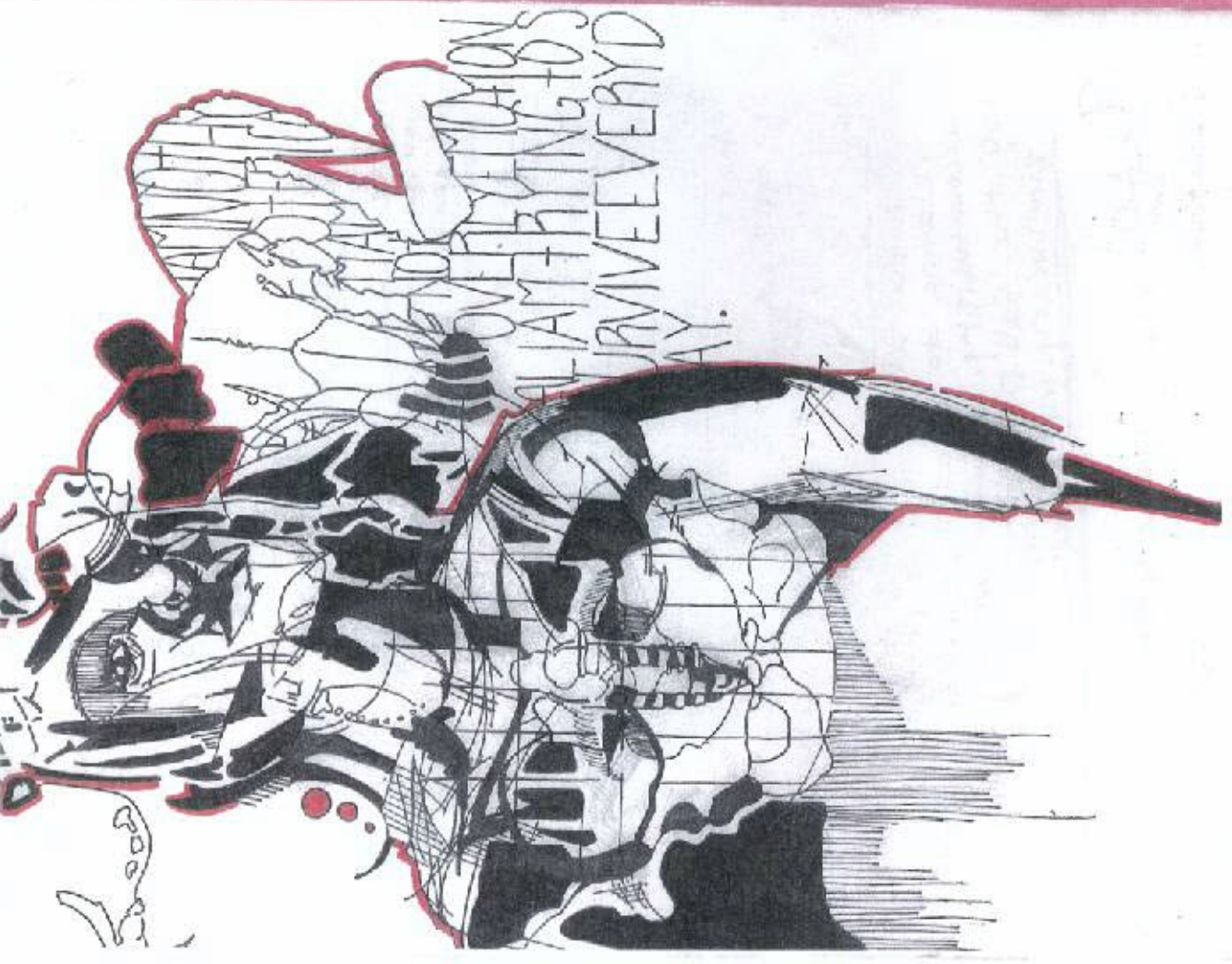


it's down to this



reflections, stories, experiences, critiques and ideas on  
community and collective response  
to sexual violence, abuse, and accountability





## TRIGGER WARNING!!!

The subject of this zine is collective and community response to sexual violence and abuse. It contains personal experiences and stories that at times are graphic in detail. Also, some of the ideas and reflections in this zine might be difficult and upsetting to read. Therefore, this zine is potentially triggering.

Please consider your surroundings and mental and emotional state before reading. Consider having someone to call for support before reading.

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# That's all!

Thanks for reading.

Here are some things I would recommend checking out:

- The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence within Activist Communities (you can find it at [southernpress.org](http://southernpress.org), or an earlier free.pdf version at [www.incite-national.org](http://www.incite-national.org))
- Support Zine by Cindy Crabb - check out the doris distro in general [www.dorisdorisdoris.com](http://www.dorisdorisdoris.com)!
- [phillyspissed.net](http://phillyspissed.net) - lots of free resources
- [www.incite-national.org](http://www.incite-national.org) - check out their "resources for organizing" page, particularly their stuff on community accountability
- "For a Safer World" - a really extensive guide for all kinds of resources relating to trauma, survivor support, accountability, addiction, mental health... by the Sali Distro Project [zine.library.info/safer-world](http://zine.library.info/safer-world)

I am also interested in making this an ongoing project. If you'd like to contribute to a second issue of this zine, email me!

[smogcielo@gmail.com](mailto:smogcielo@gmail.com)



# introduction

When I first planned this zine's existence a couple of years ago, I naively envisioned it to be a sort of community response to sexual violence manual or perpetrator accountability 'how-to' guide. In the time since, I have had some significant shifts in perspective so that I don't think a 'how-to' guide is necessarily possible or even makes sense.

It is instead a zine compilation that reflects upon and questions where we are at in seeking out new and alternative ways to respond to sexual violence within whatever sort of collectivity of people.

I wanted to see the zine happen because I knew myself and many others to feel stuck or dissatisfied with what we understood to be emerging norms for aggressor accountability and survivor support models. but as for the people I had worked with and with whom I shared a mutual investment and dedication to anti-sexual violence work, many of us felt unable to voice criticisms or were afraid to admit that we had criticisms.

Putting this zine together was one of the most difficult and taxing projects i've tackled in a while. I initially hoped for the creation of this zine to be a collective effort, and when I sought out co-collaborators, I received enthusiastic response but also learned that most were really burnt out on this topic. So I ended up approaching it alone.

As I began to solicit and receive submissions, it was difficult to really hold onto a coherent voice and vision for the zine. So many of us have such different and seemingly opposing views on the topic, even if our hearts are in the same place. I have had a hard time knowing how to listen to and trust myself on this project, I kept catching myself trying to appease the opinions or desires of others interested in the creation of this compilation.

Every submission I received for the zine I considered to be strikingly different from one another and also to be valuable in its own way for the ways in which they reveal our messy and complex emotional responses to this work. I feel like the essays and artwork in this compilation reveal just how multi-faceted our approaches and analyses

frequency of uncomfortable moments that kept coming up, for any of us trying to be apart of the process. we had nothing to guide us other than our collective pain and fear. and instead of this situation bringing us closer together, it (of course) drove some of us much, much further apart.

maybe communities will end up realising that there is no attainable moment of consensus, that we all have different standards and different desires and different expectations and different solutions. but almost anything different seems worth trying, if we consider the losses we accrue through our current approaches.

i hope that some of this has been helpful.

please let me know if you have any feedback on this - its supposed to be a jumping off point for generating more discussion, and hopefully that it will do...

if you wanna let me know your thoughts, you can contact me at [painiarxhsabitch@riseup.net](mailto:painiarxhsabitch@riseup.net).

thanks for reading!



can be. In each essay I found something to relate to and empathize with.

I don't want to tell people how to think about these issues. I want to encourage people to think for themselves. I want there to be space for challenges, but I hope for those challenges to be well informed. I didn't want to leave an essay out simply because I disagreed with parts of it. Mostly I hold that if you have worked your ass off trying to support people and fight rape, then your voice deserves to be heard. **Just because an article is in here doesn't mean I want you to agree with it.** I chose what to put in here based on the earnestness and sincerity with which people approached the topic.

This zine is intended to be part of an ongoing and open dialogue around approaches to anti-sexual violence work.

I think we can all benefit from sharing these experiences, knowledge, voices and opinions, with the hopes that we can expand and consider the perspectives and visions with which we approach one another. I hope that this zine inspires critical reaction, but reactions that come from places of openness and awareness.

In my own life, my perspective constantly shifts and expands, I try to hold onto a multitude of perspectives and voices at once. Sometimes certain voices get louder or grow distant depending where I'm at, but I can always hold onto them.

I hope that this zine can both challenge where one might be at, in the sense of challenging desires to silence, or creating more understanding for why someone might see things the way that they do.

I hope it creates more ability to hear each other out and to find new and appropriate ways to support one another in breaking apart rape culture and the violences it intersects with and depends upon.

— Claire Thib.  
smogcielo@gmail.com

communities to define their expectations of each other, within them, has to do with the common view that calling out one another's abusive behaviours implies that the person doing the calling out believes themselves to be perfect.

F U C K . T H I A T .

there is *no end* to how miserably damaging this view is to moving towards a culture of accountability. there is no end to the ways that this myth bullies people into submission, or how it limits the extents to which we might allow ourselves to be openly critical of *ourselves*. because people are made to feel so ashamed of the ways that they are still reconciling the fundamentals of their socialisations with their radical visions of change and growth that there becomes a pressure to not be critical of *anyone*, lest we misrepresent ourselves as having overcome it all.

i think we all need to learn to become more comfortable with the idea that we are fucked up in the ways that we still are, and become more open about how we are trying to take responsibility for what we can of those fucked up behaviours. *without* giving the impression that we can not call each other out until we believe that we are successfully past the point of susceptibility to making mistakes. this would necessitate that people not be made to feel ashamed of their own struggles with the fucked up tools they have been given to work with, for one thing. but it would also demand that people take responsibility for the consequences that their choice of behaviours has on the people they interact with. we can only move away from shame once people demonstrate that another incentive for change is possible.

i would love to see it become more and more common for communities and collectives to embrace a structure of prevention around interpersonal violence, within them. to talk explicitly about what is and is not acceptable behaviour. to come up with strategies for intervention. to establish expectations of what "community-based" approaches would mean, as far as crossing that uncomfortable boundary between the goings-on of a "dating relationship", and everyone else.

in one experience ive had with confronting someone in my community about their violent tendencies, i remember the look of horror on his face when i brought up personal information that his ex-partner had shared with me, for the purposes of intervention. it was clear that he had, previously, thought that the happenings within their relationship were safe from scrutiny, because of the prevailing taboo (that we are all influenced by, i think) around butting into other peoples dating relationships. he came at me with, "thats between me and her", and i responded, "not if shes asking me to step in". this shatters the protective barrier around abusers that is created by their tactics of isolation. the fact that we were in a room full of people helped. the fact that multiple people in the community found that they had an ability to come together to stand up to the patterns of violence with which this person conducted himself in various aspects of his life, was monumental.

however, it ended shortly thereafter. there was no way to sustain the



collateral damage from systemic forms of violence is carried through  
able lacking in our reserves of support and understanding for one

positive, too, that a big part of being socialised female, which lets a  
ators of gendered violence of the hook, is that we are trained, every  
lives, in a lot of cases, to fear the absolute worst, most violent  
ee ourselves as absolutely rape-able, vulnerable, slutty, at fault, etc.  
the bar for what seems worth reacting to SO HIGH (in terms of the  
-threat) that we can start to see everything that is not horrifically  
narrow escape that we should be "thankful" for. obviously, wearing  
likelihood of us standing up for a less violent, less exploitative  
ng the spectrum of its manifestations.

clarity establishing  
stations of accountability.  
ie light of all of this, with a nuanced understanding of how "gender  
means more than "man hits woman", it should be plain to see that  
long term ways of healing communities requires a targeting of  
in all of its deeply rooted forms. and that *preventing* the further  
t is done to survivors of violence (directly, or vicariously) also  
orough understanding of what histories and backgrounds support  
foundations. its worth examining what assumptions we have as a  
ll the various corners of our socialisation, based on our class  
s, our racial identities, our ethnic cultures, regional norms, education  
ces of radicalisation, sexual practices, exposure to trauma, and on

sidering all of these things, and knowing how common it is for  
work its way into the tendencies of even the nearest and dearest to  
its seems tragic to me that there are not better models for pre-  
; expectations of one another within communities of radical folks,  
ating avenues for both prevention and accountability. i know that a  
easons behind that have to do with there being a certain amount of  
around what is ever meant by "community" and who is included, but  
orth the stretch required to establish some part of that before an issue  
since the people affected have no trouble identifying themselves and  
after the fact.

ally think that another one of the main issues is that people *don't want*  
*do the work.* because it burns you out like a fucking match, real quick.  
ne any of us for wanting to pretend like abuse and assault will never  
gain, in the rare stretches of time when were not eating it for every





## SO THAT YOU KNOW by J. DeWitt

The ways I've engaged with the huge, vague, overwhelming, and sometimes mind boggling concept of accountability keep twisting and changing. Angry, tense, driven, manic, stressed, bitter, burnt out, over

and over again. THIS IS NOT A CAUTIONARY TALE! And it is not the be all, end all. But this is how my experience of acting as a mentor, contact person, and support in an "accountability" process has felt.

I became a part of this process because I was angry, and frustrated. I had been struggling with my own history of sexual violence and domestic abuse when I found out that someone I shared space with had assaulted his partner, and I was furious. (A note: I have chosen not to use specific names in this piece). I was close with a lot of this person's housemates, but didn't know him very well. They had shared with me their frustration and skepticism with how his process was forming. I felt like I had skills I could offer, and at the time it seemed like this perfect outlet for some of the anger I was feeling. It was decided that I would take on a more direct role, and after some talking my friend and I decided to work together as co-facilitators of his process.

Before we started working together, I had little framework for how an accountability process was supposed to work. I went to a school that had a sexual offense policy and structure built into it's policies, but it was very specific to that place. I had gone to a couple workshops about radical communities responding to sexual violence, but never left with a very concrete idea for how these structures worked.

In the past year that I've been a part of this process, I keep trying to push myself, to ask myself what I'm actually trying to do, what accountability is really supposed to mean. Is it:

- That this person is supposed to be responsible for working through his own hard shit, figuring out the why or how in a situation that will never have an excuse or a reason?
- That in working with him, we respect the needs and direction of the survivor.

"abuse" or "sexual assault" that we have experienced as normal, previously, might be too upsetting of an experience for us to validate. We might not be ready to admit that we were abused or assaulted, for a lot of totally understandable reasons.

three, because our indoctrination into a hetero-patriarchy causes female-assigned people to act in ways that compete for male attention / approval, and privilege the ways that socialised-males have been taught to act, thereby biasing our feelings about who did what, as well as coloring our expectations of what is "acceptable behaviour" (read: rational, unemotional, aloof, in a word, "masculine": not hysterical, whiny, and dramatic, in a word, "feminine").

four, because our experiences with violence are rarely, if ever, taken seriously enough and we end up either hardening ourselves to our own, and consequently other peoples, experiences with it, or else we begrudge them for the support that they are asking for that we never received. We might lose our capacity for compassion because we've convinced ourselves that we are tough and proud for getting through what we got through, with little support. The way some immigrants will turn on undocumented migrant populations, unable to go through the *fucked up* system which would never permit their legal entry, ignorantly asserting, "we did it the legal way. You should, too": we have a tendency (in general, not just as female-socialised people) to want to compare our suffering to one another's, to make ourselves feel more accomplished. To treat our pain like our credentials. Because there is a scarcity of love and support and true justice in our culture, we feel like we can not afford to empathise with each others hardships, or give up our idea that we have it worse than anyone else, because we have reasons to believe that we will deplete our own store of strength for when we are hurt, once again.

sometimes, too, we can simply lose sight of the injustice that is taking place. Because we've all been taught to swallow so much shit that we literally don't understand what all the fuss is, about something we've witnessed our entire lives and come to expect. Violence and exploitation become so normalised, I hear women, especially, being like, "what's the big deal?" about a whole lot of behaviours that no one should ever have to become accustomed to.

this also brings up the myth that people only blow whistles who are privileged. That people who have really suffered don't need to make a "big deal" out of "little things", but that people who have had little hardship in their lives mistake "little things" for "big deals" all the time. This can be true. People, as I've said, do numb themselves for the sake of their own survival, and may not react much to losing another friend to a violent death. Hearing about another friend's rape, being abused in their own relationships.

however, people also have the opposite reactions (and everything in between). Our nerves become so damaged, our familiarity with our own vulnerability so activated, that we jump at the slightest sound. Because we have no chance to heal. Because violence is such a regular part of our lives, or was.

im just trying to point out that people process things differently, and that



the mess, and loses any belief they might have ever had that "accountability" is worth striving towards, or worth expecting of people, generally.

i am not basing this observation off of one, or even two situations. this has been the norm, from the 10 or so years that i've been aware of and apart of communities trying to address peoples out-of-sight violence, more visibly.

i have observed, as i've mentioned throughout this, that the people defending the person being called out go to great lengths to ensure that the abusive, violent person does not have to feel the affects of their actions back onto themselves. like there is something fundamentally violent and unfair about there being consequences to the fucked up things that we do (whether they are intentional, or not).

and why am i still talking about everyone else, except the violent and abusive person? its not because i actually think that anyone else is to blame. its not because i really believe that anyone elses actions should ever become the focal point of a situation in which abuse has taken place. its just a reflex, developed out of the fact that i rarely hear much, if anything, from the person who has been called out. little, unsubstantiated preeps of "im doing a good job" or "i never did that" or "shes a crazy bitch" or, in rare cases, "holy shit, ive been messing up really, really bad and i want to change, deeply"; followed by some actual steps in that direction and a whole lot of communication with the people in their lives. this void that typically exists where there should be accountability from the person being called out is, whether they are conscious of it or not, a fantastic design for making sure that responsibility gets passed onto the people whose voices and faces are more regularly associated with the situation. the survivor, for example. the friends. the organisation. whatever and whoever else. its almost like we can forget that there was a perpetrator, at all.

like i said at the beginning, i wrote this because i felt that there was a lack in texts devoted to our roles, as outsiders, in processes of calling for accountability. not because i think that we, as outsiders, are the main people responsible for whether or not that accountability process is successful. only that we play a part, worth considering.

and because sometimes we, as outsiders, also need advocates.

the main population who, in my experience, becomes the most divided, and therefore, weakened, during a time when someone close to us has been called out for abuse or assault, seems to always be the socialised-females within a collective or social group. and i attribute this to our socialisation, of course. and i blame patriarchy, of course.

i am left asking myself how we can address the foundation set by patriarchy to destroy all potential for female ally-ship,

for one, because of how situations where violence is being called out often expose the many triggers of female-socialised survivors, who then need to take care of themselves instead of tending to the needs of others in their communities.

two, because recognising that another person is identifying something as

-That we find ways to support and challenge him.

-That he steps down from leadership roles until he can work to understand his own issues with power and control.

-That with our support we can start breaking down whatever ideas he has about himself in relationship to his lovers, friends, and community, and start understanding who he is as a person who has raped and could rape again.

And somehow in all of this, we need to find a way to be accountable to a larger community as well, and be in communication about our progress and our goals. There's all these ways that we're supposed to help, push, and challenge him, and a whole other set of ways that we (me and my co-facilitator) are supposed to be accountable as well. That as this person does his work, we do ours to respect what the survivor needs, be open about what we're doing and where we think he is at while creating an environment of trust, and to try and engage some sort of larger, amorphous community in what we're doing, all the while trying to stay present and engaged in some really hard shit. This has been one of the most challenging things for me to navigate.

How do we make all this happen? It feels impossible to juggle all these things at once, to hold on to all the needs and experiences of so many different people and stay really present for it. So often wanting to check out, to yell, to tag out, to simply be able to say "Here, it's your turn". But unfortunately, the longer we do this work, the less people stay involved with us. Despite our efforts, our communication with a larger community has always been lacking. We've left a lot of the explaining to the person who has perpetrated, wanting to challenge him to be really honest about where he's at, while still trying to make ourselves as approachable as possible. I wish that from the start we had put our own letters, emails, phone calls out there with his. I wish we had found more sustainable ways to stay in contact with others, without feeling the stress of keeping up with it all. How was this being accountable, to not add our perspective?



It has been very easy to slowly become more and more insular, to lose track of checking in and seeking outside support. At first, our process consisted of two support people, who met with this person every week, and some of his friends, roommates, co-organizers, and former partners made an effort to check in, occasionally come to meetings, or hold meetings of their own with him. A couple people from DWOS were involved in the initial forming of the process and have made themselves accessible to us when we need some guidance. We established a loose system for checking in with the survivor and people supporting them. A few people who had done some work with other anti-rape groups helped by sharing their thoughts and insights and doing some proof reading of the disclosure letters we were working on.

However, this group became smaller and smaller as this person struggled through the work of disclosing, and of respecting the space of his former partner and the communities that no longer felt safe or comfortable around him.

### **THIS IS (basically) WHAT OUR PROCESS LOOKS LIKE:**

We meet with him every other week now. We used to meet every week, but decided it would give us more time to reflect and do our "homework". We try to all come up with different topics and questions to reflect on, sometimes materials to read and discuss. In the beginning, we dealt with a lot of different issues and scenarios as they came up, and most of our work was reacting to boundaries being crossed, issues of disclosure, and sharing space. Later, bigger road blocks came up around sex, where we felt we were at in our process versus where he felt we were at, and around feeling burnt out, trying to stay present when things in our personal lives was making it harder to focus. Every few months we'd end up having to step back, re-evaluate, try some new approach. It's hard to maintain momentum while dealing with breaches of trust, f\*ck ups, excuses, and always facing the question: is this working?

anything fucked up starts to happen, and ill be here for you if and when it does". which has allowed me to be more honest with my loved ones, and less hard on myself, thereby allowing me to explore this pattern of being attracted to abusive people in a much, much safer way.

which brings up another, crucial element to leaving "outs" for ourselves, in relationships with abusive people. i think we need to be totally honest with ourselves about what we are attracted to about the person from the get-go. for example, if there are any warning signs that the person could become unsafe, we can try to bear in mind that there is nothing shameful about liking someone because they are a challenge, because they show potential for growth and change, because we think we could be a good influence, because its exciting, because we want to be self-destructive for a bit, or whatever. being able to be honest with ourselves is, in my opinion, the best defense against letting that relationship or that person fall into a position in our life where they acquire the potential for destroying our abilities to trust ourselves (among many, many other things).

i could go on and on about the generally harmful perspective that our society imposes upon us about the role that Romantic Relationships should have in our lives and how our success in those relationships is pretty much gauged by how tolerant we are of our own unhappiness and how endlessly damaging this is to anyone seeking a life free from violence and abuse, but hopefully this is enough. i know for myself, trying to de-emphasise Romance in my life is hard, hard, because of the pressure from every direction to partner up. because we fear loneliness. because all our friends are doing it. because we're not supposed to be able to count on anyone unless they're obligated to us through sexually binding contracts.

but if we can manage to get distance from these beliefs which, literally, advocate for an abusive relationship over no relationship, how much healthier we would all be.

