

GENDER OPPRESSION • ABUSE • VIOLENCE

COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY  
WITHIN THE  
PEOPLE OF COLOR PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

July 2005

Report from INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence  
Ad-Hoc Community Accountability Working Group Meeting  
February 7 – 8, 2004  
Seattle, WA

Sponsored by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence  
Co-sponsored by Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA)

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence  
incite\_national@yahoo.com  
[www.incite-national.org](http://www.incite-national.org)

# Table of Contents

i

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1: Introduction	1
INCITE! Call to Action! in Our Progressive, Radical, Revolutionary People of Color Movement	1
Goals of this Report	1
What Is In This Report	2
The February 2004 Ad-Hoc INCITE! Community Accountability in Organizations Working Group Meeting	3
The February 2004 Ad-Hoc INCITE! Community Accountability in Organizations Working Group	4
Section 2: Naming Gender Oppression	5
Naming Gender Oppression: Definitions	5
Naming Gender Oppression: Definitions (Breaking It Down)	6
How Is Gender Oppression within Progressive, Radical, Revolutionary Movement(s) Maintained, Supported, Encouraged?	8
Patriarchy: The Root of Gender Oppression	8
Denial	8
Minimizing	9
Victim-Blaming	9
Counter-Organizing	10
What Is the Opposite of Accountability?	10
And It Can Get Even Sneakier and Nastier	12
Section 3: Politics and Principles: What Is It That We Want?	13
Principles of Accountability	13
Principles of Accountability (Chart)	16
Section 4: Process and Practice: So What Should Happen? What Can We Do?	17
Set conditions for safety, respect, gender equity now!	17

## Table of Contents

ii

Community Accountability principles and policies as prevention	17
Recommended Policies and Procedures (Minimal)	18
Recommended Policies and Procedures (Detail)	19
Section 5: Note for Survivors and Supporters	29
Section 6: Note for Abusers and Supporters	30
Appendix	31
Appendix A: Critical Resistance-INCITE Statement: Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex	31
Appendix B: Examples of Community Accountability Principles	35
INCITE!	35
Communities Against Rape and Assault (CARA)	38

## **INCITE! Call to Action! The Struggle Against Patriarchy in Our Progressive, Radical, Revolutionary People of Color Movement**

Patriarchy continues to oppress all of us within our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color organizations and movement. This system of oppression has held back our movement, divided us, forced us to make false choices among forms of oppression, and created environments of fear and submission rather than justice and liberation. Patriarchal attitudes and ways of doing our work, gender-based abuse within our own intimate relationships, among our own constituents and among comrades too often goes on silent and unchallenged. Denial, minimizing and victim-blaming which prop up and support continued gender-based oppression and violence remains deeply rooted within our consciousness, assumptions, attitudes, and actions or lack of action.

Our movements have failed to take collective action to seriously challenge gender oppression thereby creating a long list of casualties – women and girls<sup>1</sup> who have remained silent, those who have slipped away from our organizations and movements because they couldn't take it anymore, and those who have been pushed out for shouting out about oppression and abuse.

Will we continue to oppress our own in the name of liberation? Or will we create liberatory structures and practices which encourage rather than silence those who dare to speak out against abuse?

### **Goals of this Report:**

- 1) Demand that our progressive, radical, and revolutionary people of color organizations and movements **take collective responsibility to address and end patriarchy and gender oppression in all of its forms.**
- 2) Develop **community accountability politics, principles, processes** and **practices** around issues of gender oppression, abuse and violence (and which can extend beyond gender to address other forms of oppression).
- 3) Develop community accountability principles and practices which **strengthen our resistance to the criminal justice system.**
- 4) Integrate **gender analysis** with an analysis of other systems of oppression, i.e., class, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, education, national origin, religion, physical and mental ability/disability, immigration status, language and other factors and extend community accountability politics, principles, process and practices **to address and end other forms of abuse and violence.**
- 5) Create new liberatory politics, practices, and politics to unlearn patriarchy, end gender oppression and promote **social justice and liberation for all of us.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Women/girls includes female-identified, transgender persons. See more on gender fluidity on p.4.

## Section 1: Introduction

2

### **What Is In This Report:**

This INCITE! report on *Gender Oppression, Abuse, Violence: Community Accountability within the People of Color Progressive Movement* contains concerns, definitions, preliminary recommendations, and discussions from the ad-hoc INCITE! Community Accountability in Organizations Working Group meeting held in Seattle in February 7 – 8, 2004.

Report topics include:

- 1) Call to Action! (Section 1)
- 2) Definitions of Gender Oppression (Section 2)
- 3) How Gender Oppression is Maintained, Supported, and Encouraged (including minimization, victim-blaming, counter-organizing, and “sneakier and nastier” behavior) (Section 2)
- 4) Principles of Accountability (Section 3 and Appendix)
- 5) Preliminary Recommended Policies and Procedures (Section 4)
- 6) Special Notes for Survivors and their Supporters (Section 5)
- 7) Special Notes for Abusers and their Supporters (Section 6)
- 8) Critical Resistance - INCITE Statement: Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex (Appendix)

## **The February 2004 Ad-Hoc INCITE! Community Accountability in Organizations Working Group Meeting**

This document is generated from a two-day meeting held in Seattle February 7 – 8, 2004 by an ad-hoc INCITE! Community Accountability in Organizations Working Group<sup>2</sup> specifically gathered to address gender oppression including patriarchal political and work environments, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and sexual assault committed against women/girls/women-identified persons of color within progressive, radical and revolutionary people of color organizations and movement.

This meeting was a follow-up meeting to a Community Accountability working group meeting held in Brooklyn, NY in February 2003<sup>3</sup> sponsored by INCITE! and Sista Il Sista which looked more broadly at concrete struggles towards community accountability around violence against women and girls within geographical locations (e.g., 4-block neighborhood in Brooklyn), identity-based spaces (e.g., queer communities of color in Seattle), and, to a lesser extent, within people of color organizations and movements.

This February 2004 meeting addressed the challenges of and necessity for community accountability around issues of gender oppression within our own progressive, radical, and revolutionary people of color organizations and movements. Individuals and organizational representatives with decades of experience within labor, immigrant rights, anti-violence, racial justice, anti-prison-industrial complex, and anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist revolutionary organizations and movements met to create a collective response to what was recognized as multiple isolated, often privatized acts of gender oppression.

All of the participants shared personal/political experience in struggling with concrete issues of gender oppression, abuse, and violence within a political context. All understood first-hand how complex, confusing, yet important this work is. Most reported frustrating and failed attempts to deal with the issue. A couple more hopeful examples provided insight into the promises of community accountability.

The 2-days led to a wealth of thinking – reflections, questions, and suggestions. 2-days was not enough. We did not have time to reach consensus if that was even possible.

One result is this working document<sup>4</sup>, offering some beginning considerations and suggestions for principles and processes regarding work to be done to address and end oppression acts and structures within our own organizations and movement.

---

<sup>2</sup> This ad-hoc working group was part of INCITE!'s Community Accountability Task Force. This Task Force has transformed into INCITE!'s Campaign Against Police Violence Against Women of Color and for Community Based Responses to Violence. If interested in this campaign, contact Andrea Ritchie at aritchiedc@aol.com.

<sup>3</sup> The results of this meeting are documented in INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, Community Accountability Principles/Concerns/Strategies/Models, Working Document (March 4, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Please feel free to make use of any of the materials found in this document. You do not need permission from INCITE!, but please credit INCITE! or any of the other organizations responsible for materials in the appendix. If you have any additional questions or comments to make, please forward them to INCITE! c/o mimiekim@yahoo.com.

Section 1: Introduction

4

**The February 2004 Ad-Hoc INCITE! Community Accountability in Organizations Working Group**

Jane Sung E Bai (CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities)  
Alisa Bierria (INCITE! National; Communities Against Rape and Abuse)  
Eboni Colbert (INCITE! Community Accountability Task Force; Communities Against Rape and Abuse) (CARA)  
Marta Esquilin (Casa Atabex Ache)  
Simmi Gandhi (INCITE! National)  
Onion (INCITE! Community Accountability Task Force; Communities Against Rape and Abuse) (CARA)  
Xandra Ibarra (Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse)  
Theryn Kigbamasad-Vashti (Communities Against Rape and Abuse) (CARA)  
Helen Kim  
Mimi Kim (INCITE! National; INCITE! Community Accountability Task Force)  
Raquel Laviña  
Sujin Lee  
Dayanara Marte (Casa Atabex Ache)  
Shale Marulana (Communities Against Rape and Abuse) (CARA)  
Kristin Millikan (INCITE! Community Accountability Task Force)  
Ai-Jen Poo (CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities)  
Cindy Wiesner  
Young Im Yoo  
Representative (Desis Rising Up and Moving) (DRUM)

**Naming Gender Oppression: Definitions**

Gender oppression is the individual acts of abuse and violence, patterns of power and control, and systems of abuse and violence perpetrated against women and girls due to their gender<sup>5</sup>.

This includes state-sponsored violence; the effects of imperialism and capitalism on our material, social, and spiritual conditions; corporate violence; media violence; workplace violence; and violence at the level of family and intimate relations.

For the purposes of this document, we are focusing on gender oppression committed within the environments of our people of color political work, i.e., within workplaces, organizations, coalitions, and movements, by perpetrators including individuals (men, women, transgender) and/or by organizational cultures and conditions. These forms of gender oppression specifically include individuals, workplaces or organizations systematically elevating men, work done by men or male-identified work, and men's culture at the expense of women, work done by women or women-identified work, and women's culture; sexual harassment; sexual assault; and intimate partner or domestic violence (physical, emotional, sexual, economic).

