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The Show Must (Not) Go On: Student Second Responders on Days After

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Abstract

In the wake of collective trauma and tragedy, artists may be called upon as “second responders” to facilitate healing and grief for a community. In this article, we explain the artists-as-second-responders discourse, including the messaging of artists feeling useful, art as diversion, and art as healing. Then, using an example of student-artists compelled to make sure “the show must go on” at Michigan State University in the days after a mass school shooting, we critique the second-responder discourse by arguing that such messaging may cause more harm to artists and facilitate problematic escapism. We also challenge the “call to serve” and offer recommendations for how, on days after, institutions can respond in more trauma-informed and supportive ways. In doing so, we argue that, in fact, the show must not always go on.

Introduction

It hadn't even been 48 hours and the students had already been "called into action." They were to report to rehearsal, to the costume shop, to the memorial event to sing alongside the head football coach. Some were not even on campus anymore, dispersed as they were in the aftermath of yet another mass school shooting, this time at their campus, their home. They walked across campus, past police tape and drying flowers, past signs reading "Spartan Strong" and "We love you, MSU" left by community members, into their assumed duty as "second responders." After all, the show must go on. This messaging came from their instructors and directors, as well as from professional artists featured in a video they received from Broadway casts and writers. From a playwright, they were reminded, "In moments like this, we need our artists to be second responders." From an actor: "Be sure to tell good stories." But how? How could they "tell good stories" when they were living such an awful story? Just days earlier, on February 13, 2022, eight of their classmates were shot while in class. Three died, and five were hospitalized in critical condition. An hours-long search for the gunman meant students had been terrifyingly blockaded in their dorm rooms, classrooms, bathrooms, performing spaces, and dining halls. The sounds of helicopters swirled overhead for hours. How, amidst all of this trauma, could they tell any stories at all?

For some students, it was likely not even the first time they had been charged with being a second responder, growing up as they had in "generation lockdown" (March for Our Lives, 2023) amidst an onslaught of traumas and tragedies. Indeed, the campus had just returned to so-called "normal" operations after the crisis phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the perspective of scholars who research trauma and teaching, we couldn't help but wonder about the potential harm facing students as they wrestled with the "second responder" ideology in the days after the mass shooting at Michigan State University. We, too, wrestled with it, as MSU faculty. Here, then, we explore the discourse of second responders, offering explanations for why it is taken up and critiques about how it is used in the wake of trauma and tragedy. In doing so, we argue that, in fact, the show must *not* always go on.

Days After

A key component of knowing when and how, if at all, to respond in the wake of traumatic current events is an understanding of how people experience these critical moments. Dunn (2022) takes up this idea in a theory of Days After Pedagogy (DAP), where she argues that educators must find ways to respond to students' needs and emotions in humanizing, flexible, and justice-oriented ways. While this work primarily focuses on K-12 classroom and school contexts, the central arguments remain the same for higher education broadly and for artists specifically. Equity-focused DAP considers the identities of students and their teachers and

refuses the politics of silence and neutrality, recognizing that ignoring a trauma often does more harm than good. However, equally important is ensuring that educators themselves are supported in the wake of tragedy and do not unnecessarily experience the secondary trauma that often comes with being in a caregiving profession in times of crisis.

A theory of days after pedagogy is relevant to our argument here about artists because we see art as a pedagogical endeavor. Art can teach us about others and ourselves, as the best critical pedagogy does (Darder, 2017). Art can inspire dialogues and disagreements, discussions and debates, as successful educators also do (Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017). While previous work has illuminated the stressors and challenges that educators face on days after, here we argue that there are similarly complex challenges that artists face on days after.

Defining Second Responder

To understand the discourse of second responders necessitates that we also define first responders. In common parlance, a first responder is someone who is trained to provide help during an emergency incident. Medical personnel, law enforcement, and firefighters are often the groups most people think of as first responders. In the United States, federal agencies also define first responder as those working in emergency management; public works; and federal, state, and local government and non-governmental agencies. Overall, a first responder is someone who cares for others' physical safety and security.

