

## Section 5. Other Resources

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## Section 5.1. Keywords – Definitions: Words We Use and What They Mean to Creative Interventions

**Ableism:** Attitudes, actions, or structures that belittle or put down a person(s) because of actual or perceived physical, developmental or mental impairment.

**Abuser** (See Person Doing Harm)

**Accountable, Accountability:** For people involved, thinking about the ways they may have contributed to violence, recognizing their roles, acknowledging the ways they may need to make amends for their actions and make changes toward ensuring that violence does not continue and that healthy alternatives can take its place.

**Ageism:** Attitudes, actions, or structures that belittle or put down a person(s) because of their youth or actual or perceived lack of lived experience.

**Ally** (See Community Ally):

**Bisexual:** Being attracted to two sexes or two genders, but not necessarily simultaneously or equally.

**Bystander:** Someone not directly involved in a situation of harm, but who may have witnessed the harm and who may be called on to address the situation of harm or prevent future harm from happening. Creative Interventions tends to use the term allies rather than bystanders since the term bystanders sometimes seems like someone who just happens to be in the area of where the violence happened rather than someone who may have significant relationships with the people involved in violence – what we refer to as allies or community allies.

**Collective:** An approach relying on collaboration including shared capacity, resources and decision-making.

**Collusion, Collude, Colluding:** Acting on behalf of the person(s), groups or institutions perpetrating harm through supporting their violence, denying it, minimizing it, excusing it, or by blaming the survivor or victim.

**Community:** A grouping of people based on some common experience including geography, interests or values, identities, or interests. When we use this term we do not assume complete agreement within the group nor do we assume it to have only positive dynamics.

**Community Accountability:** A process in which a community such as family, friends, neighbors, co-workers or community members work together to transform situations of harm. This can also describe a process in which the

community recognizes that they are impacted by violence even if it is primarily between individuals, that they may have participated in allowing the violence to happen or even causing the violence, and are responsible for resolving the violence.

**Community Ally:** Someone from one's community (either close-in community member or someone from within a larger community) who may become involved as an active participant in an intervention – and who brings their energy, skills or other resources to help bring about positive change.

**Community-Based:** Approaches that build on and promote community knowledge, skills, values and resources especially those of oppressed communities.

**Criminal Legal System:** Another name for the criminal justice system but one which emphasizes that this system may actually not be connected to real justice. It may also take into account the civil system of law such as that governing divorce, child custody, property ownership and lawsuits.

**Criminal Justice System:** The system controlled by the state or the government which produces people who are considered illegal, laws that determine who is criminal and who is not, the system under which people are determined to be criminal or not, the system of punishments and the actual carrying out of the punishment, itself, most notably including incarceration, parole and probation, and the death penalty.

**Criminalization:** The process through which actions (most often directly associated with people oppressed communities) become illegal.

**Culture:** A shared system of learned values, beliefs, and practices of a group of people.

**Engagement:** Meaningful communication with someone including their involvement or participation in an intervention.

**Gay:** Term often used to describe male-identified people who are attracted to other male-identified people. Sometimes used as an umbrella term for all queer identities.

**Gender:** Social constructions applied to behaviors, expectations, roles, representations used to delineate people as men, women, and transgender or gender-variant. Different from sex or sexuality.

**Gender-Based Violence:** A phrase used to describe violence targeting specific individuals or groups on the basis of their gender.

**Gender Queer or Gender Non-Conforming:** Demonstrating gender behaviors and traits not associated with a person's biological sex as typically dictated by dominant society.

**Gendered Violence:** A phrase often used instead of gender-based violence to describe violence that targets individuals or group on the basis of their gender or through ideas and actions that force certain ideas about gender through the use of violence.

**Harm:** Some form of injury to a person, group or community. This injury can be of many types: physical, financial, emotional, sexual, spiritual, environmental and so on.

**Harm Reduction:** A set of practical strategies that reduce negative consequences of drug use that meet drug users "where they're at," addressing conditions of use along with the use itself while engaging users in deciding the best course of action. Recently, harm reduction principles have been applied to a range of situations including interpersonal violence to advocate for approaches that involve those people closest in to the situation of harm to reduce as many harmful factors as possible while acknowledging that complete separation may not be possible or favorable.

**Heteronormativity:** A system that assumes that heterosexuality is "normal"—thereby marginalizing people who do not identify as heterosexual and carrying out the activities and institutions of everyday life as if everyone is and should be heterosexual.

**Heterosexism:** A system privileging heterosexuality above all other sexual orientations and marginalizing people who do not identify as heterosexual.

**Hir:** A gender neutral pronoun that can be used instead of his/hers.

**Holistic:** Holding all parts including survivor(s), allies/community, person(s) doing harm to possibilities of positive change.

**Homophobia:** The irrational fear and intolerance of people who are homosexual or of homosexual feelings. It is generally due to one's internal fear of those feelings in oneself but instead directed to other people.

**Interpersonal Violence:** Harm occurring between people in non-intimate relationships, usually in workplaces, community networks or institutions, or other collective formations.

**Intervention:** Action(s) taken to address, end, significantly reduce, or prevent violence.

**Intimate Violence:** A phrase used to describe actions including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children, elders, and people with disabilities by people known to them. It also includes intimate partner abuse, sexual violence committed in the context of a relationship, marital rape.

**Lesbian:** Term often used to describe female-identified people who are attracted to other female-identified people.

**Liberation:** To be freed from oppression, confinement, or control.

**Liberatory Approach:** An approach for addressing harm that does not rely on rely upon the state or other oppressive systems, but instead look to communities to end harm as central to a group's liberation.

**Male Supremacy:** A system of power that privileges male-identified people as well as their actions, ideas, and beliefs, that is maintained through the exploitation and repression of people who do not identify as male.

**Nativism:** The policy and practice of favoring the people already living in a place (usually a country or nation) over immigrants.

**Offender** (See Person Doing Harm)

**Oppression:** Exercise of power and authority over another person(s).

**Organic:** An approach that builds from what people and communities already know and value.

**Outing:** Making public an identity or behavior someone wants to keep private. While usually used in terms of gender or sexuality outing can also include disclosing health conditions, immigration status, age, etc.

**Patriarchy:** A system in which male-identified people exercise power and privilege over female-identified or other people and justify their dominance to what they consider to be “natural” differences between men and women.

**People of Color:** African, Asian, Pacific Islander, Latino or Latinx, Arab, Middle Eastern, Indigenous, and mixed and biracial persons of these ethnicities, races, or cultures who identify themselves in resistance to white supremacy in a collective and cultural community.

**Perpetrator** (See Person Doing Harm)

**Person Doing Harm:** The primary person committing or perpetrating harm or the people directly committing or perpetrating harm in a situation of interpersonal violence. Other people may also be involved as people doing harm, perhaps in a less direct way, by encouraging or tolerating harm or by discouraging efforts to address, stop or prevent harm.

**Prison Industrial Complex:** A term recognizing prisons and jails as a part of a broad system that ties together the state or the government; industries such as those building jails and prisons, those that benefit from prison labor, and those that are in the business of determining who is criminal and who is not; and ruling the way that the public thinks about “crime” as a way to not think about the ways that people who are named as criminals are actually a product of a larger capitalist system that feeds upon the poverty, oppression and exploitation of certain people at the expense of others – often based upon race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, national origin and other forms of discrimination.

**Queer:** Although some people still reject this term as only being a slur, “queer” has increasingly come to be an umbrella term to describe sexual orientations or gender identities that reject heteronormativity.

**Racism:** A system that uses the concept of race as the basis for maintaining inequality in society.

**Regenerative:** Create solutions that expand healthy change to more people and more communities.

**Restorative Justice:** A model that aims to repair harm by engaging community members and restoring community balance by calling on shared values, principles, and practices of accountability.

**Self-Determination:** A concept describing the ability and practice of communities to determine their own dealings without being controlled or restrained by outside or governmental forces. This is sometimes also used to describe the ability and practice of individuals, especially those usually oppressed, to be able to carry out their thoughts and activities without restraint or control by others (usually those who would oppress them) or governmental forces.

**State:** Set of people and interests that determine the laws, policies, and practices of a predetermined area. Also known as the government – federal, state, and local.

**State Violence:** Violence perpetrated at the hands of or on the behalf of state. This can include police violence, military violence, the types of punishments and uses of control by schools and so on.

**Survivor:** Person(s) harmed. The word survivor is often used as a more positive way to think of someone who has been harmed. Sometimes this word is used interchangeably with the word victim.

**Sustainable:** Able to be maintained or carried out over the long-term or over a long time without running down the energy and resources of the people carrying out the activity or process.

**Team:** A group of people involved in ending, significantly reducing, or preventing violence. Their roles can include supporting safety and healing, serving as a facilitators, providing resources, etc.

**Transformative Justice:** Phrase used to describe an approach to and processes for addressing harm that seeks to not only address the specific situation of harm in question, but to transform the conditions and social forces that made such harm possible. Sometimes used interchangeably with community accountability.

**Transgender:** A term referring to a gender identity not falling within, or actively rejecting traditional gender identities of male and female including people who reject their socially assigned gender or select a unique gender identity, people who prefer to express ambiguous gender identities, or no gender identity at all.

**Transphobia:** The irrational fear or hatred of transgender people.

**Two Spirit:** Two Spirit people are those who fulfill one of many mixed gender roles found traditionally among Native Americans, Inuit and other indigenous groups expressing itself through the presence of masculine and feminine spirits living in the same body.

**Victim** (see Survivor): may be applied in cases in which the person does not survive harm. Some people who have been harmed prefer the term victim to survivor.

**Violence:** Use of physical, economic, structural, emotional, sexual or psychological force exerted for the purpose of coercing, violating, damaging, or abusing.

**Violence against women:** A phrase used to describe a range of acts generally committed against people who identify as women based on their gender identity. These forms of violence are usually thought to include domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking specific to women and girls.

**White Supremacy:** A system of power that privileges people of European descent as well as their actions, ideas, beliefs, that is maintained through the exploitation and repression people of color. This is similar to racism but makes specific that this system upholds the privilege and power of white people.

**Witness:** Person who observes or experiences harm happening but may not be directly surviving that harm. The impacts of witnessing violence can be very severe in themselves.

**Zie** (also spelled ze): A gender neutral pronoun that can be used instead of he/she.



## 5.2. Real Life Stories and Examples from the Toolkit

The following real life stories and examples are from Section 4. *Tools to Mix and Match*.

We have put them here in one place so that you can see stories and examples that you can use to think about your situation of interpersonal violence and violence intervention.

They are short pieces from what are often long and complicated interventions to violence. But they represent diverse situations and various types of strategies that people have taken to address, reduce, end or prevent interpersonal violence. They also highlight some of the tools presented in Section 4. *Tools to Mix and Match*.



### **Story A: *I hear yelling in my apartment building. What is going on?***

I live in a small apartment building in a city in the South near the border with Mexico. We have several immigrants from different countries living in the building. Some of us keep to ourselves and some have made friendships with the other residents. There is not a lot of fighting and violence here. But if there is, at least someone will hear – the next door neighbor or the people directly upstairs or downstairs.

I was hanging out with some of my neighbors. We don't know each other too well but we like to get together once in awhile. Sometimes our conversations turn to gossip about other people in the building. One time, one of them talked about the neighbors who live right next door to them, a couple that has been fighting. The couple has a 5-year old daughter. The husband has lived in the building for a few years – a seemingly nice guy who tends to keep to himself. He married a woman who moved in about 6 years ago. His wife mostly speaks Spanish. She's friendly but communication is usually pretty limited if you don't speak Spanish which most of us don't. I'll call them "Marcos" and "Maria" although those are not their real names. My neighbor continued with the story saying that he has heard them fighting and that the husband was yelling at his wife, Maria, "Go ahead and call the police. You don't even speak f\*\*ing English."

I had never heard any yelling, myself. But when I heard the story, I wondered why Marcos mentioned the police. Immediately, I thought he may have hit Maria and perhaps she threatened to call the police, but I wasn't sure. When I heard about his comment about her English, I was more worried. Why is he insulting her about her English? Is he telling her she can't seek help even if she wanted to? Why is he telling her that the police won't do anything? Why is he yelling like that about the mother of his daughter who probably heard everything he said? These are all abusive and pointed to signs of more serious abuse. I also know that this type of violence doesn't usually stop one time. It was likely to continue and could get worse. I figured this story wouldn't stop here.

We wondered what was going on but didn't make any plans for action.

Later, I was talking to people who lived upstairs from them. I'll call these neighbors Tom and Grace, although these are not their real names. They could really hear the yelling, which was mostly coming from Marcos. Maria's voice was much quieter or she seemed to be crying. They thought they heard things being thrown around and were getting worried. They could hear the daughter crying during these times. I told them about what I heard from the other neighbors. Since they seemed really concerned, too, we tried to make sense from the things we knew and we had heard.

(This story is in Section 4.A. *Getting Clear* to show how you can use this information to figure out what is going on in a situation of interpersonal violence and what steps you could do next given this information)

## **Story B. *Confronting the Person Who Raped Me***

A young immigrant woman came to an immigrant organization seeking assistance. She had gone to a party with her former employer, the owner of a bar. That evening, he attempted to rape her. She was able to struggle and get away. However, the experience was clearly traumatizing. Outraged, the woman had decided that she wanted to confront this man. She talked to the advocate about her plan to enter the bar and directly confront him, convinced that her sense of violation could only be met by this bold move.

The advocate, moved by the courage of this woman, responded by offering to go into the bar with her, a strategy ultimately challenged by the advocate's team of co-workers. This offer went beyond the usual practices of this organization and much beyond what most anti-violence organizations would recommend. Interested in the further exploration of this woman's request, this organization wondered whether this was the right opportunity for trying out a community-based intervention. The other options didn't seem to fit. She had already gone to the police who told her she did not have a case. And she did not have money or speak English. Who would she go to for "therapy" except the organization? Besides, it seemed like she was seeking her own pathway to healing which for her meant facing him head-on.

The advocate decided not to go with her and confront this man. But she did decide to act as a supporter or facilitator to see if she could provide a supportive anchor for this woman to carry out this plan of action. Self-determination became the guiding value for the organization's workers. Safety was also foremost in their minds. How could they prioritize safety without taking away this woman's self-determination?

The staff team discussed what a facilitated community-based intervention would look like in this situation. How could the advocate ask exploratory questions without trying to convince this woman not to go or to scare her off? The advocate met again with this young woman. This time she helped her explore her goals in confronting this man. Could her goals be met in other ways? Did she think about safety? It became clear that this woman's goal was direct confrontation even after all of the questions. But she was also open to discussing safety plans and to role play this action. She appreciated the support to figure this out.

The advocate role-played possible scenarios based upon her knowledge of the dynamics of sexual assault. She presented possible dangers as well as responses of victim-blaming, denial, threats and violence. She helped the woman explore who else among her friends and family might be willing to help. The role play brought up many situations which this woman had not considered. She recognized that marching into the bar on her own or with others was too dangerous. She had not thought of the possibility of his denial or his manipulation that it was her fault or her imagination. After going through the role play, she realized that these were all possibilities and appreciated the

opportunity to go through the process. She took this as useful information that helped her clarify a safer plan which still met her goals.

Since the advocate was also interested in helping this woman explore what other allies she had, she asked more about this. Although the advocate had at first been convinced to march alongside her, she thought more about this. It was dangerous. She did not “know” this man, his possible reactions, or how her presence could make the situation more dangerous. Supporting this woman to center this “intervention” within her own community made more sense. They are her first-line supporters. They know her and the situation in which she worked. And the advocate was willing to help think through their possible roles and safety as well as hers.

The woman could not identify anybody within her community to help out when this plan was first discussed. But the question seemed to make an impression. By the time, she decided to go and confront this man, she had talked to a friend who agreed to stay close to her phone in case any crisis occurred.

After thinking through and role-playing the safety plan, she called her former employer to meet her at a restaurant. He agreed. When she went to prepare for the meeting, she talked to the waiter at the restaurant and asked him to keep a close watch on the situation in case anything happened. These were two allies, the friend and the waiter, that she organized to help support her safety.

The woman ended up meeting with her former employer, confronting him by naming his action and her outrage. Within a short time, he admitted his guilt and apologized without further incident. She called the organization following this confrontation with great appreciation, relief and a sense of closure.

This story illustrates the basic principles of the model of community-based intervention, the critical role of helping the survivor identify her own goals and a plan of action to meet these goals. It also highlights the importance of exploring a collective response and the opportunity it opens for a different set of options resulting from the involvement of other people. It also offers one example of engagement with the person doing harm and the transformative power of this possibility for the survivor. We can imagine that the “healing” powers of this action were deeper and more powerful than anything the police or professionals could provide.

(This story is in Section 4.B. *Staying Safe* to show how one person decided that she wanted to confront the person who had attempted to rape her – but needed to seriously think about safety.)

(This story was also presented in Kim, M. “Alternative Interventions to Intimate Violence: Defining Political and Pragmatic Challenges.” Pp. 193 – 217 in Ptacek, J. (Ed.), *Feminism and Restorative Justice*, (NY: Oxford Press, 2010).

### **Story C: *My Husband Is Hitting Our Daughter: Who Can Help***

My husband's abuse toward our first daughter started even before she was barely 1 year old. He clearly had lots of problem managing his own frustration and didn't seem to know how to discipline kids appropriately. He often yelled at her and spanked her when she was little. This sort of violence continued until my daughter was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

One incident that comes to my mind is when my daughter was about 5 or 6 years old. On the living room couch, my husband was trying to pull out one of her teeth which was shaking badly. My daughter was obviously scared and didn't want to do it. Although I knew he was getting impatient with her, I decided not to intervene at that moment since it usually made things worse. I heard my daughter crying and my husband's frustrated voice. And suddenly my daughter started to cry even louder. I remained in my bedroom. My husband went out shortly afterwards, so I came out to see if my daughter was okay. When I asked her what happened, she simply said, "Dad hit me." "Where?" I asked. She pointed her finger to her face. When I saw the mark of his hand across her face, I became furious.

The pattern was always the same. He would tell our daughter to do something or bring him something. If she didn't do it immediately, he would get upset. Then, he would shout and tell her again. If she complained or tried to explain why she couldn't do it, he got angry and accused her of talking back to him. Then he hit her. It tended to get worse if I tried to intervene or if my daughter even looked at me.

One evening, my husband and I were having an argument about the time he hit her when he was trying to pull her tooth. We were arguing in the car on the way back from church. He kept insisting that he didn't hit her at all. I became so angry that I got out of the car and walked away. I later called my friend to come and pick me up. In the meantime, I later found out that he told my oldest daughter that everything was her fault. He blamed her for my leaving the family that evening. This had a serious impact on my daughter; she still remembers his exact words years later.

I returned home that night and again got into an argument with my husband who shouted that he didn't hit her. I thought about next step...and I started to break things in the kitchen. The next day, I cut all of his shoes with scissors.

I then decided to call my father, my husband's older sister, and one of a mutual good friend/mentor. I called my father and my husband's older sister in order to reach out to the person in authority in each side of the family. They called him separately and confronted him. This was my attempt to make him somehow accountable for his behavior. I also called our mutual friend/mentor whom he respects, hoping that this might have an impact on him in the long run

My father called my husband and told him that it was wrong to hit a child and that it shouldn't happen again. When our friend/mentor heard what had happened, he came over to our home right away. He saw my daughter's face and confronted my husband about his hitting. My husband was clearly upset and embarrassed.

In the meantime, I told my daughter that it wasn't her fault and told her and my son not to worry if they hear loud voices. My goal that night was really making him feel sorry for what he did so that any future abuse can be prevented or greatly reduced.

It wasn't like I had a plan for that sort of situation. I had to think hard and fast to do all the things I could so that his behavior would stop. Although the people I called were supportive and did what they can to let him know how wrong it was to hit a child, I doubted that it would have a long lasting effect on him. I acted on my instincts and attempted to involve more people. What I was thinking all along, however, was that it is necessary for him to experience a more profound change within him to really change.

When my father, his sister, and our friend/mentor called, my husband initially denied hitting our daughter. He was angry with me for telling other people. He said I was "making a big deal out of nothing." As they continued to confront him, his denial slowly disappeared. He was upset at the fact that I had contacted several people, but became more embarrassed over time.

The intervention helped. He did stop hitting our daughter after that time, but the profound changes didn't come until later. Two things seemed to make the deepest impact. First, one of his friends shared his own story about how his grown up daughter wants to maintain distance with him because of his verbal and physical abuse toward her while growing up. This personal sharing had a big impact on my husband who always wanted to have close relationships with his kids. Second, my husband experienced a spiritual breakthrough, and he began to look at different parts of his life. He has changed so much since then.

Looking back, I think that one of the major impacts of my interventions was that my oldest daughter felt more secure and safe at home knowing that I would never overlook her dad's violent behavior. Although it took many more years before my husband was able to control his temper and stop violent behavior, my husband did realize that I will not stand for it if he treats our children in an abusive way.

I think that any kind of intervention is important. It may not stop the violence from happening again, but it almost always helps children.

(This story is in Section 4.C. *Mapping Allies and Barriers* to show an example of how a mother turned to family and friends to help her stop her husband's violence towards their daughter.)



### **Story D: A Community Confronts Domestic Violence**

Two years ago, I was married to a man who I'd been with for ten years prior, and our relationship had troubles. Over the last year of our marriage, my former partner was going through training as a police officer, and at the same time, we had just relocated to a new state. We were struggling with some large issues in the marriage, and things had gotten more difficult. I just became increasingly afraid of someone that I used to feel really safe with.

I have three kids who were 10, 6, and 4, and they were witnessing a lot of arguments, a lot of loud screaming, a lot of doors being slammed, a lot of things that I felt were really unsafe for them to see. My home just felt more and more dangerous. I felt scared to leave the house. I felt scared to come home. I felt scared to sleep in my bed.

The last straw came one night when I had gone to a friend's house and my partner followed me in his car. And when I arrived at my friend's house, he pulled up and got out of the car and was yelling and screaming horrible things at me. I felt very afraid, but I didn't know what to do. I knew wherever I went, he would follow me. So I decided I would go to my office which was nearby, and it was night time so there wouldn't be anybody there. When I finally got inside, I waited for a few minutes and he left.

I called a friend, who came and met me at my office, and she suggested that I call another friend who had a house I could go to while we figured out what to do, so that's what I did. When we got there, everybody sat around in the living room and just reassured me that it was safe for me to be there, that they were welcoming of it, that they understood. I was at this point on the run from someone who was furious and had a gun, and I *still* felt bad. I felt like I was exposing people to something that I couldn't control, something I was terrified of. But I didn't know what else to do at that point, and they were saying it was where they wanted me to be.

My friends asked me, are there some people that I could gather up, that I could call, that might be support from in this time. I guess I should say that being part of this, this community organization which is committed to ending sexual violence which meant that we had a way of responding that I knew people would come together. I knew if I needed help, people would come and talk to me and we could work it out together. So it didn't feel strange to meet, to call people and say, "Hey, I need help, and this is what's going on."

And at the same time, experiencing these things in my home felt like people would see me differently; people would judge me; people would think I was a hypocrite; people would think I was weak. And I remember being really troubled by that the first few days. But I got reassurances from folks that that was exactly what the point of the organization was, and that experiencing harm is not about

being strong or weak, that experiencing harm just is. It's what we choose to do about it that's important.

So we made phone calls, and asked people to come over. We had 7 or 8 people come over and just started talking through what to do. At that point it felt totally overwhelming. I was still on, "Is this really happening to me?" and, "What can I do to make it okay?" rather than thinking of anything beyond tomorrow, or next week.

But I think my wants were something like: I want to be in my home; I want my kids to feel safe; I think I said, "I want him to leave."

I think those were basically it at that moment, and then we just brainstormed what needs to happen right now in the next hour, in the next day, in the next week, for those wants to happen. We walked through it so if I want to be in my home, how do we make that happen? How do we make sure that that's a safe space? And, I think one of the answers to that question was, at least in the near future, having folks be there with me.

So we eventually set up a schedule. We put out an email with a schedule for the week, and blanks for people to fill in, and I was amazed that people did fill it in. And they did come by. They came by every day and they came and sat in my living room, and they brought food, and we just sat together. I was amazed at that. That was how we got home to be a safe space for me again.

When we were thinking about whether to call the police or not, I did feel like I needed some help in calming the situation down, but I didn't know what to do, because if I can't call his friends on the job, and I can't call them in...It doesn't seem right to call them in an unofficial way, because who knows what's going to happen with that. And calling them in an official way doesn't necessarily seem like it's going to produce any certain results either.

So we tried to think about who could talk to him. And we figured out some people in the community that he could talk to, if he was open to doing that. My mom talked to him, and she was willing to deal with him. He was totally raging, and for whatever reason she was not intimidated at all and just was able to talk to him really calmly.

I had people checking on me, people staying during the daytime hours, sometimes overnight for the next week, and it just felt good. It felt so good to have this full house, you know, this busy house of people coming by, and, you know, people were playing with the kids, and we were making art in the kitchen, and someone was always making tea, and it felt not alone.

In terms of talking about successes, I guess the biggest one is that I did get all three things that I wanted, that I identified as wants to happen. That my kids went through that time feeling safe; that he did leave the house; that I was able to



return home; and that all that happened in a fairly short amount of time. So in terms of success, I'd say, ultimately for me as a survivor, those were the most meaningful successes.

Another success in terms of communication was that we made a phone list immediately. That was one of the first things we did so I always knew I had someone to call. And people would call and check on me. At that time, I think it was hard. I was worried about people burning out. I was worried about people feeling overwhelmed by me and my stuff.

So I didn't have to constantly, hour by hour, be reaching out for needs to be met because we'd identified them beforehand and there were enough people involved. It felt like no one was carrying all of it, or more than they could. It certainly wasn't that things didn't feel hard. It felt really bad. I think what *was* helpful was this wasn't an intervention where it was like, "How are we going to get him away from me? It was like, "How are we going to make sure that there's not harm happening in our community? How are we going to make sure that we've done our best to address that? The problem was consistently the harm. The problem was consistently the events or the behaviors, or the things that were harmful that were happening, but not *him* that was a problem – not that my choice to stay as long as I had was a problem.

