

The Real Work: A Podcast About Theater Culture and Transformative Justice

Episode 3 - Softening the Fist

Music

TIERRA: The Real Work: A Podcast About Theater Culture and Transformative Justice. What does it really mean to practice transformative justice? Could doing so heal patterns of oppression, violence, and abuse, and grow communities where everyone thrives? What about in the theater community? Where would we even start? This six-episode audio series tells the story of 27 theater practitioners on unceded Lisjan Ohlone territory who gathered regularly for one year to explore using transformative justice, or TJ, in our creative spaces and our lives. We were guided by one of the founders of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, Mia Mingus. This podcast is a report back and an invitation. May we invest in the real work it will take to end and heal all levels of violence for ourselves, our communities, and our future generations.

Music

TIERRA: Episode three: Softening the Fist. Greetings, y'all. It's Tierra again, welcome, welcome back. Thank you so much for returning, for showing up, for continuing this work with us. Last episode, we took you all through a very fast course in TJ 101. To recap from our origin story in episode one, that was also the next step taken by my colleague, SK, after collaboratively organizing the town hall on sexual harassment in Bay Area Theater. Cal Shakes then hosted two identical daylong workshops covering TJ fundamentals, facilitated by Mia, free and open to members of our theater community and organizational partners. We encouraged everyone to bring plus-ones if not plus-twos to build the community part of community responses to violence. About 80 folks came through. And from there we invited anyone interested in learning more to commit to a yearlong training. I also want to name our Black feminist organizing practice of feeding folks substantial nutritious meals at these and all the subsequent workshops. For folks who said yes, we had eight eight-hour days ahead of us with homework like readings and videos to study before each workshop. Anyone who missed a day had to self-organize a makeup session where they could go through any discussions, exercises, and content they had missed with other people. It was a serious commitment. And the path forward wasn't linear. We often circled back to the same concepts, expanding on them, ever deepening, and widening and uncovering. There was a lot to learn and a lot to unlearn. For example, we all came into the training year with different experiences, with discussing consent as violence prevention. Consent, that is the agreement to participate in any activity, especially sexual encounters, is informed,

specific, enthusiastic, reversible at any moment, and freely given uncoerced. The absence of a no is not on its own consent. And the presence of a yes isn't always either, especially if someone's tone of voice or body language are telling a different story. And when folks are fearful of saying what they really want, whether it's a yes or a no or something else because of the power dynamics of the situation, whether it's a request from your boss or a possible future employer, or there are large differences in age and experience, that's a situation that erodes authentic consent and creates the conditions where violence can occur. We also did a level set and got clear for anyone who came into the room unclear that prisons and policing are legacies of enslavement, tools of social control, and actively make violence worse. That as abolitionist organizer and educator, Marian Kopper, has said, prisons aren't feminist, but places that retraumatize survivors and actively perpetuate sexual, race based, and other kinds of violence. That trans and cis Black women survivors, among others, are frequently criminalized for defending themselves from violence. And that disabled, undocumented, Indigenous, Black, and trans communities are not safe when we encounter police, any alternatives for dealing with systemic intercommunal and interpersonal harm. In place at state systems like prisons, policing, ICE, and CPS, we were asked to imagine community infrastructure to hold TJ interventions at different levels. We were asked to imagine for ourselves the transformations we could make if, when we expect severe punishment for mistakes, instead were met with tenderness. Mia used the metaphor of the fist to explain how, unlike our current severely punitive carceral system, T.J. creates conditions that support folks to step up and take accountability when they've caused harm. Here's one of our cohort members explaining it.

EMILY: When we are in pain, we close up like a fist. And if you try to pry the fist open and poke at it, the fist just grips harder. But, if you give the fist a soft place to land, and I'm letting my fist land in my opened other palm, soft and open, then the fist will be more likely to relax and open. And Mia has referred to this metaphor throughout the yearlong workshop as a metaphor for how we can allow people to open.

TIERRA: I came to appreciate the rituals of, as Mia put it, being in TJ space together, the containers we built to hold each other and the work. Each workshop began with reviewing our community agreements.

MIA: So, reminder, take care of yourself and each other. If you need to step out for any reason, please do that. Remember, though, we want to be mindful that this is not a formal healing space, but of course, healing might happen. Please be mindful, disclosures, again, please, please, please be mindful of disclosures. I know it's hard to ask for consent around disclosures, especially with yourself. Think about how you will feel after you disclosed this and not just after, but how we feel tonight, how we feel tomorrow, how we feel the next session. Really try to practice this skill of

self-assessment here. But especially around harm that you've done or were complicit in. We want to be really mindful of that because we don't know what everyone's history around trauma is here. Okay? Confidentiality squared, please don't forget of course what's said here stays here. Of course, the learning can leave, but we want the personal details to stay. But squared is somebody that said something, you see them in a different space, and you're like, oh my gosh, we want to talk about what you shared. Please ask for consent before you do that. Because they may not want to talk about that. They may not want to talk about it with you. They may not want to talk about it ever again. So, please use consent. Collectively create and support a brave learning space, we can't guarantee a safe space ever, but we want to try to all practice being brave. How do we do that and like really pushing against our fear. And using our fear in an intelligent way. It can be like a compass helps us to point in a direction where we can still do work. And so, self-reflection, curiosity, integrity, please, please, as much as you can, focus on yourself. Try to have your own self-reflection, and your own experience in this. I am a facilitator. The SEED group can help me. I know there might be other facilitators in the room. Let us facilitate so that you can really learn and be present in this space. And if you find yourself really fixating on somebody else, really challenge yourself to do some self-reflection. Be present, be mindful of power dynamics and be transparent about that. I especially want it to be non-intrusive of people's different positions that they hold in the theater community. But I think around any type of power. It's kind of a space-taking gimmick, so move up, move up. These are our agreements. Anything else you want to add here? Anything else you cannot live with here? You're like, no, I will not be present.

[Laughter]

MIA: Okay. And we can keep checking in. Please keep track of these, though, and like get, self-assess yourself.

TIERRA: Then we have announcements from the SEED group – that's that four-person core organizing team I was part of – to the whole cohort.

SK: I want to name out, each person in this room will be assigned one SEED person to kind of check in between the sessions. This is not a mandatory check, and it could be a text, like, hey, how's it going? You may decide what that SEED person, like, you know what? I don't need you checking in with me. I'll reach out to you. You know what I mean? People can kind of develop their own system. This is a resource we're offering to folks, and it can also serve as a feedback clue. Some days it's useful in the moment, to be like, hey, this is happening. But maybe some of the like bigger, larger questions, feedback might be best to like test or process out of it. Give to one us one-on-one.

TIERRA: As we are building relationships and trust with each other, what we're not officially saying is that this is then, as we were talking about pods today, we're all in a pod together and like we're all going to be set up to handle interventions with each other. At the end of this. That may happen, with some of us, like some of us consider each other in our pods already, but to explicitly say that's not officially what we are right now. Anything else to add?

SARAH: I would just add that we are also learning alongside you, which is why we're not experts in this either. So, our role is really to help facilitate the program, making sure that it happens, communicating, and making sure there's food, and making sure that we have an agenda working with me in those kinds of things. But I know I'm really learning all of this for the first time as well. And so, we'll all kind of stumble through it together.

TIERRA: We take time to review. We debrief a concept from the previous session.

