

# {HOLDING} {SPACE}

## REPAIRING HARM

### Transcript

#### Joan Collier

Welcome, and thank you for listening to Holding Space, a podcast where we make room for conversation about the nuance and complexity of all things equity, inclusion, diversity, access, and justice. I'm your host, Dr. Joan Collier, assistant vice president for equity and inclusion in University Equity and Inclusion here at Rutgers University. In this episode, we'll be revisiting a conversation about repairing harm that was part of the Education as Disruption educational series from fall 2021. I was joined by Rebecca Vazquez, director of violence prevention and victim assistance at Rutgers–New Brunswick, Kaylin Padovano who at the time served as staff and faculty training coordinator in the Center for Research on Ending Violence in the School of Social Work in New Brunswick, and Avery Arrington, who at the time was assistant director of student conduct and a restorative justice practitioner. We explored interpersonal harm and discussed restorative justice as a practice and process to rebuild community after harm has occurred. Let's listen in!

So y'all, we're here to have a conversation about repairing harm. Often, when you're talking about bias or just general inclusion building, there's you know, conversations about things that are going wrong, right? What happened bad? And it's not as often that we have a more public conversation about how we repair that harm and what that can look like, what it has looked like at the institutional level and at the interpersonal level. So we want to do some of that here today. And so we're going to jump right on in. Oh, this is so much fun. So some folks might be wondering why in the world we're talking about repair in an education as bias sort of setting. And so what I'll ask is that can we talk about what practices and behaviors

contribute to an inclusive campus environment for faculty, staff, and students. And let's - let's just go. Kaylin, [I'm] kicking it over to you.

### **Kaylin Padovano**

Thank you, yeah, so I'm going to talk a little bit about what kind of practices and behaviors as Joan said, that I'm utilizing. As Joan mentioned, I do bystander intervention trainings with faculty and staff around issues of interpersonal violence and harassment here on campus. And historically, faculty and staff, quite frankly, have kind of had the attitude that they're not part of the problem. So there has been amazing trainings and resources for students, but there hasn't necessarily been as many resources for faculty and staff. I'd like to emphasize, too, is when I first came into this position, a lot of folks were telling me that you have to get all the bad actors in a room, all the people who cause harm, and just go give trainings to them and root them out. But the fact is that we all exist on a continuum and we all may have caused harm at one point or another, and we may be the targets of that harm, so that's a lot of what I talk about in my trainings, and I talk about having a more proactive approach to this rather than reactive. So I think something else we tend to do as a practice is to just react to incidents after they happen. But we need to be creating a climate and a culture where these behaviors aren't the kind of lower-level behaviors aren't tolerated so that we can prevent the higher-level types of violence from happening. I think a couple specific behaviors that I talk about in my trainings are number one I would say is accountability, and that's both on the individual level and an organizational level too. Because we're talking about who has caused harm to each other, whether it's through harassment, whether it is physical violence or interpersonal violence within a relationship that's on an individual level. But as an institution, Rutgers and other institutions have caused harm to individuals just by being part of the oppressive systems that we're trying to dismantle through our work, but I think that we need to take accountability for that as well. I think, listening, so truly listening as a university, but also as an individual, listening to students, listening to your colleagues, especially those who are marginalized. Listening to listen – not to respond, and not assuming that you know what someone needs. So if you have been harmful to someone not assuming that you know what the solution is going to be,

listening to what you can do to make it right. And then also, I'm a little bit biased, but encouraging active bystander behavior. So this is what I talk about in my trainings for faculty and staff a lot. Creating a culture where everyone feels empowered to stand up to injustice to step in and not to say that, "That's not my problem." So harm that's caused is all of our problems. And then also with that, recognizing that it might not be as safe for certain colleagues to jump in. So colleagues who have been historically minoritized, BIPOC colleagues, they do not have the same level of privilege to be able to jump in and say, "Hey, stop doing that!", as someone with more privilege might have. So we, especially as white people at Rutgers, need to take accountability for being a bystander and taking some of that heat away from our colleagues of color, away from our LGBTQ colleagues, disabled colleagues, and create a culture where everyone is holding each other accountable. And I'm gonna pass it over to my colleague Rebecca. But I think also just something to remember too is again, it's between – it's behaviors that we can do among ourselves that can be transformative. But in order to really, truly be effective, we need Rutgers as an institution to take a look at what – what are the conditions that allow this kind of harm to happen, and address that on an institutional level, too.

