

Moving Beyond Critique: Creative Interventions and Reconstructions of Community Accountability

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Introduction

IN THE SUMMER OF 2006, A DRUMMING TEACHER FROM SOUTH Korea WAS INVITED TO teach a weeklong intensive drumming workshop at a Korean cultural community center in Oakland, California.¹ He was a teacher within a well-respected tradition of drumming associated with village life and radical anti-state politics in Korea. Trusted ties with this Korean institution had been woven through Korean American pilgrimages to the Korean village home and invitations to teachers to visit various drum groups throughout the United States. After an evening of singing, storytelling, and drinking—the usual festivities accompanying a full day of intensive drumming instruction—several students stayed the night to rest and recover for the next day. For over two decades, the cultural center had developed a safe, multi-gender, and intergenerational space and haven for the teaching of Korean drumming and dance, community performance, and ongoing cultural and political exchange between the home country and the diaspora. That night, this safety was shattered when the drumming teacher sexually assaulted one of his students.

The violation was immediately communicated throughout the small building, and center leaders quickly pulled together a direct confrontation involving the members and their community-led board. The next day, members gathered at the center to denounce the violation and support the victim of violence. In this situation, the victim steadfastly refused to name herself as a “survivor,” finding the former term a closer match to her experience of sexual violence.

Liz, the president of the Oakland cultural center at the time of the assault, recalls the next day’s encounter:

When we got there, the teacher got on his knees and knelt in front of us, which is the deepest sign of respect. And then he asked us, begged us, not to tell his organization back home. We said we couldn’t do that. “We’re not here for your apology. We’re here to tell you what happened, what

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we're going to do, and that's it." He made a big sign of remorse, taking his drumming stick and breaking it. He put it on the ground like "I'll give up drumming for this." Most of us were disgusted.

What followed was a set of sexual assault awareness workshops for center members and members of other affiliated drumming groups. An immediate telephone call to the head of the Korean drumming institution elicited the leader's profound shock and unconditional apology. Then a letter with a list of demands was sent. The Oakland organization demanded that the Korean institution establish sexual assault awareness trainings for its entire membership, which ranged from college students to elder farmers in the village, and commit to sending at least one woman teacher in future exchanges to the United States. They requested that the teacher step down from his leadership position for an initial period of six months and attend feminist therapy sessions that directly addressed the assault. The traditional relationship of deference to esteemed teachers and the teaching institution shifted as the Oakland organization challenged the familiar practice of sexual harassment and violation.

The organization also contacted a sister progressive drumming group in Seoul. That group had dealt with sexual assault in a manner that reflected its deeply democratic values. Its one hundred members were collectively organized to address a sexual assault that had occurred among the membership. The person who had committed the violation went through an extensive process with the group's leaders and members. After leaving the organization, he posted a public apology on its website and retained relationships with drumming group members.

Inspired by this story of collective action and its concrete results, the Oakland organization implemented measures that reversed the usual silence and victim-blaming that accompany sexual assault. The annual October festival was dedicated to the theme of healing from sexual violence. Facts regarding the incident were published in the program and shared as a part of the evening's festival. This was not intended as a shaming act, although the teacher may have been shamed by it. Rather, it was a challenge to the community to take collective responsibility for ending the conditions that perpetuate violence, including collusion through silence.

This story reveals painful lessons about community violence and the limitations of our community-led processes. The Korean cultural center came together with a unified response to violence, but grew divided as the process continued. During the drawn-out period of institutional reflection and engagement, the energy and spirit of the organization, as well as the friendships that had held it together, were sapped. The victim never returned. Korean American visitors who participated in drumming events in South Korea viewed the continued presence of the teacher with resentment and suspicion. His eventual removal from the institution did not necessarily lead to the sense of justice that people desired.

Liz, the center's president, reflected further on this set of events and on the uncertainties accompanying the process of community accountability:

Some people asked us later why we didn't call the police. It was not even a thought in anybody's mind. I know that a couple of folks—her close friends—tried to break in, to kick his ass, but they couldn't find him. Luckily they didn't. Luckily for him and the organization, too, because I think if they had, [it] would have been a ... mess. Well, I don't want to say luckily because the victim even felt at some point, "maybe we should've just kicked his ass. Now, I feel like I've got nothing. I don't have the police report. We didn't throw him into jail.... We didn't do nothing." We talked to her and said, "We didn't move forward on anything without your consent." We asked, "What else can we offer you?" We offered her to go to counseling and therapy. We offered her whatever we could do at the time. In retrospect, I wish we could have spent more time to just embrace her and bring her in closer.

This story explores the role of force and violence, as well as our response to violence. Despair over a long and complex process of accountability spurred discussions among the members of the Oakland organization about the potential benefits of violent retribution. Liz reflected on a member's insightful remark as they pondered the expedience of violence: "That's what the teacher wanted. He wanted that. When he was making that apology, he wasn't necessarily saying 'beat me up.' But he was saying, 'do anything you want to me, I deserve it.' That way, once you do, he can walk away and say, 'Okay, now I'm done, wipe my hands and walk away. They've done everything they can already.'" Some may fear a violent response most, but some could also welcome a quick but dramatically symbolic payback. "Kicking ass," a familiar symbol of community rage, can also be a substitute for a process of repair and change.

Creative Interventions: Moving Beyond Critique

Mapping Alternatives in the New Millennium

While this story was unfolding, Creative Interventions (CI) was already under way. Inspired by a social movement that challenged gender-based violence—and that had been infused with new life at the historic 2000 Color of Violence Conference in Santa Cruz and the 1999 Critical Resistance Conference in Berkeley—many of us fashioned a critique of institutional responses to violence and then *moved beyond it* to establish new institutional spaces for creating and promoting community-based responses to interpersonal violence.

