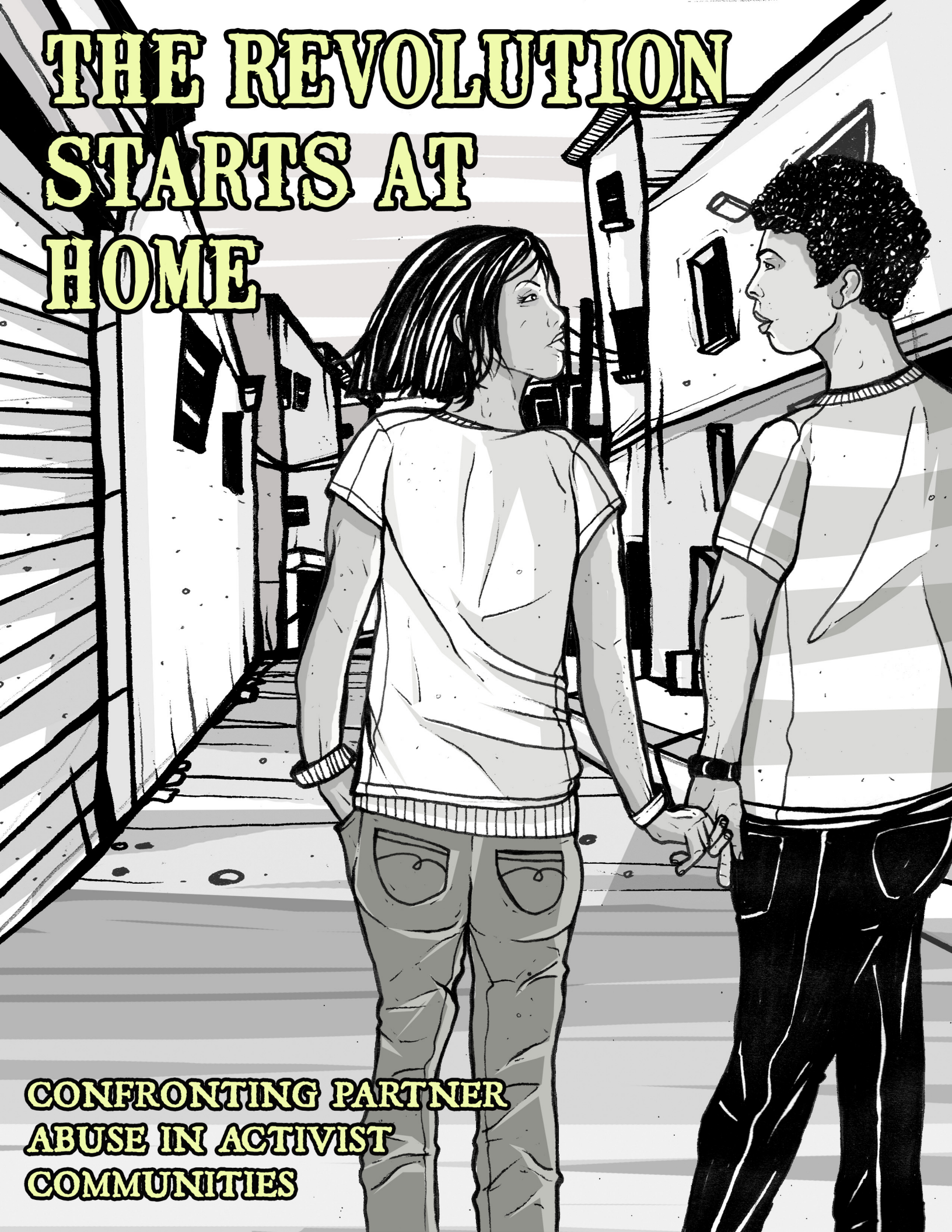
THE REVOLUTION STARTS AT HOME



CONFRONTING PARTNER ABUSE IN ACTIVIST COMMUNITIES

I am not proposing that sexual violence and domestic violence will no longer exist. I am proposing that we create a world where so many people are walking around with the skills and knowledge to support someone that there is no longer a need for anonymous hotlines.

I am proposing that we break through the shame of survivors (a result of rape culture) and the victim-blaming ideology of all of us (also a result of rape culture), so that survivors can gain support from the people already in their lives. I am proposing that we create a society where community members care enough to hold an abuser accountable so that a survivor does not have to flee their home. I am proposing that all of the folks that have been disappointed by systems work together to create alternative systems. I am proposing that we organize.

Rebecca Farr, CARA member

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where the revolution started: an introduction

In 1996, I am falling in love. I am fucking that hot mixed Latino queer boy who feels like my separated at birth brother in a field of daisies outside a really horrendous music festival in a southern Ontario small hippie town. I am staying in his one room apartment lined with milk crate bookshelves filled with Chrystos, Freire and Sapphire. I am incredibly happy. I am going to run away from America and this is all I need.

In 1997, I will be running from him. I will be pushing his hands choking me off my neck. I will be curled up in a closet as he screams and kicks the door with his boots on. I will be lying to the cops so he doesn't go back to jail. I will run, finally, into the arms of a community who loves me and him and has no ideas what to do. In 1999, I will leave for good.

In 2004, I am sitting behind a gray fuzzy office divider dividing off a piss-yellow, airless workspace at the tenant hotline that is my horrible nonprofit dayjob in Toronto. As usual, I'm on Livejournal, my Riseup email account and Friendster all at the same time, while I answer intermittent phone calls from people about to be evicted.

Somewhere in the middle of it, I get an email. I get a phone call. My ex had been hired as relief staff at the youth shelter where my lover worked. My ex was on the Evite for the intimate pre-party of the beloved poet's booklaunch that I was also invited to. One of the youth I used to teach mentioned he was spinning at a night she DJd.

Six years after my finally being able to leave the queer brown man who was my sweetest thing once, who'd turned into someone who kicked, choked, sneered and yelled; a man embedded in people of color activist community, a poet and a longtime prison justice and anti-police brutality organizer; I still watched my back. Still lived matter of fact with PTSD and scanning the streets for him as I walked home. Still varied my routes to that home. Still never went to a club he might be at alone.

He'd stopped identifying as queer, so I fled to women's country and he got the straight POC zones in the divorce. Zones that didn't know what to do with us, how to hold him accountable or keep me safe. Zones that said, "Maybe he has food allergies and that's why he's violent." "Maybe he's had therapy and changed - how do you know?" (*Because then he would've apologized, asked what I needed and done it, stopped staring at me with his lips curled back like he wanted to kill me whenever he saw me.*) "Our men go through so much, it's no wonder- you can't be so hard on him." "What, you're going to call the cops? You're going to bring the prison-industrial complex down on a man of color?" "Have you tried healing him with love?" "It's so personal," "No one really knows what happens in a relationship but those two people," "You're a strong woman of color - you can take it."

I left those voices to make my base in the queer/trans of color and women of color communities, which were, thank god, big and strong in my city. I mourned the straight POC activist communities I'd lived and worked inside for three years, and I also knew that if my partner had been female or trans the queer POC communities would mostly not have known what to do with us either. But I also lived in more and more peace and security. I grew community that protected me. I ran into him less and less, even in the year where I moved into an apartment four blocks away from his new place. (This, in a neigh-

borhood with one breakfast spot and one bar.)

But I still ran into him. Still looked up and saw him staring me down at the club. Still saw him headlining a show, speaking at a rally.

I'd gotten away alive. I'd gotten more than many folks get. But I still wasn't done. You don't get done without justice.

~

I felt caught. I was safe. I wasn't dead, as he'd threatened ("You ever send me back to jail, I'll take you to the cop shop, kill you and then kill myself.") But I didn't know how to move forward. Should I write the dub poet and tell her that her friend had kicked and choked and terrorized me, a sister poet? Should I contact the heads of the political groups he was a part of and ask them to not have him as a speaker? I was afraid that any attempt of mine to contact him, or contact people in his life and let them know what was up, would be met with a violent, unpredictable backlash against me. A worker in rape crisis and DV, I was familiar with the feminist DV understanding that the way to go is to cut off all contact with a stalker or harasser after setting a clear "NO," that any attempt to negotiate or discuss would be twisted into manipulations that screwed with your safety.

And I was tired. I was tired of always having to put myself out there to be physically and emotionally vulnerable explaining partner abuse to others when it wasn't an abstract issue- it was my credibility, and my life stories before those skeptical eyes as I said that yes, he'd hit me and no, there was no excuse for it, and yes it was really that bad. I couldn't get him fired from his job at the shelter. I'd never called the cops on him because I didn't want to send a man of color to prison, so there was nothing that would show up on his criminal screening. I couldn't get him fired from every job working with youth in the city. Sometimes I thought I should just leave the city, but I didn't want to be pushed out of my first city, my first true love, my home.

Most times, I did nothing. Except that doing nothing is also doing something. It's continuing to get up in the morning, pray, shower, write, hang out with your friends, live your life. Sometimes it's the best thing you can do. But I wanted an end. I wanted transformation. I wanted us to finally figure out what to do with abusers

Journal entry 9/24/2004

My therapist interrupted me in mid "I hate that I would have to start a political movement to convince all his friends that he is abusive and abuse is wrong in order for me to feel safe" rant. She said, "But that's not community accountability. Community accountability means you don't have to do it all yourself."

road maps to justice in real life

Out of that conversation, I emailed some friends and we started talking about doing something, together, to challenge partner abuse in activist communities. Because it is scary, dangerous and exhausting to do it all by yourself, I have notes and essays I was working on for this zine that date back to 2000, but in 2004 I knew that I needed people to walk with me.

I had been inspired by INCITE Women of Color Against Violence and most specifically, their Community Accountability Principles and their internal document on partner abuse within activist communities of color. The Community Accountability Principles were a deep sigh of relief - somebody got it! Somebody got the need to look for real alternatives that prioritized survivor safety while

holding perpetrators accountable.

But I wondered: how had the 300 brainstormed ideas in the document worked in practice? As someone who has been a veteran of both the Riot Grrl girl gang years (aka, "Let's get a posse and fuck shit up/ Dead men don't rape!" – inspiring idea, doesn't always work in practice) and failed "healing circles" with my abusive ex (idea being that a bunch of men in the community sat with him and tried to talk about what was going on - process gets really funky and falls apart unless there is a centering of what the survivor needs, an understanding that the survivor and perpetrator don't have equal power in the situation, and an understanding that the perpetrator will not be permitted to whine his way out of responsibility by crying) I wanted to see what solutions we were cooking up.

I've also been fascinated by feminist and other radical utopian fictions since I was a kid, and one big thing I've always wondered is, what will we do with perpetrators? If we agree that the cops and courts are not our friends; if they do not work to keep us safe; if perpetrators are not 'out there' but 'in here'- what solutions do we magic out of our guts to create safety, justice and healing?

Partner abuse in activist communities has been an open secret for a long time. I read Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power* and saw how partner abuse inside the Black Panthers helped, along with COINTELPRO, to destablize the movement. Anthologies like *Naming the Violence* documented the lived realities of abusive relationships inside 1970s and 80s radical lesbian communities. Other feminist of color writers and activists like Angela Davis, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, Elizabeth Martinez, Aurora Levins Morales and many others have documented the complicated realities of abusers within movements. Arab-American feminist scholar Joanna Kadi write about how the feminist movement had looked at abuse as political, but only on a man/woman basis, and explored the incredible implications of looking at what abuse means when we look at race, class, disability, age, and gender and sexuality.

the backstory:

This project has taken us through a buttload of emails, many three and four way conference calls routed through Iowa, with us phoning in from Toronto, New York, Durham and Boston. From artists residencies, VONA meetups, sex parties, impromptu childcare sessions and airport gates. It's taken us through grad school acceptances, 3,000 mile moves, lovers, breakups, book launches and international travel. We've stood together in rare moments outside the Asian/Pacific Islander Spoken Word Summit in new York or after all-day journeys on public transit to get to Brooklyn Pride. After an initial call for submissions in 2005, this zine is bigger at 100 + pages than I ever imagined. It's enriched by testimony and road maps from many different communities.

It's enriched as well by surprises. Many survivors whose stories I knew personally through the underground railroad of stories, who I assumed would be down to contribute, turned out not to be ready. Some collectives I was inspired by never wrote back.

In my life, there are also surprises. Four years since that moment of rage, grief and helplessness online at work, I no longer work at the tenant hotline, live with the lover or in that city. I left my city, but not because I was forced out, because I wanted to. I live in Oakland, aka June Jordan country. I don't watch my back anymore, at least not for him. I go wherever I want. Friends say that I look free. I am free.

I flip back through four years of Livejournal

posts and am amazed at what I've emerged from. I am amazed at the concrete tools we have created out of our own genius. Take these tools into your own lives and see where they fit. Make and share your own. We are the ones we've been waiting for, and out of our own genius knowledge we will figure out how to make a revolution that leaves out none of us.

–Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Thank you to everyone who had my back during the long process of my finding safety from my ex partner. Special thanks to Hana Abdul, Adrineh der Bhoggosian, Karine Silverwoman, Trish Salah, Zoe Whittall, Cherry Galette, Adrian Nation, Timothy Colman, Maceo Cabrera Estevez, Gordon Edgar, and all my Bay Area friends. Thank you to Pearl Cleage, bell hooks, Elaine Brown, Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz and other women who courageously testified about their experiences in violent relationships within activist movements. Thank you to the editors and contributors of The Peak's special issue on abuse within activist communities for first opening this door. Thank you to the generations of radical anti violence movements and survivors. Thank you to INCITE, Generation 5, CARA, UBUNTU, Critical Resistance, Philly's Pissed and Northwest Network for making the way and being so awe-inspiringly awesome in creating the groundbreaking work that will transform our world. ▮

When I was 17 years old, my family didn't approve of my boyfriend at the time. They thought that he was a bad influence on me -- he was an immigrant from a different ethnicity/race without a "good job" (we had worked together at the same movie theater) or "good educational background." I battled my mother and emerged from that experience resolved not to let anyone else control or decide for me who I was involved with, or what kind of relationship(s) I chose to have.

Four years later, after moving to a city where I knew no one and in another relationship I knew my family wouldn't approve of, I turned my back on my family and friends. We were stressed out about immigration status and making the rent. I was canvassing in the late afternoon and evenings for a rape crisis center with a group of mostly women who were rape and sexual assault survivors and my partner was driving a cab on the night shift.

I had no one to turn to and no support system when our relationship became volatile. At the time, I didn't feel part of any community. Part of my relationship experience was the feeling of being isolated – having no friends, place to go to outside of our apartment, or any organization that I felt I belonged to or who knew me and my history.

So when years later, I started building my own community and circles, what it meant for me to be in community was to not have to feel alone and isolated, to be able to feel hopeful about the possibilities that there could be ways to figure out how to feel protected in whatever, whichever ways we needed to.

When a friend who I had met through community work needed to escape from an abusive husband, we worked out a system that she would call me when she was ready and I would drive over and get her out of there. And it worked!

But I soon learned that not everything was that easy or simple or clearcut.

Sometimes my friends hadn't yet figured out what could be helpful or didn't want to talk about it. Sometimes I felt too far away to be of much use or help, or didn't realize what the impact of what I was doing until much later. A good friend confided in me, but didn't want me to let on that I knew what was going on to the person who she was in the abusive relationship with, and we were all part of the same organizing collective. I entered into relationships too where I often didn't know how to handle difficult situations because we were doing this kind of work together.

When Leah asked us to join her in making a resource guide/telling our own stories and strategies, I saw it as something that I would have loved, read, found useful throughout my journeys, both in some of the situations I found myself in, as well as in supporting those loved ones around me.

I hope you find it useful as well.

xoxo,
Ching-In Chen

▮

the revolution starts at home: pushing through the fear

Jai Dulani

Accepting yourself is a big part of writing.
~ Chrystos

I am scared to write this introduction. I am scared that people won't believe a word I have to say. I am scared that I don't believe what I have to say. I am scared and feel ashamed because I am not 14 anymore. I am not 17 anymore. I am not 19 anymore.

1. Maps to Secrets and Lies (14)

What has brought you to this moment right now?
~ Sharon Bridgforth

A queer, closeted, intense love affair in Chandigarh, India. That was my first relationship. She was the beautiful, new braniac at school. And me? At 14, I was going on year three of being the "girl from America" - which to my classmates meant some unfortunately false assumptions about:

a.) me being rich and
b.) me being a slut.

My family was split in two different countries. Her family moved around a lot because of her Dad's job. We knew what it felt to be uprooted. We wanted to find home in each other. Home. Safety. Stability. Space. To be ourselves and share our pain, hopes and fears. Ninth and tenth grade was a whirlwind of love letters, holding hands underneath our desks, stealing kisses during study time, secret dates to the lake, codes to say "I love you" in front of a parents' (1-4-3 – very original and hard to crack), mixed tapes (think 80's love songs: Lionel Richie, Richard Marx, Jefferson Starship - "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now") and last but not least, lots and lots of hallmark cards (the silhouettes of a man and woman in front of a beach sunset was accommodated in our gay-but-not-named-gay relationship). We were best friends to the world. To each other, we said we were in love. After all, outcasts always find each other. It was us against the world. Us against the world.

I want to end the story there. A secret underground love story, queer without labels, my first gay relationship - in India – proving America didn't make me a homo.

I don't remember our first fight. Her jealousy and possessiveness affected my relationship with my sister, as my sister could smell something was wrong ... and missed me as well. "*What kind of hold does she have over you?*"

My classic defensive retort: "*You don't understand*."

No one did. No one knew I was her refuge from her parent's emotional and physical abuse. No one knew that I became her only escape. She needed to know where I was and what I was doing all the time. She couldn't handle me having other friendships. She was so angry once when I said I was going out with some other friends that she kept calling my house. I remember being embarrassed and not knowing what to tell people what was going on. But I soon learned to lie because disagreeing with her or challenging her was not an option. She had to win. I couldn't leave until she did. I was frequently late and made up a lot of lies, to teachers, tutors, family. Cutting herself was a coping mechanism she used to deal with her family. When she realized how much it upset me, she knew she could

use that against me. She wasn't afraid to punish me. Amongst nail-digging, pinching, pushing, hair-pulling, face grabbing, was the occasional backhand. But mostly, her palms cut up. Lines of destiny mixed with lines of self-hate, manipulation, dried blood: Maps to secrets and lies. She would do it in front of me. A blade. A compass. A knife. I would cry, beg her to stop. Escalation was her favorite though. Pills. Poison. Pink lips craving suicide. She was fearless. It was torture. It was control. And it worked. Every time.

My family and I returned to the states 4 months before my sixteenth birthday. Letters of despair followed me. "*Why did you leave? I need you. Everything got worse when you left. When are you coming back? I can't take it anymore*." Pages and pages, letter after letter after letter. I was the only one ... who ever loved her, understood her, could save her, from the doctor that molested her, the father who beat her, the fiancé who raped her ... the murder in self-defense? ... the cancer that ... didn't exist.

Over a decade later, I still don't know what was real. I know that I lost myself. That at 16, I was looking up shelters in India, sending money I earned from the bagel shop I worked at, and talking to a lawyer friend. I know that after I attempted to cut off contact, she spoke to my grandmother for my updated contact information, posing as the sweet girl who missed her best friend. I know that I lied awake as the phone rang over and over again in the middle of the night, waking my parents. When I answered, she pretended to be someone else or not to hear me or my frustration. The emails, letters and calls eventually died down. Last I heard from her was a comment she posted on a website that had published a poem of mine: "*I still love you.*"

II. Apologizing (17)

He said my long Asian hair fulfilled a fantasy. It was my senior year of high school in Pennsylvania. The year I went to a feminist conference, to my first Take Back the Night, and the year I dated my first boyfriend.

The feminist conference was huge for me. I saw so many dykes. It was the first time I named that I had been in a gay relationship. (While in India, I seriously had not named it that. We talked about whether what we did together was wrong, but we didn't stop and we knew enough to hide it from everyone). I came out to myself at this conference. Not only that, but there was a South Asian dyke there, whose family was connected to mine through the Hindu temple community. She was in graduate school and was an activist. And gay. At 17, it was beautiful to see a Desi queer activist. We kept in touch. I introduced her to my boyfriend and they hit it off. She invited him to present at a multicultural event she organized as he did Tai-Chi (also a part of his Asian fetish).

I was determined to lose my virginity before college. My boyfriend and I engaged in what was originally consensual sexual activity. However, the pain was so intense that I soon realized I wasn't ready and my body needed it to stop. My verbal and physical attempts were not forcefully shut down, simply minimized. I didn't know what else to do. I wanted it to be over. I cooperated. As Bran Fenner says in his piece, "Cooperation is not consent."

I soon broke all communication with him after I started college. (He also wasn't too keen on keeping in touch since I shaved my head my first week at college, which apparently was me *reaching into his chest and tearing his heart out*.) The South Asian dyke friend gave me a lot of heat for ending

things with him. I came off as a cold bitch. Why not be friendly, keep in touch, didn't I know I hurt him? When I visited home that first semester, I got in touch with my ex and we met up for coffee. I ended up crying and crying and crying. Apologizing.

III. Overdosing on Seduction (19)

My life isn't dangerous anymore, but I'm still afraid.
~ Chrystos

I've written about my overdose before. I've written about how I internalized the layers of guilt and shame that my family carried - around issues of race and class, about how what I did to myself followed a laundry list of violent family memories we all wanted to forget, about how I came out to my mother in the hospital. I've written about everything except what exactly happened that led up to me trying to kill myself. It's as if I wrote about a car I was driving, how I inherited it, how the road was shit, and the fact that I crashed into a tree – but I didn't write about a hitchhiker I picked up along the way. A hitchhiker who I felt trapped in the car with, and crashing felt like the only solution.

I met this "hitchhiker" in college. She was beautiful rage. Fiercely political. A woman of color artist not afraid to make white people cry. We talked politics, organized, performed poetry. And we both still do these things. I just try to avoid being in the same room as her.

This particular part feels hard to write about. I repeat history here. History I feel I should've learned from.

My life quickly became about how she was doing and what she needed. She was constantly talking about being a victim. While what she was upset about was valid – white racist people in her classes, homophobia from her community, worrying about money – there was a way that it all translated to my erasure, in order to take care of her ... emotionally ... financially ... sexually. She preferred our sexual relationship to be a secret. This made the nature or depth of our relationship unclear to me. I remember wondering if she felt ashamed of me and she reassured me that that wasn't the case. In hindsight, I think our relationship was undefined so that there wasn't any accountability on her end. If I was upset about our relationship, I didn't have anyone to talk to about it since no one knew about it and it didn't feel like I had a right to talk to her about being upset since we weren't in a "real" relationship.

Part of why we weren't in a "real" relationship is because she was seemingly heartbroken about her ex and wanted to get back together with him. Like me, he was also on the FTM spectrum. The three of us had a messy intertwined existence for about 6 months. Intertwined in that both he and I went through phases of being with her and not speaking to her. I witnessed her use every part of his identity against him – his being half-white, calling him by his old name, anything that was apart of him she used to put him down. During a time that they were not speaking to each other, she took him home from a party when he was drunk. He couldn't walk up the stairs by himself. They had sex in his room.

There was a certain time period where he and I became friends and we both were not speaking to her. We bonded over what it had been like to date her. We talked about feeling trapped by rigid gender roles, about how that dynamic affected us emotionally and sexually. My physical relationship with her felt like an addiction, mechanical movements of submission, part of who I was sup-

posed to be.

Meanwhile, I had quickly become *the* poc anti-violence activist. I had co-organized Take Back the Night and more women of color students and professors were in attendance than ever before (or at least in a long-ass time!). I had developed a reputation as the only visible person of color anti-violence activist.

Two nights before I overdosed, she took me home from a party. Sex in my room ... I was so drunk, couldn't walk straight. ... My body remembers. Sobering up naked in bed. ... *Do you think I'm a rapist? ...*

The next night, hours before I took a shitload of pain-killers, she and her ex had a huge fight in my room. This was what tipped everything over. She yelled at him in front of me. I saw him physically react, get smaller and smaller. She got in his face, backed him against the wall with loud hurtful words. I did nothing. I stood there, paralyzed, complacent.

I hated myself. Was disgusted. Felt hypocritical and ashamed for having an anti-violence activist reputation. I felt like I chose her over him. Fucking over friendship, since I was sleeping with the enemy.

I felt responsible for everything shitty that I was feeling. I was feeling shitty about my body and the sex from the night before. Sex I had told myself I wasn't going to engage in ever again. I was feeling shitty about not standing up for a friend. I felt trapped in shame.

IV. Of Martyrs and Prayers

> *[You] need to look at what's happened in your life, so it doesn't control you.*
> *~ Chrystos*

As someone with a history of being socialized female, I understand how that can translate to believing I need to be a caretaker, erasing myself, and giving in to other people's sexual desires in order to please them. In many ways, I was simply playing out what I learned and internalized. Over and over again.

I have thought critically about what that means. What was my role in these relationships? What does it mean to take responsibility for:

1.) my healing?
2.) identifying the affect of my trauma on other people?

I remember having a conversation with a friend about our work as multi-issue anti-oppression activists and telling her that I often worry about coming off as wanting to prove I am a victim. She said she has always looked at our work as trying to prove we are human. Healing to me has meant humanizing myself. I have struggled to forgive my 14-17-19 year-old-self. However, in writing this piece, I have found forgiveness. Solace in the familiar fear that takes over and gives me chills and paralyzes me. Because here I am pushing through the fear.

When Leah contacted me about taking on this project, I had no idea what a gift it would be for my own journey. I am grateful for each and every submission. I am grateful for the opportunity to push through the fear. My understanding of partner abuse in activist communities is rooted in my understanding of fear, as a tool and product of abuse.

My experiences, both in terms of what I have endured as well as what I have witnessed, particularly in activist communities, have shined light on the intricacies of

how silence works, the intricacies of what is at stake, and what is possible.

I reflect on my experiences and think about how vulnerable queer teenagers are to abusive relationships. Not being out leads to a secret relationship, which can easily lead to secret abuse. I think about the power of language. Naming a relationship – acknowledging an existence – helps to identify real violence in a real relationship.

I think about how in queer communities, especially queer people of color communities, you know how much shit your lovers/ partners have been through. How they are often survivors, if not of physical or sexual violence, then definitely of the violence of oppression. How can we hold them accountable and still get them the support they need for the fucked up shit they have been through and still keep ourselves safe? How do we share community? How do survivors get past the shock that "one of us" is recreating the violence? The guilt of not wanting to add to our lover's oppression or make their situation worse? The fear that the community we found or created will hate us, shun us, expel us for shaking up the foundation of trust we thought we shared?

As if we come to these activist communities with a history of being believed, not blamed for the violence we experienced. Naturally we lie again to cover it up. Naturally "the community" is uncomfortable or unaware or perhaps unintentional in boldly perpetuating silence.

The very shit that led us to be activists and organizers is the shit that has been recreated. It feels shocking. Unnerving. But not unbelievable. How easy is it to be isolated when everyone is working hard all the time and burnt out anyway? And did we forget that abusers are often charming, talented, intelligent beings? Of course they are popular speakers, artists, writers, trainers. We look for monsters, not martyrs. We look for someone who looks like "the enemy." Did we forget that it is the ones we know, not strangers who hurt us the most?

This zine is a prayer for us all, as witnesses and survivors, to step up and push through the fear that keeps us silent. This zine is a prayer for hope, healing and responsibility. An offering of stories that will hopefully validate, inform and inspire dialogue and action. A calling for us to notice, whose life is getting smaller and smaller? Whose needs are at the center of/ defining the relationship? Who is manipulating activist language to cover-up their behavior?

While we have more questions than answers, we at least have questions that can serve as a roadmap towards healthier and more accountable communities. A roadmap to what is possible. After all, the revolution starts at home. ▮

there is another way

Ana Lara

Part I: Survivor's Rights & Responsibilities

As a survivor of abuse, in any of its forms, I have the right to:

1. Name rape, incest, sexual molestation, assault, battery, domestic violence, and all forms of abuse in all its forms.
2. Feel angry, hurt, sad, loving, or forgiving of my perpetrator(s), and any friend(s) or family who has collaborated with the violence.
3. Speak about my abuse.
4. Have a space to reflect on my personal history without judgment.
5. The physical and psychological care that is necessary for surviving trauma.
6. A safe and secure home.
7. Safe relationships with family, friends, partners, lovers and service providers.
8. Confront perpetrators and those who have participated in violations and abuses.
9. Leave.
10. Take action to stop the abuse.
11. Feel beautiful and loveable.
12. Love and be loved.