That made it possible for me to feel like I could come into the space and say what I needed which at that time really included not being someone who was perpetrating harm against him by engaging the power of the state whether or not it would have benefited me in that moment. It could only have had negative effects on him.

And then I got to make a decision about what do I really need right now to do my work, to take care of my kids, to get through this day, to heal.

We need to trust people to be the experts on their own lives and to take them seriously and have faith in people to set the course for working from harm to transformation. I think that comes best from people who are experiencing harm and have a vision for themselves about what they want. And to give people time to identify what that is and be willing to sit with the discomfort of not being able to rescue somebody in a simple or quick way. I think that those values were ultimately the most healing for me.

(This story is Section 4.D. *Setting Goals* to show how one woman was able to name her goals – she calls them "wants" – and how her friends and family gather to help her reach her goals.)

(Adapted from the transcript from *Community Responds to Domestic Violence* available from StoryTelling & Organizing Project (STOP) [www.stopviolenceeveryday.org](http://www.stopviolenceeveryday.org). The story is also available in downloadable audio mp3 on the same website)

### **Story E. *Getting Support from My Co-Workers***

So we'd been married for a year and a half. We were both very involved politically. I had a new baby, I was at home. I know that I started feeling like my life was kind of slipping away.

But his world started to change. And he started to become much more community-involved and I was less and less community involved. And it led to a lot of tension in the relationship, and a lot of tension around me being at home and he being sort of out in the world. I think the arguing and the fighting and the challenging verbally started. And it just escalated. And became very contentious, you know. The relationship was very contentious.

So I remember he came home one night, and he had been out. And I remember he came home one night and we just started fighting. I picked up a glass and threw it at him and it hit him in the side of his face and that was it. He chased me in the living room. We have this brick fireplace in the living room. He chased me in the house and grabbed me, threw me on the floor and just pounded my face into the brick wall. I mean, when thinking about it now, I'm thinking, "How did I survive that?" I felt like he was going to kill me. I mean, I felt like this man has lost his mind, and I'm dead. I remember that he just kicked me, pounded my face into the brick wall, into this fireplace, and...and then he left.

The first assault was one thing. That was shocking to me. The second one was more shocking. Because the first one felt to me like he just lost it, and he just wasn't aware of what he was doing, and he just responded so violently because he lost control of himself. And that to me was not as shocking as the second time because I felt like the second time was almost more being very much more intentional. So I was much more shocked that actually happened after we got back together. I still felt like I was in a lot of shock, and I was very depressed.

You know, I was depressed after this happened. I was depressed for probably about three or four months. I was just in a deep, deep depression. And mostly because I felt like you know this was a person that I just didn't know. I just didn't see this side of him.

I couldn't go to work. My supervisors were very supportive. I mean my whole face was...I couldn't go to work because my face was so damaged that there was no way I could leave the house looking like I was looking. So my co-workers were very supportive and gave me the time I needed to be off.

I don't think we called the police. And I wasn't going to. I mean, police to me was never an option. I don't think I felt like they would have done anything at all. I wasn't necessarily opposed to the police, but I just didn't feel like I knew what their role was. So I didn't call them, but there was plenty of other support. And I don't think I ever, I don't think I felt like there was anybody who was not supportive of me. I never heard anybody say things like, "Well, you need to leave

the motherf\*\*\*\*\*” or to say, “What did you do to provoke him?” I don't think I heard those kind of comments from anybody. I got a lot of support and affirmation and people wanting to be helpful.

I think the first level of support was concern for my physical well-being. And you know, really making sure that I felt safe. And where I was, was I safe? And did I feel like I needed some support to make me safe? And I don't think there was much of a sense from my friends of any sort of like domestic violence shelters or anything like that. I think it was, “Do you feel safe here in your house? He's not here, he's gone, do you feel safe? Do you feel like he'll come back? And if he comes back do you feel safe about that?” And so I think there was a lot of concern about my safety.

There was also a lot of concern about my mental health and what that meant in terms of just taking care of myself physically. People brought me food. “Are you eating?” “Do you need somebody to be here with you?” I mean, I think the fact that I was depressed was really scary for people. “Do you need us to be here to make sure you're eating?” “Make sure you're not sort of thinking about suicide or anything like that.” So there was a, there was a lot of that. “Do you just need someone, do you just need someone to come and cook you some dinner or lunch or whatever.” I had people that bought groceries for me, and brought food to me, and offered to come and help clean the house. And it wasn't at all patronizing. It was like, “You know what, we understand that right now you might not have the energy to do all of these things, so let us take care of you.”

Even to the point where – I just, I never will forget this. We had hardwood floors at the time. And I remember one person saying, “Do you want me to come in here and paint your walls?” I mean, it was like, “We'll paint for you!” You know, I think they wanted to change the environment or create an environment where I felt comfortable. “Is there something different we can do here in your house.” So I remember that a couple people came and painted my living room and dining room, and I remember getting new rugs on the floor.

So my friends were more concerned about my well-being and I had a little nine month old. They were concerned about “Was I able to take care of her and did I need some support in taking care of her?” So people were providing tangible things for me. And then, people were just willing. “You need to call us in the middle of the night, call me.” I mean I just had people who were like, “Just call me.” “You need to talk, just call me and talk.” I felt like I was a burden, and I felt like I didn't want to impose this on my friends, but I felt like they were there. “You want to talk ad nauseum, talk ad nauseum.” So I felt like there was just kind of listening, they were able to listen to me.

(This story is in Section 4.E. *Supporting Survivors* and shows how a group of friends and co-workers got together to help a survivor of violence and a new mother make it through a period of physical injury and depression towards recovery).

### **Story F.1. A Cultural Organization Deals with Sexual Assault**

In the summer of 2006, a drumming teacher from South Korea was invited to teach a week-long drumming workshop at a Korean cultural community center in Oakland, California. After an evening of singing, storytelling and drinking, several students stayed the night to rest and recover for the next day. For over two decades, the cultural center had developed a safe space for the teaching of Korean drumming and dance, community performance and cultural and political exchange. That night, safety was shattered when the drumming teacher sexually assaulted one of the students.

People staying at the center immediately heard what had happened, and center leaders quickly pulled together a direct confrontation involving the members and their community-led board. The next day, members and board members gathered at the center to denounce the sexual assault and support the victim. In this situation, the victim refused to name herself as a “survivor” – finding “victim” a better description of her experience of violence.

Liz, the president of the Oakland cultural center at that time, recalls the next day’s meeting. “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 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 series of actions, a set of sexual assault awareness workshops for the center members and members of other local drumming groups. The board made an immediate telephone call to the head of the drumming center in Korea. Their leader expressed his profound shock and unconditional apology. This call was followed by a letter with a list of demands. The Oakland organization demanded that the Korean institution establish sexual assault awareness trainings for their entire membership which ranged from college students to elder farmers in the village, a commitment to send at least one woman teacher in their future exchanges to the U.S., and a request that the teacher step down from his leadership position for an initial period of 6 months and attend feminist therapy sessions directly addressing the assault. Even though it was culturally difficult for the Korean American group to make demands of their elders in Korea, everyone decided this was what needed to be done. The group in Korea also did not question these demands. They respected them and did not make any complaints.

The Korean American organization also made contact with a sister drumming group in Korea, one that had dealt with their own experience of sexual assault in the past. That organization had organized their one hundred members to address a sexual assault that had occurred among their membership. In that situation, the

person who had committed the assault went through an extensive process with the leaders and members of the group, leaving the organization but following through with a public apology posted on their website and retained relationships with drumming group members.

Inspired by this story of community accountability, the fact that it had been made public and a process in which the person doing harm took responsibility and offered a public apology, the Oakland organization followed with a series of events that reversed the usual silence and victim-blaming accompanying sexual assault. The annual October festival was dedicated to the theme of healing from sexual violence. Facts regarding the incident were printed in the program and shared as a part of the evening's festival, not as a shaming act although it may have indeed shamed the teacher, but as a challenge to the community to take collective responsibility for ending the conditions perpetuating violence including collusion through silence.

This story reveals other 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. What became a long drawn-out period of institutional reflection and engagement sapped the energy and spirit of the organization and the friendships that had held it together. The victim never returned. The continued presence of the teacher at community festivities in South Korea were viewed with resentment and suspicion by Korean American visitors who participated in drumming events in Korea. His eventual removal from the institution did not necessarily lead to the sense of justice that people desired.

Liz, the center's president, reflected on this set of events and 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 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 did that we would have just been in a whole world of fucking 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 kick his ass. 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.”

The story further explores the role of force and violence in our response to violence. Frustration over a long and complex process of accountability spurred

discussions among the members of the Oakland organization over the potential benefits of violence. Liz reflected on a member's remark as they considered retaliation. "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.'" While some may most fear a violent response, some could also welcome a quick but symbolic pay back. "Kicking ass," can also substitute for a process of repair and change.

(This story is in Section 4.F. *Taking Accountability* to show how one community organization dealt with the person doing harm to address his violence; how they turned to the organization that he represented to ask them to take on a process of accountability with their community; and how they turned to a sister organization to learn from them about how they had dealt with a similar situation of sexual assault within their organization.)

(Adapted from Kim, M. [In press]. "Moving beyond critique: Creative Interventions and reconstructions of community accountability." *Social Justice* 37(4). For Liz's Story audio and transcript, see Liz's Story at [www.stopviolenceeveryday.org](http://www.stopviolenceeveryday.org) )



## **Story F.2. *Women Come Together to Confront Our Community Leaders***

I got a story for you, and it's about community accountability. This Hmong woman in Wausau – she was killed by her husband and then he killed himself. He shot her boyfriend, too, and now he's in the hospital in critical condition.

The reason a lot of Hmong women don't leave violent relationships or go back and forth is because when you're married, you belong to your husband's clan in the spirit world. When you die, they bury you and you have a place to go. If you're in-between places, then nobody's gonna bury you, nobody's gonna pay for a funeral, and you have no place to go in the spirit world. That's why so many women stay or don't do anything.

So this woman, her husband's clan wouldn't bury her because they said she's a "slut." Then her boyfriend's clan said, "she doesn't belong to us so we're not going bury her." And her parent's family said, "if she listened to us, this wouldn't have happened." So they wouldn't bury her either. So nobody's claiming her and nobody's going bury her or pay for the burial. This is 3 weeks later.

So this woman's been working with an advocate from Women's Community in Wausau up there. She's been working with this woman who was killed, and she calls me. We'd been talking with the advocates up there for awhile trying to figure out what to do. I'd already been planning to go there to talk about domestic violence and community accountability to a big group of Hmong people at a conference they were planning.

So I say, go back to that clan and say that if they don't bury her and pay for the funeral, we're going to publicly shame them. They have until Wednesday, and if they don't do it, then we're going to go out nationally and write an article and tell everyone that we don't even bury our dead. We'll go to all the women's organizations and shame the community. We'll let them know that there's 18 clans up there, and nobody buried her.

I said, we always gotta go back to the problem which is that this is why women don't leave or go back and forth – because they're afraid they're going be left with nobody to bury them when they die. You bury him first, and he's the one who killed her. And you leave her and say that she died because she's a slut. She didn't die because she's a slut, she died because this guy was abusing her and you all knew that. She died because the Hmong considered her somebody's property, and now she gets killed and can't even get buried. She's not a slut. Hmong men go out with other women all the time, and nobody dies.

Everybody knew that she was getting treated like s\*\*\* by this guy. If they don't do something about this, then we're gonna go out and tell everybody and shame the whole community.



So one of the advocates working with the clan leader – she told them this, and you know what? They got the money together and buried her. Her husband’s clan took responsibility for her and buried her. That’s community accountability.

(This story is in Section 4.F. *Taking Accountability* to show how women in a community came together to challenge their community’s leaders to do the right thing and to honor the death of a woman who was killed by her husband in an act of domestic violence. Even though they were not able to save this woman’s life, they came together to challenge the woman’s family and community leaders to make an important statement and demand for respect.)

### **Story F.3. *Stopping Violence as a First Step***

I was in a relationship with Karen for 3 years. Even though I started seeing the warning signs, I agreed to live with her. Our fighting started getting worse and more regular. It got so every day I would wake up worried that my day would begin with a fight. I did everything to avoid her getting mad, but everything I did seemed to get her upset.

After every argument or fight, she and I would process about how she handled frustration. She had thrown a cup against the wall so hard that the plastic split and shattered. She had gotten out of the car that I was sitting in and slammed her hands on the roof of the car as hard as she could. She had hit her head against the bathroom wall and slammed the sink top with her hands. She had thrashed her legs around under the covers in bed and kneed the wall when she was mad that I hadn't brushed my teeth. She would yell, curse, and literally sprint away during a disagreement or argument.

We had processed and processed about it and had moments of shared understanding about why she experienced things and behaved in the ways she did, how she had learned it, what she was reacting to, etc. She came to understand that although she never physically hurt me and wasn't a "batterer" using threatening or controlling behaviors against me, her behavior made me anxious, uncomfortable, and eventually full of contempt.

She learned that it was hurting the relationship. But all of the talking did not result in actual change. Finally, a couple years later, after one incident, I told her that I would assuredly leave her if she did not change this aspect of her behavior. I asked her what she thought would work—what would make her change her behavior, since talking together about it wasn't working. We had long passed the point where talking had any chance of stopping her from escalating her anger.

She didn't want me to leave and knew that I was serious. She came up with something herself, and we agreed upon a rule. If she began to get upset, she would try to use calming, self-soothing practices for herself. And if she expressed her anger and frustration with physical violence even once – including throwing things against the wall or pounding on things without necessarily touching me – she would arrange for herself to stay in a motel that night, and cover the costs and transportation on her own. She would take a cab and not walk to a motel at night (even if she wanted to walk), because putting her as a queer woman on the street alone at night was not going to be part of the plan. She could get hurt. And even if she didn't, I would worry so much that I would get no rest. She agreed that she would take the cab so that she would be safe and I wouldn't have to worry. The whole decision around these consequences seemed like such a small thing, but it made a big difference in her behavior.

We eventually broke up. Her agreement to stop her abuse, and her plans to take steps to avoid further abuse made a difference. I think it also helped her

understand that she really could take steps to control her abuse. It took years of me explaining to her how I felt and years of tolerating what I now find to be an intolerable situation. But she did finally admit that what she was doing was wrong or at least wrong to me. And she finally took steps to change her behavior. She stopped the most immediate violence and took responsibility to make plans to make sure that she would either stop or at least remove herself from our home if she couldn't make herself stop in any other way.

This was a first step and an important one. She could finally recognize with my insistence over and over again that her abusive behavior was wrong. We were for awhile able to take a break from the continued cycle of violence.

But she chose to go no further. She would not change her underlying attitudes and behaviors. She refused to admit how deep these problems were and how simply stopping the most immediate behaviors would not be enough for me to trust her and relax enough to enjoy our relationship together. We had a moment of relief, but without deeper changes, I knew it would be just a matter of time before her abuse would start again.

Stopping violence takes many steps. Changing violence and becoming someone who can truly enjoy human connection, love without control, communicate without having to make every conversation into an argument or a contest, and be open, curious and appreciative about one's partner are things that I now seek.

(This story is in Section 4.F. *Taking Accountability* to show how one woman and her abusive partner came to an agreement about how she will stop her violence in the future.)

## ***Story F.4. Surviving and Doing Sexual Harm: A Story of Accountability and Healing***

### *Introduction to Surviving and Doing Sexual Harm: A Story of Accountability and Healing*

The following is a story from the perspective of a person doing harm, a person who has also survived harm. In his story, these two dynamics are intimately interlinked. Because there are so few stories from the perspective of the person doing harm, we have included many details occurring over many years of struggle, believing that certain pieces may be important for people doing harm, survivors and allies to better understand the dynamics of accountability.

At this point in time, the public stories of people who have done harm and who are taking accountability seriously remain rare. This is only one story told in some detail. This person's feelings and process may or may not be similar to those of other people doing harm. This person's ability to find resources, political groups doing accountability with values that are non-punishing and non-criminalizing, may not be there for everyone although our goal is that these resources will become more and more commonly available.

Note that this story is shared by someone whose name remains anonymous. This is not only to protect confidentiality but also to make sure that this story does not become a means for this person to receive public recognition or a sense of heroism for his accountability. It is common for people doing harm who have made some movement towards change to be elevated above people who have survived harm – especially if they are men. The story teller has specifically asked to not receive recognition for any contributions they have made towards this project or Toolkit. Humbleness and humility are core parts of the accountability process. From the story, we can see that the process of accountability, itself, has been long and difficult. But, ultimately, it is accountability to oneself and to others that has made this person's healing and transformation possible.

The story teller also asks that if people are able to recognize him or other identities through the details included in this story, that you please have compassion about who you share these identities with. If you recognize him, he asks that you please talk with him about this story, even if only to acknowledge that you know this part of his history; he does not want this story to be an unspoken secret among those that know him.

### ***Surviving and Doing Sexual Harm: A Story of Accountability and Healing***

#### *Why I am Telling My Story*

In all of my years trying to find resources, I've only come across three stories of people who've done harm and only one of them had enough information, enough

of the person's real story, to actually be helpful to me. I want to tell my story to help people who are trying to work on their sh\*\* and also to help people who are supporting that process or who are mentors to have some idea of what might be going on for that person who still doesn't understand themselves – to help folks be better support for accountability processes.

### *Naming the Harm*

You know, for most of the harm that I've done, I've never really been called out for it, so I don't really have other people's names for it, just my own names. I consider myself to have sexually assaulted people, also crossed people's boundaries in sexual ways that aren't sexual assault, and just generally had patriarchal behavior. And then the last thing that's always a little more difficult for me to talk about is that I also molested a relative of mine when I was young.

### *Accountability and Its Early Beginnings*

My accountability process started in my early 20's. The violence and harm I had been doing wasn't just a one-time thing where I just messed up once, it was like an ongoing pattern that was chronic, and happening over and over again in my life. There were a couple of moments when I was able to stop myself in the moment when I was doing harm, like when I hurt someone I cared about very much, seeing her weep when I pushed her sexual boundaries, what I see as sexual assault, I said, "Sh\*\*. I need to stop right now." But even then, that kind of like horror wasn't enough to let me intervene in the big, chronic patterns. It took a lot more before I could start changing, even when I was recognizing chronic patterns of harm I was doing in my life and hated that I was doing those things.

By that point in my life, I was a total wreck. For years and years of my life, my mind had been filled almost with nothing but images of doing gruesome violence to myself. I was having trouble just keeping my life together. I was just under huge amounts of stress, having total breakdowns on a fairly regular basis, and was just being ripped apart inside by everything. And also, being ripped apart by trying to keep myself from the knowledge of what I'd done. It was too much for me to even look at. At the same time, I really wanted to talk with people about it. I was just so scared to do it because of the particular sorts of thing that I had done. You know, like, people who sexually abuse are the most evil of all the monsters in our cultural mythology. And *everybody* is basically on board with doing nothing but straight up violence to them. And so much of my life had been organized around just trying to keep myself safe that it wasn't a risk I could take. It wasn't even a question of choice. It just wasn't a possibility, even though I wanted nothing more.

At some point, I started spending more time around people involved in radical politics and feminist politics. And so one person that I knew, I'll call him Griffin (not his real name), one of their friends had been sexually assaulted. So I just happened to be at a table when Griffin was having a conversation about what

people were going to do about it. And that was the first time that I had ever heard of Philly Stands Up. Where I was living at the time was really far away from Philly, so it was just basically a name and an idea. But, you know, that one tiny seed of an idea was enough to make me realize that it was possible. That there were people that I could talk to that weren't going to destroy me.

It was a few months later. There was just a lot of stuff going on in my life where my history of doing violence to people and my history of surviving violence, they were coming up over and over and over in my life. But I still refused to acknowledge either of them. And it wasn't like a conscious thing. I don't know exactly what it was, but I hadn't gained the moment of insight yet into understanding that that is my history. I ended up talking with that same friend, Griffin, who had mentioned Philly Stands Up, and just in this one conversation, my whole history came out. It was the first time I talked with anybody about either my history of being raped or my history of doing sexual violence to other people. That was *a moment* when I stopped running from my past. Those two things in my life, surviving violence and doing violence, are inseparable. I started coming to terms with both of them in the exact same moment. That was the first time I ever broke my own silence. And that's when I started trying to find some way of doing accountability.

Part of what made this possible was the particular relationship with one of the people I had harmed, June (not her real name), a person that I loved tremendously, and somebody who, even though I haven't seen her for years and probably won't see her again in my life, I still love tremendously. And so the pain of hurting somebody that I love that much was part of it. And then I think part of it was that I had had someone to talk to. I'd never been able to communicate with people about anything in my life before. And part of it was that things got so bad at one point that I didn't have the choice anymore of not seeking support. I had a breakdown where somebody came into my life and listened to me, and I couldn't hold it in any more. And so I had started learning how to communicate from that. And then Griffin, the person I had the conversation with, really started off my own accountability process. I think for me, it was about that friend. I didn't feel threatened by them. I had a trust with them that if I talked to them, they would still care about me and see me as a person. But it's all part of this much larger context. It wasn't just something about that one particular friendship that made the difference; it was like this whole arc of all these huge things that were happening in my life, all of these breakdowns and changes and new commitments and new understandings that were all developing together that brought me to that point.

Actually, now that I think about it, there was a moment a couple of years before that was really the first time I'd ever broken my silence, but in a very different way. For a few years before that moment, I'd started being exposed to feminist politics and things like that. And for the first time I knew that someone that I loved and cared about was a survivor of rape. I was in kind of a tailspin for awhile



trying to figure out how to respond to that. I started seeking out more information about how to support survivors of sexual violence, but it hadn't really been connected to my own life, really. I started to understand the importance of having the violence that was done to you being acknowledged and decided that I needed to step up in my own life. So the real first time that I ever broke my own silence about the harm that I had done was when I talked to the person who I had molested. I approached them and said, "Hey, I did this." But I didn't have the capacity yet to actually engage with it. And so I talked about it with that person and totally broke down and put that person in a position where they were having to worry about caretaking for me, you know, the way that it happens so stereotypically. I gave them some resources, like a rape crisis number to call and things like that. That person asked me if they could tell a particular adult in their life, and I told them, "You can tell whoever you want." But I didn't have the capacity in my life yet to really work through everything that meant, and so I just brought the shutters down and the walls and everything else and cut that part off from my life again. After that, I shut down and I became totally numb, totally blank, for months.

By this point a couple of years later, I had two friends that I ended up talking with, disclosing this to, Griffin and my friend, Stephen (not his real name). And I didn't tell anyone more than that because I was scared, I was scared of everything that would happen. The only thing before Griffin who had mentioned to me about Philly Stands Up, the only thing I'd ever heard in the scene that I was part of there was that all perpetrators should be ridden out of town on a rail. Just like that, along with my own fear of violence that I'd carried for at least a decade by that point, made me really scared to talk about it with anyone else. It was just Griffin and Stephen. Those two were the only ones that I had talked about any of this with for like a year.

### *The Accountability Process: A Difficult Beginning*

Over the course of that year, I ended up finding out that I crossed two more people's boundaries, even though I was committed to doing everything that I needed to do to make sure that I didn't cross people's boundaries. Like the first time it happened, I thought that I was asking for consent, but I wasn't. Or I wasn't able to communicate *enough* in order to actually have real consent. And so that person, when I crossed that person's boundaries, they confronted me on the spot about it. They were like, "Was that sexual for you?" And I was like "oh damn," but I was like, "Yeah. yeah, it was." And they were like, "I didn't consent to that, and that was a really difficult thing for me because of this and this and this." And then later on, it happened again, when I thought I was doing everything that I needed to have consent.

Part of what was going on at that point, was that I still had a huge amount of guilt and shame and traumatic reactions to being vulnerable. But after the second time that I crossed someone's boundaries, I realized what I was doing wasn't working



and I needed to take accountability a step further. I decided to do all of these disclosures to people in my life. When I was doing these disclosures, I wasn't able to be present at all. I was forcing myself to do it, over and over again, and was just like totally emotionally overwhelmed and burnt out. I didn't think about how I was doing them and how that would impact other people. Because I wanted to be 100% sure that I wasn't going to cross anybody's boundaries, I dropped out of everything and just socially isolated myself.

It also seemed like everyone was totally happy to let me become totally isolated and let me drop out of everything. Nobody reached out to me, or as far as I know, people didn't really talk amongst each other or anything. I think it was just like people didn't know what to do with the information, so they didn't do anything. Griffin and Stephen had moved out of town, so they weren't there to support me any more. In that period, the only two people who did reach out to me were people whose boundaries I had crossed. And they were offering support, but I was just like, "No, I can't put you in the situation where you're taking care of me." Because by that point – during the year when I'd just been keeping quiet about things and trying to deal with it by myself, I started reading a lot of zines about survivor support, stories of survivors doing truth-telling and that kind of thing. By that point I'd learned enough to know that there is the pattern of survivors having to emotionally caretake for the people who had done harm to them. So I put up the boundary and I was like, "Thank you, but I can't accept your support."

I was doing all this stuff that was self-punishing, having no compassion for myself – just this combination of a desire to be 100% certain that I wasn't going to be crossing anybody's boundaries and this destructiveness that came out of intense self-hatred. And then it kept going, but I left town. I got way beyond burnt out; I wasn't even running on fumes any more, just willpower. But, I didn't cross anybody's boundaries!

