



Experiments in Responsibility: Pocket Parks, Radical Anti- Violence Work, and the Social Ontology of Safety

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Abstract: Sex offender registries have given way to residency restrictions for people convicted of sex crimes in many communities in the US. Research suggests, however, that such restrictions can actually undermine the safety of the communities they are ostensibly meant to protect. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, this essay explores why such restrictions, and strategies like them, fail and are bound to fail. Then, it considers the work of generation FIVE, an organization that seeks to eliminate child sexual abuse in five generations, to explore modes of response to sexual abuse and assault that build community safety.

The Harbor Gateway neighborhood of Los Angeles recently joined many communities across the country in banning the residence of some people convicted of sex offenses. They achieved this result through the building of a pocket park, a tiny public park.¹ While pocket

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1. Ian Lovett, "Neighborhoods Seek to Banish Sex Offenders by Building Parks," *New York Times* (March 9, 2013), <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/us/building-tiny-parks-to-drive-sex-offenders-away.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

parks have long been a strategy for introducing relatively inexpensive public green space into areas where land prices are prohibitive and development options limited, they are now being put to a new use. The neighborhood's decision to name a 1000 square foot plot of land a park bans the legal residence of some people convicted of sex offenses because of state legislation prohibiting those registered as sex offenders still on parole from residing within 2000 feet of a park or school.² Once a technique for introducing more public space into a neighborhood, pocket parks are now being used as an extension of the carceral system.

A resident of Harbor Gateway, Patti O'Connell, remarks of this new use of pocket parks: "I think it's great. I just feel sorry for wherever they're moving to. It's scary that there's sex offenders all around with all these little kids here."³ While O'Connell does not say so explicitly, it seems she thinks the parks are great because they will eliminate those who have been convicted of sex offenses from her community. Considerable research suggests, however, that this new use of pocket parks could actually make the neighborhood less safe.⁴ People displaced by the pocket park may not simply be displaced to another community.

As Jill Levenson, professor of psychology and an expert on sexual violence, notes: "Since the vast majority (80–95 percent) of residential properties in densely populated metropolitan areas are within 2500 feet of a school, park, or daycare center, housing options can be diminished to a degree where sex offenders become homeless or transient. This transience undermines the very purpose of sex offender registries (to track and monitor where sex offenders live) and creates other barriers to successful reintegration."⁵ Further, of the new pocket park strategy and its tendency to make sex offenders homeless, rather than forcing them to relocate, member of the California Sex Offender Management Board, Janet Neeley comments: "It's counterproductive to public safety, because when you have nothing to lose, you are much more likely to commit a crime than when you are re-

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. See Matt R. Nobles, Jill S. Levenson, and Tasha J. Youstin, "Effectiveness of Residence Restrictions in Preventing Sex Offense Recidivism," *Crime and Delinquency* 58.4 (July 2012): 491–513; Kelly M. Socia, "Too Close for Comfort? Registered Sex Offender Spatial Clustering and Recidivistic Sex Crime Arrest Rates," *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 25.6 (December 2013): 531–56; Paul A. Zandbergen, Jill S. Levenson, and Timothy C. Hart, "Residential Proximity to Schools and Daycares: An Empirical Analysis of Sex Offense Recidivism," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 37.5 (May 2010): 482–502.

5. Jill Levenson, "Sex Offender Residency Restrictions Impede Safety Goals," *Jurist* (February 2, 2012), <http://jurist.org/hotline/2012/02/jill-levenson-sexoffenders-residency.php>.

building your life.”⁶ Residency restrictions, in other words, are so restrictive that they can make it impossible for people on sex offender registries to find housing. Thus, an attempt to eliminate people from a neighborhood often leads to their internal displacement and works against the aim of making the neighborhood safer.

