

# Crowdsourcing Content Guidance: A Commons-Based Approach to Harm Reduction in Theatre

**Sabrina Zanello Jackson**—*Independent Artist*

## About the Author:

Sabrina Zanello Jackson (she) is an Argentinian-American dramaturg, researcher, text editor, director, teaching artist, and arts administrator. She was raised across U.S. cities and abroad and currently lives on Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui land (Tucson, Arizona). Guided by an ethos of anti-oppression and Transformative Justice, her work aims to examine cycles of history, envision transformative civic engagement, and foster healing. Her research interests span consent work, Disability Justice, Mad Studies, interactivity and performance, archivism, and non-carceral responses to harm. Sabrina graduated with a BFA in Dramaturgy and a minor in Literature and Culture from Carnegie Mellon University in 2022. Recent work includes the hybrid musical *How the Light Gets In* (Project Manager), *Sharp Needle* at The Mercury Store (Dramaturg), and education and community engagement at Olney Theatre Center. To share ideas or get involved with the Crowdsourcing Content Guidance project, contact her via her website at [www.SabrinaZanelloJackson.art](http://www.SabrinaZanelloJackson.art).

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### The Problem: “Suffer for Your Art”<sup>1</sup>

In the three years before my mother passed of cancer, I became more careful about engaging with stories of death. In 2021, I read Julia Izumi’s *miku, and the gods*. (2021). I had heard so many praises of the play that I didn’t bother to review its Subject Matter Keywords<sup>2</sup> on the New Play Exchange (NPX), which prominently include “grief” and “coming to terms with death.” When the folkloric comedy about friendship, adventure, and Sumerian gods that I had anticipated turned out to be a profound exploration of death, grief, and ancestry, I was shaken. I sobbed all night and woke the next morning to eyes swollen half-shut. I don’t regret reading the play, but I do regret not reaching out to friends for content warnings beforehand. Bracing myself before reading would have let me engage the text dramaturgically while shielding myself from the ultra-personal.

Content guidance—alternatively called content “warnings,” “disclosures,” or “advisories”—can benefit anyone, including artists. A fellow dramaturg, GG,<sup>3</sup> confided: “I cannot stand stories where an animal dies. When possible, I search DoesTheDogDie.com beforehand. If there’s a chance of that happening but I don’t know for sure, I won’t engage with the narrative at all.” Content advisories empower GG to engage with *more* content and do so with *greater* attentiveness, rather than be distracted by their anxieties about the unexpected.

Have you ever turned down watching a horror movie because it was too late at night? Content guidance can guide our choices based on mood or readiness. “I don’t have any specific story, other than that every time I go to see a show, I feel empowered by content warnings,” Stephen,<sup>4</sup> an actor, told me. “For example, am I prepared to see the embodiment of a sexual assault? Is that something I want to see on my Friday night?” While the discourse on content disclosures often focuses on ableism-ridden descriptions of survivors or neurodivergent people, content warnings are useful *regardless* of ability or trauma.

More theaters are recognizing the value of content warnings for audiences, but their importance for theatre-makers is still overlooked. The “tortured artist” myth persists. Great art is born of greater suffering. On the contrary, storytellers can benefit from content guidance as much as spectators. By not providing content guidance from the impetus of creative work, theatre institutions and educational theatre programs alike exclude artists with Madness<sup>5</sup>/mental illness, neurodivergence, sensory differences, and trauma and subject them to unsafe working conditions.

When arts organizations do not routinely provide content guidance in advance, they require individuals to come forward and request it. This can mean someone having to explain their trauma or come out as disabled for their request to be validated. Writer and Disability Justice organizer Mia Mingus describes this as forced intimacy: “the common, daily experience of disabled people being expected to share personal parts of ourselves to survive in an ableist world,” (Mingus 2017). Until arts and educational institutions normalize content warnings as a tool beneficial for everyone regardless of ability, and provide them proactively, artists with disabilities and/or trauma will be “expected to ‘strip down’ and ‘show all of our cards.’” In other words, discarding harm prevention/reduction methodologies makes it difficult for everyone to communicate consent—doubly so for disabled folks.