### *Accountability: My Stages of Change*

What were the stages of change for me? The first stage, which isn't one that I would really recommend that people generally include in accountability processes, was the self-destructive one where I would just step back from things. A component of this could be good, but not in a self-punishing, destructive way. But that was really the first step, isolating myself from everything. And then, doing some research and self-education at the same time. I was also going to therapy and was coming to understand my own history better, was able to articulate for myself that really what I needed to do was containment – figure out the boundaries that I needed to assert for myself to make sure that I wasn't going to hurt anybody. It took me a while to understand that because of the ways that people who are socialized male in this society, they're never expected to assert any boundaries on their own sexuality. Both in terms of, "I don't want to do this," but also in terms of actively seeking other people's boundaries, seeking out to understand what other people's boundaries are. So basically that whole first

period was just tracking myself, figuring out in what sorts of emotional states I was most likely to cross somebody's boundaries and what it felt like when I was getting there; what sorts of situations were likely to trigger it and also in day-to-day interactions, what kinds of boundaries I needed to be asserting for myself to make sure I wasn't getting close to any of those things.

Then once I had that containment figured out and had the space where I was trusting myself not to be crossing people's boundaries, then there was room in my life to be able to go inwards and start working on self-transformation and healing. Part of that, too, was that I was still crossing people's boundaries on a regular basis. Every time it would happen it would be a crisis for me. Sometimes I would get suicidal. Sometimes I would just be freaking out and paranoid and have huge flare-ups of guilt and shame. So when I was crossing people's boundaries, there wasn't emotional room for that type of transformation and healing to take place. I needed to create this sort of containment not just for the worthy goal of not doing harm but also to make sure that I had the capacity, the emotional space, to be able to work on that healing and transformation. So that was the second phase, when I was working with an accountability group that I sought out for myself. There was a lot of healing and self-transformation.

Now at this point, I feel like I've gotten enough of that worked out that I feel like I'm getting to a place where it becomes an ethical possibility for me to start reaching back outwards again, and starting to work on getting involved in organizing or perhaps have relationships. Because for this whole time I've had a strict rule for myself around abstinence and celibacy, just not getting involved in people because – because I know that any time that would happen, that all these things that I haven't dealt with would come up. And once all that unresolved trauma flares up, then the game is basically lost for me. So now, the potential for having intimate or sexual relationships starts to become more of a reality for me and at this point I feel like I've learned enough about where all that's coming from, and I've healed enough that I can communicate about it enough to understand my limits and boundaries and to reach out at the same time.

Another shift that's been happening, too, is that towards the beginning it was basically like I couldn't have people in my life that I wasn't able to disclose to. There were some people that were either an acquaintance or some sort of person that had power over me that were in my life that I didn't really disclose to. But basically, every person that I was becoming friends with, at some point I'm gonna need to tell them, just as part of the process of being friends. When I decided that I wanted to be friends with them, I would have to tell them. At this point, as I'm getting to the point where I'm putting people less at risk, I feel like I'm gaining back more of the privilege of retaining my anonymity. It's still really important for me to disclose with people, and there are some situations in which I'm probably always going to be disclosing to people really early on. For example, any time I want to get involved in anti-violence work, that's going to be a

conversation I have at the outset, before I get involved. But I feel like I'm regaining some of that privilege of anonymity now, too.

### *Accountability and Healing: Moving through Guilt, Shame and a Traumatic Response to Vulnerability*

Now it's been years of seeking support through political groups working on accountability and therapy and staying committed to the process. The things I now understand about healing, in the wholeness of my experience, as both a survivor and a perpetrator, look very different than the ones that I've read about or that people have talked to me about, where it's healing only from *surviving* abuse or violence.

I think that the three biggest emotions that I've had to contend with in that healing and transformation – and this is something that I've only articulated in the last, like, month of my life – I think the three biggest things that I've had to contend with are guilt, shame and a traumatic response to being vulnerable.

I think those three things – in myself at least – are the sources for the self-hate. It took me a long time trying to figure out even what guilt and shame *are*. What the emotions are, what they feel like. I would just read those words a lot, but without being able to identify the feeling. One of the things someone told me was that it seems like a lot of my actions are motivated by guilt. And that was strange to me because I never thought that I had felt guilt before. I thought, “Oh, well, I feel *remorse* but I don't feel guilt.” It was years of pondering that before I even understood what guilt was or what it felt like in myself. Once I did, I was like, “Well damn! That's actually just about everything I feel.” I just hadn't understood what it felt like before, so I didn't know how to identify it.

Now my understanding of guilt is that it's the feeling of being worthy of punishment. That guiltiness crops up when I become aware of the harm that I've done. I might engage in minimization, trying to make that harm go away, so that I don't feel that guiltiness for it any more, so that I don't feel worthy of being punished. I might try denying it – same sort of thing. Maybe I'm going to try to numb myself so that I don't feel that – so that I don't have that feeling any more. Or maybe I'm going to make that punishment come to me – just being in that place where there's this feeling that the other boot is gonna drop all the time, and that it should drop, trying to bring about a sense of resolution to that sense of impending harm by harming myself.

And another thing that I can see in myself is trying to get out of that sense that harm is gonna come to me by dedicating my life to amending the harm. But the thing is that it's different from compassion, trying to right wrongs because of guilt instead of because of compassion. Doing it through guilt, I notice that I can't assert any boundaries with myself. It's like a compulsion, and it leads me to burnout. Because any time that I stop, that feeling comes back, and it's like, *the*

*harm is gonna come.* I'm learning how to stay present with that difficult feeling and breathe through it. It helps me a lot.

And then, as far as the shame goes, my understanding of shame is it's like the feeling that *I am someone who I cannot stand to be.* I was at this workshop where somebody was talking about their experiences with addiction and said, "My whole life, when I was in the middle of this addiction, I had this combination of grandiosity and an inferiority complex." You know, like this sense that I was better than everyone else and that I was the worst scum of the earth. I think when that's the manifestation of shame – that *this* is who I should be and *this* is who I really am. When I've seen myself in that kind of place, then usually I'm reacting to the shame either by trying to drown out that awareness of the side of me that's scum, and one of the primary ways that I did that was through finding ways of getting sexual rushes or something like that. And the other thing that I've seen myself do is trying to eradicate that part of me that's the scum. And mostly that happened through fantasies of doing violence to myself, targeted at that part of myself that I hated, that part of myself that I couldn't stand to be, and trying to rip myself into two. I think that's a lot of what was fueling my desire for suicide, too.

One of the things that happened with the accountability process is that once I started talking to people about the things I was most ashamed about, and making it public, then that grandiosity went away. And instead I had to come to terms with this other understanding of myself that wasn't as caught up in illusions of grandeur and instead was this forced humbleness. Like, *I'm a person* and I'm no better than anybody else. *I'm a person and I can also change.* So through talking about the things that I'm most ashamed of, that shame became transformative for me. That was a really big aspect of healing for me. And it required a lot of grieving, a lot of loss. And that's something that I was going through during that first year when I was talking with people about it.

As I was talking with other people about it, all these possibilities were closing off in my life. I'll never be able to do this thing now. I'll never be able to have this type of relationship now. The world was less open to me. Like, I can't think of myself in the same way any more. A lot of times I didn't really have the capacity to really face it. But in the moments of insight I had, where I was coming to terms with it, I was really grieving, weeping, over the things that I was losing because of the accountability. That was a big part of healing for me, finding and connecting with and expressing the grief. And also the grief over everything that I had done.

There are still some things that I probably will have to let go of but that I haven't allowed myself to grieve yet, some possibilities that I'm still clinging to. I've found that a lot of time when I get on a power trip and find myself in this controlling sort of attitude, one of the things that resolves that is if I can find a way to grieve. The power trips, the controlling attitudes, tend to happen when I'm trying to control things that are changing. If I can just accept the change and grieve ways

that possibilities are changing, then that brings me back. I mean, I've come to terms with a lot of the things that I was grieving when I first started talking with people about it. I'm starting to be able to find ways in my life now of different paths to some of the same things that I wanted for my life, but just paths that have a lot more humility in them. And I think that's one of the really valuable things that accountability has given me. Any time I start that thinking big about myself, then I bring it back to this accountability that I'm doing and it's helped me a lot in just like helping me find ways to stay connected to humility. That's something that I really appreciate about it.

The third one's a traumatic response to vulnerability. And this is one that I still don't understand that well because I'm just now starting to have some understanding of it. But like I was saying before, because of the violence that I've experienced in my own life, a huge portion of my life has been dedicated to keeping me safe. And for me, those behaviors have been enforced in myself through that same type of self-hate and violence. So if I leave an opening where I'm vulnerable, then that self-hate comes to close it down. If I ever mess up in a way that left me vulnerable, then I find that I start having all these fantasies of doing violence to myself. It's a way of enforcing in myself to never let that happen again. I don't really understand it that well. One of the things that I've been working on more recently is learning how to be open to vulnerability. And that's the last part of self-hate that I've healed the least.

One thing that my history of surviving violence has created is a huge dedication in my life to making sure that I never allow myself to be vulnerable. In the past, it's been utterly impossible for me to allow people to see that I'm any sort of sexual being and has also made it impossible to talk about any sort of like emotions of importance. Or just asking for consent, there's a sort of vulnerability that's involved with that. So this created this wall that set me up to make it really, really hard for me to have consensual sexual interactions with anybody. In my family, we had no communication about anything whatsoever. I didn't have any models around communication. Now that I'm in a world where communication is possible, it's hard for me to convey to people what it's like to be in a world where that's not possible. For a huge portion of my life, there wasn't even a glimmer of possibility. These things that I was feeling, they weren't in the realm of talkability. It meant that I couldn't ever be present enough with the emotions to learn how to intervene. Any time they would come up, I would just try to eradicate them with all this violent self-imagery, without even realizing what I was doing.

### *Accountability as a Gift*

I have a friend that's been involved in a lot of accountability work, and he's insisted to me that what I'm doing isn't accountability because there's not survivors somewhere who are issuing a list of demands or that kind of thing. But for me, that's only one aspect of accountability. There's another aspect that's being accountable to myself, making sure that I'm living the values that are



important to me in the world. Ultimately, accountability for me is a commitment to do what I need to do to make sure that I don't repeat those patterns, that they stop with me. Part of that has been the work around creating boundaries for myself. Part of that has been the healing and transformation. And part of it is also engaging with the world, to not see it as an individual thing, but to see myself as part of a social struggle. I need to be engaged with the world to be part of ending all of this sexual violence that's everywhere.

The accountability has this gift of humility. One of the things that is really valuable for me about that humility is the amount of compassion that it's allowed me to have for other people. I still have superiority complexes, but nowhere near like I did. At this point in my life, I'm able to understand myself as being the same kind of human as so many other people. I don't put myself on a different level from them. And so I feel like I have a much greater ability to understand people's struggle and pain, and to learn from it, and to *love* people, coming out of that compassion and shared struggle.

That ability for real, authentic love is something I never had. I thought that love was this obsessive thing. And when I realized that I needed to stop that, I had this moment of grieving and loss and doubt, because I thought, "Well, if I stop this, will I ever feel love again?" It required this huge shift. Once it quieted down, once I stopped it, then the whole landscape was just silent. It took me awhile to re-tune my hearing so that it wasn't just the roar of this obsession, but that I could hear the birds, and the insects, and the breezes. From there, learn a sort of love that's based in resilience, and shared commitment, and sacrifice. So that's been a real gift that it's given me.

Another thing too, is that I can bear to live with myself. I never could before. Most of the time I'm okay being in my own skin. It's been huge – even though I went through some extremely dark and difficult periods where the basin of depression that I'd lived in for so long in my life dropped into an abyss. Coming out of that abyss, through a continuing commitment to accountability, it's like the first time in my life when I'm starting to feel I'm free of this sort of depression and this crippling anxiety and paranoia. I have emotional capacity now; like I can feel things. I'm still not in a place where joy is a big part of my life, but it seems possible now. Through all this grieving and everything that I've done, I've also had a couple moments of clarity and lightness that I'd never experienced before in my life.

I think something else that has been a real gift for me, in terms of accountability, is the possibility for having lasting intimate relationships with people, whether sexually or not sexually. And having some capacity for pleasure – sexual pleasure, even, because before it was so caught up in shame and guilt and feeling triggered that I only ever felt horrible. Now I don't feel like I'm consigned to that for the rest of my life. I feel that there's a possibility of being liberated from it.



(This story is in Section 4.F. *Taking Accountability* to show one person's experience of coming to terms with both surviving and doing sexual harm and the process of accountability and healing.)

(This story is available at the StoryTelling & Organizing Project (STOP) website at [www.stopviolenceeveryday.org](http://www.stopviolenceeveryday.org).)

### **Story G. A Small Story (He Korero Iti)**

We live in a town, but many of my husband's *extended family* (whanau) live in the valley where he grew up about 40 kilometres away. My husband and his brother are renowned for a number of things – one being how they extend the life of their cars and vans using highly technical items like string and wire – another how they share these vehicles for a variety of tasks such as moving furniture or transporting relatives, building materials, tractor parts, *traditional herbal medicines* (rongoa), eels, vegetables, dogs, and pigs (dead or alive). They are renowned for being people of the people, the ones to call on in times of trouble and death, the ones who will solve the problem and make the plan. They travel to and from town, to the coast to dive for sea food, to endless meetings, to visit *extended family* (whanau) - along the many kilometres of dirt roads in and around the valley, through flood or dust depending on the season in those patched up, beat up, prized cars.

There are a number of things to know about the valley - one is that the last 33 children in the world of their *small sub-tribe* (hapu ririki) to grow up and be educated on their own lands go to school here, despite government efforts to close the school. Another is that the valley is known to outsiders and insiders as 'patu wahine' – literally meaning to 'beat women' and this is not said as a joke. The mountain for this valley is named as the doorway spirits pass through on their way to their final departure from this life. This valley is also the valley where my husband and his siblings were beaten at school for speaking their first language. It is the valley their mother sent them to so they would be safe from their father – back to her people. It is where they milked cows, pulled a plough, fed pigs but often went hungry, and were stock whipped, beaten and worse.

My brother-in-law still lives in the valley, in a group of houses next to the school. So it's no surprise that one of our cars would be parked by these houses – right by where the children play. Perhaps also not a surprise that while playing that time old international game of rock throwing our eight year old nephew shattered the back window of the car. If I'd been listening I probably would have heard the 'oh' and 'ah' of the other children that accompanied the sound of glass breaking from town, and if I'd been really tuned in I would have heard the rapid, frightened heart beat of 'that boy' as well.

His mother is my husband's cousin – and she was on the phone to us right away. She was anxious to assure us 'that boy' would get it when his father came home. His father is a big man with a pig hunter's hands who hoists his pigs onto a meat hook unaided. He is man of movement and action, not a man for talking. Those hands would carry all the force of proving that he was a man who knew how to keep his children in their place. Beating 'that boy' would be his way of telling us that he had also learned his own childhood lessons well.

So before he got home we burned up the phone lines – sister to sister, cousin to cousin, brother –in-law to sister-in-law, wife to husband, brother to brother. This

was because my husband and his brother know that there are some lessons you are taught as a child that should not be passed on. The sound of calloused hand on tender flesh, the whimpers of watching sisters, the smell of your own fear, the taste of your own blood and sweat as you lie in the dust – useless, useless, better not born. This is a curriculum like no other. A set of lessons destined to repeat unless you are granted the grace of insight and choose to embrace new learning.

So when the father of ‘that boy’ came home and heard the story of the window ‘that boy’ was protected by our combined *love* (aroha) and good humor, by the presence of a senior uncle, by invitations to decide how to get the window fixed in the shortest time for the least money. Once again phone calls were exchanged with an agreement being made on appropriate restitution. How a barrel of diesel turns into a car window is a story for another time.

Next time my husband drove into the valley it was to pick up the car, and ‘that boy’ was an anxious witness to his arrival. My husband also has very big hands, hands that belong to a man who has spent most of his life outdoors. These were the hands that reached out to ‘that boy’ to hug not hurt.

A lot of bad things still happen in the valley, but more and more they are being named and resisted. Many adults who learned their early lessons there will never return. For *people of the land* (tangata whenua) this is profound loss – our first identifiers on meeting are not our own names but those of our mountains, rivers, *subtribe* (hapu) and *tribe* (iwi). To be totally separate from these is a dislocation of spirit for the already wounded. This is only a small story that took place in an unknown valley, not marked on many maps. When these small stories are told and repeated so our lives join and connect, when we choose to embrace new learning and use our ‘bigness’ to heal not hurt then we are growing grace and wisdom on the earth.

Di Grennell

Whangarei, Aotearoa-New Zealand

**Glossary:**

Whanau – extended family group

Rongoa – traditional herbal medicines

Hapu ririki – small sub-tribe

Patu – hit, strike, ill treat, subdue

Wahine – woman/women

Aroha – love, concern for

Tangata whenua – people of the land

Hapu – subtribe

Iwi -tribe

(This story in both versions is in Section 4.G. *Working Together* to show how a whole family pulls together to protect a young boy from a beating by his father.)

### 5.3. Creative Interventions Anti-Oppression Policy (Anti-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment)

The following is the Anti-Oppression Policy used by Creative Interventions to help to create an organizational culture that supports accountability. This includes expectations that people disclose histories of violence and do no further harm. It also creates expectations that harm that does take place within the organization or by people that are affiliated with the organization will be addressed using the kind of accountability values and processes that are in this Toolkit.

We found that many organizations have no policies in place to deal with situations of violence or harm -- or that policies are there in paper only with little thought given to how this can help strengthen organizational cultures.

We encourage organizations, groups, families, friendship networks think about what kind of environment you want to uphold regarding harm and violence and that you discuss together what values and practices you want to have. We also encourage you to think about processes that do not necessarily jump to banning, punishment or criminal justice without thinking about how you can rather encourage disclosure and can provide support to survivors and support accountability for people doing harm.

This is just one example that may be helpful in creating an environment challenging violence and supporting accountability.

**Creative Interventions**  
**Anti-Oppression Policy**  
**(Anti-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment)**

*Commitment to Social Justice and Equality*

Creative Interventions is an organization promoting social justice and equality on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, class, immigration status, education, national origin, religion, age and physical ability.

*Freedom from Oppressive, Demeaning, Degrading, Discriminating, Harassing, Sexualized Attitudes/Behavior*

As such, Creative Interventions and its personnel agree that as an organization and as individuals, we are committed to the following policies:

1) Non-oppressive work/organizational conditions due to gender, race, ethnicity, class, immigration status, education, national origin, religion, age and physical ability including:

- a) Freedom from demeaning or degrading gesture, look, talk or touch within the work/organizational environment;
- b) Freedom from sexual or otherwise inappropriately intimate gesture, look, talk or touch within the work/organizational environment;
- c) Freedom from assignment to demeaning or degrading tasks due to gender, race, ethnicity, class, immigration status, education, national origin, religion, age and physical ability.

2) Commitment to deal collectively and positively with any violations of these freedoms if they occur including:

- a) Organizational process supported by the Executive Director and/or Board of Directors in line with the recommendations of the *Incite! Gender Oppression, Abuse, Violence: Community Accountability within the Progressive People of Color Movement Document* (Incite!, July 2005), *Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies* and the *Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence*.

3) Commitment to the development of education to promote respectful attitudes and behavior throughout the organization and the prevention of violation of these expectations.

*Process for Addressing Violations of Anti-Oppression Policy*



**If any individual or group of individuals feels that this anti-oppression policy has been violated, they have the right and responsibility to address this to the Executive Director and/or Board of Directors in verbal or written form and should expect a response as to next steps within two (2) weeks of the issue being raised.**

-----  
**I have read and agree to the above:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**CI Person Signature**

## 5.4. Community-Based Responses to Interpersonal Violence Workshop

The following is an example of a workshop based upon the community-based responses to interpersonal violence as presented in the *Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence*.

# Community-Based Responses

## to Interpersonal Violence

### Day One: Understanding Interpersonal Violence

#### OVERVIEW:

##### — PRIMARY USE —

This workshop is designed to provide participants with (Day 1 ) information about interpersonal violence and state violence, and (Day 2) tools/principles for practicing community based approaches to interpersonal violence

##### — GOALS —

- Participants will draw clear understanding of the different types of interpersonal violence and state violence
- Participants will develop analysis about intersections of state and interpersonal violence in order to understand set the framework for practicing community based responses to violence.

##### — AUDIENCE —

Anyone open to learning the basics of community based responses to interpersonal violence.

#### GETTING STARTED:

##### — AGENDA —

1. Welcome and Review Agenda & Objectives & Housekeeping	10 mins
2. Introductions/Ice Breaker	10 mins
3. What is Violence?	10 mins
4. What is Interpersonal Violence?	15 mins
5. Examples of Interpersonal Violence	20 mins
6. Interpersonal Violence is related Power	40 mins
7. LUNCH	45 mins
8. Statistics Game with State Violence	45 mins
9. Small Group Discussion	15 mins
10. Large Group Discussion	20 mins
11. Resources	5 mins
12. Closing and Evals	5 mins

**Total Time**

**4hrs**

##### — MATERIALS NEEDED —

Group agreements on easel paper (unless they will be created with group)

Pens and markers

Blank easel papers

Slips of State Violence Statistics (pg. 7-8)

Charts with list of questions (Types of Interpersonal Violence, small and large group questions)  
Power and Control Wheel handout  
Blank Index Cards and Evaluation Symbol Chart  
Tape

### Facilitator Tips

Prepare flip charts with list before you begin. Prepare Statistic Slips on pg. 7-9 and keep an answer sheet for accuracy. Prepare Evaluation Symbol Chart.

## DIRECTIONS:

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### 1. Welcome and Review Agenda & Objectives

10 mins

#### Welcome

**Logistics:** Housekeeping (the gender neutral restrooms, lunch, interpreter ethics, and a note on pronouns, scent sensitivity, accessibility for people with disabilities etc.)

**Group Expectations/Group Agreements with Participants**

#### Review Agenda and Goals

**Take care of yourself:** The topic of violence is very close to many of us, today we will be speaking in detail about interpersonal violence and if for whatever reason you feel like you'd like to take a break please feel free to do so at anytime during the presentation.

---

### 2. Icebreaker/Team Building

10 mins

Do a go-around and ask participants to:

- 1.) Write their name vertically on a piece of paper
- 2.) With each letter in your name, write the reason why knowledge about interpersonal violence is important to you
- 3.) Have participants move around the room introducing themselves to at least 3 people and have them share their responses

#### Example:

sexual abuse is prevalent in my community

Although there are services available, I want to be able to support my friends

Not only has sexual and domestic violence been a part of my current community, I am a survivor

Demanding longer prison sentences for people who cause harm is not working

Responding in a way that nurtures the well being of queer people of color is important to me

Ally to grassroots political approaches to ending violence

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### 3. Defining Violence

10 mins

Ask Participants to define violence. If participants have trouble give examples to get them started.

*What is violence?*

**Facilitator Note:** Keep this list up somewhere in the room so you can continue to reference this definition. This definition can include internalized violence, academic violence, state violence, ideological violence, etc.

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## 4. Defining Interpersonal Violence

15 mins

Facilitators should ask question jot down answers and share the CI Toolkit's types of Interpersonal Violence.

*What is interpersonal violence?*

In addition to the participant's definition, share the below list:

### Types of Interpersonal Violence

- Most often takes place within a relationship, intimate partner, family, dating, friendship, acquaintances, co-workers, neighbors, members of organizations
- Domestic violence or Intimate partner violence that takes place within an intimate relationship such as marriage, domestic partnership, dating relationship, former relationship
- Family Violence that can include domestic violence but can also extend to children, parents, grandchildren, grandparents, other family members and others who may be very close to family like family friends, guardian, caretakers, and so on
- Sexual violence that includes unwanted sexual attitudes, touch or actions such as sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, molestation, child sexual abuse,
- Child abuse any kind of abuse against children
- Elder abuse any kind of abuse against elderly people

*Are there any others we didn't name?*

---

## 5. Examples of Interpersonal Violence

20 mins

*Because these relationships of violence may also include relationships of love, companionship, friendship, loyalty and also dependence and even survival, this can make it more confusing to understand dynamics of violence and also to change them. We look at interpersonal violence as any form of abuse, harm, violence, or violation taking place between two or more individuals. It can include forms of violence used to harm someone, keep someone under one's control, or get someone to do whatever one wants them to do. The violence can be:*

**(Have this already written up and share the following)**

**The Violence can be:**

- Physical, emotional, sexual, economic, or may take some other form
- Isolation, stalking, using someone's vulnerability due to discrimination against them
- Using someone's vulnerability against them

- Using one's own vulnerability to manipulate or control someone or excuse one's own use of violence
- Using things someone values against them- outing of sexuality or work in order to damage someone's reputation at work in community or relationships or threat of harming others or pets

You can highlight any of the examples above by asking the participants or sharing some examples. Some examples are listed below.

