

Without community

there is no liberation

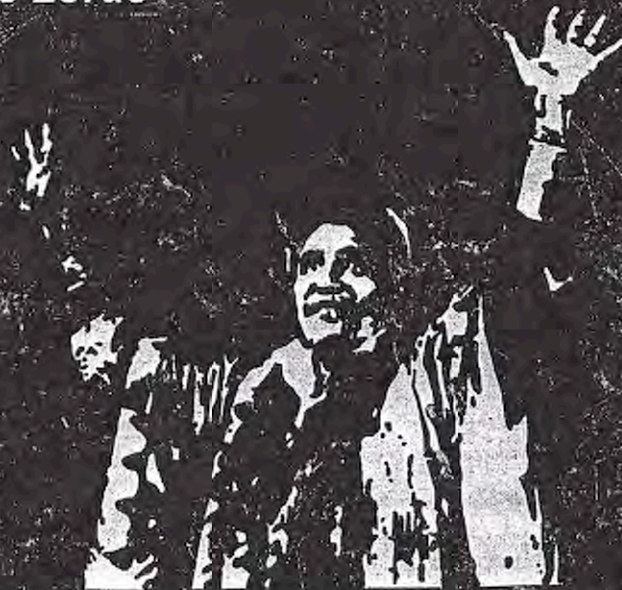
...but community must not mean

a shedding of our differences,

nor the pathetic pretense that these

differences do not exist.

- Audre Lorde



EXCUSE ME,  
CAN YOU  
PLEASE PASS  
THE  
PRIVILEGE?



# BROWNIES

Oct 3, 2004

I never intended this to be a zine. I never intended it to be anything at all, really. Just a stream of consciousness personal release in writing. In a couple weeks, I plan to be at the Nola Bookfair. I guess that's why this thing exists.

A few weeks ago I ~~started~~ started really working on my new zine full force. I toyed around with the idea of doing a sequel to my last zine ZEN AND THE ART OF BROWNIE BAKING but decided to do a personal zine instead (not that the brownie zine WASN'T a personal one). I convinced myself I would have it finished for New Orleans, but looking at my schedule now, I'm ~~gonna~~ going to quit fooling myself. I really want this zine to be meaningful, and I don't want to rush it. I don't know when the zine will be done. I do know it will probably be called BRAGGADOCIO.

I wanted to have a ~~small~~ small zine for the Bookfair, but I didn't want it to be slapdash. So I made this. It's actually an excerpt from BRAGGADOCIO. I wrote it last February (2004).

I ~~was~~ was gonna make a few copies for the bookfair, but now that it's done, I figure I should make some more copies while I'm at it.

# THANKS

lets get in touch!

I love mail! ...but I have recently been living ~~out~~ out of the country for several months at a time (I'm moving to Jamaica in January!). So PLEASE WRITE, but email me first to check that the address is okay.

but in general:

during the school year:

during the summer:

josh russell  
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second printing

# 701 / 450

this zine was frantically drawn, cut, and  
pasted together over the course of three days  
in anticipation of a zine fair that i now  
can't go to anyway.

the following things helped me keep my sanity  
during those hours of isolation:

inner conflict, saul williams, petrograd,  
dragonforce, the foundatin, phil ochs,  
woodie guthrie, harum scarum, lost cherees  
antischiem, toots and the maytals, paintbox,  
chumbawamba, the coup, la fractinn lifesavas,  
fela kuti blackalicious & episodes of family guy

I also recently finished these books and I  
think you should read them too:

FEMINIST THEORY FROM MARGIN TO CENTER-bell  
mi hooks. MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS-tracy  
kidder. A NEW WORLD IN OUR HEARTS-love and  
rage anarchist federation. PERSEPOLIS-  
marjane satrapi. WE ARE EVERYWHERE - notes  
from nowhere collective. QUIET RUMORS: AN  
ANARCHA-FEMINIST READER-dark star collect-  
ive. THE POLITICS OF ANTISEMITISM-cookburn  
& st. clair. OBSOLETE COMMUNISM AND THE  
LEFT WING ALTERNATIVE-daniel cohn-bendit.  
WOMEN, RACE, & CLASS-angela davis, and  
HOMOCONS; RISE OF THE GAY RIGHT-richard  
goldstein.

you can get most of these books from

[www.AKPRESS.com](http://www.AKPRESS.com)

all images in this zine were  
hand drawn by me.

