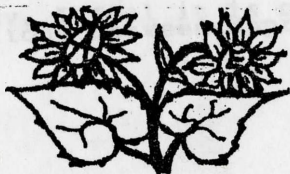




Domestic violence happens everywhere. We are all influenced by the violently oppressive society dominated by patriarchal capitalism. The social norms are dictated to us but we have the power and obligation to resist them. Of course many of us are aware of this and have been working to prioritize this issue for a long time. So how do we overcome, heal from, and abolish domestic violence (dv) without relying on the ineffective injustice system of the United States of AmeriKKKa? Well, first let's take responsibility for each other and our healing.

I traveled around north america for 1½ years doing workshops in mainly urban "radical communities" with my friend Rath. We encountered many folx along the way. Many of which were ready and willing to deal with dv within their scenes. Many others gave lip service to the issue during our discussion and then abandoned it as soon as the next hot topic or mass action came their way. This is part of my attempt to keep reaching out and through community, stoking the fire to get people to continue helping and respecting each other.

My name is Yareak (pronounced:ya-ray-ah). I am a jewish anarcho-transfeminist. I was raised a girl and identify as genderqueer. I am a loud, analytical tranny who loves humanity and hates violence. On that tip, I believe ALL manners of self-defense are not violent but necessary. I am a survivor on a multitude of levels. I am a counselor to other survivors; my ultimate goal in life is to abolish domestic violence. I live in mid-coast Maine. I moved here six months ago. I have just begun to get involved locally. I look forward to learning more as I go. I am just starting to meet others who work on this issue.



I feel a discussion of language used to describe dv is key to diminishing taboos surrounding the issue. It is important that there is some sense of commonality of definitions for coherent dialogue. I also recognize there may be diversity of opinion about language and definitions. The language I am using is stuff Rath and I came up with.

*Domestic Violence: Any pattern of behavior used to coerce, dominate or isolate. It is the exertion of any form of power that is used to maintain control over a person. It facilitates competition verses cooperation.

*Economic Abuse: Maintaining power and control by manipulating resources and fostering dependency. Some examples are stealing money, running up debts, purposely getting evicted, denying access to money.

*Sexual Abuse: The utilization of sex as a weapon. This can include rape, assaulting of "sexual parts," accusations of cheating, FORCED participation or watching pornography, ignoring safe words. Withholding sex in order to CONTROL a survivor is abuse. This occurs when an abuser refuses sex as a tactic of maintaining control not the denial of sex due to lack of desire or just plain not being in the mood.

*Verbal Abuse: Using language as a weapon. Some examples are name calling, blaming, belittling, not communicating (silent treatment), ethnic or racial slurs, sexist or transphobic language, "outing" (i.e. HIV status, orientation, identity).

*Emotional Abuse: Projection of power in order to demean or cause harm.

Amnesty International's Definition: "verbal degradation, denial of powers, isolation, monopolizing perceptions, occasional indulgence, and threats to kill." This is very similar to the treatment of prisoners of war.



*Consent: A verbal, physical, and emotional agreement. Consent is the presence of Yes not the absence of No!

*Healthy Relationship: What Ever You Want! It is crucial that people discuss boundaries and their pasts before entering into a relationship with another person. Some important aspects of healthy relationships are open and honest communication, explicit boundaries, Consent, and cooperation. We must remember that most of us have not been taught what healthy relationships are or resemble so WE must create a safe space and atmosphere for a discussion of relationship dynamics.

*Survivor Autonomy: Nobody is an expert on anyone else's experiences and their reactions to them. It is crucial that we not speak for survivors unless we are speaking of our own experiences explicitly. When providing support for a survivor, their individuality and autonomy MUST be respected at ALL times! Although our personal emotional responses to situations cannot be dictated by anyone, including the survivor, our behavioral responses MUST be in accordance with the survivor's wishes.

*Community Responsibility: A commitment to the establishment and maintenance of emotional, physical and psychological health on an individual and collective level.

Domestic violence touches everyone, it is a pariah on every community. Social privileges (i.e. gender, class, race) doesn't protect people. However, it is important to recognize that privileges may create greater access to resources for survivors who have them.

