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Thinking Through Perpetrator Accountability (2009)

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Thinking Through Perpetrator Accountability

“They” is used as a singular pronoun throughout this text to refer to survivors and perpetrators without reference to their gender identity. Although the majority of intimate violence is perpetrated by people who were socialized as male against children and people who were socialized as female, abuse occurs in relationships between people of all genders. People of all genders are survivors and perpetrators.

Slowly but steadily, dialogue is opening up around abuse and recovery in intimate relationships. These days, most temporary anarchist gatherings foreground some kind of consent policy, and almost every radical conference features a standard workshop on a community response to sexual assault. It is amazing how much this has been prioritized in radical movements in the US. It has not always been this way, and still these important issues seem largely overlooked in many other anarchist movements. (1)

In my early punk days, if you were sexually assaulted, you just wrote a zine about it detailing what an asshole the person was and telling everyone to stop being friends with them and push them out of the community. Usually one or two people in every town took it seriously, a few people in your hometown viciously took sides without making any space for real conversation, and everyone else ignored you.(2) By the time I came to anarchist organizing, I was doing weekend shifts on the rape crisis line and overnight stays at the domestic violence shelter. While the connection between the injustice of the state judicial system and the misogyny of everyday life was inescapable for me, I struggled to understand how friends that could theorize so extensively about anarchist politics could be so oblivious to the power and abuse in their relationships and the relationships around them.

Anarchist communities have clearly come a long way in prioritizing conversations about abuse, but still the dialogue seems formulaic, distanced, as if seen from the outside—like we don’t really know how to approach it or we’re simply afraid to take it on. As much as some things have changed over the years, time after time I have seen anarchists around me fail to grasp the gravity of abuse in intimate relationships and fail to see how necessary outside support and intervention is. I have seen individuals dedicated to combating abuse burn out from a lack of appropriate support and attempt after thwarted attempt at accountability processes that never get anywhere.

In most of our communities, we have no established structures for this, no resources or guidelines for conflict resolution; as individuals, we don’t have the skills to communicate openly, directly, supportively with one another. We don’t know where autonomy and community intersect. As anarchists, we seem confused about when it is okay to get involved in others’ lives, but our lives cannot be made distinct, separate. We are more interrelated than many would like to act, and it is only this interdependence that makes us strong.

Accountability is about making a commitment to the people in our lives to work through destructive behaviors, toward healthier, more egalitarian relationships. Accountability is about the willingness to receive input from and be responsive to the people around us, prioritizing their needs, safety, and emotional health in our actions.

Getting It Together

Lately, I've been hearing complaints about the lack of skill and guidance in dealing with accountability processes for perpetrators of sexual assault, intimate violence, and abuse. I've seen a desire to craft "the anarchist model" for dealing with situations "like these." It's great that people are talking about this, but it's not useful to fall into a rote "this is what consent always looks like" or "this is the community response to sexual assault" model. Some people have done a great job of taking the ideas of consent and shaping them in ways that work for them—maybe it's easier to feel how consent is a daily practice, how it's widely applicable, or maybe it's just more fun to talk about it and compare notes. But we also need to develop nuanced approaches to perpetrator accountability processes that really work in our individual lives.

We seem to be developing a new standard response for what to do when someone is identified as a perpetrator of intimate violence or sexual assault. The survivor seeks support and—ideally with the help of friends—issues a list of demands for the perpetrator and requests regarding how they want others to interact with that person. Although I am not asking for survivors or their supporters to do anything more than what they want to, when this is the full extent of the response, it can feel insufficient. We need more comprehensive, long-term responses, in which other friends or family create support structures for the perpetrator, as well, for more thorough accountability and rehabilitation. It is an extremely complicated process to heal from all of the heartbreak and trauma associated with abuse—for the survivor, the perpetrator, friends, and family(3)—and it requires a serious commitment and structures of support for all involved that rarely exist in our transient cultures. Every situation is unique; every survivor and perpetrator are unique—what they want and need will be different. There is no formula, but hopefully this framework can contribute to a dialogue about how to craft an appropriate model for each situation.

