

Breaking the MANacles

an anti-patriarchy reader



Made especially - but by no means exclusively - for those socialized as men

a few online resources

Anarcha-Feminism Resource

<http://www.enrager.net/thought/ideas/feminism/>

Anarcha-Feminism & Gender Anarchy Resource Page

<http://www.anarcha.org/sallydarity/critique.php>

Cleveland Men Against Sexism

<http://www.clevelandmas.org>

Colours of Resistance

<http://colours.mahost.org>

Deal With It — Journal by anti-sexist anarchist men

<http://fruitiondesign.com/dealwithit/>

Planting Seeds Community Awareness Project

<http://www.pscap.org>

Who edited this thing? My name is Andrew, and I compiled this zine for a class on Anarcha-Feminism at Fairhaven College in Bellingham, WA. If you'd like to share any thoughts with me (or you thought the title was stupid) you can email me at [<mourningcommute@yahoo.com>](mailto:mourningcommute@yahoo.com)

Many thanks to the authors of these pieces for furthering the ever-important struggle against patriarchy!

Most of these works are widely available on the world wide web, and if the links provided in this zine don't work, a quick search on Google.com by the name of the essay should be able to find what you're looking for.

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Authored by anonymous anarcha-feminists in Philadelphia, this list of questions is designed to get those socialized as men thinking about the role patriarchy plays in their everyday lives. If, as a "man," you feel yourself getting incredibly defensive, take a deep breath and keep reading—breaking the *manacles* has begun!

SHUT THE FUCK UP, or HOW TO ACT BETTER IN MEETINGS P. 9

By Dan Spalding

An open letter to "men" in the movement, designed to give men the practical skills needed to step back and make space for women in activist circles. Take heed and shut the fuck up—it may very well be the most radical thing you can do!

GOING TO PLACES THAT SCARE ME: P. 16

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Feeling pretty good about yourself for being an out and about ally to gender oppressed peoples? Harris offers a timely reminder about what outing the inner manarchist is really all about.

STICK IT TO THE MANARCHY

By the Rock Bloc Collective P. 30

An essential critique which launched an essential debate. Aggressive, ho-lie-r than thou, elitist, macho? Odds are you're a manarchist! Followed up by a response from the authors to various criticisms. An excellent example of what tactical critique is all about, and how it can strengthen movements for social change.

ARE YOU A MANARCHIST?

QUESTIONNAIRE

General Questions

1. Do you ascribe to either:

A) "Passive-Aggressive Patriarchy:" (Often come across as a victim/ helpless/in need/dependent and get women in your life to be your physical and emotional caretakers? To buy you things? To take care of your responsibilities? Pick up your slack? Use guilt or manipulation to get out of your responsibilities and equal share of the work? Do you treat your female partner like a "mom" or your secretary?)

B) "Aggressive Patriarchy:" (Do you often take charge? Assume that a woman can't do something right so you do it for her? Believe that only you can take care of things? Think that you always have the right answer? Treat your female partner like she's helpless, fragile, a baby or weak? Do you put down your partner or minimize her feelings? Do you belittle her opinions?)

2. How do you react when women in your life name something or someone as patriarchal or sexist? Do you think of her or call her a "PC Thug," "Feminazi," "Thin-skinned," "Overly-Sensitive," "COINTELPRO-esque" or "Un-fun?"

3. Do you see talking about patriarchy as non-heroic, a waste of time, trouble making, or divisive?

4. If a woman asks your opinion, do you assume she must not know anything about the subject?

5. Do you believe that women have "natural characteristics" which are inherent in our sex such as "passive," "sweet," "caring," "nurturing," "considerate," "generous," "weak," or "emotional?"

6. Do you make fun of "typical" men or "frat boys" but not ever check yourself to see if you behave in the same ways?

7. Do you take on sexism and patriarchy as a personal struggle working to fight against it in yourself, in your relationships, in society, work, culture, subcultures, and institutions?

Available online:

<http://www.infoshop.org/inews/stories.php?story=01/11/21/0853184>

8. Do you say anything when other men make sexist or patriarchal comments? Do you help your patriarchal and sexist friends to make change and help educate them? Or do you continue friendships with patriarchal and sexist men and act like there is no problem?

Activism Questions



9. As a man, is being a feminist a priority to you? Do you see being a feminist as revolutionary or radical?

10. Do you think that you define what is radical? Do you suffer from or contribute to "macho bravado" or "subpoena envy"? (i.e. defining a true or "cool" and respectable activist as someone who has: been arrested, done lockdowns, scaled walls, hung banners, done time for their actions argued or fought with police, done property alterations, beat up nazi bone-heads, etc.)?

11. Do you take something a woman said, reword it and claim it as your own idea/opinion?

12. Are you taking on the "shit" or "grunt" work in your organizing? (i.e.: Cooking, cleaning, set up, clean up phone calls, email lists, taking notes, doing support work, sending mailings, providing childcare?) Are you aware of the fact that women often are taking on this work with no regard for their efforts?

13. Do you take active steps to make your activist groups safe and comfortable places for women?

14. If you are trying to get more women involved in your activist projects, do you try to engage them by telling them what to do or why they should join your group?

15. Do you ever find yourself monitoring and limiting your behavior and speech in meetings and activist settings because you don't want to take up too much space or dominate the group? Are you aware of the fact that women do this all the time?

16. Do you pay attention to group process and consensus building in groups or do you tend to dominate and take charge (maybe without even realizing it)?

Sexual/Romantic Relationships and Issues



17. Do you make jokes or negative comments about the sex lives of women or sex work?
18. Can you only show affection and be loving to your partner in front of friends and family or only in private?
19. Do you discuss the responsibility for preventing contraception and getting STD screening prior to sexual contact?
20. Do you repeatedly ask or plead with women for what you want in sexual situations? Are you aware that unless this is a mutually consented upon scenario/game that this is considered a form of coercion?
21. During sex, do you pay attention to your partner's face and body language to see if she is turned on? Engaged, or just lying there? Do you ask a woman who she wants during sex? What turns her on?
22. Do you ask for consent?
23. Do you know if your partner has a sexual abuse, rape, or physical abuse history?
24. Do you stay with your partner in a relationship for comfort and security? Sex? Financial or emotional caretaking? If you're not completely happy or "in love" with your partner anymore? Even though you don't think it will ultimately work out? Because you're afraid or unable to be alone? Do you suddenly end relationships when a "new" or "better" woman comes along?
25. Do you jump from relationship to relationship? Overlap them? Or do you take space and time for yourself in between each relationship to reflect on the relationship and your role in it? Do you know how to be alone? How to be single?
26. Do you cheat on your partners?
27. If your girlfriend gets on your case for patriarchal behavior or wants to try to work on the issues of patriarchy in your relationship, do you break up with her or cheat on her and find another woman who will put up with your shit?
28. Do you agree to romantic commitment and responsibility and then back out of these situations?
29. Do you understand menstruation?

30. Do you make fun of women or write them off as "PMS-ING?"

Friendship Questions



31. Do you tend to set the standard and plans for fun or do you work with the others in the group, including women to see what they want to do?

32. Do you talk to your female friends about things you don't talk to your male friends about especially emotional issues?

33. Do you constantly fall in love with your female friends? Are you friends with women until you find out that they are not in love with you too and then end the friendships? Are you only friends with women who are in monogamous or committed relationships with other people?

34. Do you come on to your female friends even jokingly?

35. Do you only talk to your female friends (and not your male friends) about your romantic relationships or problems in those relationships?

36. Do you find yourself only attracted to "Anarcho-Crusty Punk Barbie", "Alterna-Grrrl Barbie," or "Hardcore-Grrrl Barbie?" (The idea here being that the only women you are attracted to fit mainstream beauty standards but just dress and do their hair alternatively and maybe have piercings and tattoos) Do you question and challenge your internalized ideals of mainstream beauty ideals for women?

37. Have you ever heard of or discussed "sizeism" and do you think it is low on the oppression scale?

38. Are you aware of the fact that ALL WOMEN, even women in radical communities, live under the CONSTANT PRESSURE and OPPRESSION of mainstream patriarchal beauty standards?

39. Are you aware of the fact that many women in radical communities have had and are currently dealing with eating disorders?

40. Do you make fun of "model-types" or "mainstream" women for their appearance?

Domestic/Household Questions



41. When was the last time you walked into your house, noticed that something was misplaced/dirty/etc. AND did something about it (didn't just walk by it, over it, away from it or leave a nasty note about it) even if it wasn't your chore or responsibility?

42. Are you constantly amazed by the magical "food fairy" who mysteriously acquires food, brings it home, puts it away, prepares it in meal form and then cleans up afterwards?

43. Do you contribute equally to domestic life and work?

44. How many of the following activities do you contribute to in your home (this is a partial list of what it takes to run a household): A: Sweep and mop floors and clean carpets B: Wash and put away dishes C: Clean stove, countertops, sinks and appliances if they are messy and each time after you have prepared food D: Collect money, do food shopping, put away food and make meals for people you live with E: Do house laundry (kitchen towels, bathroom hand towels, washable rugs, etc.) F: Clean up common room spaces, even if it's not your chore G: Pick up other's slack H: Deal with garbage, recycling, and compost I: Take care of bills, rent, utilities J: Deal with the landscaping and gardening K: Clean bathrooms and make sure bathroom is clean after you use it L: Feed, clean up after, and take care of house pets.

