

Community Repair of Moral Damage from Domestic Violence<sup>1</sup>

Abstract: I argue that communities have a moral responsibility to repair and prevent moral damage that some survivors of domestic violence may experience. This responsibility is grounded in those communities' complicity in domestic violence and the moral damage that may result. Drawing on Claudia Card's work on domestic violence, I first explain two forms of moral damage that some survivors may experience. These are: 1) normative isolation, or abusive environments that are marked by distorted moral standards about the abuse itself, and 2) coerced self-betrayal, the coercive entrapment of the survivor's agency, emotions, and beliefs to express the will of the abuser. Though the abuser is always the primary cause of abuse, I argue that survivors' communities can contribute to a climate that facilitates domestic violence by, for instance, sustaining harmful norms about gender roles, shaming survivors, protecting abusers, and not wanting to interrupt "private matters." When this complicity exists, I argue that communities have a moral responsibility to create structures that repair and prevent moral damage from domestic violence. Finally, I sketch out some practical considerations for building these structures. This involves creating violence-resistant communities that protect survivors, hold abusers accountable, and help survivors reclaim their agencies.

Keywords: Domestic violence, moral damage, trauma, transformative justice, moral responsibility

In this paper, I argue that communities can have a moral responsibility to repair and prevent moral damage that some survivors of domestic violence may experience, and that this responsibility is grounded in those communities' complicity in domestic violence and the moral damage that may result. Drawing on Claudia Card's work on domestic violence, I first explain two forms of moral damage that some survivors may experience. These are: 1) normative isolation, or abusive environments that are marked by distorted moral standards about the abuse itself, and 2) coerced self-betrayal, the entrapment of the survivor's agency, emotions, and beliefs to express the will of the abuser. Though not all survivors may experience these moral damages or experience them in the same ways, for those that do, either form can, to varying degrees, hinder her abilities to accurately assess the abuse as wrong.

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I then argue that when communities facilitate these damages they have a responsibility to survivors to repair and prevent that damage. Though the abuser is always the primary cause of abuse, I argue that survivors' communities can contribute to a climate that facilitates domestic violence by, for instance, sustaining harmful norms about gender roles and violence, shaming survivors, protecting abusers, and not wanting to interrupt "private matters." Finally, I sketch out some practical considerations for building reparative and protective structures. This involves creating violence-resistant communities that protect survivors, hold abusers accountable, and help survivors reclaim their agencies.<sup>i</sup>

Though the feminist claim that societal norms enable domestic violence is uncontroversial, it may be less obvious why we should diagnose moral responsibility and repair at this level. Because morality is a shared exercise, I suggest that moral damage, and thus moral repair, should also be understood communally, particularly in a case of moral damage that clearly has oppressive overtones. Further, some moral damage from domestic violence (when it exists) can be *made possible* by community complicity. A community's failure to morally challenge an abusive environment—or worse, its facilitation of that environment—can itself be morally damaging *and* can contribute to domestic violence. In these cases, communities can be more than incidentally responsible, at least in part, for instances of domestic violence and resulting damage.<sup>ii</sup> A community's responsibility to survivors can be overdetermined: communities have responsibilities to protect its members from harm, but some may have additional responsibilities to repair and prevent moral damage from domestic violence in particular. Spelling out these responsibilities can help address the particular harms that some survivors face.

## I. Moral Damage

Judith Herman classifies domestic violence as a form of captivity trauma since it “brings the victims into prolonged contact with the perpetrator, [creating] a special type of relationship, one of coercive control” (1997, 74). Though there are different types of domestic violence, which broadly refers to the use of controlling violence within the home, I will focus below on the domestic violence that Michael P. Johnson characterizes as intimate terrorism.<sup>iii</sup> This is when “the perpetrator uses violence in the service of general control over his or her partner” but the partner is not violent in response (2008, 13).<sup>iv</sup> And in such cases of “coercive control,” I argue that survivors may experience one or both forms of (related) moral damage:<sup>v</sup>

(1) Normative Isolation: an abusive environment marked by isolated and distorted moral standards about the abuse itself, most relevantly, that the survivor is to blame for and the abusers is excused from the abuse and that the abuse is justified.<sup>vi</sup>

2) Coerced Self-betrayal: the coercive entrapment of the survivor’s agency, emotions, and/or beliefs to express the will of the abuser and thereby participate in her own abuse.<sup>vii</sup>

Before explaining each form of moral damage, a few clarifications are in order. First, I understand these damages in terms of more or less severe hindrances to survivors’ moral agencies with regard to the abuse, which may include moral beliefs or judgments, capacities to choose and act, narratives about the abuse, etc.<sup>viii</sup> But there is a diversity of degrees and experiences here, and to cite damage to a (part of) moral agency is not to suggest that survivors are “broken” non-agents who endorse their abuse. Moral damage is consistent with a survivor’s exercise of agency and in no way entails her responsibility or blame for the abuse. Rather, a better way to think of moral damage is as a degreed notion: to a greater or lesser extent, continued abuse may impair some survivors’ abilities to recognize harms again herself and protect and exercise her agency accordingly. Survivors can (and do) understand their situations for what they are while at the same time becoming worn down by abuse. This dual consciousness

can be experienced as, for instance, a tension between knowing that the abuser is wrong yet acting to appease him, or knowing one did nothing wrong yet *feeling* guilty.

