed, insular communities typically insist that their own ideologies, values, and norms are not merely different, but superior

to those who have more conventional genders and sexualities" (Serano, *Excluded* 61). In such circles, those who do not or cannot align with group norms become outcasts of the marginalized subculture, in addition to the mainstream society (*Excluded* 61). These outsider identities can range from seemingly mundane categorizations, such as "simply passé" to "assimilationist, conformist" and outright enemy (Serano, *Excluded* 61).

In the contemporary "safe space" movement, the sameness model relies less on collective "female" or "queer" identity and more on the identity of the "social justice activist." This specific activist persona is defined through adherence to specific linguistic norms, such as the use of trigger warnings, the avoidance of "slurs," and the rhetoric of "privilege" and "oppression." Theoretically, the use of such strategies constitutes activism and constructs the "activist" as such. Failing to behave in accordance with these norms suggests indifference or opposition to social justice as a goal. Thus, the use of safe space strategies purportedly functions to divide activists committed to social justice from those invested in the oppressive status quo.

The results of the sameness model, however, are not limited to boundaries between "us" and "them." The closed space framework also functionally limits the collective identity upon which the movement is based. In so doing, it also limits the terms, goals, and tactics accessible to activists. In Michigan, for example, the use of the "sameness" framework positioned differences among women -- such as trans status -- as a threat to group identity and group unity. As a result, the framework limited the festival's constituency (i.e. who qualified as a woman) and its goals (i.e. positioning misogyny, but not transmisogyny, as a central problem). In the contemporary safe space movement, the sameness model can enforce specific choices (e.g. "person-first language" for disability) at the expense of others (e.g. the use of "identity-first" language).

Understanding popular trends as the only possibility for activism obscures alternatives by reframing dissent within movements as (always only) external opposition.

Moreover, separatist models shape how "acceptable" intragroup differences are conceptualized and addressed. At Michigan, for example, differences -- such as those in race and religion -- acknowledged by the organizers were met with the creation of additional "safe spaces," within the larger boundaries of the land. The sameness model facilitated an understanding of difference that suggested women of color and Jewish women needed the opportunity to retreat from White supremacy and anti-Semitism within the Michigan community, in the same way that women (broadly) needed an opportunity to retreat from mainstream male-dominated space.

Thus, within the separatist model, intragroup differences facilitate the proliferation of safe spaces, with the boundaries of each defined by collective identity. However, as the WBW boundary reveals, that collective identity is rarely, if ever, unambiguous or uncontested. Attempting to use identity markers to define who may access a safe space ignores the complexity of social identity. It fails to account for the fluidity of many individual identity markers over time, the negotiation of such identities between self-understanding and external ascription, and the inevitable differences within groups. If, as within Michigan, the response to intragroup differences is the demarcation of increasingly interior safe spaces, the end result is isolation: the single individual with the exact identity and experience required. As Serano suggests, "when we try to place all women in the same box, we unintentionally suffocate ourselves" (*Excluded* 39).

It is this understanding that critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw highlights when she declares that "the organized identity groups in which we find ourselves are in fact coalitions, or at least potential coalitions waiting to be formed" (Crenshaw 489). Women, for instance,

constitute a coalition along axes of race, sexuality, disability, and so forth. The same can be said of "feminists" and "activists."

Indeed, the understanding of activism as fundamentally a process of coalition-building constitutes, in Serano's analysis, the other "prevalent" tack of queer organizing. She contrasts the "sameness" model that divides groups into smaller and smaller communities with one of "alliances built on shared experiences and interests" (Serano, *Excluded* 60). Using herself as an example, Serano explains that she "seek[s] alliances with other women, with other femmes, with other transgender-spectrum folks, [and] with others who engage in same-sex relationships or BDSM," but also "with people who are marginalized in other ways, for example, because of their race, class, and so on" (Serano, *Excluded* 60). She thus employs a model based in coalitions and "communities," which -- she suggests -- is "not so much about surrounding [herself] with people who are 'just like [her],' but rather about learning from and supporting others who share issues and experiences that are similar (yet somewhat different from) [her] own" (Serano, *Excluded* 59-60).

It was this idea of coalition that singer and social activist Bernice Johnson Reagon, speaking at another feminist event, the 1981 West Coast Women's Music Festival, encouraged attendees to embrace. Reagon challenged the idea of feminist organizing as a place of shelter and self-nurturing, contending that, done effectively, the work of building coalitions was often painful: "[I]f you're *really* doing coalition work, […] most of the time you feel threatened to the core and if you don't, you're not really doing no coalescing" (Reagon 343). Reagon did not deny the need for nurturing space to sustain oneself for the long haul, but she differentiated between that nurturing space and activism. In contemporary terms, Reagon's speech functions as an

acknowledgment of the necessity of safe space that simultaneously refutes the equivocation between "safety" and social justice.

The Michigan model could have -- and by some accounts did -- function in this vein. After all, the "women of color" and "Jewish" sub-spaces demarcated within the land did not limit those women from attending larger community events and interacting with the broader population of festies. Moreover, concerns about racism and anti-Semitism were not necessarily restricted to discussion within those designated spaces. As discussed in more detail below, many "festies" experienced personal and political challenges at Michigan. Thus, it is possible that the spaces for additionally marginalized women functioned as temporary "nurturing" communities that allowed for coalition-building within the larger Michigan collective. It is equally possible, however, that the "sameness" model that informed Michigan functionally discourage coalition-building as a process.

Moreover, sameness-based communities run the risk of placing the onus for activism on the populations most directly harmed by systems of oppression. If opposition to sexism is based upon shared experiences as women, men can easily remove themselves (or find themselves barred) from taking action to extinguish it. Likewise, when anti-racist or anti-anti-Semitic projects are restricted to people of color and Jews, this limits the possibility for larger alliances. Ultimately, the very safe zones that aim to protect marginalized groups can, in practice, ghettoize them and "their" concerns.

Reagon's understanding of safe space as necessarily temporary informs an analysis of Michigan (and by extension, contemporary safe space projects) that considers an often-neglected factor in such critiques: time. Her argument illuminates some of the more radical understandings of Michigan, which framed the project not as a spatial refuge from the male-dominated society

but as a temporal "break" from it, which allowed feminists to experiment (and eventually return) with alternatives. Gender studies scholar Ann Cvetkovich speaks to this understanding of safe when she challenges "the false expectation that somehow the safety of Michigan will mean that [attendees] won't have problems" (quoted Cvetkovich and Wahng 142). On the contrary, she suggests, "Michigan enables […] shit to come up" (Cvetkovich and Wahng). In contrast to protective frameworks of safe space, Cvetkovich argues that "a good definition of safe space" is, in fact, an environment where "maturing can happen" (Cvetkovich and Wahng 143).

Supporters of this model contrast the "safe space" that facilitates processing from "safe space that's a barricade" or "an asylum" (quoted Cvetkovich and Wahng 143). Here, a safe space is not a zone free of conflict, but rather one that allows for those within a community to process disagreements and reactions. Many of the festies interviewed in the literature on Michigan point to the importance of processing, with one commentator declaring it "an integral part" of participation in the festival (quoted in Cvetkovich and Wahng 142). Another suggests that the willingness to process conflict "is assumed" among attendees, and represents a key value of the community, which is difficult to grasp without ongoing participation in the festival (quoted in Cvetkovich and Wahng 142).

By this understanding, then, safe space functions not as an end in itself, but as a means to facilitate processing. Ethnomusicologist Boden C. Sandstrom suggests that "the creation of a safe space for women who attend the Festival is vital in fostering an atmosphere in which discussion and conversation can spontaneously and openly occur" (Sandstrom 149). This analysis emphasizes that separatism is not simply "the absence of men" -- or other "outsiders" -- but also, and as importantly, "the communal gathering of womyn" -- or "insiders" -- as active participants in the creation of something new.

This perspective best aligns with that proffered by current safe space proponents, who argue that call-outs, content warnings, and other safe space strategies expand the possibilities for social interaction and discourse. Feminist and *Shakesville* founder Melissa McEwan, for example, frames trigger warnings (or content notes) as tools in a collective process, marked by the active participation of multiple agents. McEwan terms "[t]he provision of content notes […] an exchange in which readers must participate, […] a communication between two people" rather than "a proclamation" (McEwan "Triggered"). This vital distinction understands trigger warnings as a participatory practice, not unlike the dialogue and processing some Michigan attendees associate with the Michfest model of safe space.

McEwan herself, however, has been a vocal critic of "trans-exclusive" feminism, as well as a broader supporter of transgender rights (McEwan "A Statement"). In fact, one of the examples she offers in favor of providing content notes specifically addresses the safety of trans women:

> The presence or absence of trigger warnings can serve as a good faith litmus test for whether a writer is sensitive to issues that affect you, and whether the commentariat is likely to be supportive or hostile to your participation. It's a reasonable thing for a reader to expect that a blogger who provides a trigger warning or content note about transphobia, for example, will have moderators who do not allow rampant transphobia in comments. (McEwan "Triggered")

Given McEwan's position as a trans ally and Michigan opponent, it would be markedly over-simplistic to suggest that contemporary safe space proponents simply replicate Michfest

practices. Instead, McEwan's position informs an understanding of safe space strategies as participatory tools, rather than ends in themselves. This *participatory* understanding of safe space strategies functions -- in a variety of ideological and political projects -- to best forward social justice aims, while guarding against the use of those tools for oppressive (anti-justice) purposes. In the context of Michigan, models of safety that emphasized conflict and processing protected against alternative conceptions of the space (such as the WBW policy) that privileged sameness to the detriment of women in the group. In the context of the contemporary safe space debate, the understanding of content notes as a participatory "exchange" between individuals engaged in dialogue offers an alternative to safe strategies that enact and maintain norms within a community.

In other words, safe space strategies function best as social justice measures when they are understood as means rather than ends. When "safe space" and its strategies become synonymous with social justice, the room available for activists (insiders) to contest them necessarily diminishes. The awareness of alternative tools, and the likelihood of pursuing alternative or conflicting goals, likewise dwindles. In place of these contested, contradictory pursuits, sameness models of safety result in increasingly uniform activisms.

Within homogeneity-based safe spaces, strategies such as calling out and trigger warnings function primarily as methods of community formation and affiliation. They effectively align their practitioners with a larger "social-justice-oriented" community. The call-out, for example, communicates a critic's knowledge of oppression and resistance, as well as their commitment to a justice-based value system, which in turn defines them as a member of a larger group (e.g. activists, feminists, et cetera). Such call-outs simultaneously define critics against "outsiders" -- the objects of the call-out -- who lack this knowledge and have behaved contrary to

these values. The terminology -- calling *out* -- becomes specifically relevant here, as naming the outsider becomes a means to establish oneself as an insider, to form or maintain ties within the community.

Certainly, community-formation and -affiliation projects should not be underrated. For marginalized groups, often the populations call-outs seek to defend, community affiliation can be life-saving. They can also function as interventions in the larger system, as researchers -- including media scholar Ananda Mitra -- suggest when noting that these projects can "[produce] a call that the dominant has a moral obligation to acknowledge" (Mitra 29). In so doing, call-outs and other safe-space strategies can expand the onus for social change to include the privileged, effectively lessening the burden on the oppressed.

In other applications, however, calling out and other safe space strategies effectively Other the already marginalized. Perhaps, as in Michigan, a safe space built for women ultimately excludes a population of them. Indeed, safe zones that rely on the use of a specific academic vernacular (e.g. privilege, kyriarchy, et cetera) can alienate those without access to education. Moreover, since the vast majority of individuals occupy a combination of privileged and oppressed identities, these two projects -- targeting and protecting marginalized individuals -- are not mutually exclusive. This indicates the intricate complexity of individuals and identity groups and the inherent challenge in sorting them into clear binaries of "privileged" and "oppressed" or "safe" and "unsafe."

More importantly, even if such a division is possible, it should not – in and of itself – be the goal of social justice work. The necessity of community- and identity- formation projects to the work of social justice must not obscure the dangers in uncritically centering those projects.

Like calling out, community-building and identity expression are often valuable pursuits. They are not, however, inevitably pursuits of social justice.

The tools deployed in the name of safe space -- separatism, calling out, trigger warnings, et cetera -- can be used to harm or help, oppress or liberate. If activists wish to guard against these more negative iterations of safe space, they must begin by cultivating nuance. Serano, for instance, suggests that those invested in social justice begin "to dismantle the 'righteous infallible activist' versus 'evil ignorant oppressor' binary that many activists […] seem to embrace" (quoted in Berlatsky). In place of this "'us versus them' mentality," they should begin to "accept the fact that 1) we all have much to learn from other activists, and 2) that even the most well-informed and dedicated activists will oftentimes disagree with one another" (quoted in Berlatsky). These steps will begin to facilitate the shift from sameness-based activism, which discourages intragroup differences and lays the foundation for exclusion, to a model based in coalition.