Children & Childcare



45. Do you spend time with kids? If you do, do you spend time with children (yours or anyone's) in a way that is gendered? (do certain things with boys and other things with girls?)

46. If you are a father, do you CO-parent your children? (Spend equal time AND energy AND effort AND money to raise them)?

47. Do you make childcare a priority? (at both activist events and in daily life)

48. Do you help make the lives of single mothers in your life and community easier by finding out if and how you can assist?

49. Have you politicized your ideas about child rearing and parenthood radical communities? Do you believe that individuals who are in the movement have children or that the movement has children?

Multi-Category Questions

50. When was the last time you showed a woman how to do a task rather than doing it for her and assuming she couldn't do it?

51. When was the last time you asked a woman to show you how to do a task?

52. Do you get emotional needs met by other women, whether or not you are in a romantic relationship with them? Or do you cultivate caring, nurturing relationships with other men in which you can discuss your feelings and get your needs met by them?

53. If a woman discusses with you or calls you out on your patriarchy, do you make an effort to be emotionally present? Listen? Not emotionally shut down? Not get defensive? Think about what she said? Admit you fucked up? Take responsibility/make reparations for the mistakes you made? Discuss your feelings and ideas with her? Apologize? Work harder on your own shit to make sure that you don't make the same mistakes again with her or other women?

54. Do you look inside yourself to find out why you fucked up in these relationships and work to both change your behavior and be a better anti-patriarchy ally in the future?

55. Do you organize regular house meetings or activist meetings to resolve conflict in the house/group?

56. Do you use intimidation, yelling, getting in someone's physical space, threats or violence to get your point across? Do you create an atmosphere or violence around women or others to threaten them (i.e.: throw things, break things, yell and scream, threaten, attack, tease or terrorize the animals or pets of women in your life)?

57. Do you physically, psychologically, or emotionally abuse women?

58. Do the women in your life (mothers, sisters, partners, housemates, friends, etc.) have to "remind" you or "nag" you or "yell" at you in order for you to get off your ass and take care of your responsibilities?

59. Do you talk to other men about patriarchy and your part in it?

60. When was the last time you thought about or talked about any of these issues other than after reading this questionnaire?

Scoring: ALL MEN need to work on issues of patriarchy, sexism and misogyny. However, this questionnaire may point out to you areas of particular focus or concentration for your own anti-patriarchal/sexist/misogynist process and development.

For further reading...

An anarchy-feminist critiques the manarchy questionnaire:
<http://www.geocities.com/sallydarity/manarchy.html>

An open letter to other men in the movement: **Shut the Fuck Up** or, How to act better in meetings

by Dan Spalding

"Even with my mask I often spoke the tyranny of power. My first duty was to cultivate a revolutionary silence."

-Subcomandante Marcos

Introduction

Being an activist these days means fighting for a thousand different things - indigenous rights, rainforests, corporate accountability, etc. Despite this diversity of campaigns, there seems to be some agreement on the kind of society we want to create. It's a society that isn't based on white supremacy, class exploitation, or patriarchy.

This essay is about how men act in meetings. Mostly it's about how we act badly, but it includes suggestions on how we can do better. Men in the movement reproduce patriarchy within the movement and benefit from it. By patriarchy I mean a system of values, behaviors, and relationships that keeps men in power. It relies on domination, claiming authority, and belligerence. By the movement I mean the anti-corporate globalization movement in the US I am a part of.

I think people organizing for affordable housing, against police brutality, for the rights of immigrants (for example) are also fighting the same system that's wringing the blood out of the bottom 99 percent of the world's population and the environment they live in. However, I don't know from my experience if the men who organize around those issues act the way the men in the movement do.

Just to be clear, those men are almost always white and from middle-class or wealthier backgrounds. In my experience, as someone who identifies as a man of color, men of color dominate meetings in basically the exact same way. But I find that men who do not speak English fluently tend not to do so as much. I wish I could think of more exceptions.

Who cares about meetings?

Good question. Most meetings of large-ish organizations (of more than 30 people or so) I've been to don't amount to too much. The real work - doing research, getting people involved, organizing protests and actions, fundraising, media stuff - gets done by working groups or individuals. Meetings are just about a lot of talking, right?

Well, yes and no. At worst meetings force a lot of people to get together and generally discuss everything that's been done, everything that's going on, and everything that needs to be done. These meetings tend to wander a lot. Responsibility is not clearly delegated, decisions aren't made overtly, and the organization isn't more focused afterwards than before. At the same time, there's heated arguments over seemingly trivial things, or hurtful criticism of individuals. But those arguments and criticisms don't amount to too much in the end.

But a good meeting is a different animal altogether. With good self-facilitation and a good facilitator (or two, or three...), everyone contributes to the meeting, without anyone taking control over it. People make constructive criticism, and try to incorporate concerns raised into their proposals. And since everyone gets to contribute their ideas into the decision-making process, the decisions are not only the best possible ones - but also the ones people are most invested in. Since everyone feels ownership over the decisions, people are more likely to take on responsibility for projects.

If you're serious about using consensus, you have to care about meetings. That's the only place a group can democratically decide what to do and how to do it. The alternative is an informal group of the most influential and forceful members (who dominate discussion) making the big decisions.

It's not just how often you talk, but how and when

Consensus decision making is a model of the society we want to live in, and a tool we use to get there. Men often dominate consensus at the expense of everyone else. Think about the man who...

- * Speaks for a long, loud, first and often
- * Offers his opinion immediately whenever someone makes a proposal, asks a question, or if there's a lull in discussion
- * Speaks with too much authority: "Actually, it's like this..."
- * Can't amend a proposal or idea he disagrees with, but trashes it instead
- * Makes faces every time someone says something he disagrees with
- * Rephrases everything a woman says, as in, "I think what Mary was trying to say is..."
- * Makes a proposal, then responds to each and every question and criticism of it - thus speaking as often as everyone else put together (Note: This man often ends up being the facilitator)

And don't get me started about the bad male facilitator who...:

- * Always puts himself first on stack, because he can
- * Somehow never sees the women with their hands up, and never encourages people who haven't spoken

It's rarely just one man who exhibits every problem trait. Instead it's two or three competing to do all the above. But the result is the

same: everyone who can't (or won't) compete on these terms - talking long, loud, first and often - gets drowned out.

This is a result of society's programming. Almost no men can actually live up to our culture's fucked up standards of masculinity. And our society has standards for women that are equally ridiculous. In one way, we both suffer equally. That's why we all yearn and strive for a world where these standards - which serve to divide us and reduce us and prop up those in control - are destroyed.

In another way these standards serve those who come closest to living up to them. Sure, we all lose when a few men dominate a meeting. But it's those men who get to make decisions, take credit for the work everyone does, and come out feeling more inspired and confident.

But I can't be sexist - I'm a hippie

Oh, but you can. The irony is that you can basically do all the things listed above, even if you don't fit the stereotype of the big strapping man. I've seen hippies, men who would be described as feminine, queer men, and others who in many ways go against the grain not go against the grain at all when it comes to dominating discussion. A hippie might speak slowly and use hippie slang, but still speak as the voice of authority, and cut off the woman who was speaking before him. A man who some might call feminine can still make a face like he smelled something when someone he doesn't respect says something he disagrees with, thus telling her to shut up; he may also politely but consistently put himself on stack every time someone criticizes his proposal.

So shut the fuck up already

What's to be done? I've come up with a little idea I like to call, "Shut the fuck up." It goes as follows: Every time someone...

- * Says something you think is irrelevant,
 - * Asks a (seemingly) obvious question,
 - * Criticizes your proposal or makes a contradictory observation,
 - * Makes a proposal
 - * Asks a question, or
 - * Asks for more input because there's a brief lull in the discussion. . .
- Shut the fuck up. It's a radical process, but I think you'll like it.

Since my childhood, I was raised by my parents and by every teacher I ever had in school to demand as much attention as possible. In class I spoke more often than almost anyone else I knew. Surprisingly enough, some of my teachers were annoyed with me. But while they may have counseled me to raise my hand first, they never asked me to speak less or listen more. As a result I probably got twice as much attention from my teachers, measured in time spent with me, than most of the other kids I went to school with.

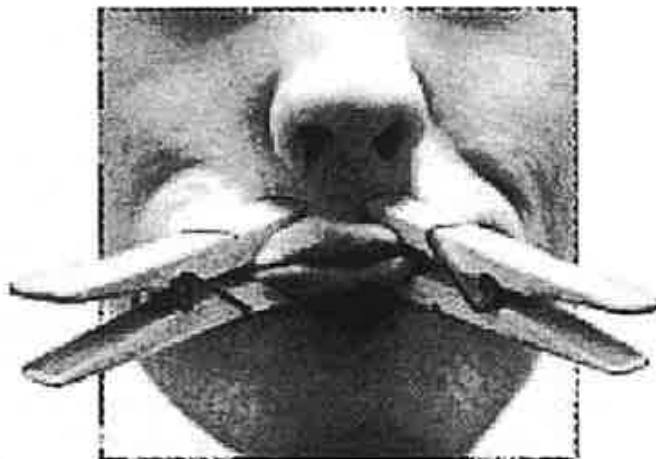
But a mere 15 years after I started learning to exhibit almost all

the dominating male behavior I list above, something happened. I was in a class with a friend of mine. Let's call her Anne, because that's her name. Anne and I were in the same study group, and the night before she had gone over the exact question the professor was now asking. However, Anne wasn't answering, even though the rest of the class was silent. I don't know what struck me to actually stop and think instead of answering the question myself, as I was wont to do. That incident got me thinking about who spoke most often in class, why, and what I could do. The answers to the first two questions I've basically given already. The third is a little trickier.