*What are some examples of using one's own vulnerability to manipulate or excuse one's own use of violence?*

*Some examples include (only state those that you think may be helpful): Physical (pushing, slapping, hitting, beating, kicking, pulling hair, holding down, locking into a room or space, weapons), Emotional (name calling, put downs, humiliation, always being right, or crazy making), sexual ((includes making someone participate in sexual activities of any kind against their will or without their acknowledgment), Economic (withholding financial info from partner, controlling income against will of partner, gambling, abuse of credit cards, destroying one's property), Isolation (making it difficult for someone to make friends, keep up relationships, see one's family, go to work, go outside the home, talk to other people, or make phone calls), Stalking (sending/monitoring text messages, emails, or calling repeatedly, following someone home, workplace, school or other locations, leaving notes/messages in a harassing manner), Vulnerability (threatening to call immigration enforcement authorities, taking advantage based on the person's gender, sexual orientation, race, class or economic situation, age, education, ability to speak English, physical or mental ability or disability), Vulnerability (uses one's own lack of power in society as a justification for power and control of others, sometimes using one's own abuse during childhood as an excuse for violence, sometimes using self-harm suicide, driving recklessly, overdose, cutting),*

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## 6. Interpersonal Violence is related to Power

40 mins

*Although we know violence can come in many forms and look different, violence is often used in a way that makes one person have power and control over another. Sometimes we may think that violence as anger, passion, or loss of control. But we find that interpersonal violence is often used to maintain power and control over their partners.*

**Hand out Power and Control Wheel and discuss as a group the below list of patterns of power and control:  
One sided**

**Attempts to control/dominate/coerce**

**Takes advantage of vulnerability**

**Exists in a pattern**

**Calculated and planned**

**Exists in a cycle**

**May increase over time**

**Isolation**

*Often we think of mutual abuse, but what we have to remember is that this is a myth and after observing patterns in a relationship we can see that someone's life is always getting smaller and resources (friends, money, family etc) are always becoming more and more limited and controlled.*

*Some things we may want to recognize is how interpersonal violence uses vulnerabilities to abuse. What are some of these?*

**Write these down as the group dictates them to you and offer the additional list if necessary.**

**-Gender/sex**



- Race
- Class/income level
- Level of education
- Immigration status
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Physical or mental disability
- Occupation (in underground economies)
- Religion
- Political affiliation
- Emotionally, financially or otherwise dependent on others for survival
- What country or region they are from (especially if under current or historical colonial control)

**Facilitator Transition:** *Many people live at the intersections of many of these categories/oppressions. For example: Women of color live at the dangerous intersections of sexism, racism and other oppressions. In this case, interpersonal violence is not simple a tool of patriarchal control, but it is also a tool of racism and colonialism. That is, colonial relationships are themselves gendered and sexualized and are most often exercised through the state. After lunch, we will participate in an activity that will show us, through statistics, how the state contributes to further marginalize survivors and people who abuse within the context of interpersonal violence.*

## 6. LUNCH Break

45mins

## 7. Statistics Mix and Match

45 mins

In this section, you will need to have prepared the statistics slips on pg. 7-9. You will find that each statistic has a partial statement and answer. Cut them separately and when passing them out make sure that the answer and partial statement are somewhere among the group. Each participant will be asked to roam the room looking for the “match” to their partial statistic. You, as the facilitator, should have an answer sheet with the correct answers so that you can check for accuracy.

Pass out statistics slips and give the participants enough time for each one to find their match. Once this is completed. Have each duo/match share their statistic with the group. While each duo/match shares their statistic, make sure they are in fact correct with your answer sheet and ask if there are any comments or questions.

**Facilitator’s Transition:** *We are not sharing these statistics to bring you down or make you feel hopeless, these statistics are vital to our understanding of the intersections of state and interpersonal violence. These intersections help us understand just how important it is for us to develop creative interventions to interpersonal violence that do not prioritize 911, criminalization or prisons. For a few minutes lets discuss in small groups the impacts of this violence on our communities, survivors, and people who cause harm.*

## 8. SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION about impact of violence

15 mins

Break up into small groups and ask each group to answer the following questions:

*(These questions should be written up)*

- How might interpersonal/state violence hurt/impact close friends, family and community?
- How might the interpersonal/state violence hurt/impact the survivor?
- How might the interpersonal/state violence hurt/impact the person doing harm?

If difficult for groups to answer, give participants a simple scenario. After a 10 minutes of this discussion in small groups ask them to move back to the large group and ask for informal report back of a few of these questions.

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## 9. LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

20 mins

*Even as we recognize the impact of interpersonal/state violence it's still difficult for us to recognize interpersonal violence or state violence because we sometimes don't want to deal with it//face it. But by looking at our personal biases we can be more responsive in our lives to interpersonal violence. Here a few questions I'd like for us to loosely discuss before we close the workshop today.*

- How might our personal biases and experiences influence how we understand violence?
- How does your discipline and the institution you are a part of strengthen/uphold violence?
- How might we be more responsive in our positions/lives to the needs of people who cause harm, survivors, communities who experience interpersonal violence?

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## 10. Resources

5 mins

*Share local resources for do/sa and other online resources for learning more in depth about interpersonal violence.*

**Facilitator's Transition:** *Great. We'll we are at the end of our workshop session. We hope you enjoyed it and that you will join us for DAY TWO of this workshop. Today's workshop helps to lay the framework for using community based responses to violence.*

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## 11. Short Eval and Closing

5 mins

**Put up evaluation symbol chart and pass out index cards.**

*Before you leave today please fill out an index card with the following symbols and your responses. THANK YOU and see you for the next session of WORK IT OUT!*

AND

Pass out index cards and ask participants to write their thoughts within the following four categories:

- ☆ (a key learning )
- △ (change/improvement to session)
- ? (any question)
- 😊 (something you liked)

Pick up Index Cards and Close.

## ***Statistics Mix and Match***

You will find that each statistic has a partial statement and answer. Cut them separately and when passing them out make sure that the answer and partial statement are somewhere among the group. Each participant will be asked to roam the room looking for the “match” to their partial statistic. You, as the facilitator, should have an answer sheet with the correct answers so that you can check for accuracy.

Pass out statistics slips and give the participants enough time for each one to find their match. Once this is completed. Have each duo/match share their statistic with the group. While each duo/match shares their statistic, make sure they are in fact correct with your answer sheet and ask if there are any comments or questions.

Note: Read the statistics and choose enough for your group and the ones you feel are more relevant or find relevant statistics to substitute the ones below.

### **Border Statistics**

1. Latinos and Black people compromise 43% of those searched through customs even though they compromise \_\_\_\_\_.

they compromise 24% of the population (Bhattacharjee 2001).

2. American Friends Service Committee documented over 346 reports of gender violence \_\_\_\_\_.

on the US Mexico border by Border Patrol from 1993-5 and this is just the report of one agency.

3. Immigration officials often rape and sexually violate immigrant women in exchange for \_\_\_\_\_.

crossing into the U.S. and for green cards.

4. Policies like Secure Communities (S-Comm) increase the collaboration between federal immigration law enforcement and local police and this endangers immigrant survivors \_\_\_\_\_.

because they are less likely to call police for fear of deportation.

5. Queer people of color crossing the borders experience heightened levels of scrutiny and violence if they are gender non-conforming. Until 1990, \_\_\_\_\_.

queer and LGBT immigrants were not allowed into the U.S. This has significantly impacted how “deviant sexuality” is policed today on the border.

6. An undocumented woman from Tucson calls the police for help in domestic violence situation. Under current mandatory arrest laws, \_\_\_\_\_.

the police must arrest someone on a domestic violence call. Because the police cannot find the batterer they arrest her and have her deported.

### **Criminalization of Women of Color and Queers**

7. A Black homeless woman calls the police because she has been a victim of group rape \_\_\_\_\_.

and the police arrest her for prostitution (Chicago)

8. A Black woman calls the police when her husband who is battering her accidentally sets fire to their apartment. \_\_\_\_\_.

She is arrested for the fire (NYC).

9. Over 40% of women are generally in prison as a direct or indirect result of \_\_\_\_\_.

gender violence. (Jurik & Winn 1990)

10. When police are called to intervene in queer or LGBT relationship violence, police often use sexist and homophobic stereotypes to determine to who arrest and sometimes arrest both parties under the “mutual combat” theory. They often believe “women cannot be abusers and men cannot be abused.” \_\_\_\_\_.

Reports of mis-arrests rose by 120 % in Los Angeles. (NCAVP, 2008)

11. Gender non-conforming people “consistently report experiencing extreme disrespect when attempting \_\_\_\_\_.

to access legal services, having their cases rejected or ignored by the agencies they turn to, and feeling so unwelcome and humiliated that they often do not return for services.” (Attorney Dean Spade, 22)

### **Welfare**

12. In New Orleans and now in more than 17 states, there has been an increase in legislative attacks on women, \_\_\_\_\_.

who are often survivors of interpersonal violence, seeking state support must consent to drug testing in order to be eligible for TANF/ state assistance.

13. Welfare reform policies contribute to rising levels of housing insecurity and homelessness. This causes many survivors of interpersonal violence to \_\_\_\_\_.

stay with their abusive partners in order to generate more income.

14. The state has forced families to face the impossible choice of \_\_\_\_\_.

“choosing” shelter/feeding/childcare or being safe from their abusive partners.

15. Approximately 37% of women and 28% of men in prison had \_\_\_\_\_.

monthly incomes of less than \$600 prior to their arrest.

### **Incarceration**

16. The War on Drugs has incarcerated \_\_\_\_\_.

thousands of survivors of rape and abuse.

17. Since 1980 the number of people in women’s prison \_\_\_\_\_.

rose almost twice as fast as the growth of the number of men imprisoned.

18. Many women, men and children are raped and sexually exploited by prison guards as well as other inmates while in prison. \_\_\_\_\_.

The number of assaults is 3 to 4 times higher than the number outside prison walls.

19. One study of 6 male prisons in California in 2007 found that 67% of the respondents who identified as LGBT reported having been sexually assaulted by another inmate during their imprisonment, \_\_\_\_\_.

a rate that is 15 times higher than the rest of the prison population. (Journal of Interpersonal Violence 21, no. 12 2006)

20. 30% of women prisoners are African American and 16% are Latinas. Black women \_\_\_\_\_.

are incarcerated 4 times the rate that white women are.

21. More than half of the women in state prisons have been abused, \_\_\_\_\_.

47% physically abused and 39% sexually abused (with many being survivors of both types of abuse)

22. In California alone, there are 600 women in prison for killing \_\_\_\_\_.

their abusers in self-defense. (Prison Activist Resource Center) Average prison terms are twice as long for killing husbands as for killing wives.



## 5.3. CARA Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies

**The following is a piece written by a collective of women of color from Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA): Alisa Bierria, Onion Carrillo, Eboni Colbert, Xandra Ibarra, Theryn Kigvamasud'Vashti, and Shale Maulana. This gives principles and case studies based upon years of CARA's experience organizing against sexual violence and against state violence.**

## **CARA Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### CARA’s Accountability Principles

**1. Recognize the humanity of everyone involved.** It is imperative that the folks who organize the accountability process are clear about recognizing the humanity of all people involved including the survivor, the person(s) who has committed the sexual assault, and the community involved. This can be easier said than done! It is natural, and even healthy, to feel rage at the aggressor for assaulting another person, especially a person that we care about. However, it is critical that we are grounded in a value of recognizing the complexity of each person, including ourselves. Given the needs and values of a particular community, an accountability process for the aggressor can be confrontational, even angry, but it should not be de-humanizing.

Dehumanization of aggressors also contributes to a larger context of oppression for everyone. For example, alienation and dehumanization of the offending person increases a community’s vulnerability to repeatedly being targeted for disproportional criminal justice oppression through heightening the “monster-ness” of another community member. This is especially true for marginalized communities (such as people of color, people with disabilities, poor people, and queer people) who are already targeted by the criminal system because of their “other-ness.” When one person in our community is identified as a “monster,” that “monsterization” is often generalized to everyone in the community. This

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

generalization can even take place by other members of the marginalized community because of internalized oppression.<sup>4</sup>

Also, dehumanizing the aggressor undermines the process of accountability for the whole community. If we separate ourselves from aggressors by stigmatizing them as monsters then we fail to see how any of us could become or have been aggressors of violence or how we have contributed to a context that allows such violence to happen. By not seeing the humanity of the aggressor, as well as the aggressor's support network, we miss how the community may have played a role in not creating a sustainable measure of support and accountability that may reduce future acts of violence.

**2. Prioritize the self-determination of the survivor.** Self-determination is the ability to make decisions according to one's own free will and self-guidance without outside pressure or coercion. When a person is sexually assaulted, his sense of self-determination has been profoundly undermined. Therefore, the survivor's values and needs should be prioritized, recognized and respected. The survivor should not be objectified or minimized as a symbol of an idea instead of an actual person. (Remember, respect the humanity of everyone.) It is critical to take into account the survivor's vision for accountability which can be the foundation for the implementation and vision for when, why, where and how the aggressor will be held accountable. It is also important to recognize that the survivor may not want to lead or orchestrate the plan. The survivor must have the right to choose to lead and convey the plan or choose not to be part of the organizing at all. The survivor should also have the opportunity to identify who will be involved in this process. Some survivors may find it helpful for friends or someone from outside of the community to help assess the process and help facilitate the accountability process with their community. To promote explicit shared responsibility, the survivor and his community can also negotiate and communicate boundaries and limits around what roles each person is willing to play and ensure that others perform their roles in accordance with clear expectations and goals.

**3. Identify a simultaneous plan for safety and support for the survivor as well as others in the community.** Safety is complex and goes far beyond keeping your doors locked, walking in well-lit areas, and carrying a weapon or a cell phone. Remember that the "plan" in "safety plan" should be a verb, not a noun, and requires us to continue thinking critically about how our accountability process will impact our physical and emotional well being<sup>5</sup>. Consider questions such as these: How will the aggressor react when he is confronted about his

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

<sup>5</sup> Thank you to the Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse for asserting the verb in "safety plan" and sharing that important distinction with the rest of us!

abusive behavior? How can we work together to de-mechanize the aggressor's strategies? Remember, one does not have control over the aggressor's violence, but you do have control over how you can prepare and respond to it.

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

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

#### **4. Carefully consider the potential consequences of your strategy.**

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

you are further isolating the survivor and yourselves from the community. Think of the realistic outcomes of your process to hold someone accountable in your community. Your process may not be fully successful or it may yield prosperous results. Whatever your outcome you may find that you are more prepared and skilled to facilitate a process of holding others in your community or circle of friends accountable in the future.

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

**6. Make sure everyone in the accountability-seeking group is on the same page with their political analysis of sexual violence.** Sometimes members of a group that is organizing for accountability are not working with the same definition of "rape," the same understanding of concepts like "consent" or "credibility," or the same assumption that rape is a manifestation of oppression. In order for the group's process to be sustainable and successful, organizers must have a collective understanding of what rape is and how rape functions in our culture. For example, what if the aggressor and his supporters respond to the organizers' call for accountability by demanding that the survivor provide proof that she was indeed assaulted or else they will consider her a liar, guilty of slander? Because of our legal structure that is based on the idea of "innocent until proven guilty," and rape culture that doubts the credibility of women in general, it is a common tactic to lay the burden of proof on the survivor.<sup>6</sup> If the group had a feminist, politicized understanding of rape, they might be able to anticipate this move as part of a larger cultural phenomenon of discrediting women when they assert that violence has been done to them.

This process pushes people to identify rape as a political issue and articulate a political analysis of sexual violence. A shared political analysis of sexual violence opens the door for people to make connections of moments of rape to the larger

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



culture in which rape occurs. A consciousness of rape culture prepares us for the need to organize beyond the accountability of an individual aggressor. We also realize we must organize for accountability and transformation of institutions that perpetuate rape culture such as the military, prisons, and the media.

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

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

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

**8. Let the aggressor know your analysis and your demands.** This guideline may seem obvious, but we have found that this step is often forgotten! For a number of reasons, including being distracted by the other parts of the accountability process, the aggressor building distance between himself and the organizers, or the desire for the organizers to be anonymous for fear of backlash, we sometimes do not make a plan to relay the specific steps for accountability to the aggressor. Publicly asserting that the person raped another, insisting that he must be accountable for the act, and convincing others in the community to be allies to your process may all be important aspects of the accountability plan –



but they are only the beginning of any plan. Public shaming may be a tool that makes sense for your group, but it is not an end for an accountability process. An aggressor can be shamed, but remain unaccountable for his behavior. Organizers must be grounded in the potential of their own collective power, confident about their specific demands as well as the fact that they are entitled to make demands, and then use their influence to compel the aggressor to follow through with their demands.

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

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

**10. Prepare to be engaged in the process for the long haul.**

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

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

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

### [Accountability Scenarios](#)

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

Organizers at CARA met with Dan in an effort to share with him our concerns and begin an accountability process, but he was resistant. Women of color who were Dan's friends, who did not want to believe that Dan was capable of this behavior, chose to protect Dan from being confronted with the information. Instead, several young women was surprised by unscheduled meetings within the

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

Youth Empowered, facilitated by an older woman of color, where they were bullied into “squashing” their concerns about Dan. They were accused of spreading lies and were told that they should be grateful for the organizing opportunities afforded to them by Dan. In one of these meetings, a young woman was shown a letter from the police department that criticized Dan about organizing a rally. This was an attempt to make her critique of Dan’s behavior seem divisive to the movement against police brutality. After these meetings, each young woman felt completely demoralized and severed all ties with Youth Empowered.

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

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

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

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

We decided that instead of meeting with all the women of color in Dan's ranks, we would choose one Black woman from CARA to invite one Black woman from Youth Empowered to have a solid, low-drama, conversation. We also asked another Black woman familiar and friendly with both groups and strong in her analysis of sexual violence within Black communities to facilitate the conversation. The woman from Youth Empowered had positive experiences organizing with CARA in the past and, though our earlier conversations about Dan were frustrated with tension and defensiveness, she was willing to connect with us. The participation of the third woman as a friendly facilitator also helped us to be more relaxed in our conversation. The first meetings with these women went very well. The CARA representative was clear that her organization's analysis was that Dan had a serious problem with sexual harassment and we were specifically concerned about the fact that he was working with young people. The Youth Empowered representative received the information with very little defensiveness and was eager to have more conversation about the reality of Dan's behavior. This one-on-one strategy seemed to loosen the intensity of two progressive organizations warring with one another and instead became three sistas trying to figure out the problem of misogyny in our community.

The outcome of these meetings was the healing of the strategic relationship of our organizations, which was important for movement building, but we still had not moved to a place where we could hold Dan accountable. We struggled with the specific thing we wanted to see happen. The women who he sexually harassed were not asking for anything in particular, they understandably just wanted to be left alone. We decided that we did not want him ejected from the activist community, but it was not safe for him to mentor young people. It was at this time that a young 17 year old Black woman, Keisha, connected to us through Rashad, a young 17 year old Black man who was organizing both with CARA and

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

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

The Black woman from Youth Empowered who had been engaging with CARA was stunned by Keisha's letter and quickly organized a meeting with Dan, Keisha, Rashad, her CARA contact, and other Youth Empowered organizers, along with the same Black woman as a facilitator. Keisha and CARA organizers prepared for tactics that Dan and his supporters would use to discredit Keisha. Though each organizer admitted that there was a problem with institutional sexism within Youth Empowered, they belittled the conflict as if it were a misunderstanding between Keisha and Dan. They said she was "acting white" for putting her thoughts on paper and for wanting to resign her internship. Keisha, being the youngest person at the meeting, was mostly intimidated and silenced by these hurtful tactics. The CARA organizer who was there, however, carefully challenged each attempt to discredit Keisha. We continued to support Keisha during and after this meeting.

Keisha's letter, however, had a strong rippling effect that continued to impact Youth Empowered. The Youth Empowered organizer who had been talking with CARA was moved by Keisha's letter and committed to figuring out an accountability plan for Dan that made sense for her organization. She began to organize discussions to clarify the issues that included organizers from CARA, Dan, and organizers from Youth Empowered. These conversations were much different than when we had started two years ago. We no longer had to convince folks that institutional sexism existed in the organization, or that Dan's behavior was a form of sexualized violence. Because of the pressure created by Keisha's



letter and CARA's stronger connections with women of color at Youth Empowered, Dan resigned from his mentorship position at the organization. With his absence, the new leadership at Youth Empowered began to more confidently address the institutional sexism issues within the organization.

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

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

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

However, the most important principle that we exercised in this process was taking a step back and making sure we were all on the same page with our analysis of what we were dealing with. Our frustration with Dan was a little sloppy at first – we weren't sure what the problem was. For example, there was a question about whether or not he raped someone, but we had not spoken to this person directly and, therefore, had no real reason to think this was true other than the fact that he was exhibiting other problematic behavior. We had to decide that the behavior that we were sure about was enough for which to demand accountability. The power of naming the problem cannot be underestimated in this particular scenario. Because the behavior was not intensely violent, such as sexual assault, we were searching for the right to name it as sexualized violence. Sexual harassment often presents this problem. There is no assault, but there are elusive and destructive forms of violence at play including power manipulation, verbal misogynist remarks, and the humiliation of

young people.<sup>8</sup> Once we reached consensus in our analysis, we were prepared to receive the opportunity that Keisha's letter and work offered and use it to push the accountability process further along.

**Scenario Two:** Kevin is a member of the alternative punk music community in an urban area. His community is predominantly young, white, multi-gendered, and includes a significant number of queer folks. Kevin and his close-knit community, which includes his band and their friends, were told by two women that they had been sexually assaulted at recent parties. The aggressor, Lou, was active and well-known in the music community, and he was employed at a popular club. Lou had encouraged the women to get drunk and then forced them to have sex against their will.

One of the survivors and her friends did a brief intervention with Lou, confronting him in person with the information. She reports that at first he was humbled and apologetic, but, after leaving them, reversed his behavior and began to justify his actions again.

Frustrated with Lou's lack of accountability and with sexual violence in the music community in general, Kevin's group began to meet and discuss the situation. They not only reflected on the survivors' experiences, but also how the local culture supported bad behavior. For example, they discussed how a local weekly newspaper, popular in the alternative music community, glamorized the massive amount of drinking that was always prevalent in Lou's parties. Kevin's group decided that there was a real lack of consciousness about the issue of sexual violence and the community needed to be woken up. To that end, they designed fliers that announced Lou's behavior and his identity, asserted the need for Lou's accountability as directed by the survivors, included a critique of the newspaper, and suggested boycotting Lou's club. With the survivors' consent, the group then passed the fliers out at places where members of their community usually congregated.

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

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<sup>8</sup> We can't say enough how much of a debt we owe Anita Hill for giving us the voice to call out sexual harassment as violence, particularly in a context of Black folks working with one another. While not going into the complete complexity of the Hill-Thomas hearings, we do respectfully want to give props to that sista for helping to create the opportunity for other women, especially Black women, to name sexual harassment for what it is.



instead of backing off, they re-grouped and used anonymous e-mail and the Internet to protect their identities.<sup>9</sup>

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

*We expect that the sexual perpetrator be held accountable for their actions and prevented from shifting blame onto the survivor. We expect that the perpetrator own their assaultive behavior and understand the full ramifications their actions have and will continue to have on the survivor and the community. The perpetrator must illustrate their compliance by making a public apology and, with the help of their peers, seek counseling from a sexual assault specialist. It is equally important that they inform future partners and friends that they have a problem and ask for their support in the healing process. If the perpetrator moves to a new community, they must continue to comply with the community guidelines set forth above. We believe that by working with the perpetrator in the healing process, we can truly succeed in making our community safer.<sup>10</sup>*

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

Besides sending lawsuit threats to the group, Lou mostly ignored the group until the boycott of the club where he worked started to gain steam. Soon, bands from out of town also began to intentionally avoid playing at the club. This pressure compelled Lou to engage in a series of e-mail discussions with Kevin with the goal

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<sup>9</sup> Those of us working on community accountability should have a talk about aggressors' threats of suing for slander and libel. These threats happen often, especially if the aggressor is well-known and has a reputation to defend. However, the individual who sues for slander or libel has the burden of proof and must be able to demonstrate that the allegations are false. It's very hard to prove that something is false, especially when it's, in fact, true. Still, the threat of a lawsuit can understandably be frightening and it would be helpful to have more conversations about what the actual danger is and perhaps develop some best practices when considering using public disclosure as a tool to reach accountability.

<sup>10</sup> Press Release, January 25, 2003

of negotiating a face-to-face meeting. Engaging through e-mail was a difficult and frustrating process. Lou was consistently defensive and wanted “mediation.” Kevin was clear about his group’s analysis and goals and wanted accountability. Eventually, they gave up on setting a meeting because they couldn’t agree on terms.

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

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

The fact that the group worked collectively was also very critical. We had the impression that sometimes their work was more collectively driven and sometimes only one or two people were the main organizers. When only one or two people were doing the work, it was clear that the process lost some sustainability. However, we must also reflect a lot of compassion on the reality that some folks who initially began to organize realized down the line that they needed stronger boundaries between themselves and the process. In terms of planning, it may be helpful to do on-going self-checks to note how the work may be triggering one’s own experience of surviving violence or to determine if one just generally has a low capacity for doing this *kind* of accountability work. Perhaps a specific type of strategy is not a good match for the culture of the group. As this group moved into a different direction that focused more on raising consciousness and building stronger community connections, we noticed a significant revival in the energy of the organizers.

Finally, we think that the most important principle that made a difference in this community’s work was when they presented a critical analysis of sexual violence and rape culture to the larger community of rock musicians and alternative

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

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

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

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

The young Chicana women of Unido decided to devise a plan to confront Unido's largely male leadership about the problem of sexual violence in general and

John's behavior specifically. Identifying the criminal system as a real problem in their community, they did not want to pursue law enforcement. Also, Marisol did not want the episode to end with Unido simply isolating the aggressor without resolving John's abusive behavior. The young women decided that they wanted John to be held responsible for his actions and for his behavior to change. Their plan included demanding that John step down from leadership positions in Unido, that he pursue counseling and that his friends supported him to go to appropriate counseling, and that Unido pursue intensive educational work on sexual violence.

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

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

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

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

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

## Section 5.6. Distinguishing between Violence and Abuse

Adapted from a speech given by Connie Burk, Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse titled Intimate Partner Violence: Are We Measuring What Matters? Dec 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008, Washington, D.C.

**Domestic abuse is in many ways not a question of *violence* at all, but a question of *agency*.**

Domestic violence, at its core, is a process where one person systematically undermines the agency of another person in a relationship. Agents are people who are in charge of themselves. Another word for “agent” is “subject,” a person who can do something, experience reasonable consequences, reflect on those consequences, learn and then act again.

In the simplest terms, domestic violence objectifies survivors.

That is to say, folks who batter attempt to change **subjects** into **objects, people** into **things**. People who batter attempt to change self-determining subjects, people who can act, experience reasonable consequences, reflect and act again, into objects, into things that do not act but are acted upon.

If you think back to 7<sup>th</sup> grade English and diagramming sentences, it looks something like this:

Mike kicks the ball.

Mike kicks Andrea.

This process of objectification has been called “power and control”. An abusive person attempts to systematically assume power and control over their partner. They may control their partner’s access to friends and family, money, clothing

choices, food, spiritual and religious practices, shelter and medical services. People who batter often use physical violence to reinforce their tactics of control and to demonstrate that there are irrational and frightening consequences for resisting that control.