These conferences critiqued the network of remedies to domestic violence and sexual assault. Made up of crisis lines, counseling centers, legal advocacy programs, and a system of criminal-legal responses to gender-based violence, it took an individualized, social service approach toward survivor support and a policing response to people who perpetrate violence (Bhattacharjee, 2002; Crenshaw, 1994;

Kim, 2010; Ritchie, 2006). This social movement, it seemed, had demobilized through professionalization and had become deradicalized through its pursuit of policies that were also championed by proponents of neoliberalism, most notably, criminalization (Bumiller, 2008; Smith, 2010).

I was involved in or witnessed various community-based interventions to gender-based violence within the space of progressive organizations. These community-driven efforts arose from a politics that was suspicious of police involvement and a pragmatic recognition that available institutional remedies would not lead to desired outcomes. Although I had actively worked in and established a number of organizations that were created to provide remedies to gender-based violence, particularly within immigrant communities, I recognized that our approaches still fell short of providing the sustainable solutions that our communities needed.

Restorative justice responses to gender-based violence developed to a limited extent in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada, but were rare in the United States and remained surprisingly beyond the scope of antiviolence programs (Strang and Braithwaite, 2002). Where practiced or proposed, antiviolence advocates, who often feared for the safety of survivors in legal processes prone to the pressures of reconciliation or the dismissal of injuries through mere words of apology, viewed alternative justice approaches with suspicion or outright hostility (Coker, 1999; 2002). More radical critics noted that restorative justice practices offer an alternative or diversion within the scope of a process still driven by the criminal legal system (Smith, 2010).

Giving voice and form to the shared frustrations of many in the antiviolence movement and other social justice arenas was the critique developed by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, which grew out of the Color of Violence Conference, Critical Resistance, the prison abolitionist organization, and Generation Five, which developed the concept of transformative justice as a response to child sexual abuse. An enthusiastic search for alternatives that challenged gender-based and state violence, however, revealed a surprisingly small and uninspiring set of examples.² The reproduction of investigative processes, victim-blaming, and punitive responses akin to aspects of the U.S. criminal legal system was disappointing and a shocking realization to those of us looking for more liberatory models.

In the early years following the establishment of Incite! and Critical Resistance, our proposed alternatives were largely polemical and thin on concrete examples. However, as the decade progressed, grassroots antiviolence organizations and collectives began to develop promising categories of practice—community accountability, community-based alternatives, and transformative justice—which offered overlapping menus of progressive principles and were unified within a critique of the institutions built up by the antiviolence movement since the mid-1970s. These practices resonated with activists, advocates, and everyday people looking for solutions to community violence, including gender-based violence. Many of them were seeking examples of what these alternatives could look like.

The establishment of Creative Interventions in 2004 was driven as much by disappointment in the failure of progressive communities to challenge violence within our own networks as by the positive mandates of a newly energized antiviolence movement. To populate the void of alternatives with more thoughtful and pragmatic models, tools, and examples of what might constitute community-based responses to violence, CI organized its activities around projects that aimed to build knowledge and practices in what appeared to be a vast unknown.

Rediscovering Community Accountability Through Story Telling: The StoryTelling and Organizing Project (STOP)

CI hoped to fill that void through two projects. Liz's story of sexual violence in the Korean community is one that was collected and shared through the *StoryTelling and Organizing Project (STOP)*,³ or what was originally known as the *National Story Collecting Project* (Herzing and Ontiveros, 2011). This project collects and documents community accountability stories, presenting them as alternative sources of knowledge to inform communities about what people did, how they carried out interventions, and the lessons they provided. The process of story collection, documentation, and listening is also a vehicle for organizing communities to generate action and stories that build upon each other and strengthen their capacity to challenge interpersonal and state violence.

Fundamental to this project is the belief that community accountability is not simply a contemporary innovation, but reflects everyday ways of thinking and doing that have been practiced within communities for generations. Our failure of imagination was not rooted in a lack of examples, but rather in the devaluing of community-based actions. Invariably, public discussion of the concept of community accountability would give rise to personal stories and experiences that fit the criteria of what CI calls "community-based interventions to interpersonal violence." Collective responses to violence—planned or spontaneous, successful or failed, led by the survivor of violence or not, and using a continuum of tactics often employing some form of force or threatened violence—were not uncommon. Many had confronted violence through their own creative means, sensing that options such as conventional services or the police were either unavailable or inappropriate.

Unifying this diverse range of stories is that the violence remained hidden and silenced, even by those whose lives were dramatically transformed by these actions. Indeed, a search for written documentation of such responses revealed a void. Interventions to violence were confined to the antiviolence institutions built by an increasingly bureaucratized movement and system responses, including restraining orders, arrests, and enhanced criminal penalties for gender-based violence. The stories of STOP reverse the dominant paradigm by privileging stories of violence intervention carried out within the spheres of home, family, friendships, work, and community. They address, reduce, end, or prevent violence through collective

action that may never engage the institutions we have come to equate with violence intervention.

Liz's story inspired others to imagine what a community effort could look like and showed that communities could overcome traditions of silent acceptance of gender-based violence, form a public response, and demand institutional change. This story, and many others published by STOP, clarified promises and quandaries that would later characterize CI's on-the-ground efforts to develop a model and tools capable of supporting community-based interventions to violence through its pilot project, the *Community-Based Interventions Project*. This story inspired others to move beyond rhetoric and imagine what one community's effort could look like. Communities could transcend silent acceptance and build upon connections across diaspora to offer solidarity and the concrete lessons of other organizations. This is one story among many that fueled the second project of CI.

