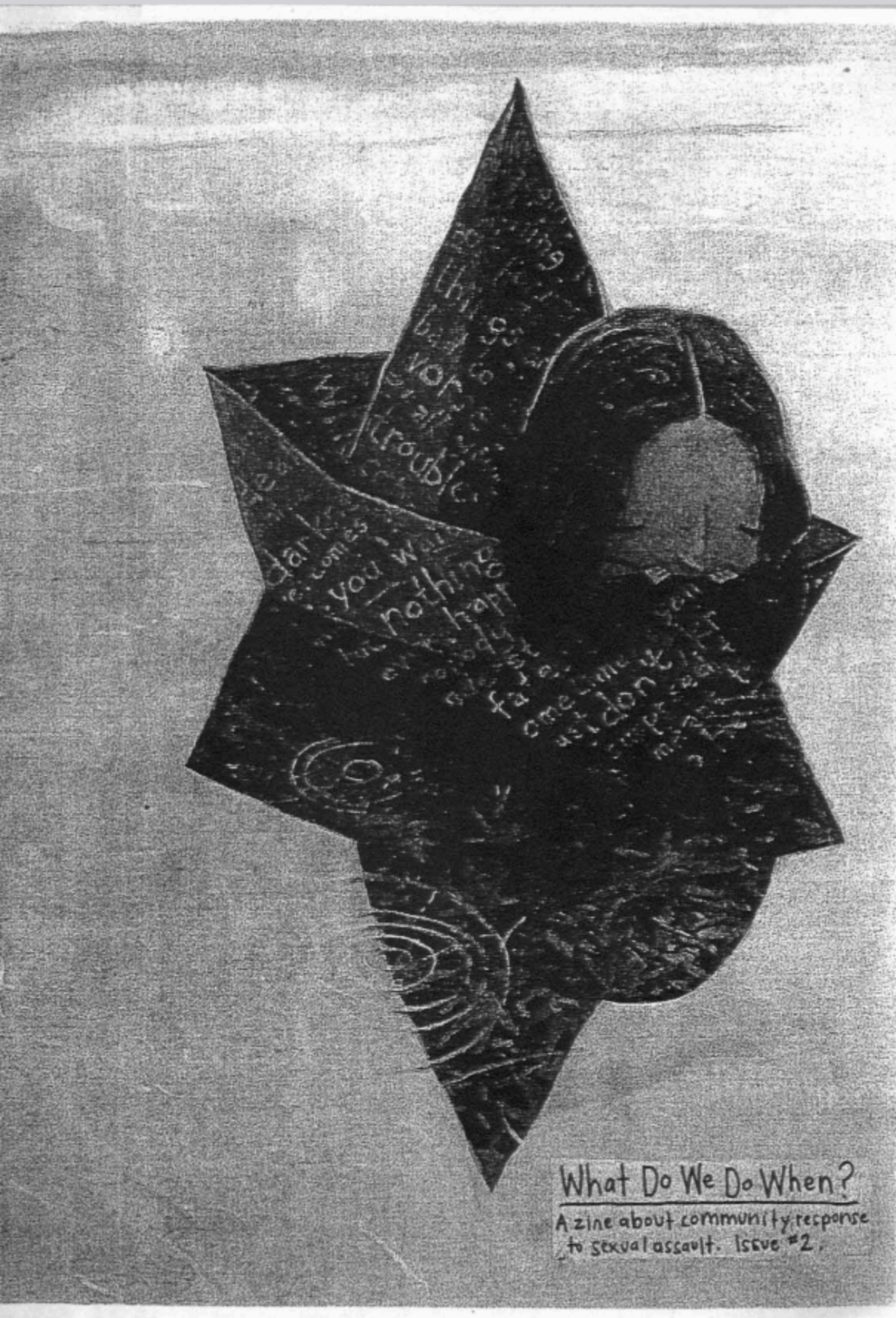

What Do We Do When?
A zine about community response to sexual assault. Issue #2.

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For info or if you want copies of #1 or more copies of this zine. Email:

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its been a year and a half since sexual assault has become a big focus of my life. not because i wanted that, but just because it has. i mean its always been a part of my life but now its "my project". and its huge, a snowball, and i'm tired, and i'm sick. it seems wherever i turn another situation smacks me in the face. the thought of preparing for "what do we do when...?" makes me wanna run and hide. in the past few days ive had to honestly examine the reasons why ive been pushing it to the last of my list of priorities, why the thought of this next workshop - the third that ive done - fills me with dread. yet i can't let it go because i still feel so passionately about its importance. i think i haven't been taking care of myself and been unable to give myself the space i need to heal from all the situations ive been involved with; and i haven't been able to ask for the support that i need to cope. which brings me to my first important point:

TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

for healthy communities we need healthy individuals. for me that means taking care of our mental health and being aware of when we need help. it means considering what safety means for each of us, and making our own boundaries and seriously considering what makes us feel comfortable and what does not. in terms of activism and projects, it means not taking on too much and being able to say no. it means working on our vulnerabilities, our guilts and shames, and dealing with our scars from our past, being honest with ourselves and eachother. working on our relationships with eachother - and realising that all types of relationships and friendships are affected by the bullshit oppressive nature of our socialisation into global capitalism, and we need to be active in working on our communication, particularly of our emotions. we need to look out for ourselves and we need to look out for eachother. now, i KNOW i'm not even close to achieving a lot of these things, but i know it's what i need to aspire to.

there is no "key" to sexual assault", and i certainly don't have many answers to the endless questions i'm faced with. and i feel like i'm just starting to scratch the surface. i'm attempting to write what i find to be the most important at the moment as i evolve through. in the last workshop i ran at K TOWN 2005 in Copenhagen, one of the most prominent ideas was about community awareness and preventative stuff we can do. this stuff is really important because it is tangible and its practical, where some of the other aspects of sexual assault are arbitrary and harder to grasp let alone feel like your getting somewhere with them, and so:



COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

there are heaps of ideas for raising awareness, and preventative measures communities or groups of friends can take. some of these ideas include:

Safer Spaces Policies: creating safer spaces is about being visible and explicit about what behaviours are OK and not OK. having an visible safer spaces policy at gigs and events keeps this stuff in peoples head as they rock out. it helps organisers and the community make our spaces safer and more accessible to everyone, but also helps to keep this ideas in peoples head. the following is the safer spaces policy we are using for belladonna 2005

"The Belladonna Collective is working to create Safer Spaces at all of our events. We say "safer" realizing that no space can be entirely safe for everyone. Although there is often a discourse on 'equality', we realize that not everyone experiences spaces in the same way as others. We are hoping to shift the discourse to that of 'respect' and 'responsibility'. We are experimenting with this Safer Spaces Policy (SSP) to put the discourse into action.

Safer Spaces are welcoming, inviting and engaging. They are about creating an accepting and supportive environment. Safer Spaces require that people not only respect and accept one another but actively look out for the welfare of each other and the whole community.

There will be clearly identified Mediators at all the events (i.e., during the daytime activities and at the shows in the evening). The Mediator's role is that of a contact person. They are there to be approached if someone is feeling unsafe. They can act as spokesperson &/or mediator if someone needs to be called on their unsafe behaviour. They are there to talk to folks about what the SSP is and how it works for Belladonna DIY Fest.

What is creating a Safer Space all about?

Respect people's physical, mental and emotional boundaries.

Always get explicit verbal consent before touching someone or crossing personal boundaries.

Respect people's opinions, beliefs, differing states of being, and differing points of view.

Be responsible for your own actions and the effects they have on others.

Take responsibility for your own safety and get help if you need it.

collectives of support: i think it's important to have ongoing groups of people interested in/dealing with sexual assault. a place to get together and debrief, support eachother and heal.

benefit shows: one idea is to have benefit shows to raise money for a pool of money that can be accessed by survivors to use for counseling, morning after pills etc. the actual event can also can act as an awareness raising type thing.

workshops: on consent, language, ways of healing, ways of dealing with sexual assault. sexual health workshops!! learn about ourselves. body positive get-togethers! etc

talk to your friends about this stuff!!

zines. put out zines get some ideas happening

LANGUAGE

there are an infinite amount of situations that fall under the banner of sexual assault - unwanted touching, harassment, coercive sexual behaviour, manipulative sexual behaviour, non-consensual sex, verbal harassment, rape, not acknowledging someone not responding to sexual advances, ... and our language starts to run out or at least starts to loose meaning. also so many of these terms are loaded with cultural meaning - like for example rape is linked to dark alleys/physical violence/strangers in society's consciousness. but it is more than this over used example that frustrates me about language. language helps perpetuate the idea that "perpetrators" of sexual violence are inherently evil. but the sooner we take perpetrators out of this context the closer we come to demystifying sexual assault and understand how it comes to be happening so commonly, all the time, EVERYDAY. because we live in a rape culture. because of patriarchal capitalism we have such fucked up ideas on how to relate to eachother, especially sexually. because in our society it is OK to get what you want no matter how it makes people feel. it is ok to use your privilege and power to get what you want, trampling over people in the mean time... and perpetrators of sexual assault are not psychopaths, they are a product of this normalised fucked up state of affairs. but this is not OK, and perpetrators of sexual assault are (or should be) accountable to the people they have hurt and held responsible for how they have made people feel. and this becomes so clear when your friend, someone you love or someone you respect gets called out as a perpetrator. how deep this shit is, how much fucked up ideas of power have been drilled into us. striving to be radical, but still so confined by oppressive ideas on gender, sexuality + power. one of the most important things for me right now is the language we use around issues of sexual assault because i feel like it really limits what i am able to say - i want to be able to explain what's going on in my head and where i'm at with it all but i feel to restricted by the language available to me. like for example the words perpetrator and survivor, its too binary i notice people stumbling over the words all the time. particularly survivor, i think a lot of us force ourselves to use the word because we aren't sure what else is available to us. i don't feel like it's a term i would identify myself as: - we need a more complicated language, because this complicated stuff we are talking about. i would like to move the language away from these polarised ideas to which it is so tightly affixed and start to think about a new way of talking about this stuff, a way of speaking that has more meaning and more depth and more accurately represents what is going on and how it makes us feel. and importantly move away from hierarchies of sexual assault.

getting down to the harder stuff, here is a few key points to keep in mind when responding to an incidence of sexual assault. every situation is going to need its own response, driven by each survivor, but here are some things to consider as a support person...

FUNDAMENTALS FOR SUPPORTING SURVIVORS (SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT)

when someone tells you they have been assaulted, believe them. listen, give space. help them explore options available to them.

are they comfortable with other friends getting involved?? take as much time and space as necessary.

The support person/s need/s to be trusted 100% by the survivor. support person/group of people working with the survivor needs to be strong & communication needs to be developed.

supporting the survivor might involve mediating with perpetrator or perpetrators support people. If so, there will need to be open lines of communication between the two groups. this might be hard but it is vital for making sure the wishes of the survivor are enacted.

by supporting a survivor you will need support yourself. take the time to think about how you can make that happen.

some questions to think about:

How do we practically put the survivor's demands into action? What if the support person has a problem with what the survivor wants, but also wants to respect their wishes? For example, what if the demands of a survivor do not address issues of safety?

A big question is, should people be told about the situation and how? Things that inform this are: Is it something the survivor is ok with? How does it aid the situation? Is there concern for safety? Does discussing it with the wider community buy into people's attitudes on sexuality, gender etc...

FUNDAMENTALS IF YOU OR YOUR FRIEND IS CALLED OUT (SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT)

in the first issue of whadda whadda we reproduced a REALLY great piece by wispy cockles. it is called ***"Taking The First Step: Suggestions To People Called Out For Abusive Behavior"*** and you can access it at http://fruitiondesign.com/dealwithit/02wispy.php i have found this article useful more than once. its really fucken good. if you or your friend is called out: READ THIS.

It's absolutely essential for the person who has been called out to keep their head together. To take responsibility for their actions, and make productive change, they will need to be keeping their shit together. This person needs support & strategies to help them address what they have done and how they have made people feel. taking *actual* responsibility for what has happened will be more than admitting your abuse.

in my experience there are 2 extremes of behaviour when a person is called out, that are completely destructive. On the one hand there is denial: a refusal to acknowledge or engage in a process, avoiding responsibility. On the other hand the person becomes overwhelmed with guilt & shame and they become unable to do anything - this behaviour can shift the focus of

process/healing away from the survivor, and on to the perpetrator.

SPACE SPACE SPACE! this is really important. people that have been called out need to have a realistic understanding of what giving up access to space means & why it's so important. they need to understand what the concept of a safe space for the survivor means & how it works, and keep out of it without a fuss.

finishing up...

i don't want to be doing this - there are so many other projects that i want to be doing, so many other actions. and i do have other things, but this is the one takes over the one that impacts on all aspects of my life. but i just cant see how we can be part of any effective change or action while sexual assault is constantly in our face. while its still embedded in our activist cultures.

and it pisses me off that i have to do this, me and my wimmin activists all over the world. and people wonder why white-activist/punk-guy culture drives me crazy sometimes. YOU GET TO DO <u>THAT</u> BECAUSE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU DONT HAVE TO DEAL WITH <u>THIS</u>! but i'm inspired to read about groups like "dealing with our shit", hetero guys being proactive about this stuff. and i am inspired by the guys that are taking this shit seriously and taking it on and being active. to all my friends around this city, around this country, and around the world dealing with this shit, you are fucking awesome...



I received these handouts at "Born In Flames" Conference in Portland, June 2005. They ask reflective questions about sex, sexuality, trauma + healing, triggers and coping when triggered. They come from a resource book on dealing w/sexual assault + healing

What Is Safety?

Most people think of safety as a "feeling" of being safe. While this is one way to judge safety, it is not always reliable. You can be in a very safe situation and feel unsafe because you are dealing with an aspect of your abuse. Or, because you are a trauma survivor, you may be in an unsafe situation and feel just fine. While feeling safe is important, it does not necessarily give you reliable ground upon which to determine if you are safe, or safe enough to proceed.

What Tells You That You Are Safe?

When checking in on your safety in a given situation, consider the following:

- How do you feel in your body? Do you feel safe, scared, unsettled?
- Is your physical environment safe and free of violence and abuse? (No one is hitting, kicking, punching, or pushing you. No one is calling you names or threatening you or anyone you care about.)
- Does your partner, lover, or friend consider your needs, wants, and desires as important and relevant as his or her own?
- Can your partner, lover, or friend really meet your needs? Does he or she have the know-how, the tools, and the good intention?
- Do you have the power in this situation to act upon your own behalf? To take care of yourself fully?
- Are you making your own choices? Not being pressured, pushed, or manipulated?

Asking yourself these questions gives you a way to assess whether or not you are safe—even when you do not necessarily feel safe.

Write about the following. Then, have a conversation with a friend or therapist about what you wrote.

1. Take a sexual self-inventory. What have you experienced sexually up to now? What did you like? What did you not like? What do you know about your sexuality? What would you like to learn?

2. Take a piece of paper and make three columns, titled "yes," "maybe" and "no." In the "yes" column, list all the sexual activities that you enjoy or think you would enjoy. In the "maybe" column, list all the sexual activities that you enjoy under certain circumstances or that you might be willing to try. In the "no" column, list all the sexual activities that you do not enjoy and do not want to explore. Include both masturbation and partner sex. Now, look at your lists. Which column most closely resembles your current sex life?

3. Imagine an activity that is physically pleasurable to you, enlivening to your senses. It could be walking on warm sand, feeling the breeze against your face, touching your partner, having oral sex. Imagine yourself in that scene now. What kinds of sensations are you feeling while you experience this specific pleasure? Where in your body do you feel them? How much pleasure or desire can you take in?

4. What sexual activity or fantasy would you like to try out? Be explicit. What's stopping you?

1. Consider two consensual sexual experiences you've had. What sensations and signals in your body, emotions, and thought process let you know they were consensual?

2. Consider two nonconsensual sexual experiences. What sensations and signals in your body, emotions, and thought process let you know they were nonconsensual? Did you dissociate? When and how?

3. Practice saying your "yes," "no," and "maybe" about sex out loud: "I would like to _____." "I might like to _____. I do not know if I want to _____." "No, I do not want to _____." Fill in the blanks with your own sexual desires and boundaries. Start by saying these out loud to yourself, then try practicing with a friend. It gets easier quickly with a little practice.