When focusing on perpetrators—both in this article and in assembling an accountability process—it must be clear that the survivor(s) and their needs should be central to the extent that they desire. Other people in supporting roles should take the lead from them—that could mean receiving direct instructions, checking in with them regularly, or avoiding communication about the process, specifically as dictated by the survivor(s). However, that does not mean that a survivor must be involved for a group of friends or family to create a process of accountability for an individual. The hurt that comes from abusive behaviors extends beyond the intimate relationship in which it is focused. The perpetrator must be accountable to the survivor, to their communities, and to themselves, and anyone from the effected groups can offer valuable input on how a perpetrator can recover from their abusive patterns.

Accountability

- a perpetrator is accountable to the survivor(s)
- a perpetrator is accountable to their communities
- a perpetrator is accountable to themselves

Meeting Basic Needs

An effective accountability process cannot be established until the situation has leveled out enough for all involved to listen and communicate honestly. When a survivor first identifies that they have been in or are in an abusive relationship, the initial priority is to assess the situation and take steps to assure the safety of everyone involved. Listen to what the survivor wants. Ask questions that can lead to concrete solutions. Offer to help in any way you can—but only in ways the survivor wants.

If the survivor and the perpetrator live together, find emergency housing options for one or both of them. If the survivor and the perpetrator work on projects together, find people to take on their responsibilities without immediately ousting either of them. If the survivor and the perpetrator live in a small town or neighborhood, or if they see each other regularly, help make a plan for accomplishing

daily life tasks without running into one another and putting undue stress on the situation. Whatever the challenge, figure out how to create the space necessary for both the physical and emotional safety of the survivor.

When a Perpetrator is Unwilling

It is never easy to be presented with the fact that you have hurt someone, but it can be especially hard to get this through to many perpetrators. When a perpetrator is first confronted about their abusive behavior, they may respond with surprise and repudiation before the initial shock passes. Some may try to continue utilizing the manipulative logic and defense mechanisms honed through their pattern of abusive behaviors, as if pushing back the obvious reality. They may deny, dismiss, or minimize the situation, the survivors' concerns, or the survivors themselves. They may try to put the blame onto the survivor; they may frame themselves as the victim. They may use their social status or charisma to put on a good public face. They may pay convincing lip service to the process, using the language of consent and accountability, while continuing to refuse to acknowledge their actual role in the abuse with the survivor.

People often get tricked by the subtle machinations of a perpetrator who is unwilling to approach this process honestly—because the smooth-talking calm of the perpetrator on the defense is more palatable than the emotional intensity of many survivors or because people simply don't have a clear understanding of what abuse is(4). People don't want to get wrapped up in messy drama; they only want to interact with a situation where everything is clear and simple. However, abuse is never simple.

If a perpetrator in the midst of rationalization says a survivor was abusive to them too, don't get confused. When someone is being abused, they often must respond with some kind of defense.

Especially in situations where the abuse is long-running, it can eventually become difficult to disentangle abusive behaviors from survival responses. For instance, toward the end of my time living with my abusive ex-housemate, he was screaming at me so consistently that I was afraid to ever approach him to talk. While he was at work, I moved a piano into our house without asking for his consent. While it is my responsibility to check in with my housemates whenever I want to do something to our house, by creating an atmosphere of fear, he made that impossible. During our attempt at an accountability process later, he listed this and similar examples, as if what he called my "inconsiderate, abusive behavior" was justification for his anger toward me.

This is not to discount the situations in which two people both bring major patterns of abuse to a relationship. When the instigation of abuse is coming equally from two people, both individuals can be involved in some kind of accountability process to remediate their destructive behaviors, and both individuals can give input and perspective into the process for the other person.

However, when one person is calling another out for abuse, and the person being called out puts the onus of abuse solely on the other, this should send up a red flag immediately. Any time a person reacts defensively, seeking to protect themselves and their reputation rather than being concerned that they might have hurt someone, that behavior alone warrants serious scrutiny and suggests the need to reconstruct priorities.

