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Finite to Fail, Infinite to Venture:

Interactivism and Relational Ethics

Rachel Rosenbaum

Senior Honors Thesis

Department of Anthropology

Colby College

May 2013

My friends are my estate.
-Emily Dickinson

To the EDFC- you are my family and my inspiration.
May you *always* be finite to fail but infinite to venture.

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Hamster, twerking, swag.

Afros, silly sentences.

Cube life, all my love.

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And finally, my dearest friends in the EDFC. All the love in the world. Your voices are beautiful and your spirits, magical.

Key of Critical Themes

✚ = Collaboration

★ = Anti-Hierarchy

⊙ = Creativity

☒ = Space

∞ = Possibilities

▲ = Direct Action

• = Affinity

◆ = Anonymity

■ = Relational Ethics

✎ = Theory and Praxis

✱ = Imagination

✿ = Mutual Aid

✿ = Belonging

● = Affect

For the curious reader...

Use this key of themes to deepen your understanding of the fragmented voices that scatter the text.

Each symbol is meant to bring a playful side to the analytical work involved in interpretation.

Have fun with the puzzle.

Spaces and Places

Pulver Pavilion/ Cotter Union: Pulver Pavilion is the student center on campus. This building contains the bookstore, the Pugh Center, many event spaces, the offices of campus life, a café, the information desk, the campus post office, and study and hangout spaces. This space is highly significant to the campus. It separates the historically male and female sides of campus and is an epicenter of student traffic. This space is where endless events are held ranging from lectures to student dances and concerts.

The Pugh Center: The Pugh Center was created in 1996 after the proposal from the student group “Students of Color United for Change.” In their proposal they advocated for multicultural housing and their proposal was later turned down. However, a task force was assembled comprised of trustees, alumni, faculty, students, and staff eventually recommending that a space in a centrally located building should be constructed and dedicated to issues of multiculturalism. Today this space houses many campus groups, the most central of which is the Pugh Community Board. Its mission states that The Pugh Center is there to “promote multicultural communication and understanding.” This space is very central to the lives of individuals in the EDFC. It is also one of the spaces that students who identify as non-normative feel the most safe.

Page: Page is an event space in Pulver where most Colby dances take place.

PCB: PCB stands for the Pugh Community Board. PCB is a student run group that does programming to increase events geared towards issues of multiculturalism. They are responsible for many amazing initiatives on campus, including bringing activists Angela Davis and Gloria Steinem to speak at Colby.

SOBU/SOBHU: Students for Black Unity formed during the occupation of Lorimer Chapel. It later changed to Students for Black and Hispanic Unity and is a large club on campus today.

The Bridge: The Bridge is Colby’s all-inclusive queer and ally community. The Bridge does programming to support LGBTQ issues and acts as a supportive community.

The Feminist Alliance: The Feminist Alliance is a club on campus formed to promote issues of gender equality and sexual diversity.

The Civil Discourse: The Civil Discourse is school-wide e-mail bulletin where anyone can post.

The Colby Echo: The Echo is the student-run school newspaper.

Miller: Miller is Colby’s library and houses classrooms for the humanities departments.

Diamond: The Diamond Building is the social sciences academic building.

GSD Center: GSD is short for The Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource center.

TBTN: Take Back the Night is a national movement to march against sexual violence. Stop the silence, end the violence.

Occupy Colby: This was a gathering started by a coalition of students and faculty inspired by the occupy movement. The meetings took place in the Diamond building.

Openings

Forever is composed of nows.
-Emily Dickinson



It is so easy for students at Colby College¹ to graduate without ever knowing the legacies of those who came before them; the students who made lasting change, acted with compassion, fought for social justice, respected human difference and strove for diversity. Some of their names are on the buildings they learn in and sleep in, yet too often they never get to know their stories. In my time at Colby I have only managed to recover snippets of the history of Colby activists in my daily life; a passing remark about Mary Low, Colby's first female student, or abolitionist, Elijah Parish Lovejoy.² But what did I really know about them? It was not until I did some digging that I found out more about some of these remarkable individuals. But I kept finding myself wanting to know more. I had so many questions. How did something like "The Coalition for Institutional Accountability"³ at Colby come to be? How did these individuals *feel* during their time here? How did they experience instances of injustice? How did they make sense of their activism? I wanted to hear from these activists. I wanted to know them and understand what propelled their activism. What inspired them and created the possibilities of their visions for change? I wanted to know, and I still want to know, what conditioned⁴ their activism?

¹ When I refer to Colby College throughout the text, I am referring to both the institution and the campus culture. If I mean to emphasize one over the other than I will explicitly state which part of Colby I am referring to. I also delineate certain actors within the overarching terms "Colby," "Colby College," or "the Campus."

² See "Activism, Diversity, and Social Justice at Colby College: 1813-2013".

³ A group of queer students and students of color who gathered to protest institutional racism and sexism during a meeting with the board of trustees in 2002.

⁴ I use the term "conditioned" to mean "enabled" and conditions to imply circumstances throughout this text. In using this term I want to acknowledge that saying "conditions of possibility" implies a paradox. Conditions put restraints and limits around possibilities but this is how possibilities sometimes work in institutions. Because of the complex webs of power present throughout Colby, there were often conditions around possibility.

It is my curiosity and admiration for those who dared to dream of a better Colby that promotes my interest in pursuing this project. This project is a story about a group of activists at Colby. It is a narrative that tells what conditions our activism. I tell this story, in part, as my final offering to Colby before I graduate. This story illuminates lives lived here that do not fit with the pristine image that so many institutions thrive on selling. It shows how Colby has hurt us and how we channeled that hurt. This project is a story about people trying to heal in the face of repression and this narrative acts to unravel that repression. It is about student activism, the power of love, and the joy that can be found when we have the courage to rebel. It is a story about imagination and creativity. It is a story about survival. But above all, it is my way of giving back to the people that inspire me. I want their dedication, their unique approach to activism, and their subjectivities to be remembered. They open up spaces of *possibility* at Colby and beyond that should not be silenced or forgotten by the passage of time.



The group of creative activists at the heart of this narrative goes by the public acronym, the “EDFC”. The EDFC is a group that was created in the fall of 2011. It is an anonymous entity and is not officially recognized by the College. Additionally, the majority of students at Colby could not tell you what the EDFC is or who is in it; that is exactly what the group wants. Today there are 21 members comprised of current students and alumni, myself included. The EDFC came together at Colby College when sorrow, anger, frustration, and injustice were the ruling emotions of the campus climate. All of us were enveloped in an environment where occurrences of sexual violence and bias incidents were far too common. There was an explosion of dialogue throughout campus around incidents such as voyeurism, homophobia, and date rape drugs. In

this period the EDFC forged connections through support, friendship, and an urgent desire to act on these issues in new and meaningful ways. The manifesto of the group states:

We are an anonymous group of students committed to making change at Colby College. We have experienced Colby to be a place where our voices are silenced, our artistic expression is stifled, and the issues close to our hearts are ignored. We are dedicated to disrupting norms, fighting apathy, increasing community responsibility, and taking action against oppression. We believe in the power of art to achieve these goals. We do not vandalize. We do not destroy. We create. We take responsibility for our creations by clearing them when they have served their purpose. We are learning about what it means to be student activists. We are learning about what it means to be compassionate, to be empathetic, and to listen. Each of us brings unique experiences and perspectives, the sum of which inform our work. Together, we weave a quilt of strength and love. We strive to take back public spaces and use them to inspire dialogue, interactive creativity, and free expression. We believe that it is finite to fail, but infinite to venture.⁵

As a group, we exercise our will to imagine. To imagine a community not ruled by systems of suppression, silencing, inequality, or domination. We are imagining a world constituted in love, respect for human difference, creativity, interaction, and healing.

This group of compassionate learners occupies a unique space at Colby that dwells in possibility. This project seeks to tell our story. To do this, I focus on the dialectic between the EDFC, Colby College, and the subjectivities of the members of the EDFC. This allows me to illuminate how Colby led to the creation of the EDFC, how the EDFC changed and influenced the members, how the EDFC changed Colby, and then what the existence of the EDFC can say about Colby. My goals are to highlight the subjectivity of the members, the creation of the collective, and the process of our activism in ways that reveal the broader implications that this group has on: 1) what makes activism effective, 2) what inhibits and incites activism at Colby,

⁵ The members of the group wrote the manifesto in December of 2012 in a collaboration with each other.

and 3) what does this model of activism allow and constrain. I want to interrogate what the very existence of the EDFC means about Colby as an institution. In this project I also strive to make sense of the activism of the EDFC in critical ways, asking ultimately if such an experience is sustainable and how the EDFC was effective.



At one level, this thesis is about my own personal journey. This project forced me to think about how I understand myself as an activist, as a member of the EDFC, and as a graduating senior from Colby College. This thesis is clearly my attempt to retrospectively make sense of the EDFC and my time at Colby. It shows how I make sense of approaches to activism, how I make sense of my strong connections to the members in the EDFC, and how I reconcile the tensions and ambiguities of trying to be an activist at Colby College. This project is about researching my own activism as well as the activism of those I admire. Consequently, this project is deeply reflexive. Luis Fernandez comments on the utilization of reflexivity as a research method:

Equally important for ethical research is the notion of reflexivity. Reflexivity, at its most basic level, is the ability of a person to stand back and assess aspects of her own behavior, society, power, and culture in relation to such factors as motivation and meaning (Steier 1991). In relation to ethnography, reflexivity represents a deep questioning of objectivity, of clean and unproblematic separation between the researcher and those researched. It involves understanding that in saying something about the people you study, you are also saying equally as much about yourself, since all of your passions, thoughts, and feelings inform your curiosity and the selection of what you study. Reflexivity signals the understanding that an observer is just as much part of the social setting, context, and culture that she is trying to understand. Rather than falling back on the notion that “objective distance” is needed for producing “truth,” a reflexive approach embraces interaction and focuses on uncovering situated knowledge by encouraging participation and involvement, in the space and time of those whom one studies (Fernandez 2009: 99).

This project muddles the distinction between the researcher and the researched because I am exploring aspects of my everyday life. I include a high level of reflexivity because it is the only

way to acknowledge my positionality as a member of the EDFC. In attempting to tell the story of the EDFC, I have to tell my story as well. My reflexivity is emphasized throughout the text and I additionally in fragments as a way to interview myself. These fragments appear in **apple casual** font.

To tell our story, I conducted interviews with 10 of the members of the EDFC. The other members were either unable to be interviewed, abroad during the year, or alumnae of Colby. However, the voices of those who were not interviewed reverberate through my words and my memories of this special group of people. Without each of them, this project could not exist. Many of my ideas and my questions were directly informed by my relationships with these individuals and my experiences as a part of the EDFC. The methodology of this project reflects our approach to activism in that it was participatory and collaborative. Many of the members were directly involved in how this project came together, from the organizational structure to the formulation of my research questions. They edited drafts, helped me grapple with my positionality, and encouraged me to tell our story. It is also necessary to mention that I was not on campus during the spring of 2012. My involvement with the EDFC continued virtually through our private Facebook page and many Skype conversations. I relied on my interviews and conversations with the members to inform my understanding of the EDFC and the campus climate during the spring. To uphold the anonymity of this group, each individual I interviewed decided how they wanted to be identified. Some chose their own pseudonym while others preferred to be referred to as “anonymous.” Excerpts from my interviews with “anonymous” participants are differentiated using numbers.

The voices of these individuals appear throughout this ethnography mainly in the form of what I call fragments. Their voices are signaled by my use of Century Gothic font and are

outlined with a border. The reason behind this structure is that I did not want to explicitly analyze their responses, but rather I wanted them to speak for themselves.⁶ I incorporate these quotations in moments that are revealing of the topic I am discussing and they work to illuminate various subjectivities throughout the text. Additionally each fragment is accompanied by different symbols, each of which signifies a different theme of my overarching analysis (see Key of Critical Themes, page 6). These fragments allow the structure of this written text to reveal and mirror the EDFC's approach to activism. They are interactive and visually disruptive. This decision to utilize fragments echoes the structure of the edited volume, *Anthrohistory: Unsettling Knowledge, Questioning Discipline* (Bhimull, et al. 2011). Throughout this text the authors play with a range of organizational schemes. The articles in this volume display an engagement with creativity and academic freedom, which inspired me to create my own structural alternatives. In the preface, the authors state:

As part of our engagement and experimentation with anthrohistory, visual fragments throughout the book perforate and suture the text. Photographs, drawings, and quotations explore, connect, and extend the papers and their themes. As fragments, they are shards and particles of revelatory residue that fracture, rupture, shatter, disintegrate, and crack. They are mischievous interruptions weaving in and out of the papers. They unsettle fixity. They open (Bhimull, et al. 2011: 7).

The organization of my interview materials reflects this same goal. The voices of the members are representations of moments. They are the traces of lives lived at Colby and words once said. Their fragmentary nature echoes the necessary incompleteness of the story while also revealing openings and new possibilities.



⁶ I have many reasons behind leaving the quotes from my interviews untouched. I wanted to give the reader a sense of how these individuals speak in their purest, unfiltered forms. I did not want to erase their ways of speaking with my own words. I acknowledge the potential risk that quotes may be less readable this way, but this risk is worth having their voices speak for themselves.

I am compelled to do this project because it tells the story of people whom I know to be the most caring, compassionate, and empathetic voices I have ever encountered. They show me the persistence of kindness and caring. They show me everyday that “where there is power, there is resistance” and this resistance can come in unexpected places and manifest in unexpected ways (Foucault 1978: 95). This group is a rare glimpse into a truly egalitarian moment, an anarchist moment, a moment of dreamers, lovers, a moment of coming together. This group is significant in the ways it changes Colby, the ways it changes because of Colby, how we as individuals change each other, and the personal transformation that comes with being involved in the EDFC. It is significant in how our moment as rebels, sense makers, artists, and activists can show how we carve out space for ourselves and others and enact a semblance of agency to heal and to dream and to imagine what is *possible* for us. It shows that *how* we practice activism matters.

I call the specific type of activism that characterizes The EDFC “interactivism⁷.” This is a term I devised to describe our work. It is the combination of the terms “interactive” and “activism.” Through using this term, I am constructing a different vision of activism. The virtue of this type of activism is interactive creativity. This involves types of creative, spatial, and visible occupations of public space that demand the Colby community to engage and respond. These interventions prompt a diverse range of public responses that are critical to the interactivist approach.

With this project I ultimately want to ask what is at stake for Colby. Colby has been the place that I have called home for four years. It is a place I learn and grow, and it is a place where

⁷ This term developed when I wrote a paper during my time in Beirut, Lebanon during the spring of 2012 about a series of “banners” created by the EDFC that occupied our student center.

I become simultaneously empowered and disempowered, created and destroyed. The EDFC was a salvation for me in a time of desperation and intense sadness at Colby because it affirmed my belief in the power of love and imagination. Through this project, I have come to an understanding that what this group does is deeply significant to Colby and anthropologically significant as a moment of anarchist practice and thought. I interrogate and think critically about how this group came to be. What were the conditions that made this space of possibility possible?

