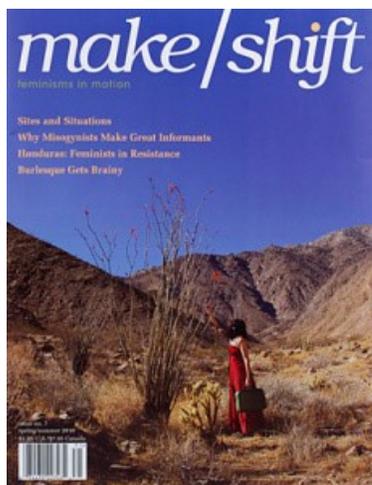


INCITE! Blog

Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements

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(<https://inciteblog.files.wordpress.com/2010/05>

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Originally published in *make/shift* magazine

Some people may have seen this article already, which has been making its rounds on Facebook and the blogosphere, but INCITE! blog editors loved it so much that we wanted to share it here. The piece was originally published in ***make/shift*** (<http://www.makeshiftmag.com/>) magazine's Spring/Summer 2010 issue and written by **Courtney Desiree Morris** (<http://creolemaroon.blogspot.com/>).

In January 2009, activists in Austin, Texas, learned that one of their own, a white activist named Brandon Darby, had infiltrated groups protesting the Republican National Convention (RNC) as an FBI informant. Darby later admitted to wearing recording devices at planning meetings and during the convention. He testified on behalf of the government in the February 2009 trial of two Texas activists who were arrested at the RNC on charges of making and possessing Molotov cocktails, after Darby encouraged them to do so. The two young men, David McKay and Bradley Crowder, each faced up to fifteen years in prison. Crowder accepted a plea bargain to serve three years in a federal prison; under pressure from federal prosecutors, McKay also pled guilty to being in possession of “unregistered Molotov cocktails” and was sentenced to four years in prison. Information gathered by Darby may also have contributed to the case against the RNC 8, activists from around the country charged with “conspiracy to riot and conspiracy to damage property in the furtherance of terrorism.” Austin activists were particularly stunned by the revelation that Darby had served as an informant because he had been a part of various leftist projects and was a leader at Common Ground Relief, a New Orleans-based organization committed to meeting the short-term needs of community members displaced by natural disasters in the Gulf Coast region and dedicated to rebuilding the region and ensuring Katrina evacuees’ right to return.

I was surprised but not shocked by this news. I had learned as an undergrad at the University of Texas that the campus police department routinely placed plainclothes police officers in the meetings of radical student groups—you know, just to keep an eye on them. That was in fall 2001. We saw the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, watched a cowboy president wage war on terror, and, in the middle of it all, tried to figure out what we could do to challenge the fascist state transformations taking place before our eyes. At the time, however, it seemed silly that there were cops in our meetings—we weren’t the Panthers or the Brown Berets or even some of the rowdier direct-action anti-globalization activists on campus (although we admired them all); we were just young people who didn’t believe war was the best response to the 9/11 attacks. But it wasn’t silly; the FBI does not dismiss political work. Any organization, be it large or small, can provoke the scrutiny of the state. Perhaps your organization poses a large threat, or maybe you’re small now but one day you’ll grow up and be too big to rein in. The state usually opts to kill the movement before it grows.

And informants and provocateurs are the state’s hired gunmen. Government agencies pick people that no one will notice. Often it’s impossible to prove that they’re informants because they appear to be completely dedicated to social justice. They establish intimate relationships with activists, becoming friends and lovers, often serving in leadership roles in organizations. A cursory reading of the literature on social movements and organizations in the 1960s and 1970s reveals this fact. The leadership of the American Indian Movement was rife with informants; it is suspected that informants were also largely responsible for the downfall of the Black Panther Party, and the same can be surmised about the antiwar movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Not surprisingly, these movements that were toppled by informants and provocateurs were also sites where women and queer activists often experienced intense gender violence, as the autobiographies of activists such as Assata Shakur, Elaine Brown, and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz demonstrate.

Maybe it isn’t that informants are difficult to spot but rather that we have collectively ignored the signs that give them away. To save our movements, we need to come to terms with the connections between gender violence, male privilege, and the strategies that informants (and people who just act like them) use to destabilize radical movements. Time and again heterosexual men in radical movements have been allowed to assert their privilege and subordinate others. Despite all that we say to the contrary, the fact is that radical social movements and organizations in the United States have refused to seriously address gender violence [1] as a threat to the survival of our struggles. We’ve treated misogyny, homophobia, and heterosexism as lesser evils—secondary issues—that will eventually take care of themselves or fade into the background once the “real” issues—racism, the police, class inequality, U.S. wars of

aggression—are resolved. There are serious consequences for choosing ignorance. Misogyny and homophobia are central to the reproduction of violence in radical activist communities. Scratch a misogynist and you'll find a homophobe. Scratch a little deeper and you might find the makings of a future informant (or someone who just destabilizes movements like informants do).