We understand that broader systems intersect within these individual, organizational, and political contexts. We also understand that gender oppression intersects with oppression based upon class, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, education, gender identity, national origin, religion, physical and mental ability/disability, immigration status, language and other factors which are not secondary to gender as categories of oppression. We also understand that the ways that these other categories of oppression intersect within any given situation or context of gender oppression must be addressed in order to adequately capture the dynamics of gender oppression and to create effective strategies to address and end it.

While this document significantly addresses patriarchy/gender oppression and internalized racism, it does not adequately address other intersecting forms of oppression, abuse, and violence. It also does not adequately address the material, social, and political realities of gender fluidity and queer/transgender/inter-sex peoples, calling into question the appropriateness of the gender binary often assumed within this document.

---

<sup>5</sup> Much of the language of the meeting and reflected in this document assumes a gender binary of women/men; girls/boys, concepts which are challenged by the realities of gender fluidity and the movement to challenge oppressive social/political constructions of gender. INCITE! and the organizations and individuals present at the meeting were at varying levels of understanding of gender fluidity, hampering our collective ability to put out a more complex or defined analysis in this document. This is a work in progress. INCITE! acknowledges the necessity to promote an understanding of a more complex and socially/politically grounded notion of gender and is committed to transforming language and practices as a part of our own accountability. We look forward to seeing this document transform as INCITE!, and the organizations and individuals engaging with this document and this work continue to sharpen our analysis of the intersections of gender and violence.

Section 2: Naming the Abuse

**Naming Gender Oppression: Definitions (Breaking it Down)**

**GENDER OPPRESSION =**

<b>WHO'S DOING IT</b>	<b>DOING WHAT</b>	<b>AGAINST WHOM</b>
Individual (Mostly men* but can be women, transgender)	Individual acts of abuse and violence against women and girls*	Women and girls (especially if more vulnerable or have less power because poor, person of color, indigenous, immigrant, queer, less education, disabled, english as second language or no english, young, dependent on the person/organization who's doing it)
Organizations (workplaces, organizations, coalitions, constituencies, movements)	Patterns of power and control elevating men/boys at the expense of women/girls	
Systems (imperialism, capitalism, militarism, police, prison-industrial complex, non-profit industrial complex, white male christian heterosexual patriarchy)	Systems of abuse and violence targeting women/girls	

**GENDER OPPRESSION IN PROGRESSIVE, RADICAL, REVOLUTIONARY PEOPLE OF COLOR MOVEMENT=**

<b>WHO'S DOING IT</b>	<b>DOING WHAT</b>	<b>AGAINST WHOM</b>
Individual people of color (Mostly men* but can be women, transgender)	Elevating men/boys*, men's work, male culture	Women and girls* of color within these organizations and movements (especially if more vulnerable or have less power because poor, indigenous, immigrant, queer, transgender, less education, disabled, english as second language or no english, young, dependent on the person/organization who's doing it)
Progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color organizations cultures or conditions (workplaces, organizations, coalitions, constituencies, movements)	Demeaning or devaluing women/girls, women's work, women's culture	
	Centralizing knowledge and decision-making to the advantage of men/boys	
	Giving men/boys roles and positions with higher status and more public recognition	
Systems (imperialism, capitalism, militarism, police, prison-industrial complex, non-profit industrial complex, male christian heterosexual patriarchy)	Sexual harassment; Sexual assault	
	Intimate partner/domestic violence (physical, emotional, sexual, economic)	
	Internalized sexism	

\* **Note:** Men/boys and women/girls can include biologically-born, transgender, or man/boy-identified persons or women/girl identified persons.

Section 2: Naming the Abuse

**NAMING GENDER OPPRESSION: Sexual Harassment, Sexual Abuse/Assault, and Intimate Partner Abuse or Domestic Violence\* =**

TERM	WORKING DEFINITION	CAN INCLUDE
SEXUAL HARASSMENT	Unwanted sexual/affectionate attention or creation of an unwanted sexualized environment	Sexual looks/gestures Sexual comments Sexual jokes Unwanted request for dates, sexual relations Subjecting to pornography or environment demeaning to women/girls/queer people Threats to demote, fire, harm (emotionally or physically) if sexual or dating requests are not met or if victim/survivor tells other people
SEXUAL ABUSE/ASSAULT	Coerced or otherwise unwanted sexual contact (if with a child, this can be any sexual exposure, behavior or contact)	Sexual touching Fondling, molesting Exposure to sexual parts/genitals of the offending person Oral, vaginal, anal touching or penetration by the offending person's body or object Threats to harm (emotionally or physically), demote, fire if sexual contact is not met or if victim/survivor tells other people
INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE – or – DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	Acts of abuse or harm or pattern of power and control exercised by one person over another within an intimate relationship (dating, living together, married, former relationship, heterosexual or same-gender)	Physical abuse including threats and threats to harm others or self Verbal abuse Emotional abuse Isolation Sexual abuse/assault Economic/financial abuse Threats or use of other systems of oppression to gain power/control such as INS, queer outing, etc.

\* **NOTE:** These definitions and categories are simplified for the purpose of these tables. They intentionally avoid overly legalistic terms which can be used to dismiss abuse or violence or distract from the facts of abuse.

## **How Is Gender Oppression within Progressive, Radical, Revolutionary Movement(s) Maintained, Supported, Encouraged?**

### **Patriarchy: The Root of Gender Oppression**

The system of patriarchy is the root of gender oppression. We all exist within a system of oppression which assumes rigid gender binaries of women and men, female and male; which values males and the male-identified and devalues female and the female-identified; which assumes heterosexual normativity; which delegates men/boys/male-identified to roles and positions which have higher status and levels of decision-making than women/girls/female-identified; which assume male values as universal and given. This system of patriarchy intersects with racism, classism, homophobia/heterosexism, transphobia, ableism, ageism, nativism (anti-immigrants) to oppress women of color/queer people of color. Ultimately, it oppresses us all. Despite our commitment to social justice and liberation, we as activists, organizations and movement are not immune.

Gender oppression is not just an act, it's a state of mind and a way of doing. The patterns of power and control, acts of abuse and violence, and cultures and conditions tolerating, condoning, encouraging and perpetrating abuse and violence appear to follow certain patterns.

### **Tools for Maintaining Gender Oppression: Denial, Minimizing, Victim-Blaming, Counter-Organizing**

Patriarchy upholds and supports gender oppression. 4 primary tools for maintaining gender oppression and for avoiding accountability are: 1) Denial; 2) Minimizing; 3) Victim-Blaming; and 4) Counter-Organizing.

#### **1) Denial**

Our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color as individuals, organizations and movement (just as the rest of the world) have been pretty good at **denying** that gender oppression exists.

*What can denial look like?*

- Silence
- Inability to take any action
- Putting issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression on the back burner (forever)
- Viewing issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression as individual, personal, private rather than acts of gender oppression requiring public and collective responsibility and solutions
- Writing off sexual harassment or sexual assault as a "date," "affection," "showing that he likes you," "flirting," "misunderstandings," etc.
- Viewing any issue of gender oppression (which requires more than abstract talk) as "bourgeois," "middle class," "white feminist," "dividing our movement," playing into the hands of the race/class/nation enemy

## 2) Minimizing

Our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color as individuals, organizations and movements (just as the rest of the world) have been pretty good at **minimizing** gender oppression as an issue or **minimizing** situations/acts/patterns of gender oppression.

*What can minimizing look like?*

- Putting issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression on the back burner (forever)
- Viewing issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression as individual, personal, private rather than acts of gender oppression requiring public and collective responsibility and solutions
- Writing issues, acts, or patterns of gender oppression off as a “misunderstanding”
- Writing sexual harassment or assault off as “dating,” “asking someone out”
- Writing domestic or intimate partner violence off as “fighting,” “an argument,” “they have problems,” “they both have problems,” “she should just leave him (or her)”
- Viewing any issue of gender oppression (which requires more than abstract talk) as taking away from the “real” and/or “important” work
- Hoping that it goes away or the people raising or causing the issues go away
- Addressing it very ineffectually (and knowing it)

## 3) Victim-Blaming

Our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color as individuals, organizations and movements (just as the rest of the world) have been pretty good at **blaming the victim or others who call for accountability** when gender oppression as an issue or a situation of gender oppression arises. This **blaming the victim or allies** is often combined with **denial** and **minimizing**.

*What can victim-blaming look like?*

- Calling the people (usually women) raising the issue of gender abuse, oppression or violence “bourgeois,” “middle class” “white feminist,” “dividing the movement,” “destroying unity,” “lynching,” taking us away from the “real” or “serious” work, a race/class/nation enemy
- Blaming women/girls who raise the issue of gender oppression, abuse or violence as “deserving it,” a “flirt,” “young,” “wants attention,” “must have done something wrong,” a “slut,” “man-hater,” a “lesbian/dyke,” “making a power play”
- Blaming women/girls who take a stand against gender oppression as “bitches,” “controlling,” “angry,” “man-haters,” “lesbians/dykes,” “white feminists”
- Turning abusers into victims by naming people (usually men) accused of sexist, abusive, or violent attitudes and behavior as “victims,” “nice guys,” “heroes,” “important to our work (more important than the women/girls raising the issue or victim to abuse)”

#### 4) Counter-Organizing

Our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color as individuals, organizations and movements (just as the rest of the world) have been pretty good at using the skills and tactics better used for fighting real enemies against people (usually women/girls/female-identified) who raise the issue of gender oppression, abuse or violence or a situation of gender oppression, abuse or violence.

Basically, this means that our own people (mostly men/boys/male-identified but also women/girls/female-identified) have been good at **counter-organizing**. And **counter-organizing** can involve a higher level of the devaluation, deceit, and manipulation which are all also a part of the dynamics of gender oppression and avoidance of accountability.