In contrast, second responders deal with the affective. They are those who support people's emotional, mental, and interpersonal well-being or healing in the wake of an emergency or tragedy. Many social service professionals, such as social workers and counselors, are seen as second responders. Second responders may connect people with resources like housing, food, or supplies, or they may share their expertise through therapy or support groups. Second responders may engage in short-term or long-term interventions with the goal of supporting affected peoples to rebuild their lives or heal from a traumatic event. There is tremendous emotional labor involved in being a second responder. The only academic literature that explores second responders is in the field of criminal justice and medicine. For example, there are several pieces about police and nurses as second responders to mental health crises or incidents of domestic violence.

Educators, too, may be called on as second responders, though many educators challenge this discourse by noting that "we're not trained as therapists." This is an important distinction regarding Days After Pedagogy. A holistic approach to supporting students on days after demands that both educators and therapists be available, not that teachers be the sole arbiters of support and care amidst trauma. DAP requires educators to acknowledge that life is

happening outside the classroom in ways that surely impact what happens inside the classroom, not that they be counselors.

Similarly, artists have also been called second responders. Especially during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, many turned to artists for inspiration, healing, and joy. For example, Californians for the Arts, a non-profit organization devoted to improving access to the arts, developed a campaign called #ArtistsR2ndResponders. They wrote that “first responders save lives; second responders help put people’s lives back together. Artists are essential workers in our society and our economy, helping us recover, reflect, and rebuild” (Californians for the Arts, 2020). Arguing that “artists and arts organizations are part of the solution during the COVID-19 pandemic,” they recalled the many ways that virtual performances, museum archives, and online community gatherings served as an “outpouring of human spirit, feeding academic intellectual, and creative appetites... Art has been one of our most vital sanity tools during this crisis.”

Explaining the Second Responder Discourse

Of course, a pandemic is far from the only crisis to which artists are called to respond. In this section, we explain in more detail several elements of the second responder discourse in the arts: (1) the way that being second responders allows artists to feel “useful”; (2) the fact that artists can provide diversion, discharge, and solace; and (3) the perception of the arts as healing.

Feeling “Useful”

In the face of a devastating event, there is a human tendency to want to do something helpful or supportive to those people experiencing distress. Artists and musicians, too, experience a drive to be of use. In some ways, being of use allows people to respond to the traumatic event rather than absorbing and processing the trauma. Following 9/11, firefighters, for example, were thrust into emergency response. Later, however, 15.5% of firefighters surveyed reported PTSD symptoms; 44.5% of people who exhibited probable PTSD occurred in delayed onset (Berninger et al., 2010). In times of extreme distress, pausing to reflect may provoke the full weight of the trauma. Moving to action instead may allow people to function under extreme stress for longer. The delayed onset of PTSD symptoms among firefighters following 9/11 (Berninger et al., 2010) points to what might occur several years after a traumatic event, while also highlighting the ability of these professionals to respond to crisis in the moment.

After the shooting at MSU, the greater East Lansing and Lansing community leapt into action to support all members of the MSU community through healing events, gatherings, and resources. The drive to feel useful in the wake of tragedy was apparent as resources became

widely available to all. At many of the events, however, student and faculty musicians and theatre artists were called to serve to facilitate healing. As “second responders,” these musicians and artists did not receive resources, but were rather compelled to provide them for others.

As musicians and theatre people, we know that we are not first responders. Music and theatre are perpetually subject to cuts, particularly in education contexts. As such, musicians and theatre artists have become used to being positioned as unimportant. The livelihood of arts programs remains subject to budget approvals, and there is a long history in music education, in particular, of advocacy arguments that position music education as essential in the wake of budget cuts.¹ Traumatic events, then, create an opportunity for musicians and artists to prove the value of our content area. After years of being cast by policymakers as “fringe” or “unimportant,” musicians and artists want to feel useful, so we position ourselves as important to the healing process. Doing so not only allows us to feel useful in the wake of a tragedy, but also may contribute to arguments for the continued funding of the arts, both in and beyond education contexts. Musicians and artists as second responders may then not only experience the pressure to serve the public, sometimes in spite of our own wellbeing, but also do so to defend the value of our artistic and musical practice in a climate of budget precarity. When audiences then respond positively to our efforts, such a response feeds our feelings of usefulness as artists and musicians and affirms our value after years of being told we are not essential. Positioning ourselves as second responders then not only communicates that musicians and artists are useful, but also allows us to claim that the arts themselves are useful and essential.