4. Consider two healthy sexual risks. How will these risks serve your sexual healing? Who can support you in taking these risks? How can you take care of yourself in the process?

5. What forms of safer sex do you use? What is your risk level for contracting a sexually transmitted disease? What are your standards for safer sex in your sexual relationships?

Trigger Plan

Developing a trigger plan is like preparing for a trip. You usually choose your itinerary and gather your maps before you buy your plane ticket. Similarly, set up your trigger plan before you are in a sexual setting. You can develop this plan to use on your own, without necessarily letting your sexual partner in on it. But sharing the plan with your sexual partner can be an empowering risk as well as a great support when working on sexual healing. Please use this plan when being sexual with yourself as well as during partner sex, because masturbation can be just as triggering.

1. Notice.

What are some of your current triggers? What happens when you are triggered? How can you (or your partner) notice that you are triggered? Be specific about behaviors. List at least three signals or signs that let you know you are triggered. For example: I start to get angry and my lover's touch bugs me. I hold my breath. I want to say something, but I feel like I can't. I worry that I will hurt my lover's feelings. Then I start tensing up in my body and find myself just "bearing it," waiting for the whole thing to be over.

2. Stop.

Take a deep breath. Stop the sexual activity. You can do this by using a safeword, by moving your body to communicate that you need to stop, or by getting up to go to the bathroom. Breathe again. Name three things you can do to stop sexual activity when you are triggered. Refer to your sense of internal safety and resources.

3. Choose.

Now you get to choose how you would like to proceed. Keep breathing. Relax your body. It is easiest to do this step if you have already generated a list of options you feel will work for you. Choose from this list what will meet your needs and support your sexual healing now.

4. Engage.

Instead of dissociating, engage in whatever strategy you have decided on. Continue to build your capacity to stay present and tolerate the sensations and feelings that are a part of this healing work. Just a reminder: you are always allowed to change your mind and to choose again. If you find that you consistently make the same choice, try choosing something different. For instance, if you usually choose to calm the trigger and continue being sexual, try going into the trigger instead. If you consistently choose to stop being sexual, practice continuing slowly. Bring yourself to your own edge of discomfort so that you can expand your possibilities and process the abuse.

5. Return.

Go back to the beginning whenever you need to.

1. Explore what being dissociated or "checked out" is like for you. What happens in your body when you dissociate? What do you say to yourself internally?
2. How can you recognize this state for yourself? How could a partner or friend help you recognize it? What would they sense or see in you when you dissociate?
3. What do you have to gain by living an embodied life? What do you have to gain by having an embodied sex life?
4. List three ways you can begin to re-enter your body, or re-associate. What embodiment practices are you willing to take on regularly?

Reflect on the following questions. Write about them in your journal and have a conversation about them with a support person.

1. Why heal sexually? What do you want to gain from it? How will your life be different and more satisfying? How will you know when you've gotten what you want?
2. What is safety to you? What is the difference between safety and comfort? What are examples of experiences in which you were safe yet uncomfortable?
3. Practice building an internal sense of safety. What sensations and feelings in your body give you a sense of safety, settledness, or resourcefulness? Where do you feel that now?
4. What support do you have now to assist you in your sexual healing?
   a. Self-care: journal writing, positive self-talk, ability to feel your emotions, eating well and exercising, somatic practices, spiritual practice.
   b. Community support: peer support group, therapist, friends you can talk to about sex and recovery.
5. What do you need to support your sexual healing? What actions can you take to build this network of support? Think big. Go beyond the bare minimum requirements for survival. Imagine having all the support you possibly could use. What would that be?
6. Take a look at your own attitudes and biases regarding sex. Make a list of what you think is healthy and not healthy regarding consensual sex. Discuss your list with a friend. Be sure to include issues of sexual orientation, what you consider appropriate sexual expression for women, fantasy, monogamy and nonmonogamy, abstinence, anal sex, religious beliefs, bondage, sadomasochism (S/M), cross-dressing, etc. This is an opportunity to explore your own beliefs about sex and sexual expression.

Where do these ideas about sex come from? Where did you learn what you believe? Is there more for you to learn about anything on your list? Do you know anyone who practices any of the consensual activities that you listed as "not healthy"? This is an opportunity to explore and learn more about your own beliefs and values, those you want to keep and those you may want to change.

Confronting Rape Without The State

Two years ago I was raped by a very recent ex-lover. Someone I'd come to trust, be intimate with, share my stories, my life and my dreams. When I came to identify his violence as rape, my sense of reality was destroyed. My life seemed so distorted... I didn't know how to react, or what to do.

I chose to pick up the pieces, and sought to find my own sense of justice. I found an inner strength I didn't know existed. This piece of writing is about that struggle.. about my choices, and my journey to gain a sense of power following such deep violation.

This story is also about a community process, a process to heal, find justice, support each other, deal with the sexual violence which occurred... one communitys' attempts to not just ignore the situation, like so often happens.

In this context when I speak of community I mean a group of 14 women and men who had been friends of mine, and whom I'd worked with politically. I chose these people to be a part of the collective process, because I trusted them, because I respected their politics. It was important I saw these people confront the reality of this man's rape against me, a friend also to many of them.

In writing this I acknowledge this is my experience, not necessarily that of my friends involved in this process. I use the words community, group and friends interchangeably.

There's so much I couldn't cover in this article, and so much I've probably forgotten and simply don't know where to start. I'm writing this at the very least to start a dialogue towards change. At best it will assist other communities in their struggle against sexual violence and create change.

Speaking Out

One of the communities I live amongst is a community where sexual violence is recognised, at least in a theoretical sense, as a violation of a person, as a crime often committed by men (though not entirely) against women. It is my analysis that this occurs within a systemic oppression against women, which maintains gender and other power relations.

I live amongst anarchists, lefties, queers, street reclaimers, punks, feminists, vegans, squatters... those who view dissent as a major identity. But were they ready to dissent against something so close to home?

My initial decision was to tell only a few close friends about the rape. This was due to a few main reasons; I was scared of his (perpetrator) response, I felt guilty that he would have to endure an outing, I was scared of people not believing me, and scared of people's potential complacency. After travelling for three months after the rape, I knew I had to come home and deal with it. I was depressed and anxious, and knew I couldn't live in my community without speaking of this. I didn't want to move because I needed my friends' support.

When I told my friends about the rape I was asking they also confront it. That the violence be recognised for what it was. That this rape not be swept under the carpet, like is so many women's experiences when they decide to come out.

This was important to me. I felt I needed this to feel respected and safe... so I could have my humanity restored. I did not trust the criminal justice system to give me real justice. I know it only to perpetuate the misogynist and patriarchal society we live within. I was not prepared to put myself through a process where I had to prove I was violated. I was not prepared to risk being denigrated further by a misogynist police system, which would question why I was in bed with him. I was not prepared to give them an opportunity to make me another statistic. Reporting this crime to the police would have been a meaningless validation.

A community confronts sexual violence

The process we were to embark on was at the very least, a rejection of the state and criminal justice system. We wanted to attempt to find our own solutions.

There was a general idea that people deserved opportunities to redeem themselves, and that a community had a responsibility to try to work with perpetrators of rape, in seeing them as more than a rapist. For me it's about acknowledging rape as a behaviour which will not go away by ridding our lives of 'bad men'. We need to collectively seek solutions to deal with the violence perpetrated against women.

I know that some people, including myself, struggled with these ideas. Yet the framework we worked within was with the belief that people can change their bad behaviours.

Discussions about what justice looked like did not progress very far, and we came up with no 'solutions'. We did resolve that the perpetrator should be confronted about his behaviours, and held accountable within the larger community. This resulted in a large meeting with the perpetrator, people he chose to invite, and my friends. The basis for this idea was inspired by the restorative justice model, though not restorative justice in it's entirety. This came from two main reasons; we recognised that restorative justice would not be appropriate for our needs, also restorative justice is an ongoing process in which the perpetrator was unable to be a part of as was leaving the country.

The group of 13 diminished to 9 over time as some went over seas and for others' the process brought up too much of their own stuff, which lead to them feeling they did not want to be involved. At first my friends mostly just listened to me, and asked me what means of support they could provide. My main request was to confront the perpetrator, and not allow him into spaces where I was or would be. Some felt more comfortable than others to personally confront him... though everyone made a commitment to ask him to leave if he arrived at spaces where I chose to be. This occurred once that I know of.

This was an important recognition for me, of the abuse that I had experienced, and the way in which it would continue to effect my life. I believe I had the right to feel safe and comfortable, and as he had chose to use violence to make me feel unsafe, I should be able to choose that he not be able to participate in spaces where I would otherwise exist. These choices allowed me to feel safe, and I am greatful to have had access to such meaningful support.

I feel the idea of punishment was never really explored, and something in hindsight I believe we should have, and would like to have done. I felt that early on there was a tone set, that punishment was not within our ideals, and should not be explored.

Living within a space of a loose non-hierachical, and non –oppressive belief systems I think people found it difficult to conceive of themselves with this power. This was something I felt trapped by, yet did not speak about.

The power of support

As a result of speaking out, and demanding people deal with this assault, I was supported within my small group of friends, and the wider community. My friends made it a priority in their lives, to make space for dealing with this and attend meetings. I saw a more general support though friends outside of this group, and the comments my friends made about the positive way that their friends had responded to our meetings. I think the majority of emotional support I received was outside of the group, which I think is true for others also.

As a result of this process my friendships, on the whole, have been strengthened, I've formed some incredible bonds, and made new friends. I feel incredibly valued within my community, and validated as a 'survivor' of sexual violence. This said, it did, at times, put a large strain on some of my closest friendships, as we struggled with how to deal with the rising tensions, conflicting ideas and different feelings. Some of my friends had their own experiences, and had less support than me, and found confronting sexual violence in this way incredibly challenging.

Meeting emotional needs

I felt mostly we focused on outcomes and process, rather than allowing ourselves to feel emotions. I think the separation of emotions from a practical response was problematic, but I think it stems from most people not knowing how to deal with their own emotions, let alone support others collectively. I do think people attempted to deal with emotions that came up, but mostly it wasn't a predominant feature. In hindsight I think an external facilitator with group support skills would have been really useful.

I think the group wasn't very successful in meeting the needs of the people within it. One of my friends in particular spoke of the way in which her own assault was impacting on her in this situation. She spoke of the feeling that lip service was being paid to this, yet she was given no actual support. I think, in hindsight again, that people didn't know how to respond, or how to support her.

I also, sometimes felt very alone in these spaces. It was hard to be the only one as angry, as hurt, as sad, as betrayed... the only 'direct' victim in this. Though my friends were effected, I desired for them to have a stronger response. I wanted desperately to be another member of the community... it sometimes felt they had each other, and their pain was similar. No one experienced my pain the way I did, and I desperately wanted that.

In hindsight I believe this had a lot to do with me not feeling comfortable with expressing my own anger, and wanting a collective space to feel comfortable to do that. This is something now I believe could have been really important also, but something none of us recognised. From the conversations I had with people outside of meetings, I think I was not the only one struggling with my anger.

However I believe this experience did strengthen the ability of my community to respond to each others' needs. This happened more on a one to one basis, than collectively. I know some people felt quite alienated by the collective process, which also led them to drop away from the group.

Negative Responses

Though I don't regret being open about the rape in such a political sense, I did have negative reactions also.

I never knew 'who knew' and 'who didn't'. I never knew whether the looks of sympathy I received from people when I went to events was imagined or real. I never knew what people were saying about me, though I knew there were whisperings going on. It made me angry that I was seen as 'a victim'.

I was open to being subjected to being the victim any time or any place. I once had a woman confront me at a dyke night in a local pub, and ask "I know this is a bit full on, but are you the.(insert my name)... that .(insert perpetrator name)... raped. This came at a time when I was beginning to see myself as more than the victim. I felt obligated to speak to her about my experiences, though I wanted to sink into the floor.

Some people came to know me through my experience of being raped. Ironically I made some good friends throughout this process, though it felt quite strange to be the face for 'the one who named rape and was trying to deal with it in a radical way'. This was the first time that most people in the Sydney 'radical' community had heard of such a process occurring.

Autonomy and control

The group provided me with a lot of control, autonomy and decision making power within the group, which gave me a strong sense of empowerment. I think this choice, though unspoken, came from a respect of me as the survivor of violence. Where my choices and power had been eroded through the rape, the group tried to re-instate this power by giving me over all say of things that should occur in this process of justice.

As I said, control and ownership was an important part of my empowerment process, though at times being so instrumentally involved felt draining, difficult, and frustrating.

There was an unspoken expectation that I would convene the group. Convening the group in particular put an enormous amount of pressure on me, not completely realised by myself until later. In essence it meant I took on a lot of responsibility for this process occuring. Whilst this was in some ways empowering, it was also incredibly draining, at a time when I needed to also focus on my own healing process.

My internal conflicts

At times I felt such guilt that my friends had to experience this, had to suffer through this process. I'd look around at how tired my friends were and sometimes wish I'd kept my 'dirty secret'. I came to understand through much work on myself, that these feelings was part of the guilt that many people having experienced sexual violence experience.

The struggle to think of the perpetrator as someone who deserved support and a 'second chance', was incredibly challenging. I had friends who were in my support circle, and also choosing to communicate with him on some level. I felt so conflicted; I thought theoretically he needed opportunities to speak honestly, though I felt contempt and vengeance. On bad days it left me feeling frustrated, angry, sad and betrayed.

At times being able to separate my suffering, and how people thought of the crime and me, from the way in which people treated him, gave me a feeling of strength. However in other ways needing to think about these things was disempowering as I often punished myself. I tried to think of the politics of my feelings, instead of just letting them exist, and letting myself feel them.

In saying these things I want it to be recognised that no one expected, or asked of me, to give him a second chance. It was clearly stated from the beginning that everyone understood and respected my right to have nothing to do with him, ever again.

I chose to be involved, I chose to initiate it. I wanted desperately to believe in humanity. I wanted desperately to believe someone I'd once cared about and had chosen to abuse me, could change. I wanted my friends to respect me, though I know they would have without this. I need to believe men are capable of changing their behaviours. So, I too gave him a second chance on some level. Not a chance at friendship, but I was prepared to recognise his ability to change, and act within that framework.

I needed also to believe alternatives existed to the ones we have. This was the best one I believed available to us, within a framework of non punishment.

In operating within such a framework I needed to respect his right to safety also. This was extremely hard to do. And something I'm not sure I totally believe in.

The day of collective confrontation

I was shocked and amazed at the sense of empowerment I felt as a result. Being able to tell the experience exactly as it happened for me, with my community and him to have to sit with, was so empowering. Speaking my mind to him, looking him in the eye whilst expressing such rage, and having my peers also experience this, gave me a great sense of power.

This day was on some levels disappointing. For we never received the vindication we hoped for from him. He showed no remorse, expressed no sorrow... his responses were extremely self focused. I felt angry that I had put so much energy into that day and he had no real respect for us. He came not even prepared. Though this response, or lack there of it, gave me what I felt I needed to wash my hands of him. To finally say good riddance and not feel I was missing out on anything. I saw him for the weak man he is.

In conclusion...

On the whole I am happy with the decisions I made. I was not silenced. I effectively and very publicly broke the silence on sexual violence, and I feel inspired that others took the challenge too. It gives me great inspiration for our future.

I'm not sure if I got my justice... in some way I think I did. Sometimes I am disappointed, I think we should have done more. Perhaps this comes from a place of anger, feeling he got away too easy, whilst I have still suffered.

Without the support I received from my community and friends my experience would have been a much different one, and one I'm not sure I would be sharing in such a way. I know I'm privileged to have had this experience. Sexual Violence

continues around the world, silently. Though the rage and turmoil within those effected will not be silent, it impacts us all in very destructive ways. This still makes me very sad and angry.

I have such deep love and respect for those who entered into this process with me... thankyou to all. Josie, Karen, Pete, Paul, Chris, Moon, Jason, Noha, John, Lou, Sunil, Jen, Tanya and Annette.



In secret, we perpetuate these cycles of abuse by not openly confronting and challenging them.