Ultimately, in order for safe spaces to be just spaces, activists must understand and guard against the potential for "safety" to justify ghettoes and cliques. Perhaps the greatest strength of the era in which Michigan and Camp Trans unfolded was the open dissent between those invested in queer and women's liberation projects. In order for these movements to serve their goals, they must remain as diverse as the populations they represent. Moreover, they must manage not to equivocate between those heterogeneous perspectives, divesting them of power or context, but instead engage in a continuous, contentious exploration of those tensions. The concern must not be simply that we are or are not creating safe space, but that we are limiting social justice to safe space alone. In other words, in order for social justice to work, we must guard against the belief that we know, fully, how and why it will.

CHAPTER III. HARMED OR HARMFUL: DISCOURSES OF TRAUMA AND SHELTER

In May 2014, University of California-Santa Barbara (UCSB) sophomore, Bailey

Loverin, published a *New York Times (NYT)* opinion piece lauding the call to expand the use of

"trigger warnings" on college campuses (Loverin, "Trigger Warnings Encourage"). Loverin had

personally advocated for the use of trigger warnings on UCSB syllabi, arguing that "these

warnings are less about protection and more about preparation" ("Trigger Warnings Encourage")

because they "allow survivors the chance to prepare to face the material" ("Trigger Warnings

Encourage") and contribute to the conversation.

Although hardly the first entry in the trigger warning debate, Loverin's piece, and her

activism at UCSB, quickly inspired a slew of additional commentary from educators, journalists,

and activists (e.g. Souza; Times Editorial Board; Flood). "Comedic" trigger warnings -- such as

columnist Jill Filipovic's tongue-in-cheek "Trigger Warning: this piece discusses trigger

warnings" (Filipovic) and *NYT* national correspondent Jennifer Medina's "Warning: The Literary

Canon Could Make Students Squirm" (Medina) -- illustrate the tendency among many

commentators to view requests like Loverin's as absurd outgrowths of an overprotected

generation. Indeed, Filipovic further "warned" readers that her piece might "look askance at

college students who are now asking that trigger warnings be applied to their course materials"

(Filipovic). Political blogger Kevin Drum, writing for *Mother Jones*, asked if "supporters of

trigger warnings [are] just hoping to gives kids a few more years of refuge from the outside

world" (Drum), equating college students with children who have yet to face the dangers of

"real" (adult) life. By January 2016, a comedic "millennial think-piece bingo" card published to

McSweeney's included "trigger warning culture" as a square (Liu).

In general, these responses "read" Loverin as the hypersensitive offspring of overprotection and entitlement. She became a metonym for the failures of the "millennial" generation and of White feminists, a symbol of hyper-frailty, childish complaint, and political correctness. Capitulating to such a standard, opponents argued, would simply reinforce her generation's right to victimhood at the expense of free speech and critical thought. In defense of public discourse, trigger warnings could not stand.

Opponents of trigger warnings represent the practice as an outgrowth and cause of hypersensitivity and victim culture (Lukianoff and Haidt; Brooks). They regularly note that trigger warnings first developed in contexts specific to trauma victims -- such as forums for rape and assault survivors -- and have now proliferated past the point of usefulness (e.g. Filipovic, Jarvie). Schools and Web forums, they argue, are not meant to be therapeutic spaces centered on healing, and the shift to re-create them as such can only harm education and public debate. Moreover, the use of trigger warnings promotes avoidance, at the expense of healing. Essentially, campaigns like Loverin's demand schools be a therapeutic setting (which they are not), and that they provide a service not recommended for therapeutic purposes. Acquiescing to these demands can only affirm a generation of victims.

The connection of trigger warnings to victimization -- and to trauma more broadly -- constitutes one of the only areas of overlap between supporters and opponents of the practice. Commentators link trigger warnings to trauma historically -- noting the notes originate in feminist Web forums and anti-violence activism -- and contemporarily, through references to current theoretical and medical models for trauma and trauma treatment. Like the metaphors of safety that frame this project, the references to past feminisms and current psychotherapeutic recommendations are rarely considered at length, instead invoked superficially in support of

existing points. Thus, this chapter seeks to reconsider claims across the safe space debate, by exploring common arguments about trigger warnings in the context of historic and contemporary theorizations of trauma. Through an examination of the shelter movement, critical trauma theories and psychotherapeutic recommendations, this chapter examines claims that trigger warnings are currently "spreading," that they are necessary for (or antithetical to) healing, and that they create a generation of victims or -- conversely -- represent a remedy to victimization for a marginalized group of trauma subjects.

<div align="center">The Shelter Model</div>

The "shelter movement" that informed the original call for safe space shares the contemporary model's elements of separatism. The majority of shelters for female domestic violence victims rely on a "feminist" or "National" model, developed in the 1970s, that requires an all-female staff and an undisclosed location. This serves in contrast to the earlier "Chiswick" model for domestic violence intervention, which developed when the Women's Aid Centre in London's Chiswick borough expanded "to offer refuge to battered women" (Haaken and Yragui 54). Given its original use as a "community center for homeless women and children" (Haaken and Yragui 54), the Chiswick center was centrally and publically located, in stark contrast to the hidden refuges that have proliferated since (54).

Shelters following the National model protect the location of the residence as an extension of protections to clients. Using interviews of directors and staff of domestic violence facilities, psychologists Janice Haaken and Nanette Yragui link the practice of concealed locations with beliefs about women's safety and potential violence. They note that "most [respondents] (96 percent) stated that safety for women leaving abusive relationships was the main advantage" of maintaining the locations' confidentiality, even though "81 percent

acknowledged, either by direct statement or through a narrative example, that this practice is

partly illusory" (Haaken and Yragui 58).

Whether alluding to overwrought representations of "rampant, all-pervasive and

omnipotent threats of male violence" (56), absent critiques of "aggression within the

organization[s]," (63), or false confidence in confidentiality, Haaken and Yragui's contention

that the safety secured through concealed locations is "partly illusory" speaks to a larger critique

of a core tenet of the National model. Haaken and Yragui argue that the decision to hide shelter

locations, while "founded on reality-based concerns over the threats posed by violent men […]

also signified a diminished sense of the collective strength of women" (Haaken and Yragui 56).

Early grassroots networks rooted in "a sisterhood of support and advocacy" allowed women to

"resist collectively" and inspired a vision of shared strength (Haaken and Yragui 53). In contrast,

Haaken and Yragui argue, the National model has "displaced" that concept of "collective

strength" in favor of "an emphasis on security measures, driven by what [is] perceived to be

rampant, all-pervasive and omnipotent threats of male violence" (Haaken and Yragui 56).

This new model, which Haaken and Yragui term "the 'womb' of feminism" (53) reifies

conservative gender norms that align femininity with fragility and masculinity with violence. In

so doing, it not only imagines male violence as a ubiquitous and constant threat, it also obscures

the possibility of violence among women within such "maternal spaces of protection" (53).

Haaken and Yragui contend that "the romanticizing of women and the denial of power dynamics

in feminist organizations have the effect of inhibiting direct discussion of conflict" (63). The

representation of women as fundamentally more nurturing and less violent, a dangerously

outdated trope, locates "'power and control' motives […] entirely outside the protective fold of

the shelter" and the feminist women within it, and thus makes "it is more difficult to confront sources of aggression within the organization" (Haaken and Yragui 63).

A similar dynamic occurs within the contemporary safe space movement, when those aligned with movement subjectivities -- (e.g. "social justice warrior," "feminist") -- and performing movement-sanctioned behaviors (e.g. calling out and requesting trigger warnings) construct each other as pure do-gooders against the always unjust outsiders of society at-large. In this context, the implementation of safe space strategies, as Filipovic argues, is not "so much about helping people with PTSD as [it is] about a certain kind of performative feminism" that offers "a low-stakes way […] to identify yourself as conscious of social justice issues" (Filipovic).

This, in itself, is not necessarily a problem, particularly among activists -- such as feminists -- who often suggest deeds create reality. Many activists argue for action-oriented understandings of identity, proposing "feministing" (Valenti) and insisting that "ally is a verb" (Invictus Animus). In this context, the possibility of "doing social justice" hardly seems problematic. Rather, it may be the newest installment in a long line of constructivist projects that invest in the power of action to produce social change.

On the other hand, representing one tactic -- such as calling out or the trigger warning -- as "doing social justice" can elide the difference between strategy and goal. Consider, in the context of the shelter movement, how the creation of an undisclosed location increasingly obscured other possibilities for intervention.

That detriment, as in the shelter movement, sometimes occurs as the result of the mistaken belief that power dynamics do not exist within the movement or shape the behaviors of those involved. This difference compounds violence and conflict by failing to address it as such.

Furthermore, it fails to recognize differences within the movement, under the presumption that all members are united under a singular, shared threat, experienced in an identical way. The idea that oppression is a unilateral experience, however, has been dismantled in the recent decades of feminist and other social justice activism, which acknowledge that systems of oppression intersect to affect different members of a group, differently. Women, for example, experience sexism differently if they are additionally subject to racism, ableism, or heterosexism, than if they are privileged along those axes. Recognizing the harm that women can and do inflict upon other women has strengthened the theories and practice that shape the feminist movement. Likewise, the contemporary safe space movement -- which regularly invokes models including intersectionality and identity politics -- must contend with the complexity within and variation among those committed to the cause.

In the shelter movement, the commitment to creating a "refuge" from outsider violence achieved two problematic effects. First, it aligned feminine identity with victimhood (and therefore masculinity with violence), collapsing the complexity of female and male subjectivities and reducing the movement to one centered on victims. That strict subjectivity, in turn, excluded women who did not properly "fit" the female model, rendering them as violent non-women, outside the population the shelter sought to serve. Both of these tendencies bear consideration in dialogue with the contemporary movement for safe space, and are thus outlined further below.

Trigger Warnings and Trauma

In order to analyze the relationship between the shelter movement and contemporary calls for safe space, we must first consider the specific ways that the current discourse links "safe space" to trauma and victimization. In a discourse primarily defined through debate, the

connection between trigger warnings and trauma constitutes a rare point of agreement. "Being triggered," according to *Shakesville* founder and editor Melissa McEwan, "does not mean 'being upset' or 'being offended' or 'being angry,' or any other euphemism people who roll their eyes long-sufferingly in the direction of trigger warnings tend to imagine it to mean" (McEwan, "Triggered"). Rather, the experience is a specific "physical and/or emotional response to a survived trauma or sustained systemic abuse" (McEwan, "Triggered"). Other similar definitions explicitly tie the trigger warning to a medical model of trauma, explaining it as a "note to readers that material following the warning may trigger a post-traumatic stress reaction" (Filipovic). Symptoms of such reactions, according to McEwan, can range from "a brief moment of dizziness, to a shortness of breath and a racing pulse, to a full-blown panic attack" (McEwan, "Triggered"). This understanding aligns with the pre-2013 categorization, by the American Psychiatric Association of post-traumatic stress as an anxiety disorder, characterized in part by "hyperarousal symptoms" including "irritability, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle responses" (Bar-Shai and Klein 3). Although re-categorized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5 (DSM-5) as a "Trauma- and Stressor-Related [Disorder]" (Echterling 201), hyperarousal symptoms such as McEwan describes remain key components of the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, which -- the manual notes -- often co-occurs with generalized anxiety disorders (GADs) and other related illnesses (American Psychological Association).

On these grounds, McEwan challenges suggestions that "[t]o say, 'I was triggered'" is equivalent to saying, "I got my delicate fee-fees hurt" (McEwan), arguing that the warnings function as a means of "mitigating harm" among trauma survivors. Indeed, many commentators support trigger warnings as a harm-mitigation strategy, provided they are limited to their original terms of use. Filipovic, for example, recalls how

[i]n the early days of feminist blogging, trigger warnings were generally about sexual assault, and posted with the understanding that lots of women are sexual assault survivors, lots of women read feminist blogs, and graphic descriptions of rape might lead to panic attacks or other reactions that will really ruin someone's day." (Filipovic)

In that context, she argues, it was "[e]asy enough to give readers a little heads up – a trigger warning – so that they can decide to avoid that material if they know that discussion of rape triggers debilitating reactions" (Filipovic). Freelance writer Jenny Jarvie likewise takes no issue with trigger warnings' original appearance "in self-help and feminist forums to help readers who might have post traumatic stress disorder to avoid graphic content that might cause painful memories, flashbacks, or panic attacks" (Jarvie). The problem, she suggests, stems from the increasing popularity of the warnings, which surpasses their original purpose and threatens the broader public discourse.

Jarvie argues that "[w]hat began as a way of moderating Internet forums for the vulnerable and mentally ill now threatens to define public discussion both online and off" (Jarvie). Filipovic concurs, suggesting that trigger warnings "have expanded widely and become more intricate, detailed, specific and obscure" (Filipovic). Essentially, detractors insist that the practice threatens to snowball into an impossible standard that fundamentally limits the possibilities for public discourse and debate.

Edward Schlosser, a college professor writing under a pseudonym, worries in a "viral" *Vox* piece that -- in a contemporary moment defined by "a simplistic, unworkable, and ultimately stifling conception of social justice," a single mistake can terminate an instructor's career (Schlosser, "I'm a Liberal"). A previous piece, posted to his personal blog, suggests that

[a]ll it takes is one slip-- not even an outright challenging of their beliefs, but even

momentarily exposing them to any uncomfortable thought or imagery—and that's it, your

classroom is triggering, you are insensitive, kids are bringing mattresses to your office

hours and there's a twitter petition out demanding you chop off your hand in repentance.