In the educational setting, requiring students to individually request content warnings can be a monumental access barrier due to the power dynamic between instructors and students. Students may fear retribution from their professors. This is doubly true for students of marginalized identities who face higher levels of scrutiny under ableist, white supremacist, and cisheterosexist systems. Just as Mingus asserts that “able-bodied people will not help you with your access unless they ‘like’ you,” *Minor Feelings* author Cathy Park Hong emphasizes that students of color often feel obligated to achieve at higher standards than their white peers (Hong 2020, 32). If a student felt pressured to project “anonymous professionalism,” and not “take up space nor make a scene,” they would likely feel discouraged from proactively bidding for care.<sup>6</sup> We must remember that institutional hierarchies remain intact as long as they are structurally powered, whether in a professional or educational context. If those in power wish to counteract these hierarchical pressures, providing content warnings before being asked is an excellent way to demonstrate openness and compassion.

In response to the premise that the impacts of Madness/mental illness, neurodivergence, sensory differences, and trauma are not “severe,” I contend that we shouldn’t only care about people’s wellbeing when there is risk of serious physical or psychological damage. When interviewed for a video on Transformative Justice,<sup>7</sup> Mia Mingus expressed:

I think a lot of harm that happens is like death by a thousand cuts. And we often don’t pay attention until there are so many little cuts that we’re bleeding out. And then we rush... to the crisis and the emergency and we drop everything. But what if we started dropping everything when the little

cuts happen? (Project NIA and the Barnard Center for Research on Women 2020)

Content warnings represent this exact opportunity. Let's move to a culture of care from the beginning of our theatrical processes, whether that be uploading a new play to NPX, writing script coverage, or kicking off a production timeline. Granted, content guidance is only one small part of harm prevention/reduction, but it is a worthy place to start treating those "little cuts."

*What if submitting content warnings only meant a few extra clicks?*

I believe one way to address our problem is to build a living, crowdsourced database of script content warnings for the theatre community. A recurring sentiment from critics is that implementing content disclosures requires unreasonable time and effort, at the expense of other work. Some script readers include content warnings in their coverage, but coverage is an inherently closed-door practice and varies by organization. With a crowdsourcing tool, content guidance could make it out of the rooms where literary management and season planning happen and into public service. The work is already happening, so why not put it to sustainable use?

In 2012, Gwydion Suilebhan dreamed up a centralized script repository to connect playwrights with producers (Suilebhan 2012), which catalyzed the birth of the New Play Exchange (Loewith and Suilebhan 2016). Similarly, this note from the field seeks to function as my concept for a crowdsourced content guidance database, exploring my prototyping process thus far and laying out the strengths and gaps of the current vision. I encourage readers to reach out with feedback or to get involved.

### **A New Future: Crowdsourcing Content Guidance**

I envision this commons-based approach being used on a global scale, making content warnings accessible online as easily as a plot synopsis. The intention is to provide a four-fold solution:

1. Provide support before the need arises, modeling access intimacy (Mingus 2011)
2. Archive this labor to reduce redundancy
3. Allow for multiple perspectives on the same play, modeling a culture of abundance
4. Cultivate a shared vocabulary for discussing sensitive content

The crowdsourcing tool has had two conceptualizations to date: the first practically, the second theoretically.

### A Brief Summary of Iteration 1.0

In 2021, I prototyped a database of playscript content advisories crowdsourced by and for my conservatory theatre program. All students, faculty, and staff were encouraged to (a) submit content warnings for a script they read for any reason (education, work, or pleasure) and (b) search the database for a play before reading it.

Content guidance was submitted via a [Google Form](#), which organized content into six major categories: (1) strong or insensitive language, (2) nudity, (3) romantic or sexual intimacy, (4) sexual violence, (5) graphic violence, and (6) illness or trauma. Categories were meant to make it easier for people to submit warnings and to expedite database navigation. Each category was subsequently divided into “mentioned in the text” and “depicted on stage” (Figures 1–2).

Does the text MENTION or ALLUDE to romantic or sexual intimacy?

- Intimate contact, kissing
- Prolonged intimate contact, foreplay, dancing
- Solo sex acts
- Partnered sex acts
- N/A
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1: Question about sexual content mentioned in the text from the Content Advisories by Play Google Form.

Does the play DEPICT romantic or sexual intimacy on stage?  
In other words, is it shown or performed?

- Intimate contact, kissing
- Prolonged intimate contact, foreplay, dancing
- Solo sex acts
- Partnered sex acts
- N/A
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 2: Question about sexual content depicted on stage from the Content Advisories by Play Google Form.

Form responses were automatically added to the [Google Sheet](#) (Figures 3–4). The Sheet was alphabetized by playwright’s last name, making it easy for users to search via the hotkey Control+F or by scrolling.