Five years ago, I found myself embroiled in a very public and very painful situation – my then-partner was quite publicly accused of repeat sexual assault by at least three women. To this day, I regret my handling of this and try to use a lot of my mistakes to help inform others about ways in which they can respond if this issue comes up in their lives. Evaluating how punk/anarchist/radical communities deal with assault as well as how our broader culture addresses it is important to me.

One of the biggest mistakes I made was shielding my partner from the necessary inquiries that people wanted to make of him. I cared about and loved my partner very much at the time, and was incredibly blinded by his charm, affection, and blatant denial of events that I later learned were entirely accurate. If I could go back in time, I would have removed myself from the process. As shameful as it is to admit, I denounced these women and attempted to find flaws in their stories as a way of proving my partner's innocence. As generous as these women were in sharing their experiences, I had no right or place to do that and it haunts me to this day.

I want to be a person that others can come to if their partner is called out for assault or abuse, because I feel like I have a lot of suggestions. One would be to try as much as possible to remove oneself from the situation. I realize looking back that my partner was really grateful that I shouldered a lot of what should have been his work in getting together the facts and trying to address the situation. I even worked with people in the community to help set up a mediated discussion with him – and I now fully realize that was not my responsibility and was very damaging, both to me and to others.

Later in the relationship, when his obliteration of my boundaries and utter disregard for me became clear, I received more and more information that let me know he was in fact an assaulter. I also came to terms with the fact that in the course of our relationship, he had once assaulted me, and repeatedly violated or pushed my boundaries out of the realm of what I was comfortable with. I broke up with him, and I wrote letters of apology to the other women. I have tried to honor requests they have for me of ways in which I can make amends, but one was not interested in speaking to me and I can't blame her. I have tried to make some good come out of the situation though by sharing experiences with others and engrossing myself in sexual violence prevention work.

It was amazing to me the generosity of spirit two of the women offered me. One request they had was that I sit on a panel with them on radical communities and sexual assault at the National Conference on Organized Resistance in 2002. In a packed room of over 200 people, in a tense environment, I admitted my mistakes and thanked the women for their courage. It remains today one of the most difficult things I have ever done, but it was a wonderful step in my healing process.

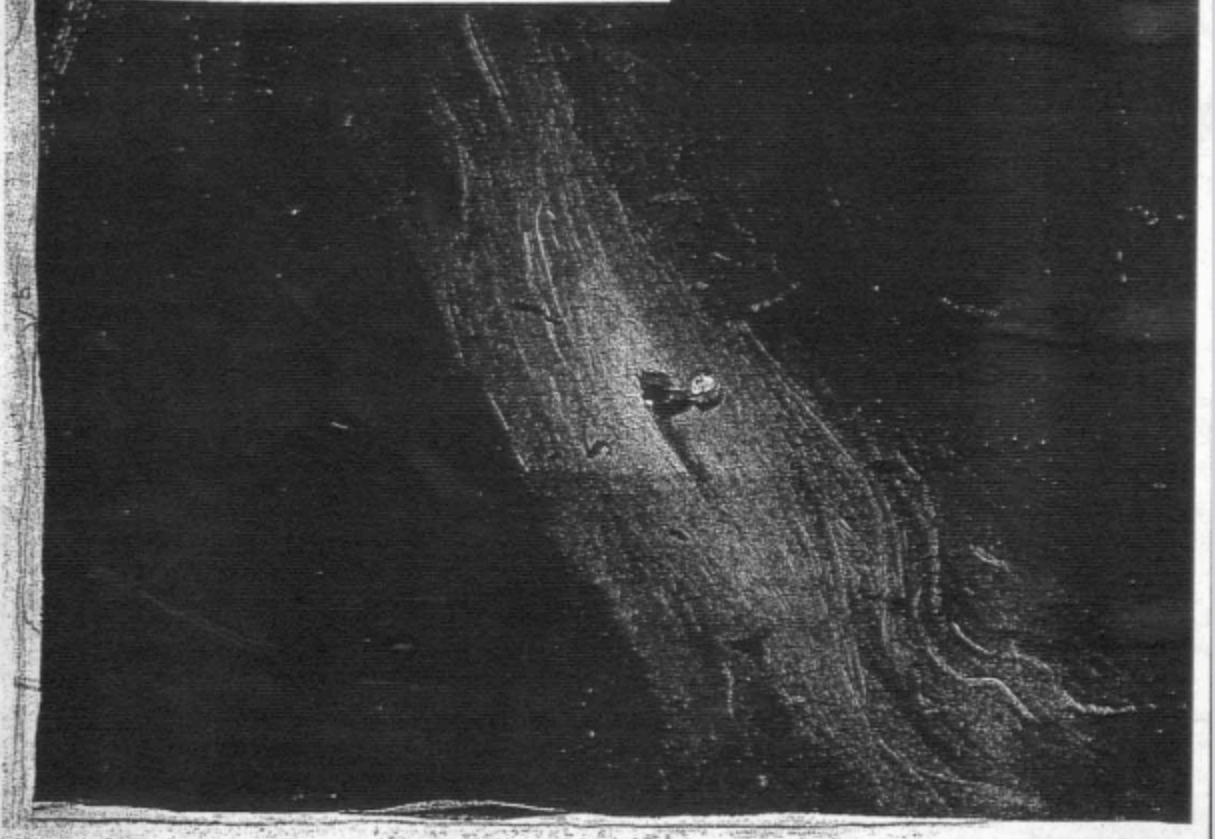
While community forums in radical contexts are one exemplary mechanism for prevention work, I have found other elements about radical responses problematic. I am frightened though by radical communities' desire to serve all functions in handling a sexual assault case – from mediation to counseling to justice. Professional advice and help can be critical in sexual assault, and I worry that radical communities will reject resources that may indeed offer assistance. I am thinking more about professional counseling here than police per se, but I would also hope that if police assistance is something the survivor is interested in they don't feel shunned by their community in seeking it. Sadly, police are often very uneducated around assault issues and retraumatize survivors. If I were to describe my sexual assault to the police, they would

in no way validate me, assist me or provide me with anything remotely close to what I need to heal. However, many do seek help from police, so until we have another justice system in place the way those people receive service is a concern to me, even as we build alternatives.

When both reporting a sexual assault and getting a rape kit done at the hospital, survivors have the right to ask for a female nurse or police officer. Sexual assault affects people of all genders even though the majority of cases that become most public and documented fit the male-assaulter/female-survivor paradigm. It's crucial that we try to develop language and resources that make it safe for male/trans/queer survivors to get the help they need and deserve without being stigmatized. We need to create a climate where that is possible.

I also firmly feel that community discussions and strategizing around response need to be an ongoing part of radical groups. This way, people do not have to have these sorts of dialogues only in the midst of the crisis. It also allows people to start developing language and comfort levels talking about something incredibly painful, divisive and overwhelming. I'd really like to have been able to go to the Born in Flames conference that people put together in Portland all about dealing with assault in radical communities. I wish these kinds of events were happening all over, all the time, and I definitely commend them for it.

If people are interested in talking more about this and sharing, I can be reached at kalotto@hotmail.com. I am really grateful to know the amazing people that I do that dedicate so much of their hearts to the critical work of building a world free from assault and oppression –we have so much work ahead.



Excerpt from "Talking About Our Lives: A Conversation on Socialisation & Manhood"

Taken From "On The Road To Healing: A Booklet For Men Against Sexism"

The three of us had this conversation one day to try & document our thoughts about socialisation & manhood. Because of the conversation format some of what we say is a little scattered, so bear with us. B = Basil Elias, MC = Matthew Campbell, and MM = Mathew Mullinnix.

B: For me, one way my dad tried to make me "act like a man" was w/handshakes, When we would shake hands he would squeeze really hard, & I was expected to squeeze hard to. This was a test of manhood & I wouldn't play sometimes because I didn't feel I could live up to the expectations. I knew I wasn't strong enough to beat my dad & I didn't want to try. This carried out in other ways too. Sometimes when I would get into fights, I would just give up because I knew I couldn't win. I didn't feel like I had what it took to pass those tests. At the same time I started to give up more in fights and other "men's games", I became really introverted & thought that I was just really fucked up. This was also the time I started drinking & doing drugs all the time.

MC: I did the exact same thing. When I was 15 I didn't have any options. I felt like I was in a cage. I became introverted & felt like I was fucked up, wasn't worth anything & not "man enough". I felt like I wasn't coordinated or competent enough: I felt like I was in a cage of what I could do. I started drinking to deal with my feelings. Drinking & smoking were ways I could control how I felt instead of just letting it be.

MM: You can totally calculate drugs. You know how many beers it takes to get drunk, or you know how long the trip is going to last.

B: Or if you don't know how many beers it takes, you drink way too much. You know how many beers get you drunk and you drink 10 times more than that because then you know that you'll be too fucked up to think.

MM: Do you think doing drugs actually feels like emotions sometimes? When I get emotive it feels really weird. Especially when I get upset or when I have a lot of emotion. I kind of wonder if doing drugs often feels the same way, but it's a lot more acceptable to get all fucked up.

B: I think there's a difference though because when you're feeling really weird when you're not doing drugs if not something that's taking you away from your emotions because it is your emotions. When you do drugs it's replacing that feeling of your emotions, and you just feel weird. I guess doing drugs can be easier because you don't have to deal with hardships in your life either.

MM: I didn't have the options of having emotions when I was living with my parents. The one time I that I actually cried they thought I was going insane. I felt like it too. I was having a fight with them because I was defending this queer boy and my mom was totally anti-queer. I got so much ammunition for this fight beforehand. I went to the queer resource centre & got all this information on churches, why they have problems with gays & why it doesn't make sense. I had it all ready to present. I started fighting with my mom & my dad came in & started fighting with me. My dad was shoving me up against the wall in the laundry room, which is a very small space, and my mom was just standing there while I was getting beat – doing the laundry. Then I started panicking,

freaking out & crying. My dad came at me, did a huge bear hug on me & I couldn't move. I had no control over the conversation, over my emotions or over my body. My mom finally came to my rescue screaming "you need to let him go". After I left, my dad said, "he needs to be in an institution". They thought I was totally fucked because I was having emotions & freaking out.

MC: They're doing all this fucked up shit but saying that you need help & you're the problem. That's so fucked up.

MM: In the past week I've been crying so much because I've been dealing with a lot of my emotions in relation to being sexually abused. Every time I start crying I feel like there is something wrong with me. I feel like I'm just a mess, and shouldn't be this fucked up. When I think about it now, I know that people should be healthy criers, but whenever I cry I feel so bad.

I know I used to get angry, sad or whatever, I would usually take it out on my environment. I would break something to show I was upset rather than cry. Either I would break something or do something else physical or tangible as a result of the emotion, like cutting my arm or dragging my knuckle on a brick wall or throw something through a window.

B: How old were you when you can remember expressing your emotions in an aggressive way?

MM: I have a hard time with ages, but I was possibly in elementary school when I threw something through my window for the first time. I got grounded for something or other. I was always getting in trouble. I got sent to my room & was upset that I couldn't go pla with my friends. I was mad that I got sent to my room again, so I picked up a big chunk of clay & threw it through my window. I didn't really mean to do it I just did it.

MC: I never really expressed anger in such a clear or overt way. I would get back at people in real subtle ways. I did really passive aggressive things – simple things that are really disrespectful to people like breaking appointments & not doing things that they would want me to do because they would want me to.

MC: What are good skills to deal with that?

B: When I was growing up I learned a lot of skills about how to deal with my life. I feel like I need to get some more perspective on why I did what I did. Why did I sexually assault my first girlfriend? Why did I curl up in frustration and attack when I was taunted? These questions are important to me now I'm thinking about where I am. I'm rearranging my life to better to deal with it. I was raised with some context, with images of Rambo & John Wayne, tighter handshakes & aggressive tough-boy-G.I. Joe shit. Now I'm looking at it saying "that's not what I want". I have a decision to make, & I'm redefining what it means to be an man by admitting that some of the skills I was raised with are either skills I don't need anymore or skills I want to nurture in myself. I know that I have really bad skills to deal with my emotions & feelings & I'm trying to replace those bad skills with better skills that are more suitable to living a healthier, non-abusive life. This is difficult but it's what I need to do. Now I'm to the point where I can acknowledge my feelings, I can say "I'm feeling anxious, overwhelmed, scattered, frazzled, sad" etc.., but I don't know what to do next.

MM: See I can't even do that first part. When I get a rush of emotions, that's all it is. The feeling that comes out is "I don't know what I'm feeling". I have a really hard time figuring out what emotion I'm feeling.

MC: That's definitely a positive step from acting instantly with aggression or violence. It's a big step to be able to acknowledge your emotions. I always hear that anger is usually the second emotion and that there's always a root that goes before anger. A lot of time that root is hurt, fear, insecurity or other feelings. This is where I'm at. I'm trying to identify those feelings. To acknowledge "I'm feeling hurt now so I'm just going to sit & feel this hurt & talk out this hurt". That's really hard to do because it's not pleasant. With anger I feel more powerful & like I have more power & control over what's going on, but that power & control is just an illusion.

MM: I remember wanting to control my environment & everyone around me. Part of this had to do with the sexual abuse that I went through from my dad, I always felt like I was under his control and had to be in control of my emotions on some level or another. You can see how I had to do whatever I had to do to make sure that what I was feeling was manageable. Another control issue was the way that I always used to communicate with my mom. My dad moved out after a while & it was my two sisters, my mom & me. There were three girls and a boy in the house & I really wanted to feel like I was in control, so I would use logic all the time.

My mom would say that I couldn't go out & I would ask "why not?", and break it down logically. The root of her feeling like she didn't want me to go out was never good enough because it always came down to her feeling scared or like I wasn't spending enough time with them. I wanted a concrete reason to like if I mow the lawn, or do something else then can I leave, and not just make her feel better. That just didn't make any sense to me. I could always argue my way into or out of anything. Do you know what I mean? Have you ever had that feeling of "stay calm, stay rational"?

MC: I was extremely self-centered & egotistical in the way of thinking that I was right & everyone else was stupid. This was especially more so with women in my life – my mom & my sister.

B: You expressed stuff more so towards them?

MC: Yeah definitely. Part of the reason is that my father wasn't really around & my brother was off in college. So there wasn't much opportunity with them. But I still feel the hierarchy that my dad was on top and the attitude that these were women & I'm a man. My mom had been exposed to this attitude all her life. The men in her life looked down on her, called her stupid and that kind of thing – even my father. I was playing out that cycle. When I was 7 and my mother was 35, I was acting like I was better than her, making her know that and making her feel like shit. Most of the arguments I had were with my mom. I felt like she was stupid, and I would be totally rational and logical to deal with our conflicts. I almost never argued with my dad though, because there was such a distance. I remember arguing once or twice in high school. It was fucked up. I remember one time he thought I was lying about something, and I wasn't. This was probably the first time I told the truth to my parents in a couple of years. He freaked out, threw me up against the cabinets & started choking me. My voice was crackling. I felt powerless. I was trying to defend myself & I wasn't able to.

With me, my parents were really controlling, especially with my schoolwork & stuff about my race. It all ties together though. See my parents came to this country from the Middle East, and were raised really different than me. In one hand they wanted me to have a lot of the things they had, especially the social & cultural traditions. On the other hand, they wanted me to assimilate into American culture. Not only that, they me to assimilate into middle class American culture. So, they pushed me with school to become so many things that I never wanted to be, like a Businessman or a Doctor. They tried to control what I studied, and when I resisted, how much I studied. Then they would try to control a lot of my outlook on the world. They would tell me that I'm an American, not an Arab. They would tell me to close that part of myself off from the rest of the world around me. They knew the political repercussions of being an Arab in this country – all the racism and bigotry etc... – and they didn't want me to have to struggle. So, they would try to make me be only American. This forced assimilation was part of the cycle of violence they put on me.

Finally, I have begun to recognize this cycle & how it manifests itself in me. As well as being hurt, I know that I've hurt a lot of people too. This is one of the hardest things for me to recognize and acknowledge. For example, I sexually assaulted my first girlfriend, and that was me, continuing the cycle of violence. She was in a hard knox situation in her life already. She had been sexually abused by her parents, was from a poor & dysfunctional family, and was looked down on by lots of people around us. We started going out and were both looking to each other to be some sort of escape from our own situations in one way or another, until I sexually assaulted her. I feel so angry with myself every time I think about this.