*What can counter-organizing look like?*

- Harassing, demeaning, denouncing, gossiping about, spreading rumors and lies about or threatening to do these things to women who raise the issue of gender oppression either as survivors/victims or as allies
- Demoting, firing or threatening to demote or fire women who raise the issue of gender oppression either as survivors/victims or as allies
- Isolating or discrediting persons who raise concerns and/or call for accountability
- Questioning the legitimacy of concerns to detract from the need to be accountable
- Questioning the legitimacy of the accountability process to detract from the need to be accountable
- Accusing others of abuse in order to call attention away from own accountability
- Denying, minimizing, victim blaming, and plain-old lying about doing any of these things when called on it

#### **More on Counter-Organizing – or – What Is the Opposite of Accountability?**

People who commit acts of gender oppression, abuse, and violence can add on all sorts of additional manipulative behavior in order to: 1) Make sure their victims/survivors don't do anything back, 2) Make sure they don't get caught, 3) Make sure that if they do get caught they can get out of it.

These 3 things are the **OPPOSITE of ACCOUNTABILITY**.

#### **1) Make sure their victims/survivors don't do anything back**

- Pick someone who they think won't tell or is not in a position to tell (vulnerable, powerless, young, feels guilty or responsible, is not believed by others, etc.)
- Uses denial (Silence; I didn't do anything; What did I do?)
- Uses minimizing (I didn't do anything; It was nothing; It didn't mean anything; I'll never do it again; It was such a little thing; What – that?)
- Tries to make them believe it's their fault (You wanted it; you asked for it; you didn't say "no;" you should have known; you liked it; you made me do it; you provoked it)
- Discredits their work and/or personality
- Threatens them by saying that they'll out them about something, ruin their reputation, will make up stories, etc.
- Threatens them with physical harm, firing them, calling the police on them, calling INS, hurting family or friends or pets

#### **2) Make sure they don't get caught**

- Do things when people aren't looking or in ways that people can't see
- Start discrediting their survivor/victim, their work or personality, so that anything they say won't be believed
- Organize to isolate the survivor/victim and any allies

## Section 2: Naming the Abuse

11

- Act in heroic, self-sacrificing or other ways so that will make people think they could do no wrong or feel indebted to them

### 3) Make sure if they do get caught, they can get out of it

- All the things in 1 and 2 (may be heightened)
- Make up a story or stories explaining away their behavior
- Silently or not so silently threaten those who try to do something to raise the issue or confront them
- Threaten to sue, call the police, call INS, report to funders
- Claim that they are being a victim – may refer to being a victim of “white feminists,” being victim to the race/class enemy
- Claim that the accusations are “personal gripes,” “individual issues,” “power-plays”
- Apologize and think that’s all they have to do
- Apologize and then get mad if they have to do anything else
- Say that they didn’t know and expect this to be all they have to do
- Say that it’s a misunderstanding and expect this to be all they have to do
- Say they didn’t mean it and expect this to be all they have to do
- Cry (can look like remorse but can be a way to get people to feel sorry for them)
- Start making excuses for their behavior (not to explain or understand, but to excuse their behavior and avoid accountability) (bad childhood, stress, too much work, too much responsibility, they’re so dedicated to the movement)
- Try to meet with the victim/survivor as a good-will gesture or as a way to be direct and honest (but really to interrogate/intimidate them)
- Use leaders sometimes from outside of the community to back them up, e.g., white allies with power and a reason to back up a person of color to look good especially when the survivor/victim is someone less powerful
- Use relationships with respected folks within the movement to back them up, prove that they cannot be abusers, shield them from accountability
- Quit or leave immediately if they think they have to take some accountability (not for reasons of the victim/survivor’s safety or because it’s the right thing to do, but because they want to avoid accountability)
- Use delaying tactics until everyone gets worn out

**And It Can Get Even Sneakier and Nastier**

Some oppressive, abusive, and violent people (mostly men/boys/male-identified but also women/girls/female-identified/transgender) go beyond these actions and devote considerable energy towards increasing their opportunities for abuse. Some examples include:

- “Chronic” abusers, harassers, rapists, batterers, etc. who find one person (usually women/girls/female-identified) after another to oppress and abuse
- Abusive persons who ask others to cover for them or organize others to cover for them
- Abusive persons who “mentor” other (often less powerful or younger) individuals in order to exercise power and control over them or to take advantage of them
- Abusive persons who “mentor” other (often less powerful or younger) individuals in order to groom these others to mimic their attitudes and behaviors and to offer protection
- Abusive persons who use their skills to gain positions of leadership, status and power within the political movement in part to gain more power and control over others, increasing opportunities for abuse and escape from accountability

SECTION 3: POLITICS AND PRINCIPLES WHAT IS IT THAT WE WANT?
--

The February 2004 Ad-Hoc Community Accountability in Organizations Working Group did not reach consensus on this list of principles, in part, due to the limited time. This list reflects the discussions of principles brought up within the meeting in part based upon those presented in the appendix by INCITE! and Communities against Rape and Abuse (CARA).

**Principles of Accountability for Individuals/Organizations/Constituents/ Movement:**

1) *Understand impact of unequal power.*

Gender oppression, abuse and violence takes place within a context of patriarchal (and other forms) of power.

- a) *Unequal power as cause of abuse.* Acknowledge how unequal power dynamics caused or allowed oppression, abuse or violence to occur.
- b) *Address unequal power in accountability.* Consider unequal power dynamics in the accountability process and act to correct unequal power dynamics, make responsible use of unequal power relationships which exist, and/or minimize its negative impact on the accountability process.

2) *Prioritize survivor safety.*

Gender oppression, abuse and violence violates the safety and integrity of individual women/girls/female-identified and women as a collective group.

- a) *Support.* Offer a consistent *support* space including specifically designated people for support and specific roles they can play.
- b) *Safe space.* Consider how to keep a *safe* space within the workplace, organization, political spaces including asking the abuser to stay away (temporary or long-term).
- c) *Confidentiality.* Consider and be clear about *confidentiality* (who knows what and how long will confidentiality be kept).

3) *Prioritize survivor self-determination.*

Gender oppression, abuse and violence exercises male privilege and power or that used by the abuser (including women/girls/female-identified) at the expense of women's right to self-determination.

- a) *Self-determination.* Consistently offer self-determination and choice over the process of accountability (does she want to be a central part of it; does she want to leave the process to others but be updated and how often; does she want regular spaces and places for communication and input on the process; does she want to directly meet with the abuser – with whom and how; decision-making on reparations).

4) *Collective responsibility and action.*

Gender oppression is often exercised as individual, interpersonal, and private acts. This keeps the blame on individual victims/survivors (and individual abusers) and helps to keep these violations out of the public eye and outside of the boundaries of collective action and responsibility.

a) *Collective responsibility for creating conditions of oppression/abuse.* Understand that violations taking place within an organizational, constituent, or community context are also the responsibility of that collective group.

b) *Collective action towards community accountability.* Take collective responsibility to come up with principled and effective accountability processes to address gender oppression, stop it, and prevent it in the future.

5) *Collective accountability for oppressive, abusive, and violence organizational culture and conditions.*

Organizational conditions are often themselves systems of gender oppression, abuse, and violence – or – serve to tolerate, condone, encourage, or perpetrate gender oppression, abuse, and violence.

a) *Acknowledge collective responsibility in creating a culture or condition allowing for abuse.* Take account of any responsibility the organizational culture or conditions have towards perpetrating, tolerating, condoning, or encouraging gender oppression, abuse, and violence.

b) *Change organizational culture or conditions.* Take action to change organizational culture, structures, and practices which tolerate, condone, encourage or perpetrate gender oppression, abuse, and violence.

c) *Transform organizational culture or conditions.* Transform organizational culture, structures, and practices to those which prevent gender oppression, abuse, and violence; encourage those who are survivors/victims or abuse, witnesses, and perpetrators to come forward; and move towards gender equity and liberatory gender relations.

6) *Abuser accountability for oppressive, abusive, and violent attitudes and behaviors.*

Individuals and/or organizations responsible for oppression, abuse or violence fully accountable for their attitudes and actions. Individuals/organizational perpetrators must hold themselves accountable. And the collective accountability process must also prioritize full accountability by abusive individuals/organizations/constituents.

a) *Acknowledge the abuse.* Create an accountability process where the oppressor/abuser fully understands acknowledges the abuse (as specific acts and patterns and their political implications) without excuses, disclaimers, denials, minimizations, or victim-blaming.

b) *Acknowledge the consequences of abuse.* Create an accountability process where the oppressor/abuser fully understands and acknowledges the impact and consequences upon the survivor/victim, their friends and family, the organization, and the community.

c) *Make reparations.* Create an accountability process where the oppressor/abuser makes sincere and meaningful reparations which can include a full public apology, payment for damage, payment of debts, behavioral changes, counseling, leaving the organization, political education for self and towards others, etc.

d) *Make long-term, permanent change.* Create an accountability process where the oppressor/abuser can receive and take action towards meaningful and long-term personal and political education regarding his or her attitudes and actions, alternatives to abusive attitudes and actions, and is held accountable to a plan for long-term follow-up and monitoring including consequences if conditions are not met.