MIA: So, okay, did everybody leave the pods writeup? I'm sure you've all read it and memorized it. It's great. So, just to review, as we pass this around you, pods are a really hard part of TJ. And they're an important structural part of TJ, because like as I said last time, if we're not going to call the cops, and we're not going to use the courts, and we're not going to use prisons, then who are the people that are going to be responding to violence and harm and abuse? That is going to be us. And so, we really need to build up our own skills and to build out our networks of support aka our pods. So, your pods are made up of, you can have multiple pods, but your pod is made up of the people that you would call on if you experience violence. If you witness violence, if you are surviving violence, or if you are doing violence, or may do violence where you have done violence or harm. That is a specific type of relationship with a transformative justice, and I want to be really clear, pod is different than friend, is different than family, is different than coworker, is different than comrade. They might be those people, but that type of relationship is distinct unto itself. Does that make sense? And the reason why we stress that is because it's especially intimate in sexual violence where the people who are closest to us aren't always the people that we call on, because oftentimes that's where the violence is coming from. We choose our pods, somebody that you might want to have a conversation with, right, around accountability. That's a specific type of relationship. And so, we want to be mindful of that. And so, actually, thinking about your pods, everyone has their own criteria around who their pod people are. I totally agree. But I really want you to think about, not just like whoever your friend is, whoever you're comfortable feel, but like who are the people who actually have the skills and capacity to be able to do what's necessary, being our pod? Right? And you might have different pods for different things. You might have one group of people that you are like, if I was a survivor or surviving some kind of harm, I would have to call these people, right? They might be a different group of people in your life. If I had to take accountability for

something, then these are the people I would call, because oftentimes, those people don't overlap. If they do, great. You're so lucky. But a lot of times they don't. And just to be real, it can be a lot harder to find pod people for your accountability class, so to speak. Right? Because we don't readily have those skills. So, I really, really encourage everyone here. We have six more sessions to really dig deep in building your own pods, like in your personal life, and also thinking about who might be part of your pod, in your fear world that you move in. So, if something went down, you would actually call on them, right? So again, really stress to you all, I want to push you all to try to build your pods and expand them and deepen your capacity. So, once you figure out who your pod people are, try to then deepen that capacity. Any means that you particularly love, any videos that you've watched, watch them with one of your pod people. Talk about that, right? Be like, hey, what do you think about sexual violence? You know, it's not always the easiest thing to roll off the tongue. It's kind of useful to go back and read an article, watch a video, listen to an audio story. Even talk with them around like getting consent, right? This is why I want you all to practice this is, is because when we do this work, especially around harmers, when we do this work on accountability, we're oftentimes looking for who are the people in that harmer's life that they actually have some relationship and trust. And it's even better if they had a track record, talking about accountability together. And again, if it fits, right, get to what's inside there. 'Cause it's hard to just open up on your own unless you really practice those skills, especially with people who might be really angry with you, right? People who might be really disgusted with what you've done as well, right? Then it shouldn't be put on them to do that. Other questions about pods?

WANDA: What if a harmer is also part of the pod?

MIA: That's all you need to learn from this training. You're done.

[Laughter]

MIA: I will give you a certificate now. And we are all harmers. So, remember – oh, Wanda's question was, what if a harmer is part of the pod? And I said, yes. Or can a harmer be part of a pod? Yes. Because I also want us to remember that we are all harmers also in some way, shape or form. Every person in this room has probably caused harm or hurt or pain in some way, or been complicit in it, even in ways we don't realize. And that's even better. Because then we can talk together, right? That helps build empathy. Because I know the things that I may have done that have caused a lot of pain to people or that were really irresponsible that I never should have done. And that builds compassion and empathy in me to be able to then listen to the harm that maybe I just caused or done. Or maybe Anne's like, I know this is harm. Like you talk about it. I'm not sure, right? But then we can engage in that conversation. And if I have

never done anything wrong, and I'm like, I am so perfect, it's going to be really hard to have that conversation. And even if it's just through your privilege, right? So, we will revisit pods. We talk about accountability, as well, specifically around accountability pods and like how hard it is when someone who you are close to does something that's harmful.

TIERRA: And before we got too deep in, we'd make time to ground.

MIA: I want to ask you all to take a second and ground again. And I want you to notice how you're changing your body when you do that. So, I want you to go back to the position that your body was in before I said that, and I want you to feel how you change your body when you take a second to react. Right? When you think about daily practices and we think about building up our capacities, grounding, whatever you want to call it, a center grounding, whatever you want to call it, that is a really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really important practice for us, and I want you to practice it all the time, in your daily life throughout this year, all the time through these trainings. So, let's take a second to ground, do whatever it is inside of you that helps you ground. Some of us might be breathing. Some of us might be sitting a little straighter, making some space in between each vertebra of our spine. For others of us, it might actually be relaxing in a bath. Some of us practice hyper-vigilance. I don't know, there's probably one in this room who does that. Others best might be to sit up a little more, pay more attention, because we tend to disassociate and kind of just lean back and check out. Whatever it is for you that helps you to tap into being grounded. It might be looking at something and actually like focusing. Whatever helps you be present. You're going to be doing this work as you are, say for example, going to be listening to a survivor tell you their story, you need to be present for that story. And that story might take two to three hours for them to tell you. If you're going to be talking to a harmer about harm they've done, you need to be present for that. That story might take two to three hours to tell. So, how do you practice being present and grounded all the time? And, when I say that, I mean being connected to yourself, as well as other folks in this room, as well as the larger group. How do you practice all three of those things at the same time? Take just a moment to ground again. Feel inside yourself, what that feels like. Get some perspective, right? Step back from the situation that's happening. Get present to time and space with your sensations, with your emotions. Okay. Great. So, I want you to keep breathing and practice as we talk about typical responses to violence.

TIERRA: Then we dig in.

MIA: So, we're going to talk about these main typical responses to violence. And we talk about these because it's important for us to be able to know what they are so that we can prepare for them, so that we're not thrown off guard when they happen. Okay? So,

our first one is concern. What does concern look like? Anybody who wants to jump in. And if you can say your name before you speak, that would be excellent. Yeah.

SARAH: Sarah. Asking questions.

MIA: Asking questions. Yeah, Anne.

ANNE: Empathy.

MIA: Empathy.

JAMILA: Offering immediate support.

MIA: Can you say your name, too?

JAMILA: Jamila.

MIA: Are there any ways that concern can look that are not helpful?

RADHIKA: Yeah.

MIA: Yes. Radhika.

RADHIKA: When it's so concerning, sometimes a facial thing. Oh my gosh! I put too much on that other person, you know, that might not be the right person to tell it to because they can't handle it.

MIA: Yeah. Clive.

CLIVE: Clive. I feel like concern can manifest in me as an anxiety to act very, very quickly.

MIA: Yes. That kind of knee-jerk response, right. That's often a reaction, right? Definitely. Emily.

EMILY: To piggy back off that, trying to fix it.

MIA: Trying to fix it. Can you say a little bit more about what that looks like?

EMILY: At least for me, I don't like someone being in pain, and so I try to think of ways of what I can do to take their pain away. Instead of just hearing it.

MIA: Yeah. And that one of the audio stories we listened to remember the Ubuntu one. I think he said trust people who are experiencing harm, right, instead of trying to just rush in to rescue them. Let's go one, two, three.

KIM: Hi. Kim. And kind of like also tied to that, introducing other worries that the person actually experienced violence hasn't brought up, yet.

[Laughter]

MIA: Give me an example of one of those.