Reconstructing Community Accountability Practices: The Community-Based Intervention Project

The *Community-Based Intervention Project* is a pilot study that set out to develop a model and set of tools to be used by family, friends, co-workers, and community members to intervene in interpersonal violence (Kim, 2010). Although it focused on gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual assault, the application was germane to other forms of interpersonal violence. CI and four other primarily immigrant-based domestic violence and sexual assault programs in the San Francisco Bay Area designed it as a collaborative project.⁴ Intervention team members met regarding 23 situations of violence and worked directly with over 100 people engaged in violence intervention. The team was made up of seven regular members and one additional evaluator who was a long-time antiviolence advocate committed to progressive politics. All members are people of color. Unlike many conventional violence intervention teams, this group consists of people with extensive experience with survivors of gender-based violence and others who were working with people doing harm (two of them had done harm themselves).

It was critical for an organization established by people who identified with survivors to include others who had substantial experience with and a commitment to working with those who had done harm. The project valued and openly discussed the inclusion of intervention team members who identified as having done harm and were actively practicing accountability through their personal and work lives. This mix of experience and orientations contributed to the creation of a multidimensional approach to violence intervention that was committed to "holism" — the consideration of multiple perspectives, including those of survivors, community allies, and people doing harm, in the process.

This pilot project was central to CI, but remained largely out of the public domain to respect the confidentiality of the participants,⁵ the need of CI to incubate a potentially controversial project, and the desire to build up sufficient experience

to make its results meaningful. Although each situation was profoundly unique, the assumption was that certain generalizations could be drawn over time and across diverse conditions.

This project sought to create a model and tools that did not rely upon the existence of organizations or institutions, although they could be adaptable within an institutional setting. The model was to be accessible at multiple levels (from individuals to organizations) and relevant to the various stages, degrees, and types of violence. Ultimately, we hoped that CI could provide resources available in audio, text, and web-accessible formats to guide those closest to violence, including survivors, friends, family, co-workers, community members, and people doing harm, to drive their interventions and bring about their own collective change. These tools can continue to be transformed through storytelling, drama, visual arts, or any other media and in any language that could best engage the group or communities.

Our model was meant to recruit and organize available and accessible resources, without the need of professional help, money, or other means beyond the group's own capacities. Standardized tools are only meant to serve as guideposts. We believed these tools would be applied and expressed in a manner unique to each setting and would build upon the culture and practices already inherent in that community's strengths.

Stories collected through STOP highlighted community-based efforts employed by community members for generations. CI's interest was to legitimize such interventions and to contribute to their effectiveness and social change potential through resources developed by two of its projects. Of course, CI did not consider all community-based interventions to be positive. Many of the lessons from STOP and from the pilot Community-Based Interventions Project reveal the difficulties underlying this approach. It was not enough simply to tout the potential and promises of community-based responses to violence. For us, a critical aspect of knowledge production was the highlighting of successes as well as failures, contradictions, and challenges.

The Model of Community-Based Intervention

The on-the-ground pilot project began with central assumptions and priorities that informed the basic characteristics of the model. First, the people closest to the violence have the greatest motivation to end it and the greatest knowledge regarding its dynamics, context, and the elements that might lead to change.⁶ This intimate expertise, coupled with the accumulated knowledge of the antiviolence movement and the innovations of CI and other organizations pursuing community accountability strategies, would serve as the foundation for a community-based approach. The most motivated party, therefore, could initiate the intervention. In the experience of CI, this was usually the survivor. A family member, friend, or "community ally" could also start the intervention; the survivor may not even

necessarily be involved, at least initially. This opened the possibility for the person doing harm to initiate the intervention.

Second, collective efforts would be more effective and transformative than the conventional antiviolence model, which promotes individualized approaches. The CI model encourages collective action, from small to large, and from tightly organized to loosely coordinated. CI recognized that many of the people brought in to help to address and resolve situations of violence lacked knowledge and coordination. One person's advice or actions may completely contradict those of another. CI relied upon and developed concepts and tools derived from community organizing to promote more effective teamwork, including thoughtful recruitment of allies that might be gathered into a team, guidance regarding appropriate roles, meaningful goal setting, and tools to aid collective decision-making and coordinated action.

Third, the conventional antiviolence binaries of female-male and victim-perpetrator were not rigidly or dogmatically held. Although the exact details of an alternative were not known initially and remain ambiguous, the assumptions of the conventional approach were altered. CI tried not to reproduce the language of the criminal justice system. General terms such as "person doing harm" or "person who caused harm" are used instead of perpetrator, offender, batterer, rapist, or predator. For example, in a specific situation of violence we may say perpetrator of sexual assault. This allows for the possibility of change, without assuming it is inevitable. In concrete situations, we were more likely to use someone's name.

Fourth, although intervention goals could not be determined in advance, the goal-setting process was central to the community-based intervention. The conventional antiviolence approach is generally seen as "survivor-centered," with survivor needs and perspectives becoming central and their goals driving the intervention. In contrast, CI's approach attempted to deepen the practice of self-determination in two ways. First, it fully opened up the process of goal setting to explore a full range of options that may not be known in advance; second, it allowed for a process that could build group consensus through the collective negotiation of goals. Therefore, it would not necessarily be assumed that the survivor's or any individual's goals would solely drive the intervention process. And it would not be assumed that the survivor or the collective group would prioritize conventional antiviolence goals such as physical safety or separation from the person doing harm.