(Schlosser "A Personal Account")

Schlosser's reference to "kids […] bringing mattresses" specifically references a protest of film

professor, Laura Kipnis, who drew critiques from students after publically defending sexual

relationships between students and professors (Kipnis). His larger contention -- that increased

calls to defend students' emotional safety indicate hyper-vulnerability among this generation --

illustrates a common theme among opponents. Commentator Jonathon Chait, for example, cites

"a professor at a prestigious university" who informed him that "just in the last few years, she

[has] noticed a dramatic upsurge in her students' sensitivity toward even the mildest social or

ideological slights" (Chait). Similarly, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathon Haidt, writing for *The*

Atlantic, suggest that the generations of students born after 1980 received "a consistent message

from adults: life is dangerous, but adults will do everything in their power to protect you from

harm" (Lukianoff and Haidt). Given that context, Lukianoff and Haidt do not find it difficult to

"imagine why students arriving on campus today might be more desirous of protection and more

hostile toward ideological opponents than in generations past" (Lukianoff and Haidt).

This interpretation of safe space as a "generational" issue coexists with an understanding

of trigger warnings as dangerous primarily because they have exceeded the original bounds of

"acceptably" traumatic events. Rarely do those who oppose the new "trigger warning culture"

take issue with their past use among sexual assault survivors and military veterans. In fact, they

explicitly draw upon these examples, in order to contrast them with new "unreasonable" origins

for trauma, including "texts that may upset students" and "words, ideas, and subjects that might cause discomfort" (Lukianoff and Haidt). To accept the proposed expansion of trigger warnings, by these analyses, means accepting that "small social slights […] might cause searing trauma" (Chait).

Thus, opponents regularly deride trigger warnings for "dead pets/ parrots, a bad injury in sports" (Halberstam) and other relatively minor events. They simultaneously presume "major" events -- which might "rightly" cause psychological and physical harm -- are limited to trigger warning's "past use." By this logic, while the reasonable feminists of prior eras may have asked for and utilized trigger warnings in discussions of "true" violence, today's activists have diluted the meaning of violence and trauma through endless expansions of both terms. The reality, however, is more complicated. After all, not all contemporary calls for trigger warnings -- or for safe spaces, more broadly -- rely on "slight" offenses.

Consider Schlosser's reference to "kids […] bringing mattresses" to Kipnis' office, following her *Chronicle of Higher Education* article. For Schlosser, it constitutes a fitting example of the new safety standards, which Chait describes as a call to "treat even fairly unpleasant ideas or behaviors as full-scale offenses" (Chait). Essentially, if a single opinion piece can launch student action, something must be amiss.

Yet, the mattress protest relies upon a more complicated example. Five months prior to Kipnis' piece, Columbia University senior, Emma Sulkowicz, drew national attention for her one-woman protest of the university. Sulkowicz was raped her second year of college and retraumatized when the university cleared the accused student of any wrongdoing. For her senior thesis, Sulkowicz developed a piece of "endurance art," which involved lugging the dormitory mattress (upon which the rape occurred) with her wherever she went, until she graduated or the

rapist was expelled (Sulkowicz). Over the following months, many of Sulkowicz's classmates rallied to help "carry the weight" across campus, and students at more than 130 universities gathered to carry their own mattresses in support (Svokos). In May 2015, Sulkowicz graduated from Columbia. She received her diploma with one hand, supporting her mattress with the other (O'Connor).

In many ways, Sulkowicz's story fits the implied criteria of "acceptable" calls to action. Having experienced physical, sexual violence, she pushed the university to take action and mitigate her ongoing experience of harm. In contrast, the students at Northwestern responded to discursive violence, rather than physical. Like the anti-trigger warning editorialists who suggest contemporary student resistance responds solely to "discomfort" and "insensitivity," the Northwestern mattress protests blurred two distinct forms of harm: action and speech. Perhaps the point most clearly illustrated by the Kipnis-inspired mattress protests is that both proponents of safe space and their opponents are capable of equivocation.

Yet, the original "Carry that Weight" protest cannot be so easily categorized. After all, Sulkowicz was not simply protesting her rapist or his continued presence on campus following her report. She was also drawing attention to the hostile environment this created, essentially taking the university to task for a failure to protect her not only from the rape itself, but also from the retraumatization that occurred in its aftermath. In this sense, the rapist's continued presence on campus functioned symbolically to communicate the university's mishandling of the rape charge and their dismissal of Sulkowicz's wellbeing. In simpler terms: his presence was triggering.

Thus, the original mattress protest was not simply a call to action against the rapist or against the university for failing to discipline him. It was a claim about the nature of trauma and

the rights of trauma victims. In this context, the Northwestern protestors are less easily dismissed. After all, if they were also survivors of sexual assault, further harmed by the symbolic violence of Kipnis' tweets, the distinction between their claims and Sulkowicz's lessens considerably. Granted, Kipnis did not originally harm these students. However, in an equally literal sense, the officials at Columbia did not harm Sulkowicz. Yet, when the concept of discursive violence enters the equation -- even as an extension of physical violence and trauma -- definitions of harm grow increasingly ambiguous.

As Chait and others repeatedly note, this particular complication is not new to the discourse of social justice. Many opponents suggest that trigger warnings and call-outs "merely repackage" the ideology of earlier "political correctness" (PC) initiatives (Chait). Although Chait's description of trigger warnings, as tools used to "[bludgeon] even many of [their] own supporters into despondent silence" (Chait), is open to critique, he has considerable support in drawing connections between the current safe space movement and the "political correctness" initiatives of the 1990s. The notion of trigger warnings -- and of the contemporary social justice movement writ large -- as a reenergized iteration of old-school PC politics provides a powerful trope in the discourse.

Perhaps more importantly, it links conservative pundits like Chait to surprising allies, such as queer feminist theorist Jack Halberstam. Like Chait, Halberstam sees the contemporary call for safe space as a reiteration of earlier leftist activism, in his case the "weepy, white lady feminism" that rightly "gave way to reveal a multi-racial, post-structuralist intersectional feminism of much longer provenance" (Halberstam). These 1990s advances "turned the focus away from the wounded self" and allowed activists to recognize their true enemy: neoliberal capitalism (Halberstam). Now, in Halberstam's opinion,

younger people who are benefitting from several generations […] of queer social

activism by people in their 40s and 50s (who in their childhoods had no recourse

to anti-bullying campaigns or social services or multiple representations of other

queer people building their lives) (Halberstam)

have suddenly resurrected the rightfully extinguished "rhetoric of harm and trauma that casts all

social difference in terms of hurt feelings and that divides up politically allied subjects into

hierarchies of woundedness" (Halberstam).

Halberstam's generational argument against a vanguard of "younger folks, with their gay-

straight alliances, their supportive parents and their new right to marry [who] regularly issue

calls for 'safe space'" replaces the "p.c. movement" of Chait's memory with his own recollection

of "weepy white lady feminism" (Halberstam). Yet, the arguments share a sense that the current

movement constitutes a reiteration of an ill-conceived activism past.

Notably, those activisms were contentious during their original heyday, and the memory

of them at work in Chait's and Halberstam's analyses is, likewise, contested. Fellow feminist

activist, Julia Serano, for example takes issue with Chait's notion of political correctness (quoted

in Berlatsky), as well as Halberstam's memory of nineties queer activism. Serano calls "[t]he

notion that queer and trans people of my generation were somehow stoic and resilient, whereas

the younger generation of queer and trans people are a bunch of oversensitive crybabies […]

quite a stretch" (Serano, "Regarding Generation Wars"). She recalls that "we too complained

about how oppressed we were, and […] often expressed our hurt feelings in public, and often

became outraged about particular language choices or media depictions that we found

problematic" (Serano, "Regarding Generation Wars"). Ultimately, Serano argues, the "main

difference" between today's activists and the anti-neoliberal activists Halberstam identifies is one of personal allegiance. Serano writes that "we (in glorifying our own past) tend to believe that the causes that we fought for were righteous and justified, whereas the younger generation's causes and concerns may seem misguided and frivolous to us" (Serano, "Regarding Generation Wars"). Although he does not fully acquiesce to this understanding, Halberstam does note that his argument against the current generation requires "flattening out all kinds of historical and cultural variations within multiple histories of feminism, queerness and social movements" (Halberstam).

Indeed, as Ann Snitow[1] notes in her 1989 "Gender Diary," the feminist movement has continually experienced divisions between those who wish to organize around collective identities and those seeking to deconstruct those identities. Snitow identifies multiple feminist "conflicts," including those between cultural feminism and radical feminism and social constructionism and essentialism, which -- while not identical -- share common traits (14-28, 29). Each time the conflict resurfaces, she argues, feminist organizers "suffer a harmful amnesia" (14) that obscures the ongoing reality of the division, as well as previous theorizations and tactics for approaching it.

Within the contemporary debate, the call for "safe space" is regularly framed as a "recent" development, attributed to the "millennial" generation or to social media. This tendency rightly situates the current debate within a greater cultural context, examining the specific moment in which the debate has gained traction and considering possible factors for its rise. At the same time, however, attribution of the "safe space" movement to social media or millennials risks detaching the present era from the history that informs it. This determinist view too easily

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[1] I would like to thank Dr. Becca Cragin for directing me to this source.

compounds the "amnesia" (Snitow 14) or "flattening" of history (Halberstam) that distances activists from established approaches, by mistaking these conflicts for first-time occurrences. Too often, this "new issue" framework leads to further entrenchment of existing positions, as activists attempt to choose between two apparently contradictory paths. In contrast, an awareness of the past alerts feminists to the shared roots of seemingly polar approaches (Snitow 29, 36). As a result, this approach has the potential to open activists to unstable, indeterminate positions that better reflect the nuance of personal identity, social movements, and systemic oppression.

Thus, one initial intervention to the existing "safe space" debate is to reconsider the history in which it is situated, by considering not simply the controversies regarding "political correctness" or shifts in queer activism that occurred during the early nineties, but instead the anti-violence and shelter movements that informed the original call to safe space.

<div align="center">Victims, Survivors, and Opponents</div>

The contemporary safe space movement regularly draws critiques for its purported role in shaping a "victimhood culture" (Campbell and Manning 694-695). Because representations generally tie call-outs and trigger warnings to a specific generation -- (e.g. "millennials) -- the debate rarely acknowledges the long history of the "victim" trope. The representation of social justice activism as a haven for victims goes much further back than the advent of social media. As sociologist Rebecca Stringer notes, "[f]eminism is […] routinely held up as the prime exemplar of the ills of 'victimism'" (Stringer 4). As an example, she notes the contention, from the conservative think-tank Civitas, that leftist movements are creating a "victocracy […] where citizens take up victim identity instead of taking personal responsibility" for their positions in society (Stringer 3).

Stringer strongly critiques these conservative "anti-victimism" positions, but also notes the historical shift -- *within* the feminist movement -- away from victim identity. She contends that, in recent years, "as well as being a target and critic of conservative anti-victimism, feminism has also been a key venue for articulating anti-victim discourse" (5). Indeed, many critiques of the safe space movement meet this description. Filipovic, for example, notes that ""trigger warnings are largely perceived as protecting young women and, to a lesser extent, other marginalized groups" and suggests that, as a result, they "[contribute] to the general perception of members of those groups as weak, vulnerable and 'other'" (Filipovic). Feminist media analyst Flavia Dzodan describes her personal resistance toward "portraying [herself] as a 'victim'" (Dzodan), and -- although she argues that this resistance is not necessarily positive -- ties call-out culture to manipulation and "competition over whose scars are 'real,' whose wounds hurt the most, [and] who is the biggest victim" (Dzodan). Over time, she contends, this tendency "turns really easily into a way of disavowing our own power" (Dzodan). Dzodan's critique is highly nuanced, but it nevertheless challenges a perceived trend toward victimism, and supports a larger call to redirect activists toward positions of resilience and strength.

Refusing victim identity has thus become a prominent trend in activism, as it has in the shelter spaces originally crafted to serve them. Initially, the shelter movement, and other synchronous efforts, constructed models of support for violence and abuse victims. Although hardly a proponent of victimism, sociologist Joel Best notes that in the post-Civil-Rights era, the "rhetoric of equal rights […] inspired slogans about victim's rights" (10), which in turn "spawned a victims' rights movement that demanded such reforms as victim compensation, victim impact statements, and victim allocation at sentencing and parole hearings" (Best 10). Originally a conservative platform espoused by "tough-on-crime" Republicans, the victims'

rights framework was eventually incorporated by progressives, particularly in the wake of sociologist William Ryan's groundbreaking 1971 book, *Blaming the Victim*, which positioned marginalized groups as "victims of society" unfairly indicted for their oppression. In addition to establishing some concrete resources and reforms, including increased coverage for mental healthcare, consumer rights campaigns, and disciplinary specialties in "victimology," the victim's rights movement also created the victim as a recognizable subject, a "familiar [figure] on the social landscape" (Best 10).