KIM: Like, saying, oh gosh, you have to go do this. Or oh gosh, that's going to affect this person, this other person this way. Or, oh gosh, this is going to turn our entire friend group into blah-blah-blah, when that's not even like scenarios that the person who actually experienced the violence has thought of or gone to, yet.

MIA: Yes. J

J JHA: Taking agency from the person you're showing concern to immediately. Like, now you have lost all capacity to think and decide for yourself. Let me do it for you.

ANNE: Well, let me tell you what happened to –

[Laughter]

ANNE: Let it out.

MIA: No one here has ever experienced that.

CAT: Or done it, exactly.

[Laughter]

MIA: I feel like when concern feels bad, usually to me it is like a suffocating quality.

CAT: Yeah. Well, I think also, it makes me think about who you are in relationship to the concern. So, like if I'm the one who caused the harm and we're still together and I'm concerned, it could be more like, oh my god, I did something wrong. So, now I'm like concerned about you but I'm really just actually more about me not having to embody the guilt. You know what I mean?

MIA: Yeah. That's an excellent example, thank you. I saw, right here, LeeAnn.

LEEANN: It's connected to what a lot of people said, like escalating the problem by bringing other people in prematurely.

MIA: Yeah. What about denial? What does denial look like? I know nobody here has ever experienced denial. Yeah.

RAY: I think there's a sort of obvious, oh no, that couldn't have happened because x, y, z, or, are you sure of this sort of questioning? I think there's also – I'm sure that there is also selective listening that can happen because your brain just goes into that sort of white noise and you can't process it. So, you're not hearing all of the story or all the events.

MIA: Yes. And you just hear what you want to hear. Right? Just hear the parts that make you feel comfortable.

RADHIKA: You're too sensitive.

MIA: Oh. Can you say more about how that is denial?

RADHIKA: I had this experience where I reported harm to an artistic director, and they told me I was too sensitive. And it was around like sexual misconduct. He said, your generation is too sensitive. In my time, this happened all the time. So, basically, it wasn't that I'm too sensitive, the harm didn't happen.

MIA: Yeah.

RADHIKA: I just need to be stronger.

MIA: You're too sensitive to live in denial and minimization. So, that these are not mutually exclusive. Joy, it can happen all at once!

[Laughter]

MIA: I saw a hand over here. Yeah. Amanda.

AMANDA: I think it's sort of like the devil's advocate, like, well did you ever think that maybe it was that it happened this way or maybe that person was thinking this when they say it –

MIA: Oh, yes.

AMANDA: But trying to be helpful in that way. Like, maybe you are wrong. Like incredible, so you're wrong.

MIA: And devil's advocate I feel like it can also fall under blame, too. I feel like the devil's advocate can live in a lot of these places.

AMANDA: Yeah. Yeah.

MIA: Yeah, right here. Sharon.

SHARON: Sometimes even before the person is explaining what the story was or what her experience was, they're being cut off from finishing.

MIA: Like literal stopping of it.

SHARON: Yeah. They tell you, hold on, hold on, hold on. I don't know if that's exactly what you're saying here. Like, are you sure you heard, saying what you're saying? Kind of like –

MIA: Yeah. Definitely.

JAMILA: As the person that the harm happens to, you could also have conflicting views yourself of, you know, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I loved this. Maybe I did.

MIA: Yeah. Absolutely. Can you say a little bit more about that? Because I think it's so important.

JAMILA: I mean, I think when you're in a situation, when something happens, sometimes you start to question whether you allowed it to happen.

MIA: Mm. And that too can totally fall under blame, right? You can blame yourself. It's really common. Yeah. Or that your body's not ready to process it, so you've just been telling it never happened. But you can't have the capacity or have the opportunity to have space. How many of us have experienced something where we just had to pull ourselves together because you're at work, you're at whatever's happening. Tierra.

TIERRA: I think it's a thing that can fit in multiple places, but saying like, I've never had that experience of that person, like, they've always been like this to me.

MIA: Yeah.

RADHIKA: A literal neurological blackout of that incident which is beyond your control.

MIA: Other examples of denial? Yeah.

NINA: Nina. Silence.

MIA: Yes, yes. Can you say a little bit more about how that might play out?

NINA: There's so much denial that you don't even approach anyone, not even yourself, to work through it and it becomes this, I don't know, shadow in your mind.

MIA: Yeah. Or just like no response, too, like lack of response. Yeah.

TIERRA: It can also be like straight up lying or misdirecting and like misrepresenting the situation totally.

MIA: Yeah. Anybody else have anything about denial before we move to minimization? What does minimization look like? It's a very common response to harm.

KIERAN: Justifying harmful behavior. I mean, both, for people who have been harmed in trying to come up with motivations for what happened, or harmers justifying their actions through why they think that it was justified.

MIA: Yes. Thank you. Yeah. Anne.

ANNE: Not a big deal.

MIA: Not a big deal. I don't know why you're making it such a big deal. It's really not that bad. Everybody has enough chocolate to eat, right, as we're doing this?

[Laughter]

MIA: Anybody else?

FENNER: I feel like there's this way people use flattery to minimize, like, you know, you're so strong and smart. You don't need to let this bother you. You're fine, look at you.

MIA: Yeah. Totally. Minimization can look all different ways. It can look like flattery. It can look like put downs, but it's just to minimize it, no harm.

SK: Yeah. I think even folks who experience harm, being like, we're cool. We're cool. We're cool. You know, like nothing happened. Maybe that's also connected to denial.

MIA: I think it can go both ways. That's the fun of these responses.

[Laughter]

VALERIE: Yeah, something like, that happens to everyone when they do – everybody who works there has that happen. Everybody who's 19 years old has that happen. That kind of –

MIA: Yeah. I hear that one especially a lot in terms of gender. Well, that's what it means to be a girl. That's what it means to be – you know, like. just deal with it.

VALERIE: It's like that when you go to that costume shop if you are this type of person.

MIA: Yeah, totally. Yeah. Which also, I feel that it's like that. It could also go under blame, like you should have known. Like everyone knows they treat people shitty there, or whatever, you know. LeeAnn.

LEEANN: Prioritizing the mission or like the work that's being done. Being like well, yeah, this happens. But what we're working on is so important. Like that matters so much. You can't derail us, or like don't distract us from that.

MIA: They do such good work in the community. Yeah. Tierra, Wanda, and J.

TIERRA: I think something about, like I did hear that happen but I guess I didn't realize you'd be so upset.

MIA: Yes. Wanda.

WANDA: Racing to forgive. And what I'm thinking about is when all those people were killed in the church, and there was a rush to forgive the harmer as opposed to allowing the people that were harmed to be in the harm for a minute. It's like, oh, we forgive him.

MIA: And they kind of get over it, right? Or like, well, it's been so long. Like, how are you still mad about that? J.

J JHA: So, J. And it's the opposite. So, if we're told that it happens to everyone – the opposite of that: No one has ever said that. Or yes, no one has ever spoken up. Do you really think you want to be the first person to do that?

MIA: Right. Anybody else?

RADHIKA: The way it comes is as a question mark. But the violence of that question mark – Do you really, you know, making you second guess yourself.

MIA: Yes. Totally. Let's move to horror. What is horror, first of all? When we talk about typical responses, what is the essence of horror? Yeah. Fenner.

FENNER: Fenner. Overwhelming emotional response that stops movement, I would say, debilitates you, paralyzing.

ANNE: Fear and disgust.