### **preventing the dividing and conquering of our communities when an abuser is called out.**

that it is a system

#### shared experiences of violence

i get to this part of the piece, and i remember how frustrated i am that im even writing it. that when someone perpetrates violence in our communities, in the lives of people we love and in our own lives, that this explosion of burden gets spread to everyone within range, while the abusive, violent person often feels little to no real "inconvenience" (this is, of course, only my perspective). how frustrating it is, that everyone else scrambles to figure out what the "right thing" to do is, gets blamed for doing it wrong (hey each other), loses friends, goes on living with the triggers and trauma that preceded and were born out of



behaviour to become problematic enough for us to get distance from them, without feeling embarrassed, or disappointed, or like we are failures.

primarily, i see it as immeasurably important that we never stick up for our loved ones to the extent that we will feel ashamed if we do begin to see those characteristics presenting themselves in them. even if we genuinely think that they are incapable of demonstrating the kind of abuse that they have been called out for. because the most dangerous thing in relationships with abuse can be isolation. and the more we defend them, the more embarrassed we might be to admit that we were wrong, and the more reluctant we might be to seek support, or to take the necessary steps to get away from the person, when we start to see the things we denied showing up in our own relationship.

if we get into a relationship with someone and only learn about their history of violence or abuse afterward, the same etiquette should still apply, in what im proposing. i know it can be a shock, and that we might want to react defensively, but i maintain that it is by far in our best interest to believe that the worst of those warnings is true, and prepare accordingly.

i try to be honest with the people in my life about my friend / lover / partners histories and about what steps they have taken to change and what they plan on doing to continue changing in the future. its part of upholding that trajectory of accountability (and if the people we are involved with arent okay with that, its a really fucking bad sign). im not saying that i dont worry about peoples judgment, and that i dont sometimes fall susceptible to the line of thinking that says "well, you only have yourself to blame if youre gonna be close with this person, despite knowing their history". and im not saying that its not scary to admit to friends when my partners and lovers do start showing those violent and abusive tendencies in our relationship. just because ive left the possibility open and up for discussion. its still scary. and hard. and i still, sometimes, think im doing something "wrong" by being with them.

but so, so much less so than before, when i was in a relationship where i felt like i had to uphold this image of my partner as "radical" and "sensitive" and "feminist" and blah, blah, blah. because my pride was wrapped up in this expectation that a "good feminist", such as myself, wouldnt possibly be in any other situation. i couldnt bear to let people know how bad he was to me, because i had talked him up so much and so many people bought every word i said. i wanted him to be seen as "good", because it would reflect onto me. of course, i didnt understand that this was happening at the time, in exactly this way. but i look back at the way i became more and more isolated with him, afraid to call my friends because i would end up talking about what he was doing to me and then i feared that they would see me as helpless, or stupid for staying with him.

luckily, ive had incredible support over the years, in the form of people im extremely close to, including my long-term, non-monogamous, not-abusive (for real) partner, being like "i respect you, and trust that you make good decisions that are no one elses right to judge, and youre definitely not to blame if

I don't think I could keep meeting with this person without my co-facilitator. In my opinion, the person we are working with is used to being able to talk himself out of most things, and it honestly is pretty easy to get caught up in how he is explaining himself. It's also too easy to get lost and confused with some of the run around we get in response to hard questions like "what made you feel justified in not using consent with your partner"? or "what factors/excuses allowed the assault to continue"? or "how did power and control affect you or your partner's ability to tell others what was going on"? It's hard to even want to hear the answers to these questions sometimes. I'm so grateful to have another set of ears, someone else to help me sort through what he says to find the truth in it, the moments where he lets himself get past the guilt and the bullshit and tell us what's going through his head.

Oftentimes, the place that my co-facilitator and I are at is pretty different than where he feels he is, or even where his therapist thinks he is. It can be really hard to try to keep focused when he may feel like he's past it or ready to move on to a different topic. Several times we've dealt with "breaches of trust" that ultimately come from not being on the same page. These have been some of the most hard, frustrating, and confusing moments. Other people I know in accountability processes have experienced similar problems, especially around celibacy versus sex, and intimacy. It's so hard to stay invested in working with someone who has perpetrated when it feels like the process is backpedalling, derailed. It's hard to leave room for mistakes when so much hurt has already been done.

I'm not sure what has kept this work sustainable for us. I think there have been points where it felt really unstable and draining. It seems like it's been key for us to be really honest and vocal about our boundaries, and not to set ourselves up to burn out. However, there are times where I'm not really sure what our boundaries even are, or when we're burnt out. Having support people has been important. So has having a close friendship with my co-facilitator. I think this process would feel a lot more stable if there were more people involved--even if that just meant more people checking in with us, or criticizing us, or offering perspective. It's so easy to forget how important the checking in is, to not get sucked in to something that can sometimes feel so private, so personal it's hard to share.



For a while I fixated a lot on what it means to be "successful" in an accountability process. I think I entered this process with some really unrealistic ideas around success, or what it would feel like for this process to come to some sort of completion. I suppose it's impossible to not have high expectations (and a lot of optimism) when first starting any kind of process. At later points in our relationship, our work felt successful when we were being really honest and getting into some of the really dark and hard places in this person's past. At this point, I think the fact that we are all finding ways to still be engaged and involved is a kind of success. I've had to really re-think the ideas I had around healing and justice. I'm still not sure how to bring about those things, and what role I can really play in a healing process when I still lack so much of the skill and perspective that is really needed to handle

it with care.

In every way, my thoughts about accountability have changed drastically. In some ways, it feels even bigger and more unclear than it did when we all started working together, and in other ways I can call upon many more real life experiences and imagine more ways to make accountability something that's a part of my daily life. I think I have a lot more realistic sense of what this work entails in terms of support, energy, and commitment. I think I imagined this process being a lot bigger than just the three of us, on having a lot of people to fall back on.

Maybe it's our own fault for not finding ways to engage people-- it can feel really hard to ask for support while trying to respect people's privacy, boundaries, anger, and in general all the ways it can be hard for people to talk about sexual violence. Maybe the city we live in isn't quite there right now, our communities feeling so disparate in some ways.

Maybe it's our own fault for not finding ways to engage people-- it can feel really hard to ask for support while trying to respect people's privacy, boundaries, anger, and in general all the ways it can be hard for people to talk about sexual violence. Maybe the city we live in isn't quite there right now, our communities feeling so disparate in some ways.

publicly, and then I say what I feel needs to be said, this sometimes is extremely uncomfortable, and I'm hoping we can talk about this situation, more and more.

lastly, and this is perhaps the most scary to bring up, what about when the primary survivor in the calling for an accountability process disagrees with the severity of the demands being made by other members of the community? it's not always as simple as just saying, "well, the survivor is always the person who should say whether something is appropriate or not". because the violent person's behaviour may, and most likely is, a liability to a much greater population than the most vocal survivor. if the violent person is playing a public role in an organisation, in a band, in a collective, or community space, and people in those circles want to restrict that person's access to those spaces, for their own safety or the safety of people they know and love, against the wishes of the survivor, who wants to take an approach more reflective of models of "transformative justice", what then? is it ever appropriate for a community, or some of its members, to say "these are demands we are making for ourselves, separate from the demands being made by the survivor for their, individual, safety"? I am saying "yes", in cases where there are more restrictions being placed on the abusive person than the primary survivor proposed. NEVER LESS. never, ever am I suggesting that a community takes it upon themselves to be like, "we want to go easier on this abusive person than the survivor wants", thereby choosing the well-being of the abuser over the well-being of the survivor.

it's really hard to work through these issues, and painful, and complicated by endless layers of subjectivity and separateness, and I'm wondering what people think about this.

**ideas for how to stay safe while in a relationship with someone who has been abusive.**

( responsibility to yourself )

there are some risks that run particularly high for us when we are in intimate relationships with abusive and violent people (or "people with violent and abusive histories / tendencies", depending on what point you're trying to get across). I don't mean obvious things, like that they can be abusive and violent towards us, affecting our sense of safety, and confidence, and self-esteem (all of which are greatly influenced by the ways other people treat us), and so on. I am more interested in talking about how we can tend to the self-contained points of vulnerability, like our pride, and trust in ourselves, and self-perception.

the absolute number one thing that I think becomes the most instrumental in whether or not we maintain a line of defense against the potential power of an abuser or abusive relationship has to do with whether or not we leave ourselves "outs" in the relationship. by "outs", I mean places where we prepare ourselves and our loved ones for the possibility of that abusive



survivors are sumuuper hesitant to call out the behaviour for what it is. they are afraid to call it "abuse" or "assault" because they believe that they played a role in its making, and therefore deserved it. or, at the very least, dont want to put the entire onus of responsibility onto the person who, in reality, is responsible for having decided to deal with the situation violently. this is especially common in situations when the abuser or assaulter was successful at creating the impression that they are victims!

so one question becomes, how do we negotiate between supporting a survivors pace and process, while simultaneously validating that they were, in fact, abused or assaulted? and not, as the language suggests, playing a mutual part in an "abusive relationship" or some such bullshit? my approach has been to never suggest words before the survivor uses them. to not label someone elses experience as "abuse" or "assault" until they are asking me, or talking about these things in the specific context of abuse or assault. and to reinfoce, over and over again, that the other persons choices are not their fault.

and what of our desire to publicly call the behaviour out for what it is, before the survivor is able to see it or is ready to, for whatever reason? i have no better idea than to wait, though its really fucking hard sometimes. hard, because i understand that anyone capable of abusing or assaulting one person is likely to do the same things to other people, if there is no intervention. how do we approach the task of limiting the degree to which an abusive or violent person can continue doing such things to *other* people? this, i really have no good ideas for. and i have been faced with this conundrum so many times, it boggles the mind. i will be approached, in confidence, by a friend who wishes to unload some of their experiences with their partner or friend or acquaintance, which are clearly identifiable as dangerous, sexually violent, emotionally abusive, unsafe, exploitative, etc, and then i am asked to not share the information with other people, who live and work closely with the person we are talking about. i always error err? on the side of respecting the survivors need for safety, which i know is relative and unsubstantial sounding, in a context of behind-the-scenes abuse. nonetheless, i dont want to make things worse for them! this is endlessly difficult to work through, for me.

but at the very least, im suggesting that we stay strong and non-judgmental for that survivor, and that we not forget what we know, and that we are available, ready, and willing to have their back when they are ready to let other people know about what has been happening. it pretty much always pains me to go about things this way, but this is what ive been taught and its what i do in the spirit of erring on the side of caution for the sake of the person most directly affected.

and what about when it starts to affect me, directly? what about when i find myself sharing space with someone whose abusive tendencies i have privileged knowledge of? honestly, i squirm. i keep my distance. i wait until i can say something. in other words, until they do something towards me, or in my presence, that is blatantly fucked up, or until the survivor speaks more

Some of the resources I've read about mentoring or facilitating an accountability process talk about "the hardest part", and everyone seems to have their own experiences of what that superlative means. I would say the hardest part about this sexual violence/ accountability work is sexual violence itself. It's hard to listen to someone point blank admit to raping someone, and harder still to hear all their hypotheses of "why", knowing that there will never be a reason, as much as anyone could want some sort of reason or solution. It's hard to feel motivated to keep up with meeting, checking in with my co-facilitator, and keeping in communication. It's hard to write this right now. Sometimes it feels like I have this wellspring of energy (and anger) and other times it's all I can do to show up and be present.

### A FEW MONTHS LATER

And after writing this a couple months ago, and doing some reflecting,

and after some more really hard breaches of trust, I've decided to step back from our bi-weekly meetings. I feel like I've really lost my sense of where things are at, and am having a harder and harder time seeing things critically, taking the time and energy to focus on our work, and being present for it. I hope I can get it back, because I don't think working with people in my community on issues of sexual violence will ever stop being important to me. Right now, I'm looking for a little hope, a little inspiration, something to sustain me. A little help please?





By Maya

The first priority has been communication.

There were a couple meetings regarding a battering personality and a survivor who stepped out into our group of friends seeking support.

This process unnecessarily involved taking sides and people becoming either bored with the topic or exhausted. The meetings involved housemates and friends of both parties. People spoke about their experiences with both individuals and suggested possible solutions to problems dealing with partner abuse. Each person took turns and everyone was reminded to not interrupt or talk over others.

A community is a network, a root system for radicals alike and needs to be there for friends and members when dealing with serious issues such as trauma and abuse. The community needs to foster safe spaces and open forums to discuss these topics and help survivors recover.

The accountability process could involve helping friends and community members seek counseling whether one-on-one or through a support group such as AA depending upon the situation and the needs of others. Workshops could be held like self-defense classes or a speech on practicing consent. The issue of whether or not the perpetrator deserves to be sent to authorities or not or dealt with in a grassroots way.

There has been a lot of chaos. People have not been stepping up and owning their shit. Others were bringing irrelevant issues into play and demonizing others. Violence has furthered and people are losing friendships. Other than meetings there were no other outlets for healing, such as workshops or classes.

I also think that there can be simultaneous processes that do not infringe upon the sovereignty of the survivor and not only that there "can" be, but that there almost necessarily *needs* to be, if we truly support the idea that the abuse was not the fault of the survivor. I say this because I have never known of a situation where a person was emotionally or sexually abusing someone else, without there being any signs, in their other relationships, that this behaviour was not far off. *every person I have ever known of* who has been called out showed signs of manipulating, taking advantage of, intimidating, or otherwise abusing other people in their lives, past and present. so although it can feel "sudden" to those of us who were comfortable believing that these people were trustworthy, no one "suddenly" becomes a sexual predator. no one "suddenly" becomes really fucking good at dominating their partners, or housemates, or collective members.

and yet, "suddenly", we are all like, "fuck, I thought they were just [girl crazy], [really sexual], [kinda manipulative], [angry], [drunk], [awkward], [weird]", what have you. sometimes followed by the feeling that we, also, have been lied to, put at risk, manipulated, humiliated, etc.

sometimes, we might also experience this phenomenon of realising that we have had more serious grievances with someone in our lives, perhaps a friend or ex-partner, than we were willing to admit, prior to seeing that they were capable of making other people feel the same way. and this can be really jarring! its not a coincidence that a lot of abusive and violent people use isolation as a tactic for keeping their targets under their control. it creates a dynamic wherein it becomes easy for us to believe that its happening to us because we are making them do it. we dont know that theyre doing it to other people, as well, so we dont know that it is a *pattern* of behaviour that has nothing to do with our behaviour, in particular. that its *their* problem, not ours! so there are degrees of "involvement", for sure.

and as people intimately involved in the life of the person doing the abusive and violent things, any of us should have the right to make our own demands (as long as we are bearing in mind that the demands are on our behalf or the behalf of the community at large, and not speaking for what is best for any single survivor.)

even people in rather distant positions, as, say, someone who is part of an organisation or collective with the abuser, that doesnt know the abuser well, but shares space with them and plays a role in giving the abuser an impression that their behaviour will or will not be tolerated, needs to be given opportunities to outline some of their own conditions for continuing to share space with the person whose behaviour has been so problematic. again, this is not *just* because of the need that each of us has to feel safe, but because it is *absolutely crucial* that we not give them the impression that we believe, for a second, that the survivor did anything to deserve the abuse or assault, and that therefore *anyone* can and should feel threatened, if there are no measures taken to see that the abuser changes dramatically.

i think this process is important for a lot of reasons, some of which are, admittedly, potentially problematic.

one refers back to an issue that I already brought up, about understanding that it may take survivors a long time to stop blaming themselves for what happened to them. in light of this, I know that there can be times where



abusers. they are not seen as rapeable by almost everyone socialised within their culture. this is even more true for men who pass as straight, right?

so since im just trying to talk about what might become a barrier to understanding, for outsiders, looking in, i think its worth pointing out that maybe everyone can imagine that they can relate to the experience that the survivor ("in question") is seeking support for, but no ones trauma entitles them to judgment of another persons experience with violence. period.

putting the "community" back in to "community-based approaches to dealing with violence"

ive noticed that a HUGE area of contention amongst folks trying to support survivors and / or accountability processes is on the subject of the rights of *other* members of the community to make demands of the person being called out. there seems to be a whole lot of resistance to the position that anyone who feels affected should be able to make their own demands of the person whose behaviour is hurting them in some way, though this is the position that i am leaning more and more towards, as i have more and more experiences with abusive and sexually violent people in my circles of friends. i dont know if the issue is always one of people taking the rhetoric around "survivor-focused", "survivor-centered", "survivor-determined" approaches to advocacy completely literally, but whatever the case, im proposing that we re-examine our attitudes about community involvement in proposing the terms of an accountability process.

i am definitely *not* proposing that i have any answers. i am only attempting to illuminate some phenomena that i have observed, that i think warrant attention in this discourse, generally. and ask some questions, since your guess about what to do about any of it is as good as mine.

though, first, i want to say that being "survivor-focused" (in principle and in practice) should never, ever be compromised in some very specific ways. that, specifically, the survivor is the *only* person who is entitled to an opinion about what needs to be done for them to feel that there has been accountability for the ways that they were violated and abused. that the survivor be understood to have an endlessly complicated relationship to their own healing, and what is required for that, that should never, ever become usurped by the perspectives and demands of other people in the life of the person being called out on what is "best" for the survivor. that everyone who even ventures to have an opinion on the subject of what "should" or "should not" be done for the sake of the survivor be gently reminded that the survivor, most likely, feels something akin to powerlessness. that making decisions for them or giving them advice (let alone, criticism!) can reinforce these feelings and set them waaaaaay back in their process of sorting through all the layers of pain and violation and re-awakening.

when i think of "survivor-focused", i think of a process wherein the survivor is supported through the often slow and confusing task of figuring out what they need to feel safe again. i think of there being time and space for that person to change their mind. a lot. i think of communities respecting the right that that person deserves to establish the conditions under which they have to deal with the subject of their abuse, even if its inconvenient for the people around them and makes people feel antsy and uncomfortable.

What has worked was having the two people involved in an unhealthy relationship that affected a household and group of friends talk to each other with a mediator present. Having too many people present affected everyone's energy levels and the survivors feeling of safety. What doesn't work is when people aren't aware of the issue at hand and assume what it's about. Due to sexist, subtle subconscious conditioning, people took the side of the male over the female, even though he is a violent character. It doesn't make sense and ends up causing further damage to the survivor.

It is so important to support the survivor and to help them meet their needs. To be present and listen and be a true friend is a matter of the heart.

The whole situation was pretty fucked up because no one really was following through with their word. Agreements were broken. At a meeting the perpetrator called the victim a whore in front of everyone, who was totally out of line and I was the only one to say anything about it and to tell him that he didn't have a right to say that and that was a part of his problem being a sexist asshole. the issue of sexism needed to be addressed and everyone was running away from being "punk" and calling themselves artists instead thinking that art has nothing to do with ideals.

Since all of this we've been having more "girls' nights", which have included writing, sharing stories, watching movies about rad women, staying away from sexists as much as possible, going to therapy and counseling, etc. We are all in this together, and we are dedicated to a feminist future.



Some things I learned while trying to help friends of mine hold themselves accountable:

1. I can not do this work alone. It will drive me completely crazy. I need support.
2. Support is best in person, but over the phone is better than nothing.
3. Before meeting with/reading emails from the person I am trying to help be accountable, I need to make sure my support person will be available for me to decompress/discuss the situation.
4. Support person should be able to be emotionally supportive, and also to help me stay in touch with reality: When am I having emotions that have to do more with my own history than with the situation at hand? When am I letting things slide because I care about the abuser and don't want them to feel bad? When should I let my anger subside before communicating further? When is the anger totally something they should hear? When is it getting to be too much for me to handle?
5. It is ok to say I can't do it any more.

6. The assaulter should/must have outside therapy; but if they go to anger management - or therapists that primarily work with abusers, it is likely that they will be told that they are not an abuser. Try and find a feminist therapist, or talk ahead of time of this likelihood. The abusers I worked with were emotionally crushed by the label abuser, so this was a real problem. They must understand that we and the therapist might be coming from different understandings of abuse. Explain the long history of the mainstream views on what counts as rape/assault, (like that it used to not count if you raped your wife. Date rape didn't used to count, etc.) Explain that many therapists think that if the assaulter's conscious intentions weren't bad, then they are not really at fault. We do not agree.

IF THEY ARE A DUDE looking in, from the outside, its not enough for them to just be like "i know i have privilege, and i know i dont experience things the same way (or even in comparable ways) to my female-perceived friends", while they are spouting off their opinions on how everyone is handling a situation to anyone who will listen. it is also so, so crucial that they think about the ways that people are trained to seek their approval (socialised males and socialised females), and how much more weight their opinions may be able to carry, without anyone giving their permission for them to do so (the speaker, included)! they can be acting the part of a great ally in all the prescribed ways (me being cynical), but the bottom line is that their judgments and opinions may have a disproportionately great influence on the narrative that people take away from a situation, or on the survivors sense of validation, or on the abuser / assaulter's sense of validation, than they might even want! we all need to be fucking careful to not give mens voices more power over our perceptions of things, by default, simply because they are men.

yet.

recently, some men in my life have brought up to me that they feel like women actually have more power in these types of situations, because men are (now, and in these circles) afraid to question them for fear of being seen as oppressive. the only thing i can really come up with for this predicament, right now, is that we really dont have a better temporary solution (like all aspects of our current models for community accountability) than to encourage men to look deep within themselves at what is causing them to feel like they want to be able to ask those questions, while encouraging them to remain quiet, until theyre sure theyve figured out their motives and are sure that they are good ones. maybe ask, is there a latent, or not so latent, belief that someone is "over-reacting"? that, perhaps, the survivor is being "dramatic"? that they are "vindictive" / "catty" / "manipulative"; etc? i realise that my use of these words is loaded here, and that it may feel really rude to have anyones desire for clarity be equated with misogynistic and victim-blaming undertones, but im afraid thats what weve got to work with, until our entire culture experiences a momentous shift. however, im not suggesting that if we ask ourselves these questions that the answers will most certainly be "yes!" and i will be victorious in another round of proving that all men are shit-heads. i believe that there are situations where they will be able to say to themselves, confidently, that their desire to ask clarifying questions or critically look at the terms of the accountability process is from a place of utmost respect for the survivor, and with a thorough understanding of the ways that they can not, in a lot of cases, understand how it feels to be in the other persons shoes, especially after a lifetime of being targeted by gendered violence. at which point, as ive already said, i would encourage them to be fucking careful.

i, also, really want to be careful to not overlook the fact that a lot (A LOT) of men in my life and who are involved in these discourses are living as survivors of sexual violence and emotional and physical abuse. in this sense, they have experienced what it feels like to be targeted. and that is real and that is something that they carry with them, for sure. and i think the main, significant difference is that intimate violence towards men is not so much "systematic". it is not reinforced by every aspect of our culture. men, despite their experiences and trauma, are not taught that they are invulnerable from agents outside of their



i think that people, in general, need to become a lot more patient during processes of UNLEARNING violent, oppressive behaviour. whether the behaviour is coming from a position of white privilege, class privilege, gender privilege, ability privilege, citizenship privilege, (you get where im going), trauma, mental illness, misunderstanding, addiction, cultural difference, or whatever. even saying that someone has changed dramatically since the incident(s) in question plays into this idea that abusive, violent, oppressive behaviour is easily and quickly abandoned with a little encouragement. it gives us all the impression that we can say sorry and actually *make up* for the suffering that we have caused in the lives of anyone who we oppress, systematically or intimately.

so not only does sticking up for people being called out make the survivor feel like shit (understatement of the year), it sets a bad example for communities who believe that change is possible, by setting low standards for how that change is attained and actualised. as people with radical visions, critical of the world / industrial civilisation at large and our socialisation as monsters within it, we need to have higher standards for ourselves and those we love.

barriers to understanding  
nuances to being on the outside, looking in.

a lot of times, i see people who are close / getting close with the person being called out, acting like the judge and jury of what went down. asking inappropriate questions, demanding "proof", and it seems really, really important to me that it be said, loud and clear, that *describing* assault or abuse *does not* and *can not* possibly fully convey how it felt and what happened on psychological levels, in those moments. its ridiculous to think that any of us, as outsiders, without intimate knowledge of the context(s) in with the abuse or assaults were occurring, are entitled to judge the validity of the survivors experience. abuse and assault are not qualifiable by anyone but the person who experienced it- *not just because* we robotically "respect survivors", but because real life power dynamics are developed over time, through patterns of behaviour that have effects on the degree to which a person is empowered to stand up for themselves, see abuse for what it is, hold the abuser / assaulter accountable, etc.

in other words, we need to never expect people to be able to recreate their experiences for us, knowing that it is virtually impossible to speak about an experience with violence in a way that is accessible to someone outside of it. ESPECIALLY when the person who has lived through it is still sort of realising everything that happened to them. in my experience, getting out of an emotionally abusive or sexually violent situation is like having an out of body experience. speaking for myself, this can be even more extreme if i really cared for the person who was hurting me. things constantly look different than they did, from where i was positioned at the time. i can, later, see things i didnt see, in those moments. but that can take a long, long time. and it will be different for everyone.