What else can we do?

Lucky for us, being a man gives us a lot of authority. I mean that in a good way, too. Much like people of color are always assumed to be selfish or paranoid when they speak out against racial profiling, women are often assumed to be bitchy when they call out patriarchal behavior.

What does that mean for us? First, we shut the fuck up. This was easy for me in school - I just made a rule that I never spoke more than twice in a 50 minute class. Surprise! Almost every time I would have spoken, someone else eventually said the exact same thing, or something smarter. It was frustrating when it was another obnoxious man doing the answering, but a lot of times it wasn't one of the two guys in class who spoke most often.



The problem is that the classroom is designed to have one person in charge, and it ain't the student. While you could point out problem behavior in class, there's not a lot of 'space' for it - it's not expected or encouraged, and would probably be dismissed by the professor.

The beauty of consensus is the facilitation. Not only can we facilitate ourselves - and we should - but we can facilitate each other. This is mainly the job of the person chosen to be the facilitator. But when the facilitator is ignoring problem behavior - or exhibiting it - it's easy for other people in the group to guerrilla facilitate.'

Sometimes it's as easy as pointing out the people who have their hands up, but are somehow missed by the facilitator, or by suggesting straw polls or go 'rounds or other tools that get everyone involved. But it's usually not that easy. The worse the pattern of behavior in the group, the more natural the fucked-upedness will seem. And you'll often be given the evil eye by the people you're calling out, if not a

verbal backlash. And finally, it's obviously not the job of the people most trampled on by patriarchal behavior to always be calling it out. That's where we come in. We are, at least at first, given the most respect when we call out bad behavior.

The problem is doing the calling out in a constructive way. It's all too easy to call people out in a hurtful and authoritarian fashion - thus entertaining everyone with your unintended irony, but also acting the exact way you don't want others to. When you call people out in a way that's hurtful instead of constructive, it still tends to keep the quietest people at a meeting from participating.

The solution

So call people out, but try not to be too personal about it. Unless it's outrageous, wait until the person is finished, and then make your process point about how people should stick to stack, or consider not talking if they've just spoken, or whatever. And if it seems someone's pissed off at your calling them out (and white men make it real easy for you to tell if they're pissed off), make the effort to talk to him after the meeting is over. It usually doesn't take much to smooth ruffled feathers.

Unfortunately, it also doesn't take much for those same people to do the exact same thing the next meeting. So while part of the answer is self-facilitation and facilitating others, another part is also giving everyone the skills and confidence they need to assert their place in the meeting. This means having regular workshops, for new and experienced activists, on how consensus is supposed to work. It also means going through the formal process of consensus and explaining it during meetings. You can do it quickly, especially after the first few times. But when people assume that everyone is familiar with the process, those who are least confident (but still have good ideas) will be the first to drop out of discussions. Meanwhile, other people who think they know the process but don't tend to hold things up. I'll let you guess what I think the gender breakdown of those groups is.

Another key ingredient is talking to individuals outside of meetings. Talking honestly - "I know you care about the group, but in meetings it seems like you talk down to anyone who disagrees with you, and you cut people off a lot, and that makes it really hard for other people to participate" - is a big part of it. And as with any interaction, you have to keep an open mind to hear their perspective. Ideally, you could resolve things at this level and not have to bring things up before the group.

But it's still a good idea to come up with a structure to address the way people act badly in meetings, for people to regularly "check in" with how they feel the process is going. It also makes it easier for people who wouldn't normally criticize others to do so constructively. The structure could mean that once every two months the group has a "process" meeting, where the focus is on how people act in meetings, working groups, etc. It's often easier and 'safer' for people to call out

problem behavior, and easier and 'safer' for the culprits to own up to it and ask for constructive criticism.

Finally, it means constantly thinking about how we, as men, tend to dominate and control the world around us. To me this is most apparent (at least in other people) in meetings. To me, that's also where it's easiest to address. This is a continuous process. We have to always read about this, talk about it, inquire into how others address it, come up with creative and successful solutions, and apply them. But no matter where we take it, I think this struggle always starts with shutting the fuck up.

As men, we're encouraged to dominate conversation without even thinking about it. It's too easy for us to do really good work - fighting genetic engineering, tearing down the prison industrial complex, freeing Mumia - and still act exactly like the frat boy next door. We have to confront each other and ourselves so that domination stops seeming natural, and so we can start doing something about it. So the next time you don't think about how you're talking, please think about how you're talking.

And the bonus section.....

But I can't let a girl do this—I mean, I'm the only one who knows how

Shut the heck up! Sharing responsibility for projects is fundamental for ensuring that everyone in the group develops skills and confidence. I'll give credit where it's due: We men are pretty good at letting women bottomline work like child care, note taking, food prep... But we rarely have structures to let women take on our responsibilities.

In your meetings, are women taking on projects in proportion to their numbers? If you're not paying attention, you should be. Along with consensus, sharing work is one of the hallmarks of democratic organizing. In my experience the most prestigious, challenging, and rewarding work belongs to men. Often, it belongs to the same men who dominate the meetings where these tasks are ostensibly delegated.

One way men make work theirs (in the worst way) is by hoarding information around it. What work has been done? What's left to do? What are the priorities? The deadlines? If the work is done informally, not only is there no accountability for it getting done, but there are also no records and no regular updates. This makes it almost impossible to pass on responsibility for the project to someone else - unless you're setting them up for failure.

Another problem is contacts. Somehow it seems that long time organizers tend to all know each other. If there's a problem they can just call each other up. This isn't just intimidating for people lower on the activist totem pole; it makes it that much harder for them to get the same work done. If we pretend our contacts are just friends, instead of people we rely on to get work done, the group at the top will stay

there. And I think that group is almost all male.

Finally, there's language. Experts in the capitalist world tend to mystify their work. Whether it's "move to demur," "updating the HTML," or "within the confines of this narrative," professionals have a vested interest in making their work sound as obscure and difficult as possible. Professionals in our society own the little part of the world they have "expertise" over. They make decisions that affect everyone, and get more control and authority as time goes on.

Sound familiar? All these factors - hoarding information, exclusive contacts, mystifying language - get even worse during a crisis. In the middle of an action it's easy to say, "There's no time to teach anyone new, men or women, how to work the radios." First, that's usually a group of men speaking. Second, that's why you have start before the action. If the problem is just a few big egos and a lot of people's complicity, then you can delegate immediately. If there's more at work, you have to set up a structure so folks outside the de facto leadership meaningfully take on projects. That structure can include documenting steps and information, helping new people develop working relationships with other organizers, using everyday language instead of bullshit acronyms, and so on. But without a process it's much more difficult to pass on that responsibility.

And who do you think you'll be passing it on to?

(freely inspired by Jo Freeman's "The Tyranny of Structurelessness.")

Epilogue

This essay came out of my frustration with the male domination in meetings in this movement and the absence of men's efforts to change it. It also came out of my need for self-reflection. This will ideally lead not just to all men acting exactly like I think they should, but also a lasting dialog on how we behave in meetings and what we can do about it. If you have any thoughts on what I've written, please contact me and tell me what you think dan@midnightspecial.net. This isn't a declaration of war; it's just a starting point.

Time for me to shut the fuck up.

For further reading...

"The Tyranny of Structurelessness" by Jo Freeman

<http://anarchy1.tripod.com/tos.txt>

Going To Places

That Scare Me:

Personal Reflections

On Challenging

Male Supremacy

by Chris Crass



Part I: "How can I be sexist? I'm an anarchist!"



"What do you mean I'm sexist?" I was shocked. I wasn't a jock, I didn't hate women, I wasn't an evil person. "But how can I be a sexist, I'm an anarchist?" I was anxious, nervous, and my defenses were up. I believed in liberation, for fighting against capitalism and the state. There were those who defended and benefited from injustice and then there's us, right? I was 19 and it was 1993, four years after I got into politics.

Nilou, holding my hand, patiently explained, "I'm not saying you're an evil person, I'm saying that you're sexist and sexism happens in a lot of subtle and blatant ways. You cut me off when I'm talking. You pay more attention to what men say. The other day when I was sitting at the coffee shop with you and Mike, it was like the two of you were having a conversation and I was just there to watch. I tried to jump in and say something, but you both just looked at me and then went back to your conversation. Men in the group make eye contact with each other and act like women aren't even there. The study group has become a forum for men in the group to go on and on about this book and that book, like they know everything and just need to teach the rest of us. For a long time I thought maybe it was just me, maybe what I had to say wasn't as useful or exciting. Maybe I needed to change my approach, maybe I was just overreacting, maybe it's just in my head and I need to get over it. But then I saw how the same thing was happening to other women in the group, over and over again. I'm not blaming you for all of this, but you're a big part of this group and you're part of this dynamic." This conversation changed my life and it's challenge is one I continue to struggle with in this essay.