As a survivor of abuse, in any of its forms, I have the responsibility to:

1. Take care of myself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually–whatever that means for me.
2. Reflect on the ways abuse has affected me and to seek appropriate forms of support.
3. Understand the sources of my pain.
4. Interrupt patterns of abuse and self-abuse in my own behavior that hurt me and/or others.
5. Take full responsibility for my choices and behaviors.
6. Reach out to other survivors as a source of support or to provide support.
7. Live my life to the best of my abilities and with the goal of reaching my full potential.
8. Stay present to myself and to my needs.
9. Form healthy relationships that nourish me.
10. Claim my own desire.
11. Accept my beauty, power, strengths, weaknesses and humanity in the world.
12. Survive my history, circumstances and violations.

Part II: What I Was Thinking

This essay is written for myself and other organizers who are survivors of abuse, in all its forms. I'm writing it in the hopes of making connections between our experiences as survivors and our roles as organizers.

For many years, and with many friends and peers, I have had an on-going discussion about the effects of abuse on ourselves and our community work. At the core of that discussion is a tension around how to identify ourselves and each other with regards to where we are in relationship to our personal histories. Are we victims? survivors? What are the politics of these identities? Without ignoring or discounting the important history of the domestic violence movement in the United States, or where you the reader may be in your own process, I want to clarify where I sit today with regards to this particular item.

People of color, queers, genderqueers, we are the living proof that we do not accept

institutionalized forms of violence as inherently true or valid–that we believe in our own worth and right to live life on our own terms. It is important for me to start there because my understanding is that when we extend the definition of oppression to include violence in all its forms, we are extending it into an understanding that all forms of abuse are unacceptable: from institutional racism to partner abuse, from police brutality to date rape, from financial control to compulsive heterosexuality. In other words, WE ALREADY HAVE A BASIC FRAMEWORK FOR MAKING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN OUR OWN EXPERIENCES AND THOSE OF OUR COMMUNITIES.

If that is my starting point, then please know that this essay is an attempt to create language for defining my own experiences and my own lessons. This is a divine opportunity because to date I have not seen language that reflects 1) how I have survived abuse and the ramifications of my process on my community organizing work and 2) the direct connection with our own resolutions around personal abuse and the ways we affect others as community organizers. Given that resolving our personal histories of abuse is a life-long process that is more like walking around a well than down a straight road, I am in no way implying that I have it all figured out. But rather, the opposite: when we're aware of our own pain, and work to uncover its sources, we become our best allies to our own healing–and can become stronger in our community work.

My limited experience of the existing institutionalized domestic violence frameworks has been frustrating and painful. Some of the worst abuse I have experienced has come from social service or community based organizations offering services to survivors, and to the most disenfranchised members of our society. In the process of reflecting on these experiences, I ended up sitting down and writing out all of my thoughts about my own history of abuse and survival and the lessons I have learned in the process. The very first realization that came to me out of that process resulted in the "rights & responsibilities" statement. As I saw myself writing down what I have learned about what I have a right to, and in turn, how I have taken my own lessons from abuse and turned them into a sort of code for healing behavior in the world beyond myself, I was scared. I saw that what I am suggesting is potentially dangerous. That it could be misinterpreted. For me, these "rights & responsibilities" have served as a guideline for personal and community healing.

Let me clarify: healing from our personal experiences is not just a matter of personal health, but also about social change. Our communities have suffered lifetimes of abuse from slavery to police brutality. And the work that is required to undo the internalized and externalized forms of oppression is not just about what we do out in the streets, in non-profits or community groups: it's also about how prepared we are to deal with the fall out of our circumstances and personal experiences. It is hard work to do this. It is really hard.

Part III: An Example from My Own Life

Many years ago, when I was 21, I dated a woman who was incredibly abusive - to the point of trying to destroy my friendships and the beginnings of physical violence culminating in a gun threat. Being a full blown dyke drama queen, I was dating someone with whom I worked. We were in different buildings, but nonetheless, after the destructive break up, which I initiated because I couldn't take her controlling behavior, she followed me around during work hours for about three months. I quit my job as soon as possible and made sure that I changed my social circum-

stances to avoid the places where she hung out. This sucked for me, but I didn't want to risk seeing her. It didn't matter–she found ways to find me.

The moment of personal fury and epiphany came when she approached an acquaintance (let's call her "Sarah") almost two years later, and informed "Sarah" of my betrayal of her love. "Sarah", someone with whom I was doing intense community work, was not familiar with the violence I had lived through with this woman. "Sarah" came over to my home one day telling me I had a responsibility to ensure that all of our community was taken care of. I was so upset, I turned pale. After taking an hour to calm down, I explained to "Sarah" why I had broken off all communication with my ex. "Sarah", also a survivor of abuse, immediately understood. She started crying, having herself felt the effects of abusive manipulation. However, a couple of months later, "Sarah" invited both me and my ex to a party–without informing either of us that we would both be there. When I asked her why, she said it was not her responsibility to value one community member over the other. I left the party. It was apparent to me that "Sarah" was not sensitive to the subtleties of abuse in our communities. As a result, she had created a context for perpetuating violence. I understood her desire to create healing, but I thought that her method was deplorable.

If I had not done the work to take care of myself, to ensure my own safety and mental health, who knows what kinds of violent rips I could have created in that moment. The truth is, the community was small–especially that of queer, colored organizers. We all knew each other. For me, it had been especially important that I take steps to ensure my personal safety and to seek help after that relationship. It was important because I was working with other survivors, and with people going through abuse in that moment–not directly within an organization, but because that is the reality of my communities. If I had not been working on getting solid on my own stuff, who knows what kind of energy I would have put out at that party, in that moment, with my community.

That incident became an important catalyst for discussions about partner abuse–all of us in our community felt the ripple of that setting. One, because we cared about each other, people noticed I left the party. Two, when they asked me, days later, I used it as an opportunity to break the silence around the partner abuse–which in turn led other women in our community to break the silence regarding the "ex". And three, because we realized there was a shared experience of violence, we began to create bridges to safeguard ourselves, to hold each other accountable and to create spaces of healing.

After that night, I never saw my ex again. In our community discussions, we all asked ourselves to identify the roots of our pain, to define community and community work. We asked ourselves what it meant to be accountable–how to differentiate loyalty from truth, and how to hold truth in gentle manners. We started to analyze the frameworks we were using to define our work. It became clear that a trust had been broken between "Sarah" and me, and that in order for the work to continue to be effective, we would have to be healed and that trust restored. It became evident that white, middle class models of mediation and community work were not what we were using, nor where they appropriate or enough.

Those discussions at age 23 became super important for my own development as a person, artist and organizer. They were critical to my understanding of the links between personal experience and community work. Through those shared moments and conversations, I started to understand that our per-

sonal experiences of abuse could be become a roadmap for continuing or stopping the perpetuation of violent, oppressive behavior. That being a survivor and a perpetrator are simultaneously possible, just as it is possible to be a racist queer, or a homophobic person of color. And that much in the same way we work to not perpetuate racism, we must also work not to perpetuate violent interactions. There are other ways.

Truth telling does not have to be a traumatic, abusive process. Believe me when I tell you I have experienced social change in non-abusive, healing forms. And usually, it comes out of models generated by the most traumatized of our communities–communities of color, genderqueer communities, genderqueer colored communities... we know that there is a way to do the work without hurting ourselves and others. Because creating hurt is what our society does to us every day, and what white supremacy and nationalism and fascism operate on.

Part IV: What I Dream Of

I know, in my flesh, that my ancestors had no choice about their enslavement. But they did have a choice about how to survive that enslavement. They chose profound spiritual power, subtle and direct forms of resistance, and sometimes, participation in the system as overseers or slave owners themselves. I think, I believe, the same range of options is available in all circumstances. Nobody told Condoleeza Rice to become a neo-conservative self-hating enemy of the people, for example. And I am grateful that Huey Newton chose to resist the police officers in Oakland 40 years ago. They are of the same generation.

There's no way to account for people's choices in their behavior. But I do believe that we make choices and that in most circumstances, excepting addiction or mental illness or within extreme states of oppression, we are usually in control of our choices, even when taking account of our circumstances. I want to be clear that I am not talking about having a choice in our circumstances. Rather, I am talking about what we do WITH our circumstances. This is what makes us powerful leaders and organizers–our awareness of our circumstances and how to deal with them.

This is also different from our emotions. As human beings, we can't determine how we're going to feel about a situation–and we're entitled to all of our feelings–but we can determine how we will act once we become aware of them. When abuse occurs, a choice–either intentional or unintentional - has been made to engage in destructive behavior. And as most survivors know, when abuse occurs, it is usually followed with a justification. As organizers, we can stop the lack of intentionality, and we can stop destructive behavior in all its forms.

I know that as organizers we don't let racism, transphobia, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism or classism stop our own growth as communities, or the assurance of our rights. We actively work to unearth the internalized forms of oppression within ourselves. I know, as a result of my observations and my readings, people who have lived through a lot and survive are often the most powerful and necessary leaders of our movements. However, many of us don't even try to answer for our personal responses to public behavior. Many times, we justify our abuses by using our status within a community, or isolating the truth tellers who reveal our pain. Many times, we allow for the abuses because we are desperate–the work demands that we be on. That our most brilliant members mentor us, teach us, guide us, facilitate our own development–even if it's fucked up.

I can think of many examples of this. One

particularly poignant example is from a conference on the effects of violence on women of color that I attended several years ago. I sat in the audience, excited that one of my heros was about to speak. I then watched as she, a veteran queer Chicana leader yelled, in public and abusively, at a young Native American female assistant who was simply trying to set up her microphone. We then listened to her justify, to a room of 3,000 women of color, her behavior with the fact of her status in the movement. Needless to say, I was saddened. I was deeply saddened with her choice about how to deal with her frustrations.

As organizers and leaders, we know we have great responsibilities in assuring the positive movement of social change, and we are aware of the constant pressure of self-development. However, we cannot ignore the impact of our own histories on how we approach the work. We cannot forgo our own health thinking it will not affect our communities. Because we are, all together, the community.

It is my hope that as direct or indirect survivors of abuse, we also don't allow our abuse to become THE pattern for our interactions with others.

It is my hope that we choose to heal and to do things in ways that foment healthier communities, rather than broken ones.

It is my hope that as leaders we become models of healing.

It is my hope that we as organizers and leaders stand on equal footing with others.

It is my hope that we as organizers and leaders live with enough humility to apologize and approach change as possible for ourselves.

It is my hope that as organizers and leaders in our movements we take care of ourselves so that we are available for the long haul.

I truly believe the more we take care of ourselves as leaders in our movement, the better we can do our work. If we don't take care of ourselves, or deal with our own histories, how can we be emotionally and mentally prepared to interact in ways that don't mimic the abuse that is familiar and present within our interactions? The personal is deeply political–and not just in terms of identity, but in terms of lived experience.

Part V: The Imperative Tense

In truth, I feel a sense of urgency around all of this. I am now in my 30s and what this means is that I'm watching yet another generation of young people being abused within our movements. I am seeing that the foundations I lay in my 20s were not maintained in my communities–those of us who were doing this work 10 years ago, are watching the wheel get re-invented–without mention of what has already been done. In other words–the machinations of oppression are alive and well, and simultaneously, those of us who have stepped up to or have been entrusted to doing the work, no matter our age, must deal with ourselves. We don't have time for this. We are in a state of extreme crisis and oppression. Right now, the social contract is being dismantled by people who operate on ensuring our continued oppression.

We must ensure the perpetuity, health and safety of our communities, in order to lay the groundwork for deeper liberation. And similarly, as communities, we must find the existent models, re-discover old models, find new models for ensuring our healing. I am asking that those of us who are survivors use our experiences to create these maps, with integrity, love, truthfulness, gentleness and a vision for assuring the dignity and safety of our collective humanity. I am asking that

we do the hard work to leave the destructive patterns behind–trade them in for new ones; that we survive our history and circumstances, allow ourselves to feel beautiful and be loved so that we can create that for each other.

Peace and light, always. ▮

how i learned to stop worrying and love the wreckage

Gina de Vries

i. anger is sexy

She wanted to poison me against the rest of the world, that girl. It was me and her, radical revolutionary partners-in-crime against the fucked-up human race. She was a poor white Southern kid from a classically broken home, stuck forever in that queer-kid, poor-kid, dysfunctional-family, the-world-owes-me-because-I'm-a-victim frame of mind. The kind of girl who'd experienced enough drama for seven lifetimes, who was fifteen-going-on-fifty, and who didn't have a goddamn clue how to trust or love anyone, least of all herself. She made up for what she didn't know by being big and bitchy and loud, taking up as much space as possible, and always having the last word.

I was sixteen, just as petrified, and she made me feel stronger by osmosis. Like maybe I could absorb some of her self-assurance, inherit her cocky attitude. I liked her strength, her confidence, her wicked sense of humor. I liked that she was trying to get her Southern accent back. She had short spikey hair, a wiry boy's body, she was so pale and skinny, had almost no tits at all. She wore baggy jeans and tiny baby tees, one of those metal ball-chain necklaces, black Converse. The perpetual baby-dyke look, cute and vaguely punky, not even close to butch and aloof, my usual type. But she had a vague North Carolina drawl and was hopping mad. That was almost as good. We were revolutionary activist radical queers together, we had long bonding conversations that involved the words *problematic* and *fucked-up*. Me and my girl against the terrible world. It worked until I became the enemy.

ii. passing/desire

According to her, my offenses were as follows: I stopped wearing my wire-rims and started wearing cat-eye glasses. My skirts got shorter. I wore my hair in pigtails. I didn't want to own a car. My make-up was glittery. I was turning into a hipster. I liked sex too much. I didn't like sex enough. I didn't care about passing. I was friends with famous people. I don't believe in marriage. I think transwomen are women. I got scared when she threw her alarm clock at my head. I got scared when she threatened to jump out the window. I got scared when she hit herself and left bruises the size of grapefruits. When she pushed her fingers inside me after I'd already said No, loudly, clearly, I told her to stop. I didn't want to bottom to her anymore, because the only times she wanted me were after she'd thrown something. I was a baby. Over-sensitive, over-dramatic, making a big deal out of nothing, this wasn't abuse, she wasn't hitting me, not exactly, she wasn't raping me, it'd only happened once and she'd stopped when I said *No* the second time. She wasn't cutting herself in front of me, just hitting herself, *that* was different. The absence of blood and razors made it okay.

When I was anorexic, it took the attention away from her. I like the color pink. I like Hello Kitty. I dyed my hair purple. I dressed like a slutty little punk girl. I wasn't professional enough. No one would ever take me seriously. No one would ever understand me like she did. No one would ever love me as much. I pierced my eyebrow. I wanted to pierce my lip. She told me I'd be more beautiful without the lipring, so I didn't. I said *No*.

Boys were the problem, she said. Masculinity was the problem, she implied, every time my

eye wandered away from her jeans and fitted tees look to women who wore their clothes very differently. I didn't love her enough. The kind of sex I wanted was too perverse, too queer. The women I wanted were too tough, the men I wanted wore more make-up than I did. I wasn't really queer because I was bisexual. I was too queer because I was bisexual. Why did I have to talk about it? A hot flush of my desire was enough to enrage her for days. I wanted to suck cock and I didn't care if it was flesh or silicone, I just wanted to be on knees and have my mouth filled by someone who wanted it as much as I did. I wanted someone to hurt me because it made them wet, made them hard, made them shiver.

I wanted things she couldn't give me. I wanted things at all. I write about sex. I had sex with people she'd told me I could have sex with. People wanted to fuck me and they didn't want to fuck her. I didn't like hamburgers. I hate Mountain Dew. I don't think sex should be a punishment. I don't believe in punishment. I didn't want to process all the time. I like coffee. I asked her to pick up the Mountain Dew cans she'd strewn around my bedroom. I wanted a night a week to be alone. I like butches too much. I wanted to sleep in my own bed. I missed my friends.

But these problems, they were our business, our life as a couple. Talking about it would be breaking her confidentiality. I passed us both off as healthy, happy, normal. I barely passed at all. Everything I was, everything I wanted, was wrong wrong wrong wrong. We had to be morally upright. Middle-class. Married. Respectable. Respectable lesbians were not bisexual leatherdykes. They were not outspoken perverts and sluts and queers. Respectable lesbians did not synthesize queeny fag, punk dyke, and slutty Italian-Catholic school-girl looks and come out fierce and fiery and giggling. They did not wear short skirts and keep their hair long and still never, ever get mistaken for straight. They were not the trampy, brazen, not-gay-enough, too-queer failure of a lover that I was.

iii. homewrecker

When I left her, she screamed at me. A clear, loud, thick sound, richochetting off the tiny walls of her messy bedroom. I could hear our housemates discussing us timidly in the living room. They were worried. *How Dare You* she shouted, as more objects from her floor whizzed by my face, a foot, six inches, three inches away from me. Her clock, as per usual; books; pillows and blankets too. *You're going to FUCK him tonight, AREN'T you?* The boy she'd told me I could have sex with and then demanded I cut off after we made out against a brick wall. He was dangerous because he was a boy, but really what that meant was he was dangerous because he wasn't her. I said, weakly, *This isn't about him. I just can't do this anymore. I'm tired.* I murmured, *Please, stop*. I kept waiting for her to hit me. I almost wanted her to–it would have made it all real. It didn't occur to me to just leave the room. It took me three days to break up with her, because I'd start trying to leave and she'd convince me it would work, *slam*, another book hurled against the wall, we had a wonderful relationship, *smack*, the sound of her hand hitting herself. We were happy, weren't we?

I wrecked her home by leaving, she said. I was erasing her family. I was her everything–*You're taking away my life,* she said to me, *How can you do this? How Dare You.* I don't know what made my words stick the third night. My Nana says that sometimes these things just happen in threes.

She told the story of our break-up to anyone who would listen, the story of how I ruined her life, left the beautiful holy sanctity of our five-year lesbian partnership to fuck

boys. The mantra she repeated to anyone who would listen, *Gina left me to fuck boys, Gina left our wonderful relationship to fuck the enemy*. I wrecked our home to let willowy fags and muscular butches slap me around because I actually wanted it. Not because it was how someone punished me for wanting freedom. I wrecked her home because her home was our relationship and being a homewrecker was my last and only survival strategy. Being a homewrecker was the only way I could get out.

But how do you even wreck a home that's already way past broken, the foundation rotten to its awful fucking core? When I met her, I could have been any scared sixteen-year-old girl, easily ensnared by someone tall and smart and manipulative, someone just as scared as I was, but with a different and dangerous coping mechanism. I got myself into that mess, but you know what, I got myself out. I made my home in myself. I am not *her* home. I have never been her home. ▮

infestation

Jill Aguado, Anida Ali, Kay Barrett, Sarwat Rumi, of Mango Tribe

shades of brown and gray scurry around
leave a trail
morsels of flesh
tails swish back and forth

somewhere at some moment men/women
were
is
am
are

predators.

she is unaware.

what can we do
when our predators lie in sheep's clothing,
greet us with kisses,
hold our hands
in communal peace exchanges,
run at our side for the cause?

these demons wear sharp teeth beneath false smiles

she is unaware.

the predator holds his tongue under bad jokes
disguised as
charm

and waits in between vodka blasts
and swaying hips
to unleash his lasso.

she is unaware.

but–
who's this brother?
do you know him? Spot him?

is s/he you?

somewhere at some moment

our brothers

our sisters

were
is
am
are

predators.

arm in arm
we link

mass mobilization

in the way of soul chants cradled
to beat schemes as smooth as
the blood that runs through the capillaries of our people.

but–
who's this sister?
do you know her? Spot her?
in the slogans of banners &
loudspeakers? turntable angle?

is s/he you?

changeling vermin,
you shape shift tactics of
predation and power
over us.

joy does not play here.
she floated away last night with fairy tales,
Barbie dolls,
pink lipsticks,
the-sugar-and-spice-and-everything-nice
that little girls *used* to be made of.

she was unaware.

she remembers
the loving gazes and tender reminders
of herself.

she tries to cover
the holes bulleted into a heart left
too wide open
for far too long

she learns the craft of mortar and brick
lays them thick as armor round the muscle the size of her
fist

she weeps, heart drumming itself into shock.
she weeps, streetlamp saint
she weeps, as angels splatter against the windshield in
rush hour traffic

she did not ask for this martyrdom

she was unaware.

say with me:

No art is immune. Say: *no movement, no song is immune.*
the same hands

No art is immune. Say: *no movement, no song is immune.*
the same hands

we're to believe bloodlines grow us
back to the homeland,
back to resistance.

how will I know you from

my lover
my sister
my comrade
my friend

when you wear the disguise of my own earthy muscle
my own foreign bones?

but I don't have to be powerless.
Not here.
Not in my communities.

Not around my sisters

I don't care who the fuck you are!

You don't have *any* right to be
an asshole,
a sexual predator,
fuckhead,
rapist,
pillager,
thief –
a poser fronting as a partner in the cause –

you sack of limp balls and groping claws swaggering around
young flesh.

we will
exterminate the infestation

of your rodent hands
crawling over paralyzed skin

twitching
sniffing
seeking to consume the souls we will not give you

exterminate the infestation

of your hands
your words
your thoughts
your cocks

multiplying in our homes
in our communities
in our classrooms
in our beds
in our dreams
in my home

you fucking bitch
I want to
crush your windpipe
force open your ravenous jaws
spit the poison
you infused in me
back into your salivating maw

I want to grab your balls and rip them off.
use them the way David used his marbles –
twirling them in a dangerous sling –
spinning and spinning until momentum is built and
shoot them back at you!
bring down your
Goliath sized ego

how would you like that, Brother?
lover
sister
comrade
friend?

you sorry excuse for X chromosome

fuckheads!

I will hold a mirror up to you
Of multiple truths written in blood.
survivors' words on the mirror walls of an entire room

and lock you inside.
keep you naked
force you to read the words
witness the truths.

I will watch as you try to wash,
smear the testimonies with your body,
with your blood,
your sweat,
your saliva,
your tears.

nothing washes the words away.

how will you escape this time?

I will watch as you try to break down the mirrors –
scratch at the glass.
will you shatter instead?

I wanna try out this experiment:

rats in a box…
and I have a few test subjects in mind.

you know who you are.

I wanna name names.
you will not get away with this bullshit!

we are aware.

if you knew
behind every woman you terrorize
is a whole army of sisters ready to pluck out your balls
and break your knuckles –
it would be a different world.

the ultimate cock block!

exterminate the infestation
my lover
my sister
my comrade
my friend

say with me:

No art is immune. Say: *no movement, no song is immune.*
the same hands

No art is immune. Say: *no movement, no song is immune.*
the same hands

exterminate the infestation

we are aware.

and justice will walk through us.

no title

Anonymous

I stand in the stone corridor, looking at the uniformed court officer with wide eyes.

I am here checking out the space before my court date to get a peace bond against my lover.

"What do you mean we all wait in the same space?" I ask.

"Don't worry- just ignore him dear".

"Ignore him…right".

Later, the judge will call my lover 'mister', give her masculine pronouns despite her having an obviously female name

I will learn a lot through this process of the gendered assumptions about relationship violence.

We didn't fit their framework of understanding.

The truth was though, in their own way, my queer feminist activist communities didn't know any more what to do with me or us than the courts did.

I sometimes felt profoundly alone, like I was drowning in the collective silence and judgments built around me. And in very different ways, I wouldn't doubt this to also be my lover's experience. Neither seemed very helpful.

I didn't love the option of engaging the court system, it being an institution embedded in racism, classism, patriarchy. At demos, cops were always on the other side, a force we were generally fighting against. It wasn't a decision I made easily or lightly.

But then there weren't a lot of other options that I saw. I didn't trust my lover to hold herself accountable, and who else would be there to deal with whatever came next? My therapist says that she doesn't believe in western medicine, but that if she broke her leg, she would surely go to the hospital. However conflicted my decision, in the absence of community alternatives, it offered me some promise of response, some authority where I felt like I had none.My refusal to see her didn't stop her showing up at my house, my shouts didn't stop her fist.

Among a community of activists, my decision wasn't a popular one. The only witness to the event in question refused to corroborate my story. The sticky threads: She was a woman of colour who saw her cooperation as participation in and collusion with a tool of the colonizers, a system that has only brought injustice and devastation to her First peoples. From my end, I had a declared witness who would not support my story, risking my credibility. It was difficult to hold these tensions, to not feel her silence as a deep betrayal of our friendship and my safety.

The morning of filing my statement to the police, who would now hand deliver the court summons to my ex-partner:

My new lover thinks this is an occasion to celebrate. "You must be relieved".

No, my choice paradoxically involves giving over control, an uneasy space I occupy after a relationship where I felt so little of it. I have crossed over to the point of no return.

That, and an overwhelming grief I have been staving off by procrastinating until the deadline. That our relationship is over is undeni-

ably real to me in this moment.

How could I say, that even after everything, I still longed for her?

It is a difficult thing to explain to anyone who hasn't been there. From the outside, this possibility seems unimaginable. From the outside, things are clear and straight-forward.

From the inside, life is held in powerful contradictions. I lived our profound intimacy that when good, was nothing short of magical. That the person with whom at times I felt the most safe, the most at home, was the same person at times I both dreaded and feared. The person who could be big and angry could just as easily be intensely vulnerable and incredibly loving. For all her suffering, I thought I could love her pain away- that I just had to love her bigger, better.

Shame was a steadfast companion. The good feminist that I am, I have read the books on the cycle of abuse and violence. I know them. How did I get here? I should have known better than to let this happen. What kind of feminist was I?

As a therapist in training, I encouraged clients to name abuse, and when they couldn't, I would call things for what they were. How could I say out loud that I had gotten caught in such a crazy dynamic? What kind of therapist was I?

Once out of the relationship, I worked hard to see the hooks. How deep our socialization runs that somewhere inside of me, part Catholic upbringing to honour commitment, part fairy-tale that true love only comes once, I clung to my values, and my fear. To my homophobic family, how much I wanted to show you that queer relationships could be healthy and long-lasting-that I could have what you have, that I could be just like you. And how, because of this, I have kept my silence, that you don't know me as well as you might.

It would be easier to tell you that the story ends there—that I picked up the pieces and moved on, but it doesn't. I got back together with her. Some said I was like the reality of this betting on the wrong horse.

In a strange way the specialness that marked our love, what set 'us' apart from 'them', transformed itself into a fierce protection. A new bond of 'us' against 'them'.

More than anything, it fueled our desire to disprove the doubt and speculation.

Looking back, there thankfully was some (although I wouldn't have thought so at the time).

My house held a meeting with us in which my partner listened to and addressed their concerns and the ways in which her behavior had eroded their sense of safety too. She would have to earn their trust back.

My partner and I created a new narrative to overwrite our history. Things were different, the 'old self' was gone. This was a very effective tool in combating the external doubt and at first, we hardly drew on it. Things were different…for a while. This narrative, though useful, left no room inside the relationship to name old behaviors, old ways, if they didn't exist anymore.

The narrative began unravelling, but in the face of people's judgments and my own hope of change, to whom could I admit this?

Rarely did I get time alone to even think such thoughts. I would be accused by her of using my femme and 'passing' privilege against her through the court process; using my class privilege when I didn't pay for this or that; of not knowing what it was to be a 'real'

survivor. When she disclosed unnegotiated?? affairs, my upset was evidence of my lack of internal security and radical politics. Amidst the chronic exhaustion from sleepless nights of fighting and processing, this was always the way.

Everyone has a bottom line, more about this, more about the friends. more about safe space in our community being eroded and ending it there and I finally reached mine. A moment that, in the bigger picture, was quite ordinary. No violence, nothing spectacular. Another disrespect, another boundary crossed. A moment of pure clarity when I realized 'this will not stop'. And I got out.

Some of you told me privately about your own stories of abuse in our communities and I thank you for that. A few of you have been brave enough to talk out it in public.

Thank you to my friends who listened patiently, and acted as my reality-testing.

Thank you to my now partner who waited through my triggers, and restored my faith in love.

//

As time went on, I thought about her less and less.

I was less pulled to see her and talk to her.

Last I heard, she was working at our local women's rape crisis center. ▮

i married a marxist monster

Ziggy Ponting

I remain caught on the horns of the same old dilemma. The one I've been stuck in since I was with her. What to do with the fact that this fairly high profile career activist, who does do good work often, is really abusive at home. That she mangled me and my self-concept so badly cannot be irrelevant, but I still feel as though it reflects poorly on me and as though I ought not rock the lefty labour boat by talking about it.

Abuse. The word transforms her from a slightly difficult, neurotic "political powerhouse" into a nasty, disturbed bully who would chase me around the house in her rages. It makes her a perpetrator, when being a victim is her stock-and-trade. It makes me a victim–a mess to be cleaned up, an inconvenience. It makes me a rat to say it, a squealer. And, in my imagination, all those folks have way more reason to be loyal to her than to care about me.