As the proliferation of pocket parks and similar strategies indicates, communities across the US are increasingly responding to harm by attempting to eliminate those who harm. Yet, such a response not only does not make communities safer, it cannot do so. To understand why, I turn to the work of Judith Butler whose insights into precarity and vulnerability offer a way to understand the failure of pocket parks, and related strategies, to bolster public safety. Especially since *Precarious Life*, Butler has explored what injury, critically considered, can reveal about our ethical responsibility to, from, and with one another. Butler argues that we must acknowledge that our vulnerability can never be fully eliminated; we are all precarious lives. However, while all lives are precarious according to Butler, we are not therefore equally vulnerable. Our precariousness can be differentially and systematically exploited to produce precarity—“that politically induced condition which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.”⁷ Pocket parks and similar eliminative strategies effectively make the lives of those who have committed sexual offenses more precarious, and they do not make communities safer. Butler’s work helps us move from thinking about the failure of pocket parks as a strategy, on the one hand, to the conditions of that failure, on the other, and, thereby, move from considering a policy to considering the ontological conditions of our safety.⁸

While Butler’s work is a critical resource for thinking through the problems of the eliminative strategy of pocket parks in combatting sexual abuse and assault, she does not develop robust alternative strategies.⁹ Thus, I also turn to the work of one group of people who have been developing alternatives: generationFIVE.¹⁰ GenerationFIVE has a rather simple vision:

6. Ibid.

7. Judith Butler, *Frames of War* (London: Verso, 2009), 25.

8. Thus, Butler helps us move from considering the failure of pocket parks in certain instances to why pocket parks cannot make *us*, in any community, safer.

9. On this point, see Janell Watson, “Butler’s Biopolitics: Precarious Community,” *Theory & Event* 15.2 (2012), <http://0-muse.jhu.edu.skyline.ucdenver.edu>. In her trenchant critique of Butler and Roberto Esposito, Watson argues: “Their proposed solutions pay little heed to the state, production, or the economy, inadvertently leaving the backdoor open to laissez-faire liberalism’s weakening of the state, precaritizing of production, and financializing of economies.”

10. *Color of Violence: The INCITE Anthology*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006); *The Revolution Will Not Be*

to eliminate child sexual abuse within five generations. They work to do so through a Transformative Justice framework, which requires addressing individual harm while also fostering community liberation. Using that framework, generationFIVE does not offer a prescription for achieving safe communities. Rather, they call on us to “consciously and consensually take on this experiment” in “developing new practices that we believe will bring about safety and justice.”¹¹ Their work is to build “the capacity of communities to increase justice internally.”¹²

GenerationFIVE approaches the problem of child sexual abuse as a problem that can only be addressed through transforming the ways we live together. Rather than narrowly and singly focusing on individuals who commit violent acts, generationFIVE focuses on the conditions, norms, and practices that allowed violence to occur or even fostered it. Thus, when generationFIVE speaks of the need for transformation and accountability, they do not *only* mean the personal transformation and accountability of those who have harmed others—though they do mean that. GenerationFIVE does not individualize violence, reducing an understanding of instances of violence to simplistic narratives of perpetrator and victim, but rather they understand violence as something that occurs within, affects, and is perpetuated by communities of people. In doing so, they consider the actions of individuals within a communal context to understand harm in ways that we cannot fully understand or intervene against if it continues to be treated as an isolated event, extracted from systems of communal responsibility.

In light of the proliferation of pocket parks and other eliminative strategies such as incarceration, sex offender registries, and zero tolerance in schools, as well as their failure to make communities safer, generationFIVE’s resistance to the exploitation of the precariousness of some lives for the safety and profit of others makes their work a critical resource for all those

Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007); and *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence within Activist Communities*, ed. Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (Brooklyn: South End Press, 2011) are excellent resources to learn about organizations that are developing alternatives to state violence in response to community violence like Sista II Sista, the Chrysalis Collective, Creative Interventions, Challenging Male Supremacy, the Audre Lorde Project, and the Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse.

11. Sara Kershner, Staci Haines, Gillian Harkins, Alan Greig, Cindy Wiesner, Mich Levy, Palak Shah, Mimi Kim, and Jesse Carr, “Toward Transformative Justice: A Liberatory Approach to Child Sexual Abuse and other forms of Intimate and Community Violence; A Call to Action for the Left and the Sexual and Domestic Violence Sectors” (San Francisco: GenerationFIVE, 2007), 29.
12. *Ibid.*, 5.

who wish to end child sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence. Moreover, they have begun to imagine how we might organize social interdependence differently—to make all of us safer. That imaginative work is also critical if we are to question and transform current systems. First, however, we must understand the predominant responses to sexual abuse and assault we currently permit and perpetuate.