7. Know my limitations: I can only work with people who understand that they have been abusive. I can not work with people if they refuse to meet demands. I can not work with people who are manipulative or who ignore my own stated needs.

8. At the beginning, make sure the abuser knows that the needs of the survivor will likely change radically over time. In the beginning, demands might seem unsustainable/unfair. Make sure they understand that the boundaries and needs of the survivor are often extreme, because assault/abuse is extreme. When a person has been intimately hurt by someone they thought they could trust, it makes sense that they wouldn't trust them in any way and that they would need strong boundaries, right?! If the assaulter honors the demands/boundaries, there is more likely a chance that some amount of safety will be rebuilt, and the boundaries might become less extreme. However, they should also be aware that even if they do meet demands, the survivor might still feel unsafe/have more demands. It is generally impossible for the survivor to know what they need. Needs change.

It is a bad set up for the abuser to think that if they meet a set of demands, all will be well. Make sure they understand the larger picture.

9. Don't call it an accountability process if it's just me and the assaulter working to hold them accountable. It's just me trying to help.

10. Set definite times to meet and means of contact, and stick to that, even if we live in the same house or run into each other often. Being on call 24/7 will create an atmosphere in my daily life that is full of dread. Same with emails. They are not allowed to just email whenever, or I will always dread checking my email.

11. I can not change the abuser. Do not martyr myself. They deserve education, communication, and a chance to change, but I, personally, can not fix them.

-cindy crabb, doris zinc



by wendy

I know incredible people (friends, roommates, neighbors, acquaintances) participating in survivor support and accountability processes in multiple realms. And although we as folks working towards communities capable of preventing and adequately addressing abuse and violence have quite a task ahead of us, I am continually thankful that I know so many folks who are knowledgeable of and engaged in anti-abuse and anti-violence work... I wish everyone new so many people who actively cared because of course everyone should, but that's not reality (yet) and I know I am lucky and privileged.

Reflecting on current and past support and accountability processes that I've been part of, I often revert to feelings of confusion and recognize that there were/are several situations in which no clear resolution was/is available. And this isn't because I lack critical thinking skills or the ability to adapt concepts to complex circumstances. It's because people and power and communities are often incredibly confusing and contradictory and so are most of our concepts of support and accountability, especially in relation to concepts of communication, transparency, and power. While our inconsistencies have been a source of frustration for me at times, I also really appreciate these inconsistencies and know that they accurately depict our relationships, processes, and communities, they accurately depict the limitations of the structures we're part of but also fighting against, they keep us on our toes, keep us humble and keep us creative. It's the silence surrounding the confusion and complexity that instigate my own feelings of stress and shame, and so I greatly appreciate the space that zines (like this one!) and discussions and other forums provide to acknowledge and experiment with difficult subjects. Below are a few of my own dilemmas that maybe you're struggling with as well.

- How do we manage the contradictions between survivor support and community responsibility, especially the need for communities to make transparent and well-informed decisions (decisions with significant repercussions) regarding accused perpetrators?
- For what types of abuse is banning appropriate? For how long? Who should be able to initiate "bans" and for what reasons? For

it is so, so, so unfair to not take responsibility for our own biases and motives as the lovers, friends, collective members, housemates, or community members of a person being called out. I know for myself, because I was conditioned to associate love and violence from being raised, from early childhood, in such an environment and started on a similar trajectory early in my dating / sex life, not to mention being socialised within a misogynistic patriarchy, that I am still attracted to abusive dynamics in my life, today, even when I'm not conscious of it! so I am not always the best judge of whether someone is exploiting me or someone around me, because a lot of those behaviours are really "familiar" to me. if this is true about you, too, examine that! because even though we are not obligated to work through our own issues at a faster pace than what we are ready for, and aren't to blame if we are manipulated into trusting someone who abuses us, it's actually *not responsible* to ignore our own tendencies towards abusive situations when we are in a position (in the life of someone being called out / in the life of someone calling someone else out) where our behaviour implies a judgment on the validity of someone else's experience with abuse from someone we trust as a result of our own biases, whatever they may be. that we have biases is true of all people, with any variation in experiences.

it's probably important that I mention here, though it's not really in the direction I want this section to be going, that people who get involved with people who later become abusive are not stupid. not asking for it. shouldn't have "known better". shouldn't have "seen it coming", whether they had news that that person has a history of abuse or sexually violent behaviour, or not. it should be well understood that abusers are often extremely charismatic, extremely charming, and from what I have observed in my own, "radical" communities, EXTREMELY good at manipulating language around ally-ship, accountability, support, etc. it is not uncommon for people who have been called out in radical communities to completely master the rhetoric around transformation and accountability so that they may be accepted back into a scene which allows them to feel that they are more enlightened than the general population. which, lets be honest, is often how radical analyses are framed. and abusive, exploitative people are just as susceptible to needing validation as anyone. I am merely pointing out that no one should be thought of as immune to enacting the various ways that they have been shown that they can fuck people over, no matter how trustworthy they seem.

which is part of why I kind of think, across the board, that it's a good idea to refrain from sticking up for people who have been called out. by "sticking up", I mean specifically saying things like, "they wouldn't have done that", or "they've changed so much since that happened", or "it wasn't that big of a deal... [person calling them out] is just crazy / sensitive / dramatic / overly-emotional / etc." I know that saying that we should never stick up for people being called out is a controversial stance, but hear me out:



in this way, in the situation that involves the three of us, the best thing we can do is keep the subject on the table. to take precautions so that no shame is associated with her bringing stuff up, and by having it so that sies not the only one bringing stuff up.

implicated. our role in holding them accountable. our responsibility to the person who they hurt.

i can not stress enough how important i think it is for any person intimately involved in the life of someone who has been called out for any form of abuse or sexually violent behaviour to see themselves as hugely influential in creating an impression that being responsible for the consequences and prevention of that same behaviour is either glaringly "unimportant", or glaringly "non-negotiable". our conduct towards people who have been called out, and towards the people calling our loved ones out, paves paths of either escape or support. accountability, or business as usual, and this impression is not only made on the people most directly involved, but on our communities in general. to everyone paying attention.

the most disturbing scenarios that i have encountered in my experience with advocating on behalf of survivors of abuse or assault in a "radical, community-based" context are the ones where someone who is new to the life of the abuser / assaulter becomes extremely outspoken in defending them. when friends and lovers of abusive, violent, or exploitative people misdirect their desire to support their friend or lover (who they have reason to believe is not capable of that which they have already done to warrant the reputation that preceded them) towards efforts to undermine and invalidate the experiences of the people who have been abused and assaulted, their denial and protectiveness further traumatises those who have had to go through the (often) humiliating and exhausting experience of calling their abuser out.

i understand that our roles, especially as "survivors" of our own histories and experiences with violence, can become really complicated. i understand that there is a lot of trauma standing in line behind everything that we do, as humans socialised in a vicious and soul-sucking world, and that its not always easy to confront an abuser / perpetrator of assault because it forces us to empathise with the suffering that they have caused in the life of the person(s) they have hurt, which can be horribly triggering!

and while its not our "fault" if we are too traumatised by our own histories of abuse to stand up to our loved ones, and hold them accountable to the needs of the people they have hurt, *at the very least* we have to not perpetuate the idea that the demands being made of them are frivolous, unfounded, or unimportant.

community members (i.e. not survivors, not folks who've witness abuse, not close friends and family members) can banning be acceptable upon initially hearing about allegations of abuse or should it only be a last resort after all other possibilities are tried (obviously this question omits any situation where a possibility of physical safety is possibly at stake... right?). At what point (or relationship) do "boundaries" become "punishments" or reasons to not deal with those accused of abuse?

- What do we do when a survivor's needs conflict with the needs of other community members? Whose needs do we prioritize? Why?
- How do we guard against righteous authenticity (i.e. this is what real support and accountability looks like)?
- Similarly, how do we ensure that people's roles in support and accountability are not premeditated? >either you do this/react in this way or you're not supportive/willing/able to hold someone accountable?
- How do we structure accountability processes so they are not tests or measures of linear enlightenment or other structures that are coercive? (When you think/react this way, you are a safe, accountable person, and until you think/react this way...or is this manner of thinking just a natural consequence of people's behaviors and views?)
- In cases of dual perpetrator/survivor status, which status do we prioritize?
- How do we approach allegations of abuse that are not public knowledge (when survivors have disclosed abuse to individuals but do not want to share that information with other community members or the accused)? At what point is implicit silence/secretory too much of a burden to shoulder? Whose wellbeing is prioritized?

Even with all these unknowns, the uncertainties, the inherent fuck-ups and pain, I do know that attempting accountability processes is important. And there are a lot of risks...of being unpopular, of losing friends, of hurting ourselves or people we care about, of not being able to trudge through the uncomfortable and perplexing conflicts. Ultimately, being vulnerable and attempting to address abuse as a community, even at the risk of being known as that person or those people or that community that fucked-up or "wasn't good at it," is necessary because otherwise we're fucking up anyway. Thank you to the many people (survivors, perpetrators, friends, family members, partners, coworkers, housemates, neighbors, bystanders) taking risks to build communities of support and healing.



## We Found A Way To Heal

by Robnoxious

Time will heal a wound on the body, but you also have to take care of your wound in a specific way so it doesn't fester and rot. Like a physical wound, time will also heal psychic and emotional wounds, but you must also take care of these in specific ways. Ignoring psychological and emotional trauma, hoping it will go away, will only make the suffering continue, and even cause you to act out that same trauma on other people. This has been my experience.

After dealing with sexual abuse in our community (non-mainstream, underground, alternative, anarchist, punk), in the roles of survivor, perpetrator, and supporter, I have seen that the most common method for dealing with sexual abuse is Silence. Ignore it because it's too painful to deal with. My experience with that method is that the pain continued to rot and fester inside of me, and it did not go away, it increased. I have also supported a friend who was afraid to hold someone accountable for sexual abuse. Silence.

I have held myself accountable for sexually abusive behavior, and I have held someone else accountable for being sexually abusive to me, and I have supported a close friend who was holding someone accountable for sexual abuse. (I am going to use the phrase "sexual abuse" for this article, because it seems confusing to use different labels in an attempt to categorize specific experiences. I realize this is problematic because using one word to represent a spectrum of different experiences makes everything vague. By abuse I mean someone who has knowingly or un-knowingly inflicted pain on someone else, physically or emotionally.)

Sad to say it FEELS like I have done it all: but it's not true. Every person's experience is different and specific. My experience with sexual abuse accountability and support are unique to me. In specific ways it seems all the

...that i would have to have a conversation with his ex about the romance that was developing between us, and that i would make any decisions about what to do after that. i wanted him to know that i valued her experiences, and cared a great deal about supporting her, no matter what. and that whatever the case, i still wanted him to work at understanding what he put her through and how to be accountable, now.

i called my friend, his ex, the one who he had been verbally and emotionally abusive to, the one who was in the process of figuring out what she needed in general, and what she needed from him, to feel more okay about their past and start to think about what might be able to happen in the future.

i think i first left a message, letting her know that i would want to have a conversation about him, if she were willing, and to call me back if she wanted. i dont honestly remember exactly what i said. but she called me back, and i basically told her that romantic feelings were developing between he and i, but that i wouldnt even consider being romantically intimate with him if it would cause her to feel as though she had lost support or that i hadnt taken her seriously from the get-go.

we had a really honest conversation about what each of us was thinking about and what each of us was feeling. she happens to be a really amazing, emotionally responsible individual who was capable of being open about what it was that she was worried about, what i could do to prevent further harm, what it was that she still really struggled with from her past with him, what she thought she needed, etc.

we came up with a plan to be in touch. to keep checking in about how things were going, with an understanding that she could be honest with me if, at any point, she felt like mine and his relationship was threatening her healing process or our friendship.

i cant say whether or not ive done "a good job". thats for her to say, one way or the other. but we are still in touch, still sharing our lives with one another, discussing unrelated things probably more than this situation, which comes up with less and less frequency as the past gets further and further away and we all move forward with our separate lives. as none of the three of us live in the same place, its been a lot less frequent, as an issue, than many other situations would bc, were we all sharing space and what not.

he and i still talk about what hes working on, what he needs to be working on, what i need from him in order to feel that hes becoming a safer person, etc. i dont speak for her and never have. in this situation, there have been no demands that he is not respecting, however there are no formal processes for him to either participate in or ignore. i have advocated for the things she has said she would like from him, but not with consequences. in other words, i have not always known what my role can be as far as him actually being accountable.

because the point of accountability is not that perpetrators jump when we say so, but that they come to deeply understand what theyve done, take measures to reduce further harm to the person or people that they hurt by respecting the needs that have come out of the situation, and work to change so that they do not do the same things, again, and this is a long process. and not always easily measured.



prior to me having the perspective and leverage to be able to identify and name all of these things, i wrote a letter to involved members of the "community", pleading with them to make the process easier on me. asking them to stop saying things that made it worse. encouraging them to locate whatever courage they needed to locate to create a climate of care and concern for these types of situations in our little city and little scene. i wasnt ready, yet, to call him an "abuser" i was still fucked up and taking way too much responsibility for what had happened. i was still being manipulated by his excuses that he had had such a fucked up life and that that was why he had done what he did. but i knew that i was not getting the support that i wanted to be able to expect from a bunch of people who claimed to care about radical, community-based approaches to ending intimate violence and demanding accountability.

roles reversed. getting into a romantic relationship with someone who has been abusive to someone i love. within a year of me getting out of that relationship, i found myself being romantically attracted to a dear friend of mine who i knew full-well had been emotionally and verbally abusive to another good friend of mine. i knew a lot of the intimate details, even, because of being close to both parties. and i knew that some of the ways he had treated her were uncannily similar to some of the ways i had been treated in the abusive dynamic that i was still recovering from.

oh no! it was dangerous and delicate for a lot of obvious reasons, not the least of which being that i clearly have an attraction to abusive people that goes way back to the foundations of my socialisation and that desperately needs to be broken if im to ever have healthy, nourishing relationships! but ill discuss that in the next section.

the relevant part, for right now, is that i needed to be really fucking careful to not recreate any of the experiences that i mentioned above in the life of my friend who had lived through the abuse of our other friend and had had the strength to call him on it and seek safety for herself. i knew only too well how much it could seem like someone was wiping out any and all effort that was being put into holding an abusive person accountable, so i thought, specifically, about how to **not** give the following impressions:

- (a) that i didnt believe that the way she had been treated was truly fucked up and scary and unfair
- (b) that i hadnt been listening
- (c) that i thought that it was because of *her* that he had acted that way, and that he would treat me differently
- (d) that i would do whatever i wanted, despite how it would make her feel
- (e) that i would no longer be available to support her, if i were to become romantically involved with him

same: someone did something that hurt someone else, and the person who suffered the abuse needs to be supported so they can heal, and the person who

did the abuse needs to be responsible for their actions and for changing their

present behavior so they don't hurt anyone again in the future.

I have had a number of experiences with sexual abuse in my adult life, and

never recognized any of them as being sexual abuse when they happened. Only

years later would I come to understand the damage done to me. Ignoring pain is

a defense mechanism, the Silence method of dealing with pain sometimes works

automatically in your mind, for survivors and perpetrators. To protect your

psyche, the memory is put out of reach of your consciousness.

I think it's important to share our experiences, if we can, to create space that

makes it possible for people to express their experiences and find the help they

need. The open ears of just ONE person can release a lot of the bottled up pain.

Here are my four stories about accountability.

The first time I remember being sexually abused was by a doctor in Little

Rock who was administering a test for an STI which involved inserting a long

swab into the urethra to obtain a fluid sample. She did this to me without

warning and it hurt terribly, when I jumped back clutching my genitals she

shamed me, "Hah! Typical man." The physical pain of this abuse persisted for

weeks, I had been internally damaged. She penetrated me without my

permission and to this day the experience will come to my mind and I will clasp

my legs close and feel that stabbing pain and shudder. It was a violation of my

body and the memory of it makes me angry for years. Looking back I wonder,

what abuse did she suffer that she was now passing on to me?

I'm still angry but I begin to feel some compassion.



Everyone's experience is different. I could look at this experience and say,

well, it wasn't that bad, compared to some things that my female bodied friends

have survived. Recognizing yourself as a survivor of sexual abuse is not about

judging your experience against anyone else's. What's important for you as a

survivor is to recognize that you were abused and that it wasn't your fault and

the person who did it was fucked up and bears the responsibility for their

actions. They are the ones that need to change and stop doing abusive things.

There is nothing I can do to hold that doctor accountable, it was a dozen years

ago and I have no names or addresses. Sometimes there's nothing you can do to

hold someone accountable. I have to accept that. The only thing I can do is share

my story and tell people not to trust doctors, don't trust any authority.

Trust yourself.

This is part of the reason I declined to participate in the process of a men's

group when I recognized myself in the role of perpetrator. I felt a distrust of

organizations, even tho it was a collective. After I tested positive for genital

herpes I entered a period of time where I decided it would be okay not to tell

sexual partners that I had herpes. I knew better, but I justified this in my mind by

rationalizing: if I wasn't having a breakout it was a low enuf risk that I didn't

have to tell them. Failure to fully disclose the risk of infection to a sexual partner

was a failure to gain consent. If my sexual partners had known I had herpes, they

might have declined the encounter. By not revealing the truth about my body, I

had sexually abused my lovers.

I wrote about this fuck up in my zine and gave it to everyone I knew, I louted

myself. I then worked to change my behavior and learn how to be open and tell a

sexual partner that I had herpes. I changed my behavior rapidly and now I

always tell a sexual partner that I have herpes. I've turned down sexual

encounters with people who I thot were too drunk to make a good decision about

exposing themselves to herpes. I also tried to contact the sexual partners in the

very early on in this process of distancing myself from almost everything associated with him, a person in the community that i had spent a fair amount of time working on survivor support / accountability stuff with began dating this abuser. some of her friends who were supporting me became concerned for her because of what i was able to share with those i trusted about what i had been through with him, and tried to make her aware of the fact that she was getting involved with someone who had a slew of abusive tendencies and who had been adamantly opposed to taking any sort of responsibility for his behavior or respecting any of the boundaries that i had tried to set up to keep us separate.

i then got an email from the woman who had just started to get to know the abuser, telling me "i cant support this accountability process because i just dont consider what he did to you to be abuse".

and that fucking hurt, real fucking bad. i was not capable, at that point, of understanding that this was her own survival mechanism and not a reflection on the validity of my experience. it fucking set me so far back in my process of trying to un-do all of the damage that he did by blaming me for everything. so far back.

later on, but still less than a year into my very slow healing process, a very good friend of mine began dating this same abuser, at that point telling me that she would not be available to support me anymore, and that she was unwilling to acknowledge the efforts i had made to identify his dangerous behaviour and the demands that i had made of him. just like that, in one swoop. via text message. she said things to me like "what happened between the two of you is between the two of you", and, "i know that my getting involved with him means we cant be friends right now, and that is the choice that ive made". so, ouch.

these types of experiences contribute to this thing im experiencing even now, in this moment of writing, where im having to fight off the urge to defend myself. this feeling that i have to explain myself to the reader. that i have to re-live all of the shit ive already lived through and re-lived through a million times because of the amount of people who made me feel like i had to make a case for why what i was put through should be taken seriously. because you wont believe me. because im making a big deal out of nothing. because this language is trendy and misused (things he would say to me when i would tell him i thought our relationship was "abusive". i didnt have the courage or self-esteem, while experiencing the abuse, to delineate between what was his responsibility and what was mine. it was always that our "relationship" was concerning, in the few times i tried to address it with him...).

but im not gonna do it. youll just have to take my word for it, and consider it practice for when youre faced with someone who is not as far along in their process of reclaiming the dignity and scif-love that they lost to an abuser as i am, after a whole lot of support and space and distance.

because it took me a long, long, long time to put the majority of my experiences into words. not until long, long, long after i needed people to believe me.



i also want to acknowledge that my experience with intimate and sexual violence is not inclusive of a very wide range of peoples experiences in the world. i dont talk much about physical violence because it isnt talked about as much as emotional abuse or sexual assault is, in my world. i dont know a lot of people in abusive situations who also have kids with the person hurting them, or who are married, or who have other limitations to their options to get out. i am, for whatever its worth, coming at this subject from a place where most of my experiences have been from within a community that claims to care, and know better, and which seeks out ways to address these sorts of situations without the consultation of cops, professional counseling, the legal system with all of its restraining orders and court summons and everything else, etc...

my way of talking about the subject of intimate violence, and about the nuanced roles within our processes of dealing with it, is very much directed by my expectation that those reading this are ready to fucking move forward. to get better at this, after all our hard work. to stop re-traumatizing people. to stop replicating the same dynamics that we reject law enforcement on the basis of. to start understanding this realm of violence, deeply, and predict what will happen next. for the exceptions to our indoctrination into exploitation and abuse can not determine our approaches! and our own trauma needs to become our reason for giving more of a shit, instead of turning away.

### **being intimately involv'd with someone who has been called out for abuse or sexual assault.** ( responsibility to others )

*i am coming at this subject from a number of places, and i want to illuminate each of those positions in case anyone reading this relates to any of them. so first ill tell my stories, then ill offer my ideas for how to be intimately involved with someone who has been called out in a respectful, supportive way to various people involved. the next section is where i will talk about some ideas i have for how to keep yourself safe.*

the pain, first. some things that make getting out of an abusive relationship even harder than it already is.

the pain that i have associated with this subject comes from having certain friends of mine and some people i was living closely with blatantly not support me when i was going through the terrifying process of admitting to the people around me that i was being verbally and emotionally abused by someone liked and trusted in our community. i had to do this, for my safety, because i had been so isolated from everyone throughout the course of my relationship with him that the only way to reduce the triggers of having people associating us all the time was to be pretty blunt about why i needed to avoid situations where i would need to be around him. we worked together in a social justice type of organisation that was very small, took a class together at the community college, and shared a lot of the same friends and spaces, and it was a horrible process to have to basically drop out of my life in order to stop the cycle of violence from continuing.

past that i had failed to inform and apologize to them, but sometimes i'm just too little too late. At least I know that I changed and that I won't traumatize anyone in that way again. I held myself accountable as best I could. I wouldn't recommend the "go it alone" method at all, I think it was the hard way. Most things are easier to do when there's a crew to do them with.

Third story. I became sexually abused myself a year later and didn't recognize it, some part of my mind silenced the possibility. I didn't take care of the emotional trauma because my defense mechanisms had bottled the pain up. This experience happened with a long time sexual partner. Skipping the gory details, some short time after the traumatic experience I found myself intoxicated and became triggered and lashed out at my loved ones and myself, physically hurting myself. I didn't understand why I had done this until a long time later when I was reading a zine about sexual abuse and came to realize that what happened to me in that relationship with my lover was sexual abuse. I realized that the outpouring of violent, self destructive emotion that night was caused by the sexual abuse I had repressed. The bottled up emotion had exploded.

