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A large, stylized red handprint graphic is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page. It is rendered in a watercolor-like style with various shades of red and pink, giving it a textured, artistic appearance. The handprint is oriented with the fingers pointing towards the top right.

Taking Account of our Politics:

*An Anarchist Perspective on
Contending with Sexual Violence*



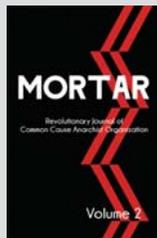
In our current context, confronting the reactionary and fundamentally misogynistic MRA movement presents one possible strategic avenue for militant feminist organizing. Pushing this work beyond organizing the occasional counter-protests will mean developing our critique of MRAs to include a critique of capitalism, racism, and colonialism that puts forward a competing narrative to the social issues they highlight. It may also require targeting key MRA organizers, employing tactics used by groups like the ARA in their battles against white supremacist organizations.

Anarchists doing the work of aligning ourselves politically to the myriad realities of sexual violence helps to fill in holes that riddle the activist Left's generally weak framework of understanding when it comes to confronting horizontal violence. This work can also help us develop strategies to contend with misogynistic social movements which shore up support for the patriarchal social relations we aim to overthrow. While dealing with instances of sexual violence remains as important as ever, we need to demonstrate that challenging aggressors of sexual violence can tie in to a wider revolutionary politics. We believe the way forward is by letting the politics lead, and by committing to the ongoing development of our ideas to be tested in practice.

Taking Account of our Politics:

An Anarchist Perspective on Contending with Sexual Violence

by 1 Hamilton member,
1 Toronto member,
1 former Toronto member



This text is from Volume 2 of *Mortar: Revolutionary Journal of Common Cause Anarchist Organization*. Common Cause is an anarchist-communist organization based in Ontario, Canada, with active branches in Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto.

Linchpin.ca | mortar@riseup.net

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Common Cause Editor's note: *This article discusses some of our members' experiences of sexual assault and accountability processes. Where we have included specific details, we have only done so with the consent of those parties involved.*

ourselves to solely taking on MRA groups, and must instead always be working toward broader based revolutionary feminist organizing, tested in practice.

Conclusion

For the past few years, members of Common Cause have struggled to develop the organization's politics around sexual violence. This work has been led mainly by women members, who come to it with a variety of experience in dealing with sexual violence in their own lives and within Left activist organizations. The policy of our organization is to deal collectively with instances of sexual violence perpetrated by or against our members, with provisions dealing with support for survivors, holding aggressors to account, and relating to other affected individuals and organizations. Moving forward, we believe Common Cause must continue to develop our politics around sexual violence. We need to let our politics lead both in dealing with instances of sexual violence and in determining our organizing strategy against sexual violence in broader society.

While it is clear that dealing with individual instances of sexual violence within our circles is crucial, we see that accountability processes as taken up within the activist Left are often flawed, and in some instances, potentially counterproductive. Where accountability processes have tended to tie up the well-being of the survivor with the transformative processes of the aggressor, we believe an aggressor-as-class traitor orientation is in order. Confrontational approaches to dealing with aggressors, which hold no false pretences of rehabilitation, should be on the table. And because we are dealing with entrenched ideological and institutional systems of power, we recognize that putting all one's eggs into the basket of accountability is not always a survivor's best means to fighting back and healing.

Strengthening our politics around sexual violence requires that we examine the operation of patriarchy, racism, and colonialism in capitalist society. The gendered division of labour in this period of capitalism provides material privileges for male members of the working class, while forcing many female members of the class into unpaid reproductive labour and putting them at high risk of violence within the patriarchal nuclear family. Racialized women are further attacked by state policies seeking to manage their bodies and ability to have children. Colonialism has intensified and re-structured patriarchal relations in the interests of Capital and the State amongst Indigenous populations. Orienting against sexual violence with a better understanding of how patriarchy, racism, and colonialism institutionalize it needs to underlie our strategies for dealing with instances of sexual violence and our broader organizing efforts.

as the involvement of police. We must be aware that these tactics often dovetail with the MRA narrative that feminists oppose free speech, and stifle debate, because it threatens to undermine their position as most oppressed gender—with all the sweet perks that entails. Given MRAs' tendency to innocently claim that men's issues are being brushed aside as unsubstantiated, and that the discrimination men face in society is ignored due to the influence of feminism, this approach must certainly make them feel like modern day civil rights activists. It is important to note, however, that MRAs often film these events as a method of intimidation. The recordings are then often posted on the US-based hate site *A Voice for Men*, where anonymous men dox female protesters, making them the targets of rape and death threats.

