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Setting Fire to the Church of Social Justice
3 Critiques of Identity Politics, Call-Out Culture & Other Models of Statist Thinking
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two people. So who gets to call it? Who gets to wield that power in the community? (And lets all be honest that there is power in calling someone to an accountability process.) People in unhealthy relationships need a way to get out of them without it getting turned into a community judgment against whomever was unlucky enough to not realize a bad dynamic or call it abuse first. These processes frequently exacerbate mutually unhealthy power plays between hurt parties. People are encouraged to pick sides and yet no direct conflict brings these kinds of entanglements to any kind of resolve. I am sick of accountability and its lack of transparency. I am sick of triangulating. I am sick of hiding power exchange. I am sick of hope. I have been raped. I have been an unfair manipulator of power in some of my intimate relationships. I have had sexual exchanges that were a learning curve for better consent. I have the potential in me to be both survivor and perp — abused and abuser — as we all do."

— Safety is an Illusion: Reflections on Accountability

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ing than railing at people from a distance and labeling them as wrong. Ultimately, according to Garza, building a movement is about restoring humanity to all of us, even to those of us who have been inhumane. Movements are where people are called to be transformed in service of liberation of themselves and others.

I want to spend less time antagonizing and more time crafting alternative futures where we don't have to fight each other for resources and care. For an introvert like me, that may look like shifting my activism towards small scale projects and recognizing personal relationships as locations of mutual transformation. It might mean carefully choosing whether I want to be part of public disruptions or protests, and giving myself full permission to refrain at times. It may mean drawing attention to the ways in which other people outside of movements have been living out activism, even if no one has ever called it that. It might mean checking in with myself about how I have let my heart grow hard. It may mean admitting that speaking my truth isn't justification for being mean. It might mean directly dealing with my religious hangups so that I can come to a place where the resonant aspects of theology or spirituality become part of my toolkit. It means cultivating long-term relationships with those outside my (not that) safe and exclusive community, understanding I will learn so much from them. It means ceasing to "other" people and leave them behind. It means honoring their humanity, in spite of their hurtful political beliefs and violent actions. It means seeing them as individuals, not ideologies or systems. It means acknowledging their agency to act justly. It means inviting them to be with us in love, and pushing through repeated rejection. Otherwise, I'm not sure how I can sustain this work for the rest of my life.

> **"Here is the problem with using this (accountability process) model for emotional abuse: its an unhealthy dynamic between**

from them when those around us respond with kindness and patience. Where is our humility when examining the mistakes of others? Why do we position ourselves as morally superior to the un-woke? Who of us came into the world fully awake?

4. Sacred texts

There are also some online publications of dogmatic activism that could be considered sacred texts. For example, the intersectional site Everyday Feminism receives millions of views a month. It features more than 40 talented writers who pen essays on a wide range of anti-oppression topics, zeroing in on ones that haven't yet broached larger activist conversations online. When Everyday Feminism articles are shared among my friends, I feel both grateful that the conversation is sparking and also very belittled. Nearly all of their articles follow a standard structure: an instructive title, list of problematic or suggested behaviors, and a final statement of hard opinion. The titles, the educational tone, and the prescriptive checklists contribute to creating the idea that there is only one way to think about and do activism. And it's a swiftly moving target that is always just out of reach. In trying to liberate readers from the legitimately oppressive structures, I worry that sites like Everyday Feminism are replacing them with equally restrictive orthodoxy on the other end of the political spectrum.

At this year's Allied Media Conference, BLM co-founder Alicia Garza gave an explosive speech to a theatre full of brilliant and passionate organizers. She urged us to set aside our distrust and critique of newer activists and accept that they will hurt and disappoint us. Don't shut them out because their politics are outdated or they don't wield the same language. If we are interested in building the mass movements needed to destroy mass oppression, our movements must include people not like us, people with whom we will never fully agree, and people with whom we have conflict. That's a much higher call-

"Rather than promoting categories of denigration and subordination, the counter-essentialist discourse of Identity Politics attempts to invert the historical categories of oppression into categories of celebration… The discourse of counter-essentialism includes the ideologies of innocence and victimization, which can quickly transform an identity based on the history of shared oppression into a posture of superiority. Counter-essentialism supposedly proves that the victim is eternally innocent, so victims' actions and reactions are forever beyond reproach; all good Christians know that suffering is ennobling."
— Essentialism and the Problem of Identity Politics

A Note on Call-Out Culture By Asam Ahmad

Call-out culture refers to the tendency among progressives, radicals, activists, and community organizers to publicly name instances or patterns of oppressive behaviour and language use by others. People can be called out for statements and actions that are sexist, racist, ableist, and the list goes on. Because call-outs tend to be public, they can enable a particularly armchair and academic brand of activism: one in which the act of calling out is seen as an end in itself.

What makes call-out culture so toxic is not necessarily its frequency so much as the nature and performance of the call-out itself. Especially in online venues like Twitter and Facebook, calling someone out isn't just a private interaction between two individuals: it's a public performance where people can

demonstrate their wit or how pure their politics are. Indeed, sometimes it can feel like the performance itself is more significant than the content of the call- out. This is why "calling in" has been proposed as an alternative to calling out: calling in means speaking privately with an individual who has done some wrong, in order to address the behaviour without making a spectacle of the address itself.

In the context of call-out culture, it is easy to forget that the individual we are calling out is a human being, and that different human beings in different social locations will be receptive to different strategies for learning and growing. For instance, most call-outs I have witnessed immediately render anyone who has committed a perceived wrong as an outsider to the community. One action becomes a reason to pass judgment on someone's entire being, as if there is no difference between a community member or friend and a random stranger walking down the street (who is of course also someone's friend). Call-out culture can end up mirroring what the prison industrial complex teaches us about crime and punishment: to banish and dispose of individuals rather than to engage with them as people with complicated stories and histories.