In the chapter entitled “Creation,” I discuss my memories of how the EDFC came to be, delving into various aspects that conditioned our activism as a collective and what made the space of the EDFC possible. Here, I also incorporate other members’ memories and reflections on the creation of the group and outline a preliminary understanding of what our activism looks like. In the next chapter I build the framework for conceptualizing “interactivism as anarchism” in order to make sense of our approach to activist work. This chapter also introduces the idea of relational ethics, which is a concept that emphasizes the role of emotions and ethical understanding within activist groups. To highlight this theoretical frame, I then discuss manifestations of interactivism as anarchism in moments throughout the globe. Following this chapter, I include an index of moments of EDFC interventions. This table describes the many interactivist actions the EDFC accomplished that I do not otherwise discuss at length but which are listed here to document what our interactivism looks like. The next chapter, “Fragments of an Activist History,” delves into some of the history of activism at Colby and the reflections of students on the broader campus climate. In “Do You Feel Safe?” I illustrate an example of the activism of the EDFC. In this section I develop the subjectivity of the members and several conceptions of our activism. This works to show how our work impacts the rest of campus and

how it impacts individual members. I contrast the efficacy of this intervention to our other work. Then, in “Reflections” I discuss the sustainability of the EDFC, criticisms and ambiguities, and the future of the EDFC. Finally, in the second “Openings” chapter I come back to the dialectical interplays between the EDFC and Colby College and the overall significance of this project which is to open up further possibilities of being.

Creation

*People need hard times and oppression to develop psychic muscles.
-Emily Dickinson*



*They might not need me; but they might. I'll let my head be just in sight; a smile as small as mine
might be precisely their necessity.
-Emily Dickinson*




For the past three years I have spent a considerable amount of time trying to make sense of activism and my identity as an activist. Like many naïve eighteen year olds, I came to Colby College thinking I was a globally aware student with a great deal of experience raising awareness and funds for a range of international development issues and humanitarian crises. I considered myself an involved person. At Colby, as a member of many clubs, an avid event planner, and a believer in social justice it was somewhat easy to classify myself as a “campus activist” without really knowing what I meant and what was at stake in that representation. Thankfully, my experiences at Colby took many turns, and my engagement with academia sensitized me, forcing me to be sincerely critical and to think reflexively.

During the spring semester of my sophomore year, my education allowed me to question the implications of my “activism.” Engaging anthropology allowed me to be critical of my assumptions about activism and to be critical about Colby as an institution and a home. Recently I came across a passage from a University of Maine Sociologist, Kim Huisman. In her discussion of a public theatre project by Somalis in Maine, she talks about the importance of an activist oriented education. She says that participation in public pedagogy provided students with, “opportunities to connect their own personal experiences and subjectivities to larger social processes while also problematizing some of their tightly held assumptions about their history and culture” (Huisman 2011: 235). This understanding is in so many ways what I see as the

study of anthropology. For me, anthropology became my way of unlearning harmful ideological frames learned through processes of cultural and historical construction. Anthropology opened up space for me to think critically about every facet of life. I finally had the language to articulate how I was feeling and what I saw around me. In this way, I learned how to make sense and question freely. Anthropology became my way of being and my way to matter.

I have this lived experience that is very negative and while even though I'm an activist and I'm trying to change that lived experience for others, I think it's my academics that keep me going. Because it is in my academics that I see that possibility for difference that is not necessarily clear in everyday activism. - Timmy Jerhune  



Through my experiences in the classroom and with academia, I was able to encounter issues such as gender and sexuality, race, class, exclusion, and silence with a greater understanding and a different set of questions. As I became more aware of the ethical questions of activism and grew more critical of my environment at Colby, I started to reorient my energies to highlight the issues that were at stake for people on my own campus. My thinking was radically changing and, in turn, I tried to change the ways I engaged activist work. I was trying to make space for myself in order to be able to *see* myself at Colby⁸. I was trying to feel belonging and to learn how I could cope with and hopefully unravel harmful power relationships that were illuminated through my journeys with academia.

Junior fall I had so many intellectual breakthroughs that coincided with all this cool activism on campus so it was like a really serendipitous experience to have those two things combine. -Silas 

⁸ I developed this understanding and phrasing through an engagement with Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* in my "Anthropology, History, Memory" class. She asks in her discussion, "Where is the place that you move into the landscape and can see yourself?" (Steedman 1986/1997: 142). This indicates a fuller understanding of the self. It is a way of making sense of ones identity and ones history to more fully *see* oneself.

I've never been that good at like, while I love academia, I've never been good at test taking or writing, so it's like what am I even doing here? But I mean even from then, from high school, just how much fulfillment and like how real it was to go do that work [activism] instead of like studying chemistry over and over again, I really took that and that's where I started taking my education over my academics and caring more about the outside worlds than my internal world.

Then when I came to Colby, I guess I became an activist in many different settings: social, environmental, corporate, a lot of different settings, but I think I became more of a social activist at Colby. When I was able to learn to deconstruct all these different things and all these power structures that I didn't even realize were what were repressing me before, and there was this point where I realized... I used to be really self-conscious and hated myself and lots of self harm happened when I was younger, but then when I realized that I didn't hate myself but now I like hate society for making me feel that way, that was sort of a turning point.

Academia gave me the language to utilize to explain some of the things I was feeling. Like heteronormativity and social constructions. Like not having the word for heteronormativity but feeling it, I couldn't even explain it, but then when I had that word I was like oh, that's was this is! –Barbara Hammer  

During my sophomore year I started changing my campus involvements. I became active in the Colby Feminist Alliance to tackle issues of gender and sexuality as well as sexual violence. I also started going to weekly Bridge meetings, Colby's all-inclusive queer and ally community. Through these, I collaborated with dedicated and hard working students and built strong relationships and friendships in the process. However, I often felt unfulfilled by my efforts to pursue social change and plan awareness campaigns for issues I felt passionate. It became clear that the majority of the issues I was fighting for and the ways I tried to create change on campus created more frustration and disempowerment for me and were not nourishing. My activism led me to feel that I was “almost but not quite” making change, I was “almost but not quite” feeling belonging, I was “almost but not quite” engaging Colby in a meaningful way.⁹ My

⁹ This is a phrase that Anthropologist, Chandra Bhimull, uses in our frequent discussions in and out of the classroom that draws on the idea of “structures of feeling.”

so-called activism took a lot of effort and I did not feel like I was necessarily creating positive change.

Furthermore, I did not feel that the types of programming in these various groups called for a response by those that were perpetuating the very issues we were fighting against. For example, at a campus forum I went to my sophomore year, students and faculty were airing their grievances about issues of sexism and race tension on campus and the lack of institutional support and recognition of these issues. Students, including myself, talked about how the burden to address these issues often falls on the students. We are expected to both fight these issues through consistent programming and also be students, trying to focus on academics. We could easily identify this tension and many commented that it is hard to be both engaged academically and engaged as an activist, stuck between trying to change Colby and trying to thrive at Colby. The problem for me was that none of the members of the administration were even at this forum and the cross section of students was consistent with every other event that involved the discussion of “contentious” social issues. It became quite clear to me that I needed a way of making sense and making change that allowed me to collapse the distinction between an academic learner and an activist in order to truly express myself. I wanted my academics to nourish my activism and my activism to encourage my academics. It also became clear that Colby needed a different way of engaging the campus in order to involve normative populations at Colby and gather a wider range of responses and dialogue across the campus.

I think my other activism, I don't even think I can consider it activism cause it was always within the system and that it was through clubs that got funding from the college and in that way we were always accountable to our actions. And in that way I think we fit within the rule of the college that we didn't want to make people overtly uncomfortable. –Anonymous¹ ▲

In this period of trying to make sense of these tensions, I was often angry and depressed. This lingering disparity between my academic rewards at Colby and the rest of my life at Colby really disturbed me. I did not want to continue to literally buy into my own misery. No one was forcing me to go to Colby, and in fact attending was an immense privilege! I had to find a way to make my time at Colby rewarding and I wanted it to be okay for other people that were struggling in Colby's environments as well. I knew I was not alone in this desire. There are so many people here who try to make lives better at Colby. Yet their efforts can often be undermined by a culture of silence that saturates the campus. The lack of institutional and cultural support for those who feel marginalized by different aspects of the Colby community creates this culture of silence. And furthermore, this silence is replicated through processes of heteronormativity, tolerance of white supremacist thinking, and a lack of respect for human difference. There are barriers for those of us trying to unmake hegemonic systems of hatred and normativity that marginalize certain experiences and validate others.

I was heartbroken by a conversation I had with one of my best friends, an out gay male on campus. He came to Colby comfortable with identifying as openly gay but Colby's culture of silence that upholds normativity changed that. He told me:

In high school I felt so comfortable being out. I felt like I could truly be myself. But at Colby I have felt my mindset changing. I act straighter with everyday I am here. I buy different clothes and consciously enact different behaviors. I am constantly proving to myself my ability to act straighter even though I am still very visibly out on campus. I find myself looking down on people that act differently. Every time I see a boy with his nails painted or someone not wearing shoes in public I think they are weird and I get mad at them, but in reality I used to be them. I don't like who I've become at Colby and I don't understand how I got here.¹⁰

¹⁰ This quotation is taken from notes in my journal from October 2011. It is as accurate as I could replicate since I wrote it down immediately after our conversation.

The intense presence of heteronormativity¹¹ at Colby has affected the lived experiences of so many of my closest friends. This was not an isolated case. This culture of silence is what made it possible for a student to be brutally raped and tell me she did not want to report it. It is what made it possible for a man to send her threatening text messages so she would not report the crime. Her experience and her pain was ignored and consigned to the dark. I began to see Colby as a place that was hurting people. The most dedicated and caring people that I know were feeling beaten down by the oppressive silences and norms that are too often institutionalized at Colby. These silences are replicated in explicit and implicit practices in various factions of campus. Veena Das insists that violence (or in this case violation), “attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and fold itself into the recesses of the ordinary” (Das 2006: 1). Violations at Colby are normalized and naturalized, becoming silenced. Campus activism was successful in illuminating some of these silences, but there was a need for something new. Something that could unmake silence, hatred, and the anger that was leaving us in the shadows; a way of challenging the status quo while also promoting positivity; a space to freely talk and sincerely listen.

There are so many things that are stifling about Colby. I feel silenced because I don't have enough money. I feel silenced because I'm a woman. And I feel silenced because we have to create these definitions of 'who we are' and we like, we like have to show that we are this major, we are doing this, this is what we're involved in. And you know, I don't know. I don't think people at Colby hear each other, I don't think we know how to listen to each other. When I'm there I only feel like I'm heard by a few, select amount of people. And I feel like the other people I'm around either don't want to hear me or because they aren't interested or because of how they define me. I'm either different from

¹¹ Heteronormativity is the belief that people fall into the distinct, natural, and complementary genders of “man” and “woman” and that with these categories come “natural” or “normal” gender roles in life. This belief also assumes that heterosexuality is everyone’s normal sexual orientation. A heteronormative view states that one’s biological sex, gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation have to align based on normative principles.

them or my opinion doesn't matter or they don't know how to listen to people so voices get lost. – Anonymous² ❁



In the spring of 2011 activism at Colby focused a great deal on issues of gender and sexuality. This included successful campaigns such as the Bridge's NOH8 campaign¹², the well attended Take Back the Night¹³, and the creation of a proposal for a gender and sexual diversity resource center¹⁴. The members of the EDFC all felt that this push for issues of gender and sexuality bled into the fall of 2011 and that the climate of campus built on these issues from the previous semester. Many people were still very angry about the lack of support or institutional momentum behind the gender and sexual diversity resource center. This was further exacerbated by allegations of sexual violence throughout the community and the presence of mostly sexuality-related micro-aggressions¹⁵. As students who identified as campus activists, the soon to be members of the EDFC may have felt these issues more deeply than other members of the community. We felt that it was already our responsibility to respond through our various affiliations. Yet, we could no longer think of a productive way to do this.

I was just trying to invite people who I knew were hurting, who I knew wanted to talk about these things, who were angry. Like I overheard [name omitted] on the phone one day, and I didn't even know her, but she was talking about how angry she was about what had happened on campus so I invited her to a meeting. We just kept inviting people who we knew needed to talk and needed this outlet. –Anonymous¹ ● ❁

¹² This was a campaign on campus that is part of a larger media campaign that fights for marriage, gender, and human equality.

¹³ Take Back the Night is also a national campaign that fights against sexual violence.

¹⁴ Colby is the only college in its conference without a women's or LGBT resource center on campus. This proposal was created by students and faculty to fight for a center on Colby's campus. So far, all that Colby has managed to do is hire a Dean of Gender and Sexual Diversity who resigned after less than a year.

¹⁵ Micro-aggressions are everyday aggressions such as using the word "fag" that can seem like part of the fabric of normal interactions, but really micro-aggressions can be very painful, silencing, and alienating. Micro-aggressions should be taken very seriously because they work to enforce forms of domination.

In the fall of 2011, the day that Frida Kahlo from the feminist activist group the Guerrilla Girls spoke at Colby, I received an e-mail inviting me to a “think tank” for an underground, completely anonymous, art activist group dedicated to fighting against anti-intellectualism, homophobia, sexism, racism, and confronting contentious campus issues. As I read this e-mail it stirred up so much excitement and anticipation and I could not wait for the first meeting! What I remember from that first encounter are the sounds of people talking over each other, but it is such a beautiful sound that reverberates in my memory. It is the sound of what was to come. It was the kind of conversation where the words could not pour out of us fast enough. We all had so many ideas, so many emotions coursing through us, so much we wanted to do. There was crying, and yelling, and a lot of laughter. Even though I knew some of these students very well and others hardly at all, this group immediately became my family.

It started off really small and it grew...we invited people who we thought would be great additions to the group. First it just started with discussions about our feelings, which is a great thing to talk about, and hypothetical things we could do to make Colby a better place, and then it turned into small forms of activism like positive things. –Silas ●

After coming back from abroad I was invited to join the EDFC. I got a text that said: ‘Secret meeting, it’s full of love.’ I went to a meeting and absolutely LOVED it. I loved the love I felt in the room, and the passion, and the acceptance of differing views, which is kind of the basis of everything. And I was totally excited to get involved. –Jesse ◆✿•■✿●

The other members and I began to meet several times a week. During our meetings we would gather in either on-campus spaces such as seminar rooms, or at off-campus houses or on-campus dorm rooms. We would talk about the problems of Colby and how they made us feel, we supported each other, talked intellectually, and brainstormed ways to confront the issues that were plaguing not just us, but other students as well. In these meetings, we created a space where we could really listen and really speak about the issues in tangible ways. During this period of

time, the majority of us followed the events of the Arab Uprisings from 2010-2012¹⁶ and the Occupy Movements¹⁷. Some of the members also participated in the Occupy Colby meetings¹⁸. In some ways these events inspired us to take charge of our community and showed us that anyone can be empowered to incite radical social change. The combination, then, of injustices present on our campus, our previous activist pursuits, our emotions, and the greater climate of change together allowed for the creation of the EDFC.

Even just the first meeting, there was wine, and there were just so many fucking feelings and people didn't know how to deal with it. But it was also just so powerful that we could all meet together in that space, cause it felt like just even from looking at the discourse that so many people just felt alone. Alone in like coming out as being sexually assaulted or feeling unsafe on this campus.