While it is worthwhile to oppose these events as they happen, using any of the above tactics as context dictates, we must ask: how can we seek to organize in ways that move past a superficial liberal politics? How can our efforts come to truly reflect the development of a revolutionary politics? What can we do to expand the presence of revolutionary feminism to a movement that exists beyond protesting one-off MRA events? How can revolutionary feminism evolve to eclipse MRA activity and retake space from groups like CAFE?

This challenging question obviously necessitates an expanded critique of patriarchy that defends feminism, and includes an analysis of capitalism, racism, and colonialism, while being able to provide a competing narrative to the real problems highlighted by MRAs. We need to introduce and strengthen strategies that promote the self-organization of women, on campuses and beyond, to take on these issues and our own. We should also propose tactics to deal with MRAs beyond the counter-demonstration. One possibility would be to go after particularly egregious MRA organizers, employing similar tactics as the Anti-Racist Action (ARA) network has used to such great effect in their efforts to dismantle white supremacist organizations. This could begin by pointing out the roles that white supremacy and patriarchy play in dividing the working class, by providing one group with a set of material benefits that come at the expense of the other.

Finally, as Amanda Marcott suggests in her article titled *Confirmed: "Men's Rights Activism" Is For Misogynists Without God*, it may be worth considering the possibility that, since MRAs are overwhelmingly young, many will drift from their reddit atheist roots, "maturing" into the comfort of vaguely Christian conservatism. This route provides a stronger and more effective opportunity to punish women, while still reaping the benefits of female labour. This possibility necessitates a long-term strategy that shouldn't be at odds with our current efforts. Whatever tactics we propose, we need to stress that we cannot limit



In the fall of 2010, several female members of Common Cause took on the task of developing a sexual violence policy for the organization. At the time, and as far as we were aware, there had never been an instance of sexual violence in Common Cause. Our drive to write the policy came from some members' past experiences of being sexually assaulted while participating in other organizations, from a desire to do better, and from our own readings on sexual violence and accountability processes generally. Since then, we have, unfortunately, had to make use of the policy to address issues of sexual violence as an organization. There have been situations in which our members have been sexually assaulted, situations where members have been aggressors, and situations outside our organization where we have been asked or felt compelled to offer our perspective.

We strive to develop our politics through a process of trying things, analyzing our successes and failures, and using our conclusions to make a better attempt in the future. There are few situations we encounter with as high stakes as sexual violence. Failures have been devastating, both to individuals and organizations. For this reason, our analysis must be thorough and considered. It is often easy to attribute failures of accountability processes to factors specific to the situation—this aggressor was too manipulative, this support committee couldn't get its shit together, this or that person flaked out on their assigned tasks. Specifics do need to be considered, but our analysis needs to come from our politics. As anarchists, we are seeking to develop a strong foundation from which to address issues of sexual assault and sexism seriously and genuinely, and we seem to be struggling.

Common Cause has struggled as much as any other organization in this regard. When dealing with sexual violence, we have found that we are at our worst when we worry too much about what others think, when we equivocate, apologize, or try to control or guess at others' behaviour. We have found that we are at our best when we let our politics lead. For us this means that people who sexually assault others should be thought of less as "community members"

and more as class traitors. They take advantage of the divisions in society (and particularly of the oppressed members) for their personal gain, and in doing so actively prevent organizing to overcome them. In *Common Cause*, we have found that reorienting ourselves away from “community accountability” and toward “political accountability” has been a positive step in addressing sexual violence and sexism more broadly.

The first section of this article will outline the ways in which we saw the development of accountability processes, some of the major critiques, and our views on them. It will also introduce the concept of political accountability. The second section will take on the important question: what are our politics? *Common Cause* certainly made the mistake of putting the cart before the horse—that is, trying to figure out how we would deal with sexual assault before working out our politics around patriarchy. This section will examine how the power dynamics at play within issues of wage inequality, the gendered division of labour, colonialism, and broader issues of sexism affect and play out in sexual violence and community accountability processes. The final section looks for ways of countering the emerging Men’s Rights Activist (MRA) movement in Canada, particularly on university campuses.