MM: Me too. That's what I'm constantly racking my brain about. I wake up every morning thinking about the people that I've hurt. I don't know how to deal with it. I molested my sister. Part of my abuse was that I had to abuse my sister. A couple of weeks ago I made a list of all the people I could have possibly sexually assaulted or abused – all the way up to my first girlfriend, and all they boys I've slept with. I wonder how they see that now. This includes all the times that I've had sex before I even knew what sex was. Are they macho boys now, thinking about me as a little pervert? That's what my sister thinks. She thinks I'm a perverted, sick, fucker. I've gotten so much mail from her that's like "you're fucked, the whole family's fucked". I have no idea how to deal with that. I don't know if I can forgive myself for that.

MC: There's a long list of people I've hurt too – in many different ways. I have a hard time talking about it. Not only sexually or physically abusive, but I've been abusive in other ways. This cycle of violence has been taught to me. The pain comes around and I'm not taught how to deal with it. I know what it's like to have been really hurt and really abused and I've passed that on. I don't like that.

So, I'm doing this work. I'm doing work against sexism and violence. But at the same time I'm scared to talk about the ways that I've abused people. This is really tricky because in order for me to be really open and honest I have to reveal some really horrible things I have done, and I feel like people are going to discount the work and the wonderful things I do. I'm afraid that people will call me a hypocrite.

MM: Basil, you were talking about being emotive in a controlling way – what did you mean by that?

B; When I started being confronted by feminism I went into a process of becoming self critical of how aggression, violence & sexism fit into my life. I tried to be more sensitive to the people around me but in a way where I felt like I had control over what was going on. I still find this a pattern in my life. I have a hard time expressing my feelings in an open way. I have a really hard time letting go in general. This relates to a lot of fear I have of what I'll be like if I let go, who I'll be like, & how people will receive me. So, when I examine my feelings, sometimes I feel I do it in a precise, logical & rigid way. One thing I've been working on lately is to try and let go, open up, and feel what it feels like not to be so logical or controlling about my emotions.

MM: I think I hit that problem of letting go when I do art. Art is so intimidating to me because it's not logical. How you hold a brush, which way you move it, and how much paint you put on can't be calculated. Doing art feels like pure emotion sometimes because its out of my control.

MC: Lately, I feel like I've adapted all these new ideas about what's ok for men to do. I have a lot of understanding now about these things, like it being unhealthy for me to hold in my emotions. Now I know that it's a good thing for me and other men to experience, express and let out our emotions. But just because I know it doesn't mean I do it. I still get freaked out. If there are guys around I'm not gonna cry. I'm constantly looking around to see who's there. There are certain people who I talk to about personal things, but it takes mea long time to trust a group of guys. For example, I've been talking with you guys for a while now about personal things, but how personal do I get? How intensely do you know me? Do I speak from my heart or am I speaking from experiences that I had or feelings that I had? Can I tell you about how insecure, how fucked up, insignificant or un-manly I feel right now?

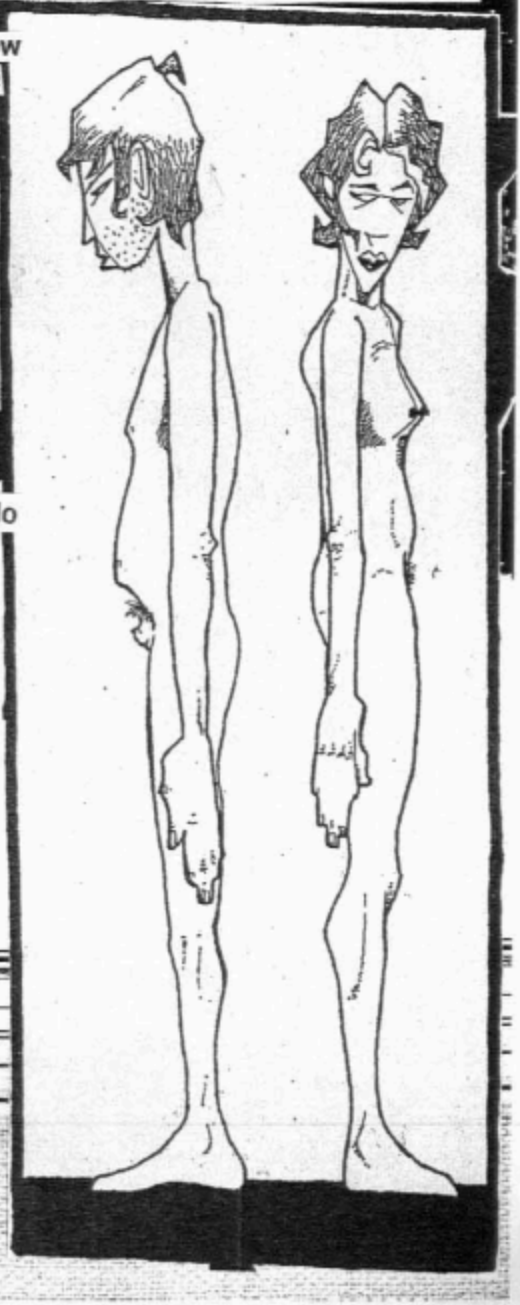
B: I have a great story. Today when I saw you at school you asked me how I was doing, and I said frazzled because I was having a hard time earlier. I was still having a hard time when I saw you but I said how I was doing in a way that was analytical and disconnected from how I was actually doing. I didn't allow myself to really express my feelings to you. I presented myself like I was in total control. I have an easier time expressing myself with the women in my life, but no matter how vulnerable or against sexism you guys or other men in my life are, I have a hard time letting go and being open. There's always a disclaimer at the end of what I'm feeling when I'm with guys. I especially have a hard time trusting me who don't openly acknowledge that there is sexism. It doesn't have to be in the same "men against sexism" language – using words like 'perpetrator' or 'cycle of violence' – but it has to be some acknowledgement that there is a problem and an attempt to deal with it.

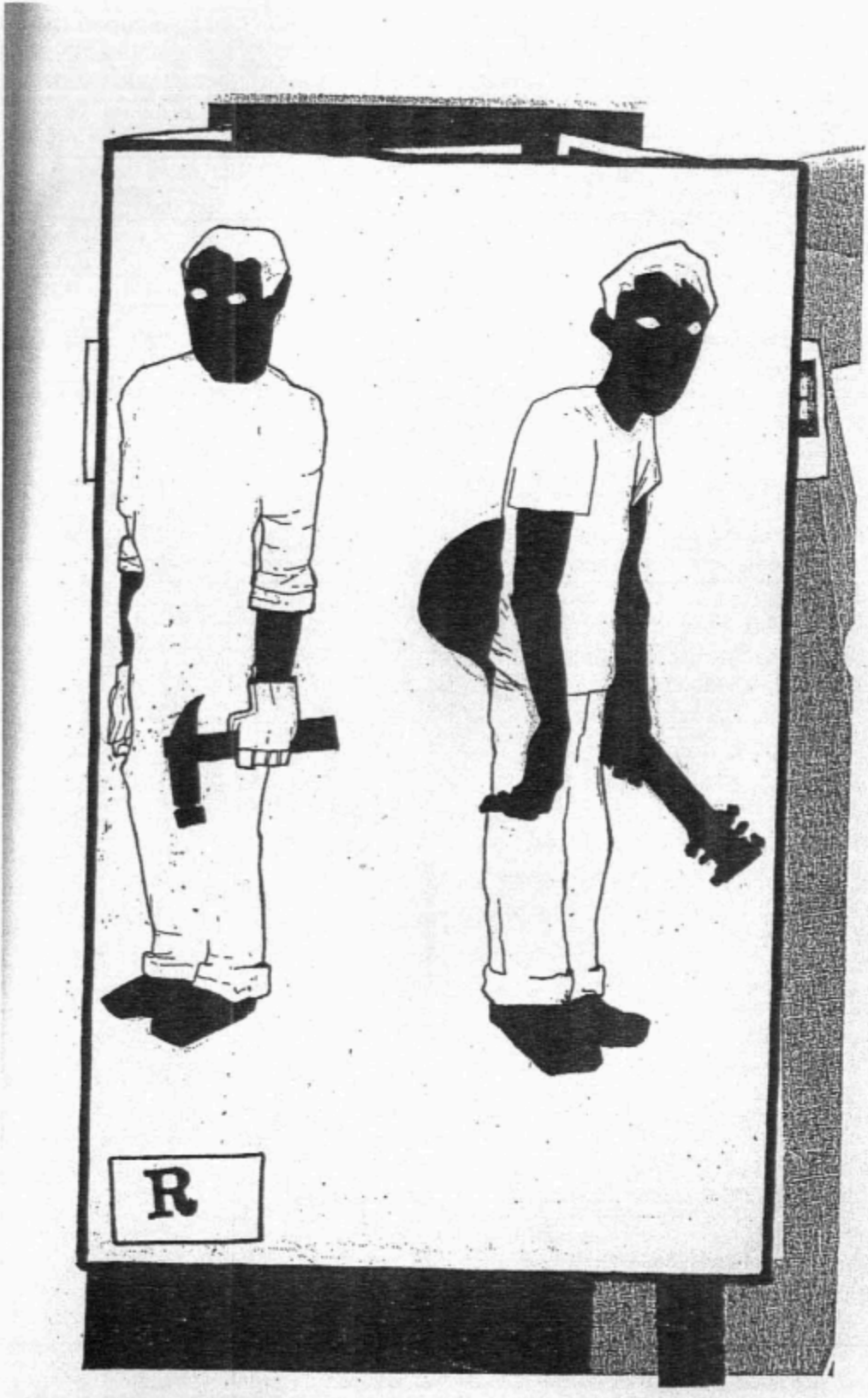
MM: I've never really cried to another boy. Maybe with my dad once, but I was way out on the edge, feeling like I was about to go crazy when that happened. But I've totally cried, gotten shaky and out of control with women.

MC: This is a little different, but I felt a freedom when I first came upon feminism, because I felt a comradeship. I felt like men had abused me in my life. Not necessarily child abuse but even trying to live up to being a man. Being teased and picked on and the subtle things of me not feeling like a man. Feeling abused by the media images of roles and leaders and those things. When I came to feminism I realized that I'm not crazy and

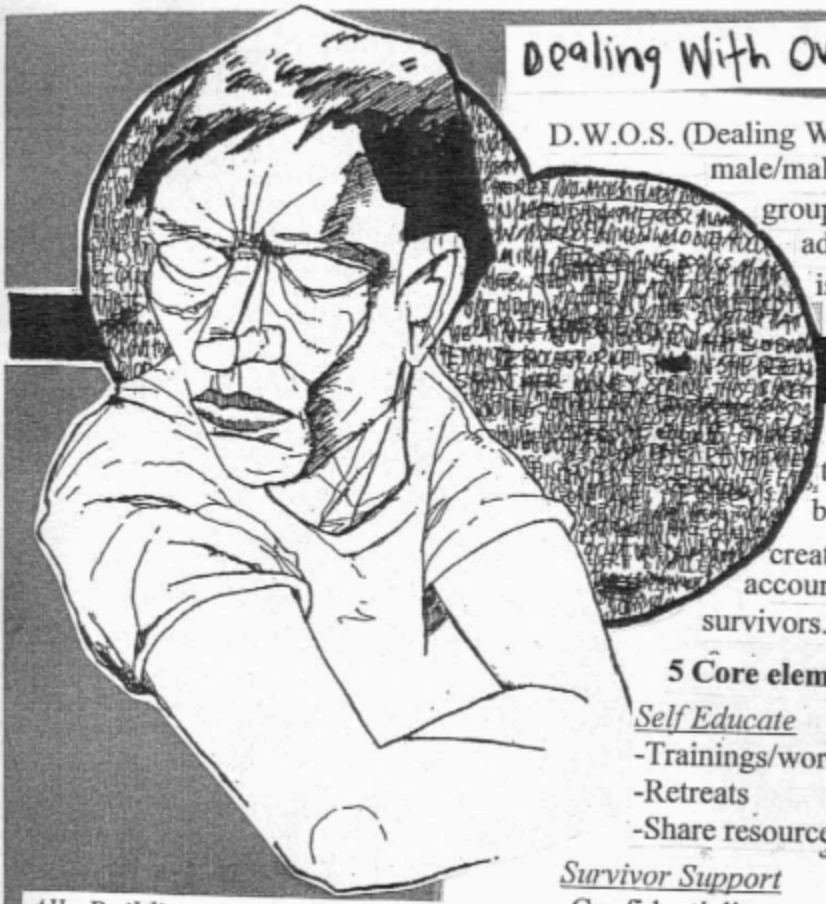
that things are fucked up. I started hating all men for a good while. Then came upon the realization that I'm still male. Now I hate myself too. Part of this may sound unhealthy and self-hating but there are parts of me that I shouldn't accept. I don't think I should like those parts. I shouldn't hate them but I should put them in a context of what I grew up with and what I did. I can't change my past but I'm still responsible to make sure I don't make these mistakes again and that I give my best effort to help prevent other from being abused and abusing other people. The major work I see is with men. It's a really difficult task because I was real resistant to admit that I was wrong. I'm still resistant to saying that I'm part of the problem. Masculinity, for me, was wrapped up in ego. I was taught to be right and in control. I know that in order to make a better world I have to forego the whole thing. I had to change absolutely everything I was taught. That's difficult.

B: Which brings us back to the zine. The whole reason I wanted to put together this zine is to talk about the processes of men ending sexism and my process. How I was raised a man. How I was raised as aggressive and how I didn't have the skills to deal with my emotions. I not only didn't have the skills to deal with my emotions; I didn't have the skills to acknowledge my emotions, or to take care of myself, to take care of other people. I wanted to talk about those things and how feminism totally confronted the shit out of me. How I embraced that confrontation because while I was being confronted, it was the only place where I could see people publicly saying "things are fucked up", and saying it because they cared about themselves and me. I realized that my pain is real and I'm not alone, and that I could do something about it. Now all I do is men's work. I do all this activism against sexism and domestic violence. I'm trying to put together this zine and try to talk to people. And its coming out of this intense feeling of responsibility.




R

Dealing With Our Shit



D.W.O.S. (Dealing With Our Shit/Sexism) is a male/male identified survivor centered group that strives to be anti-rape advocates, educators around issues of sexual assault, and committed supporters of survivors and their allies. We promote positive sexuality, active consent, and the challenging of oppressive behaviors. We're working on creating communities that demand accountability and empower survivors.

Maud Stevens Wagner
San Antonio, 1907

5 Core elements of D.W.O.S.'s work

Self Educate
-Trainings/workshops
-Retreats
-Share resources

Community Education
-Presentations
-Dialogues

Ally Building
-Collaborating on events
-Engaging with professionals and community members that are working on issues of sexual violence

Survivor Support
-Confidentiality
-Reinforcement of the healing process
-Non-violence
-Listening to/respect survivors needs
-Taking action, within our boundaries, to see that the needs of the survivor are met

Accountability
-Mentoring of perpetrators in a process of change
-Group accountability
-Accountability of mentors to each other

Group Agreements

1. We strive to be anti-rape advocates, educators around sexual assault issues, and committed supporters of survivors and their allies. We are committed to personal evaluation, education, training, and creating alliances.

2. Rape is an act of violence and power over another that we understand as a choice. As an aspect of patriarchal social control, sexism is tolerated and even rewarded by society. It is closely tied to other systemic oppression including racism, classism, and heterosexism.

3. Society does not expect us as men to be responsible for the hurtful actions of men. It expects complicity and silence. We disagree. As men, and male-identified genders we hold each other responsible – personally and communally – for our actions. In our everyday lives we want to be proactive in dealing with sexism, male privilege and power dynamics.

4. We want to see healthy sexuality around us. We seek ways to model new behavior such as speaking out against sexist attitudes, challenging oppressive behaviors, being honest emotionally. We challenge gender stereotypes, homophobia, predator/prey mentality, media images of beauty.

5. We encourage perpetrators of sexual violence to be accountable to survivors, their allies, and the broader community. This may take the form of group counseling, mentoring, and therapy. We challenge the desire of men to use words, political theory, and intellectual privilege to avoid dealing with the real devastating impacts of rampant sexual predatory behavior. We commit to being in dialogue with allies and the broader community in making our process open and real. We too strive to be accountable. We are committed to the long term process of change and education involved in dismantling patriarchy.