–Barbara Hammer ● ☒ ❁

In our meetings it was clear that we were increasingly concerned with the lack of meaningful and empathetic understandings from students, faculty, staff, and the administration regarding issues of gender and sexuality manifesting in slurs, lack of policy, denying the desire for a gender and sexual diversity resource center, the absence of women's health programs on campus, and the small budget allotted for gender and sexuality programming. We felt sexism, safety issues, sexuality discrimination, racial tension, and a pervasive sense of ambivalence towards change that we knew we had to confront. The EDFC opened up possibilities for social change in large part because it allowed us to usurp the authority of the administration and confront the campus culture in ways that provoked responses from facets of the community that

¹⁶ The Arab Uprisings were a series of uprisings that have forced some leaders from power across the Middle East. These uprisings began in Tunisia and spread to mainly Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Sudan.

¹⁷ The Occupy Movement is the global protest movement whose primary goal is to fight against social and economic inequality. Protesters strive to make economic power relations fairer.

¹⁸ These meetings were organized by a couple professors and students and could gather crowds of over a hundred people. They were meant to provide a space to talk about what occupy was as well as a space to brainstorm about problems afflicting Colby and beyond and what we all could do to collaborate to fix them.

we felt we rarely reached in our other activist pursuits. With no leader, no hierarchy, and complete respect, we brainstormed ways to better the campus, stir up controversy, and supported each other along the way.



October 26th, 2011:

I was so relieved. Relieved that there were people that were as *angry* as me. People that could relate to all the bullshit that was going on around me. If I one more person came to me asking for advice on how to report their *rapist!* The intimidation that ensued when a girl had to face the members of the football team that spied on her naked body, the faces reminding her of one of the worst nights of her life. My friend telling me how Colby made him act straighter, squelched his flamboyancy and his desire to express himself, his fear of detection. The passing remark “Do you like dicks” uttered when someone saw a Pride sticker¹⁹ on a students door. The assaults, the microaggressions. I WAS ANGRY. Hurt. Colby was beating us down. Beating me down. I could no longer feel happy, feel safe in a place that did not take care of us in the most basic ways, a place where people were not looking out for each other. And then FINALLY. They saved me. With one look I knew they knew, they understood. We didn’t even have to use words to say how frustrated, how sad, how disillusioned we all were. We saved each other.

The campus just seemed exhausted and there was a lot of, not negative energy but not positive energy either. And that was very evident in the first EDFC meeting that people were kind of clamoring for something positive and clamoring for some kind of progress. I think for me and for the group it was more of a coping mechanism in some ways than, it was more coping than political. It

¹⁹ Pride stickers are stickers created by our LGBTQ group on campus that display Colby’s iconic library tower encased in a rainbow flag.

was more of a support group in some ways than trying to make palpable change. –Jesse •❁



In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical frames that help me make sense of the activism of the EDFC. The EDFC was the space through which a group of student activists collapsed the distance between our identities as scholars and as activists. Our membership in this new mode of activism opened up space for us to be both at the same time. We could employ our sensibilities in an anonymous forum that allowed our creativity and our emotions to flourish. In seeking to understand how the EDFC came to be and what it means to me and other members, I have found it particularly productive to relate our interactivism to theories and models of anarchist practice. This allows me to illuminate the most important aspects of the group. In the following chapter, I define what I mean by “interactivism as anarchism” and highlight the thematic qualities of this framework.

And that's how it started. Our first meeting was at an off-campus house over wine and I can honestly say that it was one of the happiest nights I ever had at Colby. It was all just more of a support group for us, more of a support group for the people who felt they wanted to scream that something was wrong and no one was hearing them. And in a way that everyone got it. Everyone in the group got it that something was incredibly fucked up and that they were less alone in that feeling. And I think that in itself was beautiful and it changed my senior year. And I think that the people in the group were transformed in ways that we couldn't even come close to transforming the rest of the campus. I don't know if our activism touched others in the same ways that it touched us.

–Anonymous! ☒ ∞ •❁ ❁●

Interactivism as Anarchism

I dwell in possibility.

-Emily Dickinson

“I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Are you – Nobody – too?

Then there's a pair of us?

Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!

How public – like a Frog –

To tell one's name – the livelong June –

To an admiring Bog!”

— Emily Dickinson



My desire to pursue an honors thesis on the EDFC began last spring when I was abroad in Beirut, Lebanon. I took a graduate studies anthropology class called Art, Aesthetics, and Social change that gave me a preliminary understanding of how to make sense of creative forms of social change. We talked at length about the role of affect²⁰, art objects, and forms of mediation in contexts of social crisis and upheaval. This class was especially interesting because it came at a time of uprisings throughout world, namely the Arab Uprisings and the Occupy Movement. This class gave me a space away from campus to reflect on the EDFC and to start to make sense of what it was we were doing and why I felt so strongly connected to this group. It was during my time abroad that I came up with the phrase “interactivism,” which is simply a combination of “interactive” and “activism,” and I began to build a theoretical frame of what this looks like. By using the term interactivism, I am trying to construct a different vision of activism that is not usually seen or talked about at Colby. The virtue of this type of activism is interactive

²⁰ There is no fixed or stable definition of affect. My definition of affect is a mode of thinking that describes how emotions occur in everyday life. Affect is the process of “continual becoming” and my definition conveys openness (Thrift 2004: 60). In terms of social change affect is the role of emotions in creating change and a way to trace change that continues far beyond the original act. Change then can take on the quality of emotions in that they are in a state of “continual becoming.”

creativity. Interactivism works to eliminate the distance between the activist and the spectator through mediation, which I argue, opens up possibilities for change and productive dialogue. Interactivism works to open up “participatory spaces of action” (Routledge 2009: 82).

Additionally, encountering contemporary anarchist theory has illuminated how the unique construction of the EDFC can work to further the efficacy of our interventions as well as to increase our affinity. Both interactivism and anarchism have helped me come to a better understanding of why and how the EDFC matters.²¹ To begin, I demonstrate how the EDFC reflects anarchist organization, thought, and practice. I then move on to weave the elements of interactivism into the discussion and illustrate how the EDFC practices interactivism as anarchism.



Popular understandings of anarchism define the movement as the belief in the upheaval of all forms of government, which can be misleading. To understand anarchism, we have to look at the lived realities of anarchists and see what anarchism looks and feels like to them. As I read the work of contemporary anarchists I found a rich literature that humanized political movement. Their words resonated with me and constantly reminded me of the mission of the EDFC. Basic agreement in anarchist thought espouses four central principles that the EDFC also practices: “(1) opposition to hierarchy, (2) decentralization, (3) a commitment to freedom and autonomy, and (4) opposition to vanguardism” (Amster 2009: 3). Additionally, central to anarchist practice is the commitment to direct action²², mutual aid²³, collaboration²⁴, and resistance to

²¹ Both of these frameworks were encountered after the fall of 2011 and the members and I did not necessarily think of ourselves in these terms as we engaged in the EDFC.

²² Direct action is defined by Paul Routledge as a method, “whereby we devise a plan to do something in collaboration with others, and then do it without recourse to external authorities” (2009: 82). The most important ideas of direct action are the emphasis on group activity and rebellion against authority.

domination²⁵. Underlying these strategies is the dedication of anarchists to imagining a world that is different from the one in which they find themselves. I have found that the EDFC of Colby College resembles these key principles of anarchism in very concrete ways. Our group has no leader or president and is explicitly anti-hierarchical. We work through practices of mutual aid and collaboration to increase the efficacy of our direct actions that aim to unmake domination and oppression in all their forms. One important difference, however, is our choice of anonymity, which contrasts with many anarchist activist movements.

The beauty in the decision to be anonymous. Like I do feel like that was inspired by the Guerilla Girls talks, I think we started like the week after the Guerilla Girls. And they were artists. We're bad artists. Anonymous, angry, shitty, artists...that care. The anonymity... I felt like it was something like we are doing this [intervention] but we also don't want people to be like oh these three people are the ones doing this. It was also to show that other people can be doing this stuff too and that's sort of what we want. The EDFC is not something that is going to show up on the activism page in 30 years while Reclaim Colby might because it has a name. But that's okay. –Barbara Hammer ☉⚡◆∞●

Many anarchist movements retain elements of anonymity to protect activists from arrests and government intervention. However, in most contemporary movements I encounter, people embody their practices in protests or in performance art. The members of the feminist art activist group, “The Guerilla Girls,” wear masks to protect their identities. Yet their bodies are still in the public eye, even if their identities are concealed. During a recent talk I went to with art activist, Favianna Rodriguez, she criticized anonymous art groups. She felt that the embodiment of her

²³ Mutual aid is the process of collective action that supports direct action.

²⁴ Paul Routledge defines critical collaboration as, “the creation of participatory spaces of action which are inclusive and anti-hierarchical, the nurturing of creative interactions independent of electoral politics, and conducting direct action” (2009: 82).

²⁵ Todd May emphasizes the importance of resisting forms of domination in his discussion of the difference between domination and exploitation. He believes exploitation is located in the “sphere of work” (2009: 12). But he says, “there is economic domination, to be sure, but there is also racial domination, gender domination, sexual domination, education domination, familial domination, etc. Domination, unlike exploitation, can occur in any realm of social experience” (2009: 12).

identity as a Latina woman artist increased the efficacy of her activism and the messages of her art. The EDFC, however, uses anonymity strategically to increase the efficacy of *our* activism. Anonymity for us allows freer circulation of ideas outside the social pressures of our other activist outlets. We can raise controversial issues without the fear of its association with a prominent campus group. Our anonymity allows us to circumvent blame and be freer in our activist pursuits. Revealing our identities would increase attention to our personal biographies and reduce attention to the art interventions themselves. I interviewed a student who is active in a movement on campus called “Reclaim Colby.” He commented on this attention to biographies at Colby. He said that at Colby, “everything needs a face.” He attributed this both to people’s egos and the tendency of people to publically associate themselves with a certain group. The EDFC works against this tradition.

Our anonymity lets us mobilize alternatives. We do not have to get permission to put up our work. We remain respectful of the space and do not vandalize, but we are reclaiming spaces that should be *student* run in the first place. We are taking back our *home*. Our anonymity keeps our activism in line with our goals and keeps our public image focused only on the interventions. The anarchist activist group CIRCA, which stands for the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, describes themselves as clandestine, which reflects the ideologies of anonymity within the EDFC:

We are **clandestine** because we refuse the spectacle of celebrity and we are everyone. Because without real names, faces or noses, we show that our words, dreams, and desires are more important than our biographies. Because we reject the society of surveillance that watches, controls, spies upon, records and checks our every move. Because by hiding our identity we recover the power of our acts” (CIRCA 2007: *About*).

The members also found the secrecy of the EDFC to work as an alternative, “underground” space in contrast to the “secret” or “underground” fraternities on Colby’s campus. These

fraternities have been experienced as alienating and often promote white supremacist, heteronormative, and sexist thinking. The anonymity of the EDFC is a critique of underground fraternities and a way of transforming the meaning of “the underground.”

I think there is something transgressive about the EDFC in that we were trying to be secret and I think in that anonymity of it, we felt empowered. Because I felt that we weren't limited by what the college would think of us or what the college would do to us. –Anonymous³ ◆ ❁ ■

Additionally, anonymity functions as a way to foster social bonds within the EDFC. Through dedicating the EDFC to ideas of mutual solidarity and direct action we developed a pattern of collaboration that rejected “leaders” and highlighted instead the idea that without leaders, we could intensify our rebellion. We were posing problems to authorities by resisting surveillance, celebrity, and control. We were working outside the system and the bureaucracy of Colby politics. Anonymity became both a tool for creativity and a way of intensifying our bond. We could keep our identities secret from campus, a secret that we could share *together*.

You didn't have to go through the administration to do anything, like some of the stuff we do with the [omitted campus group] 99% of it has to be approved by the administration. But we [the EDFC] don't need anyone's permission, which is really nice. Cause so many ideas can be road blocked by obstacles presented by Colby. –Silas ▲ ★

October 20th, 2011:

We were sitting in the student center hours after we put down the banner. People were writing all over it! And we were obsessively monitoring it and seeing how everyone was reacting to the big question, “Do You Feel Safe?” Every time I saw someone in the EDFC that day we would stop and giggle, hug, and give each other

knowing glances²⁶. My other friends thought I had gone crazy that day. I did not leave that building for six hours and I was obsessively going over to look at the banner. Everyone kept asking me “Do you know who did this?” or remarking, “oh I bet it was...” or “I wonder who did this...” But I knew who did it. We did. And it felt fun and important keeping this secret. I had something that linked me very intimately to the other members of the EDfC. We had a secret to keep.

We as a group would stay up until like one in the morning away in a miller classroom just talking about art or activism and supporting each other through our crazy theses and our papers. Like during the day we would see each other and we would just smile cause we knew we had something—a connection that other people didn't have. –Anonymous⁴ ∞ • ◆ ■ ❁ ❁ ●



Anonymity positions the EDfC to enact anarchist pedagogies. Gabriel Kuhn's, work on poststructuralism and anarchism illuminates this connection particularly clearly. Kuhn focuses on solidarity and bridging the gap between theory and practice by placing poststructural theory in conversation with anarchism. I found the following passages from Kuhn's work particularly applicable for explaining the means and goals of the EDfC:

1. “A *critique of the subject* that liberates us from the need to conform to fixed identities and opens a never-ending playground to create and permanently recreate subjectivities in self-determined process” (Kuhn 2009: 23).

This works to show how identities and subjectivities have the capacity to be fluid and endlessly re-created. This ties into the role of personal transformation involved in participating in the EDfC. My interviews show how the EDfC constantly remakes its members' subjectivities and opens up possibilities of being. This also echoes the idea that many of the members articulated to me about categories of identity. Solidarity among the members was increased in part because the

²⁶ The “Do You Feel Safe” banner that is referred to here is one of the EDfC's interventions. It is addressed at length in a later chapter.

members did not have to employ certain fixed elements of their identities, but rather the EDFC acted as a space to transform one's identity or sense of self.

2. "Foucault's *theory of power* which helps us understand the complexity of social stratification, strife, and struggle much better than previous concepts of power—and properly understood—opens up new, well-grounded, and effective means of resistance, rather than hindering them" (Kuhn 2009: 23).

Foucault's conception of power opens up possibilities of resistance for the EDFC. Michel Foucault said that, "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1978: 93). This understanding of power allows for us to approach activism from new angles. Our direct action, then, does not have to follow a top-down model to be effective. This allows us to resist sideways, across, from behind. We can blow up the limits of resistance. This intensifies direct action as a way to unmake power relationships, because it resists power in multiple directions.

3. "Foucault's *specific intellectual*, who pursues theoretical work as a contribution to solving concrete and immediate problems rather than a means to establish oppressive grand theory" (Kuhn 2009: 23).

The narrative of the EDFC works towards making sense of a particular frame of activist work to speak to the Colby community. As a "specific intellectual" this does not allow me to use theoretical frames to solve grand truths, but rather to make sense of lived realities.

4. "The *dismantling of boundaries separating theory and praxis* which makes the former an inherent part of the political struggle rather than its guide" (Kuhn 2009: 23).

Here Kuhn's words prompt me to think about my earlier struggles with separating activist work from academic work. The two inform each other in a dialectical process. The members of the EDFC all work to collapse the binary of theory/practice, which only helps us question more

freely and engage each other and our work more fully. All of our different intellectual backgrounds nourished and influenced our activist work.

5. “An *affirmative/positive character* of thought and action that prioritizes creativity over entanglement in petty critique and in-fighting” (Kuhn 2009: 24).