People who batter also **exploit** their partners' resources, displaying a profound sense of entitlement to their partners' body, mind and spirit. This exploitation has been such a prominent experience for LGBT people that, at the NW Network, we generally talk about "Power, control & exploitation". Survivors may find themselves working several jobs to make ends meet, attempting to support their abusive partner to deal with a drug addiction, a history of sexual abuse, discrimination at work, financial troubles or depression. A person experiencing this exploitation can find their personal, physical, spiritual, economic and mental resources drained in an attempt to meet the needs of their abusive partner. This process, again, attempts to turn a *subject* into an *object*: to turn a person who is the center of their own life into a person whose primary purpose is to serve another person's needs and wishes.

Abuse or domestic violence, therefore, refers not just to a specific violent or cruel incident—or even a series of violent or cruel incidents—but to the **totality** of attitudes, behaviors and contexts that enable one person to objectify another.

My partner directs the Washington State Domestic Violence Fatality Review. Over the past decade, they have reviewed almost 100 of the nearly 500 domestic violence related fatalities in Washington State since 1999. As the data from our domestic violence fatality review, and the data from reviews from around the country can attest, batterers can overwhelm a survivor's struggle for agency and literally turn a subject into an object; a living, breathing person into a still, lifeless body. When a batterer kills their partner, it is the twisted yet logical endpoint of objectification uninterrupted. Even one domestic violence murder is too many, and we know that hundreds of people are killed by their batterers every year.



But, given the thousands and thousands of abusive relationships in our communities, relatively few batterers actually achieve this logical endpoint of objectification. There have been 500 domestic violence related fatalities in Washington State in the past 10 years, but thousands and thousands of partners have been battered. Why is that?

It is because survivors survive. Not as objects only acted upon but as subjects. As actors acting. Survivors learn and adapt, they provoke and fight back, they reach out and get help, they toil in obscurity, they quietly save money and plan to flee, they scream, they accommodate and placate, they plot and manipulate, they defend their children, they lie and misdirect, they find a way where there is no way and they resist objectification. They try to make sense out of their experience and they survive.

“Surviving” refers to all the things a person does to resist objectification and attempt to take back power in one’s own life. Some of the things that people do while surviving are noble and beautiful and consistent with the story of how a survivor should act. They make great United Way copy. Many of the things that people do to survive are complicated and feel shameful, scary or confusing to survivors and to outside observers. As advocates, we may find ourselves cheering survivors’ actions that resonate with us and avoiding the ones that trouble us, but all of it matters. All of it is part of the messy process of survival and all of it merits our thoughtful and compassionate attention.

But, When it comes to being fully open to the entire span of survivors experiences—of the choices and actions survivors take within the context of surviving abuse—the anti-violence movement—from across the spectrum of response—has fallen short. We center people who batter as the “actors” in abusive relationships and we can describe in detail the actions they take to establish abusive systems of power, control and exploitation, but we really speak very little about what survivors do to survive. We are constrained by the need to

convince the larger community to support survivors—to prove that survivors are good and therefore worthy of care and regard.

We are constrained by an ironically sexist applied domestic abuse analysis that centers batterers, people understood to be men, as the only people whose actions “matter”. (We are deeply concerned about what **happens to** survivors, but we are less interested in understanding what survivors **do** themselves.)

We are constrained by our over-reliance on the criminal legal system in our response to domestic violence. And we are constrained by our own pain and discomfort when confronted with the complex realities of survivors’ (even our own) experiences.

**We** may be reluctant to talk about or help make sense of the complex, confusing choices that survivors make in the context of surviving abuse—but I can assure you that **people who batter are not**. People who batter say: *You are just as bad as me. If those people knew what you did, they would never help you. You deserve this. You are the abuser, not me.* Our confusion and reluctance colludes with batterers’ goals.

Our ambivalence lingers on and, in the meanwhile, our movement to end violence loses credibility with survivors, and community members and institutions—because women act violently AND because survivors use violence to survive.

We **know** this. We have observed it in the actions of our mothers and ourselves and the women in shelter. And everyone who lives in the world long enough will have the opportunity to observe this for themselves. Women use violence—that is straightforward.

The question is: **Who** will assign meaning to this information and **what meaning** will be assigned?

Since 1997, I have been working in my diverse lesbian, bisexual, trans and gay community in a queer specific anti-violence context. Almost all of the trans and female survivors and most of the male survivors we work with want to avoid the criminal legal system. Since we work in a context of same-sex abuse, we cannot rely on gender to determine if a person is establishing a pattern of abusive power and control, resisting objectification or doing something else altogether. We have developed a very useful assessment process to understand if and how power, control & exploitation may be working in a relationship. We have also had to meet squarely the facts that women batter women and men, men batter women and men, & survivors use violence to resist objectification.

I think this helps us hold the various tensions involved in our discussions with a lot of compassion.

I **know** women use violence. I am not saying that the recent spate of research on gender symmetry in IPV is accurate. Actually, I am highly skeptical of data suggesting that, in intimate relationships, women use physical force as often or more often than men do. The E.R's and the morgues just don't back that up. BUT I am saying that it would not challenge my analysis of domestic violence if those dubious claims were true.

This is because:

- 1) **Men's power over women is privileged in our society.**
  - 2) **Batterer's control relies on gender disparities and other systems of inequality in our society.**
- and
- 2) **Assessment of context, intent & effect is needed to understand the meaning of a given action.**

It is not a coincidence that in heterosexual relationships, men overwhelmingly batter women.

In fact, if you only could have one piece of information about a person in an abusive heterosexual relationship, what piece of information would be most predictive of whether a person was a survivor or a batterer? Gender.

This is not because women are biologically nicer, or that women are socially constructed to be non-violent, or that women are incapable of exploitation. Thousands of kids can tell us that women can be violent; thousands of undocumented domestic workers can tell us that women are capable of exploitation; and thousands of lovers can tell us that women can be abusive. My mother was a smart, outgoing, talented, generous woman who would gladly knock us from here to kingdom-come, I learned early that there was nothing inherently non-violent about women.

In heterosexual relationships, women are more likely to be battered because sexism privileges men's power over women in our society.

In Kansas, at the shelter where I worked, women would come to the shelter and we would take them to the bank to get their money, out of a joint bank account under their name, and they would be told something like—"No, problem, Sally, just get your husband, Sam, to co-sign and we will give you this money." The Banker was operating completely independently of Sam. They had not coordinated their control. Sam was not holding a gun to the Banker's head, or promising him a reward if he thwarted Sally's attempts to leave him. The Banker didn't know anything about Sam and Sally as such. Sexism, in this case, the sexist assumption that women aren't to be trusted with the family's money (that is to say, their own money) completely independently backed up her husband's control.

Men's power over women in our society is asserted in ways we register as wonderful, and ways we register as benign and ways we register as sinister. Women are taught to defer to this power and men are taught to assume this authority in a thousand little moments. Girls wait to be asked to the big dance, and wives take their husband's names, and women walk on eggshells, and sometimes they get hit.

Almost all of these moments are legal, and a very very good many of them are celebrated as some of the most precious and valuable experiences a heterosexual person can ever have. These moments establish a baseline of authority in relationships and in the larger world that is different for women than for men.

Of course, the categories of "women" and "men" are not stable. And like every other binary construction used to categorize human experience, there is more diversity within than between these two groups and many people fall outside the categories altogether.

But in the dominant culture, the expectations surrounding the notion of "man" and the notion of "woman" are rigid and remain relatively strictly produced and enforced. In case folks think I'm reaching into the irrelevant past, there is a new One-a-Day vitamin campaign for teens—using cutting edge science they created different vitamins to meet the specific health needs for growing teen boys and teen girls. The commercials promise moms that the girl vitamins will help nourish beautiful skin and the boy vitamins will build strong muscles.

Women's experience is not a monolith. My mother was a mixed race woman raised to be a matriarch of matriarchs who would die by the age of 53. My partner's mother was a young white woman and wife with three children as the second wave of feminism broke. She would come out as a lesbian and eventually live away from her sons on women's land. My partner's step mother was a young white unwed mother trying to establish a career who accepted the

task of raising three more children and would eventually rise to incredible success in her profession. Three women with wildly different experiences all living within a few miles of one another in Kansas.

Despite their differences, our mothers' actions, like other women's actions in heterosexual relationships took place with a backdrop of undermined authority, little social support for establishing authority over male partners, a dominant culture default of paternalism both for the survival of the family (undergirded by unequal pay for equal work and the persistent burden of childrearing and homemaking) and protection from men's violence in the larger world (undergirded by women's experience of many types of objectification over the course of their lifetimes). Our mothers' experience of gender disparity was compounded by the consequences of racism and homophobia and poverty and other manifestations of institutional inequality. And so it goes. In religious practice, women are constituted as helpmeet to men and are exhorted to be subject to men in every Western tradition. While egalitarian movements within Judaism, Christianity and Islam re-vision this frame, these are not the fastest growing branches of any of these faiths.

Women, religious and secular, conservative and liberal, are taught to heedfully **notice** their men's priorities and to take them seriously at a minimum, and **internalize** them as their own whenever possible. When they don't, they will pay a lonesome price. From the institutional to the personal, women's agency is constituted with vulnerabilities shot through.

Even in the most egalitarian contexts, women are cautioned to be vigilant not to claim their power in a manner that threatens men's.

So, this is the backdrop of women's actions. Men's actions are taking place with this backdrop in relief.

These backdrops, though related to one another, set opposite stages—and the meaning of the action on those stages cannot be the same.

Men walk onto the stage with almost all the set pieces in place to establish and maintain coercive control. Most men do not choose to use violence or batter even then. They may experience certain irritating benefits in their relationship based on their privileged power, they may do less housework even though their partner is employed as well, but they do not overstep into violence or into battery. However, given the abundance of social and institutional supports for men's accepted power over women, it's difficult for a man NOT to establish a credible framework for abusive control over a female partner when he uses petulant, mean, scary or violent behaviors.

The **meaning** one man's violence against his female partner is formed in the larger context of male violence and male privilege. Even with the absence of "intention" to batter, even when a man is acting out of remedial skills and a lack of emotional competence—those times when a man is just being a asshole but has no intention to turn a subject into an object—his scary actions will more easily be coercive. Like it or not, those actions carry to weight of the history of men's coercive control of women. At the same time, when a man has even the slightest will to batter—the conditions of sexism in the world around him will power-boost his attempts at abusive control.

With few exceptions, women's petulant, mean, scary and violent behaviors against male partners lack a backstory of "women's violence" in society—as warriors, or serial rapists, or whathave you. Women's actions often lack the credibility to leverage institutional supports to establish authority over men. Women can set the stage for coercive control in heterosexual relationships, but it takes a disproportionate degree of determination to do so.



Still, in many, many conversations, survivors of abuse express feeling trapped in abusive relationships by the guilt and shame and confusion over their own petulant, mean, scary and violent behaviors. Even those behaviors that they used to directly resist abuse.

We can all agree that such behaviors matter when they are used to batter someone. But do women's petulant, mean, scary and violent behaviors matter even if they do not have the consequence of coercive control? **Or if they are only used to *survive* abuse?** I say yes.

We must understand that there is a distinction between “violence” and “abuse”. Not all violence is abusive. Some violence is resistant—it is used to resist objectification, to resist abuse.

These actions are not abuse AND they matter AND their meaning must be understood in context.

In order to attempt to meet survivors unflinchingly in their full experience, we have to be able to accept survivors as agents--as people who act, not things only acted upon. We must agree that, as people, it matters what survivors do. Even when the choices of survivors are viciously limited, when survivors are between a rock and a hard place, when the toll of threats and crazymaking turn one's understanding of the world upside down, what a person *does* as a survivor matters. It matters because one's humanity—one's “person-ness”—matters. When advocates are unable to meet survivors in the full, messy, broken, heroic, petty realness of the actual choices that survivors have made—we reinforce the silence and shame that often haunt survivors of violence.

So, I say “Yes!” it matters—because what women do matters and what survivors do matters—to them, to their humanity, to their children, to their partners, to our community, to me! But many in the field say, “No.”

I believe this is because the only current location we have for “mattering” is a punitive response from the criminal legal system—a system that is particularly ill-suited to understand or respond helpfully to survivors’ actions. Right now, we have not looked carefully at these actions as they are used by survivors to survive. They only exist in our discussions as actions used by batterers to batter. And our only real response to batterers is a criminal legal response, and we know that such a response for survivors is harmful. We don’t know how to sort out the meaning of a given behavior. Is it abusive? Is it resistance? And we get stuck. And we’ve stayed stuck.

Which brings us to the importance of assessment.

In our trainings, we do an exercise where specific behaviors are passed around to the participants. Things like: *Reads partner’s mail. Hits wall next to partner’s head. Pressures partner to have sex.* In dyads, people answer the question: how might a person who batters use this behavior to establish or maintain a pattern of power, control or exploitation?

Next they are asked to describe how a person **surviving** abusive power & control might use the same behavior.

In the debrief, folks are able to think of reasons a survivor might use each behavior to resist abusive power & control. Sometimes the reasons imagined are self-defensive, or retaliatory, or provoking, or testing. But they are all very credible and, surprisingly to most folks, **by their own experience** very common. In the first moments after being asked why a survivor might pressure their partner to have sex, there is often a pause. But, even then, people can offer a variety of contexts, intents & hoped consequences that reconcile the behavior with the experience of surviving. Survivors might pressure their partner to have sex to head off the threat of more lethal physical violence, to prove to a partner that s/he

is still sexually interested in them, to distract a partner from violence against children/or leaving to drive drunk/or escalating accusations, to “earn” money or privileges that commonly are given only in exchange for sex, to try to reconnect with some tender aspect of the relationship.

In our same-sex abuse assessments: We can’t use gender to make an assessment of who is abusing. And we can’t use a list of behaviors. We know from talking to people that any behavior—from the power and control wheel or the conflict tactic scale or any list of behaviors—can be used to establish a pattern of power & control or to resist a pattern of power & control. Any specific behavior can be used to abuse OR to survive.

“Assessment”, in this context, refers to an intentional process to learn as much about what is happening in a person’s life as needed in order to 1) identify if & how coercive power, control & exploitation is working in a relationship and 2) to connect that person with the best possible resource.

So, here’s a little quantum physics for you. Our process conceptualizes domestic abuse as a system, not a machine. With a machine, no matter how complicated, one could eventually identify and catalogue all it’s parts. One could identify which parts were broken and had to be repaired for the machine to work or which parts would have to be removed to prevent it from functioning. If domestic abuse was like machine, assessment would be much simpler and lists of behaviors would suffice. But a system, unlike a machine, is fractal, self-referencing and adaptive. It can incorporate new information and change—*you don’t care if I trash you anymore, so, what happens if I trash your sister?* In our assessment, we aren’t looking for a specific behavior or condition or even sets of behaviors or conditions, we are attending to whether or not a system of power, control and exploitation will emerge in our conversations.

To understand context, intent & effect, we may talk about money & resources, anger and coolness, sex, staying and leaving, leveraging institutional privilege, identities, connection & isolation, sharing information and lying, blame, guilt & entitlement, cultural & religious practices and expectations, use of physical & sexual violence & force. We are less interested in the content of people's agreements (such as whether they seem to us to express sexist or egalitarian views) than in how those agreements were arrived at, how they can be renegotiated and if the consequences are reasonable if agreements are breached.

We listen for a range of things that don't appear on the power and control wheel, things like dread and using vulnerabilities:

- Violent incidents can be chaotic and careening and anyone involved may experience fear, dread tends to reflect the 24/7 and the cumulative effect of coercion.
- People who batter often use their own vulnerabilities (drug use, illness, experiences with oppression, past abuse) to insist that their partner prioritize their needs over the partner's own. A survivor might be expected to work two jobs to make ends meet because their partner's past arrest record means getting a job is difficult, or to stay still during the night so as not to trigger a partner's PTSD from war trauma or childhood sexual abuse.

And, as you might imagine, the assessment process was how we first came to hear so much about things survivors had done that they regretted, or still could not comprehend or that they feared would mean that no one would help them or that they wouldn't deserve help.

Once you talk to someone about the violence that they have used to resist abuse and they express their ambivalence and confusion and—at times—how trapped they feel by their actions, you have to start to deal with it. You can't say: "Great

News, We’ve assessed that you’re a survivor so never mind about all that violence—you had to do it!” And you wouldn’t want to.

So what does that mean for folks who are responding to domestic violence? Some of the facts that are confounding to advocates and policy makers and law enforcement and researchers and friends & family, include:

- some women use violence
- some women use violence in intimate relationships
- some women abuse men
- some survivors use violence against abusers

I believe that these facts do not challenge a feminist, advocacy-focused analysis of domestic abuse that understands domestic violence has a form of objectification and that recognizes the real experience of surviving. They are entirely reconcilable with this understanding of domestic violence. Not all violence is abusive. Violence must be understood in context.

However, the observations are **not** reconcilable to a **criminal legal** framework. *Victim* and *perpetrator* – as legal categories – are mutually exclusive.

Advocacy Model Language		Criminal Legal System Language	
A person who experiences a pattern of power and control by another.	Survivor	Victim	A person against whom a crime of battery has been committed.
A person who establishes a pattern of power and control over another.	Abuser/ Batterer	Perpetrator	A person who has been convicted of committing a crime of battery.
<p><b>The advocacy model understands that people who abuse their partners may:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a pattern of control that occurs 24-7,</li> <li>• Control/exploit their partner over time,</li> <li>• use a number of tactics—some of which are illegal, <b>most of which are legal</b>,</li> <li>• rely on systems of oppression and social inequalities to maintain their control over their partner.</li> </ul>		<p><b>Meanwhile, the criminal legal system:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is designed to address specific incidents and determine if they are legal or illegal,</li> <li>• Evaluates “moments in time”, not patterns of abusive control,</li> <li>• Ignores bias and treats everyone as ‘agents under the law’—regardless of institutional inequalities.</li> </ul>	

The criminal legal system is incapable of acknowledging and integrating sociopolitical differences among people—it understands everyone to be ‘equal agents under the law’—it can’t deal with race or gender or sexuality in meaningful ways and yet we know that institutional inequality is a big deal here.

The criminal legal system is not able to address survivors’ use of violence in the context of surviving abuse. And it’s not able to adequately address the different meanings of the same actions given different social positions, histories or contexts.

So, why do we care so much if the criminal legal system can’t handle it? After all, domestic abuse is not a criminal experience; it’s a human experience that may include criminal acts. And, the anti-violence movement is not a criminal legal movement, but a human rights movement.

We have to care because domestic violence interventions and domestic violence advocacy are immersed in a criminal legal paradigm.

The collapse between a criminal legal paradigm based on the understanding of domestic battery as essentially being a criminal legal category of behaviors and actions involving “perpetrators” and “victims” with an anti-violence paradigm based on the understanding of domestic abuse as essentially being a question of agency has created great confusion.

Survivors’ actions don’t make sense from a strictly criminal legal lens. They cannot be understood or even clearly named or explained. “Victim” and “Perpetrator” are mutually exclusive terms, but “Survivor” of abuse and “Perpetrator” of an illegal act are not.

Tillie Black Bear and Dr. Beth Richie and countless other advocates and organizers warned us about the narrow slice of women's experience that we were attending to when we focused on the criminal legal system to the virtual exclusion of everything else. They warned us that poor women, women of color, undocumented women, queer women would be the most vulnerable to the worst consequences of this approach. We didn't change course, even after these women and others demonstrated the importance of economic justice, and racial justice and reproductive justice and other critical paths that would fortify survivors' agency and make them less vulnerable to objectification—by their lovers, by the state.

Rather than understanding criminal legal consequences for battering as one project within a global and holistic effort to repair the damage to women and men caused by sexism, to create loving and equitable relationship and to prevent abuse--rather than understanding criminal justice as a small bit of the global arc of justice that could include economic, racial, reproductive etc justice--our anti-violence interventions, policy priorities and research have been thoroughly absorbed into a broad criminal legal project.

**I think it is this—not the facts that women can abuse or survivors resist abuse with violence—that is so hard to deal with and keep the issue of survivors' use of violence so confounding.**

**And it is this that we will have to repair if we are going to truly, fully advocate for all survivors.**



## Section 5.7 Portrait of Praxis: An Anatomy of Accountability

**The following is a piece written by Esteban Kelly and Jenna Peters-Golden, members of Philly Stands Up (PSU) to describe the values and processes underlying the community accountability/transformational justice processes developed by PSU.**

## **PHILLY STANDS UP PORTRAIT OF PRAXIS:**

### **AN ANATOMY OF ACCOUNTABILITY**

**by Esteban Lance Kelly & Jenna Peters-Golden of *Philly Stands Up!***

The alchemy of our accountability work is a serendipitous mixture; part art, part science. To be sure, the skill and complexity involved in working on accountability processes is difficult to finesse. Nevertheless, we affirm that average people, regular folks in communities all across North America develop and exercise their own processes for making justice in sexual assault situations internal to their communities. In doing so, average people will meet more success, by any measure, than the State ever has in addressing the chaos of issues stirred up by incidents of sexualized violence.

What we now know, we learned through trial and quite a bit of error. Our missteps enabled, and in some cases exacerbated pain for which we are both responsible and repentant. Very few of us in the history of Philly Stands Up came to the group with formal prior experience working on sexual assault issues, let alone doing work with people who have caused harm. We are average people, figuring out how to do thorny work and our achievements stem from being committed to our values and purpose. We believe that people who have caused harm can change, and that we can play a crucial role in catalyzing that shift.

In recognition of contemporary peers and historical generations of people who have figured out and passed along lessons such as these, it is with a great sense of humility, that we share some logistical guts of what we've devised for our process and practices in working on sexual assault situations.

When we say that we work to hold people who have perpetrated sexual assault accountable<sup>1</sup> for the harm they have done, what this means is that we strive for them to:

1. Recognize the harm they have done, even if it wasn't intentional.
2. Acknowledge that harm's impact on individuals and the community
3. Make appropriate restitution to the individual and community.
4. Develop solid skills towards transforming attitudes and behavior to prevent further harm and make contributions toward liberation.

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<sup>1</sup> Our working definition is based on Generation Five's articulation of accountability in their document, *Toward Transformative Justice*.

We conceptualize roughly five phases to an accountability process: the Beginning, Designing the Structure, Life Process, Tools We Use, and Closing a Process.

#### Phase 1. The Beginning:

People find us in many ways: we are known from leading educational workshops, contributing to zines and also through word of mouth, the internet, or through personal connections with individual members in PSU.

Sometimes a person who has caused harm gets in touch with us and says something like, "I really messed up and the person I hurt told me I need to work with you guys." Sometimes they say: "A few years ago I was abusive/ I sexually assaulted someone/ and I wasn't really ready to deal with it until now." In our workshops, people are often surprised to hear about those situations. The reality is that people who have caused harm are a complicated variety of people, and as they grow, many folks reflect on past behavior and see problems that they need to resolve.

Another approach is that someone might say, "I was sexually assaulted by *so-and-so*, and I want to hold them accountable." They would then task us with tracking down *so-and-so*, and attempting to instigate an accountability process. Beyond these cases, there are always the instances where someone who is neither the survivor nor the person who caused harm gets in touch with us on behalf of either party.

In any event, once we have touched base with the person who has caused harm, we vaguely sketch out the situation and discuss it as a group. We first find out if two collective members are able to take on this situation (we learned early on to always strive to work in pairs). If so, we discuss what we know about the situation and we honestly assess if we are equipped to handle it. There is always the possibility that there are pieces of this situation that we can't handle. Sometimes we are not qualified for one reason or another and by trying to work on it we could cause more harm than good. Sometimes PSU members decline engaging a situation because of elements that feel emotionally triggering.

After we have assessed the situation, we schedule a meet-up with the person who has caused harm. We typically meet in places that are public but run a low risk of encounters with people we

know; examples include parks, train stations, hotel lobbies, food courts or outdoor cafés.

## Phase 2. Designing the Process:

Next we try to design a process based on what the situation warrants. Often, we have a document listing "demands." Demands are actions the survivor needs from the community or the person who caused harm in order to be safe and to heal. Below is a sample list of common demands:

- \* "Pay for my STI testing/ abortion/ doctors appointment"
- \* "Deal with your drug/ alcohol problem"
- \* "If you see me out somewhere, it's your responsibility to leave the premises"
- \* "Don't talk to me or contact me"
- \* "Don't go to 'such and such group' meetings for now" (typically an organization in which both the survivor and person who has caused harm participate)
- \* "Disclose to all the people you are sleeping with or dating, that you sexually assaulted someone and are in an accountability process"
- \* "Write me a sincere letter of apology"

Demands are the central document in our accountability process. In situations where we have a list of demands, they fundamentally drive the design for our process. Our goals as facilitators of the process are to meet the demands laid out by the survivor- and in some cases the community at large- both in letter and in spirit. In designing a particular process, we bear several principles in mind:

Firstly, we try to involve the person we are working with into the design of the process. If they help make the plans, timelines, goals and help to brainstorm the things we can do together, then they feel more invested in everything. They are reluctant to bail on things because they do not see themselves as walking out on an externally imposed program.

Secondly, in order to engage them, we figure out methods that specifically work for the other person. If it is a visually-oriented person, we make drawings or word maps to describe what we are talking about in a meeting. If they hate to read, we might record a reading for them. If they have ability needs that make it hard for them to sit down for meetings, we might plan walks around the block while

we talk. In our engagement efforts, we have even arranged meetings consisting of street skating and board games. Be accommodating and creative!

Another important practice of ours is that we use the meetings as an opportunity to model the behavior we are trying to build in the person with whom we are working. Some examples of how we demonstrate preferred behavior include: articulating and maintaining discrete social/physical boundaries, striving for clear communication, practicing empathy, showing respect (which is perceptibly appreciated among people who have been ostracized in the aftermath of sexual assault), and exemplifying utter honesty. If the person we are working with misses a meeting or arrives late, we will discuss how they needed to communicate this better, and help them understand how the ways in which it was inconsiderate. Together, we lay down ground rules for how we want to communicate with one another, which gives us concrete agreements for holding folks accountable. We use their progress in adhering to agreements to create positive momentum; an endorsement for their capacity to grow and change- to be their better selves.