Perpetrator accountability through mentoring

How it began:
DWOS members were struggling to figure out how to be proactive and encourage accountability of perpetrators as an option, seeing that banishment from the community doesn't necessarily help. Often a perpetrator would simply travel to another community where they would be unknown and could perpetrate again. Meeting directly with perpetrators seemed too intimidating a process for some time, but allies of the group helped make it seem like a real possibility. From word of mouth a perpetrator approached the group, saying he wanted to work on accountability and things started out from there. Since then DWOS has worked with 3 perpetrators in this process, and making mistakes along the way and trying to learn everything we can from it as we go. Based on these experiences we've made a general outline of how the process takes place.

An outline of the mentoring process

1. Survivor's requests are central - survivor's requests are obtained usually through the survivor and/or survivor's supporters, and fulfilling the requests are the basis for mentoring. The mentoring meetings are time to discuss progress and action taken to fulfill these requests. Since DWOS is survivor centered we do not question or judge the requests, although we will not choose violence as a group, claim to be able to "fix" or "diagnose" someone, or promise there will be a certian result - but none of these have been requested of the group.

2. Mentoring is taken on by 2 members of DWOS and one offender - we felt that one on one meetings were not desirable because individuals may fall into unproductive dynamics and go a long time without clear direction, due to any number of causes. Another dynamic that has come up is that one of the DWOS members tends to be closer to the situtation (knowing the offender, survivor, or survivor's supporters from before the assault), and the other mentor is more removed from the situation - often not knowing many of the people involved. This has largely been unintentional, but we see as somewhat useful too.

3. Agreements between mentors and offender are made - the mentoring process is explained to the offender, and if he agrees to begin meetings times and frequency are

worked out, confidentiality/transparency issues are also addressed in initial meetings.

4. Mentors are not professionals - we don't pretend to be professionals or create a "power-over" dynamic within the mentoring meetings. Although we've sometimes been treated like parole officers or counselors, we're not that and aren't trying to be. The atmosphere is much more like a peer group, but with intention and purpose - to focus on fulfilling the survivor's requests and maintaining a commitment to being accountable for the impact of our behavior.

5. Treatment and Therapy requests - DWOS has sought to build relationships with professionals who supervise treatment and/or provide individual therapy for perpetrators. These relationships have helped in understanding what options exist for a perpetrator that is requested to go through therapy or treatment. DWOS is still working on how to make the referral process work well, but have done this on a case by case basis, and don't have a particular system in place.

6. Mentors supporting each other - DWOS's intention is to have meetings of mentors together, on a quarterly basis, to discuss what works best in different situations, troubleshooting particular issues, and providing support for mentors working sustainably. One of these meetings has happened, but a regular system is not in place.

7. Each case is dealt with based on it's specific circumstances - there's no set formula overall. Meetings can vary in content from discussion about: the offender's accountability process, articles and essays about rape culture, or any other issue that seems appropriate to those involved.

Feel free to contact us: dwosfightsrape@gmail.com



INTRODUCTION

What do we do when sexual violence occurs within activist communities? In 2004 in Sydney, Australia I was asked to facilitate a 'restorative justice' process with a woman who had been raped, the man who raped her and the community around them. This is a personal account of my experiences.

Personal because there is no way to be definitive or objective about a process that was steeped in the specific conditions of our community and developed by individuals with particular needs. I should also point out that because of the emotional nature of the process I can't separate myself from the experience enough to write an objective account. I am also a product, however conscious, of my culture and the people around me.

I use Restorative Justice (RJ) as a handy term although I don't think what we did fits neatly into the established definition of RJ as used by the state. There are other names like conflict resolution and transformative justice, none of which really fit. There are also many theories about what is and isn't just, but instead of trying to unpick that stuff here I've simply attempted to record the process we used in detail in the hope that this will be a useful resource for other people working against sexual violence. Let theory follow practice.

PREPARATION

The first time I heard about the rape was when the perpetrator (Marty*) told me what he had done. The RJ process was already being organised and he asked my advice about finding a facilitator. My first responses were, in order, happiness that he wanted to do something about it and doubt that anyone would want to facilitate such a process. Anyone close to the people involved would be inappropriate, and no professional facilitator or therapist would touch the situation with a ten-foot pole, I said. Anger came afterwards. It was a day or so before I was aware of the feeling of broken trust, and all the 'what ifs' and questions that went along with it. I struggled with the usual denials. Was it really rape? How do I define it? About the process itself I was intrigued and deeply dubious.

A few weeks later another participant (from the group who had been working with Zoe on developing the process) approached me and asked me to facilitate. I agreed in principle. I have to admit that it was partly because I was at a point in my life where i said yes to everything. More importantly, though, I had taken some time to read the proposal and after a few weeks of discussion with some of the participants I knew that the project was both possible and vital. I have worked in the welfare sector for several years, the last two in the criminal justice system. I have seen what happens to people who go through that system, victims and offenders alike. It doesn't work. I have also been a facilitator in the anarchist/activist community for eight years, and I wrote an honours thesis about small group decision making. To accept the challenge of facilitating the project was not a difficult decision, but the task itself was daunting. Where to start?

Before I could agree to participate I had to meet with Zoe and talk to her about what she wanted from the process. I knew Zoe socially but not well. We met in the park and talked about general ideas, practical problems, and her feelings about the rape and its consequences. My immediate impressions were of strength and a need for closure; she was very aware of her own grieving process. It would have been difficult to accept the role of facilitator without understanding her motivation. Having worked on the idea for a year she was well prepared to go through with it. In the months we spent working on this meeting I learned a great deal, and much of that from Zoe.

The next step was research. I read everything I could get my hands on, from criminal justice system manuals to books on the philosophy of forgiveness. Briefly, restorative justice is the idea that the victim and offender meet with a group of their peers and discuss the effects of the crime, allowing the victim to process their grief and the offender to change. It is based on Maori and Native American processes. It was implemented in New Zealand and Australia in the early 1990s and then in the United States. Within the criminal justice system, it is ordained by the court that the offender goes through the process instead of jail, making it resemble punishment. RJ is used for juvenile offenders and not for serious crimes. In New South Wales the RJ section of the Department of Corrective Services is very small and the courts seem reluctant to prescribe it for all but the most minor of offences. This was the first autonomous RJ process that any of us knew about.

Rape is not a tennis ball through a window. We had to formulate a process to fit our specific situation. Fortunately the bulk of the work was done by Zoe and the group she worked with, who had written a proposal and basic plan for the day. I nutted this out in more detail with her and the group in a series of meetings. I also met with Marty and tried to gauge his feelings and expectations for the meeting. He admitted the assault and seemed to genuinely want to make up for it somehow. Without this the process would not have been possible.

Of all the preparation, for me the most important part was meeting with Zoe. In the literature they advise facilitators to brief participants, but in my meetings with the group I felt they were briefing me, much to my relief. Reading and discussing this with people outside the process was also vital. I was fortunate to have an understanding mentor and a few friends with whom I could exchange ideas.

As we planned the process in more detail, the group sourced a space, chairs, food, and organised times. We were fortunate to have a nice squat with harbour views to use for the day, and I was blessed to be working with a group of very skilled and organised activists. I had many expectations for the day, some ideas about what was possible and what dangers we faced as a group. I will outline these in more detail below, but first I want to explain the process.

THE PROCESS

The following is the plan for the day. As anticipated, the day itself diverged from the plan, but I feel it is important to have a record of the process we tried to use before I explain how it was adapted.

I

Facilitator: First of all I would like to acknowledge that we are on Eora land and to express my solidarity with the struggle of Indigenous people for self-determination. Thankyou for coming. My name is Jen and I will be the facilitator for today. First I would like everyone to introduce themselves by going around in a circle and saying our names, and then I will explain the process for today.

Group: say their names

Facilitator: Some housekeeping: where are the toilets, kitchen, turn off your phones, first aid [rescue remedy, tissues]

Today may raise a lot of issues for people so if you need someone outside this meeting to talk to, here is a list of organisations that can help. [I hand out a prepared list of contact numbers - rape crisis centre, helplines etc]

Is everyone comfortable?

Now I will explain the process for today and my role in that process. First I would like to say a few words about why we are here. We're all here because we have been affected by a rape in our community. We are here to express our responses to that rape. We are here because we are autonomous activists who believe in taking responsibility for our actions, rather than using the criminal justice system. We are also here to look at ways we can move forward as a community and prevent this from happening again.

My role is to explain the process for the day; to make the meeting safe for everyone (this means I will interrupt you if I think your behaviour is inappropriate); to check in for breaks regularly; and to make sure we keep focus and keep to the process agreed. I am new to this too, so please call me on my shit if you think I am not doing a good job.

Now I will explain the process [as outlined below]

Does everyone understand and agree?

We have also devised a few ground rules for today:

- That this process is confidential;
- That we focus on the harm done - the act and not the actor - and as much as possible use 'I' statements such as 'I feel';
- That this is a non-judgemental space and we acknowledge that everyone has different ways of coping and communicating and that we listen to them;
- That there be no interruptions when anyone is speaking (except by me); and
- That anyone at any time can call timeout by indicating to me. We are here because we choose to be here and anyone can leave at any time. However please call a timeout as chances are if you are feeling fatigued somebody else is too.

Does everyone understand and agree?

Are there any questions about the process?

Now I would like to invite Zoe to begin this process by telling her story.

2.

Zoe: tells her story, she chose to read a detailed pre-written statement about her experiences

3.

A minute's silence

4.

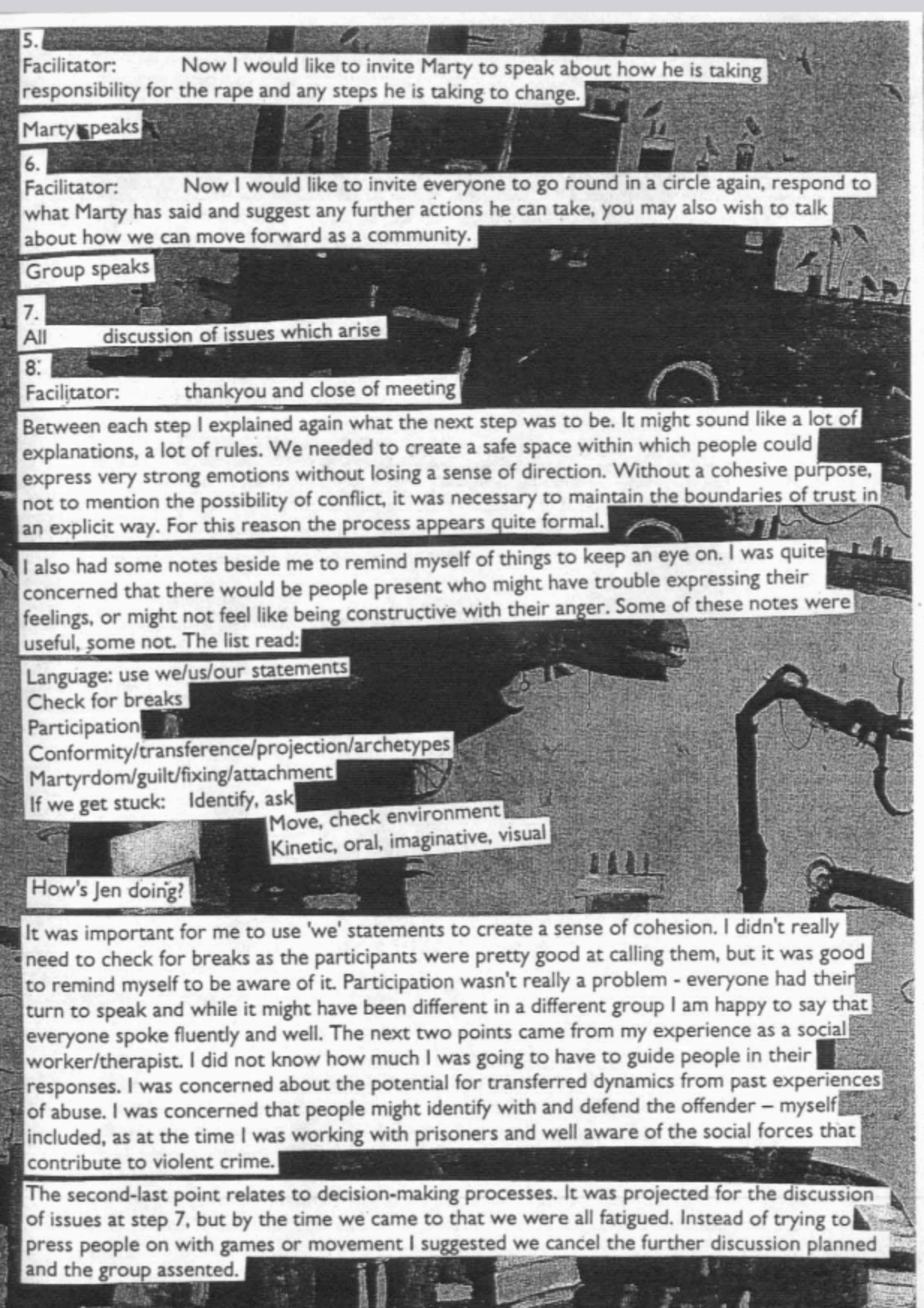
Facilitator: Now we will go round in a circle and talk about our responses to the rape. You can say as much or as little as you want, so please take your time.

As a guide, I suggest people talk about the following:

1. how you felt when you first heard about the rape;
2. how you feel now;
3. how you think it has affected you; and
4. how you think it has affected our community

I have brought a stone which I ask you to hold while you speak and pass to the next person when you have finished. This is partly to make my job easier but also to help us take our time to speak. First I will read emails from people who couldn't be at the meeting. [I read emails]

Group speaks in turn



5.
Facilitator: Now I would like to invite Marty to speak about how he is taking responsibility for the rape and any steps he is taking to change.

Marty speaks

6.
Facilitator: Now I would like to invite everyone to go round in a circle again, respond to what Marty has said and suggest any further actions he can take, you may also wish to talk about how we can move forward as a community.

Group speaks

7.
All discussion of issues which arise

8.
Facilitator: thankyou and close of meeting

Between each step I explained again what the next step was to be. It might sound like a lot of explanations, a lot of rules. We needed to create a safe space within which people could express very strong emotions without losing a sense of direction. Without a cohesive purpose, not to mention the possibility of conflict, it was necessary to maintain the boundaries of trust in an explicit way. For this reason the process appears quite formal.

I also had some notes beside me to remind myself of things to keep an eye on. I was quite concerned that there would be people present who might have trouble expressing their feelings, or might not feel like being constructive with their anger. Some of these notes were useful, some not. The list read:

Language: use we/us/our statements
Check for breaks
Participation
Conformity/transference/projection/archetypes
Martyrdom/guilt/fixing/attachment
If we get stuck: Identify, ask
Move, check environment
Kinetic, oral, imaginative, visual

How's Jen doing?

It was important for me to use 'we' statements to create a sense of cohesion. I didn't really need to check for breaks as the participants were pretty good at calling them, but it was good to remind myself to be aware of it. Participation wasn't really a problem - everyone had their turn to speak and while it might have been different in a different group I am happy to say that everyone spoke fluently and well. The next two points came from my experience as a social worker/therapist. I did not know how much I was going to have to guide people in their responses. I was concerned about the potential for transferred dynamics from past experiences of abuse. I was concerned that people might identify with and defend the offender – myself included, as at the time I was working with prisoners and well aware of the social forces that contribute to violent crime.

The second-last point relates to decision-making processes. It was projected for the discussion of issues at step 7, but by the time we came to that we were all fatigued. Instead of trying to press people on with games or movement I suggested we cancel the further discussion planned and the group assented.

The last point on my list was very useful as it was difficult to remember that while I had a degree of control over the meeting structure, I was also going through my own emotional process. I have experienced sexual and domestic violence in my life and while I knew that I would be affected by the meeting I had no way of predicting how. I knew I had to remind myself that it was okay to be "selfish" if I needed a break. I was careful to watch my own mental state, to listen actively without becoming too involved.