The EDFC works towards positivity. In order to fully nourish ourselves through activist work, we cannot let negativity or hateful criticism overshadow us. Rather we try to use our energies to invest in creative approaches to thought and action that address our problems and that work to emotionally support us.

6. “Finally, a thorough *radicalism* of thought that addresses the foundations of our problems” (Kuhn 2009: 24).

The **hope** of radical social change is at the heart of the EDFC, even if we did not accomplish change on a grand scale. The capacity and anticipation for change gives us the drive to pursue our goals and invest in the possibilities of action that radical thought provides us with.

Radicalism of thought allows the EDFC to grapple with specific issues that we believe most negatively affect Colby. All of these six principles permeate the activist philosophy of the EDFC and give new language to what our practices look and feel like. I now want to turn to the idea of openings and dismantling boundaries. These ideas are central to seeing anarchist thought and practice at work. Openings and living beyond binaries allows greater engagement in the power of the imagination and human possibilities.



What is the difference between *potential* and *possibility*? Potential is productively thought of in terms of energy. According to basic laws of physics and chemistry, there is potential energy and activation energy. When you have a ball (or, say an idea) at the top of a hill, that ball contains potential energy. There are an infinite number of ways that the ball can drop

down the hill. However, once the ball drops, the potential runs out and the fun is over. The potential energy travelled that single pathway down the hill and converted into kinetic energy. The potential is now gone. Possibility, on the other hand, is a much more open-ended term. Possibility suggests limitless avenues that do not stop, but rather turn into new possibilities. In activist work, if your commitment to change ended after your project travelled down that one path, then the chances of lasting change are slim. The EDFC's mission is never ending because we invest in possibilities of action and re-action. Our activism takes twists and turns and changes constantly. One act can turn into new possibilities for resistance. The ball then, would never really stop falling or bouncing or rolling down (or sideways or up or round and round) the hill.

Possibilities for me can be conceived through Fernando Coronil's discussion of a labyrinth. Possibilities are, "assembled as a labyrinth whose exits become entrances into an expanding labyrinth, it's arrivals are points of departure and its answers pose new questions" (Coronil 2011: 302). The only limit to possibility, then, is our own imagination. Human possibilities, as David Graeber phrases it, "are in almost every way greater than we ordinarily imagine" (Graeber 2004: 1). I make this distinction to show how human possibilities and *not* human potential work at the level of the activist. In particular, I want to highlight the importance of the *imagination* to activist work and how possibilities are involved in that process of imagination. To imagine possibilities is to open up and expand the trajectories towards positive social change. To see only potential is to see one path to social change. In discussing the EDFC of Colby College, this distinction is paramount. The EDFC imagines new worlds and deeply invests in human possibilities. We do not believe that there is a singular way to effect change and we do not believe that change can happen overnight. We conceive of possibilities to open more

avenues towards change. We have goals and aims, but the ways in which we want to achieve them are creative, open-ended, dialectical, playful, and transcendent.

It was the elucidation of possibility and of hope. –Timmy Jerhune ∞

Imagining is essentially an optimistic endeavor that is tied to faith. To show this, I turn to anthropologist and anarchist, David Graeber:

First, it would have to proceed from the assumption that, as the Brazilian folk song puts it, ‘another world is possible.’ That institutions like the state, capitalism, racism and male dominance are not inevitable; that it would be possible to have a world in which these things would not exist, and that we’d all be better off as a result. To commit oneself to such a principle is almost an act of faith, since how can one have certain knowledge of such matters? It might possibly turn out that such a world is *not* possible. But one could also make the argument that it’s this very unavailability of absolute knowledge which makes a commitment to optimism a moral imperative: Since one cannot know a radically better world is not possible, are we not betraying everyone by insisting on continuing to justify, and reproduce, the mess we have today? And anyway, even if we’re wrong, we might get a lot closer (Graeber 2004: 10).

The act of imagining an alternative world *is* an act of trust and belief. The EDFC does not know that a world conceived through compassion and empathy is *not* possible. The limits of knowing cannot be a restrictive factor when you are looking towards a future. Therefore, we will still imagine it in this way. The members of the EDFC perceive the world with *possibility* and therefore truly understand that it is “finite to fail, but infinite to venture” (Dickinson 1924)²⁷. Whatever we do, we are fundamentally opposed to reproducing more of the “mess we have today.” We want to liberate the college campus from hegemonic norms entrenched in white supremacist, sexist, and heteronormative thought. In the imaginary we can find this liberation.

As Graeber says,

²⁷ This Emily Dickinson quotation encapsulates how I feel about possibilities. To fail involves limits and bounds, while to invest in possibility and to venture into the imagination is infinite. The EDFC perceives the world through infinite possibilities that test the limits and go beyond the boundaries.

If everyone really were free to define themselves however they wished... This is what I mean by ‘liberation in the imaginary.’ To think about what it would take to live in a world in which everyone really did have the power to decide for themselves, individually and collectively, what sort of communities they wished to belong to and what sort of identities they wanted to take on—that’s really difficult (Graeber 2004: 102).

The EDFC enacts the power to decide for ourselves who and how we want to be and to liberate ourselves. We do not have to answer to outside parties to tell us how we, as a collaborative group, want to be. The EDFC made the community we wanted. Then, the EDFC through the very fabric of its construction and action asks the community of Colby College to *imagine* new possibilities, possibilities that go beyond hegemony, silence, and apathy. Our practice poses the question of “what *is* a Colby value²⁸?” The work we are doing challenges every individual in the EDFC and individuals within the Colby collective to imagine what kind of community we can be and want to be.

Never underestimate the power of imagination, especially that of the collective imagination. I dream of living in a world defined by agency and justice where privilege is in a state of constant question, exploitation is a myth of the past, love is omnipresent, and beauty is the dominant adjective. Ideal? Maybe. Impossible? Only if I allow myself to give up the power to imagine such a world. Only if I give in to the powers at hand that tell me that such a world is impossible. Only if I give up, what to me is perhaps the most beautiful part of being human: agency. – Anonymous² ∞*●



The EDFC further resembles anarchist groups in structure and practice. In his discussion of social movements in anarchism, Joel Olson, describes an *infoshop* as, “a space where people can learn about radical ideas, where radicals can meet other radicals, and where political work can get done” (Olson 2009: 40). To a large extent, the EDFC is an *infoshop*. We strive to be radical intellectuals, and we are dissatisfied by the world around us and the problems that afflict

²⁸ “What is a Colby value” turned into a campaign that was coined by the Colby College Bridge in response to a homophobic bias incident.

our community. Through regular meetings and interactions, we learn from each other and collaborate to disseminate political and creative work. Yet, we go beyond this. Olson argues that infoshops are not enough and what we need is movement building. The EDFC might not have inspired movement building, but we are not just a club to do programming on issues we are passionate about, we are not just a support group, or a meeting of minds. We are all of this and more.

And then we just started brainstorming and I don't even think it was the intention in the beginning but it was kind of beautiful how in all of our ideas we ended up taking this sort of point of view of we want to make art! Like I'm artistic in a very alternative sense, like I can't like paint you a realistic picture of anything. And like we were all leaders and had all this access to supplies like no other. Like let's go get some paper, let's go get some paint, let's write do you feel safe on the floor of Pulver. But I mean I had never been a part of that visual disruption art. Like I've been at rallies but that is still sort of expected to have a group of people with signs, but like especially at Colby it's made me realize that the sterility of the people and of the campus and even just interactions with people are a part of what makes this place so oppressive. Just how **NORMATIVE** it is...Yeah that sort of visual disruption art is what I believe in now. It's amazing. -Barbara Hammer



Within this discussion, it is important to understand how we, as activists, transformed our actions from ideas in an infoshop atmosphere to a practice of interactivism. This brings me to the concepts of direct action and mediation. The interactive work of the EDFC comes in the form of objects. Because we are an anonymous, art activist group, we use objects to both disguise our identities and to create less limiting forms of expression. Using objects to foster our creativity also allows our work to be interactive with the community. We place our works in public spaces, for example, a banner in the bathroom of the student center, or a guerilla art installation in a central academic building. Interactivism for the EDFC comes alive in those spaces where we use direct action to create “participatory spaces of action.” Participatory spaces of action are both

interactive for the members, through using creative means of expression, and interactive for the audience who create responses to these objects.

Activism becomes interactive when it utilizes forms of mediation. Mediations form connecting links between people. Interactive activism is a form of mediation between the activists and their audience. The EDFC uses mediating, creative, artistic, disrupting objects to allow our audience at Colby College to participate in our activism. Through introducing the campus to various mediating objects, we seek to enact a form of social change that the audience themselves help facilitate. Social theorist, Brian Massumi, helps me to think about mediation more clearly:

Culture occupied the gap between matter and systematic change, in the operation of mechanisms of ‘mediation.’ These were ideological apparatuses that structured the dumb material interactions of things and rendered them legible according to a dominant signifying scheme into which human subjects in the making were ‘interpellated.’ Mediation, although inseparable from power, restored a kind of movement to the everyday. If the everyday was no longer a place of rupture or revolt, as it had been...it might still be a site of modest acts of ‘resistance’ or ‘subversion’ keeping alive the possibility of systematic change (Massumi 2002: 1).

Through using objects and materials that are “legible” to members of the Colby community, the EDFC is jamming the everyday landscape with direct actions. Whether the actions utilize modest letters or grand banners, the EDFC is using objects that are rendered participatory in our own cultural setting. The spatial disruptiveness and fleeting nature of the objects themselves (in their culturally specific materiality and aesthetics) in strategically public domains, allows the EDFC to illuminate possibilities of change and social interaction. The space or the distance in-between the activist and the spectator (a community comprised of individuals at Colby) shrinks because of the duality of participation. This space of in-between allows us to see power at work in

mediation. We can look to this space as a space of *rupture* and *disjuncture* that shows the points at which people come together and veer apart (Turner 1974).


And I think art is freeing because the content interests you and the presentation interests you and so the two are in dialogue and I think sometimes that is less intimidating. –Anonymous¹ ☉

John Jordan says, “Direct Action is praxis, catharsis, and image all rolled into one...to engage in direct action you have to feel enough passion to put your values into practice: it is literally embodying your feelings, performing your politics” (Jordan 1998: 134). In linking direct action to interactivism, I am inserting practice, emotion, and imagination as central to the subjectivity of the activist. Direct action is interactive because it involves the public performance of your values and passions. The EDFC’s work is reflective of the subjectivities of the members because it incorporates all of our personal feelings into collaborative work that is disseminated in a public space. We use humor and play to embed “a threatening idea inside a non-threatening form” and as “a way of making spectators active participants in the performance” (Farrar 2008: 290). Through blurring the lines between activist and bystander and eliminating some of that exclusionary distance, the EDFC creates a participatory design that allows others to engage our ideas more directly. The EDFC “jams” Colby’s popular culture with images that question the community, ask and allow for responses, and disrupt in playful and critical ways. Farrar and Warner, who work with the Billionaires for Bush, argue that:

it is possible to overdraw the distinction between actor and audience that critiques of spectacular culture typically rely on; in fact, traditional forms of mass media are being replaced by more interactive technologies that may open up (rather than shut down) avenues for political participation (Farrar 2008: 274).

Interactivist approaches introduce new methodologies of mediation in activist work that allow the messages of the activists to be re-acted *through* the audience. This opens up a considerable

space for change that persists and inspires beyond the original activists. Interactivist approaches that incorporate creative and participatory mediations allow an element of agency to emerge for the audience. Through directly engaging in the artwork of the EDFC, the Colby community can enact their own agency and enrich the possibilities of interactivist work.

It was fun but it also serves a purpose, whereas doing things just to do things seems like a chore. But it was genuinely fun to be doing this type of interactivism. It was empowering to be with likeminded people and have these conversations.
–Silas 

Space is another critical element in interactivism as anarchism. The EDFC is re-claiming public spaces through anarchist practices, and transforming the space through interactivism. Claiming space as public through the creation of art transforms the space itself. The meaning of the space becomes centered on around the intervention and incites action within it. People interpret these objects within a given context in multiple ways. They may even ignore the object altogether, but the possibilities of action or re-action have been opened up in the transformation of space. Those altering these spaces with their art are reworking the landscape of possible interactions. Interactivism for the EDFC is *materialized* in public spaces. Because of the quality of these spatially and visually disruptive objects as challenging and culturally intelligible, these objects affectively incite action. This is directly calling on Victor Turner’s conception of symbols. Turner says, “Symbols instigate social action. In a field context they may even be described as ‘forces,’ in that they are determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action.” (Turner 1974: 36). This works at the level of social process, meaning that we can see material possibilities as dynamic forces that bring people together, both in their creation and their visibility.

We were co-opting a space and making it into our own event. We formed outside of campus spaces, places, and events. Not within the logics of the campus. Too many people forget that we share this public-private space. –Silas



The process of creativity allows the material possibilities of the objects to be realized which are simultaneously creating solidarity and affinity within the groups that build them. Direct action is intimately tied to emotion and solidarity, action, and imagination. Through the process of creative action, activists create space for emotional solidarity and communal affinity. The EDFC enacts this process to create mediations. The very process of creativity allows us to forge bonds, act our dreams, heal, inspire and be inspired. Central interactivism as a practice of direct action is the role of empowerment and healing. Through our practices of anonymously creating art that could physically take back our public spaces and transform their meaning, we began to develop our own sense of capacity and power. Martha Ackelsberg, who writes about the anarchist feminist group Mujeres Libres, explains:

When people join together to exert control over their workplace, their community, the conditions of their day-to-day lives, they experience the changes they make as their own. Instead of reinforcing the sense of powerlessness that often accompanies modest improvements granted from the top of a hierarchical structure, a strategy of direct action enables people to *create their own power*. (Ackelsberg 1997: 167).

Through the direct action of the EDFC, manifesting in creative forms of interactivism, we are *creating* our own power and exercising our will to shape and make sense of a new world. The EDFC is as much or more about empowering the activists themselves as it is about imagining a better world for others.

They were some of the most brilliant people I've ever met. I disagree with some of them, but all of them were brilliant, all of them were radical, all of them were activists. I was surrounded by people who were as intelligent or more intelligent

than I was. It was this just convivia of activism and intelligence. –Timmy Jerhune



Paul Routledge, who specializes in resistance movements, also touches on the importance of empowerment as an effective strategy for activism. He examines an anarchist group similar to the EDFC called CIRCA, the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army. Routledge himself is an activist and academic involved in CIRCA and “discusses the methodologies of activism, affinity, and emotion, and [his] personal reflections on what an activist geography might look like” in an article he wrote on CIRCA (Routledge 2009: 82). I am drawn to Routledge’s work because he occupies a similar position to CIRCA as I do to the EDFC. He is a researcher and an activist. He also researches his activism. Because of this, Routledge is sensitive to the need to develop a relational ethics and an activist geography. He believes, as do I, in politicizing the personal through active resistance and living “alternative geographical possibilities in addition to theorizing about them” (Routledge 2009: 90). He shows the importance of empowerment that reflects interactivist goals. Routledge says:

An activist approach to academia is concerned with action, reflection, and empowerment (of oneself and others) in order to challenge oppressive power relations. It’s about forging mutual solidarity through critical collaboration, the creation of participatory spaces of action that are inclusive and anti-hierarchical, the nurturing of creative interactions independent of electoral politics and conducting direct action (Routledge 2009: 82).