### Phase 3. Life Structure:

When it is needed, we often put a lot of emphasis into fostering balance and creating structure in the person's life. If they are unstable then it becomes difficult for them to be present in the work we are doing together. In such situations, it becomes crucial for us to account for the fuller context of challenges in their lives. The more grounded one is, the better their chances are of following through on their accountability process.

Toward that end, we create space for them to have a personal "check-in" at the beginning of each meeting. This is a moment for them to share anything they wish about their daily lives, emotional state, or logistical hurdles. The check-in allows us to hear, for example, about their progress in finding a therapist or stable housing, or about job interviews or family visits. At times, we have actively passed along jobs prospects, accompanied people in looking for viable housing, and given people rides to therapy appointments. This humbling and more fundamentally 'human' work has helped us to see what it truly means to acknowledge that we are all in community together; that a politics of trust depends on everyday support and interdependence, and that nobody rests outside of that in a just society.

#### Phase 4. Tools we use:

Each process is unique. Most meetings consist primarily of talking. We talk about stories, the instances of assault that took place, relationship patterns and countless connected issues. We employ several general tools as guides in the meeting space:

- Story telling- We ask to hear stories, encourage discussion about dynamics or emerging themes, and use these didactically, sometimes revisiting their stories.
- Writing- Giving "homework" is a good way to maintain continuity between meetings. Sometimes people write down recollections of an instance of abuse, record what certain words mean to them, keep a log of times they felt frustration or anger (those are common emotions we work with), and maintain a journal about how the accountability process is going for them.
- Role Playing- Taking a cue from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, we sometimes try to act out interactions that have occurred or that could occur. Role Playing is great for building skills of perception and empathy, and is a safe way for people to try out new behaviors and understand past ones.
- Reading/ Listening/ Watching- Most situations that we come across call for educational development. There are countless helpful texts, films, lectures, podcasts etc that help to explain everything from patriarchy, to substance abuse, internalized oppression and dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression. Here, our role is to tailor any resources for the person we are working with.

#### Phase 5. Closing a Process:

Improving upon ourselves is lifelong work for everyone and certainly for folks who have a history of perpetrating violence. Most of our accountability processes last between nine months and two years, and could usually continue ad infinitum. This begs the question, "when is it time to wrap up a situation?" Much like therapy, there is no objective answer to this, but here are some indicators for when it might be appropriate to wind things down.

One obvious moment to close out a process is when both the letter and the spirit of the demands have been met. If a demand is "write me a letter of apology," it won't do for the person who

has caused harm to draft a letter within the first few months of their process. Composing an apology may be the technical letter of the demand, but writing it to convey sincere contriteness is the true spirit of the demand. This penitence can only be declared once hard work and requisite time have gone into understanding one's role in the harm of the assault, and once they have gained a sense of empathy for how it affected the survivor(s) and the community.

If a demand calls for sobriety or a reduction in the use of illicit substances, then fulfilling the true spirit of the demand would require both cutting back substance use and moving toward a true understanding of how the survivor (or community) came to this demand. What we would look for is recognition by the person who caused harm that in their case, drinking or using creates conditions for their judgment to be impaired and how this traces to their abusive behavior. Making that connection and changing their relationship to that substance would therefore be true fulfillment of the demand.

Another indicator for transitioning out of a formal process is that the person who has caused harm has identified ways to change the behavior that has led to sexual assault and has demonstrated their capacity to navigate through "gray zones". Here, it is important to see how they have practiced this shift in their everyday life and to feel confident as a guide in the process that this change is profound and lasting.

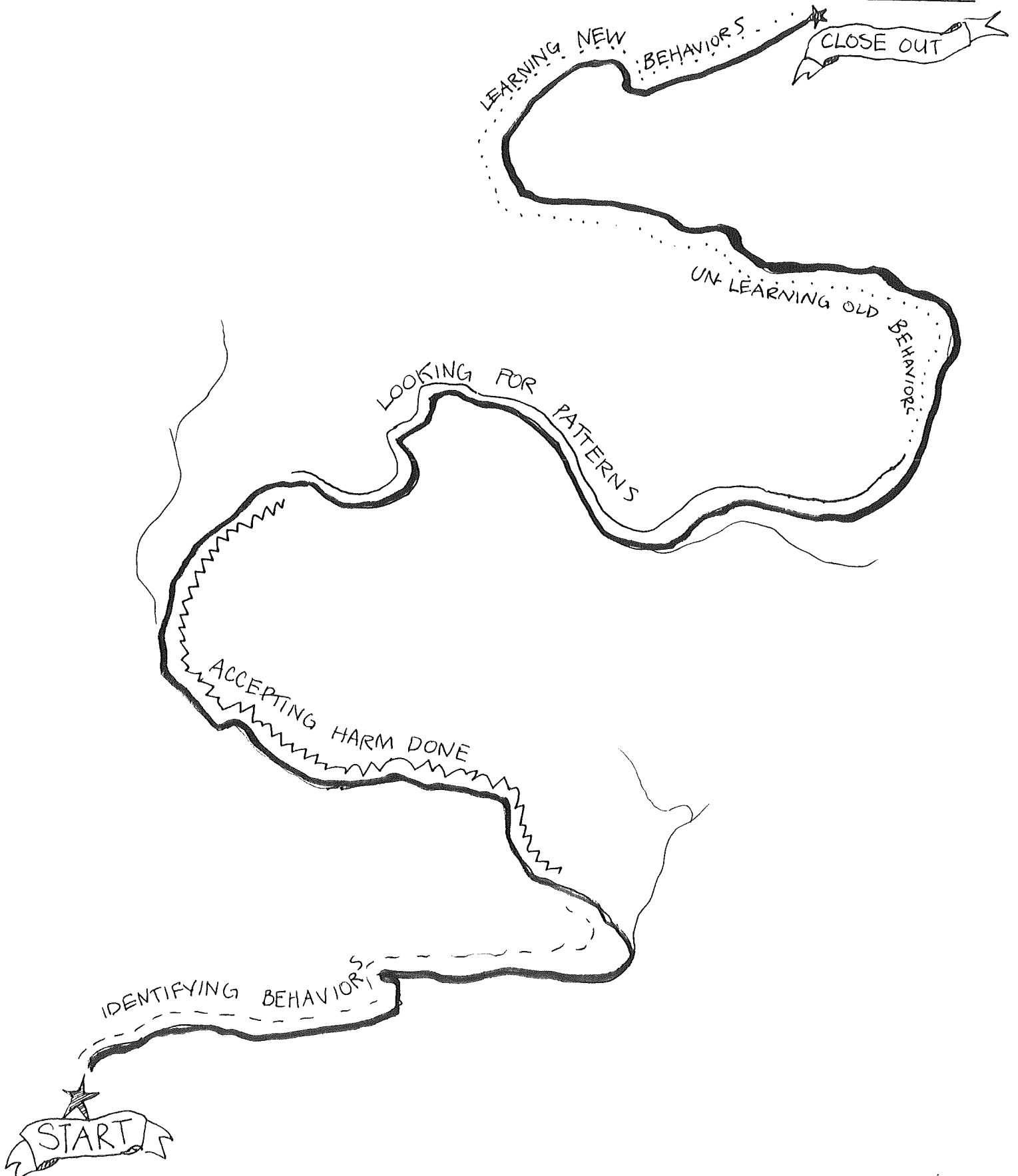
Often we would be hesitant to wind down an accountability process unless we are confident that whomever we are working with has developed responsible and sustainable systems of support in their life. We look for clues that they have not one or two, but plenty of upstanding friends, with whom they can talk to about matters of consequence. This can include housemates or family members who they can trust for support when challenges come up, particularly with issues related to this work. We also work to ensure that they are familiar with the resources available to them around the city that can serve their needs.

Usually "ending" a process looks more like phasing it out. Over time we go from meeting each week, to twice a month, to once a month, until finally we are only meeting to check-in periodically. After an accountability process, the people with whom we have worked know that we are here for them whenever they need us.



# ROAD MAP

OF AN  
ACCOUNTABILITY  
PROCESS



## **Road Map of an Accountability Process**

An Accountability Road Map sketches out a process to give it structure while clarifying intentions, goals, and allowing you to get a sense of the trajectory and the big picture. Because accountability processes are never linear or clear cut, we use a road map instead of an agenda; Road Maps have ample room for construction, road blocks and detours. They help you maintain a sense of your over all goals, while remaining flexible and open to re-routing paths and re-imagining the journey once you've started.

## **The Five Major Phases of Accountability Processes**

There are endless ways to map out phases of an accountability process, but here are the five most common phases we have charted in our work and experience:

### **Identifying Behaviors**

The first step in a process is that a person must have an awareness and understanding of the actions and behaviors for which they are being called out. This is foundational and can sometimes take longer to accomplish than you might imagine.

### **Accepting Harm Done**

Building on the understanding of what specific behaviors led them to this accountability process, the next step is to acknowledge in what ways these behaviors were harmful -- even if harm wasn't their intention. This is the seed of one of most frequent goals in a process: building empathy.

### **Looking for Patterns**

Making comprehensive change to prevent future assault requires broadening the focus beyond the isolated incident(s) that precipitated this process. This means identifying and naming the person's history of abusive/harmful actions and contextualizing these behaviors in their underlying assumptions and socialization.

### **Unlearning Old Behaviors**

The process of breaking habits starts with identifying harmful dynamics and then deepens beyond naming to analysis and understanding. Gaining an awareness and determining the kinds of situations that trigger or enable abusive or harmful behaviors and then having clear strategies to avoid and diffuse the potential path for harm.

### **Learning New Behaviors**

Building new positive/healing patterns of behavior goes hand in hand with breaking down the old harmful patterns. One of the tools in this stage is role play, where a person can rehearse their consent practices, graceful acceptance of criticism, disclosure strategies, etc. Also important is becoming familiar with their resources to support positive and new behavior [affordable therapy, sites to find jobs, a clearly defined network of supportive friends, membership to the gym, etc]. This phase is very much about understanding the ways to build new behaviors so this skill becomes sustainable and fueled by self reliance.

## Blueprint for Doing the Work

Three of the most consistent and challenging barriers people going through accountability processes run up against are:

1. inability to recognize and name the emotions they commonly feel
2. lack of empathy for others (specifically the survivor[s])
3. getting lost in the sea of dynamics, feelings, and memories they are being asked to consider, talk about and revisit.

The Blueprint is a tool we came up with to help move past all three of these sticking points. It is a structure that can sometimes be conceptual and confusing to get the hang of, but it has endless possibilities for how you can use it and the potential to help ground them in what is often a confusing and overwhelming process.

### Floors

In the Blueprint, each floor is assigned to represent one person or group of people. The first floor is often the Person Who Has Perpetrated Harm's floor. The 2nd floor is the Survivor's floor. There is no limit to how many floors you can add.

### Rooms

Each floor is made up of rooms. One room holds one emotional state like, "anger", "feeling misunderstood", "embarrassed", "joyful", "irritated", "anxious", "rational" and on and on and on. You can fill in the rooms of your blueprint as you get to know each other. Together you can all build the rooms based on what themes or commonly experienced emotions the person you are working with feels. It is helpful and feels productive to say, "I've noticed that when you are telling stories about times you've lost your temper or gotten upset, you often feel frustrated at the beginning and end of the interaction. Would you say that *Frustration* is a room we should build on the first floor?" The process of building rooms together is a great way to have all of you meaningfully participate in the hard work of the process. **Building rooms is also a key way to identify patterns of behavior.** Where you place specific rooms can also help see the connection between two or three emotions, i.e. if "feeling misunderstood" often results in "anger" or "being mean" it is helpful to build those rooms next to each other, so you can all see how they interact with one another.

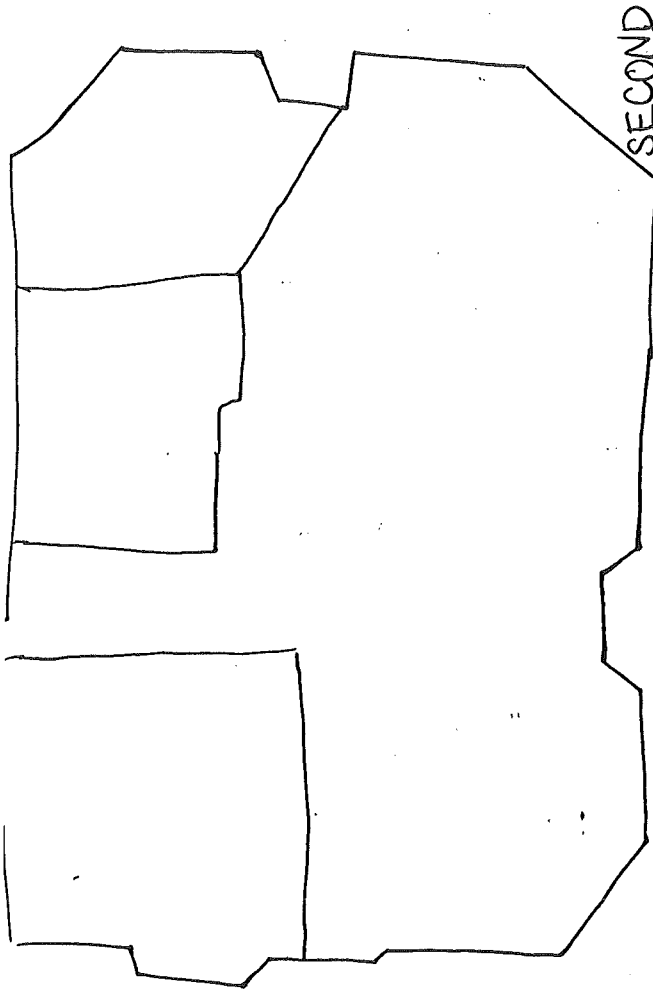
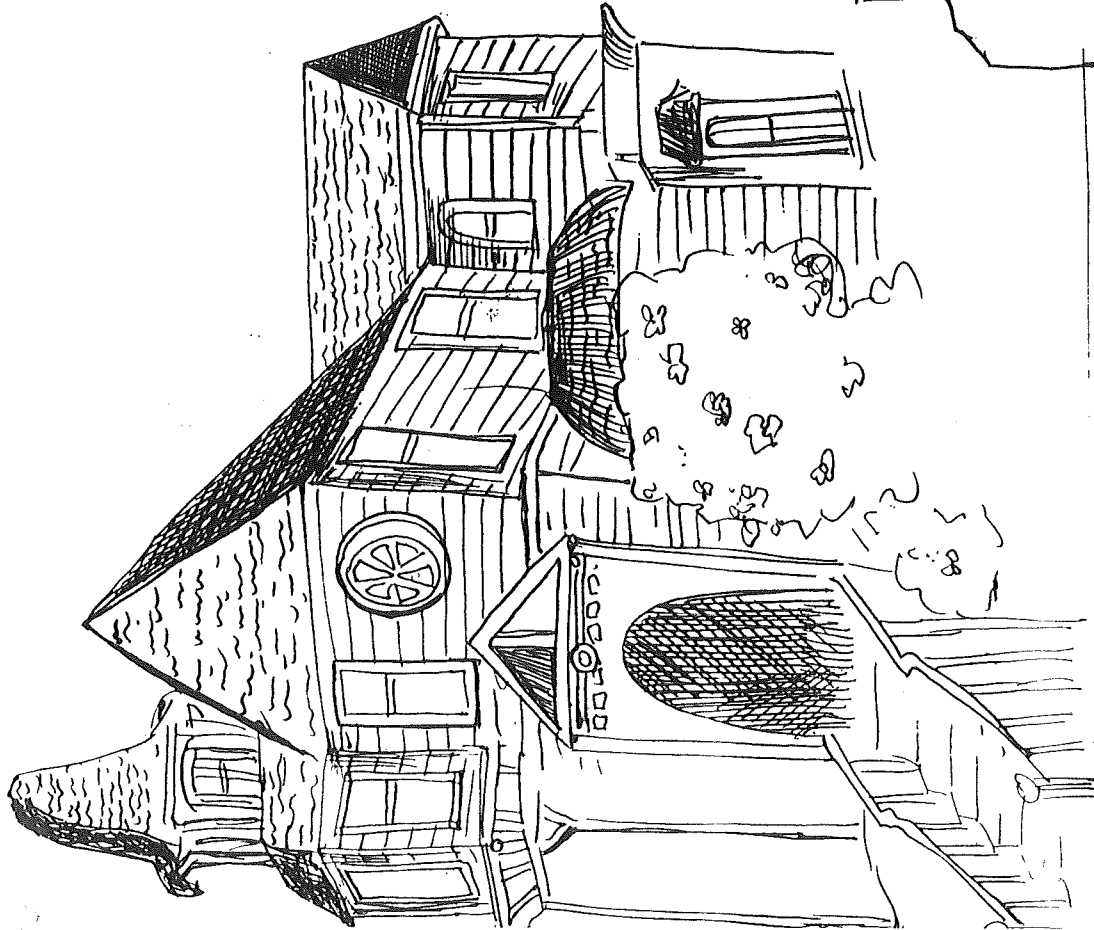
### How to Use Your Blueprint

While the act of building it is ongoing [you can always add more rooms, closets, relabel rooms], once you have some things labeled and constructed, there are lots of ways to use the blueprint. Often, we have it sitting on the table while the person we are working with is telling us a story from their week or discussing an instance of assault that we are working through in our process. If they get confused, are getting off track or losing focus, we can say "Where were you on the first floor when he said that to you?" They can take a minute to regroup and work to notice what emotional state they were in.

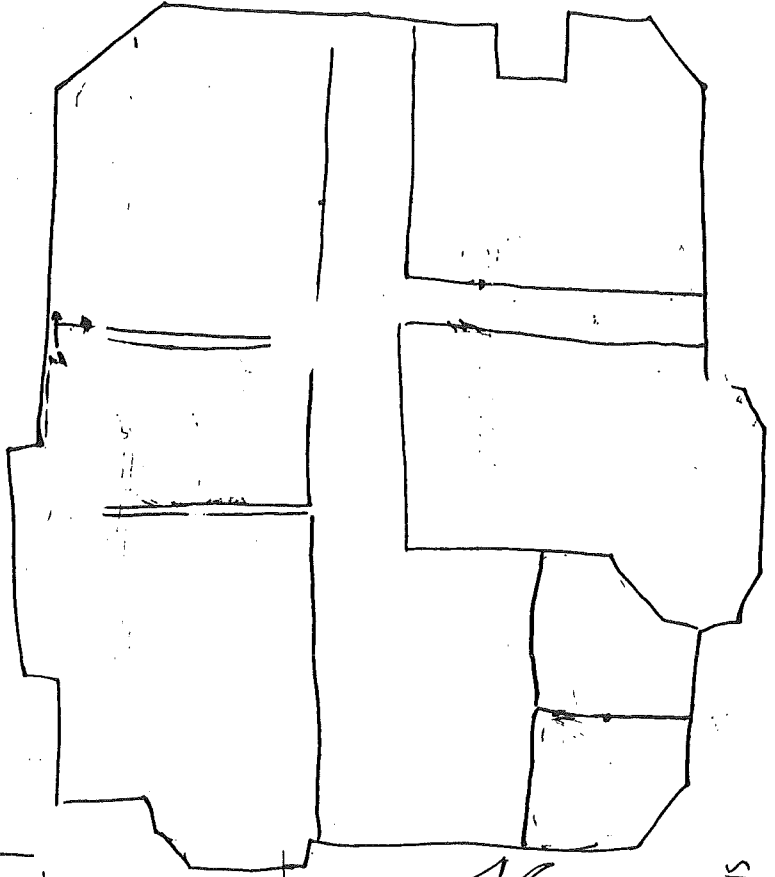
You can use the model of a "house" as realistically or creatively as you want. Often, we use

the “hallways” as actions and opportunities for making decisions; “When that conflict was happening, you were walking down this hallway and you turned in to the “manipulative” room. What would happen if you had turned in to a different room?” or “What would it take for you to have gotten up out of “anxiety” room and walked down the hallway to the “spiritual centered” room? What route would you have taken?” The hallways are key. They remind the person you are working with that there are decisions and actions before, during and after conflict or conditions that lead to harm. Pointing out how they have choice in which rooms they walk in to is a way to point out responsibility -- it is also a way to talk about the real challenges of and default ways they get to a specific emotional state.

The distinction of floors can be confusing. The struggle of “learning empathy” often looks like the person who has caused harm having a difficult time seeing anything from a point of view that is different than theirs. This can come off as egotistical and narrow. If the person you are working with is spinning around and around in their version and experience of the story and you want them to move or see it from a different vantage point, it’s hard (and probably not helpful) to say, “you are being completely self-involved. Look at it from the survivor’s point of view!” It is possible, though (and maybe more helpful) to say, “you are stuck on the first floor. I want you to try and get to the stairs and walk up to the second floor for a little while.” The second floor usually won’t have any rooms labeled because you (probably) don’t know the emotional states of the survivor. Being “on the second floor” is symbolically important because it signifies a separation from the person who has caused harm’s story and rooms. When they are on the second floor it is an exercise in imagining and trying to understand how someone could have interpreted or experienced their actions differently than they might think.





SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

FLOORPLAN *for clarity the WORK\**

ROOMS = STATES  BEING

HALLS = CHOICES  ACTIONS

## Section 5.8. Confronting Sexual Assault: Transformative Justice on the Ground in Philadelphia

**The following is an article written by Bench Ansfield and Timothy Colman describing a situation of sexual violence in the Philadelphia community and PSU's vision of transformative justice.**

## **Confronting Sexual Assault: Transformative Justice on the Ground in Philadelphia** **by Bench Ansfield and Timothy Colman**

*An earlier version of this piece appeared in Volume 27, Issue 1 of Tikkun ([www.tikkun.org](http://www.tikkun.org)), a quarterly interfaith critique of politics, culture, and society published by Duke University Press.*

Lee was all too familiar with the impact sexual assault can have on lives, communities, and social justice organizing. After being sexually assaulted by a prominent anti-poverty organizer, Lee felt confused and betrayed. He stepped back from the campaign the two of them had been working on together and began to avoid the organizer as much as possible. It was months before he told anyone about the assault.

Eventually, he joined a support group for survivors of sexual violence, and began to work through some of the numbness, shame and fear that had developed after the assault. As he began to confront these feelings, what emerged from within him was a deep well of grief and anger. It became more and more difficult to see the organizer at community meetings or friends' parties. He started getting angry with his housemates for inviting the organizer to events at the house, even though they had no knowledge of the assault. Much of his anger stemmed from the lack of repercussions facing the organizer, as well as the lack of power he had to protect himself from the organizer's ongoing presence in his life.

Lee knew that he did not want to report the sexual assault to the police, for a whole long list of reasons. He would lose control of his story if he reported it; he would be forced to tell the details of what happened to the police and to testify in court; a number of painful details about his own life and history might emerge; and he would almost definitely lose the case. But more importantly, the idea of pressing charges felt like its own tragedy. He had become politicized in the anti-police brutality movement and was now involved in prison abolition organizing. Lee's sense of justice, what would make him feel like the anti-poverty organizer had faced his due, had nothing to do with courts or cops or prisons. Finally, no matter the verdict, he didn't believe a court case would make the organizer change. Lee wanted him to somehow understand the harm he had done, take responsibility for it, and transform whatever it was inside him that had made him do it. But Lee didn't want to be the one to push the organizer to change—he couldn't even bear to be in the same room with him. And so he just tried to forget the incident had ever happened.

Lee's story—which we are sharing with his permission, having changed his name and identifying details—evokes the frustratingly limited options available to survivors of sexual assault in most U.S. cities and the urgency of creating new systems. This is a helpful starting point to begin discussing transformative justice approaches for addressing sexual assault.

What would happen if our responses to sexual assault came from a vision of the world we want to live in? A scattering of groups, including UBUNTU in Durham, Safe OUTside the System Collective in Brooklyn, Young Women's Empowerment Project in Chicago, Community United Against Violence in San Francisco, and others across the United



States and Canada, are working to create community accountability and support networks based not on the punitive and coercive methods of the criminal justice system but rather on principles of care and harm reduction.

In Pennsylvania, two organizations involved in this work are Philly Stands Up and the Philly Survivor Support Collective, groups that trace their roots back to 2004, when a group called Philly's Pissed formed out of a burning rage at the lack of options for survivors of sexual assault in their communities. Based in West Philadelphia, both groups work in collaboration to shift cultural responses to sexual assault, bring healing and accountability to the fore, and challenge the punitive response of the state. Faced with a criminal legal system that routinely disempowers survivors and an exploding U.S. prison population, it is clear that we are in desperate need of alternatives to prevent, confront, and heal from sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

One way to move away from the punitive methods of the criminal legal system is to turn toward the idea of community accountability. Our work is about realizing the potential carried by our families, communities, and networks to address violence without relying upon the police, courts, prisons, or other state and nonprofit systems. We did not invent this strategy; many of our guiding principles have been made possible by indigenous communities' responses to violence, both historically and contemporaneously, as well as INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence's groundbreaking efforts to document community accountability models.

Instead of interrogating and victim-blaming the survivor, then punishing and demonizing the person who perpetrated assault, we envision and construct systems of community accountability that are grounded in safety, self-determination, healing, and the human potential to change. Central to this generative project is an understanding that instances of sexual violence occur within larger systems of structural violence and oppression. We must confront each individual act of sexual violence within its systemic context. At the same time, we must build alliances with movements both in Philadelphia and beyond to end all forms of interpersonal and state violence. We call this work transformative justice, and we practice it as part of an inspiring movement that is germinating throughout North America.

