

Dominant culture - Parwaneh

CW: Burn out, panic attacks, Mackery

Hello,

I am Parwaneh and I am part of queering defaults. When I started the telegram group "The future is intersectional" 2 years ago, I was looking for spaces where I could fit in as a multi-marginalised person. But I don't talk about my experiences of discrimination today, although I could say a lot about it. Today I want to address an issue that affects us all. I want to talk about being white and masculinity. How this affects us all? I don't mean that we all suffer from the fact that there are old white wealthy hetero-cis men, with healthy norm bodies (although of course we do). Today I want to talk about the old white man within ourselves. I'll call mine Simon.

I'm sure many of us have worked with, lived with or been in friendships or other relationships with white cis men and thought to ourselves: dude, why is every sentence a dick comparison. Many may have even drawn conclusions from this and are increasingly retreating into safer spaces for FLINTA*, Bi_Poc or queers.

I too have withdrawn more and more and in all areas from white cis men or other quite privileged people over the last few years. Because there was just always a lack of understanding of how I talk about my positioning and power relations. Because I kept having the same discussions, kept feeling like I had to defend myself. At some point I just didn't have the energy to keep explaining that cultural appropriation and cultural exchange are not the same thing and why gender parts have nothing to do with my gender identity and why I don't want to do all the fucking care work on my own.

But what if we retreat more and more into these safer spaces and still don't feel safe, not at eye level, not respected or just not comfortable?

A few months ago I was introduced to the workbook "turning towards each other". It is about conflicts and one exercise is the "dominant culture check". Our culture is shaped by centuries of brutal colonisation and patriarchal violence. The dominant culture check is meant to help you reflect on these internalised values and patterns. On this day I met Simon. Simon is a perfectionist and really bad at delegating. He's always in a hurry and is quite conflict shy.

I was kind of ashamed to see how many white, male, capitalist values and behaviours I had adopted. It didn't fit my identity, with so much separation from the old white man and from this shit system of patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism. How did I miss that?

Binary thinking, which we always criticise when it comes to gender, is something we have internalised so much in other issues. It's when we keep focusing on what's going wrong and forget what's already working well. When we are convinced of the one right way or when we divide into the people from our community and the others. If we then no longer recognise that people who are part of our community can also be perpetrators and relativise their mistakes.

Or how often have I slogged myself into burn-out, mental break down, a state of social isolation and panic attacks, because I thought I had to deliver. Because I measured my worth by how productive I was and, above all, how perfect. A claim that is naturally doomed to failure. A demand that also leads to avoiding conflict. Because according to this logic, criticism means failure.

And how do we know that we are good? Again and again we fall into the trap of measuring our success by external appreciation. How often have I worked on projects where people were treated disrespectfully, where everyone was burnt out at the end? But the performance was great. There were 100 people there. And next time there will be even more. Because the bigger the better. Besides, xy thought it was good and that means something. Because a jury awarded a prize, I finally know that I'm worth something.

Can we please stop glorifying huzzle culture.

If we keep thinking we can do it all by ourselves and we don't need any help. Because if I do everything on my own, then no one will take any part of the spotlight away from me. How often do we look at a photo and judge it only by how good we look in it ourselves and not by how we or everyone in it was feeling when the photo was taken?

We've all become pretty good at spotting toxic masculinity when it involves men. And white-dominant behaviour when it comes to potatoes. But we are also shaped by the social structures we live in. We can wrap it up nicely and say I'm marginalised, then it's emancipatory when the world revolves around me, but then it just remains a copy in bright colours of the shit we actually want to get out of.

And not to fall into my own trap: Of course, a lot of things are going really well, even though we live in this system. Because there are also centuries of cultures that practice care and resilience. How often have I witnessed people celebrating each other for their different strengths instead of discussing what is more important. How often conflicts are conducted without fragility, openly and honestly and with the trust that the other person is really listening and not just wanting to be right. How often have I been allowed to work in flat hierarchies in which everyone was nevertheless given a certain amount of freedom and competence to make decisions. It is becoming more and more natural to see mistakes as an opportunity to learn.

Now Simon is not a little white cis-macker who lives with me, whom I can simply kick out. I am Simon. I always have been and I always will be, somehow at least a little bit. Because as much as my perfectionism annoys me, I pay attention to details. And as much as I let schedules stress me out, it helps me to respect other people's time. And as much as I'm working on not being so conflict-averse, this shyness helps me to stay diplomatic.

So as frustrated as I am time and again - with others and with myself - I have also been able to learn and grow from this. I can only recommend everyone to go in search of the little white capitalist in you and put him in his place. But I wouldn't banish him completely either.