### **Rebecca Vazquez**

Yeah, really well said, Kaylin. I'm reflecting a lot on the latter part of the question where it says, you're gonna talk about what practices and behaviors contribute to an inclusive campus climate. Part of my response to that piece of the question is recognizing that there's no cookie-cutter response. And I think that's where a lot of institutions, not only are we reactive, but then we tend to do these broad, sweeping cookie-cutter approaches to things that are nuanced. And so in the interpersonal violence field and gender-based violence, I've been doing this work for almost 15 years. All of the survivors that I've met with have a diverse set of needs. Some of them want nothing to do with a person who caused them harm. Some of them want to continue a relationship, but with different boundaries in place. Some of them want an apology. They don't want a sanction. They don't want, you know, a charge. They want an acknowledgment that harm was done. They want an acknowledgment that their experience mattered, and they want to be validated by the person or institution that

caused that harm. Some people don't want that, right? So when you when you come up with these cookie-cutter, reactive approaches, it misses the opportunity to put survivors' voices in the center or anyone who's been harmed, whether it's BIPOC or the LGBT community. Whatever the identity is or whatever the group organization is, the person who is harmed, the organization who is harmed, should have the right to say this is what it would look like for harm to be repaired in order for then the inclusion to take place. But because we do these cookie-cutter, reactive approaches that doesn't tend to happen.

**Joan Collier**

So many good things. Avery, did you want to jump in? You know my mind is ripping and running.

**Avery Arrington**

Yes, that was really great. Y'all, I feel like you are just throwing it around, passing the ball so wonderful. I'm glad to catch it. What stood out to me was talking about accountability and also a continuum where sometimes we're on the end where we've caused harm and other times harm has been caused to us. And also there's no cookie-cutter approach, Rebecca, so thank you for bringing that up. I want to bring to the conversation what we're talking about repairing harm, which is really looking at a way to process and address that harm, which is, some people want restorative justice, right? So first it takes for someone to literally accept responsibility and accountability to say, "Hey, I fell short in this. I am acknowledging that," and with that process, it's allowing decision makers – we talk about when folks are the ones that are causing harm, we like to put them in the center and we like to say, "You did this, so now we're going to give you this sanction or this punishment." This process looks at a way to center survivors and victims to say, "Hey, what are their needs? How can we get to address those needs and also work collaboratively, if possible, to repair the harm or prevent this from happening again?" So I'm glad you two mentioned that, but yeah the first step – and that takes a lot, right? And that's where we talk about that institutional kind of shift and understanding and having a community in an environment where it's acceptable and it's okay to acknowledge when we fall short. And I think that is where it kind of starts, where we

can begin some of this work and that cultural shift that we talk about when we talk about inclusive campus climates.