I gave hip hop to white boys  
when nobody was looking.

they found it locked in a basement  
when they gentrified Brooklyn.

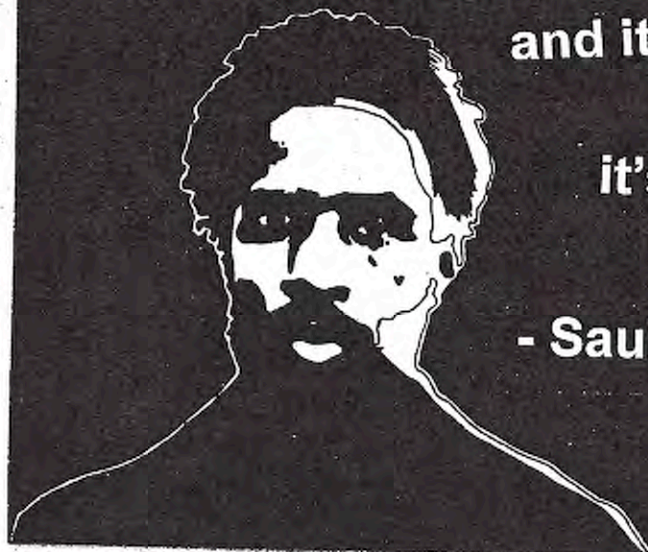
...so substitute the  
anger and oppression

with guilt and depression

and it's yours

it's yours.

- Saul Williams




To be honest, I am at a different place in my life now than I was when I wrote this..!

I guess writing this was the only way I could synthesize my thoughts. I wrote it for me. I wasn't ~~planning~~ planning on sharing it with anyone. I did, eventually. I was embarrassed ~~and~~ and self conscious and really nervous about people seeing it. But it turned out that reading it helped ~~in~~ some of my friends ~~at~~ articulate things they had been feeling too.

There seems to be very little discourse about privilege in our communities from privileged people themselves. Most of it tends to be from those traditionally marginalized by society, and most of that tends to be in the context of expressing their disenfranchisement and alienation with activist and "radical" communities where these issues aren't adequately addressed (or aren't addressed at all). White kids - and white males in particular - need to get our shit together. And that's not going to happen ~~by~~ through liberal PC-ism, and its not going to happen by calling out other people on their shit without looking at our own. And it's certainly not going to happen by living exclusively in our tight-knit anarchist or zinester enclaves.

I'm still not quite sure how to respond to that. Respectful relationships across differences (in power) require us to embrace a paradox: our social statuses *do* confer different kinds and degrees of power on us, and our relationships must somehow acknowledge that and attempt to account for it; but obsessing about these aspects of identity can hide our commonality for sure. The unnecessary barriers that it can potentially create might prevent us from interacting genuinely. It can also push people into roles that they don't feel they fit into...



So yeah, I'm still trying to figure this stuff out. I probably will be for the rest of my life...Sorry if you read this looking for answers.



I'm tired of stupid rich kids  
trying to find validity

In tokenistic gestures  
of patronizing sensitivity.

It's our obsession with our differences  
that hides our common bonds.

Concentrating on given status

is what keeps  
the system strong.



# I'M HOP- ING.

I'm hoping that in some degree this can open up some honest communication and dialogues about these issues, because they aren't going away.

...but at the same time, I'm not sure ~~how~~ how much talking about them is going to make them go away either. It's a step though. My fear is that we talk about and intellectualize stuff forever, and it stops there. In a way, that's even more dangerous, because we somehow convince ~~ourselves~~ ourselves that we're socially and politically literate. We create these (largely homogenous) comfort zones for ourselves, and then call them 'subcultures' (or at our most audacious, 'counter-cultures'), and then use 'the struggle' as a rationale for not entering spaces that challenge us and make us uncomfortable.