Second, when I claim that domestic violence may cause moral damage in some survivors, I only mean to identify one of many possible harms. Other dimensions are more urgent and ought to be triaged accordingly, like physical safety.<sup>ix</sup> Finally, because there is a great diversity in situations of abuse and experiences of survivors, these damages are contingent. Not all survivors may experience them or experience them in the same way. This is because there are different types and degrees of abuse—and as noted above, my focus here is on the moral damage connected to domestic violence that takes a more extreme form of intimate terrorism—and because individual experiences differ widely and resist generalization. What follows may only be relevant for a subset of domestic violence survivors, but nonetheless calls for a response when it does occur.

First, consider the moral damage of normative isolation. Physical and social isolation are features of much domestic violence as they help create an environment of control over survivors (Herman 1997). But abuse may also normatively isolate survivors who find themselves in enclosed normative spaces that are largely dictated by distorted, abusive standards. And there is a danger of (partially) internalizing these standards, often for the sake of survival. These situations of abuse can be characterized as isolated, distorted moral environments with defective moral structures arranged around the abuser's arbitrary system of wrong and right. Consider this survivor's account, quoted in Herman:

It was a very brutal marriage. He was so patriarchal. He felt he owned me and the children—that I was his property...he told me to regard him as God and his word as gospel. If I didn't want sex and he did, my wishes didn't matter. One time...I didn't want it so we really fought. He was furiously angry that I would deny him. I was protesting and pleading and he was angry because he said I was his wife and had no right to refuse him... (1997, 78)<sup>x</sup>

This survivor clearly articulates the distorted moral standards of her abusive situation and the serious consequences for violating them.

Illuminating a possible reason for an abuser's moral distortion, Lundy Bancroft, a counselor who has run programs for abusive men, writes: "An abuser almost never does anything that he himself considers morally unacceptable...an abuser's core problem is that he has a distorted sense of right and wrong" (2002, 35). The "distortion" here indicates a set of moral standards that are untethered to a communally shared sense of right and wrong. Within distorted moral environments like these, punishment is connected to abusive conceptions of right and wrong—for which the abuser tends to exonerate himself—and survivors are treated as the sole loci of wrongdoing. As Herman puts it, the survivor "has learned that every action will be watched, that most actions will be thwarted, and that she will pay dearly for failure...she will perceive any exercise of her own initiative as insubordination" (1997, 91). The survivor's agency can thus, to a greater or lesser degree, be circumscribed by the distorted moral environment.<sup>xi</sup>

Abusive environments can create a narrow normative territory that is cut off from the moral landscapes of communities and other non-abusive relationships, which can become more difficult to access.<sup>xii</sup> This moral isolation can be both a disconnection from and distortion of shared values of the broader moral community, insofar as moral distortions have detached the survivor from the basic moral norms that we ought not harm others, that every person is fundamentally worthy of respect and fair treatment, that those who wrong are held accountable—those norms that we have generally been taught, whether or not we've lived in particular worlds that uphold them. This describes what Margaret Urban Walker calls "normative isolation," which occurs when these fundamental moral expectations are lost (2006, 97). Normative isolation can happen both when we are wronged and when others fail to recognize wrongs against us.

Specifically, normative betrayal can involve: “[f]ailure to receive confirmation of one’s judgment that certain actions are unacceptable, that wrongs are worth correcting or redressing, that wrongdoers should be held to account, or that victims deserve reparative response” (Walker 2006, 96).

When normative betrayal happens, it is primarily due to the abuser, who may undermine the survivor’s basic normative expectations of trust, security, and safety. But the wider community can also commit normative betrayal and reinforce the abuser’s moral distortion when they shame, silence, and stigmatize survivors. As such, the survivor can be abandoned by both her partner and her community. Walker enumerates a number of possible “destructive” responses on the part of the harmed party, including “confusion and anxiety...about whether they are competent judges of right and wrong; [the harmed person] can lose conviction or self-trust in making these judgments” (2006, 96). A potential result is a collapse of some moral relations through the weakening of trust in others, of normative expectations of themselves and others, and even trust in moral norms (Walker 2006, 96-7).