Art as Diversion, Discharge, and Solace

In 2012, Saarikallio (2012) developed and validated a scale to describe the role of music in mood regulation. In other words, she considers what people seek when they reach for music in support of their mood. A key subscale she identified, she described as “diversion”—the “forgetting [of] unwanted thoughts and feelings with the help of pleasant music” (p. 98). She also observed that people gravitated toward music for “discharge”—the “release of negative emotions through music that expresses these emotions” (p. 98)—and “solace.” Solace involved “searching for comfort, acceptance, and understanding when feeling sad and troubled” (p. 98). Music and other arts may then offer an opportunity for diversion (Lonsdale

¹ The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) and the Coalition for Music Education in Canada often position music as crucial to a “well-rounded education.” See <https://nafme.org> and <https://coalitioncanada.ca/en/> respectively to see how these organizations position and advocate for music education.

& North, 2011; Saarikallio, 2012) and allow listeners to release and express stress and trauma, take comfort from their distress, and promote wellbeing (Saarikallio, 2012; Silverman, 2021). We argue that following traumatic events, people may reach for the arts to support three of the facets Saarikallio (2012) identifies: diversion, discharge, and solace. The arts, and Saarikallio speaks of music specifically, may allow people who have experienced trauma to distract themselves from their traumatic experiences, to discharge negative emotions and process traumatic stress, and also potentially find comfort in their encounters. The desire people have for diversion, discharge, and solace makes the push for artists as second responders seductive. If artists can offer escape and comfort following a traumatic event, decision-makers often look to the artists to offer what they see as a vital service. The cost to artists, however, is rarely considered in thrusting them into a difficult situation to serve the larger population.

Art as Healing?

Trauma scholars and scholars who grapple with “difficult knowledge”—knowledge that is challenging that often involves significant trauma—often position the arts as healing (Britzman, 1998; Felman, 1995; Felman & Laub, 1992; Schwab, 2010; van der Kolk, 2014). Schwab (2010) points to the potential of the arts to become “transformational objects.” She argues that they offer a vehicle of expression for difficult knowledge that can then become accessible to others. Encountering trauma through music or theatre then becomes a way to engage with a traumatic event through a mediated form. These trauma scholars all point to the artists as a way to process and work through traumatic events, both past and present (Britzman, 1998; Felman, 1995; Felman & Laub, 1992; Schwab, 2010; van der Kolk, 2014). Discourse about the arts then sometimes revolves around its healing properties. Britzman (1998), for example, points to engagement with literature as a way of working through traumatic pasts. In his famous book on healing trauma, van der Kolk (2014) concludes his work with a discussion of the potential of choral singing. Hill (2009) fosters a classroom community with the purpose of “wounded healing” at the center. Youth work with Hill and their teacher about their suffering in and through engaging with hip-hop by listening. Hip-hop provided a medium to process “scars of suffering” (p. 249) for both the youth and for Hill himself.

Trauma scholars in music education, however, critique and challenge the discourse of healing embedded in music education praxis. In the introduction to an edited volume on trauma and resilience in music education, Bradley and Hess (2022) strongly caution against this discourse:

Another concern guiding the writing of this volume, however, is the discourse of “healing” as applied to music. While we firmly believe that music, and by extension music education, may be useful as a way to help individuals and even cultures

(Pilzer, 2012) deal with and process traumatic responses and may sometimes prompt the recovery of traumatic memories (Gabrielsson, 2011), music alone cannot “heal” trauma. It is a tool for releasing emotions, calming those experiencing traumatic stress, and may provide clues to the recovery of traumatic memory. Music class and musical activities may also be an important way to break from strictly intellectual endeavors and re-inhabit one’s body. Reconnecting with the body is an important consideration for those experiencing dissociation (Levine & Frederick, 1997; van der Kolk, 2014). (p. 11)

Music may then support the *processing* of trauma, but in and of itself, does not “heal” and positioning it in this way is misleading at best, and harmful and detrimental at worst. Murakami (2021), in fact, points to all the ways that music (therapy) can cause harm through the various points of interaction and curriculum in music therapy contexts. She identifies six potential sources of harm in music therapy: 1) the music presented, 2) the music therapist, 3) the therapeutic application of music, 4) the therapeutic relationship, 5) client-specific music associations, and 6) ecological factors. The possible harms she identifies include both physical and psychological. While Murakami’s work focuses on music therapy, harm may occur at similar sites in music education. The music presented, if it triggers past trauma or contains traumatic content, may cause harm. Teachers who are not trauma-informed (and even teachers who are trauma-informed) may unintentionally provoke a trauma trigger. The use of music in different ways in the classroom may also reinvigorate past trauma, through exposure to music that emerges from trauma or oppression or is reminiscent of a traumatic event a student has experienced. Hess (2019), too, cautions that a focus on the resilience potential in music-making serves to distract from a focus on oppressive systems that create trauma. Music, then, is far from an unequivocal and uncritical *good*.