MRA movements may seem like a departure in an article primarily focused on sexual assault, but we see a link. Not only do MRAs directly address sexual assault, but they are a social movement organizing around sexism. In order to combat sexism and sexual violence, we need to be active both in dealing with direct instances of sexual assault, and in countering broader social movements, such as MRAs and anti-abortion activists, who actively oppose women’s liberation. As with accountability processes, we have struggled to understand how best to counter these groups. What can we do beyond the counter-demonstration? How do we address groups that form in response to perceived declines in male privilege? How do we apply our understanding of the current terrain of patriarchy in ways that can lead to meaningful actions?

The overall goal of this article is to link our actions around sexual violence, our political, social, and economic understanding of gender oppression, and possibilities for activism against patriarchy into a coherent whole. This does not spell an end to our mistakes. Unfortunately, fuck-ups are likely to continue. Rather, this is an attempt to understand our experiences of the past four years — hammered out in boring procedural discussions, emotional outbursts, and some clear, collective discussion — politically. It is an attempt to learn from our mistakes and our successes, to make better attempts, better failures, and better analysis in the future.

in Ottawa and Vancouver. Currently CAFE is trying to establish a “Centre for Men and Families” in Toronto, and claim to have already received nearly half of the \$50,000 start-up funds required—mainly from private donations. The proposed centre would operate as a support hub for men who claim to experience gender-based violence or discrimination, but, unfortunately, will most likely act as an echo-chamber in which “women’s issues” are assumed to undermine and eclipse the disproportionate amount of hardships that men are perceived to face in society.

Feminists in Toronto have combated MRA activity in a couple of ways. Rallies have been organized on campus to correspond with the timing of MRA events, in an attempt to engage attendees in dialogue about their issues of concern. Printed materials have been distributed that attempt to re-frame the issues raised by the MRAs as broader social problems perpetuated by patriarchy, and which contain lists of resources for men who are facing domestic abuse or depression. The goal here is to catch the fair-weather MRA before he falls into the abyss of misogyny and victimhood, while still operating within the territory of liberalism.

Much like the rise of accountability processes as a means of addressing instances of sexual violence, these attempts at dealing with the reactionary sexism of MRAs ought to be encouraged and celebrated insofar as they reflect an active undertaking to combat concrete manifestations of male supremacy. Unfortunately, this more liberal brand of combating MRAs also shares with accountability processes a shallow level of political development concerning the systemic roots of the issues they attempt to confront. Whether it is in the context of holding a presence at MRA events or through debates on social media, a re-framing approach has been coupled with the tendency to engage in a mere statistics war waged against MRA information campaigns. In this context, both sides of the debate seek to present and explain statistics concerning gendered trends surrounding issues such as homelessness, suicide, and industrial accidents, while neither group takes on a deeper analysis of the interlocking systems of power that underlie such trends. To engage genuinely, perhaps we should resist the temptation to retort MRA claims with the standard “but women have it worse”. Perhaps a more effective strategy would be an acknowledgement, “yes, men do commit suicide at a higher rate than women—so what are we going to do about it, besides standing around blaming feminists?”

Granted, some feminist approaches to MRA activity have gone beyond the realm of a statistics war, and have crossed into the realm of more confrontational tactics. These have included vocal condemnation of MRA events, as well as actively blocking entrances. This has resulted in significant controversy, as well

understanding of work in the context of capitalism. An understanding that lends itself to a strategy that is only enhanced, not threatened, by a knowledge of women's unique exploitation under capitalism.

Nevertheless, the surface utilization of partially legitimate issues by MRAs – coupled with their reliance on liberal concepts such as “gender blindness” and “equality” as a cover for their anti-feminism – make them a difficult group to engage with using rational discourse. In the absence of a feminist movement that could posit a revolutionary explanation as to why these problems are necessarily perpetuated in a patriarchal, capitalist society, MRAs are able to use this void as an opportunity for their further development. This has taken the form of challenging the very idea that women are structurally oppressed in society.

Men gravitate towards the anti-feminism of the MRAs, not simply because they have experienced hardship in their lives, but because of the significant material benefits they receive under patriarchy. MRAs defend a system that entitles men to the unwaged domestic work of women, as well as higher paid employment with greater social status. Ironically, MRAs consistently raise the rigid definition of masculinity, which men often adhere to (i.e. sexist behaviour) in order to maintain these privileges, as unfair to men. In this vein, the challenge to male dominance that feminism promotes manifests itself sexually as a challenge to male entitlement to female bodies. Female sexual agency is therefore viewed as a threat by many MRAs who, motivated by anger at potential rejection, and uncritical of the role masculine socialization has played in forming their views around consent and choice, like to whip up hysteria regarding so called “false” rape accusations, thereby contributing to their defence of rape culture more broadly. It's likely that female sexual agency is the primary reason men participate in MRA groups, since it seems the bulk of MRAs are in their early twenties—too young to have first-hand experience of some of the other talking points that they rally around. Their unwavering dedication to misogyny should implore us to strengthen our efforts to build an organized response to MRAs. Part of that effort must be a persistence in exposing “men's issues” for what they are—running the gamut from legitimate but misguided, to completely fraudulent.