The EDFC uses direct action explicitly to create these “participatory spaces of action” that become spaces of empowerment. These spaces again highlight the central points of anarchist practice: direct action, collaboration, mutuality, and anti-hierarchy. The EDFC utilizes what can be considered anarchist practices to foster inclusivity and creativity in our actions. In this way, our anarchist sensibilities directly lead to our interactivist practices through creating “participatory spaces of action.” To echo our manifesto: “we strive to take back public spaces

and use them to inspire dialogue, interactive creativity, and free expression.” This method is *our* approach to direct action that empowers the members of the EDFC and creates unconventional spaces of interaction.

I play within the system most of the time, but I hate rules. And its nice to just feel relieved enough to say whelp, I am gonna write 'fist the power' on the snow. I just want people to see shit. And the reason I love this is that you can just make a fucking statement. There aren't many ways to make fucking statements. Other than like press release style, edited, on the civil discourse. And that's pretty much about it. But it's nice to just say stuff. Visual disruption is huge. We have a beautiful campus but it's so well manicured that it reflects the sterility of the student body to ask tough questions and talk about tough things. – Jesse

☉ ☒ ▲ ∞ ◆ ✨

I am not a creative person. I would love to be an art activist but I can't because I don't have the artistic capabilities of doing that. So I think for me my intellectual life has taken the place of what my art would have been, and in a way it is its own art. Words and meanings are art and that people who craft them are artists in their own right. And so in my academics I am creating these possibilities, of learning new ways of doing things, that allow me to move forward. So it's these imagined possibilities or I guess these liminal spaces that created through academics that power my activism. I personally would rather be doing this through art like Faviana Rodriguez. My personal dream even though it would never be realized is to do art like that that is very accessible, very in your face, so instead I use words and I use spaces and I think about things, but I think that is also valuable. Because if nobody does that then nothing will change. –Timmy Jerhune ☉ ∞ ✨ ✍️ ⚡ ✨

Thus far, the concept of interactivism has emerged as a relational field of activism that encompasses *all* of the actors involved. Through this expanded view of activism, we can better interrogate transformation and social change. We *must* look at these spheres as in constant contact for they all constitute the landscape where we can come to know and make sense. This approach is essential in order to *encounter* the EDFC. This reworked understanding of what activism can look like allows for a shift in orientation of the story of the EDFC toward the building of “relational ethics.” It is with this that I focus again on the subjectivity of the EDFC

and the role of emotions and affinity. As I stressed earlier, the EDFC came together at a time of deep emotional struggle for the other members and myself. All of us came together because of our anger, our sadness, our disappointment.

October 15th, 2011:

When I entered the room, I immediately felt comfort explode within my body. It was strange that in a room full of mostly strangers I could feel a deep sense of understanding. We came together because we needed each other. I could no longer exist in a space where anger was the most pervasive emotion. It was destructive to be complicit to the violence and discrimination around me. When I found the EDFC, I found people that I could learn how to love with again, people that had similar emotions as me and wanted to confront Colby and challenge our community to be better. Our connections were not simply political, they were deeply emotional.

Being so affectionate is not something I'm really good at. I might be sort of a cynical person, I like to say I majored in cynicism, otherwise known as WGSS. But I think the EDFC was a very affectionate place and that both made me feel uncomfortable but also helped me become more affectionate. –Silas ●●■

Many anarchists emphasize the importance of affinity and emotion in anarchist activist groups.

Paul Routledge defines affinity as follows:

Practically, affinity consists of a group of people sharing common ground and who can provide supportive, sympathetic spaces for its members to articulate, listen to one another, and share concerns, emotions, or fears. The politics of affinity enables people to provide support and solidarity for one another (Routledge 2009: 85).

The EDFC was based on this sense of affinity. We created common values and beliefs that were expressed within a supportive atmosphere where we could be playful, angry, radical, crazy, loving. We were allowing ourselves to be rebels, to celebrate the things that Colby was not, and to dream together in order to find happiness and joy. We were not dreaming up the possibility of revolution, but envisioning a state of “continuous rebellion” that could heal us collectively and individually. Essential to the EDFC was the celebration of human difference and the ability to find commonality and empathy that transcends these differences. Again, Routledge is useful here:

The common values and beliefs articulated within the politics of affinity constitute a “structure of feeling” resting upon collective experiences and interpretations, which are cooperative rather than competitive, and which are predicated on taking political action. The idea of consensus here is based on the notion of “mutual solidarity”—constructing the grievances and aspirations of geographically and culturally diverse peoples as interlinked. Mutual solidarity enables connections to be drawn that extend beyond the local and particular, by recognizing and respecting differences between people while at the same time recognizing their similarities (Routledge 2009: 85).

We were able to encounter the “entanglement of emotions, psychological development, souls, passions and minds” of each other that both respected difference and forged meaningful bonds across difference (Routledge 2009: 86). Composed of a wide variety of individuals, The EDFC was synthesizing our personal and collective emotions through mechanisms of creativity and imagination. Routledge discusses this transformation of emotions. He believes, as do I, that utilizing emotions is an “effective technique for taking political action” and to transform emotions into activist work is a legitimate and even healing endeavor (Routledge 2009: 87).

It made me love Colby, which I never thought I would. In fact I went through most of my career at Colby incredibly critical of the institution and of the people and often I felt just very lonely. I felt that I didn't necessarily fit in and then to have a group of completely different people of completely different social groups, but willing to like cry the first meeting and talk about their desire to change the school made me feel like there is so much to this school that I love.

And that it is the people and the students and I never ever thought that I would feel that way. It's a type of love that I'd never felt before because it's neither familial nor romantic but it was definitely love that I felt for those people. And they honestly made my senior year amazing. –Anonymous¹ ☒ • ■ ❁ ❁ ●

Feelings and emotions can both heal as well as make spaces and experiences of belonging. What the members of the EDFC *felt* conditioned the very possibility of us coming together. The “structures of feeling” from which the EDFC arose were collectively experienced by the members personally and as a group (Williams 1954). This structure of feeling for the EDFC was the instance of recognition that we did not necessarily “fit in” with the dominant culture. Additionally, we were no longer just isolated as student activists or because of our identities; we were isolated within our student activism. In this sense, the EDFC was created out of a structure of feeling of double isolation, collectively experienced, that motivated us towards taking political action to change our possibilities of *being* at Colby. Our feelings allowed us to come together and find each other in a space of belonging.

My favorite EDFC moment just had to do with the community of it, of us. –Jesse •

My favorite part of EDFC was believing I could be in a world where I didn't have to like put up barriers, you know? Where I could just *be* and people would love me and accept me. And that was it. It was like a separate world, a world within Colby that was easy to *be* in, that I didn't have to try so hard in, and that was beautiful. And that world is hard to find. Like even if we didn't do anything on campus, being a part of a world like that is like activism in itself. Existing in a world where you don't have to constantly define yourself. You don't have to constantly explain everything. –Anonymous³ ❁ ❁ ■

In the EDFC we constituted ourselves through forging highly supportive, loving bonds. We found it necessary to emphasize our emotional lives as academic activists who were struggling to realize our dreams and what we hoped was possible in our futures. We created a deep sense of affinity that was forged first from our collective structures of feeling, and then

reinforced through our practices of direct action and the process of interactivism. Affinity, then, acted *through* our public mediations. This space for us, however, is behind closed doors and operates in secret. This only intensifies our bonds through instituting a sense of belonging that does not exist *for* anyone except ourselves. The secrecy of our group is just as much about reinforcing the bonds of solidarity as it is about the freedom it affords us in our activist work.


Jeff Juris also takes up the discussion of the role of emotions and affective solidarity in interactivist work. He argues that through the embodiment of performing resistance, activists create and are motivated by powerful emotions (Juris: 2008). These emotions enhance the sense of collective solidarity among the affinity group as well as to advance the power of the mediation. The EDFC is motivated by emotional energy or “affective solidarity” in creating our mediations (Juris: 2008). However, the sense that these emotions are publically *disembodied* shifts the role of our emotional ties to personal (private) transformation, healing, and struggle.

We nurture our mutual solidarity and collective action through anonymity and a disembodiment of the public spaces our artwork mediates. This is liberating in that it allows *all* of us to move towards a relational ethics:

A relational ethics is about decolonizing oneself and getting used to not being the expert. It is about solidarity through the process of mutual discovery and knowing one another. A relational ethics is attentive to the social context of collaboration and our situatedness with respect to that context. It is enacted in a material, embodied way, for example through relations of friendship, solidarity, and empathy...a relational ethics thus requires that we are sensitive to the contingency of things, and that our responsibility to others and to difference is connected to our responsibility to act (Routledge 2009: 89).

Routledge’s definition of relational ethics is the space that the EDFC seeks to work within, through, and embody together. It shows the landscape through which we disperse the process of interactivism. Our relational ethics informs the manifestations of our mediations and the possibilities of action and re-action our work enacts. Through our commitment to collaboration,

mutual aid, freedom and autonomy, resisting oppression and hierarchy, and to direct action the EDFC operates in ways that mirror anarchist thought and practice. The EDFC conceives possibilities in these terms but deeply layers these possibilities with love and other human emotions. We operate through relational ethics to visualize our dreams of a better Colby.

The fundamental thing that the EDFC taught me was that being out there and being in your face is okay. Like I have always personally been politically and intellectually radical, but that had never manifested itself externally. Previous to the EDFC I had talks with my friends about all sorts of different things like yeah we believe in these liberal radical ideas but nothing ever came of that. But, Being in the EDFC I was with a group of people that not only thought that but then we acted on it. So I think that broke down a barrier for me that I hadn't really known was there beforehand. Where there was a very sharp divide between theory and praxis. So I guess what the EDFC taught me was that there doesn't need to be that divide. And sometimes that theory is praxis and that praxis is theory. That distinction isn't as important as people think it is as long as change is being made either theoretically or in the real world. And obviously, ideally change should be made in the real world, but sometimes you need to create that space intellectually, academically, culturally before it can be effective in the real world. Outright activism like the EDFC is especially important to me because it shows people that are not necessarily in the space to act out, who are not in the space to speak up, who are unsure of themselves, who are depressed, or whatever, that things can change, that things will change, and that things do change. So I guess I would just like to give everyone an affirmation that they will be okay in the long run. -Timmy Jerhune 

Moments of EDFC Direct Actions

Letter: The EDFC's first intervention was to produce a parody of an email from Dean of Students, Jim Terhune. This email was originally sent to the student body about "underground frats" at Colby. Some of the members took the email and replaced "underground frats" with "sexual assault" to make a statement about the lack of administrative attention surrounding sexual assault. They used official Colby College paper and replaced Jim Terhune with "Tim Jerhune" and disseminated the letters around campus.

"Do You Feel Safe?" Banner²⁹: This was a 50-foot banner placed on the floor of the student center. The banner was interactive and students wrote on the banner to respond to the question.

"Don't Touch Me" posters: These were large posters made of a conglomeration of photocopied hands that spelled out, "don't touch me." They were hung up all over the student center, the library, and academic buildings to comment on consent.

Radical Pencils: The EDFC released a series of pencils on campus that had different sayings on them. We put them everywhere on campus and see people using them to this day. The sayings were: "Snap this Phallus," "Normal is a Lie," and "Finite to Fail, Infinite to Venture."

"You Are Beautiful" Banner: Some of the members spray painted a large sign that said "You Are Beautiful" and hung it up in the bathroom of the student center. This was done during a school dance as part of a positivity campaign. Underneath the banner when you lifted it up, "You Are Still Beautiful" was written in lipstick on the mirror.

Letters to Professors: The EDFC crafted a letter to submit to all professors encouraging them to go to an event titled, "A Shout Out to Professors." This was a campaign to illuminate identity issues in student-faculty relations. The letter also urged professors to encourage their students to attend the forum on sexual assault.

Fliers: After researching the campus's sexual assault policies and federal law on sexual assault policies we found that the college was in violation of federal law that requires colleges to provide annual statistics on crimes, including sexual offenses. The EDFC created a series of fliers that detailed the violations and included information on Colby's policies and where people could find them. These posters were disseminated all around campus.

"I Promise To..." Banner: This was a banner created in the same fashion as the "Do You Feel Safe Banner." It was meant to start a dialogue on upholding community values and to get people to be accountable to those values.

Colby Read This: A compilation of poems, stories, and experiences that reflects the style and tone of the document "Queers Read This!" There were two volumes produced.

Valentine's Day: The EDFC created cardboard hearts and stuck them in the snow on Valentine's Day. The EDFC also ordered fake rainbow roses and put them in the student center with a large heart sign telling them to take one and give it to someone special.

²⁹ The "Do You Feel Safe" banner is addressed in a full chapter later on in the text.

Guerilla Art Instillation: This was an instillation put up in the Diamond Building to work against censorship and the inhibition of free expression. “Censorship Kills Art” was repeated multiple times.

Interactivism at Work

Fortune befriends the bold.
-Emily Dickinson



The EDFC is deeply inspired by groups that promote public art, visual disruptions, and fight to end oppression. It is no coincidence that our group formed shortly after Frida Kahlo from the Guerilla Girls, the feminist art activist group, spoke at Colby. Nor is it shocking that we formed on the tails of the Occupy movement, some even active in the campus' very own "Occupy Colby" gatherings. Our ideas for how to conceive the EDFC's organization and practice were especially influenced by the social movements and groups that we all grew to admire as campus activists. Through my research, I both investigate movements that we as individuals were very influenced by in the year 2011 as well as groups that I myself fell in love with after the formation of the EDFC. These groups are important in that they promote an understanding about what manifestations of interactivism as anarchism can look and feel like on the ground.

The examples I will outline all show the role of direct action, affinity, collaboration, mutual aid, and the imagination in the process of interactivism. I explore the following examples: The Guerilla Girls, Tahrir's Revolutionary Art Union, The Occupy Movement, Billionaires for Bush, Giant Puppets, and the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA). Each of these examples illuminate one or more of the characteristics of interactivism as anarchism. My goal in this discussion is to show how interactivism can be seen in many places across the globe and that this phenomenon is by no means unique to the EDFC. I also want to illustrate the various manifestations of these different themes of interactivism and how they look in practice. This

section works to further clarify the thematic threads of EDFC practices through concrete examples.



To begin building this landscape of interactivism in practice, I will start where the EDFC began, with the Guerrilla Girls. The Guerrilla Girls are a collective of anonymous female activists who use the names of dead women artists as pseudonyms and appear in public wearing gorilla masks. They create posters, stickers, billboards, books, installations, and various embodied actions to, “expose sexism and racism in politics, the art world, film and the culture at large” (Guerrilla Girls 2007: 32). Their work utilizes humor and uncomfortable imagery associations to hold institutions accountable and ridicule the unquestioned and rampant statistics of sexist and racist inequalities. They have critiqued the art world, Hollywood, U.S. politics, and much more through harnessing play and imagination. One of my personal favorites is the poster they created using the body of a female nude with the head of an angry gorilla proclaiming: “Do women have to be naked to get into U.S. museums? Less than 3% of the artists in the Met Museum are women, but 83% of the nudes are female” (Kahlo 2010: 206). Through combining these images together, the Guerrilla Girls are showing the absurdity of disproportionate representation in museums.