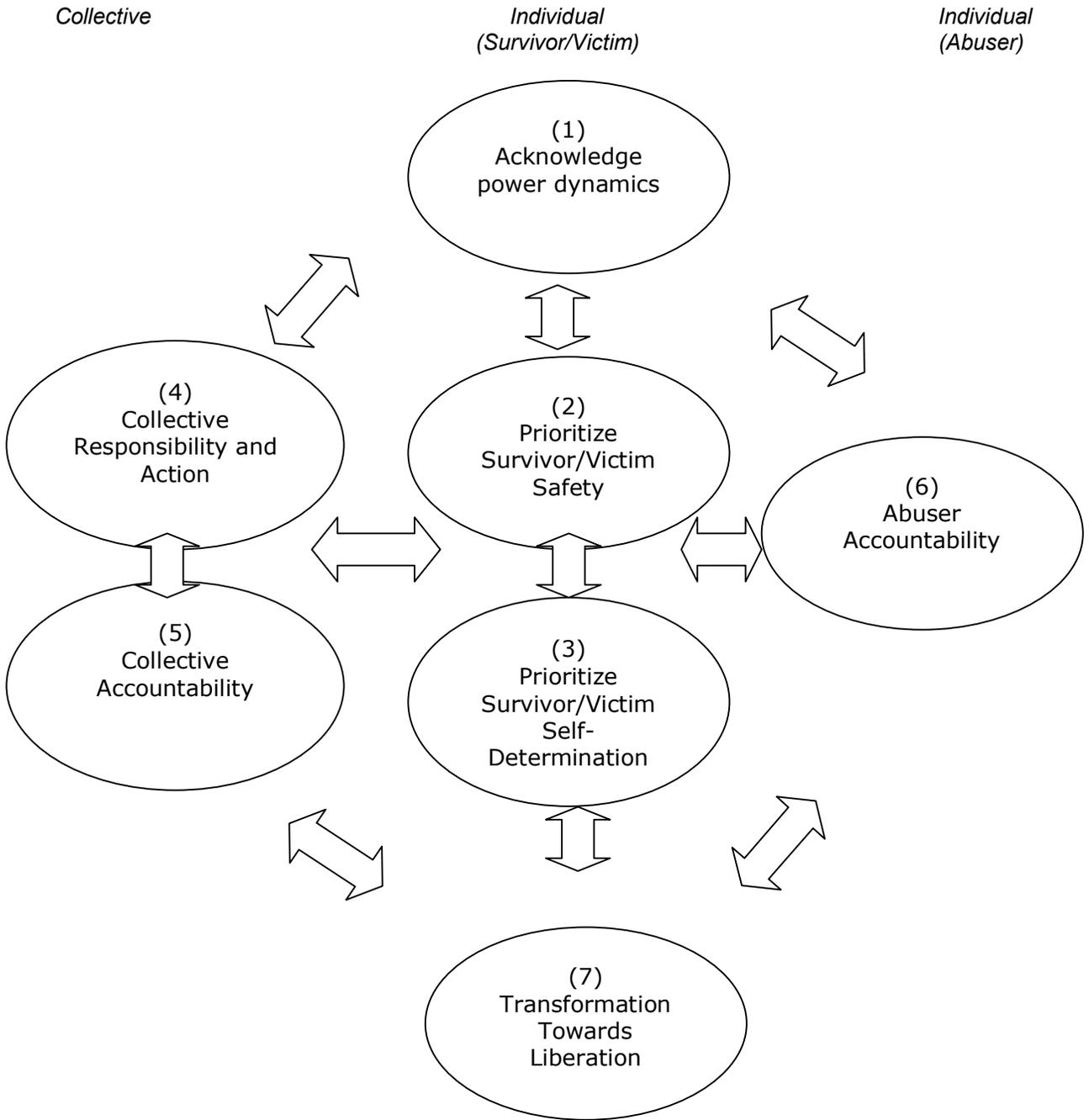
7) *Transformation towards liberation.* The overall goal for community accountability is to **transform** all individuals and collective groups towards gender equity and respect – towards liberation.

### Section 3: Politics and Principles

15

- a) The accountability process should allow for the transformation of *victims/survivors* from victimization from oppression, abuse and violence to safety, healing, and self-determination.
- b) The accountability process should allow for the transformation of *abusers/oppressors* from perpetrators of oppression, abuse and violence to responsibility, accountability, and advocacy for gender equity and respect.
- c) The accountability process should allow for the transformation of *organizations* and *communities* from those tolerating, condoning, encouraging, and perpetrating oppression, abuse, and violence towards those upholding in principle and practice gender equity and respect.
- d) The accountability process should allow for transformed *relationships* among all of these individuals and collective groups from oppression, abuse, and violence towards liberation.

**Principles of Community Accountability (Chart)**



SECTION 4: PROCESS AND PRACTICE SO WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN? WHAT CAN WE DO?
---

**Set conditions for safety, respect, gender equity now!**

Organizations, movements, communities already have some norms and ways of doing things even if they're not written or made explicit. Unfortunately, many of these support gender oppression or do not adequately challenge it. Even if we are committed to gender equity, many of us have experienced that we are not equipped to address acts and patterns of gender oppression, abuse, and violence when they arise.

**Community accountability principles and policies as prevention**

Organizations which have clear, well-defined, and well-communicated community accountability principles, policies, and procedures in place:

- 1) Ground the organization in principles and practices which demonstrate a commitment to gender equity and liberatory interpersonal and social relations and which challenge patriarchy;
- 2) Prevent oppression, abuse, and violence by providing a clear message that serious action will be taken if these acts do occur; and
- 3) Provide a transparent process for accountability allowing for a fairer, more immediate, and more effective and transformative process if and when acts of gender oppression, abuse, or violence do occur

(NOTE: There was discussion about the benefits of a transparent and shared – not hidden on a shelf – policy to promote a collective organizational politics and culture around oppression, abuse and violence. A transparent organizational or collective process would reduce individualized, reactive responses. Everyone would know, agree to, and have ownership over a set of principles and procedures which could be grounded in common values and be flexible enough to address a range of situations and people.)

- 4) Provide structure and practice for ongoing internal political education to members (including new members), staff, constituents, and movement on unlearning patriarchy, gender equity, and liberatory interpersonal and social relations.

**Recommended Policies and Procedures (Minimal)**

- 1) Principles of accountability. (See Section 2 and Appendix)
- 2) Define patriarchy, oppression, abuse, and violence (regarding gender oppression and/or other forms of oppression). Be specific. Go beyond a laundry list. But do not get caught up in “legalistic” language which can be limiting. (See Section 1)
- 3) Describe accountability process and procedures including: (More detail on this next in Section 4)
  - 1] *Scope of accountability* (Who does this cover?)
  - 2] *Organizational body(ies)* responsible for accountability
  - 3] *Safety and self-determination process* for the victim/survivor(s)
  - 4] *Initial accountability process* for the abuser/perpetrator(s)
  - 5] *Assessment process* for figuring out what happened and implications for accountability process
  - 6] *Communication process* for both victim/survivor and abuser/perpetrator, accountability body, organization, and broader community
  - 7] *Goal setting process* which reaches common goals among victim/survivor, the accountability body, organization, and broader community
  - 8] *Accountability process* and involvement of abuser/perpetrator; victim/survivor; organization; and anybody outside of the organizational context
  - 9] *Consequences/Reparations/Transformation process*
  - 10] *Follow-up, Monitoring process*

### Accountability Process and Procedures (Detail)

#### 1) Scope of community accountability

a) *Who does your community accountability include? Who falls under community accountability? As victims/survivors? As abusers? Does this include members, families and friends of members, staff and volunteers, board, other individuals and groups within coalitions or working partnerships, the larger political community, the neighborhood, etc.?*

b) *Internal accountability versus dealing outside of the organization? What are safety and accountability responsibilities and processes within the narrower organizational context? What are they when this context extends beyond organizational boundaries?*

#### 2) Organizational body responsible for safety and accountability

Safety and accountability can require a coordinated team of individuals and groups. Each may have different roles/functions but all should be operating with common goals. Different individuals may be involved in different teams, and teams may in some cases consist of only one or two people.

In selecting team members, considerations should include: Who makes sense? Are their relationships to survivors/victims or abusers appropriate for them to be on that particular team? Do they fully understand the dynamics of gender oppression and are they committed to the principles and process of accountability? Do they have the time and energy to commit to a long-term process? Will these teams or team members require additional support from inside members or outside resources?

a) *Accountability policy team/committee.* Who is responsible for formulating accountability principles and policies? What kind of decision-making does this call for? How are these updated and changed? How often?

b) *Reporting Committee/Team.* For people experiencing, witnessing, or perpetrating (and wanting to take accountability for) oppression, abuse, or violence – what individuals or group of people should people approach regarding safety and accountability?

c) *Back-up Reporting Committee/Team.* If the people or groups responsible for accountability are not trusted or are among those responsible for oppression, abuse, or violence – what alternative people or groups are available for safety and accountability?

d) *Overall Accountability Committee/Team.* What are the specific roles of these individuals and/or bodies with regard to all of the accountability steps and responsibility to various people and groups involved? How are the other sub-committee/teams related to the overall team? How will the entire process be coordinated?

e) *Assessment Team.* Who is responsible for assessment of the overall situation and recommendations for appropriate process?

f) *Survivor Safety/Support Committee/Team.* Who will make sure to ensure survivor safety and support? What are the specific roles and routes of communication of this individual/committee/team?

g) *Abuser Accountability Committee/Team.* Who will make sure to consistently address accountability of the abuser? Immediate and more long-term? What are the specific roles and routes of communication of this individual/committee/team? Who are people trusted by or respected by the abuser who will also work to uphold accountability?

h) *Collective Accountability Committee/Team.* Who will make sure that the organization or collective body takes full responsibility for acknowledging its own role in creating the conditions for abuse, addressing the abuse, and transforming its culture and conditions?

i) *Follow-Up/Monitoring Committee/Team.* Accountability processes often require long-term follow-up or monitoring. Who will be responsible for carrying out the long-term, monitoring process?

