# Trigger Warning Theory

#### A. Interpretation: If a debater reads an argument about intimate partner violence, they must ask everyone watching or participating in the debate round if they may do so.

#### Just generally, look to the spirit of the interp, debates over inclusivity in debate should not be avoided using tricks or blippy “we meets”

#### B. Violation – they initiated a debate about ipv (and/or read graphic accounts of victims) and didnt read a tw

#### C. Standards –

#### Inclusivity - preventing emotional trauma - Introducing sexual assault arguments without consent perpetuates a traumatic experience for victims, and studies prove that trigger warnings can actually help survivors.

**Holmes 17** [Lindsay Holmes (Senior Wellness Editor at HuffPost) 8/26/16, Huffington Post, “A Quick Lesson On What Trigger Warnings Actually Do,” https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/university-of-chicago-trigger-warning\_us\_57bf16d9e4b085c1ff28176d//BWSKR]

The University of Chicago sent a welcome letter to incoming freshmen, posted online Wednesday, where they made it abundantly clear that they do not support “trigger warnings” or “safe spaces” in classes or on campus. In other words, students who may be susceptible to mental health issues, like post-traumatic stress disorder or panic disorders, are undeserving of a warning that a lecture or guest speaker may aggravate those issues or traumatic experiences. And just below a promise of inclusivity, respect and diversity, the university also stated that it would not provide zones on campus for students to freely visit where they can be sure to avoid hateful and re-traumatizing rhetoric. (In case, say, someone invites George Will, a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist who likes to tell college audiences that rape victims are a privileged class on campus.) But back to the issue of trigger warnings. Read the letter in full below: View image on Twitter View image on Twitter The Chicago Maroon ✔ @ChicagoMaroon In a welcome letter to freshmen, the College made clear that it does not condone safe spaces or trigger warnings: 2:31 PM - Aug 24, 2016 6,767 4,420 people are talking about this Twitter Ads info and privacy ”You will find that we expect members of our community to be engaged in rigorous debate, discussion and even disagreement,” part of the note reads. “At times this may challenge you and even cause discomfort.” The problem with this interpretation of trigger warnings is that it presumes all participants have the same level of privilege. But many **discussions are not just intellectual exercises for everyone ― [rather,] people who face discrimination, [or] have experienced violence or simply struggle with brain chemistry are at a disadvantage because they’re potentially dealing with a mental health issue. A desire to be warned about potential triggers has nothing to do with people not wanting to “challenge” themselves academically. What’s more, research clearly shows that atmospheres that promote negative stereotypes can act as barriers to treatment, furthering stigma and causing additional psychological trauma**. A fundamental misunderstanding of triggering**Trigger warnings and safe spaces aren’t a way to avoid disagreement or debate**. The clinical version first appeared back in the the early 1900s when psychologists were working to classify “war neurosis,” or the trauma of serving in the military. That led to the more modern discovery of PTSD and what “triggers” those painful memories of war. Trigger warnings as we know them today gained steam from blogging platforms that emerged with the digital age, Buzzfeed News reported. They were created as a way to protect users from harmful content that may contribute to pre-existing mental health issues (i.e. sharing photos about an eating disorder that might “trigger” or, worse, “inspire” someone who is currently dealing with anorexia). The debate over using warnings filtered into college classrooms in the past few years. **Trigger warnings are potentially lifesaving for people who have dealt with traumas like sexual assault, hate crimes or violence**. Eliminating these advisories and zones on campus suggests that someone should have to listen to someone who questions their humanity or experience. This kind of insensitive rhetoric also implies that mental health issues or traumatic pasts ― those that require a safe space or a trigger warning ― render a student weak. And that type of attitude silences those who may be struggling.**Research shows that many people don’t speak up when they’re experiencing complications with their mental wellbeing. Referring to potentially serious, damaging content as something that could cause mere “discomfort” delegitimizes someone’s experience. In reality, it’s more than just feeling a little uncomfortable. Mental health disorders ― particularly those following trauma ― can cause panic attacks, difficulty sleeping, problems with concentration and more**.

#### Thus, introducing such sensitive topics into a debate round create an unsafe and potentially emotionally harmful debate space. This link turns and precludes notions of fairness and education, as they affect the security of the debate space.