Ironically, there is a certain privilege conferred on white/male/well off/heterosexual people just but TALKING about our privilege. We get lotsa cred for it. As if it were such a huge and momentous thing to acknowledge something that shapes our entire existence. When white people talk about privilege, they get the spotlight. It enacts the same power dynamic that our politicized spaces claim to oppose. The fact that people can treat "dealing with your privilege" as if it were some kind of burden - some kind of OPPRESSION - is pretty absurd and insulting to people actually dealing with being on the bottom end of structural violence. No wonder so many activists of color are sick of hearing white kids gripe about "dealing with their privilege". Serious questions of intent need to be raised. Are we talking about this stuff because we actually want to deal with it, or are we talking about it because we want our cultural sensitivity to be validated? Do we just want to prove to ourselves that we are not racist? ~~Or we~~ ~~just~~ ~~we~~ Am I writing this zine to account for power imbalances in the relationships in our community, or am I doing it to assuage some sort of unconscious guilt? I like to believe my intentions are straightforward.

If there is anything I have learned in life, it's that as much as you try to question your assumptions, you can never be completely sure.

So I guess that's why I'm a little nervous about publishing this.

about. It's never anyone's place to tell someone else they are oppressed. That gets difficult for me sometimes, especially when talking to anti-feminist women. It doesn't mean I can't share my beliefs and engage in honest discussion, and it doesn't mean that my beliefs are irrelevant just because I have privilege. It does mean that I'm not going to let myself fall into overzealous activist mode. It also means that I won't let myself buy into that self-congratulatory bullshit that so many 'enlightened' well-off people seem to reassure themselves with. To quote Detestation, "a big white pat on the back" is not and should not be what I am looking for in life. Perhaps ending on a longer quote from that song is in order.

between this approach and the notion of "working within the system." Proponents of working inside the system tend to be liberals who have no consciousness of what exists *outside* the system. Their position often comes from an impulse to do what is comfortable, convenient, and doesn't challenge the status quo. I do believe, however, that it is possible to co-opt their system in the interests of facilitating and enhancing ours. I do not believe that we can *use* our privilege as a tool to *combat* our privilege.

### So what do we do if we find these solutions insufficient?

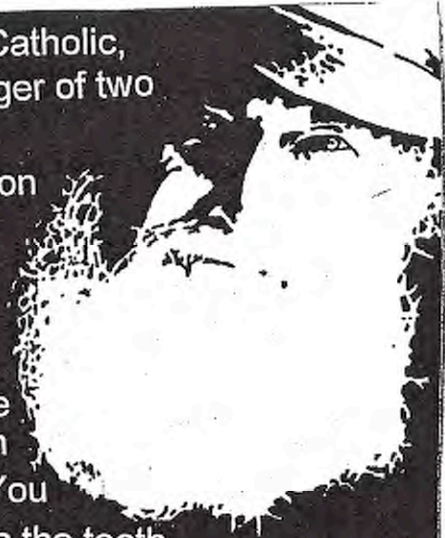
I can't tell anyone else how they should handle it, but for me, I'm still trying to figure it out. And that's okay. I still try to be conscious of the way my privilege affects my life, but now I try to do it in a way that is conducive to honest (though sometimes embarrassing) communication across boundaries. I also think it's important to realize that I will never truly know what it's like to not have privilege. Part of being at the top of a power structure is not being able to see what is below you. I can theorize all I want, and I can talk to as many people as I want, and I can go out and 'see reality' as much as I want, but I still won't understand everything. It's also important for me to realize that it's not my place to tell other people how they should be / are affected by my privilege. Just because someone might be part of a "disempowered" group in society doesn't mean that they necessarily identify with that group, or that they believe all the radical theory that we talk

Ammon Hennacy was a Catholic, anarchist, pacifist, draft dodger of two world wars, tax refuser, vegetarian, one man revolution in America. After he got to know me...he said you've got to be a pacifist. I asked why. He said it will save your life...He said, you were born a white man in mid 20th century industrial America. You came into the world armed to the teeth

with an arsenal of weapons - the weapons of privilege. Racial privilege. Sexual privilege. Economic privilege. If you want to be a pacifist, it's not just giving up guns and knives and clubs and fists and angry words, it's giving up the weapons of privilege, and going into the world completely disarmed. Try that. That old man has been gone now for 20 years, and I'm still at it. But I figure if there is a worthwhile struggle in my own life, that's probably the one.

- Utah Phillips

(not that I'm a pacifist...)