This story has a happy ending. I cut off communication with this ex-lover until she would apologize and get help. After years this finally happened. She held herself accountable. Thru email a process of healing began between us. This summer, five years later, I met her at a public place. I was scared. I was worried what would happen. I thot about the letters we had exchanged and I knew from my intuition that she was in a different place. We met and talked. It was good.

We had come full circle. I was even having fun hanging out: we once loved each other! We got food and sat in the court, I opened a bottle of sangria soda and there was too much carbonation in the bottle- the cap shot off and hit me in the nose with a sound like a gunshot! I sat clutching my nose that was stinging with pain, and then I looked at her and we laughed our asses off. Fuck yeah. Life wasn't an inevitable downward slide into darkness. It was possible to heal. It was possible for two people to recognize that each had worked to change for the better, it was possible to forgive someone and love them again.

Redemption is a beautiful thing.



something I can speak about in detail, because those are their stories, I don't want to dis-empower them by sharing their experience. Supporting my friends who had been sexually abused was something I had little idea how to do well. I often felt like I needed support in being a supporter. That kind of trauma is too intense to deal with alone. I needed a group, community solidarity, a crew. It didn't feel like there was a community out there, but in keeping with the survivors requests for confidentiality, it felt difficult to reach out

I went into all these experiences with a terrible lack of knowledge about how to deal with any of it. In a stumbling bumbling way I tried to figure out how to hold myself accountable, hold others accountable, and be supportive to my friends. I owe thanks to the creators of Support zine, which helped me realize many things. If only that zine could be the text book for a sex positive required class in a all junior high schools. Also, thanks to those friends who helped me thru hard times.

Dealing with sexual abuse is not something I hear discussed much, there is a void. It's a secret thing, silenced and forgotten. If the suffering isn't acknowledged and gets bottled up it will explode in unhealthy ways. Inward. Outward.

I never went to a counselor or support group. I went the hard route, and I wouldn't recommend it. The faster and easier way is to have other people supporting you and greasing the wheels of your healing process. I hear that there's low income counseling available in most places. The easy way, the hard way, an alternative way, realize that there are ways to climb out of the shit. The pain and hate can be acknowledged, embraced, and then dealt with. There is no reason to live in misery. We can't ignore or deny it, this is our life! Breaking the cycle of abuse in our intimate relations is serious radical activism. What could be more important?

my use of certain language is a reflection of my analysis. I do not mean to imply that one can use "abuse" and "assault" interchangeably, but I will sometimes categorise the type of behaviour that I think could mean that either of these things is occurring as simply "abusive". This is because I'm mostly trying to write about violence that occurs within intimate relationships, or within communities of people, however widespread, who acknowledge that they share some bond of one type or another. And I believe that it is within these contexts that any violation, any time that someone's vulnerability is taken advantage of, any time that power is asserted over someone else in a way that is nonconsensual and damaging to that person's sense of strength and control in their own lives, any time that someone is made to feel "unsafe", however tangible or intangible that may be, indicates that there is an abuse of trust occurring. It indicates that there is violence on an emotional level, in conjunction

with the physical or sexual violence that may or may not accompany it, and that the person doing the violent or abusive behaviour is responsible for the emotional, as well as physical, consequences of their actions.

I do, also, mean to say that even when abuse is limited to non-physical / non-sexual realms, that there is a violence occurring. I do see violence as a non-hierarchical web, and I do see that a person who, for example, can tear down their loved ones self-esteem and sense of emotional safety is committing a violent act, partly for how these effects of emotional abuse on a target translate into barriers to their ability to protect themselves against further violation.

I definitely think that it's important that people open their minds up to different definitions of violence than the ones we have been conditioned to associate with the term, because when a term like "violence" is limited to its typical imagery, a false dichotomy of safety and danger is created, wherein survivors often have a hard time validating that their own experiences may count as something terrifying, dangerous, damaging, alarming, what have you.

I also think that a lot of things can feel violent, and should be treated as such, that aren't meant to. And that a lot of things which make abusive people feel powerful aren't seen as violent, when they should be. For example, being with someone who gets easily mad at their target all the time and frequently, strategically, stops talking to them to punish them may not seem as violent as someone who screams and throws punches, but each may affect the target's ability to feel safe, or understand that they deserve something different. Each perpetuates a reality wherein we expect nothing better, and are conditioned to become more and more tolerant of more and more dangerous manifestations of violence.

It is with these things in mind that I try to talk about the following. I try to avoid words like "perpetrator", only because I think it can be a barrier to a reader's willingness to understand. It can seem too formulaic, perhaps, or too narrow a role. But I never, ever mean to imply that I think that the person who has done the damage is ever in a situation where they don't need to find some way to own that and change and move forward.



there is no guide to "how to support a process of accountability in your community" that i am aware of. radical, community-based approaches to cleaning up after abusive behavior definitely address "how to support survivors", and there are some great resources that i've seen for perpetrators about what they ought to do if they are called out, but our "community-based" approaches to addressing intimate violence often reinforce the problematic myth that abuse is contained within a specific relationship, or that the abuser was only acting the way they were acting because of how they were being provoked by the person they were abusing.

i say this because i have seen numerous examples of situations where friends of the abuser turn on the people calling them out, as though seeking safety for oneself can be confused with an offensive attack on an entire group of people, or how people often interpret their "neutral" treatment of the abuser as "not getting involved" - reflecting the prevailing taboo around calling abuse out for what it is, and reducing peoples experiences of abuse to mere matters of "opinion": rather than as something that is more or less socially mandated, predictable, and documented throughout the history of imbalanced power relationships.

we delegate people to roles of "involvement", so that the rest of us can patiently wait for the drama to pass, so we can invite perpetrators and abusers to our parties again, or make out with them without having to be reminded by the people around us of all that shit that went down with them.

i have waded through a heartbreakingly shallow analysis of intimate abuse in my community, and have ached from the signs and symptoms of surviving abuse in the reactions of almost everyone who learns of these situations as they surface. i have been especially tormented by the ways that bonds between female-socialised people are broken in the wake of these public processes of calling out (mostly) men, in particular, for abusive and / or sexually violent behavior.

*this is not, primarily, a proposal for what to do with, or about, abusive people in our lives. i want to offer a beginning to a different dialogue, on how we can not only prevent the construction of the mine-fields that abusers bestow upon the communities that they have been a part of, including how we can actually assist in the processes of those abusers facing up to their problematic behavior, while simultaneously validating the experiences of the people who have taken the brave step outside of the silence that their abuse has relegated them to by seeking safety and support, not least of all helping ourselves to stay safe in our own communities and intimate relationships with those directly involved.*

## Creating Non-Oppressive Materials for Accountability: A Community Process by Cheyenne Neckmonster (with the valued help of Aron, Mik, Frances, Crys, Rae, and many other friends— thanks y'all!)

While writing *Ask First!* (a zine about issues surrounding sexual assault), I was on the hunt for suitable resources for perpetrators. My search mostly took place online, and most of the stuff I found wasn't really satisfactory, due to its heteronormative nature. Much of the literature on sexualized violence, assault and similar issues is cast in a male=aggressor/female=victim dichotomy that perpetuates a lot of cultural myths about gender and agency. Everything else was prohibitively expensive or intended for professionals.

I found a couple of things that seemed worthwhile: a small article from [selfhelpmagazine.com](http://selfhelpmagazine.com) (which mostly discussed privilege and entitlement in a super easy way), a list of suggestions for perpetrators from *Deal With It* zine, and a short piece about Jeff Ott, the singer of Fifteen, and the self-accountability process in his zine *My World*. I included what little I could find, either in abridged entries at the end of *Ask First!* or in the bibliography, but found myself dissatisfied with the resources available for perpetrators and those working with them.

A few months later, I found myself facilitating a group discussion about how to approach perpetrators of sexualized violence in my community: the goal set (and the name for the group) became Make Louisville Awesome. Despite the fun name, sitting in the midst of my hurt friends and wishing I knew what to do, frustration rose quickly to the back of my throat and caught there: what should we tell perpetrators? How do we get them to engage with accountability processes and dialogues about respect and responsibility, in a respectful and responsible manner? I felt then, as I do now, that there's a shortage of good resources on this topic (for supporters, survivors and perpetrators in these situations; especially those of us who wish to work on community levels). In this short list of resources, there are even less that don't attempt to simply invert the implied power dynamic. It doesn't make sense to victimize perpetrators as a means of empowering survivors.

I spoke with others from the meeting about creating resources, and we all wanted something that would underscore the value of community and healing. To participate in society, it seemed clear to us that one must recognize the agency they have as an individual and the effects their actions may have on others. It seems that some perpetrators can't understand the necessity of healing *until* they understand that they are part of a community, where their actions as individuals affect those around them. Fostering empathy is crucial in this regard; without it a perpetrator can learn the lingo, act more responsibly and respectfully, but can still avoid the heartbreaking reality that their actions are responsible for hurting someone else.



My community was struggling with how to achieve accountability in a way that wasn't oppressive. A lot of the things I've read about accountability processes (and especially what I've heard from perpetrators I've worked with/spoken to) have come across as ineffective in achieving goals and maintaining a sense of community. Rather, most of these have had an oppositional or dualistic tone that perpetuates the current "justice" system in many ways. The perpetrators I've acted as ally/support for have gone through stages of guilt, anger, frustration, depression, disempowerment, and fear. Though certain styles of accountability processes are designed to enrich perpetrators and give them perspective, I've seen these efforts backfire and build resentment.

That is to say, I've never seen it done right, and I want to know how to structure an accountability process that is inclusive of everyone's needs.

My community had a few run-ins with self-management before: someone had

crossed another's boundaries, got called out, and then the effort fizzled out.

These unresolved incidents still cause tension between individuals, years later. There was no good precedent for dealing with these issues in my community, and there still isn't.

This brings me to a major frustration with working with perpetrators: some of them just don't care. I think that this is something that needs to be addressed: do we "kick them out," having given them a chance? Is there a way to encourage a reluctant person to be in an accountability process that doesn't involve threats of litigation, isolation, or violence? Making all the pamphlets and zines and facilitating discussion groups and workshops and stuff in the world isn't going to convert someone who isn't interested in being accountable for their actions.

Why do perpetrators act in the manner they do? Inappropriate behavior can be a cry for attention; are perpetrators acting out of a frustration that they are not heard? On that note, would you want to listen to someone who isn't willing to listen to you? These questions are difficult for me to answer-- and may not apply to every situation. Further, how do communities make accountability a positive thing? Checking one's privilege and entitlement is not an easy or painless process, but may be necessary for personal growth. Rather than focusing on the immediate penalty or stigma, is it possible to see accountability as a long-term commitment to oneself and one's community in a less negative light? Since I have exhausted this topic with my friends and myself I'm going to put it to you, the readers-- I am really interested in being a part of any discussions on this topic in the future-- even if it's a passing comment or an email conversation.

## friend / lover / (abuser)

ideas on how to be responsibly involved with people who have been called out for abuse or assault.

it often sounds like:

*i just don't consider what he did to be 'violent' or 'abusive', like she's saying...*

during what i imagine is a genuine, yet terrified, effort to show support for a friend or lover who has done the abusing and / or assaulting which inspires the sort of public dialogue that results in such public defensiveness

*teams are chosen. voices are silenced. cycles of abuse are ignored, while they are perpetuated. no one is safer. business as usual goes on protecting the same people who will hurt us. wounds are reopened. we dig our own graves.*

is it out of fear that people speak in defense? out of an intimate knowledge of the violent person that bears absolutely no resemblance to the behaviors that they have been called out for? out of an inability to accept that violence resides so close to home because of ones own trauma? out of a belief in the lies and manipulations that the perpetrator has defended themselves with? or out of a deep lack of familiarity with prevalent dynamics of intimacy and violence, power and silence, patriarchy and exploitation that characterises so fucking many of the relationships people have that the existence of such should sooner be assumed than denied?

it is with a disturbing frequency that i have either experienced or witnessed intimate abuse in relationships that are close to me in my adult life. i have watched my friends move out of their houses to escape dominating and abusive housemates. i have watched friends recoil in fear when they go to an event that their violent ex is attending. i have seen friends collapse into dysfunction because of the trauma that accompanies their experiences of repeated rape and abuse by their partner. i have seen myself drop out of classes, organizations, and communities to avoid having to run into someone who spent the majority of our time working together constructing a picture of me in my mind that was weak, dependent, destructive, and the cause of everything wrong in either of our lives.

and in these sad years, i have repeatedly noted (amongst the wreckage) the cavernous black hole that exists in the place of where resources ought to be available to the people "peripherally involved" when the people directly involved in these situations reach out for support from their communities.



of forms abuse takes, be it verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual, and take those seriously. A culture in which we expand our definitions of what forms of abuse warrant an aggressor to mend harms done. A culture in which we are receptive and committed to change when we act out abuse.

Right now I see a culture, in the broader society and within radical movements, with often very different and sometimes opposing values to these listed above. A culture that unfortunately supports aggressors in their defensiveness and unwillingness to change. A culture that questions survivors. A culture in which our supposedly "progressive" organizations harbor patriarchs and aggressors while discounting and ignoring survivors and people, especially women, who bring up institutionalized sexism and a lack of dealing with abusive behavior. A culture in which we minimize and deny our own and others' abusive actions. A culture in which abuse is normalized.

So, how do we change these values? How do we create communities that value accountability? I've touched on a lot of this already, but here are a few basic steps. We can believe survivors and validate their experiences. Friends and fellow community members responding to a survivor's experience with, "I'm hearing a lot of different stories," is much different than, "I believe you and want to do what's in my capacity to support you and hold the aggressor accountable." We can put more energy into learning how to support survivors by taking trainings offered by the local center against sexual assault, reading books, zines, and articles on the topic, and asking survivors what has been the most helpful for them in a support person.

We can be receptive and agree to participate in an accountability process when someone comes to us with concerns about our behavior. We can support our friends through their accountability process when they are called out for abusive behavior. We can contribute to expectations of an aggressor as they're working on addressing harms done. We can back up a survivor's demands.

We can work proactively within our communities to have accountability structures set up before someone is called out, thus acknowledging the value of accountability processes. We can emphasize the importance of a whole community's participation in a process by participating in it if we're among the most directly affected or only peripherally affected by an aggressor's behavior.

We can center accountability in our strategy for a larger movement for radical change. If we're committed to social change, then we must make addressing harms done a priority. Let's be clear that interpersonal harms are manifestations of larger systems of oppression in our society; that being accountable and participating in transformative processes without law enforcement is revolutionary. Actually putting this rhetoric that I've heard a lot, but not seen in action very often, into practice will take more effort and a lot of difficult work, as it requires each one of us to be committed to accountability.

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As a survivor, I fully understand the righteous anger and desire to make perpetrators feel like shit-- that's why we, as survivors, shouldn't be the only ones involved in the process of calling out and holding perpetrators accountable. In a way, creating lists of demands and holding others accountable reinforces the power differential that is implied in survivor/perpetrator interactions, but doesn't challenge the existence of hierarchy or power structures in themselves. We may find ourselves in both roles within the same series of interactions: what then?

In my opinion, holding ourselves and each other accountable should be everyone's job. Ideally, it would just be a function of community living, not a source of drama or extra pain. Survivors all face their own unique issues, but I've encountered a lot of very (understandably) enraged survivors who, when given a chance to channel that anger into doing this work, seek to exact revenge in some way. I don't think this is appropriate; working towards a rehabilitative model for accountability is ultimately more important than anger. If someone's safety is at stake, that is certainly an appropriate consideration, and one to be

taken seriously. Anger, on the other hand, should be taken as something that someone is experiencing and not necessarily as a vehicle for an accountability process.

From the perspective of perpetrators, many communities suffer from inconsistencies: fucked up behaviors are tolerated by some, but called out and/or ridiculed in others. If a perpetrator feels called out because of **who they are**, not **what they did**, they are more likely to react negatively. One way to address this may be to encourage community members-- perpetrators, survivors, and everyone else-- to make their own processes more transparent. Clearly communicating needs, goals and motivations leaves less room for doubt, judgment and distrust to grow. These processes don't take place in a vacuum; there are tons of factors at work here-- and social interactions and precedents color a lot of these processes and interactions.

As someone who writes zines and tries to foster learning and sharing via writing, I decided that I wanted to make some sort of easy-to-read, accessible material about being accountable and what that can look like. In my search for guides on working with perpetrators, I came across a pamphlet that was on PhillyPissed.net: *What to Do When Someone Tells you that you violated their boundaries, made them feel uncomfortable, or committed assault: a start.* I was excited that I was able to find materials from a radical source. Freely available-- and radical/DIY-- resources are difficult to find sometimes: websites go down, zines go out of print.



The pamphlet was an inspiration and a good jumping-off point for me: I wanted to make something like this. Some language needed to be changed in order to make it more widely relevant-- and, more specifically, to meet the needs of my community-- but overall, the ideas and feedback given in the original document helped our group conceptualize our own version. Before taking someone else's idea and running with it, I emailed the author: a very friendly person named Elise (who runs a listserv called HelpOUT for folks who do accountability/support work), and asked if I could tweak the tri-fold and put a new version out. Elise was excited that someone was into their project and also into making something new-- so I called a meeting and our small group made plans to meet. Creating the tri-fold was an attempt to crystallize the collective thoughts on how traumatic situations should be handled, in the best case scenario.

I made tea, some friends came over, and we looked at the original document. Over a few hours, we came up with a differently organized structure for information, paraphrased or changed some of the entries, and added some of our own. Two more meetings, about eight hours (and dozens of cups of tea) later, a

finalized draft was being passed around for feedback, input, layout suggestions, and a finished draft was nearly ready to print. It's out now, and I'm hoping to have a .pdf of it up online soon. Check my distro's website (below) for updates, or to order a free copy.

The major difference between the original document and the document that was created by Make Louisville Awesome in winter 2009 was the choice of language. Gendered language seemed inappropriate for the content, so we were careful about that, using neutral pronouns (if at all). In many of the sources I've found, there is an overall blaming, oppositional, or angry tone in articles and guides intended for perpetrators; this was another consideration-- I'm not fond of the "tough love" approach. Meeting perpetrators as equals, as people who fucked up, was central to the message of the tri-fold. The scope was broadened in our version to include incidences of other interpersonal trauma: verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, etc. The title was changed, too: *What to do when you've been called out: A brief guide.*

affecting not just them, but many people within the community. It also responded to the isolation and silence the aggressor had created concerning their actions.

I think it's also important to include organizations in community accountability processes. To acknowledge their space within communities and how an organization's actions (either supporting a survivor or endorsing an aggressor openly or through inaction) can affect how necessary the aggressor thinks it is to engage in an accountability process. For example, if an organization doesn't step up to support accountability processes, and aggressors can keep working with that organization without consequences, without addressing their behavior, it can undermine a process as a whole and the aggressor's participation in it. Conversely, if an organization communicates the importance of accountability, and imposes consequences (eg. scaling back an aggressor's duties and public engagement), it can influence the aggressor to participate in a process.

Community pre-strategizing can be another tactic: preparing, brainstorming, and outlining a plan before someone's called out. This plan can outline the roles various community members can fill. Preparing a structure for a process can communicate that your community takes survivor's experiences seriously, has determined that harms should be addressed when they occur, and expects community members to help participate in and define what that process should look like. It also acknowledges the wide effect an aggressor's actions can have on a whole community or group of friends, and the complications that can arise with the crossover of all the relationships within a community.

On the other end of this, reflection on our experiences, in all those different roles, with an accountability process can be a great step toward refining our processes and learning as we go forward. I feel like a lot of us are still figuring out how to better deal with addressing harms without law enforcement and on a community basis. Projects like this zine and other places to record and share information on models and structures that worked or didn't add to our somewhat new body of information.

### How do we build a culture of accountability?

What I mean by a culture of accountability is a lot of what I've already touched on: a culture which strongly values being accountable to our actions. A culture in which we believe survivors. A culture in which individuals value supporting survivors and learn how to do that appropriately. A culture that takes accountability processes seriously, whether it's us, our friend or a peripheral member of our community that grievances are being brought to. A culture where we support aggressors through restoring the trust of their community again. A culture where we move our scrutiny from what survivors say to what aggressors are doing. A culture in which we recognize the variety



It's been proven time and time again that when an aggressor can surround themselves with a social group that makes excuses for them, shields them from dealing with their issues and doesn't support demands or consequences, we're not going to get very far. If we allow aggressors the space to shirk their accountability processes and thus shirk their responsibility to change, it's pretty certain that they will repeat abusive actions. Also, if we don't try and provide adequate support to survivors for the long term, it can discourage other survivors from sharing their experiences and can invalidate their need to see an aggressor held accountable.

But if we can extend participation in "community" accountability processes beyond the most affected people, we can change expectations about the importance of participating in accountability processes for community members and aggressors. If we were more accustomed to participating in accountability processes in various roles, when we were identified as an aggressor it would seem more normal, compulsory, and less intimidating to participate in our accountability process.

### **How do we expand the model of accountability to really include the whole community?**

I think we need to get creative on methods, structures, and models of what an accountability process can include.

A first step is identifying who in a community, in addition to the survivor, an aggressor has damaged with their actions. Who else needs to see the aggressor take steps to rebuild trust and how does this affect who outlines the process? Other affected people can include past intimate partners who, with information about an aggressor's abuse surfacing publicly, may realize the aggressor has acted similarly to them. This can trigger a traumatic experience of an individual re-living their abuse and spark the difficult process of identifying themselves as a survivor. Close friends and allies that respected the aggressor can be hurt, angry or disappointed. Friends of the survivor can be really angry and it can strain, drastically change, or end their relationships with the aggressor and their friends, defenders, or support people.

To acknowledge how many people are affected by an aggressor's actions, we can encourage pro-active responses by other community members that include the survivor's perspective. The two examples in the last section illustrate some of these responses.

Another example I've seen is a community meeting, called by two people who had been witnessing a persyn's concerning behavior, to address the grievances of multiple people with the aggressor's behavior. It included the members of the collective house in which the aggressor lived and a few other close friends and fellow activists. It opened a space to talk about how one persyn's actions negatively affected a community house and all the activities it supported/that went on around it. It provided a forum where many people who had grievances but hadn't talked about it much outside of isolated conversations, were able to see that one persyn's behavior was negatively

These changes were not made to criticize the original author, but to recognize that the initial document was made under other circumstances, for another (but related) purpose. It was logical to create a derivative document that could be built upon by others, too. Hopefully someone will see our pamphlet, recognize ways it can be done better, and improve upon it. Our version wasn't made to correct or water down the original, but rather to offer another way of saying much the same thing. With any luck, someone else will see it and feel like they can add to it too, and the process of collective revision will continue. Just because something is published doesn't mean it has any authority-- how you, the reader, interacts with it is the purpose for its existence. Question things, edit them, make them your own-- all art, all communication is derivative. Creation is just the first step, and the tri-fold isn't copyrighted. All I'd ask is that you send a copy when you update it!

In the spirit of trying to offer resources for those who feel at odds with accountability work, I think a look at restorative justice models provides alternatives to the current "justice" system. Using compassionate language rather than punitive language in guides is one easy way to get points across in a more approachable, and thus resonant, way. If you're interested in looking at alternative paths of justice and communication, which could perhaps lead to fresh approaches and ideas about how to make accountability processes work, here are some places to begin:

- + Information about restorative justice is freely available at [restorativejustice.org](http://restorativejustice.org), complete with tutorials, theory primers, and case studies.
- + Nonviolent communication is also a good skill to cultivate; an introduction is

online at [cnvc.org](http://cnvc.org), the Center for Nonviolent Communication's homepage.

