

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

Community Accountability Principles/Concerns/Strategies/Models Working Document

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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. 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.

1.1 What do we mean by Transformative Justice?

Via Generation Five

For the Left to accomplish its vision of a just world, we must develop a liberatory response to intimate, interpersonal, and community violence.⁵ The daily reality of such violence prevents people and communities from imagining and participating in the creation of a more just world. Without a just world, people cannot find healing and safety. Developing a radical response by Left social movements to all forms of violence opens the opportunity to heal the trauma of past violence, reduce the level of violence we experience, and mobilize masses of people for fundamental social change.

Transformative Justice responds to the lack of—and the critical need for—a liberatory approach to violence. A liberatory approach seeks safety and accountability without relying on alienation, punishment, or State or systemic violence, including incarceration and policing. We premise the Transformative Justice approach elaborated in this paper on three core beliefs, namely:

- Individual justice and collective liberation are equally important, mutually supportive, and fundamentally intertwined—the achievement of one is impossible without the achievement of the other.
- The conditions that allow violence to occur must be transformed in order to achieve justice in individual instances of violence. Therefore, Transformative Justice is both a liberating politic and an approach for securing justice.
- State and systemic responses to violence, including the criminal legal system⁶ and child welfare agencies, not only fail to advance individual and collective justice but also condone and perpetuate cycles of violence.

Transformative Justice seeks to provide people who experience violence with immediate safety and long-term healing and reparations while holding people who commit violence accountable within and by their communities. This accountability includes stopping immediate abuse, making a commitment to not engage in future abuse, and offering reparations for past abuse. Such accountability requires community responsibility and access to on-going support and transformative healing for people who sexually abuse.

In addition, Transformative Justice also seeks to transform inequity and power abuses within communities. Through building the capacity of communities to increase justice internally, Transformative Justice seeks to support collective action toward addressing larger issues of injustice and oppression. The goals of Transformative Justice as a response to all forms of violence are:

- Survivor safety, healing and agency
- Accountability and transformation of those who abuse
- Community response and accountability
- Transformation of the community and social conditions that create and perpetuate violence, i.e. systems of oppression, exploitation, domination, and State violence

The term “Transformative Justice” emerged directly out of Generation FIVE’s work on child sexual abuse as the term that best describes the dual process of securing individual justice while transforming structures of social injustice that perpetuate such abuse. While we developed this model as a response to child sexual abuse, we imagine Transformative Justice as an adaptable model that can and will be used to confront many other forms of violence and the systems of oppression they enable and require.

3.1. Reviewing the Community-Based Intervention to Interpersonal Violence

From The Creative Intervention toolkit

The Community-Based Intervention: Review

In Section 1: *Introduction & FAQ* and Section 2.1. *What is the Community-Based Intervention to Interpersonal Violence*, we introduced this intervention approach as one that is:

- *Collective*: The intervention involves the coordinated efforts of a group of people rather than just one individual.
- *Action-Oriented*: A community takes action to address, reduce, end or prevent interpersonal violence.
- *Community-Based*: The intervention is organized and carried out by friends, family, neighbors, co-workers or community members rather than social services, the police, child welfare or governmental institutions.
- *Coordinated*. The intervention links people and actions together to work together in a way that is coordinated towards the same goals – and that makes sure that our individual actions work towards a common purpose. It sees us as a team rather than individual, isolated individuals working as lone heroes or rescuers – or as separated parts, not knowing about or considering what actions others may be taking.
- *Holistic*. The intervention considers the good of everyone involved in the situation of violence – including those harmed (survivors or victims of violence), those who have caused harm, and community members affected by violence. It also builds an approach that can include anyone involved in a situation of violence as a participant in the solution to violence – even the person or people who have caused harm if this is possible.
- *Centers on Those Most Affected by Violence to Create Change*. The intervention centers those most affected by violence. It provides ways for those affected by violence and causing violence to develop new skills, insights and ways to put

together a solution to violence – or to form a system that not only addresses violence but reduces the chances that violence will continue.

- *Supports the sometimes complex pathway to change and transformation.* Changing violence, repairing from violence, and creating new ways of being free from violence can take time.
- *For the survivor/victim,* the intervention relies upon consideration of the best ways to support survivors or victims of harm by sharing the responsibility for addressing, reducing, ending, or preventing violence (breaking isolation and taking accountability), without blaming the survivor/victim for their choices (without victim blaming), and by offering support towards what they define as their own needs and wants (supporting self-determination)
- *For the person doing harm,* the intervention relies upon consideration of the best ways to support people doing harm to recognize, end and be responsible for their violence (what we also call accountability), without giving them excuses (without colluding), and without denying their humanity (without demonizing)
- *Facilitated.* The intervention works well if someone in our communities can act as a *facilitator*, someone who can act as an anchor for the process of intervention, or someone who can help us to walk through different parts of this Toolkit. Therefore, we call this a *facilitated* model. The facilitator role can be taken on by more than one person or it can rotate among group members as the process continues. The facilitator does not have to be a professional or someone who is an expert on violence intervention. It simply needs to be someone who can be clear-headed, act within the values and guidelines of the group, and who has some distance from the center of violence to be clear of the chaos and confusion that is often a part of a violent situation. See more about the facilitator role in Section 4.C. *Mapping Allies and Barriers*. If one cannot find a facilitator, then at the very least, this Toolkit and the many people whose experiences it represents may help to guide us through the process of violence intervention.