It isn't an exaggeration to say that there is a mild totalitarian undercurrent not just in call-out culture but also in how progressive communities police and define the bounds of who's in and who's out. More often than not, this boundary is constructed through the use of appropriate language and terminology – a language and terminology that are forever shifting and almost impossible to keep up with. In such a context, it is impossible not to fail at least some of the time. And what happens when someone has mastered proficiency in languages of accountability and then learned to justify all of their actions by falling back on that language? How do we hold people to account who are experts at using anti-oppressive language to justify oppressive behaviour? We don't have a word to describe this kind of perverse exercise of power, despite the fact that it

conditions of decolonization. In it, he sharply warns the colonized against reproducing and maintaining the oppressive systems of colonization by replacing those at top by those previously at the bottom after a successful revolution.

As a QTPOC (queer, trans person of color), I have experienced discrimination and rejection due to who I am. I have sought out QTPOC-only spaces to heal, find others like me, and celebrate our differences. Those spaces and relationships have saved me from despair time and time again. And yet, I reject QTPOC supremacy, the idea that QTPOCs or any other marginalized groups deserve to dominate society. The experiences of oppression do not grant supremacy, in the same way that being a powerful colonizer does not. Justice will never look like supremacy. I wish for a new societal order that does not revolve around relations of power and domination.

3. Preaching/Punishments

Telling people what to do and how to live out their lives is endemic to dogmatic religion and activism. It's not that my comrades are the bosses of me, but that dogmatic activism creates an environment that encourages people to tell other people what to do. This is especially prominent on Facebook. Scrolling through my news feed sometimes feels Iike sliding into a pew to be blasted by a fragmented, frenzied sermon. I know that much of the media posted there means to discipline me to be a better activist and community member. But when dictates aren't followed, a common procedure of punishment ensues. Punishments for saying/doing/believing the wrong thing include shaming, scolding, calling out, isolating, or eviscerating someone's social standing. Discipline and punishment has been used for all of history to control and destroy people. Why is it being used in movements meant to liberate all of us? We all have made serious mistakes and hurt other people, intentionally or not. We get a chance to learn

countless hushed conversations with friends about this anxiety, and how it has led us to refrain from participation in activist events, conversations, and spaces because we feel inadequately radical. I actually don't prefer to call myself an activist, because I don't fit the traditional mold of the public figure marching in the streets and interrupting business as usual. When I was a Christian, all I could think about was being good, showing goodness, and proving to my parents and my spiritual leaders that I was on the right path to God. All the while, I believed I would never be good enough, so I had to strain for the rest of my life towards an impossible destination of perfection.

I feel compelled to do the same things as an activist a decade later. I self-police what I say in activist spaces. I stopped commenting on social media with questions or pushback on leftist opinions for fear of being called out. I am always ready to apologize for anything I do that a community member deems wrong, oppressive, or inappropriate- no questions asked. The amount of energy I spend demonstrating purity in order to stay in the good graces of fast-moving activist community is enormous. Activists are some of the judgiest people I've ever met, myself included. There's so much wrongdoing in the world that we work to expose. And yet, grace and forgiveness are hard to come by in these circles. At times, I have found myself performing activism more than doing activism. I'm exhausted, and I'm not even doing the real work I am committed to do. It is a terrible thing to be afraid of my own community members, and know they're probably just as afraid of me. Ultimately, the quest for political purity is a treacherous distraction for well-intentioned activists.

2. Reproducing colonialist logics

Postcolonialist black Caribbean philosopher Frantz Fanon in his 1961 book Wretched of the Earth writes about the volatile relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and the

occurs on an almost daily basis in progressive circles. Perhaps we could call it Anti-Oppressiveness.

Humour often plays a role in call-out culture and by drawing attention to this I am not saying that wit has no place in undermining oppression; humour can be one of the most useful tools available to oppressed people. But when people are reduced to their identities of privilege (as white, cisgender, male, etc.) and mocked as such, it means we're treating each other as if our individual social locations stand in for the total systems those parts of our identities represent. Individuals become synonymous with systems of oppression, and this can turn systemic analysis into moral judgment. Too often, when it comes to being called out, narrow definitions of a person's identity count for everything. "But when people are reduced to their identities of privilege (as white, cisgender, male, etc.) and mocked as such, it means we're treating each other as if our individual social locations stand in for the total systems those parts of our identities represent. Individuals become synonymous with systems of oppression, and this can turn systemic analysis into moral judgment."

No matter the wrong we are naming, there are ways to call people out that do not reduce individuals to agents of social advantage. There are ways of calling people out that are compassionate and creative, and that recognize the whole individual instead of viewing them simply as representations of the systems from which they benefit. Paying attention to these other contexts will mean refusing to unleash all of our very real trauma onto the psyches of those we imagine to only represent the systems that oppress us. Given the nature of online social networks, call-outs are not going away any time soon. But reminding ourselves of what a call-out is meant to accomplish will go a long way toward creating the kinds of substantial, material changes in people's behaviour – and in community dynamics – that we envision and need.

Asam Ahmad is a Toronto-based writer who still has a hard time trusting words. He coordinates the It Gets Fatter Project, a body positivity group started by fat queer people of colour.

Questioning Rape by Anonymous

Coming To Terms

How do you begin to say, "I think we've been going about this all wrong?" How do you get out of a dead-end without going in reverse?

It seems like in the last fifteen years, rape has gone from being an issue that was only talked about by feminists and downplayed in other radical communities, to one of the most commonly addressed forms of oppression. Part of this change might be owed to the hard work of feminist and queer activists, another part to the spread of anarchism, with its heavy emphasis on both class and gender politics, and another part to the antiglobalization movement, which brought together many previously separated single issues.

Despite all the changes in fifteen years, its just as common to hear the sentiment that rape is still tacitly permitted in radical communities or that the issues of gender and patriarchy are minimized, even though in most activist or anarchist conferences and distros I know about, rape culture and patriarchy have been among the most talked about topics, and it wasn't just talk. In the communities I have been a part of there have been cases of accused rapists or abusers being kicked out and survivors being supported, along with plenty of feminist activities, events, and actions.

