

"When safety for you means danger for me"
Veró Caridad Rabelo (interviewed by Shyla the Super Gecko)
San Francisco State University, USA
Mental Health Symposium 2025
Thursday, May 15

[2025/05/15 15:00] Carolyn Carillon: Hello everyone.

Today's presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time. The presenter may also use a teleprompter (speak easy) in local chat.

A little explanation about this service.

Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.

Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.

You will see the transcription in local chat.

Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.

The transcriptionists are Carolyn Carillon & Elektra Panthar.

Shaerken Changeheart may be jumping in to do transcription and voice.

The speakers will be identified by initials as they speak.

The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speakers:

VR: Dr. Vero Caridad Rabelo

SSG: Shyla the Super Gecko

<<transcription begins >>

SSG: I'm Shyla the Super Gecko

Hello Dr. Rabelo

VR: Thanks for having me

SSG: Can you tell us about yourself?

VR: It's truly an honour to be here

I know it's been a long day

Thanks for sticking it out

Take care of yourselves

About me

Visually, I have light tan skin, closely shaved black hair, and my avatar is wearing a tan shirt, orange-brown suede jacket, black slacks, and black leather boots.

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My background:

- I am currently joining from the territory of Xučyun (Huichin), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochoenyó speaking Ohlone people, in so-called Oakland, in the San Francisco Bay Area of California.
- Ancestrally, my family is from the Caribbean: Puerto Rico on my mother's side, and Cuba on my father's side
- Geographically, I grew up on the ancestral and unceded land of the Munsee Lenape and Mohican peoples, in so-called New Jersey
- I received my Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, with minors in Latina/o Studies and Africana Studies, from Williams College in Massachusetts, on the ancestral and unceded land of the Mohican peoples
- I then received my PhD in Feminist & Gender Psychology from the University of Michigan, on the unceded lands of the Potawatomi and Anishinabe peoples
- And for the past 8 years, I've been a faculty member at San Francisco State University

I do have a tendency to speak quickly
 If I'm speaking too quickly, please let me know
 Interrupt me
 Write in the chat

My research interests:

In terms of my research interests, I'm interested in the many ways that our work makes us unwell. I research how people endure, cope with, and resist injustice at work, including sexual harassment, racism, and workplace mistreatment on the basis of sexuality and gender expression. I also organize and participate in peer crisis support networks which center autonomy, consent, and anticarceral approaches to care, which basically means trying to find creative ways of keeping each other safe without involving police or nonconsensual treatment such as forced psychiatric holds.

More recently, I've been investigating what different communities each need to feel and be safe, and what we can do when these needs come into conflict.

[2025/05/15 15:06] Elektra Panthar: SSG: The paper we asked you to talk about today is titled "When safety for you means danger for me: The racial politics of carceral public safety discourse." First of all, can you tell us what the title means?

[2025/05/15 15:06] Carolyn Carillon: VR: I'd like to start with a story

--Sure -- and I'd like to first begin with a story about a San Francisco resident named Banko Brown.

- At the age of just 12, Banko became homeless.
 - At this same time, he got involved in local community activism.
 - His mentors described him as a visionary
- # On April 27, 2023, Banko Brown was trying to get food from Walgreens, a United States based chain of pharmacies and convenience stores.
- A private security guard was stationed at the front of the store, which might not have been obvious seeing as he was not wearing his work-issued uniform
 - The guard accused Banko of stealing \$15 worth of candy.
 - Banko became verbally upset at this accusation; in response, the guard tackled Banko to the ground.
 - Banko managed to escape, but when he got up, the guard shot him.
 - Banko died later that night

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Even though Banko was unarmed and barely 5'4", or 163 cm, the San Francisco District Attorney refused to file charges against the security guard, determining that his actions were justifiable because he felt unsafe

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Two years later, many are still grieving the murder of Banko Brown, a young Black trans activist who was murdered for being hungry, an act of violence legitimized by the state when they said the murder was justified – not because Banko was endangering anyone, but because the guard felt unsafe by his presence.