Sometimes, a perpetrator will be awesomely ready for or will even request help to begin their accountability process. More often, it will take a lot of patient and firm explaining for a perpetrator to see the importance of such a process. In all too many situations, a perpetrator will deny the abuse and refuse their responsibility to the bitter end, and an accountability process will not be possible. In that context, should they so desire, I hope the survivor finds great support in bringing down all the vengeance of the world on them. For the former two situations, read on.

(Mis)Understanding Abuse

I have heard people say they didn't get involved because the survivor never asked them for help.

I have heard people say that they don't need or want to know what is going on in their friends' romantic relationships.

I have heard people say that they don't understand how a survivor could have let it happen, or how such a strong feminist could have allowed such abuse.

I have heard people say that the abuse must not have been that bad because the survivor went back to the relationship with the perpetrator one or more times. (However, statistics show that on average in this country, it takes a survivor seven attempts before leaving a domestic violence situation for good.)

I have heard people say that the perpetrator has been around so long and is such a valuable part of anarchist organizing that no one wants to kick them out of the scene or sever their long-standing friendships.

I have heard people say that they didn't really know what to do, so they figured someone better equipped would sort it out.

I have heard people say that the survivor and their supporters should stop being so divisive, stop trying to spread such hate against the perpetrator. I have even heard people argue that there could be no other explanation than that the survivor must be working for the Feds.

I have heard people say that they never really liked either the survivor or the perpetrator that much anyway.

Approaching the Accountability Process

Remember that in supporting perpetrators of abuse, it is the person you are supporting, not their behaviors.

The most foundational structure for beginning an accountability process involves the survivor and their support group, the perpetrator and their support group, and an agreed upon method for communication between the groups. It is essential to define concrete networks of support for both the survivor and the perpetrator. We are only able to change the destructive behaviors we have inherited from this culture when we have healthy opportunities to process our feelings and supportive spaces in which to learn from our mistakes. Please don't underestimate how much a perpetrator needs support.

A support network for a perpetrator can be made up of people with varying levels of commitment or roles within the group. As a whole, the group should function to create safe spaces to explore the feelings resulting from the abuse—including defensiveness and guilt that can obscure deeper feelings—and to help the perpetrator identify their behavioral problems and make concrete plans for how to change them. They should advocate for the perpetrator's needs and help find appropriate resources and people to fill necessary roles. Perhaps most importantly of all, supporters should check in with the perpetrator regularly, making sure that everything is on track and nothing falls through the cracks. Particularly with emotionally difficult work, it is easy to avoid doing what is agreed upon or what one knows is needed, simply because it is hard. A support network should be the encouraging, yet unyielding voice that doesn't let that happen.

Once support groups for both people solidify, establish the healthiest way to communicate between the groups. The survivor could decide to be in direct communication with the perpetrator, either privately or with one or more people from each support group present at each conversation. They could decide to communicate through some kind of mediator: either through a "neutral" person or through one or more people from each support group. Or the survivor could decide to have no communication at all with the perpetrator, in which case some combination of people from either the perpetrator's group or the survivor's group must facilitate the accountability process themselves.

Of course, it is possible for there to be overlap between these support groups, particularly in small circles of friends where some people may be close with both the survivor and the perpetrator. However, everyone involved in the accountability process must be up front with themselves about their own difficult feelings and motivations. Supporters should know that it is legitimate to have their own

feelings of hurt and anger about the abuse and should be aware of the ways their own trauma around abuse may be triggered, but supporters of the survivor or the perpetrator must not take advantage of their roles to exact their own rage or vengeance on the perpetrator—nor their own masculine guilt about their past abusive behaviors. People involved in supporting roles in the accountability process are bound to bring different skills, as well as different emotional investments; the challenge is in balancing the various perspectives to put something together that is really forward moving and healthy for all involved.