Content Advisories by Play (Responses)

Play Title	Playwright (Last Name, First Name)	Why did you read this play?	Does the play use strong or insensitive language?	Describe any options you ticked for STRONG OR INSENSITIVE LANGUAGE that warrant more explanation or details.	Does the play PORTRAY nudity on stage?	Describe any options you ticked for NUDITY that warrant more explanation or details.	Does the text MENTION or ALLUDE to romantic or sexual intimacy?	Does the play PORTRAY romantic or sexual intimacy on stage?	Describe any options you ticked for ROMANTIC OR SEXUAL INTIMACY that warrant more explanation or details.	Does the text MENTION or ALLUDE to sexual violence?	Does the play PORTRAY sexual violence on stage?	Describe any options you ticked for SEXUAL VIOLENCE that warrant more explanation or details.
Love and Information	Churchill, Caryl	Personal					Partnered sex acts	Intimate contact, kissing	p37: Ex scene could be in a sexual context after sex/etc., close intimate scene between two exes. p49: Scene talks about sex and a character refers to having sex with the other. p67-9: Scene talks about one character having virtual sex with a virtual woman via computer game.			p19: Allusion to what could have been nonconsensual sex between a 12 y.o. and a 13 y.o., a pregnancy at age 13. p55-6: Potentially sexually violent: partner tries to convince other partner to touch them/sleep together and the other partner tells them they disgust them.
Do You Feel Anger?	Nelson Greenberg, Mara	Course requirement	Profanity, Slurs/derogatory language, Crude or body-based humor, Problematic/outdated expressions (eg "insane", "cokewalk", "blind")	Misogynistic insults, Crude humor based on genitalia, urination/defecation, and sex acts.	Partial nudity, Any clothing other than streetwear (pp, undergarments, swimsuits, revealing costumes)	Female character wears a mermaid costume as a form of empowerment (not oppressive/voyeuristic).	Intimate contact, kissing, Prolonged intimate contact, fopplay, dancing, Solo sex acts, Partnered sex acts	Intimate contact, kissing	Mentions of masturbation and ejaculation; (unreciprocated) oral sex acts; pornography; genitalia. Depictions of flirtation and attempted nonconsensual kissing in the workplace.	Sexual harassment, Intimate partner violence/abuse, Child abuse/pedophilia	Sexual harassment	Mention of long-term domestic abuse/dating violence; nonconsensual sex acts; allusions to child sexual abuse; female character repeatedly mentions being "rugged" in the office. Depictions of verbal and physical sexual harassment; attempted nonconsensual roleplay; gaslighting; threats of workplace or personal retaliation; injury (bleeding ear) after a mugging.

Figure 3: Content Advisories by Play (Responses). The first half of the Google Sheet database. For easier navigation, color-coding groups the columns into the categories of strong or insensitive language, nudity, romantic or sexual intimacy, and sexual violence.

Content Advisories by Play (Responses)

Play Title	Playwright (Last Name, First Name)	Does the text MENTION or ALLUDE to graphic violence?	Does the play PORTRAY graphic violence on stage?	If you selected power-based violence above, what form(s) does it take?	Describe any options you ticked for GRAPHIC VIOLENCE that warrant more explanation or details.	Does the text MENTION or ALLUDE to illness or trauma?	Does the play PORTRAY illness or trauma on stage?	Describe any options you ticked for ILLNESS OR TRAUMA that warrant more explanation or details.	Is there anything else someone should know before reading this play?	How clear were the advisories/categories in this form?	Which advisories/categories seemed unclear?	Do you have any feedback or questions to share with the Content Advisory Committee about this form?
Love and Information	Churchill, Caryl	Gore/blood/injury, torture	Bullying (verbal, then physical)		p6: Discussion around torture/violence; scene is in reference to someone who's being tortured. p66: Children are mocking another child who has a special stone, then they throw stones at them.	Self-harm, Suicidal ideation, Death/death-related grief	Mental illness, Psychological trauma	p6: mentions jumping out a window, eating fire, self-harm. p20: talks about murder and suicide as a way to send a message. p22: Character is told by doctor that they are terminally ill. p24: Scene is called Schizophrenia. p55-6: portrayal of dementia. p62: Scene is called Manic/character is potentially manic. p74: Scene/potential interludes about depression with one character talking to another who doesn't respond, to be interspersed throughout the play.				
Do You Feel Anger?	Nelson Greenberg, Mara	Power-based violence or hate crimes, Gun violence, Graphic/violent death	Power-based violence or hate crimes, Gore/blood/injury, attempted office bombing	Gender-based	Mention of murder by stabbing, serial killing and mass murder, beating, Depiction of attempted beating with a baseball bat, attempted office bombing as break-up retaliation, but the bombs turn out to be dog food cans, a bloody nose and a severely bleeding ear at the end of the play	Mental illness, Psychological trauma, Childhood bullying/social exclusion	Mental illness, Psychological trauma	Mention of familial abuse; childhood trauma from witnessing their parent's murder. Depictions of trauma-induced breakdown.	As a woman, it was intense		5	