I wrote that four months after leaving. Our assets were still entwined, I was still having nightmares, and I had just begun to eat like a regular person again. My dearest dream was to make sense of what had happened–and expose her private shame–by writing the story of our relationship, a version that finally, I could control. Now, I've been out of there for three years, have had no contact with her–even through lawyers–for almost two years. And I still feel tentative. I still avoid any meetings, protests or events she is likely to be part of. I am still afraid of calling it abuse publicly, of what she could do in response. So, I've written and rewritten this piece about 30 times, and it is still one of the hardest things I've ever done.

And I don't exactly know why.

I know that I am desperate not to become the hysterical hard-done-by ex-lover crying abuse in order to slander. I am determined not to exaggerate or be dishonest. I don't want to write a revisionist history to try to justify my own mistakes, don't want to seem reactionary because this experience has made me question the culture of labour and lefty politics. Despite the little voice that still chastises me for whining when I wasn't tortured for being a trade unionist, haven't watched my loved-ones starve under an embargo, didn't have to flee my country–the pain I've experienced seems important. I am writing this partly because so much of what happened in those four years of hell happened because it wasn't considered important when I was hurt, because her distress always trumped. Because so much of what happened in private was covered up, glossed over or excused. Because I didn't have a way of understanding it when I was supposed to be the Privileged White Girl, and she the Activist of Colour, so busy fighting the victimization of people like her, doing the important work of struggling for the just world that I thought we both believed in.

I guess it's not surprising that there was a very complicated set of factors that set this up. One of the biggest ones, and the one I have still not untangled entirely, is my own white guilt–learned in pasty-faced liberal lefty circles–which I allowed to override my intuitive analysis of the power-imbalances in our relationship, never mind my own history of actively critiquing the pitfalls of traditional romance and the gendered division of labour. My self-effacement was compounded by the ways she deployed her brownness among white-folk, as she was encouraged to in labour subcultures anxious to see themselves as anti-racist and international. The

fact I was with her, she made clear, gave me political credibility. And when, to keep me in line, she claimed that other brown women were pursuing her, that they told her they wondered why she'd be with a white girl, I sympathized, wondered why she had chosen me, felt intimidated by the comparisons, and grateful.

Another factor was the undiagnosed and, as far as I know, still unacknowledged personality disorder that my ex struggled frantically to disguise and control–and, not infrequently, took out on me once the front door was closed. The symbiosis between her understanding of herself as always-already victim (a symptom of the particular pain and narcissism of her illness) and the framing of folks of colour as "disadvantaged" (and therefore necessarily innocent) on the left, and in my mind, excused a ridiculous amount of nasty and dysfunctional behavior. Besides, she told me (and I, in my own racism, swallowed) her bad temper was cultural, her people were more passionate than my repressed middle-class British background prepared me for.

Of course, I also imagined that I was immune to such retrograde dangers as domestic abuse. That was something that happened to weaker women, women who weren't independent, queer and feminist like me–duped, unfortunate women who bought into polarized gender roles and heteronormativity. I had known since I was 12 that I never wanted to be anyone's wife. I made a swift and screaming exit from heterosexuality before I was 20 for just that reason. I had publicly mocked marriage, scorned couple culture, played as slut and worked as ho. I was a clever pomo girl, nonmonogamous, tough-assed, articulate, motorcycle-riding and unapologetic. Surely, I would be able to spot an abusive relationship a mile away. Certainly I would never be the one so invested in the idea of the happy marital-home (albeit the lefty-luppy version) that I'd be unable to acknowledge the constant anxiety, intimidation and dread that filled my days.

But all the academic know-how in the world, apparently, can't protect you. Knowing that the personal is political doesn't mean you will know exactly how it's political. And love, it just is, right? I mean, I knew all about those asshole lefty men who couldn't quite wrap their heads around the idea of women as genuine equals and, despite their much-flaunted political honour, treated their girlfriends/wives/whatevers like personal servants and used the movement for their own aggrandizement and philandering. I remembered a women's studies prof of mine, who'd been through such a relationship, used to wear this great button–"I Married a Marxist Monster"–but I sure never figured that I would, or that it could be a nut-brown queer girl freaking out in the doorway because her dinner wasn't ready, or lying to me about an urgent collective meeting so she could shag someone else behind my nonmonogamous back. I mean, at the beginning, I actually bought her arguments that her work as a paid activist was so important and consuming that I should be responsible for groceries, cooking and laundry, etc.–nevermind my full time job.

And what an unlikely couple we were for sordid secret dramas. Two not-so-tall slightly outdoorsy women in a mixed-race, cross-cultural "lesbian" relationship, with middle-class socially-conscious jobs, who attended protests and political meetings hand-in-hand, greeting their circle of labour, lefty and queer friends with hugs. Older professional activists called us good comrades, people took pictures of us at events, I took classes in her first language while visiting anarchists crashed at our place–such appearances were very important to her. How could anyone imagine her–a good few inches shorter–shoving me around at the top of the stairs, sweeping everything off the dresser in a fit of rage,

or bringing a paring knife to bed? And how could I acknowledge how screwed up things were? When she said my unconditional love was so important to her. When each incident sounded so surreal, strange and improbable when I tried to describe it. When she didn't mean to, was just stressed out by all her responsibilities/ flashing-back on childhood abuse/ reacting to my insensitivity. When it felt necessary to keep a semblance of normalcy together, make sure we made it to the demo on time, to smile and hold her hand while she worked the crowd. When I was so convinced of my own culpability, that she was right and if I just weren't so difficult to love (so in my own head/ such a slut/ so unwilling to compromise), she wouldn't be so scary. Surely, as she said, the turbulence of our relationship pointed to a deeper passion than I had known in my previous WASPy existence, and it would all even out over time.

I really thought abuse was when someone put a brick in a sock and hit you with it. I thought it always left visible bruises, was perpetrated by unambiguous assholes and would be obvious to everyone around. I didn't know it made you doubt your own perceptions, that it could be so subtle and manipulative, that you could buy right into it and pity her (rather than yourself) as she ripped your favourite sundress off you or kicked your houseplants down the stairs. I didn't know how insidious intimidation is, that you could be controlled by learning how to tiptoe around someone's frightening moods, that you could be cornered into denying your own beliefs in order to avoid conflict, that you could spend mornings hiding in a closet in your own home, waiting for her to leave for work. I didn't know your body could shut down, that desire could be suffocated like that or that marital rape could happen between women–that eventually you'd put out to try to halt the hounding, the constant criticism and guilt, the accusations: "You don't want me anymore!" Which, of course, I didn't–those hands hurt me so often that their caress became unbearable. But I didn't understand, had always had a healthy libido, thought that there must be something terribly wrong with me. How was I to know that those repulsive memories could stay with you and haunt your later lying with better lovers? I didn't know that projection is a huge part of perpetrators' M.O., that they could convince you that you were like them or worse, call you "abusive" for yelling back, pushing back, or leaving.

I really didn't know, or really want to know, these things. And I certainly was not aware that you could keep complex secrets from yourself, that in the midst of daily horrors, you could even abandon yourself to cope. That you could know and not-know, at the same time, that being regularly maligned and discounted like that was completely Not OK. I didn't realize that you could smother your own instincts, paste a bland look on your face and go play convincing happy couple in public. It was only when I started to write nearly every day like I had before I met her, (resisting her–often very dramatic–interruptions, refusing her distractions, sticking to my own thoughts and feelings, keeping it all in one book), that this denial began to wear thin. When I could look back over pages chronicling weeks of intense anxiety, horrible "fights," earnest expressions of concern from my close friends and my own enormous unhappiness, then, I began to let myself see. I began to understand how little energy I had left, how much "taking care" of her was diminishing me, that her much-touted politics didn't include an equitable division of domestic or emotional labour, that her rants about the need for on-line access for activists in the global South rather overlooked the fact that I still didn't have private email access from our home.

I wish I had listened to the dyke-grapevine, right at the beginning when she was court-

ing me so aggressively, when the word on it was that she was messed-up, a liar and none of her exes would have anything to do with her. I wish someone at the collective meetings had noticed that I was never given the agenda, that she held it for both of us and consistently shot down my ideas. I wish one of the older labour and development lefties had checked in with me about why she was always borrowing money on our behalf. I wish my being with her hadn't suddenly guaranteed me return calls from labour folks who previously hadn't had the time of day for me or the projects I was working on. I wish I knew how to explain to the all the straight-lefties who were bending-over-backwards to be gay-positive that abusers aren't always men, that girl-on-girl relationships are not utopic, that sexism, homophobia and racism can thrive in the same skin that gets paid to be organizing against them. I wish I'd been able to tell the activists I respected that it isn't a lack of political commitment, but fear of her malice, influence and anger that keeps me away from the mainstream labour movement which continues to enable, excuse and hire her.

My queer crowd saw what was going on, weren't so blind to interpersonal dynamics that they missed my increasing meekness, my altered personality. My friends, my writing, and my own gradual understanding that having to struggle to find a way to live on this planet as my queer pro-sex anti-capitalist feminist self was one thing, but having to wage that war daily in my own home was another entirely, saved my ass. I had clung stubbornly to most of my close friendships (a tight circle of queer artists, activists and academics) for the entire ordeal. Despite the ex's active dislike of most of them–they weren't socialist enough, grass-roots enough, brown enough, involved enough in labour issues–I had insisted on maintaining those relationships–knowing at least how important they were to my sanity. So, when my therapist convinced me that I should leave the house whenever one of her rages started, it was to their houses that I went. They kept listening to my justifications for her behaviour, and said the same things over and over again, in a lot of different ways, with love and patience, until I heard them. Then, they passed me hankies, stood guard, helped me pack, find a lawyer and move.

I still don't have an account of those years that makes sense of what happens, or is even an artistically clever exposé. Now, I read my sporadic writing from the earliest time living with her, and I can see that I had these moments of clarity, when I understood that what was going on was not at all ok, when I called her actions what they were, poured out my suspicions, anger and despair. I'm often even weirdly witty in those pieces. But the-I-who-was-writing always seemed to think I could fix it by talking to her, or leaving the house when she started to rage, or adjusting the logistics of our lives. And then, I find all these pages that reek of my denial, that repeat the Disney story of romance and go on, in desperate phrases, about my commitment to her. In these pieces I can see that I clung to that relationship as long as I did because of the fairy tale passionate and political partnership I wanted it to be, because we were supposed to be changing the world and wasn't that more important than I was? I clung to it out of what I imagined was personal and political obligation, determination and a sense of profound guilt that I couldn't make it happy, didn't love her enough.

But the worst moments of my forensic forays are when I discover the odd piece describing, in painful detail, abusive or fucked-up incidents that I've since forgotten. Then, I have to sit around and try to remember which closet it was I huddled in that morning, what else was going on when she accosted me ranting about my sleeping with someone else, where it was we were going when I jumped out of the

car and walked the rest of the way to be free of her vitriol. I have to wonder if I don't remember because it was downright unbelievable, or if it was one of the episodes she denied the next morning, or if the human heart can only hold so much heaviness. I have to think about the words "trauma," and "abuse," and "recovery" and forgive myself again for failing so completely to look after myself then. I try to remind myself of what my doctor (a self-described "friend of labour") said when I told her I was leaving because it was just too abusive to stay. "Good for you!" she said, like I hadn't just thrown away years of my life on that relationship, and when I looked at her like she was insane, she continued, "You're getting out. That's what matters. You are taking great care of yourself."

And, in retrospect, I can see that I was. Leaving an abusive relationship, let me tell you, is fantastic. After you start properly sleeping and eating again–and not checking the locks all the time–there is this fantastic period of euphoria when you get your life back, your good cheer back, your routines and autonomy. There's still the long and horribly draggy parts of healing, too, but even in the midst of those periods, it sure feels like nothing could ever be quite as truly awful as what you've already weathered. I also found I'd grown a weird new kind of radar–I can spot chronically dysfunctional folks a mile away now, and know to give them an extremely wide berth.

I guess, as well, my politics have changed. I am not willing to be martyr for the movement in any way any more. I have come to understand liberal white guilt as a particularly worrisome kind of racism, the foundation of tokenism, and an incredible denial of the agency of folks of colour. I think it can offer an extremely attractive psychic loop for us white folk, where we can flagellate ourselves for our individual privilege, watch the folks of color be angry, imagine that feeling guilty does something (beyond reifying feelings of superiority) to mitigate that privilege, and go right back to doing things pretty much the way we always did. "I'm not racist, how can I be when I feel so damn bad about the effects of racism?" "I'm not racist, look at me standing here beside my brown buddy, cleansed by association." "We're not racist, look–our meetings always include an ethnic guest, and we try to keep at least one person of colour on staff." While really, we are so guilty of racism, that we can't imagine those who we see as the victims of it as anything but, daren't complicate our analyses of privilege, and fail to work with members of other racialized communities as equal partners. ∎

philly's pissed and beyond

Timothy Colman

When I was fourteen and fifteen years old, I was in an abusive relationship with my best friend. It ended because I stopped talking to him or spending time with him. The last time he tried to assault me, mutual friends of ours were visiting from out-of-state and staying at his house. I stayed there, too, the last night they were in town, after he pressured me. The next morning, after they had left, he and I were folding up sleeping bags and he started touching me. I managed to stop him and left his house. I kept going to high school with him for three more years. We had all the same friends.

I'm a transguy; in high school I was some kind of a girl, but have since come out as a boy. At the 2007 Trans Health Conference in Philadelphia, I was in a workshop where someone recounted how a friend of theirs had thrown a party after having chest reconstructive surgery where he burned all the pictures he had of himself from before he transitioned. This story hit me like a punch in the gut. I want to understand and support the things people do to feel valid and good and real in their gender identity and expression–but I had a visceral reaction to the image of this anonymous transman burning all those photographs.

I remember that feeling of wanting to destroy the person I used to be, to burn up the remnants of my past and start fresh. I wanted to become a healthy, whole person, the person I pretended I was most of the time. For a long time, I hated and feared the girl I had been at fourteen. I was afraid she would show up someday and ruin everything that was important to me. This was never solely about being trans; it was also about my history as a survivor of sexual abuse and assault. Gender dysphoria and sexual trauma: I can say it like that, separate them into two clear, contained things, but truth is, they always had a complicated and intertwined impact on how I lived in my body and related to people around me. One reason I didn't talk about the abuse was I feared if I told the people I loved, the people who loved me, what had happened to me, they would see me as the person I had been when it happened. I believed this would drive them away from me.

Now, when I think of myself at fourteen, fifteen, hell, pretty much onward for many years, I feel fiercely protective. I remember this loudmouth shy-eyed kid, kind of a dyke but still figuring it out. I'd just cut off all my hair; I was trying out being at home in myself. I'm still working to understand how the person I was then both is and is not who I am today. I'm working to integrate.

When I was nineteen, the boy who abused me wrote me a letter explaining that all that abusive bullshit and sexual assault was him trying desperately to be a successful heterosexual man. He's queer now. I'm not sure if he was asking me to absolve him of the things he did. Part of me wants to cite examples, to write a list, to prove how awful it was. I don't remember it as a list, though. I don't remember it as a narrative. It's a flash of many moments, layered on top of one another, without much order or sense. The things he did to me, while he was doing them and for years afterward, carried with them pain and disgust and a deep shame. It was all senseless, out of context, and it got all over me; I couldn't disentangle myself from the awfulness. I didn't understand it as, *What he did was terribly wrong, and it hurt me*. There was no clear logic to how it lived in me: the terribly wrong and the hurt and me and him were all jumbled up together. Part of what got me out of

the strangling grip of abuse memories was telling the fragments, working to remember the order and context in which things happened. It scared me to see the people closest to me freeze up or sharply inhale air when I spoke the details aloud–again, I was terrified I'd drive them away–but their witness helped me make some sense out of this senseless thing.

I didn't write back to his letter, but I wrote him a letter of my own when I was twenty-two, one which said, *I believe it's possible for people to change, and that you've changed in some ways. I hope you have people in your life who will support you but also be critical of you, who will hold you to standards of accountability. The best way you can show me that you've really have changed is by respecting the following: 1. I don't want to see you. What this means: if you know I'm going to be somewhere, don't come. If we're in the same social situation–a party, a bar, whatever, it's your responsibility to leave. 2. I don't want to talk to you. Don't talk to me, or look at me like you expect me to talk to you. 3. I don't want you to ask people we both know, or friends of yours who I've interacted with, for information about me*. He agreed, and I stopped seeing him at parties and bars. He also moved to California, which made things easier.

I didn't know I could write a letter like that three years earlier, when I was doing college activism with another boy who'd sexually assaulted me, the child of a lesbian, a Good Straight White Activist Boy, another fellow Jew. He lent me *Labyrinth* by Borges and burned me a late free jazz Coltrane album. Then he persuaded me to sleep in his bed when I didn't have a place to stay and I woke up to his hand down my pants. I avoided his gaze for many years, through meetings of the white anti-racist group where we'd talk about building trust and share strategies for challenging other white students on campus. Afterwards, I'd go home with the sweet girl I was dating and freeze up and shake while talking in her bed.

A few years later, his roommate–the boy who had borne silent, sleeping witness to my assault–committed suicide. The Good Straight White Activist Boy came back for the memorial service and I freaked out nauseously and silently and felt like a jerk for wanting to talk to someone about my body memories while I was supposed to be mourning this person's death.

In college I was in the support group for survivors of sexual assault and abuse, where a lot of statements were exchanged about how we were all women, and that made the space so safe, while I bit my lip and stared at my hands. It took me a full year after coming out as a transguy to tell the support group. It was the only place where I had found a sense of connection around this incredibly isolating thing that took up so much space inside of me, and I was afraid if I was honest about my gender identity, I'd lose that.

I was a counselor on the sexual assault response team. I ran workshops for new students about consent and assault. At any given moment, in the cafeteria or at a party, I could point out at least four perpetrators of sexual assault. But all that time, it never felt possible to stand up to the people who'd assaulted me; I never knew I could write a letter that said, *Stay the fuck away from me, stop smiling at me & stop talking shit on me to my friends*. I never knew I could tell the other assaulter I couldn't do organizing with him: tell him, you need to leave the white anti-racist group and stop coming to my friends' parties. The comfort and understanding I found in the survivors' support group helped me feel less lonely and crazy, but I didn't find within it a vision for transformation, the courage and momentum to challenge the world around me to become a place where survivors of abuse could live fully and

wholly and be believed and respected.

When I moved to Philadelphia, I started meeting people who did radical organizing around sexual assault, mostly as part of a group called Philly's Pissed, and people whose visions of possibility were informed by this work. There were so many small things which were actually hugely important, like having friends and lovers who said, after I told them about my weekend back home, when my friend invited me to a bar without telling me the high school abuser would be there, *Wow, that's not okay*. Friends who told me, *You don't have to see him. It doesn't have to be a secret. You might want to just tell a bunch of people at once. And you can ask them not to invite him to their parties.*

Eventually, I joined Philly's Pissed myself, and found myself, every week, in meetings with people who proceeded from a certain set of assumptions–like, part of healing is taking back power that's been taken from you, and sexual violence is something that happens to people of all genders, and sometimes, survivors are fucking angry. Furthermore, the group had a basic commitment to supporting the self-determination of trans people. The set of givens that I found within Philly's Pissed was by and large the set I'd already been working with myself, on my own, but it was immensely powerful to be in a space full of people with the same vision. When I'd done survivor support work and sexual assault education in the past, it had been with people with wildly variant political outlooks and personal investments; it felt stunningly different to be doing this work with Philly's Pissed. I felt safe, alive, energized. These people really fucking had my back, and not just because they loved me, or because they saw how my past was destroying me, but because they knew survivors of abuse and sexual assault need to be able to articulate what they need, and demand it, with the knowledge that they will be believed and supported.

All this–after years of keeping quiet, holding so many awful secrets, and being challenged when I did talk about the abuse. I have so much love for the few dear friends who held me and listened while I whispered memories during the worst years. But hours spent in their beds couldn't undo the rest of the world. Other friends, who were his friends too, would argue with me from his point of view, saying, "How do you think he feels, knowing there's someone out there who thinks he's a rapist?" When I was 16, one of these friends stopped me in the middle of the street while we were crossing three lanes of traffic on the Lower East Side, I'd just used the word "rape" for the first time (prefaced by *I'm not saying it was but it was kind of like*–a disclaimer I'd later remove), and she asked, "Are you really sure you never enjoyed it?"

For awhile, I had tried to just be over it. I had lost so much community and connection in avoiding him. I was sick of not getting to see my friends. The winter I was nineteen, I lost my dad to cancer, and after that, grieving death was more on my mind than healing from abuse. Sometimes you have to pick. I needed all the love and support I could get. I was sick of having to chose between avoiding him and seeing people I loved, I was sick of distancing myself from friends because they Didn't Get It, because they were not only still friends with him but talked to me about him, repeated his words to me: *He said that really, you two were in love back then. You know, it's hard for him to see you, too, especially when you ignore him.*

Anyway, I'd Gotten Over It. It was July 2004 and I was at a birthday picnic auction in Prospect Park, a top surgery fundraiser for this guy I barely knew. I'd come with a wonderful friend, a new friend. I knew she went to college with the high school abuser but we never really talked about it, I just told her we had fucked up history and that I didn't

talk to him. I was having a good time. She and I were headed to the Siren Music Festival at Coney Island. But then he showed up, the high school abuser, with another friend of mine from high school, one of the ones I'd been keeping my distance from but really loved and missed and fuck it, I just wanted to be normal and so off we went on the subway to Coney Island, me and my brilliant new friend who knew the abuser from another context and the other high school friend and him. I was fine. I was fine. Except then we got there and started drinking and I freaked out and ran into a dirty punk sweetheart friend of mine and wandered off with him and we got Coronas in brown bags and drank them on the beach and I just kept saying, *I'm so glad I ran into you. I hate that boy I'm with*. And he nodded understandingly with his soft eyes and I never explained and he never asked. And then I met back up with the others, and we took the subway to a tiny boring party and then left quickly again, because someone was driving–*driving!*–back out of the city and on the way, they could give us a ride home. Except I was stuck in the backseat of the car, four of us across in there, and next to me was the boy. The one who, I suddenly remembered as the side of my body was pushed up against his, used to force me to suck his dick until I gagged and sometimes threw up, his hands holding my head down, all over the back of my neck such that it still makes my skin crawl sometimes when people touch me there. Getting Over It didn't really work for me.

When I sent him the letter, he took three months to write back. I figured that was that; he was going to continue showing up in my life, over and over, sitting across the table from me at a hipster bar, staring at me while I tried to talk to my friends, looking at me and talking to me, and shifting around awkwardly when I didn't look back at him. All the while, my body shivering with so many flight-desires, so many fucked-up memories. Certain friends could tell you about how I called them drunk from outside of bars, at 18, 19, 20, 21, freaking out, saying, "he's here"–after I didn't go to high school with him anymore, after I'd left that city behind and gotten used to some distance. I'd dealt with some of the demons from my past, and dramatically reduced my capacity for dissociation in the process. I wasn't so good at turning myself off anymore, at going numb. Turns out I needed that skill if I wanted to hang out with my old friends.

But even if he kept doing the exact same thing, I knew it had shifted something forever to write to him. Now it was on the table. I called him *a perpetrator of rape & sexual assault*, I called him *manipulative and abusive*. I didn't phrase it as an accusation, a confrontation; I was not into running the risk that he'd turn it into a debate about what he did to me. I just kinda dropped it casually in there. Now I had some steady ground to speak from, if he showed up at a bar / at a party / watching porn drunk in my friend's fucking living room while I freaked out silently (see: Timothy at 18, I got fucked up on whiskey and weed and caffeine pills that night and had the worst panic attack of my life). Now I could say, "I asked you not to be here, I asked you to leave if you saw me." That kind of confrontation still terrified me, but I'd laid some groundwork towards no longer staying silent, caught in a thought-loop of shame and memories (not to mention the confusing element of guilt which I got from our mutual friends–for "being mean to him," "ignoring him," "refusing to look at him," or–what was that?–oh right, "calling him a rapist," all things they accused me of doing).

What's more, I knew if he didn't do what I asked, there were Steps I Could Take. Radical sexual assault organizing taught me about the tools at my disposal. For one, I could tell more of our mutual friends, and ask them to respect my wish to not share space with him.

There was no guarantee they'd agree, but in asking, I'd still be honoring this belief I hold, somewhere deep in my heart, that I deserve to have space from him, to never have to see him again, to be and feel safe, to have control over my life. I was willing to tell people if I had to (deep breath), and to stand firm in my belief that we all deserve to live in our bodies and lives, fully and without fear. I knew he talked a lot of feminist theory and gender theory and thought of himself as someone who would Never Do That Again (he said this to me in the letter he wrote me), and I knew that was also a kind of power I had; he *knew* what he'd done was deeply, deeply fucked, and he believed, or wanted to believe, that he had changed. He seemed to want me to witness and confirm this change, and I wasn't going to do that, but I could tell him the simple small things he could do to stop hurting me. So I did. And then, after three months, he wrote to the friend who'd offered to field his response, and he said he would do the things I asked of him.

The month I was writing that letter was pretty hardcore-scary though. I think in order to build radical communities which really truly support survivors of rape & abuse & sexual assault, it's necessary to describe the fear, shame and terror some of us go through–to communicate the dire importance of survivors being believed, supported and heard. So to that end I will say–the month I was writing the letter, I felt pretty crazy a lot of the time. I chose to write it because I was like, *Oh I've worked through that stuff, I'm solid now, I'm tough and I don't dream about it anymore and I don't choke every time someone says the word "blowjob" and I can have fun casual sex without being triggered and I can refer to being assaulted without instantly floating a million miles away and/or feeling insanely vulnerable.* Writing a letter to the high school abuser that told him to step out of my life seemed like something I wanted to do, once this new world of survivor-support and radical accountability structures had presented it to me as something I *could* do. So I started. I was tough. I had moved on. I could do it.

But the process of writing the letter sent me right back into a spiral of shame and anxiety. I became the scared vulnerable crazy kid I thought I'd left behind years ago. I self-injured for the first time in years, I got deep into panic and fear, I struggled a whole lot. What was it? It wasn't so much digging up memories, but more that it made me confront every one of my fears about him and the world as it related to my abuse history. I was afraid he would tell all our mutual friends and acquaintances I was a jerk, afraid they would think I was unreasonable, that I lacked compassion. I was afraid they wouldn't believe me about the abuse and rape, even though somewhere I had a letter from him where he admitted to it, and also afraid if they did believe me, they'd forever see me as weak, vulnerable, damaged because of it. Or he would tell everyone about it and lie or not lie but nonetheless they'd hear stories of me being raped and assaulted when I was a girl and this would cut clean my tenuous and fragile claims to boyhood.

Mostly, the fear boiled down to this: he was someone who had this huge power in my life, who had hurt me so deeply and fucked me up so profoundly, who had coerced and manipulated me into staying quiet about the things he was doing, who cleverly and persistently took away so much of my power, my voice, my ability to negotiate circumstances for myself. Although it was seven years since he'd ever laid hands on me, some place deep within me I still couldn't get rid of the sense that he had an enormous amount of power. I was afraid to challenge him and deeply, irrationally terrified that he could somehow destroy me–destroy the beautiful and good life I had made for myself. And in some ways, he did still have a lot of power, as a white, rich, non-trans boy

in a world that by and large doesn't believe survivors, doesn't recognize the humanness of trans people, or the existence of survivors who are boys. In some ways my fear was not irrational at all. But I had brilliant, visionary people on my side, people who loved me and people who had my back because they believed in self-determination for survivors and everyone else. What's more, I knew writing to him was part of shifting the culture of this world to become one which *does* believe & support survivors, and trans people, and trans survivors: a culture that takes consent and self-determination seriously.

Seizing back power from the person who abused me opened up new space in my life, new possibilities for how I can relate to my past and people from those years. I am lucky he agreed to step out of my life a little–lucky only because of all the others who don't ever get that space, not because it is such a huge thing to ask. I'm no longer afraid of what he'll do to me now if I tell people what he did to me ten years ago. I can talk move a little more freely, talk a little more openly, be a little less guarded. I'm trying to remember and reintegrate the parts of me I sequestered away for so long. For years, I had to choose whether to stay numb, hovering above my body, in order to keep old friends, or to fully remember and honor my past and create a new, unrelated life. I went back and forth between these two options, the either/or, but part of writing him that letter was refusing to be the one who's pushed out. I want to transform our communities into ones that support survivors in taking up space, because we shouldn't be the ones who always have to leave. I'm working now to stand firmly and squarely in my life and body and self, past and present. ▮

notes on partner consent

Bran Fenner

LISTEN. "Yes" means, "yes." Everything else means "no!" If someone says "no," that means "no."

BE RESPONSIBLE. If your date is drunk or passed out, it is not an invitation for sex. You are responsible for everything you do; these are choices you make.

RESPECT. Don't make people feel bad for saying "no" to one or a few or all sexual acts. Being in a relationship or on a date does not mean you have any rights to someone else's body. You are not entitled to anything except mutual respect.