This is an essay for other white, middle class, raised male who

identify themselves as male, left/anarchist organizers struggling to build movements for liberation. I want to focus on my own experience of dealing with issues of sexism and anti-sexism from an emotional and psychological centered perspective. I'm choosing this focus because it is personally challenging, it has proved effective in working with men against sexism and because of consistent feedback from women who I organize with not to ignore these aspects of the work. Rona Fernandez of the Youth Empowerment Center in Oakland writes, "Encourage men/ gender privileged folks to examine the role of emotions (or lack thereof) in their experience of privilege. I'm saying this because I think men/ gender privileged folks also suffer under the system of patriarchy and one of the most dehumanizing ways they suffer is in their inability/ difficulty in expressing feelings." Clare Bayard of Anti-Racism for Global Justice puts it pointedly in addressing gender privileged activist men, "It took years of study and hard work to develop your political analysis, why do you think emotional understanding should just come to you, it requires work as well."

This essay looks to the leadership of women, women of color in particular, who write about and organize against patriarchy in society and sexism in the movement. The work of Barbara Smith, Gloria Anzaldua, Ella Baker, Patricia Hill Collins, Elizabeth 'Betita' Martinez, bell hooks and so many others who provide the political foundations, visions and strategies for the work gender privileged white men need to do. Additionally, there are more and more gender privileged men in the movement working to challenge male supremacy. There are thousands of us who recognize that patriarchy exists, that we have privileges as a result, that sexism undermines movement, that women, transgendered folks and genderqueer people have explained it over and over again and said "you all need to talk with each other, challenge each other and figure out what you're all going to do." And yet there are far more white men in the movement who agree sexism exists in society, perhaps in the movement, but deny their personal involvement in it.

Lisa Sousa, who is part of the San Francisco Independent Media Center and AK Press, told me that in recent discussions she's had in groups about sexism and gender, she's heard the following responses from men: "we are all oppressed", "we should be talking about class", "you are just using gender as a way to attack such and such". When she raised the issue that women leave the majority male group soon after joining, the responses included: "men leave our group too, women are not leaving more, people leave its a fact in volunteer organizations", "we just need to recruit more women, if women leave, there's more where they came from".

These comments are so familiar and while it is tempting to distance myself from the men who made them, it's important that I remember when I made those comments. As a person who believes in movement building and collective liberation, it's important for me to connect

with the people I'm organizing with. As a person with privilege organizing others with privilege, that means learning to love myself enough to be able to see myself in people who I would much rather denounce and distance myself from. It also means being honest about my own experiences.

When I think back to that conversation with Nilou and her explaining how sexism operated. I remember trying not to shutdown and I tried to listen.

The word "But" repeated over and over again in my mind, followed by "it was a misunderstanding, I didn't mean it that way, I didn't know you felt like that, I wasn't trying to do that, I would love to see you participate more, I don't understand, no one said they didn't want to hear what you have to say, we all believe in equality, I love you and would never do anything to hurt you, it was circumstances not sexism, I don't know what to do." Looking back ten years later, it's amazing to me how often that same list of "buts" comes running to mind. I'm more like those 'other' men that I'd like to admit.



Nilou spent hours and hours talking with me about sexism. It was tremendously difficult. My politics were shaped by a clearly defined dualistic framework of good and bad. If it was true that I was sexist, then my previous sense of self was in question and my framework needed to shift. Looking back, this was a profoundly important moment in my growth, at the time it felt like shit.

Two weeks later, at our anarchist study group meeting, Nilou raised her hand. "Sexism is happening in this group." She listed the examples she had told me. The defensive reaction that I experienced was now amplified by the 5 other men in the room. Other women started speaking up. They too had experienced these dynamics and they were tired of taking it. The men were shocked and defensive; we began listing all the reasons why claims of sexism were simply misunderstandings, misperceptions. With genuine sincerity we said, "But we all want revolution."

After the meeting, the woman who had been in the group the longest sat me down. April had been part of the United Anarchist Front for well over a year and she too gave me example after example of sexist behavior. Men in the group didn't trust her to handle responsibilities, even if they were newer. She wasn't looked to for information about the group, nor were her opinions asked for on political questions. Others joined our conversation and men continued to challenge the assertion of sexism. April put forward an example that she had just clearly explained to me and men denied it as a misunderstanding. A few minutes

later, I restated the exact same example given by April and this time it was met with begrudging agreement from other men that perhaps in this case it was sexist. April called it out immediately, I hadn't even fully realized what happened. I looked at April as she broke it down. April's words coming from my mouth were heard and taken seriously. There it is. I didn't really want to believe that sexism was happening, but now I saw it. I felt horrible, like a kick to the stomach. Nilou and April desperately trying to get us to agree that there was a problem. How could this be happening when I hadn't intended it to? I was scared to say anything.

Two months later, I was sitting in a men's caucus silently. We didn't know what to talk about. More specifically, we were scared, nervous, dismissive and didn't put energy into creating a useful discussion about sexism. Nilou and April had suggested we spend a day talking about sexism and we'd start with caucuses. "What are the women talking about", we asked ourselves. When the group re-united the discussion quickly turned into women defending themselves, defending their understandings of their own experiences. I felt horrible and struggled to believe what I was hearing. I felt completely clueless about how to move in a useful way.

Several people of all genders left early in tears, disillusioned and overwhelmed by powerlessness. My Mom had observed part of our discussion and asked to speak. "You're all taking on enormous issues and these issues are hard. It makes me happy to see you all at such young ages seriously talk about it. It shows that you really believe in what you're fighting for and it's a conversation that doesn't happen in one day." I could feel the heaviness in the room as we looked at each other, many with tears in their eyes. It was clear that challenging sexism was far more than learning how to make eye contact with women in group discussions, it was challenging a system of power that operates on the political, economic, social, cultural, psychological level and my internalized superiority was but the tip of an iceberg built on exploitation and oppression.

Part II: "What historical class am I in?"

"Do you know what class you're in?" Being a white, middle class, male taking Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies classes for all seven years that I was in school, I was asked that question a lot. In a Black Women's history class, someone offered to help me figure out where I needed to go.

I understood why people asked me and I understood that the question wasn't just about class as in a room, but class as in a social category in a white supremacist, patriarchal, heterosexist, capitalist society hell bent on maintaining control. I knew what class I was coming from and I knew that my relationship to Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies was complicated. I knew some people didn't want me in those classes and I knew that my very presence made others feel uncomfort-

able. And many of the teachers and some of the students told me that they were glad I was there. It helped me see how complex these struggles are and that there aren't easy answers.

I went to community college for four years and then San Francisco State for three. The majority of my teachers were women and people of color. I had grown up in a generally segregated community and had few role models, authority figures, mentors or teachers who were people of color.

What I read and studied in college - women of color feminism, Black liberation struggle, Chicano/a history, colonialism from the perspective of American Indian history, labor history and organizing, queer theory, anti-racism from the perspective of immigrant and refugee women - had a profound impact on me. However, having people of color and women of color in particular grade me, instruct me and guide me was incredibly important to my development on psychological levels that I wasn't necessarily aware of at the time. Having people of color and women with progressive/left/radical politics leading my educational development was a subversive shifting of the power relationships that wasn't mentioned on the syllabus but was central to my studies.

Learning in majority women and people of color settings also had a deep impact, because it was the first time that I had ever been in situations where I was a numerical minority on the basis of race or gender. Suddenly race and gender weren't just issues amongst many, they were central aspects of how others experienced, viewed and understood the world. The question I sometimes thought silently to myself, "why do you always have to talk about race and gender", was flipped on its head; "how can you not think about race and gender all the time?"

Over time I developed a strategy for school. I'd stay pretty quiet for the first month or so of class, pushing myself to really listen. In the first week of class I'd say something to clearly identify myself as opposed to white supremacy and patriarchy (sometimes capitalism) as systems of oppressions that I benefit from, so people knew where I was coming from. This was generally met with shock, excitement and a sign of relief. I participated in dialogue more as I tried to develop trust through listening and being open to the information, histories and stories. While this strategy incorporated anti-sexist goals, it was also about presenting myself in a certain way.

The other part of the strategy was to participate and raise questions and other perspectives in my Western Civics, Political Science and other white, male dominated classes. People of color and women I worked with were clear that this was something they felt I had a responsibility to do. "They expect it from us and dismiss us as angry, emotional, stuck in victim mode. You need to use your privilege to get heard by white people and men." The goal wasn't to necessarily change the perspective of the Professor but to open up space for critical dialogue about race, class and gender with the other students who were mostly white and often mostly male. This was extremely useful learning as

well, because frequently I came across as cold, angry, self-righteous or unsure of myself, none of which were particularly helpful. If my goal is to yell at men and white people to alleviate my own guilt and shame for being white and male, then perhaps that's a useful tactic. If my goal is to actually work with folks to embrace anti-racism and feminism, then I needed to be more complex and real with myself.