### 3) *Safety and self-determination for the survivor/victim*

Safety and self-determination are immediate and long-term needs of survivor/victims, both of which have been violated in situations of oppression, abuse, and violence.

Think about what the collective responsibility is towards providing safety and ask the survivor/victim what she needs in terms of safety, decision-making, involvement in the process, and information.

a) *Immediate safety.* What are the immediate safety needs of the survivor/victim? Does the abusive person or accused person need to be immediately separated from the person/organization? For how long? Are there immediate medical, emotional resources needed?

b) *Confidentiality.* What are the survivor/victim's needs or desires for confidentiality? Get specific in terms of who knows, what they know, when they know. How can your process respect the confidentiality needs/wishes of the survivor/victim while at the same time upholding a responsible accountability process? How long can or should confidentiality be kept? How much control do you have over confidentiality and what can be done about it?

(NOTE: Confidentiality was raised as an area of concern. In some situations, survivor/victim decision-making on confidentiality may not be the same as that decided by the collective body. This can go either way – the survivor/victim may desire a greater level of public disclosure or the collective body may want more disclosure. How do we balance survivor/victim self-determination and organizational/political principles when these appear to be in conflict? This issue requires more discussion/work.

Furthermore, confidentiality cannot always be upheld despite clear policies and the best intentions. People talk, and sometimes it's unrealistic or even unprincipled to ask people to keep their mouths shut. How can we have a collective process which requires some disclosure and maintain boundaries around confidentiality?

Some noted that confidentiality actually serves to maintain and support oppression and abuse, preferring either open public disclosure or less emphasis on the importance of confidentiality in accountability processes.

It was generally agreed that strengthened and more transparent policies and procedures around accountability in advance would make confidentiality conflicts or concerns less problematic. More work is needed.)

c) *Support.* What kind of support will the survivor/victim need both in terms of the situation of oppression, abuse, or violence and in dealing with the accountability process? How can this support be provided on an on-going basis? What resources can the organization offer in terms of support from within the organization and additional support from outside resources such as counseling, etc.?

d) *Self-Determination.* What does the survivor/victim need or want in terms of the process – specifics, timeline, outcomes? How can you respect the needs/wishes of the survivor/victim while at the same time upholding a responsible accountability process?

4) *Initial accountability process for abuser or person accused of abuse*

a) *Immediate accountability process.* The accountability process should include a general process for addressing an abuser or person accused of abuse which is immediate. The nature of accusations, immediate safety concerns including the possibility of asking this person to step out at least temporarily, a clear plan for immediate and ongoing communication (to and from the abuser or accused abuser) regarding the process including person(s) to contact and regularity of contact should be included.

b) *Support.* What kind of support will the abuser need to take responsibility for the abuse and to understand and commit to the accountability process? Who can best offer support? How can this support be provided on an on-going basis? What resources are appropriate for the organization to offer in terms of support from within the organization and additional support from outside resources?

5) *Assessment process*

Following the immediate reporting and safety/accountability response, there needs to be an assessment of the details of the oppressive pattern, the situation of abuse or violence. An assessment informs the information to be given to all parties involved in the accountability process as well as an appropriate process and timeline.

(NOTE: The working group struggled with *assessment* versus *investigation*. To some, the term or the process of *investigation* suggests some kind of fact-finding, truth-gathering objective body, uncomfortably similar to a criminal justice process. It also suggested that the survivor/victim may not be telling the truth. Similarly, the term *alleged abuser or offender* brought up criminal justice language which seemed to discredit the survivor/victim as an *alleged survivor/victim*.

Others recommended a rigorous investigation process for fairness to the accused or for “due process” including questioning of individuals related to the accused abuser outside of the organization and/or within the intimate or familial realm of that person.

Because of the significant lack of consensus (especially given the time constraints), no further recommendations regarding the assessment process can be offered at this stage of the working document. More work is needed.)

6) *Communication Process*

Communication is an important aspect of the accountability process. Accountability opportunities and opportunities for transformation for survivor/victims, abusers, organizational members, and the larger community/movement can be lost if information and process are not communicated regularly, political analysis is not offered, and/or long lapses in time and communication leave these individuals/collective groups to fill in the blanks with their own idea of what is or is not happening.

a) *Communication within the overall accountability committee/team.* Since it is recommended that different subgroupings of the overall accountability team divide their roles with respect to the survivor, abuser, organization, and other, these individuals/teams need to be in clear communication.

b) *Communication with the survivor.* This is driven by the priorities of survivor safety and self-determination. If the survivor is not central within the accountability process either by her choice or the organization’s decision over a responsible accountability process, then on-going, respectful communication over the process and input on the process needs to happen on a regular and clearly defined basis. Who needs to be in contact with the survivor and who the survivor can or wants to contact (including the abuser) with what information and how needs to be clear.

Consistent and ongoing support of the survivor also requires consistent contact and communication.

c) *Communication with the abuser.* This is not equivalent to communication with the survivor. This is not driven by self-determination concerns but concerns over abuser accountability and transformation. Abuser accountability and transformation requires a clear naming of the abuse, consequences to the survivor and the organization, and clarity around the process. Holding the abuser accountability within the larger collective requires consistent and ongoing engagement with the abuser.

d) *Communication with the rest of the organization.* This is driven by the principles of collective responsibility, collective accountability, and community transformation. The accountability process should include a plan about how those organizational members within and outside of the immediate process will be informed and involved.

e) *Communication outside of the organization.* This is driven by the principles of collective responsibility, collective accountability, and community transformation. It may also be driven by the need for safety and abuser accountability outside of the boundaries of the organization. Depending upon the situation of abuse, it may be appropriate to keep in communication with people or groups outside of the organization. Thought about who this involves and what information and how and when this will be communicated needs to be part of the plan.

f) *Confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality.* While lines of communication and guidelines for content and confidentiality should be kept clear and transparent to all participants including the abuser, confidentiality is not always desired or controllable. What will be kept confidential? Among whom? For what purpose? For how long? Are confidentiality guidelines realistic? Are they time-limited?

(NOTE: See discussion notes on confidentiality in 3(b). More work is needed.)

## 7) *Setting goals*

The accountability process may be different depending on what are individual and collective goals. Goals may be ending abuse, finding appropriate consequences to repair the harm, making the abuser and/or organization/constituency/community responsible and accountable for the abuse, transform the collective group through the accountability process so that further gender oppression will be prevented, etc.

a) *Survivor/victim goals.* Assess what the goals for the survivor/victim in the process of accountability.

b) *Collective goals.* Assess the range of goals within the collective group.

c) *Reaching consensus on goals.* Different individuals and different factions or groups may have different goals. These goals may be contradictory. Goals may also contradict the principles of accountability. It is important to have a process in which explicit goals (even if problematic) can be made transparent. These then can be explored for whether they serve a greater purpose or whether they are contradictory to overall accountability principles. The group should reach consensus on common goals and assess throughout the process whether these goals are in line with the process and whether they are being met.

(NOTE: There was much discussion about the goals of accountability, much of which is reflected in the section on principles (section 2). The criminal justice system generally supports goals of punishment and retribution. As a social justice movement, we challenged ourselves to discuss goals which are transformative but which do not collude with oppression and violence. For example, revenge, punishment, public humiliation, and banning are common underlying goals

when abuse has been committed. Are such goals in line with transformation? How are they or how are they not and in what situations? More work is needed.)

#### 8) *Accountability process*

The accountability process itself, particularly that of assessment (see number 5) and the process leading up to and including a call for acknowledgement and reparations is one which many organizations have failed to do successfully.

Various processes including one-on-one meetings between an appointed person from the accountability team or an entire accountability team with the abuser, a long investigation process with findings brought to abuser along with the organizational members and others outside of the organization, public hearings naming the abuser and the accusations, an internal tribunal involving the abuser and survivor/victim with a community interrogation of the abuser, were all mentioned as processes which organizations have attempted.

Because these processes differed so widely and involved very different situations, any generalization or recommendations is difficult to present at this stage of the working document.

a) *Reasonable timeline and use of organizational resources.* The organization should take accountability seriously and be realistic about the amount of resources which can be engaged on a consistent and sustained basis. The accountability process leading up to consequences and reparations should be timely and reasonable.

b) *Long-term plan for follow-up.* Accountability is generally not a one-time confrontation. A reasonable timeline can be followed by a long-term sustainable follow-up process so that the abuser sustains his (or her) accountability and transformation. Likewise, long-term and sustainable follow-up for the organization to reflect upon its own accountability and its need to follow-up with long-lasting change requires a long-term follow-up process.

#### 9) *Consequences/Reparations/Transformation Process*

Abuser accountability requires consequences or reparations on the part of the abuser in order to address the abuses to the survivor (and her immediate community), the harm to the organization and broader community, the harm to the movement, and the violation of the principles of social justice and liberation. Transformation requires that the survivor's violation of safety and self-determination be addressed, that the collective take full accountability towards upholding survivor safety and abuser accountability, and, finally, that the abuser fully acknowledge and make reparations for the oppression, abuse, and violence he (or she) has committed.

(NOTE: There was some discussion of the difference between individual survivor/victim requests for consequences or reparations and those determined as appropriate by the organization or collective body. It was agreed that this remains an area of concern, but consensus was not reached as to which would be prioritized.

Furthermore, there was discussion about the degree of consequences/reparations according to the severity of the act or acts of oppression/abuse/violence which took place. More work is needed.