MIA: Yes. Yes. Yes, there is fear in there, right? And it's almost like, you know, there's almost like a stigma to it, like you don't even want to touch it.

KIM: Kim. And like you're making a judgment.

MIA: Yes.

RADHIKA: This happens a lot, when someone starts crying, there's some kind of blame. The person who is the harmer bursts into tears, it just paralyzes the conversation for the horror being not of the situation but, oh my gosh, did I do that? That kind of horror.

MIA: Horror happens especially in severe cases of violence. I know like, for example, child sexual abuse is one horror that happens all the time. Right, like I can't even imagine how you're living and breathing. There was another hand that I saw. Yeah.

AMANDA: I think it's just the urgency to respond, like immediately. Like we'll find him or her. This is what we'll do.

MIA: Yes. J and then Tierra.

J JHA: I think it sort of comes from the reading that we read. It's dehumanizing.

MIA: Yes.

J JHA: Because you immediately take people out, whether it's the harmer or the victim, and you make the event more important than actually the humans that are involved.

MIA: Absolutely. Tierra.

TIERRA: I think shutting down.

MIA: Do you want to say more about that?

TIERRA: I think if you're confronted with harm that you've done or, yeah, something, you know, sort of an extreme harm that's happened. Like someone then not being able to be present with that person anymore or their own process and just shutting down.

MIA: Totally. What about blame?

[Laughter]

MIA: An old favorite standby. What does blame look like? What is it? I feel like there's some big archetypes here. Yeah.

CLIVE: Clive. If only you didn't X or we hadn't X.

MIA: Yeah. Ray.

RAY: Ray. I think maybe the other side of the coin of blame is justification. Well, they grew up in this, this and this circumstance, or they came from that culture, or they were harmed in this way, so of course they're doing this.

SARAH ROSE: Like, I try to offer you this, but you rejected my offer, you know, of peace or whatever you think you're doing to make the situation more and insisting that they are not doing their part to make it work.

MIA: Absolutely. Or don't you remember that time when I asked you that? And you said no, so, pretty much at fault. Other people, what does blame look like when you see it?

RADHIKA: You shouldn't have been there. I've heard this a lot. You shouldn't do theater if you can't handle it.

[Laughter]

MIA: So much comedy, right? Yeah. Sharon.

SHARON: That the response was incorrect or something.

MIA: Ooh, yes. Good one.

SHARON: I guess, like you're overreacting, or the person who harmed didn't have the intention of harming. So, like why did you read that into it? You know, why didn't you respond with hurt?

MIA: Yeah. Gaslighting is really big here. Does everybody know what gaslighting is? Does anybody want to give a brief definition?

LEONTYNE: Making you think that whatever it is that you're responding to didn't actually happen or somehow that, yeah, you're overreacting to it, that what you thought you saw was not actually what you saw, that what you thought was not what you should have thought. Like that you're crazy.

FENNER: Discrediting your own experience.

NINA: Self-blame from just like all society of all time ever.

MIA: Yeah, I don't think anybody knows what that looks like, Nina. I saw another hand.

[Laughter]

LEEANN: It's like not blame of the victim but blaming the structure. Like an example in theater, I think of a lot is like, oh, we just don't have time, really. We don't have the money to prevent this stuff. Like, we are doing the best we can. There just isn't time. We have so much to do. We have such limited resources, like blaming scarcity.

MIA: So, what about rage and outrage? What does that look like? It's like it hurts so much that we have to laugh, right? Yeah. Kieran.

KIERAN: Pushing for immediate reaction.

MIA: Pushing for immediate reaction. Say more about that.

KIERAN: Trying to convince someone who's been harmed that they need to take action or it can happen to someone else or the person will just go free; that if they don't do something, they're at fault.

MIA: Absolutely. Yes.

JAMILA: More violence.

MIA: Yeah. Vigilantism lives here. Does everybody know what vigilantism is? Anne.

ANNE: Mob justice is another way of saying that. But what I was going to say was, dehumanizing the harmer.

MIA: Oh, yeah. Dehumanizing the harmer. Or the survivor, right? I've seen it both ways. Or sometimes even the bystanders. "I can't believe you let this happen to them. I told you, if they wore a dress to school, that you knew they would be bullied, right? I can't believe you allowed them. This is because of your meddling, right?" Anybody else? Yeah.

RAY: Ray. Just saying that I think the immediate reaction that I've seen in myself and other people is sometimes there's a delay, and then rage or outrage will occur. Like maybe it's not until you see the harmer again in person, or until something settles in, like the denial has gone down or just like gets stored in your body and then it pops out you're behind the wheel or you're rage crying for no reason at the grocery store.

[Laughter]

MIA: And you're like, I don't know where these examples come from.

CAT: I can think of an experience where a violent thing happened, and I was really hurt. And I told someone who I wanted to care about it, and they didn't get it. So, then I was – the rage came up again. Because I was like, why don't you understand how messed up this was?

MIA: Yes. Yes.

KIERAN: Committing reciprocal harm.

MIA: Say more about that, please.

KIERAN: Lashing out at someone in the same way they have harmed you.

MIA: We're sure nobody does that here. Fine, if you don't want to call me back, I'm not gonna answer your texts. Right? Yeah. Fenner.

FENNER: Cutting off, ostracization.

MIA: Ostracization, absolutely. Yeah. And like –

FENNER: I can't stay with you ever again because of what you told me, whatever part of that you're in...

MIA: Yeah. Okay. Tierra.

TIERRA: Tierra. I think I want to speak to that. There's a part of rage that I find healthy and healing, like recognizing that I don't want to deny or minimize or blame myself or whatever, but like this actually did happen and it shouldn't have.

MIA: Yeah.

SARAH: I can add to that also, bottling up and compressing and tamping rage down.

MIA: Yeah, that's a big one. That's a big one.

Music break

MIA: So, what I want to ask people now to think about as we look at all of these things, think about overconcern, actually, and when it's gone bad. What might that be taking care of? What might some of these responses be taking care of? SK.

SK: I was thinking about earlier. It feels like some of them are like a function of control, like controlling the narrative.

MIA: Also, there's a connection. Because you're having a connection. I saw Anne.

ANNE: Yeah, it triggers something that's personal to you in your own history or situation that is amplifying your reaction to what the other person has experienced.

MIA: Yeah, definitely. Sarah.

SARAH: I think it could also be a function of fear of responding in the wrong way or fear of not knowing what to do, of the unknown. Basically, being afraid of the situation.

MIA: Yeah, definitely. Leontyne.

LEONTYNE: Guilt.

MIA: Yes, yes.

LEONTYNE: And not wanting to admit or see the responsibility that you may bear, what the person is saying.

MIA: What about denial? What might that be taking care of? It could also be guilt.

NINA: I think survival.

MIA: Say more about that.

NINA: When either you or someone you know has gotten hurt really in a huge way, and the pain is too much for your mental capacity or emotional capacity.

MIA: Especially common with other survivors. Especially common. We see this all the time with parents who are also CSA survivors. They cannot handle that, one, they might have been complicit, right, or they have not processed their own trauma. So, this is how themselves. We're talking about this, not to justify people's behavior, but to give a little bit more understanding to what's going on inside that closed fist. If this closed fist is denial, what's going on inside there? They could have never done that. I know that they're not like that. Right? What could be going on inside of that? That's what we always want to ask. What can that be taken care of? Fenner.

FENNER: Ego I think plays a lot into all this.

MIA: Yeah.