February 20, 2004

# EXCUSE ME, CAN YOU PLEASE PASS THE PRIVILEGE?

I first thought about white-skin privilege in sixth grade.

I listened to a song by NOFX called "Don't Call Me White." Lyrically, it was a childish, knee jerk reaction to feelings of guilt. It went "Don't call me white / I wasn't brought here, I was born / Circumcised, categorized, allegiance sworn / Does this mean I have to take such shit / For being fair skinned? No! / I ain't a part of no conspiracy, I'm just you're average Joe / Don't call me white! / It represents everything I hate..."

I thought



conscious of, though I do have problems with the way it is indiscriminately applied to anyone perceived to not be revolutionary enough (for example, I reject our legal system and the logic of lawmaking, but I also think we would be dead without amazing groups like the National Lawyers Guild. I also think it's important to attack a structure from *everywhere* - its naive to think we can do anything otherwise). I do think this anarcho notion applies in this case though, because we've seen the affects of it. It results in assimilation and capitulation. You have to constantly reconcile your approach to an oppressive system you are purporting to fight. It helps you make a critique of injustice, while making any systemic analysis irrelevant. You *can* make progress in improving peoples lives, but as long as you are using your privilege, your privilege will *always exist*, which means that oppression will too. For example, I have the privilege of attending an elite university. Thus I organize a lot here, and use school funds to bring radical and diy groups to campus. I am in a position where I can not only expose college kids to subversive communities, but in the process I can take financial resources from a private institution that functions like a corporation and give them to groups working for positive change. So in a sense, I am using my privilege and social position for "good" - but I don't pretend that this somehow combats privilege. If my immediate goals were to democratize education and knowledge, this approach would be strategically bankrupt. It's a good and valuable tactic for immediate and apparent change, but if our intention is to challenge *privilege*, it's useless. Furthermore, there are marked differences



being perceived as jealous. I still won't have to teach my kids about systemic racism for their own daily physical protection. I can "reject my privilege" all I want, but nonetheless, I still have the luxury of knowing that none of my actions will be perceived as indicative of the nature of people of my race. My native language is still basic to functioning in the new economy. And if I ever get burnt out on being conscious of white privilege, I still always have the option of ignoring all of this and reaping all the benefits of a racist society. In fact, if I did that, it would make my life easier and I would probably be praised for it by mainstream America for it. So "rejecting privilege" is a farce.

# THREE

Using it for "good."

I'm still not quite sure I understand this option, though a lot of people seem to buy into it. I guess the basic idea is that I can embrace my privilege, and use my advantage and disproportionate influence in society to create positive change. My initial response to this notion is that I don't know how it could work in any practical sense. What does it mean to use your privilege for 'good' instead of 'evil'? How do you break down a system of privilege by invoking it? The standard anarchist critique of this idea is that if you use a system's resources, you are supporting it. Ends can't contradict means; means must be a living enactment of the envisioned ends. I think this critique is really important to always be

Shortly after that was my first encounter with thinking about male privilege, with a song by Propagandhi called "Refusing to Be a Man." I had already thought a lot about gender roles, mainly because I didn't really fit into the one prescribed for me. When I was in kindergarten, my favorite color was pink. My best friend's mom was a fundamentalist Christian who said we weren't allowed to see each other anymore when she discovered us playing dress up - I was wearing my mom's clothes. I never really identified with other boys. So yeah, I rejected normative masculinity when I was really young. Growing up, I tried more and more to be a 'boy,' but it usually didn't quite work. I was never really that athletic, and I never could rid myself of the sensitivity that was usually ascribed to 'girls.'

When I heard that Propagandhi song in seventh grade, I was like

hey! me too!  
I refuse to  
be a man!

...it wasn't until couple years later  
that I actually read the lyrics  
beyond the chorus.



"...birthright can bestow the power to yield  
the subordination of women, and do you know what  
patricentricity means? I found out just  
a couple of days ago

It means male values  
über alles

and hey, sex has been distorted  
and villified. I'm scared

of my attraction to body  
types. If everything desired

is objectified,  
then eroticism needs  
to be  
redefined

and I  
refuse to  
be a  
man."