### **Forging Paths to Safety, Justice, and Healing**

Applying a transformative justice approach to the issue of sexual assault means working to support individual survivors while building real options for safety, justice, and healing outside of punitive and disciplinary state systems. Efforts to create alternative systems such as this are underway from North Carolina to California. Here in Pennsylvania, the Philly Survivor Support Collective is working to create and maintain systems of support and accountability wholly outside the framework of the criminal legal system.

Our commitment to transformative justice comes out of a recognition that the criminal legal system dehumanizes and disempowers all survivors, in addition to increasing the amount of violence in all of our lives. This negative impact is most acute for survivors and communities who are already disproportionately targeted by state violence, including communities of color and indigenous communities, and survivors who are sex workers, incarcerated, and/or transgender. We believe that efforts to transform our communities must be grounded both in the present moment—in the form of ensuring survivor safety

and prioritizing survivors' self-directed healing—as well as in the long haul: working toward a vision of the world we want. In order for the movement to end sexual assault to be led by those most directly affected, we must build our capacity to support each other's healing, ensuring that as survivors, we are able to bring the fullness of our wisdom and experience to the work.

For many people, it is difficult to even conceive of a way of responding to violence—whether sexual assault or other kinds—that does not rely on the courts, police, or prisons. We are eager to share a description of our work in Philly with the hope that it will encourage others to join in the growing movement to create alternative approaches to addressing harm.

On an individual level, our work is always directed by the survivor. Our role is to listen to them, meet them where they're at, offer emotional support and resources, and create solutions together. We ask survivors if they have initial priorities that they want to focus on as a first step; after they identify these, we creatively plan together how to address them. These often include immediate health or safety needs, such as emotional support, medical care, counseling, strategizing to engage the support of people close to them, acupuncture, child care, safety planning, travel to get away from a harmful situation or to be near loved ones or concrete resources, or any number of other needs.

After these urgent needs are met, we stay present with survivors as they begin to explore options for accountability, justice, and healing. Transformative justice offers a lens through which survivors can examine the underlying conditions where the violence occurred, and identify what change they might want from the person who harmed them, their community, or the broader world. Survivors might pursue individual or collective paths to healing, might make demands for accountability or transformation from the communities or organizations where the assault occurred, and might make demands of the person who harmed them or leave that person aside altogether. During this process, we work to transform the community, people, or institutions that surround the survivor, increasing the capacity of the community to be responsive to the survivor's needs.

Each situation we take on offers its own challenges, which are also possibilities for growth and transformation. If a survivor chooses to make demands for accountability from the person who caused harm, we may assist the survivor in engaging the support of friends or community members to communicate these demands, or in facilitating an accountability process with Philly Stands Up. If the person who caused the harm is still in the survivor's life or community, we can work with the survivor to create a safety plan or ask for certain shared-space policies.

Safety planning is a tool often used by survivors who are in a relationship with an abusive partner, to minimize potential harm and to have a plan to draw upon quickly if they need to leave. Shared-space policies are commitments made by loved ones, community members, or organizations to take certain actions, as determined by the survivor, in the event that the survivor is put in the position of sharing space with a person who has harmed them. These policies can act as one alternative to a restraining order. The action requested by the survivor might be to ask a person who has caused harm to leave spaces where the survivor is present until that person has demonstrated a behavior change, or to have support teams on hand that can offer solidarity, support and safety to the survivor

when the person who caused harm is present. Another option survivors might pursue is identifying harmful practices or attitudes endemic within their community or the larger culture that contributed to instances of sexual violence, such as victim-blaming, silencing, sexism, racism, transphobia, transmisogyny, classism, ableism, criminalization of sex work, and many others, and calling upon people to work collectively to eradicate these attitudes.

It is important not to place the burden for ending sexual assault on survivors. We must fight the idea that the survivor of a sexual assault is responsible for transforming the person who harmed them or preventing that person from sexually assaulting someone else. Our work is founded in the transformative justice principle that we are *all* responsible for addressing the root causes of sexual assault, and that together, we hold the power to transform our communities.

### **Toward a Non-Punitive Accountability**

It can be a harrowing process to let ourselves open up to the hope that someone who has perpetrated assault can truly be accountable, especially given the shortage of models of justice that are not entrenched in retribution, dehumanization, and incarceration. Transformative justice processes—like those that Philly Stands Up facilitates with people who have perpetrated assault—are fundamentally about altering our ideas about what seems possible, reminding us that we can no longer afford to dismiss people who harm others as inescapably violent. Our accountability processes are inspired by our faith that we really can dream up and practice methods for confronting sexual violence that move us toward safer, more self-determined communities, as well as gnaw at the structural underpinnings fostering cultures of violence.

Our interventions are rooted in the safety, healing, and demands of the survivor, but often go beyond these foundations to ask how we can identify and transform the patterns of behavior that enabled the assault in the first place. As we work to shift accountability away from the survivor and onto the person who perpetrated assault, we have to define what accountability means in each unique situation. The contours of each process look quite different from one another, but they share the same core objectives. Over the course of weeks, months, or years, our weekly meetings strive to push the person who perpetrated assault to recognize the harm they have done (regardless of their intentions), acknowledge the harm's impact, make appropriate restitution, and develop skills for transforming attitudes and behaviors that are harmful to self or others.

Whenever possible, an intervention treats as its grounding document a list of demands from the survivor that have been shared with us by the survivor directly or through the survivor support collective. These demands can range from “do not share space with the survivor” to “compose a letter of apology” to “disclose to your current and all future partners.” The demand list guides us throughout an intervention and offers a tangible checklist we can use to measure our progress.

Frequently, though, our processes are forced to reckon with issues unprompted by a survivor's demands. When a person who has just been called out for sexual assault first comes to us—either on their own volition or due to community pressure—their life is often in shambles. Before we can start recounting specific violent incidents or reading over a demand list, we have to make sure that they have secure housing, a decent job, and

a steady diet. It is not unusual for us help them obtain a suitable therapist or assist them in reaching out to their loved ones for support and guidance. These tasks are critical for most any transformative justice process, as they enable the capacity for change by collaboratively cultivating tools for finding balance and grounding. Through this methodology, we not only build trust and model interdependence, we also work toward eliminating a mainspring of sexual assault—instability and insecurity.

Often the most difficult challenge facing an intervention is earning “buy in” from the person who perpetrated assault. Because we reject the forceful violence intrinsic to the criminal legal system’s interventions into sexual assault—such as forced “rehabilitation,” incarceration, or, so frequently, inaction—we are forced to devise creative techniques to consensually pull someone into a process. Although we sometimes have to rely upon the use of community leverage to persuade someone to work with us, we make every effort to draw someone in by helping them acknowledge their own call to change.

It is critical to tailor an accountability process in such a way as to make the person we are working with understand that they *need* the process. Of course, this acknowledgement can only arise in a trusting atmosphere. For this reason we keep our meetings small and intimate, with two members present for each intervention. Often we meet in public spaces like a park or a train station so as to avoid making the person who perpetrated assault feel cornered or attacked. And we collaboratively design a process around their needs and abilities. During one intervention, any given meeting might have involved visual activities like sketching and mapping, breathing exercises, or poetry. These strategies reflect an ongoing balancing act as we strive to make the person who perpetrated assault feel safe enough to respect the process and be vulnerable, while still being open to the challenges we are posing.

As an accountability process slowly gains traction, we begin to identify harmful patterns of behavior as potential sites of transformation. Facilitating the recognition of deep-seated and destructive cycles of behavior can be one of the most trying elements of an intervention. Most often, this requires naming and unpacking the ways that various privileges and internalized oppressions play out in relationships. For instance, we may have to unravel how ableism was at work in an able-bodied person’s repeated coercion of her partner to have sex during flare-ups from an autoimmune disorder. Or we may have to map out how a cisgendered man’s patriarchal socialization contributed to a general imbalance of control in a heterosexual relationship. In a similar fashion, our interventions frequently scrutinize how oppressive race and class dynamics contribute to a relationship atmosphere ripe for sexual assault. As facilitators, this is often the most hazardous ground to cross. Acting as both witness and mentor to a transformative justice process is alternately frustrating and enlivening, appalling and regenerative.

It is critical to note that our work is not about “curing” the person who perpetrated assault. A lifelong and cross-generational project rooted not in that person’s rehabilitation, nor in the restoration of the community that existed pre-assault, transformative justice is, rather, a consistent movement toward community safety and individual/collective transformation.

By way of illustration, our intervention with Jesse (again, a pseudonym) lasted two years, and continues with occasional check-ins. At the beginning of his process, Jesse showed

up to meetings recalcitrant and invulnerable. Certain that he had done nothing harmful, he argued that his ex-partner—the survivor in this situation—was getting revenge on him by “misrepresenting” as assault an incident that was in actuality a simple issue of poor communication. In order to sustain the process and keep him coming to meetings, we put the assault in question on the back burner for the first six months, dedicating our time together to building trust and helping him secure a new home. Slowly, as facilitators, we began to identify his harmful patterns of behavior—including pent-up anger, narcissism, and an inability to communicate his needs. Correspondingly, we set about cultivating relevant tools, such as empathy-building, anger management, communicating in stressful contexts, and establishing consent during sex. By the time Jesse was amenable to discussing the specific incidents of assault, we had already developed an arsenal of tools for empathizing with the experience of the survivor, identifying his destructive actions, and practicing a different course of action in a similar context. Many months later, when Jesse had met the survivor’s demands, indicated his capacity for healthy relationships, and demonstrated a command over his own damaging behavior, we began transitioning out of the process. Yet even now, with the intervention no longer active, our check-ins with Jesse confirm that he is pressing on with the critical work of self-transformation, effectively keeping the accountability process alive.

Seven years out, it still feels as though we are reaching through the dark nearly as often as we are coming up against familiar scenarios. As one small piece of a growing movement, we know it is only through our risks and mistakes that we can collectively forge creative responses to violence.

*Bench Ansfield is an organizer with Philly Stands Up and Philly BDS. Timothy Colman is an organizer with the Philly Survivor Support Collective, a former member of Philly’s Pissed, and a contributor to The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities (South End Press, 2011). If you are interested in learning more or donating to support our work, please visit: <http://phillysupportstands.wordpress.com>.*

## 5.9. Shame, Realisation and Restoration: The Ethics of Restorative Practice, by Alan Jenkins

**This article is written by an Australian practitioner with a long-term commitment to restorative practices.**

# Shame, Realisation and Restitution: The Ethics of Restorative Practice

Alan Jenkins

In this article, I want to highlight the ethics of restorative practice in therapeutic intervention with men who have abused family members. The term *restorative action* is commonly evoked in the aftermath of abuse, especially in the context of attempts to re-establish respectful relationships between family members. I will critique popular ideas concerning remorse, forgiveness, pardoning and reconciliation, and pose possibilities for ethical practices of restorative action.

**Key Words:** Shame, Apology, Forgiveness, Restorative Action

*Restorative action* is commonly regarded, in accordance with dictionary definitions of restoration, as an attempt to rebuild, repair or return to a former state. Such meanings tend to promote a nostalgia or homesickness for what was. Nostalgia is often evident when a man who has abused his partner longs to return to the comfort of earlier times in a relationship, when he could rely on his partner to be tolerant and to defer to him in issues of concern. Such nostalgia invokes *a time when we didn't argue, a time when things were simple and uncomplicated.*

A similar nostalgic concept of restorative action, at a broader societal level, is apparent in our Prime Minister John Howard's invitation for us to reclaim the 'relaxed and comfortable' lifestyle of the 1950s. This was a time, he proposes, when mateship and family values were paramount; a time unfettered by the interference of political correctness. His nostalgia neglects to acknowledge the hegemony inherent in the White Australia Policy, Native Protection Act and criminal codes, which safeguarded the 'values' in question through actively suppressing diversity in the community.

Both men might be seen to possess a similar longing for past times when things seemed easier or less complicated for those with privilege, where acknowledging diversity and difference could be seen as unacceptable and threatening to corrupt a 'decent' way of life.

When we think of restorative action, it is perhaps helpful to consider:

- To restore what?
- For whom?
- For what purpose?
- And, in whose interests?

One alternative meaning of *restorative* caught my eye in the dictionary entry, one that seemed conspicuously different: *the tendency to give new strength or vigour.* This interpretation points to something new, something better and healthier, suggesting a revitalisation, or new possibilities that might develop. In this context, *restorative* suggests something creative and productive.

I would like to consider this expansive concept of restorative action from an ethical perspective. What possibilities might such a concept open up in work with men who have abused family members?

## Responses to Sexual Assault in a School Community

Some time back, I was telephoned by a school counsellor who wanted to refer a 14 year-old boy who had 'sexually harassed' on the school oval a girl from his year group. I enquired about what had taken place and was told by the school counsellor that the boy had initially wanted the girl to go out with him. At first she agreed to his request but later decided not to. Following her decision, the boy and his friends followed the girl around the schoolyard for two days, making offensive and derogatory comments. This harassment finally culminated in the boy 'molesting' the girl.



**Alan Jenkins** has becoming increasingly intrigued with possibilities for the discovery of ethical and respectful ways of relating in his work with people who have abused and members of their communities. This paper is an abridged version of the keynote address delivered at 26th Australian Family Therapy Conference, October 2005. **Contact address:** NADA Consultants, PO Box 773, Stirling SA 5152; alanjenkins@ozemail.com.au



I discovered that the counsellor's descriptions of the boy's behaviour were seriously understated. The boy forcibly pinned the girl to the ground, removed her clothing and raped her with his fingers. His friends watched this assault. On reflection, the school counsellor agreed that this behaviour constituted sexual assault.

I enquired about how the school had responded to this incident. I was informed that the assault had been reported to police who were apparently uninterested, because the girl had initially agreed to go out with the boy, albeit briefly. The counsellor had sought counselling help for the girl, which she and her family declined. They apparently did not want police involvement, and the girl ceased attending school. The school had suspended the boy for two weeks and was seeking counselling for him with the hope that he might soon be ready to attend a re-entry meeting and return to school.

The counsellor agreed that the suspension was perhaps inadequate, and that the boy's conduct made it questionable whether he should return to the school community. However, he pointed out that the school would face difficulties in taking a stand because the education authority and the boy's parents would most likely be concerned about depriving him of his 'right to an education'.

I enquired about how the school response to this incident might impact on the girl, *her* right to an education, and *her* decision to leave the school. The counsellor agreed that the girl might feel extremely unsafe, intimidated and humiliated. These experiences might affect her ability to return to the school, particularly with the prospect of the boy's imminent return. She might feel uncertain about the attitude of the staff and students of the school towards her. The counsellor acknowledged that perhaps the girl's entitlement to receive an education at this school should have some priority over the boy's, in these circumstances. However, he did not think that the school and education bureaucracies would support this priority, particularly in light of the fact that the police had decided not to charge the boy.

I enquired about what the school had done about the boy's friends, who had watched the assault but had taken no action.

I noted that the school's motto included the words 'respect' and 'consideration', and asked the following questions to the school hierarchy:

- How had this incident impacted on young people feeling safe at school?

- What had it meant for boys and girls' sense of being emotionally secure at the school?
- What might have been lost or damaged in the school community as a result of this incident?
- What action did the school intend to take to address these issues?

It rapidly became apparent that the initial views of restorative action at the school were based on nostalgic considerations. The school's proposed actions comprised:

- Send the girl off for 'counselling' and hope that she soon feels safe to come back to the school.
- Provide 'counselling' for the boy to ensure he understands that his behaviour is unacceptable and have him return to school as soon as possible.
- Arrange mediation between the boy and girl with the hope that an apology will lead to forgiveness and the re-establishment of cordial relations.

Little consideration had been given to the impact of this incident upon the school community or the need to address the experience and behaviour of the boys who witnessed the assault. The school's responses would constitute a reactionary form of restorative action which focuses on a few individuals and the hope that everything can go back to the way it was, as though the incident could be quickly left behind or forgotten.

Fortunately, the counsellor agreed to organise meetings with student leaders, staff and members of the parent council, to discuss the nature and effects of the incident and consider how the school might respond with the individuals concerned and to address the impact upon the school as a whole. These forums enabled deeper consideration, with a focus on restorative action involving the whole school community. In this way, the incident could be seen as provoking a creative renewal within the school.

Taking an ethical focus, the counsellor urged the audience at these forums to consider:

- What does this school stand for?
- How might we establish a respectful, safe, protective and considerate school culture?
- Having established such a culture, how do we maintain it?
- How do we reach out to provide safety and protection to the girl who was assaulted?
- What would it mean if the boy's right to an education at that school were privileged over the girl's?

- How do we establish expectations and consequences for a student who has hurt another student and thereby caused harm to the whole community?
- How do we establish expectations and consequences for those bystanders who took no action?
- How do we assess and address the effects of this abuse on our community?
- How do we raise awareness and educate about sexual assault, abuse and violence in the school community?

The school community's collaborative approach focused on ethical behaviour, and agreed to strive to restore fairness and justice for all involved in the incident. Further, the school community examined school culture, and recommended strategies to prevent future abuse.

### The Nature of Apology

I now want to consider the ethics of restorative action from the perspective of work with men who have abused. The concept of apology has become increasingly popular, even pivotal, in restorative action within therapeutic, criminal justice and social justice practices. However, we need to consider when, how and in what circumstances an apology might be likely to be restorative, in the expansive as opposed to the nostalgic sense. The caricature apology in the film *A Fish Called Wanda*, which is delivered at gunpoint to a terrified and unwilling recipient, might strongly resonate with survivors of abuse who have felt further harmed or insulted by ill-considered attempts at apology.

When apology is an instrumental act designed to achieve a specific goal, it can result in further abuse of a person who may already feel humiliated and vulnerable.

I witnessed such an apology. An eight-year-old child had been sexually assaulted by her older brother, and had been left feeling culpable and ashamed as a result. During his apology, the young man burst into intense sobbing. His expression of emotion inadvertently privileged his feelings, in a context that had been intended to support the little girl. She appeared distressed and overwhelmed and interrupted his apology to deliver her own apology to him, perhaps for causing him so much distress or perhaps to end this distressing ritual.

A Judaeo-Christian tradition links the concept of atonement, which may be expressed through apology, with the concept of forgiveness. Dominant and popular concepts of forgiveness tend to emphasise the

achievement of three major components (Jenkins, Hall & Joy, 2002):

- Relinquishment by the offended person of suffering or resentment
- Pardoning the person at fault, or the offensive act
- Reconciliation or re-establishment of a relationship, or significant connection

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“When apology becomes regarded as an externally prescribed moral obligation, its nature tends to become corrupted.”

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These represent separate *possibilities*, each of which may be considered by a person who has been subjected to abuse. However, if possibilities become *requirements*, notions of apology and forgiveness become subject to expectations and move into the realm of moral obligations. A demand for apology; ‘What you did is terrible — you go over and apologise right away’, can in turn lead to a demand for forgiveness by the wronged individual. This provides little opportunity for anyone to realise the nature of abusive acts or their potential impact upon others. The kind of apology that results tends to be based on a sense of appeasing the demands of others or a self-centred desire to be released from guilt and responsibility for one's actions; for a ‘quick fix’ of forgiveness and forgetting. Such apologies can even be followed with moralising outrage by the abusing person, when the persons suffering from the abuse are unwilling to forgive.

Stephen had sexually assaulted his granddaughter, Ava, but became increasingly preoccupied with his daughter Monica's distress, outrage and reluctance to have contact with him. Following his apology, he self-righteously complained, ‘She can't forgive’; ‘Her anger is eating her up and destroying what we have as a family’; ‘She must learn to put it all behind her and move on — for her own good’.

When apology becomes regarded as an externally prescribed moral obligation, its nature tends to become corrupted. The vital importance of acknowledging the exploitative nature and effects of abusive behaviour upon others becomes obscured.

Our Prime Minister's refusal to apologise, on behalf of white Australians, to Indigenous Australians

for past injustices perpetrated, appears to mirror Stephen's lack of recognition of the effects of injustice. Aboriginal leaders and many Australians have requested or demanded such an apology, as a symbolic basis for reconciliation and reparation. The Prime Minister has stubbornly refused, questioning the patriotism of 'black armband' historians. A government policy based on a watered down 'statement of regret' and misleading notions of 'practical reconciliation', reflects a belief that Aboriginal-White Australian reconciliation can and should take place without appreciation and acknowledgment of previous injustice and harm.

Media coverage of political and cultural events frequently highlights corrupted notions of apology. The politician who recently made gratuitous and opportunistic references to a previous party leader's resignation in disgrace and subsequent suicide attempt, was interviewed by a journalist about his dishonourable comments. The interviewer clearly expected that an apology might be due. The politician declined, stating, 'I'm not the most sensitive man'. He appeared to invite us to excuse his actions as those of a person perhaps incapable of considering their harmful effects. He then reluctantly added, 'If it makes people feel better, I'll apologise'. The notion 'If I have offended anyone, then I am sorry', is frequently trotted out by politicians, spin bowlers and any number of public figures, in circumstances where they have behaved offensively. This kind of apology clearly means little more than a desire for others to relinquish resentment and bad feelings. Such apologies reflect nostalgic views of restorative action.

The major Christian churches have established 'healing' protocols, which can involve apologies to those who have been sexually assaulted by clergy. However, these protocols and apologies generally fail to acknowledge that the abuses took place in the name of the church and that the church breached a duty of care in taking no action to prevent them. Perhaps this failure to acknowledge responsibility stems from a lack of understanding of the nature of abuse and the experiences of those who suffered it, or perhaps it is driven by priorities of financial risk management. Whatever the reason, many people are outraged and feel further abused when they participate in these 'healing' processes.

The concept of apology is perhaps most destructive when linked with the expectation that an apology should automatically lead to the proffering of forgiveness.

Such expectations are apparent in the demands of a man who had physically, verbally and sexually abused his marriage partner over a period of 10 years: 'I have

owned up to it. I am coming to counselling. I have said I am sorry. She should forgive me. What more is she expecting? Why can't we get back together?'

### The Nature of Restitution

Rather than 'apology', which has become corrupted by misunderstandings, I have found the concept of *restitution* to be more helpful in restorative practice. Restitution involves a process of expanding one's understanding through acknowledging the abuse of power inherent in the original harmful action, and consideration of the feelings and experiences of the other(s) whom one has harmed. Restitution is informed by remorse, which is centred on the experience of those who have been hurt by the abuse, rather than the sense of personal distress and loss felt by the person who has abused. Restitution moves towards renewal, whereas apology frequently invokes nostalgia.

David had abused his partner, Amy, and terrified his children, who witnessed some of this abuse, over a period of several years. David wrote the following passage in an attempt to apologise for his actions. 'I am really sorry. I will never treat any of you like this again. I think we can make it work if you just give me another chance. We can put this behind us and have the family we have always dreamed of.'

David genuinely felt sorry, and was committed to ceasing abusive behaviour. However, his statement reflects a self-centred preoccupation with a desire for Amy to relinquish her angry and hurt feelings, pardon him, and reconcile with him.

Only when David was invited to consider closely the profound effects of his abusive actions upon family members, alongside recollections of his father's hollow apologies to his mother in similar circumstances, did he begin to recognise the offensive and reactionary nature of his apology. This led him to embark on a patient journey towards a restorative understanding of his family's experiences and needs.

Acts of restitution require acceptance of the abused person's entitlement to make his/her own judgments about whether or not to relinquish feelings, pardon or reconcile. There can be no strings attached. The person who has abused is prepared to accept whatever decision is taken by the other. There can be no expectation or requirement for forgiveness.

Derrida in his essay 'On Forgiveness' invites us to examine and elevate the concept of forgiveness beyond the popular and banal. He examines the concept of reparation in the context of attempts by nation states to address crimes against humanity, and notes that forgiveness is often sought or offered

'in the service of a finality' where it 'aims to re-establish a normality' (Derrida, 2001: 31). He goes on:

Forgiveness is not, it *should not be*, normal, normative, normalising. It *should* remain exceptional, extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality (ibid: page 32).

Derrida highlights a paradox; 'There is the unforgivable. Is this not in truth, the only thing to forgive?' (ibid: 32). He continues, 'If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls "venial sin", then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear'. When we consider that 'forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable', we face an aporia or paradox which opens up remarkable possibilities in forgiveness but which highlights the consideration that forgiveness cannot be conditional and 'should never amount to a therapy of reconciliation'.

### The Politics of Atonement

It is in this light that I want to consider the nature of the journey that a man might take towards restitution; a journey of atonement. This journey involves a shift from a self-centred to an other-centred focus, through:

- Political realisation about the nature and effects of abuse
- Restitution and reparation for the harm caused
- Resolution, through accepting the preferred outcomes of those that have been hurt.

This concept of atonement departs from the Judeo-Christian tradition that appears to link apology to forgiveness and reconciliation (Isaiah 43.25; Ephesians 1.7–8; Leviticus 16.6–30).

This is a political journey towards becoming ethical. Its reference point is the man's own ethics; his preferences for his own ways of living and relating with others. His ethics concern the kind of man, partner or father that he wants to become.

In order to assist the man discover and clarify his ethics, we as therapists are required to take a parallel ethical journey which calls for us to be open to the possibility that there may be more to this man than violence, minimisation of responsibility and self-centred demands for forgiveness and forgetting. The parallel journey requires openness to the possibility that this man might value qualities such as partnership, caring, compassion, mutual respect and equity, yet be pursuing them in extremely misguided and destructive ways. He may be attempting to pursue ethical goals, using cultural blueprints that inadvertently promote controlling behaviour, disrespect and violence.

When the man acts from a sense of exaggerated entitlement and abdicates responsibility for his actions, he will be used to relying upon others to take action on his behalf, in regard to his abusive behaviours. He may not be wilfully cruel or nasty, but he may never have taken the time or trouble to think about his partner's experience. He may be used to relying upon her to tolerate his abusive behaviour, worry about it, try to prevent it, walk on eggshells around it, and take responsibility for coping with its consequences (Jenkins, 1990).

A journey towards becoming ethical involves being accountable to the experiences and needs of those who have been subjected to abuse:

- Who is doing the work to address the effects of abusive behaviour?
- Who thinks most about the impact of abuse?
- Whose job should it be to think about it?