In the movement to address violence against women, the victims' rights ideology funded rape crisis hotlines and shelters, passed policies declaring rape a war crime and marital rape a reality, and enacted a federal amendment prohibiting "environment[s] that would be intimidating, hostile, or offensive to reasonable people" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). Yet the movement also drew substantial critiques for conflating sexual intercourse with rape, men with predators, and women with victims. This point constitutes one of Best's key critiques of the victim model, which -- he argues -- renders "relationships between victims and their victimizers [as] [...] relatively straightforward and unambiguous" (Best 11). In essence, the victim model creates the victimized subject as incapable of violence and -- in many cases -- as bereft of agency.

Such critiques have partially facilitated the shift, within the women's movement, from a discourse of victimization to one of survivorship. Social justice activist Emi Koyama notes that contemporary "[f]eminists organizing against domestic and sexual violence generally use the word 'survivor' instead of 'victim' to refer to people who experience violence" unless the individual dies as a result of the assault (Koyama, "Reclaiming 'Victim'"). She suggests that the rhetoric of "survivor" and "even [...] 'thriver' [...] is [...] often invoked by people who are

working to heal and empower victims/ survivors of abuse as well as by the victims/ survivors themselves" (Koyama, "Reclaiming 'Victim'").

Koyama explains how, after personally using the survivor framework for several years, she "began questioning 'survivor' narratives and […] came to identify with and [embrace] the term 'victim' more" (Koyama, "Reclaiming 'Victim'"). She sees 'victim' as a "compelling alternative to the cult of compulsory hopefulness and optimism in the 'trauma recovery industry'" and a means "to honor and embrace weakness, vulnerability, and passivity as well [as proactivity and strength]" (Koyama, "Reclaiming 'Victim'"). This, in turn, opens a path to avoid "blaming and invalidating victims" (Koyama, "Reclaiming 'Victim'").

Stringer shares Koyama's concerns about an uncritical shift toward survivorship, arguing that the "concerted movement away from the language of victimhood across a wide array of discourses" facilitates "the neoliberal replacement of the concept of structural oppression with the concept of personal responsibility" (Stringer *i*). She notes that "individuals and groups who have endured all manner of violence, injustice, and misfortune routinely publicly refuse to be perceived as 'victims', or find themselves hailed by others as agents, survivors or resilient, resistive subjects, rather than as 'victims'" (Stringer 3). Indeed, when social work scholar Joanne Baker interviewed 55 Australian women between the ages of 18 and 25, she found each of them "[going] to great lengths to avoid being regarded as a victim," even in instances of domestic violence (Baker 190). This, Baker contends, speaks to the extent to which "[n]eoliberal and post-feminist discourses have closed down the space available for articulating any sense of unfairness or oppression" (Baker 190). The neoliberal victim model, in Stringer's analysis, promotes "a conception of victimization as subjective rather than social, a state of mind rather

than a worldly situation" (Stringer *i*). In so doing, it establishes a binary between agents (survivors) and pawns (victims) (Stringer 13).

Stringer argues in favor "of 'reclaiming' victimhood amidst the dominance of neoliberal victim theory" (Stringer 157). She builds on Koyama to suggest that "reclaiming" victimhood "lies between the poles of celebration and jettison" and can thus reintroduce nuance and ambivalence into the discourse around victimization and victim identity (Stringer 160). Importantly, Stringer does not suggest an uncritical embrace of victimhood replace its uncritical abandonment. Instead she argues for a "neutral" re-envisioning of the term that can act "as an opening rather than a resolution -- an opening into new avenues of politicization rather than an end in itself" (Stringer 160). Reclaiming victimhood, in Stringer's analysis, is a necessary step toward a new theory of injustice, oppression, and violence, not the full realization of that project.

In considering the safe space discourse, the critiques offered by Stringer, Koyama, and their associates serve as a potent reminder that victims are not fundamentally without value, but rather have been socially constructed as maligned subjects. In reality, recognizing victimhood as a potentially useful, accurate, or positive framework may offer important alternatives to existing theoretical models. For example, Stringer's discussion of the agent/ victim binary serves as a reminder that "survivors" have not cornered the market on agency. In fact, victimhood has provided and can continue to provide a possible means of enacting power, as it did through the creation of a protected class under the heading "victims' rights." The arguments for trigger warnings, and for safe space more broadly, can be linked to this understanding of power, which supports refusal of the neoliberal victim model -- and its investment in resilience and personal responsibility -- in favor of wider of collective expectations.

Historian and educator Angus Johnston supports this position, validating trigger warnings as a meaningful challenge to a model that lacks social responsibility. He argues that the university spaces where Loverin and others ask for such strategies to be employed "have always been spaces where difficult, traumatic stuff [gets] dealt with" (quoted in Leff) and that "safe space" proponents are simply part of a vanguard of students "willing to assert themselves and say, 'My emotional well-being does matter'" (quoted in Leff). McEwan furthers this critique when she states, "The only reason I can imagine resistance to trigger warnings […] is that their ubiquity will create an expectation of sensitivity with which people can't be bothered" (McEwan, "Triggered"). In place of a conservative model that renders safe space proponents as "oversensitive," McEwan suggests that perhaps critics of trigger warnings "are simply not sensitive enough" (McEwan, Triggered).

In Stringer's view, the "personal responsibility" model enforced by anti-victimists, relies upon "the rather uncompassionate conception of victimization as self-made" which "fairly obviously evacuates sociological explanations of social suffering" (Stringer 9). At the same time, neoliberal victim theory "rebaptizes compassion for the victim as, practically, a lack of compassion--a 'tough love' position that situates the victim's character and not the social world as the target of intervention and transformation" (Stringer 158). Through the neoliberal lens, the necessary project is not the transformation of existing systems of oppression that victimize but the personal transformation from "victim" to "survivor." Moreover, rather than presuming the potentially untenable position of asking victims to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, supporters of this model ensure the "concept of victimization as self-made is made more palatable by being couched within an appealing narrative of liberation borrowed from the very

forms of progressive politics that neoliberal victim theory notionally subverts" (Stringer 10). Unlike victims, survivors are rendered as free, powerful, and feminist.

Stringer, Koyama, and Johnston insist that cultural critics and activists move beyond a framework that exonerates systems by shifting emphasis onto individuals. Further, they rightly note the absence, within the neoliberal framework, of awareness for the disproportionate victimization of specific populations, the ongoing targeting along axes of race, class, gender, et cetera. Not every identity group has equal access to the personal transformation the neoliberal model validates. However, one of the important points that cannot be lost in Stringer's call to "reclaim" victimhood is that not every identity group has equal access to the subjectivity of "victim" either.

The inaccessibility of "victimhood" to certain marginalized populations takes on specific significance within a discourse that defines itself for and against victimism. When, for example, the refusal of safe space strategies is rendered as a show of strength, a rejection of "the toxic messages that women have gotten our entire lives: that we're inherently vulnerable" (Filipovic), the varied experiences of women are increasingly obscured. These "toxic messages" are not universally delivered to women, but are instead enacted against specific groups of women -- for example, White women -- who are deemed both vulnerable and worthy of protection. For others, equally toxic tropes -- such as the stereotypical "strong Black woman" -- render "victimhood" nearly inaccessible. Haaken and Yragui note that "[t]he super-strong black woman is represented as lacking in feminine vulnerability, as utterly stoical in the face of hardship" (Haaken and Yragui 64). American Studies scholar Natalia Cecire also notes that the pressure, within a neoliberal model, to focus on the individual co-exists with a pressure to display "resilience" which she terms "the neoliberal value par excellence" (Cecire). In this context,

"resilience" and "strength" may be far from liberating. Like excoriations of femininity in the name of feminism, extreme criticisms of victimhood risk discarding both baby and bathwater.

To avoid this, these critiques must recognize that the "toxic messages" received by marginalized populations vary across intersections, and that -- by and large -- most tropes and strategies can and are used for toxic and curative purposes. Indeed, many critics and activists note misuse and abuse of "trigger warnings" including "white students who say they are 'triggered' by having to hear about racism" (Smith) or students who "can't read Sappho because it's gay" (Seltzer). The practice itself also erects a hierarchical framework that can "[highlight] particular issues as necessarily more upsetting than others" (Filipovic). In that context, it becomes increasingly necessary to investigate those traumas that remain unmarked in the current safety movement.

As sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom observes,

no one is arguing for trigger warnings in the routine spaces where symbolic and structural violence are acted on students at the margins. No one, to my knowledge, is affixing trigger warnings to department meetings that WASP-y normative expectations may require you to code switch yourself into oblivion to participate as a full member of the group. ("Trigger Warned Syllabus")

The absence of trigger warnings -- or calls for the same -- on systemic, institutional, and other forms of trauma complicates the claim that trigger warnings are "snowballing" to cover all conceivable actions. While they have proliferated substantially in recent years, they have clearly continued to do so along political lines. This insight also troubles the notion that trigger warnings

unfairly equivocate injustices, for although a large number of instances -- particularly linguistic microaggressions -- receive equivalent treatment in this model, an equally large number of injustices remain obscured and unchallenged.

Serano underscores this point when she explains that she "share[s] some concerns about the misuse/ overuse of the concept of 'triggers,'" but still believes that activists and theorists can address that issue "without entirely dismissing the concept of trigger warnings and their potential usefulness in some circumstances" (Serano, "Regarding Generation Wars"). In this vein, while Halberstam's complete opposition to trigger warnings may be extreme, his concern that "all claims to hardship have been cast as equal" under the contemporary model bears consideration. While a hierarchy of trauma and oppression has rarely functioned effectively to promote social justice, the increased *contextualization* of trauma and oppression may be an important step in that direction.

For positions that are generally so polarized, the safe space movement and its opponents have a surprising amount of common ground. Both rely on "victim politics," representing themselves as either victims of social systems of oppression or of political correctness and the new generation of social justice warriors. Both rely largely on individualized, personal projects (e.g. the call-out, the transformation to survivor). As a result, both can be (and are) appropriated to neoliberal uses. This speaks not to the interchangeability of the two ideas, but to their ambiguity. In order to fully address the issues that have generated "trigger warnings," as well as the problems inherent in that strategy, we may need to spend less time examining which tactics are used and more examining how they (and the resistant tactics) function in specific contexts. This, in turn, must coexist with a more nuanced understanding of trauma in connection with these projects.

Psychomedical Models of Trauma and Healing

Both "sides" of the trigger warning debate blend concerns about public discourse with

concerns about psychological health. Proponents call for trigger warnings as a means to expand

discourse (e.g. McEwan, "Triggered") and mitigate psychological harm. Opponents, on the other

hand, emphasize the "costs" of trigger warnings to intellectual exchange and suggest that such

strategies only compound psychological trauma. Often, these two concerns contradict each other

within specific platforms. Chait, for example, opposes trigger warnings for limiting political

discourse in order to create emotional or psychological safety. At the same time, however, he

suggests that "trigger warnings aren't much help in actually overcoming trauma" (Chait). In

other words, he aligns with Filipovic's claim that intellectual debate does not and should not

occur within "emotional safe zones" (Filipovic), while also suggesting that trigger warnings fail

as a means of emotional safety. Chait bases his claim about the effectiveness of trigger warnings

as a treatment for trauma on research from the Institute of Medicine that suggests "avoidance [of

triggers] can reinforce suffering" (Chait). Having assumed that trigger warnings will be used to

avoid material, he suggests that those engaged in public discourse have no responsibility to serve

as therapeutic professionals, while simultaneously aligning himself with the authority of those

professionals.

As Chait's argument illustrates, claims about how trauma victims or survivors "should"

approach their psychological healing often rely upon a medicalized model of trauma, specifically

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Both "sides" of the debate regularly invoke a hypothetical

character -- an "ideal" PTSD sufferer -- to support their points regarding trigger warnings.

Loverin, for example, invokes images of the sexual assault survivor and the military veteran, two

key subjects in PTSD discourse, to argue for the necessity of trigger warnings: "No professor is

going to teach over the rape victim who stumbles out in hysterics or the veteran who drops under a chair shouting" (Loverin, "Trigger Warnings Avert"). Furthermore, such situations may "leave other students shaken and hesitant to engage" (Loverin, "Trigger Warnings Avert"). Trigger warnings serve to prevent these outcomes.

For the other side, the same "characters" prove the need for medical treatments for trauma. Author Deb Stone, for example, invokes sexual abuse as an example of traumatic experience, but argues that "the majority of trauma-exposed persons do not develop PTSD" and that those who do need treatment, not warnings. Stone cites psychomedical models that involve "safely re-engaging with the images that populate the survivor's memory of the event," a practice she contrasts with trigger warnings and other strategies that "perpetuate avoidance," "increase social isolation," and play a "role in the maintenance of PTSD" (Stone).