Fifth, CI paired the concept of safety with that of risk taking.⁷ This seemingly contradictory assumption is a basic challenge to what CI views as a fetishization of safety in the antiviolence movement, one that has taken legitimate desires for safety and channeled them into interventions requiring shelter and arrest. In short, attention to immediate safety through physical separation is often driven more by the rules and regulations of shelters and the legal mandates of the criminal justice system than by the priorities of the survivor.

Sixth, the experience of team members with interpersonal violence interventions led us to realize that resistance is part of the process of change. People doing harm

could not be expected to follow a linear path from harmful behavior to contrition and positive change. Resistance to change was arguably not so fundamental to the characteristics of people doing harm that change would be impossible. Rather, a community-based intervention model would expect resistance, without succumbing to it or accepting that the usual tactics of denial, minimization, blaming, and manipulation condemned an intervention to failure. A central question we hoped to answer was how we could anticipate, contain, and shift resistance toward accountability.

Finally, CI assumes that people may be mobilized to work together to end violence without necessarily sharing its radical antiviolence politics or that of other groups working on community accountability or transformative justice. The development of collective violence intervention approaches and practices can enhance the capacity of community members to challenge interpersonal violence, gender-based violence, and other forms of violence, including state violence, leading perhaps to a more liberatory politics. For those who profess a radical politics, the act of engaging in collective violence intervention could concretize and strengthen political practices.

CI envisioned a facilitated model. The facilitator was to serve as an anchor throughout the intervention, providing some level of stability and consistency in a process that can easily be undermined by the crisis-driven nature of violence. In particular, the intimate relationships among the primary survivor and perpetrator of violence, and the people to whom they are connected, often lead to mixed loyalties, multiple perspectives regarding the details of violence, competing visions of fault and blame, and expanding fears for safety as people become more closely involved in confronting the situations of violence.

Contrary to the common perception of a facilitator as a professional helper, in the CI model facilitators are trusted individuals from one's community; they are familiar with the parties involved in the situation of violence and understand the dynamics of violence in its cultural context. Ideally, a facilitator would be far enough removed from the crisis aspect of situation to be able to provide stability and consistency over time. This facilitator need not be a professional or work at an antiviolence organization. Although not everyone can act as a competent facilitator, many community members should be able to step up to the task and receive the support needed to play this role if provided the tools developed by this pilot project.

Developing a Model

CI's intervention teams spent about three years taking calls and meeting in person with anyone seeking its assistance. Starting with the rudimentary assumptions of this model, CI fashioned its approach as a facilitator, asking a set of questions meant to guide the participants toward their own solutions. Its assumptions concerning reliance upon one's own community for resources and the encouragement of collective action were met by determining who the person calling might want to bring along. Even the decision to begin the process alone generated a process that

CI calls “mapping allies.” Unlike conventional antiviolence resources that generally ask a survivor of violence to begin engagement with services on their own, the CI approach encouraged teamwork with members of one’s own social network. CI did not assume that the survivor would be the first person to take action. Survivors were often the first to approach CI, but friends, family members, and people from the same organization were among those who came to CI for support.

In a process that CI calls “getting clear,” the person or people considering an intervention are prompted to clarify the known situation of violence, the level of risk and danger, the resources available, and the information and next steps still needed. This process can help to validate the feelings of those overcome by the mixed emotions that usually accompany violence and move people from panic or paralysis toward a greater level of clarity. Participants were encouraged to share this information to properly assess their situation, to identify what was going on, and what they wanted. At this point people could potentially map options and next steps, even if these plans were very simple and immediate. The sole accomplishment for that day may be to guarantee safety for that evening or to make plans to call one friend

Visual aids such as a large white board or easel paper to list facts, possible allies and/or barriers, goals, or possible next steps often help this process. Representations of the people involved in violence and those who might help or harm them were shuffled on a table to clarify the complex dimensions of violence, the human dynamics, and possible steps toward a resolution. These writings and objects were photographed and shared during subsequent meetings as reminders of what had been discussed and what had changed over time.

Role-playing became a regular exercise whenever allies might be added, potential challenges to safety or the intervention might arise, or engagement with people doing harm was being considered. Potential barriers, victim-blaming, and hostile reactions were acted out. Potential threats to safety were presented so that people could consider their best options and plan safety strategies. People were sometimes asked to face situations that they had not formerly imagined. When other possible barriers or threats were raised, facilitators and their allies were asked to propose appropriate responses.

After additional meetings, CI standardized the initial questions and steps that were helpful in formulating an intervention to violence. Other tools were needed to identify and manage common problems, such as working with groups that mobilized around a situation of violence, but disintegrated as disagreements emerged. The resulting toolkit, available on the CI website,⁸ attempts to document and share these lessons in the form of a practical model and set of tools capable of addressing the diverse situations of violence faced by communities. Due to its modular and pragmatic style, it is applicable to different cultural contexts, reading levels, and a range of political affiliations. At a minimum, we hoped that individual situations of violence could be ameliorated. The larger project involves transforming collective groups of people,

so that they extend across communities and regions. This proliferation of efforts, the sharing of successes and failures across communities, and the availability of a growing set of models could lead to the gradual adoption of the community-based approach as an alternative to conventional violence intervention remedies.