What is Consent?

Consent is freely and voluntarily agreeing to do something. Not giving in to someone who is harassing you to do anything. Not when they or you are heavily intoxicated, not when someone is sleeping, not when they have said NO.

If the other person says no to a sexual request that should be taken seriously. It is not an invitation to beg, plead or cry for sex.

If you feel sad, sometimes you can't help but cry. This may mean after being told NO, you might need to take some time to yourself to cry, calm down or maybe talk to a friend - not guilt someone into sex.

Touching someone while they are sleeping or trying to wake someone up because you find yourself being horny in the middle of the night is selfish. How many important decisions are you asked to make after being woken up in the middle of the night?

If you think there is a possibility you might want to have sex with your partner in the middle of the night, talk to them beforehand and make agreements. For some people, it could be hot to be woken up in that way, but unless your partner has given you permission that is fully consensual, you are raping them.

No one is obligated to get you off sexually if you are horny and the other person is not. You do not need to show your disappointment; you can always jerk off. If it becomes a consistent problem you may need to adjust your relationship–if you're monogamous, it could mean figuring out how to open up your relationship for a bit so your sexual needs get met, or waiting it out while being a support to your partner and re-evaluating later or it could be a sign of a bigger problem. Though sex is an important part of many of our lives, how considerate are you actually being if you have succeeded in wearing someone down to the point where they give in to your needs versus their own wants, desires or boundaries?

When someone is rejected for sex by their partner, date or friend, different emotions may come up for you. Some examples are lowered self-esteem, anger, sadness, lack of confidence. These are all very real emotions that you will have to figure out how to deal with. However, making the other person feel guilty or bad for setting a sexual boundary is not okay or helpful.

Try listening first, then maybe talking to a friend who you trust, especially a friend who is a good communicator and is good at seeing issues from multiple sides. Some friends

may automatically side with you especially if they don't like your partner; try someone who can better separate the people from the actions.

Some Examples From My Own Life:

One time, I had a flashback to a sexual assault from my childhood during sex. I had to stop and started to cry. My then-partner held me for about 20 minutes and I started to feel better. I was then asked to continue with the sexual act I had stopped doing. I felt sick to my stomach and confused so I said I wasn't in the mood, but they constantly said "please" and whined for about 5 more minutes until I gave in.

In this moment I went through major guilt. I had guilt that I had a history of sexual abuse and later on depression that sometimes hinders my sexual desires especially with specific sexual acts. This was a running theme in this relationship–I was made to feel bad for not wanting to have sex, the other person pleaded for short and long amounts of time and/ or would make me feel like a mean jerk for not wanting to be sexual.

I would also engage in what started as consensual acts and when sexual acts that I absolutely did not want to do would be asked for, I found myself either trying to get out of it all together or trying to find a substitute that would allow for the other person to get off so I wouldn't have to go through a long process of saying NO, knowing that it wouldn't be listened to by the other person and I would have to give in to it eventually. This rarely worked, however and they would go back to asking for things I clearly did not want to do. Though this behavior was less aggressive than the time they held me down while I tried to get free and pleaded NO repeatedly, this was still violent and scarring.

Fortunately, it ended and as traumatized as I still am from different aspects of that relationship, I've learned a lot from it. The most important thing I learned is that cooperation is not consent and my first NO should be the final NO. The excuse of "But I want to make you feel good" is not an excuse; it's self-serving. NO is always easier for me to say to strangers but since then almost all my partners have been sexually responsible which I am very thankful for.

This experience also helped me relate more respectfully to other people –I'm more aware of respectful touching and not assuming what's comfortable for people as well as understanding that many people in my community have been sexually assaulted.I want to do everything in my power to not to replicate those patterns.

We are however human and may fuck up. The point is not to go to a place where you focus on what you did wrong all the time but you figure out how to grow and change and have your actions show that. My ex lover-may never know why I refuse to be in the same spaces as them or how many female-bodied people have felt sexually disrespected by them'there was a certain point where it seemed this person stopped listening, which seemed to come after being isolated and talked about in the community. This person to this day may blame me for their "excommunication" though most of the community talk came from other people. The consequence is that now they are not in a place to truly look within themselves and understand male-bodied privilige, consent and healthy relationships. This behavior and pushing women and trans men into unwanted sex or sexual acts seemed to be ongoing.

To this day, I see the appeal of shaming and community call outs but think it aids in the stunted growth process of the perpetrator as well as false relief for the person wronged.

Can you be more specific here? As in organizing, I believe in the escalation model. Before you destroy someone's reputation, there should be people who can commit to trying to work with both parties so that both parties can heal and create realistic boundaries. Accountability could mean so many different things.It could mean one person is asked to stay out of certain social events and seek counseling. The other person may require support as well in order to begin to let go of the damage caused.

There isn't much we as individuals (particularly if you are poor, brown, female-bodied, queer-bodied, disabled) have control over. I'm reminded of the Reproductive Rights Movement and the struggle for self-determination, Police Brutality plaguing the poor and brown, women and trans people to protect who and what exactly?! Answer tends to be property values and racist middle class white people. The criminalization of immigrants and the threat of deportation, transnational adoption babies being sold like commodities to rich Americans placed in a land where they are then labeled minorities/less then.

That said, I am even more disappointed when social justice activists are perpetrators of sexual harassment, assault, sexual manipulation, rape. We as a community remain too silent in aiding in cycles of abuse allowing violence to fester like a sore on someone's forehead. We all see it but try not to look. Why?! What are we afraid of? Is it the amount of work it actually takes to create a long term vision for alternatives to policing, the complications of organizational impacts, the systems of oppression in our own communities which force us to create new language that isn't sexist, heterosexist, and transphobic?

All of these things are valid. But I am tired of us seeing a community member abuse their partner -we have one meeting, take great notes and subsequently drop the ball. I'm sick to my stomach when I think of the fact that the person that violated my body and boundaries is constantly surrounded by community people who have yet to hold this person accountable as this person's friends and I have had to hear of numerous female-bodied folks complain about unwanted advances from the same person, while I get blamed for their isolation from the community.

I wish my initial reaction to violence wasn't a violent retaliation where I was able to unleash a hidden rage I carry on a daily basis, one kick punch or choke hold for every injustice I have witnessed or been victim of. I hate that I hold a fear of becoming what I hate so deeply that I have an extended period of relearning the art of touch and sensuality with every new person who comes into my life.

But how beautiful it is to know that its possible. I feel a sense of empowerment each time I let someone know they're dancing too close. To know that I have the ability to forgive someone who has fucked up and is actively working to change. Each time helps me let go just a little bit more. Isolation is not the answer–there needs to be community support for all parties in a way that continues the process of accountability for the person who "fucked up", support and clear boundaries around space for all parties and community events. Both people may get triggered when they see each other and reactions can be damaging on many levels. But what about the sexually inappropriate people who are less willing to take accountability? What do responsible community people do to watch out for the people who may be at risk for their non-consensual behavior? Do we post guidelines for fundraisers and house parties around consensual behavior and those that do not adhere to them will be asked to leave? Why not?

I personally believe that many of the rules

that are clearly posted at the door at many sex clubs or play parties should be universal. We have to be ok with setting a standard for ok behavior and be willing to be disciplined about maintaining it.

We have to be dedicated to not only institutional change but also to transforming our interpersonal dynamics–fuck politeness and niceness. It tends to lead to passive aggressive behavior and unhealthy repression. Change isn't usually pretty. Healing is not pretty–it's pus and scabs falling off and reforming surrounded by scars that tell stories.

From all of this, the biggest task I have ahead of me before the recommended forgiveness of the community member who repeatedly violated my body and took away so much of me is to forgive myself and heal the other part of my past that has been left uncared for. ▮

femora and fury: on IPV and disability

Peggy Munson

Outside the cyclone of abuse, there is a social structure steeling the actions of abusers, and this is abundantly clear in the ways ableism informs abuse. Say you have a life-threatening heart condition that worsens if your heart rate goes too high, and your rage-a-holic partner can inflict severe physical harm through prolonged yelling. Over two years, you go from being semi-bedbound to totally bedbound from her verbal abuse, yet you cannot get a restraining order because she never slapped or punched you. You tell an advocate that your partner did inflict bodily harm, in ways you might never recover from, but the advocate fixates on the heroic ways your partner helped you out after your last hospital stay. You talk about Munchausen Syndrome By Proxy and how your partner loved the attention, and ask if any courts in this state allow phone access, but you may as well be explaining shortness of breath to an unmindful marathoner. The advocate finally concedes "emotional abuse" is "very real." The battered women's shelter is "working on" making one room disability accessible, but it's "not a funding priority." Your phone therapist says, "Well, you do have a degenerative condition–are you sure she made you sicker?" Meanwhile, you can't get up for a glass of water, and a simple phone call leaves you exhausted. You finally contact your abuser because you need someone to pick up a prescription. She stops at the drugstore and rekindles the abuse cycle. It's not about flowers and chocolate: it's about meds that keep you alive.

Intimate Partner Violence organizations have begun to address these realities of disability, but they rarely do more than cite statistical horrors (people with disabilities are at least twice as likely to be abused) and impose a template that doesn't fit. Disability is treated as a sidebar, not something with dramatically different risks and needs. Many IPV organizations are in fact performing acts of neglect and exclusion that mimic those of abusers, by denying access (not providing materials in Braille, not installing wheelchair ramps or enforcing strict fragrance free policies) that effectively shut disabled victims out and keep them locked in violence. Afraid to confront their own ableism, these organizations rationalize the ways that disabled people are denied help, using a tired social argument that it's "too hard" to treat people with disabilities as equals.

In a culture that denigrates human vulnerability and provides nothing but a shoddy caregiving net, people with disabilities often rely on their abusers for food, bathing, toileting, transportation, and other survival needs. Leaving can be imminently life-threatening because victims might lose sustaining care, and replacing this can be next to impossible unless there are non-abusive family members willing to provide it. Many caregivers–not just partners–have intimate access to the lives of people with disabilities. If IPV organizations don't understand the pressing need for transitional hands-on care, a disabled person will not be able to leave. Most IPV literature attributes this literal dependency to an erroneous psychological belief system instead of addressing cruel social projections that people with disabilities are needy for having fluid physical realities. If the only alternative to an abusive caregiver is an institution or a life where she is peeing into a bedpan with nobody to empty it, a disabled victim may be weighing one bad option against another. Are four sterile walls better than an abuser who offers affection, money, or other perks? Not necessarily.

For every Stockholm Syndrome, there are highly detailed acts of physical deprivation and torture that hold a person captive. When someone has a disability, these acts are easy to inflict: they may just be a matter of hiding someone's painkillers, or sabotaging his TTY phone, or–more insidiously–becoming an indispensable aid so that he can't function without the provided care. Disabled victims can't always just get up and go–an idea rooted in the assumption that all people are unencumbered by physical restrictions. Whereas a safety plan for an able-bodied person may involve words like run, walk, call, or drive, these action verbs may not be possible for a quadriplegic, a heart failure patient, someone with a brainstem injury, or someone with cognitive impairment.

IPV crimes against people with disabilities are typically handled administratively through social service organizations, not the criminal justice system. This belies a disturbing social philosophy: our society does not really view abuse of the disabled as a crime. Although many states have mandatory reporting laws for abuse against people with disabilities, and social service personnel are legally mandated to report such abuse, few IPV organizations are familiar with these laws. Plus the court system is ridiculously inaccessible. Several years ago, a woman contacted me about the fact that she was being dragged down hallways by her hair and thrown against walls by a partner. I tried to convince her to get a restraining order, but this was immeasurably hard for her due to her anxiety disorder and extreme agoraphobia. She was quite disabled, but it didn't matter as far as the courts were concerned. They would not do anything to accommodate her disability. I asked an attorney friend of mine what it would take for the courts to accommodate a homebound person. My friend laughed and said, "Oh, they won't come to you unless you get a doctor's letter saying you're going to die within weeks."

Later, I tried to get my own restraining order against a partner who was terrorizing me. Bedridden and homebound, I could not even make the calls to advocates, who kept refusing to talk to my Personal Care Attendant on my behalf–probably because they assumed she was my abuser, and they couldn't imagine a disability hindering someone's ability to make phone calls. They told my PCA there was no way I could get a restraining order without going to the courthouse unless an attorney filed a special motion on my behalf (not only can I not travel, but I can't go into facilities that aren't fragrance and chemical free). It took my PCA about fifty calls (she estimates) to find an attorney who would do this. The attorney said time was of the essence as weeks had passed since my last contact with the abuser, and then she stopped returning our calls. I gave up in a state of complete despondency. I was hovering on the edge of death and couldn't even fight for appropriate medical care, let alone coordinate the changing of my locks or action against my partner. My helplessness wasn't learned: it was literal. Even lifting a phone receiver or talking into it required more strength than I generally had.

The West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that disabled victims are more likely to be blamed for their abuse, because they are perceived as difficult to be around or care for, and "caregiver stress" is considered a legitimate excuse for bad behavior. These social myths are no different from abuser jargon that habitually accuses the victim of provoking the abuse. Because of the subtleties involved in abusing a disabled partner, people with disabilities might not identify themselves as abused, and rarely get support from a society that already perceives abusers as self-sacrificing for dating crips. It is common for batterers to "target punch" their victims to avoid getting caught. With an able-bodied victim, this might mean

hitting her torso where bruises will not show. With a blind partner, this could mean putting obstacles in her path so she will trip and fall. With a frail partner who is too neurologically impaired to express consent, this could mean using body weight to hold her down during sex even while she tries to resist by stiffening her body and pushing weakly with her forearms, then forcing the sex in a way that physically harms her.

Advocates working with disabled victims of IPV must redefine the list of what constitutes IPV, tailoring it to an individual's disabilities just as the abuser has probably done. Abusers will sometimes use the minimum amount of force to maintain power and control, and this minimum amount of force used on a disabled victim–though it may cause substantial injury–might not fit neatly into legal definitions of abuse. Coersion and threats to a disabled partner could involve threatening to withdraw basic support, an act that can be more dangerous to a person with a disability than a violent beating. Intimidation tactics might include harming or mistreating a service animal. Economic abuse might include embezzling funds from a disabled partner who can't fill out a deposit slip, or giving her lavish gifts of adaptive equipment the state won't pay for to encourage her dependence. Physical abuse might consist of rough handling when transferring someone out of a wheelchair, or over-medicating. Sexual abuse might include forced abortion, inappropriate touching during bathing or dressing, or put downs about a disabled person's sexuality. Neglect can include withholding care, medication, or life-sustaining attention. Denying the person's feelings might include attributing injuries to the disability itself ("You're just touch-sensitive! That didn't hurt."). Many forms of abuse against people with disabilities–particularly those against some of the most vulnerable groups, such as the developmentally disabled–involve discrediting a person's own voice when she tries to convey her experience.

Activists have to think about the creative ways that abusers are maniacal and get away with it. Abusers sail through life, therapy, and the court systems with a "not as bad as that guy" philosophy. Their rationalizations are endless, and they can often pass off controlling behaviors toward a disabled partner as "concern." If they can convince themselves or others that looking through a partner's garbage, monitoring his phone calls and mileage, and insisting to know what he does every waking hour is not abuse, they will. For a disabled person confined mostly to a home or bed, such acts of control can be a replication of the inherent suffering the disability might already create. Most people will believe the abuser's pleas that she was simply trying to protect the (ungrateful) disabled victim.

At every juncture, society is complicit in the abuse if disabled victims. For example, an abuser will isolate a victim of IPV. If that victim is wheelchair-bound, and very few venues in town are wheelchair-accessible, the abuser is not the only one isolating her: society has shut her out by relinquishing responsibility for accommodation. When she comes forward with her abuse, her peers might side with the abuser because they are, through inaction, supporting a similar agenda. When the abuser talks about all he has done for his victim–as abusers are prone to do–and the list includes bathing her, driving her to medical appointments, and hand-dispensing medication, people might view him as a hero. This reflects the deep threads of ableism in our culture, which believes that basic, hands-on care for most disabled people is exceptional, and should not be socially mandated.

People often believe that disability empowerment means taking a "just like me" attitude that presumes a disabled person wouldn't want exceptional treatment–even if that

treatment is fragrance free accommodation or a sign language interpreter or, more subtly, acknowledgement of someone's physical vulnerability. The differences in human vulnerability can be huge, especially when talking about IPV dynamics that involve power and control. To sidestep this fact pretty much denies the entire reality of people with disabilities and reinforces a mentality that only wheelchair athletes and feel-good- supercrips should be recognized. Understanding the intricate differences in power and ability enables activists to calibrate their definitions of abuse. While the abuser of an able-bodied person might dramatically bar her exit by pushing furniture in front of escape routes and pulling phone cords out of the walls, the abuser of a bedridden individual can inflict the same level of terrorism by simply charging into a bedroom and screaming when she can't get up and leave. These acts are equivalent and should be treated as such. It can be incredibly invalidating for a disabled abuse victim to hear, "I would just leave if someone treated me that way!" Or even, "I would just ask the abuser to leave." Asking an abuser to leave is often not an option for someone with a disability: she might need him to take care of her after he battered her. And who is going to explain to the hospital staff the medical needs relating to her rare congenital condition?

Ironically, what endears a batterer to a disabled victim is often his investment in her vulnerability, which most of society insults, ignores, and doesn't respond to in an empowering way. All abusers are dependent on keeping their victims vulnerable–a fact that transcends disability. This attunement to the power imbalance can give abusers a sixth sense about what a disabled person needs, and how to give or withdraw it for the purpose of control. This is no small thing when other able-bodied people just stand by and don't offer help. Few people know the intricate ergonomics of a disabled person's life, even though her ability to function or very survival depends upon these things. What puts the "I" in Intimate Partner Violence is often this: abusers may see intimately into a complex reality that most people do not notice or care about. For example, I tried to explain to my family for years why I needed someone to be on call 24 hours a day due to my erratic medical emergencies, my need for someone to bring me food and water while I was lying down unable to move, and my need for someone to nurse me during my many unpredictable crashes after having a chemical exposure or exerting myself. They offered inconsistent bursts of help and care–a week here and a few days there. They assumed that someone out there would fill in the gaps between these weeks and days. But I had nobody to do it, nobody but an abuser carefully tuned in to my vulnerabilities. While others in my life would try to create a cheerful mood and bring me take-out food, my abuser would dig in to the gritty realities of my disability, draping a blanket over my legs before I even said I was cold and bringing me a glass with a straw so I could drink lying down. These were the acts of kindness woven into the abuse, but without them I wouldn't have survived. This isn't to excuse the abuser's heinous behavior, but to point out that until people are given the resources to live healthy, functional lives, they will be easy prey no matter how many Model Mugging techniques they know.

The details, in other words, cannot be afterthoughts. Wheelchair ramps, phone access, and other accommodations are essential for disabled victims to make the first move toward escape. Abusers tend to look for social cues to tell them whom they can effectively victimize. Fully educating IPV organizations about disability–and including the voices of people with disabilities in that education process–is a critical step in stopping abuse. Extensive planning must go into making sure services are accessible before a person with a

disability calls, because time is of the essence when stopping abuse and people should not have to beg for access. Meanwhile, as time passes, more victims of IPV will become disabled. It is not uncommon for initially able-bodied victims of IPV to become temporarily or permanently disabled by physical injuries inflicted by abusers, or to develop ongoing psychiatric disabilities caused by the abuse. These survivors are at high risk for re-traumatization that might incorporate the disability. The underpinnings of abuse have to do with distorted notions of strength and weakness, with the essence of bullying. IPV activists must ferret out inequities in their own organizations, to take a concrete stance against the exploitation of privilege. Disability is a central issue in IPV. The ability to convey the gestalt of a traumatic experience to a receptive witness, and validation that truly comprehends the difference in vulnerability, helps disabled victims of IPV to step out of the fury and into a safe future. ▮

www.peggymunson.com

untitled

Emily Stern

I begged her to stop.

I was paralyzed by the memories of one of the times that I'd been raped. The angle of her hand as she pumped my cunt sent me spinning backwards to another time. Since I wasn't with that man, and I was lying in my own bed, in my own house, and I wasn't 10 anymore, I was able to whisper "Please! Stop!"

Jo continued to fuck me. She was leaning over me, and her face was so close that I could smell her honey calendula lotion. Surely she must have heard me. "Please baby- please stop"

"Why?" She said, not stopping. "I'm comfortable"

My eyes bugged out and I combated all of the different feelings that came up for me, including wanting to please her, being scared that she would be mad at me, feeling guilty for being damaged and ultimately, anger.

"Get the fuck off me!" I yelled.

Finally, she did.

It certainly wasn't the worst thing that had ever happened to me, but it wasn't what I expected my girlfriend to do.

One night, she asked me to tell her my abuse history. I told her everything. I especially tried to explain the things that set me off, the triggers that led to my disassociating from my body. When I finished, she started talking about how she can understand triggers. She began to cry. She told me that she got triggered when her girlfriends didn't have sex with her every night. I continued to hold her. As a survivor, my first instinct is always to join and believe people when they talk about triggers. As I held her while she cried, I tried to understand why she was triggered by not having sex every night. I asked her about her abuse history, and she said that she hadn't experienced any kind of sexual abuse, rape or violence growing up. I wondered if her complex relationship to her gender identity could have been contributing to fears of not being touched, or if her self-esteem was somehow dependent on sex. She never explained it when I asked. I knew there had to be a reason, but without an explanation, I just felt like she was trying to manipulate me and make me feel guilty for the times when I needed physical space.

Over time, Jo told me about all of her ex's. They'd all had a similar MO. They would all just break up with her with no explanation whatsoever, and never talk to her again. She cried as she told me about how they'd all disappeared. She described how she would go to them and try to talk to them at work, and when that wouldn't work, she would wait for them at home; when that wouldn't work, she would follow them home from work; and when that wouldn't work, she would talk to friends and try to get them to talk to her exgirlfriends for her. In retrospect, she was describing a pattern of stalking her girlfriends. If that had been a man doing that to a woman, we would have easily been able to draw upon that definition in the strait domestic violence community. Granted, there's often absolutely nothing done about it in that world as well, but, there is a definition, a recognition that it is inappropriate. Queer communities don't always hold that same familiarity or association. There's more of an emphasis on women only and/or queer spaces always being safe spaces. That common belief makes this kind

of violence incredibly difficult for many people, women especially, to accept. For some, I think it's an identity crisis. For others, it's illogical because of where we fit in the patriarchy. For me, it's all of those things, but at the end of the day, it's still violent and not ok.

We finally broke up for good on New Year's Eve, almost six months to the day. My friends were thrilled; they knew I was miserable and we were a volatile combination.

Less than a week later, Jo was back in town, and back again that weekend. And the week after that. She'd made a huge point to not make any friends while we were dating, and then, all of the sudden she was everywhere. Despite working full time, she still chose to travel those 2 hours each way to get there, sometimes a couple times a week- by bus. She was suddenly at dinner parties, small art shows, my favorite cafés and restaurants, even my colleague's houses. When I emailed her that it was suspicious, she emphatically disagreed. I knew she was lying. She had already displayed questionable behavior before. A few months before we'd broken up, I'd found out that Jo was oddly obsessed with where I lived, with my friends, and with their music and art. She'd laid out dozens of stacks of meticulously organized photographs that she'd taken over the years. Each one contained fellow artists. I knew every face.

"Why do you have all of these pictures of people you don't know?" I asked her.

"They're just amazing!" she said and went on to tell me facts that I didn't know about the people that I hung out with everyday. I was creeped out I tried to keep in mind that we don't have a lot of people to look up to, and how so many of the queer icons and leaders are actually in our communities, since they're so small. After we broke up, and she started hanging out all over town, several of those artists came to me and told me that they had avoided her for years because they felt stalked by her.

Like many people who engage in abusive behaviors, Jo was nice as pie; Funny, extremely attractive, charismatic, incredibly generous, and generally pretty fun to be around. People liked her. She was quickly able to shroud herself with her new "friends". So, I didn't feel safe telling my community that I thought she had been stalking me, and that I thought that she used me to get close to the people that she idolized so much. A few months after we split, Jo showed up at a rehearsal for a show I was in. It was completely inappropriate because she was barely an acquaintance of the cast. I emailed and called her, saying, "You are not allowed to come to any rehearsals, or to come backstage, for any of the show that I'm in. I'm working. I need space." She didn't respect my request. Not only did she go backstage before all of the shows, she also sat in the front row of the tiny black box performance space for 4 shows in a row. (Imagine giving a show in your living room and she's on the couch right in front of you.) By 4 shows, I mean one at 8pm, one at 10 pm, and the same the next night. She also went out with everyone afterwards - with all of her "new friends" that she met when she'd bought them drinks and food and told them how great she thought they were.

One day, a friend said, "Emily, do you ever feel like she's stalking you?" I said, "Yes! I have felt so crazy this whole time!" I also explained that I sometimes couldn't tell if she was stalking me, or my friends. Either way, it was disrespectful of my feelings. I had specifically asked for space from her, and she completely ignored my request. I explained how hard it had been to discuss this with people in my community because she was suddenly part of it.

My friend offered to help by having a mutual

friend of ours approach her. Jo vehemently denied everything. It wasn't long after that this that the mutual friend wouldn't discuss it with me anymore. Despite her previously acknowledging and agreeing that the behavior was suspect, she stopped communicating with me about it and then seemed to become better friends with her.

Even when I realized I was being stalked I was never willing to involve the police. Jo easily passed as a male, and she's a person of color. The small town, however "progressive", was still run by a bunch of white people. I had no faith that she would be treated fairly. She also would be facing the possibility of the police beating her up or some other horrendous acts. In addition, the queer scene that we were a part of was primarily white. There were a lot of us working to be accountable, but we were far from the majority. I was concerned about her safety with them as well. I knew that that she would have been exposed to a level of danger and potential abuse far higher than what I was experiencing.

I made myself get used to seeing her all over the place, and I begin to numb out and move on. A year and a half later, I was asked by a local activist named Sean if I wanted to participate in an intervention to hold my ex-girlfriend accountable for her actions in the community. He explained that there was a string of people that have claimed that she had stalked them, scared them, or had bad boundaries with them over the years, the most recent being his girlfriend. AND, he also told me that Jo was now officially moving to the small town where I lived.

I spoke with his girlfriend, and we compared stories; they were practically identical. She said that she was going to be a part of the intervention. I began to get excited at the idea of some recognition, some honesty from Jo, and some safety for the next poor kid she was going to date.

Sean and a few other community accountability activists presented 3 possible courses of action:

- a letter signed by all of the people she had crossed boundaries with- from coast to coast;
- staging a community forum/discussion;
- each of us writing our own letters explaining how and why we felt she had bad boundaries.

The letter signed by all of the people who had experienced inappropriate behavior with her was one that I liked the most. It was something tangible, and she could read it in private. I thought that it was the most likely to reach her and get her into therapy.

Really though, I wasn't especially comfortable with any of the options. None of them felt safe to me. I didn't see how I was going to be protected. Also, the Sean's girlfriend had decided not to participate after all, so I was it. I was nervous about taking the heat for all of it.

Soon after, things got sticky. Jo and a close friend of mine began hooking up.

With the new development of Jo dating someone else in our community, the activists decided it was best to make the final decision about what to do through a mediated conversation to make sure that we were being as fair and thoughtful as possible. That conversation resulted in someone feeling guilty, and they told a friend, who told the girl that was dating Jo; she then told Jo, and then, pandemonium..

Jo said told everyone that what we were doing was a racist witch hunt and that she didn't do anything wrong. While I didn't agree, I also understood that accusing people of color of being perpetrators of sexual violence is a

very common, detrimental- and sometimes deadly stereotype. Jo's new love interest is also a person of color, and, as a white person, I struggled with finding language to discuss the incidences, the behavior, acknowledge the racial stereotypes, honor Jo's feeling that I was being racist, take responsibility for where I had privilege and name her behavior- all at the same time.

Sean and the other people involved decided it was best to handle it one on one. They each set up a time to meet with her alone and discuss their concerns, and they all ended things amicably and discretely. That wasn't a comfortable choice for me; I couldn't do it. I hadn't had any one on one contact with her in over a year, and I didn't want to start now. Then, the activists literally disappeared, leaving me to defend vicious rumors about how I was a racist, and was out to get her and had been plotting to hurt and ruin her for no reason. I no longer had the support and proof of "people coast to coast" who had experienced similar things". Not only that, I was dealing with the emotional ramifications of an old wound torn open and constantly being triggered by her presence.