To some extent, the psychomedical literature on trauma supports the claim that avoidance functions to perpetuate or compound trauma. Avoidance, in fact, is one of the three symptoms clusters that define post-traumatic stress disorder. In the individual with post-traumatic stress, the useful instinct to avoid situations that inspire fear, (thus minimizing exposure to danger), "becomes pathological" (Nacasch et al. 246). This transition from health to pathology occurs

> when (1) associations among stimulus elements do not accurately represent the world, (2) physiological and escape/avoidance responses are evoked by harmless stimuli, (3) excessive responses interfere with adaptive behavior, and (4) quiet and safe stimulus and responses are erroneously associated with danger. (Nacasch et al. 246)

Additional data suggests that the prevalence of such pathological fear, in tandem with the "re-experiencing" and "hyperarousal" symptoms, encourage "avoidance and escape behavior [that] […] worsen the severity of PTSD symptoms" (Nacasch et al. 246). In other words, an individual with PTSD, convinced a situation represents a mortal danger, avoids the situation, and -- in so doing -- confirms that their safety depends on such avoidance.

All of this seems, at first glance, to support the claims of the trigger warning opponents, who rightly argue against the idea of avoidance as a healing strategy. The first issue with this paradigm, however, is that it mistakenly conflates the call for trigger warnings with a defense of avoidance. In contrast, proponents often frame the trigger warning as a tool that allows individuals with trauma to choose whether and when to engage (Loverin, "Trigger Warnings Encourage"; McEwan, "Triggered"). Like a film rating, the warning might inform decisions about whether to and when to approach the material, but it does not determine that decision. Trigger warnings, likewise, allow for avoidance but do not necessitate it.

As importantly, although the psychomedical discourse recognizes avoidance as a symptom cluster detrimental to healing, the recommended treatment should not be oversimplified to, in effect, "facing one's fears." Rather, a large body of psychological research supports "prolonged exposure (PE)" therapies, which systematically build from "imaginal exposures," (i.e. mental pictures of a trigger) to "*in vivo* exposures" (i.e. active engagement with the situation) (Nacasch et al. 247). Ideally, each exposure challenges the neurological feedback cycle that understands the situation as dangerous. Such approaches have been shown to be "effective in reducing PTSD symptoms in a wide range of populations and across various countries and cultures" (Nacasch et al. 249).

A key component of the exposure process, however, is its systematic, gradual approach. In fact, the literature warns against "exposing" trauma patients to triggers without obtaining their informed consent or allotting ample time for triggered stress to decrease (Deacon 14-15, 16-17). After all, one of the core theorizations of trauma is the "emotional processing" theory developed by clinical psychologists Edna Foa and Michael Kozak, which essentially contends that trauma occurs when pathological fear structures prevent an individual from processing an event (Foa and Kozak 20-35). Trauma treatments that overwhelm the individual's ability to process result in "reliving" memories rather than "revisiting" them, and are thus less conducive to progress (Zoellner et al.).

These insights complicate the position that trigger warnings cannot improve survivors' mental health. If the hope is that trauma victims will manage to confront and process the triggers they experience, trigger warnings are one strategy to encourage that practice be done in the controlled and systematic way recommended by the research, rather than in random, uncontrolled moments that may well exacerbate symptoms.

Of course, the medical model is not the only one available for consideration and should not, in a social justice context, be accepted uncritically. Indeed, one of the more radical elements of the safe space model, according to theorists like Valéria Souza is that "blanket 'trigger warning' policies […] *assume disability—not* able-bodied/mindedness—as the *default state*" (Souza, original emphasis).

Souza takes issue with trigger warnings, however, and notes that proponents like Loverin often employ a "trope of the mad student" (Souza) to suggest that individuals with trauma are likely to act explosively and harm others. While critically valuable, that point is equally true of

safe space opponents. Given this, it serves less as a directive in one direction or the other, than as a reminder that both sides are capable of falling into unjust traps.

Indeed, this may be one of the most critical interventions in the safe space debate: the recognition that the same tools can be used for just and unjust ends, for healing and for harm. If trigger warnings have an advantage, it is their ability to function as one strategy in tandem with many others (including medical treatments such as PE). If they have a downfall, it is the increasing ubiquity that positions them as a "universal" intervention, obscuring both the context in which they occur and the additional and alternative tools available for use.

"Trauma" itself is more nuanced than the safe space debate generally allows. Indeed, some of the very battles waged over trigger warnings have parallels in social scientific and critical trauma studies literature. For example, professionals increasingly suggest the need to distinguish between traditional understandings of trauma as linked to a single predicating event and "chronic" or "complex" trauma, which can stem from ongoing experiences such as long-term abuse or cultural oppression (Herman 377-391; J. Alexander et al.). A chronic trauma model may provide a better medical understanding of possible treatments for the cultural traumas associated with membership in specific marginalized populations.

At the same time, critical theorists and activists alike must remain critical of an unchecked embrace of any medical model. As humanities scholar Maurice Stevens notes, trauma has […] been racialized, sexualized, gendered and classed from its inception" (1). The hysterical white woman and "strong black woman" provide examples of this. Particularly in social justice contexts, activists attempting to understand how oppression can traumatize, must not uncritically align themselves with frameworks informed by those same systems of oppression.

This chapter has suggested that the effects and uses of "trauma" are not unilateral. The spaces built to shelter victims can serve as refuges and ghettoes. "Victim" identity can disempower or serve as a foundation for political action. Survivorship can resist a neoliberal model or reify it. As Serano argues, "injustices can occur via the expression of certain language and beliefs, but they can also occur via the censoring of certain language and beliefs" (quoted in Berlatsky). Similarly, "some 'codes of conduct' […] are necessary to create spaces where people feel safe to be who they are, but also, […] the notion of "safe space" can be (and has been) used as a tool to marginalize or exclude" (quoted in Berlatsky). In this context, the solution is not to adopt the "safe" strategy or the dangerous one, but rather, to recognize that both strategies have the capacity to work toward either end.

CHAPTER IV. THE "PC POLICE:" RETRIBUTIVE AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

MODELS

On August 9, 2014, Darren Wilson shot and killed 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Wilson, a White officer employed by the Ferguson police department, fired at least six bullets at Brown, initially grazing the teenager's thumb, then hitting his right arm, chest, and head multiple times ("Ferguson, Missouri"). The precipitating altercation was variously framed as a response to Brown's refusal to walk on the sidewalk and an attempt to investigate a shoplifting incident at a local convenience store (*State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson,* 202, 207-209). Both versions ended with Brown lying dead on the Canfield Avenue asphalt for over four hours (Richardson). During that time, the police held at bay a crowd that included Brown's parents (Richardson). Two hours after Brown's death, when gunshots were heard in the distance, the officers on-scene pointed their guns at the crowd. The shots had come from the opposite direction (Richardson).

The murder of Michael Brown amplified a growing national discourse around police brutality and the value of Black life. Previous deaths – including Trayvon Martin's in Sanford, Florida and Aiyana Stanley-Jones' in Detroit, Michigan – had already sparked resistance by Black communities and anti-racism activists; the incidents found eerie parallels in the Brown case. In the weeks following Brown's death, St. Louis County prosecuting attorney, Robert McCulloch, convened a grand jury to determine whether to bring criminal charges against Wilson. Meanwhile, protestors took to the streets of Ferguson and of cities across the world, to call for Wilson's indictment, policing reforms, and an end to anti-Black policies. "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) – a rallying cry and platform founded in 2013 by queer Black activists Alicia

Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi — became the core of a growing international

movement for social change (Garza).

Events like those in Ferguson illustrate the complexity of "safe space" within a broader

context shaped by racialization, violence, and the criminal justice system. As Black feminist

scholar Brittney Cooper notes, the police brutality catalogued by BLM activists connects to a

number of "battle[s] over how [Black and white people] share public space [that are]

foundational to the narrative of race in this country" (Cooper, "Listen When I Talk"). Who has

the right to "public safety" in the streets, on the sidewalks, or at the park? Who constitutes the

public? Like the contemporary discourse around trigger warnings and call-outs, the criminal

justice system invokes the notion of "public safety" to encourage specific behaviors and justify

certain punishments. That system, like the safe space project -- has a relationship with justice

that is -- at best -- contentious. The notion of public safety remains fraught and offers a potent

reminder of the possibility that "safety" can have dangerous effects.

Moreover, much of the discourse for and against safe space as a social justice aim utilizes

the rhetoric of the criminal justice system. Regular references to policing, accusations, and guilt

tie safe space projects to a symbolic field informed by the police, court, and prison systems. This

chapter examines safe space strategies including call-outs and trigger warnings in connection to

the events in Ferguson and conflicting representations of "safety." It also outlines how critical

consideration of those systems -- and the movements (e.g. anti-prison, restorative justice, et

cetera) that challenge them -- might inform conversations on safe space.

<p style="text-align:center">Dangerous People</p>

In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle

Alexander declares the claim that "the primary function of the [justice] system is to keep our

streets safe and our homes secure" a myth, "the fictional gloss placed on a brutal system of racialized oppression and control" (M. Alexander 59). While the processes – e.g. policing, trial, and incarceration – that system employs purportedly protect civilian safety, they simultaneously identify specific citizens as threats, and target those populations for punishments including death. Thus, Alexander declares the current criminal justice system "the most extraordinary [system] of racialized social control the world has ever seen" (M. Alexander 103).

Alexander's description contrasts strikingly with the "protect-and-serve" model of policing, as well as with the self-representations of officers. Although Alexander and the majority of BLM activists tie policing to violence, officers and their supporters primarily position violence not as a threat they embody, but rather, as one that they face in the line of duty. As a result, the primary emotion officers describe, when recalling violent events, is not rage or dominance. It is fear.

For example, in his grand jury testimony, Wilson recalls fearing that Brown would kill him, either through additional blows or -- if Brown managed to overpower him and take his gun -- by firing his weapon (*Missouri v. Wilson* 216, 224.) The fear of death is a theme echoed by officers involved in similar shootings, both before and after Ferguson. For example, Timothy Loehmann, the officer who shot and killed twelve-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, released an official statement describing how he and his partner "feared [Rice] was going to run" (Loehmann), paid special attention to Rice's hands because "hands may kill," and were unsure, after Rice fell to the ground, whether "the threat was over" (Loehmann). Three years prior, neighborhood watch coordinator George Zimmerman told television host Sean Hannity that seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin, whom he fatally shot, had beaten him and threatened his life (Zimmerman). Zimmerman's fear that he "would lose consciousness," and that he "didn't know

what would happen" if he blacked out parallels Wilson's concern that a third punch from Brown would either "be fatal" or "at least" render him "unconscious," leaving him vulnerable to further assault or death (Zimmerman, Wilson).

The fear Wilson and other officers describe stems in part from the legitimate dangers they face on the job. On average, 144 police officers die in the line of duty each year (National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, "Law Enforcement"). However, the specific articulation of those concerns with racialized fears of Black and Brown bodies is not supported by statistical evidence. In fact, the majority of officers who die "on the job" are not victims of violent assault, but of heart attacks, car accidents, and other accidental causes (National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, "Causes"). As importantly, the "felonious assaults" that result in officer deaths are primarily committed by White offenders (Ye Hee Lee), suggesting that the key threat to "police lives" is White violence, specifically.

In other words, the fear officers describe stems from the inherent danger on the job, refracted through the socially supported fear of Black citizens. As legal scholar Katheryn Russell-Brown theorized in her 1998 text, *The Color of Crime*[2], "the public's [perceptions] that crime is violent, Black, and male have converged to create the *criminalblackman*" (114), a stereotype that informs representations and interpretations of Black male bodies as "the symbolic pillager of all that is good" (84). Russell-Brown explicitly ties the power of the *criminalblackman* trope to White *fears* (83), an alternative to common theorizations of racism that identify its basis in hatred or anger.

Indeed, while officers and their supporters repeatedly insist on their non-racism, they also regularly rely on narratives of fear. Understanding racism as the hatred of Black people, they

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[2] Russell-Brown published the original edition of *The Color of Crime* as Katheryn K. Russell; however, successive editions have indicated the name change.

deem themselves non-racist; however, fears of Black people plays a key role in the narratives they offer to explain their decisions to use violent and deadly force. The racism at work in these scenarios is no less deadly than racism based on hatred or rage, but it does not require either emotion to function or to achieve to disastrous results. In the context of the already heightened danger officers face, the presence of racialized fears can exacerbate the perception of a person as threatening, to the extent that an officer feels compelled to use deadly force, in cases where it might not otherwise appear necessary.

This explanation, however, obscures the threat of violence that Black and Brown persons face in encounters with police, which -- unfortunately -- is far more substantiated by the data. Even if, as they report, officers experience fear in these encounters, the results of such events regularly confirm that Black and Brown suspects face the higher risk. Although the majority of people killed by police officers are White, Black and Brown persons are killed at a higher rate, given their population ("The Counted"). In the year following the Michael Brown murder, Black individuals were killed at more than three times the rate of White individuals, and more than twice the rate of persons in all other racial groups (L. Fields). These numbers, reported by *Vice* on the anniversary of Brown's death, include only reported killings, and thus -- like the FBI database that relies on voluntary reporting by police departments -- may underrepresent the issue. In this context, discussion of police officers' fears obscures the fear that permeates communities of color and the violence enacted by the criminal justice system onto those communities.