The Makings of an Informant: Brandon Darby and Common Ground

On Democracy Now! Malik Rahim, former Black Panther and cofounder of Common Ground in New Orleans, spoke about how devastated he was by Darby's revelation that he was an FBI informant. Several times he stated that his heart had been broken. He especially lamented all of the "young ladies" who left Common Ground as a result of Darby's domineering, aggressive style of organizing. And when those "young ladies" complained? Well, their concerns likely fell on sympathetic but ultimately unresponsive ears—everything may have been true, and after the fact everyone admits how disruptive Darby was, quick to suggest violent, ill-conceived direct-action schemes that endangered everyone he worked with. There were even claims of Darby sexually assaulting female organizers at Common Ground and in general being dismissive of women working in the organization. [2] Darby created conflict in all of the organizations he worked with, yet people were hesitant to hold him accountable because of his history and reputation as an organizer and his "dedication" to "the work." People continued to defend him until he outed himself as an FBI informant. Even Rahim, for all of his guilt and angst, chose to leave Darby in charge of Common Ground although every time there was conflict in the organization it seemed to involve Darby.

Maybe if organizers made collective accountability around gender violence a central part of our practices we could neutralize people who are working on behalf of the state to undermine our struggles. I'm not talking about witch hunts; I'm talking about organizing in such a way that we nip a potential Brandon Darby in the bud before he can hurt more people. Informants are hard to spot, but my guess is that where there is smoke there is fire, and someone who creates chaos wherever he goes is either an informant or an irresponsible, unaccountable time bomb who can be unintentionally as effective at undermining social-justice organizing as an informant. Ultimately they both do the work of the state and need to be held accountable.

A Brief Historical Reflection on Gender Violence in Radical Movements

Reflecting on the radical organizations and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s provides an important historical context for this discussion. Memoirs by women who were actively involved in these struggles reveal the pervasiveness of tolerance (and in some cases advocacy) of gender violence. Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Elaine Brown, each at different points in their experiences organizing with the Black Panther Party (BPP), cited sexism and the exploitation of women (and their organizing labor) in the BPP as one of their primary reasons for either leaving the group (in the cases of Brown and Shakur) or refusing to ever formally join (in Davis's case). Although women were often expected to make significant personal sacrifices to support the movement, when women found themselves victimized by male comrades there was no support for them or channels to seek redress. Whether it was BPP organizers ignoring the fact that Eldridge Cleaver beat his wife, noted activist Kathleen Cleaver, men coercing women into sex, or just men treating women organizers as subordinated sexual playthings, the BPP and similar organizations tended not to take seriously the corrosive effects of gender violence on liberation struggle. In many ways, Elaine Brown's autobiography, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*, has gone the furthest in laying bare the ugly realities of misogyny in the movement and the various ways in which both men and women reproduced and reinforced male privilege and gender violence in these organizations. Her experience as the only woman to ever lead the BPP did not exempt her from the brutal misogyny of the organization. She recounts being assaulted by various male comrades (including Huey Newton) as well as being beaten and terrorized by Eldridge Cleaver, who threatened to "bury her in Algeria" during a delegation to China. Her biography demonstrates more explicitly than either Davis's or Shakur's how the masculinist posturing of the BPP (and by extension many

radical organizations at the time) created a culture of violence and misogyny that ultimately proved to be the organization's undoing.

These narratives demystify the legacy of gender violence of the very organizations that many of us look up to. They demonstrate how misogyny was normalized in these spaces, dismissed as "personal" or not as important as the more serious struggles against racism or class inequality. Gender violence has historically been deeply entrenched in the political practices of the Left and constituted one of the greatest (if largely unacknowledged) threats to the survival of these organizations. However, if we pay attention to the work of Davis, Shakur, Brown, and others, we can avoid the mistakes of the past and create different kinds of political community.