In Toronto, MRAs are attempting to become a more permanent feature of the city's political landscape. They have established a student group, which they call the Canadian Association for Equality (CAFE), on the University of Toronto campus, where they have hosted lectures by anti-feminist academics such as Warren Farrell and Janice Fiamengo. CAFE has also set up men's rights groups at Ryerson University (also in Toronto), and several other university campuses in Ottawa, Montreal, Peterborough, and Guelph, as well as two off-campus groups

I. Development and Critiques of Accountability Processes

Development

In this article, the term “accountability process” will refer to the ideas and principles around sexual violence and community accountability developed on the activist Left in the past ten to fifteen years. Of course, the activist Left of the past ten to fifteen years has no monopoly on responding in informal, community based ways around sexual violence. It happens in many contexts: among high school friends, coworkers, people who share cultural ties, etc., often spontaneously and in response to the situation and, like more formalized accountability processes, with varying degrees of success. However, for this article, we will use a more specific definition of accountability processes as the formal and politically motivated processes that have developed by Left activists in North America. A caveat to add is that this account is skewed by how we experienced the development of these ideas as anarchists in southern Ontario who generally became involved at the tail end of the anti-globalization movement. So it will be reflective of what gained traction in the circles we run in, and works that may have had important impact elsewhere may be left out. In the interest of not ignoring our context, this section will also describe some of Common Cause's own experiences with developing and working with accountability processes.

The first real test of Common Cause's ability to navigate an accountability process guided by our sexual violence policy came in the fall of 2011. Earlier in the year, a Toronto member was called out for sexually assaulting a female friend in a club. He had been intoxicated and had repeatedly touched her without her consent, despite what should have been obvious non-verbal cues to stop. After receiving an email detailing the assault, he informed several fellow members of Common Cause as to what had happened, and indicated his understanding that the woman in question would be preparing an accountability process. He responded to the email thanking the woman for calling him out, and indicating his willingness to engage in a process, saying this was not the first time something like this had happened, and it needed to be addressed. Hearing this, the woman responded by indicating that she would be speaking to other women about his behaviour, and requesting that he not bring the issue up with any of them unless asked about it directly. Another member of Common Cause was tasked with communicating with her in order to help coordinate an organizational response, and was told to wait until they had decided how

they wanted to approach it. Over the next several months, she got in touch with another individual who was interested in participating in a process of holding the male member accountable, and the two of them met to discuss what they felt would be a proper response. While this was going on, the male Common Cause member continued to participate in a number of other activist organizations in the city. When the news that he had committed sexual assault reached the attention of members of one of these organizations, he was asked to leave the three organizations he was then active in, and questions were raised as to why this information had not been shared earlier. This turn of events took place shortly after the Ontario Conference in the summer of 2011, where Common Cause had officially passed our sexual violence policy, and so this policy was used to draft a process of holding the member of Common Cause accountable for his behaviour. The Toronto branch met to discuss the terms of this process, and it was agreed that the male member would abstain from drinking in public for six months (and abstain from drinking to excess at all times), during which time he would participate in the research and presentations of two internal workshops dealing with proactive consent practises. He was also to draft a letter to the three organizations he had been a part of, informing their members of his actions. This plan was shared with the woman who had originally initiated the process, and she and others working with her agreed it was an appropriate response, while maintaining their option to initiate a separate process in the future, should they decide to. The following summer, Common Cause added a section to our sexual violence policy that attempted to balance the desire for privacy and confidentiality on the part of the survivor with the need of people in the community to be properly informed, so that they can make decisions about who they want to be around, and work with.

Other incidents, whose examination deserve their own article, have resulted in similar policy changes. For example, one such incident necessitated the drafting and implementation of a member expulsion policy. These processes were significantly more complex than a brief and sterile summation allows. They represent hundreds of hours of work and conversation on the part of our members and those involved. Both were emotionally challenging and far from perfect, but allowed for many opportunities to reflect on the efficacy of our efforts.