I felt abandoned. I felt defensive, and I was angry as hell with the so-called "concerned activists" that had initiated the process. I never felt safe in my community again. I never knew what was being said behind my back. People would seek me out to talk to me when my ex would do something that they felt uncomfortable about, and then I would see them hanging out the next day, so I didn't really know who to trust, outside of a few very, very good friends. I retreated, and moved soon after. As the old story goes, the illusion of a close-knit and caring community committed to social justice was just that: an illusion. To this day, I hear that my ex continues to thrive in the same tiny town. As far as I know, she has never openly taken responsibility for any of her actions.

As I have been writing this story, it is clear to me that the feeling of being abandoned by my community is the wound that still lingers. Being left alone was awful. It was irresponsible. It was wrong. Leaving the victim with no support system is unacceptable, and as a community, we should work very hard on making sure that this doesn't happen. If you can't continue doing it, then find someone who can, or make sure that they have a counselor. Survivors already feel completely isolated, and this has the potential to put them over an edge. The abuser should also have community and support. They are not mutually exclusive.

I am left with many questions. Such as:

- How do we acknowledge the pain of the survivors in these domestic violence situations, while still acknowledging that rehabilitation is possible and the ultimate goal?

- How do we negotiate the magnitude of the intimacy issues that are so prevalent in the queer community? They deeply affect survivor's abilities to speak out for themselves in these kinds of situations.

- How do we continue to openly and lovingly address the enormous amount of abuse and rape that so many of the community members have survived? How do we draw conclusions about how this abuse has affected our abilities to say when something is scary, uncomfortable, or just plain wrong when we are struggling so deeply with self-esteem, understanding personal boundaries, learning to love our bodies after hating them for our entire lives, AND somehow fit into a queer community so you don't feel any more isolated than you already do? How does a partner learn how to deal with these issues in a respectful way? Where do they discuss it openly and safely?

■ How do we take these questions and actions into a more therapeutic realm? For instance, I have worked with sex offenders, facilitating therapy groups and doing case management. If there's one thing that is clear to me, it's that talking things through, and really getting to the bottom of a compulsive romantic/sexual behavior takes an incredible amount of hard work, support, and help from a skilled practitioner of some kind. Who and where are these facilitators in our communities?

■ Where and how do race and abuse overlap? How do we talk about them? My ex is one of a few People of Color in the community. She is brave. I don't know the myriad struggles that she and other POC face, apart from what they have chosen to tell me, and what I have been privileged to hear and read about. She said that she felt targeted by me because of her race. I cannot guarantee that there isn't some part of me that is doing that. I can also say that as far as I know, I am not.

The queer community is full of strong people who have survived many obstacles to simply be queer in the world, combined with whatever else they've survived from their childhood experiences, classism, racism, date rapes, bad relationships, hate crimes, etc. When I think of all of the amazing work being done with accountability regarding race and class issues, and I compare it to the work that is being done around intimacy, relationship, and survivor issues, I see the same gaping hole that I noticed in the "anti-oppression" movement. We process about a lot of difficult subjects, and that gets us only so far. We do not have very many safe community spaces for emotional process. We save that for therapy, and for our deep, good friends, or the stranger at the bar when we're totally ripped and flipped out. We have not set precedence, an example, a model of what an emotionally healthy community looks like and acts like. We still keep who we are in the closet.

What if Jo could have said to someone, "I am really scared of being alone and rejected and my fear drives me to scare the crap out of people or try to make them uncomfortable in an effort to control and manipulate them into staying in a relationship with me" What if I could have named the behavior, using terms and definitions that we were both familiar with? What if we were part of a culture of exploration rather than accusation?

Racism is always a factor, whether it's institutionalized or personal or both. It needs to be addressed openly- fears laid out on the table along with everything else. It is possible for people to be accountable for their power and prejudice AND discuss their victimization. The biggest challenge for survivors may be to look in the mirror and own how they too can be perpetrators. There is no way to hold a person of color accountable without perpetuating racism if you're not emotionally, consciously, owning your racism and privilege. Even then, one needs to be willing to listen; to expand their definition of racism, even if they are learning from their perpetrator. Community organizers should continually raise these issues throughout any kind of accountability piece.

Clearly, queer communities are working to define and prioritize self-care. This zine is an excellent example of how people are creating supportive spaces that soothe our wounds. Ultimately, my hope is that we have a community that has a language to respectfully and effectively deal with people's boundary and intimacy issues through a deep and compassionate examination of what motivates us. From there, we can create and share tools to deal with behavior patterns that are born of fear and abuse. ▮

transforming communities: community-based responses to partner abuse

Vanessa Huang

"I'm an activist against the prison system because as the prison system works now, I've seen so many great ideas, lives, and spirits just completely squashed by the bureaucracy, and by the total abuse and dehumanization that goes on within these walls. It's time we learn to stand up," said Misty Rojo on Justice Now's 2005 CD, *The We That Sets Us Free: Building a World Without Prisons*.

Like so many people in prison, Rojo is a survivor of both interpersonal violence–in her case, over 10 years of partner abuse–and the state violence of policing and imprisonment. Her call invites us to create ways of living without throwing people behind prison walls: What would it mean for us to hold each other accountable for the harms we do without calling the cops? How do we transform our lives so this harm no longer happens? Can we even imagine it?

As a queer first-generation Chinese-American anti-prison organizer, I grew up not always being able to communicate with my parents or relatives about my work: how do I explain prison abolition, community-based accountability, or transformative justice in Chinese? Who should and can I be out with, as queer and as a survivor?

I wrote an earlier version of this article in 2004 for *ColorLines* Magazine (www.colorlines.com). Sharing the article with my mother was simultaneously a building moment and a reminder that even when communicating in the same language, in this case English, we know different words and have varying comfort levels in using them, and I was communicating in language and stated intentions commonly shared by activist-identified communities.

Over time, I've realized that even if in 2004 I found barriers sharing this work with my mother, this conversation about the need to vision beyond bars takes place everywhere we are building and practicing *familia*. Now, when my mother and I are out to dinner with family friends who ask about my work challenging imprisonment and ask, "Don't we need more prisons so people aren't so crowded?" and my mother responds that it doesn't address the root of the problem, I'm no longer surprised. Nor was I surprised that when her friend was splitting with her partner and sought a restraining order because he refused to move out, my mother, while providing emotional support throughout the process, opted out of attending the strategy meeting about the restraining order.

So when people ask how my sister and I both turned out the way we did–whether or not we came from "activist parents," the answer is a "no, but…": But my mother is one of the fiercest and loving people I know. She's survived childhood, the experience of immigrating from Taipei to the Midwest in the 70s, and almost single-handedly raising my sister and I. Growing up, I've watched her nurture loved ones, young and old, while taking people to task for the harm they do, like in my elementary school classroom where my teacher wanted us to learn to file taxes and this Asian boy who wrote down my name on his tax form as his "wife" would intrude my personal space in class.

My mother's fierce loving, coupled with my father's decision to pursue his life's passion as an urban designer back in Taiwan and China while my mother raised my sister and I here in the States, deeply shaped an uncompromising commitment to the boldest of visions in my political work. Over time,

my understanding of my childhood also has shown me that in many ways, the hardest work begins at home, and that accountability to people in our daily lives is integral to being accountable to the work of transformation.

Building the Movement

Those of us targeted by policing and imprisonment—communities of color, immigrant, poor and working-class, queer and trans, and disability communities—have long had reason to not turn to these systems for support around the violence and harm we face, and to instead create our own interventions.

This need has become all the more urgent with the increased surveillance and policing after 9/11. In Atlanta, Georgia, the South Asian anti family violence organization Raksha launched Breaking the Silence after the PATRIOT Act and increased deportations targeting the immigrant and refugee communities. "We have to think about the impact law enforcement has had in our communities," said Priyanka Sinha, community education director at Raksha. "People don't feel safe; our families have been broken up."

In recent memory, our movements have amplified our collective analysis and articulation of this need, answering Angela Davis' call on *The We That Sets Us Free* to "begin to think about the state as a perpetrator of violence against women, and understand the connections between intimate violence, private violence, state violence, prison violence, and military violence." Since organizers working with the prison abolition organization Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence collaborated five years or so ago to write the joint statement, "Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex," the prison abolition and prisoner rights' movements have amplified our analysis of how gender oppression and state violence intersect, and seen a proliferation of organizing with and advocacy for people in women's prisons and a marked growth in this work with trans and gender variant people in men's and women's prisons. We've taken seriously the task of engaging in dialogue and work with the anti-violence movements to end interpersonal violence.

And radical and progressive networks within the anti-domestic and sexual violence movements today commonly acknowledge the ways in which pushing for legislation criminalizing "violence against women"—while effectively contributing to public understanding of this violence as harm that demands accountability—has helped to expand the harmful reach of the policing and imprisonment on our communities. We actively are organizing ourselves towards non-policing, non-prison responses to partner abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence:

Generation Five (G5), a San-Francisco-based project that works to end child sexual abuse, has worked to build our movements' understanding of "transformative justice" responses to interpersonal violence, premised on the understanding that our work is not only about intervention in individual incidences of harm, but also about transforming "the conditions of oppression and domination that allow that violence to happen" in the first place. G5 trains communities to support transformative justice approaches to child sexual abuse. One participant, a psychologist in a children's agency, contacted the survivor's extended family to create a plan to support the child, hold the aggressor accountable and support the aggressor's process. Afterwards, she called CPS to report what happened, since child psychologists are "mandated reporters"–but also pitched the plan she and the community had created. CPS found it acceptable and stayed out; so did the criminal legal system.

Sara Kershnar, G5's director, said of the last several years that "what we've been able to do put child sexual abuse, intimate and community violence more on the map as a political project" and to articulate their vision for transformative justice. Most recently, G5 distributed its document, "Towards Transformative Justice: A Liberatory Approach to Child Sexual Abuse" at the United States Social Forum. A call for people to engage in developing transformative justice responses to violence, the document offers several principles in developing transformative justice responses; these include a commitment to liberation amongst those involved; shifting power relations; developing safety; seeking accountability; building collective action; honoring where we all come from; and making the process sustainable. Sara said G5's goal over the next several years is to "find the right partners with clear politics, clear principles, and clear practices" to help create models, develop skills, and facilitate strategic thinking.

Over the past several years, Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA) in Seattle has actively supported people and networks in developing community accountability strategies. In one situation, CARA supported a group of young women organizers who had been sexually assaulted by a male co-organizer. Because of the women's demands, the group removed him from his position and he entered counseling with support from friends. The group also began sponsoring trainings on sexual violence throughout its national chapters.

Drawing from this work, CARA for the past few years has been developing "Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies," which they contributed to the 2006 INCITE! Color of Violence Anthology. In this document, CARA shares a number of principles as a resource for people to consider in organizing community accountability strategies: recognizing the humanity of everyone involved; prioritize the self-determination of the survivor; identify a simultaneous plan for safety and support for the survivor and community members; carefully consider the potential consequences of the strategy; organize collectively; make sure everyone involved in the group seeking accountability shares a political analysis of sexual violence; be clear and specific about what you want from the aggressor in terms of accountability; let the aggressor know your analysis and demands; consider help from the aggressor's community; and prepare to be engaged in the process for the long haul.

And Mimi Kim, who has worked to end domestic violence and sexual assault for over 15 years, launched Creative Interventions in 2004 to create space for "the people closest to and most impacted by violence to envision and create ways to make it stop" and to collect and analyze stories stories of responses to harm that don't rely on the criminal legal system. Since 2004, Kim said, "the projects and vision remain remarkably similar, though we're still on the frontiers of what this all means in 2007. In a lot of ways, we are building a long, long history of everyday people trying to end violence in ways that don't play into oppressive structures." Simultaneously, Kim said the work has been about explicitly naming leadership in women and trans folks, people of color, queer folks, poor folks, and people with disabilities and creating collective leadership.

"The point of opening up and creating these alternatives," Kim reflects, "means creating a world that is very different from this one. If kids grow up seeing that abuse gets stopped by someone right next to them, if we create subsystems where people know that if they're violent, it's not going to be tolerated–we're going to create a whole different

way of living in this world."

Practicing Community

"We need to shift toward an underlying culture of partnership and trust and away from a culture of domination," said Jane Dorotik, currently imprisoned at California Institution for Women, on *The We That Sets Us Free*. Domination underlies every single relationship, from relationships between parents and children, between governments and citizens, us and nature. In contrast, a partnership-, trust-oriented model supports mutually respectful, caring relationships. There can be hierarchies as would be necessary in all social structure, but power would be used not to constrict and control, but to elicit from ourselves and others our highest potential." While our communities have made movement since 2004 towards community accountability strategies, this is hard work and we have a long ways to go–especially when we don't tend to have many support systems for the kind of accountable relationships Dorotik is calling for.

"The notion of accountable communities is both parallel to and contrasting from, a precursor to community accountability," said Connie Burke of the Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse in Seattle. Since we aren't generally skilled at being accountable to each other, and this is something that perpetuates patterns of abuse, she explained, the Network sees its work as "creating the conditions necessary to create loving and equitable relationships" as a building block towards accountable communities.

And rather than continue to single out people who harm as a distinct group, the Network has collaborated with survivors to develop relationship skills classes for anyone interested in building the skills to engage in the process of accountability. Burke explained that "when something dramatic and traumatic happens, if we haven't practiced, we don't just all rise to the occasion. We tend to do what we've always done."

Another project the Network has developed is Friends Are Reaching Out (FAR OUT), which supports survivors in breaking isolation and reconnecting with friends and family and to ask for the kinds of support they need. The project also supports people's networks to come together when there isn't imminent harm on the table to come to agreements on ways of approaching problems for when they arise. "We moved from there to people in more dangerous situations," said Burke.

The Network also has supported identity-based networks in constructing accountable communities. For instance, the community Seattle has supported femmes in constructing positive femme culture, art, and writing spaces that are "anti-racist and class-aware"–not constructed in ways that exploit other women's work. Similarly, the Network has sponsored a project called Intentional Masculinities to support trans men, masculine-identified women, people on the FTM spectrum, and some queer non-trans men in constructing accountable, "pro-feminist… loving, kind, strong, and hot" masculinities.

Transforming Justice

While we've seen some movement towards community-based responses to harms we face within our homes and networks, we have a lot more learning and growing to do. As we continue this work, it's important that we continue to make the connections among "intimate violence, private violence, state violence, prison violence, and military violence," as Angela Davis calls for on *The We That Sets Us Free*, and to make new connections with other forms of violence, like hate violence, as well. This is one area we

also have much learning and growth to do in terms of responding to harms directed at us from outside of our immediate networks: How do we hold people accountable for the harm they do when we don't have interpersonal relationships?

In this moment, we have few, if any options for responses to racist, sexist, queerphobic and/or transphobic violence from people we don't know. But in a political moment where liberals and moderates are beginning to locate hate violence on their radar, and engage with the state in responding, it's critical that we examine our choice in language, strategy, and its impacts on our communities and the work of transformation.

For instance, from the well- and less-publicized cases of Vincent Chin to Gwen Araujo and Sakia Gunn to the more recent Jersey Four–all survivors and victims of hate violence–what's the impact when commentators, organizers, and/or cultural workers lead with the language of "hate crimes"? Defining hate violence as a crime, thus criminalizing it, enables people to be convicted of the crime and thrown into prison. We can ask similar questions of ourselves about this response as we do now of the impact of criminalizing domestic violence: What was the impact of pushing for a criminal legal response to this form of partner abuse? Did sending partners to prison, an environment and structure rooted in abuse, exploitation, and misogyny fostered by the state, make sense as a strategy to stop patterns of abuse and exploitation at home? We now know that this approach didn't work, and that it did play a role in growing the use and justification for policing and imprisonment and expanding their harmful impact on our communities. Similarly, what is the impact of efforts to enact "hate crime" legislation and other policy efforts to limit the use of the "gay panic defense"? While such defenses are clearly absurd, efforts to limit their use ultimately are about being able to criminalize people. And when we're facing the challenge of ending hate violence, does it make sense to respond to hate violence by calling for people to be sent into an institution that plays such an integral role in maintaining and strengthening white supremacy, the gender binary, and heteronormativity?

When the only response put before us is to look for "justice" via the criminal legal system, when the enormity of what we're facing seems as insurmountable as they do, it's extremely hard to imagine another way. But tapping into our collective courage to dare to dream the world we want to live in is our fundamental task in the work of transformation. It's organizing against imprisonment with people in women's prisons and formerly imprisoned trans women–many of whom are survivors of violence at the hands of the state, and at home and/or on the streets prior to their imprisonment, many of whom are queer and/or trans people of color–that's shown me more and more each day that investing any more of our collective "ideas, lives, and spirits" into the criminal legal system is futile–they will only continue to be "squashed by the bureaucracy and…total abuse and dehumanization," as Misty Rojo said on *The We That Sets Us Free*. "It's time we learned to stand up."

While we have a long ways to go, people have begun to take leadership. In 2005, members of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), INCITE!, Justice Now, the Transgender, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project (TGJIP), and others convened and participated in a conversation about community-based responses to harm at Creating Change. Our intent was to push ourselves and the broader LGBT movement to be accountable to all parts of our queer and trans networks, including folks directly impacted by intersecting forms of violence. And the AFSC published and distributed the pamphlet "Close to Home: Developing In-

novative, Community-Based Responses to Anti-LGBT Violence," in which they wrote, "Violence against LGBT people and other targeted groups is an explosive symptom of already shattered social, economic, cultural, and religious relationships in our communities, and of the fear, rage, and resentment that is the result of those shattered relationships. The problem isn't 'out there,' located only in the beliefs and actions of the pathological few; it exists much closer to home." ▮

taking risks: implementing grassroots community accountability strategies

Written by a collective of women of color from Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA): Alisa Bierria, Onion Carrillo, Eboni Colbert, Xandra Ibarra, Theryn Kigvamasud'Vashti, and Shale Maulana

Sexual violence is often treated as a hyper-delicate issue that can only be addressed by trained professionals such as law enforcement or medical staff. Survivors are considered "damaged," pathologized beyond repair. Aggressors are perceived of as "animals," unable to be redeemed or transformed.[1] These extreme attitudes alienate every-day community members – friends and family of survivors and aggressors – from participating in the critical process of supporting survivors and holding aggressors accountable for abusive behavior. Ironically, survivors overwhelmingly turn to friends and family for support, safety, and options for accountability strategies.[2]

Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA), a grassroots anti-rape organizing project in Seattle, has worked with diverse groups who have experienced sexual violence within their communities to better understand the nature of sexual violence and rape culture, nurture community values that are inconsistent with rape and abuse, and develop community-based strategies for safety, support, and accountability. Using some general guidelines as the bones for each community-based process, we work with survivors and their communities to identify their own unique goals, values, and actions that add flesh to their distinct safety/accountability model. In the following paper, we discuss these community accountability guidelines and provide three illustrative examples of community-based models developed by activists in Seattle.

Because social networks can vary widely on the basis of values, politics, cultures, and attitudes, we have found that having a one-size-fits-all community accountability model is not a realistic or respectful way to approach an accountability process. However, we have also learned that there are some important organizing principles that help to maximize the safety and integrity of everyone involved – including the survivor, the aggressor, and other community members. An accountability model must be creative and flexible enough to be a good fit for the uniqueness of each community's needs, while also being disciplined enough to incorporate some critical guidelines as the framework for its strategy.[3]

Below is a list of ten guidelines that we have found important and useful to consider.

CARA's Accountability Principles

1. Recognize the humanity of everyone involved. It is imperative that the folks who organize the accountability process are clear about recognizing the humanity of all people involved, including the survivor(s), the aggressor(s), and the community. This can be easier said than done!

It is natural, and even healthy, to feel rage at the aggressor for assaulting another person, especially a person that we care about. However, it is critical that we are grounded in a value of recognizing the complexity of each person, including ourselves. Given the needs and values of a particular community, an accountability process for the aggressor can be confrontational, even angry, but it should not be de-humanizing.

Dehumanization of aggressors contributes to a larger context of oppression for everyone. For example, alienation and dehumanization of the offending person increases a community's vulnerability to being targeted for disproportional criminal justice oppression through heightening the "monster-ness" of another community member. This is especially true for marginalized communities (such as people of color, people with disabilities, poor people, and queer people) who are already targeted by the criminal system because of their "other-ness. " When one person in our community is identified as a "monster, " that identity is often generalized to everyone in the community. This generalization can even be made by other members of the marginalized community because of internalized oppression.[4]

Also, dehumanizing the aggressor undermines the process of accountability for the whole community. If we separate ourselves from the offenders by stigmatizing them then we fail to see how we contributed to conditions that allow violence to happen.

2. Prioritize the self-determination of the survivor. Self-determination is the ability to make decisions according to one's own free will and self-guidance without outside pressure or coercion. When a person is sexually assaulted, self-determination is profoundly undermined. Therefore, the survivor's values and needs should be prioritized, recognized and respected.

The survivor should not be objectified or minimized as a symbol of an idea instead of an actual person. It is critical to take into account the survivor's vision for when, why, where and how the abuser will be held accountable. It is also important to recognize that the survivor must have the right to choose to lead and convey the plan, participate in less of a leadership role, or not be part of the organizing at all. The survivor should also have the opportunity to identify who will be involved in this process. Some survivors may find it helpful for friends or someone from outside of the community to help assess and facilitate the process with their community. To promote explicit shared responsibility, the survivor and community can also negotiate and communicate boundaries and limits around what roles they are willing to play and ensure that others perform their roles in accordance with clear expectations and goals.

3. Identify a simultaneous plan for safety and support for the survivor as well as others in the community. Safety is complex and goes far beyond keeping your doors locked, walking in well-lit areas, and carrying a weapon or a cell phone. Remember that a "safety plan" requires us to continue thinking critically about how our accountability process will impact our physical and emotional well-being.[5] Consider questions such as: how will the abuser react when he is confronted about his abusive behavior? How can we work together to de-mechanize the aggressor's strategies? Remember, one does not have control over the aggressor's violence, but you do have control over how you can prepare and respond to it.

Violence can escalate when an aggressor is confronted about her behavior. Threats of revenge, suicide, stalking, threats to disclose personal information or threats to create barriers for you to work, eat, sleep, or simply keep your life private may occur. The aggressor may also use intimidation to frighten the survivor and others. They may use privilege such as class, race, age, or socio-political status to hinder your group from organizing. While planning your offense, organizers must also prepare to implement a defense in case of aggressor retaliation. If your situation allows you to do so, organizers can also alert other members of the community about your plan and prepare them for how the abuser

may react.

Organizers must also plan for supporting the survivor and themselves. It is easy to become so distracted with the accountability process that we forget that someone was assaulted and needs our emotional support. It is likely that there is more than one survivor of sexual assault and/or domestic violence in any one community of people. Other survivors within the organizing group may be triggered during the community accountability process. Organizing for accountability should not be just about the business of developing a strategy to address the aggressor's behavior, but also about creating a loving space for community building and real care for others.

Organizers should also try to be self aware about their own triggers and create a plan for support for themselves as well. Sometimes it's helpful to have a separate group of friends that can function as a support system for the survivor as well as for the organizers.

4. Carefully consider the potential consequences of your strategy. Before acting on any plan, always make sure that your group has tried to anticipate all of the potential outcomes of your strategy. Holding someone accountable for abuse is difficult and the potential responses from the abuser are numerous. For example, if you choose to use the media to publicize the aggressor's behavior, you might think of the consequences of the safety and privacy of the survivor and the organizers involved. But you will also have to consider the chances of the media spinning the story in a way that is not supportive to your values, or the possibility that the story outrages another person outside of your community so much that he decides to respond by physically threatening the aggressor, or the chance that the media will give the aggressor a forum to justify the abusive behavior. This need to "what-if" an accountability strategy is not meant to discourage the process, but to make sure that organizers are careful to plan for possible outcomes. Your first plan may need to be shifted, modified, and tweaked as you go. You may find that you are working to hold this person accountable for a longer period of time than you expected. There may be a split in your community because of the silence surrounding abuse, especially sexual and domestic violence. You may feel that you are further isolating the survivor and yourselves from the community. Think of the realistic outcomes of your process to hold someone accountable in your community. Your process may not be fully successful or it may yield.

5. Organize *collectively*. It is not impossible to organize an accountability process by one's self, but it is so much more difficult. A group of people is more likely to do a better job of thinking critically about strategies because there are more perspectives and experiences at work. Organizers are less likely to burn out quickly if more than one or two people can share the work as well as emotionally support one another. It is much harder to be targeted by backlash when there is a group of people acting in solidarity with one another. A group of people can hold each other accountable to staying true to the group's shared values. Also, collective organizing facilitates strong community building which undermines isolation and helps to prevent future sexual violence.

6. Make sure everyone in the accountability-seeking group is on the same page with their political analysis of sexual violence. Sometimes members of a community organizing for accountability are not working with the same definition of "rape," the same understanding of concepts like "consent" or "credibility, " or the same assumption that rape is a manifestation of oppression. In order for the group's process to be sustainable and successful, organizers must have a collective

understanding of what rape is and how rape functions in our culture. For example, what if the aggressor and his supporters respond to the organizers' call for accountability by demanding that the survivor prove that she was indeed assaulted or else they will consider her a liar, guilty of slander? Because of our legal structure that is based on the idea of "innocent until proven guilty, " and rape culture that doubts the credibility of women in general, it is a common tactic to lay the burden of proof on the survivor.[6] If the group had a feminist, politicized understanding of rape, they might be able to anticipate this move as part of a larger cultural phenomenon of discrediting women when they assert that violence has been done to them.

This process pushes people to identify rape as a political issue and articulate a political analysisof sexual violence. A shared political analysis of sexual violence opens the door for people to make connections of moments of rape to the larger culture in which rape occurs. A consciousness of rape culture prepares us for the need to organize beyond the accountability of an individual aggressor. We also realize we must organize for accountability and transformation of institutions that perpetuate rape culture such as the military, prisons, and the media.

Lastly, when the aggressor is a progressive activist, a rigorous analysis of rape culture can be connected to that individual's own political interests. A political analysis of rape culture can become the vehicle that connects the aggressor's act of violence to the machinations of oppression in general and even to his own political agenda. Sharing this analysis may also help gain support from the aggressor's activist community when they understand their own political work as connected to the abolition of rape culture and, of course, rape.

7. Be clear and specific about what your group wants from the aggressor in terms of accountability. When your group calls for accountability, it's important to make sure that "accountability" is not simply an elusive concept that folks in the group are ultimately unclear about. Does accountability mean counseling for the aggressor? An admission of guilt? A public or private apology? Or is it specific behavior changes? Here are some examples: You can organize in our community, but you cannot be alone with young people. You can come to our parties, but you will not be allowed to drink. You can attend our church, but you must check in with a specific group of people every week so that they can determine your progress in your reform.

Determining the specific thing that the group is demanding from the aggressor pushes the group to be accountable to its own process. It is very easy to slip into a perpetual rage that wants the aggressor to suffer in general, rather than be grounded in a planning process that identifies specific steps for the aggressor to take. And why not? We are talking about rape, after all, and rage is a perfectly natural and good response. However, though we should make an intentional space to honor rage, it's important for the purposes of an accountability process to have a vision for specific steps the aggressor needs to take in order to give her a chance for redemption. Remember the community we are working to build is not one where a person is forever stigmatized as a "monster" no matter what she does to transform, but a community where a person has the opportunity to provide restoration for the damage she has done.

8. Let the aggressor know your analysis and your demands. This guideline may seem obvious, but we have found that this step is often forgotten! For a number of reasons, including being distracted by the other parts of the accountability process, the aggressor building distance between himself and the

organizers, or the desire for the organizers to be anonymous for fear of backlash, we sometimes do not make a plan to relay the specific steps for accountability to the aggressor. Publicly asserting that the person raped another, insisting that he must be accountable for the act, and convincing others in the community to be allies to your process may all be important aspects of the accountability plan – but they are only the beginning of any plan. Public shaming may be a tool that makes sense for your group, but it is not an end for an accountability process. An aggressor can be shamed, but remain unaccountable for his behavior. Organizers must be grounded in the potential of their own collective power, confident about their specific demands as well as the fact that they are entitled to make demands, and then use their influence to compel the aggressor to make follow through with their demands.

9. Consider help from the aggressor's friends, family, and people close to her. Family and friends can be indispensable when figuring out an accountability plan. Organizers may hesitate to engage the aggressor's close people; assuming that friends and family may be more likely to defend the aggressor against reports that he has done such a horrible thing. This is a reasonable assumption – it's hard to believe that a person we care about is capable of violently exploiting another – but it is worth the time to see if you have allies in the aggressor's close community. They have more credibility with the aggressor, it is harder for her to refuse accountability if she is receiving the demand for accountability from people she cares about, it strengthens your group's united front, and, maybe most interestingly, it may compel the aggressor's community to critically reflect on their own values and cultural norms that may be supporting people to violate others. For example, this may be a community of people that does not tolerate rape, but enjoys misogynist humor or music or doesn't support women in leadership. Engaging friends and family in the accountability process may encourage them to consider their own roles in sustaining rape culture.