# TWO

## Rejecting it.

I have heard this option articulated best by Saul Williams. I saw him speak at an antiwar rally, where he advocated a complete refusal of privilege. He essentially said that the best way to challenge a system is to deny yourself the luxuries that it affords you at the expense of others. But the problem with this is that it's impossible. And it's delusional. Privilege isn't something one asks for. It's something that is automatically given to them based on socially salient characteristics. Therefore, it's impossible to reject. An example: part of what white privilege is about is the luxury of ignoring problems that you aren't directly affected by. One way to reject that is in refusing to believe that I can ignore racism just because I have the privilege to do so. That's great. But I can do that as much as I want, and I still won't have to fear police harassment for being in the wrong neighborhood. Any institution with ample resources will still generally be in an environment where my race is catered to. The textbooks I used in high school were still more than likely to have been written by someone of my race, about people of my race, and intended for the consumption of someone of my race. I can still go to class without worrying that people will think I don't deserve to be there. I can still criticize dominant culture without

# ONE

Ignoring it.

A lot of punk kids seem to choose to do this. Basically, it's just pretending that you aren't affected by any of it. Sometimes people voluntarily choose a lifestyle of "poverty" without acknowledging how their privilege makes it all possible. It's part of the "evasion" ethic - being poor: if you aren't having fun, you aren't doing it right. I think that it's such a huge slap in the face to people who are actually struggling to survive, and it makes a mockery of genuine homelessness. Don't get me wrong - I'm not saying that this choice characterizes all kids who hop trains or squat or survive exclusively on dumpstered bagels or choose to spend their lives hitchhiking around the world or looking for adventure. I actually think that's a really inspiring lifestyle, and I have a lot of respect for my friends who engage in it. But when it becomes a romanticized escapist CrimethInc way to not deal with your impact on the world, it gets reduced to a fashionable trend that captivates repressed middle class white kids, without helping anyone break down systems of privilege.



Embracing a simpler lifestyle is one thing, pretending to be poor is another.

I was like

WOAH WOAH WOAH,  
BIRTHRIGHT CAN BESTOW  
POWER? WHAT DOES  
THAT MEAN?

I suppose that was what really started my exploring concepts like privilege. It's no secret that we live in a polarized and stratified society. That rich people rarely even see poor people, and communities are entirely divided along class and race lines. My suburb was certainly no exception.

Part of the effect of this division is to make privilege less recognizable and identifiable. If you are completely surrounded by rich white kids growing up, how are you supposed to understand that your privilege even exists?

YOU'RE   
 NOT.

That's how we maintain this system so well, the people perpetuating it aren't even conscious of it; they just act in accordance with a host of shared cultural assumptions, experiences, values, organizational memberships and worldviews – worldviews that can't possibly be maintained unless the people holding them are completely sheltered from life beyond what they have been given. All of that works to suppress any genuine perception of privilege.

Before I read those Propagandhi lyrics, I was your standard middle class punk rock kid – I hated the fact that my family was financially well off because it compromised my identity as 'punk.' Oh what I wouldn't have given to have grown up struggling for money! I wished so hard not to live in a nice house, or in Wilton, Connecticut.

Not that I ever actually considered the implications of the life wrenching struggle that real poverty creates; all I thought about was authenticity.

After reading the lyrics to that Propagandhi song I realized that the very fact that I could romanticize poverty was an exertion of my class privilege. I started to understand the class structure in this country, and realized that my wealth literally and directly created poverty. I still wouldn't own up to it though. I would get in arguments with a friend in my cushy suburb about who was poorer than whom, and always downplayed my financial security. I occasionally tried to emphasize the fact that I was Jewish, because despite not having *really* experienced anti-Semitism, it was at least one way I could feel like a minority and escape the guilt that accumulated in my conscience.

As a result, this dissonance travels with me everywhere I go. It's never going to go away, and I can accept that. I had no control over how I was born, and I had no control over the history of oppression that my identity is wrapped up in.

THEREFORE  
I AM NOT  
GUILTY,  
BUT I AM  
RESPONSIBLE.

I used to believe I had three choices  
in how to deal with privilege:

Well I'm a white, comparatively wealthy male, who dedicates his life to fighting a system created by white, wealthy males.