The picture of normative betrayal I’ve just described assumes that a survivor is protected by her community *until* isolated from it. But the reality is more complicated: some survivors may occupy liminal spaces in their community such that they are already normatively betrayed in other ways. In other words, minoritized social groups may already suffer normative isolation from dominant communities. These existing inequities can compound the moral damage of normative isolation. For instance, domestic violence in a queer relationship may be dismissed very quickly because it does not follow a heteronormative pattern. Here, normative isolation has compounding layers: a queer survivor is betrayed twice (at least) by her community due to intersecting norms that dismiss both domestic violence and queer relationships. Survivors within

BIPOC communities may also be subjected to intersecting dimensions of normative isolation. Since any violence within these communities is considered unremarkable by a white supremacist society—an existing normative betrayal of BIPOC—the additional normative isolation of domestic violence can exacerbate this moral damage. We can see this in the astounding rates of domestic violence against indigenous women (Matamona-Bennett 2015) and the ease with which they are ignored by the dominant, white supremacist society.

This first form of moral damage involves the distortion of moral standards in the abusive environment. The second form draws on parallels between domestic violence and oppression, terrorism, and torture (and their intersection) and identifies the moral fallout—the coercion of the survivor’s self-betrayal. Card draws these connections in several of her works. Like terrorism, extreme forms of domestic violence involve “a pattern of ongoing behaviors that work together, like the bars of a cage, to produce coercive domination” (Card 2002, 145). Consider some tactics used to achieve this coercive dominance: “Like other terrorists, abusive intimates use threats and heightened fear to manipulate and control. Spousal batterers use terror to obtain service and deference in everything from sex and money to petty details of household management” (Card 2002, 143). While these threats are immediate, they are mirrored in the broader terrorist institution of what Card calls the protection racket of rape (1996). Driven to find male protectors against male perpetrators, rape as an institution maintains women’s dependence; similarly, the terrorism of domestic violence keeps particular women at the service of particular men.

These terroristic aspects of domestic violence can be reinforced through torture. Card argues that several “ordinary” practices, some forms of domestic violence among them, “impose treatment that should be recognized as torture” (2010, 207). One of Card’s modifications to the UN definition of torture is an added condition of defenselessness to capture the power imbalance

inherent in torture. Though there are physical acts of domestic violence that constitute torture (Card 2010, 227), defenselessness need not be physical. Rather, "...when there is already abuse or the probability of it gross power disparities aggravate the likelihood of torture by making it easy to disable victims" (Card 2010, 228). This defenselessness, coupled with the perceived unassailability of the abuser, contribute to what David Sussman calls a torture victim's "forced self-betrayal" (2005, 5).<sup>xiii</sup>

Drawing on Sussman's view, torture and domestic violence share certain structures and harms: the survivor is in an asymmetrical relationship of dependency with her abuser/torturer, in which the latter has more choice and control (Sussman 2005, 6); the abuser/torturer exerts a capricious will with impunity (7-8); the survivor may take the perspective of the abuser/torturer (24); and the arbitrary reversal between abuse and reprieve forces the victim to cater to the abuser/torturer's whims (24-5). Through the use of (physical) pain or threat and its removal and her dependency on the abuser/torturer, a survivor may adopt the abuser/torturer's attitudes (Sussman 2005, 29). Sussman writes, "Torture does not merely insult or damage its victim's agency, but rather turns such agency against itself, forcing the victim to experience herself as helpless yet complicit in her own violation" (2005, 30).<sup>xiv</sup> Forced self-betrayal happens when the survivor's agency, emotions, and moral beliefs and judgment are made to turn against her, "expressing the will" of the abuser (Sussman 2005, 29).

What is the moral impact of adopting the perspective an abuser? Card summarizes:

Tortured human beings...can become desperately active in seeking to accommodate torturers...Crueler than pain are memories of choosing against one's principles and values, accusing oneself and loved ones in order to ingratiate oneself with persons one despises, becoming complicit in projects one regards as evil, being broken as a human being. (2010, 236)

Identification with the abuser may facilitate survival when it helps the survivor anticipate the abuser's every move (Card 2002; 2015), yet it can also lead to moral compromise when it involves acting against one's values. And this can have serious ramifications for the survivor's moral self. Comparing an abuse survivor and an oppressed group, Card argues that a type of moral damage is a dissolution of integrity, a self or group that "splinters" (1996, 42.) Survivors who come to identify with their abusers can become morally fractured, losing the tether to their own values. There is a moral danger in this obfuscating perspective-taking: "...lacking integrity one is in danger of dissolving into a variety of personalities, changing one's colors (values) like a chameleon in changing environments." (Card 1996, 89). The dissolution of integrity signals a serious damage to moral agency.

As with normative isolation, the moral damage of coerced self-betrayal can be exacerbated by existing social inequities. For instance, within the context of a white supremacist society, some BIPOC survivors may feel an expectation to show family—and thus racial or ethnic—loyalty. Consider the racist stereotype that Black women are responsible for keeping their families together (Lorde 2009) or sexist norms within Chicano families in which women must cater to men (Moraga 1993). If a survivor stays in an abusive situation partly because of such familial or cultural pressures (which are themselves couched in a white supremacist society that threatens those communities) the coerced self-betrayal she experiences may have an added layer of upholding her racial or ethnic loyalty. To be clear, I am *not* suggesting that one's race or ethnicity makes this moral damage likelier; I just wish to acknowledge that, for some, there may be layers to this damage relating to their intersecting identities.