Pocket Parks

In the U.S., many communities use pocket parks as a strategy within a larger approach to sexual abuse and assault. Pocket parks rely on state practices designed to label some people as sex offenders and which remove some persons with prior prison sentences from communities after they have served the terms of a punitive sentence. Like pocket parks, and for very similar reasons, incarceration is unlikely to increase the safety of communities. In their report based on the meta-analysis of 117 studies beginning in 1958, Paula Smith, Claire Goggin, and Paul Gendreau conclude: “Prisons and intermediate sanctions should not be used with the expectation of reducing criminal behavior.”¹³ Further, as Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind have argued, the widespread nature of mass incarceration means that entire communities bear the negative economic, social, emotional, and health consequences of incarceration, which disproportionately affects children.¹⁴ So even if children were not directly vulnerable to the prison system (which they are through mechanisms like curfew laws and zero-tolerance policies in schools), the destabilization of their communities contributes to the differential exposure of children to harm.¹⁵

While the next step in state management of people convicted of sex offenses—sex offender registries—do not physically remove people from communities, they do continue to mark people convicted of sex offenses within a community after they have undergone state punishment for their offense. Human Rights Watch, which in 2007 released the first comprehensive report of US sex offender policies, found:

The consequences to registrants are devastating. Their privacy is shattered. Many cannot get or keep jobs or find affordable housing. Registrants’

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13. Paula Smith, Claire Goggin, and Paul Gendreau, *The Effects of Prison Sentences and Intermediate Sanctions on Recidivism: General Effects and Individual Differences* (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2002), ii. For a discussion of the role of prisons in the *production* of recidivism see Chloë Taylor, “Foucault, Feminism, and Sex Crimes,” *Hypatia* 24.4 (2009): 1–25.
 14. Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind, *Invisible Punishment* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 1–2.
 15. See also Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

children have been harassed at school; registrants' spouses have also been forced to leave their jobs. Former offenders included on online registries have been hounded from their homes, had rocks thrown through windows, and feces left on their doorsteps. They have been beaten, burned, stabbed, and had their homes set on fire. At least four registrants have been targeted and killed by strangers who found their names and addresses through online registries. Other registrants have been driven to suicide.¹⁶

These effects occur without residency restrictions. Thus, though registries do not physically remove people from community relations, they are powerful means of producing stigma that removes people in other ways.

Pocket parks share in the strategy of physical removal accomplished with imprisonment, while building on the stigmatization of registration as a sex offender. Pocket parks not only increase the chances that someone convicted of a sex offense will become homeless, but they also exacerbate the difficulties that already come with a felony conviction of finding or sustaining a job, gaining access to education, maintaining or reestablishing familial relations and/or fulfilling family obligations, and creating and sustaining friendships.¹⁷ While it may be tempting to think that someone who has committed a sex offense deserves all of these negative consequences and more, the research on residency restrictions, as well as incarceration and registries, should give us pause. These strategies are not making us safer, while they seem to effectively feed (and perhaps even kindle) rather than sate desires for revenge.

Why Don't Pocket Parks Make Us Safer?

Butler's recent work on precariousness and precarity illuminates why attempting to eliminate those who are seen as sources of threat to a community is ineffective at making us safer. She writes: "Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure."¹⁸ Those attachments and this exposure arise from the bodily nature of our existence. Butler notes: "This disposition of ourselves outside ourselves seems to follow from bodily life, from its vulnerability and

16. Human Rights Watch, "US: Sex Offender Laws May Do More Harm Than Good: End Registration of Juveniles, Residency Restrictions and Online Registries" (September 12, 2007), <http://www.hrw.org/news/2007/09/11/us-sex-offender-laws-may-do-more-harm-good>.

17. See Michelle Alexander, "The Cruel Hand," in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 137–72.

18. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 20.

its exposure.”¹⁹ Thus, responses that seek to eliminate vulnerability seek to destroy an ineliminable disposition. This futile attempt to eliminate the ineliminable vulnerabilities comes at a heavy cost.²⁰

We can see the vulnerability and exposure of bodily life perhaps most clearly when we consider infants and children; infants and children clearly need others to care for them in order for them to survive. The nature of that care (or its failures) is not, however, predetermined. As Butler argues, “to be a body is to be exposed to social crafting and form, and that is what makes the ontology of the body a social ontology.”²¹ Thus, we must acknowledge that the fact of children’s dependence is not what makes them vulnerable to sexual abuse and assault; children’s vulnerability to sexual abuse and assault is part of our social ontology. As Butler writes: “How interdependency is avowed (or disavowed) and instituted (or not) has concrete implications for who survives, who thrives, who barely makes it, and who is eliminated or left to die.”²² In other words, we must look to how children’s dependency is avowed (or disavowed) and instituted (or not) to understand why sexual abuse occurs.²³