I think that in a political scene that aims to end oppression, taking a community-minded approach to accountability processes would be to the benefit of everyone involved, as challenging and uncharted as that is. The group that put together the pamphlet dubbed itself "Make Louisville Awesome" and though some of us have left Louisville, we all hope to continue to develop accountability tools that aren't oppressive. A project that is still in the works is a respect workbook for folks who have been called out. This would ideally put people in touch with their privilege and/or entitlement issues, and be useful for self-analysis in situations that trigger anger. Feedback and suggestions on this project are welcome; I don't like to assume that a) I know what I'm doing and b) that I know the best way to put a phrase to paper-- collaborators are welcome!

For more information or a copy of "What To Do When You've Been Called Out," visit [copythatdistro.wordpress.com](http://copythatdistro.wordpress.com) or email me at [neckmonster@gmail.com](mailto:neckmonster@gmail.com) or [make.louisville.awesome@gmail.com](mailto:make.louisville.awesome@gmail.com).



## HOW TO FIND A HELPFUL THERAPIST

In all the zines I've read and all the stories I've heard, when a survivor calls out a perpetrator and makes a list of demands, it seems like one of the most common - and most commonly not observed - demands is for the perpetrator to see a therapist. I can't say for sure why this is the case, though I have some ideas.

There were a number of things that made me hesitant about seeking therapy.

Many, but not all, forms of sexual assault are technically illegal acts (regardless of how often, or how infrequently, they're brought to court or prosecuted). When I decided to look for a therapist, I was scared because I wanted help around things that I was afraid could bring the coercive hand of the state into my life - around sexual assault that is illegal. I was afraid to talk to therapists about what I needed help with when I interviewed them because I didn't have any understanding of how therapists interact with the legal and court systems. I didn't, and don't, want to be locked in a cage in jail, though I do want help. I was afraid that telling a therapist about my problems would mean that the therapist would report me; then I would have to make a choice between either denying my own actions (which accomplishes nothing but further harm) in order to stay out of jail, or be truthful and suffer the consequences of the state's free license to dole out violence with no accountability. Fortunately, my fears didn't reflect the realities of therapy. I was able to receive help without putting myself in danger. (More on this later.)

I was ashamed about what I have done, and had a lot of fear and anxiety about talking openly about it; this gave me anxiety about seeking a therapist, and also made it harder to be honest with therapists about what help I needed.

Before I decided to seek a therapist, I had a lot of negative feelings about therapy: I didn't want to deal with the stigmatization that comes with needing help or having psychological problems that are beyond my ability to deal with alone. I felt shame and confusion about my own behavior, and I felt intense fear and anxiety at the prospect of speaking about it. Because of these, I found it impossible to communicate with anyone about it for a long time - so therapy wasn't even on my worldmap as a possibility. Later on, when I found ways to

An incentive from the community can help people follow through with repairing harms caused by their actions. Examples I've seen include social incentives, limits to where an aggressor can go, requirements that they disclose their past to new communities, organizations and partners, limits to their ability to be a public representative of an organization, restrictions on their ability to contact the survivor, and requirements that they not have intimate partners for a period of time. Social incentives can look like pressure from an aggressor's social group: their friends, partners, acquaintances, people they play music with or work with in collectives. If many of the people an aggressor interacts with on a daily basis communicate that following through with an accountability process is necessary to maintain their friendship or space within an organization, or to hang out with them in the same spaces at all, aggressors can be more likely to put in effort.

While some affected community members may understandably want distance from the aggressor for a long time, it's important that the aggressor not be ostracized to the point of leaving that community, not dealing with their behavior and moving on to repeat that behavior in another place (I've witnessed this many times). So it's also essential that the aggressor have support people throughout the difficult process. People to consistently check-in with the aggressor, hold them to the demands and consequences laid out for them, challenge them to take full responsibility for their actions, support them and gauge where they are in the process. Aggressors need people to answer to besides themselves and friends or partners who defend them. Having a community or social group united in their emphasis of the importance of an aggressor respecting the survivor's demands and other consequences laid out for them increases the chances of an aggressor taking accountability seriously.

I think material consequences (like the examples given above) are really important to effective accountability processes. I've seen aggressors with no material consequences, no concrete ways to show they've worked to understand that their actions were harmful to another person/people and that they will change their actions and not replicate them in the future. They are able to talk, finesse, finagle and manipulate their way out of any real limits on their lives, while the survivor is dealing with many limits on the spaces and people with whom they feel safe. Let's be honest, a lot of aggressors are manipulative, they've been called out for manipulation, are good at it, and have manipulated multiple people. I think this also means that it's up to the community, not the aggressor, to decide if they're fully participating in an accountability process, to define ways to measure this, and to determine how long limits on their life should be in effect.

The important thing is the aggressor acting differently in the future and restoring trust in their community that they have changed. Without some material consequences, some real steps made in good faith, and a visible change in behavior, it can be hard for the survivor and other community members to believe the aggressor won't act out abuse again.



aggressor ignored these, so my friend contacted a number of venues, other bands the aggressor was supposed to play with, and folks who were booking shows with the information and with a request that the venues not host the band and that other bands refuse to play if the aggressor was going to be on tour. For my friend, this directly responded to a few of the reasons the aggressor gave for committing these abusive actions, and created time for the aggressor to have to acknowledge their behavior and work to change it, not just continue playing in a popular band on tour.

I've also seen independent action taken by a survivor's support people. Using the survivor's words, words that they consented to sharing with others, folks wrote letters to people who had relationships with the aggressor: either living with them, going to the same events and hanging out in the same spaces, or working with them in collectives. The survivor did not outline a specific demand that these people be contacted. But the support people, seeing that the aggressor was manipulating attempts at an accountability process and was dangerous, determined that people in the aggressor's community needed to be warned about their behaviors for safety.

This also helped to ensure that the survivor's experience was clearly communicated (which the survivor wanted to happen), because the aggressor's explanation downplayed their actions. Notifying people in the aggressor's circles enabled some of those people to address the aggressor more adequately. When someone challenged the aggressor with the survivor's description of their experience, the aggressor was less able to minimize, manipulate and deny their actions. More people with information and thus, hopefully, more concerned people within an aggressor's community can force the aggressor to have to deal with their actions, engage in an accountability process, and work to change.

With these examples of other affected community members taking action in mind, I want to reiterate the importance of survivor autonomy, of giving the survivor space to take the lead and set up guidelines and boundaries. It is essential that everyone respect their wishes. Even as I suggest we expand outside the common "survivor-aggressor" model outlined above, we need to always keep in mind survivor autonomy and strive for community accountability processes that are guided by the survivor's perspective.

I think another essential component of effective accountability processes are consequences. Consequences for the aggressor either outlined by the survivor or other affected community members. For me, the goal of accountability processes for aggressors is change: that persyn (and other involved community members) stepping outside their comfort zone to reflect and challenge themselves to change so they will never act out abuse again. For radical change to be possible the oppressors also have to change, they have to transform and cease to be oppressors. Unfortunately, even if we kill all the rapists, that won't change the structures of gendered violence in our society. This is a really tough goal to reach, for all of us, and I don't think this kind of challenge will be realized without some outside pressure and support.

talk about my actions, it was still hard to open about - which made it hard to talk to therapists about the things I most needed help with.

I was scared of the power that therapists can have - the power to diagnose behaviors or attitudes as pathological, to coercively medicate or institutionalize people. I was offended by a sense of patronization and lack of understanding I'd gotten from the couple psychologists and psychiatrists I'd had casual interactions with. I didn't get a sense from those first impressions that therapists would be capable of, or were interested in, real empathetic support. This was amplified because I don't believe in the individualized theory of mental health, that psychological and emotional problems are signs that there is something inherently wrong with a particular person; rather, I see harmful or problematic behaviors mostly as symptoms of living in a fucked-up world, and I believe that personal transformation is inseparable from social transformation. I also come from the perspective that medicalized "pathologies" of the psyche aren't necessarily "diseases" or "sicknesses;" like the folks at the Icarus Project, I feel that some of them are dangerous gifts - valuable but potentially harmful abilities and states of being. I felt all of these perspectives were completely blown off by those psychiatrists and psychologists I had interacted with, and I didn't trust the institution of psychology worth shit.

Then there's the simple fact that therapy costs money - sometimes lots of money - and I've never had expendable income; furthermore, because of other emotional problems I found it hard to hold down even a part-time job. On top of that, I come from a middle-class family, but my political sense of the world gives me a sense of guilt and shame about that privilege. I held a certain degree of hatred for therapy because I saw it as a rich people's indulgence, a sign of bourgeois decadence and yuppie lifestyle.

On top of all of that, going to therapy - even if I didn't have all these other reservations and emotions - meant I would also have to rearrange my routine, maybe cut back on or drop out of some activities that I enjoyed in order to create enough time in my schedule for weekly sessions. Besides that, I would have to find some way to get access to non-monetary resources, like a car, in order to make therapy a realistic possibility.

If other people's experiences are anything like mine, it's no wonder people don't go to therapy. It's easy for me to understand why someone would have a tremendous resistance to going - or would simply find it easier to do nothing, rather than deal with all of these huge problems. I have been through about a year and a half of therapy, however, and I would like to start up therapy again when I'm able. I know that it has been unquestionably useful in my process of understanding myself, dealing with my shit, sorting out all my emotional problems, and changing. So I want to talk about how therapy can help, and more particularly about how to find a helpful therapist - because it is



completely true that there are manipulative, power-hungry, non-validating, dogmatic, and controlling therapists out there. Fortunately, I have found those aren't all therapists.

### Why Therapy?

So how can therapy be useful?

patrice jones, in her book called Aftershock, about trauma and activism, provides a good description of some of the benefits of therapy. "The great thing about talking with a therapist is that, besides being an expert in the problems in living faced by traumatized people, the therapist's sole role in the relationship is to be helpful. The conflicts of interest and personal dynamics that can prevent friends and comrades from being helpful don't get in the way." And "because the therapist will, as a matter of professional ethics, have her own source of emotional support," someone seeing a therapist "doesn't have to worry about offering reciprocal care. You can express yourself freely in the safety of the consulting room, without worrying that your memories or emotions will be too difficult for the listener to bear."

Therapists are professionals. While in almost every other circumstance, in anti-capitalist circles at least, this tends to leave a bad taste in the mouth, here it has an upside, too. For one, it means that good therapists are, well, "professional." They don't gossip, they don't hang out with your friends, you don't have any particular social obligation to make small talk with them at the grocery store. Everybody, I wager, has things they're ashamed of, or afraid of, to the point where they can't hardly squeak out a word to anyone about those things. I imagine this is even more the case for someone who is going through an accountability process for sexual violence, abuse, or boundary crossing. But a lot of times, these same issues that are surrounded by shame and fear are also the persistent, nagging issues that form the cornerstone for a whole host of other problems. These shame-silenced memories can also provide hints about other areas, maybe areas you haven't explored before, that might prove fruitful in helping you understand your own life and behavior. Airing the issues that are immerse in shame and processing them can - and in my personal experience, does - make a big difference in transformation and healing, and it can reveal all sorts of insights about the feelings that underlie larger negative patterns. Having an outlet to talk about the things I'm most ashamed of has done wonders to improve my daily quality of life and my ability to enjoy living.

A helpful therapist will listen, and be able to stay present with whatever it is you're talking about. Sometimes friends just can't handle it when somebody

What I've seen happen a number of times is the responsibility of the accountability process starting, continuing, and reaching a resolution (the responsibility of creating demands, communicating them, and applying the necessary pressure to ensure they are followed) is put on the survivor and their support people; in the same way that the burden of proof is so often on survivors in our society. Or, at least, other community members and friends of the aggressor don't see it as their responsibility to engage in the accountability process or brainstorm ways in which they can act to support the process. And, at most, deliberately try to question the survivor and undermine the process.

Sometimes, accountability processes continue on in some form for years. It can take a long time for an aggressor to follow through with their demands and to come to a place where they understand their actions and effectively change their behavior, thus restoring trust in their community. (It's possible that some people, sometimes the survivor, will never trust the aggressor again.)

A survivor can also need support for years to come. For example, at any point in the future they re triggered or they happen to interact with the aggressor again. As the process continues in some capacity for years, it's important that community members who are a part of the process have their own support so they can stay committed to supporting the survivor and the aggressor through the length of the process. I've seen participation in processes fade away many times leaving the survivor with no support, for their personal healing and for making sure the aggressor is continuing to follow their demands, and the aggressor without anyone to hold them accountable to the process. I think it should be our goal that years down the line the community can still provide a network of support the survivor and the aggressor can tap into when needed.

To create this network of support, it's really important that other people in an affected community step up. Step up to personally support the survivor in whatever capacities they can. Step up to support the survivor's demands, like backing a survivor's right to safe spaces and spaces in public without the presence of the aggressor. Step up to work with the aggressor to follow through on their accountability process and with their difficult process of reflection and change. Step up to outline some of their own expectations for the aggressor.

As an example of this last one, a friend who's involved with a punk scene that has a broad reach regionally came up with some of their own expectations and consequences for a member of a different band who was called out for being involved in unconsensual sexual relations with multiple people. One survivor made a public call-out. My friend was really affected by this information because they were friends with the aggressor and were part of similar social groups. They first contacted the aggressor and suggested a few actions the aggressor could take to appropriately address their abuse. The



## Building a Culture of Accountability\*

\* I use gender neutral pronouns throughout and for survivor and aggressor to acknowledge that people of any gender can occupy those roles.

*I share these thoughts and ideas as someone who's been a part of a few accountability processes addressing gendered violence and abuse within intimate relationships within mostly young, punk/activist/anarchist circles, thus what I write about here can most easily be applied to those circles. I've been involved in these processes in many different capacities: as a main support person for a survivor, not involved with the aggressor, as an advocate for a survivor in addressing an aggressor, as a survivor/someone bringing grievances, and as someone who has imposed consequences on an aggressor in my community (the survivors were not a part of my community in this situation). My experience with community accountability processes has left me with a couple big questions and ideas for future, hopefully more successful, accountability processes. These questions guide this piece.*

### How do we get aggressors to actually participate in their accountability process?

I think we need everyone for this, all members of an affected community. When someone commits a harm, when sexual violence or emotional abuse happens in our communities, it not only affects the survivor and the aggressor, but their friends, partners, other survivors, acquaintances, and people the survivor and the aggressor organize with. Thus, survivors aren't the only people who need to see the aggressor take action: the aggressor is accountable to more than the survivor who experienced abuse at their hands; they must restore trust in the whole community of which they are a part.

I think it is crucial to expand outside the common model of: a survivor creates demands/expectations that are communicated to the aggressor, which they then must follow to repair the harm, to be accountable. I think we should aim to move toward a more encompassing, truly "community" accountability model. It's super important that all community members and people close to the survivor and the aggressor take the survivor's experience seriously. BELIEVE them and communicate to the aggressor (if they want to communicate with them) that they expect them to follow through with an accountability process, that they want to see them repair the harm, to grow, change, and heal.

brings up a particularly intense topic or one that hits home for them. Sometimes friends are dealing with their own issues - which might lead them to feel overwhelmed listening to problems that other people are working through. Sometimes friends are afraid to talk about certain issues, or don't know what to say, so they change the topic or don't bring it up. Sometimes friends are just distracted. Co-counseling with people close to you is good, and it's part of a process of healing and finding support. But it's not always enough; there are times, or topics, when it can be great to have somebody who's not in the thick of their own healing process, just like you. Somebody who's not going to be triggered by what you say, or be distracted by their own need for support. (In situations of accountability, it may also plain and simple be inappropriate to talk to some of your friends about some of the things you need to talk about. If you need to talk details of something you've done, for example, in order to process it - your friends may not be able to listen, without rage, a desire for punishment, or other complicating emotions, especially if it was something done to other people they know and care about.)

On top of that, a helpful therapist will be able to bring some solid experience to the table. A helpful therapist will have experience, theoretical training, and an extensive exposure that comes from study, so they can help you identify patterns you may not see. A helpful therapist will often have a long professional history, with clients who have had problems similar to yours. They can provide little tricks that they've learned along the way for breaking out of thought cycles; they can provide forecasts for how the road may look ahead, and whether you'll turn out all right. These things can make all the difference; someone without the clinical experience may be stumbling along in the twilight next to you, looking just as desperately for some message from the future. It can be reassuring to hear someone speak from experience, not just hope and conjecture.

### The Candidates

But all of these things depend on having a HELPFUL therapist. There are still a fair number of folks out there that, despite their Ph.D.s, are less useful than the rot falling off an old shoe. So the question remains: how to find a helpful therapist?

And how to find one on the cheap?

And how to find one that will be able to help you if you're looking to stop crossing boundaries?

What follows are some tips and resources I've come across, in order to



help answer these very questions. Let's start with the general.

If you're looking for therapists who have experience working with people who want to stop crossing boundaries, there are a couple of organizations that keep directories and make referrals. If you need low-cost therapy, it's worth asking all of these referral services about therapists who offer sliding scale fees. (I used these referral services to find one of the therapists I saw.)

In the U.S., there's the **Sex Abuser Treatment Referral Line**, which is a national referral service operated by the Safer Society Foundation, Inc. for anyone interested in locating a treatment provider for an individual with sexual behavior problems. You can get in touch with the referral line

By phone: (802) 247-3132 Monday-Friday, 9am-4:30pm EST

By fax: (802) 247-4233

Or by email: [tummyk@sover.net](mailto:tummyk@sover.net)

All telephone referrals are done anonymously. For more information on the Safer Society Foundation, check out their website at <http://www.safer-society.org>

Then there's the **Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health**, which is a nonprofit organization "dedicated to promoting public and professional awareness and understanding of addictive/compulsive sexual behavior and its associated negative consequences." They also talk specifically about "out of control sexual behavior:" sexual addiction, sexual compulsivity, and sexual offending. For a mainstream organization, their analysis isn't half bad. Among other things, they offer referrals. For more information, check:

The Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health

PO Box 725544

Atlanta, GA 31139

(770) 541-9912

Email: [sash@sash.net](mailto:sash@sash.net)

Web: <http://www.sash.net>

Then there's the **Sex Abuse Treatment Alliance**, which is a nonprofit

had raped and assaulted me.

So when my head starts taking me to extremes- either the ones where I am overapologetic and guilt ridden for the ways I had interacted with the increasing amount of people close to me in my life who ended up raping or assaulting others close to me in my life, or where I want all those people who violated and abused my friends to suffer - I try to hold that the context of my past actions involved trying to make sense of the tidal wave of power, violence, manipulation, trauma and pain I suddenly understood our everyday lives and realities to entail in such enormous, overwhelming, tangled, inseparable, entwined, complex layers building every body, structure and gesture that performed itself within and around me.

**trying to hold everything at once without spilling**

Each place holds different experiences, memories and stories. A certain story can be pushed out, drowned, covered over- but I don't think it ever goes away. I think it is possible to hold onto a lot of stories at once without displacing or de-validating anyone else's truth.

It gets really confusing, my mind flips all over the place, and the best I can do at this point is to know that every reaction makes sense, and to try and learn to trust my reactions.



organization to prevent sexual abuse. They work both with those who have been abused and those who have abused. Among other things, they provide referrals for abusers and abused, they promote the use of restorative justice methods for the abused and their abusers, they "provide a network of support for abusers who are currently in treatment," and they provide information/support/letters for people in prison who want help.

Sex Abuse Treatment Alliance (SATA)

<http://www.satasort.org>

Phone: (517) 482-2085 or (517) 372-8207

Email: [help@satasort.org](mailto:help@satasort.org)

Then there's **Stop It Now!**, which is a public health based organization working to "prevent and ultimately eradicate child sexual abuse," and they "challenge abusers and people at risk for abusing to stop abusive behaviors and to reach out for help." Among other things, they produce informational pamphlets to educate adults on prevention of child sexual abuse. They also run a helpline, which is a toll-free number for adults who are at risk for sexually abusing a child, for friends and family of sexual abusers and/or victims, and for parents of children with sexual behavior problems. All calls are confidential and will be answered by a trained staff member; they encourage people calling to report any abuse to law enforcement, but they themselves will not report anyone. The website and helpline both offer referrals.

Stop It Now!

<http://www.stopitnow.org>

351 Pleasant Street, Suite B319

Northampton, MA 01060

Phone: (413) 587-3500

Helpline: 1-888-PREVENT (1-888-773-8368), Monday-Friday 9:00am-6:00pm EST

Fax: (413) 587-3505

Email: [info@stopitnow.org](mailto:info@stopitnow.org)

So those are some mainstream, sex-offender specific referral services.

It doesn't have to mean completely ignoring every situation and pretending it isn't happening, because that is just so much worse. A lot of people do not have the privilege and luxury of ignoring the violence that is happening all around us.

But instead I would want people to engage, and to try and be open-minded and to think for themselves, but to also challenge where their reactions and assumptions might be coming from.

in the end, I can see that what I needed wasn't punishment of the person who assaulted me, I didn't initially crave revenge at all.

What I needed was support. I needed to know that the people around me, who claimed to be invested in the lives of one another, who claimed to desire change and community, who proclaimed the existence of community spaces, I needed to see and experience some sort of acknowledgment of what happened to me that wasn't shaming or denying.

When I look back at how I handled myself in the last few years, I am mostly uncertain and confused.

Sometimes my mind festers in a place of bitter resentment, where I detest the city I've called home for too long. Other times the pain in my chest is from a new perspective of the words and actions I took that I couldn't see before.

When we are blindly stumbling into a new path, where we can't see that far ahead of us, where there is nearly no one to guide us or give us ideas or suggestions- isn't it to be expected that we'll fuck up?

When the compass and the telescope are forged from the aftermath of stolen and trampled bodies, when the path is drawn by those struggling to keep their heads above water when nearly everything and everyone around them wants them, needs them, encourages them- to drown?

I couldn't see what I see now without stumbling through the new and unknown. I couldn't see and understand what I now know without trusting my gut and going with it.

I had to get really fucking ragefully, vengefully mad, irate, furious!! in order to make it this far. I had to push back hard against the pressure coming at me from all sides in order to ever find a moment of calm, in order to see and name the ways I too had fucked up. I had to unleash every bit of fury within in order to keep from suffocating, to gain a sense of myself again, to feel like I belonged to myself again, to feel undefeated and unclaimed by those who



If you want to find a therapist who has experience specifically around helping people to stop crossing sexual boundaries, another place you might go - though it seems counter-intuitive and frightening - is to your **local Rape Crisis Center**. This option might make even more sense if you're someone who has survived sexual violence yourself. It makes more sense than you might think - lots of survivors have problems with boundaries, and want to stop crossing people's boundaries in sexual ways. This is where the grey-zone of consent comes in; probably most survivors, if they do have problems with crossing boundaries, never go into that nebulous area called "assault." I actually found the therapist I saw for a number of months through the local Rape Crisis Center, and she was really helpful.

I was up front with her that I was seeking therapy because I wanted to stop crossing people's boundaries; that's when she told me what I repeated above, that lots of survivors have problems with boundaries. She mentioned it to reassure me that she does have experience in this arena. Usually, though, it wasn't the primary focus of her clients' therapy, so we had to shift her customary focus around a bit. But it worked well, once she understood that I wanted the focus to be solidly, and before everything else, on my problem crossing people's boundaries. I would suggest that you take care specifically here to be up front when interviewing therapists from Rape Crisis Centers. Some therapists who work at Rape Crisis Centers may not be prepared to counsel people if they have a long or intense history of sexual violence; it is imperative to know whether this is the case before you start committing to (and paying for) therapy sessions.