It is important, also, to recognize that not everyone wants to take on the role of supporting a perpetrator of abuse. In radical communities, often the people who are most committed to doing work around abuse and accountability are people who are themselves survivors of abuse, and it can be particularly emotionally taxing and complicated for past survivors to support perpetrators. It is only going to be good for a perpetrator if their supporters have the emotional capacity to be fully present for them. As such, there must be space for people to decline doing this kind of work. This may mean others with more privilege in terms of gender, sexuality, or abuse history stepping up to take on these roles. In crafting the general framework for the accountability process, it is essential to focus on the necessity for rehabilitation, not punishment. If we don't want to recreate the flaws of the judicial system, we should not unquestioningly adopt its focus on forcing people to atone for past infractions. As anarchists, we should be cautious not to recreate cycles where punishment for abuse creates more abuse, creating a miniature prison-industrial complex within our own movement. We already know that doesn't work.

That said, it is completely valid for the survivor to have any range of emotions in response to the trauma they have experienced. They can dictate everything that happens for them, for the spaces around them, for their own healing process. The survivor should be fully supported in whatever they need for themselves, but it is still possible for them to ask for unacceptable things from the perpetrator. They shouldn't be the only ones to dictate what the perpetrator should do or how it will be best for them to achieve the collectively desired goals. There has to be room for negotiating what is reasonable and non-coercive to ask for and what can be challenging in a productive way for the perpetrator. Accountability processes are not the place for exacting revenge. Again, it is completely valid if that is what the survivor wants—particularly if the perpetrator is unwilling to participate in an accountability process—but that type of retaliation must happen outside of this process.

Setting Boundaries for (Not) Interacting

Along with establishing how the survivor and perpetrator will or will not communicate with one another, it may be important to create other ground rules for negotiating the physical spaces and working relationships in which the survivor and perpetrator could potentially interact. The survivor and their support group should communicate as clearly as possible about how much separation from the perpetrator will create a positive healing environment for the survivor. Because these boundaries can be revisited and changed at any point in the process, survivors should feel entitled to try out various approaches until they find a system that works.

As the support groups develop the details of the boundaries, they should take the context into consideration. First, they should evaluate how much community the survivor and the perpetrator share:

- How interconnected are the communities that the survivor and perpetrator are in? Where do they overlap and diverge?
- What is their capacity for support?
- How can the perpetrator continue to have positive social interactions without infringing on the space of the survivor?
- How can the perpetrator use the distinct communities they come from as a way to get outside support without sidestepping their accountability?
- The support groups should also establish what social spaces the survivor and the perpetrator

share; this may include their houses, friends' houses, organizing spaces, community venues, or public places they have no influence over:

- How often are the survivor and the perpetrator in those spaces?
- How important are they to the healing and support needed by both people?
- How does access to those spaces contribute to accruing informal social or political capital?

Finally, support groups should consider what projects the survivor and the perpetrator share:

- Does the survivor want to continue work-related communication in person, through email, or via listservs, or is some more mediated approach desired?
- How does this affect the survivor and the perpetrator's participation in different groups that communicate and work together?
- For groups that both the survivor and the perpetrator are a part of, is this work that contributes to or distracts from the accountability and healing processes?
- It can be incredibly complicated to create safe spaces for the survivor and their friends while maintaining the perpetrator's connection to and participation in radical communities. Clear communication can help facilitate dealing with these challenges in the small, interconnected social circles the survivor and perpetrator often share. In addition to making specific requests for access to social space without the perpetrator, the survivor or their support group may ask the perpetrator to decrease their general visibility—minimizing the ways they are around, even when they are not around. That might mean asking the perpetrator to take significant steps back from public organizing, to make an effort to avoid receiving public recognition, or to spend less time in high-profile social settings.