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Meanwhile, Banko's daily life exposed him to actual threats to his safety and well-being, including repeated rejections from homeless shelters, harassment for being trans, and ultimately getting murdered while unarmed

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This tragedy magnifies the chasm between people's sense of safety vs. actual safety
- I hope to illustrate how this distinction is crucial for improving public safety, especially for people who are vulnerable to interpersonal violence and state-sanctioned death

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So, going back to the title of my research paper, let's break it down piece-by-piece
When we say "When Safety for YOU means danger for ME", this title is nodding to the fact that mainstream conversations about public safety often implicitly center groups with more power and privilege, like white folks, property owners, and U.S. citizens, and that sometimes the things that help these dominant groups feel safer are the same things that can actually expose less powerful groups to more danger

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Different groups may need different things to feel safe and these might be in conflict with each other

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Now the second part of my paper: By racial politics, I mean the many ways that race and racism are invoked in public safety discourse

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By public safety discourse, I mean the language, imagery, arguments, and metaphors used to talk about public safety, whether at town hall meetings, in the news, or on social media platforms like Facebook, X, NextDoor, and Citizen

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Carceral refers to jails, policing, and other systems of social control and confinement.

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So, carceral public safety discourse refers to messages which advocate for the expansion of policing, surveillance, and criminalization as the ideal methods for enhancing public safety

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Putting it all together, the title "When safety for you means danger for me: the racial politics of carceral public safety discourse" is essentially stating that relying on the state government and criminal legal system to define crime, identify threats, and allocate resources in service of eliminating these threats will typically only benefit one segment of the population – namely, those with greater power and privilege – while at the same time actually making everyday life MORE DANGEROUS for communities who are vulnerable to criminalization, like disabled folks, especially those of us who are disabled and people of the global racial majority

SSG: Please tell us about the populations you worked with in researching for this paper?
What sorts of fears are they dealing with?

VR: One disclaimer: So, this was actually a conceptual paper, meaning that my co-authors and I surveyed the literature in our field and critically analyzed the current state of psychological research on public safety

In particular, we wanted to see how social science research could help us make sense of the increasing criminalization of poor and disabled people, especially poor disabled people, particularly where we are located in the San Francisco Bay Area of California, a place once known for its progressive politics and yet is increasingly more hostile to poor and disabled folks

Just to clarify, I didn't interview people for this study
It was more of an editorial or literature review
I based i[t] on my own experiences and those of the people I'm in community with

I'd love to do a follow-up study, where I actually interview people about how they encounter carceral public safety apparatuses, and the impact this has on their sense of safety
I'll pause there for now

SSG: We all need to feel safe
You mentioned some factors
Can you elaborate?

VR: I do invite folks to share in the chat: what do you need to feel safe?
I'll wait

[2025/05/15 15:13] Inside of Sleep (Inside Whisper): Gender neutral or family restroom/
single use restroom.

[2025/05/15 15:13] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): I need to
feel that I can use my own agency.

[2025/05/15 15:16] Itico (Itico Spectre): Tornado warning is making me feel unsafe.

[2025/05/15 15:14] Carolyn Carillon: VR: Thanks to those who shared
Feel free to keep sharing if that's accessible

I imagine we have things in common
Access to affordable housing
Clean air and water
Safe bathrooms
We may need other things
Like the ability to express your religion
Or to use drugs where there are people and clean disposal sites
So there are factors that contribute to our safety
There are also other factors like race, disability, gender
Also space
Some people feel safer at home
Others may experience abuse at home so home isn't safer
People may feel unsafe when they're around people who aren't like them

Feeling fear and discomfort is not the same as being unsafe
That's the inspiration for my research
Sometimes our biases and privileges can make us unreliable narrators when it comes to our own safety
We may feel unsafe when we're not in danger
Culture can feed this
So critically examine the factors that contribute to our sense of safety
Where do our fears come from?
This is important when our fears affect our decisions about how others move through the world
Our sense of safety can't be established at the expense of someone else's danger

SSG: in your paper, you mentioned that cultivating safety is political
Can you speak to that?