Another area of concern was the inability to fully control public disclosure even if the survivor/victim and/or collective body calls for limited disclosure. See Notes on confidentiality in 3(b))

a) *Consequences/Reparations from the abuser* can include:

1] Full public naming of the abuses committed (how public is to be determined by the accountability process including decision of the survivor/victim)

## Section 4: Process and Practice

24

2] Full public naming of the consequences of abuses committed to the survivor, her community, the organization, and the movement even if unintentional (how public is to be determined by the accountability process including decision of the survivor/victim)

3] Full public acknowledgement of responsibility for these attitudes and actions (how public is to be determined by the accountability process including decision of the survivor/victim)

4] Full public apology for these attitudes and actions to all the parties harmed (how public is to be determined by the accountability process including the survivor/victim)

5] Agreement to fulfill any reparations requirements – minimally those requested by the survivor/victim and the accountability process – but encouraged to include those initiated by the abuser

a] Reparations can include the payment of resources (including money) to the survivor for repayment of debts or payment for harms, payment for any costs such as counseling, fines to the organization or community

b] Services to the survivor, the organization, or the community

c] Arrangements to stay away from the survivor/victim, or the organization, or public events, as requested by the organization and/or survivor

d] Leaving the organization must be seriously considered as an appropriate consequence even if the abuser is able to understand and take accountability for these abuses

e] Ongoing political education and action for self and others within organization/constituency/community, particularly around gender oppression and unlearning patriarchy

6] Agreement to ensure accountability and transformation by engaging in long-term process including:

a] Counseling, abuse treatment, or other long-term political education

b] Follow-up and monitoring to make sure they are not continuing to engage in oppressive or abusive attitudes or behaviors

c] This may involve self-initiated and/or organizationally initiated disclosure of history of oppression, abusive or violence to community or movement members outside of the organization including future employers

d] Further commitment to ongoing political education and action for self and others within organization/constituency/community, particularly around gender oppression and unlearning patriarchy

e] Understanding of consequences if these long-term requirements are not fulfilled and/or if further oppressive, abusive or violent attitudes and acts continue

b) *Consequences/Reparations* by the organization

The organization may be the abuser in this situation or may have contributed to creating conditions tolerating, condoning, or encouraging abuse. The organization should also engage in

its own assessment of consequences and reparations and subject itself to determination by the survivor/victim as to appropriate consequences, reparations, and long-term follow-up.

These consequences/reparations may be similar to those for an individual abuser (See prior list).

The organization should also commit to ongoing political education and action regarding gender oppression, prevention, and full support of gender equity and liberatory gender relations.

#### 10) *Follow-up/Monitoring*

Because oppressive and abusive patterns are so deeply engrained, long-term change is challenging, and conditions for continued denial, minimizing, victim-blaming, and manipulation are so prevalent, follow-up and monitoring should be a part of the accountability process.

##### a) *Follow-up/Monitoring plan*

1] *Follow-up/Monitoring Committee/Team.* The plan should include a group whose role it is for ongoing follow-up and monitoring

2] *Follow-up/Monitoring Timeline.* The plan should include regular intervals for follow-up/monitoring, system for follow-up/monitoring, and criteria for determining whether the abuser is adequately changing oppressive and abusive attitudes and behaviors

##### b) *Consequences if abuser fails to take accountability.*

If the abuser fails to take accountability at the step of consequences/reparations or later, the organization needs to consider further consequences. These consequences can include:

1] *Leaving the organization.* This may be appropriate even if the abuser takes full accountability.

2] *Public disclosure* of the abuser and his (or her) oppressive, abusive, or violent attitudes and behaviors to others outside of the organization and/or to future organizations within which this person may work. This may be appropriate even if the abuser takes full accountability

(NOTE: This was an area of concern for many within the group since the failure for abusers to take accountability was a common experience. Suggested measures appeared more punitive and/or isolating as accountability is avoided or counter-organizing occurs. Is this a necessary consequence when accountability is not followed, and does this still fall under the overall goal of ending oppression and supporting transformation? What other consequences or processes could support accountability and transformation? More discussion is needed.)

SECTION 5: NOTE FOR SURVIVORS AND SUPPORTERS

- 1) *It is not your fault.* The abuse is the responsibility of the perpetrator and/or the organization allowing the abuse to happen.
- 2) *Think about what you want for safety and healing.* Safety and an opportunity to heal from oppression and abuse are your right. Think about what you need from your friends, family, co-workers, comrades, your organization, and the movement for safety and healing. Do you want additional support? Should your organization be providing leave time? Support for counseling? A space for you to be heard?
- 3) *Think about the role of the organization in addressing accountability and reparations.* Accountability for oppression/abuse is different for different people, for different situations. Do you want a statement of accountability and apology? Do you want it public? Do you want it written? Do you want a supportive space for your abuser to hear and understand what you have experienced? Do you want a public statement from your organization?
- 4) *Think about how you want to be involved in the process of accountability.* Do you want to be involved in every step? Do you want to be involved in specific aspects of the process? Do you want to stay out of the process but be informed at certain times, regarding certain decisions?
- 5) *Think about how you want to communicate with the perpetrator.* Do you want to face the perpetrator in person? Alone? With other support? If you face the perpetrator in person, do you want that person to remain silent? Do you want to give them an opportunity to respond? In person? In writing? Will you accept communication only if it is in the form of apology and accountability?

SPECIAL NOTE FOR THOSE SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF OPPRESSION/ABUSE:

- 1) *Remind them that they are not to blame.* Survivors often blame themselves for the abuse or for not taking action which could prevent it. Remind them who is responsible – the perpetrator, the organization which allowed abuse to take place, the movement, systems of oppression, etc.
- 2) *Help them explore what they may need for safety or healing.* Survivors especially within the movement often deny the traumatizing impact of oppression and abuse. Validate their needs for safety and healing. Help them explore what would make this possible.
- 3) *Help them explore what would help with accountability and reparations.* Advocate for a process which supports the survivor and leads to accountability of the perpetrator and the organization. Help them explore what they want from the process of accountability and reparations.

SECTION 6: NOTE FOR ABUSERS AND SUPPORTERS

SPECIAL NOTE FOR ABUSERS OR THOSE ACCUSED OF ABUSE/OPPRESSION

- 1) *Take accountability.* Regardless of intention or motivation, your attitudes and actions have had a negative impact on someone else. You are responsible for the consequences. Not intending to hurt someone (if you feel you did not have this intention) does not excuse you from the impact of your attitudes and/or behaviors.
- 2) *Understand the negative impact of your attitudes or actions on the individual(s), organization and movement.* Your attitudes and actions have hurt another person within your organization or movement. They have also hurt your organization, community and movement. Understand the widespread impact of gender oppression and abuse and take accountability.
- 3) *Understand that evading accountability has a further cost on the person you have hurt/offended, the organization, constituents, community and movement.*
- 4) *Support for you means support to take accountability, not support to defend yourself from accountability.* If you have friends, family, co-workers, comrades whom you trust, ask them to help you to take accountability – not to help you avoid accountability.
- 5) *Take accountability for full reparations.* Consider what you need to do to take accountability including full public apology, offering resources (including money) to the survivor/organization to help with healing/reparations for the abuse, counseling, leaving the organization (temporary or permanent), involving yourself in political education for yourself and others.
- 6) *Understand gender oppression/abuse and accountability as fundamental issues of social justice.*

SPECIAL NOTE FOR SUPPORTERS OF ABUSERS OR THOSE ACCUSED OF ABUSE/OPPRESSION

- 1) *Support them to take accountability.* Taking accountability is the right thing to do – for the survivor/victim, for the community, for the movement, for the abuser or person accused of oppression/abuse. The best way to support them is not to enable them to make excuses – but to take full accountability.
- 2) *Support their transformation.* If you are involved in the process of accountability, advocate for a process which fully educates the abuser on the nature of the oppression/abuse, the consequences on the survivor, the organization, and the movement, and which asks for full reparations.
- 3) *Support ongoing political education.* Support ongoing political education on patriarchy/gender oppression for the organization, constituents and movement.

APPENDIX A:  
Critical Resistance-INCITE Statement

**Critical Resistance - INCITE Statement  
Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex**

We call social justice movements to develop strategies and analysis that address both state AND interpersonal violence, particularly violence against women. Currently, activists/movements that address state violence (such as anti-prison, anti-police brutality groups) often work in isolation from activists/movements that address domestic and sexual violence. The result is that women of color, who suffer disproportionately from both state and interpersonal violence, have become marginalized within these movements. It is critical that we develop responses to gender violence that do not depend on a sexist, racist, classist, and homophobic criminal justice system. It is also important that we develop strategies that challenge the criminal justice system and that also provide safety for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. To live violence free-lives, we must develop holistic strategies for addressing violence that speak to the intersection of all forms of oppression.

The anti-violence movement has been critically important in breaking the silence around violence against women and providing much-needed services to survivors. However, the mainstream anti-violence movement has increasingly relied on the criminal justice system as the front-line approach toward ending violence against women of color. It is important to assess the impact of this strategy.

1) Law enforcement approaches to violence against women MAY deter some acts of violence in the short term. However, as an overall strategy for ending violence, criminalization has not worked. In fact, the overall impact of mandatory arrests laws for domestic violence have led to decreases in the number of battered women who kill their partners in self-defense, but they have not led to a decrease in the number of batterers who kill their partners. Thus, the law protects batterers more than it protects survivors.

2) The criminalization approach has also brought many women into conflict with the law, particularly women of color, poor women, lesbians, sex workers, immigrant women, women with disabilities, and other marginalized women. For instance, under mandatory arrest laws, there have been numerous incidents where police officers called to domestic incidents have arrested the woman who is being battered. Many undocumented women have reported cases of sexual and domestic violence, only to find themselves deported. A tough law and order agenda also leads to long punitive sentences for women convicted of killing their batterers. Finally, when public funding is channeled into policing and prisons, budget cuts for social programs, including women's shelters, welfare and public housing are the inevitable side effect. These cutbacks leave women less able to escape violent relationships.