Simultaneously, abusers usually utilize their privileges, especially by threatening to remove them in order to maintain control within the relationship. As I acknowledge the universal nature of dv, I feel it is crucial to understand the connections between oppression and dv. Not

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only does lack of privilege affect one's resources but it may also dictate actual forms of abuse. This can play out in multiple ways. Many abusers will use a survivor's oppressions as a weapon of power. This is most clear within tactics of verbal abuse involving oppressive language. An example is an abuser threatening to expose a survivor's oppression (i.e. gender identity) in order to create an unsafe situation. Another way an abuser may use oppression is name calling. Most name is verbal degradation based on "deviations" from social norms. The other common connection of oppression and dv occurs when the abuser has equal or less privilege than the survivor. This usually involves the abuser using their burden to control and abuse the survivor. This burden is used to maintain the survivor's pity in order to further manipulate them.

I would like to address the myth of "mutual abuse." This myth seems to be prevalent in the communities i have encountered. As I've stated previously, dv is the creation and manipulation of power OVER someone within a relationship. In other words, an imbalance of power must occur for abuse to be present. This means that when a survivor (the individual with less power within that relationship) strikes back in any manner it is always self-defense NOT abuse. It is important to remember that even when we are paying great attention to the relationships around us, there are things we don't witness. In real terms, this can mean that we are seeing one person consistently lashing out at the other. We could also be witnessing an exchange of abusive behaviors. When in actuality, we may be seeing a reaction to abuse that is occurring when we aren't present. If a survivor comes to someone for help, and they hear that they have been "equally abusive" it can reinforce the abuser's blame of



the survivor, plus make the survivor feel they are responsible for ending the abuse. This allows the abuser to remain unaccountable. I found a statement that explains clearly what we as friend family, and community members can pay attention to when we suspect abuse:

"There may be unhealthy psychological interactions that are mutual in relationships, but we need to be careful not to equate that with 'mutual battering.' Both (partners) may be irritating and hurtful to eachother, but that's very different from the power-over, 'squashing', behaviors of batterers." --Karen Lee Asheran "The Myth of Mutual Abuse"

Keeping this in mind may help us to learn more about the in-depth issues of power and control present in relationships plus debunk the myth of mutual abuse.

The most consistent question asked during our workshops was "How do I support survivors?". Usually, this was asked by folx who don't identify as survivors. Many times it was non-trans men who asked. In my personal life and what I have witnessed is that people who have experienced any part of their lives as a womyn seem to figure out how to create informal support networks and discussions. In other words, because violence has been a factor in our lives due to living in a misogynist and transphobic society, we may be more comfortable discussing it (atleast among "ourselves"). This provides us with the beginning stages of figuring out how to deal with and overcome this violence. I am not trying to claim that womyn and trannies have figured out how to abolish violence and truly support eachother. (I won't even go into the rampant transphobia in some "womyn's communities, or the widespread misogyny perpetuated in some "trans communities.") It just seems that folx

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who have been victimized acquire and share survival skills. I believe this is the case for all groups of oppressed people but I am only speaking of my experience. Once again I do want to stress that ALL people experience violence. It does disproportionately affect trans and women.

Enough ranting... I will try to begin to answer the question posed. First of all, the most important aspect of supporting a survivor (or anyone at that matter) is being aware of your boundaries. In order to be a true supporter one must acknowledge one's own limitations and attitude about abuse. Another crucial part of support is being consistent and following through. Be honest with a survivor about your availability emotionally and logistically. It is important to remember that there is no recipe or protocol. Every survivor is an autonomous individual with different needs and desires. That is why it is most important to Listen to the Survivor! Those of us in a supportive role must follow the survivor's lead. An atmosphere of true empowerment should envelop the healing process. We all benefit from full consensual support of survivors. Many times this will be the survivor's first chance in a long time to gain control of their lives again. The supporter's autonomy should also be respected.

Every survivor has different needs. This is a time for great patience. Many times people need time to figure out and articulate their desires and boundaries. Remember: Don't pressure a survivor to "take action" until they are ready.

BE PATIENT!!

This is one reason supporters need support. Many times we are able to see tactics or steps of healing before the survivor is ready. This can be frustrating. We also need support because abuse of people we care about affects us too.

Supporters need to heal as well and it helps to

have others to lean on. So many supporters are also survivors and supporting others can trigger memories of our own experiences of abuse. Here are some tips that should help with support survivors:

Respect Boundaries: Make it clear that you acknowledge the boundaries the survivor establishes. Also understand that boundaries can shift be Flexible. Respect all types of boundaries; emotional, psychological and physical.