Often times we find organizations (including our own) engage with these processes in a manner that is lacking in political clarity, and consequently disingenuous. We endeavour to treat these processes as politically necessary and not tokenistically, as if they're just another box to check off to prove we made an attempt. In the spirit of those who have shown commitment to creating

accountability processes can be detected within the more liberal feminist responses to MRA organizing thus far.

The MRA movement is a growing force in North America, appearing most prominently on university campuses as student clubs that purport to address and raise awareness about "men's issues". By manipulating the anxieties men face under the regime of neoliberal austerity, "men's issues" groups choose to scapegoat feminism, thereby obscuring the underlying social relations of Capital and patriarchy that both men and women must navigate in order to survive.

Men's rights groups have existed in various forms since the 1850s, and more concretely since the 1970s. Historically, this movement has been framed as a critical response to the advancement of women's rights. More than offering a mere critical response, MRAs represent a patriarchal reactionary politics. It is no coincidence that their solidification in the 1970s took place against the backdrop of an influx of women into the paid labour force, and the increasing material gains won through women's rights struggles as part of the expansion of the post-World War II Welfare State. Over the decades, the movement's rhetoric has been finessed to include pleasant words like "equality" and "inclusivity" and phrases that attempt to highlight a commitment to "achieving equality for all Canadians, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, family status, race, ethnicity, creed, age or disability." Rhetoric like this almost seems to betray the core message, which has remained consistent. The message being that feminists represent a special interest group that place themselves in direct competition with men for access to finite societal resources, and should therefore be opposed.

MRAs' claims that men endure hardships in society, such as lack of access to mental healthcare, problems in the judicial and prison systems, and unsafe working conditions are partly legitimate. However, like the anti-choice activist interested in fetal rights, it's clear that much of the interest MRAs have in these issues, and the debates they lead to, are occurring in bad faith. For instance, discussion of unsafe working conditions amongst MRAs does not lend focus to the operation of Capital as a force of exploitation that does harm to working class bodies through its consumption of labour power. Further, of little surprise, MRA discourse lacks any analysis regarding the gendered division of labour that has historically exposed women to uniquely unsafe working conditions. One contemporary example of such exposure is the disproportionate threat of sexual violence faced by female workers in the retail, service and hospitality industries, or the threat of workplace injury to predominantly female personal support workers in understaffed care facilities. Clearly, any attempt to genuinely contend with unsafe working conditions on the job necessarily requires an

with intellectual disabilities—have perpetuated extremely high rates of sexual violence as part of their broader eugenics projects. So, our confrontations against instances of sexual assault must also account for the dynamics of state control and power over women’s bodies—and especially those of women who are also oppressed on the basis of race, poverty, sexuality, and disability. Perhaps more importantly, our struggle against sexual assault is woefully inadequate without a struggle against those institutions of the State that continue to perpetuate abuse and control of women’s sexuality and reproduction.

III: Politics to the Front – Participating in Feminist Struggle

The point is not for women simply to take power out of men’s hands, since that wouldn’t change anything about the world. It’s a question precisely of destroying that notion of power.

Simone de Beauvoir

The struggle against sexual violence and patriarchy must manifest in our daily lives and organizing efforts. As we develop our politics around these issues, it is imperative that we find ways to test our ideas in practice. As we have seen, a key problem with emphasizing accountability processes is that, by doing so, we are slipping away from addressing the structural roots of sexual violence. By side-stepping an analysis of the wider systems of power that are at play, we risk containing our politics within inward-looking activist scenes. Of course, we absolutely must contend with individual instances of sexual violence, as they will continue to occur. In this regard, an attempt has been made above to underscore how we feel that an approach that stresses political accountability can potentially address some of the short-comings of the community accountability model. However, we must also deal with movements that are actively and publicly organizing to perpetuate patriarchal social relations more broadly. MRAs comprise one such movement. As we endeavour to spread feminist ideas, we can expect to contend with reactionary elements in society that see these ideas as a threat to their relatively privileged existence.

By developing and putting into practice an anarchist political analysis of sexual violence and patriarchy, we are better poised to critique and build upon the failings of current feminist challenges to MRAs. More specifically, as will be explored below, the same absence of structural analysis which seems to plague

processes of accountability, we must be committed to re-evaluating the results of our efforts and learning from our mistakes. In order to do this, it’s appropriate to examine their nascent form.