That violence extends to discursive violence, which often continues after death. Officer testimonies substantiate racialized fears through the application of familiar stereotypes. Wilson's grand jury testimony, for example, dehumanized the young man he had killed. He claimed that – when he attempted to grab Brown's arm, he "felt like a five-year-old holding Hulk Hogan"

(*Missouri v. Wilson,* 212). Describing Brown's expression, he declared "it [looked] like a demon" (*Missouri v. Wilson,* 225) – blurring the lines between man and monster and between man and thing. In reality, Michael Brown was within an inch of Wilson's height and approximately eighty pounds heavier; yet, such descriptions called upon a powerful racist trope of "giant negroes" with "superhuman strength" (Williams).

The representation functioned to position Wilson's fear of Brown's (potential) violence as a justification for his own (enacted) attack. Discursively, the possibility of Wilson's death replaced the reality of Brown's. The death itself became a Rorschach blot, open to widely variant interpretations. Protestors embodied the testimony of certain eyewitnesses – lifting their arms and bending them at the elbow to signal surrender – and took up the chant "Hands Up, Don't Shoot." The opposition had other witnesses, some of whom – as McCulloch noted in his announcement of the grand jury decision – remembered Brown's "hands as being out to his sides, [...] in front of him with palms up, [...] raised by his head or by his shoulders" or finally "in a running position or in fists" ("Ferguson, Missouri"). These tensions reflect the complexity of the case – in which, *contra* Daniel Moynihan, audiences had both their own opinions and their own facts. McCulloch's shifting description – which rhetorically transformed the "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" image into that of an angry Black man, charging – represents a larger narrative turn. In order to protect Wilson, Brown had to be symbolically brought back to life, made not dead but deadly.

Dangerous People and Safe Space

According to sociologist Karen Fields and historian Barbara J. Fields, the logic of racism is created "in the ordinary course of everyday doing, and this logic "govern[s] "rituals of deference and dominance" or "how different people must deal with each other"(K. Fields 25).

The murder of Michael Brown exemplifies the extent to which conflicting ideas about the right of White authorities to Black citizens' space, time, and attention can have fatal consequences. In the contemporary safe space debate, these results are rarely so blatant. Yet, the standard practices of the current social justice movement reenact some of the same inequalities.

Writer and *Black Girl Dangerous* editor Tina Vasquez speaks to this issue in her discussion of trigger warnings, a "safe space" strategy she does not often use. Vasquez explains that, as the poor daughter of an immigrant father, "much of what's required" in social justice spaces feels "totally foreign" to her ("It's Sometimes Hard"). Vasquez notes that she does not feel entitled to inhabit all spaces, and takes no issue with the fact that she does not always "feel at home" in certain contexts ("It's Why I Don't"). Yet, she draws attention to the requirements those spaces place upon marginalized individuals, including those "who grew up as immigrants or the children of immigrants," those who "grew up poor," those who "didn't have access to language or education," and those who "were raised in a house that was the definition of 'problematic'" ("But It's Interesting"; "When They Didn't"). In the context of the normalizing, sameness-based model of social justice described in the first chapter, these standards function to forward an elitism that fails to consider some of the same identity markers (race, class, citizenship, et cetera) that directly influence its goals.

Those standards, by Vasquez' description, render her -- and others who "fail" to perform them -- as outsiders, threats to others' safety and unworthy of their own. She recalls one instance in which another individual suggested that the way she speaks, specifically her use of curse words, was "aggressive" ("It's a Lot of Learning"). Incidentally, research on domestic violence notes similar reactions to women of color within the shelter system described in the second chapter. In an interview with psychologists Janice Haaken and Nanette Yragui, Bridgette

Fahnbulleh, director of the African American Providers Network, suggested that "black women are more apt to have brief stays in shelter than are women from other ethnic backgrounds" and are at times "asked to leave for behavior that is perceived by white staff and residents as violent [….] [including] […] expressive behaviors -- for example, talking loud or yelling" (paraphrased in Haaken and Yragui 63-64). Haaken and Yragui contend that "[i]n bourgeois society, many forms of aggressively charged behavior, particularly those of dark people, are interpreted as 'violent'" (63). A wide range of behaviors including "[t]alking loud, swearing, moving fast, [and] arguing […] may be viewed through a racist, paranoid lens as disturbing indicators of a threatening proneness to aggression" (63). Indeed, these are some of the key descriptions Wilson provided in his narrative of the encounter with Brown (*Missouri v. Wilson* 208-209). In the shelter field, like the criminal justice system, the fact that providers have dedicated their careers to challenging one form of violence (i.e. domestic or criminal) does not render them "immune" from enacting another (i.e. racist) (Haaken and Yragui 63).

Vasquez describes experiences of Othering and marginalization within the current social justice movement. She explains, "I speak and write like where I come from, like who I was raised by" ("I Speak and Write"), and suggests that these practices mark her as a threat, rendering her outside the zone of protection and the population it serves. This, in turn, minimizes her support network and curtails her ability to function as an activist. The situation leads her to pose a powerful question: "How do you bring your whole self to a space that treats who you are as a trigger?" ("But I Also Want").

<div align="center">Targeting the Other</div>

Marginalized persons such as Brown and Vasquez are targeted not as individual persons, but as members of populations marked for surveillance and domination. In Ferguson, a city

largely bereft of public services, policing constitutes an exception. Historian Colin Gordon terms law enforcement in Ferguson "the only sustained point of contact between African-American citizens and their local government" (Gordon, "How Racism Became"). Both that local government and the police force in Ferguson remain nearly all-White institutions (Sanders; Roth). Moreover, they regularly operate, explicitly or implicitly, to maintain racial barriers (Martinez, Meeks, and Lavandera). Literal policing in Ferguson, like the metaphoric policing in the safe space debate, relies on a process of Othering, which blurs protection *of* one population with protection *from* another. In a December 2014 interview, Sam Dotson, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Chief, suggested that certain law enforcement agencies within his jurisdiction "victimize those whom they are designed to protect" (Reilly and Stewart). Adel Allen, an early Black resident in Kirkwood, a municipality eighteen miles southwest of Ferguson, likewise raised questions about whether the police "were protecting me or protecting someone from me" (quoted Gordon, "How Racism Became").

Indeed, the patrolling, arrest, and conviction practices that disproportionately target Black individuals suggest the latter. A Department of Justice report found that African-Americans accounted for 85% of vehicle stops in Ferguson, 93% of arrests, and 88% of cases "involving use of force" by police (Martinez, Meeks, and Lavandera). To further complicate matters, policing – and the attached criminal justice system in Ferguson – function as economic enterprises. Fees and fines constitute 14.38% of Ferguson's revenue, a striking contrast with other local towns, such as the wealthier, Whiter municipality of Clayton, which garners only 3.09% of its revenue through such means (Better Together St. Louis). Such practices simultaneously compound the wealth gap between majority-White and majority-Black neighborhoods in the County and also profit off the existence of that gap. Stripped of pathways toward economic stability at the

individual and community levels, Ferguson residents become profit points for the very system disenfranchising them. In this manner, the circumstances of their oppression provide material incentive and ideological justification for its continuance. Mapping disadvantage onto Ferguson strengthens the structural and symbolic borders around Whiteness and wealth in St. Louis County. Unfortunately, this issue extends beyond both Ferguson's city limits and Missouri's state line. Such cycles of oppression and violence exist across the United States, and -- in various forms -- internationally.

As importantly, the oppressive capitalist potential of policing does not disappear within social justice circles. A growing number of scholars critique the rise in in what sociologists Shari L. Dworkin and Michael Messner term "corporate celebrity feminism" (22), which incorporates rhetoric about the "empowerment" of women and girls into existing capitalist structures, with end goals of increased sales, not social justice. A few high-status women benefit from this version of feminism, which "lets white cis, wealthy well-connected women swap places with men at the top of the pile " (Michelle) while leaving the vast majority of women's lives either worsened or unchanged. Michelle, a blogger for *Pursued by a Bear*, terms the system "book-deal feminism" (Michelle), a commoditized women's movement that serves a small minority of women publishing contracts at the expense of the broader collective.

Policing in the social justice movement interacts with this dynamic by punishing and expelling already-marginalized voices from discussions. The silencing of those who do not perform safe space strategies "correctly" collaborates with the amplification of "appropriate" messages delivered by those with relative privilege. Ultimately, this drastically increases the already strong probability that "book deals" and celebrity status will be awarded to those within a minority who have more power and who present the least threat to the systems of oppression

(classism/ capitalism, racism, et cetera) with which sexism interacts. This further entrenches the gap in economic and cultural capital within movements, and allows systems of oppression to replicate and sustain their existence.

<div align="center">Resistance as Violence</div>

To further complicate matters, the same processes that render individual bodies and behaviors "aggressive," while obscuring the deadly aggression of others, also represent resistance as violent. For example, as BLM protests increased in Ferguson and elsewhere in the country following the Brown murder, public officials and media commentators routinely represented the protestors as a greater threat than the systems they opposed. This shift in the signification of danger and deadliness relied primarily on violence inflicted on the protestors remaining unnamed, while their actions – violent and nonviolent – were marked as aggression. A report in the *New York Times*, for example, mentioned that an unnamed protest group had posted on the social media platform, Twitter, that it was "offering a reward for information on the whereabouts of the officer Darren Wilson" and "that it was 'restocking on 7.62 & 9 mm ammo'" (Eligon, Bosman, and Davey). In response, the *Times* noted that law enforcement agencies were "constantly looking" at *protestors* in an attempt to "separate the rhetoric from the actual threats" (Eligon, Bosman, and Davey).

Such coverage follows a pattern of strategic silence and speech required to reposition the threat of violence as one always directed at police, rather than one police may initiate. In this account, an assembly of unnamed individuals levies a violent threat at Wilson. Law enforcement, positioned as peacekeepers who seek to identify and contain any "actual threats" are systematically detached from the possibility (raised by the protestors, as well as by Brown's murder) that they might themselves register among those threats.

This strategic silence disguised the prevalence of violent threats against protestors. Even on CopTalk, an unmoderated, anonymous message board apparently restricted to current and former officers in the St. Louis area, multiple messages expressed the desire to see violence inflicted not only on protestors, but also on those who supported them. When the owners of MoKaBe's, a coffee shop seventeen miles southeast of Ferguson, announced on November 11, 2014, that the venue would serve as a "safe space" for protestors following the grand jury announcement (Stiles), one CopTalk user suggested they had "announced via Facebook [...] that they [...] support 'cop killing'" (Stiles). This revision simultaneously distorted the business's message (as "cop killing" was not mentioned, let alone supported, in their statement) and distorted the facts of Brown's death. Through such representations, the death of Brown at the hands of a police officer became re-signified as the (symbolic) death of Wilson at the hands of Brown.

That ideological shift had material consequences. Multiple Web users, including CopTalk's "Ex-Lady in Blue" and a Facebook accountholder quoted in Web reports, expressed the desire to see MoKaBe's "burned to the ground" (quoted in Parker). Ex-Lady in Blue suggested the protestors themselves would undoubtedly destroy the space that housed them: "Can't wait until the shit hits the fan in this place, during the protests, or when all of those ingrates destroy their property" (quoted in Parker). Other commenters, including the unnamed Facebook user, did not explicitly locate the origin of the threat, instead attributing it to an unnamed "they" – e.g. "hope they burn that $h!t [sic] coffee shop to the ground" (quoted in Parker). In both instances, the commenters expressed desire for this turn of events and reveled in the imagined irony of the business needing protection from the public safety organizations that – within this rendering – it opposed. "I'm gonna laugh when you call 911 and they don't show up,"

noted the Facebook commenter (quoted in Parker). The Ex-Lady in Blue expressed similar hope that "they burn this place down, and that our fire department can't get there in time to help, because I wouldn't want any of those guys hurt, trying to put out a fire at a place like this" (quoted in Parker). Such responses positioned the protestors and their allies (e.g. MoKaBe's) as a threat to the lives of public servants, while simultaneously rendering an Othered geography ("a place like this") that did not warrant protection.

Such rhetoric, in fact, justified not only the absence of protection but also targeted attacks. On November 25, 2014, one day after the grand jury announced its verdict, police released tear gas into MoKaBe's. One protestor, Washington University lecturer Valéria Souza, described a "white cloud" of the gas, which "all of a sudden [...] was so thick you couldn't see in front of you" (quoted in Wicentowski, "New Video"). Months earlier, excessive use of tear gas, batons, and arrest in Ferguson had led to an international outcry. In August, protestors received tips on constructing makeshift gas masks from citizens in Gaza, Palestine. By November, Ferguson residents suggested that only international attention and solidarity from sources outside the city were "[keeping] cops from attacking protestors" or "tear gassing everybody and shooting at folks" (Townes and Hellerstein). Police, on the other hand, ignored the preeminence of tear gas in earlier months and the threats from self-identified officers following MoKaBe's announcement, and termed the events of November 25, 2014, "unintentional," in spite of conflicting video footage (Wicentowski, "St. Louis Police").