Don't Impose Your Beliefs: Respect the diversity of tactics in healing. Don't push a survivor to act outside their comfort zones. Don't ever invalidate any experience of abuse. All abuse is detrimental, no form of abuse is worse or better than another.

Get Consent: Always ask before speaking about the abuse with the survivor or anyone else. Never do anything to respond or share the knowledge of abuse without the survivors explicit consent.

Allot Space for the Survivor to Define Their Own Experience!!

Honor Survivors' Feelings: any response someone has to abuse they survived is valid. It is hard to hear the expressions of fear, terror, shock, horror, anger, grief, rage, sadness, disgust or shame. (Just a few examples.) Tough emotions need to be worked thru. Remember - utilize your support network.

Help Recognize, Clarify and Utilize Resources:

A lot of times it is difficult to recognize internal as well as external resources. Don't pressure, just help them see past their abuse. This can include providing information such as hotline numbers or self-defense knowledge, or reminding the survivor of their own strength.

The cops and courts revictimize and demean most survivors. It is evident that the injustice system produces abusers rather than rehabilitate them. Yet until our communities create alternative

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solutions, it is our fault survivors' choices may be limited to relying on the injustice system. In order to be prepared to support survivors of abuse it is important to know a little of what to expect. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Survivors May Experience...

- A distrust of their spontaneity
- A loss of enthusiasm
- A prepared, on guard state
- An uncertainty about how they are coming across
- A concern that something is wrong with them
- An inclination to soul searching and reviewing incidents with the hope of determining what went wrong
- A loss of self-confidence
- A growing self doubt
- An internalized critic
- A concern that they aren't as happy as the "should be."
- An anxiety and fear of being crazy
- A sense that time is passing too quickly and they are missing something.
- A desire to escape or run away
- A belief that what they do best may be what they do worst.
- A tendency to live in the future- "Every thing will be great when/after..."
- A distrust of future relationships

Of course this is not an all-encompassing list and you should remember we are all individuals and our experiences vary. It is important to know that healing is many times a life long project. A survivor is a survivor forever (an abuser can never lose that label either). Being able to really follow thru and be there for loved ones who have survived abuse is crucial. Support doesn't just end when the sense of crisis has subsided. Just keep in mind that supporting survivors is an incredibly rewarding and righteous political act.



Domestic violence is often minimized as a "personal problem" and just a women's issue. While really it is a pariah which devastates entire communities by perpetuating oppressions. DV is one result of the power and control characteristics of social hierarchies. It should be dealt with as such. If we are working towards the abolition of oppressions we all have a responsibility to confront and abolish dv.

We must define what we stand FOR not just what we are against. If we want to create healthy community we have to work for it. This begins with how we interact with one another. In my travels I have begun to see small steps in this direction. Some communities have begun discussing healthy communication and creating support networks. This should and will continue to grow.

We should all take interest in each other's relationships. The understanding of the difference between privacy and isolation is crucial. Certainly we are all entitled to our privacy and shouldn't feel expected to share more than we desire to. It is also healthy to show compassion thru interest in how people around us interact. One of the biggest reasons abuse cycles go unchecked is isolation.

Abusers create isolation in order to maintain control. Abusers restrict survivors from discussing their relationships with others. This is reinforced by social pressures, which are presented under the guise of privacy. Many of us are redefining family. We are trying to create a more inclusive definition. By doing this we are acknowledging the importance and complexity of our relationships with people outside of the constructed nuclear family. If we are going to consistently challenge social norms we must do so by opening dialogue about all our relationships. We need to begin to honor all of our relationships. It is revolutionary to create healthy family plus it leads to stronger and longer lasting friendships.

One idea that has surfaced in the battle against dv is creating Violence Prevention Task Forces. This begins with a compassionate commitment to community. I believe we will change attitudes about dv and our collective responsibility to abolish it thru dialogue. This dialogue begins with a discussion of our definitions of healthy relationships and abuse. We challenge prescribed norms by creating new definitions of relationships, utilizing healthier communication styles, and thru a commitment to care for ourselves responsibly. Once this commitment is made we are ready for action. While this action certainly requires ingenuity it also involves utilizing existing resources. These resources involve individuals with skills such as mediation and existing organizations that may be outside the perimeter of our "radical communities," such as dv shelters. Getting training from these organizations thru employment or volunteering can be very useful. We should encourage each other to acquire skills and knowledge from where ever we can and share them liberally. Everyone involved should discuss their political understandings of dv, sexual assault and oppressions. Ideally, consensus can be reached around language and tactics. Don't forget to address prevention, abolition and building healthy relationships. From the beginning there should be many discussions about feminism, non-hierarchical organizing and appropriate responses to violence. All participants should have a deep understanding of power dynamics, responses to misogyny and all forms of oppressions. An accountability process should be created by the group for itself. Because the consequences of inconsistency and lack of follow-thru can be so grave within this context a realistic discussion of abilities and availability must occur. Cross training is necessary in order to prevent informal heirarchies from forming. This task force is a valid part of grass roots organizing. This should be created out of the under-



standing of community responsibility not as a reactionary move. This task force should be used as a support group, educational tool and a resource for community responses to dv.