ON THE DAY

The meeting began a little late as people straggled into the squat in various states of apprehension. In borrowed chairs arranged in a circle I sat facing the exit, with Zoe two chairs to my left and Marty three chairs to my right, so that they were not exactly facing each other. The seating arrangement divided into 'teams' with people from 'sides,' which worried me at first, but I think this was unavoidable. I made the introductions as planned and passed the stone to Zoe to tell her story.

I can't articulate my feelings about this part of the meeting. I can only say how powerful it was. Zoe began reading nervously and finished speaking aloud, charged with emotion and strength. The energy was incredible and overwhelming. We had planned a moment's silence but we needed a ten minute break, which was called by Zoe.

We stopped for ten minutes and then returned to step 4, the first circle. The talking stone was a good help as it clarified when people were finished or just pausing. After the first circle we had a longer break, the first ten minutes of which I spent crying uncontrollably in the back room. I was expecting to feel strongly but I wished at that moment I had someone to take care of me! Fortunately I could take a walk along the harbourside, where I did some stretches alongside some joggers and felt much better for the second half.

We gathered to hear Marty's response with a mixture of apprehension and joy. The first part of the process was painful, but the release of speaking was at once liberating and conducive to group cohesion.

Marty's response threw me, and I think many of us. He claimed not to be able to share his changing process as the things he was changing were all in his head. He spoke about the day as if it was something we were doing to him, instead of something he was an active participant in. I was expecting an apology, or at least a concrete example of what he was doing: seeing a counsellor, or offering some kind of support to the group's ongoing projects. I was disappointed.

In part this disappointment was my own fault. I was optimistic about the process and in my preparations I had been thinking about the potential for good outcomes, particularly when speaking with the group. I had been determined to stay positive. I had hoped that we would at least approach forgiveness. The gap between theory and practice is always bigger when you start with theory and try applying it to people.

We began step 6 in a state approaching exhaustion. Participants raised a lot of issues. The suggestions included: an apology; that Marty keep in contact; that he disclose the rape to anyone he is closely involved with, politically or personally; and that he distribute any publications the group makes, all good, concrete points. I think he listened, but when he was given the opportunity to speak again he seemed to fumble through a series of self-justifications. He was not sure if he was part of this community, he said, which came as a shock to those of us who had been working alongside him for years and considered ourselves friends. I don't want this article to be about his therapy process, but the flight response was a fairly clear indication of where he was at. There's an important point to be made here and it's something one of the participants said in response to Marty. Community is something you are part of whether you

want to be or not. We don't choose to be interdependent, we simply are, and until we acknowledge this we will never be able to organise our own lives. This is not in conflict with the idea of individual responsibility. Community lies at the heart of autonomy.

A particular moment of the second circle really affected Zoe, and that was when one of Marty's supporters began to argue that his lack of response was justified because it was not integral to the RJ process. She had a point in that his response was not the most important part of the day, but her way of communicating seemed to defend Marty and go against the process we had developed. Zoe called a timeout and was quite distressed. After a few minutes she came to me and told me she wanted to leave. I encouraged her to see it through. Afterwards I felt guilt about this. I didn't want to force her to participate, I felt I was pushing my own agenda, as I had envisioned that she would have the last word. She tells me that she did feel some pressure to stay on, but was glad she did so in the end.

Despite the tiredness of the group there were a lot of good points made in this part of the process. I could feel the anger at Marty's response, but there was a genuine effort to communicate to him where that anger came from and to challenge his way of thinking. The response to the process itself was positive, and many participants expressed a wish to continue meeting and to develop similar procedures for dealing with future conflicts.

We packed up and headed for the pub. On the way Marty called me to thank me for facilitating. It felt like an afterthought. I was angry at him for a long time about the way he communicated in the meeting, but I have come to realise that in the end it didn't matter whether he came through with an apology or not. It mattered that Zoe and the other participants were able to tell their stories. It mattered that we did it, that we showed him - and more importantly each other - how strong we really are.

SOME REFLECTIONS

Was the second half of the meeting useful? I think so. Without Marty's participation the first half would have been punitive or meaningless. Without the responses to Marty he would not have felt the sense of interaction and participation necessary to make it real for him. Although the process depended on Marty's participation in this way, it was not about him. It was about Zoe and the people who cared about her. In that way I would argue that it was a success. However, I do think we raised more questions than we answered. We still don't really know how accountability works, what it means to take responsibility.

It affected everyone in different ways, but I was personally quite distraught after the RJ experience. I went through a physical illness and emerged with a great and quiet rage at the world in general but especially at Marty. I was and am still angry with him for the rape. I was also angry with him for the way he participated in the process. I am no longer in contact with him. It is sad to lose a friend, but it was the rape and not the RJ process that broke that trust. It's up to him to take responsibility for that.

Shortly after the meeting Marty left our community by his own choice. For the rest of us it has been hard to see if he is doing anything about the rape, but at the very least we offered him the opportunity. Too often people are simply expelled from a community without considering them as a human being, capable of change. This can also cut off the victim's opportunity for closure. 'Traditional' justice freezes people in those roles. I think RJ has the potential to liberate us from shame and victimhood and to outlive our mistakes. Watching Zoe's voice change as she told

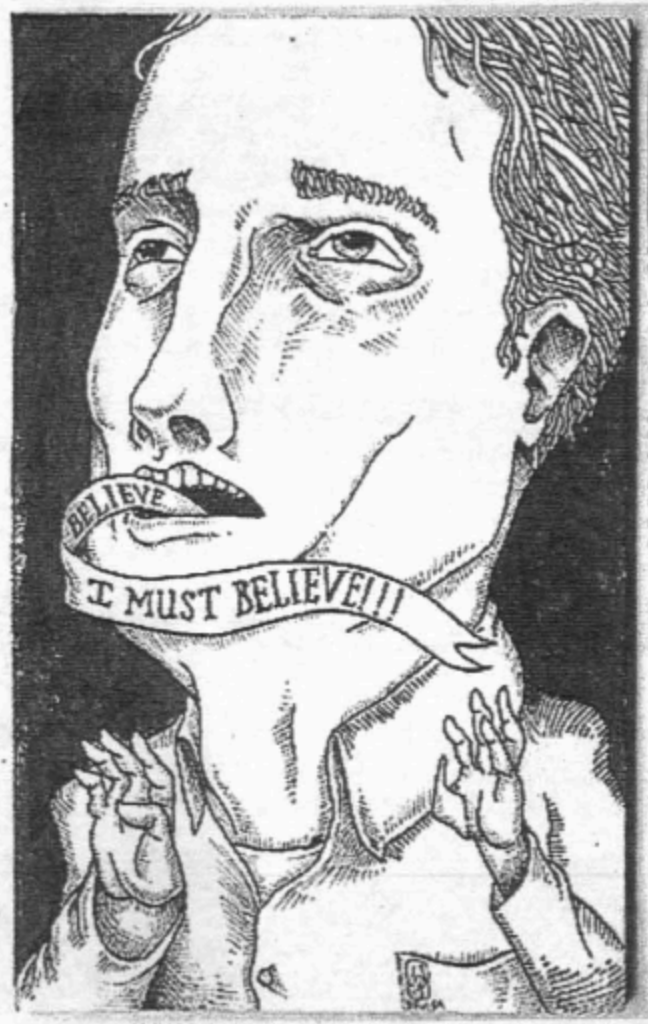
her story from nervous reading to empowered truth-speaking was all the evidence I needed to believe that we can transcend the roles an act of violence can thrust upon us.

What we came up with certainly isn't a perfect way of doing things but it's a start. Next time it happens I will do things a little differently. I will know (not just intellectually) that it is not the time for forgiveness, that forgiveness is a long-term goal and a process of remembering suffering in a constructive way. It takes more time than one meeting! I will know how to look after myself a little better. I will not have any expectation of decision-making at the end (though I think it was good to have the space for it available). And there will be a next time. Though I wish that we could stop rape and violence forever, I know we have a long struggle ahead.

I want to write a bit about what I have learned from the process, but I think it is impossible to categorise all the questions and ideas that it raised for me in a mess of personal/political; I need a lot more writing and fighting before I can articulate it all. Freedom is a lifelong craft. But I can share the most important thing I learned, and this from Zoe as well as all the other participants: we are not only stronger than they can possibly imagine, we are also stronger than WE imagine.

Keep fighting.
Jen

*names have been changed



short interview project

we decided to ask a bunch of people a set of questions about sexual assault, to try and get some ideas and different perspectives flowing. the questions were:

1. what are the ways in which you define sexual assault/rape/harrassment/coersive sexual behaviour?
2. for you, what are the issues regarding sexual assault that need to be brought into the open, educated and taken action on?
3. what steps can we take as a community (as a group of people working together) to make our spaces safer?
4. what do you see as the key things that need to happen in responding to an incidence of sexual assault/rape/harrassment coersive behaviour?
5. how do you feel about the language available to us used to describe sexual assault and the issues surrounding it? do you feel the language currently used (for example traditional binary definitions of perpetrator/survivor) accurately sums up what youve trying to say? any suggestions on how it could be better?
6. how can we achieve a healthier approach to sex, consent, boundaries and our relationship with each other?

..... and heres what we got

Response to the What do we do next interview zine question: what steps can we take to make our community safer?

I think an important step in making our community safer is addressing sexual safety and health in the context of emotional/mental health. In my experience, destructive non-consensual sexual relationships are often just one manifestation of unhealthy hearts and minds: People often use physical comfort, validation or power to make ourselves feel better when we are unhappy, non-communicative and emotionally dependent, This automatically creates a non-consensual power dynamic where sex is just another tool of control, another means of manipulation.

I think that the connection between mental health and sexual assault is a major piece of the dialog that is missing in a lot of resources. If we can recognize this dynamic as something we are all susceptible to, we can:
a. start identifying and preventing poor mental health and destructive behaviour in relationships before one or both people feel violated
b. change our mindset from the binary villain/victim situation to a paradigm where every individual in an unhealthy relationship is healed

It is fundamentally important to address mental health and sexual assault in a long term way, constantly relevant and immediate, rather than just as a post-crisis analysis or bandaid solution. Here are some ideas for how we can make our community and relationships safer and more consensual by addressing mental health: Individual commitments to maintaining good physical health (eating well, sleeping enough, drinking water, additional/alternative wellness, sexual health) Individual commitments to regularly checking in with our own mental health and talking to one or two important people in our lives about it (that aren't a significant other/sexual partner) Commitments in relationships to constructively address personal mental health and the relationship by setting goals, identifying behaviours and issues to work on Co-counselling regularly with a group of caring peers on a regular basis
Community discussion/dialog/workshops including discussion that connects mental health to non-consensual/destructive sex

One good resource is the icarus project website and publications: www.theicarusproject.net

Amina's Response

Name: Kylie (Kylie who is using some stuff from a previous int. I did with Bite The Hand That Feeds the Poisoned Food zine cos I sometimes get a little bit exhausted from writing about this stuff BUT of course I still think it's really important & wanna share what I can).

Where do you live mostly: Brisbane, Australia

WHAT are the ways in which you define sexual assault/rape/harassment/coercive sexual behaviour?

I tend to use these terms to refer to sexual behaviours, interactions and situations that are unwanted, where no opportunity for "consent" was given or considered, where boundaries have been knowingly crossed. Basically where consent has not been expressed but someone (who would be called the perpetrator) has continued anyway and knowingly crossed someone else's (who would be called the survivor) boundaries. Obviously this would include a range of violations and does not simply refer to penetrative sex.

Also, I would use a definition that allows for later reflection – like, once you've escaped the weird fucked-up interpersonal power dynamics and had space to think, or through relating it to a friend - it becomes obvious that the interaction was not consensual or mutual and that your vulnerability/trust/boundaries were exploited.

FOR you, what are the issues regarding sexual assault that need to be brought out in the open, educated & taken action on?

This may be the place to mention that in terms of responding to sexual assault in radical communities, my experience has been that –with a few notable, amazing exceptions- women are doing a lot of the hard work. With facilitating processes, with supporting survivors, with initiating discussions, with running workshops, with making zines and resources, with a lot of gritty hard stuff. There does appear to be a slight perception that it's a "women's-only issue" and I don't think that should continue.

WHAT steps can we take as a community (as a group of people working together) to make our spaces safer?

In terms of public, community spaces, particularly "temporary" spaces such as fests, gigs and conferences, I have some small suggestions about the actual organisation of the space and the proceedings, as well as about collective response to any sexual assault situations that occur.

In terms of events/conferences/fests/shows etc, I think clear signs at the door/entrance and in the program/flyer stating that sexual harassment/assault is not tolerated in this community/at this event is a starting point. Because this stuff does come up at these events. All the time.

During the event, if someone calls out a perpetrator of sexual violence, one way to respond is that the perpetrator would immediately be asked to leave the immediate space, and the discussion and "working through it" can happen *away* from the actual event or at a later time (as suggested by the Blackthorn Collective). I guess you need to consider safety but also whether them leaving would mean they're not going to be accountable and engage in any processes. If it's a fest/conference, and the surv may not see the perp again because they live in different towns/countries, it's important to give the surv immediate support with any process they want to facilitate.

As regular fests/conferences often have a fund of benefit money/donations, I think it is the responsibility of the community to help out survivors in practical, immediate ways – helping out with money/access to STD tests, Morning After Pill, PEP [post-exposure prophylaxis, a course of medication that can prevent HIV infection if taken within 72 hours of exposure], pregnancy tests; health check-ups, counselling, access to telephones/calling cards, possibly even support/assistance with living expenses if they will need to take some time off work etc. (I'm not sure about how people would feel about possibly using funds for perps to access psychological help/counselling etc??)

One thing I really like/d about the Queeruption (Amsterdam anyway!) fest model (which is really just a way-cool version of the general anarcho-collective-consensus type model) is that there are/were designated mediators. Maybe this sounds a bit fancy or unnecessarily "structured", but really it's just 2 people (or at least 2 people) who are identified as approachable if you have a conflict/issue that needs to be sorted out with another person/people at the fest. At Queeruption there were plenaries (or meetings at the start of the day to discuss any issues and plan upcoming workshops etc for the day ahead) where the mediators were identified to everyone. Daily plenaries were also used to bring up issues such as inappropriate language and inappropriate touching around the festival space in general.

At other fests, that don't have the same sort of "plenary structure" as Queeruption, there could be people doing shifts at an info-table, who you could approach if you had a problem with someone at the fest harassing you (for example). Maybe there could be info outlining the process on a flyer or in the fest program. It's nice to feel like you could actually get heard if there was a problem, to be able to bring things up and not keep silent, instead of just leaving and being bummed out about the hopelessness and inevitability of "stupid patriarchal punk boys" or something.

Also, a lot of weirdness and unfortunate situations transpire at fests etc when people are overwhelmed/tired/sleep-deprived/overloaded/drunk/vulnerable/temporarily without a place to call home. At such events, I think it's really crucial to have "quiet spaces"/chill-out spaces so that people can get the space they need to, and to possibly catch up on the sleep they didn't get cos of the weird situation at the sharehouse/squat/convergence centre they're staying at etc. Wimmin-only (trans-inclusive, of course) spaces can be really crucial to non-wimmin-only events.

We are often reminded that sexual assault occurs in homes, on dates, with friends, with perpetrators known to us – as well as on dark streets, with unknown perpetrators. I think it's important to introduce a greater sense of responsibility to the private spaces in our punk networks. In terms of "making our spaces safer" as a community, I think we have to remember that "private" spaces are a huge part of radical communities.

This is especially so in punkrock - the network of friends connected by the couches and sharehouses and squats and bedrooms and loungerooms and kitchens where we live out our lives. The extended network of friends in the punk community is full of people intimately sharing space and life with each other, without necessarily knowing each other very well, or having a developed sense of trust. Staying at someone's house after a latenight show, or staying at someone's house for an extended time is just part of the everyday, part of the daily culture of punkrock.

As the "houseguest", "traveller" or "couch-surfer", you are often hyper-aware of being in "someone else's" space and not wanting to tread on anyone's toes or get in the way. There is often confusion, awkwardness and insecurity that arises from being unsure of the obligations and expectations attached to you. Not to mention the constant negotiation of different, unfamiliar ways of expressing and communicating. Because of this, as a humble couch-surfing traveller, you often have an almost instant readiness to obligingly accept whatever arrangements your hosts suggest in order not to upset them or "overstay your welcome."