The Racial Politics of Gender Violence

Race further complicates the ways in which gender violence unfolds in our communities. In "Looking for Common Ground: Relief Work in Post-Katrina New Orleans as an American Parable of Race and Gender Violence," Rachel Luft explores the disturbing pattern of sexual assault against white female volunteers by white male volunteers doing rebuilding work in the Upper Ninth Ward in 2006. She points out how Common Ground failed to address white men's assaults on their co-organizers and instead shifted the blame to the surrounding Black community, warning white women activists that they needed to be careful because New Orleans was a dangerous place. Ultimately it proved easier to criminalize Black men from the neighborhood than to acknowledge that white women and transgender organizers were most likely to be assaulted by white men they worked with. In one case, a white male volunteer was turned over to the police only after he sexually assaulted at least three women in one week. The privilege that white men enjoyed in Common Ground, an organization ostensibly committed to racial justice, meant that they could be violent toward women and queer activists, enact destructive behaviors that undermined the organization's work, and know that the movement would not hold them accountable in the same way that it did Black men in the community where they worked.

Of course, male privilege is not uniform — white men and men of color are unequal participants in and beneficiaries of patriarchy although they both can and do reproduce gender violence. This disparity in the distribution of patriarchy's benefits is not lost on women and queer organizers when we attempt to confront men of color who enact gender violence in our communities. We often worry about reproducing particular kinds of racist violence that disproportionately target men of color. We are understandably loath to call the police, involve the state in any way, or place men of color at the mercy of a historically racist criminal (in)justice system; yet our communities (political and otherwise) often do not step up to demand justice on our behalf. We don't feel comfortable talking to therapists who just reaffirm stereotypes about how fucked-up and exceptionally violent our home communities are. The Left often offers even less support. Our victimization is unfortunate, problematic, but ultimately less important to "the work" than the men of all races who reproduce gender violence in our communities.

Encountering Misogyny on the Left: A Personal Reflection

In the first community group I was actively involved in, I encountered a level of misogyny that I would never have imagined existed in what was supposed to be a radical-people-of-color organization. I was sexually/romantically involved with an older Chicano activist in the group. I was nineteen, an inexperienced young Black activist; he was thirty. He asked me to keep our relationship a secret, and I reluctantly agreed. Later, after he ended the relationship and I was reeling from depression, I discovered that he had been sleeping with at least two other women while we were together. One of them was a friend of mine, another young woman we organized with. Unaware of the nature of our relationship, which he had failed to disclose to her, she slept with him until he disappeared, refusing to answer her calls or explain the abrupt end of their relationship. She and I, after sharing our experiences, began to trade stories with other women who knew and had organized with this man.

We heard of the women who had left a Chicana/o student group and never came back after his lies and secrets blew up while the group was participating in a Zapatista action in Mexico City. The queer, radical, white organizer who left Austin to get away from his abuse. Another white woman, a social worker who thought they might get married only to come to his apartment one evening and find me there. And then there were the ones that came after me. I always wondered if they knew who he really was. The women he dated were amazing, beautiful, kick-ass, radical women that he used as shields to get himself into places he knew would never be open to such a misogynist. I mean, if that cool woman who worked in Chiapas, spoke Spanish, and worked with undocumented immigrants was dating him, he must be down, right? Wrong.

But his misogyny didn't end there; it was also reflected in his style of organizing. In meetings he always spoke the loudest and longest, using academic jargon that made any discussion excruciatingly more complex than necessary. The academic-speak intimidated people less educated than him because he seemed to know more about radical politics than anyone else. He would talk down to other men in the group, especially those he perceived to be less intelligent than him, which was basically everybody. Then he'd switch gears, apologize for dominating the space, and acknowledge his need to check his male privilege. Ironically, when people did attempt to call him out on his shit, he would feign ignorance—what could they mean, saying that his behavior was masculinist and sexist? He'd complain of being infantilized, refusing to see how he infantilized people all the time. The fact that he was a man of color who could talk a good game about racism and racial-justice struggles masked his abusive behaviors in both radical organizations and his personal relationships. As one of his former partners shared with me, "His radical race analysis allowed people (mostly men but occasionally women as well) to forgive him for being dominating and abusive in his relationships. Womyn had to check their critique of his behavior at the door, lest we lose a man of color in the movement." One of the reasons it is so difficult to hold men of color accountable for reproducing gender violence is that women of color and white activists continue to be invested in the idea that men of color have it harder than anyone else. How do you hold someone accountable when you believe he is target number one for the state?