The majority of the rhetoric from government officials continued, likewise, to frame the police department as protectors, not aggressors. The State of Emergency, declared by Missouri Governor Jay Nixon on November 17, 2014, one week before the grand jury's verdict and eight days before the gas attack at MoKaBe's, expanded the reach of law enforcement in response to

ongoing (and predicted) protests. Nixon "[directed] the Missouri State Highway Patrol together with the St. Louis County Police Department and the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department to operate as a Unified Command" (Nixon). In the interest of "civil rights and [...] public safety," Nixon granted the St. Louis County police force "command and operational control over security in the city of Ferguson" and the Unified Command the right to "exercise operational authority in such other jurisdictions as it deems necessary" (Nixon). He then supplemented this command with a call to Missouri's Adjutant General to "order into active service such portions of the organized militia as he deems necessary" (Nixon). Thus, Nixon declared a State of Emergency, not in response to the death of a Missouri citizen at the hands of a St. Louis County police officer, but in response to the potential and actual protests that followed that death. Employing the rhetoric of "public safety" and "civil rights," Nixon increased the presence and authority of the very law enforcement officials who, protestors insisted, had put both at risk. The Ferguson police department, already equipped with military-grade equipment (Shinkman), was further empowered under the nationalistic, militaristic rhetoric, to protect the homeland against attacks, even those (inconveniently) occurring from within.

<div align="center">Political Correctness as Policing</div>

In the context of the safe space debate, resistance to existing oppression is often reframed through claims about "political correctness," which work in tandem with criminal justice metaphors. For example, David French, a staff writer for the *National Review,* declares that, just as conservatives have long predicted, "the PC police [have turned] on their own" (French). Jonathan Chait, in his article "Not a Very P.C. Thing To Say," suggests that the safe space movement leaves educators "terrified of *facing accusations* of triggering trauma," and that they will be unable to defend themselves against such claims, without being further charged with

"tone *policing*" (Chait, emphasis added). Educator Edward Schlosser avoids the "PC" label, but nevertheless defines the current intellectual climate in these terms, describing it as "a heavily *policed* discourse of semantic sensitivity" (Schlosser, "I'm a Liberal," emphasis added).

However, "political correctness" does not function equally across contexts. Feminist theorist Julia Serano takes issue with the "PC" lens for this reason, declaring she "is definitely not a fan of framing these matters in terms of 'political correctness' as that label is only ever used to target the perspectives of people who have historically been disenfranchised" (quoted in Berlatsky). Noting that all spaces rely on informal standards for appropriate behavior, Serano suggests that "the term 'political correctness' is a pejorative that people who are (in some way) a part of the majority or status quo tend to wield against codes of conduct that are championed by minority or marginalized groups" (quoted in Berlatsky). These claims ignore "the potential harm that can occur when language and beliefs that injure or erase marginalized groups are considered to be socially acceptable" in favor of outrage over perceived censorship (quoted in Berlatsky). In this way, the "danger" in the social justice discourse is relocated from the threats against marginalized individuals to the threats posed by their protests.

As illustrated by the events in Ferguson, policing also varies across contexts. As Black feminist scholar Brittney Cooper notes, ""the mantra of policing in White communities [is] 'protect and serve' and in Black and Brown communities it is 'kill or be killed'" ("We Can't Breathe"). This difference in approach facilitates differential responses, with communities primarily comprised of people of color relating to the police with skepticism, fear, and hostility that are largely absent in white communities (Brown and Benedict). The public safety project defends only a portion of the public, having defined the rest of the citizenry as outside threats. In

this context, references to "policing" symbolically reference a power structure that defends certain individuals, communities, and neighborhoods against the "threat" of others.

Thus, figurative references to "policing" -- used to suggest those in the majority are being unfairly targeted -- function similarly to concerns about "violent" protestors; they incorrectly identify resistance as the source of violence. To do so, they appropriate the marginalized perspective of policing, invoking negative associations such as targeting, discipline, and restraint, rather than more positive significations, such as protection and public service. They incorporate the language of resistance in order to counter it.

The events in Ferguson illustrate the ways that those in power recast themselves as targets of oppression by framing those who resist as "violent" and obscuring their own violence. Similarly, critiques of the censorious and limiting effects of the "PC police" ignore the identity-based limitations on expression structured into the existing discourse. In other words, they frame the status quo as unequivocally free and the resistance as restrictive, and -- in so doing -- miss the restrictiveness already in practice. Despite of the concerns of conservative commentators, if "policing" is occurring within the safe space movement, their voices would not be under considerable threat. As with literal policing practices, the most heavily targeted would be the marginalized.

Claims that the safe space movement "polices" discourse fail to consider how structures support (or undermine) particular forms of expression. They effectively equate all interpersonal pressures without considering context. Vasquez's experience in social justice circles speaks to a similar equivocation between certain speech habits -- such as cursing -- and violence. Her use of expletives, read through a racial system that codes her as a threat, marks her as "aggressive" and a "trigger" ("It's a Lot of Learning"; "But I Also Want"). Rendering Vasquez as violent,

however, simultaneously facilitates violence against her. The perceived threat justifies her expulsion from the space; "calling her out" becomes justifiable as "self-defense." In this way, the contemporary policing model, enacted by progressives on progressives, elides the difference between the threat of violence and actualized violence.

Trigger warnings, similarly, elide the difference between violence and its memory. This suggests an inattention to time in the discourse, as representations blur past violence (memory), present violence (action), and future/ possible violence (threat). This distinction may be intensely difficult to make without reifying a "hierarchy of oppression," which activists have long critiqued. However, it bears consideration, nonetheless, as the absence of a temporal analysis also leads to flawed solutions. It fails, for example, to account for relentless and chronic violence that does not occur in discrete moments. Vasquez notes that the violence she experiences rarely bears any kind of warning, and explains that much of her early life consisted of "violence that blindsided" her in a context in which "there was no such thing as a trigger warning" ("And Trigger Warnings").

That context -- the "chronic state of emergency" theorized by anthropologist Mick Taussig -- shapes reality for the vast majority of marginalized persons and makes concepts such as "safe space" difficult to fathom. In a 2012 essay for *The Rumpus*, for example, feminist theorist Roxane Gay expressed "surprise" that "there are still people who believe in safety and protection despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary" (Gay). That "overwhelming evidence" (Gay) is particularly apparent to those enduring what Taussig terms "terror as usual" (Taussig 4). Building on Walter Benjamin's contention that 'the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (Benjamin 257), Taussig called for increased attention to this "chronic state of emergency," which cannot be termed disorder, *per se*, because it is

always also built into the system of order" (Taussig 4). In other words, violence is not an exception to the rule, but -- as Brown's death and Gay's commentary suggest -- a function of the rule as such.

Likewise, within the contemporary safe space movement, violence and aggression are an everyday reality for many. Additionally, as disability studies scholar Valéria Souza notes, individuals with less privilege "often cannot 'choose to avoid' or even 'prepare themselves beforehand' for repeated encounters with trauma, for it is happening all around them--*to them*--on a daily basis" (Souza). Cultural and systemic trauma cannot be sealed out of a specific zone because they are effectively built into the structures that separate one zone from the next and enacted by the populations that inhabit each space. Souza distinguishes the chronic trauma experienced through marginalization from the discrete traumatic events that inform the safe space model, arguing that

> [o]nly if you are privileged enough to experience an end to your lived trauma do you have the time--the luxury, the *choice*--of insisting that literary and cultural objects reminiscent of you original trauma bear 'warning labels.' Only if your lived trauma is not relentless, does it even occur to you that you might be able to avoid confronting it. (Souza)

Souza's distinction between discrete and chronic trauma need not be read as a dismissal or minimization of traumatic experiences. Recognition and response to traumas such as military service and sexual assault can and must coexist with those focused on ongoing, systemic violence. Failing that, advocates and theorists risk minimizing trauma on the one hand or

"creating an environment where *speaking, naming*, or *showing* trauma is becoming more taboo than *actually traumatizing another human being through an act of violence"* (Souza, original emphasis) on the other.

This environment mirrors the efforts, in relation to Ferguson, to render acts of speech -- such as marches, vigils, and vandalism -- "violence" equal or greater to the murder that sparked them. In the context of Ferguson, the possibility for "safety" and "harm" to function as means of repression becomes clear. Similarly, when the disproportionate targeting of the marginalized recurs within the contemporary safe space discourse, it transforms expression into a form of violence and effectively further obscures the violent power structures that necessitate those protests.

Sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom analyzes safe space strategies on university campuses within this vein, when she notes that the privatization of higher education has created a "student-customer model," in which a "customer is king" mentality justifies the eradication of critical race and gender studies curricula because "there is no incentive to teach what customers would rather not know" (Cottom, "The Discomfort Zone"). She argues that trigger warnings, likewise, become strategies for curtailing critical investigation of oppression through ethnic studies and gender studies programs ("Trigger Warned Syllabus"). Cottom notes that trigger warnings are rarely proposed for those "routine spaces where symbolic and structural violence are acted on students at the margins" (Cottom, "Trigger Warned Syllabus"). Instead, "trigger warnings are being encouraged for sites of resistance" such as critical courses and student organizations that critically address issues of sexism, racism, heterosexism, et cetera (Cottom, "Trigger Warned Syllabus"). This uneven enactment, she suggests, does not "silence power so

much as it stifles any discourse about how power acts on people" (Cottom, "Trigger Warned Syllabus").

Cottom's argument clarifies that "safe space" can be commoditized and used at the expense of justice. Indeed, "safety" can be dangerous, particularly for those groups depicted as unworthy of protection or as "threats" to the truly vulnerable. Furthermore, Cottom's analysis indicates that, like the attacks on "protestors" in Ferguson, the vilifying of these dangerous Others is racialized, but not strictly racial. Racial stereotypes that associate Black and Brown bodies with violence and criminality certainly contribute to and compound the sense of these populations as a threat to safe space, but Othering also works to vilify and contain resistance across racial lines. In this context, all protest is threatening, but not all protests receive equal penalty.

<div align="center">The Restorative Justice Model</div>

Numerous sources have identified the murder of Michael Brown as a pivotal factor in the rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, specifically, and of protests of white supremacy and police brutality more broadly (e.g. Cobb, Day). This ongoing resistance in the wake of attempts, such as those by the grand jury and county prosecuting attorney to cast Michael Brown and BLM as violent and dangerous suggests substantial resilience and dedication on the part of protestors and can inform attempts to respond to the figurative "policing" that occurs within the safe space movement. In particular, the commitment of BLM activists to the "guiding principle" or "restorative justice" ("Guiding Principles") offers important possibilities for safe space projects.

Restorative justice, a model developed by psychologist Albert Eglash in 1958, offers a means for addressing wrongdoing outside the prominent framework of retribution. Eglash

developed the model to address the ways the dominant criminal justice system failed victims, perpetrators, and society at large. In contrast to a crime and punishment system, the restorative justice model involves ongoing engagement, accountability, and -- when agreeable to victims -- dialogue between victims and perpetrators. Rather than emphasizing legal violations, the restorative justice model emphasizes and addresses the harm committed against individuals and communities (Eglash; Zehr).

Perhaps the clearest corollary to this model in the safe space debate is Ngọc Loan Trần's framework of "calling in" (Trần). Trần describes calling in as a method of collaboratively addressing harm, while maintaining the belief that "mistakes […] have possibility for transforming [culture]" (Trần). Like restorative justice, calling in is imagined not as a replacement to the existing model, but rather as a supplement to it. Unlike the "political correctness" critiques of the call-out, Tran's model critiques a "politic of disposability" that denies activists' fallibility and the interconnectedness of social justice projects. In this sense, Trần does not suggest the call-out is unnecessary or that it is inevitably harmful, but instead, pushes activists to spend time "weighing the stakes" before resorting to the increasingly common call-out strategy, in order to make informed decisions about how to address harm. Ultimately, addressing harm remains key, and it is the failure of the call-out to address it fully and effectively -- rather than the disproportionate "violence" or "toxicity" of the call-out in relation to that harm -- that supports alternative means.

Criminologist Howard Zehr notes that the restorative justice model can be appropriated for harm. It can, for example, focus on the needs of perpetrators over those of victims or be diluted into "forgiveness" without accountability (Zehr 4, 6). The same can be said of "calling in" and other alternative strategies to existing safe space models. Indeed, there is no alternative

to the call-out or to safe space, broadly, that is immune to the forms of misuse and re-appropriation that have allowed "social justice" tactics to function counterproductively. However, given awareness of that vulnerability and constant vigilance against such possibilities, restorative justice frameworks and their corollaries can inform new possibilities that may better serve the movement and its actors. In order to address the brutality that literal and metaphoric policing enact on marginalized persons, such alternatives are vital.

CONCLUSIONS

As the preceding analysis makes clear, the concept of safety is complex and often contradictory. Too often, safety is defined in opposition to threats projected onto marginalized people and the spaces they inhabit. The protection it offers is rarely universal, instead mapping across the same axes of power and oppression that social justice movements seek to challenge and eliminate.

Yet, the pursuit of safety for those marginalized individuals should not be devalued or dismissed out of hand. The assertion from activists that "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) remains a meaningful and necessary rallying cry in a context of white supremacy. Likewise, the call for the safety of oppressed and traumatized persons constitutes a key intervention in a broader cultural context that continues to endanger and vilify these individuals. "Police lives matter" may appropriate and contravene the terms of BLM, but it does not undermine the movement's value. Similarly, the ability for safety to function at cross-purposes with social justice does not erode its value as a goal.