Lessons Learned

Learning from Others

Among CI's ambitious goals was its dissolution as a nonprofit organization, or 501(c)(3).⁹ We drove ourselves to develop lasting regenerative models, tools, and technologies that could continue in multiple forms far beyond CI's life cycle. During this pilot period, the longevity of the CI approach was not our prime interest; instead, our aim was to contribute to other informal and formal indigenous formations that were relevant to a community's local context. We gained many tools through discussions with partners that were also actively exploring community-based interventions. This included the community accountability strategies of Sista II Sista (Smith, 2005), Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA, 2006), the collective efforts inspired by Incite! Women of Color against Violence (Incite!, 2005; 2006), the transformative justice framework of Generation Five (2007), the cultural context model of the Institute for Family Services (Almeida and Durkin, 1999), the narrative therapy approaches of the Dulwich Centre (2002), the restorative justice work of Joan Pennell and Gale Burford (2002), the community accountability practice of Philly Stands Up (see this issue), and the Harm Free Zones initiated by a collective led by Critical Resistance in New York and later adopted and developed by a collective of grassroots organizations in Durham, North Carolina (Harm Free Zone, n.d.). Nationally or internationally, we continue to work collaboratively across organizations and communities to strengthen a social movement consisting of many groups working toward liberatory approaches that challenge the intersection of gender-based and state violence.

The Constraints of the 501(c)(3)

The tensions between the nonprofit organizational form and a project promoting non-reliance on professionalized institutions led to innovations and contradictions. During the pilot period and beyond, community members and organizational partners viewed CI as an institution with "expertise." As people in crisis turned to CI for support, the personnel who developed the facilitated model inevitably played an active, central role in interventions as facilitators. Since the model and tools never became available in an external form to supplement the questions developed by intervention teams, we were never able to fully test the viability of the approach outside CI.

As an intervention team, we regularly questioned whether our role could be replicated outside our organization. Could a facilitator who is simply a particularly

skilled and sensitive member of one's own family, friendship network, or community assume the position, supported by a CI toolkit and other resources? Was the toolkit sufficiently accessible and informative to lead to successful interventions on the scale we intended? Would facilitators need additional orientations, training, and ongoing support? If so, how could this be provided without the existence of CI or a similar institution? And how could we offer lessons and guidance without reproducing the errors of prescription and continued reliance on professionalized experts?

The Problem of Sustainability

Many people came to CI after their own interventions had faltered. Burnout was a common problem for groups that after many hours and mounting disagreements appeared to have accomplished little. Perhaps a more fully developed model and tools could have prevented that result or generated a sufficient degree of success. Groups lacking full unity concerning goals and bottom lines tended to blame each other over failures to implement unstated assumptions regarding what was to be done, as well as how. People often felt compelled to follow the lead of the survivor. Survivors, however, were reluctant at times to assume the burden of this role, while others sensed that they had insufficient information on the details of violence to make appropriate decisions. Fear of disappointing or betraying a survivor could lead to group paralysis.

Sometimes groups organized by survivors of violence came to differ with that person's wishes or became frustrated by the changes a survivor may undergo during a course of action. For survivors still actively engaged with those who had caused them harm, emotions could be confusing as they experienced fear, guilt, and anger. Consequently, antiviolence interventions could produce unstable results and even disintegrate.

Engaging the Person Doing Harm

Relationships with the person doing harm and that person's willingness to engage in an intervention varied greatly. Some survivors did want to directly confront that person. But this model relies on leveraging relationships and community connections as a context for change for the person doing harm. CI therefore endeavored not to make the survivor solely responsible for changing the person who had caused harm, or to individualize the burden and threat to safety. Beyond the limited options available in the community, CI did not offer substantial support to change people doing harm. Adequate resources for engaging the person doing harm were thus difficult to marshal.

Collective members who were willing to play this role with a person doing harm faced a number of challenges. Awkwardness with friends emerged as relationships of support or shared interests were overtaken by what could feel like the burdens of violence intervention. Sometimes, those supporting the person doing harm developed

a growing sympathy as they witnessed the distress accompanying an intervention or heard “their side of the story.” Other friendships or alliances became strained, for they did not wish to remain engaged with a person who had committed harm or to be associated with someone who was publicly known as having done harm. This was rooted in their disappointment with that person and the desire to distance themselves from the responsibilities of intervention. Such engagement with the person doing harm, in CI’s experience, never led to violence or serious acts of retaliation. But that certainly could happen. A person doing harm with access to more resources than the survivor—including popularity or standing in the community—could gain considerable sympathy as compared to the survivor of violence.

Many people involved with CI explored various ways in which they and their allies could approach the person doing harm. Often, however, they declined. Preventing many from pursuing these options were fear, lack of adequate leverage with the person doing harm, or the absence of the planning and strategizing needed to sustain a long-term engagement. Those who did become engaged were banned from community events and received requests for public apologies, along with expectations that disclosure of past harms would be broadcast for interminable periods. Indeed, the terms under which the slippery notion of accountability would be satisfied remain an open question.

Exploring All Options, Engaging All Stakeholders

During the pilot period, CI did provide an alternative space for violence intervention. An evaluation, in which some participants were interviewed,¹⁰ disclosed that they were satisfied to find an option that was not otherwise available. For survivors of violence, it offered a space to fully consider a range of options that neither condemned nor questioned desires to remain in relationships with people who had harmed them. It also encouraged them to bring allies into a supportive space, which cannot be underestimated. For others, the ability to explore and work through goals that might include fantasies of retribution or redemption helped to distinguish realistic objectives from hopes. Indeed, this exercise proved to be an important step in goal setting. CI’s approach differed distinctly from the way in which intervention team members with considerable experience had previously led sessions in conventional antiviolence settings. Ambivalence over intimate relationships that were also harmful was held within the space and entered into different goals and strategies.