Also, the participation of the aggressor's close people ensures long-term follow through with the accountability plan. Friends can check in with him to make sure he is attending counseling, for example. Also, the aggressor may need his own support system. What if the intervention causes the aggressor to fall into a deep suicidal depression? The organizers may not have the desire or the patience to support the aggressor, nor should they need to. However, the aggressor's family and friends can play an important role of supporting the aggressor to take the necessary steps of accountability in a way that is sustainable for everyone.

10. Prepare to be engaged in the process for the long haul. Accountability is a process, not a destination, and it will probably take some time. The reasons why people rape are complicated and it takes time to shift the behavior. Furthermore, community members who want to protect the aggressor may slow down or frustrate organizing efforts. Even after the aggressor takes the necessary steps that your group has identified for him to be accountable, it is important to arrange for long term follow through to decrease the chances of future relapse. In the meantime, it's important for the organizers to integrate strategies into their work that make the process more sustainable for them. For example, when was the last time the group hung out together and didn't talk about the aggressor, rape, or rape culture, but just had fun? Weave celebration and fun into your community, it is also a reflection of the world we want to build.

Also, the change that the organizing group is making is not just the transformation of the particular aggressor, but also the trans-

formation of our culture. If the aggressor's friends and family disparage the group, it doesn't mean that the group is doing anything wrong, it's just a manifestation of the larger problem of rape culture. Every group of people that is working to build a community accountability process must understand that they are not working in isolation, but in the company of an *on-going* vast and rich global movement for liberation.

These principles are merely bones to be used as a framework for a complex, three-dimensional accountability process. Each community is responsible for adding its own distinctive features to make the body of the accountability process its own. What follows is a description of three very different scenarios of community groups struggling with sexual violence and mapping out an accountability plan. These scenarios occurred before the folks at CARA crafted the list of principles above, but were important experiences that gave us the tools we needed to identify important components of accountability work.

Accountability Scenarios

Scenario One: Dan is a Black man in an urban area who is active in the movement to end racial profiling and police brutality.[7] He is also works with young people to organize against institutional racism at an organization called Youth Empowered. He is well known by progressives and people of color in the area and popular in the community. Over the course of three years, four young Black women (ages 21 and younger) who were being mentored by Dan approached CARA staff with concerns about on-going sexual harassment within their activist community. Sexual harassment tactics reported by the young women included Dan bringing young people that he mentored to strip clubs, approaching intoxicated young women who he mentored to have sex with them, and having conversations in the organizing space about the size of women's genitals as it relates to their ethnicity. The young women also asserted that institutional sexism within the space was a serious problem at Youth Empowered. Young women had fewer leadership opportunities and their ideas were dismissed.

Organizers at CARA met with Dan in an effort to share with him our concerns and begin an accountability process, but he was resistant. Women of color who were Dan's friends, who did not want to believe that Dan was capable of this behavior, chose to protect Dan from being confronted. Instead, several young women were surprised by an unscheduled meeting within Youth Empowered, facilitated by an older woman of color, where they were bullied into "squashing" their concerns about Dan. They were accused of spreading lies and told that they should be grateful for the organizing opportunities afforded to them by Dan. In one of these meetings, a young woman was shown a letter from the police department that criticized Dan about organizing a rally in an attempt to make her critique of Dan's behavior seem divisive to the movement against police brutality. After these meetings, each young woman felt completely demoralized and severed all ties with Youth Empowered.

Black activists have struggled with the tension of patriarchy within our social justice movements since the movement to abolish slavery. Women who identify the problem and try to organize against sexism and sexual violence within our movements are often labeled as divisive, and even as FBI informants. Their work is discredited and they are often traumatized from the experience. As a result, they often do not want to engage in an accountability process, especially when they are not getting support from people they thought were their comrades, including other women of color.

Over the first two years, CARA made several attempts to hold Dan accountable and each effort was a struggle. An attempt to connect with women of color who organized with him only strained the relationship between our organizations. We also realized that our staff members were not on the same page with each other about how to support young women who were aggravated with one organization discussing the problem at our organization. How did that impact our ability to build strategic coalitions with Youth Empowered? How were we going to support the young women to tell their truth without the story descending into a feeling of hopelessness? Was this a problem about Dan or was this a problem with the organizational culture within Youth Empowered?

We realized that it was not enough to recognize Dan's behavior as problematic and try to appeal to the conscience of the people around him. We needed a thoughtful plan supported by everyone in our organization and we needed to identify folks within CARA who would take the necessary leadership to map out the plan for all of us. We decided that the women of color would meet separately from the general CARA membership to develop an analysis and strategy and the rest of CARA would follow their lead. The women of color decided that our struggle with Dan and his behavior had also become an organizational issue for CARA – it was not solely a community issue – and we identified it as such. We named Dan as a person who had ongoing chronic issues with sexual harassment. Surprisingly, this intentional defining of the problem had not yet happened among our staff. We talked about his behavior as problematic, unaccountable, manipulative, but we had not collectively and specifically named it as a form of sexualized violence.

Importantly, we decided that our analysis of his behavior was not secret information. If people in the community asked us our opinion about Dan or disclosed that they were being sexually harassed at Youth Empowered, we decided that our analysis would not be confidential but would be shared in the spirit of sharing information about destructive behavior. In the past we struggled with whether or not sharing this information would be useless or counterproductive gossip. We knew the risk of telling others that a well-known Black man who organized against police violence was responsible for sexualized violence. But we decided that it was safer for our community for us to not allow ourselves to be silenced. It was also safer for Dan if we supported our community to move along in its process of struggling with his behavior and eventually demanding accountability. If our community didn't hold him accountable and compel him to reform his behavior, we worried that he would step over the line with a woman who would not hesitate to report him to the police, which would give the police the ammunition they needed to completely discredit Dan, as well as our movement against police violence. Therefore, we made a decision to tell people the information if they came to us with concerns.

We decided that instead of meeting with all the women of color in Dan's ranks, we would choose one Black woman from CARA to invite one Black woman from Youth Empowered to have a solid, low-drama, conversation. We also asked another Black woman familiar and friendly with both groups and strong in her analysis of sexual violence within Black communities to facilitate the conversation. The woman from Youth Empowered had positive experiences organizing with CARA in the past and, though our earlier conversations about Dan were fraught with tension and defensiveness on all our parts, she was willing to connect with us. The participation of the third woman as a friendly facilitator also helped us to be more relaxed in our conversation.

The first meetings with these women went very well. The CARA representative was clear that her organization's analysis was that Dan had a serious problem with sexual harassment, and we were specifically concerned about the fact that he was working with young people. We were specifically concerned about Dan's engagement with young people because of the power Dan had in choosing which young person would get internships, go to out of town conferences, or receive leadership opportunities. Dan's friend received the information with very little defensiveness and was eager to have more conversations about Dan's behavior. This one-on-one strategy seemed to relax the tension between the two progressive organizations; instead we became three sistas intentionally unpacking the problem of misogyny in our community.

The outcome of these meetings was the healing of the strategic relationship between our organizations, which was important for movement building, but we still had not moved to a place where we could hold Dan accountable. We struggled with the specific thing we wanted to see happen. The women whom he'd sexually harassed were not asking for anything in particular; they understandably just wanted to be left alone. We decided that we did not want him ejected from the activist community, but that it was not safe for him to mentor young people.

It was at this time that a young 17 year old Black woman, Keisha, connected with us through Rashad, a young 17 year old Black man who was organizing both with CARA and with Youth Empowered. (Rashad was referred to CARA through Dan's organization because the rift between the two groups had significantly healed. If we had not accomplished this, Keisha may not have found CARA.) Keisha was an intern at Youth Empowered and had written a four-page letter of resignation that detailed Dan's sexist behavior. The women at CARA listened to Keisha's story, read her letter, and decided to share with her our collective analysis of Dan's behavior. Because Dan is so deeply supported at Youth Empowered, CARA's response helped her feel affirmed and validated. CARA's organizers helped Keisha strategize about sharing the letter at Youth Empowered by asking her what she wanted to achieve, how she wanted to be supported, andwhat she wanted her next steps to be after the meeting.

Keisha read her letter aloud to Youth Empowered members that night, with Rashad acting as her ally. She received some support from some women in the community, but she was also told that her letter was very "high school" and immature by a Black woman within the organization who was also a mentor. Dan pulled Rashad aside after Keisha read her letter and told him that he was making a mistake by organizing with CARA because "those women hate Black men. " It was a very painful event, and yet both Keisha and Rashad felt positive about the fact that they followed through with their plan and publicly revealed the same problems that other young Black women before Keisha had named but privately struggled with.

The Black woman from Youth Empowered who had been engaging with CARA was stunned by Keisha's letter, and quickly organized a meeting with Dan, Keisha, Rashad, her CARA contact, and other Youth Empowered organizers, along with the same Black woman as a facilitator. Keisha and CARA organizers prepared for tactics that Dan and his supporters would use to discredit Keisha. Though each organizer admitted that there was a problem with institutional sexism within Youth Empowered, they belittled the conflict as if it were a misunderstanding between Keisha and Dan. They said she was "acting white" for putting her thoughts on paper and for wanting to resign her in-

ternship. Keisha, being the youngest person at the meeting, was mostly intimidated and silenced by these hurtful tactics. The CARA organizer who was there, however, carefully challenged each attempt to discredit Keisha. We continued to support Keisha during and after this meeting.

Keisha's letter, however, had a strong ripple effect that continued to impact Youth Empowered. The Youth Empowered organizer who had been talking with CARA was moved by Keisha's letter, and committed to figuring out an accountability plan for Dan that made sense for her organization. She began to organize discussions to clarify the issues that included organizers from CARA, Dan, and organizers from Youth Empowered. These conversations were very different than when we had started. We no longer had to convince folks that institutional sexism existed in the organization, or that Dan's behavior was a form of sexualized violence. Dan eventually resigned from his mentorship position at the organization, but we don't know if this was because of the pressure created by Keisha's letter and CARA's stronger connections with women of color at Youth Empowered,. With his absence, the new leadership at Youth Empowered began to more confidently address the institutional sexism issues within the organization.

Although we think that this work has created a safer environment at Youth Empowered, Dan still has not been accountable for his behavior. That is to say, he has not admitted that what he did was wrong or taken steps to reconcile with the people who he targeted at Youth Empowered. However, at the time of writing, we expect that he'll continue to go to these meetings where these conversations about sexual violence (including his own) will be discussed in the context of building a liberation movement for all Black people.

Working The Principles: In the above scenario, CARA organizers utilized many of the community accountability principles discussed above. We were sure to respect the autonomy of the young women. They needed distance from the situation, so we did not pressure them to participate in the often-grueling process. However, we did regularly update them on our progress, keeping the door open if they changed their minds about what they wanted their role to be. In the meantime, we set up support systems for them, making sure we made space for Black women to just relax and talk about our lives instead of spending all of our time processing Dan.

Because the issue was complicated, we planned together as a group, running strategies by one another so that many perspectives and ideas could help improve our work. We also learned from our mistakes and learned to consider more carefully the consequences of strategies such as calling a big meeting rather than strategically working with individuals. Also working with the Black woman from Youth Empowered, a friend and comrade of Dan's, was really critical in bringing Dan closer to the possibility of accountability. Her participation brought important credibility to the questions we were asking.

However, the most important principle that we exercised in this process was taking a step back and making sure we were all on the same page with our analysis of what we were dealing with. Our frustration with Dan was a little sloppy at first – we weren't sure what the problem was. For example, there was a question about whether or not he raped someone, but we had not spoken to this person directly and, therefore, had no real reason to think this was true other than the fact that he was exhibiting other problematic behavior. We had to decide that the behavior that we were sure about was enough for which to demand accountability. The power of naming the problem cannot be

underestimated in this particular scenario. Because the behavior was not intensely violent, such as sexual assault, we were searching for the right to name it as sexualized violence. Sexual harassment often presents this problem. There is no assault, but there are elusive and destructive forms of violence at play including power manipulation, verbal misogynist remarks, and the humiliation of young people. Once we reached consensus in our analysis, we were prepared to receive the opportunity that Keisha's letter and work offered and use it to push the accountability process further along.

Scenario Two: Kevin is a member of the alternative punk music community in an urban area. His community is predominantly young, white, multi-gendered, and includes a significant number of queer folks. Kevin and his close-knit community, which includes his band and their friends, were told by two women that they had been sexually assaulted at recent parties. The aggressor, Lou, was active and well-known in the music community, and he was employed at a popular club. Lou encouraged the women to get drunk and then forced them to have sex against their will. One of the survivors and her friends did a brief intervention with Lou, confronting him in person with the information. She reports that at first he was humbled and apologetic, but, after leaving them, reversed his behavior and began to justify his actions again. Frustrated with Lou's lack of accountability and with sexual violence in the music community in general, Kevin's group began to meet and discuss the situation. They not only reflected on the survivors' experiences, but also how the local culture supported bad behavior. For example, they discussed how a local weekly newspaper, popular in the alternative music community, glamorized the massive amount of drinking that was always prevalent at Lou's parties. Kevin's group decided that there was a real lack of consciousness about the issue of sexual violence and the community needed to be woken up. To that end, they designed fliers that announced Lou's behavior and his identity, asserted the need for Lou's accountability as directed by the survivors, included a critique of the newspaper, and suggested boycotting Lou's club. With the survivors' consent, the group then passed the fliers out at places where members of their community usually congregated.

A couple of weeks later, the newspaper published an article defending Lou by implying that, since the women that he allegedly assaulted had not pressed criminal charges, the allegations could not be that credible. Kevin's group realized that they needed to do a lot of re-education about sexual violence within the music community. At the same time, they were being pressured by Lou with threats to sue for libel. The group had not planned for this possible outcome, but instead of backing off, they re-grouped and used anonymous e-mail and the internet to protect their identities.[8]

They proceeded to write a powerful document that shared the survivors' experiences (written by the survivors), defined sexual violence, and addressed issues of consent and victim-blaming. Using a mixture of statistics and analysis, they challenged the criminal legal system as an effective source for justice, thereby undermining the newspaper's absurd assertion that sexual violence can only be taken seriously if the survivor reports it to the police. Most importantly, the group clearly articulated what they meant by community accountability. With permission, we have reprinted their definition of accountability below:

> *We expect that the sexual perpetrator be held accountable for their actions and prevented from shifting blame onto the survivor. We expect that the perpetrator own their assaultive behavior and understand the full ramifications their actions have and will continue*

to have on the survivor and the community. The perpetrator must illustrate their compliance by making a public apology and, with the help of their peers, seek counseling from a sexual assault specialist. It is equally important that they inform future partners and friends that they have a problem and ask for their support in the healing process. If the perpetrator moves to a new community, they must continue to comply with the community guidelines set forth above. We believe that by working with the perpetrator in the healing process, we can truly succeed in making our community safer.[9]

They released their full statement to the press and also posted it to a website. The statement had an important impact. A reporter from the popular weekly newspaper contacted them and admitted that the statement compelled her to rethink some of her ideas about sexual violence. It also kindled a conversation in the larger music community about sexual violence and accountability.

Other than making threats of a lawsuit to the group, Lou mostly ignored the group until the boycott of the club where he worked started to gain steam. Soon, bands from out of town also began to avoid playing at the club. This pressure compelled Lou to engage in a series of e-mail discussions with Kevin with the goal of negotiating a face-to-face meeting. Engaging through email was a difficult and frustrating process. Lou was consistently defensive and wanted "mediation. " Kevin was clear about his group's analysis and goals and wanted accountability. Eventually, they gave up on setting a meeting because they couldn't agree on terms.

Throughout this process, Kevin's group experienced a great deal of exhaustion and frustration. During the periodic meetings that CARA staff had with Kevin for support and advice, he often expressed feeling really tired of the project of engaging with Lou at all. Slowly, Kevin and his group switched tactics and focused more on community building, education, and prevention. It's a critical shift to decide to use your resources to build the community you want rather than expend all of your resources by fighting the problem you want to eliminate. They began a process of learning more about sexual violence, safety, and accountability. They hosted benefits for CARA and other anti-violence organizations. They prepared themselves to facilitate their own safety and accountability workshops. They did all of this with the faith that they could transform their music community to reach a set of values that were consistent with being fun, sexy, and liberatory and explicitly anti-rape and anti-oppression.

Working the Principles: Similarly to the first scenario, this community engaged in some trial and error and learned a lot about different strategies. They were careful to check in with survivors about each of their strategies. It's important to note that one survivor changed her role as the process continued. At first, she was the main person who drove the initial confrontation with Lou. As the group pressured Lou more indirectly, she chose to stay on the sideline. The group did a good job of being flexible with her shifting role.

The fact that the group worked collectively was also very critical. We had the impression that sometimes their work was more collectively driven and sometimes only one or two people were the main organizers. When only one or two people were doing the work, it was clear that the process lost some sustainability. However, we must also reflect a lot of compassion on the reality that some folks who initially began to organize realized down the line that they needed stronger boundaries between themselves and the process. In terms of planning, it may be helpful to do ongoing self-checks to note how the work may be triggering one's own experience of surviving violence or to determine if one just generally has a low capacity for doing this *kind*

of accountability work. Perhaps the type of strategy is not a good match for the culture of the group. As this group moved into a different direction that focused more on raising consciousness and building stronger community connections, we noticed a significant revival in the energy of the organizers.

Finally, we think that the most important principle that made a difference in this community's work was when they presented a critical analysis of sexual violence and rape culture to the larger community of rock musicians and alternative artists. It seemed important to sap the arrogance of the newspaper's uncritical defense of Lou, given how much influence the newspaper has within the larger community. We also think that creating and sharing the statement was important in light of the group's flyering strategy. There's very little one can say on a flyer and sexual violence can be very complicated. Their statement did a great job of demonstrating the full dimension of sexual violence by weaving in the survivors' voices in their own words, using statistical information to show why people do not believe survivors, and presenting a liberatory vision of accountability and justice.

Some members of the community may regret that they were ultimately unable to compel Lou to follow their demands. However, CARA feels that it's not unreasonable to think that their work did have a significant impact on Lou. After experiencing the full force of collective organizing which asserted that his behavior was unacceptable, we venture to guess that Lou might be less likely to act in manipulative and abusive ways. In any case, we think their work may have also compelled other members of the community to think critically about the way in which consent operates in their sexual encounters, which is important work in preventing future sexual violence. Also, it's important to remember that this community did in fact stay with their accountability process for the long-haul – they now simply have their sights set higher than Lou.

Scenario Three: Marisol is a young, radical Chicana activist who organizes with CARA as well as the local chapter of a national Chicano activist group, Unido. While attending an overnight, out of- town conference with Unido, a young man, Juan, sexually assaulted her. When she returned home, she shared her experience with organizers at CARA. She told us how hurt and confused she felt as a result of the assault, especially since it happened in the context of organizing at Unido. The organizers validated her feelings and supported her to engage in a healing process. We then began to talk with her more about Unido to get a better grasp on the culture of the organization as a whole and if they had the tools to address sexual violence as a problem in their community.

Marisol realized that she needed to discuss the problem with other young women at Unido. Through conversations with them, she learned that Juan had an on-going pattern of sexually assaulting other young women organizing with Unido. She found three other women who had had similar experiences with the same activist. This information led Marisol to organize an emergency meeting with the women of Unido to discuss the problem. At this meeting, she learned that this behavior had been happening for years and women before her tried to address it and demand that Juan be ejected from the position of power he possessed within the organization. However, though Unido's leadership had talked to the Juan about his behavior, there was no real follow-up and no consequences.

The young Chicanas of Unido decided to devise a plan to confront Unido's largely male leadership about the problem of sexual violence in general and Juan's behavior specifi-

cally. Identifying the criminal system as a real problem in their community, they did not want to pursue law enforcement-based responses. Also, Marisol did not want the episode to end with Unido simply isolating the aggressor without resolving Juan's abusive behavior. The young women decided on a plan that included demanding that Juan step down from leadership positions in Unido, that he pursue counseling and that his friends support him to go to appropriate counseling, and that Unido pursue intensive educational work on sexual violence.

The women's collective strength and demands were so powerful, that Unido's leadership agreed to remove Juan from Unido's ranks and to sponsor trainings on sexual violence not just within Unido's local Seattle chapter, but prioritize the issue throughout Unido's national agenda. The workshop curriculum focused on the connection between liberation for Mexicans and Chicanos and the work of ending sexual violence.

Also, because of the help of his friends and community, Juan was supported to go to culturallyspecific counseling addressing power and control issues, particularly for aggressors of sexual violence. Marisol also worked to build a strong community of support for herself and other survivors within Unido. Eventually she decided it was better for her health to create a boundary between herself and this particular chapter of Unido, but after a year's break, she is organizing with another chapter of Unido. There, she is incorporating a consciousness of sexual violence and misogyny into the local chapter's political agenda.

Working the Principles: Compared to the other two scenarios, this scenario had a pretty short timeline. While the first scenario has taken over two years (so far!), the second scenario has been happening for a little over a year, the third lasted for a mere two months. One reason is the 14 ease in which a strong accountability process can be facilitated when the community is a specific group of people rather than an unstructured and informal group. If there is a system of accountability within the community that is already set up, organizers can maximize that tool to facilitate an accountability process for sexual violence.

Interestingly, organizers at Unido previously attempted to hold the aggressor accountable using the same means, but their demands were not taken seriously. We think the attempt led by Marisol was more successful for two reasons. First, survivors were backed up by a collective of people instead of just a few folks. This lent credibility and power to the group of organizers as they approached Unido's leadership. Second, the organizers were clearer about what they wanted to see happen with Juan as well as with Unido. Instead of a vague call for accountability, the women asserted specific steps that they wanted Juan and Unido to take. This clarity helped pressure Unido to meet the challenge by complying with the specific demands that the women called for.

Also, the fact that Juan's friends agreed to support him to attend counseling was a great success. Support from friends and family is perhaps one of the most effective ways to ensure that aggressors attend counseling if that is the goal. They can be more compassionate because they love the person, they are more integrated in the person's life, and they have more credibility with the person. Support from the aggressor's friends and family can be a precious resource in securing an aggressor's follow through with an accountability process.

A Note On Credibility

We hope that the above scenarios reveal the "jazziness" often needed for a community to

negotiate itself through a complex process that has multiple components. While organizers should be committed to some fundamental political principles (womanism/feminism, anti-racism, proqueer, etc.), and can build on the organizing principles we have listed above, the context of any situation will likely be complex, and therefore organizers must also be flexible enough to modify and improve tactics as the process unfolds.

To underscore the need for jazziness, we want to briefly explore a problem that comes up frequently in community accountability work: how do the community and the organizers think about the *credibility* of survivors and of aggressors? Because of oppression, people of color, women, young people, queer people, and people with disabilities are often not believed when telling their stories of being violated and exploited. In our first scenario, for example, one of the Black women who experienced sexual harassment wasn't believed because of the racialized and gendered stereotypes of Black women as promiscuous. For this reason, the wider feminist antiviolence community has a principle of always believing women if they report being sexually violated.

CARA also leans in this direction, but we do not do so uncritically. We try to develop a process of *engagement* with a person's story of being violated, rather than thinking of the process as a *fact-finding mission* with an end goal of determining the Objective Truth of What Really Happened. It is almost impossible to prove a sexual assault happened – and when it is possible, it is incredibly time and resource-consuming. The reality is that a perfectly accurate account of an incidence of sexual violence is difficult to attain. Though everyone has an obligation to recount their experience as accurately as they can, sometimes survivors do not get every detail right or their story may be inconsistent. That's understandable – the experience of sexual violence can be extremely traumatic, and trauma can impact a person's memory and perception. Furthermore, the 15 person's age or disability may impact their capacity to convey their story with perfect accuracy. This does not necessarily undermine their credibility. Sometimes aggressors can have what seems to be a very polished account of what happened. That does not necessarily mean that they ought to be believed.[10]

As a strategy to step around this problem of credibility, we implement a jazzy method that demands an intentional engagement of organizers with the people and the context of the situation. Organizers are not objective, coolly detached receivers of a report; rather, they are helping to build and create the way to think about what happened and what should happen next.

Critically engaging an account of sexual assault means to actively consider it in multiple contexts. For example, we come to this work with an understanding that we live in a culture in which sexual violence is, sadly, a regular occurrence. We consider how institutional oppression informs people's choices within the situations in question. We look at people's patterns of behavior. We think about other information that we know about the community in which the violence happened that may be helpful. Because we understand that we are also not objective, we reflect on how our own biases might be informing the way in which we perceive information and whether this is helpful or not. We help each other think critically around hard corners of the story so that our analysis doesn't become narrow or develop in isolation. In short, we critically engage the story to come up with our best assessment of important pieces of the story and then develop a plan to address the situation based on solid political values and organizing principles.

Conclusion

Given the intensity of addressing sexual violence in a community, naming an aggressor will almost necessarily cause some community upheaval and hurt. We urge people organizing for community accountability to be prepared for the risks involved in leading a community accountability process. This work will be hard and messy, but it is also work that is vital, deeply liberatory, meaningful, and geared towards movement building. Engaging with communities to do this work helps to reconnect people to one another, potentially strengthening our relationships and making our communities more resilient and prepared for other political work. Instead of depending on institutions to support us - institutions that will often respond oppressively if they respond at all - community accountability work helps us to develop a practice of liberation in our personal lives, our community lives, and our political lives. Revolutionary movement building will only happen if we can build the systems and practices that affirm our liberation-based values of connection, agency, respect, self-determination, and justice. Community accountability work provides us with a critical opportunity to transform our relationships and communities to reflect these liberatory values. ▮

[1] For the purposes of this article, we use the word "aggressor" to refer to a person who has committed an act of sexual violence (rape, sexual harassment, coercion, etc.) on another person. Our use of the word "aggressor" is not an attempt to weaken the severity of rape. In our work of defining accountability outside of the criminal system, we try not to use criminal-based vocabulary such as "perpetrator," "rapist," or "sex predator." We also use pronouns interchangeably throughout the article.

[2] Golding, Jacqueline M., et al. "Social Support Sources Following Assault," Journal of Community Psychology, 17:92-107, January 1989. This paper is just one example of research showing that survivors are much more likely to access friends and family for support than they are to access police or rape crisis centers. Golding's research reveals that 59% of survivors surveyed reported that they disclosed their assault to friends and relatives, while 10.5% reported to police and 1.9% reported to rape crisis centers. Interestingly, Golding's research also asserts that survivors rated
rape crisis centers as most helpful and law enforcement as least helpful. She suggests that, since friends or relatives are the most frequent contact for rape victim disclosure, efforts should focus on enhancing and supporting this informal intervention.

[3] Borrowing from philosopher Cornel West, we can call this approach of simultaneous improvisation and structure a "jazzy approach." Much like jazz music, a community accountability process can incorporate many different and diverse components that allow for the complexity of addressing sexual violence while also respecting the need for some stability and careful planning. Also, like jazz music, an accountability process is not an end point or a finite thing, but a living thing that continues to be created. Our understanding of community accountability ultimately transcends the idea of simply holding an abusive community member responsible for his or her actions, but also includes the vision of the community itself being accountable for supporting a culture that allows for sexual violence. This latter accountability process truly necessitates active and constant re-creating and re-affirming a community that values liberation for everyone.

[4] We define "internalized oppression," as the process of a person that belongs to a marginalized and oppressed group accepting, promoting, and justifying beliefs of inferiority and lack of value about her group and, perhaps, herself.

[5] Thank you to the Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse for asserting the verb in "safety plan."

[6] We do not mean to simply imply that the principle of "innocent until proven guilty" should be completely discarded. However, we also recognize that this particular goal is actually often disregarded in a criminal system that is entrenched with institutional racism and oppression. Our goal is to create values that are independent from a criminal justice-based approach to accountability, including thinking critically about ideas such as "innocent until proven guilty" from the perspective of how these ideas actually impact oppressed people.

[7] All names of people and organizations have been changed for the purposes of this article, not because we are concerned about the legal ramifications of slander or because we have a blanket rule about confidentiality, but because we try to be intentional about when and for what reason we publicly identify aggressors.

[8] Those of us working on community accountability should have a talk about aggressors' threats of suing for slander and libel. These threats happen often, especially if the aggressor is well-known and has a reputation to defend. However, when suing for slander or libel, one has the burden of proof and must be able to demonstrate that the allegations are false. It's very hard to prove that something is false, especially when it's, in fact, true. Still, the threat of a lawsuit can understandably be frightening and it would be helpful to have more conversations about what the actual danger is and perhaps develop some

best practices when considering using public disclosure as a tool to reach
accountability.