All the same, every year I meet more people who have stories of communities torn apart by accusations of rape or abuse, both by the shock and trauma of the original harm, and then by the way people have responded and positioned themselves. One option is to blame a passive majority that toe the line, giving lip

can muster during a vulnerable period in their lives. We should have compassionfor the people who, lacking other clear options, fall into the role of victim while acknowledging that it is time to create alternative narratives.

Excommunicate Me from the Church of Social Justice by Frances Lee

There is a particularly aggressive strand of social justice activism weaving in and out of my Seattle community that has troubled me, silenced my loved ones, and turned away potential allies. I believe in justice. I believe in liberation. I believe it is our duty to obliterate white supremacy, anti-blackness, cisheteropatriarchy, ableism, capitalism, and imperialism. And I also believe there should be openness around the tactics we use and ways our commitments are manifested over time. Beliefs and actions are too often conflated with each other, yet questioning the latter should not renege the former. As a Cultural Studies scholar, I am interested in the ways that culture does the work of power. What then, is the culture of activism, and in what ways are activists restrained by it? To be clear, I'm only one person who is trying to figure things out, and I'm open to revisions and learning. But as someone who has spent the last decade recovering from a forced conversion to evangelical Christianity, I'm seeing a disturbing parallel between religion and activism in the presence of dogma:

1. Seeking purity

There is an underlying current of fear in my activist communities, and it is separate from the daily fear of police brutality, eviction, discrimination, and street harassment. It is the fear of appearing impure. Social death follows when being labeled a "bad" activist or simply "problematic" enough times. I've had

or empathize in a way that feels good to you. They probably won't. Get as far away from the person who hurt you as humanly possible and don't take on their fucking process. Settle into the isolation and pain, because it's going to be with you for a long time. Understand your part in the experience not because you deserved it, or because you were to blame for it, but understand your part so you can play a different, healthier, role in the future.

Ultimately, I think I have come back to a state of relative homeostasis again because I took the time to consider what parts of the abuse and rape were mine to carry and which ones weren't. The process has been slow and painful. I think I began to heal when I stopped caring so much when, or if, it happened. I made my peace with being broken, and as I accepted the damage the scars slowly keratinized. I no longer care if the people who hurt me have become less caustic, because I am not responsible for them. I also don't care if people who are not close to me understand what happened. Accountability processes are much too tied into social currency, reputation and propriety. I will not be held hostage to the theoretical dictates of a false anarchist "community." I try and hold myself accountable to the community of people I have real ties to—those I parent, work and struggle with. Beyond that circle I have found the idea of accountability doesn't hold up well under strain. It's not that I don't believe in accountability—I do, just with a little "a."

**It should be noted that the substitution of "survivor" for "victim" does not entail any actual critique of victimhood, or how victimhood embodies a patriarchal and legalistic role. Those who wish to end patriarchy should feel no affinity with the victim-mentality. It is important to distinguish a political critique of victimhood from a lack of support for victims. It is understandable that we sometimes fall back on victimhood, a socially recognized powerlessness, because it is one of the only identifiable ways to access support, and taking a different route requires more intention and energy than most people

service to the new politically correct doctrine, without living up to their ideals. In some cases I think that is exactly what happened. But even when there is full community support, it still often goes wrong.

After years of thinking about this problem, learning about other people's experiences, and witnessing accountability processes from the margins and from the center, I strongly believe that the model we have for understanding and responding to rape is deeply flawed. For a long time I have heard criticisms of this model, but on the one hand I never found a detailed explanation of these criticisms and on the other I was trained to assume that anyone criticizing the model was an apologist for rape, going on the defensive because their own patriarchal attitudes were being called out. After personally meeting a number of critical people who were themselves longtime feminists and survivors, I started to seriously question my assumptions.

Since then, I have come to the conclusion that the way we understand and deal with rape is all wrong and it often causes more harm than good. But many of the features of the current model were sensible responses to the Left that didn't give a damn about rape and patriarchy. Maybe the biggest fault of the model, and the activists who developed it, is that even though they rejected the more obvious patriarchal attitudes of the traditional Left, they unconsciously included a mentality of puritanism and law and order that patriarchal society trains us in. I don't want to go back to a complicit silence on these issues. For that reason, I want to balance every criticism I make of the current model with suggestion for a better way to understand and deal with rape.

My Experience

When I was in a mutually abusive relationship, one in which both of us were doing things we should not have done, without being directly aware of it, that resulted in causing serious psy-

chological harm to the other person, I learned some interesting things about the label of "survivor." It represents a power that is at odds with the process of healing. If I was called out for abuse, I became a morally contemptible person. But if I were also a survivor, I suddenly deserved sympathy and support. None of this depended on the facts of the situation, on how we actually hurt each other. In fact, no one else knew of the details, and even the two of us could not agree on them. The only thing that mattered was to make an accusation. And as the activist model quickly taught us, it was not enough to say, "You hurt me." We had to name a specific crime. "Abuse." "Assault." "Rape." A name from a very specific list of names that enjoy a special power. Not unlike a criminal code.

I did not want to create an excuse for how I hurt someone I loved. I wanted to understand how I was able to hurt that person without being aware of it at the time. But I had to turn my pain and anger with the other person into accusations according to a specific language, or I would become a pariah and undergo a much greater harm than the self-destruction of this one relationship. The fact that I come from an abusive family could also win me additional points. Everyone, even those who do not admit it, know that within this system having suffered abuse in your past grants you a sort of legitimacy, even an excuse for harming someone else. But I don't want an excuse. I want to get better, and I want to live without perpetuating patriarchy. I sure as hell don't want to talk about painful stories from my past with people who are not unconditionally sympathetic towards me, as the only way to win their sympathy and become a human in their eyes.

As for the other person, I don't know what was going on in their head, but I do know that they were able to deny ever harming me, violating my consent, violating my autonomy, and lying to me, by making the accusation of abuse. The label of "survivor" protected them from accountability. It also enabled them to make demands of me, all of which I met, even though

continual process what expectations do we have about how no gets communicated? Intimacy is complicated and we are all damaged in our own way.