Unfortunately he wasn't the only man like this I encountered in radical spaces—just one of the smarter ones. Reviewing old e-mails, I am shocked at the number of e-mails from men I organized with that were abusive in tone and content, how easily they would talk down to others for minor mistakes. I am more surprised at my meek, diplomatic responses—like an abuse survivor—as I attempted to placate compañeros who saw nothing wrong with yelling at their partners, friends, and other organizers. There were men like this in various organizations I worked with. The one who called his girlfriend a bitch in front of a group of youth of color during a summer encuentro we were hosting. The one who sexually harassed a queer Chicana couple during a trip to México, trying to pressure them into a threesome. The guys who said they would complete a task, didn't do it, brushed off their compañeras' demands for accountability, let those women take over the task, and when it was finished took all the credit for someone else's hard work. The graduate student who hit his partner—and everyone knew he'd done it, but whenever anyone asked, people would just look ashamed and embarrassed and mumble, "It's complicated." The ones who constantly demeaned queer folks, even people they organized with. Especially the one who thought it would be a revolutionary act to "kill all these faggots, these niggas on the down low, who are fucking up our children, fucking up our homes, fucking up our world, and fucking up our lives!" The one who would shout you down in a meeting or tell you that you couldn't be a feminist because you were too pretty. Or the one who thought homosexuality was a disease from Europe.

Yeah, that guy.

Most of those guys probably weren't informants. Which is a pity because it means they are not getting paid a dime for all the destructive work they do. We might think of these misogynists as inadvertent agents of the state. Regardless of whether they are actually informants or not, the work that they do supports the state's ongoing

campaign of terror against social movements and the people who create them. When queer organizers are humiliated and their political struggles sidelined, that is part of an ongoing state project of violence against radicals. When women are knowingly given STIs, physically abused, dismissed in meetings, pushed aside, and forced out of radical organizing spaces while our allies defend known misogynists, organizers collude in the state's efforts to destroy us.

The state has already understood a fact that the Left has struggled to accept: misogynists make great informants. Before or regardless of whether they are ever recruited by the state to disrupt a movement or destabilize an organization, they've likely become well versed in practices of disruptive behavior. They require almost no training and can start the work immediately. What's more paralyzing to our work than when women and/or queer folks leave our movements because they have been repeatedly lied to, humiliated, physically/verbally/emotionally/sexually abused? Or when you have to postpone conversations about the work so that you can devote group meetings to addressing an individual member's most recent offense? Or when that person spreads misinformation, creating confusion and friction among radical groups? Nothing slows down movement building like a misogynist.

What the FBI gets is that when there are people in activist spaces who are committed to taking power and who understand power as domination, our movements will never realize their potential to remake this world. If our energies are absorbed recuperating from the messes that informants (and people who just act like them) create, we will never be able to focus on the real work of getting free and building the kinds of life-affirming, people-centered communities that we want to live in. To paraphrase bell hooks, where there is a will to dominate there can be no justice, because we will inevitably continue reproducing the same kinds of injustice we claim to be struggling against. It is time for our movements to undergo a radical change from the inside out.

Looking Forward: Creating Gender Justice in our Movements

Radical movements cannot afford the destruction that gender violence creates. If we underestimate the political implications of patriarchal behaviors in our communities, the work will not survive.

Lately I've been turning to the work of queers/feminists of color to think through how to challenge these behaviors in our movements. I've been reading the autobiographies of women who lived through the chaos of social movements debilitated by machismo. I'm revisiting the work of bell hooks, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Gioconda Belli, Margaret Randall, Elaine Brown, Pearl Cleage, Ntozake Shange, and Gloria Anzaldúa to see how other women negotiated gender violence in these spaces and to problematize neat or easy answers about how violence is reproduced in our communities. Newer work by radical feminists of color has also been incredibly helpful, especially the zine *Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Partner Abuse in Activist Communities*, edited by Ching-In Chen, Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha.

But there are many resources for confronting this dilemma beyond books. The simple act of speaking and sharing our truths is one of the most powerful tools we have. I've been speaking to my elders, older women of color in struggle who have experienced the things I'm struggling against, and swapping survival stories with other women. In summer 2008 I began doing workshops on ending misogyny and building collective forms of accountability with Cristina Tzintzún, an Austin-based labor organizer and author of the essay "Killing Misogyny: A Personal Story of Love, Violence, and Strategies for Survival." We have also begun the even more liberating practice of naming our experiences publicly and calling on our communities to address what we and so many others have experienced.