Rape Crisis Centers should tend to have information available about which therapists offer sliding scale fees. They should also generally refer people to therapists who are competent, ethical, and helpful. In the U.S., you can locate the nearest rape crisis center by going to RAINN's listing at <http://centers.rainn.org/>

Another useful resource for finding therapists near you is the **Psychology Today Find a Therapist** function. If you go to Psychology Today's website at <http://www.psychologytoday.org> and click on "Find a Therapist" on the bar near the top of the page, you can search and sort their extensive listing of therapists. Using an advanced search, you can find therapists according to things like average session cost, age specialty, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and language spoken.

has been raped to somehow handle something as violent as rape and/or assault in a manner that is quiet, subdued, removed. But a larger response of demonizing the assaulter, rejecting that person's presence, or the opposite - pretending it didn't happen, or aggressively defending the reputation of the assaulter - these are also responses that make sense within a rape culture.

We are taught to look at those who commit rape and assault as horrible, demented people - worthy of expulsion or even mob-justice style death. Yet at the same time we are taught to systematically deny or normalize the blatant, excessive presence of rape in our everyday lives, involving all of the people around us. So when sexual violence actually gets called out, rather than getting angry at the perpetrator, we point blame and anger at the person speaking up about it.

When we hear that rape happens, it becomes unthinkable. We deny with fury that a person we love could ever be capable of such a monstrous act and in the rare situations where it is believed that it happened, the response is to want the aggressor dead and out of sight.

Sexual violence is horrific, it is terrifying, it really is that bad, but we also think of rape as only happening in these rare, unusual situations, when the reality is that it is happening from people we trust and see every day.

In the confusion of trying to figure out how we should feel, I often see a demand to know the details of a situation we did not experience so we can determine for ourselves what kind of response is appropriate from others and for ourselves.

Instead, maybe we can accept that we won't know what happened, but not have that result in turning away from a situation. I can respect that someone needs to leave a space and it doesn't have to mean I am obligated to then think of this person as a shitty human being.

There have been times where I can simultaneously be triggered by someone's presence, but still be able to know that there are good things about the person too. This stuff is confusing and it's important to be able to trust that sexual violence really is happening and that doesn't mean you have to completely write someone off, although you can and should if you want to and I've often learned that some people really are total pieces of shit not worth anyone's time. Do what makes sense for you.



Trauma takes time. Sometimes a lot of time. And you might not understand why it's so hard for someone who has lived through so much shit to be around certain people. Safe space seems impossible. Safe space will mean something different for everyone. I actually think it is completely impossible to make a space totally safe for everyone as people will always have very different and constantly shifting triggers. But I think you can hold a bottom line and commit to basic things, such as taking active steps beyond the empty promises of good intentioned mission statements.

**What is hard is seeing that eventually everything goes back exactly to the way it was before. Does anything change?** I hate that having a hard time with the people who have raped my friends is considered to be my own problem. I hate that I still cannot physically be in the same space as certain people who have raped my friends. I realize that the larger problem for me with running into these people in public, is the surrounding social indifference to the situation.

We erase our collective memory and don't speak of the assaults and rapes that have happened in the spaces we continue to occupy. And those that still see it become deeply resentful. We deny that a person could ever have hurt someone else because it is uncomfortable to face the truth. Its easier when the 'survivor' disappears because we don't have to feel uncomfortable anymore. I'd rather not focus on one certain person's shitty actions but instead recognize that there are many people in our lives who have been severely hurt by the violent actions of a larger, systematic problem we are all complacent within, that we all participate in. I would rather we recognize that people deserve and need to be supported when this shit happens to them. I want to see us work to keep these lives from disappearing.

I want us to recognize how we participate in a rape culture and intersecting privilege, violence and exploitation. I want us to work to recognize it all around us and within us. It isn't about pointing our fingers at one certain person and cleansing ourselves of any possible capability of inflicting harm. Call outs don't happen that often, the same shit goes on all the time unannounced. I called out the person who assaulted me because I didn't want to keep silent and go on pretending that sexual violence wasn't happening all of the time.

I don't like when people are against asking someone to leave a space or against someone speaking up about what a person did to them because they are afraid it will ruin that person's reputation. Many people cringe at the act of 'call outs' saying, don't you realize those words will follow that person for the rest of their lives! That shouldn't be the focus. I don't think that has to be the case. I think it's unfair to expect someone who

If you can't find any sliding-scale therapists through the above avenues, you may also try calling the local **Social Services office**. They should have information on any county- or state-sponsored mental health clinics in the area. In the county where I used to live, there was a county-sponsored mental health clinic that offered therapy sessions for as low as \$5 apiece. The therapists who worked there were almost universally highly recommended by the therapist I was seeing at the time. So, all in all, that's not too shabby.

If none of this works, try the Yellow Pages looking for therapists.

The recommendations of any friends who have seen therapists in the area are solid gold for finding a helpful therapist, too, in general (though friends' therapists won't necessarily have experience working with sexual violence issues).

## The Interview

SO, now you've found the names of SOME therapists... How to choose which one? How do you know which therapist will be a for-real ally, and how do you find out which therapist is bound to become an unhelpful bugbear in your life?

The answer to this question is the therapist interview. Even if you get a great recommendation from someone, saying that Therapist A is radical and experienced, it's still crucial to give them an interview. This vets them for personality, approach, and compatibility, and it empowers you to be more active during the therapy itself. Interview a number of candidates before picking one. Therapists usually (and should) provide an opportunity for you to interview them, without charging anything. I found this process to be really helpful. More on how to conduct interviews with therapists in just a second.

But first, another quick word from patrice jones, giving her recommendations: "How do you know whether or not a therapist is right for you? Ask questions. Make sure you feel comfortable with this therapist's way of thinking about people and their problems in living. But



don't worry too much about theories. Some research indicates, and I believe, that the empathic 'match' between client and therapist is the most important factor in whether or not a course of therapy will be helpful. Make sure you feel comfortable with this person. Trust yourself. If you feel safe with this person, trust that and give it a go. But also trust your misgivings. Some people are not trustworthy. You don't want to hurt yourself further by becoming vulnerable to one of them. If you feel unsafe, you'll need to figure out whether this is because of the person or because of your own fear about talking about your trauma. How can you tell? Shop around. Have test sessions or preliminary meetings with a few prospective therapists. Whatever you feel with all of them is probably due to you. Any differences in how you feel are probably due to the differences among them."

Now, some recommendations for interviewing therapists. The first time I went looking for a therapist, I dreaded the initial contact. I felt like I would have to make myself extremely vulnerable - it's not easy to tell a total stranger who you don't trust and who has power over you the story of the sexual violence you have committed. Seeking my first therapist, I just sucked it up and did something that felt extremely unsafe to me. It ended up working out well, but that same fear and dread led me to seriously drag my heels the second time I went looking for a therapist. I didn't want to have to put myself through that kind of an emotional wringer, even to find help. Fortunately, after a couple months of dragging my feet, I met someone with some experience facilitating radical accountability processes, and he gave me a couple concise sentences that summed up what I was looking for - in therapists' own language - so that I didn't have to explain the long way by making myself extremely emotionally vulnerable with a stranger. Those couple sentences go something like this: "I'm looking for a therapist in the <your city> area to work with a noncriminal self-referral. Specifically, I'm looking for someone with expertise working with <your demographic> who have sexually offended, for an opportunity with potential for ongoing therapy, and for someone with interest in or experience with transformational healing and/or restorative justice." Having those two sentences saved me untold amounts of anxiety an apprehension. They were also useful in providing a quick filter to tell me which therapists were worth setting up

But maybe that can be a measure of someone's accountability. Maybe being willing to face the hurt and trauma your actions have caused other people is necessary. Maybe there was a point where I needed to back off, but I catch myself now wanting to over-criticize myself to the point where even saying 'that was fucked up' or expressing any amount of anger towards these people I started to think was not okay.

I want to be wary of my own ability to use accountability as a way to control someone else's actions and I caught myself confusing someone's acquiescence to my want for them to suffer and have consequences to be a measure of their accountability. Yet I want to be clear that expressions of rage are important, that fury and revenge are valid. And while I have to be careful of my ability to abuse power and control in situations of accountability, I also have to catch myself when I start to over-apologize and over-excuse to the point where I act as though assault and rape should be easily excused and dismissed.

### what I would like to see

I would want people to question and examine their initial reactions when they hear of a situation of abuse and/or violation.

I would want people to be able to guide themselves and to be cautious, rather than fall into apathy or in with the dominant crowd reaction.

If someone is telling you that they think of someone as unsafe, or violent - then this true for that person in the current place that they are at, you don't have to feel the same way in order for it to be valid.

Trauma is complicated and it manifests itself in different forms at different times.

There are people I can be around now and feel mostly comfortable with that a couple of years ago would have triggered some very intense trauma for me. I might still want to ask them for space here and there, and I think that's okay.

I don't want to hear the people I share space with deciding what is an acceptable reaction to the rape or assault someone else experienced. Being raped by someone in some sort of collectivity, social scene, network - and then trying to reach out for support in holding that person to taking some sort of responsibility and accountability is an experience that leaves one so devastated, so alone, so hated, so despised, so deeply traumatized that you can't breathe, that you actually can see space around you collapsing. You feel as though you are being perpetually choked. When that is your reality, no one else gets to tell you how someone is going to make you feel.

And I think that goes the same for when one is subjected to many kinds of violence, particularly when these violences compound, collide and build off of one another.

I would like to see more understanding for those that survive and are subjected to different kinds of violence to have the space to react however the fuck they need too.



consequences implaced upon you. But I was unable to see and name that this is essentially what I wanted to happen.

It's not that the actions of these people in my life weren't deserving of my anger or of consequences or of revenge, but the problem was that I understood these to be a measure of someone's 'accountability'. I thought the ability to endure and accept my furious reactions were equivalent with how accountable someone was being.

**Well I sure fucked up.**

It is a dangerous thing to say out loud.

It is something I mostly have denied or have been unable to fully confront because of its implications. Its terrifying in that it puts into question the work I have been doing for so many years. It's terrifying in that it brings up incessant webs of confusion and constant flip-floppings between self-righteousness and extreme self-doubt.

It's terrifying to say because I feel like it could give others more leverage and reason to say fuck trying to care about rape and assault, it's useless to try and do anything about it so lets just stick to indifference and silence. I don't think my fears are completely unrealistic.

But these fears should not prevent me from asking important questions.

I wanted to control the actions of the people that assaulted my friends. I told myself that it was about keeping people safe, and I do think that's what I understood myself to be doing. But I also wanted them to suffer. I wanted them to have consequences and because suddenly I could put myself on the side of 'survivor' and them on the side of

'perpetrator/aggressor/assaulter/rapist' I could use that as leverage, I could justify my actions by saying that I knew better.

I could use 'accountability' as a means of holding control. How many times did I end up saying an aggressor was being 'unaccountable' because they disagreed with me, yelled back at me, or I didn't like what they were doing? I did think these people were fucking up, I didn't think their actions were okay, but again, who said accountability was a linear path? I had very unrealistic ideas of what accountability looked like and meant.

Someone isn't going to figure it out just because I really want them too, I've been told that it takes meeting that person where they are at and a whole lot of patience and support. I couldn't say if that's true because I've never been able to fully give that to someone. I don't know anyone who has worked to support someone through an 'accountability process' that hasn't lost their ability to be patient, who hasn't wanted to say 'fuck this', who hasn't gotten upset. Is that because the ways we try to hold people accountable don't make sense? Is that because these two concepts - patience/support vs. 'accountability processes' are at odds with each other?

I could only see that I had been fucked with too many times and the friends I thought I could trust were showing me that maybe I couldn't and I felt justified to give them a hefty piece of my mind, and if they didn't want to listen I could say that it was a measure of their accountability.

an interview with.

When I was preparing to interview therapists, I made a list of questions covering all my concerns and needs prior to scheduling any interview appointments. I actually wrote all of the questions down on a sheet of paper in order to make sure I didn't accidentally leave out any important topics. I'll share some of the types of questions I asked.

First of all, probably one of the most important - in terms of allaying my fears and building a foundation for trust - comes the issue of confidentiality. As I was saying above, I was scared to talk to a therapist because I have crossed people's boundaries in ways that are illegal. It was important to me to ease some of those fears, and so I asked the therapists about confidentiality and reporting to law enforcement. I have since learned a little more about therapy and confidentiality, which lays many of my fears to rest.

According to Patricia Jones, professional therapists "ethically must not and legally cannot be forced to break confidentiality about past actions." In the case of abuse and other things, however, this does not hold if the abuse is ongoing in the present. It also does not hold if the therapy client has plans to do some such action in the future. (Commonly, therapists will tell you that the only time they will report is, for example, when there seems to be a threat to the safety of either the client or someone else, in the present or the future - for example, if there is current domestic violence, if the client has a plan to commit suicide, or if the client plans to injure someone else. In cases where there is current abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult, I believe therapists are actually required by law to report the abuse.) It is still important to have a frank conversation about confidentiality, however, before disclosing anything. If think you might have legal trouble at some point in the future, and you want to make sure someone like police or the FBI don't get their hands on your files, Jones says "you may wish to ask the therapist with whom you work to keep only the most vague and cursory notes, so that your privacy is protected even if authorities do manage to breach confidentiality." You might want to ask potential therapists when they would report you without your consent, when they would recommend you report yourself (but not report you themselves), whether they have reported other clients



in the past (and what the situation was like), and so on. You might also want to ask them about their relationship with and opinion of law enforcement – do they feel prison is rehabilitating? Do they feel the legal system is just? And so on.

It can also be wise to ask lots of questions about confidentiality if someone else – parents, boss, the government – is paying for the therapy. Be sure you're clear what the therapist will and won't tell such people. What sort of information will they have access to, and what will the therapist share with them? What sort of relationship will the therapist have with these people? What sort of power do they have over the therapist?

After this, I was up-front about what I was seeking therapy for more specifically – that I want to stop crossing people's sexual boundaries, stop engaging in sexual violence, etc. – and I asked how (or if) they feel they would be able to help. I also asked what kinds of diagnosis they would use for people coming to them with these sorts of desires. One of the therapists I saw, for example, had experience working with people with sexual behavior problems, and he said he usually diagnoses people with "adjustment disorders with depressive (or anxious, etc.) mood." (Basically: "everything is generally okay in this person's life, but they're having some problems with a particular aspect of their life and have some depressive/anxious/etc. tendencies." It's an all-purpose, vague diagnosis.) He understood that there is an incredible stigma attached to being diagnosed with a sexual behavior problem, and worked to make the therapy experience less frightening for the people he worked with.

It is a good idea to ask about the therapists' understanding of queer/trans issues, racism, specific cultural concerns, any political or religious beliefs, and so on. If they don't seem to have a good understanding of something important to your life, ask if they would be willing to educate themselves on their own time in order to become better informed and a more sensitive therapist.

I asked questions regarding the therapists' feelings about herbal medicine and their approach to pharmaceuticals (and if they'd want me to take

But obviously it's not that simple. The ways we use power are far more complicated. Also, being in the state I was, failure for these friends to respond perfectly in the way that I wanted them too would cause me to start falling over that edge. I then would end up wanting these friends to suffer severe consequences.

When people tried to figure out what accountability could mean for them, I scoffed at them. I looked at accountability as an either-or situation, I thought it was an easy to grasp concept. I couldn't see what was so difficult about just not wanting to violate anyone enough so that it wouldn't happen again.

At this point in my life, the people close to me that were being called out and trying to be accountable were all cis-men, so I constructed accountability as being equivalent with confronting male privilege and patriarchy. While I do hold that rape-culture is a construct of hetero-patriarchy, in that these structures teach us that we can access power through forced sexual possession and control– I realized its also much more complex than that. And while a gender binary enforces violent identity socializations and seeks to dictate who we may be and who we may love, the fact that binary gender is false means that the ways we might internalize and act out the socializations of a rape culture have more to do with how we seek to access power and to feel control. Actualizations of who may access control and abuse power in a relationship are not going to fall neatly into gendered categories as who we are and who we love does not fall neatly into a binary.

But that's also not to deny that being socialized as male and being socialized as female are different in the ways we learn to accept and submit to power, versus obtain and exercise power.

My experiences, since childhood, had been to submit to dominant social constructions of a hetero male sexual desire, to understand that my body's worth depended on how sexually desirable men would find me. But anyone could occupy that dominant position, it's about performing a role. I am capable of it too, by judging and demanding how someone should appear in order to fit my standards and desires of gender, even if those standards come from a place of internalized violence.

But even so, I imagined myself cleansed of any ability to abuse power. I acted from a place of self-righteousness, and a moral high ground. I named myself an inhabitant of right and good and comfortably assigned myself a position on that side of the line, beyond which resided the perpetrators, the assaulters, the rapists, the defenders of rape, the not-giving-a-fucks.

At that time, I understood accountability and taking responsibility to mean really being able to accept that you deserved to suffer and to have



and writing.

I had no patience.

And I didn't think I should have been expected to have any.

I thought, fuck patience when the conditions are rape. Why the hell should I be patient if it means that more assault and rape are going to happen while I wait for others to get their shit together?

I don't like when reactions to rape that are informed from places of trauma and pain, are dismissed or silenced. I hate when traumatic reactions are named 'hysteria' or 'insanity'. Too me, trauma is the beginning of breaking out of socialization and denial. And it's messy.

To be able to suddenly see everywhere, constantly around you the presence of gender and sexual violence, entangled within white supremacist colonial society, and economic exploitation - violences inseparable from one another - is a wake up call. It's horrifying, it's overwhelming.

To me, trauma has meant shock, the shock of coming into a full realization and awareness of the nightmare we live within.

I needed something to believe in and I started to cling aggressively to the idea of perpetrator accountability and survivor support.

**It was a stable safe ground in a stormy sea.**

Absolutes felt really good. They felt safe. I wanted lists and diagrams and rules and structure.

They felt like dry solid ground in a torrential flooding. I desperately needed something to hold onto.

I so very much wanted, needed there to be a right and a wrong, a good and a bad. I took what I learned and read about survivor support and accountability models as absolutes. A lot of what I read presented these things as absolutes (or did I just choose to read them that way?).

In my own shock and trauma from the devastation of rape and sexual violence, learning that friends I loved and trusted had raped or assaulted other friends I loved - was too much to handle.

I couldn't separate my own trauma and the violence I had been through from the violence they had committed. It felt like betrayal.

Each time it happened, again and again, I felt more crushed, further devastated, until I felt nothing at all. I just felt numb.

My feelings were exceedingly confusing to me. At moments I could feel bad for them and want to be there for them to help them to figure it out. At other moments I felt completely desparate and teetering on the edge of completely fucking losing it. I thought maybe if they could understand what people had been through and continued to experience everyday, then of course they would get it and they'd just realize the error of their ways, and they'd never assault or rape anyone again, right?

some), and about their ability to respect things (like spiritual experiences) that might be commonly written off as crazy. If I tell them something is a problem, I asked whether they'll believe me and accept it as a problem; similarly, I wanted to know when they would and wouldn't challenge me (or simply overrule me) if there's something they see as a problem that I don't actually see as a problem. If you want to know about the therapists' particular methods, the interview is a good time to ask about the therapeutic approach different therapists take, as well.

One of therapists I saw recommended another couple questions to ask during interviews in the future: How much experience does someone have as a therapist? How much therapy/healing have they done for themselves? How much experience do they have with clients working through x or y issue? (My therapist recommended the second question as a way of gauging how present a therapist can be while they listen to what you're saying - if they'll still be working out things from their own past when you talk to them about your life, and how present they will be if you show intense emotion, or start sobbing, or whatever.)

These interviews helped me feel more empowered and assertive in the therapy, and more able to ask for what I wanted. They helped me feel comfortable saying so if I wanted to stop talking for a while and get feedback or education from the therapist, or if I wanted to stop the therapist when they were talking and go in a different direction. The ability to do this was a great gift. I felt more able to direct the therapy towards where I actually wanted to go, instead of where the therapist thought I wanted to go. Overall, the therapist interviews were invaluable to making therapy something worthwhile and something that tangibly benefited me.

### Closing Comments

In my last session with one therapist I saw, I talked with her about how the therapy had been and gave her feedback on my experience. One of the interesting things I learned from her was that it took her a handful of



sessions before she was able to learn how to respond to me, and understood what I wanted her to respond to and focus on. When I first started the therapy, I was pretty uncertain about the whole thing (and whether it would even help), but I kept coming and eventually – as she adapted to where I was coming from – the therapy became really helpful. I didn't realize that even experienced therapists go through a learning curve to adjust to new clients.

In my experience with seeing therapists as part of an accountability process, I have also noticed a couple patterns worth mentioning. The first one is that therapy alone wasn't enough to give me the tools I needed for transformation. My own healing and change process has also required (and still does require) conversations with friends, conversations with people who have experience with radical conceptions of consent, reading and self-education, and a lot of personal and group work outside the context of the therapy office. The second issue that's important to bring up involves a typical therapist's understanding of radical politics and community accountability. One of my therapists – who had experience working with people with sexual behavior problems – would pretty frequently express skepticism about the accountability process I was involved in and often seemed somewhat dismissive of the things I was defining as sexual violence. It was only through constant intervention on my part – stopping him and explaining why it was important for me to value disclosure, explaining why it was that some particular things were abusive on my part, or whatever – that I was able to create the kind of therapeutic environment that helped me engage with my accountability process. I have heard, repeatedly, of other cases of people going to therapy as part of an accountability process and the therapist dismissing the need for an accountability process and minimizing the harm caused to the survivor. Because therapists are supposed to be “experts,” and are widely given the authority that comes from the term, it can be easy to allow a therapist to let you off the hook. Instead, however, I would challenge you to consider the impact that letting yourself off the hook will have on the particular survivor in your situation, on the webs of trust that have been ruptured in your scenes or communities, on your own future relationships. I would challenge you to consider: the possibility you might end up harming people you really care about in the future; and the ways you might feel boxed in, tense, stunted, defensive or closed because of any feelings you might have (like always needing to be in control). I

Yes, it is flawed, but it is unrealistic to expect a sudden perfect way to respond to rape.

When we all have been so deeply imprinted and built out of gendered and sexual violence, when we are so deeply socialized to fit a gender assignment and a gender role, when we reside and occupy so many differing positions of social power, where we can dominate and control while being controlled and oppressed simultaneously on so many different colliding, chafing, intersecting planes and levels, how can we expect to neatly step out of these roles, without any lingering confusions, traumas or delusions, and expect to quietly and calmly heal and transform the rape culture within and around each other?

When I'm not feeling so bitter, I have to remember that it is truly remarkable that I tried the option that I did and that I actually did have a fair amount of support and people who did not judge my decision and who never doubted my experience to be true.

When we all are socialized within a rape culture, the fact that we can so strongly reject it and undo many of the ways it has entrapped us, gives me immense optimism.

I didn't think it was possible to have been exposed to so much sexual violence and be able to not have it always 'mark' me in some form. I didn't even imagine I could ever get to a place where I can see and engage in a sexuality on my own terms, that wasn't somehow marred or forever held back by the lessons I had learned.

### Trauma

The only way I knew how to keep from drowning when the presence of gendered violence became too unbearable and achingly sharp, a knife blade severing through my perception and stability on all sides, the only way to keep from being suffocated by its weight physically pressing down on me was to try and push back. Pushing back meant anything to fight off the words and actions that victim blame, that silence, that encourage, that normalize, that perpetuate, that are blind or just aren't there.