This also provided a rare space for allies to fully explore the impact of violence on their lives, to identify appropriate roles in confronting violence, and to break the sense of isolation as they recruited others to play active roles. Allies could express their ambivalence and mixed loyalties toward the survivor and the person doing harm, and move toward greater clarity. When groups working on interventions experienced tensions among themselves, a facilitated space made it possible to name and resolve those tensions.

Disagreements among allies leading to breakdowns in the intervention were not uncommon. Mediation was necessary, and also took place between survivors and allies to reduce tensions and conflicts. The CI model, however, did not mediate between survivors and the person or people doing harm. CI's approach was consistent with other critiques of the role of mediation in violence interventions, e.g., that of some "restorative justice" models. As such, mediation assumes an equal level of power among parties and is not used whenever there is risk of retaliation or some other form of harm if the process goes awry (Busch and Hooper, 1996). An exchange of information during mediation could potentially be used to inflict further harm on the survivor. Thus, CI accepted the conventional dichotomous view of the survivor and harm doer as a caution against the use of the mediation framework.

Among those in pilot interventions were people involved in various intimate relationships: heterosexual, same-gender, and gender nonconforming. Some came from situations of family or community violence. In CI's experience, violence within heterosexual relationships followed the pattern of a male inflicting harm on a female survivor. Within CI intervention teams, tensions arose regarding the centrality and expression of gender analysis during an intervention. I normally assumed a gender binary and embraced the doctrine of "believing the victim," particularly when that person was a woman within a heterosexual dynamic of violence. My inability to suspend these assumptions revealed my own internal challenges, as well as those within the intervention team. Should we fundamentally question rather than assume the ways in which gender will play out in a dynamic of violence? Questioning the validity of this form of gender analysis, among other concerns, created discomfort.

Some CI facilitators considered analysis to be less important to their role than helping participants explore their own perceptions about the dynamics of violence and intervention. In this pilot project, the organization's personnel artificially occupied the role of facilitator, instead of people who were more organically linked to a community. This exacerbated dilemmas regarding the intervention in terms of how gender analysis, or any other analysis of power based on race, class, sexuality, age, ability/disability, or immigrant status, applied.

At times, CI interventions involved people with whom we share community. Our own personal situations of violence were brought to the team to facilitate our own interventions. These situations were personally useful and tested the validity of the model. They answered the underlying question driving the CI project of whether the model would be a helpful alternative in our own lives. Thus, the model and tools derived from our personal experiences.

The Gender Binary and the Victim-Perpetrator Dichotomy

Accepting a gender binary or even a conventional dichotomy between the survivor and the person doing harm did not preclude us from understanding and supporting processes that had the potential to challenge survivors, particularly as they concerned allies involved in violence intervention. The intervention team discussed

the possibility of creating more opportunities to challenge survivors to articulate how they may have contributed to the dynamics of violence within their relationships. We sought to understand how people could be challenged regarding the ways in which they carry out an intervention. Of course, creating such opportunities can easily cross the line into victim-blaming or become a dangerous distraction from the process of accountability. Indeed, these dynamics are disturbingly common. CI was not particularly successful in proposing constructive ways to challenge survivors. The resulting model and tools build in more opportunities for identifying and negotiating difference and for increasing trust within the group. They should guide interventions that are aligned with more liberatory values and principles, thereby reducing the possibility that the intervention itself might produce further harm.

In CI's approach, the person doing harm might initiate an intervention or eventually join one as a partner, as opposed to merely being its target. During the pilot period, this idealized vision was rarely achieved. Indeed, internal struggles constrained our advances and limited our capacity regarding the extent to which CI would work directly with these individuals. Faced with an internal plan specifically geared to establishing a group for people doing harm, objections were raised since it could clash with the widespread, community-based interventions we envisioned. A separate component for people doing harm was thought to violate our principle of holism, since it would artificially focus on people doing harm rather than provide a more integrated model of change. CI was split over these issues. Given the inability to reach a consensus on this aspect of the project, it was never carried out. By the end of the pilot period, therefore, we did not gain adequate information to assess how a community-based model could shift the people doing harm from being targets of intervention to being partners.

Unpacking the Accountability Process

CI's experiences offer a better understanding of how variations in relationships within which violence occurs and differences in desired outcomes can lead to better-defined intervention strategies. Clarifying whether violence occurred in close and intimate relationships, among acquaintances, or among strangers can help to determine what leverage toward change is available in the community. A better articulation of goals is possible if it is known whether desired outcomes include hopes for ongoing closeness or intimacy, coexistence within overlapping community spaces, or complete separation.

Finally, CI envisioned accountability as a series of steps or stages that could help to guide goals and next steps. These markers are useful even if they are not ultimately reached. Since we always anticipate resistance to challenges to violence, particularly from the person or people doing harm, accountability is best considered in terms of a process of change. No matter how open those doing harm might be when first confronted with demands for change, resistance soon follows.

Understanding the commonality of this dynamic flowed from our own reactions when being confronted about our harmful attitudes and actions. The usual tactics of denial, minimization, and blaming others, including a focus on perceived injustices in the act of intervention, seemed likely. How can community processes embrace resistance as part of an intervention rather than as evidence of failure?

The Legitimacy of Authority, Force, Coercion, and Violence

Fundamental to a process of accountability is the reduction of violence or threats of retaliation to the point that deeper levels of change can be considered. Given that some form of “confrontation” and a tendency to resist change are inevitable in situations of accountability, CI had to contend with questions regarding the ethics and efficacy of community-based authority, force, coercion, and even violence or the threat of violence.