VR: Each of us means something different by public safety
Political projects are anything where you want to shape to a political end
It's not objective
It's a social construct and it's dynamic
It changes based on who is controlling the conversation
Once we can frame public safety as a political project, we can analyse it
It helps us ask questions
Like who is prioritized in these conversations and interventions?
Who is deserving of protection?
Who's a threat?
How they reinforce privilege
How do they impact communities that are already vulnerable to surveillance?
I'd encourage you to dig below the surface
Who's centered or framed as a threat?
Think of the consequences
How will they impact our most vulnerable neighbours?

SSG: I like your concept of life-affirming public safety constructs. Can you speak to that?

VR: Being in community with people who are disabled
I get concerned when public safety is linked to police expansion
Disabled people are more likely to be harassed or even murdered by law enforcement
They can create disability through violence
Life-affirming public safety frameworks are the opposite
They seek to preserve life, especially the most vulnerable
To violence
In work, what changes when we shift our discourse
In my work, I emphasize how we meet people's needs
To live the good life on our terms
The state is quick to abandon disabled folks
I also want to share a story
In Chicago, they did focus groups
To ask people what they need to feel safe
People mentioned trees and plants
To help make the air fresher and cleaner

Make the neighbourhood more inviting
And that would mean people would more likely to treat each other with respect
Even though the city started with the conversation about public safety, the police said more trees would compromise them and make it more difficult to surveil people
Community-driven solutions are often shot down by those in government
No one is going to centre our needs
I'd love to turn this question back to you
What changes do you want to see in your environment to feel safer?

[2025/05/15 15:26] Gentle Heron: Sidewalks
[2025/05/15 15:26] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): real housing no housing I'm going to lose because of someone else in power's whims

[2025/05/15 15:26] Carolyn Carillon: SSG: I'll share one
For me, safety is whether I think I can go to an ER room without someone deciding if it's covered or not
And get care

VR: absolutely!
Health care access is huge
Are we going to be heard and treated with respect?
Not to mention the cost
Especially for us in the US
Or in other broken healthcare systems
Also, housing
Stable housing is so challenging
Especially if we live with disabilities that further constrain our options

[2025/05/15 15:27] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): housing is healthcare
[2025/05/15 15:28] Inside of Sleep (Inside Whisper): Affordable access to essential mental and physical health medications.
[2025/05/15 15:29] Stepin (Stepinwolf Darkstone): I think the focus on healthcare is not the right. The primary goal should be health and health care is a tool to keep that.

[2025/05/15 15:28] Buffy Beale: In Canada, we have free dental services but it only covers one visit, and many require more after years of neglect
[2025/05/15 15:29] Carolyn Carillon: VR: Buffy, I'm glad you mentioned that
Some aspects are better but there's still a lot to be desired
Especially if you live with chronic conditions
[2025/05/15 15:29] Buffy Beale: yes, a lot more with a sliding scale from free to minimal for those who can afford it

[2025/05/15 15:29] Carolyn Carillon: SSG: I'll add another
I think the constant fear that someone else can determine my safety as a disabled person
Whether I get to stay in my home
Or if I can afford medication
Whether or not I'm presented as a person who's milking the system

VR: absolutely

[2025/05/15 15:29] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): and unarmed crisis response.

[2025/05/15 15:30] Carolyn Carillon: VR: I want to highlight what Shaerken said About an armed response

That's HUGE

I work a lot on anticarceral response

That means, folks organizing on our own for crisis support

To create a way to call to ask for help

And people come who are unarmed

Often the ideal help doesn't exist

Or it can introduce other safety concerns

[2025/05/15 15:32] Elektra Panthar: SSG: Before we go to audience Q&A, what else would you like to tell our audience? I will also mention that there is a handout in the giver box on stage. Audience, click the box and you will get Dr. Rabelo's reference list.