It was about desperation. A desperation that I could not handle another rape or assault happening. I could not have another friend turning out to have sexually assaulted someone close to me. I could not handle being spoken over, being shut up, not having my voice or opinion or intelligence trusted, having my body scrutinized and judged. Opening my eyes too sexual and gendered violence showed me how prevalent and saturated its presence was in my everyday life, and how many of my friends around me were complacent in its existence, either by ignoring it or by actively encouraging and condoning it. Once I opened my mouth I couldn't stop. I could keep from being suffocated and drowned by the weight of this reality if I kept talking back and screaming



sex positivity. I found this infuriating and contradictory. How could you claim a radical sex positivity while avoiding any sort of honest dialogue about how rape culture and sexual violence affect us?

I ended up distancing myself from a lot of projects and collective spaces I was involved in because I couldn't be a part of anything if it didn't incorporate a significant commitment to addressing sexual and gendered violence.

When I first called out the person who assaulted me, I just wanted them to care about their actions and to see that I didn't deserve what they had done to me. When I realized that would never happen it dissolved into rage. It felt good to feel justified in rage and anger. This rage spread and I felt furious with the entire social scene and city I participated in.

I would also feel the same rage for those in my life that ended up assaulting and raping my friends. I wanted revenge.

Yet I also confusingly wanted interactions with some of these people in my life that wouldn't be about hatred, but would be about reaching a common understanding between us. These were people I had at some point known well and trusted, maybe even loved. Learning that they had done the very things I had once confided in them as being the worst, most devastating experiences of my life, was shocking, heartbreaking and crushing. Part of me wanted to support them in trying to figure their shit out, another part of me wanted to rip out their organs. I ended up blurring the two feelings together and the results were disastrous.

### looking back

As the number of friends in my life who turned out to have raped or assaulted grew, in the midst of so much lashing back for my having called out my assaulter, in the midst of my eyes opening to the extent of sexual violence we were submerged within, I look back at this time and wonder what would I have wanted to have happened? What would I have done differently during that time?

How could I think of a 'better' way to have responded? There weren't any ideal options, the ideal option would have been not to be raped. I hate the pressure that got placed on me, that gets placed on others when this happens to them.

Would it have been easier to keep silent? Maybe it would have been easier to suppress the event and keep lying to myself that this assault, along with all the others, were totally normal and fine. But I think an explosion was inevitable.

We do need to be critical of what I understand to be an emerging standard of a call out-accountability process model, but I hate when those who have never been in my position, or who have never really been invested in fighting rape-culture, are so quick to demand it's disappearance or to demonize those who utilize it.

would challenge you to start reading and believing accounts written by survivors of abuse and sexual violence. I would challenge you to educate yourself first and then start asking: What will be the greater impact of my actions if I allow myself to be let off the hook? Who will I harm, what will be made less possible, why do I want to get off the hook? For transformation and healing to happen, you have to be able to challenge an expert who's giving you an easy way out. In fact, you have to be committed to it.

patrice jones also has a couple of recommendations of things to do to compliment therapy. She says while talking to others is essential, there are also things you can and should do to take care of yourself. She recommends that people make a list of these things, then refer to the list when they're feeling bad and don't know what to do. She counsels people to make themselves do things on the list until they feel better. She especially recommends making a list of "oases," activities that give you a break from trauma and intense feelings by allowing you to absorb yourself in something else. Reading and TV, for example, she doesn't consider oases; your mind can easily drift back to trauma while doing these things. Oases keep your attention by requiring you to do something. In contrast, she says bowling, gardening, and tinkering can be oases - any of these activities (and plenty of others) can be both distracting and soothing. She counsels people to make a list of what works for them, and then turn to the list when they need a break. Similarly, she talks about "anchors;" an anchor is a person, place, activity or thing that gives physical feelings of relaxation, safety, or well-being. Again, she suggests that people make a list of anchors and then go to or even just think about an anchor when they need to experience a positive feeling for change. Self-care is an essential part of healing and transformation; healing and transformation can only happen through love, and self-care goes hand-in-hand with the kind of self-love required for positive, sustained change.

These are some of my thoughts, experiences, and collected pearls of knowledge. I hope they prove useful and help guide you on your path towards accountability. Even though I'm an anonymous ghost living behind a veil of paper and words, I care. I want you to find peace, love, and healing. The work is worth it; I know because I am doing it. Things get better and things change, and as hard as accountability can be, it is worth it.

Don't give up.



everyday violence and gender socialization, but not really. Don't mistake a drunken party for something more than what it is.

Because of my misunderstanding, it hurt when self-proclaimed radical spaces would ignore what the person who had assaulted me had done and at times defended this person's right to be there as they didn't want to ostracize him. I understand this intention, but I hated that some of these spaces never showed some sort of support or consideration for the people this person had assaulted. They didn't address the right of the 'survivors' to be there. They failed to see how actively defending or ignoring this person's presence in a space would in effect ostracize all of the people that person had violated from the space. There seemed to be a lack of understanding that he was responsible for his actions, that it was *his* choice to assault me, not mine. I had never asked for that to happen. It was somehow more like I was responsible because I was the one who had a problem with it. If I had passively accepted assault, then everything would be fine, but because I chose to have a problem with being assaulted I was just making things more difficult for myself.

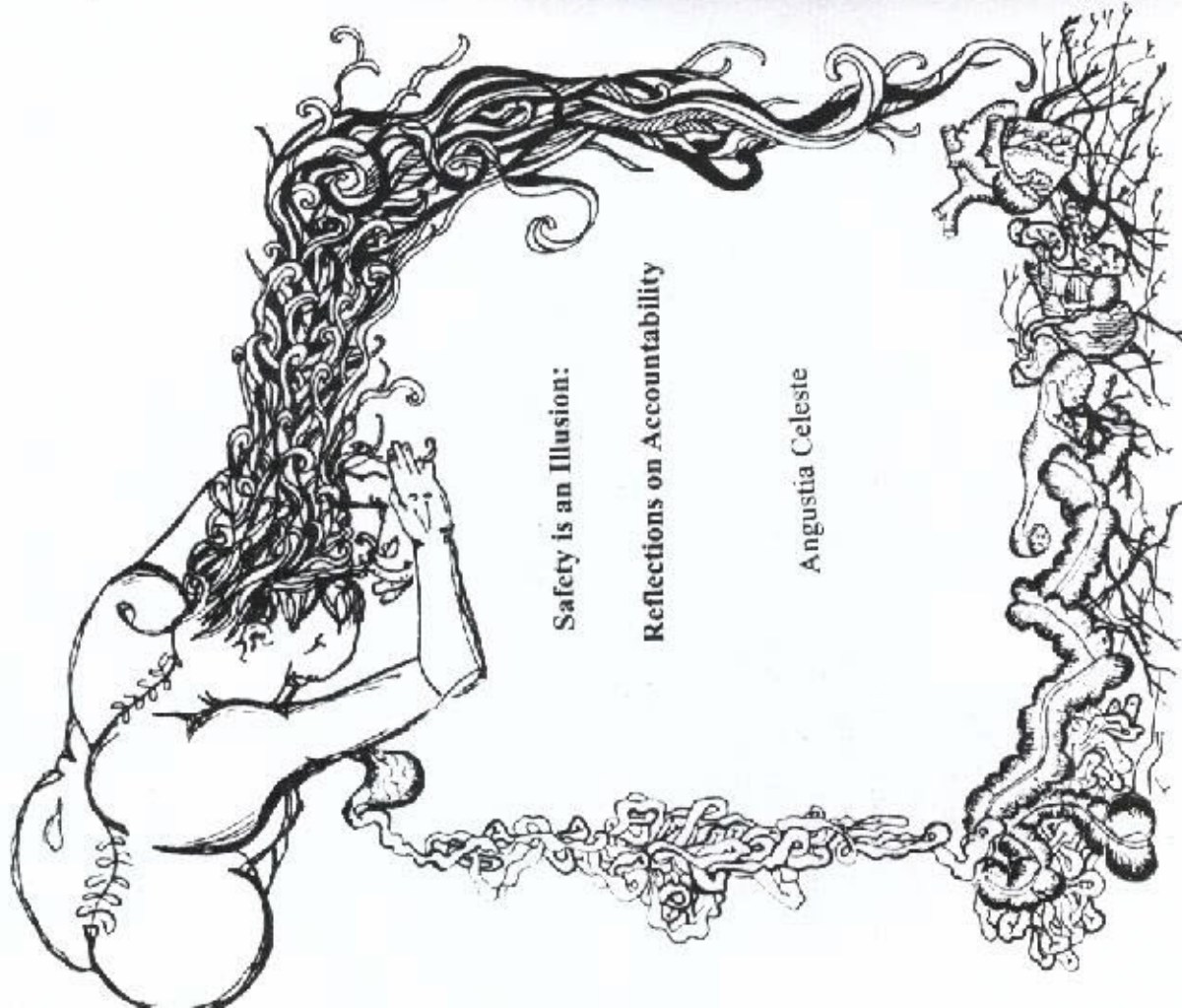
This is a dynamic that is painful to see happen so many times. It is so much easier to just avoid a situation rather than actively seeking out a solution in which the survivor of violence can feel supported in a community, or collective space. But inaction pushes these people out, they are being told that their bodies and their lives do not matter, that they are not important or worthy enough to deserve any sort of response or support. No response at all means that so many can't find places for themselves within the cities they live in when there is an unwillingness to acknowledge what goes on within collective, participatory spaces.

I thought calling out my assaulter would mean that he would have to acknowledge the situation and take responsibility for it. Instead it only seemed to enlarge the circumstances of violation, like a big gaping wound being dragged and stretched all over the damn city.

The only way to breathe was to escape it, to physically leave town. It makes sense that when people are raped and assaulted, they often end up staying silent, because saying anything will be so disruptive to the places they inhabit that they will lose their ability to exist and reside within their spaces and scenes. If they don't say anything though, that place will lose all semblance of its familiarity and security, every site might become a reminder of the violence inflicted on them and of the violence that they are expected to endure.

If they do speak up, then their shit becomes everyone's business and there is no end or refuge to the constant bullshit and horror, only spreading itself further every day. So then you still end up leaving because staying still is unbearable.

I felt repulsed and frustrated when those unwilling to address the sexual violence present within their collectives and networks would then talk about



Safety is an Illusion:

Reflections on Accountability

Angustia Celeste

\* artwork by Rosemary



situation, to know that I didn't deserve it or bring it upon myself in any way, was an incredible epiphany.

To have people in the city (both familiar and faceless) have my back and understand what kind of shit might be going through my head and to offer to support me through it, was utterly shocking and unheard of.

To hear of some sort of functioning collective (with a name and everything!) that existed for the very purpose of confronting gender violence and rape culture, that existed to try and work with people who violated others, was astonishing.

I gained the impression that 'call-outs' and 'accountability processes' were something really established and well worked out in the city.

I thought all I would have to do was let people know what had happened, I thought then my assaulter would realize what they had to own up to, that they would care about their actions and it would eventually be okay...

I honestly can't say what I would have done differently looking back. I probably **would** not have called out my assaulter at all.

I could not have ever prepared myself for the nightmare of being publicly identified as the announcer of my assaulter's actions. The public backlash was far worse than the violation itself, or rather, it made the trauma and violence of the rape something much more inflamed.

It was terrifying, invading, violating to feel as though an entire city (this was not the case, but it felt that way) now wanted to question me, interrogate me- getting public glares, getting harassed with emails to 'stop what I was doing'.

For me, calling my assaulter out was about wanting to be heard and to have what happened be taken seriously. I wanted the support of a community to back me up so I didn't just disappear, so others couldn't twist my words and shut me up.

I didn't want to back down this time as in past experiences I had always just walked away and refused to acknowledge what had happened.

I was tired of accepting rape and assault in denial and silence. I wanted people to see that this was everywhere all the time and that it was between their friends.

**A big mistake I made was presuming a community when there wasn't one.**

I was mistaken in thinking that the majority of people I engaged with shared common, similar goals.

Those in love with the words 'movement' and 'revolution' and 'community' would tell me that 'if I didn't like it then why didn't I leave?' or inform me that there were more serious issues at hand if I spoke up about the need to address gender and sexual violence within our own "communities" and networks.

I had also presumed being punk meant having a political agenda or some sort of ideal. I was drawn to punk because I wanted something more than passive acceptance of the way things were. I thought we all wanted to challenge

I was asked by a dear friend to write this piece about accountability within radical communities- offer some insight in light of the years we've spent fighting against rape culture. Except I don't believe in accountability anymore. It should be noted that my anger and hopelessness about the current model is proportional to how invested I've been in the past. Accountability feels like a bitter ex-lover to me. The past 10 years I really tried to make the relationship work but you know what?

There is no such thing as accountability within radical communities because there is no such thing as community- not when it comes to sexual assault and abuse. Take an honest survey sometime and you will find that we don't agree. There is no consensus. Community in this context is a mythical, frequently invoked and much misused term. I don't want to be invested in it anymore.

I think its time to abandon these false linguistic games we play and go back to the old model. I miss the days when it was considered reasonable to simply kick the living shit out of people and put them on the next train out of town- at least that exchange was clear and honest. I have spent too much time with both survivors and perpetrators drowning in a deluge of words that didn't lead to healing or even fucking catharsis.

I am sick of the language of accountability being used to create mutually exclusive categories of 'fucked up' and 'wronged.' I find the language of 'survivor' and 'perp' offensive because it does not lay bare all the ways in which abuse is a dynamic between parties. (Though I will use those terms here because its the common tender we have.)

Anarchists are not immune to dynamics of abuse, that much we can all agree on but I have come to realize more and more that we cannot keep each other safe.

Teaching models of mutual working consent is a good start- but it will never be enough: socialization of gender, monogamy- the lies of exclusivity and the appeal of "love" as propriety are too strong. People seek out these levels of intensity when the love affair is new, when that obsessive intimacy feels good and then don't know how to negotiate soured affection.

That's the thing about patriarchy its fucking pervasive and that's the thing about being an anarchist, or trying to live free, fierce and without apology- none of it keeps you safe from violence. There is no space we can create in a world as damaged as the one we live in which is absent from violence. That we even think it is possible says more about our privilege than anything else. Our only autonomy lies in how we negotiate and use power and violence ourselves.



I really want to emphasize: there is no such thing as safe space under patriarchy or capitalism in light of all the sexist, hetero-normative, racist, classist (etc) domination that we live under. The more we try and pretend safety can exist at a community level the more disappointed and betrayed our friends, and lovers will be when they experience violence and do not get supported. Right now we've been talking a good game but the results are not adding up.

There are a lot of problems with the current model- the very different experiences of sexual assault and relationship abuse get lumped together. Accountability processes encourage triangulation instead of direct communication- and because conflict is not pushed, most honest communication is avoided. Direct confrontation is good! Avoiding it doesn't allow for new understandings, cathartic release or the eventual forgiveness that person to person exchanges can lead to.

We have set up a model where all parties are encouraged to simply negotiate how they never have to see each other again or share space. Some impossible demands/promises are meted out and in the name of confidentiality lines are drawn in the sand on the basis of generalities. Deal with your shit but you can't talk about the specifics of what went down and you can't talk to each other. The current model actually creates more silence- only a specialized few are offered information about what happened but everyone is still expected to pass judgment. There is little transparency in these processes.

In an understandable attempt to not trigger or cause more pain we talk ourselves in increasingly abstracted circles while a moment or dynamic between two people gets crystallized and doesn't change or progress. "Perps" become the sum total of their worst moments. "Survivors" craft an identity around experiences of violence that frequently keeps them stuck in that emotional moment. The careful nonviolent communication of accountability doesn't lead to healing. I've seen these processes divide a lot of scenes but I haven't seen them help people get support, retake power or feel safe again.

Rape breaks you- the loss of bodily control, how those feelings of impotence revisit you, how it robs you of any illusion of safety or sanity. We need models that help people take power back and we need to call the retribution, control, and banishing of the current model for what it is- revenge. Revenge is OK but lets not pretend its not about power! If shaming and retaliatory violence is what we have to work with then lets be real about it. Lets chose those tools if we can honestly say that is what we want to do. In the midst of this war we need to get better at being in conflict.

I also see that we all deserve patience when we go through the shock and trauma of suddenly becoming aware of just how much we have been constructed by sexual and gendered violence, when we suddenly realize that everything within and around us has been molded by scripts of power and violence, so deeply embedded that we can't see or envision or imagine a place or ourselves without sexual violence. When everything feels so clogged and consumed by rape, that we can't function without its reminders in our faces, clawing at our skin.

### How it started

Years ago I hit a breaking point.

The weight pressing on me from above and at all sides was (and sometimes still is) unbearable.

I went on a tyraide.

I tried to help start response collectives, tried to support other survivors in my life, obsessively read whatever material I could get my hands on. I would sit bolt upright in bed at 3 am and couldn't go back to sleep until I had written long letters and biked around the city delivering them to whoever I had determined to have said something disempowering, who doubted that I had been raped, who questioned the validity of my story, who said things that sat in my mind, slowly ripping apart whatever mental stability I had left.

I wanted that city to wake up, I wanted to force its eyelids open.

I certainly am not the first person to have felt this way - to pour everything they had left into this work. And now I understand why we fade, why we can't do it anymore, but I also know that no one ever really 'gives up' with this, because it is inescapable. Once you see it, it never goes away.

I first learned about 'call outs' and 'perpetrator accountability' when the first person I chose to trust again physically, after a violent abduction kept me unable to touch anyone for quite some time, ended up assaulting me after only a couple of weeks.

Our bodies and minds have incredible mechanisms for helping us to get through horrific situations. I'd been getting really good at storing trauma away to be dealt with later.

Now that I had been assaulted yet again, after such a long time of trying so hard to not ever have to endure that again, - I couldn't admit what had happened to myself.

I tried to pretend it wasn't real, but the pressure kept building.

As the person was someone who shared the same social circles and collective spaces, it was different then being raped or assaulted by someone I would probably never see again (as I had experienced in the past). It was strongly suggested to me that I call the person out.

At that point, being able to identify what had happened to me and put a name to it was a big deal for me. To know that others had been through the same



These reactions and fears make evident the difficulty and confusion of working one's way through shock and trauma.

When I began to be able to see and understand that nothing exists in a dichotomy, that someone is not the sum of their actions, I was unable to apply this truth to my own actions. I then put excessive blame on myself, I felt incessantly guilty for the times I had yelled, for the enraged letters and emails I had written, for calling out the person who assaulted me, for speaking up at all.

Now I try to hold onto everything at once. It's a juggling act, but it's important for me to remind myself that the actions and responses I took were important ones. I don't think this work can be ever be approached in terms of right and wrong but rather, understanding that navigating ones way through the nightmarish storm that is dominant US society is incredibly confusing and figuring this mess out won't happen in a linear path where we are always marching towards perfection. It is within a rape culture that I was brought up, every day of my upbringing I was molded to fit a role, to act a script; in which my foundational identity was formed around other's ideas of what my sexuality should look like. Being able to distance myself from that at all, being able to reassemble myself on my own terms, meant that every step I took made sense. I had to forge my own path. Being able to see what I can see now would not have happened without giving it everything I had and learning to trust myself. I can't expect to suddenly be free of everything I internalized as 'normal' and 'true'. Trauma and violence are a web. They are not flat, easy to grasp experiences and states of being.

I have to remind myself that I also deserve patience for learning to navigate through trauma, just like the people I felt hurt and betrayed by deserve it too- that is assuming they're also sincerely trying to wade through the shitstorm (which it's worth saying that when sexual violence gets called out, it often seems that people hold out for the collective memory to erase itself rather than really be concerned with the act(s) resulting in the calling out). I see now that when I ask for patience in my process and my path, that I should be able to have more patience to anyone trying to figure out their path as well, no matter what their experience has been (again assuming they actually are trying).

I wasn't capable of patience before because I saw sexual violence as a life or death situation, I couldn't be patient when the conditions were rape and assault. I didn't think anyone deserved patience when they had violated someone else.

I see anger and rage as indispensable for helping one try to own up to the ways one experiences privilege and accesses power at the expense of others and their bodies.

In learning to see the many ways I internalize and access settler privilege at extreme cost - anger and rage have been essential for me to understand the urgency and severity of undoing the power I access daily.

Abuse and rape are inevitable consequences of the sick society we are forced to live under. We need to eviscerate and destroy it, but in the meantime, we can't hide from it- or the ways it affects our most personal relationships. I know in my own life an important process in my struggle for liberation was making my peace with the worst consequences of my personal assault on patriarchy. Dealing with being raped was an important part of understanding what it meant to chose to be at war with this society.

Rape has always been used as this tool of control- proffered up as a threat of what would happen if I, in my queerness and gendered ambiguity, continued to live, work, dress, travel, love or resist the way that I chose to. Those warnings held no water for me- in my heart I knew it was only a matter of time- no matter *what* kind of life I chose to live because my socially prescribed gender put me at constant risk for violation. I was raped at work and it took me a while to really name that assault as rape. After it happened mostly what I felt, once the pain, rage and anger subsided was relief. Relief that *it* had finally happened. I had been waiting my whole life for it to happen, had had a few close calls and finally I knew what it felt like and I knew I could get through it.

I needed that bad trick. I needed a concrete reason for the hunted feelings that stemmed from my friend's rape, murder and mutilation a few years back. I needed to have someone hurt me and realize I had both the desire to kill them and the personal control to keep myself from doing it. I needed to reach out for support and be disappointed. Because that's how it goes down- ask the survivors you know most people don't come out of it feeling supported. We've raised expectations but the real life experience is still shit.

I was traveling abroad when it happened. The only person I told called the police against my wishes. They searched the "crime" scene without my consent and took DNA evidence because I didn't dispose of it. Knowing I had allowed myself in a moment of vulnerability to be pressured and coerced into participating in the police process against my political will made me feel even worse than being violated had. I left town shortly thereafter so I didn't have to continue to be pressured by my 'friend' into cooperating with the police any more than I already had. The only way I felt any semi-balance of control during that period was by taking retribution against my rapist into my own hands.