3) Prisons don't work. Despite an exponential increase in the number of men in prisons, women are not any safer, and the rates of sexual assault and domestic violence have not decreased. In calling for greater police responses to and harsher sentences for perpetrators of gender violence, the anti-violence movement has fueled the proliferation of prisons which now lock up more people per capita in the U.S. than any other country. During the past fifteen years, the numbers of women, especially women of color in prison has skyrocketed. Prisons also inflict violence on the growing numbers of women behind bars. Slashing, suicide, the proliferation of HIV, strip searches, medical neglect and rape of prisoners has largely been ignored by anti-violence activists. The criminal justice system, an institution of violence, domination, and control, has increased the level of violence in society.

4) The reliance on state funding to support anti-violence programs has increased the professionalization of the anti-violence movement and alienated it from its community-organizing, social justice roots. Such reliance has isolated the anti-violence movement from other social justice movements that seek to eradicate state violence, such that it acts in conflict rather than in collaboration with these movements.

5) The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken power away from women's ability to organize collectively to stop violence and has invested this power within the state. The result is that women who

seek redress in the criminal justice system feel disempowered and alienated. It has also promoted an individualistic approach toward ending violence such that the only way people think they can intervene in stopping violence is to call the police. This reliance has shifted our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence.

In recent years, the mainstream anti-prison movement has called important attention to the negative impact of criminalization and the build-up of the prison industrial complex. Because activists who seek to reverse the tide of mass incarceration and criminalization of poor communities and communities of color have not always centered gender and sexuality in their analysis or organizing, we have not always responded adequately to the needs of survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

1) Prison and police accountability activists have generally organized around and conceptualized men of color as the primary victims of state violence. Women prisoners and victims of police brutality have been made invisible by a focus on the war on our brothers and sons. It has failed to consider how women are affected as severely by state violence as men. The plight of women who are raped by INS officers or prison guards, for instance, has not received sufficient attention. In addition, women carry the burden of caring for extended family when family and community members are criminalized and wherehoused. Several organizations have been established to advocate for women prisoners; however, these groups have been frequently marginalized within the mainstream anti-prison movement.

2) The anti-prison movement has not addressed strategies for addressing the rampant forms of violence women face in their everyday lives, including street harassment, sexual harassment at work, rape, and intimate partner abuse. Until these strategies are developed, many women will feel shortchanged by the movement. In addition, by not seeking alliances with the anti-violence movement, the anti-prison movement has sent the message that it is possible to liberate communities without seeking the well-being and safety of women.

3) The anti-prison movement has failed to sufficiently organize around the forms of state violence faced by LGBTI communities. LGBTI street youth and trans people in general are particularly vulnerable to police brutality and criminalization. LGBTI prisoners are denied basic human rights such as family visits from same sex partners, and same sex consensual relationships in prison are policed and punished.

4) While prison abolitionists have correctly pointed out that rapists and serial murderers comprise a small number of the prison population, we have not answered the question of how these cases should be addressed. The inability to answer the question is interpreted by many anti-violence activists as a lack of concern for the safety of women

5) The various alternatives to incarceration that have been developed by anti-prison activists have generally failed to provide sufficient mechanism for safety and accountability for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. These alternatives often rely on a romanticized notion of communities, which have yet to demonstrate their commitment and ability to keep women and children safe or seriously address the sexism and homophobia that is deeply embedded within them.

We call on social justice movements concerned with ending violence in all its forms to:

1) Develop community-based responses to violence that do not rely on the criminal justice system AND which have mechanisms that ensure safety and accountability for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. Transformative practices emerging from local communities should be documented and disseminated to promote collective responses to violence.

2) Critically assess the impact of state funding on social justice organizations and develop alternative fundraising strategies to support these organizations. Develop collective fundraising and organizing strategies for anti-prison and anti-violence organizations. Develop strategies and analysis that specifically target state forms of sexual violence.

Appendix  
30

- 3) Make connections between interpersonal violence, the violence inflicted by domestic state institutions (such as prisons, detention centers, mental hospitals, and child protective services), and international violence (such as war, military base prostitution, and nuclear testing).
- 4) Develop an analysis and strategies to end violence that do not isolate individual acts of violence (either committed by the state or individuals) from their larger contexts. These strategies must address how entire communities of all genders are affected in multiple ways by both state violence and interpersonal gender violence. Battered women prisoners represent an intersection of state and interpersonal violence and as such provide and opportunity for both movements to build coalitions and joint struggles.
- 5) Put poor/working class women of color in the center of their analysis, organizing practices, and leadership development. Recognize the role of economic oppression, welfare "reform," and attacks on women workers' rights in increasing women's vulnerability to all forms of violence and locate anti-violence and anti-prison activism alongside efforts to transform the capitalist economic system.
- 6) Center stories of state violence committed against women of color in our organizing efforts.
- 7) Oppose legislative change that promotes prison expansion, criminalization of poor communities and communities of color and thus state violence against women of color, even if these changes also incorporate measure to support victims of interpersonal gender violence.
- 8) Promote holistic political education at the everyday level within our communities, specifically how sexual violence helps reproduce the colonial, racist, capitalist, heterosexist, and patriarchal society we live in as well as how state violence produces interpersonal violence within communities.
- 9) Develop strategies for mobilizing against sexism and homophobia WITHIN our communities in order to keep women safe.
- 10) Challenge men of color and all men in social justice movements to take particular responsibility to address and organize around gender violence in their communities as a primary strategy for addressing violence and colonialism. We challenge men to address how their own histories of victimization have hindered their ability to establish gender justice in their communities.
- 11) Link struggles for personal transformation and healing with struggles for social justice. We seek to build movements that not only end violence, but that create a society based on radical freedom, mutual accountability, and passionate reciprocity. In this society, safety and security will not be premised on violence or the threat of violence; it will be based on a collective commitment to guaranteeing the survival and care of all peoples.

<http://www.incite-national.org/involve/statement.html>

APPENDIX B:  
EXAMPLES OF PRINCIPLES OF ACCOUNTABILITY

**INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence  
Community Accountability  
Principles/Concerns/Strategies/Models  
Working Document  
March 4, 2003**

NOTE: These ideas have been generated from various communities involved with INCITE!s Activist Institutes and workshops. INCITE! does not endorse particular strategies. We recognize that what works in one community may not work in another community, and that some of these strategies may not work in any community. The purpose of this document is to provide ideas and to spark the development of additional strategies that may help promote community accountability on the issue of violence against women of color. If you have additional ideas, principles, concerns, and/or strategies you would like to add to this working document, please send to Andrea Smith, Program in American Culture, 3700 Haven Hall, Ann Arbor, MI 48109 or <incite\_national@yahoo.com>. We will continue to update this document as we get feedback.

**Principles**

1) - Principle of Collective Action: The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken power away from women's ability to organize collectively to stop violence and has invested this power within the state. The result is that women who seek redress in the criminal justice system feel disempowered and alienated. It has also promoted an individualistic approach toward ending violence such that the only way people think they can intervene in stopping violence is to call the police. This reliance has shifted our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence. Thus, community accountability strategies require collective action. If we ask the question, What can I do?, then the only answer will be to call the police. If we ask the question, what can we do? then we may be surprised at the number of strategies we can devise.

2) Principle of Prioritizing Safety for Survivors - Many community accountability strategies have been developed under the model of "restorative justice." However, we are finding that such models often do not prioritize safety for survivors. They are often coerced to go along with mediation strategies in order to "keep the peace." In addition, the Aboriginal Women's Action Network reports that in Canada, "restorative justice" models have been used by white perpetrators to escape accountability for violence committed against Native women. They report that one man, Bishop Hubert O'Conner, was charged with multiple instances of sexual assault of aboriginal girls and boys. While found guilty, his punishment was to participate in a healing circle with his victims. They also complain that many of these models, are termed "indigenous" and hence Native peoples must use them, even they may bear no resemblance to the forms of justice particular Native nations used at all.

Any community accountability strategy will be ineffective if it relies on a romanticized notion of "community" that does not address the reality of sexism and homophobia within our communities. In addition, it is important to frame community accountability strategies as a question of whether or not a survivor should call the police if she is under attack. The question is not, should she call the police. The questions are, why is that her only option, and can we provide other options that will keep her truly safe.

3) Principle of Self-Determination: Community accountability strategies will not work in all communities at all times. Each strategy must be evaluated within its community context and constantly be re-evaluated for its effectiveness and fairness.

4) Principle of Re-thinking and Building Community: The term "community" is generally thought of in terms of geography. Given how mobile people are, particularly in large urban areas, it is not clear how there

can be these strategies under these contexts. However, we can expand our notion of community to include communities based on religious affiliations, employment, hobbies, athletics, etc, and attempt to develop strategies based on those communities. For instance, one man was banished from a community for committing incest. However, he simply moved out of that area. But because he was a well-known academic, the family held him accountable in the academic community by following him around when he gave academic talks and exposing his history.

In addition, in order to have community accountability, our work may also include building communities where they have been fractured so that they are in a position to hold its members accountable.

5) Principle of Exposing the Ineffectiveness of the Criminal Justice System to Address Gender Violence: Because of the difficulties in developing community accountability strategies, many anti-violence advocates argue that relying on the criminal justice system is our only “alternative.” It must be recognized, however, that the criminal justice system is itself not an alternative. It not only does not provide safety for women as an overall strategy (although may do so in individual cases), but actually puts women in greater danger of violence, particularly state violence (these issues are discussed in the INCITE-Critical Resistance Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex). In the end, the only thing that will stop violence against women of color is when our communities no longer tolerate it. Developing these strategies are difficult because they entail addressing the root causes of oppression - racism, sexism, homophobia, and economic exploitation - but in the end, it is only through building communities of resistance and accountability that we can hope to stop violence against women of color.