Who is responsible for identifying when yes becomes no? I would like to propose that we are responsible not only for obtaining a yes from our lovers before proceeding and keeping those lines of communication open but, more importantly, we are responsible for vocalizing our own yes or no. We need to redefine healthy consent as communicating our sexual needs in a proactive manner.

If that doesn't happen we should be able to say, "you didn't notice I was dissociating, can we talk about PTSD and trauma?" That conversation seems more productive to me than, "you raped me because you didn't notice I checked out, even though I didn't say no." It needs to be okay to make mistakes and we need a language for hurt that doesn't default to the worst kind of hurt ever. Hyperbolic language leads to a ranking of pain. Does everything need to be called assault or rape before we help our friends work through it? We need an intermediary language, something between "that was perfectly communicated every step of the way," and "you assaulted me."

At a spiritual level it is important to ask why couldn't I vocalize my needs? What kinds of conversations, or partners, do I need in order to do that? We should not expect our lovers to read our minds. We need to make contingency plans. Healthy sex should involve telling your lovers what you want them to do when you check out. We are all responsible for our own happiness, pleasure and safety —these things are too important to outsource.

As for getting through the dark days, the only concrete advice I can give about sorting through the pain of assault or abuse is don't turn to a larger community for support—turn to your friends, your chosen family and a therapist (if you believe in them). Don't expect that people who were not already close to you will understand the situation or be able to respond

can and trying to live a happy life. This doesn't mean you have to forgive to heal. I hold to my bitterness because it keeps me safe, but because I do not expect others to join me in that hatred it has been easier, with the passage of time, to let some of the pain recede.

To those who feel I gave up on transformative justice too soon, perhaps I did. I think if I lived in a different kind of community I would have more faith in transformative justice. I have heard that these models have worked in other kinds of communities. Within the anarchist scenes of North America however, I just don't see the cohesion, gentleness or longevity required for transformative processes to work. People are too transient. I am not an optimist at a structural level. It's not something I am particularly proud of so perhaps I shouldn't be suggesting others accept my dismal assessment of anarchist "community."

Really the discourse of transformative justice is hard for me to take at face value because the person I was in an abusive relationship with was very adept at using that kind of language in a manipulative manner, while the person who raped me had absolutely no point of reference for anything so radical. "Breaking cycles of abuse" is an enticing and lofty goal but sometimes I fear that all it means is that we put tons of time and energy into pieces of shit who will never address their socialization. At what point is it just not your fucking problem anymore?

This of course gets to the heart of most people's problem with the zine. It was criticized for not offering a productive solution. I admit, I don't have one; there is no one solution. A tendency towards myopic essentialism got us into this mess, a fancy rewriting of the survivor/perpetrator dualism with slightly more nuance sure as hell isn't going to get us out. We should be discussing what consent really means.

We have done a good job of defining healthy sex as an active yes—and not just the absence of no, but is that really a standard we practice and how do we hold people to it? If consent is a

some of those demands were harmful to me and other people. Because I had not chosen to make my accusation publicly, I had much less power to protect myself in this situation.

And as for the so-called community, those who were good friends supported me. Some of them questioned me and made sure I was going through a process of self-criticism. Those who were not friends or who held grudges against me tried to exclude me, including one person who had previously been called out for abuse. In other words, the accusation of abuse was used as an opportunity for power plays within our so-called community.

For all its claims about giving importance to feelings, the activist model is coded with total apathy. The only way to get the ball of community accountability rolling is to accuse someone of committing a specific crime.

The role of our most trusted friends in questioning our responses, our impulses, and even our own experiences is invaluable. This form of questioning is in fact one of the most precious things that friendship offers. No one is infallible and we can only learn and grow by being questioned. A good friend is one who can question your behavior in a difficult time without ever withdrawing their support for you. The idea that "the survivor is always right" creates individualistic expectations for the healing process. A survivor as much as a perpetrator needs to be in charge of their own healing process, but those who support them cannot be muted and expected to help them fulfill their every wish. This is a obvious in the case of someone who has harmed someone else it should also be clear in the case of someone who has been harmed. We need each other to heal. But the others in a healing process cannot be muted bodies. They must be communicative and critical bodies.

Perp/Survivor

The term "perpetrator" should set off alarm bells right away. The current model uses not only the vocabulary but also the grammar of the criminal justice system, which is a patriarchal institution through and through. This makes perfect sense: law and order is one of the most deeply rooted elements of the American psyche, and more immediately, many feminist activists have one foot in radical communities and another foot in NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). The lack of a critique of these NGOs only makes it more certain that they will train us in institutional modes of thinking.

The current method is not only repulsive for its puritanism and its similarity to the Christian notions of the elect and the damned; it is also a contradiction of queer, feminist, and anarchist understandings of patriarchy. If everyone or most people are capable of causing harm, being abusive, or even of raping someone (according to the activist definition which can include not recognizing lack of consent, unlike the traditional definition which focuses on violent rape), then it makes no sense to morally stigmatize those people as though they were especially bad or dangerous. The point we are trying to make is not that the relatively few people who are called out for abuse or even for rape are especially evil, but that the entire culture supports such power dynamics, to the extent that these forms of harm are common. By taking a self righteous, "tough on crime" stance, everyone else can make themselves seem like the good guys. But there can't be good guys without bad guys. This is the same patriarchal narrative of villain, victim, and savior, though in the latter role, instead of the boyfriend or police officer, we now have the community.

The term "survivor," on the other hand, continues to recreate the victimization of the standard term, "victim," that it was designed to replace. One reason for calling someone a "survivor" is to focus on their process of overcoming the rape, even

"The way the oppressor tries to stop the oppressed from using violence as a means to attain liberation is to raise ethical or moral questions about violence. I want to state emphatically here that violence in any society is neither moral nor is it ethical. It neither right, nor is it wrong. It is just simply a question of who has the power to legalize violence."[4]

I don't have an absolute moral or ethical justifier for retaliatory violence, because one should never work in tactical absolutes. No solution or approach will be appropriate all the time. All I can do is clarify in what context retaliatory violence makes sense to me. I think people who are violently physically assaulted should be able to beat their rapist. However it is essential to understand karmic/proportional retribution.