If domestic violence can cause moral damage in some survivors as I've argued, how ought we respond? It is important to identify the harms of domestic violence, but more important

to do so with an eye towards protecting survivors and reducing the risk of violence. Both types of moral damage will bear on actions that discharge a community's responsibility to survivors. But first, we must identify the grounding of this responsibility.

## II. Misogyny, Violence, and Responsibility

A significant amount of feminist work has argued that misogynistic social environments contribute to gender-based violence.<sup>xv</sup> Insofar as social institutions maintain a narrative of women's rightful subordination to men, deem women passive and submissive, and violently treat women as sexual possessions, they help create the conditions that facilitate domestic violence.<sup>xvi</sup> Card implicates two related institutions that support gender-based violence: the protection racket of rape discussed above, and marriage. Card argues that while marriage itself isn't abusive, it creates conditions of access that protect violent partners and further endanger survivors (2002, 153). Together, Card describes a society that terrorizes women to seek protection from violent men in a contractual relationship with other men that makes violence harder to escape.<sup>xvii</sup>

Other social practices reinforce norms of protecting abusers and blaming survivors. Card writes, "[Partner battery] has a special importance in society that makes it often impossible for the abused to escape and that supports, facilitates, and even enforces abusers' continued access to victims and often penalizes survivors who fight back when they have no help" (1996, 86). For instance, shame may be part of some survivors' experiences; the fact that women may be subject to social shame and punishment for being abused compounds this problem. Social worker Viveka Enander captures this double bind:

[A]bused women risk being stigmatized in the general community, paradoxically both for being home wreckers and for not leaving their abusive partners. In the first case, women are made responsible for keeping families together, regardless of individual cost. In the

second case, women who are subjected to male violence are made responsible for solving this difficult social problem by the individual act of leaving. (2010, 6)

Further, there is a culture of shame around domestic violence. Community and family pressure to keep the “shameful” and “embarrassing” abuse secret can preclude survivors from seeking help (Fugate et al. 2005). Given such efforts to protect male abusers and shame survivors, it is no wonder that some survivors remain silent.

Inequities other than misogyny can also shape community responses to domestic violence. The institutions of white supremacy, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and so on, contribute to an environment where domestic violence (and violence in general) is treated as acceptable, specifically against marginalized groups. For instance, Kimberlé Crenshaw writes of how white communities raised awareness by emphasizing that domestic violence *can happen to anyone* (read: middle class white women) (1991, 1258-61). Intersecting racism and sexism meant that domestic violence against women of color was not regarded as a problem on its own terms; rather, domestic violence was framed in term of a dominant cultural narrative to gain political attention (Crenshaw 1991, 1260). So, even when a community tries to address domestic violence, these efforts may reflect existing oppression and thereby exclude whole groups of survivors. Similarly, white supremacy is built into the carceral systems which are currently the main structures of public safety in the U.S. We know that law enforcement is not necessarily a safe resource for BIPOC communities; these carceral responses can beget more violence than they preclude, often tragically so. When existing community resources that are already infused with violence and oppression meet the social practices that countenance domestic violence, the most vulnerable survivors are left unprotected and threatened.

We can see how the social countenance of gender-based violence along with other oppressive forces not only supports domestic violence but can also connect to the moral damages

of normative isolation and coerced self-betrayal. Normative isolation is partly maintained by survivors' communities insofar as they fail to recognize or appropriately respond to abuse. Survivors may be blamed for their own abuse; that is part of the moral damage of being coerced to participate in one's own harm driven by normative isolation. Further, this distortion of survivors' responsibility and manipulation of their agency is a reflection and instantiation of a society that does the same: we blame and shame those who suffer abuse rather than those who abuse. Communities that fail to appropriately respond to the moral wrong of domestic violence can exacerbate survivors' shame and motivate their silence, reinforce false moral beliefs about abuse, and make coerced self-betrayal seem unremarkable, thus contributing to the misogynistic cycle that furthers domestic violence and its damage. This is not an accident: this gross moral perversion is at the heart of diagnosing domestic violence as a *social* pathology and also points to the needed communal treatment (Matamonasa-Bennett 2015, 22).

Because morality is a shared exercise, it would seem that any community that allows a morally distorted environment to exist has committed a moral harm to those involved—this is Walker's point about normative betrayal. In other words, communities are not only implicated in the conditions of domestic violence itself but are also implicated in the moral damage that may result insofar as they contribute to a climate where this damage occurs. Because communities facilitate the moral damage of domestic violence in these ways, they bear a responsibility to repair and prevent it.