Our current predominant responses to child sexual abuse do not undertake such work. Indeed, while the making homeless of persons convicted of sex offenses shows how exposed adults are to social practices, it does not make children safer. Adults who cannot find legal housing in proximity to their family and friends, a job, and needed services (like many adults on sex offender registries in the era of residency restrictions) are adults whose vulnerability is exploited with the result that their lives are less livable.²⁴ Ostensibly, the vulnerability of those convicted of sex offenses is so exploited as a response to the harm they have committed. And yet, such responses are ineffective at reducing future harm to children or helping those who have already been harmed. As noted above, these responses seem much more engaged in revenge. Butler helps us to understand why revenge is ultimately at odds with redressing or preventing harm.

Butler argues:

19. Ibid., 25.

20. There are, of course, vulnerabilities that can be eliminated. Some diseases can be eradicated through vaccination, for instance. Butler’s focus is on the attempt to master all vulnerability through eliminating those seen as the source of threat. Butler’s point is that we cannot successfully eliminate our vulnerability to others and thus we must consider other ways of responding to harm.

21. Butler, *Frames of War*, 3.

22. Ibid., 43.

23. See Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

24. And, as sketched above, those vulnerabilities are not exploited only by residency restrictions, but also by every step of the state response.

The reason I am not free to destroy another—and indeed, why nations are not finally free to destroy one another—is not only because it will lead to further destructive consequences. That is doubtless true. But what may be finally more true is that the subject I am is bound to the subject I am not, that we each have the power to destroy and to be destroyed, and that we are bound to one another in this power and this precariousness. In this sense, we are all precarious lives.²⁵

Butler argues that we are not free to eliminate all threats to us, not just because of the mutually assured destruction of cycles of violence, though she acknowledges the power of that cycle. Her more pressing point is that we are not free to eliminate threats in this way due to our mutual vulnerability.²⁶ We are constrained by this relationship to the Other and our responses to harm must acknowledge this constraint if we seek to change our social ontology. As difficult as it is, we must consider this mutual vulnerability in our responses to sexual abuse and assault if we wish to end such abuse and assault.

As Fiona Jenkins explicates this point: “the *critical* exposure of injury must focus on how the effort at canceling injury seeks to simultaneously annul its own terms of responding violence, for instance in the way a violence done to the other is constructed as a response that is at once (1) fully justified by (2) the violation to self and (3) premised on denying that the other is a being that can be violated.”²⁷ The violence of denying shelter to those convicted of sexual offenses, among other things needed to live, justified by the violence of the sexual offense, seeks to erase the very relationship of vulnerability to the Other necessary for this violence to be carried out. Yet, such vulnerability cannot be eliminated; it can only be organized. Thus, if we wish to eliminate child sexual abuse, we must stop trying to eliminate those who have committed such harms and start addressing the social ontology that perpetuates such harms.

Currently, in the US, we often choose to focus punitively on the person responsible for the abuse—the perpetrator; that person is responsible for that harm and they should be made to pay. In conversation with Levinas, and arising from her thinking about interdependency and vulnerability, Butler thinks responsibility differently. As Samuel Chambers and Terrell Carver summarize:

Butler would certainly say something like the following: I *act*, and my actions are somehow *mine*, but the conditions of my acting are never of my own making. Thus one must surely be considered responsible for one’s actions, but that sense of responsibility cannot be allowed to exhaust its meanings. If we allow ‘responsibility for’ to comprehend our sense of responsibility, then we implicitly deny the truth of the claim that we did not create the conditions of our acting.²⁸

25. Butler, *Frames of War*, 43.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Fiona Jenkins, “Toward a Nonviolent Ethics: Response to Catherine Mills,” *differences* 18.2 (2007): 166.

28. Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory*:

We see, then, on Butler's account, not an evacuation of responsibility for the person who has harmed, but rather an acknowledgment—itsself driven by acknowledgement of dependency and vulnerability—that our account of responsibility cannot stop there.

