August Dialogue:
The Zimmerman Trial and the Virtuous Victim Narrative of White Women

-Distinguishing between actual victimization and victimization that serves cultural/social purposes

-One’s felt need for protection often involves de-humanizing the other

-“Monsterizing”; throughout our history, the “other” has always been turned into a monster (i.e. Native Americans talked about in Europe, their first descriptions were de-humanizing – “savages,” “three arms,” etc.; situations of war and the enemy being otherized)

What is the victimization of white women? What does it depend on?
-Masculinity defined by ability to protect (females)
-“White women are most important and most fragile” narrative
-Invisibilization of other bodies through victimization of white women
-Property value
-Women as pillars of the home
-Splitting who we are into different roles
-Infantilization
-Hysteria- be quiet, don’t shake things up at all, b/c if you do we’ll put you in an institution
-White women as property of white men; protecting women as you would protect property
-Racialized fear of men; white men operate within this larger context
-Within dynamic of demonizing African American men, white men were raping African American women with impunity

What purposes does this narrative serve?
-Hiding the fact that white men are the ones committing the most violence against women (this is completely hidden in the narrative)
-Used for justification in lynching of African American men

What is the biology of the narrative? (i.e. you are not physically strong enough to protect yourself against another man; you need a man to survive; you need to be protected b/c you cannot protect yourself totally)

Sexuality of white women and women of color defined through opposite poles; pure, virtuous vs. exotic, exploited

Sub-themes
-Seclusion of white women
-Idea of women coming to protect each other en masse; “hoards of angry women & vigilante justice”
- Fighting cases of women protecting themselves who then end up being punished/imprisoned
- Strength in numbers → can we use this to repair the world instead of for intimidation?
- This image/idea can also be terrifying for some/not liberatory
- Another idea of this would be having the whole community holding the person accountable to unacceptable behavior

How white men are socialized to inhabit the dual role to protect the “virtue” and “innocence” of their white lady, and commit abuses towards her simultaneously; he owns the virtue

Homophobia, women, weakness “Homophobia is the fear you will be treated the way you treat women”

When I’m feeling like I’m a victim bc I’m triggered based on past real experiences, I’ll project that this person is the aggressor and I’m the victim, I then justify because I’m the victim, I can attack him; I don’t have to take responsibility for being the aggressor

The victim narrative can distort the ways that we take responsibility, wield power, and hold ourselves accountable

Wielding power and being violent; where is the distinction?

Channeling our fear and our anger in creative ways, being careful about shame and humiliation; the idea of collective action is super important and can be scary because it’s risky and we’re taught not to do it at all

- What are the resources that the person (who committed an abuse or crime) needs? Seeing how people have been fucked over by the system to have been situated in a place to perpetrate violence against another human

- Raising white boys into this culture; how can we effect change at that level?

The liberatory path
- action (after crime is perpetrated how do we act in that space)
- day to day life, previous to the potential victimization, how to keep this narrative out of our heads; how do I not be a person walking down the street and look behind me with my socialized mind thinking “a man of color” or “a white man” and I’m in fear
- how do we unlearn this, given the real need to protect oneself???

Real fear vs. created/socialized fear and their narratives are intertwined in our bodies!!!!
Sexual harassment is so easy to become normalized; anger is a step out of the normalization of animal noises/things said to you on the street

Longing for male allyship; acknowledgement of awareness of sexism

Questlove’s piece “Trayvon Martin and I Ain’t Shit” (powerful piece, dehumanization of black men, personal stories)

How can we be keeping racism as the core focus that doesn’t need to lessen the realities of sexism?

Zimmerman trial
  - restorative justice
  - collective change in consciousness around re-humanizing
  - need to humanize this body that’s been dehumanized for so long
    - What does collective re-humanization look like, of ourselves and of other people?

- There will always be unlearning of socialized fear vs. legitimate risk/fear

- Acknowledgement on street; nod back can be powerful

- There’s something about the ways in which “good anti-oppression people,” the ways we’ve learned to think about oppressor and oppressed, the powerful and the victim, that feels at stake here. Even though we hold the dichotomies, there’s something that is still too simplistic about it that feels like it’s at stake in this conversation. To get to the place of restorative justice and true humanization, there’s something about this entire idea that needs to get thrown out, maybe.