There are a few things to note about this responsibility. First, any community will have overdetermined responsibilities to protect its members from harm, including a general responsibility to prevent violence. The responsibility I outline here is not the sole moral responsibility to survivors. And there are responsibilities to survivors even when no moral

damage exists—they will just rest on different moral grounds and require different actions to discharge that responsibility. My point in articulating this responsibility is not to suggest it is the only or the most important moral response to domestic violence. Rather, I want to broaden the normative space to suggest that beyond responsibilities from close others and general responsibilities of public protection, we all bear some responsibility for the moral health of our community and its members.

I suggest that members of communities in certain positions and with certain social identities bear this responsibility. It is strengthened by proximity or closeness to survivors insofar as this facilitates repair: friends, family, roommates, neighbors, coworkers, etc. are especially responsible for acting given the nature of their relationships to survivors. But this responsibility is *grounded* in complicity: being a member of a school, town, city, society in which violence against women and gender minorities is normalized.<sup>xviii</sup> Part of repairing moral damage involves challenging the systemic misogyny (and other oppressive institutions) that created the damage in the first place. The latter task falls upon every capable adult. For instance, community leaders with some influence or resources in the community—educators, religious leaders, local business owners, etc.—ought to contribute to repair efforts.

One might argue that those who are most privileged by misogyny have the greatest responsibility to challenge it—namely, men. However, this solution would reinforce the protection racket in which men are both saviors and threats. Rather, though men and other privileged parties can support efforts to help survivors, these efforts should be (at least partly) survivor-led. Card argues that rather than wait for formal justice for women, “A more promising idea might be to seek circumstances of justice among women, or groups of women, to try to cultivate circumstances in which cooperation among women would be fruitful” (2014, 480).<sup>xix</sup>

Building on Card's view, survivors (and their allies) bear at least part of this responsibility to challenge misogyny and help other survivors.<sup>xx</sup> This is not meant to further burden survivors, but rather to recognize that while all capable members of communities bear this responsibility, it should be led by those who are most affected.

While this responsibility is grounded in communities' role in domestic violence, the moral response cannot *only* hold perpetrators and collaborators accountable. Developing Card's notion of forward-looking responsibility (Card 1996), Alison Bailey articulates a notion of "shared *respond-ability*" in the context of mobilizing a community response to hate crimes (2001, 233). Bailey's approach moves beyond a backwards-looking model of holding perpetrators responsible to asking of the community "how they should support those harmed...[and]...strategize ways of preventing future harms" (2001, 233-4). Shared responsibility calls for a collective effort—guided by victims' voices—to take up the moral task of protecting victims from further harm, even if one was not culpable for that harm (Bailey 2011, 230). Similarly, while many individuals in a community likely play some role in upholding misogyny, and while I do think this fact generates a responsibility, following Bailey, I argue that this responsibility transcends individual culpability so that it can center on care for survivors. If some of the harms of domestic violence involve a moral betrayal from one's community, this community has a responsibility to address these harms, and this includes individuals who are not necessarily culpable for those harms; responsibility can outrun culpability. In the next section, I outline the practical contours of this responsibility.

### III. Building Violence-resistant Communities

Communities' responses to domestic violence should be guided by repairing moral damage: correcting normative isolation and betrayal and helping survivors reclaim their agencies in the service of their *own* will. Andrea Smith writes that when communities are part of the problem in sustaining violence, "Our political task... becomes to *create* communities of accountability" (Smith 2011, xvi). In line with Smith, I suggest that addressing the moral damage of domestic violence involves *building* (sub-)communities or collectives that are actively resistant to domestic violence, and thus challenge the enabling of violence against women. I do not pretend that this is the solution to domestic violence. But building violence-resistant communities is one bottom-up change that can have real impact. In a community that correctly recognizes and responds to the wrongs of domestic violence, survivors may have more resources to identify and escape that abuse; when communities are structured to prevent abuse, it may be harder to establish normative isolation and coerced self-betrayal.

Why focus on the community level to address these issues? One may object that we already have structures in place to deal with domestic violence, namely, state-funded law enforcement and non-profit organizations. But as mentioned in the previous section, these solutions—specifically law enforcement and the prison industrial complex—are founded on white supremacy and thus provide a state-sanctioned means of violence against BIPOC communities. Institutions that promote violence simply cannot be relied on to end violence, especially because that violence is explicitly directed at communities of color. A system that does not protect *all* of the vulnerable members of a community is not a safe system. Activist groups such as INCITE! comprised of radical feminists of color have long recognized the harms of state violence and white feminists' complicity in supporting a carceral solution to violence against women (Kim 2018). So, if state-funded institutions cannot be trusted to protect all

survivors, we need an alternative that can, and we can draw on our communities to create it. I hope to add to this important work of these activists in what follows.