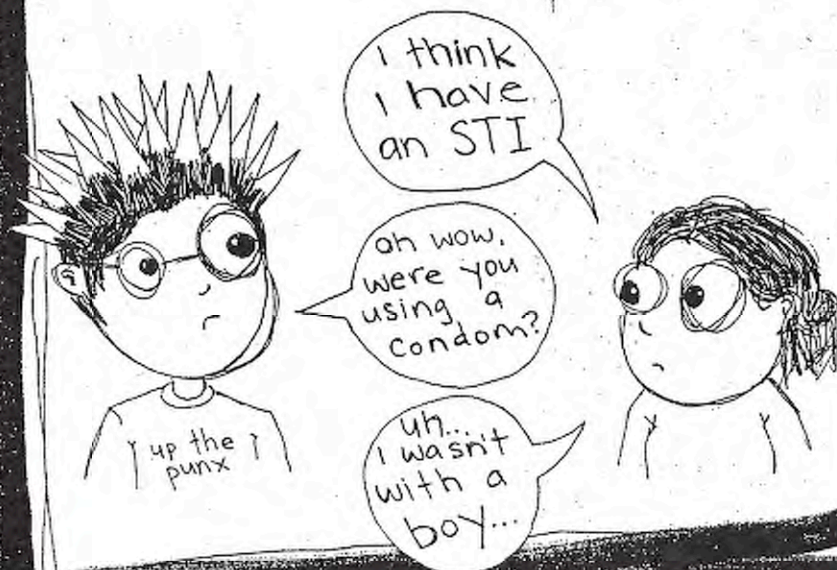
I definitely don't identify as heterosexual, though all of my serious relationships have been with women. So regardless of how I might characterize my sexuality, I largely benefit from heterosexual privilege too; we should also probably throw that into the mix.

(So I guess structurally, I'm a well off straight white boy fighting a system created by, and for the benefit of, well off straight white boys.)

While I reject a structure based on the overwhelming advantages granted to me because of how I happened to be born, I am undeniably a product of those privileges...and paradoxically enough, it was probably those privileges that allowed me the opportunity to analyze and understand "the system" in the way that I do...so not only am I a product of privilege,

**BUT MY RADICAL  
POLITICS ARE  
TOO.**

I helped to start a Gay/Straight alliance in my high school, but didn't think about how my own actions reinforced heterosexism and worked to establish straight sex as 'normal.'





I wore Anti-Racist Action patches, though most of my friends were white, and I never interacted with other people on cultural terms that weren't my own. The thought of leaving my comfort zone never occurred to me. After all, I was a white male; American mass culture was geared and oriented towards *me*. I was comfortable everywhere I went...though I only went where I was supposed to go (with the only conceivable exception being the punk shows I snuck away to in NYC, for which I had to make up extravagant lies to my parents to explain where I was...though one could also argue that being an ignorant middle class white male meant that punk shows were *exactly* where I was supposed to be).

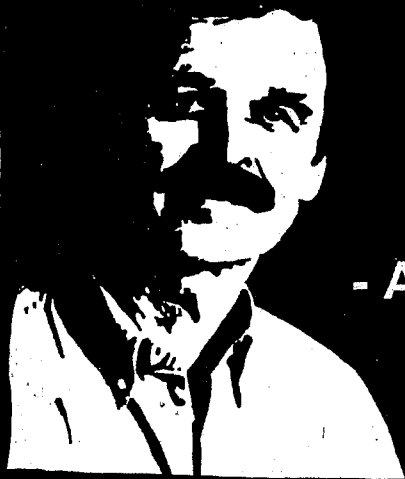
Throughout high school I slowly understood privilege more and more, and I began to realize that it structured literally every interaction I had. But despite my "consciousness," I still didn't know where to go with these ideas. It was quite

frustrating.

SO WHERE  
DOES THAT  
LEAVE ME  
NOW?