I don't think retaliatory violence is appropriate for situations that were not physically violent. Responding to physical violence with physical violence is understandable but responding to gray area miscommunications of consent with physical violence is manipulative and unnecessary. I also do not think it is appropriate to ask others to enact violence if you cannot bring yourself to participate. If you can't do it yourself (with help), then you need to pick a different kind of revenge. The point is catharsis, isn't it? A beating will send a direct message, but nothing can really communicate the experience of rape— only the anger and despair that come afterward.

Violence should be approached with humility and as a final resort. It is worth noting that it may not make you feel better, it may make you feel worse—it's hard to know beforehand. Revenge is intimate, and not always healthy. Protracted campaigns of shame and intimidation continue to tie you emotionally and psychologically to the person who hurt you. At some point the best revenge is separating yourself in the ways you

[4] Carmichael, Stokely. Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism. New York: Random House, 1972.

were going to "end cycles of violence" together. We weren't ending any fucking cycles, we were continuing them.

Until I rediscovered my agency I was totally paralyzed. How could I ever feel safe if nothing I had done contributed to the abuse? What could I change about the way I loved? Did I just need to implicitly know if people had that tendency in them?

How do you pick "undamaged" lovers? How could I ever fall in love, and more importantly break up with anyone again, without being afraid? Different choices along the way could have kept things from getting so fucking crazy at the end, and it is both naïve and dangerous to pretend otherwise. Acknowledging that doesn't mean I deserved to be mistreated or stalked; but it does mean that because I understand the bad choices I made, I can make better ones in the future.

I realize the rejection of victim or survivor identity is harder to stomach when it comes to violent sexual assault, but even with rape one can go through a process of critical reflection. This, of course, does not absolve the assaulter from responsibility. No one deserves to be sexually assaulted or is ever to blame for being raped. We must differentiate blame from self-reflection. In order to move on with my life and regain the ability to work and travel alone it has helped me to focus on the things I have concrete control over. It has been useful to takestock of what kind of situations I put myself in, who I trust, what kind of contingency plans I make and what weapons I am actually comfortable using. Will being proactive about these kinds of considerations keep me from all future harm? Probably not—it's a fucked up world out there. Will these considerations give me a more grounded sense of control and remind me of my own power to deal with and affect the course of potential violence? Yes, I think so. This of course brings us to the issue of retaliatory violence and the zine being criticized for "glorifying violence."

I think Stokely Carmichael got the heart of why we must be wary of moral narratives about violence:

though it defines them perpetually in relation to it. The other reason is to spread awareness of how many thousands of people, predominately women, queer, and trans people, are injured or killed every year by patriarchal violence. This is an important point to make. However, given the way that rape has been redefined in activist circles, and the extension of the term "survivor" to people who suffer any form of abuse, the vast majority of things that constitute rape or abuse do not have the slightest possibility of ending someone's life. This term blurs very different forms of violence.

Judging Harm

Hopefully, the reader is thinking that an action does not need to be potentially lethal to constitute a very real form of harm. I absolutely agree. But if that's the case, why do we need to make it sound like it does in order to take it seriously? Why connect all forms of harm to life-threatening harm instead of communicating that all forms of harm are serious?

As for these crimes, their definitions have changed considerably, but they still remain categories of criminality that must meet the requirements of a certain definition to justify a certain punishment. The activist model has been most radical by removing the figure of the judge and allowing the person harmed to judge for themselves. However, the judge role has not been abolished, simply transferred to the survivor, and secondarily to the people who manage the accountability process. The act of judging still takes place, because we are still dealing with punishment for a crime, even if it is never called that.

The patriarchal definition of rape has been abandoned in favor of a new understanding that defines rape as sex without consent, with whole workshops and pamphlets dedicated to the question of consent. Consent must be affirmative rather than the absence of a negative, it is cancelled by intoxication, intimidation, or persistence, it should be verbal and explicit be-

tween people who don't know each other as well, and it can be withdrawn at any time. The experience of a survivor can never be questioned, or to put it another way an accusation of rape is always true. A similar formulation that sums up this definition is, "assault is when I feel assaulted."

Distinguishing Rape and Abuse

I don't want to distinguish rape from other forms of harm without talking about how to address all instances of harm appropriately. One solution that does not require us to judge which form of harm is more important, but also does not pretend they are all the same, would have two parts. The first part is to finally acknowledge the importance of feelings, by taking action when someone says "I have been hurt," and not waiting until someone makes an accusation of a specific crime, such as abuse or rape. Because we are responding to the fact of harm and not the violation of an unwritten law, we do not need to look for someone to blame. The important thing is that someone is hurting, and they need support. Only if they discover that they cannot get better unless they go through some form of mediation with the other person or unless they gain space and distance from them, does that other person need to be brought into it. The other person does not need to be stigmatized, and the power plays involved in the labels of perpetrator and survivor are avoided.

The second part changes the emphasis from defining violations of consent to focusing on how to prevent them from happening again. Every act of harm can be looked at with the following question in mind: "What would have been necessary to prevent this from happening." This question needs to be asked by the person who was harmed, by their social circle, and if possible by the person who caused the harm.

The social circle is most likely to be able to answer this question when the harm relates to long-term relationships or

I could not continue that relationship; in order to put myself back together I needed to cut all ties. I also could not wait for the person who harmed me to redress their ways before I began to heal. It wasn't realistic. I would have waited forever.

Think of what your body does when you cut yourself. Along with blood clotting and the immune response, your body builds a network of collagen to isolate the wound site. This allows white blood cells to clean up the area without spreading the infection. Continuing to define yourself by the pain that others have caused you creates dehiscence and keeps the wound open.