Nevertheless, the pursuit of safety does not automatically translate to the pursuit of justice, anymore than the pursuit of feminist goals automatically dismantles transmisogyny or the pursuit of human rights automatically translates into anti-racism. Safety can, and does, operate in harmful and oppressive ways, as the dangers inherent in women's-only spaces, shelters, and policing make clear. These final pages build on the concerns raised by this analysis to propose a few key guidelines for social-justice-oriented safety projects.

Context and Complexity

Critics of safe space continually argue that activists have overgeneralized the concept of harm, expanding categories of "aggressions" and "triggers" to the point of meaninglessness. In

response, they suggest restricting these categories to the more reasonable terms of some earlier period (e.g. defining trauma only as assault and military service) or dismissing them altogether (i.e. abandoning political correctness projects).

However, the issue with the expansion of "triggers" and "microaggressions" is not simply one of unchecked growth. Even if it were, within the context of social justice activism, it is neither tenable nor productive for activists to try and determine which traumas matter or what constitutes the standard for "actual" oppression. Rather than limiting the number of oppressive acts, activists must *further elaborate* the theoretical framework they use to understand safety, danger, and harm. In other words, rather than identifying the issue as the expanding number of "triggers," activists must recognize the problem elsewhere: in the attempt to apply a specialized framework universally and without regard for context.

Presuming that all oppression can be linked to discrete events leads activists to neglect the systemic and insidious issues more often linked to cultural and chronic trauma. In place of this system, activists must consider the complexity of trauma, as a category, and the multiple ways it is inflicted upon individuals and populations. Safe space that fails to address structural and systemic issues, the macro as well as the micro, can ultimately be neither safe nor just. As Tressie McMillan Cottom suggests, activists must address the department meeting as well as the ethnic studies class (Cottom, "Trigger Warned Syllabus"). They must address the long haul as well as the short-term offense, the insidious as well as the individual.

In order to do so, activists must recognize that individual as more complex than oppressor or oppressed. Identity politics are fundamentally necessary to social justice, but they are also an oversimplification of the complexity of social identity and experience. Safe space activists increasingly rely upon a version of identity politics that understands intersectionality as a

collection of identity markers, rather than a nexus of them, and fails to recognize that identity

groups are inherently constructed and unstable. Space is not made safe (or just) through the

solidification of boundaries between identity groups because those groups *inevitably* contain

heterogeneity within. More importantly, the danger does not stem from that diversity as such, but

from the failure to address the power structures that inform these identity markers, and to

actively and purposefully build coalitions across those differences. This danger is as likely to

recur in the homogenized "safe space" as in the broader "diverse" society. Addressing it requires

activists to neither abandon difference nor sanctify it. Instead, they must use that difference as a

site of intervention in ongoing, active work.

<div align="center">Multiplicity and Contradiction</div>

In order for this work to be fruitful, it must not become a rigid set of standards that fails

to recognize differences. It must not be diluted and solidified into a single, static protocol

uncritically enacted without regard to the specifics of the space and the people who occupy it.

Instead, safe space strategies must remain multiple. They must include the call-out and the

trigger warning, but not limit the work to those tactics. Activists must develop, consider, and

utilize additional strategies, such as coalition-building and calling in. They must use different

strategies in different contexts and at different times, and contest others' choice in strategies,

based on a critical commitment to justice. Social justice must not be reduced to a set of universal

linguistic or behavioral norms, but instead understood as the potential, desirable outcome of

myriad processes of resistance.

This requires a more nuanced understanding of identity politics and its role in public

debate. As writer and editor Matthew Yglesias notes, "[a]ll politics is, on some level, about

identity[, b]ut those with the right identities have the privilege of simply calling it 'politics' while

labeling other people's agendas 'identity'" (Yglesias). Yglesias further argues that "while

identity politics can be practiced in bad ways or in pursuit of bad goals, that's simply to say that

politics can be practiced for good and for ill" (Yglesias). One need not dispose of identity

politics altogether; indeed, by Yglesias's reasoning, to do so would be impossible. However, in

order to guard against "bad" uses or "bad goals," a complex understanding of identity is

required. In this context, a revised understanding of standpoint may be useful.

Standpoint theorists built on Hegel's theorization of the "master-slave dialectic" to insist

that knowledge is embedded (Collins, "Defining Black" 389) and that the ideal of "objective

truth" obscured the extent to which experience was shaped by both position and values. The

apparently "objective" findings of the past, they argued, in fact maintained a system of

dominance that represented the status quo as both inevitable and apolitical. Standpoint theorists

insisted that readings of power informed by the oppressed would prove useful to cultural

theorists, providing them with the "epistemic advantage" of a different, better view (Narayan

376).

More to the point, standpoint and Black feminist arguments specifically argued on behalf

of knowledges and perspectives, plural. Poststructural theorist Donna Haraway argued that

attempts to escape "relativism" must not result in a "single vision" or universal truth, insisting

that such an approach inevitably results in "systematic narrowing and obscuring" (Haraway 416).

The feminist response to difference should neither presume the incomparability of diverse

positions (relativism) nor homogenize that diversity into a single category (e.g. "woman"). In

place of the quest for a singular, universal knowledge – what she termed "the view from [...]

nowhere" (Haraway 418) – Haraway advocated for "partial locatable critical knowledges"

(Haraway 416), which respect the diversity of experience, both between individuals and within individuals across time.

Thus, feminist theories of "situated knowledges" and "interlocking oppressions" fundamentally forwarded multi-local, multi-visionary, and poly-vocal alternatives to the narrow overarching narratives that preceded them. This clearly differs from the increasingly uniform applications that present identity and social justice politics as clear-cut, predictable, and static. A "right" method of activism, in which political views and actions neatly correspond with one's unchanging social location, is dangerous precisely because it forwards a singular vision. This constitutes an increasingly narrow definition of feminist consciousness and feminist practice that represents a return to singular vision, which unintentionally undermines the goals of the intersectional theory informing it. In contrast, activism must be based on understandings of knowledge as partial, multiple, and fluid.

<div align="center">Processes</div>

Furthermore, a "fluid" understanding of identity suggests a focus on process, the necessity of which is obscured through the investment in safe space. The spatial metaphor inaccurately describes the "safety" projects that preoccupy contemporary activists. After all, these projects primarily rely not on structures and zones, spaces and places, but on behavioral standards and rules of engagement. Even the "safe zone" decals that proliferate across university campuses on behalf of LGBTQ students primarily refer to the actions that can be expected within a space, rather than the space itself. Thus "safe space" is not actually spatial; it is behavioral. It is the meaning projected into the space through the strategies its occupants enact and avoid.

This distinction has powerful implications. If the goal of a social justice project is the creation of a specifically "safe" space, activists and existing powers can easily fail to address

issues outside pre-designated areas (e.g. outside student affairs, gender studies courses, or feminist blogs). A process-based approach to justice understands activism as dynamic, and views each interaction and relationship as a site for intervention, education, and coalition-building. The tactics of activism insist upon relationships, and thus guard against the impulse to "do justice" only in pre-approved spaces with pre-designated, like-minded people. If, as emphasized above, activists strive for reciprocity and multiplicity in those interactions, the possibility that behavior will function as a standard to exclude diminishes, although it can never fully disappear.

What might a nuanced, multiple, process-oriented model look like? How might we re-imagine the intersection of safety and justice, moving forward? Consideration of these questions returns us to the realm of metaphor, with which this thesis began. Specifically, I propose a final comparison between the possibilities for safety-oriented social justice project and one final case study, that of safer sex.

<center>The Safer Sex Model</center>

The safer sex movement, like many of the projects examined throughout this project, developed from queer and feminist organizing (Warner 250). Like trigger warnings, call-outs, and other contemporary safe space strategies, safer sex originated as a set of strategies for preventing and reducing harm (Byram 827). Specifically, activists and educators sought to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), particularly the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) (827).

Safer sex guidelines vary, albeit minimally, between different sources, but generally recommend a combination of strategies including

- The consistent use of "barrier" protective methods, such as condoms and dental dams, in all sexual encounters for at least the first six months

- Regular, repeated testing for all sexual partners

- Limiting sexual partners, maintaining healthy (i.e. non-abusive, non-coercive) relationships, and avoiding the use of alcohol or other drugs with sex

- Maintaining personal care practices that can promote health, such as regular rest and activity, stress management, and quality nutrition (Corinna)

Unpacking safer sex as an alternate metaphor provides insight into unorthodox ways to pursue safety and social justice. To begin with, the safer sex model provides multiple strategies, rather than relying on a single approach. In the context of social justice, this multiplicity of approaches helps facilitate nuanced arguments and movements, as well as to guard against the veneration of a specific tactic or strategy as a community norm. Similarly, the guidelines for safer sex promote regular "checks" through medical testing. Safer sex is not something one can achieve or be; it is not a state or a personality trait. Likewise, social justice must be approached as an ongoing practice that is open and accountable to checks from others (such as calling-out and calling-in).

The regular and repeated testing as part of the safer sex model points to another key element of the framework: the awareness of time. Checks are recommended every three to six months and barrier methods for the first six months of sexual engagement. This emphasizes an awareness of how interactions and risks change over time that is largely absent from the "safe space" framework. Consider, for example, how calling out a person one has just met might differ from calling out a friend of several years. The awareness of time in the relationship, as well as the investment in the future of that relationship, necessarily contributes to how one approaches the situation. Similarly, a temporal analysis serves as a reminder that the absence of a problem in

one period does not assure the absence of a problem months or years down the line. Social justice tactics must be flexible enough to vary across time, as well as space.

One of the key points alluded to in this awareness of time is the notion that relationships develop. Considering the role of relationships in activism is hardly a new intervention, as evidenced by theories of coalition, the ethics of care, and "relational activism" (e.g. Reagon; West; O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy). However, the safer sex metaphor emphasizes relationality in a way the metaphor of safe space largely neglects. Safer sex presumes intimacy and relational engagement. The "barriers" that are recommended are proposed as a means of mitigating potential harm *given* intimate engagement. In a social justice context, this combination of barriers and intimacy functions as a reminder that boundaries do not have to function as a means and an end (e.g. call-outs that banish, safe spaces that exclude, and warnings that excise language). Instead, boundaries can function, within a specific temporal/ spatial location, to allow for ongoing relationship and engagement, which may in turn facilitate meaningful and lasting change.

Presumably, one does not practice "safer sex" with every person one encounters. The model is limited to sexual partners, and further limited to those partners who are neither abusive nor coercive. Social justice activism requires a similar discretion in determining partners. Although too much exclusivity can contradict movement goals, full inclusivity (e.g. of those who express unbridled bigotry) is also untenable. This recalls the need for multiple strategies and checks over time, which can help determine the extent to which one individual or group might partner effectively with another, now, still, or again.

Another key component of those decisions, within both the safer sex and social justice projects, is that of self-care. Safer sex relies upon adequate rest, nutrition, and stress

management, with the understanding that health is holistic, and these behaviors can promote immune responses and otherwise contribute to individual well-being. Within social justice work, activists and academics repeatedly refer to the need for "radical self-care," which can promote wellbeing over time, protect against burn-out, and allow one to continue the work. Hebah H. Farrag, assistant director of research at the University of Southern California's Center for Religion and Civic Culture, notes that BLM "chapters and affiliated groups are expressing a type of spiritual practice that makes use of the language of health and wellness to impart meaning, heal grief and trauma, combat burn-out, and encourage organizational efficiency" (Farrag). In order for an individual activist to challenge oppression and sustain those challenges over time, they must have the resources to protect and maintain their own well-being. Safe space projects seek to promote the mental and emotional health of those with trauma and those in marginalized groups, and that goal needs to remain a central aim in social justice. However, recognizing self-care as a process, not a permanent state or "space," will likewise benefit organizing. Additionally, radical self-care must recognize the importance of promoting others' well-being, rather than focusing solely on individual selves (CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective).

Finally, the safer sex model functions overtly as an ideal, rather than a reality. In fact, the inability of sex to ever be completely risk-free sparked the change from "safe" to "safer" sex among advocates (Corinna), who noted that the only way to remain totally "safe" from STIs was to practice abstinence. The use of "safer" emphasizes the inability to fully achieve "safety" when engaging in sex, and therefore provides a corrective to the issue -- in the safe space rhetoric -- of the ideal constraining necessary interactions, which may still result on occasion in harm. Just as condoms can break and abstinent individuals can suffer assault, harm can occur within social justice movements, even when activists align with best practices. Social justice must be

aspirational in the sense that it can never be firmly, permanently achieved; practical in the sense that it consists of processes performed in spite of this; and critical in examining the assumptions and effects connected to those practices.

It is vital that safe space be debated, contested, and critically considered. The problem with the contemporary discourse is not that it includes critics who question safe space or that it includes social justice activists and trauma advocates who promote it. The problem with the contemporary discourse is that the critiques are, by and large, not coming from those activists and advocates. Too many current critics dismiss safe space out of concern for privilege, not justice. Too many proponents presume their desire for justice cannot coexist with doing harm. Moving forward, critiques of safe space must rely upon the investment in social justice, and the promotion of safety must remain vigilant about the limits of good intentions. We must do more than work toward the safety of our spaces; we must work toward justice in our interactions.

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