I think that it's especially important that we remember to give people who are travelling/staying at our houses as much personal space as possible. When someone is travelling, they have a vulnerability that comes from not being in their usual town, not having their usual support network, not having any space to call their own, and just generally being a bit out-of-place. Being sleep-deprived or drunk just increases this vulnerability, as does feeling obliged to share a bed with your host ("We don't have any spare beds, and my other housemates don't want anyone staying on the couch right now, so you have to sleep in my bed"). Or feeling obliged to share a mattress with the other travelling punk ("We only have one mattress so you guys can share it"). Or feeling obliged to share a confined space with several unknown others - or any number of possible scenarios, really.

Of course a lot of amazing things come out of being a travelling punk, but obviously also a lot of non-consensual, non-mutual, regrettable scenarios play out in these settings of forced or accelerated intimacy, with unclear expectations and the potential erosion of personal space.

Also! I think we should also remember that when a traveller arrives on our doorstep/couch, we can feel more than free to ask them to leave if we have a bad feeling about them. There should be no obligation or sense of duty if you don't feel comfortable welcoming some random person who got your email off the internet, or from a vague acquaintance, or some distant friend-of-a-friend-of-someone-you-met-at-a-fest. I personally think that if a traveller is staying at your house and you find them creepy/weird, responsibility in a friendship culture means not sending them on to your friend's house in the next city. Or at least not without warning or calling them and telling them exactly what seemed weird. And your friends should think about who they're sending on to your house before they pass on your email and telephone number. I reckon.

WHAT do you see as the key things that need to happen in responding to an incidence of sexual assault/rape/harassment/coercive sexual behaviour?

Supporting the survivor is THE most important thing - whether as a friend, as an acquaintance, a community member – whatever you can do and whatever is appropriate.

This can mean things like immediately making the situation as safe as possible for the survivor. And helping with access to practical services such as STD tests, Morning After Pill, PEP/medication that can prevent HIV infection, pregnancy tests; counselling etc. If someone needs to take time off work, they might need support with living expenses, and with accessing a telephone, making calls etc (especially if they're not in their hometown).

A really big thing is actually remembering what the survivor wants to happen – totally supporting their/my/our decision on how to respond is fucken crucial.

If the surv chooses to do "nothing", then that is a choice that needs to be respected. I say "do nothing" in terms of taking action with a perp – as it's already upsetting and exhausting enough spending energy on just *surviving*, just basically trying to get through it at a personal level.

It's totally important to respect a surv's wish if they do NOT want their situation addressed as a "community issue." However, you also need to consider the safety of other people in the community who may be at risk from being involved with the perp. I've had this situation come up, where an acquaintance has asked me not to tell anyone about a situation. Obviously I didn't, but I have found it necessary to tell people who seemed like they'd possibly get involved with the perp that they might want to be aware of their questionable sexual history.

If the surv wants to use the cops and courts, then that is their choice, and they should not be made to feel like they –we- should be using a "radical community response." Especially cos community responses in terms of dealing with perps can be totally fucking messy, ineffectual, misguided and obsessively focussed on "the community" discussing whether they think it really happened or not. An obsession with "What Really Happened" instead of getting on with what the surv wants. At the workshop at Belladonna 04, a representative from a sexual assault service wanted to reminded everyone that even if you don't use the courts and the cops for prosecution, there are sometimes benefits to reporting assault, in terms of support services you're able to access.

If a surv does ask you to DO SOMETHING – just because you find it too difficult, I don't reckon you should just leave it untouched and unaddressed. (I reckon this goes for any sort of creepy/unwanted behaviour you've been asked to act on). A lot of us are feminist/pro-feminist/anti-rape and fight this stuff in other parts of society, but it seems we're often unable to confront this shit when our friends are the perps. Because there aren't always exact precedents and no-one's really had to deal with this situation in their circle of friends, it can be scary, awkward, uncomfortable, intimidating. Unfortunately, sometimes because no-one is really sure how to deal with it, it ends up NEVER really being properly addressed with the perp. I reckon if you REALLY can't deal with talking to a person accused of being a perpetrator of sexual violence/harassment, you should at least see if someone else will act for you, instead of just leaving it untouched.

Also if the surv explicitly says they are NOT comfortable with a "violent response" such as beating the shit out of the perpetrator, then I don't consider it cool to go ahead and do it anyway. (Personally I see it as a violent response to a violent problem, but a very necessary process for some survivors).

For me, "supporting survivors" also means supporting each other and having a friendship culture / community where we look out for each other. During a "women's meeting" in Dublin, we discussed that it might be a good idea to meet up every couple of months just to check in with each other, check that everyone is okay, just to mention anything that might have happened or anything that needs to be addressed like inappropriate touching/sexist behaviour/fucked-up attitudes/etcetera.

HOW do you feel about the language used to describe sexual assault & the issues surrounding it? Do you feel the language currently used (for example, traditional binary definitions perpetrator/survivor) accurately sums up what you're trying to say? Any suggestions on how it could be better?

I reckon the language is a bit shit, and pretty limiting. In conversations, meetings and discussions, I notice the way that words like "survivor" get enunciated indicate that it's a term loaded with meanings and controversies and hesitancy - people generally have some pretty clear ideological discomfort in engaging with the current terminology.

For me, the current language used to describe sexual assault can feel wrong or inaccurate or even too full-on. There have been situations where coercive behaviour could have been called "rape" or "sexual assault", but isn't because of the heavy weight that those terms carry. (I would never tell someone that they cannot call their own situation "sexual assault" or "rape", if that's how they have chosen to define it). If "sexual assault" is described as a certain type of sexual situation, then it implies that everything else is "not sexual assault", not domination, not coercion.

It's like "This is as far as we've got, this is the best we've come up with" – of course we wanna use language and terminology that is the least oppressive, the most empowering. But it still feels problematic, that the language we have for this stuff is a prison, the language doesn't allow us to address some of the complexities of sexual assault, the weird power imbalances, the complicated messed-up dynamics. Obviously so many relationships have degrees of power and coercion and weirdness, BUT I don't know if there's a way for language to capture those complexities.

HOW can we achieve a healthier approach to sex, consent, boundaries and our relationships with each other?

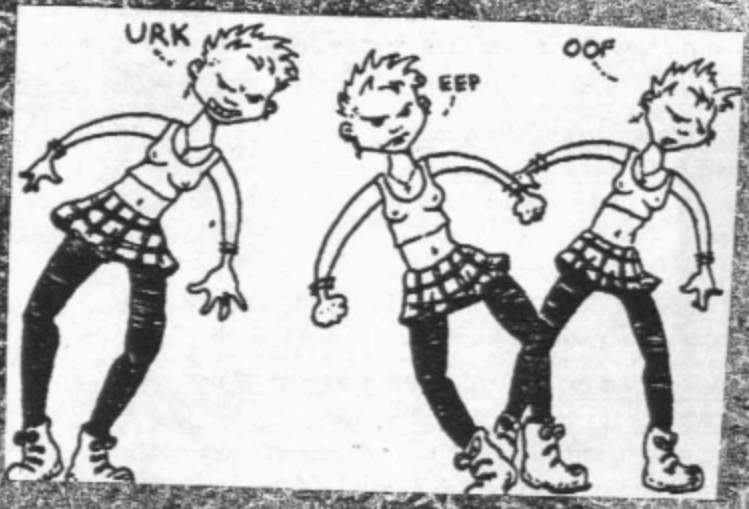
I think that a healthier approach comes from really doing the hard work in your personal life. It's totally crucial, I think, to talk about sex, consent, boundaries, dynamics. I think it's important to check in with partners at different stages of sexual interactions, not even necessarily big conversations or a big deal, but just little questions like "Are you okay with this?" or "Do you want to stop?" or "Is it okay we have sex?" Or if you really can't deal with "talking during sex", try to take some clues from what's going on with unspoken signals, non-verbal signs, body language and the like. I think instead of being awkward, it's just really nice to know that the other person (or people) involved feel present and able to give genuine consent in the situation.

Discussion of consent and boundaries in sexual relationships really need to happen and to keep happening – discussion and dialogue with friends/partners/each other/bigger groups is really important and necessary. Something that Cindy Ovenrack wrote really sticks with me: "A friend of mine told me that she hasn't had consensual sex once this year." It's important to think about being persistent and demanding about sex, and the implications of "talking a partner into" changing their mind about having sex at a particular time. I think there is a LOT to

be learned from taking a deep breath and asking previous sexual partners **"Was I ever coercive or did you feel like I crossed boundaries in our relationship and interactions?"** (And of course asking that to current partners, too).

If you *really* can't talk about it, I reckon that at least thinking about the way you relate to people is important. Challenging and questioning yourself, calling yourself out, reflecting on questions like **"Is it possible I am a bit pushy or coercive in the ways I initiate intimacy with partners?"** Or **"Do I remember that some people, especially people with histories of abuse, tend to freeze in unwanted, non-consensual situations, and am I paying attention for possible signs of this?"**

And maybe reflecting on the role of alcohol/drugs/vulnerability in possibly blurring consent in sexual interactions you've been involved in; whether someone ended up saying "yes" because you persisted in asking them and it was just easier to go along with it than to keep resisting or thinking of reasons, especially if alcohol/drugs/vulnerability blurred the lines.





Bre and Noha, Amsterdam

What are the ways in which you define sexual assault/rape/harassment/coercive sexual behaviour?

It ranges from psychological to physical. A crossing of any boundaries which are personally and/or socially defined. Physical/emotional/communicative boundaries are very often defined culturally and socially but also within these definitions, personal differences are there and need to be understood. So people need to be able to articulate them, or send out the signals but also, importantly, a certain amount of sensitivity in reading what those boundaries are needs to be developed. (Thats what I mean by social as well as personal boundaries).

Also more culturally, less critical incident kind of theory: stems from behaviour that clearly demonstrates the roles and ideas of genders, and benefit from this demarcation/ uses it to exercise will, desire or some form of power. i.e it can and does happen so often via a history of being fed and then internalising wack ideas of gender roles, sexual games, mating rituals (not that they're inherently bad, usually fun) but involving ideas such as the open receptive female (not to only focus on female ,but it's relevant.) it's about people not being able to de-objectify people (not meaning that objectification itself is a problem!); with women who are so highly sexualised in imagery...still being able to see them as people 1st and sexualised somewhere after that...

For you, what are the issues regarding sexual assault that need to be brought out in the open, educated & taken action on?

That sexual violence is still a relevant issue, that talking about this should not be conflated with radical feminism and that it is an ongoing issue/ not simply a crisis issue (although acute incidents happen and require different responses).

Also that sexual assault affects EVERYONE, that (for me) it stems from fucked communication and gender dichotomy/ideas (internalised dogmatic and needs further understanding)

What steps can we take as a community (as a group of people working together) to make our spaces safer?

open environment to begin with. kill taboo subjects of conversation/ moralistic ideas of how it should be that sexuality manifests. Deconstruction and being aware creates less chance for coercive situations and uncomfortable unsureties...

plus continual and ongoing affirmation/reaffirmation of beliefs as a community. in signs/talking (i.e pro-fem/gay/lgbt these slogans also problematic but fuck gotta start somewhere...what I mean is although it sounds simplistic I do think it is really important to continuously articulate our beliefs clearly when we can. i.e. at a punk gig having indications that it is a temporary autonomous zone (so, pro-fem, anti-homophobic/queer-friendly) either through signs, banners, T-shirts or spoken word. Sophie one thing that comes to mind is the cover of the Propaghandi albumLess Talk More Rock where all these slogans frame the front cover if the record. I guess for me it seems like consciousness of these things come in waves and for a while we get really explicit about it, then it seems to get taken as a given (esp. in radical community spaces/social scenes) and then forgotten about - Meanwhile we get less and less comfortable talking again about these ongoing issues and suddenly it seems uncool to express such strong political statements about identity and belief at all

these ideas are expressed as some goals, not dogmatic (saintly) rules attached to punishment/ostracising.

How can we achieve a healthier approach to sex, consent, boundaries and our relationships with each other?

yah let's say some alienating slogans: queer it - destabilise constructions like heterosexuality and gender, NO topics of taboo.
do this BEFORE critical incident damage control. as an ongoing project...like this!

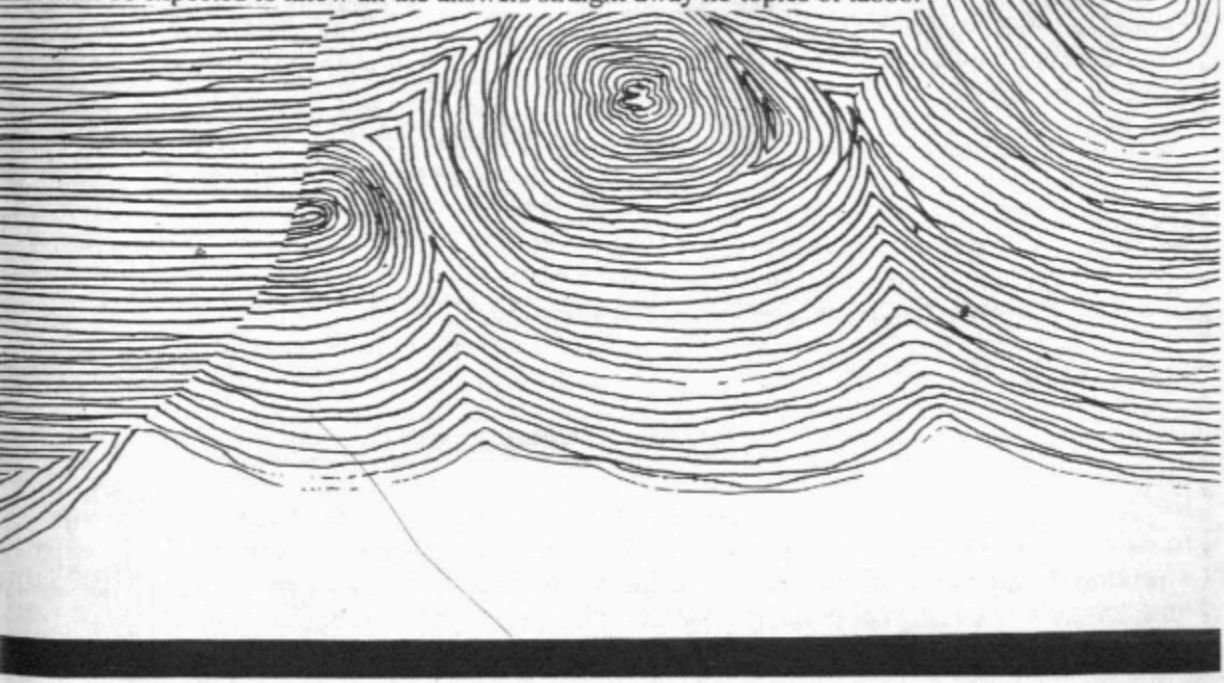
of course shit dynamics and assaults go down involving 'queer'-er communities and people , but hoping that things happen less; are recognised/stopped sooner; are more readily dealt with...

General stuff. Perhaps more consideration given to the structural arrangement of responses in acute situations. But still acknowlegeding that each situation is really different. No one who is feeling fucked over by someone in a sexual assault should have to express any sort of nurturing or understanding at the expense of their own healing process. Anger needs to be expressed and it think we should try and be understanding of that and allow it/encourage it to get out there and really value it as a step in the process.

But then on the other hand I believe this should be separated from any process that involves the perpetrator. I dont use inverted commas because I think the term is ok. (oh shit, most of the time - Its how the word gets thrown around and what we attach to it is when the damage can be done. (the term victim on the other hand is shite and we need new language!!!! also for perp. But I think this wont happen till we have a radical shift in how we think about this stuff and understand it a lot more).

There are emotional responses and political/theoretical/product oriented responses, but these usually overlap. I think as a politically engaged community we tend to feel more comfortable in keeping slightly distanced and talking at the level of ideals, goals, more than real feelings. Because we are all so crappy at communicating. I reckon that this pushes away the healing process a bit and leaves it gasping for air and confused. Perhaps as an intermediary process we need to clearly demarcate between healing spaces for the survivor and the processing space for the community, including survivor and perpetrator.