Ethical preferences and investments are discovered when we explore the flux that exists between practices of complicity and practices of resistance which characterise all power relations (Ransom, 1997).

Rob had a long history of police intervention for violence and had just completed a prison sentence for vengefully assaulting his uncle (who had sexually assaulted him as a child). Rob had been diagnosed by prison psychologists as a man with 'empathy deficits' and 'poor impulse control'. However, he was able to relate an alternative history which involved caring, protectiveness and courage as a child, when he tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to protect his younger sister from his uncle's abuse.

When Rob was again taunted by his uncle, he managed to stop himself from committing another assault. He reported that he 'felt like killing' his uncle, so I enquired as to how he had managed to prevent further assault under these provocative circumstances. He explained that he was on parole and that he did not want to go back to prison. I enquired about why this was important to him. At first he appeared surprised at my question, imagining the answer to be self-evident. However, he stopped and thought for a moment and responded, 'Gemma (his three year-old daughter) needs a dad'. I continued to enquire about why this was important to him, and he began to think deeply. He responded with tearful eyes, 'I don't want to put her through what I went through'.

In subsequent conversation, Rob appeared to rediscover ethics of care and concern, with a strong desire to protect and provide for his daughter. These were ethics that he previously appeared to have lost sight of, having resigned himself to

accept, in accordance with other's judgements and assessments, that perhaps he was selfish, 'mean' and 'out of control'.

### Ethics, Morality and Love

The work of philosophers like Deleuze and Nietzsche can help us to understand the importance of considering ethics which are immanent rather than transcendent. This concept of ethics is not concerned with judging modes of existence according to external moral standards, that is, whether Rob's behaviour is 'good or bad' or 'right or wrong', whether his thinking and actions conform to our own or someone else's moral standards. Rather, this concept of ethics focuses on the extent to which Rob's thinking and actions enable him to *move towards actualising* his ethics and preferences.

According to Deleuze, who elaborated concepts originally proposed by Nietzsche and Spinoza, ethics that are in the process of emerging can either affirm or detract from desire and life. They can be productive, creative, expansive, opening up possibilities and embracing difference, or alternatively, restrictive, repressive and reductive of options (Deleuze, 1981; Nietzsche, 1990; Smith, 1997; Colebrook, 2002a, 2002b; Protevi, 2003).

A Deleuzian notion of love departs from common *domestic* understandings by regarding love as 'an encounter with another that opens up to a possible new world'. Such a notion of love refers to a power to move beyond what we know and experience directly; to reach into and imagine the world of the other. Love requires extending oneself through creative and novel connections, which point to new possibilities that may be expansive, and creative. Love entails reaching out and embracing differences. Deleuzian love stands in stark contrast to *domestic* forms of love, which reflect a kind of capture by dominant cultural interests. These concepts of domestic love prescribe requirements for commonality and sameness, along with the suppression of difference. ('If you love me you will think the same as I do and I can feel entitled to challenge and suppress any differences you express, in the name of love.') Domestic love is not always repressive but can prescribe ownership and a sense of entitlement to correct the other and enforce sameness. From this perspective, violence is commonly enacted in the name of love (Jones, 2003).

The Deleuzian concept of love fits with restitution and with the expansive concept of atonement and restorative action I have proposed. Love supports non-violative and respectful relationships, which privilege fairness and accountability.

Our own parallel journeys as therapists require us to act from a similarly expansive sense of love when working with men who have abused. We are required to reach out and become open to understanding ethical possibilities in the man's preferences. Ethically, we can only enable the man to express his own preferences, we cannot impose our own concepts of what is right or wrong.

Over many years, I have struggled to hold my practice accountable to this concept of love. When a man attempts to justify shockingly abusive behaviour and appears to show indifference, even contempt, for those he has harassed and terrified, I find it difficult to be respectful and open to possibilities. I must make it my business to try to understand what family members have experienced as a result of being subjected to his abuse. If I failed to experience outrage and grief, I would become part of the problem. Yet I must find ways to act from love rather than from states of judgemental tyranny, when working with such a man. I rely upon my community of colleagues and their love, for critique and support in this challenging endeavour.

### The Concept of Remorse

I have found Raimond Gaita's work to be extremely helpful in clarifying ethics in restorative action. Gaita regards the experiences of *love* and *remorse* as fundamental in understanding ethical practice. Through these experiences, we come to appreciate 'the full humanity', 'inalienable dignity' and the 'unique and irreplaceable nature' of others (Gaita, 1991: page xxii).

Gaita highlights the experience of *remorse* as 'a pained, bewildered realisation of what it (really) means to wrong someone' (ibid: page xiv). We ask ourselves:

- 'My God what have I done?'
- 'How could I have done it?'

The experience of remorse is 'an awakened sense of the reality of another ... through the shock of wrongdoing the other' (ibid: 52).

This sense of remorse is clearly vital in meaningful restorative action.

Gaita also highlights the importance of an 'ethic of renunciation'; an ethic which requires that we

keep fully amongst us:

- those who suffer severe, ineradicable and degrading afflictions
- (and) those who have committed the most terrible deeds and whose character seems to fully match them (ibid: xxxii).

In a similar vein, Iris Murdoch highlights an ethical task whereby expressions of love enable us 'to see the world as it is' (Murdoch, 1970: 40). Through expressions of love, compassion and justice, we can come to appreciate the reality of another person. This task has utmost ethical priority in consideration of how we might live.

In this context, restorative action requires ethical realisation which enables both:

- Restitution to those specifically hurt and to the community.
- Reclamation of integrity and a sense of self-respect.

Gaita's concept of ethics stands in stark contrast to currently popular ethical theories such as those of Peter Singer, whose 'practical ethics' appears to concern the weighing up of relative consequences, in a utilitarian consideration of the 'greater good'. Relative, utilitarian considerations can be used to justify any number of injustices in the name of the greater good, including the indefinite detention of refugees, marginalisation of indigenous communities and lying by politicians.

### The Nature of Shame

It is not possible to embark upon a restorative journey without facing shame. The experience of shame is a sense of disgrace which unavoidably accompanies deeper realisations about the nature and impact of dishonourable and destructive actions. However, this experience of shame seems highly restraining and disabling for men who have abused family members — the shame often feeling toxic to the point of annihilation. Shame and disgrace tend to motivate desperate attempts to run and hide from their presence.

Here we must recognise a distinction between *shaming* and *facing shame*. When a man faces shame, he comes to his own realisations through recognising a contradiction between his ethics and his actions. By contrast, shaming others is a political act, an attempt to coerce or compel.

Our work cannot be ethical if it employs shaming. Our job is to provide *safe passage* to assist the man to discover and face the inevitable sense of shame which will accompany his own realisations about the nature and effects of his abusive practices (Jenkins, 2005).

Shame has tended to receive bad press in popular literature, where it is regarded as restrictive; something to be overthrown along with all oppressive structures; an obstacle to enlightenment and liberation of the self. However, Schneider invites us to consider the creative potential of shame and to situate self-development in the context of community. He asserts 'Shame is not a disease

... it is a mark of our humanity'. Shame can be valued as 'a pointer of value awareness', whose 'very occurrence arises from that fact that we are valuing animals' (1992: xviii–xvii). Schneider regards shame as vital in social relations because it is 'aroused by phenomena that would violate the organism and its integrity' (ibid: xxii). Shame offers us a warning regarding potential violation and can help protect privacy. 'To avoid the witness of shame' is regarded by Schneider as akin to removing the brakes on a motor vehicle because they slow it down.

In the context of Indigenous–White reconciliation, Gaita stresses that 'national pride and national shame ... are two sides of the same coin'. 'They are two ways of acknowledging that we are sometimes collectively responsible for the deeds of others' (Gaita, 2004: 8).

As Gaita points out, our Prime Minister asserted 'We settled the land, fought the fires and withstood the droughts. We fought at Gallipoli and later stood against murderous tyranny in Europe'; but refused to acknowledge that 'We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We bought the disasters, the alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers' (ibid: 7).

Gaita contends

The wish to be proud without sometimes acknowledging the need to be ashamed is that corrupt attachment to country — I will not call it love — that we call jingoism'. The sense of national shame is really nothing other than the plain, humbled acknowledgment of the wrongs in which we have become implicated because of the deeds of our political ancestors and which a faithful love of country requires of us (ibid: 8).

Such an experience of shame does not require debasement or wallowing in self-loathing, as our Prime Minister alleges in his critique of the 'black armband' approach. Indeed, this would constitute a corrupt or self-indulgent expression of shame. Facing shame is crucial to restorative action.

### Windows to Shame

Jack had been physically and emotionally abusive to his partner Sue, over six years. This abusive behaviour had terrified his four-year-old son, Paul who had witnessed his father's violence, possessive interrogations and attempts to restrict his mother's freedom. Jack was engaged in a therapeutic program to address this abusive behaviour and over time, made significant realisations about his actions and their effects. Jack's realisations were followed by some respectful reconnection with Sue and Paul.

I will specifically refer to two vital moments in therapeutic intervention with Jack, when he experienced forms of remorse which fit with those described by Gaita. This remorse enabled Jack to *look shame in the eye*; to *see his abusive behaviour like it really was*.

In the early stages of work with Jack, I quickly discovered that, despite his initial hostile and minimising presentation, he wanted a sense of connection and belonging within his family and a relationship with his son that was very different to the one he had experienced with his own father. We had detailed conversations about Jack's ethical preferences for family relationships, especially in regard to the kind of father he wanted to be.

One of Jack's first strong connections with remorse was experienced when a 'window to shame' opened, as he was describing an incident in which he had assaulted Sue whilst she was holding their son, Paul. At first, when he began recall this incident, Jack started to become caught up in righteous indignation about Sue's 'unreasonable' and 'provocative' behaviour. I interrupted his flow and enquired, 'Where was Paul when you grabbed Sue?' Jack immediately averted his eyes downwards and looked somewhat shaken. I commented, 'You look like you don't feel proud about what you did?' I enquired, 'What are you realising?' Jack told me that he could see Paul and that Paul was 'terrified'. I enquired about how Jack knew this. He responded that he could see Paul cowering on the floor and he could tell by 'the look in his eyes'.

Here was an image with the capacity to haunt Jack; its shocking nature evoking intense shame through the contradiction represented in its violation of certain ethics that were precious to him. Such a recognition had enormous potential to connect Jack with his own ethics and motivate him to take action. Jack had grown up in extreme disadvantage and was subjected to abuse as a child. When Paul was born he was delighted and considered 'all the things I want to give to my son; a family for the first time'. It had been important for Jack to provide something for his son that was different to what he had received himself as a child. Yet Jack had been described as a man with 'empathy deficits'. To work with Jack, we must recognise that empathy and compassion are not fixed 'traits' but highly context-specific. Like many men, when placed in a relevant context, Jack was able to feel intense remorse.

Much later on in therapeutic intervention, Jack had begun to reconnect with Sue and Paul. Jack was demonstrating respect for Sue, who was beginning to feel safe and entitled to 'be her own person' in their

relationship. At one point, when Jack was feeling close to Sue, he attempted to reinitiate their sexual relationship. Sue did not feel able to respond and declined his invitation. Jack then felt hurt and became critical of her. His response was characterised by a re-emergence of self-centred notions, that he had previously been challenging; 'What more do I have to do? She should trust me by now'. Sue began to feel guilty and thought that she should want to be intimate with him. However, she also felt angry about Jack's 'pushy' behaviour.

Such a re-emergence of self-centred feelings and ideas should not lead us to discount the work that Jack had already done. It provided a further opportunity to invite him to re-connect with his ethical preferences and imagine more about Sue's experience.

I invited Jack to consider what his sexual initiative might have meant to Sue, and why he thought Sue might not be ready to start having sex again. When I asked Jack about his knowledge of Sue's experience of sex and trust, Jack's eyes averted. He stuttered and looked ashamed. Here was another window to shame. I said, 'You look like there is something you don't feel proud about? What are you realising?' Jack's eyes became tearful as he described an incident that had taken place after he had physically abused Sue. He had felt 'bad' about his actions and had tried to 'make up' by initiating sex. She felt outraged and told him to 'fuck off'. He responded by sexually assaulting her. I enquired, 'What are you seeing?' Jack responded 'Sue frozen with fear and hatred'.

At this moment, Jack was feeling intense disgrace as he faced a haunting image of Sue feeling violated and humiliated. He acknowledged that she had also been sexually assaulted as a child by her older brother and that this abuse had had a huge impact on how safe she felt about sex. Such realisations generally promote avoidance; doing anything to avoid experiencing the sense of disgrace that accompanies seeing them clearly. Our job is to reposition shame so that it can become enabling rather than disabling.

I enquired further:

*Have you spoken out about this before?*

*What does it do to you to look at it so closely?*

*What does it do to you to see it like it really is?*

*How does it affect you to speak out about it like this?*

Jack named his actions as 'rape'. I commented on his preparedness to *call it what it really is*:

*You are trying to see with your eyes wide open what you did to Sue.*



*What difference does this make (to what you are now able to see)?*

*What is it taking?*

*How does it affect you (make you feel)?*

In reflecting on the fact that he had added to Sue's experiences of sexual assault Jack replied that he had never felt so low. He recalled the devastating impact of his own experience of being sexually assaulted by his uncle and lamented that he had 'put this on to Sue'. Jack appeared to be experiencing a point of remorse, as described by Gaita: an awakening realisation about Sue's humanity.

In attempting to help Jack reposition his shame and provide safe passage for him to experience it, I enquired:

*What would it say about you if you could think about what you did as rape, if you could see Sue frozen with fear and hatred, and you didn't feel ashamed? What does it say about you that you are thinking and feeling; that you are not running away?*

Through the process of *talking about talking about it*, Jack could be assisted to connect his realisations and experience of shame with his ethics.

*Is this the right direction for you?*

*What do you respect most; facing it or running away from it?*

*What path fits with the person you are becoming?*

*How will this help you?*

*What is it taking?*

*Will it make you stronger or weaker as a person?*

*How does it fit with the man/partner/father you want to be?*

*Do you think your Dad ever stopped and thought like this?*

*What difference would it have made if he had?*

Over time, I invited Jack to consider:

*You have made apologies before, but have you ever looked this closely at what you have done?*

*What would an apology mean without this level of realisation?*

Later on, Jack could be invited to consider:

*Who has carried the hurt and humiliation of this incident, in the past?*

*Who needs to carry it? Whose job is it?*

*How will you do this?*

*Will it make you stronger or weaker as a person?*

*Are you ready to take this further?*

In this way, Jack was invited to consider his readiness to make restitution and reparation; to avoid the temptation to wallow in corrupt or counterfeit forms of shame.

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“Restitution requires realisations and actions that reach out towards the experiences of others. However, restitution does not always involve expressing those realisations to those that have been hurt.”

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We are inviting a man to embark upon a painful journey, which requires a readiness to carry the shame on his own shoulders. Such a journey inevitably requires entering a sense of disgrace which initially involves a negative judgment of self, but recognising that atonement lies in these realisations, and taking steps to own and express them. These steps inform restitution and make it possible to reclaim the man's own immanent ethics and thus gain or regain a sense of honour and integrity. In the light of courageous and honourable steps, shame gradually ceases to mean disgrace to self (judging oneself as dishonourable) and becomes a discretionary principle for motivation. The realisation that *I committed terrible acts but I am not a terrible person*, can only be earned through embarking upon this painful journey. We do not assist our clients in any way if we encourage them to avoid or bypass shame or attempt to draw the distinction between disgrace and the shameful actions prematurely (Jenkins, 2005).

Restitution requires realisations and actions that reach out towards the experiences of others. However, restitution does not always involve expressing those realisations to those that have been hurt. Restorative action can involve *staying away* from those who have been hurt and offended by abusive conduct. Such forms of restitution may involve the recognition that, in abusing an individual, you destroy something or damage something within a community. Acts of abuse by one person towards another generally harm the integrity of whole communities by threatening their ethical foundations for trust, connection and interdependence. It is possible to make restitution by putting something back into the community that does not

necessarily require direct contact with the individual person whom you have hurt.

Any form of ethical restoration requires our commitment to a parallel ethical journey that must be entered from a state of love; a position of hospitality and accountability. We must recognise our potential to inadvertently act in abusive ways, in the name of love, justice or protection. We must be prepared to face shame ourselves in these instances and to take similar restorative action in the direction of creative new possibilities for our own lives.

I recall instances in which I have acted abusively, in the name of *child protection* or some other *noble* cause. I once engaged in a form of *good cop, bad cop* with a colleague when we both felt frustrated with a young man who denied his sexual assaults on several children who had been in Family Day Care with his family. One of us verbally attacked, shamed and humiliated the young man while the other acted *kindly* at any sign of his resistance wearing down. He eventually acknowledged one of the assaults, probably to get us off his back, but continued to deny any other allegations. His acknowledgment carried no sense of ethical realisation. It was an accommodating response to our assaults. I am haunted by the image of this young man who became increasingly lost and marginalised as a result of our work with him. It is these experiences of shame, which we are also obliged to face and address, in order to develop ethical practices which express love and have integrity.

When we work towards enabling restorative action and supporting our client's journeys towards atonement, we are brought face to face with the paradox of forgiveness; forgiving the unforgivable, whilst maintaining the notion that forgiveness is exceptional and extraordinary and never something that can be invoked as a means to an end.

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## Section 5.10. How to Find a Helpful Therapist (for people who have done sexual harm)

**The following is some tips for finding a therapist written by someone who at the time of this writing was two years into their accountability process for sexual harm.**

*written by a perpetrator who is a couple years into an accountability process for sexual violence*

## **HOW TO FIND A HELPFUL THERAPIST [for people who have done sexual harm]**

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 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 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: [tammyk@sover.net](mailto:tammyk@sover.net)

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

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.

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."

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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 and apprehension. They were also useful in providing a quick filter to tell me which therapists were worth setting up 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 patrice 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 rehabilitative? 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 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 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.

## 5.11. Resource List

This is a brief list of resources available on community-based interventions to interpersonal violence, community accountability and transformative justice. It also includes some articles and zines that can be helpful in particular to survivors of violence and people doing harm.

This is a partial list but gives you a start on some other reading materials and films that might be helpful.

### [Community-Based Interventions to Interpersonal Violence](#)

**The Revolution Starts at Home (booklet format -- has the content of the zine version, not the book version) Also available as a book published by South End Press.**

<http://zinelibrary.info/revolution-starts-home-confronting-partner-abuse-activist-communities>

**The Revolution Starts at Home (book)**

<http://www.southendpress.org/2010/items/87941>

**Special Issue of *Social Justice*, 37(4), 2012. Community Accountability: Emerging Movements to Transform Violence**

<http://communityaccountability.wordpress.com/>

**INCITE! Community Accountability Working Document**

<http://www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=93>

**INCITE! Community Accountability Within People of Color Progressive Movements**

[http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/2406\\_cnty-acc-poc.pdf](http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/2406_cnty-acc-poc.pdf)

**INCITE! and Critical Resistance: Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex**

[http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/5848\\_incite-cr-statement.pdf](http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/5848_incite-cr-statement.pdf)

**Philly Stands Up/Philly's Pissed articles** (about their organizing models)

<http://phillyspissed.net/taxonomy/term/1>

**A Stand Up Start Up [Philly Stands Up organizing zine]**

<http://www.phillystandsup.com/PDFS/A%20Stand%20Up%20Start%20Up.PDF>

**Taking Risks: Implementing Community Accountability Strategies**  
(which is also in the Rev @ Home zine, but not the book)

<http://www.transformativejustice.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Taking-Risks.-CARA.pdf>

**Protection Without Police: North American Community Responses to Violence in the 1970s and Today (by Victoria Law in Upping the Anti #12)**

<http://uppingtheanti.org/journal/uta/number-12>

**INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence Community Accountability Working Document**

<http://www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=93>

**Towards Transformative Justice**

[http://www.generationfive.org/downloads/G5\\_Toward\\_Transformative\\_Justice.pdf](http://www.generationfive.org/downloads/G5_Toward_Transformative_Justice.pdf)



### **Let's Talk: Adults Talking to Adults about Child Sexual Abuse**

<http://www.stopitnow.org/sites/stopitnow.rivervalleywebhosting.com/files/webfm/green/LetsTalk.pdf>

### **Fight Rape: Dealing With Our Shit**

<http://zinelibrary.info/dealing-our-shit-six-years-mens-group-and-accountability-work>

### **Alternatives to Police**

<http://www.zinelibrary.info/alternatives-police-0>

### **Toronto Transformative Justice reading group's 10-week curriculum**

<http://transformativejusticetoronto.blogspot.com/2011/06/toronto-learning-to-action-community.html>

### **A one-year, once a month Transformative Justice curriculum**

<https://docs.google.com/open?id=1ZKEKeiSnlgEYnluMdnDvYjBupdFqGJ-gsJYpL6pG61cZHQ461GfRp1U9-vmp>

### **Revolution in Conflict: Anti-Authoritarian Approaches to Resolving and Transforming Conflict and Harm [audio and text versions]**

<http://zinelibrary.info/revolution-conflict-anti-authoritarian-approaches-resolving-and-transforming-conflict-and-harm>

### **World Without Sexual Assault: For A Community Response to Sexual Assault**

<http://zinelibrary.info/world-without-sexual-assault-community-response-sexual-assault>

### **Hollow Water [film]**

<http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=50027>

### **The Interrupters [film]**

<http://interrupters.kartemquin.com/>

### **Restorative Justice and Violence Against Women**, edited by James Ptacek

<http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/SocialWork/?view=usa&ci=9780195335484>

### [Survivor Support](#)

#### **Support**

<http://phillyspissed.net/node/18>

#### **Apoyo (spanish-language version of Support):**

<http://microcosmpublishing.com/catalog/zines/2420/>

#### **Supporting a Survivor of Sexual Assault (10 Steps)**

<http://brokenbeautifuldownloads.wordpress.com/>

#### ***No! The Rape Documentary* [film]**

<http://notherapedocumentary.org/>

#### **Male Survivor**

<http://www.malesurvivor.org>

### **Trans and Intersex Survivors of Domestic Violence**

<http://www.survivorproject.org/defbarresp.html>

### [Resources for Accountability](#)

#### **As If They Were Human: A Different Take on Perpetrator Accountability [three Tod Augusta-Scott articles in booklet form]**

<http://zinelibrary.info/if-they-were-human-different-take-perpetrator-accountability>

#### **What is the opposite of accountability (section from Community Accountability Within People of Color Progressive Movements by INCITE!)**

[http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/2406\\_cnty-acc-poc.pdf](http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/2406_cnty-acc-poc.pdf)

#### **Taking the First Step (zine form)**

<http://zinelibrary.info/taking-first-step-suggestions-people-called-out-abusive-behavior>

#### **What to do when you've been called out**

<http://zinelibrary.info/what-do-when-youve-been-called-out>

### [For Men Working against Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)

### **Why Misogynists Make Great Informants (zine form)**

<http://zinelibrary.info/why-misogynists-make-great-informants-how-gender-violence-left-enables-state-violence-radical-moveme>

### **Philly Dudes Collective Year One (and a half)**

<http://www.microcosmpublishing.com/catalog/zines/1791/>

### **On the Road to Healing**

[http://dualpowerproductions.com/?page\\_id=18](http://dualpowerproductions.com/?page_id=18)

### **Experiments in Transformative Justice by the Challenging Male Supremacy Project**

<http://zapagringo.blogspot.com/2010/06/challenging-male-supremacy-project.html>

### **Anti-sexism for Men of Color**

<http://colours.mahost.org/org/notenough.html>

### **[Positive Sexuality](#)**

### **Learning Good Consent**

<http://phillyspissed.net/node/32>

### **How to Put Together Your Own Consent Workshop**

<http://nwbreakthesilence.wordpress.com/zine-project/>

### **My Body My Limits My Pleasure My Choice**

<http://phillyspissed.net/node/9>

**Abuse is Not S/M and S/M is Not Abuse**

<http://zinelibrary.info/abuse-not-s-m-and-s-m-not-abuse>

[Trauma](#)

**Emotional Trauma First Aid Handout**

[http://theicarusproject.net/files/trauma\\_first\\_aid\\_fact\\_sheet08-07.pdf](http://theicarusproject.net/files/trauma_first_aid_fact_sheet08-07.pdf)

**Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others**

<http://traumastewardship.com/the-book/inside-the-book/>

**Survivor's Guide to Sex/Healing Sex [The newer Healing Sex publication of the book has an Introduction about somatics]**

[http://www.cleispress.com/book\\_page.php?book\\_id=218](http://www.cleispress.com/book_page.php?book_id=218)

**Trauma and Recovery**, book by Judith Herman Lewis

**Thriving in the Wake of Trauma: A Multicultural Guide** by Thema Bryant-Davis

**The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment** by Babette Rothschild

**Waking the Tiger** - by Peter A Levine

## National Phone Numbers

### **Stop It Now! Helpline**

1-888-PREVENT (1-888-773-8368) (Monday to Friday, 9:00AM to  
6:00PM EST)

<http://www.stopitnow.org>

This is a toll-free number for adults who are at risk for sexually abusing a child, for friends and family members 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 to report to the legal system, but they will not report anyone themselves.) If you need someone to talk to, but you're afraid to start the conversations, calling the helpline may be a good first step.

### **National Domestic Violence Hotline**

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

1-800-787-3223 (TTY)

<http://www.ndvh.org/>

This is a 24-hour hotline that operates 365 days a year, and not only offers support to survivors of domestic violence, but also to perpetrators of domestic violence. Their website also has a variety of resources about domestic violence and abuse.

### **Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project**

800-832-1901

<http://www.gmdvp.org>

This website contains information on the similarities and differences between domestic violence in gay and heterosexual relationships. There are a few survivor stories from gay men abused by other gay men, myth-debunking about intimate partner abuse in gay relationships, and information about why men (and gay men in particular) stay in such abusive relationships.