Members of the antiviolence movement understandably had a weak grasp of the violent dimension of power, but were open to grappling with its complexities. CI’s open stance on the issue was indicated by its self-description as an anti-oppression (rather than explicitly antiviolence) organization. There was keen interest in STOP project stories for what they could impart regarding the use of force or violence in community accountability.

We set a low threshold for authority, force, and coercion. Those undertaking community accountability processes often claimed to disavow these forms of power, but exercised them nonetheless. Asserting righteousness or the moral high ground often obscured the fact that some level of force was being used. Elements of coercion reside even in requests for someone to listen to our account of violence, come to a meeting, or read a list of demands—no matter how gently or civilly they are made. Transparency over the assertive use of power and the potential consequences of noncompliance were important first steps in articulating principles and practices regarding their legitimate use.

We also challenged a problematic position within the conventional antiviolence movement that tends to value and profess nonhierarchical or nonauthoritarian structures of power, survivor-centeredness as a reversal of survivor disempowerment and victimization, and nonviolent tactics. Yet authoritarian relationships are often embedded within the rules, regulations, and decision-making structures of antiviolence institutions; survivor-centeredness is often trumped by the assumptions and narrow array of options offered by the antiviolence advocate; and a disavowal of violence ultimately cedes it to the criminal justice system, which the movement upholds through its reliance upon criminal legal remedies.

By shifting the site of intervention from the criminal justice system and conventional antiviolence institutions back to community spaces, CI’s interest turned to reclaiming authority within these locations. Community resources can include newly mobilized sites of authority among those formerly denied access to power.

A group of women friends, for example, can decide to organize on behalf of an abused peer. Community-based interventions also rely upon traditional authorities such as patriarchal leaders, from fathers, uncles, and clergy, to community elders. Although it was preferable to mobilize formerly marginalized sites of authority, it was often practical and effective to rely upon preexisting forms of authority. Ultimately, an alternative to conventional antiviolence remedies resided in any of these community resources, and especially in the case of active participants in education or prevention campaigns, or in direct interventions against violence.

Finally, the use of force, coercion, or violence as part of the accountability process became an open question. Deception is also closely aligned to these tactics. STOP's stories provided numerous examples of how these tactics were actively used in community-based interventions to violence. A liberatory process, however, questions the legitimacy of subterfuge and force.

Institutional concerns also existed. As the opening story suggests, organizations such as CI may consider liability, public reputation, and organizational sustainability when formulating tactics that may establish an institutional precedent that promotes violence and could easily lead to civil or criminal charges. Informal community formations may tend to threaten or actually resort to violence. Ethical concerns and risks did not escape these locations of intervention, but their operations tended to be less public. Some participants sought assistance to prevent friends or family from engaging in violent retaliation, for that course could lead to their arrest. They sought community accountability strategies that would avoid further violence and the possible involvement of law enforcement.

CI's community accountability practices relied less upon coercion and punishment and more on compassionate engagement. Our liberatory community accountability process sought to mobilize all parties, including the person doing harm, with the view that community accountability processes served their interests. Instead of a fear of consequences, community accountability aims to foster appeals to higher values or to align self-interest with the collective good. In CI's limited experience, liberatory goals were required to guide the process, since pragmatism could lead to the use of coercion or threatened or real violence as temporary measures for assuring the stability and safety needed to make further steps possible. However, the pervasiveness of punishment as a model for accountability and the association of the term "accountability" with retribution contributed to difficulties in moving beyond this mode of engagement. Thus, a practice such as banning, which makes a modicum of safety possible while mobilizing for a more engaged process, can become an end rather than a means.

Even the unintended assumption of a criminalization paradigm can cause those doing harm and those protecting them to resist cooperating in the process. Banning, even for temporary safety, may be resisted. In response, those initiating an accountability process may strengthen their resolve to make enforcement of a ban the goal rather than one measure within a more engaged process.

Public Disclosure and Navigation Beyond Shame and Punishment

Another aspect of community accountability is its collective public nature. Participants in conventional antiviolence remedies regularly disclose information to staff or others working within the antiviolence institution, but strict protocols regarding confidentiality beyond organizational walls reinforce public silence. CI's organizational interests unwittingly led to a somewhat contradictory position toward public disclosure. Its STOP project promoted public openness regarding violence and violence intervention. During the formative stages of STOP, we developed a protocol to balance safety and privacy considerations with the public's need to be informed. In its Community-Based Interventions Project, CI protected confidentiality while encouraging thoughtful public disclosure on the part of participants. Perhaps impeding the disclosure process was CI's institutional position as an intervention's facilitator, rather than an organic participant.

CI's liberatory stance concerning public disclosure was complicated by the fact that violence in the community context remains associated with shame. Disclosure can assume the form of gossip, and public information can reveal large, misleading gaps as those involved in the violence tire of sharing details. Survivors and those doing harm can easily confuse disclosure with punishment in communities that view interpersonal violence through the lens of denial and shame. Communities contending with pervasive violence may resort to a process of public disclosure to curb it. For people doing harm, it can help to compel compliance with processes of accountability. Survivors and communities often expect people doing harm to engage in public disclosure as a part of the process of being accountable. Yet how much to disclose, for how long, and to whom were questions not easily answered.

Creating Conditions to Support Community Accountability

Community accountability rests on a shaky foundation if it fails to support compassionate and collective responses to violence and associates accountability with the logic of criminalization. The principles of community accountability, community-based responses, and transformative justice can quickly slide into paralysis, collusion, or vengeance as the conditions for healthy, functioning communities weaken under the stresses of daily living and the systemic strains of neoliberalism, with its multiple forms of violence. Thus, the small and large successes of new social movement forces in articulating guiding principles, viable processes, and practices leading to lasting outcomes hopefully may interrupt violence and create the conditions necessary for strengthening more liberatory community spaces.