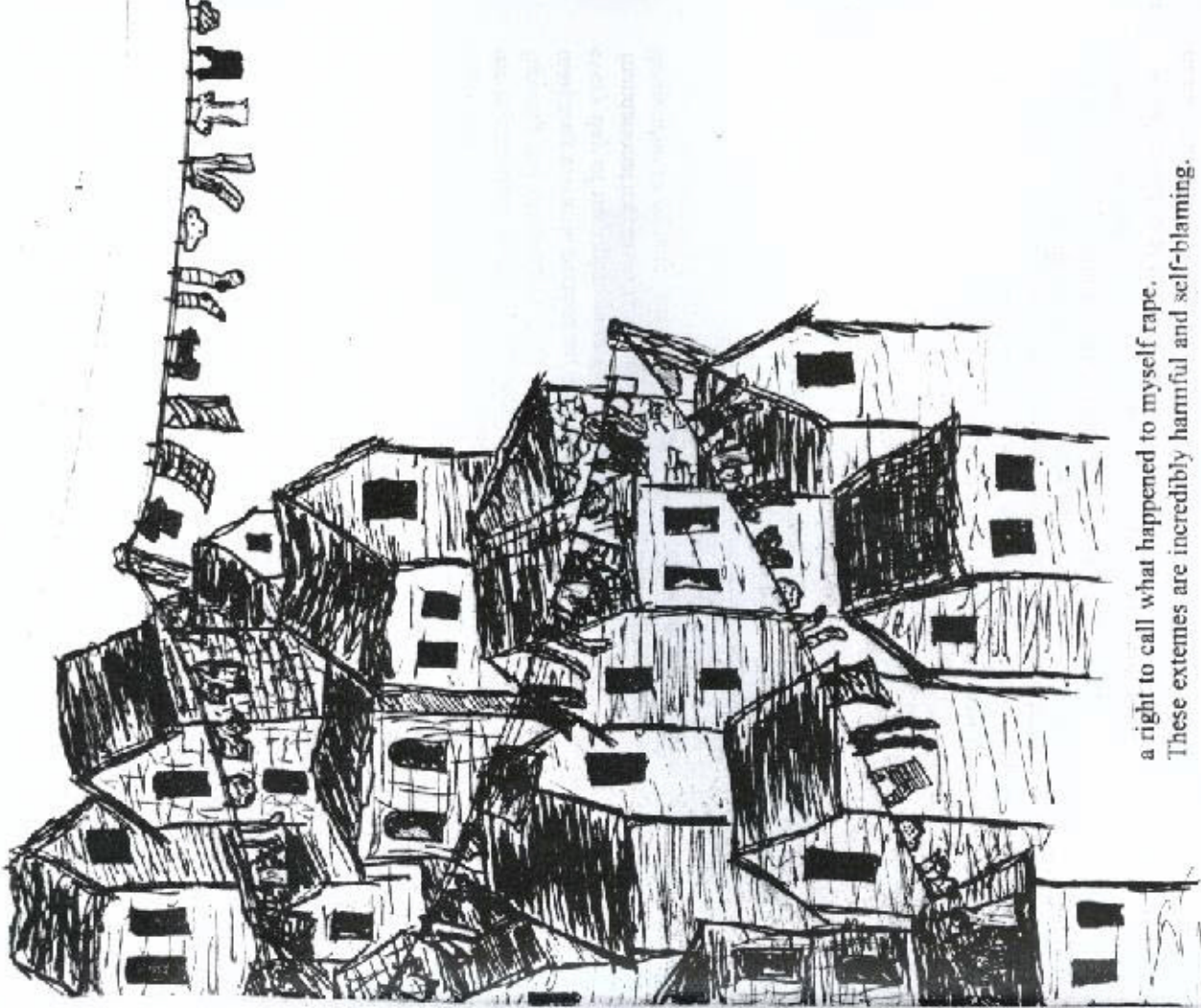
I realized that I also could wield threats, anger and implied violence as a weapon. After my first experience of 'support' I chose to do that alone. I could think of no one in that moment to ask for help but it was OK because I realized I could do it myself. In most other places I think I could have asked some of my friends to help me. The culture of nonviolence does not totally permeate *all* of the communities I exist in. The lack of affinity I felt was a result of being transient to that city but I don't think my experience of being offered mediation instead of confrontation is particularly unique.

In the case of sexual assault I think retaliatory violence is appropriate, and I don't think there needs to be any kind of consensus about it. Pushing models that promise to mediate instead of allow confrontation is isolating and alienating. I didn't want mediation through legal channels or any other. I wanted revenge. I wanted to make him feel as out of control, scared and vulnerable as he had made me feel. There is no safety really after a sexual assault, but there can be consequences.

We can't provide survivors safe space- safe space, in a general sense, outside of close friendships, some family and the occasional affinity just doesn't exist. Our current models of accountability suffer from an over-abundance of hope. Fuck the false promises of safe space- we will never get everyone on the same page about this. Let's cop to how hard healing is and how delusional any expectation for a radical change of behavior is in the case of assault. We need to differentiate between physical assault and emotional abuse- throwing them together under the general rubric interpersonal violence doesn't help.

Cyclical patterns of abuse don't just disappear. This shit is really really deep- many abusers were abused and many abused become abusers. The past few years I have watched with horror as the language of accountability became an easy front for a new generation of emotional manipulators. It's been used to perfect a new kind of predatory maverick- the one schooled in the language of sensitivity- using the illusion of accountability as community currency.

So where does real safety come from? How can we measure it? Safety comes from trust, and trust is personal. It can't be mediated or rubber stamped at a community level. My 'safe' lover might be your secret abuser and my caustic codependent ex might be your healthy, tried and true confidant. Rape culture is not easily undone, but it *is* contextual.



a right to call what happened to myself rape.  
These extremes are incredibly harmful and self-blaming.

Some of the people I know who ended up having to call someone out or who have worked hard to support accountability processes I think are hesitant to criticize the ideas and models that are held around accountability because they feel like all that we have to turn too. There are so few people willing to put their energy towards any sort of supportive response when an act of sexual violence takes place within a collectivity of people or a social scene that criticism feels threatening to the already fragile effort and care that currently exists.



sore eyes / new eyes

by claire u.

sometimes I feel like the way I understand sexual violence and partner abuse is ever-expanding and evolving, yet other moments I find myself questioning if I am just re-learning how to shut up.

at times it feels like I might have multiple personalities that are collectively making decisions on how I should feel and react about these issues, and are sometimes just battling to drown each other out.

When I run into those that have raped and assaulted my friends, my reactions are mixed; I used to break down, in many cases I have let it go, mostly I feel uncertain.

I no longer expect these people to have consequences, I no longer expect them to care. I've stopped expecting the people around us to care. The expectations I had before left me enraged, heartbroken and devastated too many times. But I also question some of those previously held expectations and wonder how much

sense they made. I've also learned to see how much more complex each situation can be and it has allowed me to have lot more understanding for where other people in my life are at.

before, I had perceived myself to be acting from a place of right and good; all those who had assaulted and raped were now

justifiably bad and therefore the holders of blame- the receptacles for my rage. I justified my desires for control and power over the actions of the 'perpetrators' in my life as legitimate and

necessary because I was a survivor, someone who had experienced rape and assault and therefore I knew best what perpetrators needed to do with themselves.

Now I question my past rationalizations for I can see how my behavior

became problematic in that I utilized power control in the name of 'accountability'. Yet I have feared that by verbally acknowledging this dynamic (which I have seen often) that it would end up squashing and invalidating the already fragile attempts to speak up about rape and assault



and to harbor some sort of meaningful response within communities/collectivities.

I fear this because my reactions have been in such extremes that I end up questioning if it was okay to ever be angry about rape; I question if I ever had

People in relation to each other create healthy or unhealthy exchanges. There is no absolute for 'fucked up', 'healed' or 'safe' - it changes with time, life circumstance, and each new love affair. It is with feelings of unease that I have observed the slippery slope of 'emotional' abuse become a common reason to initiate an accountability process...

Here is the problem with using this model for emotional abuse: its an unhealthy dynamic between two people. So who gets to call it? Who gets to wield that power in the community? (And lets all be honest that there is power in calling someone to an accountability process.) People in unhealthy relationships need a way to get out of them without it getting turned into a community judgment against whomever was unlucky enough to not realize a bad dynamic or call it abuse first. These processes frequently exacerbate mutually unhealthy power plays between hurt parties. People are encouraged to pick sides and yet no direct conflict brings these kinds of entanglements to any kind of resolve.

Using accountability models developed all those years ago to deal with serial rapists in the radical scene has not done much to help people get out of the sand pit of damaging and codependent relationships. Emotional abuse is a fucking vague and hard to define term. It means different things to every person.

If someone hurts you and you want to hurt them back- then do it but don't pretend its about mutual healing. Call power exchange for what it is. Its OK to want power back and its OK to take it but never do anything to someone else that you couldn't stomach having someone do to you if the tables were turned.

Those inclined to use physical brutality to gain power need to be taught a lesson in a language they will understand. The language of physical violence. Those mired in unhealthy relationships need help examining a mutual dynamic and getting out of it- not assigning blame. No one can decide who deserves compassion and who doesn't except the people directly involved.

There is no way to destroy rape culture through non-violent communication because there is no way to destroy rape culture without destroying society. In the meantime let's stop expecting the best or the worst from people.

I am sick of accountability and its lack of transparency.  
I am sick of triangulating.  
I am sick of hiding power exchange.  
I am sick of hope.



I have been raped.  
I have been an unfair manipulator of power in some of my intimate relationships.  
I have had sexual exchanges that were a learning curve for better consent.  
I have the potential in me to be both survivor and perp- abused and abuser- as we all do.

These essentialist categories don't serve us. People rape- very few people are rapists in every sexual exchange. People abuse *one another*- this abuse is often mutual and cyclical- cycles are hard but not impossible to amend. These behaviors change contextually. Therefore there is no such thing as safe space.

I want us to be honest about being at war- with ourselves, with our lovers and with our "radical" community because we are at war with the world at large and those tendrils of domination exist within us and they affect so much of what we touch, who we love and those we hurt.

But we are not only the pain we cause others or the violence inflicted upon us.

We need more direct communication and when that doesn't help we need direct engagement in all its horrible messy glory. As long as we make ourselves vulnerable to others we will never be safe in the total sense of the word.

There is only affinity and trust kept.  
There is only trust broken and confrontation.  
The war isn't going to end anytime soon  
Let's be better at being in conflict.

Contact - down to this@riseup.net

I had a friend once tell me that we needed to "exit the womb talking about accountability." Later on, she told me that she didn't think that she would ever see a successful accountability process involving a perpetrator in her lifetime. I personally think this feeling of doubt is stemming from the fact that people acknowledge the existence of internalized oppression, but do not want to take the painstakingly long road to get to a point where we can actually obliterate it.

Accountability is a loaded term. People throw it around like those other words - "movement", "anarchism", "solidarity". We throw it around so much that we forget what it's actually supposed to be used for. When it gets to that point, accountability becomes such an abstract concept that no one seems to know where to go next. I can't say that I have any immediate solution to this dilemma. Yet, I can safely suggest that accountability processes are the best thing that we have to combat rape, sexual assault and abuse in our communities outside of the (in)justice system. With that acknowledgment, we'd better start working a hell of a lot harder at making them concrete, long-term and sustainable weapons against the rape culture and patriarchal empire we live in. Long-term accountability will never work if we do not learn how to create safer spaces for one another to work through our shit - spaces where trauma is acknowledged and support is adequately given.

As of right now, survivors of sexual assault are physically and mentally checking out. Perpetrators are checking out. They are leaving town and dropping out of our movements. I am one of those people due to the fact that many "anarchists" or "radicals" I know have not taken mine or many of my other friends' experiences with sexual assault seriously enough. Our experiences have been overshadowed by "more important things" when we should be working to treat personal issues equally to what we consider political issues. It is not our jobs as survivors to deal with this alone, just as it isn't the job of a target of state repression to deal with their case against the state alone. If we do not see these two things as interrelated and address them together - through support and sustainable accountability models - there will never be that revolution that so many of us crave to obtain. If we ever wish to see a true revolution, we have to recognize that it does not come solely by stealing the external enemy's power, but also recognizing that the powers we hate also exist inside our communities. To escape a water-leaking closet, we need to learn how to break down the doors that trapped us there in the first place.



There is a lot of rhetoric that surrounds the concept of support. In my opinion, I don't think many of us have a clue of what it should actually look like. Granted, we know how to materially support one another - sending letters to each other in jail, raising money for bail bonds or legal fees, offering ideas on where to find a good lawyer, but real, from the depths of our being, support? Support that comes with knowing that when you see your perpetrator in a social place, everyone there will ask them to leave. Knowing that when you ask for space to be emotional and bi-polar, it will be honored and not looked down upon. Knowing that when your family member or child dies, there will be a caring and supportive community there to help you through your grief. Without that real support, we have nothing - as the monsters we are fighting aren't agents of the state, but in our own heads. When I realized that this kind of support was structurally missing in our radical community, I started to see that the people who had suffered from sexual assault, emotional and physical abuse in partnerships, depression and other mental health disorders, were often ostracized, voluntarily and involuntarily, from their communities and from the political work that they were once involved in.

I think of words like "movement", "anarchism" and "solidarity" - all words that fall into some sort of concept of support in this crazy world we live in. To me it seems like these words should stretch across a broad spectrum of issues that people are affected by - they shouldn't be limited to just state repression in the radical movement. Yet, in my experience, I feel like they have been. People are so quick to jump on organizing fundraisers, support groups and outreach when someone has been arrested on some politically related charge(s). Their passion for the "cause" is fueled by their anger against the state, against the "bad guys". But when someone is sexually assaulted in a radical community, the myth that perpetuates this dichotomy between good (us) and evil (them) is destroyed. People don't know how to act when their perceptions of how the world works is in shambles - most people tend to shuffle it under the rug, ignore it or halfheartedly try to offer their support in very strange ways (really...you are going to say that I'm in your prayers through a text message and then seemingly ignore me when you see me in person? Fuck you dude).

From the experiences I have witnessed and been a part of in Minneapolis, it seems that our community has yet to offer any sustainable model on how to radically deal with the things that hold us in our mental prisons. Recognizing that we are all survivors in some form or another, we need to learn how to support one another outside of just resisting state repression. People need to wake up and realize that currently, dealing with our own shit takes a back seat to this material kind of support. Friends and community members are being raped and abused by other friends and community members. If we don't do anything to stop it, from a purely practical perspective, there won't be any of us left to fight for the world that we all hope one day to live in.

by Ly  
Minneapolis, mn

\*\*This is my attempt at writing about how sexual assault has affected me and my relationship with sex and radicalism. The words below are from the root, rawness and vomit of my being - and could be potentially triggering to other survivors.\*\*

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I used to have a more quixotic relationship with sex and anarchy - before a rip tide uprooted me from my idealistic concept of liberation and solidarity last year. Nowadays, I've changed from a politically active anarchist into a moth, trapped in a water-leaking closet of patriarchal empire. I can't get out and I'm running out of air.

I am writing this piece not only to mentally breathe through my gurgling semantics related to my sexual assault, but to articulate my experience to those who have failed me and to other survivors who are dealing with this. It is not our shit to deal with alone. If we ever want to create a radical movement, we need to begin to address our cultural problems of sexual violence. We all need to wake the fuck up.

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## Chapter 1: It's Like Being Punched in the Stomach:

### Rape, Sex and Alcohol

I will never forget the day that I called what my partner did to me rape. Things like it had happened before, I would wake up in the middle of the night to him forcefully taking my hand in his sleep to jack him off, or the time he tried to have anal sex with me while I was passed out next to him in his tent. I think about these events, just a handful of instances of sexually manipulative situations that occurred during our relationship, and remember how I shrugged them off as seemingly innocent. I didn't know why I thought at the time that these behaviors were okay, and at the pinnacle of our dysfunctional relationship last winter, he raped me in my sleep - unprotected, silent and crippling.



Even in a radical community, sexual assault continues to occur after we hold meetings, panels and discussions about it, after we create literature and facilitate accountability structures around it. These tactics are not working. Why not? What are we not doing correctly that we can seemingly ignore the fact that sexual assault is continuing to happen all the time despite our meager attempts to obliterate it?

When I called my perpetrator out about his sexual assault, I was expecting to be met with a supportive and caring "community". It's hard to say if I really got that or not. A part of me feels immensely grateful for the few people who really stepped in to help me deal with this. There are two people I am particularly grateful for - one of whom has dedicated the last year of their life helping my perpetrator deal with his shit through a weekly accountability process and the second who has spent countless drunken nights with me on my front porch, listening to me process through my emotional trauma. I love them both for all their support, but can't help feeling like there should have been a broader response from the community about the issue.

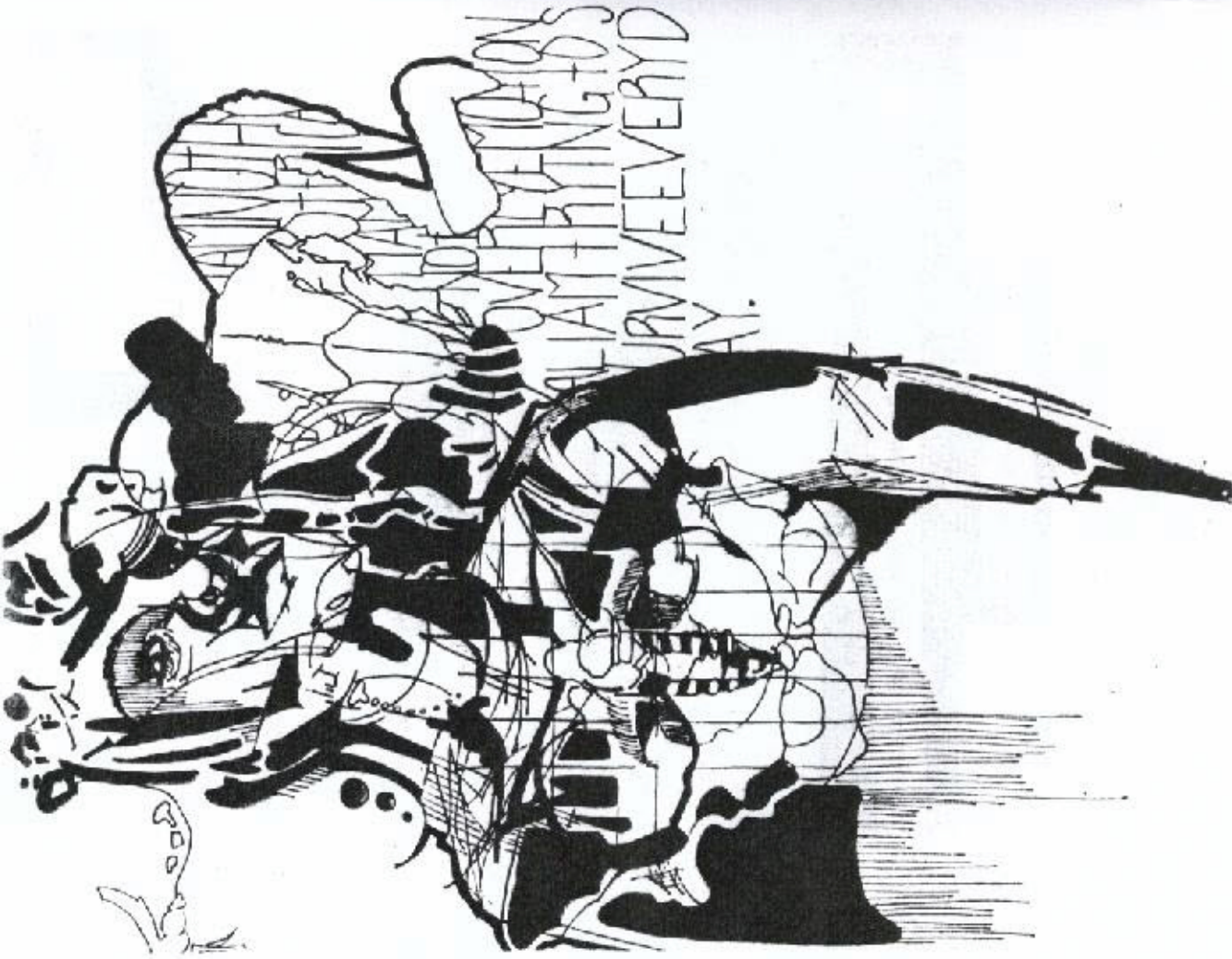
My perpetrator was a member of a group called the RNC 8, who were facing charges related to the St. Paul Republican National Convention in 2008. Everyone in the RNC 8's defense committee was generally very concerned about how this person was going to be accountable to their sexual assault - instigating point people to meet with him individually and limiting his access to particular events and organizing efforts. Yet, like many other attempts to develop community accountability processes, the community's attempts quickly became perpetrator-centric, enveloped in radical rhetoric with no value at its core.

This led me to thinking about what real support means. I was inundated

with messages on an everyday basis on how I needed to "Support the RNC 8", go to their events or fund-raise for their legal funds. At first, I was happy to know that people still felt good about supporting these people, even though more than one of them had been called out as a perpetrator in past years, including mine. As time progressed, I began to realize that the state repression of the RNC 8 became more important than addressing the issues of sexual assault in our radical circles. The perpetrators' well-being became more important than the survivors themselves.

Never once was it

made obviously clear to the broader public through the RNC 8 defense committee's "movement statements" that the RNC 8 contained perpetrators of sexual assault. Perhaps this was a defense tactic - it was easier to withhold this information than to acknowledge that sexual violence was a problem in our "movement building" community. Now that the RNC 8 case has come to a close, there is still no movement, to the best of my knowledge, on beginning to talk about sexual violence in our community or how to support survivors.



\*artwork by Ly

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So that's it, I realized. This horrible shit dance that I was mistaking for sex all these years is actually a symptom of a cultural pandemic that legitimizes rape in all its forms. I was so immersed within the mainstream notion that rape is perpetrated by some stranger in the bushes, I was ignoring the fact that it was happening to me.

Well, I thought, that's intense – and if it held any truth, how the fuck can we create a culture where we foster healthy, sexual relationships with one another? It seemed to me like I was living in a culture that generated a fucked up acceptance to the traumatic things that happen to bodies like mine. This acceptance, I realized, was reinforced by the abuse of alcohol and other substances in radical communities. I mean, if you were too drunk to remember it, it didn't happen right?

How can we continue to exist in a world where we can't even recognize rape, prevent it, or adequately deal with it when it happens so that it will never happen again?

I felt like I would never be able to breathe again.

## Chapter 2: Coming Up for Air: Thoughts on Radicalism, Support and Accountability

I kept breathing – through the loss of friends, suppressed anger, bouts of depression and long walks with my dog in the park. And now I am here, almost a year later, writing in this zine about the same issues I was thinking about the day that I was in Hard Times because no one else seems to be interested in doing it.

What I find more troublesome than all of the emotional trauma and violence I was experiencing the day after my partner raped me was the fact that it happened in a supposedly radical community. My partner turned perpetrator had read countless sexual assault zines, been to anti-sexual violence workshops and was even in a men's group with some other "radical" socialized men. Obviously these things were not completely successful because my "community" is rampant with survivors of sexual assault – and the unaccountable perpetrators that haunt them.

At first, he didn't even admit to what he had done. I had to ask him why, when I had been drunk and passed out, I awoke to my pants off and his cum in between my legs. When the severity of the situation came to light the next morning, he got down on his knees and begged to me. He told me he would do anything to make it better. I walked away. Numb in the winter air, with wine stained lips and my bra tucked in between my coat and shirt – I tried to scream. I tried to call my friends but no one answered. I called my mom but she didn't have much to say but "sorry honey." I ended up going to Hard Times Cafe and not knowing what else to do, I created catharsis through a cup of coffee and some food.

Eating the burrito I had just ordered, I began to think of what my experiences have been like being socialized as a hetero-normative female. I was bitterly reminded that I've been brought up in a society where sex is something that I've always felt obligated to give or accept at any given time, even if I was drunk and unable to give consent. I was brought up to treat my body as a vessel for the male orgasm.

I was reminded of a time when a lover asked me what I wanted in bed – I became dumbfounded and didn't know what to say. This silence triggered something in me. How can I be away from my body and my desires for so long, always responding to someone else's sexual needs, to the point that I can't even recognize or vocally express what I want sexually anymore? The thought made me want to vomit out all the cum I had swallowed in my lifetime right there on the cafe table.

Though the bile swirled up in my mouth, I didn't vomit (crude as it would have been). Instead, I thought about all the times I've tuned out when someone has wanted to engage with me sexually (especially when I was drunk) – I've turned around, shrugged and faked my own pleasure to get them off more quickly. I had so many words to describe my ambivalence, which maybe was more like a defense mechanism, but no words to call that person out for not recognizing that our interactions were not consensual or pleasurable to me. I often left situations feeling like it was my fault for not finding satisfaction in these hetero-monotonous sexual experiences.

Time and time again, my body had been treated like an object – one that could be penetrated and colonized – by socialized men. I could talk all I want about my desires, about consent, about having a healthy sexual relationship – but when it came down to it, the people I had sex with still operated on assumptions that have been laid out for them in this rape culture. Those assumptions more often than not led me to similar experiences of sexual assault like the one that occurred with my partner.



by Thea Gahr