I grew up believing that I was a lone individual on a linear path of progression with no past. History was a set of dates and events that, while interesting to learn, had little or no relationship to my life. I was just a person, doing my own thing. Then I started to learn that being white, male, middle class, able-bodied, mostly heterosexual and a citizen of the United States meant that not only did I have privileges, but that I was rooted in history. I was a part of social categories - white, male, hetero, middle class. These are all groups that have history and are shaped by history. Part of being in those groups means being deemed normal, the standard which all others are judged. My images of just being "my own person" were now joined by images of slave ships, indigenous communities burned to the ground, families destroyed, violence against women, white ruling class men using white poor men to colonize white women, peoples of color and the Earth.

I remember sitting in an African American women's history class, one of two white people, one of two men, the other 15 people Black women and I'm the only white man. We were studying slavery, Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching campaign and the systematic raping of enslaved African women by white male slave owners - millions of rapes, sanctioned and protected by law. Simultaneously hundreds of Black men were lynched by white men who claimed to be protecting white women from Black male rapists. I sat there with my head down and I could feel history in my nauseated stomach and in my eyes filling with tears. Who were those white men and how did they feel about themselves? I was scared to look into the faces of the Black women in that room. "While there is mixing of races because of love," the Professor said, "our people are so many shades of Black because of generation after generation of institutionalized rape." Who am I and how do I feel about myself?

Part III: "this struggle is my struggle"

"I haven't the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfill, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power." - Robin Morgan from the introduction of *Sisterhood is Powerful*

"Face your fear/ the fear is you/ you cannot run/ you cannot hide/ the fear is you/ in the end, what have you done/ can it be true that the damage you bring is greater than the good you make/ face your fear/ embrace your fear/ the pain inside is the truth inside/ let it out/ let it out/ when the socialization is gone/ what is left/ the fear is more real than the hope you create/ where will you go/ what will you do/ let it all go cuz it's already you/

can I move forward/ can I move forward/ open it all up/ you know it's all true/ the hope is you" -white boy emo-hardcore

I have and do go through periods of hating myself, feeling guilty, afraid. I know in my heart that I had a role in liberation struggle and I know through practice that there was useful work that I could do, but still the question haunts me, "Am I just fooling myself?" That is, am I fooling myself to believe that I am more useful than problematic. To be clear, I think Robin Morgan's quote is useful to struggle with, but not to get stuck on. I grew up believing that I was entitled to everything. I could go anywhere and do anything and wherever I went I would be wanted/needed.

Patriarchy and heterosexism also taught me, in subtle and blatant ways, that I was entitled to women's bodies, that I was entitled to take up space and put my ideas and thoughts out there whenever I wanted to, without consideration for others. This is a very different process of socialization than most other people in this society who are told to shut up, keep it to themselves, hide who they really are, get out of the way and to never forget how lucky they are to be allowed here to begin with. I think it's healthy to not assume you're always needed, to learn to share space and power and to work with others to realize the role that you in fact can and should play. What is unhealthy is how rare it is for gender privileged men to talk with each other about these issues and support each other through the process.

Laura Close, an organizer with Students for Unity in Portland, discussed this in her essay, "Men in the Movement". She writes, "Every day young men wake up and decide to get involved in activism. Often they encounter language and discussions about their male privilege that alienate and silence them without anyone actually supporting them to decolonize their minds. Consider what it would be like for ally men to take our younger/newer guys out to coffee and talk about his own experiences as a guy in the movement. Talk about what you've learned! Consider what it would mean for men to cheer on other men who are making progress towards becoming allies." She put out a challenge for men to mentor other men engaging in anti-sexist work.

I knew she was right, but the idea of really doing it made me nervous. Sure, I had plenty of close gender privileged friends, but to make a political commitment to develop relationships with other men and open up with them about my own struggles with sexism seemed terrifying. Terrifying because I could handle denouncing patriarchy and calling out other men from time to time, but to be honest about my own sexism, to connect political analysis/practice to my own emotional/psychological process, to be vulnerable?

Pause. Vulnerable to what? Remember when I said that in Women's Studies classes I would identify myself as opposed to patriarchy, white supremacy and sometimes capitalism? The level of consciousness of feminism, let alone political commitment to it amongst

most gender privileged men in college was so low that just reading one feminist book and saying "I recognize that sexism exists" meant I was way advanced. While the level of consciousness and commitment is generally higher in activist circles, it's not that much higher. I have had two major struggles going on most of my political life - genuinely wanting to be down for the cause and feeling a deep level of fear that I wasn't coming anywhere close to that commitment. It's far easier for me to make declarations against patriarchy in classrooms, political meetings and in writing then it is to practice feminist politics in my personal relationships with friends, family and partners. This is particularly difficult when political men, like myself, make so little time to talk with each other about this.



What am I afraid to admit? That I struggle everyday to really listen to voices I identify as women's. I know my mind wanders quicker. I know that my instant reaction is take men's opinions more seriously. I know that when I walk into rooms full of activists I instantly scan the room and divide people into hierarchies of status (how long they've been active, what groups they've been part of, what they've written and where it's been published, who are their friends). I position myself against them and feel the most competitive with men. With those I identify as women, the same status hierarchies are tallied, but sexual desirability enters my hetero

mindset. What is healthy sexual attraction and desire and how does it relate to and survive my training to systematically sexualize women around me? This gets amplified by the day-to-day reality that this society presents women as voiceless bodies to serve hetero-male desire, we know that. But what does it mean for how I communicate with my partners who are women and who I organize with? How does it translate into how I make love, want love, express love, conceptualize love? I'm not talking about whether or not I go down on my partner or say I love you, I'm talking about whether or not I truly value equality in our relationships over getting off on a regular basis. The fact that my partners have provided far more emotional and financial support then I have for them. I'm talking about having almost never zoned out on what a gender privileged man is saying because I thought about him sexually.

I've repeatedly found myself zoned out thinking about sex while listening to women speak who are organizers, leaders, visionaries, my friends, my comrades. I'm all about crushes, healthy sexual desire and pro-sex politics, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about

power, entitlement and women's leadership marginalized by hetero male desire. I wish I didn't get defensive on a regular basis, but I do. I get frustrated and shut down conversations about how power operates between my partner and I. I get defensive about how the world interacts with us and how that influences our dynamics. I know that there are times when I say, "ok, I'll think more about it" when really I'm thinking, "leave me alone".

This isn't a confessional so that I will be forgiven. This is an ongoing struggle to be honest about how deeply shaped I am by patriarchy and these systems of oppression. Patriarchy tears me up. I have so many fears about whether or not I'm capable of being in healthy loving relationships. Fears about whether or not I can be genuinely honest and connected with myself so that I can then open up and share with others. Fears about organizing to genuinely build and share power with others. The scars of patriarchy are on every single person I interact with and when I push myself to see it, to really look and take the time to think about it, I'm filled with sadness and rage. bell hooks, in her book *All About Love*, writes that love is impossible where the will to dominate exists. Can I genuinely love? I want to believe. I want to believe in a political practice for gendered privileged men forged in opposition to patriarchy.

I do believe that as we struggle against oppression, as we practice our commitments, we actualize and express our humanity. There are moments, experiences and events when I see patriarchy challenged by all genders and it shows what we can do. I believe that this is our lives' work and that at its core it's a fight for our lives. And in this fight we realize that even in the face of these systems of oppression, our love, beauty, creativity, passion, dignity and power grows. We can do this.

post script: "we must walk to make the struggle real"

While it's necessary to get into the hard emotional and psychological issues, there is also an endless supply of concrete steps we can take to challenge male supremacy.

An organizer working on Palestinian Liberation wrote me saying, "some things gender privileged people can do: offer to take notes in meetings, make phone calls, find meeting locations, do childcare, make copies and other less glamorous work. Encourage women and gender oppressed people in the group to take on roles men often dominate (e. g. tactical, mc-ing and event, media spokespeople). Ask specific women if they want to do it and explain why you think they would be good (don't tokenize). Pay attention to who you listen to and check yourself on power-tripping."

She is one of hundreds of thousands of women and gender oppressed people who has outlined clear, concrete action steps that people with gender privilege can take to challenge sexism and work for liberation. There is an abundant supply of work to be done. The larger is-

sue for me has been, “what will it take for me to actually do that work, to actually prioritize it and follow through on it?” In addition to men talking with each other as discussed above, we also need to hold each other accountable to follow through. There are a lot of heavy emotional issues that come up in doing this work and it’s critical that we help keep each other from getting lost and help each other take concrete steps forward. Asking ourselves, “how does our work support the leadership of women?” “How am I working to share power in my organizing?” “How am I making myself open to hearing feedback from gender oppressed people about my work?” Each of these questions generates next steps to make it happen. Examining and challenging privilege is a necessary aspect of our work, but it’s not enough. Men working with other men to challenge male supremacy is just one of many, many strategies needed to develop women-led, multiracial, anti-racist, feminist, queer and trans liberationist, working class based, anti-capitalist movements for collective liberation. We know that sexism will work to undermine movement building. The question is, what work will we do to help build movement and in the process expand our ability to love ourselves and others.