Where Do We Go from Here?

CI's efforts are part of a larger social movement project to challenge the persistence of heteropatriarchy and white supremacy in our communities and to displace the criminalization paradigm that emerged in response to interpersonal violence over

the last 40 years. The community-based approach to violence intervention—more familiarly known as community accountability or transformative justice—looks forward and backward to the institutions of the family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and community. Hence, the re-imagining and reconstruction of community accountability practices have required the excavation and reclamation of community “traditions,” as well as profound transformations in our assumptions about the roots of, and remedies to, violence.

Abundant perils and paradoxes stand in the way of re-centering community spaces that have been fragmented by individualism and competition, organized through persistently unequal power relations, and increasingly plagued by the material realities of poverty, surveillance, and pervasive violence. Thus, side by side with stories of successful community-based interventions to various forms of violence we find ample illustrations of challenges, limitations, and newly unfolding contradictions.

Efforts to document these complex dimensions of community accountability late in CI’s institutional life cycle (but at an early stage in the social movement’s formation) were intended to strengthen political analysis and practice. Yet public exposure can amplify the multiple threats to the social movement project.

CI experienced external pressures that affect other 501(c)(3) organizations in today’s environment. They are pressured to commodify concepts and practices, to adapt to funder-driven appeals to create institutionally identified or “trademarked” approaches and best practices, and to incorporate their efforts into the state institutions they have been resisting. These inescapable conditions of institutional survival increase with each success, as well as efforts to stave off failure. CI’s deliberate strategy was to begin with a limited institutional life cycle. It sought to gain sufficient resources to create and publicly disseminate a rudimentary set of models and tools while minimizing pressures to compromise these goals to attain institutional sustainability.

Beyond the threat of incorporation and cooptation was that of the rapid devaluation and disappearance of our concepts, technologies, and institutions. Community accountability and transformative justice may serve the interests of grassroots, marginalized communities, so long as states do not gain the power to control and determine their content. The subtler violence of competition in the marketplace of innovation is equally threatening to our social movement’s sustainability.

The act of publishing can hone analysis and disseminate knowledge across social movements and among important allies. It can also contribute to obsolescence. The market’s thirst for quickly consumable information can move from public knowledge to stories of accomplishments, or even to postmortems on the failures of utopian visions. Efforts to identify limitations can unwittingly fuel skepticism and demoralization in a social movement project that is facing considerable odds.

Given the ambitiousness of our collective projects and the infinitesimal resources fueling them, the pervasiveness of our efforts and doggedness in their pursuit cannot

be underestimated. Lest these stories become lost archaeological remnants rather than the foundation for new and lasting structures, our radical work is to embody these lessons in daily practice and to push for greater collective impact.

NOTES

1. This story is adapted from Liz's story, "Kicking Ass," which is available on the StoryTelling and Organizing Project (STOP) website at www.stopviolenceeveryday.org/stories/.

2. See Incite! Women against Violence (2005) for results from an Incite! Women of Color against Violence working group meeting on community accountability held in 2002.

3. STOP (www.stopviolenceeveryday.org) is a collective spin-off project with organizational partners. Among the members that collectively drive STOP is CI.

4. The four Bay Area organizations include Asian Women's Shelter, a battered women's shelter targeting Asian immigrant and refugee women and children; Shimtuh, a Korean domestic violence and sexual assault program that is a project of the Korean Community Center of the East Bay; Narika, a domestic violence advocacy organization serving the South Asian community; and La Clinica de la Raza, a Latino health organization that offers domestic violence services and organizing. Intervention team members include Sutapa Balaji, Leo Bruenn, Juan Cuba, Rachel Herzing, Isabel Kang, Mimi Kim, and Orchid Pusey.

5. Audio recordings were made with the verbal consent of the participants. The recordings and their transcripts were meant to aid in the process of developing and documenting the model. Participants were not asked to sign any paperwork, since the intent was not to reproduce the experience of the conventional social services or therapy. Nor did CI want to reproduce the experience of conventional research. Confidentiality was assured verbally. Records lack identifying information and are held in safe storage. Examples used in this article were sufficiently general across a number of situations to protect confidentiality.

6. The people closest to the situation of violence may also be motivated to collude with violence. In mapping allies and barriers, those with a positive or potentially positive stake in ending violence are among those targeted to be mobilized as allies in the intervention.

7. See also risk taking as an approach in *Communities Against Rape and Assault* (2006).

8. It is available on the Creative Interventions website at www.creative-interventions.org.

9. CI began with a critique of the institutionalization of social movements within nonprofit organizations. STOP would be spun off into an independent project driven by the individuals, organizations, and community formations to which the project is accountable. The Community-Based Intervention Project, the pilot implementation project, created a model and tools available to the public without the further need for CI. The reasons include the promotion of a community-based approach that was truly targeted toward non-institutionalized community formations such as families, friendship networks, alternative community structures and organizations, faith institutions, workplaces, and so on. CI also wanted to absorb the risk involved in forming alternative, non-state responses by limiting the life cycle of an organization that could eventually be pressured to conform to funding restrictions, legal barriers, and other long-term institutional needs that could subvert the organization's original goals.

10. Kalei Valli Kanuha conducted this qualitative evaluation. Thao Le also conducted a process evaluation of earlier stages of development, with the assistance of Catie Magee.

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