### **Concerns/Questions to Ponder/Issues**

1) How do we incorporate justice into community accountability strategies? If we do not rely on the state to adjudicate cases of gender violence, then how do we ensure justice and fairness before holding perpetrators accountable? How do we ensure that we do not turn into vigilante groups? If we do develop processes do judge cases within a community context, will we just replicate a mini version of the oppressive state apparatus within our communities?

Some models developed from addressing violence in LGBTI communities may be helpful as they report that they cannot assume that when someone calls saying they have been abused that this is necessarily true because they report that batterers also always call to save they have been abused. Therefore, they have developed tools for assessing what is really going on in the situation. One such model has been developed by the Northwest Network in Seattle. They have a whole list of questions to determine what is going on in the situation. It is important that there be a process so that batterers cannot manipulate a community accountability process against a survivor.

2) What are the boundaries of acceptable forms of community accountability? For instance, is it okay to respond to perpetrators with physical violence? Would we even consider such acts violent? How do we determine which strategies are acceptable or not?

3) Some strategies depend on banishing or ostracizing the perpetrator from the community. On one hand, it may help the person who has been victimized not to see that person. On the other hand, is this strategy simply the same as the prison system approach which also banishes people from community. In addition, if the person leaves the community, will he just abuse people in another community, and will you lose your ability to hold him/her accountable? There may be ways to keep the person in the community, without the person directly affected by him/her have to see that person. What is we presume there is no “outside” our community? Another approach that has been used is to keep the person there, but to sanction her/him, such as all members refusing to show her/him affection. It is also important that a community of accountability does not become a community that just enables the abuse. Such as sometimes perpetrators regularly “confess” their sins to the community, but then keeps on doing the same thing. Another related issue is making sure the person is stripped of her/his power position in that community. It also must be understood that any accountability strategy to get someone to change their behavior is likely to take years for it to actually change that person.

## Appendix

33

4) Some concerns have been raised about public shaming or outing. For some groups, it has been effective. It has been reported that in using this approach in queer communities (and this may be true in other communities as well) that this approach actually escalates violence.

5) What language should we use to describe those who use violence and those who suffer from it? Most of our language is derived from the criminal justice framework - victim/perpetrator. Is there other language that would be more suitable?

## COMMUNITIES AGAINST RAPE AND ABUSE (CARA)

Excerpted from a draft version of *Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies*. Written by a collective of women of color from Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA): Alisa Bierria, Onion Carrillo, Eboni Colbert, Sandra Ibarra, Theryn Kigvamasud"Vashti, and Shale Maulana. (CARA: Seattle, unpublished).

Sexual violence is often treated as a hyper-delicate issue that can only be addressed by trained professionals such as law enforcement or medical staff. Survivors are considered "damaged," pathologized beyond repair. Aggressors are perceived of as "animals," unable to be redeemed or transformed.<sup>6</sup> These extreme attitudes alienate every-day community members – friends and family of survivors and aggressors – from participating in the critical process of supporting survivors and holding aggressors accountable for abusive behavior. Ironically, survivors overwhelmingly turn to friends and family for support, safety, and options for accountability strategies.<sup>7</sup>

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

Because social networks can vary widely on the basis of values, politics, cultures, and attitudes, we have found that having a one-size-fits-all community accountability model is not a realistic or respectful way to approach an accountability process. However, we have also learned that there are some important organizing principles that help to maximize the safety and integrity of everyone involved – including the survivor, the aggressor, and other community members. An accountability model must be creative and flexible enough to be a good fit for the uniqueness of each community's needs, while also being disciplined enough to incorporate some critical guidelines as the framework for its strategy.<sup>8</sup> Below is a list of ten guidelines that we have found important and useful to consider:

---

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this article, we use the word "aggressor" to refer to a person who has committed an act of sexual violence (rape, sexual harassment, coercion, etc.) on another person. Our use of the word "aggressor" is not an attempt to weaken the severity of rape. In our work of defining accountability outside of the criminal system, we try not to use criminal-based vocabulary such as "perpetrator," "rapist," or "sex predator." We also use pronouns interchangeably throughout the article.

<sup>7</sup> Golding, Jacqueline M., et al. "Social Support Sources Following Assault," *Journal of Community Psychology*, 17:92-107, January 1989. This paper is just one example of research showing that survivors are much more likely to access friends and family for support than they are to access police or rape crisis centers. Golding's research reveals that 59% of survivors surveyed reported that they disclosed their assault to friends and relatives, while 10.5% reported to police and 1.9% reported to rape crisis centers. Interestingly, Golding's research also asserts that survivors rated rape crisis centers as most helpful and law enforcement as least helpful. She suggests that, since friends or relatives are the most frequent contact for rape victim disclosure, efforts should focus on enhancing and supporting this informal intervention.

<sup>8</sup> Borrowing from philosopher Cornel West, we can call this approach of simultaneous improvisation and structure a "jazzy approach." Much like jazz music, a community accountability process can incorporate many different and diverse components that allow for the complexity of addressing sexual violence while also respecting the need for some stability and careful planning. Also, like jazz music, an accountability process is not an end point or a finite thing, but a living thing that continues to be created. Our understanding of community accountability ultimately transcends the idea of simply holding an abusive community member responsible for his or her actions, but also includes the vision of the community itself

### CARA's Accountability Principles

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

Dehumanization of aggressors also contributes to a larger context of oppression for everyone. For example, alienation and dehumanization of the offending person increases a community's vulnerability to repeatedly being targeted for disproportional criminal justice oppression through heightening the "monster-ness" of another community member. This is especially true for marginalized communities (such as people of color, people with disabilities, poor people, and queer people) who are already targeted by the criminal system because of their "other-ness." When one person in our community is identified as a "monster," that "monsterization" is often generalized to everyone in the community. This generalization can even take place by other members of the marginalized community because of internalized oppression.<sup>9</sup>

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

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

**3. Identify a simultaneous plan for safety and support for the survivor as well as others in the community.** Safety is complex and goes far beyond keeping your doors locked, walking in well-lit areas, and carrying a weapon or a cell phone. Remember that the "plan" in "safety plan" should be a verb, not a noun, and requires us to continue thinking critically about how our accountability process will impact our

---

being accountable for supporting a culture that allows for sexual violence. This latter accountability process truly necessitates active and constant re-creating and re-affirming a community that values liberation for everyone.

<sup>9</sup> We define "internalized oppression," as the process of a person that belongs to a marginalized and oppressed group accepting, promoting, and justifying beliefs of inferiority and lack of value about her group and, perhaps, herself.

physical and emotional well being<sup>10</sup>. Consider questions such as these: How will the aggressor react when he is confronted about his abusive behavior? How can we work together to de-mechanize the aggressor's strategies? Remember, one does not have control over the aggressor's violence, but you do have control over how you can prepare and respond to it.

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

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

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

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

---

<sup>10</sup> Thank you to the Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse for asserting the verb in "safety plan" and sharing that important distinction with the rest of us!

**6. Make sure everyone in the accountability-seeking group is on the same page with their political analysis of sexual violence.** Sometimes members of a group that is organizing for accountability are not working with the same definition of “rape,” the same understanding of concepts like “consent” or “credibility,” or the same assumption that rape is a manifestation of oppression. In order for the group’s process to be sustainable and successful, organizers must have a collective understanding of what rape is and how rape functions in our culture. For example, what if the aggressor and his supporters respond to the organizers’ call for accountability by demanding that the survivor provide proof that she was indeed assaulted or else they will consider her a liar, guilty of slander? Because of our legal structure that is based on the idea of “innocent until proven guilty,” and rape culture that doubts the credibility of women in general, it is a common tactic to lay the burden of proof on the survivor.<sup>11</sup> If the group had a feminist, politicized understanding of rape, they might be able to anticipate this move as part of a larger cultural phenomenon of discrediting women when they assert that violence has been done to them.

This process pushes people to identify rape as a political issue and articulate a political analysis of sexual violence. A shared political analysis of sexual violence opens the door for people to make connections of moments of rape to the larger culture in which rape occurs. A consciousness of rape culture prepares us for the need to organize beyond the accountability of an individual aggressor. We also realize we must organize for accountability and transformation of institutions that perpetuate rape culture such as the military, prisons, and the media.

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

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

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

**8. Let the aggressor know your analysis and your demands.** This guideline may seem obvious, but we have found that this step is often forgotten! For a number of reasons, including being distracted by

---

<sup>11</sup> We do not mean to simply imply that the principle of “innocent until proven guilty” should be completely discarded. However, we also recognize that this particular goal is actually often disregarded in a criminal system that is entrenched with institutional racism and oppression. Our goal is to create values that are independent from a criminal justice-based approach to accountability, including thinking critically about ideas such as “innocent until proven guilty” from the perspective of how these ideas actually impact oppressed people.

the other parts of the accountability process, the aggressor building distance between himself and the organizers, or the desire for the organizers to be anonymous for fear of backlash, we sometimes do not make a plan to relay the specific steps for accountability to the aggressor. Publicly asserting that the person raped another, insisting that he must be accountable for the act, and convincing others in the community to be allies to your process may all be important aspects of the accountability plan – but they are only the beginning of any plan. Public shaming may be a tool that makes sense for your group, but it is not an end for an accountability process. An aggressor can be shamed, but remain unaccountable for his behavior. Organizers must be grounded in the potential of their own collective power, confident about their specific demands as well as the fact that they are entitled to make demands, and then use their influence to compel the aggressor to follow through with their demands.

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

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

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

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