I also base my sketch of violence-resistant communities on trauma-informed communities (Porter et al. 2016; Harbin 2019). Trauma-informed approaches have been implemented in health care and education settings and provide a framework that is sensitive to the needs of those who have experienced trauma (Harbin 2019). Fortified with knowledge of the ways in which trauma can disorient a person's sense of self and relationships with others, trauma-informed services are designed around these specific needs. Trauma-informed communities would recognize domestic violence as a form of trauma, identify the effects this can have on survivors, and accordingly tailor their efforts. These guideposts present a survivor-centered approach to domestic violence (rather than, say, a legal-punitive one).

First, how can violence-resistant communities repair the moral damage of normative isolation? Because normative isolation relies on false moral beliefs about abuse, community efforts to call out the abuse as wrong can start correcting the distortion. This includes, but is not limited to, acknowledging domestic violence within a community. Additionally, domestic violence must be framed as a serious interpersonal and community moral problem rather than the fault of the survivor. For example, a public health approach can reframe domestic violence from a private problem to a communal responsibility (perhaps analogous to anti-bullying campaigns). In terms of education, lessons on healthy and unhealthy relationships cannot start too young! Educators and other community leaders clearly have power here to help challenge stereotypes about abuse, create more transparency around the topic, and help identify some of the ways communities are complicit. Even calling domestic violence for what it is in informal gatherings can help challenge the traditional secrecy of the topic. Naming and condemning abuse publicly—

whether in the media or to a neighbor—send a powerful message. It affirms that survivors ought not be treated that way and abusers are morally wrong (exactly the message inverted in abusive environments), in addition to signaling support for survivors. Communities that recognize domestic violence as a moral problem on the part of the abuser and community—*not* the survivor—can help break the barrier of normative isolation.

Second, violence-resistant communities can respond to the coerced self-betrayal of domestic violence by building structures that help survivors re-integrate fractured parts of her moral agency. When a survivor's agency has been used against her in extreme cases of abuse, repairing this moral damage means giving the survivor the support to safely reclaim her agency *for herself* by rebuilding a moral self that she can endorse. Some feminist philosophers have discussed a relational nature of autonomy: autonomy is not an individual, atomistic activity but rather one that involves others. Susan Brison shows how this notion was realized in her own case after suffering trauma. She writes that others helped her expand a will contracted by trauma by, for example, walking with her to talks and having her university install a light in a parking lot, thereby facilitating activities that would have been difficult on her own (Brison 2002, 60-1). When it comes to domestic violence, survivors who have learned to adapt their wills to their abusers can be offered help to safely exercise their agencies on their own terms. For instance, some community members may offer to accompany survivors to support groups or to communicate with their abuser for them when it is necessary. Other community members can help survivors learn to do the tasks her partner may have been exclusively responsible for, thereby helping her learn to live without him—a potentially huge factor for exercising agency. Even encouraging survivors to practice their passions can help her re-integrate her own sense of self. Examples like this show how others can give survivors a safer platform to decide how *they*

want to act and the space to do so—a freedom that may have been more or less circumscribed in abusive settings. While we all need others to exercise our agencies, other people can be especially important in helping survivors rebuild theirs.

Bierria et al., members of Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA), offer additional guidance in their work addressing sexual violence within communities (2016). Though stressing that there is no single procedure that will fit all communities, they offer guideposts such as centering the survivor's wishes and desire for involvement in accountability efforts concerning their abuser (Bierria et al. 2016, 251). Following this point, violence-resistant communities should let survivor's needs, comfort level, and willingness to engage guide efforts of reparation (again drawing on a trauma-informed framework). This is part of Bailey's motivation in articulating shared responsibility: this forward-looking approach helps center survivor's voices rather than exclusively focus on perpetrators and collaborators. Giving survivors platforms to tell their stories according to their own narratives—if they so choose—can also be empowering and help correct moral distortion.

Further, a community that helps survivors learn to care for themselves and be cared for by others offers a profound form of resistance for those who may still identify with their abusers. Again motivated by centering survivors and promoting their agencies, survivor-led groups may also be a resource here. Somewhat paradoxically, helping others repair their moral damage can be a way of repairing one's own. This is a premise of consciousness raising: recognizing other's struggles can cast one's own in a new, shared light. And for abuse survivors, it can often be easier to recognize the worth of other survivors before recognizing it in themselves (Brison 2002, 63). Working from the “outside in” in this way can be a strategy of repair, and communities can help by creating space for such survivor-led work.

The concrete structures that facilitate these goals will be bespoke to each community. Creating violence-resistant communities may involve educating and empowering community members to be agents of change (Porter et al. 2016, 4). Drawing on experts from different sectors of the community for education (social workers, scholars, activists, volunteers etc.), communities can start to form networks that self-reflect on practices that facilitate domestic violence, assess the level of need in that community, and create structures for intervention (Porter et al. 2016, 4).