Figure 4: Content Advisories by Play (Responses). The second half of the Google Sheet database. Color-coding groups the columns into the remaining categories: graphic violence, illness or trauma, free response, and user feedback.

As the length of the spreadsheet shows, balancing thoroughness with expedience was difficult. I made every question optional in preference for the first three—play title, playwright name, and in what context the script was read—but the length still proved a barrier. Of the twenty-some individuals who graciously beta-tested the database, many found the form overwhelming and felt discouraged from completing it.

In summary, 1.0 was limited. Its clunky format and narrow, transient user base of university members rendered it unsuccessful. Although Google Sheets is beneficial because it is accessible to anyone online, it can only handle so much data and its opportunities for data visualization are

few. Above all, the fact that it was isolated from the platforms on which people read and review scripts made it ineffectual.

### **Concept for Iteration 2.0**

This iteration takes a new approach as a tag system built into a custom website. This way, the database would be easy to access and quick to use. A tag is a nonhierarchical keyword that describes the data that it is assigned to. Tags are useful for classifying information in multiple ways simultaneously. Ideally, the tag system would be also integrated into existing cloud-based script libraries such as the New Play Exchange, Drama Online, and Alexander Street Drama.

2.0 is largely inspired by two highly trafficked platforms that crowdsource content guidance, among others (see the end of this field note for a list). Firstly, the community-driven website and smartphone application *Does the Dog Die?* houses an extensive database of warnings for film and television, among other media (Wipple 2010). It is remarked for its democratic Upvote/Downvote feature and for making detailed spoilers and even time stamps available to site visitors (Lindbergh 2020). Secondly, *The StoryGraph*, a data-oriented book tracker and competitor to Goodreads, prominently offers users the ability to tag content when submitting a book review and filter for content when searching for new reads (Herman 2021). The latter is particularly exciting because of its similarities to the New Play Exchange: powered by metadata, encouraging dialogue, and inviting the engagement of authors themselves (Odunayo and Frelow 2019).

*The StoryGraph* also models a cautionary tale. Recent discourse highlights how content warnings have been weaponized to censor books by writers who are of color, LGBTQ+, or otherwise marginalized. In 2021, author Sylvia Moreno-Garcia sparked debate on X by pointing out how books by authors of color are tagged for sensitive content more often than books by white authors on *The StoryGraph* (Figure 5; ad astra 2021).



Figure 5: A Tweet from a thread by Silvia Moreno-Garcia, with the screenshots of *The StoryGraph* content warnings for the two books she mentions side-by-side. (Moreno-Garcia 2021)

Unconscious bias plays a hand in this double standard. A white script reader may fail to pick up on underhanded manifestations of racism or *overestimate* race's prevalence in a story. Science fiction author Octavia Butler wrote an entire afterword to *Bloodchild* to address that the extrasolar short story is not about slavery, contrary to popular interpretation (Butler 1995, 55-57). But Moreno-Garcia sees this as not only an individual issue, but one systemically reinforced by data-collecting cyberspaces. "Review spaces are not free of such biases. Neither are TWs. I'm not going to say this means there are 'bad' and 'good' reviewers because that's not what I was going on about," she elaborated in a follow-up tweet (Moreno-Garcia 2021). The ensuing debate prompted *The StoryGraph* to launch author-approved content warnings and a summary smart filter, which we'll explore later (*The StoryGraph* 2021). Given this backdrop, we must consider how crowdsourcing content advisories for plays might affect marginalized playwrights.

With the insights and a notable dilemma of these platforms in mind, let's explore possible features of the 2.0 crowdsourced database.