Trauma and trauma-informed pedagogy have recently received attention in the literature in music education, perhaps most significantly in Bradley and Hess (2022) and Griffin and Niknafs (2023). These volumes reveal the complexities of trauma. In music education literature such as these volumes, music is often the *backdrop* for experiences of trauma. For example, Griffin (2023), Sears (2022), and Emmanuel (2022) engage with the challenges of grief in the context of music education. At other times, however, music provides a way to engage trauma directly, as shown in Perkins’ (2022) chapter that explored a choir’s engagement with Joel Thompson’s “Seven Last Words of the Unarmed”—a piece that set to music the last words of seven Black men who were racially targeted and murdered by police or other “authority figures.” At other times, music can be a site to be involved while processing trauma that may both support and exacerbate residual trauma (see for example Bradley, 2020; Bradley, 2022). Music and other arts are not, however, unto themselves a means to provoke healing. *The Oxford Handbook of Care in Music Education* (Hendricks,

2023) is perhaps the most significant contribution to date in music education on the value of care and compassion in music education relationships and contexts. This handbook indicates that music education—and likely, by extension, arts education—can be a source of care and compassion. This relational work certainly moves toward trauma-informed music education such as the Bradley and Hess (2022) and Griffin and Niknafs (2023) edited volumes. Hibbard (2022), for example, also considers the relational element specifically in the context of trauma-informed music education, including the importance of presence. While care and compassion may create the conditions through which processing trauma may occur, this possibility is not innate to music itself. Recognizing the music and other arts can be both a site of help and harm in relation to trauma and wellbeing becomes important to acknowledging the ambiguity involved in any kind of healing discourse about the arts.

Collegiate Student-Artists as Second Responders: Challenging the Discourse

In the days after the campus shooting at MSU, artists were called upon in multiple ways. We want to distinguish between educational and professional contexts. In a professional theatre troupe, performers and crew would be expected to perform across the full range of circumstances. In education, however, the duty of educators and the institution is to student wellbeing. Expecting music and theatre students to act as professionals when they are not may ultimately do them a disservice. We offer two brief examples here, described anonymously, to illustrate what happens when the discourse of second responders comes to college.

Fine arts faculty members first told one group of performing artists that they must perform at an on-campus vigil. Though some students did not want to perform, and some were afraid to be on campus, they felt pressured to attend because their faculty were also those responsible for directing their program and grading them in classes. Similarly, arts staff members were also required to be at the event to provide sound and lighting. Another group of student-artists were told that they must continue rehearsing for a stage performance that was scheduled for the week after the shooting. The messaging in both of these cases was that “the show must go on” and that the campus community needed the student-artists to provide healing in a moment of crisis. In both cases, arts staff felt equally unable to express their true feelings or push back against this discourse. They wanted to advocate for students and for themselves but did not feel empowered to do so in the face of administrative pressure to perform. We share these examples not to indict the faculty members who were in charge of the performances, as they too may have been engaged in power struggles with higher-level administrators who were pushing them to go on as scheduled or respond immediately to an emergency. However, regardless of where the pressure came from, it was felt by those with the least power to resist: students and staff.

Even months after the shooting, the second responder discourse still pervaded the university.

In her remarks at the first Board of Trustees meeting since the shooting, interim university president Teresa Woodruff, stated the following:

This morning we meet in public session for the first time since the violence that gripped our campus community on Feb. 13.... Our university community responded very quickly to begin the healing and recovery from our collective trauma... The arts, too, have stepped into the breach to facilitate healing among our campus community. The Wharton Center [an on-campus performing arts venue] offered free tickets to students for several performances and programs, and the lovely paper butterfly exhibit installed last month at the International Center also became a place for healing.