Applying Bailly's notion of shared responsibility to domestic violence, forward-looking responses would mean cultivating a community in which it is harder for abusers to abuse. One way this may be done is by widening survivors' support networks. Domestic violence shelters are a good resource for survivors, but as space, length of stay, and funding may be all be limited they may not always be sufficient. More importantly, such organization may be hostile places for BIPOC survivors (Koyama 2006). Additionally, state-funded non-profits are beholden to the same white supremacist norms as other state-funded institutions, which we've seen are unacceptable in anti-violence efforts. Instead, communities can offer supplemental or supplanting structures to domestic violence shelters. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha develops the notion of "care webs" that conceive of "networks of care" for disabled and ill persons as a "collective responsibility" rather than an individual or state-sponsored task (2018, 33). On their view, care webs are constructed and maintained by those who receive and give care and thus aim to meet the various needs of their members through shared action. A similar structure could work for domestic violence survivors and allies. For example, a community may create a network to help survivors who wish to leave their abusers. A survivor escaping abuse is physiologically focused on survival; this is a basic response to trauma that drains energy away from other tasks. Delegating such tasks to a network comprised of community members can ease

this burden: as needed and agreed to by the survivor, members can help with job applications, offer childcare, teach survivors how to build credit, provide transportation, create a fund for rental applications, and so on (these are also examples of helping survivors expand their agencies). For those community members in a position to do so, opening their homes can help women who need more time away than a shelter will allow.

Additionally, a component of building violence-resistant communities involves cultivating an appropriate moral response to abusers. Though it may seem natural to course correct by shaming abusers, this approach has been ineffective in criminal contexts, most importantly because it can prompt further violence (Camp 2018). But there are approaches short of outright community shaming that still hold abusers accountable. This may be one area in which the most privileged in the community have a part to play. For instance, men—fathers, coaches, teachers—can communicate the unacceptability of abuse through words and actions, accountability measures, and perhaps even non-violent intervention in domestic disputes.<sup>xxi</sup> This may also include setting up watch networks to detect domestic violence, safe spots in public places to connect survivors with care networks, mentorship groups that check in on partnered women, education to recognize signs of abuse, making domestic violence a regular topic of conversation so survivors may be more comfortable disclosing, and so on.

I offer a rough sketch of possible community structures that build on existing efforts, but different communities will have different needs and resources. Rather than offer a to-do list, I urge the moral imperative to take up a community response to domestic violence, to *take responsibility* for determining which structures of prevention and intervention are appropriate and implement them. The term *violence-resistant* community is intentional: resistance is most

effective when it is a shared effort, for the moral wrongs of our society must be repaired together.<sup>xxii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> I've chosen to use gendered pronouns (she/her/hers for survivors, he/him/his for abusers) not to discount the fact that other gendered iterations of abuser and abused exist—including the terrible abuse against transmen and transwomen, particularly transwomen of color—but to rather highlight the overwhelming trends of domestic violence. Further, I choose to use “survivor” rather than “victim” or “abused” not because I find these latter terms inherently problematic, but rather because I find that “survivor” does a better job reminding the reader of the agency and personhood of the person who endures abuse.

<sup>ii</sup> By “communities,” I mean to indicate those with whom the survivor immediately and regularly interacts: her friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, etc., as well as the groups of people with whom she shares space, values, or activities. Her community can also include community leaders as well as those adults whose actions and inactions contribute to an environment that facilitates domestic violence, even if the survivor has no direct interaction with the latter.

<sup>iii</sup> I've chosen to use the broader term “domestic violence” throughout despite focusing on literature on intimate terrorism in order to highlight the fact that moral damage and responsibilities to repair it do not just occur in cases of intimate partner violence. Child abuse, for instance, will share some of the features of moral damage and ground similar responsibilities of repair. However, this will require its own argument, so I focus on the type of abuse traditionally discussed in feminist literature.

<sup>iv</sup> Johnson also identifies violent resistance, in which the victim is violent (but not controlling) in response to intimate terrorism, and situational couple violence, in which violence from one or both partners occurs but is not connect to attempts to control (2008). Johnson also distinguishes mutual violent control, in which both partners “use violence in attempts to gain general control over their partner,” though he admits this type of violence is rarer and less studied (2008, 13).

<sup>v</sup> Macy Salzberger (Unpublished manuscript) argues that victims of domestic violence are particularly vulnerable to the oppressive moral damage of developing deficient character traits like deference and servility which can undermine moral self-respect.

<sup>vi</sup> This term is from Margaret Urban Walker (2006), discussed below.

<sup>vii</sup> The term is adapted from David Sussman's (2005), discussed below.

<sup>viii</sup> The moral damage here is local, concerning beliefs and judgments about the abuse itself, not global moral beliefs.

<sup>ix</sup> Additionally, the negative effects of domestic violence often spread beyond the immediate relationship. For just one instance, witnessing domestic violence in childhood is considered an adverse childhood experience (ACE) that, along with other ACEs, is reliably correlated with poor health outcomes related to leading causes of death in adulthood (Felitti et al. 2008). By extrapolation, the effects of domestic violence can impact education, work, health care systems, health of subsequent generations, etc.