Dismantling misogyny cannot be work that only women do. We all must do the work because the survival of our movements depends on it. Until we make radical feminist and queer political ethics that directly challenge heteropatriarchal forms of organizing

central to our political practice, radical movements will continue to be devastated by the antics of Brandon Darbys (and folks who aren't informants but just act like them). A queer, radical, feminist ethic of accountability would challenge us to recognize how gender violence is reproduced in our communities, relationships, and organizing practices. Although there are many ways to do this, I want to suggest that there are three key steps that we can take to begin. First, we must support women and queer people in our movements who have experienced interpersonal violence and engage in a collective process of healing. Second, we must initiate a collective dialogue about how we want our communities to look and how to make them safe for everyone. Third, we must develop a model for collective accountability that truly treats the personal as political and helps us to begin practicing justice in our communities. When we allow women/queer organizers to leave activist spaces and protect people whose violence provoked their departure, we are saying we value these de facto state agents who disrupt the work more than we value people whose labor builds and sustains movements.

As angry as gender violence on the Left makes me, I am hopeful. I believe we have the capacity to change and create more justice in our movements. We don't have to start witch hunts to reveal misogynists and informants. They out themselves every time they refuse to apologize, take ownership of their actions, start conflicts and refuse to work them out through consensus, mistreat their compañer@s. We don't have to look for them, but when we are presented with their destructive behaviors we have to hold them accountable. Our strategies don't have to be punitive; people are entitled to their mistakes. But we should expect that people will own those actions and not allow them to become a pattern.

We have a right to be angry when the communities we build that are supposed to be the model for a better, more just world harbor the same kinds of anti-queer, anti-woman, racist violence that pervades society. As radical organizers we must hold each other accountable and not enable misogynists to assert so much power in these spaces. Not allow them to be the faces, voices, and leaders of these movements. Not allow them to rape a compañera and then be on the fucking five o' clock news. In Brandon Darby's case, even if no one suspected he was an informant, his domineering and macho behavior should have been all that was needed to call his leadership into question. By not allowing misogyny to take root in our communities and movements, we not only protect ourselves from the efforts of the state to destroy our work but also create stronger movements that cannot be destroyed from within.

[1] I use the term gender violence to refer to the ways in which homophobia and misogyny are rooted in heteronormative understandings of gender identity and gender roles. Heterosexism not only polices non-normative sexualities but also reproduces normative gender roles and identities that reinforce the logic of patriarchy and male privilege.

[2] I learned this from informal conversations with women who had organized with Darby in Austin and New Orleans while participating in the Austin Informants Working Group, which was formed by people who had worked with Darby and were stunned by his revelation that he was an FBI informant.

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This article is great. Hands down one of the best critiques I have read in a while. I just think it's so sad that so many great activists had to through this type of stuff. Reading about inspiring activists like Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Margaret Randall, Elaine Brown, and Gloria Anzaldúa and knowing they had to go though these types of things just make me wonder what the hell type of movement people are trying to build nowadays. It's

like people have learned nothing from the past.

I was previously in a Marxist grouping and I think maybe that's why some people in the the leadership, were always so dismissive of feminism and its critical theory. Under the guise of criticizing bourgeois tendencies they were probably trying to shy away from criticism of the way they run things. It's easier to dismiss manifestations of chauvinism, patriarchy, hierarchy, machismo and all sorts of related "privilege" when you don't have a critical theory to analyze it. Then your concerns can just be dismissed or marginalized as not following the proper political line or proletarian/working class mindset.

It is liberating to speak out against this type of behavior and I don't think it should be limited to or act as a burden placed on the females in social movements. Men need to call out people on their bullshit too. We need to speak out and expose this type of behavior. It's not just about checking ourselves and trying build up our own individualistic character. We have to be concerned for building a strong movement that's based on a solid footing that treats all people with dignity and respect.

I just wonder how you are supposed to be able to change things? I don't understand how issues like this can't be of concern to everyone in a social movement. I work in a domestic violence intervention non-profit and I wonder if that is what makes me so keen to these issues. But, there has to be a way to get people to value these issues in the normal functioning of a group.

A few comments from the repost on truthout really jumped out at me:

Comment from Truthout repost: People do tend to gravitate toward situations and groups they think will let them get away with letting their pathologies play out.

Other comment: The problem, however, is this – they could not so easily disrupt "the work" if that false premise was not already well established. That "the work" was more important than the feelings of one individual.

Further comment: I also think that women working hard in the movements must stand up in meetings and call out this behavior in no uncertain terms and demand redress. If this doesn't work, we should not leave the group, but rather stay and point out at every meeting that the group is allowing someone to be aggressive, dominating, and/or misbehaving. We have got to start having each other's back when a bully is confronted in our organizations.