Submission

Following The StoryGraph’s methodology, there would be two sections of content guidance: playwright-approved and reader-submitted. Allowing playwrights to add advisories gives them agency over the narrative being constructed about their work without censoring the perspectives of readers who may experience the text differently. If built into NPX, it would bolster the platform’s commitment to amplifying playwrights’ voices (Loewith and Suilebhan 2016). Readers would submit advisories as part of their script recommendations or via an independent function, increasing engagement on the platform.

Types of Content

Moving away from categories to a singular alphabetized list of tags, as The StoryGraph models, holds space for specificity and intersectionality. Both qualities bolster consent work. The list of tags below was mainly sourced from The StoryGraph, with some language pulled from the Trigger Warning Database (Lilley and Typed Truths 2017), Does the Dog Die?, Unconsenting Media, “Defining Mental Disability” (Price 2017), and harm reduction best practices (National Harm Reduction Coalition 2021):

- Abandonment
- Ableism
- Abortion
- Acephobia/Arophobia
- Addiction
- Adult/minor relationship
- Alcohol
- Alcoholism
- Animal cruelty
- Animal death
- Antisemitism
- Biphobia
- Blood
- Body horror
- Body shaming
- Bullying
- Cancer
- Cannibalism
- Incest
- Infertility
- Infidelity
- Injury/Injury detail
- Intimate partner abuse
- Islamophobia
- Kidnapping
- Lesbophobia
- Mass/school shootings
- Medical content
- Medical trauma
- Mental illness
- Miscarriage
- Misogyny
- Murder
- Nudity
- Outing
- Pandemic/Epidemic

- Car accident
- Child abuse
- Child death
- Chronic illness
- Classism
- Colonization
- Confinement
- Cultural appropriation
- Cursing
- Deadnaming
- Death
- Death of parent
- Dementia
- Deportation
- Disordered eating
- Domestic abuse
- Drug abuse
- Drug use
- Dubious consent scenarios
- Dysphoria
- Eating disorder
- Emotional abuse
- Excrement
- Existentialism
- Fatphobia
- Fire/Fire injury
- Psychiatric institutionalization
- Gaslighting
- Genocide
- Gore
- Grief
- Gun violence
- Hate Crime
- Homophobia
- Incarceration/Imprisonment
- Panic attacks/disorders
- Poverty/Houselessness
- Pedophilia/Grooming
- Physical abuse
- Police brutality
- Pregnancy
- Racial slurs
- Racism
- Rape
- Religious bigotry/persecution
- Schizophrenia/Psychosis
- Self-harm
- Sexism
- Sexual assault
- Sexual content
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual violence
- Slavery
- Slurs/Derogatory language
- Stalking
- Suicidal thoughts
- Suicide
- Suicide attempt
- Surveillance/Being watched
- Terminal illness
- Torture
- Toxic friendship
- Toxic relationship
- Trafficking
- Transphobia
- Unstable/shifting reality
- Violence
- Vomit
- War
- Xenophobia

In addition, the crowdsourcing system could meet individual needs by allowing users to flag tags for content they particularly wish to avoid in their profile settings (Odunayo and Frelow 2019).

### Intensity and Staging Fields

When submitting content warnings on The StoryGraph, reviewers select tags from three drop-down lists, each representing a tier of intensity: Graphic, Moderate, and Minor (Figure 6). For the theatre community's purposes, let's keep this system and add a fourth, independent field called "Staged." This would classify content that requires on-stage depiction for the audience to follow the story. There is a vast emotional difference between a character describing a death and a performer acting out death on stage. And while nudity may not be inherently sensitive in literature, it *is* when staged before a live audience. For example, consider *How to Defend Yourself* by Liliana Padilla. Seven college students gather for a DIY self-defense workshop after a sorority sister is raped (2020). Sexual assault and processing its aftermath make up the emotional core of the story, but the audience is never witness to a simulated sexual assault. The system would allow the same tag to be input into the Staged field and an intensity field, giving perusers a fuller impression of the content.

Specifying what content is depicted on stage would fit well with the benefits that users reap from the New Play Exchange's robust search-and-filter mechanism (National New Play Network 2015). Many use the platform to find scripts to produce, and filters allow them to search with their unique production parameters and resources in mind. Tagging content that must be staged for the audience to follow the story—whether nudity, violence, sex, etcetera—would allow readers to proceed knowing they should plan for an intimacy choreographer and other production safeguards, or else creatively circumvent a direct portrayal. If someone can't manage that, they can use the search filters to *exclude* plays with certain Staged tags. Best of all, this would reduce the cases of such content going unnoticed and unaddressed until it is too late in the production process.