Setting Goals for “Progress”

Once the structure for the accountability process is in place—networks of support for the survivor and perpetrator, modes of communication, and some basic boundaries around their interactions—it is possible to begin to develop a curriculum. Everyone who can offer perspective should, as various people's combined experiences with the perpetrator's abusive behaviors will provide the most comprehensive picture of the problem. Again, people should be especially cautious never to contradict the survivor's, or anyone else's, direct experience of the abuse.

Often, the first steps involve establishing a shared understanding of what happened. This is essentially an agreement of terms—the development of specific, appropriate language. This can include describing some or all of the distinct examples of abuse, and more generally ascertaining what the recurring patterns of abuse are. To explain individual experiences, we can look to classifying words like abuse, assault, unconsensual interaction, or boundary violation. Describing the overarching patterns of the abuse may be much more difficult, but figuring out the connections between the individual instances of abuse means the difference between a symptomatic and a holistic approach to recovery.

As in every aspect of the accountability process, the way these details are decided will vary from one situation to another. In one case, the survivor may want to identify a list of examples of the abuse without input from anyone else, and leave the task of describing the behavioral patterns up to the perpetrator's support network; in another, the survivor may want to discuss everything to agreement with the perpetrator and/or the perpetrator's support group. Regardless of how involved or removed from the process the survivor chooses to be, the perpetrator's support group must function with due respect for the survivor and be equipped to take the lead wherever the survivor doesn't want to.

Much of the actual emotional and theoretical processing will probably be up to the perpetrator's support group, although the survivor may want to give input about what to prioritize or how to approach certain topics. It is important for the perpetrator's support network to help the perpetrator work out what their abusive patterns are and where they come from and to create space for the perpetrator to process through their own abuse history to understand how it is interlinked with their

abusive behavior. It is also important for the perpetrator to develop a theoretical framework for understanding abuse through a critical analysis of binary gender, patriarchy, and violence in our culture. All of this is a tall order. Even the best of us can spend our whole lives trying to unlearn our defense mechanisms, poor communication skills, and the fucked up ways we relate to other people. It is a serious commitment, regardless of one's history with abuse. For the purposes of the accountability process, it's necessary to break down this complicated and massive endeavor into more manageable pieces. Some approaches to these tasks can include:

- Getting together regularly with a group of friends or one peer mentor to read books, talk through discussion questions, practice consent role plays, and develop concrete skills for improved communication. Topics to consider include: gender, sexism, patriarchy, abuse, violence, nonviolent communication, rape culture, consent, and deconstructing masculinity. This could also function as a men's—or other gender-based—support group to talk more generally about past and present experiences bound up in gender.
- Getting together regularly with a counselor to get to the emotional centers of gravity of the abuse and develop an honest understanding of how to make concrete changes. This could be a professional, licensed counselor(5), a friend who has well-developed counseling and communication skills, or a trained co-counselor. Meeting with any type of counselor should provide space solely to focus on the emotional challenges facing the perpetrator.
- Using something like an accountability circle model, in which both the survivor and the perpetrator are present with one or two supporters and a facilitator. This can be a good way to clarify what happened and get a good foundational base to move from. This can be particularly useful if the perpetrator resists accepting the survivor's definitions of their experience of the abuse; sometimes hearing the concerns from more neutral parties can help the perpetrator really take in the gravity of the situation.

Also, don't be afraid to explore outside resources when our communities don't have the capability to meet all of our needs. Look to existing men's group, batterers' programs, or abuser recovery programs. Find a local peace and justice group that does mediation(6) and de-escalation trainings. Go to the local rape crisis center to get domestic violence and sexual assault survivor advocacy trainings. Find networks of co-counselors in the area and go through their trainings. If drug or alcohol problems are a factor, consider Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or other rehabilitation options. With so much to be done, figuring out how to mark a perpetrator's progress is complicated. Some perpetrators who are familiar with the radical argot around consent and accountability may appear to be making swift progress in the way they talk about the issues, while internally refusing to explore the origins of the abuse in a way that leads to them accepting responsibility and making changes. It's important to go beyond such a superficial reading of the perpetrator's emotional development. One option is for the support networks to make a timeline of various subjects to tackle or approaches to graduate through. For example:

rape culture → deconstructing masculinity → gender binary → consent

or

accountability circle → men's discussion group → batterer's recovery program → co-counseling → rape crisis line volunteering

The support networks could make a list of new, concrete skills to be developed, or they could create a system for regular progress reports. Ideally, the support networks will find a process that feels both thorough and sustainable.