The Guerrilla Girls poke fun at powerful institutions and are fearless in their tactics. Through many years of this approach to art activism, they have managed to see real, tangible change and success. While The Guerrilla Girls do not fit the exact model of relational ethics that is central to the interactivist work of the EDFC, they enact some central tenets of interactivism³⁰. They use interactive creativity to carry out their activism, working through direct action and

³⁰ The Guerrilla Girls split up into two groups due to money issues.

utilizing the power of the imagination. Their art objects and ideologies managed to affectively incite social action resulting in reworking the possibilities of not only the future of the art world, but also possible conceptions of feminism.



Figure 1. Poster created by the Guerilla Girls in 2005, available at <http://www.guerrillagirls.com/posters>.

The reason I include The Guerilla Girls is because they inspired the members of the EDFC to form and they directly influenced our decision for anonymity. When Frieda Kahlo, a co-founder of the group, came to speak at Colby some of the soon-to-be members and myself had the chance to have lunch with her. She was candid and real and answered all of our eager questions. The key point we touched on was the groups' decision and approach to anonymity.

She was very clear that they wear gorilla masks to conceal their identities both in a playful way as well as to take the focus away from celebrity and surveillance and put the focus towards their mission. She also commented that it allowed them the freedom to have careers outside The Guerilla Girls and associations that were not based on her involvement with the group. When the afternoon winded down and the room was left with just my closest allies in activist pursuits on campus, we told her about the work we wanted to do and some of the issues of sexual assault and discrimination of sexuality on campus. She told us to be angry and to get started. She was both encouraging and motivating. It made us eager and really pushed the formation of the EDFC. As I mentioned previously, my e-mail asking me to join the EDFC arrived the very next day. At the end of Frida Kahlo's talk to campus she made a comment that encompasses my appreciation for her and the work the Guerilla Girls practice. She said, "Invent your own way of becoming an activist, an artist. Invent your own way of becoming a feminist."³¹ When I think back on these words, it is clear to me that we followed her advice.



Two other very active conversations on campus during the spring and fall of 2011 revolved around the Arab Uprisings across the Middle East and the Occupy movements that were sweeping the globe. I found the Arab Uprisings particularly inspiring at this point in my life and became very interested in the role of art and ritual in public spaces during the uprisings. When I was abroad in Beirut, Lebanon during the spring of 2012 I investigated how these themes were present in the occupations of Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution. As an example, I discuss here a public art collective in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, called the "Tahrir

³¹ Direct quotation taken from The Colby Echo, 2011.

Revolutionary Art Union.” I stumbled across this group when doing research for a paper on artistic rituals within the Arab Uprisings of 2011.

The Egyptian Revolution I refer to began following a popular political uprising on January 25, 2011. This sparked a moment of diverse forms of protest and political contestation aimed at critiquing and bringing down the current regime led by Hosni Mubarak. During the period of widespread protest, an estimated 2 million people gathered in Tahrir Square in Cairo. Throughout the Arab uprisings graffiti and public art were highly visible modes of political contestation and constituted a dialogue between protesters that contributed to processes that align with interactivism. Public art was involved in an intensely political dialectic. Reed Lindsay of “The Real News” reported a story on an art community in Tahrir Square called “Tahrir’s Revolutionary Art Union” (Lindsay 2012). Lindsay’s video about this group shows how people utilized public art as the means of creating social solidarity and increasing affinity between the protestors. It explains that it is a coalition for artists to come together, create art, express themselves, share their woes, or to see the frustrations of others. This union is comprised of revolutionary activists and artists but invites the spectators into the art process. The goal of art objects, however, is two-fold. It is part of the larger goal of demanding increased political rights in Egypt, but also the goal of “expressing” oneself as the members put it. In this instance, public art became a ritual mediator of the emotional landscape of the revolution.

Art became a conversation about the political situation and an outlet to express the fears and hopes of the people. But this art dialectic relied on commonly circulated knowledge, symbols, and meanings in order to be intelligible by a public. Revolution reworked the environment of graffiti and public art since these artists/demonstrators physically came together in the space of Tahrir Square. This allowed the rebels to form a collective; a social movement

constituted with the commitment to direct action, collaboration, imagining a more hopeful future for Egypt, and mutual aid in the name of a common goal. Resistance was the theme of everyday life and the possibilities of action were reworked through practices of interactive art. In this liminal zone, these protestors can literally rework structural conceptions of language and difference that allow new possibilities of social change for the future.



Figure 2. This image is of the Art Union's space in Tahrir Square, available at <http://muftah.org/art-revolution-in-egypt-the-forgotten-writers-foundation/>.

Possessing a great deal or even no experience and being literate or illiterate are not barriers of communication in this liminal zone. In this zone everyone has the same access to expression and the hope of creating an object that changes the possibilities of action and reaction. Symbols are intelligible by the community. They repeat the same symbols, like the colors of the Egyptian flag, doves for peace, or martyrs of the revolution. The protestors create a deep

sense of community through the production of artwork that is mutually understood and respected. Personal differences are not recognized as barriers to solidarity because the art objects become the focus of action and the protestors share the intentions that condition the art itself. This example echoes the practice of relational ethics central to interactivism. The art is the objective manifestation of human expression. Through physically creating objects as a collective, these demonstrators enact the process of mutual discovery, healing, and making belonging.

In this example of public art, we can see how the art itself brings people together. In the material possibilities of the object, the human possibilities of action through that object are ignited. This instance of mediation helps to illuminate some more integral themes in my concept of interactivism: public space, solidarity, possibilities of action, and objects as bridges between people. Like that of the artists in Tahrir Square, interactivism for the EDFC is *materialized* in public spaces. These art objects manipulate cultural symbols and images to articulate both the activist's ideas and to enable the responses of the public. Because of the duality of these spatially and visually disruptive objects as disruptive and culturally intelligible, these objects affectively incite action. This recalls Victor Turner's conception of symbols as forces (Turner 1974). This works at the level of social process, meaning that we can see material possibilities as dynamic forces that bring people together, both in their creation and their visibility.



The Occupy movement came to Colby in the fall of 2011. A couple professors and students saw the potential of the movements to inspire action and decided to organize an "Occupy Colby." The first few meetings drew crowds of almost 100 people, which was huge for our largely apathetic campus. The aim was to unite activist efforts, which was in my opinion the greatest achievement of the occupy movement at large. This was a space that allowed large

groups of people to *find each other* in order to collaborate and unite on issues of social change. A positive outcome of Occupy Colby was that it brought certain students, faculty, and community members together to form coalitions. This was indeed one of the forums where the EDFC found new members and solidified our own aims and aspirations that led to the formation of our manifesto.

The Occupy Movement to me signals a very large-scale example of interactivism. It is the single largest social movement that has utilized practices of direct action in the last 10 years. This movement was very interactivist in that it brought groups of very diverse people together in solidarity. The embodiment of protest and the slogan of the 99% were uniting forces. In his discussion of “#Occupy Everywhere,” Jeff Juris states:

From the beginning, #Occupy has been an egalitarian, radically democratic grassroots struggle that has provided a progressive alternative to the right-wing populism of the Tea Party and a framework for understanding inequality and economic stagnation that resonated with wide swaths of the public, from student to workers, professionals, and the unemployed (Juris 2012: 262).

The ability for the Occupy movement to create alternatives and open up spaces for new conversations, actions, and understandings fostered an atmosphere of progressive social change. Additionally, large-scale protests and political direct action was largely lacking in the United States leading up to the Occupy movements. In turn the interactivist approach of the movement mixed with the motivations and goals of the participators had the ability to attract many different groups of people. The approach of Occupy relied on the occupation of public space through large marches and rallies as well as the construction of tent cities. This invited obvious opportunities for media attention and increased participation from the public over time. Like the interactivist approach I outlined in the previous chapter, Occupy opened up the possibilities for interaction between the spectators and activists, inviting participation from everyone (the 99%).

Additionally, Occupy used similar practices as the EDFC and anarchist movements (which Juris calls “democratic” practices). Using participatory spaces of action, those in occupy relied on consensus-based decision making, mutual aid, collaboration and the tools of the imagination to foster the efficacy of the movement. Jeff Juris comments that many occupiers point to general assemblies or, “open, participatory assemblies as embodying an alternative to the current representative democratic order disproportionately influenced by the 1%” (Juris 2012: 263). This leaderless alternative to normative social movements opened up more possibilities of interaction between the occupiers, allowing for better collaboration and ideas from new pockets of the population. The practices of Occupy allowed for a much greater sustainability than many other mass movements throughout the past twenty years. Juris remarks that, “one way to create more sustained movements is to indefinitely extend smart mob protests, physically occupying space to intervene through time, and ultimately building community, affective solidarity, and alternative forms of sociality” (Juris 2012: 268). These alternatives, with affective qualities, foster greater bonds between the occupiers as well as create more incentives for occupiers to commit to the grievances of the movement. Additionally, Juris remarks that, “the occupations were also emotionally vibrant sites of human interaction that modeled alternative communities and generated intense feelings of solidarity” (Juris 2012: 268).



Figure 3. This picture depicts a member of Occupy Wall Street at the protest site, available at <http://commons.wikimedia.org/>.

To me, the Occupy movement was all about building alternatives of interaction based on addressing largely silent and ignored social and economic realities. In this instance it reshaped the conditions of possibility for social struggles and introduced practices of interactivism on a wide-scale. Occupy was clearly not a sustainable model for the long term. However, through the interactivist approach, the movement generated solidarity and deep social bonds between activists that could come together on common issues. This changed the landscape of possible future interactions for when the occupiers ceased to occupy. Activists could now affectively form new coalitions for more focused social change. Through practicing embodied interactive creativity, Occupy succeeded in reshaping the possibilities of action and re-action beyond the street. Occupy was more about moments of activism than creating a lasting movement.



Writing about Billionaires for Bush, Margaret Farrar and Jamie Warner discuss a realm of activism that deliberately subverts images (mediations legible in the dominant signifying scheme) in order to reclaim them and rework them for different means. The Billionaires for Bush is an activist group that reworks representations of wealthy republicans and performs these personas at demonstrations. They dress in ball gowns and three-piece suits and show up at high profile republican events, creating a spectacle of performance. Through reappropriating dominant images and turning them back around through irony and mockery, the Billionaires for



Figure 4. The Billionaires for Bush in Madison, Wisconsin, photo available at www.thehealersjournal.com/category/occupy-wall-street-2/.

Bush deliver a highly critical message. They use humor and play to embed “a threatening idea inside a non-threatening form” and as “a way of making spectators active participants in the performance” (Farrar 2008: 290). The Billionaires are using spectacle and scenes of play to disrupt the dominant interpretation of political brands and to shift the idea of a *spectator*. They

represent a type of interactivism that relies on embodied interactive creativity and imaginative and ironic play.

The activist scheme of the Billionaires and those like them are very reminiscent of that of the EDFC in some very key ways. Farrar and Warner write that, “The Billionaires for Bush work at the level of representation, using spectacle as a boomerang to encourage bystanders to question what they’re seeing and hearing and to actively think about political life” (Farrar 2008: 295). Through blurring the lines between activist and bystander, the Billionaires are creating a participatory design that allows others to engage their ideas more directly. The EDFC performs a similar move. Through utilizing public spaces, as the Billionaires do, the EDFC “jams” Colby’s popular culture with images that question the community, that ask/allow for responses, and disrupt in playful and critical ways. One of Farrar and Warner’s main arguments is as follows:

We argue that it is possible to overdraw the distinction between actor and audience that critiques of spectacular culture typically rely on; in fact, traditional forms of mass media are being replaced by more interactive technologies that may open up (rather than shut down) avenues for political participation (Farrar 2008: 274).

Interactivist approaches, such as the Billionaires for Bush or the Guerilla Girls, introduce new methodologies of mediation in activist work that allow the messages of the activists to be re-acted *through* the audience. This opens up a considerable space for change that persists and inspires beyond the original activists. Interactivist approaches that incorporate creative and participatory mediations allow an element of agency to emerge within the audience. Through directly engaging in the performance of the Billionaires audiences enact their own agency and enrich the possibilities of interactivist work.



Figure 5. An image of the Billionaires in Costume, available at <http://billionairesforbush.com/>



Thus far, I described examples of three interactivist moments: The Guerilla Girls, Tahrir’s Revolutionary Art Union, and the Occupy Movement. While these moments constitute many of the key tenets of interactivism, they also are quite different than the type of interactivism that the EDFC practices. The EDFC tends to combine the approaches of many of these interactivist moments. Another integral idea to interactivism is the physical creation of objects (like that of the Tahrir artists) and the ways in which this process fosters the activism itself. A perfect example of this process is in David Graeber’s discussion of the “Phenomenology of Giant Puppets.” Graeber is describing “anti-globalization movements,” specifically focusing on the role of colorful puppets in instigating police violence and hatred. Within his argument, he discusses the puppets’ aesthetics and materiality. For this collective of activists, the material possibilities of the puppets are tied to the *process* of creation. This process illuminates the

subjectivity of the activists and the ways that objects bring people together in very specific ways.

Graeber states:

In fact, from the perspective of the activists, it is again process—in this case, the process of production—that is really the point. There are brainstorming sessions to come up with themes and visions, organizing meetings; but, above all, the wire and frames lie on the floors of garages or yards or warehouses...surrounded by buckets of paint and construction materials, almost never alone, with small teams in attendance, molding, painting, smoking, eating, playing music, arguing, wandering in and out. Everything is designed to be communal, egalitarian, expressive. The objects themselves are not expected to last. They are for the most part made of fairly delicate materials; few would withstand a heavy rainstorm...(Graeber 2007: 382).

The process of creativity allows the material possibilities of the objects to be realized which are simultaneously creating solidarity and affinity within the groups that build them. While the puppets are what allow these activists to convey their message of anti-globalization through mocking monumentality, the objects are intentionally fleeting and elusive.



Figure 6. A giant puppet at an anti WTO protest, available at <http://www.parti-communiste.ca/?p=2111>.

The point is the process of the creation and what the materiality of the puppets represents and insights. In this case, Graeber is outlining the conditions of anarchist organization that rely on the conception of direct action. Recall that direct action is intimately tied to emotion and solidarity, action, and image. Through the process of creative action, the puppeteers are directly forming the images (puppets) as well as constituting the space for emotional solidarity and communal affinity. The EDFC enacts similar processes to create mediations. The very process of creativity allows us to forge bonds, act our dreams, heal, inspire, and be inspired. The process of our creativity and the sense that our creations are also materially short-lived, conditions the possibilities of participation of the spectators. Through sitting on the ground and constructing a banner out of paper and glue, and going out in the snow to paint “fist the power” on the campus quad, and typing up and printing and posting fliers, and waking up at 3:30 AM to tape our latest artistic creation to the walls, we are creating more than just art or dialogue. We are creating emotion and possibility and the bonds of friendship and understanding.



For me the most vivid example of an interactivist group practicing through anarchist philosophies is the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, or CIRCA. Paul Routledge helps me illustrate this in his discussion of his involvement in CIRCA, an army of activists who use clown imagery to provide a critique of neoliberalism and show that “nothing undermines authority like holding it up to ridicule” (Routledge 2009: 84). When Routledge talks about his experiences with CIRCA, he describes them as highly collaborative and non-hierarchical. The group, like the EDFC, was created out of response to precise *feelings*.