▼ Would you like to add any content warnings?

**Graphic**  
Explicit, detailed description

**Moderate**

**Minor**  
Brief mention or description

Do you want to add any further information about the content of this book?

Wrap spoiler text in tags like this:  
<spoiler>your spoiler text</spoiler>

Figure 6: The content warnings section of The StoryGraph's book review form. (Odunayo and Frelow 2019)

### Custom Details and Spoilers

If any content falls outside the existing tags or warrants qualification, submitters would be able to add detailed descriptions as comments attached to relevant tags. DoesTheDogDie.com users can toggle in their settings whether they wish for comments to default as visible or hidden (shown on click), so they can avoid stumbling upon spoilers unintentionally (Staublin 2022).

The StoryGraph goes a step further, requesting that users wrap any spoilers in programming tags as follows: `<spoiler>your spoiler text</spoiler>`. Once one's review is submitted, the spoiler text appears blacked out and is revealed only if a user clicks on it (Figure 7). This is an elegant solution for one of the most common concerns voiced by opponents of content guidance.

#### ▼ Content Warnings

**Graphic:** Body horror, Death, Gun violence, Death of parent, Mental illness, Domestic abuse, Sexual violence, Torture, Rape, Murder, Child death, Gore, and Violence

**Moderate:** Abandonment, Racism, Hate crime, Ableism, Grief, Medical content, Injury/Injury detail, Sexual content, Physical abuse, Xenophobia, Sexism, and Blood

**Minor:** Cannibalism, Adult/minor relationship, Racial slurs, Vomit, and Police brutality

 Minor religious trauma

*Figure 7: An individual reviewer's content warnings for Parable of the Sower by Octavia E. Butler. A spoiler is blacked out. (Odunayo and Frelow 2019)*

### Data Amalgamation

Displaying the tag system's aggregate data would encourage a nuanced critical discourse among users about potentially intense or triggering material. It would also foster a culture of abundance in which all opinions are valued. Balancing brevity with completeness, The StoryGraph provides a summary and a complete list of content warnings. Figure 8 shows how the platform automatically smart-filters the top three most selected tags for each intensity tier.

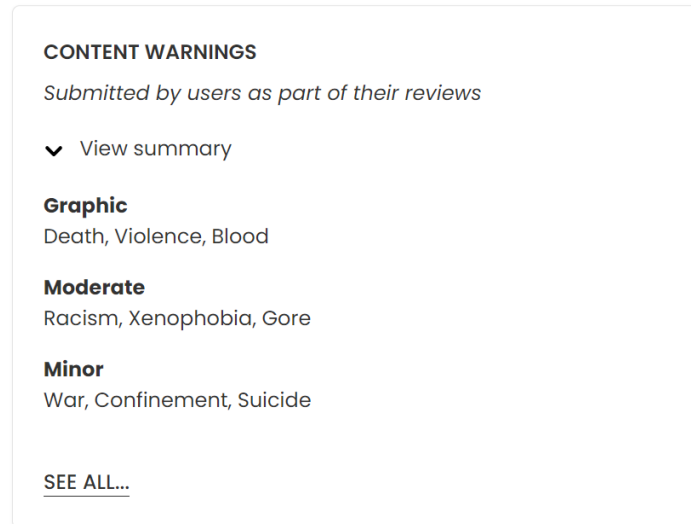


Figure 8: Summary of the content warnings for *Binti* by Nnedi Okorafor. (Odunayo and Frelow 2019)

The algorithm is complex: it generates the summary based on the number of votes a tag receives and its comparative prevalence across intensity levels. A tag must have at least twenty votes to be eligible but cannot have more votes under another level of intensity.

Clicking “See All...” opens the full list of author-approved and user-submitted content warnings (Figure 9). Each tag includes a parenthetical number indicating how many people selected that content. These numbers would equip prospective script readers with knowledge of the majority and paint a picture of the nuances and varying perspectives on the same story. If thirty people tag war as Moderate while twenty-five tag it as Minor, its intensity may be dramaturgically debatable. Additionally, this data would make the crowdsourcing tool’s inner workings more transparent to site visitors.