Some of the first discussion of accountability processes we saw came from the Incite! Women of Colour Against Violence collective, particularly in the zine (and later book) *The Revolution Starts at Home*. While zines and Internet accounts about consent and the problems of responding to sexual assault in activist spaces were not uncommon, Incite! clearly outlined a framework for responding to sexual assault in a formalized, community-based, and politically principled way. Some of the principles they proposed, and which other accountability processes tend to hold in common were:

1. Being survivor-centric: this means that the survivor is in control of the process. Often, this is cast as a sharp contrast to police and social services interventions that disempower and re-traumatize the survivor. In practice, this means that the survivor often has a specific support group or set of people who take direction on how the process should go. It also means that survivor’s accounts of incidents and definitions of violence are to be believed, and that groups are not to take action that is counter to the survivor’s wishes.

2. Processes that do not involve police and/or formal social services: virtually all groups that work on accountability processes are critical of police. Incite! particularly emphasizes the violence of police toward people of colour of all genders, whereas other groups emphasize the above mentioned poor treatment of survivors. Many groups are also critical of the mainstream domestic violence sector and its collaboration with police and treatment of survivors. There is some variation here, with some groups working with, or being okay with, at least some sectors of the mainstream domestic violence sector—for example, supporting survivors going to counselling provided by not-for-profit organizations.

3. That the aggressor/perpetrator be held to account: this one appears basic, but is worth addressing. Essentially, that something can and should be done that would make the aggressor/perpetrator accountable for his actions.

4. But, that the broader community is also responsible: this principle emphasizes the importance of context that an act of sexual violence is not the sole responsibility of the aggressor, but may also be allowed or supported by the broader community—for example, by

failing to challenge aggressive behaviours displayed in a public setting. The community also has a stake in holding the aggressor to account, as once the violent nature of the aggressor is revealed it is only reasonable that others will be concerned for their own safety. So, the “community” plays an interesting role, in both holding the aggressor to account, and being itself held to account.

5. That broader social context of gender, race, sexuality, and class also play a role: again, there is typically an emphasis on the impact of social context that we would generally find lacking in mainstream services. The other side of this argument is that successful accountability processes can be themselves a form of activism against patriarchy.

The development of accountability processes was promising to many people. Sexual assault has always been common in activist organizations, as well as in broader society, and many people felt powerless to address it when they or their friends were affected. The idea that, through hard work and good communication, we could not only heal, but improve our communities and prevent sexual assault was a very invigorating one. As mentioned, in *Common Cause*, a small group of women got together in 2010 to work on our own accountability process framework. It was a long, detailed document that laid out in specific terms how a process would start and be carried out, with considerations made for many different situations that we imagined could arise. It is worth emphasizing that, at this point, there had not been a known sexual assault involving *Common Cause*—although some of the women involved had been sexually assaulted previously, some while in activist groups. But we all felt motivated by the idea we could address this productively, by making it part of our political work—rather than an isolating personal experience.

Critique

In the past ten years, many accounts of attempted accountability processes, and critiques—both practical and political—of accountability processes in general have been written, too much to provide a decent account of all the contributions on this topic. For this section of the article, we will focus on three major critiques: 1) the efficacy of community accountability processes, 2) the definition/role of “community,” and 3) the limitations of accountability processes in linking with and advancing anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal struggles.

So to the first critique—“do these processes work?”—the first step would be to define what we mean by work. A working definition might be: that they support

Struggling Against Sexual Assault and For Reproductive Justice

While social reproduction plays a central role in capitalism and has been a focal point for the collusion of capitalism and patriarchy, it cannot entirely explain the complexities of patriarchy and sexual assault. Women’s bodies and reproductive decisions are under constant scrutiny and control. Here, we see a link between struggles against sexual violence and struggles for greater access to reproductive control for women. We see reproductive rights broadly, as encompassing not only access to birth control and abortion, but the right to have and raise children as well. Poor women, women of colour, and disabled women have been targets of sterilization and other eugenic practices for many years, in the U.S. and in Canada. For example, in the 1990s, state legislators within the United States joined hands with the private pharmaceutical interests in a campaign to manage the reproductive activities of poor women of colour through the coercive and manipulative spread of long-term birth control medication.