**Berman 14** [Mia Berman “A Plea to Debaters” http://premierdebatetoday.com/2014/11/03/a-plea-to-debaters-by-mia-berman-2]

Debaters do not choose the topics. **We cannot expect a debater who may be triggered by a topic to quit the community, to not debate on that topic or to just tune out certain ACs. Putting a victim in an adversarial scenario** in which they are forced to respond to something that is triggering **is unfair and morally wrong. A debate round is no longer a fair, fun or educational endeavor when a participant feels threatened**. If you are the one running these arguments, especially on a speech act/pre-fiat level, the only way they could ever be persuasive is if you ensure you are running them as a way to help victims, not to further and reinforce the original trauma. To prevent these situations, I propose using a trigger warning. Here’s how it works. One debater simply asks the other debater and the judge whether or not they feel comfortable hearing a case related to revenge porn/domestic violence/etc. There have been some criticisms of trigger warnings, but it’s always better to ask. First, the act of asking may be triggering in of itself. If this unfortunate event occurs, opponents should offer time and space needed to recover before beginning the round. Still, **a slight trigger before the round is preferable to the shock of finding out in-round** when the case is read at 400 words per minute and you’re forced to respond. Another debate-specific problem is that opponents could abuse the goodwill of the individual running the potentially triggering case by claiming they will be triggered to avoid debating the case. For this, debaters individually must take it upon themselves to be honest and respectful to those in the community that have been through traumatic experiences and not abuse a system put in place to help them. Feigning trauma to avoid an argument is an atrocious thing to do, and I would honestly like to believe our community is better than that.

#### D. Voters –

#### The voter is fairness. Debate by its very nature is a community-based forum, so any practice that shuts out certain debaters is contrary to the activity itself. As debaters, we have a duty not to shut out participants from such discourse. But moreover, our moral obligation to prevent harm to other debaters supersedes other theoretical concerns as those do not harm or traumatize us, so the most genuine concern ought to be promoting an emotionally safe and inclusive debate space.

#### Drop the debater is the only proper response:

#### If competitive stakes incentivize debaters to run marginalizing arguments, then the stakes of the game need to be changed to eliminate that incentive. By making it unstrategic to run arguments that endorse trauma induction we positively affect the community. The debater should be dropped to create a norm against offensive arguments. Sigel writes,

1 Doug Sigel. [Former debate coach and professor at Northwestern University]. “The Punishment Theory: Illegitimate Styles and Theories as Voting Issues.” 1984.

There does seem to be merit to the negative reinforcement approach to debate. The **arguments** and styles **that are successful are copied**; **those that aren't are shunned**. While the decision in one round can't by itself fundamentally change debate, **a general trend can be initiated** and/or reinforced **by a decision**. The experience of this author has been that, at least in college debate, the threat of punishment now hangs over teams using strategies and styles that are generally regarded as illegitimate. **Deterrence** **seems especially applicable** **to** the **debate** setting **because** the participants have control over their practices. We all practice judge analysis, trying to adapt to the inevitable likes and dislikes of even the most tabula rasa critic. The feedback a punishment decision provides is direct: everyone is given notice that the winning team will and can win rounds in the face of abusive debating and that the judge involved will vote against such practices. **It only takes a few instances of punishment for the entire debate community to start incorporating the risk of punishment in their pre-round planning**.1

#### Accountability - Unintentional or not, individuals must be held accountable. I’m not saying my opponent maliciously constructed this case, but debaters need to be held accountable for creating unsafe spaces. (worse than just losing an arg, they created an unsafe space, punishment worse than just dropping the arg)

#### Evaluate with competing interps:

#### 1] Reasonability is arbitrary and invites judge intervention

#### 2] Applied in any other debate context this notion would be absurd. No one would vote aff the said “well we don’t quite o/w your Disad, but we are really close”

#### No RVIs:

#### 1] chilling effect – discourages theory from being read, which outweighs because it effects norms in every round. If this shell is frivolous then you can easily beat it back, if you can’t then u should lose

#### 2] illogical – you don’t win just by proving you are fair

#### 3] baiting – RVI’s incentivize being maximally abusive and just prepping out theory, that kills topical discussion, which outweighs because we only have 1 month to debate each topic