Much love to the editorial crew on this essay: Clare Bayard, Rachel Luft, J.C. Callender, Nilou Mostoufi, April Sullivan, Michelle O’Brien, Elizabeth ‘Betita’ Martinez, Sharon Martinas, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Rahula Janowski and Chris Dixon.

Further Reading

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*

bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*

Paul Kivel, *Men’s Work: How to Stop the Violence that Tears Our Lives Apart*

Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: women in the international division of labour*

Barbara Smith, *The Truth that Never Hurts: writings on race, gender and freedom*

Just Ask a Woman

By Traci Harris

Fighting sexism has come a long way baby. We've come from the early days of the suffragettes demanding the vote, to the women of the sixties and seventies taking to the streets demanding their freedom, and now to men themselves throwing down the gloves and leading the anti-sexist fight. Today, when we think of sexism within progressive and radical activist communities, we usually think of it as a problem of the "olden days." We all know that during the beginning stages of the feminist movement in the sixties, women having their own spaces and voices threatened men. They used to ridicule and humiliate them every time a woman stood up for herself or her sisters. But that blatant sexism just isn't a problem today is it? Today we have men on our side, we have "ex-Manarchists" working on anti-sexist behavior and how to fight masculine authority, and we have men establishing rules for meetings and conferences that divert the sexist jackass that plagues our society. Halleluiah! We have men to command the battle against sexism!

Lately, there is a trend in just about every radical paper and journal, lead primarily by men, to "out" the "Manarchist." In "Deep Inside the Mind Of a Manarchist part one" by Kooky, a self-proclaimed ex-manarchist defines what a "Manarchist" is and shows us how to recognize the ugly monster that demands the end of all authoritarian rule yet tyrannizes women. Additionally he gives his thoughts on how to combat this hypocritical fiend. There are other works that similarly are designed to end male dominance like "Working Together for Change" by Bill Moyers, and "Tools for White Guys who are Working for Social Change and other People Socialized in a Society Based on Domination" by Chris Crass. How wonderful that there are these clever pieces written about sexism by men, distributed by men and all male groups meeting to discuss how to be on our side. What is so nice about these particular articles and assemblies, is that they actually tell other men how not to act like a sexist. They provide a sort of "12 step" program that once completed, means that they are no longer "Manarchist" pigs! These men guide all of us ignorant sheep down the path of anti-sexism.

Gone are the days when activist men screamed obscenities at women who fought for even a tiny little space free from sexism. I get things sent to me frequently about men writing open letters to other men about how to conduct themselves at meetings, rules for men to follow in organizations so as to not exclude women, or critiques of protests or workshops where men "took over." With all of this information floating about both in cyberspace and print, most of which is being writ-

Available online:

http://www.riseup.net/brady/propaganda/files/ask_a_woman.html

ten and distributed by men, we as women sure do have a lot to be thankful for. Today we can go to a protest or a workshop or a political conference and not worry about sexism, right? If only that were true!

I was at a protest recently for May Day, attended by many men from organizations claiming to work on the "Manarchist" problem. Some of these men had even written documents similar to the ones I mentioned above. I am sure if asked, most of them would claim to be anti-sexist, an "Ex-Manarchist" or maybe even a Feminist. Yet as the protest got under way, it was very clear that sexism was raising its ugly head- and not just by the pigs.



The protest, for what I am sure seemed like good reasons to the organizers, had a distinct lack of strategy in the type of actions that would take place. For example, the protest must have marched up and down the same four-block area for at least 3 hours. The stops that took place along this commercial area seemed virtually accidental and consisted of folks engaging in actions that are characteristic of a protest: chanting, cheering, dancing, street theater, etc.

As the evening wore on, other actions emerged from the severe lack of focus. I recall one man from the protest strutting into

the Gap only to be chased out by the pigs brandishing their pepper spray. On another occasion a male protester swaggered into the Borders bookstore and was directed forcefully to the exit by the pigs once again. I saw men excitedly challenging the pigs to arrest them by using what I call the "frat boy" technique. You know, when a guy challenges another guy to a fight by getting in his face, pointing his finger at him, calling him some sort of name. What usually results is a showdown of the challenged (pig in this case) who refuses to respond (but stares intimidating in his own manly kind of way) versus the puffed up challenger who usually struts off saying something like "Yeah, that's what I thought". Honestly, with the excessive amount of chest puffing I saw that evening, I thought I was at a cockfight, not a protest. Well, I guess when I look at it, I was.

A great article called "Stick it to the Manarchy" by The Rock Bloc enlightened us on what "manarchist" behavior is. They explain "manarchism" by sharing personal accounts of what they had experienced at mass actions, conferences, and within their own regular organizing. This article really put into perspective the sexist crap that activist

women face today in protest situations as well as other activist circles. You know, stuff like men yelling "If you aren't willing to take a Billy club to the head you can't march with us!" I am not a pacifist and I find that most of my feminist comrades aren't either, but really, who ever wants to take a beating to the head? Reading that article made me realize that my own recent protest experience was in no way unique. I realized that the type of ill-planned activism that I described, which resulted in actions that can only be described as raucous, wasn't tactical. Rather it was a result of radical male machismo. Furthermore, I realized that this type of " uncompromising radical male" behavior is not exclusive to protests. But I am sure we all realize this by now. What I do find interesting, is the frequency that I (and other female activists) experience this display of male-agro penis power in present-day activist communities.

Show me a woman who hasn't felt under-represented at a conference by the exceeding amount of white guys that show up to those things. Show me a woman who hasn't felt as if her ideas were less important than a man's at a workshop on gender. Show me a woman who hasn't felt as if she was talked over at a conference. Show me a woman who has not been "rescued" by a man who thought she needed rescuing during a political discussion.

So why do we keep experiencing this in our day-to-day activism? Just about every activist or political organization claims to put feminist politics and anti-sexism in the forefront of their political agenda these days as does any event you go to. I mean really, with so many men writing about it and holding workshops on it, one would think that sexism would be a non-issue in activist communities. But it isn't. So we must ask ourselves, with so many men taking part in men's only groups to discuss and design steps they can take to end male domination, why do we women have to be subjected to the same shit over and over again? Or maybe that question holds the key to the problem- men dictating (once again) how to fight sexism. Well we seem to find ourselves in a strange paradoxical situation now don't we? Men are attempting to fight the patriarchal system by epitomizing the patriarchy.

I am not saying that a man cannot write on or that they shouldn't discuss sexism. I know quite a few feminist guys with excellent feminist politics. Some of these men are involved with the same organizations that I am and some even write exceptional political pieces on gender- I am sure most women have these kinds of male comrades. But these aren't the guys we are talking about are we? We are talking about the guys who have all male groups that claim to fight sexism- yet do it from a male standpoint. We are talking about the guys who proclaim that they are "ex-Manarchists"- yet still engage in chest puffing at protests. We are talking about the guys who are omnipresent on e-mail lists and message boards saying things like "I think there are too many men speaking here and maybe we should be quiet now and let the women speak" but when we see them at conferences we can't get a word in edgewise. We are talking about the guys who hold all male

workshops to talk about sexism, what it means, what it is and how it affects them- I believe its called Consciousness Raising- yet look at getting pepper sprayed proudly as a symbol of their own radical politics.

So what should men be doing? Well, how about developing feminist politics for a change? The "12 step" model to fight sexism that seems to be so popular these days just isn't cutting it. This model in no way constitutes any sort of political attack on male supremacy. These "how to guides" of anti-sexism don't show any sort of engagement of feminist materials. Frankly, if you want to fight the "Manarchy" these days, a little political education is in order. A good friend gave me an excellent example of this. He said, "If you want to fight white supremacy you follow the tradition of John Brown, you don't go to a workshop." Similarly, if you want to fight being a "Manarchist", why don't you try tearing down the structure of male supremacy instead of going to a sensitivity training? Instead of working only to recognize the oppression that you as a man engage towards women, why don't you actually follow one at a protest? Instead of writing the "top 15 things a guy can do in a meeting to be respectful of women", why don't you become familiar with political attacks that women have engaged in on the patriarchy and follow in their footsteps? While I personally do appreciate it when men are conscious of their long-windedness at meetings and respectful of women when they speak, I am more appreciative of men with good feminist politics, because they seem to be a dying breed.

Truly the term "Manarchist" doesn't accurately define the adversary we face as women today. What is that really? A guy who claims to be against all forms of oppression yet fails to realize that he is oppressive to women. Sounds like a barefaced sexist to me. The cops claim to be against oppression don't they? But they still fuck with black youth in Compton and commit Emmett Till murders every day. The media claims to be against oppression, yet it still produces things like Maxim magazine and Rush Limbaugh. We as women activists aren't immune to sexist behavior, sexist chatter or sexist guys any more than any other woman in this society is and no amount of male writing or male sensitivity training seems to be curing the problem. When was the last time you saw a woman up front at a protest? Have the majority of activist men started looking to women for leadership and I just missed it? When do these guys stop telling everyone how not to be a "Manarchist" while personifying the patriarchy? When do these guys stop deciding what is right for women at these events and actually follow the tradition of radical women? Sexism is alive and well in the activist community, just ask a woman... Oh, what a great idea!