### **Joan Collier**

So part of my – so I'm like a pig in slop here. I'm just eating it up. Part of what is coming up for me is a piece about the interpersonal and the institutional, right? And so I sit at the institutional level and so I remember for some folks who will be watching, 2015 was a very long time ago. They were like in high school or in middle school. I can't even do math right now. They might have been in elementary school, but they were younger. For some of us, 2015 was very clear. I think for me, the year of all the shenanigans out in Mizzou at the University of Missouri, and so they had a lot of, or they had a very large racial crisis happening. There were protests all over campus. It went wild and media outlets and what came out of that, in addition, to shifts within their campus culture, was a report by the ACE right? ACE counseling, I think the American Council on Education, and part of what they talked about for institutions is that, when there has been a crisis that has happened, when there has been harm, right? The institution has to do a couple of things, it has to listen, right? Listen to actually hear what folks are offering, has to be truthful and honest and transparent as it can be. It needs to work with community members to see how it can re-earn trust or build trust. Sometimes there is an assumption that trust was there. That's a bad assumption to make. And then the institution needs to just do those things in an honest, sincere way, right? Not thinking that there will be perfection per se, but that there is an ongoing faith act that you're acting in goodwill and there's evidence of it and so that for me comes up for institutional level and the interpersonal – it's just an actual acknowledgment, like I messed up. I did that, my bad. Doing diversity education is fascinating because sometimes in a learning space, people say things, right, they're processing. They are unpacking something and then they're unpacking some mess comes up and it's like, oh, ouch, you really said that, like you really thought that, and it's harmful, it hurts, right? And if I think if folks are being honest and all of our learning of something new, we had to earn unlearn some other things. Some of those things were not good, and I tell people often, I grew up in a very, lowkey fundamentalist – not quite fundamentalist, but somewhat Christian, very conservative, very

homophobic, but that was normal. And so in my unlearning, some of the other things, I had to unlearn what had caused tremendous harm to some of my friends. In that process, and so having to get myself together and say, this is actually harmful. How do I get right with my friends? Or how do I say I'm sorry, right? That's not what I meant to do. I was trying to unlearn this and process it, and I caused you harm, and I'm sorry for that. Let me get it together and let me get it right, and I'm talking too much, so I'm moving on to the next one. But those pieces really stuck with me. But really it's the accountability. How are folks held accountable for what they're doing, in a way that is restorative? So that's my cue to you, Avery. You've already touched on it just a little bit, but what is restorative justice? Let me right- Let me just say what I actually wrote before I get really excited. Sometimes we mess up, make mistakes, or engage in purposeful, hurtful behavior. Because not all of the things that we do that cause harm are by accident. Sometimes we're malicious. Sometimes we're mean. I say we because we are all engaging in foolery at some point. That causes harm, be it emotional, physical, or psychological to members of our community, however you define that, right. How can people work to repair harm between each other? And can you talk through a couple of examples, if you have them?

**Avery Arrington**

Joan, you provided great examples.

**Joan Collier**

'Cause I'm carrying on, so.

**Avery Arrington**

You're, yeah-

**Joan Collier**

I mean, what's the point in learning the lesson if you can't share it?



### **Avery Arrington**

Exactly, I appreciate you being vulnerable and just owning right like this is how you grew up, and this is where you caused harm, and this is what you're thinking. Well, you had to unlearn and relearn so it's basically what we've been talking about. This is not new work, so I want to go ahead and acknowledge that. This predates back way before, right back to our indigenous communities with peacemaking circles, where if someone did something that caused harm in the community, the community had to say right to figure out and work together on how that person could make things right as much as possible. So this is work – this is not new work. This is work that is being explored in all different types of areas. The one I think about right now is it's popping up in criminal justice reform. It is spreading rapidly over college campuses and for good measure, we need this work. We can no longer, particularly in my work with the Office of Student Conduct, and working with students that we're addressing behavioral issues and incidents that take place on college campuses on a daily basis. We cannot just suspend everybody. We can't just say, "You did something wrong. You are terrible. We are now going to charge you \$1,000 because you did that wrong," right? Because what purpose does that serve? Did we even – did the student even learn from that behavior, right? Did we even address the folks that were actually caused harm? Did they get a voice and say? Once again, this is not new work. This is a process that really seeks, as a decision-making process, where folks like I said, if you're causing harm, we take you out of the center and we put those in the center that were impacted. So what are their needs? What can we do to address the harm that was caused? So the first step, like I said, acknowledging that you – owning what you did. Hey, I might've fell short. I understand that, like Joan your reference, right? I think I'm going to use that example.