CIRCA is a very interesting example of interactivism and resonates most closely with the goals and practices of the EDFC. Their manifesto is particularly inspiring. They outline the

reasons why they chose each word in their name. They emphasize anonymity in the sense of refusing the “spectacle of celebrity.” They also talk about the idea that nothing is final lest of all social struggle. There is a beautiful sentence reading, “the key to insurgency is brilliant improvisation, not perfect blueprints” (CIRCA 1997: *Reports*). This works to emphasize the unpredictability of activism and that social change cannot be achieved through one action, but rather consistent rebellion. In their words, “no revolution is ever complete and rebellion continues forever” (CIRCA 1997: *About*). They highlight the importance of play and clowning because “what else can we be in such a stupid world” and because “a clown can survive anything and get away with anything” (CIRCA 1997: *About*). In this sense, play and imagination give them sustainability, inspiration to continue to struggle, and the impunity to be bold. They want to make “war with love,” create chaos, and are not afraid to be fools.



Figure 7. CIRCA members hugging a police officer at a protest, available at www.clownarmy.org.

In their discussion of why they do what they do, CIRCA gives a clear look at the ways in which interactivist groups and the EDFC are so inspiring to the individuals involved in them.

They say:

Within CIRCA we are developing a form of political activism that brings together the ancient practice of clowning and the more recent practice of Non-violent direct action. We aim to develop a methodology that transforms and sustains the inner emotional life of the activists as well as being an effective technique for taking direct action. CIRCA sees both the soul and the street as sites of struggle, realizing that a destructive tendency within many activist movements is forgetting the inner work of personal transformation and healing. And that innovative forms of creative street action are crucial for building and inspiring movements (CIRCA 1997: *Reports*).

In this way, CIRCA can move beyond the trap of trying to “change the world,” and instead try to use creativity to spur incremental positive social and personal change. Their emphasis on the importance of feelings, emotions, healing, and making belonging resonate with the aims of the EDFC and the attempt to create bearable modes of being in this world. Referring back to Graeber’s discussion of the creation of the puppets, we can see how the process of direct action produces affinity. Jeff Juris also takes up the discussion of the role of emotions and affective solidarity in interactivist work. He argues that through the embodiment of performing resistance, activists create and are motivated by powerful emotions (Juris 2008). These emotions enhance the sense of collective solidarity among the affinity group as well as to advance the power of the mediation. The EDFC is equally motivated by emotional energy or “affective solidarity” in creating our mediations. However, the sense that these emotions are publically *disembodied* from our mediation puts the role of our emotional ties on personal transformation, healing, and struggle.



Groups like CIRCA remind me of the importance of practicing a relational ethics in interactivism. Providing emotional and physical support in activism make people feel less

isolated and make people feel part of a powerful collective, making interactive actions more effective because they are more empowered. All the examples outlined above, highlight the importance of emotion and relational ethics to sustaining a movement. Additionally their diverse range of activist visions illustrate in tangible ways the various forms that interactivism can take. In the next section I discuss Colby College's evolving campus climate through focusing on campus activism. I paint Colby's history as an activist history, highlighting certain moments throughout this history that are particularly inspiring to me and have influenced activism happening on campus today.

Fragments of an Activist History

*Not knowing when the dawn will come I open every door.
-Emily Dickinson*

*If I can stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain.
-Emily Dickinson*



In this section, I talk about some of the different Colby activists and movements I learned about through my research this year. By describing moments throughout Colby's history, I hope to first illuminate the structural qualities of the campus that work to silence activism and non-normative culture. But through telling certain histories I want to redefine Colby as an activist campus and present a narrative that works against this silence. In this I acknowledge the difference between history and pasts. I engage fragmented histories throughout this chapter as narratives that were produced about people and pasts. However, I remember different pasts to reproduce these histories in different ways.

In including this chapter I hope to accomplish many goals. First, I want to illustrate how my understanding of Colby's history directly informs my motivations for pursuing this project. Second, I hope to show how these entrenched processes of silence around activism and empowerment at Colby influenced the formation of the EDFC. I hope to sketch a small snapshot of what I feel are inspiring moments of activism in Colby's history that relate to the EDFC while at the same time acknowledging absences in my understanding. These descriptions of histories are fragmented and incomplete stories, but they work to show how people have continuously worked to make Colby a better place for students like me.



On February 27th, 2013 Colby College celebrated its 200th birthday. I am writing this thesis during the bicentennial year of my college. Much of the emphasis of bicentennial related programming is on the “history” of Colby and its future as an institution. However, it is very important to see what pasts are being publically remembered and which are not. This year provided a unique platform to remember many pasts due to the specificity of the celebration. The bicentennial gave Colby a reason to celebrate certain pasts in ways that are uncommon for the institution in any other year. Colby celebrated the women at Colby, Jews at Colby, Native Americans at Colby, and even war veterans and missionaries at Colby. This wide array of histories is being appreciated and produced in new ways. While I acknowledge the purpose of celebrating histories at a juncture of 200 years, I also argue that the lack of celebration or even the shame of certain histories at Colby in everyday life contributes to a culture of silence on campus. In bringing up certain histories only because of the bicentennial shows a lack of acknowledgment of them in the everyday.

I identified many silences throughout my search to access activist histories and subjectivities. There were gaps in what pasts were being remembered and actively transcribed into histories that the college would acknowledge. The silencing of certain pasts affects the campus through creating absences and erasures. I spoke with the members of the EDFC about their knowledge of Colby’s activists and most responded in ways that affirmed these gaps. I asked one member of the EDFC, Silas, “Do you know about Colby’s history of activism?” Silas replied, “I wish I knew!” Another member responded, “I feel like I should know more.” In many of my interviews, it was clear that the absence of knowledge about past moments of change and methods of activism at Colby influences how people conceive of the possibilities for change at Colby now. I found Veena Das’ work on violence particularly helpful in making sense of these

silences and invisibilities. Her ethnography investigates manifestations of violence in the everyday in post-partition India. Das says: “My sense was that violence was visible, yet somehow obscured from our view, as if the eye were a camera lens that was being made to focus on a pre-arranged scenery, and as if what we were witnessing was something that had just vanished from view” (Das 2006: 12). This helps me to conceive of the ways that activism, or even the issues that inspire activism, are at once visible and invisible. These pasts are fleeting and elusive, while at the same time always present. We see the affects of past activism everyday at Colby, but it is in ways that make these pasts invisible. These pasts are here and they are visible in the legacies of change and stasis, but they are not visible to the person holding the camera. Histories and subjectivities are produced by the institution in ways that obscure the everyday landscape of possibilities and reflect entrenched power relationships. I wish to widen the view to encompass more of this landscape.

It is important to continue to be critical of how histories are being institutionally produced and remembered and which pasts are allowed a voice. This is a college that has always been full of people who advocate for social justice and progressive change, but these pasts are often forgotten or made invisible. Writing this thesis in Colby’s 200th year, I am re-writing Colby as an activist campus. In many ways, this thesis is about showing that people *can* make space for themselves at Colby even if they feel alone or discriminated against or silenced. In discussing the EDFC and illuminating the subjectivities of the members, in their desires, fears, frustrations, joys, actions, words, I am re-producing Colby’s history of activism as an activism of the “everyday.” By this I mean that the story of the EDFC is about revealing fragments of peoples lives at Colby. These fragments show how these student activists made space and made belonging for themselves in daily life. These fragments point to a specific way that these students

inhabited the world at a particular place, space, and time. Again Das is helpful in explaining this approach to ethnography of the everyday. She asks: “What is it to pick up the pieces and live in this very place of devastation?” (Das 2006: 6).

I write this for the people that did not celebrate Colby while they were here, who were critical of the institution and who wanted to make it better, for those that Colby hurt. The story of the EDFC shows how people enacted their agency to live in the place of their devastation and who found ways to heal and found ways to truly love Colby. Das says that, “our theoretical impulse is often to think of agency in terms of escaping the ordinary rather than a descent into it” (Das 2006: 7). I want to repaint Colby as a place that has always been full of people that claimed agency over their discomforts, struggles, and devastations. These people found ways to go on living and learning at Colby. They were not escaping their everyday lives, but rather confronting them: re-making and descending into the ordinary.



This year has shown me the importance of making people’s subjectivities accessible. This year has challenged me to think about Colby’s pasts and especially the “history of activism” with new questions. As an undergraduate, Colby’s activist pasts have proven difficult to find and even harder to access. The resources for finding information about Colby’s activism are not widely publicized. Professor Mark Tappan along with students in the education department created a website to promote activism:

This web-site is designed specifically to offer insight into the activism, forms of diversity, and efforts to promote social justice that have occurred at Colby. It was first developed in 2001; it has subsequently been updated in preparation for the College’s Bicentennial in 2013. Its goal is to illuminate those in Colby’s past who have taken a commitment to diversity and social justice out of the classroom and made it tangible and relevant in the real world (Tappan 2013: *Introduction*).

This website proved to be an invaluable resource to me. It details many events, lives, and incidents that I never knew about. However, the descriptions this website gives do not satisfy my curiosity. I came away from these sources feeling excited about the new parts of Colby's past I just learned. But at the same time I was disappointed in the lack of detail these accounts provided and by the gaps in time and in experiences that were left unexplored. I felt like I could not truly access these pasts because the subjectivities of these individuals were absent. I did not fully appreciate *how* these pasts were turned into a history of activism and I wish that there were other accounts that focus more on lived experiences.

The events and groups that these resources include re-inscribe the history of what people on campus call "reactionary activism"³² and what I will rephrase as reactive activism. Most of the accounts were about distinct outbursts, incidents, or college "firsts". These histories are important, but they also show a gap in the discourse about everyday manifestations of resistance and activism shown in sustained struggles or alternative methods of confronting the campus climate. What follows are some important moments in the college's activism that I *have* been able to uncover through my own research. These accounts are constructed from the little that I have been able to gather from my time at Colby and the public archives about Colby activism. I chose moments specifically to contextualize the problems faced by the members of the EDFC during their time at Colby. They are fragmented because they only allow for a small look into produced histories about lives lived.



³² Reactionary actually means deeply conservative. However, when my informants and peers would call activism reactionary, they actually meant reactive activism. This is activism that forms as a reaction to a specific event or set of immediate problems.

In 1970, 17 members of the campus organization “Students for Black Unity” occupied Lorimer Chapel with a list of non-negotiable demands to improve the white-black imbalance at Colby College.³³ They are known as “The Chapel 17.” The Chapel 17 presented a list of five non-negotiable demands to President Strider, the administration, faculty, and students that were aimed at changing normative culture. The demands were:

1. The recruitment of black students who would probably require some type of remedial assistance. Such assistance could be given in a variety of ways.
 - A. Colby could establish a summer preparatory program such as those now in existence at Bowdoin and the University of Maine (Upward Bound).
 - B. Colby could endeavor to send as many incoming black students as possible to existing Upward Bound programs.
 - C. Colby could establish a transitional year or similar program to cope with the needs of these students while they are here.
2. The hiring of as many as possible Black professors.
3. The establishment, on a permanent basis, of basic courses such as the Negro History course being taught by Professor Foner this semester.
4. The incorporation of various aspects of black culture and black concerns into certain existing courses now offered in various departments at Colby.
5. The admission of a freshman class which will be at least 10% black (Tappan 2013).

The organizational structure of the occupation was centralized through an elected leader, Charles Terrell. Terrell would relay all public statements or group decisions to uphold consistency. He said that, “We picked the chapel because we felt that it symbolized the College and we felt that if we tried to do Eustis we'd really be disrupting the central functioning of the College. We said, ‘Let's pick the chapel. It symbolizes the College. It will upset them but it won't stop anything.’” (Boyle 2007). The Chapel 17 strategically chose a symbolic space to call the institution itself into question, while not being too disruptive to take away from the message of their action. Eventually, the college issued a restraining order on the students and they vacated

³³ My knowledge of this event came from the website “Activism, Diversity, and Social Justice at Colby College: 1813-2013”, an interview with one of the Chapel 17, Charles Terrell, and a talk given by Charles Terrell in April 2013. In this representation it is necessary to note that Charles Terrell is a wealthy trustee of Colby and it makes me curious if these histories would be produced in the same way or at all if Charles Terrell did not give money to the college. I also would like to note that no other student voices other than Charles’ were illuminated in the description of this event on the website.

the chapel. However, the occupation led to a coalition of about 150 supporters and a rally of around 300 students in support of the Chapel 17's demands. The college only fulfilled some of the demands at the time and some still remain to be met today.



In 1994, “Colby Students of Color United for Change” introduced a request for Multicultural housing on campus.³⁴ These students wanted to create, “a more comfortable, sensitive and tolerant campus environment, especially for students who feel the burden of their minority status” (Final Report 1994: 1). A task force was created on the board of trustees to evaluate special interest housing. This process gathered student opinions, collected data from other colleges with multicultural housing, and conducted a relevant literature review. The committee was apparently unable to reach a consensus with regards to special interest housing and they decided to table the issue. Instead, there was widespread consensus on creating a center instead of housing for multiculturalism. The final recommendation to the board of trustees stated, “that the enhanced the use of the Student Center by the addition of appropriate new space will create a hub and a common ground for activities aimed at promoting interaction and understanding in an increasingly diverse campus community” (Final Report 1994: 5).

The students did not get multicultural housing, but in 1995 The Pugh Center was created with the mission to promote dialogue and understanding on issues of multiculturalism. Eight years after the original proposal, in 2002, The Coalition for Institutional Accountability was

³⁴ My knowledge of these efforts comes from the website “Activism, Diversity, and Social Justice at Colby College: 1813-2013” and the documents that were produced from the original task force detailing their decisions. The “Final Report” was the “Final Report of the Colby College Trustee Commission on Multicultural and Special Interest Housing.”

formed, again calling for residential multicultural housing.³⁵ The “CIA” created a comprehensive proposal outlining their primary demands to institute multicultural housing and to strengthen Colby’s commitment to multiculturalism and diversity. The coalition was made up of students of color and queer students who organized a silent protest against issues of institutionalized racism and heteronormativity on April 12th, 2002. They showed up during the spring Board of Trustees meeting and presented their proposal. In their proposal they made it clear what they were trying to work against, writing an appendix with examples of students’ experiences with micro-aggressions. Their proposal was ultimately rejected and multicultural housing still does not exist at Colby today.



A rally took place on the campus quad against hate crimes in 1994.³⁶ There was a series of anti-Semitic hate crimes perpetuated against students, faculty, and staff at the time. At a period of increased frequency of these acts, the community decided to take action. Action was constructed around a series of complaints based on past events. The April 15th rally was reportedly one of the largest rallies in Colby’s history. Similarly, there was a sit-in in the student center on November 4th, 2008 in response to culturally and racially insensitive incidents.³⁷ However, in contrast to the 1994 gathering, this gathering called for institutional modifications. These students had several demands including a call for campus leaders to participate in Campus Conversations on Race and a revision of the College’s diversity requirement (Tappan 2013).

³⁵ My understanding of the “CIA” was informed by the website “Activism, Diversity, and Social Justice at Colby College: 1813-2013” and the supplementary document the group produced. This 14 page document is entitled “A Supplement to the Strategic Plan for Colby: Presented to the Trustees of Colby College, April 12, 2002.”

³⁶ My source for this event was solely the website “Activism, Diversity, and Social Justice at Colby College: 1813-2013.”

³⁷ Ibid.