FENNER: Reputation. Thinking about, what does it mean if I'm now involved in this process or connected to this person or the harm? Or that I have to label myself as a victim or that I feel like now – yeah.

MIA: Definitely. Tierra.

TIERRA: Like the status quo, especially in relationships. Like if you are close to someone and then are hearing that they've harmed someone.

MIA: Yeah. Sharon.

SHARON: Having unwillingness to take responsibility.

MIA: I'm gonna say accountability because I feel like both of them are in there, and responsibility. What about minimization? When do you think minimization occurs?

AMANDA: This probably falls into a couple of them, just like wanting things to be okay.

MIA: Yes.

AMANDA: Like if I can just find a way to justify it or respond quickly or something like that, we can get back to everything being okay.

MIA: A lot of them are similar. That's why I'm putting them all together. So, like minimization can also be fear of responding wrong, right? Minimization can also be controlling the uncontrollable. Like, I can't handle if somebody rapes somebody, but I can handle if like, maybe there was just some inappropriate words that were said, right? I can handle if the person I know, this survivor is telling me, trying to like, well, maybe you shouldn't have done this. Because then I can try to control the uncontrollable. This just happened to me. Where did this happen? Where were you going? What time of day was it? Like, we can't control how they respond. Yeah. Ray.

RAY: Ray. I think it just goes along with what we've been talking about. That's sort of protecting one's own narrative. Like, if somebody names an act as rape and somebody, that they're disclosing has something similar in their story but they're not calling it that. They're like, oh, that's just how sex is or that's just how whatever, whatever it is.

MIA: Yes. And this is especially true when it happens in families or in intimate networks. Right? Because if you're saying, look, you're saying violence and abuse is happening in this organization, but I'm in that organization, and I'm like, no, because then that means I have to face that, right, and I can't face that. Yeah. Emily.

EMILY: I wanted to say ignorance.

MIA: Yeah. Do you want to say more about that?

EMILY: I was thinking about people who have never encountered something like this before and have no, have no point of reference.

MIA: Yeah. And ignorance can also be a form of mild dissociation.

EMILY: Yeah. Absolutely.

LEEANN: I'm still figuring out how to say this, but like when the harmer is somebody that you like really respect or look up to or means a lot to you, like what it means to have that role model or maybe you've modeled yourself after, like a role model is being taken away from you.

MIA: Yeah, definitely that's huge. We're seeing that happen right now in our society. What about horror? What might horror be taking care of?

CAT: Pain.

MIA: Pain. Do you want to say more about that?

CAT: It hurts so much. I don't know, it was just a gut response. Like it hurts so much that – Cat, by the way. – It's like easier to be – it kind of goes with – could go with rage, too, frankly. Like there's so much pain that it's perhaps easier to be horrified or angry. Something like that.

MIA: Yeah. Because oftentimes what's underneath anger and rage is hurt and sadness or grief or sorrow.

CAT: Grief, yeah.

MIA: And if you can't go there, it is so much easier to live in angry-land, or rageful-land, or horror-land. Not all the time, sometimes it's just anger, it's just rage. Yeah, go on.

CAT: Yeah. I think horror could be like, if something happened to a friend here, and I am horrified because it's like, oh my gosh, it's like that empathy or that pain. Something like that.

MIA: Yeah. Radhika.

RADHIKA: I experience the horror a lot across cultures. When one culture sees something that's horrific about another culture, I get really angry at that horror because I feel like there's no connection. So, it's a dissociation of being humanity. Oh, that would never happen in my culture. Or like, that culture has its problems that they need to fix. So, yeah, I don't know if it's ignorance or disassociation, like a common humanity is missing, like there's no bridge. But I know it's a real response.

MIA: Yeah. Definitely. Okay, Sarah.

SARAH: Yeah. I just think of this – I don't know if this is specific to horror, this might go across – but just protecting, kind of created an us versus them subconsciously rather, if it's you against the survivor or the survivor in you against the harmer which is the very human need to essentially create community by bonding people together and creating an other.

MIA: Yes.

SARAH: Which is really hard to do on the basis of pain and violence.

MIA: And I would just add binaries in general. They add to that feeling of control, right? That if we categorize these things, we are the good people over here. We're taking eight days out of our year to learn about TJ. Those other people are bad, they don't care.

[Laughter]

MIA: Yeah. Totally. And the us versus them thing is a powerful way to bond. And we don't realize that until most of our bonds actually are around trauma. And we actually have a hard time bonding over non-traumatic things. What about rage and outrage, what might that be taking care of?

VALERIE: I feel powerless. Vigilantism to me, I associate it with being something very masculine. And so, it's this like, we're scared. We gotta prove our power. We're tough. We can take them down.

MIA: Definitely. So, think of bravado.

VALERIE: Yeah.

MIA: Yeah. Clive.

CLIVE: Clive. It could be a way for harmers to take care of their guilt.

MIA: Ooh. Do you want to say more about that?

CLIVE: Like I am somebody who has caused people harm in the past. I'm not proud of it. I wish I had never caused that harm in the past. I'm so fucking pissed off that that happened to you. I'm gonna do something about it now.

MIA: Yes, we see that all the time, especially with the privileged Olympics, right? Like, I'm the good, straight person. Those are the bad, straight people over there. I'll be the good able-bodied ally. Those people don't understand, right? [*incomprehensible*] Other people, rage and outrage. Yeah.

STEPHANIE: Stephanie. So, now as we're talking about this, I mean, it's literally just survival instincts kicking in. How do I deal with any of these to take care of my own self, my own response, my own trauma that I've experienced? So, it's just surviving at that point. It's just trying to figure out how you are gonna move forward.

MIA: Yeah. SK.

SK: Yeah, it brings up ideas of safety and stability and, you know, kind to like protection. Kind of all of these, which is another conversation about what is threat, you know? What is safety?

MIA: Yeah. And, if we can understand what's behind all of these, it can help us to orient. We have our own strategies and tactics as we're moving things forward, it helps us to better strategize, right? Because if someone is denying something because they can't face their own trauma, us being like, you're denying this, you're fucked up, you need to change. That's not going to help them if what we want is for them to actually shift. For once, just to yell at somebody, that is what we should do. But when we're talking about TJ, Transformative Justice, we're talking about how to transform this, right? Not make things worse or reinforce the harm. How do we transform it? How do we actually uproot it from the soil, right? Fenner.

FENNER: Just thinking that also a lot of this response is learned. It's learned behavior from our families, from our community. We've seen responses in the past and we want to be appropriate, so we're like, well I really feel it's appropriate to get mad. Like that's how everyone responds to something like this. And if you're not responding that way, then that's totally wrong.

MIA: Right? And it can be really super-bound up in our identities, right? So, if you think about kind of a traditional gendered identity of cis man, rage and outrage can be the way that they feel more like a man, right? Denial and minimization can be a very appropriate feminine response, you know? And so, these are very deeply ingrained, and then we get into culture, right, and different cultures have different ways that they understand, different types of response to harm and violence. All of this, right, is very, very complicated. Which is why, when we think about responding to harm and violence, these very easy, you know, kinds of really cliché ways that we think about violence and responding to it, often are not useful. Or it's just like a roll of the dice. Like yeah, two times out of 220 times, you might get it right. But the rest of the time, it doesn't really work to help change and shift any of this stuff. Yeah. Ray.

RAY: I have a question on this, sort of – Ray. I have a question on what people are touching on, and you were saying that different cultures have different responses or understandings of things that are appropriate. Are these responses like found in a lot of different cultures and cross-cultural, or are we just examining from our sort of American western perspective?