User-submitted

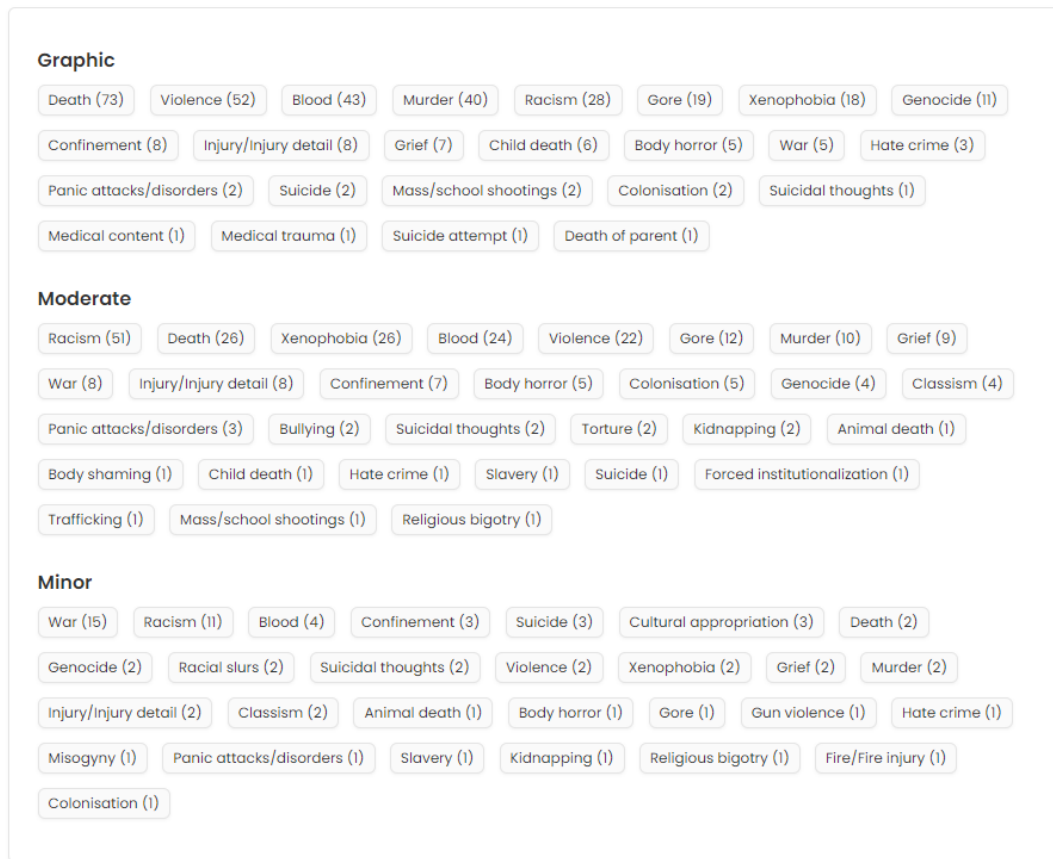




Figure 9: Complete list of content warnings for Binti by Nnedi Okorafor. (Odunayo and Frelow 2019)

Ancillary Resources

An educational guide to content guidance and consent work would accompany the crowdsourcing tool. It could include a glossary of key terms, best practices, and extended explanations of the intensity tiers (Graphic, Moderate, and Minor) and the Staged field to better assist users with categorizing content (Payne and van Staden 2017). In an ideal world, this information would not be an external link but integral to the webpage as a collection of tooltips—question marks  and information icons  that reveal more details when hovered over (Rodricks 2021).

**Considerations for Future Work**

Much more dreaming is needed, with many more voices, before this project is prototyped again. Below are a few quandaries at the forefront of my mind.

### Draft Updates

What happens when a living playwright shares a new draft of their script? The content warnings submitted before that upload may become outdated. How might the database account for that, or does this issue undermine the whole concept of crowdsourcing for any new plays?

### User Feedback

What metrics should we use to assess the project's success? How might end users be able to give feedback on the database once it's prototyped and even published? Providing an accessible, anonymous channel for feedback will be key to honoring the project's commons-based approach and mitigating forced intimacy.

### Anonymity

Should users have the option to submit content guidance anonymously? Although anonymity would mitigate forced intimacy, its ramifications within a transparent, community-focused platform are ambiguous and potentially troubling.

### Self-Selection Bias

Participation bias will skew the data of content tags. By what means might the tag system account for this?

### Biased Censorship

Earlier, this note discussed how the disproportionate use of content warnings inadvertently contributes to censoring marginalized authors. Censorship in the theatrical context could mean prematurely rejecting a play from option. What features could be implemented to counteract disproportionate tagging and its result, biased censorship?