While this commentary is brief, the emphasis on “healing”—mentioned three times in quick succession—reinforces the second responder discourse. Further, the military phrase of “into the breach” evokes the violence of the shooting and compares campus artists to those fighting a war. We discuss this militarized metaphor in more detail below.

Though we had heard the discourse of educators- and artists-as-second responders prior to the campus shooting at MSU, the danger of it became increasingly clear as we witnessed our own students and colleagues thrust into this role that they were neither ready for nor desired. Below, we engage with the literature on trauma to think through the issues with obliging artists to serve as second responders following a traumatic event.

At the beginning of his famous book *Waking the Tiger, Healing Trauma*, Levine recounts the way that wild animals will literally shake following an encounter with and escape from a predator (Levine & Frederick, 1997). This shaking, something bodies naturally do to release trauma, is essential to trauma not taking root in the body. Traumatic events often provoke nervous system responses, often categorized as the four “F’s”—fight, flight, freeze, and fawn (Walker, 2014). Walker explains:

A fight response is triggered when a person suddenly responds aggressively to something threatening. A flight response is triggered when a person responds to a perceived threat by fleeing, or symbolically, by launching into hyperactivity. A freeze response is triggered when a person, realizing resistance is futile, gives up, numbs out into dissociation and/or collapses as if accepting the inevitability of being hurt. A fawn response is triggered when a person responds to threat by trying to be pleasing or helpful in order to appease and forestall an attacker. (p. 13)

These responses occur instinctively when a threat unfolds. To limit and suppress these responses could lead to PTSD, as noted in the study of firefighters post-9/11 (Berninger et al.,

2010). Caruth (1993) describes PTSD as “an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations, flashbacks and other intrusive phenomena” (p. 24). When individuals do not have the opportunity to respond to trauma as it occurs, the likelihood of developing PTSD increases (Levine & Frederick, 1997).

Traumatic Cost to Artists

Music and drama students, staff, and faculty at MSU who were charged with facilitating healing for the greater community experienced the mass shooting alongside their peers and colleagues. We argue that being thrust into service in this way takes a heavy toll on artists, especially those who have also experienced the traumatic event. Moving immediately into action and/or service can act to suppress the nervous system response. The vigil and play mentioned above required action for music and theatre students, staff, and faculty the week of the mass shooting. While many MSU students went to be with family in their childhood homes during the week of canceled classes, student-artists had to stay on campus. Similarly, nearly all MSU staff and faculty worked from home that week, while those connected to the arts suddenly became “essential workers” who had to report to a campus still littered with police tape and memorial displays. Further, many of the artists had been in lockdown for hours in spaces they had once considered safe and joyful—stages, concert halls, and practice rooms among them—and were forced to return to these spaces, potentially before they were ready.

In the case of the vigil, administrators intended to provide a space for the community to process, and artists, specifically musicians, were asked to facilitate this space for the larger campus community. Upon talking to participants, however, some were uncomfortable with public mourning and preferred a more private context to grieve for the losses and trauma that the campus community experienced. People engage with grief differently, and while the larger community had a choice whether or not to attend the vigil and participate in public mourning, the musicians and staff shoulder-tapped to provide this opportunity for others were not presented with a choice to mourn privately. Traumatic events can provoke acute nervous system responses. Failing to offer opportunities to all members of the campus community to take care of themselves in ways that felt congruent with personal experiences of grief and trauma involves, at best, a misrecognition of how experiences of trauma are felt and processed by different individuals. Telling young adults that they are to put aside their own feelings and trauma to offer a public service also fails to understand the dangers of such suppression to the nervous system and to the community.

While other students on campus were provided with resources, music and theatre people

became part of the resources provided to others. Positioning artists as second responders fails to acknowledge that they, too, have experienced a traumatic event that requires attention to self. Moreover, other second responders, such as social workers, have chosen to serve in times of trauma. Music and theatre students, in most cases, did not choose to “step into the breach” as interim president Theresa Woodruff put it. Consent was thus absent.