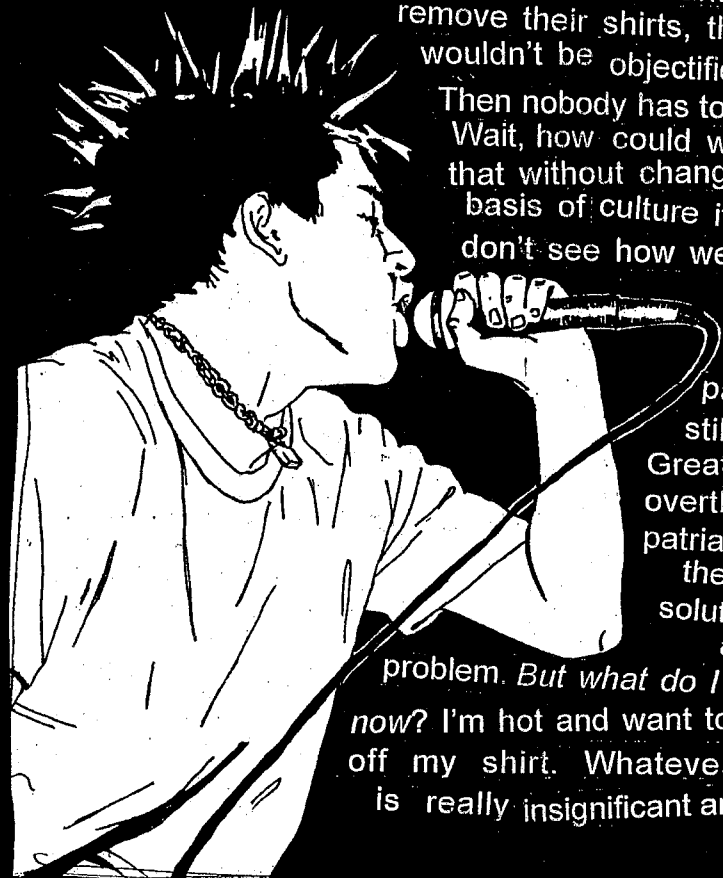
The problem isn't society  
and it isn't us. It's the  
relationship between the  
two that we have to  
understand, the nature of  
the thing we participate  
in and how we choose to  
participate in it and how  
both are shaped in the  
process.



- Allan G. Johnson

I would get into these circular debates with myself like:

Okay. I'm at a punk show, and it's really hot in here. I know that I can take off my shirt to be a little cooler. I also know that taking off my shirt is an exertion of male privilege; women cannot take off their shirts without being sexualized by everyone around them. Why should I get to cool off, while they are forced to be hot? ...but if I don't take off my shirt, then isn't that just creating 'equality' by repressing everyone? Why would I work to build an atmosphere where *nobody* is comfortable being shirtless? Shouldn't we instead try to build an environment where if women wanted to remove their shirts, they wouldn't be objectified?



Then nobody has to be hot. Wait, how could we do that without changing the basis of culture itself? I don't see how we could

do that while patriarchy still exists. Great, overthrowing patriarchy is the only solution to another

problem. But what do I do right now? I'm hot and want to take off my shirt. Whatever, this is really insignificant anyway.

It never really occurred to me that I should dialogue with people actually affected by my privilege. I was much more comfortable analyzing it from the safety of my own head. It was a lot easier to figure out why I thought other people were oppressed if I didn't need to speak to them, because I couldn't be proven wrong, and I wouldn't need to admit my own ignorance. Plus, then I could congratulate myself for being so enlightened as to think about the implications of my body language when walking down the street or something like that. I was unaccustomed to admitting that I didn't know anything. It would later take a lot of honesty and humility to start forming relationships that acknowledge and respond to these kinds of issues.

I had no idea how to reconcile my privilege, and I often engaged in activism out of guilt. By the end of high school, I could intellectually reject the idea of feeling guilty for being white, or being male, or being wealthy, but I still had no idea how to deal with privilege. Being able to intellectually recognize the absurdity and purposelessness of guilt is one thing; actually not feeling guilty is another.

When I got to college I actually took classes that mentioned the existence of privilege. None of them explained what to do with it though. The ramifications of analyzing all of this stuff exclusively in my head also played them out for the first time. I had dissected race and class and gender and sexuality so much in my own pristine world that I found it really hard to actually communicate with people across cultures. I didn't understand why most of my friends were still white.

I also realized that by trying to break down stereotypes and understanding racism exclusively in my own head that I had just erected a whole new set of assumptions, labels, stereotypes and expectations. Maybe I hadn't purged myself of all my internalized racism after all.