Another comment: The title seems to get it backwards, though. It's not that misogynists make great informants. It seems more like it's tough to smoke out informants because radical movements have plenty of people around who are not honest about what they claim to represent, esp. their position towards privilege.

other comments: On the other hand, in many nominally anarchist or leftist communities, misogyny and other forms of traditional values run amok, excused by a sacred regard for individual fiat or fear of confrontation. In these kinds of communities, there is no basis for singling out police agents due to their regressive values because the entire community is permeated with these regressive values.

As far as Darby is concerned, it appears to me that, like much of the movement, he had no clear unity on matters of political principle and that self-interest (in the enrichment of his ego, rather than something as obvious as money) was his driving motivation for being in the movement. I think that Darby was in it for the adventure, the feeling of doing something good in a world full of bullshit, and, eventually, to maintain a leadership position in the hierarchy of Common Ground. This isn't enough to sustain most people in the face of government repression, and, indeed, Darby is far from the first person from the anarchist scene to provide information to the police.

REPLY  JULY 16, 2010 AT 12:01 AM

○ tripcord says:

While I don't have a problem with the gist of the article, on the matter of Darby, I feel that it does let Malik Rahim and the rest of Common Ground management off too easily for creating a situation where he could rise to such influence. Common

Ground higher ups were so inclined to avoid accountability of their screw-ups, they actively opposed transparency and fostered the very environment conducive to giving power to Brandon Darby. Malik may have mourned the fact that Darby was using his influence inappropriately, but he did nothing effective to rectify it, leading me to believe he himself dismissed the conflicts as trivial. The inner circle of Common Ground, which misleadingly billed itself as a collective for a long while, acted more like a clique of politicians than a group of concerned activists.

And then there were those who sought to silence Common Grounds critics, on account of them harming the movement, and further stifled discussion and thwarted transparency. By the time problems had snowballed into a mess that could not be contained or ignored, the organization had imploded and destroyed itself, and sent Darby off on a path that would lead to becoming an informant.

REPLY  MAY 24, 2012 AT 1:27 PM

- ○ ▲ ○ JediMindTrick ○ ▲ ○ (@Magpieluvsyou) says:
I am very interested in learning more about Common Ground and Malik and whether they are an organization I can trust to work with. Currently I am being contacted by someone from Occupy Wall Street who wants my Occupy The Stage in NOLA to work with Common Ground, but I have an uneasy feeling. I would like to learn more of the history of the environment there. Please contact me on Twitter or at my email @magpieluvsyou or sneakofweasels@gmail.com if that is helpful.

 SEPTEMBER 5, 2012 AT 10:03 PM

- 3. K. Lovich says:
Thank you for posting/writing this! It means so much to see this analysis put into such a clear articulate form. So healing for me to read.

REPLY  JULY 16, 2010 AT 2:09 AM

- 4. Jan Marie says:
Like water on parched earth! Thank you so much for this article.
As a life long lesbian feminist of color, I can pinpoint the 2 public mass humiliations that drove me out of the early social justice movement. First was the statement given by Stokely Carmichael when ask what position women should play in the moment, he jokingly responded "prone". Second was at a Panther rally in Washington, DC. Huey P. Newton was the speaker. I was already uncomfortable with the ambient level of violence in the men around me, but it was Huey's statement that "we will level the earth to regain our manhood", [which received thunderous applause], that sent me right out the door. Ya just knew that some women in that crowd were going to be marginalized, beaten, raped or other wise "put in their place", by someone intent on regaining his manhood. For me, the struggle had been prioritized and it was clearly a single issue and by my sex I was not included, by my sexuality I was targeted.

Of course that left most of us with either an exclusively white male gay movement or equally exclusive white feminist movement. The former being rife with it's own racism and the latter being oblivious to the class issues that defined the struggles of women of color. At the same time, feminists like Betty Freidan were rabidly homophobic and terrified of any intimation that some of the most ardent feminists were lesbians. For me, it was the courage of Audre Lourde and Flo Kennedy that got me over those rough years. For me it is truly about the triple oppression of being a lesbian woman of color, in a society the was and is racist, sexist and homophobic.

REPLY  JULY 16, 2010 AT 5:42 PM

- 5. Élise Hendrick says:
Thank you for this piece. It was a cathartic read, because a guy just like this – simultaneously charismatic and hateful, and constantly attacking the female and queer members, great at distracting from the shit he'd start by attacking others – was one of the main factors in the downfall of a local civil rights organisation I worked with years ago.