Problematizing Escapism

We also observe the ways in which the arts were positioned as a mechanism for escapism. Sometimes the purpose of the arts is to help people process trauma. The vigil scheduled the week of the mass shooting provides an example of an artistic experience intended to help the community process. At other times, however, the purpose of the arts is distraction and escapism. The play at MSU was previously scheduled. School leaders and Broadway stars reminded theatre students that the “show must go on.” The play was unrelated to the tragic event and thus provided a temporary respite to the audiences from the trauma of the mass shooting. The play thus constituted what Saarikallio (2012) described (in the context of music for mood regulation) as “diversion”—distraction from unwanted thoughts and feelings (p. 98). Free tickets to another diversion were offered by the Wharton Center, an on-campus performing arts venue that hosts touring professional productions, as noted in the interim university president’s remarks. President Woodruff specifically mentioned these performances as a method to “facilitate healing among our campus community,” seemingly amplifying the importance of escapism after the shooting. By mentioning the Wharton Center theatre but not the *people* at the theatre who make “the show go on,” her comments ignore the individual performers, event staff, and related artists who took on additional labor. Overall, this disembodied discourse refuses to acknowledge the humanity of the people involved. While diversion, then, can be important and escapism can serve a purpose at times, it is ultimately avoidant and may serve to distract or suppress important nervous system responses for both artists and audiences.

Challenging the “Call to Serve”

Ultimately, we challenge the “call to serve” thrust upon artists in times of trauma, distress, and tragedy. The arts are not typically construed as a “helping profession,” a title typically reserved for educators, nurses, social workers, etc. In the context of these helping professions, compensation is never congruent with the expectations of the jobs and justifications for this lack of compensation often cite that these people were “called” into service. The expectation then is that serving in this capacity, as a professional, is supposed to be personally satisfying rather than fairly compensated. The lack of compensation is thus justified because people do these professions “for the love of it.” While the arts do not typically fall under this category of professions, in moments after tragedies, artists are often called to serve. In the case of MSU,

theatre and music students were not compensated for “stepping into the breach” because the expectation of service became part of their degree programs, supervised by their major faculty.

The language of “stepping into the breach” as part of this call to service should also be interrogated. Woodruff’s comments connote militarization, likening student-artists to military fighters. In fact, the phrase originates in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*: “Once more unto the breach, dear friends.” Henry V’s charge is designed to convince soldiers to step into a gap in a wall and put themselves in danger to protect their comrades. In that scenario, the soldiers were emergency responders who had been trained and accepted the responsibility of “stepping into the breach.” However, when we think about the student-artists at MSU, we recognize that they were *not* trained as emergency responders, nor did they sign up to be emergency responders. Suddenly, they were told they had a responsibility to “step into the breach,” though nothing had prepared them for that. Indeed, they likely needed *other* responders to step into the breach for them, rather than being expected to do so for the community’s benefit and healing.

We believe that resisting the call to service is crucial for the emotional wellbeing of artists. Because the students involved in this situation had little power to resist their call to service, this resistance would require that leaders do not compel artists to respond for the “good of community” but rather do without and allow time for the entire community to heal. Indeed, there will always be people who will volunteer for that role, but doing so requires resources. If an artist *chooses* to serve in this capacity, they must also be supported to process their own trauma in ways that might allow them to serve others. Compelling people to serve is inappropriate and dangerous in the wake of a tragedy.

As we noted above, a large group of Broadway artists made a video in support of the young artists at MSU following the shooting. Perusing the YouTube comments reveals an unequivocally positive response to this contribution. We argue that perhaps the positive response from student-artists and community members is rooted in the belief that it is entirely appropriate for artists to be thrust into service to the community. That obligation is clearly present in public discourse and embedded in artist education programs. Indeed, music and theatre students are enculturated into this discourse, as their teachers emphasize the importance of “stepping into the breach.” Instead, young artists—and artists in general—must be offered a “right of refusal” when the question of providing a public service occurs. This right of refusal becomes even more crucial in educational contexts where agency is limited. Much of the discourse following the MSU shooting emphasized the importance of self-care, but the emphasis on self-care did not extend to artists. We argue, however, that extending the possibility for refusal and deep care for the self must also extend to artists.

Recommendations

Having experienced firsthand the shooting and the aftermath of the shooting at MSU, we have a number of recommendations for institutions that experience such an event in the future. Mass shootings are terrifyingly common in the United States (Gun Violence Archive, n.d.). In 2023, as of November 28, there have been 619 mass shootings according to the Gun Violence Archive. Fifty of those occurred in K-12 schools and 27 at universities as of November 17, 2023 (Leeds, 2023). In this climate, institutions must be able to respond in a way that causes the least amount of harm amidst an already traumatized population.