Who is oppressor and oppressed can flip-flop in our heads; can we, instead of responding to one unhealthy pattern with another unhealthy one, can we throw it out and develop positive counter narratives?

Re-humanization includes the intellectual, structural piece, as well as the real, tangible, physical human piece

Liberatory action can be as simple as acknowledgement; “good evening”

Both intra-personal and interpersonal parts of liberation

Liberation – being free of the stories

Narrative around danger- “stranger danger”; this is core in the whole mythology of victim narrative; can stranger be ally instead of potential aggressor? (Someone we know well is just as likely to be an aggressor)
More spacious interactions; there are other ways we can be interacting; I am assuming you want to be different than you’re being; this could be joyful, interesting

-This person shouldn’t be acting this way vs. this is what’s happening, how can I act in this situation?

-What if every day we practiced thinking that this whole victim narrative is untrue? Thinking that I am totally powerful, I am not a victim of anyone, nobody is a victim of me? How would this change my experience in the world?

-Getting in touch with physical feelings of triggers can be a mechanism to give a second to think before reacting, escalating, jumping to disserving narratives

-Power in knowing your neighbors, knowing folks around you, bridges of connection; this reinforces and reinforced by the lonely culture we live in → SURJ has awesome poster that says “I don’t watch my neighbors, I see them”

-Conscious mind and unconscious mind – we don’t always know everything that is going on that drives us to do what we do, beliefs we are unaware we have about who we are, layers of microaggressions

Implicit bias test

-Relationship between question of legitimate risk that we want to be cognizant of, and NYPD appealing stop and frisk overturning
  -Starting w/ assumption that someone we don’t know is a potential risk

-Messages to black men to be “less killable” (i.e. walk a certain speed, take hands out of pockets), messages to women to be “less rape-able” (i.e. don’t get in cars with people, don’t dress a certain way) → where are the white allies, where are the male allies?

-Blurb for stop and frisk parody → 99% of stop and frisks on Wall St., 1% elsewhere

-We live in a culture that is based on violence against POC; how to help white children become aware of this as well

-Looking at economic ties to invisibilization of violence against POC (need for labor)

-What is monstrous in capitalism? What is monstrous in white supremacy? What is monstrous in the system?
-Writing a new version of the list for male allies that includes a whole class and race analysis about “If you want to be an ally towards women, you have to work towards racial justice”
i.e. To be a male ally, fight for racial justice, de-stabilize capitalism, fight your own need to protect, learn how to cry, re-establish connection with your emotional parts

What narratives do we want to write in place of this narrative? What are the memes? What do we want to create?

What are ways that language speaks us? How not to demonize the individual; recognizing how supremacy talks through us; i.e. “heterosexism has really got you right now, etc. “

-iNot Racist app; add for fake app (on youtube)

-ill doctrine, Jay Smooth – how to tell people they sound racist; TED talk “Dental hygiene”

COUNTER NARRATIVE

Stranger as ally
Transforming the relationship of polarization
Seeing, not watching
Gender not given such weight/importance
Reuniting the parts; “I'm a monster too!! What parts of myself am I looking at right now?”
Experimenting with living in the world as powerful, unearthing unconscious
Be mindful
Notice how your body is reactive
Know each other- say good evening
(Take implicit bias test)

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FAIRYTALES. Rewriting all the big hits.

Celebration of witches.

Fall of the woman off the pedestal into becoming the monster herself.

Halloween intervention stickers

How to dismantle white supremacy requires us looking at what's holding it up; which one of those can we take hold of and take down to weaken the whole structure? As people who have been socialized as white females this is one of the pillars that we have the most access to and power in using our bodysuits in action and conversation
On our cardboard poster:

Subtext
You = nation
You = our wombs
You = property or wealth
White women = most important, most fragile
You = home

Split who we are into artificial roles, division of labor

“My masculinity is defined by my ability to protect you”

YOU NEED PROTECTION; you are not physically strong enough to fight off another man; protect you from you (who is at risk of becoming hysterical)

What purpose does it serve?
Invisibilizes labor
Hides the violence of white men
Hides violence experienced by POC
Maintains subservient and docile position of women