MIA: There have been cross, across cultures. I mean, there might be some culturally specific ways that they show up. But like denial is, I mean, so many cultures, right? And again, the ways those cultures might practice denial might be very different. Like, the way that like WASP folks might practice it, for example, might be very different than the way that like Irish immigrants might practice it, right? When folks in the South might do it, it can be very different from the Pacific Northwest. A very polite denial, right?

[Laughter]

MIA: Okay. Any questions about these? This is helpful for people.

LEONTYNE: And one of the issues or the negative manifestations of these be a disproportionate level –

MIA: Absolutely, mm.

LEONTYNE: – of rage or outrage to, okay, it was –

MIA: Yes.

LEONTYNE: Like you were saying, if I were that outraged at everything that happened to me, I would never have a life, right? So, that's also an issue.

MIA: Absolutely. And a lot of that has to do with, so there's inner trauma or past experiences, too, right? Because – and I see it all the time in my life – people projecting their own stuff, their own unresolved crap onto people all the time, right? They're making it bigger than it is, or bigger than the person who's telling the story needs, to help understand it as, you know? And it can also be flipped, right? So it can also be less than.

LEONTYNE: Right.

J JHA: What comes to my mind is that if I am going to harm, like I am trying to communicate that. This exercise feels like that I should also take the responsibility of having the perspective of both the harmer and the people who are not adequately responding to my need for help. And it's just way too much for my brain to hold.

MIA: No, you should not.

J JHA: And I'm just like, this is all tra-la-la, but all the white privilege that I've experienced has come in all of these formats that it has taken care of. And every pore of my body says that, yes, I should hold, you know, compassion and view of the aggressor. But it is impossible for me to hold that at that time when harm is being done.

MIA: Yes.

J JHA: So, it just feels like, oh god, no. I can't hold all that at that moment. So, it just feels overwhelming for me to look at this perspective and see, yeah, everything can be

justified here. All of that. Even inadequate, completely brutal responses to a call for help could also be justified because “that’s where you came from, da-da-da-da-da.” It’s too much.

MIA: Mm, thank you. Do you have any more?

J JHA: No. Thank you.

MIA: One, again, none of these things justify these responses. We’re trying to just understand better. Two, as we talked about before, we have a collective responsibility for violence. The person who is surviving the violence or direct harm should not be the person who has to take this shit into account. That should be your pod people, people who are maybe allied with you or are co-conspirators with you, people who are helping to move forward with the process. Three, we want to hold back, right? And remember our broader picture, our broader role is how we transform harm and violence and abuse. It will be messy. It’s not going to be pleasant, as I always say in the trenches, “We’ve got to clean out this wound, and it’s not going to be pleasant, but we have to do it if you want to get to healing.” There is no way we could leave this infested, right? We have to do that. Anybody who’s had to clean out their own wound knows how freaking painful that actually is. We have to do it to get to the other side. So, absolutely, the person who is experiencing the harm, your people, they should not be the people who have to think about all these things. But I tell you what, if you are a bystander working or a supporter working to help somebody, you better be taking these into consideration, right? Again, what is your goal? Do you want to do TJ or not? Again, you don’t have to be TJ. TJ is one specific kind of orientation and approach. If you want to be TJ, you should be taking these things into consideration, right? Because if your goal is to get someone’s behavior to change, it can work by just saying, you need to fucking change your behavior, right, and we wouldn’t be here. We wouldn’t be here at all. It would have been done already. And if all you had to do was fucking march and shut down the highway, it would have been done. Clearly there’s a lot more work. And that we all also experience, and we all do these things. So, we also want to learn more about ourselves, right? And resisting accountability is part of accountability. So, if we know that, we can prepare for it, rather than being thrown off by it when it happens, right? If we know that these types of responses are very common, then when we see them happening, we can be able to name that instead of being like, holy shit, what the fuck is happening? We can be like, okay. That is clear blame mixed in with some minimization and denial. That might take care of some specific things for this person. And that might be a specific different way we approach that person or those people, than people who are exhibiting horror and rage, right? You might say, okay, these people – maybe this tactic might be better, this strategy might be better for these folks, right? We’re gonna put our organizer hat on. I know that we have been like, it’s been ground into us, even just like, you know,

individual problems and things, but we can actually think of life systemic, strategic ways to deal with these things. Thank you, though. Because I think one thing that is important to remember is that we're constantly all in those three roles. We're constantly all in survivor, bystander, harmer, all the time. So, our own stuff is going to come up again. So, we need to know, right? If we're feeling a level of rage and outrage about something, we need to be able to identify that. Sometimes it can be healthy, but sometimes it's not, right? What we want to move people to is a healthy version of concern. All the things that people were saying in the beginning, asking questions, leaning in, empathy, immediate support. That's what we want to move people to. How do you move somebody from rage and outrage to concern? These are the kinds of skills that we want to build here. We're not going to build all of the skills in one unit. That's where we're gonna start, and where we want to get to. What does it take to move someone from blame and denial to concern, a healthy form of concern? What if we can move them on from an unhealthy form of concern to a healthy form of concern, right? Do they need some support around their own boundaries, right? Do they need some support around consent and understand what that means? Absolutely. Okay. How are you all doing?

Music Break

MIA: We're gonna check the trauma responses, because I feel like we're pretty much there. Yeah? Yeah? Okay. So, these are broad trauma responses. These are the main five that we have. And I want to stress that all of these things are hardwired into all of us. All of these things are hardwired into all of us. We tend to choose certain ones that become our kind of default or favorited trauma responses, and that has to do with a whole host of things. That has to do with what is societally acceptable, right? Has to do, for example, like gender roles in norms, racial roles in norms, and culture roles in norms, right? All the different types of things inform these. But I want to go through them with you. So, we're going to start with fights. What does fight look like? As a trauma response, not just a fight. But what does fighting look like? Yeah.

LEONTYNE: Lashing out, physically.

MIA: Lashing out. Yeah. Could be verbally, too. So, violence is usually the act, and trauma is usually the consequence of that act. These are trauma responses, and they are across the board in everybody. But again, they can manifest in different ways. So, some of us, if we're exhibiting a fight trauma response, for those of us where it may not be safe to exhibit a physical fight trauma response, we might have a verbal fight trauma response. It's still a fight response, right? Or some of us, we might just puff ourselves up and get real big, and just take up a lot of space, right? That could be another way. What other ways does fight look like? Yeah, Anne.

ANNE: Retaliation?

MIA: Retaliation, yes. Yes. And especially thinking what does fight look like in your body when you speak about it? Yeah.

ANNE: Tight.

MIA: Yep. There's a contraction. There's a fist. Usually there's a – I saw your body move forward, definitely. Fight is usually, there's some kind of an engaged, like you're moving towards something, right? Versus flight, where you're moving usually away from something. What other ways does fight look like in our bodies? Yeah.

SARAH ROSE: Adrenaline.

MIA: Adrenaline. Yep. Your blood starts pumping.

LEONTYNE: Your mind goes blank.

MIA: It can. It can for sure. Disassociate runs all throughout all of these. So, you can be in a fight, responsive, and completely be disassociated. For some people, when they're in their fight response, is when they're the most clear. It depends. Yeah.

LEONTYNE: To clarify, what I meant is that it's a focus. It's sort of a *[deep breath]*.

MIA: Yes.