REPLY  JULY 16, 2010 AT 10:06 PM

6. Pingback: Why misogynists make great informants | Politics in the Zeros

7.  wkh says:

Best article ever. And I bet people all over the world striving for social justice can insert names of misogynists (who may actually be masquerading as women and transfolks too believe it or not) from their activists circles as well. A big hells yeah for finally speaking out and admitting there's a nasty foul odor within as well. And don't let ANYONE tell you that speaking out is not showing solidarity! Being chastised for speaking out is NOT solidarity, it's DYSFUNCTION.

REPLY  JULY 17, 2010 AT 10:14 PM

8.  Gilbert James says:

Thank you for this. I promise to strive to live my life with humility and eradicate heteropatriarchal forms from my being. My heart grieves for the oppression and violence my sisters, transgenders, queers, and men have experienced. I wish you love and respect.

REPLY  JULY 17, 2010 AT 10:21 PM

o  Gilbert James says:

... in afterthought, rather than men, I wish I had said, "and brothers."

REPLY  JULY 17, 2010 AT 10:23 PM

9.  Rosa Clemente, 2008 Green Party VP Candidate says:

Fantastic Article!!

REPLY  JULY 18, 2010 AT 6:07 AM

10. Pingback: REPOST of a REPOST of a REPOST: Why Misogynists Make Great Informants « NO BOSSES, NO BOYFRIENDS

11.  Marc Hudson says:

Insightful stuff, and uncomfortable reading. Will circulate.

REPLY  JULY 18, 2010 AT 11:10 PM

12.  Alison Park says:

I am so grateful to have read this article. I am always stunned and hurt by the way articulated and unarticulated gender violence thrive and co-exist in movement spaces. Issues around violence against women (rape, domestic violence, stalking, media violence, etc.), transphobia and the right to abortion and other "women's" issues, including division of labor and childcare issues in movements, have to stop being marginalize, de-prioritized and silenced. Thank you so much for this well-written, hope-creating article Courtney (and whoever from INCITE posted this).

REPLY  JULY 19, 2010 AT 2:00 PM

13.  Liberal Realist says:

I have to say, I thought the article was full of supposition and unsubstantiated claims.

REPLY  JULY 19, 2010 AT 11:29 PM

14.  Ocahn's Razor says:

This is factually nonsense. Darby wasn't always a mole. He turned into one because of the frequent conflicts he had with people who were dogmatic in the leftist movements. He couldn't distinguish between the worth of this lofty goals and the fact that idiots often may agree with such lofty goals- but that doesn't mean the goals themselves are bad just because some in-your-face lesbians or uber-PC whiner nips at your heels about everything. He let his emotional response to the most annoying fanatics undermine his faith in the goals. And that's when he turned.

REPLY  JULY 20, 2010 AT 2:13 AM

o  tghi says:

Pretty impressive, the all-consuming power of "in-your-face lesbians" to "turn" men accused of sexual assault into government informants. Now I guess we all know who to hold accountable for Darby's choices! ... Oh wait.

REPLY 📅 JULY 20, 2010 AT 4:56 AM

- inciteblog says:
In response to Ocahn's Razor's comment, we'd like to remind everyone of our [comment policy](#). If this type of commenting behavior continues, we will delete the comment in order to maintain a respectful and thoughtful space for rich and productive dialogue.

REPLY 📅 JULY 21, 2010 AT 2:31 PM

- Charcuterian says:
Booo.
hiss.

REPLY 📅 JULY 29, 2010 AT 7:59 PM

- arwyn says:
I'm not sure when you worked with darby, but when i worked with him he was self-centered, sexist, anti-consensus and manipulative. While he was informing on me to the FBI, he accused 3 of my friends of being snitches. He made his choice, to benefit himself and fuck other people over, "in-your-face lesbians" and "uber-PC whiners" didn't make up his mind for him. And even if he was pushed away from radical politics by dogmatic thinking, it only further proves that he had nothing truly invested in radical change or anti-authoritarian politics.
Also, the loftiest goals i know of him having were sleeping with girls 10 years younger than him and being seen "rescuing people".

REPLY 📅 SEPTEMBER 1, 2010 AT 11:22 AM

- Kate P. (@Amadaun6) says:
I was going to say, what kind of "lofty goals" are we talking about here? (thanks for your input @arwyn)
Besides, it seems to me that one of the main points in Morris' article is that the harms done by active informants and those who perpetuate misogyny/gender violence aren't all that different. When and why Darby added 'informant' to his list of undesirable traits has little relevance.