Disclosure

Once terms have been agreed upon to talk about the abuse and there is some semblance of a plan in

place, figure out how to talk to others about the abuse and the accountability process. Remember that a person's patterns of abusive behavior affect more than just those within the relationships where the abuse is the most focused. It's important for the perpetrator to communicate about their accountability process with their future partners, friends, housemates, comrades, and anyone they organize with. It may be that disclosure of the perpetrator's abuse history is one part of the accountability process. The survivor may request specific ways or time frames in which the perpetrator should talk about the abuse to other people in their life, or the survivor may request that the perpetrator publicly disclose information about their accountability process through an open letter, zine, or other means. Public disclosure from the perpetrator may be important for communication across multiple communities or for a perpetrator who is widely known. At its best, disclosure can be an important way to open up dialogue in a wide array of spaces.

If the perpetrator is unwilling to participate in an accountability process or is otherwise resistant to the survivor's requests, public disclosure about the abuse from the survivor or their support networks may be necessary to give people the pertinent information about a perpetrator's history. Disclosure about the abuse may also be used as a pressure tactic; the humiliation and widespread attention of publicly disclosing the perpetrator's failure to participate in an accountability process may push the perpetrator to take it more seriously. Also, when other people from the perpetrator's life begin to ask them about the situation or participate even peripherally in the accountability process, this can emphasize the importance of engaging with it.

However, disclosure is a complicated thing. It is increasingly acceptable in anarchist circles for perpetrators to disclose information about their histories of abuse and their accountability processes. Although it is important to create an environment in which it is possible to communicate openly even about difficult, emotional things, it is also necessary to develop a culture of awareness about how that disclosure will affect the people addressed—especially if they are acquaintances or simply friends. At the forefront of this concern is sensitivity to survivors who may not want to be forced to think about abuse simply because a perpetrator needs to address it. It is crucial to check in first before bringing up such a charged issue, but it may be more complicated than that to create the space for someone who may already have difficulties asserting their boundaries to navigate out of such a request.

Over the last year and a half, six different people in my life—some of whom I am not especially close with—have chosen to disclose this kind of information to me. Two came looking for my help; of the others, some might say they told me about it because they wanted me to know, another might simply say he was told to do so. All of them, though, approached me in ways that made me feel trapped; even when they asked if it was OK, the subtext was always, "I'm asking you because I need your help. I need you to hear this. And eventually I need your approval." I know that I am not the only female-bodied person, not the only survivor, who is beginning to move beyond feeling overwhelmed into feeling overburdened by the non-stop crisis created by this kind of disclosure. And I know I am not the only one who feels the subtle perpetuation of the abusive dynamic in the asking that is not really asking, particularly when so many men are consistently seeking support solely from the women in their lives. I'm not here just to fix it for you; I'm not ready at your disposal.

For every perpetrator who crosses the threshold from uncertainty into ease about their accountability process, and for every well-intentioned support network that pushes a perpetrator to disclose their abuse history to everyone in their life, I would like to ask them to consider their motivations carefully and think through the consequences each time before approaching this kind of disclosure with new people. What do you want to achieve by telling this person? Is it for you, or is it for them? How can you make it clear that it's OK for you not to broach the subject right now? If this person doesn't want to hear about your history, how should you conduct yourself?