People are so scared to speak, so scared of being anti-pcwhat the fuk is that about anyway? we cant be expected to know all the answers straight away no topics of taboo.



1. WHAT are the ways in which you define sexual assault/rape/harassment/coercive sexual behaviour? (ie, how does someone know it has happened to them, or if they have instigated it?)

sexual assault/rape/harassment must be defined by individual 'survivor' person. its where in an interaction, someone, or more than one person, feels that as a result of someone(or more than one person)'s behaviour they have been made to feel unsafe, thru whatevs means.

2. FOR you, what are the issues regarding sexual assault that need to be brought out in the open, educated & taken action on?

-objectification and sexualization of (women) travellers.
-empowerment of women/people who often feel like they are at the mercy of others, so that they can realise that they may have choices in unsafe situations (this is a hard thing to talk about because it is a step towards placing blame on survivors, but that's not what i mean, i just mean that there are choices sometimes in situations, but women are taught to deal with situations in really passive ways, eg. not wanting to offend or embarrass their 'attacker' or make a fuss, or not wanting to say anything that would make it apparent that what's going is sexual assault because that in itself may make the situation escalate)
-communication as a part of sex, not as something that stops sex- the sexiness of communicating honestly and openly

3. WHAT steps can we take as a community (as a group of people working together) to make our spaces safer?

communication, listening to 'survivors' and trying to work with what they feel they need to feel safe.

4. WHAT do you see as the key things that need to happen in responding to an incidence of sexual assault/rape/harassment/coercive sexual behaviour?

-listening to the survivor, and taking action according to their wants or needs, while also realising that the one sexually assaulted/harassed/raped etc may not be the only one that has suffered thru this (eg. friends of survivor, or friends of the perpetrator may also be affected negatively by hearing of the attack/accusations/happening or by being present for it etc)

5. HOW do you feel about the language used to describe sexual assault & the issues surrounding it? Do you feel the language currently used (for example, traditional binary definitions perpetrator/survivor) accurately sums up what you're trying to say? Any suggestions on how it could be better?

oh shit, i dislike the terms 'survivor' and 'victim'. i dislike 'survivor' because it brings death into the equation because i guess the opposite of a 'survivor' is someone who has not survived, someone who is dead. 'survivor' is such a full on term. i would be reluctant to call myself a 'survivor' of the things that i have endured because i feel that the term implies such intensity of experience and also it signifies something to else to me, like 'Survivor' the reality tv show, where there are 16 people stranded on an island, and the one who lasts the longest is the 'survivor'. so its a lonely term. in this pop culture context it implies death and destruction all around, or surviving by beating other people.and also, 'survivor' is a term

that travels thru time, like you'll continue to be a survivor of sexual assault, where as someone could perpetrate an act of sexual assault, but that 'perpetrator' tag could be renegotiated over time in response to the individuals subsequent actions, whereas a survivor of sexual assault will continue to have endured and survived sexual assault, and so still be a 'survivor' for all time. you can't become a 'former survivor' like you can become a 'former offender' because it is more of an identity label than just referring to an individual act. its a passive term, which i guess is the point, when someone takes liberties wit ya, you do become/feel passive...

and 'victim', that implies weakness in ways that are obvious, and that is one reason why people don't use that term much anymore.

but, hell, i think that most women especially have been sexually assaulted or harassed, people yelling at them on the streets or coercive sex or groping in the pit at a Frenzal's gig or full blown rape, whatever. these terms 'survivor' and 'victim' seem to create a hierarchy of negative (women's) experience. but i understand that terms like 'survivor' are important in coming to terms with being attacked or whatever.

on another topic, there is an article in 'Rolling Thunder' (the new CrimethInc magazine) that talks about how we are all perpetrators and all survivors, and i think that that is an important thing to think about.

it is like how until the mid nineteenth century there were no homosexual identities, only homosexual acts. and maybe that is what we need to think about with sexual assault, instead of putting people into boxes like 'perpetrator' and 'survivor'(even tho a lot of people really like boxes) we should all look at our individual capacity to hurt and be hurt in turn. because i guess with homo issues, we've gone full circle, from seeing homo-acts, to seeing homo-identities and then to seeing and enacting the fluidity of queer identity that a lot of the kids seem to be rocking nowadays, where we can have a whole range of experiences regardless of gender constraints. so instead of demonizing perpetrators, or seeing rape as so close to death, we could look at how our actions affect other people, and keep communicating about our experiences, to simultaneously normalize them (to take the sting out of them) and also to realize that it doesn't have to be like this.

6. HOW can we achieve a healthier approach to sex, consent, boundaries and our relationships with each other?

communication, more broad look at sex as more than just dick in vegina, and more broad realisation of love as all around us not just achievable thru orgasm or fucking.

Josie's Response



My answers merge, repeat and cross over a bit but I have kept to the questions.

I realize most of what I say is most relevant to sexual assault within a community, not for example by a stranger, but I guess that is where I have thought most.....

1. What are the ways in which you define sexual assault/rape/harassment/coercive sexual behaviour?

I have given a lot of thought to the issue of how to define sexual assault, the need to do so and the utility of doing so, but the inherently problematic nature of that task.

The terms sexual assault and especially rape carry such strong significance in our culture that it becomes hard for a process of self-defining an experience to occur when the boundaries are seen to be at all blurred – e.g. between people in a relationship; when drugs or alcohol are involved; or where a person gave consent for some of what occurred. Paradoxically the apparent severity with which 'rape' and 'sexual assault' are treated in our culture leads to reluctance to apply these labels, therefore much coercive sexual behaviour goes unchallenged.



In my view any sexual behaviour which leads a person at the time or later to feel that they have been assaulted, coerced, or their choice or freedom taken away from them or compromised could be considered as sexual assault and needs to be addressed, including by the person who did the act. This doesn't mean that I define all such behaviour as sexual assault, but that to the best of my thinking, self-definition must be upheld.



2. For you, what are the issues regarding sexual assault that need to be brought out in the open, educated and taken action on?

For me, the view of sexual assault that is currently expressed through the media, the criminal justice system etc., although it appears to be one of intolerance of sexual assault, actually serves to distance us from the reality that sexual assault takes place all the time, within our communities and circles of friendship, and that, as many women and men know, yet is generally unacknowledged, it is perpetrated by people we know, love and trust, not by a convenient evil sub-species of rapists that we can just lock up and throw away the key (or cut the balls off).



This for me is one 'issue' that needs to be exposed, discussed and faced, particularly in communities of people who question the role of the criminal justice system. It opens up a whole range of other issues regarding how to enact 'justice' outside the criminal justice system; exactly what constitutes 'taking responsibility'; how much to use anger as a motivating force in responding to sexual assault; to whom and for how long to continue telling that someone has perpetrated a rape or sexual assault (and whose responsibility this is); how to support a perpetrator in taking responsibility without protecting them from the consequences of their actions. These are issues that I believe cannot be tidily resolved, but should nonetheless be addressed.



Another crucial issue I believe is the need to always begin from a position of acceptance and belief of someone reporting sexual assault. Intertwined with this, especially in circumstances where both people are part of the same community, is the need for recognition of two distinct processes that



need to happen and both need to be supported: that of the person who has been assaulted and that of the perpetrator.

The issue of communication about sexual desires and limits also needs to be further explored. The breaking down of guilt and conditioning and building of self-awareness around sex is something most people could do with, and I believe leads to more open and responsible communication around sex which in turn reduces the likelihood of some types of sexual assault happening.

3. What steps can we take as a community (as a group of people working together) to make our spaces safer?

A main step we can take as a community is to be explicit and active about not tolerating coercive sexual behaviour, both retroactively (responding to an incidence of sexual assault etc.) and proactively (e.g. expressing non-tolerance of coercive sexual behaviour through speech, behaviour or even materials in social spaces proclaiming this non-tolerance).

Another important step is to support each other in proactively undertaking the work described above of improving our self-awareness and communication around sex in general.

4. What do you see as the key things that need to happen in responding to an incidence of sexual assault/rape/harassment/coercive sexual behaviour?

In any reported incident the person reporting it deserves to be believed and supported to make their own choice about how to respond (e.g. not having another persons political views about the criminal justice system imposed on them, whether that be to use the criminal justice system or not to).

Individuals need to be brave enough to confront a perpetrator if the person who has been assaulted so wishes, and to take responsibility for individually and collectively deciding how to respond to him/her, supporting each other NOT TO IGNORE WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

In a situation where the perpetrator is part of the same community, especially where there is a dispute over the facts, those around and involved need, rather than getting bogged down by the desire to establish exactly what happened (so as to decide 'how bad it was'), to recognise that person's process as necessary and distinct, and that it also requires support if that person is to move from the state in which they are able to carry out a rape or sexual assault, to one of taking responsibility. (For in a view which questions prisons and the criminal justice system as a response, the logical alternative is some form of justice which recognizes the potential for such change).

To the best of my thinking, and based on experience of such a situation, I believe that this support is best offered by different people to those supporting the person who was assaulted, who provide support to each other and maintain communication with the other support group or directly with the person who was assaulted if she/he wishes.

The support given to the perpetrator should take the form of support in attempting to take responsibility for their actions, NOT protection from the pain of their own guilt or other people's anger.








5. How do you feel about the language used to describe sexual assault and the issues surrounding it? Do you feel the language currently used (for example, traditional binary definitions perpetrator/survivor) accurately sums up what you're trying to say? Any suggestions on how it could be better?

I feel that the language used for example in the mainstream media in speaking of sexual assault is, as on many issues, hopelessly simplistic and sometimes damaging. I feel that in many services and communities somewhat successful attempts have been made to examine and improve this. However the binarism remains.

My thoughts on this are complex. For example in binary terms, I feel much more comfortable labeling the 'perpetrator', someone who through an act of their own volition violated the freedom and the person of another. I see this labeling as part of a process of justice/responsibility. (The expiry date of the label is another discussion…)

I find myself less comfortable labeling the person who was sexually assaulted (you will notice I have used that term throughout). Here as elsewhere I believe in self-definition and will use a term identified by that person as one they are comfortable with, but the question still arises when speaking/writing in general terms rather than about an individual.

Even though the term 'survivor' emphasizes the strength of the person where 'victim' could be seen to emphasise weakness, I still find myself uncomfortable labeling and thereby defining a person in terms of something that was done to them against their will. A term like 'the person who was sexually assaulted', while stupidly unwieldy, at least makes that person a person first.

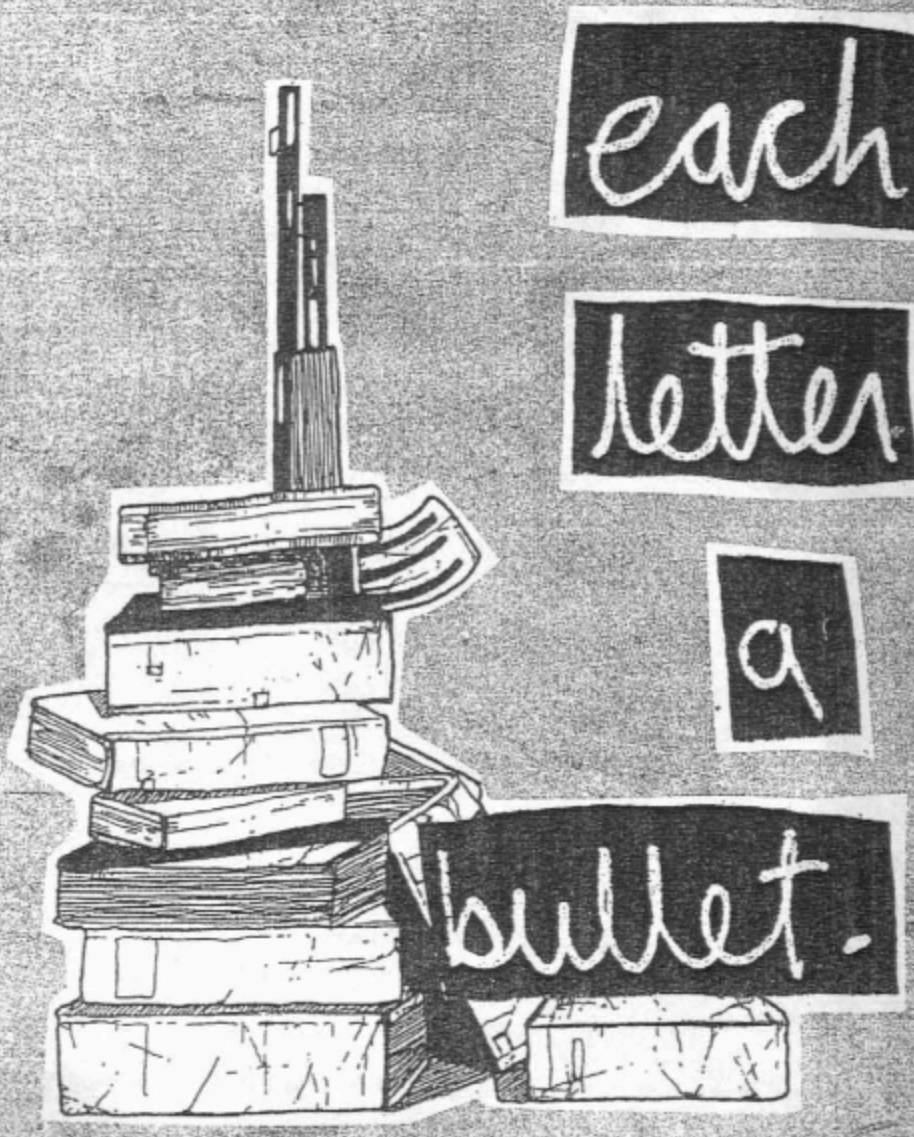
Overall though, I believe a debate about labels can't be resolved and is better defused. This can be done by being explicit that any labels used to describe a person (I refer to many types of labels here, not just those to do with sexual assault) do not describe the whole of what a person is, and may not be accurate or applicable at every point of their life.

This view also partly resolves the problematically binaristic nature of the labels (after all there are many people who have been both 'perpetrator' and 'survivor', some within a very short space of time). An act of sexual assault in itself is binaristic – one person (or more) removes the freedom of choice of another with that act (regardless of what goes before or after), therefore binaristic terms are appropriate in describing it, if recognised as limited and not absolute descriptions.

6. How can we achieve a healthier approach to sex, consent, boundaries and our relationships with each other?

This is a collective and individual process of learning about ourselves and each other and developing honesty and responsibility. We need to develop the ways to do this learning: develop relationships, spaces, freedom. Each of us must take responsibility alone and together. (Did I just describe anarchy?)

I've been spending many hours sticking all this stuff tgthr. I've enjoyed it. The simple decisions of what should go where + in what order. Simple tasks of putting scraps in the bin, changing the record + washing glue from my fingers (or more realistically, leaving dubious looking crusty white stains on the thighs of my pants!).
The only real struggle, maybe, has been trying to figure out how come i'm into it so much?
I dunno. I'm really not doin' ok at the moment. I'm struggling to deal w/what's going on + how i feel about it.
While cutting out each line, each paragraph that i stuck in this zine, i absorbed a lot of what's written. For me, what i've taken from it, what has come to sum up a lot of the self doubt, confusion, sadness, frustration + hoplessness i often feel about this 'issue', this 'project' is - the foucus on process, rather than addressing emotions.
It's not that i think there shouldn't be a fous on process. It's just that, for me, at the moment i feel that i'd be doin' a whole lot better if i foussed on addressing emotions.
Cuz shit, i can convene a meeting, confront folks, talk and read. I'm action-grrl "lets do it". But i dunno what + do w/my anger, reduce my stress, say 'naw im toobusy' w/out feeling guilty ...
I guess it runs into the whole theme of 'taking care of ourselves' ... and from that the more universal (?) theme of 'easier said than done!'
One thing i do know, set adrift on this sea of confusion in this leaky boat of self doubt (+ horrible analogies - jeez i should stick to dad jokes) - is it's worth doing. As fucken hard as this shit is - its worth doing! And for what it's worth, its enough + keep me doing it a bit longer. (Thanx Soph ♡ → Bekka)


each
letter
a
bullet.