VR: Thank you everyone for attending the session, I know it's a challenging topic, and a timely one

I want to acknowledge that as people commit to improve the world the importance needs to be given to the safety of intervention - carceral intervention often undermines security of many people

For example someone like Banko brown could have lived a vastly different life had he not met with violence due to him being trans, black

It's an important conversation

[2025/05/15 15:34] Mook Wheeler: QUESTION: You make good points. Carceral systems indeed emphasise marginalisation. But there are many communities, including some marginalised groups, who still call for increased policing in response to desperate and immediate violence (such as gun crime, gang violence, domestic violence). Could you speak to ONE specific example -- i.e. the *immediate* needs of people in countries such as El Salvador and Honduras, who lived in daily fear of gang violence and death until their govt. leaders instigated massive crackdowns on the gangs? How would you reconcile the *urgency* of their desperate needs with the long-term vision of abolition (especially in places where robust non-carceral systems don't yet exist)?

[2025/05/15 15:36] Elektra Panthar: VR: in terms of the last point yes the problem is that robust non-carceral systems don't yet exist anywhere

Our projects are neighborhood-based, they can pop anywhere

People creatively engage in survival and community

I'm not familiar with ground interventions in Honduras

In Chicago there's a lot of racial segregation

Trauma centers are far from areas where gang violence happens

So groups formed of people who teach how to treat gunshot wounds

This has saved a lot of lives already

These are not medical professionals

With respect to domestic violence, I appreciate that communities call for more policing to solve the problem - maybe sometimes they ask for them because they see no alternative

Unfortunately police often doesn't arrive in time either

So it's a systemic fault

Also many police officers commit domestic violence in their own homes unfortunately

[2025/05/15 15:40] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): @Shyla: a comment scrolled past: [15:35:46] iSkye Silvercloud (iskye.silverweb): C: I think one of the most important words in your title is "Discourse" - it needs to be a conversation with all sides able to participate, to share their perspectives and come to understanding and perhaps find solutions that allow a greater sense of safety for all parties

[2025/05/15 15:40] Elektra Panthar: VR: we need more safety planning
If other folks have wisdom they want to share, please write in the chat
I love peer support and lessons learned from sharing knowledge

[2025/05/15 15:41] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): @Shyla: a comment re: DVC that has scrolled: [15:39:59] Stranger Nightfire: quite a few cases where the person who called for the police end up being the ones killed by them

[2025/05/15 15:42] Elektra Panthar: VR: that's the reality for many people. I have a friend who experiences partner violence, she calls the police but she ends up the one being arrested because the abusing partner spins things around

[2025/05/15 15:43] Thomas Meriwether Swift (GMMSilverstar Resident): C: Many times responding police are attacked by BOTH parties

[2025/05/15 15:42] Lorin Tone: With a team, I munched Al Qaeda in London library before New Scotland Yard came into it. We had to clue them in.

[2025/05/15 15:41] Gentle Heron: Thank you Dr Rabelo. Your topic is so important. QUESTION- Now that you've experienced the virtual world, would you consider doing interview research in this environment? Our "veiled anonymity" in here might provide some sense of safety to interviewees.

[2025/05/15 15:43] Elektra Panthar: VR: I would Gentle, thank you. I need to skill up more in SL to learn to do that in a way that protects those involved
SL seems to be a great tool especially now with the situation in the US, with vulnerable people being surveilled

Especially now that we try to create robust groups of care and safety among peers

SSG: in a way as a lesbian I think how it was like when I was younger and being surveilled in San Jose. We were getting bottles thrown at us

I think of Stonewall where people fought back

I'm thinking if what I think of as safety is at risk now

Can this be solved without people feeling the need to rise up in a way that may not be beneficial for all?

[2025/05/15 15:45] Lorin Tone: but it can be done if you get mad enough
Surveilled in San Jose?

To engage in a violent manner

[2025/05/15 15:47] Elektra Panthar: SSG: I'm a pacifist

VR: Thank you for sharing that

It speaks to how safety is often fleeting

Progress is not always linear unfortunately, there can be setbacks

Recently people are organizing for safety when they are in public, or at the doctor - they plan of ways to counteract threats

There was a project to solve the violence towards gay people in public transport and taxis (before Uber etc)

That's also why knowing history of the community is important, our ancestors came up with creative solutions that can be adapted to today

[2025/05/15 15:50] Lorin Tone: Right. Cover yer back.