Suggested Roles & Needed Skills:

*Counselor- good listener, not easily triggered, capable communicator, boundary awareness, non-judgemental, training encouraged (not required), accountable to community, accessible, deep understanding of dv, and open to a wide range of techniques.

*Mediator- for community not between abusers and survivors, knowledgeable and trained in mediation, patient, objective, proficient ability in interpreting emotional statements, good vibes watcher, accountable to community, aid in creating comfortable space for open communication. This should be rotating position. A mediator should be able to decipher the central issues, allot space for open freedom of speech, have the ability to cut folks off if necessary and balance discussions. A media should not express their personal opinions or be part of the actual decision making process.

*Medic- knowledgeable and trained in health care, naturopath, understanding of mind-body connection accessible.

*Child Counselor & Parent Support- similar to other counseling role, good listener, experienced and comfortable with children of all ages, readily available.

*Self-Defense- respect of survivor autonomy, knowledgeable, ability to teach others, true awareness of risks, broad understanding of all forms of self defense. Self defense can occur at any time. It does not have to be during an abusive episode. I believe self defense tactics can range from sharing our stories to physical actions. ALL forms should be respected.

*Fund Raiser- confident communicator, accessible



good public speaker, community connections, ability to utilize resources outside their community.

*Researchers-

Legal-preferably knowledgeable about local and state laws, understanding of the inherent injustice in law and the enforcement of it.

Housing-creative, preferably have lots of connections or ability to attain them.

Community Response-Historical & Cultural, creative, good listener, multi-lingual preferable

*Coordinator- organized, confident communicator, creates accessibility of gathered info, updates, and so forth to community and survivors.

Some places and people who can share skills and knowledge are dv shelters, youth shelters, organizations that focus on anti-violence activism, treatment centers, crisis lines, nurse practitioners, other tranny and womyn activists, grant writers and prison activists.

This idea and outline was created collectively. It originated in a workshop of primarily anarchist activists in Gainesville, FL and was worked on further by participants in a dv working group at Plan Z 2002 (a trans-feminist conference).

Additional Tactics:

During our workshops we did brainstorming exercises to come up with ideas of practical ways to deal with and abolish dv. Here is a list of many of those ideas:

Believe Survivors! We need to learn to trust eachother. No More Silencing & Doubt.

Be Consistent!

Utilize All Resources! Safety Nets. Establish emergency funds, safer-housing, child-care, etc. This could include creating a dv fund. Until we abolish capitalism we need cash. Lets use it responsibly. A physical list of resources could be

created and dispersed.

Use civil disobedience and direct action tactics when dealing with abusers.

Create Support Affinity Groups of Survivors!

There could be groups for supporters and abusers too. They should fit the needs of the groups.

Communication between groups will ensure accountability. This could include informal support groups who support each other by being "on call" for emotional or physical support, sharing child care, sharing finances, etc.

Establish Community Dialogue! This could range in topics and structures. Some examples are discussions of communication styles, survivor speak outs, fish bowl discussions of oppressions. Alert friends, family, and communities of abusers actions and attitudes.

Educate Ourselves! We can never know enough.

Live Our Politics!

Take Care of Ourselves!

Take Back All the Nights (and dayz)!

The second most common topic during our workshops was abusers' healing. Everyone deserves to heal. I believe the most important aspect of an abuser' healing process is accountability. This accountability begins with self, extends to the survivor and then the community.

I realize that many abusers have been abused. They need to heal from that trauma in order to begin their unlearning process. Even if they do not identify as survivors, they have survived the same oppressive society we all have. Abusers who are willing to heal and grow need support. Ideally abusers can support each other. If other community members are willing to be a part of their healing they should be honored and supported too.