Accountability is so tied up in adjudication and external affirmations, or condemnations, that it can be very hard to modulate and process shifting feelings as you go through different stages of healing. Being someone's rape victim or survivor of abuse is not emotionally healthy. Every time a scar starts to form some part of the community process requires you to reference back to the initial pain as if it were new, and the scab gets ripped off. This can lead to chronic inflammation that can go systemic and eventually poison other relationships in your life.

Community processes that offer support based on victimization lend themselves to focusing and fixating on painful experiences. I have been raped. I was in an abusive relationship, and when I left I was stalked. Those experiences disrupted my life for a long time. I did not deserve to be treated that way, but I was not a passive participant. Being honest about participatory abuse is not the same as self-recrimination, and analyzing unhealthy dynamics is not a form of self- blame—it's a form of self-reflection.

I have a hard time understanding why people are so offended at the idea that abuse is participatory because it was the epiphany that I was also responsible for my terrible caustic relationship that allowed me to leave. I stayed in a damaging relationship for so much longer than I should have, even after I realized it was abusive, under the absurd delusion that we

the framework of innocence, examining each situation closely, and being conscientious of the multiple power struggles at play in different conflicts."[3]

Giving voice to the "multiple power struggles" at play is an uncomfortable process. Many people have offered feedback that they did not like the zine because it perpetuates the myth that abuse is a dynamic between two people and that feels like blaming the victim. It was never my intention to downplay the pain of abuse. I do, however, think that abuse is participatory and that it is useful to understand it as such in order to heal. My criticism of an essentialist understanding of victim or survivor is twofold: first, not everyone uses those categories with honesty or transparency, and second, even when they do, I am not sure that these identities really help you heal.

Personally, I don't find it helpful to think of myself as a victim or survivor. I realize that the identity of survivor was meant to address the focus on passivity that occurs with the term victim, but in practice I think the two terms are not always well delineated and the same associations and assumptions often accrue. These identities make me the subject, the passive receiver, of another's violence or abuse. In that reading of the situation, the power to end the cycle lies firmly with the active party, the "abuser." That is a balance of power that I am uncomfortable with. In order to not feel completely helpless it has been necessary for me to honestly reflect on the parts that I played in unhealthy dynamics and violent situations because those are the things that I have the ability to change.

I started writing about accountability because I was grappling with why I felt so angry that I was supposed to identify myself as the right kind of victim in order to get support. It made me angry because I did not want to continue to be defined in relation to someone who had taken so much from me.

[3] Wang, Jackie. "Against Innocence: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Safety." LIES: A Journal of Materialist Feminism Volume 1, 2012, pg 162.

shared social spaces. They might realize that if they had been more attentive or better prepared they would have seen the signs of an abusive relationship, expressed their concern, and offered help. Or they might realize that, in a concert hall they commonly use, there are a number of things they can all do to make it clear that groping and harassing is not acceptable. But in some situations they can only offer help after the fact. They cannot be in every bedroom or on every dark street to prevent forms of gender violence or intimate violence that happen there.

In the case of the person who caused the harm, the biggest factor is whether they are emotionally present to ask themselves this question. If they can ask, "what could I have done to not have hurt this person," they have taken the most important step to identifying their own patriarchal conditioning, and to healing from unresolved past trauma if that's an issue. If they are emotionally present to the harm they have caused, they deserve support. Those closest to the person they hurt may rightfully be angry and not want anything to do with them, but there should be other people wiling to play this role. The person they have hurt deserves distance, if they want it, but except in extreme cases it does no good to stigmatize or expel them in a permanent way.

If they can ask themselves this question honestly, and especially if their peers can question them in this process, they may discover that they have done nothing wrong, or that they could not have known their actions would have been harmful. Sometimes, relationships simply hurt, and it is not necessary to find someone to blame, though this is often the tendency, justified or not. The fact that some relationships are extremely hurtful but also totally innocent is another reason why it is dangerous to lump all forms of harm together, presupposing them all to be the result of an act of abuse for which someone is responsible.

If their friends are both critical and sympathetic, they are most likely to be able to recognize when they did something

wrong, and together with their friends, they are the ones in the best position to know how to change their behavior so they don't cause similar harm in the future. If their friends have good contact with the person who was hurt (or that person's friends), they are more likely to take the situation seriously and not let the person who caused the harm off the hook with a band-aid solution.

This new definition is a response to the patriarchal definition, which excuses the most common forms of rape (rape by acquaintances, rape of someone unable to give consent, rape in which someone does not clearly say "no"). It is a response to a patriarchal culture that was always making excuses for rape or blaming the victim.

The old definition and the old culture are abhorrent. But the new definition and the practice around it do not work. We need to change these without going back to the patriarchal norm. In fact, we haven't fully left the patriarchal norm behind us. Saying "assault is when I feel assaulted" is only a new way to determine when the crime of assault has been committed, keeping the focus on the transgression of the assaulter, then we still have the mentality of the criminal justice system, but without the concept of justice or balance. At the other extreme, there are people who act inexcusably and are totally unable to admit it. Simply put, if someone hurts another person and they are not emotionally present in the aftermath, simply put, it is impossible to take their feelings into consideration. You can't save someone who doesn't want help. In such a case, the person hurt and their social circle need to do what is best for themselves, both to heal and to protect themselves from a person they have no guarantee will treat them well in the future. Maybe they will decide to shame that person, frighten them, beat them up, or kick them out of town. Although kicking them out of town brings the greatest peace of mind, it should be thought of as a last resort, because it passes off the problem on the next community where the expelled person goes.

avoided as we get smarter and stronger, and the kinds that require a collective self-defense.

The suggestions I have made offer no easy answers, and no perfect categories. They demand flexibility, compassion, intelligence, bravery, and patience. How could we expect to confront patriarchy with anything less?

Epilogue

Half a dozen lessons I might never learn, not until them troubles come around...[2]

First off, this zine was meant to be descriptive not prescriptive, although I own the suggestions I've laid out and continue to hold to them. The hope was that the zine would encourage contextual, thoughtful and critical responses to rape and abuse. It should be possible within anarchist circles to have critical reflection about the use of essentialist categories without being accused of being a rape apologist. We are all holding on so tight to these labels and I think it is apparent that they are not working for us.