<sup>x</sup> Herman is here quoting from Russell, D.E.H. (1989) *Rape in Marriage* (New York: Vintage), 123.

<sup>xi</sup> To be clear, I'm not making any claims that moral damage explains “why women don't leave.” My point here is emphatically *not* to claim that survivors believe they deserve abuse and therefore don't leave abusive relationships. The reality of leaving an abusive relationship is complex and dependent on multiple factors, and the myth that women can easily walk away from abuse has been sufficiently disproven. Additionally, I don't conceptualize moral damage as evidence of survivor's weakness or passivity. Rather, I'm just trying to explicate one of the possible harmful effects of abuse on some survivors' moral agencies.

<sup>xii</sup> Survivors of domestic violence may have grown up in settings of abuse (and with rates of repeated victimization as they are, this is not unlikely), so in this regard, this may be the only moral setting they know. I don't mean to indicate that there is a single moral environment in contrast to the abusive environment. We all inhabit many “moral environments” in different parts of our lives, where this is understood as domains of our lives with different (overlapping) standards, values, and morally acceptable behaviors. The abusive environment is severely unlike these other moral environments which have basically accepted precepts of how to treat others and what treatment to expect from others—the basic trust in others that “grounds moral relations,” according to Walker (2006, 96). The abusive environment is distorted because one is no longer treated (by abuser and oneself, and likely others in the community) as a moral agent worthy of protection from harm, a precept that, in principle at least, is unallowable in other moral environments.

<sup>xiii</sup> In his argument about the unique wrong of torture, Sussman notes that rape and domestic abuse may be analyzed as “special types of torture.” (2005, 3n9).

<sup>xiv</sup> There are differences between domestic violence and conventional cases of torture (e.g. in war). Sussman focuses on how the body betrays itself by “calling out” for the inflicted pain to be removed, and in that way the victim participates in his own torture as only he can. While domestic violence can certainly involve instances of torture like this, the general form of self-betrayal relevant for domestic violence is that of the survivor’s agency, emotions, and beliefs being shaped to express the will of the abuser, rather than the betrayal of a body in pain.

<sup>xv</sup> Though this doesn’t mean that patriarchy is the one and only cause of domestic violence. Such claims would not only ignore other relevant causal factors, but also discount those instances of domestic violence that do not follow heteronormative patterns.

<sup>xvi</sup> There is a potential tension here: above, I argued that domestic violence creates a distorted moral universe that isolates the survivor from the moral community. Yet, it seems now that this moral community is no better, as its norms also countenance violence against women. So, either domestic violence does not normatively isolate survivors—the norms about harming women are the same at every level—or this isolation is of no real consequence. I suggest that this tension can be resolved by distinguishing two dimensions of the moral community: 1) general “agent-neutral” moral norms of morality, which include norms of responsibility, blame, harm, fair and rightful treatment of others, etc., and 2) particular patriarchal norms that are instantiated in the behaviors of those in the moral community. Clearly, there is an inconsistency between these two dimensions. Domestic violence isolates the survivor from the general moral norms that would recognize the abuse as wrong and instead imposes the patriarchal norms that facilitate that abuse and treat it as morally unremarkable. The moral community fails to protect the survivor by virtue of upholding the norms in (2), and it is these norms and resultant behaviors that need reform. Another way to think of this is that the moral community ought to bring their treatment of domestic violence in line with the moral assessment that would hold under the norms in (1), by feeling outrage at abusers rather than shaming survivors.

<sup>xvii</sup> Note that this is only part of the story of the risks of domestic violence, since it is not the case that only men are perpetrators and only women are survivors. Other power dynamics must also be at play in order to account for, e.g., abuse in queer relationships.

<sup>xviii</sup> So, obligations of those who are close to the survivor will be overdetermined. Additionally, only adults who are capable of discharging the responsibility will bear it.

<sup>xix</sup> I also do not necessarily endorse Card’s focus on “guerrilla feminism” or organizing women to use non-state sponsored force and violence for protection (2014, 483). I agree with Card that there is a need to organize beyond state protections, but I do not think violence and force are the best means of doing so.

<sup>xx</sup> I mean this to be inclusive of women and LGBTQ+ survivors.

<sup>xxi</sup> See Jashnani, Maccani, and Greig 2016.

<sup>xxii</sup> I wish to thank audiences at the North American Society for Social Philosophy Annual Conference, the Grand Valley State Philosophy Department Summer Research Group, the Society for Women in Philosophy Ireland Annual Conference, the Philosophical Engagements with Trauma conference at UNC Asheville, the Stockdale Center for Ethics at the U.S. Naval Academy, as well as Maci Salzberger and two anonymous reviewers for very helpful feedback on this paper.