[9] Press Release, January 25, 2003

[10] More thinking may need to be done to address situations in which people are intentionally lying about an account of rape or abuse. What happens if someone uses an accusation of abuse as a tool to isolate, punish or control that person? This could happen in an abusive relationship, but it could also happen as function of oppression (for example, a straight woman accuses a queer woman of harassment simply by virtue of her being queer, or a white woman accuses a Black man of sexual assault because of her own racism). Another problem is when a person experiences an event as violent, but this experience doesn't fit the community's general definition of "violence." The community may need to figure out if it should expand its notion of "violence" or if a different analysis and response is needed. Lastly, while struggling through these questions, we'd like to caution our left/progressive community against creating a culture of endless process that stands in for organized action. Issues of credibility, as well as other controversial issues, are complicated and can sap a group's time and energy. You may not even need to come to consensus about how to finally think about what happened. But this doesn't necessarily mean you can't come to consensus on a plan of action to respond.

an interview with Alexis Paulina Gumbs of UBUNTU

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

When I stumbled upon the work of UBUNTU and Alexis Pauline Gumbs (at iambecauseweare.blogspot.com and brokenbeautifulpress.blogspot.com) I was simply blown away. UBUNTU is a coalition based in Durham, NC and lead by women of color, queers and survivors, that came together to respond to the aftermath of a sexual assault perpetuated by members of the Duke University lacrosse team on several Black, female sex workers (who are also honor students, mothers, lovers, and community members) the team had hired to dance at a party, and the vicious, racist/sexist backlash against the survivors of the assault.

The assault and the backlash were and are horrifying. But UBUNTU's work isn't. Seeing the National Day of Truthtelling they created in response to the assault- a march filled with folks holding "I Love Sex Workers" and "I Believe Survivors" signs through the streets of Durham- filled me with so much heart and hope. I am totally in love with the kind of fierce and nurturing work by and for survivors of violence UBUNTU has grown in Durham. In May of 2008 I had the chance to have the following email exchange with Alexis about the approaches UBUNTU has taken in dealing with violence faced by members of their community.

Alexis, in our previous email exchange, you mentioned that at UBUNTU you "have created a complicated community of people ready to be there for each other in times of need (including recent instances of partner violence... loss of loved ones etc.) and to celebrate each other (we just had an amazing fairtrade chocolate extravaganza to celebrate a 35th birthday in our community." Can you talk a little bit about the concrete ways people in this community have found to be there for each other and intervene in situations involving partner abuse? What does this look like?

Alexis P. Gumbs: I am really proud of the fact that we have built a community that allows us to call on each other. I've told people that I really wish that my mother had access to a community of support like this when I was growing up. I wish she had access to a community like this right now. When violence is something that the person experiencing it has to manage all alone the cost is huge, especially when little ones are surviving the violent situation as well.

Our immediate responses to partner violence specifically have consisted so far in literally "being there" for an UBUNTU community member who had reason to fear physical violence from a threatening partner, brainstorming together to make a plan that allowed safety for this community member and the community member's family on the community member's terms. This included offering our homes as safer places to stay, staying at the community member's home, child care, researching legal options and community based alternatives and coming up with plans, back-up plans, and times and places to check in and shift the plan, and listening and listening and being ready to support.

In another instance an UBUNTU member happened to meet a young woman of color who was physically hurt and walking down this UBUNTU member's street after being beaten by a former partner. This UBUNTU member called the rest of us to see who was home and available in the direct neighborhood, took the young woman into her home and contacted the spiritual leader of the woman who had experienced the violence along with other women that the young woman

trusted from her spiritual community, who also came to the home, and made sure that she was able to receive medical care. She also arranged for members of our UBUNTU family to have a tea session with the young woman to talk about healing and options, to share our experiences, to embrace the young woman and to let her know that she wasn't alone in her healing process.

In each case these responses were invented on the spot... without a pre-existing model or a logistical agreement. But they were also made possible by a larger agreement that we as a collective of people living all over the city are committed to responding to gendered violence. This comes out of the political education and collective healing work that we have done, and the building of relationships that strongly send the message... you can call me if you need something, or if you don't. You can call me to be there for you... or someone that you need help being there for. I think it is very important that we have been able to see each other as resources so that when we are faced with violent situations we don't think our only option is to call the state.

In that way (and this leads into the next question) everything that we do to create community, from childcare to community gardening (our new project!), to community dinners, to film screenings, to political discussions helps to clarify how, why, and how deeply we are ready to be there for each other in times of violence and celebration.

In UBUNTU's statement of principles, you say, "Although our work is long-term, it is also urgent and immediate. We see providing immediate support for individual survivors and longer-term social transformation as interrelated and mutually-strengthening types of work. To resist, we must heal; to heal, we must resist." I love that you believe this and that you put this in your work. How do you balance providing one on one support and organizing for social transformation? I know that in a lot of groups I've been part of, even as folks talk (and understand the importance of) self care, it's hard to provide direct support to folks in crisis and work to organize on an ongoing basis.

This is definitely a difficult one. As of yet our major strategy for addressing the balance between doing individual healing work and long-term community building while addressing the need for crisis care on a broader level and for folks who we may not know yet has to do with

1. working in coalition

Since UBUNTU is a coalition it consists of many individuals and some organizational entities. Some of the organizations, such as North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Orange County Rape Crisis Center (who we work with often) are direct service providers that respond to individual crises and have much of the legal and organizational information that helps us to navigate situations of violence... even when those experiencing it don't want to go directly to the service provider. Also, this coalitional relationship (with organizations that are part of UBUNTU and also with organizations that are not officially part of UBUNTU but have worked with us in Coalition on projects including the National Day of Truthtelling) means that the political visioning and creative work that we do influences the work of those organizations. And people who end up connected with those service providers also have access to the work of UBUNTU as a survivor led space of continued healing through the process of building community. and

2. creating access to "community" in a broader sense

UBUNTU also functions as a site of sustainability in another sense. The fact that

we have built informal mechanisms to offer childcare, trade massages, do aromatherapy work, share personal fitness training, cook for each other, grow food together, help with homework, borrow cars, offer a space to crash means that as each of us takes seriously the work of responding to violence in our scattered community (for me this often means responding to violence that my students are experiencing, immigration violence that my family experiences, etc.) we also have a support network to help us, feed us, hug us, massage us, create a healing oil for us when we need it. And we often do. I know I so often just need a cup of tea, or a poem from my community.

On a broader scale UBUNTU in partnership with SpiritHouse (a local organization that is part of the coaltion) and Southerners on New Ground (another local organization that is also part of the coalition) has started doing community dinners at W. D. Hill (a local community center at which one of our members is an employee) which lets people know that this work exists as a tangible resource. UBUNTU has been strongly present at important community celebrations from Kwanzaa to "community day" to the MLK celebration which I think builds the message that since there are people in this community who will gather when we need, face-painting, food, art or people power to get something done, and since these folks are specifically about (and always talking about) responding to violence, that means there is a community of support available to help me respond to violence.

We are not concretely 'providing services', but from our experiences so far, I feel confident when someone calls in a state of emergency that I have a rich set of resources to offer them, from legal help, to relocation assistance, to a breathing circle, to a poem, to medical attention, to a meal. Since we are not linked to the state we have the potential to provide people with a more robust set of options that can respond to their needs and desires, and I think that is important... especially for womyn and trans folks of color and immigrants who have such good reasons to avoid the retraumatizing impact of the state. ▮

For more info, check out:

www.iambecauseweare.blogspot.com
www.brokenbeautiful.wordpress.com
www'thatlittleblackbook.blogspot.com
www.atthekitchentable.blogspot.com
www'loveproduction.wordpress.com

INCITE! Community Accountability Fact Sheet

HOW DO WE ADDRESS VIOLENCE WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES?

We are told to call the police and rely on the criminal justice system to address violence within our communities. However, if police and prisons facilitate or perpetrate violence against us rather than increase our safety, how do we create strategies to address violence within our communities, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and child abuse, that don't rely on police or prisons?

Developing community-based responses to violence is one critical option. Community accountability is a community-based strategy, rather than a police/prison-based strategy, to address violence within our communities. Community accountability is a process in which a community – a group of friends, a family, a church, a workplace, an apartment complex, a neighborhood, etc – work together to do the following things:

■ Create and affirm VALUES & PRACTICES that resist abuse and oppression and encourage safety, support, and accountability

■ Develop sustainable strategies to ADDRESS COMMUNITY MEMBERS' ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR, creating a process for them to account for their actions and transform their behavior

■ Commit to ongoing development of all members of the community, and the community itself, to TRANSFORM THE POLITICAL CONDITIONS that reinforce oppression and violence

■ Provide SAFETY & SUPPORT to community members who are violently targeted that RESPECTS THEIR SELF-DETERMINATION

COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE PEOPLE OF COLOR PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

Selections from the 2005 Report from INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

Ad-Hoc Community Accountability Working Group Meeting

February 7-8, 2004 Seattle, WA

Sponsored by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

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How Is Gender Oppression within Progressive, Radical, Revolutionary Movement(s) Maintained, Supported, Encouraged?

Patriarchy: The Root of Gender Oppression

The system of patriarchy is the root of gender oppression. We all exist within a system of oppression which assumes rigid gender binaries of women and men, female and male; which values males and the male-identified and devalues female and the female-identified; which assumes heterosexual normativity; which delegates men/boys/male-identified to roles and positions which have higher status and levels of decision-making than women/girls/female-identified; which assume male values as universal and given. This system of patriarchy intersects with racism, classism, homophobia/heterosexism, transphobia, ableism, ageism, nativism (anti-immigrants) to oppress women of color/queer people of color. Ultimately, it oppresses us all. Despite our commitment to social justice and liberation, we as activists, organizations and movement are not immune.

Gender oppression is not just an act, it's a state of mind and a way of doing. The patterns of power and control, acts of abuse and violence, and cultures and conditions tolerating, condoning, encouraging and perpetrating abuse and violence appear to follow certain patterns.

Tools for Maintaining Gender Oppression: Denial, Minimizing, Victim-Blaming, Counter-Organizing

Patriarchy upholds and supports gender oppression. Four primary tools for maintaining gender oppression and for avoiding accountability are: 1) Denial; 2) Minimizing; 3) Victim-Blaming; and 4) Counter-Organizing.

1) Denial

Our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color as individuals, organizations and movement (just as the rest of the world) have been pretty good at denying that gender oppression exists.

What can denial look like?

- Silence
- Inability to take any action
- Putting issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression on the back burner (forever)
- Viewing issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression as individual, personal, private rather than acts of gender oppression requiring public and collective responsibility and solutions
- Writing off sexual harassment or sexual assault as a "date," "affection," "showing that he likes you," "flirting," "misunderstandings," etc.
- Viewing any issue of gender oppression (which requires more than abstract talk) as bourgeois, middle class, white feminist, dividing our movement, play-

ing into the hands of the race/class/nation enemy.

2) Minimizing

Our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color as individuals, organizations and movements (just as the rest of the world) have been pretty good at minimizing gender oppression as an issue or minimizing situations/acts/patterns of gender oppression.

What can minimizing look like?

- Putting issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression on the back burner (forever)
- Viewing issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression as individual, personal, private rather than acts of gender oppression requiring public and collective responsibility and solutions
- Writing issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression off as a misunderstanding.
- Writing sexual harassment or assault off as dating, asking someone out
- Writing domestic or intimate partner violence off as fighting, an argument, they have problems, they both have problems, she should just leave him (or her)
- Viewing any issue of gender oppression (which requires more than abstract talk) as taking away from the real and/or important work
- Hoping that it goes away or the people raising or causing the issues go away
- Addressing it very ineffectually (and knowing it)

3) Victim-Blaming

Our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color as individuals, organizations and movements (just as the rest of the world) have been pretty good at blaming the victim or others who call for accountability when gender oppression as an issue or a situation of gender oppression arises. This blaming the victim or allies is often combined with denial and minimizing.

What can victim-blaming look like?

- Calling the people (usually women) raising the issue of gender abuse, oppression or violence bourgeois, middle class white feminist, dividing the movement, destroying unity, lynching, taking us away from the real or serious work, a race/class/nation enemy
- Blaming women/girls who raise the issue of gender oppression, abuse or violence as ”deserving it” a “flirt,” ”young,” “wants attention,” ”must have done something wrong,” a slut, man-hater, a lesbian/dyke, making a power play
- Blaming women/girls who take a stand against gender oppression as bitches, controlling, angry, man-haters, lesbians/dykes, white feminists
- Turning abusers into victims by naming people (usually men) accused of sexist, abusive, or violent attitudes and behavior as victims, nice guys, heroes, important to our work (more important than the women/girls raising the issue or victim to abuse).

4) Counter-Organizing

Our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color as individuals, organizations and movements (just as the rest of the world) have been pretty good at using the skills and tactics better used for fighting real enemies against people (usually women/girls/female-identified) who raise the issue of gender oppression, abuse or violence or a situation of gender oppression, abuse or violence.

Basically, this means that our own people (mostly men/boys/male-identified but also women/girls/femaleidentified) have been

good at counter-organizing. And counter-organizing can involve a higher level of the devaluation, deceit, and manipulation which are all also a part of the dynamics of gender oppression and avoidance of accountability.

What can counter-organizing look like?

■ Harassing, demeaning, denouncing, gossiping about, spreading rumors and lies about or threatening to do these things to women who raise the issue of gender oppression either as survivors/victims oras allies
■ Demoting, firing or threatening to demote or fire women who raise the issue of gender oppression either as survivors/victims or as allies
■ Isolating or discrediting persons who raise concerns and/or call for accountability
■ Questioning the legitimacy of concerns to detract from the need to be accountable
■ Questioning the legitimacy of the accountability process to detract from the need to be accountable
■ Accusing others of abuse in order to call attention away from own accountability
■ Denying, minimizing, victim blaming, and plain-old lying about doing any of these things when called on it

More on Counter-Organizing or What Is the Opposite of Accountability?

People who commit acts of gender oppression, abuse, and violence can add on all sorts of additional manipulative behavior in order to: 1) Make sure their victims/survivors don't do anything back, 2) Make sure they don't get caught, 3) Make sure that if they do get caught they can get out of it.

These 3 things are the OPPOSITE of ACCOUNTABILTY.

1) Make sure their victims/survivors don't do anything back

■ Pick someone who they think won't tell or is not in a position to tell (vulnerable, powerless, young, feels guilty or responsible, is not believed by others, etc.)
■ Uses denial (Silence; I didn't do anything; What did I do?)
■ Uses minimizing (I didn't do anything; It was nothing; It didn't mean anything; I'll never do it again; It was such a little thing; What's that?)
■ Tries to make them believe it's their fault (You wanted it; you asked for it; you didn't say .no;. you should have known; you liked it; you made me do it; you provoked it)
■ Discredits their work and/or personality
■ Threatens them by saying that they'll out them about something, ruin their reputation, will make up stories, etc.
■ Threatens them with physical harm, firing them, calling the police on them, calling INS, hurting family or friends or pets.

2) Make sure they don't get caught

■ Do things when people aren't looking or in ways that people can't see
■ Start discrediting their survivor/victim, their work or personality, so that anything they say won't be believed
■ Organize to isolate the survivor/victim and any allies
■ Act in heroic, self-sacrificing or other ways so that will make people think they could do no wrong or feel indebted to them.

3) Make sure if they do get caught, they can get out of it

■ All the things in 1 and 2 (may be heightened)
■ Make up a story or stories explaining away their behavior
■ Silently or not so silently threaten

those who try to do something to raise the issue or confront them
■ Threaten to sue, call the police, call INS, report to funders
■ Claim that they are being a victim may refer to being a victim of white feminists, being victim to the race/class enemy
■ Claim that the accusations are personal gripes, individual issues, power-plays
■ Apologize and think that's all they have to do
■ Apologize and then get mad if they have to do anything else
■ Say that they didn't know and expect this to be all they have to do
■ Say that it's a misunderstanding and expect this to be all they have to do
■ Say they didn't mean it and expect this to be all they have to do
■ Cry (can look like remorse but can be a way to get people to feel sorry for them)
■ Start making excuses for their behavior (not to explain or understand, but to excuse their behavior and avoid accountability) (bad childhood, stress, too much work, too much responsibility, they're so dedicated to the movement)
■ Try to meet with the victim/survivor as a good-will gesture or as a way to be direct and honest (but really to interrogate/intimidate them)
■ Use leaders sometimes from outside of the community to back them up, e.g., white allies with power and a reason to back up a person of color to look good especially when the survivor/victim is someone less powerful
■ Use relationships with respected folks within the movement to back them up, prove that they cannot be abusers, shield them from accountability
■ Quit or leave immediately if they think they have to take some accountability (not for reasons of the victim/survivor's safety or because it's the right thing to do, but because they want to avoid accountability)
■ Use delaying tactics until everyone gets worn out.

And It Can Get Even Sneakier and Nastier

Some oppressive, abusive, and violent people (mostly men/boys/male-identified but also women/girls/female-identified/transgender) go beyond these actions and devote considerable energy towards increasing their opportunities for abuse. Some examples include:

■ Chronic abusers, harassers, rapists, batterers, etc. who find one person (usually women/girls/female-identified) after another to oppress and abuse
■ Abusive persons who ask others to cover for them or organize others to cover for them
■ Abusive persons who mentor other (often less powerful or younger) individuals in order to exercise power and control over them or to take advantage of them
■ Abusive persons who mentor other (often less powerful or younger) individuals in order to groom these others to mimic their attitudes and behaviors and to offer protection
■ Abusive persons who use their skills to gain positions of leadership, status and power within the political movement in part to gain more power and control over others, increasing opportunities for abuse and escape from accountability.

...

SECTION 5: NOTES FOR SURVIVORS AND SUPPORTERS

1) It is not your fault. The abuse is the responsibility of the perpetrator and/or the organization allowing the abuse to happen.

2) Think about what you want for safety and healing. Safety and an opportunity to heal from oppression and abuse are your right. Think about what you need from your friends, family, co-workers, comrades, your

organization, and the movement for safety and healing. Do you want additional support? Should your organization be providing leave time? Support for counseling? A space for you to be heard?

3) Think about the role of the organization in addressing accountability and reparations. Accountability for oppression/abuse is different for different people, for different situations. Do you want a statement of accountability and apology? Do you want it public? Do you want it written? Do you want a supportive space for your abuser to hear and understand what you have experienced? Do you want a public statement from your organization?

4) Think about how you want to be involved in the process of accountability. Do you want to be involved in every step? Do you want to be involved in specific aspects of the process? Do you want to stay out of the process but be informed at certain times, regarding certain decisions?

5) Think about how you want to communicate with the perpetrator. Do you want to face the perpetrator in person? Alone? With other support? If you face the perpetrator in person, do you want to that person to remain silent? Do you want to give them an opportunity to respond? In person? In writing? Will you accept communication only if it is in the form of apology and accountability?

SPECIAL NOTE FOR THOSE SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF OPPRESSION/ABUSE

1) Remind them that they are not to blame. Survivors often blame themselves for the abuse or for not taking action which could prevent it. Remind them who is responsible. the perpetrator, the organization which allowed abuse to take place, the movement, systems of oppression, etc.

2) Help them explore what they may need for safety or healing. Survivors especially within the movement often deny the traumatizing impact of oppression and abuse. Validate their needs for safety and healing. Help them explore what would make this possible.

3) Help them explore what would help with accountability and reparations. Advocate for a process which supports the survivor and leads to accountability of the perpetrator and the organization. Help them explore what they want from the process of accountability and reparations.

SPECIAL NOTE FOR ABUSERS OR THOSE ACCUSED OF ABUSE/OPPRESSION

1) Take accountability. Regardless of intention or motivation, your attitudes and actions have had a negative impact on someone else. You are responsible for the consequences. Not intending to hurt someone (if you feel you did not have this intention) does not excuse you from the impact of your attitudes and/or behaviors.

2) Understand the negative impact of your attitudes or actions on the individual(s), organization and movement. Your attitudes and actions have hurt another person within your organization or movement. They have also hurt your organization, community and movement. Understand the widespread impact of gender oppression and abuse and take accountability.

3) Understand that evading accountability has a further cost on the person you have hurt/offended, the organization, constituents, community and movement.

4) Support for you means support to take accountability, not support to defend yourself from accountability. If you have friends, fam-

ily, co-workers, comrades whom you trust, ask them to help you to take accountability, not to help you avoid accountability.

5) Take accountability for full reparations. Consider what you need to do to take accountability including full public apology, offering resources (including money) to the survivor/organization to help with healing/reparations for the abuse, counseling, leaving the organization (temporary or permanent), involving yourself in political education for yourself and others.

6) Understand gender oppression/abuse and accountability as fundamental issues of social justice.

SPECIAL NOTE FOR SUPPORTERS OF ABUSERS OR THOSE ACCUSED OF ABUSE/ OPPRESSION

1) Support them to take accountability. Taking accountability is the right thing to do for the survivor/victim, for the community, for the movement, for the abuser or person accused of oppression/abuse. The best way to support them is not to enable them to make excuses but to take full accountability.

2) Support their transformation. If you are involved in the process of accountability, advocate for a process which fully educates the abuser on the nature of the oppression/abuse, the consequences on the survivor, the organization, and the movement, and which asks for full reparations.

3) Support ongoing political education. Support ongoing political education on patriarchy/gender education on patriarchy/gender oppression for the organization, constituents and movement. ▮

pot luck: some strategies from the field

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

This article is a mixed bag of strategies and stories of how some folks have chosen to deal with abusers in their communities. Like any potluck, it is a mix of different folks have brought to the table. Graze through this list, seeing what feels tasty for you. But before you start, you have to grab a plate and some utensils, which are these three questions:

three questions to start out with, whatever your situation:

1. What does the survivor, need to feel safe? (Answers may change over a month, year or day.) They may include: needing the abuser to leave a position of community leadership; I won't share a stage with her; I need people to walk me to my house.

2. Who are your allies? Who are people the abuser will listen to?

3. What does the abuser value? Their reputation, home, job, staying out of jail?

And then: some of many dishes on the buffet:

Community restraining order: One queer Asian activist was being harassed by an ex (white, male and straight) partner who would not leave her alone. Despite her request to him to leave her alone, the phone calls and emails didn't stop. She identified that her ex, as a mid-level activist in their city, most valued his reputation and place within that community. She was not interested in trying to dialogue with him- she just wanted the harassment to stop. She wrote what she called a 'community restraining order' restating her demands. Signed by 40 people in their mutual activist community, it said, "We are aware that (survivor) has asked you to cease and desist contacting her, but that you have refused. Any further attempt to bother her will be responded to by all of her." In the past ten years, he has left her alone.

Town hall meetings: In one Asian-American women's community of artists and activists, it was discovered that a man many had considered an ally, a fellow arts educator working with youth, was hitting on and initiating sexual relationships with teenagers he worked with. In response, community members planned a town hall meeting on abuse within their city's Asian arts/activist community, as a space to articulate appropriate boundaries for working with youth and discuss steps to creating safety. A popular arts collective that tours frequently that is part of this community enacted a new policy that they will not share a stage with any artist accused of being a perpetrator of sexual or physical abuse.

Building strength and disclosing over time: In my case, I temporarily left the mostly straight people of color prison justice/ anti-police brutality community that I had been a part of for the last three years. My abuser had successfully isolated me from most other friends. I was living with a chronic illness that had limited my energy and added to my isolation. After a few attempts to talk about the abuse with some people I had considered friends were met with horrifying responses ("Have you tried healing him with love?" and "But you're a strong woman of color, you can take it," being some of the most notable) I knew that I was too weak and isolated to take on the emotional cost of trying to convince people that being put in a chokehold was serious. I needed to strengthen myself and developing a power base of my own first. So I

cooked for myself, went to the library, found a free therapist through a local DV support group, worked two jobs and concentrated on getting a better-paying one. Getting out of poverty helped me take care of myself better, allowing me to access health care that improved my chronic illness and allowed me more mobility and strength.

Slowly, I started making new friendships, joining a queer women of color writing circle and meeting people through starting to perform my spoken word. Making friends is really hard when you're depressed and desperate to break your isolation, but it happened. Things slowly got better. My abuser had shifted from identifying as queer to straight, and decided that queerness was a white thing - so while he got to claim the straight POC spoken word scene as his own, I was able to claim the queer and queer of color scenes as mine. Although queer and trans communities often had a hard time responding when someone within them was abusive, they believed me and sheltered me.

I gradually disclosed to people I trusted. As that base of belief grew, I started asking for more things. When he showed up at the prison justice film screening I was attending, held in a small classroom where we would have been sitting very close to each other, friends told him he was not welcome and asked him to leave. When he called in to a local South Asian radio show doing a special program on violence against women, one of the DJs told him that she knew he had been abusive and she was not going to let him on air if he was not willing to own his own violence.

My safety plan included never going to a club without a group of my girls to have my back. They would go in first and scan the club for him and stay near me. If he showed up, we checked in about what to do. Because my ex had been extremely violent and had threatened murder/suicide at different times, I was sort of always at code orange. I varied the route I had home and immediately went to populated areas if I saw him in a public place. I got call display and screened my calls, not picking up private callers. I refused to move from my apartment because I couldn't afford more than $450 a month, had a huge garden and did not want to be pushed out, but I was always cautious.

At different points, friends and allies urged me to wait it out and trust in karma to work it out- that 'natural law will make the good person win' thing. And this, in my case, sort of worked. Over the years, his erratic behavior and whispers that he had been violent to other lovers caught up with him. As I published, wrote, taught and created projects, I carved out more and more of my own space. Eventually I had so much community respect that it felt like he would have had to be stupid to touch me.

It's messed up, but the truth I've found is that, often who "wins"/ gets believed in the aftermath of partner abuse comes down to a popularity contest. Whoever is more loved and valued wins. If you're 'lucky', your abuser is so much some kind of combination of obviously violent, troubled, and socially awkward that people back away. Unfortunately, it's true just as frequently that abusers are charming and manipulative and survivors are scared and scarred.

Some possible pathways to dealing with abusers that have questions surrounding them:

Banishing: Some communities have dealt with abusers by literally buying them a greyhound ticket and telling them to get out of town. This can be very appealing, and effective in that the abuser is no longer there- they're in Utah or California or wherever. It does send a strong message that violence will not be tolerated. However, it also does

not stop the abuser from returning. And without strong community based communication, nothing is stopping the abuser from continuing to abuse in a new, fresh community. Issues of trashing and believability can come up.

Outing: Some people have talked about creating lists of abusers and posting them publicly. This idea holds so much fire and resonance for me. When I was a baby riot grrl, one of the first young feminist actions I heard of was of a bathroom at a college where women started writing the names of their abusers on the inside of a bathroom stall. As a young survivor, this action set me on fire- that girls my age were actually coming together and fucking saying what everyone knew was going on and nobody talked about.

But a decade and a half later, I have questions. I still want survivors to be able to name our abusers and say out loud what everyone knows (or doesn't know) is going on. And I also want the process to feel sane and clear. One thing attempts to deal with abusers inside community are always dogged by is accusations that we're stirring gossip, lying or talking shit. This is 99% bullshit- but I still want to create a fair process that centers the safety and well being of survivors while also having clear lines of communication and accountability.

■ If public notices about abusers are circulated, there need to be contact people listed. They don't need to be the survivor at all, but anonymous notices about abusers make it hard for people to know where to go with the information, who it is coming from, or what to do about it.

■ There also need to be an ongoing process (not "mandatory mediation", but a process like the ones outlined by CARA and Philly's Pissed in other articles in this zine) with the abuser and survivor going on, that the call out is part of.

■ If information is shared, there needs to be ongoing check ins, or maybe re-bulletins, saying where things are at. Often, some one just emails saying 'this person is a batterer/rapist' and we have no idea what happened, or is happening, later on.

■

Checklist for Intersex and Trans Survivors

Here is a checklist you can use to help determine if you are in an abusive relationship. This list was adopted from several similar lists developed by different organizations, plus some questions specific to intersex and trans survivors added by Survivor Project. Does your partner...

- isolate you from your family and friends?
- grab, push, pinch, shove or hit you?
- call you "it" or other pronouns not preferred by you?
- touch where you do not want to be touched?
- negate your personal decisions?
- force you to engage in sexual acts you don't want?
- intimidate or threaten you to gain compliance?
- sabotage your medical treatment, or coerce you into treatment you don't want?
- threaten to take away children?
- demand detailed explanations of where you were and how you spent your money?
- ridicule how your body looks?
- tell you that nobody would love you?
- tell you that you are not a real man/woman?
- blame you for how they feel or act?
- threaten to "out" you to your employer, friends or family members?
- tell you that nobody would believe you?
- break or hide things that are important to you?
- force you to engage in sex work, or force you not to?
- eroticize/fetishize your body against your will?

Do you...

- feel like you are walking on eggshell, trying not to upset your partner?
- feel that you must change yourself in order to help your partner change?
- almost always do what your partner wants you to do rather than what you really want to do?
- stay with your partner because you are afraid of what your partner would do if you leave?
- feel like all these abuses are somehow your own fault?