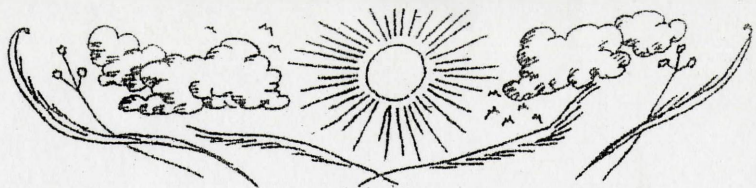
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As a community we can ensure accountability of abusers by being present through out their healing. One way this presence can be made is through the creation of an abuser support role. This person can support the abuser while holding them accountable to the survivor and community. This role would be most effective if the survivor and community has an opportunity to make requests and suggestions of the abuser. This could occur thru public forums, community mediations, or the survivor(s) communicating their needs directly or indirectly (i.e. thru another person).

Once the abuser is made aware of those requests and suggestions they should be expected to act on them. Here is when the support person could begin to help the abuser remain accountable. They could accompany them to counseling, be available for processing, and report back to the community/survivor(s). Many times folx want the abuser to attend some form of counseling. The most well known forms of counseling seem to be anger management or batterers' treatment programs.

Most of the research done by feminists within the domestic violence field prove that batterers' intervention programs are relatively ineffective. The system of BIPs is not set up to help folx heal. It is part of the "criminal-justice" system. Most programs are based on punishment rather than empowerment models. The programs that are most effective are held accountable to survivors and communities thru monitoring. This monitoring is usually done by a dv program. The monitoring is supposed to ensure the BIP includes an analysis of the connections between social oppressions and dv, individual accountability, inclusion of survivor input, etc.

This shows why individuals using these resources need help. A support person could aid in the process



by discussing sessions the abuser attends. If the program is being monitored the support person could serve as an extra check. If the program is not being monitored by an outside agency they could be the monitor to ensure a critical analysis of it. The support person should have a steadfast critical analysis of the oppressive nature of the injustice system which BIPs are a part of.

Many great tools are provided by these programs such as nonviolent communication skills. It is important that abusers have access to these tools while remaining critical of the larger system. If an abuser can discuss their therapy they will feel more supported and be able to utilize the tools they are acquiring.

For anyone taking on the position of support for an abuser there are crucial things to be aware of. First and foremost is your need for support. This is a vulnerable position to be in. It is both necessary and difficult to create trust between the abuser you are supporting and yourself. This may be obvious at the beginning, but you must always remember this is someone who has hurt others deeply. There may always be potential danger for you. The healing process is life long. It is up to you to decide how long you will be involved, establish your boundaries. It is a good idea to set up a safety plan for yourself. Some things to think about when creating a safety plan are where you could go for safety and who you could lean on. These things should be communicated to your support people.

This type of support will be effective only if an abuser is ready and willing to work on themselves. In the stories I've been told and my own experiences this is rare. Many times people need time to come to the conclusion they need help and even more time to ask for it. Be prepared

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to support each other if an abuser denies the abuse or even vanishes. Too many times abusers simply move on to another community once a survivor begins to speak publicly about the abuse. This is a good reason to communicate between communities.

The first step towards sustaining our communities is supporting each other. We must heal in order to grow. We have the power to abolish domestic violence. Lets begin within our communities.

I hope this zine helps to continue and create dialogue about dv. I would love to hear from anyone who wants to discuss anything I have written. (Or maybe things I should've.) Please feel free to use any of this zine as a tool in the struggle to abolish domestic violence.

I wanna thank my supportive family! Thanx Mel, Stinger, Mitzi, & Mom! Thank you for holding my hand and heart!

Language Note*

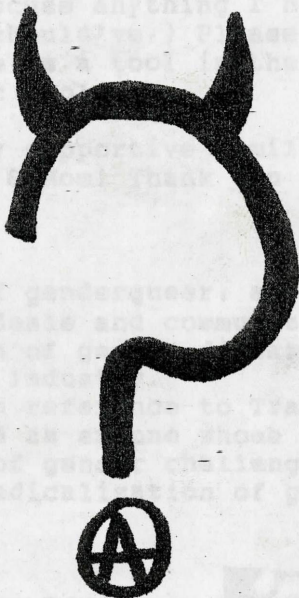
My definition of genderqueer: an umbrella term to describe individuals and communities that challenge the construction of gender dictated by social norms and the medical industry.

I used Tranny in reference to Transgender. I define this word as anyone whose gender identity or performance of gender challenges the social construct and medicalization of gender.

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