Stick It To The Manarchy

by Maggie, Rayna, Michael, and Matt - The Rock Bloc Collective

Manarchy: Aggressive, competitive behavior within the anarchist movement that is frighteningly reminiscent of historically oppressive male gender roles. Such behavior includes acting macho, holier than thou, and elitist. Manarchy often results in exclusivity.

We feel obliged to share our discomfort with manarchy as it presents itself in the anarchist movement. We are excited and inspired by the development and practice of anarchist ideals, and we must remain critical of our movement in an effort to maximize our effectiveness. Anarchism and direct action are powerful forces, yet we are still susceptible to taking on some of the oppressive cultural practices of the very system we are challenging.

We are two women and two men, all white and coming from economically privileged backgrounds. We are anarchists. We support direct action and the Black Bloc as a tactic for empowerment. In this article we focus on what has been coined "manarchy." We intend to explain and criticize manarchist behavior by running through a series of experiences that we have had at mass actions, conferences, and in our day-to-day organizing.

Most insidious is the dogmatism of 'no compromise' that is often accompanied with a macho spirit that assumes a 'tougher than thou' attitude toward dominant culture as well as allies in the movement.

At the presidential debates in Boston, one of us saw a group of people bust through a police barricade of an already blocked off street. The move was far-fetched and ill planned, and resulted in several people being pepper sprayed. This is tough, not tactical. For some of these people, being pepper sprayed became a battle wound that illustrated their no-compromise "radical" politics.

In a similar vein, two of us were at a Black Bloc meeting where one man declared: "If you're not willing to take a hit [to the head with a baton] and you're not willing to go to jail, don't march with the Black Bloc." He was frustrated with the



fact that he had been marching with the Black Bloc at the Inauguration protests and upon confronting a police barricade, found that no one was backing him up. We question whether sacrificing oneself to a beating is an effective goal. We cannot overemphasize the importance of protecting each other, yet we also understand that people in different situations have different needs. In other words, not everyone can and wants to get beat up and sent to jail for an act that may or may not be perceived as tactically useful.

The man's divisive statement assumes that he is one of the more qualified Black Bloc participants in the group. He found that no one else had stuck around to take a beating with him, demonstrating that he is tougher and, therefore, a better radical than others. His superior position—his statements suggest—gives him the authority to declare who is allowed to march in the Black Bloc. Thus, he feels comfortable telling others to stay home.

The no-compromise position has been exemplified by a posting on the Independent Media Center's website. In a critique of the Inauguration Protests in Washington, D.C., Slip writes:

"i think we really need to ask ourselves what our militancy means? is it really militant to allow to be searched to enter into the are that you were scheduled to have your first amendright right? that's not militant or defiant. is revolt if you ask for permission for the same system you are protesting? permitted protests are in no way a resistance, let alone a revolution. to me, in this revolution the ends ARE the means. we have to live our visions and take control of our own lives. this is exhibiting in not just how we live our lives, and use our lives as tools, but how we extend our dissent into literally reclaiming our spaces, when we get into the streets. we can no longer pander and go through "the proper means" the proper means are practicing real democracy and claiming our right to free assembly. NO COMPROMISE."

In this critique, Slip raises an important point about the need for militancy, defiance, and fundamental subversion of the system. Yet, his analysis around "NO COMPROMISE" remains problematic. In a capitalist system, we all must compromise. No one is perfect, and we are all implicated with the oppression that this system is built on. Some are more implicated and privileged than others are. It's ironic that the more privileged are often the ones who make the call for "no compromise" at mass actions. We should question who is able to "not compromise" at large demonstrations. For example, as four white, college students, it's pretty easy for us to be militants at mass actions. In addition to easy access to lawyers, the cops and courts treat us better than classes of people who are traditionally victimized. It is much harder for people of color, the economically disadvantaged, and people who are not physically capable of intense physical confrontation to take such a position.

Ultimately, we find the "NO COMPROMISE" position compromises a significant part of our ideals. We are working to build a world where people are empowered and loving. However, anarchist militancy tends to insult allies in the movement rather than act in solidarity. The narrative of non-compromised purity reminds us of the elite members of college fraternities saying, "you're not macho enough" and the Christian Right saying, "you're

not holy enough." It is simply a form of chauvinism that divides people.

The intersection of the militancy and no-compromise position is strikingly similar to the martyr ethic of the religious movement's call for civil disobedience. In this tactic, people sacrifice themselves for a greater cause. In the past few years, civil disobedience has come under fire by radicals calling for tactics that are less cooperative with the system and more empowering and inclusive for the participant. Yet, anarchist reasoning has gone full circle; jail time and battle wounds have become the new self-sacrificial disobedience.

We would also like to note that religious movements calling for civil disobedience tend to emphasize love, while anarchists emphasize aggression. *Five Days That Shook the World*, a book written within the movement about "Seattle and Beyond", celebrates direct action participants as "street warriors". The Random House dictionary defines warrior as "1. A man engaged or experienced in warfare; soldier. 2. A person who has shown great vigor, courage, or aggressiveness, as in politics." In the context of which we are critical, a warrior is a self-proclaimed hero, dogmatic and competitive.

We do not romanticize the image of the non-compromising militant, ready to take anything on in the name of the cause. We are not Rambo. We are not the Navy Seals. We are not heroes. We are anarchists, building a space that is empowering, accepting, inclusive, accessible, communicative, and community oriented.

To build the movement we must be more than merely relentlessly physically rugged, devoted to the cause, self-sacrificial, and militant. Those who cannot afford – monetarily, physically, or emotionally – to risk arrest, lawsuits, of physical assault are excluded from this club. This means that many women, people of color, the young and elderly, and the economically disadvantaged do not have what it takes to participate in the anarchist revolution. Is this a revolution to benefit the participants who are mostly middle/upper class white males, or is this a revolution of young warriors sacrificing themselves for the good of the women and children they exclude? Both are unacceptable.

Mass actions are only one part of anarchist organizing. However, when they occur they should feel like gatherings where people are empowered, enjoying themselves, and in solidarity with their allies. Marching in the Black Bloc we have found many are tough enough to get hit on the head, but not open enough to say hello, let alone communicate tactical ideas, need, or feelings. This embodies the typical male gender role. If one wants to be a street warrior, we urge the warrior to direct his or her negative energies at the system and contribute positive feelings back to the movement.



Rather than the motto, "NO COMPROMISE", we call for "whatever works." And if that sounds too cold, we suggest, "Live the Revolution." Quite simply, we urge our comrades to more carefully evaluate how our actions will affect our targets, capitalism, and oppression. We are not critiquing militant tactics, nor are we critiquing people who use them. We are calling for people to step outside the manarchist dogmatism and use tactics as they are useful.

We see importance and value in alliance building, discussing ideological and tactical differences, and understanding and respecting each other's varying opinions. If a movement is uniform in all its tactics and ideologies, it is not only boring, but vulnerable to extinction. We need to work with those who have different opinions, while recognizing our common goals and organize in a way that respects and acknowledges difference through communication.

MANARCHY RESPONSE, FROM THE AUTHORS

People offered both positive and negative criticism, and we have learned through this process. We feel this dialogue is a vital element of a movement dedicated to challenging oppression. We do not claim that we are the most knowledgeable on these issues, and we certainly haven't escaped the oppressive mindsets the system is based on. We make assumptions that contribute to oppression, but we are actively working to first recognize and then change these assumptions in ourselves. We are not claiming authority, or insisting that we are right. Rather, we are sharing our thoughts in order to engage in a learning process that involves the greater community. This is why response is so important. This is not a process we can do alone.

Our criticism of manarchy and its implications is our way of contributing to the dialogue. Competitive, aggressive, elitist, and exclusive behavior is contrary to our understanding of anarchist ideals and practice. "Manarchy" is the term we use to describe this behavior because it exemplifies traditional male gender roles. Many people are uncomfortable with the use of this word because it suggests, contrary to our understanding, that only/all men exhibit manarchist behavior. Because we are not saying that manarchist behavior is inherent to any particular sex, some people have questioned the importance of associating it with a specific gender. However, the conduct we describe is the same behavior that men have traditionally used to hold and justify their positions of power in a patriarchal society. The word itself is not central to our point, and we are happy to hear suggestions for alternatives.

MANY NOT ALL

People frequently pointed out that women can act militantly. We agree. There are many dedicated women who effectively use militant tactics. Simultaneously, women are not exempt from what we call "manarchy." In our previous article, we should have made this more clear.

People's criticisms were based on our lack of clarity as well as a more obvious mistake. After quoting Slip's analysis about "no compromise", we used the "universal" pronoun "his" for an ungendered quote. This word choice reinforces the very sexism and exclusion that we are trying to dismantle. We are thankful that Slip responded, and pointed out that we "are trapped in [our] own confines of maleness as well." We apologize and will strive to make sure it doesn't happen again.