Responsibility must be thought of in terms of our mutual susceptibility, for that is its wellspring on Butler's account. Such mutual susceptibility is the resource, Butler argues, for becoming responsive to the Other, even though it is a relation we do not choose or will. Thus, we must see that revenge is not possible because we cannot sever our relation to the Other, a fact which injury by the Other (or of the Other, for that matter) avows. Revenge attempts to master the injury, settling the score, but the very fact that we can be acted upon and act upon—our mutual susceptibility—forecloses the possibility of mastering injury or our vulnerability to it.²⁹

Butler is not denying that we can attempt revenge; she is denying that it can discharge our vulnerability. We are ineliminably vulnerable. Thus, Butler asks: "What might it mean to undergo violation, to insist upon *not* resolving grief and staunching vulnerability too quickly through a turn to violence, and to practice, as an experiment in living otherwise, nonviolence in an empathically nonreciprocal response?"³⁰ Of course, this question becomes pressing only if deescalating violence is our goal. In this vein, it is worth asking what other ends strategies like the pocket parks might be serving, for those ends may well be at cross purposes to the end of stopping child sexual abuse and assault.

GenerationFIVE

If ending child abuse and assault is our goal, by not turning too quickly to violence—exploiting the vulnerability of those convicted of sexual offenses, for instance—we can begin to understand why sexual offenses occur. That is, we can begin to understand how interdependency is avowed (or disavowed) and instituted (or not) and how those avowals and institutions concretely shape who is vulnerable to sexual abuse and assault and who abuses and assaults. Butler proposes an experiment in living otherwise, one that may appear outrageous within a context that proliferates strategies like pocket parks.³¹ That is part of the reason that I analyze the work of generationFIVE, who calls upon us to form collectivities that take up an

Troubling Politics (London: Routledge, 2008), 115.

29. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press), 91.

30. *Ibid.*, 100.

31. Butler writes, "It is, in some ways, an outrage to be ethically responsible for one whom one does not choose" (*Giving an Account*, 91).

experiment in responding otherwise to child sexual abuse.³² GenerationFIVE seeks transformative ways to respond to child sexual abuse that do not perpetuate violence or seek infinite retaliation. This organization can help us to understand and imagine what empathically nonreciprocal responses might look like. GenerationFIVE's work can help us move from outrage at the suggestion that we can see our responsibility in our injury, to seeing our safety in such a response.

Driven by their experiences of violence, even within activist communities, generationFIVE has developed three core principles that guide their transformative justice approach to child sexual abuse that are in striking contrast to strategies like pocket parks:

Individual and collective liberation are equally important, mutually supportive, and fundamentally intertwined—the achievement of one is impossible without the achievement of the other.

The conditions that allow violence to occur must be transformed in order to achieve justice in individual instances of violence. Therefore, Transformative Justice is both a liberating politic and an approach for securing justice.

State and systematic response to violence, including the criminal legal system and child welfare agencies, not only fail to advance individual and collective justice but also condone and perpetuate cycles of violence.³³

Rather than dehumanizing individuals, generationFIVE understands child sexual abuse within an unjust state of affairs and seeks to create the conditions for accountability.³⁴ As I understand it, transformative justice approaches take seriously the power of our social ontology to craft the lives we lead, the actions we can take, as well as desire to take, and how our lives will be shaped by those actions.

32. Kershner et al., "Toward Transformative Justice," 29.

33. *Ibid.*, 5.

34. To be clear, by resisting dehumanizing people who commit harm and analyzing the broader context in which abuse happens, generationFIVE is not thereby relieving those people of accountability. As generationFIVE writes:

The vast majority of people who sexually abuse children deny their behavior and shirk accountability. Current responses to child sexual abuse offer very few community or social supports to encourage this naming and accountability. . . . The Transformative Justice approach looks for means of promoting and supporting accountability of those who are abusive; for them, being accountable is a way of holding on to their humanity and leaves room for them to change their behaviors. (Kershner et al., "Toward Transformative Justice," 46–47)

We can see that generationFIVE sees a conflict between dehumanizing people who commit harm, on the one hand, and creating the conditions for their accountability, on the other.

To that point, they observe: “despite virtual consensus condemning child sexual abuse, we are unable to prevent it and have little available to effectively respond to it.”³⁵ Further, they note: “The most common response to violence is collusion—knowing violence is happening and allowing it to happen.”³⁶ As Therese Costello, director of the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services, illuminatingly commented in a 2008 article in *Time*, “Professionals want to advocate for their clients, but they also know the reality of the public child-welfare system. There is a natural professional dilemma when you see a kid and you think, ‘I should make a report,’ but you’re not sure you want to subject that child to the system.”³⁷ GenerationFIVE questions the naturalness of this dilemma by questioning why we have a state system charged with child welfare that compounds children’s unsafety. To put the question in Butler’s terms: why do state responses risk greater precarity for children whose vulnerability has already been exploited?