### Conclusion

Content guidance is not only vital to the wellbeing of theatre-makers with disabilities or trauma, but contributes to a culture of trust, care, and consent that benefits everyone. A database of script content warnings would amplify the discourse around trauma-informed practices and reduce the labor of crafting warnings from scratch in the long run. A commons-based approach offers education and reduces shame. Gone would be the grievance among arts administrators and

educators of feeling ill-equipped to write content warnings. I myself often feel unsure how to write them, but the support of a framework and language empowers me to do so. Even more, knowing that others will contribute different interpretations of a text makes me less worried about identifying content “incorrectly.” Disclosing some content is better than none. Making content guidance a community effort via dialogic platforms would nuance the discourse about a play and empower prospective readers with an abundance of viewpoints.

Although this database concept is flawed and leaves gaps unaddressed, I am convinced that even such imperfect, work-in-progress efforts help gradually shift institutional culture.

### **Call for Collaborators**

This paper only represents the beginning of this project. To anyone reading this, thank you. A community-driven database should be designed in community, so I eagerly invite those interested to join the endeavor. Whether you share a passion for disability-informed, consent-forward initiatives, are a programmer or user experience wiz, or have a hot take, please reach out. Collective engagement propels this work forward.

### **Non-Exhaustive List of Crowdsourced Content Warning Databases**

- Does the Dog Die?: With over 29,000 titles, it is overwhelmingly used for film and TV, but also books, video games, comics, podcasts, YouTube, and more. Data-driven and community-run (submission automatically affects the data).
- The StoryGraph: Book reviewing and tracking platform with a built-in content warnings tag system. Data-driven and community-run.
- Trigger Warning Database: For books. Data-driven and moderated (site manager manually processes submissions). The administrative account is also active on Goodreads, where it ‘shelves’, or tags, books by content.
- Musical Content Warnings: A small hub on Tumblr for musical theatre. Not data-driven (submissions are free response) and moderated.
- Unconsenting Media: For sexual violence in film, TV, and more. Data-driven in a simplified way and volunteer-moderated. It also began as a humble Google Sheet (Payne 2017). Does the Dog Die? creator John Whipple helped the site get started, largely by importing DDD’s structure (Norris 2022).



<sup>1</sup> This work is grounded in trauma-informed practices as well as the concepts of harm prevention and harm reduction as defined by Nicole Brewer's Anti-Racist Theatre (A.R.T.) training (Brewer 2020). Harm prevention and reduction are small but key threads in the fabric of community accountability (Kaba and Lu Design Studio 2024). Such care is a never-ending practice for which we are *all* responsible. Innumerable organizers in this field have inspired me; I hope the references included adequately recognize some of them and their contributions.

It is also rooted in the principles of Disability Justice (Berne, Morales, and Langstaff 2018). Considered a "second wave" of disability rights, the term emerged from conversations among disabled queer and trans people of color activists in 2005, including Patty Berne of the performance project Sins Invalid, seeking to challenge progressive movements to more fully address ableism. Disability Justice recognizes the intersecting legacies of white supremacy, colonial capitalism, gendered oppression, and ableism in understanding how peoples' bodies and minds are labeled "deviant," "unproductive," "disposable" and/or "invalid."

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<sup>2</sup> Subject Matter Keywords is a tag-based search filter used on the New Play Exchange. When playwrights upload a script, they can select keywords that speak to the play's themes and topics (National New Play Network 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym to protect the individual's anonymity.

<sup>4</sup> Pseudonym to protect the individual's anonymity.

<sup>5</sup> The Mad Pride movement offers "Mad" as one alternative identifier (of several) to mental illness or psychiatric disability. Its capitalization signals the work of Mad activists and Mad Studies scholars who argue that we need to problematize the stigmatic connotations of madness. (Kafai 2021)

<sup>6</sup> Bid for Care is a means of relationship building, connection, and liberation; gestures, actions, and behaviors between beings that signal a need for care. Bids can be verbal or non-verbal and include but are not limited to care actions like body doubling or meal support (N. Oumou Sylla 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Transformative Justice (TJ) is a political framework and approach to responding to violence, harm, and abuse without relying on the state or creating more violence. Deviating from Restorative Justice, it seeks to *transform* the conditions that allowed the harm to occur in the first place. TJ organizers have differing opinions on whether the term should be capitalized. At the risk of contributing to the "formalization" of TJ, I have capitalized it to honor the movement's work and discourage its appropriation away from its feminist queer of color origins (Dixon and Piepzna-Samarasinha 2020).

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