LEONTYNE: And that thing that I need to attack or respond to, whatever, that's all that is there.

MIA: Can everybody just lean forward with your body? Will you just lean forward like you're going to go into fight? It's harder to see around you, right? So, what Leontyne is saying, like there's this kind of focused, fixated-ness to it. You might lose your peripheral vision, metaphorically and literally, right? So, literally, you might lose your peripheral vision but metaphorically, you may not be able to gain perspective, actually see other people, right? Remember the things that you're connected to. Definitely. In fight, I will see this whole body be angled like predators, right? And oftentimes they have the big teeth and claws. Oftentimes they are larger. Usually though, with fight, animals, if we look to nature, they usually won't engage in fight unless they know they can win, right? Because if it's going to cost them an injury that might get infected, it might lead to death, for example, they usually won't engage in fight. Tierra.

TIERRA: Yeah. I had a question that, in terms of someone's triggers, if you know, within society, right. Like for example, there's more permission, entitlement under patriarchy for men to do violence. Or people with more privilege will probably do violence to people in their sphere who have less. So, choosing to displace the violent response that you can't have to like actually what harmed you onto people with less power privilege around you, can that be part of this type of trauma response?

MIA: Absolutely. Absolutely. And again, these are all hardwired to all of us, so we might pick ones that we know are acceptable. We might pick ones that we know are backed by society. Fight, in terms of our gender binary that we live in, for masculine folks, totally, right? That's so much more acceptable, right? Especially than a freeze, right?

RADHIKA: Does self-harm come under a fight?

MIA: Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah, because we, we definitely engage with these in ourselves. What about flight? What does flight look like? Yeah.

AMANDA: Quitting. Quitting a job.

MIA: Yeah.

ERIC: Ghosting.

MIA: Ghosting. Very, very, very good example of flight.

TIERRA: Avoiding a particular situation or place or people.

MIA: Yes. In the animal kingdom, we can think of flight obviously as birds. But we can also think of animals that run away really fast, who would be prey, like rabbits, for example, right? Whatever gets you out fast.

RADHIKA: Substance abuse.

MIA: Yeah.

RADHIKA: Any experience that just takes me away.

MIA: And that's both of these, right? Again, disassociate can run through all of these. Yeah. Sarah.

SARAH ROSE: Kind of like fantasizing, imagining, creating alternate states –

MIA: Absolutely.

SARAH: Go somewhere else in the mind.

MIA: Yep, you're literally existing in your own reality and creating that, that kind of padding, yeah. What does flight look like in our bodies? Could be like running away. It can also be Kieran, right here? Looking away, kind of like turned away. Not that you're doing flight right now, it's just a great example. It could just be like, we're having conversation and I kind of just like this, right? Like kind of listening, one foot out the door, right? Could be zoning out. Could be not being present.

KIM: This is probably more freeze, but also becoming smaller, right, depending on the type of flight, if it's in your mind, which is disassociation, of course. Yeah.

MIA: Definitely. Definitely.

J JHA: I see in a way I'm asking the person who is bringing up something to actually take flight.

MIA: Yes.

J JHA: So, it's not that I fly away, you should fly away. And that way, the trauma will go away.

MIA: Yeah. Definitely. And there's people who know that, you know, if I know that Amanda's first response is to avoid all conflict, I know that Amanda will leave, right? Definitely. What about freeze? Leontyne and then Fenner and then Tierra and then Ray.

LEONTYNE: Leontyne. Mind going completely blank, like no response to anything which then later on wakes up and you're like, I could have said, mmm, mmm, mmm, so many brilliant, genius things. But in that moment, just a complete inability to think of anything to say or do.

MIA: Yes, yes. Fenner.

FENNER: Putting it all on everyone else, being like, I can't do anything. Just tell me what to do.

MIA: Yeah. That could totally be a freeze. Absolutely. I have no idea what to do, right? I'm so overwhelmed. Yes. Tierra?

TIERRA: Silence or inaction. I think that just like giving the other people less to respond to from you, so as a way to like – someone was also saying like be smaller, like they're playing dead almost. Like, maybe you'll leave me alone if I don't give you more to react to.

MIA: Yeah. And leads right to, in the animal kingdom, one of the best examples is in opossum who literally plays dead, right? It uses freeze as a way of survival. And actually, I don't know if people know, but opossums actually, they emit an odor as well to make any prey who comes by, smells them and thinks that they've been dead for a while to like, eat this and I'll call in sick, right? But freeze is a trauma response that there is a lot of shame around. We do a lot of blame with freeze, right? Why didn't you do something? Why didn't you call for help? Why didn't you tell somebody it was happening, right? Why didn't you stand up for yourself? There's a lot of blame that goes with freeze. Fight we tend to think of as a very righteous kind of thing, right? Like yes, you fought, right? Or, you got away. You escaped. Good for you. Freeze and appease get a lot of shame and blame. And then a lot of self-shame and blame, too. And we want to remember again these are hardwired into us as literal ways to stay alive. Literal ways to stay alive. And the things that we might pick, again, will be very much informed by our circumstances and our surroundings. What about appease? What does appease look like?

VALERIE: Doing what the group is doing even if someone is laughing at the joke that you were actually offended by.

RAY: Changing the behavior that you were blamed for the violence or the trauma that happened. So, if I don't do this, they won't do this.

MIA: Yeah. Like if I hold my drink the whole night, I won't get drugged, right?

FENNER: Compromising what you want to quote-unquote end the process.

MIA: Yes.

ANNE: Go along to avoid conflict.

MIA: What does appease look like in your body?

SARAH ROSE: Conflicted body language. Part of your body saying yes, part of it saying no.

CLIVE: Collapse.

KIM: I feel like a freeze and appease, where I'm like, "Okay, yeah. Absolutely. I'd love to."

[Laughter]

SARAH: Smiling.

MIA: Smiling. Yes.

LEONTYNE: Soothing the harmer.

MIA: Soothing the harmer. Absolutely. I'm so sorry I made you mad. Another way that appease shows up is this, because these are our main arteries, right, our jugular. So, if we expose them, that's a way of showing appease. Because when we fight, we usually cover it up and protect it, right? We have our heads down ready to go. When we're just like this, this could be another way, too. It makes one vulnerable. We think about dogs who will roll over on their backs to show you their belly, to say I'm so little of a threat, there's no need to harm me.

RADHIKA: But I think I've used appease in a situation where I don't want to have a solid working relationship with somebody, and so the first thing I do is appease. And I don't if that's my gender training. Again, I fight for, you know, when it's with somebody that I know. But I fight for that, I use appease a lot, like a stop before I –

MIA: Definitely. And these are very much informed again by our conditions. So, we might do appease if it's our boss doing it to us. Children have to do freeze and appease often because they're too little to fight and win, and they also just can't be. These are based on privileges that we have. You know, if you think about white supremacy, who are the people who are allowed to fight have to be seen as righteous and good, and for the people who, when they fight, we see them as criminals or threats or bad.

J JHA: So, there are the racial stereotypes that have been associated with this particular response. And there have also been cultural nuances of what saying no looks like. So, it is very easy to look at an appeasing response and think that appeasing while on a cultural norm, it actually is a really clear no.

MIA: Yeah.

J JHA: You don't get it. That's fine. Just to be very careful of even, that calling something out as appeasement should be to take a pause and look at that.

MIA: Definitely. I think about like in some cultures where you just don't talk about conflict at all, right? And so, what a fight might look like in that culture might be so different in cultures where you do, right?