Part of the reason for this situation, according to generationFIVE, is the fact that even when the state is called upon, it is rarely successful at redressing violence.³⁸ GenerationFIVE presents pragmatic reasons for this inefficacy: lack of evidence; children, upon realizing what will happen, revoke statements; and removal of children from a violent home can be removal to a home or institution that is equally violent.³⁹

Importantly, generationFIVE also offers a systemic analysis of state responses, observing that these responses are not intended to address what caused the violence. As they write: “these systems were not built with the intention to prevent violence or transform those immediately impacted, the community conditions in which abuse occurs, or societal conditions that allow and are perpetuated by child sexual abuse. On the contrary, these systems serve to maintain such conditions and often collude with violence.”⁴⁰ In other words, state violence, including that wielded by state agencies charged with responding to child sexual abuse, as part of the system that perpetuates child sexual abuse. With its focus on the victim/perpetrator binary, in which conviction is the mark of success, state systems do not comprehend the complexity of sexual violence to which Butler’s analysis of precarity directs us and which has guided generationFIVE’s work.

35. *Ibid.*, 12.

36. *Ibid.*, 6.

37. Tiffany Sharples, “Study: Most Child Abuse Goes Unreported,” *Time* (December 2, 2008), www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1863650,00.html.

38. Kershner et al., “Toward Transformative Justice,” 7.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.* Included in this critique is a critique of community organizations that seek to end violence. GenerationFIVE observes: “The vast majority of sexual and domestic violence organizations leverage State intervention as the primary strategy for prevention and response” (8).

Moreover, generationFIVE emphasizes that communities are highly resistant to using state systems.⁴¹ One recent highly publicized case underscores this point. In his report on the Penn State child sex abuse cover-up, Louis Freeh quotes one of the school officials involved in deciding not to contact the Department of Public Welfare after receiving reports from several witnesses who saw Jerry Sandusky abusing children. The official wrote of the school's plan to report Sandusky instead to the Executive Board of the charity he had started and to ban him from Penn State athletic facilities that this approach "is humane and a reasonable way to proceed."⁴² We can see in this line of thinking not only a total inability to see the situation from the point of view of the children abused, but also a concern that involving the state would be both inhumane and unreasonable. Deciding to protect an abuser is often a decision, made either implicitly or explicitly, not to invite the potentially decimating force of the state into a family, a church, a university program, a charity.

GenerationFIVE shows us that this state of affairs need not be the case, but responding to sexual abuse and assault in ways that will help eliminate them requires building the capacity of communities to respond differently. As part of that capacity building, generationFIVE offers a multilayered conception of safety:

We understand safety as liberation from violence, exploitation, and the threat of future acts of violence. The safety that we seek manifests on three intersecting and mutually reinforcing levels. On an individual level, a [survivor's] safety from immediate violence and the threat of further acts of violence (sexual, economic, etc.) is central. For the community, safety comes from fostering community norms and practices which challenge violence and support conditions for liberation. Lastly, across communities and collectives, safety means mutual accountability, challenging power dynamics within and between groups, guarding against backlash, and building strong alliances so that we can collectively support and protect each other from interference and targeting by the State.⁴³

GenerationFIVE's goal is to end child sexual abuse, but they caution, "only a compassionate accountability that challenges the dehumanization of people who sexually abuse children can create the conditions for longer-term safety."⁴⁴ No aspect of safety can be secured by the denial of safety to anyone, including people who sexually abuse children. In other words, if safety is the goal, no one's vulnerability can be exploited to the point of precarity.

41. Ibid., 9.

42. Louis Freeh, *Report of the Special Investigative Counsel Regarding the Actions of the Pennsylvania State University Related to the Child Sexual Abuse Committed by Gerald A. Sandusky* (Freeh Sporkin & Sullivan LLP, July 12, 2012), 64.