📅 DECEMBER 29, 2011 AT 10:42 PM

15. The Voracious Vegan says:
Tremendous, thank you for this. I have been thinking/feeling many of these things lately and am thrilled to see them written in such a powerful, eloquent piece. I already expect sexism and misogyny in the world at large, but to find it in activist/social justice circles is even more disheartening. This post is brilliant, thank you.

REPLY 📅 JULY 20, 2010 AT 5:13 AM

16. Pingback: Dhamma As Misogyny Healer, Informant Repellent « Kloncke

17. Amory says:
THANK YOU for sharing this! You have no idea how wonderful it was to read.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Other resources I've found super useful in organizing around community accountability & alternatives to policing regarding SA & DV in radical communities include Generation Five's document on Transformative Justice, the Philly's Pissed web site's links section (phillyspissed.net), and the Philly Stands Up blog.

Thank you again, soooo so much for sharing this.

REPLY 📅 JULY 21, 2010 AT 1:39 PM

18. Pingback: Some thoughts on Al Gore and misogynistic "progressive" leadership «

Planning the Day

19. Papo Z. says:
This is an outstanding analysis of the unfortunate and enduring realities that debilitate social justice movements. The work is hard enough as a it is when misogyny is not *as* prevalent. Thank you for reminding me of my responsibility to my companer@s,

I have had plenty of experience with men and women who hate feminine gender roles and their assumed attributes, and who thrive on group conflict or otherwise serve their egos through “the work” of social justice. The most common phrase such a person might speak of when addressing misogyny or gender hatred would be “accountability.”

The term is used in this article to denote what we need, but it is not defined even by reference. The term means, literally, “what’s your story?” Or put another way, to demand accountability is to demand from someone an account of how and why they thought that their actions were viable, appropriate or moral. Too often the part where facts are found and an account is demanded from the accused is totally absent from our collective efforts. Too often we do not confront misbehavior by ANYONE in our movements, especially when that person claims special status or identity. The author nods to this reality when she quotes activists who mutter “it’s complicated” in response to some abuse “everyone knew” was going on. How did they know what they “know?”

Brandon Darby made his account. He posted on why he did what he did, and he makes a great case for the author’s assertions. He’s a poster boy for misogyny becoming the direct agent of the State. But he’s only one example, and not really typical of informants or agents in our movements. But his role for the author is served best because of his race and his gender and his self-admitted status as a confirmed agent of the state. He’s easy to label, easier to hate for all the wrong reasons.

Informants in our movements are usually sent by an agency (I say this based on my personal investigations and reading of historical accounts) and Agents Provocateurs are usually self-nominated and misguided individualists (Same source). Whether you blame the state for the appearance of the latter, you can only blame our movement’s incohesion and inability to deal openly with internal conflict for their continued existence in the roles which serve to divide us.

Unless and until men (especially white men) are held accountable and actually challenged by persons in the movement in an open manner, this problem will continue to fester. What happens instead is the soft approach; the telltale abuse survivor adaptation of slander, often anonymously posted or subversively communicated.

Oh, sure it is an effective way to get at the real bastards and undercut their authority. But it is also a great way to play on the fears, ideals, and guilt of the left in general, and isolate the not-so-bastards. Because we each want so earnestly to be good allies, we tend to adopt the “believe the victim” maxim. And that is a great thing to offer when it is time to listen in private to someone who needs to tell their story. But it is a toxic thing to turn around and repeat that story as if you “know” it to be true. It is especially toxic to turn that “knowledge” of only one side of the story into action in the community. Often that action is only symbolic, sometimes it is violence. Would any of us tolerate a state trial which muzzled the defense attorney? We sure would – if the accused were a white male who pisses us off in a meeting!

We hold governments to be accountable through an open medium, and expect debate and counter argument. But too often we throw this out when we hear rumors of bad behavior by the guy who pisses us off in a meeting. We expect the government or corporations to come clean with an account of what they are doing, and yet almost never actually do that hard work when it comes time to find out whether someone who was accused really is that bastard their former partner says they were.

Abuse is real, and it needs to be challenged wherever we find it. But too often, we really want validation and not a harder search for the truth – and we are too easily swayed by anyone who tells us we’re special, that our own bad behavior really isn’t as bad, or bad enough, to be addressed. Isn’t that what the misogynists say? It sure is. The most disgusting thing I ever heard a misogynist say was that she was not responsible for her abuse because of her gender.

I am a man, and I have made mistakes for which I will always mourn. But I am a man,