### **Joan Collier**

Go for it.

### **Avery Arrington**

Thinking and how I was, it wasn't right, right? And I need to figure out what it's going to take to understand. I need to understand and hear your story. Understand how you are impacted

and also work with you and how I can make things right and also prevent this from happening again, because I don't want to cause harm. So it's a process that, like I said, I want to be one of the few processes that actually bring folks into the same space. We don't do a good job of that, of actually asking our folks that have been directly impacted, "How would you – how could somebody make things right with you?" So there's a lot of pre-work that happens. There is a lot of work that goes into that. Getting folks prepared to build up to go into that moment to have that conversation. And it's basically what we've been talking about, doing your work along the way? You're not just going to wake up and say, "Hey, I'm sorry," thinking that it's going to resolve everything. No, there's some education that might be involved. There's some kind of deep diving, right? Some interpersonal work that you may have to kind of research. Joan, I want to go back to you needing to do your work and understand why you thought this way, where did it come from, what were those early messages where it happened, and also now where are we now, and what can I do to prevent that from happening again, and also how along the way, what can I do to make things right with my folks that identify with the LGBT plus community, right? What does that look like? How do I earn their trust back? How do I repair or rebuild and so forth. This is, like I said, it's popping up over college campuses. We utilize it in our office for various incidents that might take place. The biggest thing is making sure that when folks are operating in this process, they're operating in good faith, and it's a voluntary process, right? We're no longer – we're not going to put someone in – force someone to go through this process if their heart and their spirits aren't right, right? If you don't really understand and want to take accountability and want to start this journey, and why you did what you did, then it's not for you, and that's okay. We have plenty of traditional punitive measures we can go that route, right? We've done that, but looking to challenge folks to really think more about this work particularly.

**Joan Collier**

Go forward.

**Rebecca Vazquez**

Avery is just inspiring some thoughts in me that I want to share. Forgive me if they don't



make all the sense in the world, but here's what I'm thinking. Part of, you know, when Avery said we can't suspend everybody, right? We have cancel culture. We have all of these things. We have a punitive criminal justice system that is rooted in shame in essence, and part of what I'm learning and reflecting on right now is that restorative practices, restorative justice is a way to shift the shame. This notion that this – the survivor, the person who has been harmed, often times carries the burden of the shame that is not theirs to carry. And by the accountability taking place institutionally and on an individual level, we're able to then balance that out to say, OK, we're not going to stay in this shame, but we're going to use this shame to be able to say here's how I'm going to repair. When we shift the shame, we relieve that pressure from the survivor and the person being harmed and allow for them to not carry what was never theirs to carry to begin with. So when we have systems that are more punitive in nature, that are more, you know, punitive, for lack of a better word, there's no, there's no chance for that. The survivor often still gets stuck with carrying the shame that's not theirs until if and when they do their own work to then release that. But having these processes in place is amazing to be able to shift that shame and then to repurpose it for the productive use of the community and to really think about President Holloway's vision of the beloved community, not just a community, but a beloved community. We got to do that piece in order for it to be beloved. So I just wanted to thank you for inspiring that thought. It's working with survivors, you hear that shame piece so often and it's so insidious and pervasive. And these practices really are, really rooted in shifting that – and I think in a really positive way.

### **Kaylin Padovano**

Yeah, and I agree, Rebecca, with everything that you're saying, and I think that's why Joan's example was so good because it takes away the shame from it. I deal with that a lot, especially with faculty, as you all can imagine, it's really, really hard for them to admit that they have been wrong about something. They are used to knowing, they are used to having to know everything about everything, and it's really, really challenging to get them to kind of call themselves in but, but taking the shame away as a community is, I think something that's gonna shift the culture.



**Joan Collier**

So that'll be it for today! Thanks for hanging out with us. See y'all soon.