J JHA: Exactly, yes.

MIA: Yeah, totally. Some cultures, people talk like they're screaming at each other, but that's their normal speaking voice, and they're totally fine and happy. Other cultures, people will like whisper [*whispers*], you know – yeah. What about dissociate?

ERIC: Disconnecting from our pain centers.

MIA: Or disconnecting from everything.

SARAH: Putting a literal distance between yourself and the other thing.

MIA: Could definitely be combined with flight.

SK: Yeah. Or checking out on the phone.

MIA: Or Netflix or checking out on somebody else's problems. A lot of people do that.

NINA: Or caretaking.

MIA: Yeah. I'm just going to pour all of my energy into you so that I don't have to think about what's going on with me, right?

KIM: Loss of eye focus. Or like gaze somewhere else.

MIA: Ray.

RAY: Sometimes there's losing track of time or like regular conversations. Somebody might come in with a comment or reaction that seems to be totally separate, but they're like lost in trauma...

MIA: Spacing out.

STEPHANIE: I'll call myself out right now. I'm dissociating from you all right now. I put myself out of the circle.

MIA: Right?

STEPHANIE: I just recognized that, I'm like why am i over here?

MIA: Yeah. Definitely. That's a little dissociate and flight coming out.

[Cheers]

STEPHANIE: I guess I'm over here for a reason.

MIA: But it's all good. You've got to take care of yourself, you know?

FENNER: Yeah. Sometimes you don't see it at all. There are no physical cues because the person has disassociated from the situation. But they're in survival mode, so they are acting, and they appear and they are doing the script and filling the mask. But, you know, you try to talk to them later about the experience or whatever, and they're like, I don't really know. I was just, you know – I've had it happen on stage where there was glass on the stage and I was barefoot. And I don't remember anything from that whole show. I remember coming off of the stage and being scooped up by the stagehands. And that's it. But everyone was like, oh, you were great. What a great show. And I was like, woah.

MIA: And that's a little bit of disassociate energies mixed in there, right? A lot of us are really good at that, which is to disassociate but do it in a way that appeases everybody else, but they won't know that they are disassociated or won't get in trouble for being disassociated.

LEONTYNE: Overscheduling.

MIA: Yeah, capitalism can be great at assisting with dissociation.

TIERRA: Internally can look like memory loss and just like not actually knowing what happened.

JAMILA: Sometimes you get busy. Walking, making yourself busy with everything else.

MIA: Definitely.

JAMILA: Distracted.

MIA: Totally, right? Like I don't have time to go to these accountability meetings. I have a lot of things I have to do. Most people describe it as kind of floating up out of their body, like almost you can look and see things, like if someone leaves sometimes. But

then there's some people where instead, they take themselves and tuck themselves way down here, like in the back, right, where no one will ever be able to find you. It doesn't mean that there's not any other way, but those are the two main ways. So, okay, I want to remind us again, these are all hardwired into us and these become collective. So, you can literally have entire organizations and groups who have a particular trauma response, right? Like a solid appease response, right? It can happen. The whole group of people. This can also be cultural. These can also be just as individual violence or trauma can inform an individual's response. Collective trauma can inform a collective response, right? Probably genocide or war, forced migration, mass incarceration. All of these things, right, can inform entire groups of how they decide to deal with their trauma, right? We think about assimilation as appease, right? For example – yeah.

LEEANN: Are there times in which these become not reflexes but like choices?

MIA: Absolutely.

LEEANN: Like a toolkit. Are you talking about flight?

MIA: Yes.

LEEANN: I'm thinking about setting, really intentionally setting boundaries.

MIA: Absolutely. Yeah. That's what we want to get to. We want to get to a place where these are choices that we're making, so that we're not just falling into a flight mode just because that's all we know how to do. So, we're not just going to, "Let's go, we gotta get outta here, we gotta get everybody together," but that we're choosing them. Because these are very intelligent. These are literally the ways that everybody in this room has survived. None of you would be here without these things. But we want to make it so it's not that flight is the only thing you know how to do all the time. But flight can be really useful sometimes because sometimes we need to leave a situation. We need to get people out of the situation. We need to know how to do that, right? And instead of freezing up – other times freeze is a very intelligent and smart, completely smart way to survive, right? If we're in some violence right now, facing violence and that is one way we can survive, we should be freezing. But we want to make sure that we're choosing that, that we know how to do that well, in a way that takes care of us, rather than a way that's, you know, if you're always fighting at everything or always freezing at everything, it's not going to be useful, right? We want to learn how to choose these so that if someone's in a trauma response and they're exhibiting some of these things, then us being like, you just need to change. I don't know why the fuck you're doing that? They're doing that because that's how they know how to stay alive. They're doing that because that's how they survived. So, if we can shift our understanding, like you're just a fucking

asshole, like that is how you learn to survive in this world. How do I then understand that? How does it then inform how I interact with you, especially I want to then begin to move you to some of these things, right? Any questions about this? Or are we ready for a fast break for lunch? Are you all triggered? Are you doing, okay? Are you all thinking about what your own trauma responses are? Yes. Yes. Totally. Remember you've got all of these inside of you. So, if you need to disassociate during lunch, please do that. It might make sense for you.

Music break

TIERRA: We've reached the end of Episode 3. We've only just begun. So, rest up, take care of yourselves, and let's meet back at Episode 4. For this episode's optional take-home exercise, I want to invite you to scope out the free resources for further TJ study we've got linked in the show notes. There's an amazing roundup of resources compiled by Cory Lira of Critical Resistance Portland, another compiled by the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, and more. We've got readings, workbooks, podcasts, videos, even zines and illustrations. Consider making time to browse through these options and to pick one additional resource to engage with to deepen your TJ study. And maybe also take a moment for gratitude, for the organizers, creators, community members who have put in so much often unpaid labor to create these resources to help us learn, practice, and build alternative responses to violence, to help us heal our communities and keep each other safe. Thank you for listening to The Real Work: A Podcast About Theater Culture and Transformative Justice. Please check out the show notes for the transcript and for plenty of links and resources to tide you over til the next episode drops. And please consider sharing this work with your communities. Thank you to the Center for Cultural Innovation's Investing in Artist Grant, the City of Oakland's Cultural Funding program, and to Cal Shakes for initially incubating this project. Our theme music is by zAnda of DiaspoRADiCAL. This is a collaboration with We Rise Production, and we'd love to hear from you. Connect with us at weriseproduction@pm.me, on the socials, and at weriseproduction.com.

TIERRA: Do we want to close with a collective breath?

SK: Sure

[Breath]

TIERRA: All right, that's a wrap.

Show Notes

Sogorea Te' Land Trust: <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/>

Save the West Berkeley Shellmound: <https://shellmound.org/>

Mariame Kaba - <https://transformharm.org/> & <http://mariamekaba.com/>

Readings & Media compiled by the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective:
<https://batjc.wordpress.com/resources/readings-media/>

Transformative Justice Resources, compiled by Cory Lira of Critical Resistance
Portland:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/11D8HSm4q4LIMH_T8b3W8oFIZxMgvPYkUh0WhC5XlqCU/edit

Mia Mingus: <https://www.soiltip.org> & <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com>

Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective: <https://batjc.wordpress.com/>

For additional resources, including this episode's ASL video:
<https://www.weriseproduction.com/therealwork>

zAnda of DiaspoRADiCAL: @diaspo.radical on Instagram &
<https://soundcloud.com/diasporadical>

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