[2025/05/15 15:51] Mook Wheeler: The rise of nationalism is directly associated with increased carceral power-- historically this has always been so.

[2025/05/15 15:51] Elektra Panthar: VR: Yes Mook!

SSG: any other questions? please repost if I missed any

I want to thank Dr Rabelo and transcriptionist who kept up with us (You're welcome :))

I appreciate you coming in world and look forward for more interviews

[2025/05/15 15:52] verorabelo Resident: rabelo@sfsu.edu

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/vero-rabelo-b85ab783/>

[2025/05/15 15:52] Pecos Kidd: We are now at the end of an enlightening day, and on behalf of Gentle and myself, wish to express our thanks for all we have learned from all our presenters.

I want to thank each of them, which for many meant braving entrance into a new (to them) world for this conference.

Thank you Manish, Aman, Maria, Jen, Mustafa, Lady Tigress, Kip, Demelza, Viola, Leigh, Kathryn, Gloria, and Veró!

What a wealth of information you have shared today.

I also want to remind the audience that often what is said about one type of fear can apply to other types. Think broadly about what you've heard!

Thank you to our audience for sharing this conference with us. Without you and our excellent presenters, the conference would not exist. Thank you for coming today!

I want to especially thank all the Virtual Ability community members who volunteered and contributed to today's success.

Our greeters are the first contact with the Virtual Ability community for many attendees.

Thanks to Gemma Cleanslate for organizing the greeters, and to Ariell, Gemma, Lorin, Zip, Ari, Warthog, Pecos and Stepinwolf for greeting our guests.

I'm proud of the VAI members who introduced presenters and facilitated panels today, and the people who were backing them up.

These conference team members include ZZri, Sonitus, Inside, Lorin, Tarquin, Itico, Stealth, and Shyla

Thanks to our behind-the-scenes streaming team: Marcus, Rhiannon and James. Great teamwork, guys.

Special thanks and icepacks for their RL non-avatar wrists to our excellent transcriptionists: Elektra, Carolyn, and Shaerken.

Their efforts exemplify the work we all do to ensure accessibility for everyone in the community.

Thank you to Mook, iSkye, Itico, and Eme for their support and hard work throughout the months leading up to today.

And all the unnamed folks who stood by as back up. You served a very important role, as those who had to step up from being an understudy quickly found out. Thank you kindly.

Of course, all of us within Virtual Ability understand the incredible vision, and seriously hard work done by Gentle Heron in not only leading this community, but in planning and making this conference happen - now completing its 14th year. Thank you Gentle!

If you ever wondered about the power of teamwork, you saw a living example of it today!

A reminder that we will archive the text chat and the videos of individual sessions for future review or if anyone missed a session.

A quick invitation to visit the poster sets on Healthinfo Island (to our west) for additional information about mental illness, with two sets especially on the topic of fear..

A notecard about this month's Healthinfo Island poster sets is in the blue sign on the left of the stage.

Please stay healthy, everyone. Let's continue to enjoy our virtual world together.

[2025/05/15 15:57] Gentle Heron: Hurrah for transcribers, greeters, introducers, speakers, and all the conference volunteers and the audience. Thank you Pecos for being my capable back up.

[2025/05/15 15:56] Eme Capalini: Great job to Pecos too!
Busy day for our transcriptionists, great job!

[2025/05/15 15:56] Lorin Tone: Hurrah!!!

[2025/05/15 15:56] Buffy Beale: Cheering!!!

[2025/05/15 15:56] Stepin (Stepinwolf Darkstone): Claps

[2025/05/15 15:56] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): /me stomples and cheers.

[2025/05/15 15:57] James Atlloud (Lloud Laffer): 🎵🎵 ☀️Thanks for music ☀️ 🎵🎵

[2025/05/15 15:57] Buffy Beale: yay, great work everyone!!!