The zine was meant to parse out what wasn't working about our ever-expanding definition of rape and assault. It was an attempt to call the innate judicial reasoning behind accountability processes into question. It was meant as a critique of innocence and guilt, not an attack on people who identify as survivors.

"When we rely on appeals to innocence, we foreclose a form of resistance that is outside the limits of law, and instead ally ourselves with the State ...When people identify with their victimization, we need to critically consider whether it is being used as a tactical maneuver to construct themselves as innocent and exert power without being questioned. That does not mean delegitimizing the claims made by survivors— but rather, rejecting

[2] Gillian Welch. "Only One and Only." Revival, Alamo Sounds, 1996.

to recognize that decision. Those who are not are accused of supporting rape culture. A judge has a police force to back up his decision. The accountability process has to use accusations and emotional blackmail.

But the entire premise that everyone has to agree on the resolution is flawed. The two or more people directly involved in the problem may likely have different needs, even if they are both sincerely focused on their own healing. The friends of the person who has been hurt might be disgusted, and they might decide to beat the other person up. Other people in the broader social circle might feel a critical sympathy with the person who hurt someone else, and decide to support them. Both of these impulses are correct. Getting beaten up as a result of your actions, and receiving support, simply demonstrate the complex reactions we generate. This is the real world, and facing its complexity can help us heal.

The impulse of the activist model is to expel the perpetrator, or to force them to go through a specific process. Either of these paths rest on the assumption that the community mechanism holds absolute right, and they both require that everyone complies with the decision and recognize its legitimacy. This is authoritarianism. This is the criminal justice system, recreated. This is patriarchy, still alive in our hearts.

What we need is a new set of compass points, and no new models. We need to identify and overcome the mentalities of puritanism and law and order. We need to recognize the complexity of individuals and of interpersonal relationships. To avoid a formulaic morality, we need to avoid the formula of labels and mass categories. Rather than speaking of rapists, perpetrators, and survivors, we need to talk abut specific acts and specific limitations, recognizing that everyone changes, and that most people are capable of hurting and being hurt, and also of growing, healing, and learning how to not hurt people, or not be victimized, in the future. We also need to make the critical distinction between the forms of harm that can be

Because it is a relatively easy measure it is also easy to use disproportionately. Rather than finding a solution that avoids future conflict, it is better to seek a conflictive solution. This also forces people to face the consequences of their own righteous anger which can be a learning process.

Finally, the most important question comes from the person who was hurt. The victimistic mentality of our culture, along with the expectation that everyone is out to blame the victim, make it politically incorrect to insist the person who has been hurt ask themselves, "what would have made it possible to avoid this?" but
such an attitude is necessary to overcoming the victim mentality and feeling empowered again. It is helpful for everyone who lives in a patriarchal world where we will probably encounter more people who try to harm us. Its not about blaming ourselves for what happened, but about getting stronger and more able to defend ourselves in the future.

I know that some zealous defenders of the present model will make the accusation that I am blaming the victim, so I want to say this again: it's about preventing future rapes and abuse, not blaming ourselves if we have been raped or abused. The current model basically suggests that people play the role of victims and wait for society or the community to save them. Many of us think this is bullshit. Talking with friends of mine who have been raped and looking back at my own history of being abused, I know that we grew stronger in certain ways, and this is because we took responsibility for our own health and safety.

In some cases, the person who was hurt will find that if they had recognized certain patterns of dependence or jealousy, if they had had more self-esteem, or they had asserted themselves, they could have avoided being harmed. Unless they insist on retaining a puritan morality this is not to say that it was their fault. It is a simple recognizing of how they need to grow in order to be safer and stronger in a danger-

ous world. This method focuses not on blame, but on making things better.

The Most Extreme Form of Harm

Sometimes, however, the person will come to the honest conclusion, "there was nothing I could have done (except staying home / having a gun / having a bodyguard)." This answer marks the most extreme form of harm. Someone has suffered a form of violence that they could not have avoided because of the lengths the aggressor went to in order to override their will. Even shouting "No!" would not have been enough. It is a form of harm that cannot be prevented at an individual level and therefore it will continue to be reproduced until there is a profound social revolution, if that ever happens.

If we have to define rape, it seems more consistent with a radical analysis of patriarchy to define rape as sex against someone's will. Because will is what we want taken into the realm of action, this idea of rape does not make the potential victim dependent on the good behavior of the potential rapist. It is our own responsibility to depress our will. Focusing on expressing and enacting our will directly strengthens ourselves as individuals and our struggles against rape and all other forms of domination.

If rape is all sex without affirmative consent, then it is the potential rapist, and not the potential victim, who retains the power over the sexual encounter. They have the responsibility to make sure the other person gives consent. If it is the sole responsibility of one person to receive consent from another person, then we are saying that person is more powerful then the other, without proposing how to change those power dynamics.

Additionally, if a rape can happen accidentally, simply because this responsible person, the one expected to play the part of the perfect gentleman, is inattentive or insensitive, or drunk,

In many accountability processes, the so-called community has done as much harm, or acted as selfishly, as the perpetrator. Giving such a fictitious, self- interested group the power and authority of judge, jury, and executioner is a recipe for disaster.

What we have are groups of friends and circles of acquaintances. We should not expect to be able to deal with rape or abuse in a way that does not generate conflict between or among these different groups and circles. There will probably be no consensus, but we should not think of conflict as a bad thing.

Every rape is different, every person is different, and every situation will require a different solution. By trying to come up with a constant mechanism for dealing with rape, we are thinking like the criminal justice system. It is better to admit that we have no catch-all answer to such a difficult problem. We only have our own desire to make things better, aided by the knowledge we share. The point is not to build up a structure that becomes perfect and unquestionable, but to build up experience that allows us to remain flexible but effective.