Lately, radical conferences and gatherings have been experimenting with policies around perpetrator disclosure about abuse history. At the winter 2008 Earth First! Organizer's Conference, some people in the hosting collective put together a perpetrator accountability circle for the rural gathering. Two people

had abuse histories that they felt were important to share with everyone, and they opened up a space for other perpetrators to disclose information about their histories at the morning circle attended by the whole camp. I think the idea was to encourage—or maybe even destigmatize—disclosure around these critically important issues. They made sure to explain the accountability circle and left space for people to leave if they wanted to. I don't know if anyone left before the accountability circle, but I know that some people ended up feeling cornered, tricked into a painfully unpleasant lecture that felt impossible to leave. Rather than individuals clearly and directly owning up to past mistakes and providing examples of early indicators about potential abuse patterns, tips for checking in about triggers, or insight that could have been concretely useful, the circle quickly devolved into a bunch of men ranting endlessly and thoughtlessly about what abuse is.

Rather than opening up space for dialogue, the accountability circle felt silencing. The space was designed for perpetrators to talk and survivors to listen. It became a perpetuation of the very thing it was attempting to counteract. I left the circle feeling like it would have been a more productive use of time to get all of those people to sit down and listen to survivors tell their stories about abuse, to hear women and trans folks talk about their daily experiences with systemic sexism, for the people who are used to dominating social spaces to experience what it means to listen. Perhaps it can still be possible to balance disclosure with awareness.

Long-Term Support

Perpetrator accountability is not an easy or short process, even after everything is set in motion. It takes a lifelong commitment to change behaviors that are so deeply ingrained; it requires consistent effort and support. When talking about follow-up, we should be making schedules for weeks, but also talking about checking in after months and years. It takes that kind of long-lasting support to make real transformation possible.

Another part of follow-up is getting our stories of recovery out there. People often say that there's not a lot of success with grass-roots perpetrator accountability processes—that fundamentally, perpetrators don't change their abusive behaviors. But people also aren't used to talking about the tough stuff they've been through, nor chronicling the trajectories of their emotional and personal growth. If you're a perpetrator who has begun to make substantial progress in your accountability process, if enough time has passed that you're feeling settled in this new plateau, check in with your support network and write a zine or essay about it. Become a mentor to another perpetrator involved in an accountability process. Do what you can to share your experiences and help others through this daunting process.

[1] Just a few years ago while traveling in Europe, my partner and I facilitated consent workshops on stops across many countries; she and I were constantly astounded by how challenging these basic conversations were to people's assumptions about the gender binary and its relationship to sex and equality. [2] Thank you to all of the brave people who pushed these issues to the forefront before my days, whose zines I read aching with every sentence, filling my whole being with fury and possibility. Your words did not fall empty; they still burn inside of me today.

[3] It is important to be clear when describing that both the survivor and perpetrator need emotional space to heal, it is not to suggest that they will need the same kind of support or that what they are going through is similar. For a perpetrator, healing is merely one piece of the transformative process of being accountable to one's community. Also, it is important for the perpetrator's supporters not to use this kind of language to minimize the perpetrator's responsibility, as if the perpetrator is just sick and needs healing, and can't be held fully accountable for their actions.

[4] People have some pretty fucked up ideas about what does and doesn't constitute abuse. After months of living with an aggressive alcoholic who consistently used threats and physical intimidation against me, a different housemate told me, "If only he had hit you, then I would know how to make sense of this."

Check out the article “Cycles of Abuse and Survival” in the second issue of Rolling Thunder for a more in-depth look at what abuse is, or look for the Power and Control Wheel developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.

[5] It may be possible to find radical or radical-friendly counselors in your area. However, avoid going to a counselor who doesn't have any grounding in a radical or feminist analysis of relationships. It may just fuck things up more.

[6] Despite the suggestion to take advantage of mediation trainings to further a perpetrator's communication skill set, mediation should not be used as a substitution for an accountability process. Mediation is for two people having a conflict that needs to be resolved; abuse is not mutual. Abuse is not simply about two people needing to come to the table to work things out. Mediators may certainly be useful for helping to facilitate some of the concrete negotiations within an accountability process, but please do not suggest a session with a mediator as an option instead of a long-term commitment to an accountability process.

<http://www.anarchapistemology.net/archives/18>