We do not believe that militant behavior is specific to men, nor any category of age, race, or economic status. However, many people misinterpret our message. For example, in Dave Hill's response he quotes us as saying, "many women, people of color, young and elderly do not have what it takes [to participate in the manarchist revolution]." A few sentences later he asks, "Is it productive here to take all women, people of color, young and elderly out of your analysis of 'manarchy'? are 'manarchists' only white men?" (NYC Indy Media). Dave takes our "many" and reinterprets it as "all." This word switch significantly changes our intention by taking an observation and turning it into a generalization about sex, race, and class and its relationship to behavior. As we said above, anybody can act militantly. In our previous article, after our discussion of the term "warrior", which the dictionary defines as "a man", we say "we urge the warrior to direct his or her negative en-



ergies at the system." Yet, we've seen that most people who act exclusive, competitive, and macho at mass actions – the people who direct negative energies towards other people in the movement - are white, male, and often middle class. This is why we use the word "many". This belief could be because of our backgrounds and we invite people to share their observations.

A few responses questioned our criticism of the term "warrior". We recognize that the term can be used in an empowering way. On the other hand, as one collective writes, "As to your views on 'manarchism', they seem to correspond very closely to our general criticism, discussed and elaborated more than a decade ago, of the development of the so-called 'street-fighter' political (sub)culture, its roots, interdependencies and consequences. We also call it 'anarchist Ramboism', and identify its roots partly, just like you, in the macho culture of the bourgeois society," (e-mail). The question is, are we reclaiming "warrior" and revolutionizing its meaning or is "warrior" merely a way to justify manarchist behavior?

WE DO NOT OPPOSE MILITANCY

When we were writing the article we defined who we are in order to show where we are coming from. Among other things, we said that we are anarchists, march in the Black Bloc, and are supportive of direct action. This way, readers would understand that we are writing a critique from within the movement. We also felt pressured to "prove" ourselves by listing our militant history, but this would have fallen into the same trap that we are criticizing. Because we didn't dwell on our militant history, many people who responded assumed we are pacifists, "fluffy," and/or against militancy, despite our saying, "we are not critiquing militant tactics, nor are we critiquing people who use them." Some not only assumed things about us, but judged us according to those assumptions. We wonder how our argument would have been received if we had said that we've collectively been to jail 4 times for 13 days, hit with batons 17 times, pepper-sprayed 5 times, tear-gassed once, de-arrested 5 of our comrades, broken 2 windows, led 1 police charge, and told a cop to "fuck off" at least 212 times.

We support aggressive tactics if they are strategically useful. We are fully aware of and endorse tactical purposes of the black bloc including obscuring identities and supporting those who are willing to break the law. However, we do see a problem when people use aggressive tactics and then hold them up as trophies in order to claim authority, or in order to indulge their own self-image as better radicals. Our definition of manarchy includes "acting macho, holier-than-thou, and elitist," but it is possible to be militant without being manarchist. As we said, we have observed a specific type of militancy that displays manarchist behavior and is based on "battle wounds", "toughness," "purity", "insulting allies", and not acting in solidarity with people who use differ-

ent tactics. However, we agree with Slip that there is a "need of militancy, defiance, and fundamental subversion of the system."

To clarify our position on no-compromise, we feel that no one should compromise one's ideals. If you think you can survive without compromising tactically, then do it. However, don't ostracize others for their tactical choices. We're skeptical that anyone can "not compromise." How are we going to get to the next mass action without compromising? Train-hopping, stealing gas, bio-diesel, and bicycling are not options for everyone. This is why we question the abundant declaration of "no-compromise", and this is why we need a movement that supports tactical diversity.

TOWARD A TACTICAL CRITIQUE

Constructive criticism is an integral part of building a large, effective, and revolutionary movement. Dialogue is important because it forces one to reconsider one's beliefs as well as learn about other perspectives, evolving the politics of our movement. One should consider what the specific critique accomplishes and aim to not only improve the politics of our movement but to also increase its numbers. There are some potential problems in this process; one wants to speak one's mind, but doesn't want to alienate people. Thus, one must frame criticisms carefully in ways that don't compromise the message and at the same time don't insult potential allies.

We also want to point out that although self criticism is very important, the movement should not get so caught up in it that we lose sight of our goals and targets. While building a society without oppression, we need to find a balance between internal dialogue and actually changing the structures of society.

In reading responses, we found our emotional reaction was often determined by the way others framed their argument. Many criticisms enabled us to seriously consider whether aspects of our position were flawed. On the other hand, many insulted us. In these cases, there's a part of us that gets mad and wants to dismiss the entire response. It's difficult to be told that we are wrong and or to be discounted as if we are not committed to anarchist ideology. We are doing our best to not get offended, to admit our faults, and work to improve ourselves.

Through this process, it became clear to us how important it is to clearly outline and explain criticisms to each other. For example, we were told "how dare you pontificate from the privillage of your college room about the actions taken by those most affected by the brutality of everyday living under capitalism,"(email). Referring to our status as college students does not address the actual content of the respondent's criticism, and we feel it is not constructive to invalidate our entire argument because of who we are. Similarly, one person responded by signing: "go to hell," (nyc indymedia). We understand our position may anger people, and while we support self-expression, insults do not help us

reach an understanding of each other's convictions.

We also received several sarcastic messages. For example, "Heretoo!," at NYC-Indymedia, mockingly writes, "We must exclude all manly men from the movement. We must establish quotas for inclusion of feminized males. All males seeking entry into the movement must either prove their femininity, or be administered adequate amounts of estrogen until such time as that they can prove that they are as wise, intelligent and all knowing as oracles who penned this article. All males presently in the movement must begin a self flagellation process on the basis of their gender immediately." While such responses may be attempting to give a useful critique of our article, they result in alienating us from their messages. From the sarcasm, we understand that "Heretoo!" does not like what we say, but we don't come to a deeper understanding of the differences between our perspectives.

Moreover, insults create an air of aggression and hostility. This encourages a climate where we not only tell allies to "fuck off" but generally dismiss people and consider them unimportant. One correspondent writes "The snarky responses your piece is getting on Indymedia are just more evidence of the need to challenge the entrenched machismo of many activists" (e-mail). Our critique of manarchy is like our critique of sarcastic and purposely insulting feedback. We find them to be alienating, divisive, and counterproductive. With this dynamic, being in a consensus meeting, doing jail solidarity, and putting our bodies on the line in order to protect people is nearly impossible.

In addition to the way we were criticized, we sometimes had a hard time understanding the criticisms. "Methree" writes: "And some of the aforementioned perpetrators were not only male but white too! Oh the horror! Yes! 'WHATEVER WORKS' Right on.! What doesn't work: 'politically correct racism' and stagnating the movement with outmoded 'identity politics.'" (NYC Indymedia). We understand that "Methree" takes a different position than we do, but we don't understand what s/he's talking about. In order to improve we need to know what it is we are doing, why it is bad, and how we can fix it. For example, it would be useful to have identity politics defined, see evidence of our "politically correct racism," and hear arguments against or for "whatever works."

More disturbing are the responses that deny our experience that manarchy exists. In these cases, critics reinterpret the examples we give. Anarchocommie writes:

As to the person who claimed that anyone who is not willing to get beat up, should not be in a black bloc... I do not believe I was at whatever meeting you are referring to, yet I suspect that the rationale behind this persons statements were as follows: the point of a black bloc (from a tactical perspective) is to protect the identities of those who are in them, since most people there are more willing to engage in actions outside of the con-

straints of the law, and which can generally be described as confrontational... I think this was the speakers point, not that we should all want to get beat up, simply that we must recognize it as a possibility and be willing to protect each other and at the same time, engage in those confrontational actions" (Indymedia).

Anarchocommie discounts our experience of manarchy and responds as if we are inventing this type of behavior, but our examples are based on first hand experiences. We've seen this behavior in people we work with as well as ourselves. However, Anarchocommie finds it hard to believe that manarchist behavior exists. Thus, in pure speculation s/he reinterprets a quote from a meeting that s/he knows nothing about. S/he takes our experiences and makes it sound as if we couldn't possibly understand what the activist at the meeting had said, discounting our experiences. Judging from the responses to the article, we aren't the only ones who witness manarchist behavior. We are certainly prepared to debate whether the examples we give are accurate, but that is not our point. We are saying that manarchy occurs and we want to stop it. The examples are as much to explain what we mean by manarchy as to expose the flaws of specific behavior. If people dogmatically discount the existence of our examples, they are simultaneously ignoring our message.

We are pleased to have found such a large forum to discuss these issues. As a movement, we must be self-critical as a means of growth. We are excited by the opportunity to dialogue with many new people. We do not think that public discussion should replace one on one conversations. Unfortunately, we have not had time to personally respond to the majority of comments that were emailed to us. We appreciate the personal responses and hope to be emailing people soon.

Let's keep this discussion going.

Maggie, Rayna, Michael, and Matt
The Rock Bloc Collective

How can I be sexist?!

**I'm an anarchist/hippy/
liberal/nice guy/radical/
friend to all women/
revolutionary/enemy of all
oppression!!!**

Believe it or not—and this collection aims to have you believe it—none of those socialized as men in this society are immune to the assumptions, attitudes, and actions of sexism, no matter how radical or progressive their politics. This zine brings together five articles addressing the issues and practical steps “men” can take to deal with patriarchal behavior, to strengthen and sustain the movements of which they are part. While drawn primarily from debates among anarchists, *Breaking the Manacles* offers valuable food for thought (and action!) for all those working towards a better world.