If any of these are happening to you, consider talking to someone you trust. Call a domestic violence hotline listed in the phone book, or have a friend call so that you won't get hurt further in case the one in your area turned out to be ignorant about intersex and trans issues. No matter what your partner and the society have told you - you do not deserve to be hurt. You deserve to be in a relationship where equality and mutual respect prevail.

Continued...

Safety Planning

Due to lack of visibility of and biases against intersex and trans people, domestic violence resources in your area may not be available or comfortable to you. Listed below are some tips for you to plan your safety, adopted from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence with some modifications. Go over your safety plan with a friend if possible, because doing it alone can be very scary.

If you are still in the relationship, you can...

1. Think of a safe place to go if an argument occurs - avoid rooms with no exits (bathroom) or rooms with weapons (kitchen).
2. make a list of safe people to contact.
3. always keep change for the phone.
4. memorize all important numbers.
5. establish a code word so that your allies know when to call for help and what kind.
6. think about what you will say to your partner if he or she becomes violent.
7. remember you have the right to live without fear and violence.
8. keep copies of important documents at a safe place (e.g. your friend's house).

If you have left the relationship, you can...

1. change your phone number.
2. screen calls.
3. save and document all contacts, messages, injuries or other incidents involving the abuser.
4. change locks, if the abuser has a key.
5. avoid staying alone.
6. plan how to get away from confrontations.
7. meet the abuser in public if you must (for example, for child visitation).
8. vary your routine.
9. notify school and work contacts.
10. call a local domestic violence hotline or have a friend call to find out if it provides sensitive services to intersex and trans clients.

If you are leaving the relationship, you should take important papers and documents with you to enable you to apply for benefits or take legal action. Important papers you should take include social security cards and birth certificates for you and your children (even if they show the wrong name or sex), your marriage license, leases or deeds in your name or both yours and your partner's names, your checkbook, your charge cards, bank statements and charge account statements, insurance policies, documents related to transitioning, proof of income for you and your partner (pay stubs or W-2's), and the documentation of past incidents of abuse, if any (photos, police reports, medical records, etc).

▮

ABUSE IS NOT S/M AND S/M IS NOT ABUSE

by the Northwest Network

Whether you are topping, or bottoming, or both, these are some questions to ask yourself:

- Is your partner turned on by violating your limits or terms?
- Does your partner not use a safeword, and then later say you violated his/her limits?
- Does she claim to know more about your s/m "energy" than you do?
- Does your partner try to extend a dynamic outside of a scene without your consent?
- Does your partner expect you to read her mind about what she/he wants?
- Does your partner refuse to talk about what felt wrong or confusing to you about a scene?
- Does your partner negotiate while in role when you haven't agreed to that?
- Do you feel guilty after playing, like you've done something wrong?
- Do you feel like you're playing because you have to?
- Does your partner involve others in your scenes without asking?
- Does your partner say you pushed her/him too far even though you stayed within the limits you negotiated?
- Does your partner humiliate you by talking about your play in public without your consent?
- Does your partner use arousal or orgasm as evidence of consent?
- Do you feel fear or dread about ending a scene or setting a limit?
- Does she say you're not "real" for wanting to switch or pressure you into switching?
- Are you confused about when a scene begins and ends?
- Do you feel that if you could just play better, be hotter or give/take more, everything could be okay?
- Does you partner use scenes to suppress or cover up anger and frustration?

S/M play is consensual	Abuse is not consensual
S/M play is negotiated and agreed upon ahead of time	Abuse is not negotiated
S/M has responsible limits and safety rules	Abuse has no rules or limits and there are
S/M is fun, erotic and loving	Abuse is manipulative, selfish and hurtful
S/M play is enjoyed by both	Victims do not enjoy abuse
S/M play can be stopped by either partner at any time	Abuse cannot be stopped by the victim/survivor
Players exchange power in agreed upon roles with negotiated boundaries	Abusers force control using non-consensual manipulation and violence
S/M creates a bond of trust	Abuse destroys trust

the myth of mutual abuse

Karen Lee Asherah

Many lesbians have internalized misconceptions about lesbian battering by associating it with "mutual battering or abuse." It does great harm to battered lesbians to confuse these two distinctly different concepts. Our focus should be on the more immediate issue: *Batterers must stop abusing*.

At a San Francisco national conference on lesbian battering in May 1987, Kerry Lobel, editor of *Naming the Violence*, urged that our communities re-examine the term "mutual abuse." Lobel explained that this phrase inaccurately presumes that battering is mutual in relationships where violence occurs.

According to Barbara Hart in *Naming the Violence*: "Battered lesbians describe the patterns of violence as terrorism and control... The same elements of hierarchy of power, ownership, entitlement and control exist in lesbian family relationships. Largely this is true because lesbians have also learned that violence works in achieving partner compliance. Further, lesbian communities have not developed a system of norms and values opposing power abuse and violence in our relationships."

"Mutual abuse," in contrast to battering, holds that both people in the battering relationship are equally responsible as perpetrator and victim. Often, this belief is maintained by the community and the batterer, as well as the survivor herself.

One of the most difficult steps for myself, as a formerly battered lesbian, as for other survivors, has been to realize that I did not cause the violence. We feel a tremendous confusion about provocation and this concept of "mutual battering." Healing is promoted when survivors realize that no matter what we said or did, we were not responsible for another person's actions. We were responsible for keeping ourselves safe. Ginny Ni Carthy, in *Getting Free* (1988), puts it simply: "Your imperfections do not give your partner the right to 'discipline' you with physical violence."

Some battered lesbians try to physically protect themselves from abuse. According to Nomi Porat, it may be that lesbians "fight back" more often than heterosexual women, "as a result of widespread trainings in and acceptance of self-defense practices within feminist lesbian communities" (*Naming the Violence*).

Lesbians who have physically fought back to defend themselves not only suffer from the battering, but also from feelings of guilt because they have acted violently. This feeds right into the false notion of "mutual abuse," which continues to camouflage the fact that one woman is exerting "power" over the other. When a battered lesbian believes she is "mutually abusing" her lover, she actually protects the batterer from confronting herself, which preserves the relationship as it is, and helps the batterer avoid [accountability] for her actions.

"Since all battered lesbians have engaged in extensive efforts to protect the batterer from exposure as a terrorist and from the consequences of her violence, battered lesbians may continue 'taking care of' the batterer by blaming themselves, maximizing their violence and minimizing that of the batterer." (Barbara Hart, *Naming the Violence*)

Often batterers use the survivor's self-doubt to their advantage. Batterers are notorious for labeling the survivor "mutually abusive" in order to avoid taking responsibility for

their own actions. The following account by J.E. is an example of this tactic:

"Recently, the batterer who was my lover six years ago called me up on the phone. I was surprised to hear her voice. Though I have asked her not to call, a few times a year she phones me anyway. It had been several years since I talked to her in person.

"I thought: What does she want? I feel suspicious and scared that she intrudes into my life again. She says she just called to say 'hi' because she was having some good memories. She says she wants me to meet her for lunch next week. I am stunned. I make no commitments, small talk, she nervously laughs. She says she's doing great and by the way, she kicked her new lover out twice because she was acting like I used to. I am paralyzed. More small talk.

"Finally, breaking out of my fear, I tell her that I'm planning to get involved with the editing of the upcoming Matrix issue on battering. Silence.

"Suddenly, her voice changes. She tells me not to use her name, it would hurt business; it was 'mutual abuse' anyway. She says I was verbally abusive. Her voice sounds like an authority. She tells me that she physically battered me and that I verbally abused her. That made it 'even.' That made it 'mutual abuse.' Why can't I just forgive and forget. She does."

Battered lesbians not only have their batterer's beliefs to break away from, but may find similar attitudes mirrored by some therapists in the community. A. Freeland recounts her experiences with several therapists:

"While I was involved in the relationship, one of the therapists we went to told me that if I would just trust that the batterer loved me, she would stop battering me. Later we went to a different therapist for couple's counseling. After we separated, the batterer told me that our therapist had told her in an individual session that she that we had been [mutually abusive.]

"I think it's real dangerous that there are therapists who are telling batterers...'she's equally responsible because she was emotionally battering.' The other person may say things that are hurtful. Person A may say things to person B and person B has the right to leave, but person B does not have the right to hit person A." (Jan, Santa Cruz Women Against Rape, December, 1987.)

There may be unhealthy psychological interactions that are mutual in relationships, but we need to be careful not to equate that with "mutual battering." Both lesbians may be irritating and hurtful to each other, but that's very different from the power-over, "squashing" behaviors of batterers.

Childhood environments may condition some battered lesbians to be dependent or expect mistreatment. Batterers may have learned that violence was a good method for getting their needs met when they were children. In these and other ways, there are musutal patterns which tend to keep lesbians mutually "hooked" psychologically. But that's as far as the mutuality goes in a battering relationship.

"The problem with the term 'mutual abuse' is that it really diffuses the issue of responsibility. There's something dangerous and violent going on and the person who's being violent needs to be responsible for her actions." (Jan, SCWAR, December, 1987).

We also need to be conscious of how we use the word "battering" as well as "mutual abuse." The careless use of "battering," which describes a very painful, life-threatening situation, trivializes the experiences of

battered lesbians.

Our community can help stop lesbian battering. We can begin be re-evaluating the terms we use which perpetuate violence against battered lesbians. We can support the healing of both survivors and batterers by insisting that batterers and community alike not be allowed to hide behind the misconception of "mutual abuse." The lesbians batterer needs to be told that violence is not acceptable and will not be tolerated in our community. ▮

About the author: Karen uses a pseudonym in order to protect herself from the possible reprisal by either the batterer or her community for "coming out" about lesbian battering. She wishes to thank all those who have given their support and encouragement during this often difficult process of being "heard."

when your parents made you

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

When your parents make you, it is Chile, 1974
They think they will raise you in a revolutionary sunlight
but you are born in a refugee camp to a mother alone
as your father sits in Pinochet's prison

When you show me the one photograph of your childhood
you arre four. Your delicate fro spreads like sunrise
as you eye stare away, wide open and fully disassociated
At the refugee kitchen table
your mother rocks thick black eyeliner and wings of hair
holding a cigarette over a smile insisting
She looks like her hummingbird heart is about to explode
Your father grips her heart
like a cigarette between his fingers
He is the one about the explode
Your heart flies off someplace else

At fourteen you run away from them
sleep on couches and stairways
spray TORONTO IS HUNGRY everywhere
When the LA rebellion explodes for your birthday
you smash all the windows of the McDonald's
and make the front page of the newspaper
You cross the border in the trunk of a car

You hitch to LA
where the national guard is still on the sidewalk
Your eyes are still somewhere else
as you beat up skinheads,
throw some off a roof
get trailed by for years by that one cop
You soak stamps in rubbing alcohol delicate
write letters longhand to prisoners
walk across the city on one falafel

We have sex the first night
after watching Brother from Another Planet on video
I am trying to look like a South Asian Kathleen Cleaver
You have two pairs of baggy pants and one twin futon mattress

You have the Angry Brigade and *The Wretched of the Earth* in your bookcase
We tag *Pepita* and *Chanchito 97* on the walls of the underpass
The security guards tell us to stop kissing in the lobby

You pull out your knife as we try to have sex in the playground
when a man jumps out with his dick in hand
You tell me you've always wanted to die
but feed me, give me books
I've never been this happy

I pull you back from the window,
jam my shoulder in the door
to the room where you're trying to cut your wrists with a pink daisy razor

everyone has thought you were crazy for so long
you're bi, talk about abuse, being crazy
Being lightskinned tortures you
like an itch that never once stops
You try to rip your eyeballs out of their sockets
because you think they're blue
You sneer, at least when they think you're white they think you're Italian.

I meet your mother and she and your dad take us out
before the food comes you and your dad are circling each other
in the street. go on, hit your old man
this is why you left
but almost 10 years later you want your parents
You start to say that, after all
your father was driving a cab all night
working another job during the day, going back to school
to learn what he already knew
on papers the government declares useless
You start to treat me like he treated you

Eyes disassociated but fixed on something else
Years pass, I leave
I can't make your eyes focus
I can't stop the relentless step of the
skinheads and fathers and fists in your head

You always said you would go crazy if I told these stories
that you'd go to the cop shop and kill as many as you could
but this is my story I'm telling, not yours
my story of where violence comes from
where it goes
You tell your own story
I hear second hand
where you say you just slapped me once
Me sweetheart,
I tell a different story.

▮

A Litany For Survival

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of use who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect the death of ours

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

-Audre Lorde

So it is better to speak:

what you have survived:

and what you want
to create:

my StuFF:
HEALIng wItH AttItudE

exercise and analysis by : Ebony Noelle Golden
worksheet by: Alexis Pauline Gumbs

alongside Ntozake Shange's
For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf

I mEAn, tHInk AbOut It...

"Each character in *For Colored Girls* personifies an energy field or chakra in the body. In traditional healing arts, the color green is associated with the heart chakra thus, "Alla my Stuff" is an imperative thrust toward the Lady in Green's reclamation of self and self love. Lady in Green reminds the audience of the universal/sound expression of **love**, **self acceptance** and **allowance**. She reclaims her own "tacky shirts", her aired out vagina, "callused feet" her "arm wit the hot iron scar" as her story, her walk, ad her meditation on freedom, awareness and wholeness.

This **reclamation** and **proclamation** illustrates, specifically black womyn reclaiming ourselves, the pieces, bodies, desires communities have harvested, historically and recently, for consumption. Lady in Green's monologue is indeed a celebration of the reclamation of voice and herstory; and serves as an insightful glimpse into the importance of vocalization as expressive healing."

StEALIn my StuFF dOnt mAkE It yRS/ mAkES It StOLEn

-"Lady in Green" in *For Colored Girles*

yOuR StuFF: your gifts to the world

The STUFF that make me FUNKY:	The STUFF that make me FABULOUS:	The STUFF that make me FREE:
my	my	my
my	my	my
my	my	my
my	my	my
my	my	my
my	my	my
my	my	my

A bROkEnbEAutIFuL PRESS PROductIOn APRIL 2007

resources

Organizations working on partner abuse and sexual assault from a community accountability, people of color feminist perspective:

■ INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence: *www.incite-national.org*
INCITE! is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and our communities through direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organizing. They are the bomb. Their website has a shit-ton of resources and ideas about ending violence in the lives of women and trans people of color, community accountability and the prison industrial complex.

■ Generation Five: *www.generationfive.org*
generationFIVE envisions a future in which child sexual abuse no longer occurs. In this vision, the intergenerational impact of child sexual abuse is interrupted and mended. In this vision, the impact of trauma does not keep us from actualizing our individual and collective potential. Instead, collective healing supports our creativity and resilience. In this vision, the conditions that allow child sexual abuse to occur are transformed in such a way that child sexual abuse and other forms of violence become uncommon rather than ever more common.

In this vision, we can all contribute to ending child sexual abuse and other forms of violence because we can all participate in personal, community and political change." Gen 5 works towards ending childhood sexual abuse within 5 generations. They have amazing resources about community accountability and creating transformation plans that engage the whole community in dealing with childhood sexual abuse. Some of them are available on the website: they also have local ciphers in the Bay Area, Atlanta, New York and Boston. Check it out!

■ Creative Interventions: *www.creative-interventions.org*
Embracing the values of social justice and liberation, Creative Interventions is a space to re/envision solutions to family, intimate partner and other forms of interpersonal violence. Creative Interventions seeks to bring knowledge and power back to families and the community to resolve family, intimate partner and other forms of interpersonal violence at early stages and multiple points of abuse. It offers resources towards collective, creative, and flexible solutions, breaking isolation and clearing the path towards viable and sustainable systems of intervention.

■ CARA (Communities Against Rape and Abuse): *www.cara-seattle.org*
A group of activists in the Seattle area banded together in August 1999 to create an organization that would undermine the root causes of sexual violence. By January 2000, these activists established Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA), an organization spearheaded by survivors who are marginalized from mainstream sexual assault services. CARA creates spaces for our constituencies — including people who are young, of color, queer, incarcerated, poor, and/or have disabilities — to invest in the power of collective action, criti-

cal dialogue, and community organizing to undermine rape, abuse, and oppression. They have done and continue to do crucial, groundbreaking work on transforming partner abuse and sexual assault within communities.

info@cara-seattle.org
Phone:206.322.4856
ty/fax:206.323.4113
801-23rd Ave S, Suite G-1
Seattle, WA 98144

■ UBUNTU: *iambecauseweare.wordpress.com*
UBUNTU was born in the aftermath of the March 13, 2006 rape of a Durham, NC Black woman by members of the Duke University Lacrosse team. UBUNTU is a Women of Color and Survivor-led coalition of individuals and organizational representatives. We prioritize the voices, analyses, and needs of Women of Color and Survivors of sexual violence in both our internal structure and our external work. We are Women, Men, and people who do not fit into the gender binary. We are non-trans and trans. We are People of Color, Multi-racial, and White. We come from throughout the Triangle area and have roots both within and outside of the United States. We are sex workers, students and community members. We are workers. We are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, and Questioning. We are Queer and Straight. We are young, old, and in-between. We come from a broad range of economic, geographic, spiritual and political experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. AMAZING work and a ton of resources and inspiration are available on their website.

■ Philly's Pissed and Philly Stands Up: *www.phillyspissed.net*
Philly's Pissed is a grassroots, Philadelphia-based group that provides direct support to survivors of sexual assault, as well as education and advocacy promoting survivor autonomy and perpetrator accountability. Philly Stands Up, their sister collective, works with people who have perpetuated sexual or partner violence, helping them become accountable and work towards restitution.

■ The Survivor Project: *www.survivorproject.org*
Survivor Project is a non-profit organization dedicated to addressing the needs of intersex and trans survivors of domestic and sexual violence through caring action, education and expanding access to resources and to opportunities for action. Since 1997, we have provided presentations, workshops, consultation, materials, information and referrals to many anti-violence organizations and universities across the country, as well as gathered information about issues faced by intersex and trans survivors of domestic and sexual violence. info@survivorproject.org; (503) 288-3191

■ The Northwest Network: *www.nwnetwork.org*
The Northwest Network increases our communities' ability to support the self-determination and safety of bisexual, transgendered, lesbian, and gay survivors of abuse through education, organizing and advocacy. We work within a broad liberation movement dedicated to social and economic justice, equality and respect for all people and the creation of loving, inclusive and accountable communities.We provide support and advocacy for LBGT folks of all genders who are surviving abuse. We are leather and kink friendly. Our services are free

and confidential. They include support groups, individual counseling, legal advocacy, shelter referrals, safety planning, basic needs assistance, community education and community organizing. PO Box 18436 Seattle, WA 98118; (206) 568.7777; TTY message: (206) 517.9670; info@nwnetwork.org

■ Asian Women's Shelter: *www.sfaws.org*
AWS is a survivor-centered organization that works toward an extended family model: our shelter offers and coordinates a network of services that meets the holistic needs of survivors of violence. Domestic violence occurs when women are living in social isolation. We tell them: "You are not alone." We reach out to them, acknowledging that the survivor situation is intimately tied to family, society, culture, and economic situation. AWS has a toll-free, crisis hotline, 1-877-751-0880. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

■ Sistersong: *www.sistersong.net*
A North America wide organization, based in Atlanta, of women and girls and trans people of color working towards reproductive justice. Reproductive justice is defined as "is the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being of women and girls, and will be achieved when women and girls have the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, sexuality and reproduction for ourselves, our families and our communities in all areas of our lives."

Partner abuse in activist community publications:

INCITE Community Accountability Principles: www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=93

INCITE Special Report on community accountability within activist communities of color: www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=94

Sexual Assault in Activist Communities: Special Issue of The Peak. the University of Guelph's student newspaper. This came out in 2003, but back issues are still available. Contact : The Peak, UC Rm 236, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

Survivor stories:

Letters to Martha, Hanalei Ramos. (Self-published: contact Hanaleihanalei@gmail.com)

"Kicking Down Jane's Door", in *War in the Neighborhood*, Seth Tobocman

Deals with the Devil: And Other Reasons to Riot, Pearl Cleage

Wounds of Passion, bell hooks
Critical Condition: Women at the edge of violence

"What did he hit you with? the doctor said," by Chrystos, in *Dream On*, Press Gang, Vancovuer

Fire Power, Chrystos. Press Gang: 1996.

American Dreams, Push, Black Wings and *Blind Angels*, Sapphire.

Shout Out: Women of Color Respond to Violence, edited by Maria Ochos and Barbara Ice. Seal: 2008

Conquest, Andrea Smith

Articles:

"Violence in intimate relationships: a feminist perspective" in *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*, by bell hooks. South End Press

"Keeping Safe: Native women mobilize their own coalition against domestic violence" by Andrea Smith, in *Colorlines* Summer 2002

"Closeted Violence" (about queer DV), by Celina de Leon, *Colorlines Magazine,* September 2006

""The Silence Surrounding Queer Sexual Violence and Why We're Not Talking" by Elizabeth Latty, in *We Don't Need Another Wave*, edited by Melody Berger, Seal Press, 2007.

"How to support a survivor of a sexual assault," by UBUNTU, *iambecauseweare.files.wordpress.com/2007/02/survivor-support-booklet1.pdf*

Self-help books for survivors:

Davis, Laura, "I never thought we'd speak again"

Haines, Staci, *The Survivor's Guide to Sex*

Herman, Judith, *Trauma and Recovery*

Jones, Ann, *When Love Hurts*

Levanthal, Beth and Sandra Landy, eds. *Same-Sex Domestic Violence: Strategies for Change*. Sage Press, 1999.
Lobel, K, *Naming the violence: speaking out about lesbian battering*. Seal Press: 1996.

NiCarthy, Ginny, *Getting Free*

Renzetti, Claire, Jeffrey Edleson and Raquel Kennedy Bergen, eds. *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000.

Renzetti, Claire M., and Charles Harvey Miley, eds. *Violence in Gay and Lesbian Domestic Partnerships*. Haworth Press 1996.

Renzetti, Claire M. Violent *Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*. Sage Publications, 1992.

Sotelo, Nicole. *Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006.

White, Evelyn. *Chain Change: For Black Women in Abusive Relationships*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1994.

No! (2004). Documentary about rape in the African-American Community by Aishah Shahidah Simmons; PO Box 58085 Philadelphia, PA 19102-8085 (215) 557-8154

Queer/Trans/Two-Spirit specific resources:

Survivor Project, www.survivorproject.com. An awesome website for trans survivors of sexual and partner abuse.

La Red: www.thenetworklared.org/ 'línea de Crisis • 617-742-4911; TTY • 617-227-4911

"Ending abuse in lesbian, bisexual women's and transgender communities / Acabando con el abuso en comunidades de lesbianas, de mujeres bisexuales y de gente transgénero"
Northwest Network: www.nwnetwork.org
PO Box 20398 | | Seattle, WA 98102. Phone: (206) 568.7777. TTY message: (206) 517.9670; info@nwnetwork.org

Two Spirit People of the First Nations: www.2spirits.com

Toronto Rape Crisis Center/ Multicultural Women Against Rape: www.trccmwar.ca

Friends Are Reaching Out: www.nwnetwork.org/farout.html

Communities United Against Violence: www.cuav.org.

Violence Against Women With Disabilities:

CARA Disability Pride Project: www.cara-seattle.org/disabled.html

Disabled Women's Action Network, Ontario: dawn.thot.net/violence_wwd.html

GimpGirl: www.gimpgirl.com

Self Defense:

Brooklyn Women's Martial Arts/ Center for Anti-Violence Education: www.cae-bklyn.org/aboutus.html

Home Alive: www.homealive.org

Feminist Karate Union: www.gimpgirl.com

Resources for abusers looking to move towards accountability:

Men's Nonviolence Project: www.tcfv.org/nulceus/mnp.php

Men Stopping Violence: www.menstoppingviolence.org/index.php

About the Editors:

Ching-In Chen is the author of *The Heart's Traffic* (Arktoi Books/Red Hen Press, 2009). Past occupations include karaoke singer, flautist, 1st grade literacy teacher, community organizer, construction job counselor, and a severely lost person in the Rocky Mountains. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Water~Stone Review*, *Poemeleon*, and *OCHO*. A Kundiman Fellow, Ching-In is currently in the MFA program at University of California at Riverside.

Dulani is a writer, performance poet and antiviolence educator based in Brooklyn, NY. He has worked as a consultant on LGBTQ Intimate Partner Violence issues for CONNECT, an organization dedicated to ending gender and family based violence in NYC. In addition, he has served on the national advisory committee for three national gatherings organized by Asian Women's Shelter of San Fransisco, CA. These gatherings are called "Transforming Silence into Action: A National Gathering to Address Intimate Partner Violence in Asian Pacific Islander Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer Women and Transgender Communities" or simply TSIA. He loves dark chocolate and Brooklyn walks after rain.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha is a queer Sri Lankan writer, performer and high femme powerhouse. The author of *Consensual Genocide* (TSAR), she has performed her work widely throughout North America and Sri Lanka. Her work has been anthologized in *Homelands, We Don't Need Another Wave, Colonize This!, With a Rough Tongue, Without a Net, Dangerous Families, Geeks, Misfits and Outlaws, Brazen Femme, Femme*, and *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World*. She writes regularly for *Bitch, Colorlines, Hyphen* and *Make/Shift* magazines. Newly relocated to Oakland after running away from America for a decade, she is completing her MFA in creative nonfiction at Mills College, touring her one-woman show, *Grown Woman Show* (which will be produced by the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center at SomArts in June 2009), and finishing her second book, *Dirty River*. She is a keynote speaker at the 2008 Femme Conference and a 2008 Poetry for the People Student Teacher Poet. She remains in love with the unending possibilities of transforming oppression and abuse, with fierce queer and trans POC genius and toughass central Massachusetts girls.

About the Contributors:

Please note: Many contributors either chose to remain anonymous, used a pseudonym or wished to be credited but needed to remain anonymous to preserve their safety.

Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA) is a vibrant, women of color-led grassroots antiviolence project in Seattle that advances a broad agenda for liberation and social justice while prioritizing anti-rape work as the center of our organizing. CARA activists create community-based systems of accountability, safety, and support in order to build healthy relationships and communities free of both community violence and state-sponsored violence. We use community organizing, critical dialogue, and collective action as tools to build safe, peaceful, and sustainable communities. www.cara-seattle.org

Gina de Vries is a queer writer and activist living in San Francisco. She is co-editor of the book *[Becoming]: Young ideas on gender, identity, and sexuality*, and her work has appeared in the following books and publications: *Curve Magazine, On Our Backs Magazine, FULL zine, That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* (ed. Mattilda aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore), *The On Our Backs Guide to Lesbian Sex* (ed. Diana Cage), *First-Timers: True Stories of Lesbian Awakening* (ed. Rachel Kramer Bussel),

Baby Remember My Name: An Anthology Of New Queer Girl Writing (ed. Michelle Tea), *Tough Girls 2: More Down and Dirty Dyke Erotica* (ed. Lori Selke), *TransForming Community* (ed. Michelle Tea), and *Sodom & Me: Queers on Fundamentalism* (ed. Ian Phillips & Greg Wharton).

Alexis Pauline Gumbs is a queer black troublemaker. She is a doctoral candidate in English, Africana Studies and Women's Studies at Duke University. She is also a member of UBUNTU and the founder of BrokenBeautiful Press.

Ana Lara is an author and organizer. She is author of *Erzulie's Skirt* [RedBone Press, 2006], a Lambda Literary Finalist. Her writing has been featured in numerous literary journals as well as scholarly journals and newsletters. She directs the oral history project: *We are the Magicians, Path Breakers, Dream Makers*, documenting the stories of LGBTTQ/Gender non-conforming artists of color. Ana Lara also co-authors the website: bustingbinaries.com: a website dedicated to addressing binary thinking in U's. based social justice movements. She lives in Austin, TX with her partner, visual artist Wura-Natasha Ogunji. To learn more, go to Ana's website: www.zorashorse.com

Peggy Munson is the author of the poetry collection *Pathogenesis*, as well as the Project Queerlit-winning, Lambda Award Finalist novel *Origami Striptease*. Called "a stylist extraordinaire" by Rebecca Brown, and "a master of the written word" by Bay Windows, Peggy has also published work in *Best American Poetry, Best American Erotica, Best Lesbian Erotica*, and many other venues. Peggy is the editor of *Stricken: Voices from the Hidden Epidemic of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome*, and is an activist around disability and chronic illness issues. Information on Peggy's work, as well as free handouts about providing fragrance free access, can be found at www.peggymunson.com

Ziggy Ponting is a queer anti-capitalist white girl non-BPD tart, gardener and scribbler. She believes that dancing, fucking and loving can change the world.

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For more information or to request copies of *The Revolution Starts at Home*, email revolutionathome@riseup.net