First, we call for some level of trauma-informed education for all people in positions of power in K-12 schools and universities. People making decisions in the aftermath of a traumatic event require a comprehensive understanding of the nervous system to allow them to recognize the full range of traumatic responses among the entire populations: students, staff, and teachers/faculty. Understanding traumatic responses in the nervous system enables administrators and other people in positions of power to empower teachers and faculty to make space for trauma responses for themselves and among their students and subsequently offer options related to participation for students, staff, and faculty. Recognizing that fight, flight, freeze, and fawn all occur in response to trauma and vary widely in their specific manifestations from person to person (Walker, 2014) will help administrators make decisions that allow for the people under their care to make their own decisions.

Crucially, trauma-informed praxis centers choice. Trauma-informed principles typically include choice among principles of safety, trust, collaboration, and empowerment (Levenson, 2017; SAMHSA, 2014). People who have experienced trauma may not have had the autonomy to make decisions in their best interests. In the case of a mass shooting, choice and agency completely disappear. Employing trauma-informed principles in education contexts then may embolden members of the community to make decisions in their own best interests and increase their sense of autonomy (Levenson, 2017). SAMHSA (2014) links choice, as a core principle of trauma-informed praxis, to empowerment and voice. Doing so honors that asserting one's voice by making choices for oneself will result in empowerment. Considering the compelled role of artists as second responders with the trauma-informed principle of choice in mind requires that student-artists, staff, and faculty artists have the autonomy to choose whether or not they want to participate in an "artists as second responders" role following traumatic events.

To extend this principle of choice, administrators and others in positions of power must extend a right of refusal to artists. Because traumatic events devastate a sense of agency, artists and their facilitators must be able to refuse to participate if refusing is in their own best interests. Education about trauma responses and the nervous system across all levels of the

institution will help artists honor the ways that they process trauma and consider whether they need to withdraw from a performance to take care of their own nervous system. Implementing a right of refusal requires an environment of trust and respect, wherein it is both appropriate and acceptable to take care of one's needs without judgment.

Finally, those responsible for leading community responses to traumatic events might consider the value of offering music and theatre as ways for people to modulate in and out of trauma responses. As we noted above, music and theatre can provide some escapism. While we have critiqued this discourse, the American Psychiatric Association asserts that some amount of exposure to traumatic stimuli may help to heal post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While this directive is for the therapeutic context, the ability to touch the trauma and modulate out of it may prove important for resolving the re-experiencing of trauma for individuals. While therapeutic settings are preferable for any such exposure, exposure that occurs following a community traumatic event can be carefully handled by educators and institutions if we are attuned to the possibility. In the case of the arts, engagement with the arts may provide a meaningful break from trauma and a structured way to go back and forth from traumatic content to something else entirely. While we have argued that the music as escapism discourse is not particularly helpful, modulating back and forth does not constitute escapism, but rather titrated engagement with difficult material. The arts can provide a respite to artists, as well, and providing artists the autonomy to process traumatic experiences through modulating in and out of the trauma, may facilitate processing. Crucially, choice and autonomy among those people who have experienced the traumatic event dictate whether such a strategy will be useful to them personally.

Conclusion

If we consider art as a form of pedagogy, then Days After Pedagogy is equally as relevant for artists as it is for educators. This means that responding to moments of trauma and tragedy *is* deeply important, but not at the expense of the responders. Assuming that student-artists (and educators, for that matter) have been prepared and have accepted their role as second responders ignores the trauma that they may also be experiencing and neglects their healing in favor of the collective healing of a broader community. As was the case for the student-artists in the wake of the tragic shooting at MSU, charging artists with being second responders furthers a reliance on reactive and rhetorical administrative responses rather than systemic change and support. On days after, no one should be charged with “stepping into the breach” without their consent or without proper preparation and support. We outlined several suggestions for this type of preparation and support in the Recommendations section above. As Dunn (2022) explains about days after, we know that more days after will come in the future. We don't know what the next tragedy will be or when it will happen—be it a school shooting or another collective trauma—but we know that something will happen. And when it

does, we hope that student-artists and community artists will be supported in realizing that the show must not always go on.

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