Conclusion

The many failings in the current model have burned out one generation after another in just a few short years, setting the stage for the next generation of zealous activists to take their ideals to the extreme, denouncing anyone who questions them as apologists, and unaware how many times this same dynamic has played out before because the very model functions to expel the unorthodox, making it impossible to learn from mistakes.

One such mistake has been the reproduction of a concept similar to the penal sentence of the criminal justice system. If the people in charge of the accountability process decide that someone must be expelled, or forced to go to counseling, or whatever else, everyone in the so-called community is forced

when one is disassociating, within a societal context that does not teach us about the effects of rape, much less their intimate emotive and psychological consequences — is unrealistic.

Consent is empowering as an active tool, it should not be approached as a static obligation. Still, the fact remains that not all rape accusation can be categorized as miscommunication, some are in fact malicious.

There is a difficult contradiction between the fact that patriarchy covers up rape, and the fact that there will be some false, unjustified, or even malicious rape accusations in activist communities. The best option is not to go with statistical probability and treat every accusation as valid, because a false accusation can tear apart an entire community make people apathetic or skeptical towards future accountability processes. It is far better to educate ourselves, to be aware of the prevalence of rape, to recognize common patterns of abusive behavior, to learn how to respond in a sensitive and supportive way, and also to recognize that there are some exceptions to the rules, and many more situations that are complex and defy definition.

The typical proposal for responding to rape, the community accountability process, is based on a transparent lie. There are no activist communities, only the desire for communities, or the convenient fiction of communities. A community is a material web that binds people together, for better and for worse, in interdependence. If its members move away every couple years because the next pace seems cooler, it is not a community. If it is easier to kick someone out than to go through a difficult series of conversations with them, it is not a community. Among the societies that had real communities, exile was the most extreme sanction possible, tantamount to killing them. On many levels, losing the community and all the relationships it involved was the same as dying. Let's not kid ourselves: we don't have communities.

or oblivious to things like body language that can negate verbal consent, or from another culture with a different body language, then we're not necessarily dealing with a generalized relationship of social power, because not everyone who rapes under this definition believes they have a right to the other person's body.

Rape needs to be understood as a very specific form of harm. We can't encourage the naive ideal of a harm-free world. People will always hurt each other, and it is impossible to learn how not to hurt others without also making mistakes. As far as harm goes, we need to be more understanding than judgemental.

But we can and must encourage the ideal of a world without rape, because rape is the result of a patriarchal society teaching its members that men and other more powerful people have a right to the bodies of women and other less powerful people. Without this social idea, there is no rape. What's more, rape culture, understood in this way, lies at least partially at the heart of slavery, property, and work, at the roots of the State, capitalism, and authority.

This is a dividing line between one kind of violence and all the other forms of abuse. It's not to say that the other forms of harm are less serious or less important. It is a recognition that the other forms of harm can be dealt with using less extreme measures. A person or group of people who would leave someone no escape can only be dealt with through exclusion and violence. Then it becomes a matter of pure self-defense. In all the other cases, there is a possibility for mutual growth and healing.

Questioning Rape

Sympathetic or supportive questioning can play a key role in responses to abuse. If we accept rape as a more extreme form

of violence that the person could not have reasonably avoided, they need the unquestioning support and love of their friends.

We need to educate ourselves how systematically patriarchy has silenced thosewho talk about being raped through suspicion, disbelief, or counter accusations. But we also need to be aware that there have been a small number of cases in which accusations of rape have not been true. No liberating practice should ever require us to surrender our own critical judgement and demand that we follow a course of action we are not allowed to question.

Being falsely accused of rape or being accused in a non-transparent way is a heavily traumatizing experience. It is a far less common occurrence than valid accusations of rape that the accused person denies, but we should never have to opt for one kind of harm in order to avoid another.

If it is true that rapists exist in our circles, it is also true that pathological liars exist in our circles. There has been at least one city where such a person made a rape accusation to discredit another activist. People who care about fighting patriarchy will not suspect someone of being a pathological liar every time they are unsure about a rape accusation. If you are close to someone for long enough, you will inevitably find out if they are a fundamentally dishonest person (or if they are like the rest of us, sometimes truthful, sometimes less so). Therefore, someone's close acquaintances, if they care about the struggle against rape culture, will never accuse them of lying if they say they've been raped. But often accusations spread by rumors and reach people who do not personally know the accuser and the accused. The culture of anonymous communication through rumors and the internet often create a harmful situation in which it is impossible to talk about accountability or about the truth of what happened in a distant situation.

Anarchists and other activists also have many enemies who have proven themselves capable of atrocities in the course of

repression. A fake rape accusation is nothing to them. A police infiltrator in Canada used the story of being a survivor of an abusive relationship to avoid questions about her past and win the trust of anarchists she would later set up for prison sentences.[1] Elsewhere, a member of an authoritarian socialist group made an accusation against several rival anarchists, one of whom, it turned out, was not even in town on the night in question.

Some false accusations of rape are totally innocent. Sometimes a person begins to relive a previous traumatic experience while in a physically intimate space with another person, and it is not always easy or possible to distinguish between the one experience and the other. A person can begin to relive a rape while they are having consensual sex. It is definitely not the one person's fault for having a normal reaction to trauma, but it is also not necessarily the other person's fault that the trauma was triggered.

A mutual and dynamic definition of consent as active communication instead of passive negation would help reduce triggers being mislabeled as rape. If potential triggers are discussed before the sexual exchange and the responsibility for communicating needs and desires around disassociation is in the hands of the person who disassociated then consent is part of an active sexual practice instead of just being an imperfect safety net.

If someone checks out during sex, and they know they check out during sex, it is their responsibility to explain what that looks like and what they would like the other person to do when it happens. We live in a society where many people are assaulted, raped or have traumatic experiences at some point in their lives. Triggers are different for everyone. The expectation that ones partner should always be attuned enough to know

[1] http://anarchistnews.org/node/19486,http://www.crimethinc.com/blog/2011/11/24/g20-conspiracy-case-the-inside-story/