In the midst of 1990s neoliberal expenditure cutbacks, state funding was poured into the accessible distribution amongst poor women of an implanted long-term contraceptive known as Norplant. Reminiscent of the racist pseudo-science of eugenics, which once justified targeted sterilization on the basis of supposed biological predispositions toward various social ills, distribution of Norplant was deliberately concentrated in urban centres with a higher proportion of women of colour on welfare. In some states, Norplant was even implanted as a condition for these women to receive social assistance benefits. In addition to such coercive methods, many states used manipulation—through the promise of additional benefits to those women who complied with the implantation procedure.

In her book *Conquest* (2005), Andrea Smith also outlines how sexual violence has played a role in colonialism in North America. This has taken many forms—from sexual assault to eugenics practices, from war and weapons testing to environmental racism. Destructive environmental practices, carried out by corporations in cooperation with the State, seriously impact the ability of women to have children, in addition to posing other extreme health risks. Undeniably, these effects have most impact on women of colour, Indigenous women, and poor women.

Political accountability must also take into consideration the complex realities of reproductive justice, and the ways in which capitalist states exert control over women’s bodies—particularly those of otherwise marginalized women. State institutions—such as residential schools and institutions for individuals

and patriarchy. Throughout capitalism, working class men have held a cross-class allegiance with ruling class men. They have claimed ownership of, power over, and benefits from women's bodies and labour, as well as more access to property ownership and higher wages. This is evident in many ways. One is that women have historically taken on huge amounts of unpaid reproductive labour, such as childcare, cooking, and housekeeping. This has meant that, no matter how exploited a male worker may be, he has still had the ability to further exploit and oppress in his own home. This has also meant that, historically, working class men who married possessed a right to the body and sexuality of his wife.

It is important to note that while this may be an example of intra-class violence, in the sense that both the man and woman in this example belong to the working class, it is not horizontal violence — because men nonetheless hold structural economic and political power over women. Working class men are faced with a choice — to ally themselves with working class women and fight for gender equality and class struggle, or to continue to reproduce the gender imbalance and gender violence that they have historically benefited from. Too often, even men who called themselves revolutionaries have chosen the latter.

The concept of social reproduction is central to an understanding of how the functioning of capitalism has served to reinforce and perpetuate patriarchy as a system of male dominance. Social reproduction, in this case, refers to work required in order to reproduce workers—things like cooking, raising children, and keeping a clean home. These tasks are as necessary to capitalism as wage labour, but they are often unpaid and hidden away within the private realm of the household. However, in contemporary North American society, we often see this work being carried out by low-paid workers, who are almost all women, mostly women of colour, and often migrant workers. A key example in Ontario is the Live-In Caregiver Program, in which women workers live in employers' homes and work for long hours, for low wages, and in vulnerable situations.

The material and ideological undervaluing and subordination of women under capitalism is the basis for the reproduction of male dominance and patriarchal relations. Women are, as a group, paid less than men, take on more unpaid reproductive labour, and make up a large part of the most precarious and low-paid workers. For this reason, a political understanding of accountability must also be an anti-capitalist struggle. This means both that instances of sexual assault must be seen in the context of gendered class relations, and that we as anarchists must engage in feminist struggle in workplaces and neighbourhoods around issues of unpaid and low-paid reproductive labour.

the survivor in continuing their life and activism in the ways they want it, that they overall strengthen and improve the community more than they harm it (or, if they do break it down, it is in the right ways), and that the aggressor is held to either learn and change, or face consequences for his actions.

A common conclusion seems to be that these processes are much longer, more complicated, more exhausting, and more triggering than we ever expect, for everyone involved. As to survivors, *The Broken Teapot* makes an especially salient point that accountability processes can harm survivors by essentially tying their healing to their aggressor, so that his failure to take account of his behaviour continues to impact on them. This zine and others have also argued that the exclusive categories of “aggressor” and “survivor” often fail to account for the often complex dynamics of interpersonal conflict and volatile relationships. But despite all the hardship and the low success rate, it is probably better than not having any process at all. It is certainly better than victims of sexual assault feeling that they have no other choice other than to quietly leave. But a serious tweaking of our goals and expectations from these processes is very needed.