43. Kershner et al., "Toward Transformative Justice," 28.

44. Ibid., 43.

To be clear, in its rejection of the state, including incarceration of those who have abused children, generationFIVE has not lost sight of the fact that perpetrators are often not the most vulnerable members of communities. But they have also seen that that current structures of response compound victim/survivor vulnerability. And, further, that exploiting the vulnerability of those who have harmed will not contribute to victim/survivor safety or help to prevent future abuse and assault. Thus, they have developed a complex view of safety that includes the safety and well being of those who have committed harm.⁴⁵

While generationFIVE does not work on a model of eliminative revenge, we might worry that they operate with a narcissistic fantasy of control. Butler well describes such a narcissistic response to violence: “I’ or ‘we’ have brought this violence upon ourselves, and thus to account for it by recourse to our deeds, as if we believed in their omnipotence, believed that our own deeds are the cause of all possible effects. Indeed, guilt of this sort exacerbates our sense of omnipotence, sometimes under the very sign of its critique.”⁴⁶ Butler rightly cautions us that the critique of violence and revenge can sometimes be a narcissistic investment in one’s ability to control what happens.

If generationFIVE is making the narcissistic claim that communities bring the injury upon themselves, then they evade the critical exposure of injury that Levinas and Butler theorize, and seek a different path to achieve the impossible mastery of injury promised by revenge. In their statement of principles, for instance, we might worry about the following: “The conditions [that] allow violence to occur must be *transformed* in order to achieve justice in individual instances of violence.”⁴⁷ One reading of this imperative is that generationFIVE theorizes child sexual abuse as something the community has brought on itself and can expiate through its own deeds. GenerationFIVE gives us much evidence that this is not the intent of their claim. In their very next principle, they point to the failures of state and systematic responses to child sexual abuse. GenerationFIVE neither claims responsibility for, nor completely separates themselves from these responses. Rather, I argue, they have produced and are producing a critique of the conditions of their subjectivation.

Butler writes: “Critique is not merely *of* a given social practice or a certain horizon of intelligibility within which practices and institutions appear, it also

45. GenerationFIVE does acknowledge that force is sometimes necessary in response to assault and abuse (Kershner et al., “Toward Transformative Justice,” 7). They advocate the minimum use of force necessary to stop abuse, as well as accountability within the community about how force is used and by whom (Kershner et al., “Toward Transformative Justice,” 48). Thus, they seek to distinguish minimal use of force from vigilantism or violence.

46. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 101.

47. Kershner et al., “Toward Transformative Justice,” 62.

implies that I come into question for myself.”⁴⁸ This self-questioning follows from critique, according to Butler, because we are constituted by the norms we critique. We are subjectivated, as we are subjugated, by the norms we call into question. We live recognizable lives, in so far as we do, in so far as we live lives that are recognizable according to the norms of our social context. And, as generationFIVE well warns, calling into question those norms can be risky. Yet, not taking such risks helps perpetuate the current state affairs.

Conclusion

Neither generationFIVE nor Butler can give us a new concept of safety that will master our vulnerability and eliminate all threats. Indeed, as theorists, they argue that such dreams contribute to the uneven and exploitive distribution of vulnerability that contributes to greater levels of unsafety for all members of the community. These theorists can help us to dream new dreams, however. Butler writes:

To struggle against violence is, one might say, to mobilize aggression in the service of that struggle. It is to shift the aim of aggression from violence to struggle, a change that means committing oneself to being addressed by those whose lives make a claim upon us. To do this, there must be a critical intervention in those norms that differentially produce whose life is counted as a life at all. For this purpose, we do not need to know in advance what ‘a life’ will be, but only to find and support those modes of representation and appearance that allow the claim of life to be made and heard.⁴⁹

The challenge of generationFIVE’s work is their contention that children and those who abuse them make a claim upon us. Further, it is not a claim to which the state, at least the current one, can respond.

Pocket parks refuse the claim, not just of those convicted of sexual offenses, but of the people who have been abused and assaulted. We do not have to wonder what the consequences of such refusal will be—they are all around us. But neither do we have to begin the work of inventing alternative responses. GenerationFIVE has begun imagining and practicing responses to violence that increase safety for all members of the community in which violence occurs. We cannot eliminate our vulnerability, but generationFIVE helps us to be guided by that knowledge, rather than its denial. In so doing, they show us new paths to safety. — • —

48. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 23.

49. Judith Butler, “Reply from Judith Butler to Mills and Jenkins,” *differences* 18.2 (2007): 194.