The question of community is an important one. One critique that has been made is that the activist/anarchist/Left “community” is not really a community in any proper sense of the word. That is, communities are groups of people linked by something that promotes or even necessitates long-term interaction, such as shared language, culture, geographic location, workplace, or social identity. The activist community is porous, sprawling, and tends to attract short-term participants who quickly move on to other things. Essentially, the activist community lacks precisely the qualities that would allow a community to deal effectively with a problem like sexual violence. Another important critique is that these processes can come to promote a sort of fishbowl effect—once a sexual assault becomes widely known, those closely involved with the process are scrutinized by those who aren't directly involved. These individuals and groups may know some of the relevant details, but may miss other important information or nuances. The broader community can thereby overtake the survivor in asserting demands. Another critique is around the limits of community culpability. For sure, we all carry some responsibility for the actions of those around us, at the same time, we do not grow our friends and comrades from test tubes. We are not involved in every aspect of their relationships. Setting reasonable limits based on context seems to be a good idea. And the role of the “community” as both judge and judged needs to be re-examined.

The final question, what is the broader political value of these processes? Community accountability infers that the anarchist/activist “community”

implicitly holds good standards to which someone can be held accountable. This is often untrue. Often, the anarchists/activists in question assume that their politics around sexual assault are good, but have not done the work of understanding sexual assault in the context of patriarchy and capitalism. The shaky terrain of our assumptions plays out over and over again, with confusing, unclear, unsatisfying attempts at accountability. This is where the question of political accountability comes in.

Political Accountability

Political accountability means that our politics form the basis of the decisions we make when dealing with an instance of sexual assault, that rather than the “community”. Our politics tell us that an activist who commits sexual assault is acting as a class traitor. He is continuing to participate in the long-term cross-class alliance between working class and employing class men, resulting in devastating levels of violence—most often aimed toward working class women. This cross-class alliance provides men with unpaid reproductive labour, much greater status in social/public life, and an outlet for aggression that, until very recently, was not even considered a crime. Men who sexually assault women reproduce this cross-class alliance in the interest of Capital. Furthermore, an aggressor who claims commitment to anarchist politics is acting directly against his own held politics, against his comrades, against 50% of his class, and in misogynistic solidarity with Capital. So, what kind of accountability do we hold these people to?

Of course, many situations are complex and often less than clear cut. Sometimes, simply focusing on the politics and trying to ignore the interpersonal issues is enough. Other times, situations are legitimately complex, and require careful handling. The call here is not simply to turn the hatred and vitriol and violence up, but to collectively develop a shared view of what sexual assault really is, and let that lead our decisions. In our view, this also helps take the pressure off the survivor to constantly have to hold their aggressor to account. If we hold strong collective positions on patriarchy, sexual assault, and the relationships between them, hopefully our decisions in an accountability process will be led less by our personal connections and more by what our analysis tells us. The way to get better at responding to sexual assault is not to develop better processes, but to develop better politics.

II: Developing our Politics on Sexual Violence

When confronting an incident of sexual assault, we strive for clear and definitive answers and direction, both in terms of how to best deal with the particular situation and how to work more broadly toward confronting sexual assault politically. Too often feminists have looked for fundamental or reductionist truths to guide their response, mistaking hard lines for clarity. Political accountability, instead, looks to complexity in order to find direction. There is a complex interplay of economic factors, such as the gendered division of labour and the oppression of women who are forced to take on the vast majority of unpaid and low-paid reproductive labour. More sociological factors also play a role, such as the extreme objectification of women’s bodies in media and mainstream culture. There is a long history of men claiming ownership and entitlement to women’s bodies, and this is seen clearly in the way marriage is treated in relatively recent laws around rape. Race, colonialism, heterosexism, and ableism all interact with sexual assault. And reproductive justice, in its broadest sense, has strong links with sexual assault—women of colour, poor women, and disabled women being forcibly sterilized by the State seems like one of the very clearest examples of sexual violence.

Political accountability seeks to look at how these factors impact on issues of sexual violence honestly and complexly, without drawing forced equivalencies. That is to say that, while patterns of sexual violence are influenced by gendered divisions of labour and wealth, they also occur in great numbers in cases where there is no economic relationship between parties. The forced simplicity of both liberal feminists and MRAs—for example, MRAs’ focus on gender imbalances in prisons, without any consideration of other factors or broader issues—is a type of gender reductionism that we hope to avoid. But being nuanced should not be confused with being soft: a perpetrator of assault is a class traitor, like a white supremacist, carrying out a devastating form of intra-class violence against those he holds privilege and power over. We should be harsh, but we should be clear why we’re doing it. False claims of community are no justification. In this section, we consider some of the factors at play.

Capitalism and Patriarchy

Patriarchal gender relations and patterns of sexual violence existed prior to the development of capitalism and have manifested in many forms throughout history. However, given that capitalism is the dominant social order of the day, and a system that structures all of our lives, focus will be given here to Capital