In 1980, Colby established a group dedicated to establishing a women's center.³⁸ In the same year the college rejected a proposal for this center. In 1990, the "Task Force on the Status of Women and Issues of Gender" issued a report to President Cotter and the college, outlining an extensive list of recommendations for the college to improve upon. The majority of the suggestions were never implemented. In 2003, the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies coordinating committee issued a proposal for a Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, which never came to fruition. Finally, April 2011 signaled the most recent proposal for a Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center (GSD center). The proposal has only been accepted in part as of today. The college acknowledged the necessity for a center, but have not yet told the community what that will look like and when it will come into existence. The administration has managed to hire a Dean of Gender and Sexual Diversity that has since resigned after less than one year at the position. A petition has circulated to advocate for the GSD position to be split into two jobs. A post by a faculty member explains:

The problem is that the Pugh Center is designed to educate the entire college on issues of diversity and has just the Director on staff. When Andrea Breau was made associate director of Pugh in addition to the Director of GSD, her time was split and she ended up doing the smaller things that make Pugh function, like making posters. That meant there was not enough time to devote to the very ambitious task of starting GSD programming. If Dr. Bradley had a full time associate and the GSD position was a full time position, we might have a chance of really getting GSD programming off the ground.

The status of the petition is still in motion. The search to fill the position is also currently ongoing.

³⁸ My information regarding the struggle to institute a women's center on campus was gathered through my own conversations with faculty, staff, and students during my own involvement to achieve a GSD center on campus. Additionally I used the most recent proposal, "Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Program," and the facebook page, "Colby College needs a Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center."



On April 12th, 2009 there was a violent “altercation” between Colby students, security, and the Waterville Police.³⁹ There is not a clear understanding of what happened that night, but through what I have gathered three Colby students were arrested the night of April 12th. Colby security guards were allegedly trying to remove an African-American student from the Pugh Center. They cited reasons that he needed immediate medical care. One of this student’s friends approached the room and was then surrounded by security and Colby Emergency Response (CER). They security guards thought the student was “interfering” with the medical care of the student so they pushed him out of the room (Dogood16, 2009). However, CER did not express a need for any action against this student. While being shoved out of the room, the student yelled at the security guards but did not take physical action in retaliation. The security guard then proceeded to tackle the student to the ground causing him to start bleeding from the head. The original ill student was apparently taken away from The Pugh Center at this point. A second student then came to see what was happening to his friend who had just been assaulted by the security officer. The second student was then forced on the ground and “subdued” by three different security guards. Reportedly, neither of these students used force against the security officers during any point in the situation. “At least 11 police cruisers from 6 jurisdictions” showed up at the scene to assist security (Dogood16 2009).

While security was waiting for “backup” they did not relent their force on the two students. When the police got there the students were yelling, “I am not resisting, I am not

³⁹ My primary sources for this incident were the website, “Activism, Diversity, and Social Justice at Colby College: 1813-2013,” a CNN “ireport” from user “Dogood 16,” Colby Echo articles and opinion pieces, and the “Response to the Martin Report” which details Colby’s response to the incident. The ireport was submitted by students and conveyed that this report was a way to counteract the reports heavily influenced by authorities. This report says that, “all information provided is backed by student witness testimonies.” These sources all present different and sometimes competing accounts of what happened.

resisting, please, please, I am not resisting.” One of them also screamed, “I’m bleeding, let me go, let me go, I’m bleeding!” (Dogood16 2009). At this point the police maced the second student and threatened on looking students. The police arrested the two students for assault and “criminal trespassing.” A third student was arrested after going to the security office to ask for explanations of the charges for disorderly conduct. The officials on the case later tried to justify violent action on the students through emphasizing the role of alcohol. However, all of the students were 21 and over and had blood alcohol levels under the legal limit (Dogood16 2009).

After this horrifying and confusing night, a group called “Colby United” formed to defend the rights of the arrested students. A rally on the quad was organized. Everyone wore red in solidarity and members of the community shared testimonies about the incident. The students had four major concerns:

1. The excessive use of force by the law enforcement agencies and Colby College Security on the students involved in the incident.
2. The mismanagement of public relations by the Colby College Communications Office regarding the incident on Sunday, April 12, 2009 at approximately 1:30 am in the Pugh Center, especially the misleading statements released to the press by the Communications Office.
3. The constant mistreatment of Colby College students by Colby College employees, mainly security.
4. The misapplication of standard security protocol, which includes: the aggressive nature of the security officers and police officers responding to the incident, the unnecessary use of mace on a submissive and detained student, security officers issuing threats of physical violence towards by-standing students, as well as the verbal threatening of by-standing students by police officers, and finally lack of medical attention for the detained students (Dogood16 2009).

The administration organized a forum to talk about the event and used a legal consultant to investigate the incident further. This led to the revision of protocols responding to the recommendations from the legal consultation. However, the lingering question remained whether or not this was a racially motivated incident of violence. Students were asking themselves if the students were white, would the same treatment have occurred? This event produced a large

amount of dialogue on race, excessive force, privilege, violence, and campus tensions. One student at the open forum said, “this incident exposes a lot of problems we have, both as a student body and in the way we function as an institution. We should be able to look critically at weekend events in order to examine policies and the ways in which we, as students on this campus, feel unsafe” (The Colby Echo, November 2009).



While I read about these amazing members of the Colby community fighting for change or rallying in solidarity, the extent of how much Colby has changed washed over me. Yet, I was also hit with the realization of how many patterns of activism are repeated unsuccessfully and how far the institution still has to progress. As I touched on before, Colby’s available histories points to a tradition of “reactionary” or reactive activism. Activism at Colby is construed as rallying in response to an incident through a sit in or the creation of a petition or a protest. There is less on record to show more radical or proactive forms of activism with the exception of initiatives aimed at changing structural qualities of the campus. What there is not evidence of are creative forms of activism, art activism, activism without a name associated to it, or other alternative styles of effecting change. This does not mean that these manifestations have not existed at Colby and I can say with confidence that they have. Rather, this silence indicates what the college is able to know about, what has been recorded, and what forms of activism are valued at the institution. In short: what types of activism are worth recording?

One of my first memories of seeing the impact of activism was stumbling on the Internet onto an archive of the shirts that the group “Act Up” had made. And one of the shirts that stood out to me it was just a plain black t-shirt and it had the three monkeys hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil, so they were doing that but then below it it said “silence = death” and I think that was a very poignant moment for me because I realized for a lot of people silence is death.

And by not being active a lot of people are consigning themselves to intellectual death, to cultural death. So that was what really inspired me to be an activist, especially because I am queer so I can share that experience of marginality. I need to speak for myself because I can pass as a heterosexual white male, so I personally feel that I should use that passing privilege to speak for myself and in speaking for myself I can other speak for others. I think that is why I'm involved in activism. I speak so I can be heard, so other can be heard through me, so that more people can speak to be heard. And I think that is the fundamental end goal of activism, that everyone's voice can eventually be heard, so that everyone will have a place at the table that right now is reserved for heterosexual, white, upper middle-class, men. And I mean that might be changing now, like it might be a heterosexual, white upper middle-class woman, but it is still unquestionably exclusive to a lot of people and a lot of lived experiences. That is fundamentally unacceptable and needs to be changed. – Timmy Jerhune ●✿

Experiences with silencing were key motivations for the necessity of the EDFC. We felt that we needed a space to counteract institutional silence and to make sense of how and why Colby made us *feel* silenced. We wanted to bring an alternative set of voices and mediums to critique issues at Colby. This space was not open to us before and we did not know of any other moments at Colby where something that presented this kind of activism existed. Our lack of knowledge about and experiences with spaces like the one the EDFC created reinforced its very necessity. Looking back, it is not shocking that we did not know about alternative activism in Colby's history or had experienced them in our time at college. This goes back to the institutionalized silences that hush away certain experiences and emphasize others.⁴⁰ Colby's discourse on activism does not publically value activist narratives that did not signal either, 1) institutional or structural change, 2) the failure to institute structural or institutional change, 3) an event that directly inspired action, or 4) the Colby "firsts" such as the first woman graduate from Colby. Institutionalized forums for activism did not afford people the same style of activism as

⁴⁰ "Muted groups are silenced by the structures of dominance, and if they wish to express themselves they are forced to do so through the dominant modes of expression, the dominant ideologies" (Moore 1988: 3).

the EDFC, even while these groups and efforts provide supportive networks and outlets to promote change.

With PCB I think certainly think that we were somewhat activist in that we were trying to change the culture through an educational outlet and I think it does work. But I think you will always have some people go to those events and others avoid them. I think that with the Bridge you have a close-knit community. They became more my family my senior year as did the EDFC. –Anonymous⁴ •❁

The Bridge has been great but it has also been super challenging and we've gone through so many ups and downs. I mean dealing with so many bias incidents on campus and so many people feeling unsafe and like for the past two years being part of the gender and sexual diversity push that's just like, not that it's not eventually going to happen cause I know that it will eventually happen, but how slow and exhausting they've made the process and like how it literally feels like there is this glass ceiling we can't get through when we are working with the administration because they want it to be a slow, slow process. So that's all been frustrating.

But at the same time, being in the Bridge, just like being in an activist group, we do activism on campus, we are a support group for students, and we work on changing campus policies if they aren't proper. We have meetings, we are also a programming board, we also do work in town to provide education to the Waterville high school and middle school and have a support group at the Church. We do so many things that I'm so proud of. But similar to that I've learned that sometimes these groups like this are as much a support group for the people in it as they are trying to change the outside view.

–Barbara Hammer ■



One of the leaders of the Chapel 17, Charles Terrell came to Colby as the endnote speaker to the Pugh Community Board's "S.H.O.U.T." week.⁴¹ In his talk he celebrated some of Colby's activists and spoke about the importance of activism. He spoke about the occupation of the chapel, delving into the structure of the group, what it was like for them at Colby, his

⁴¹ The Pugh Community Board (PCB) is Colby's group dedicated to multicultural programming. Their annual "S.H.O.U.T." week stands for speaking, hearing, opening up, together. PCB picks a theme and runs a week of intensive programming to engage the Colby community in dialog.

experience, and what happened following the occupation. His talk provided me a rare look into the actual lived experience of a campus activist at Colby, especially one told first hand. He told the crowd about his family, his feelings about Colby, his arthritis, and his reasons for being on the Board of Trustees at Colby. This experience provided me with so much more insight than any of the research I have done on activism at Colby could. A brief article or summary about Mary Low cannot adequately relay how important she was to the fabric of Colby's future.

In hearing what Charles Terrell had to say about activism at Colby, I learned so much more than I did by reading about the Occupation of Lorimer Chapel. Through hearing the voices of activism at Colby I can connect with these pasts in much more meaningful ways and appreciate their legacies to a greater extent. Silencing these voices does not allow for the work of campus activists to come to life. From hearing from Terrell, I could more adequately assess the Chapel 17 and compare the group to the EDFC and my own experiences at Colby. I believe that the Chapel 17 was very interactivist but not explicitly anarchist in practice. Their approach was absolutely an example of direct action that called for a response by the community in very overt ways. Their occupation of a highly symbolic public space and the public list of demands forced the college to contend with them. Additionally, their uses of play seemed to increase their affinity, such as the warm memories Terrell expressed blasting Mo Town all over campus. They were above all dedicated to changing normative culture and used similar ideologies to the EDFC to enact their direct action, such as the resistance to domination and the practice of solidarity. Charles Terrell told us that the motto they would always come back to was, "what would you attempt if you knew you could not fail?" This is incredibly similar to the EDFC's motto from Emily Dickinson, "finite to fail, infinite to venture." This shows the group's willingness to engage in possibility and to imagine a better Colby.

Charles Terrell's talk reminded me why I care about Colby and why I should celebrate it. Charles was charming, honest, and enthusiastic about activism at Colby. It is very easy to feel as though activists' efforts to fight for progressive and transformational change will be erased in the four-year student turnover of the college. Thankfully, Charles reminded me in his talk that four years is not a long time and that most student activists and change seekers will have to wait many years to see the changes that they advocated for while they were at Colby. That does not mean that we shouldn't fight, but it reminds us that we need to appreciate all that people have done at Colby in these past four and past 200 years to fight for change. Activism at this college is cumulative and our efforts here can have lasting legacies over time. As Terrell said that night, we need to keep "speaking up about things that matter."



Other than the "Chapel 17" it is hard for me to evaluate Colby's movements for social change through the lens of interactivism because of the lack of knowledge available to me. I know that interactivist approaches exist on campus in certain acts, such as Take Back the Night or a border crossing simulation for Immigrant Rights Month. The approach exists, but the EDFC signals a larger desire for interactivist spaces and the desire to practice interactivism as individuals and as a collective. Without the available knowledge that such spaces exist on campus, students will *feel* that they do not exist. Charles Terrell's talk impacted myself and many other students because it allowed us to engage the subjectivities of a Colby activist and other activist's subjectivities through him. We were able to not only hear his story, but also to interact with him.

It is not often that current students come into contact with alumni in the context of activism, but the interaction can do a lot to change current students' conceptions and actions. In

recent years, more students have taken up the project of re-building the subjectivities of silenced realities at Colby. On the webpage, “Activism, Diversity, and Social Justice at Colby College: 1813-2013,” there is a tab of resources that includes six student papers on topics dealing with activism, diversity, and social justice. The titles explicitly dealing with these issues at Colby include: “From Apathy to Acceptance: A History of Racism and Heterosexism at Colby College,” “Hail Diversity Hail: Questioning the Campus Climate at Colby College,” “Silencing and Sexual Assault at Colby College,” and “Queering the Colby Archive: Combating Queer Erasure with Narratives of Queer Survival.” I hope that students continue this effort as it acts to expand possibilities towards necessary change at Colby.

My aim for the remainder of this project is to inscribe the subjectivities of the EDFC and the subjectivities that our interactivism opened up on campus. This will allow me to counteract the lack of knowledge about interactivist spaces and work against the silence of activism in the everyday. I do this not to freeze identities in time, but to write down lived realities as they were being lived at a certain place, space, and time. I hope that students in the future will see the possibility in what these students accomplished and what that means for how they can conceive of the possibilities for change.

Do You Feel Safe?

*A word is dead when it is said, some say. I say it just begins to live that day.
-Emily Dickinson*



It is the fall of 2011 just as the weather starts to turn bitter cold in Waterville, Maine. As the students of Colby College pass through Pulver Pavilion beginning at 7:00 AM they are confronted by a large yellow banner that expands like a runway all the way to the opposite set of doors. Yellow construction cones at each end protect the expansive banner like two goals on a soccer field. At first, the students are unaware of what to make of the banner, but quickly a different code of conduct develops and the banner becomes the spectacle of the day. There were crowds gathered around the banner until late in the afternoon. As students walked through Pulver, their behaviors changed and they interacted with the banner in ways that were out of the ordinary for the setting. This perfectly manicured space rarely contains a rogue poster, let alone a 50-foot banner.

I want to discuss this “banner” as a prime example of the interactivism of the EDFC. This discussion will include both the perspectives from individuals in the EDFC as well as the reactions of other students on campus. I want to see the banner as a social agent that propelled students to come together in very interesting and telling ways. The banner is a social agent that allowed students and members of the Colby community to come together to think reflexively about themselves and about Colby as an institution. The banner was put in the student center in the wake of very serious accusations of voyeurism, drugged drinks, rape, victim blaming, and violent hate crimes on campus. Students were propelled together in ways that forced them to communicate differently about these serious issues. Drawing on the timely problems of the

campus, this banner was an agent that motivated conversation and stitched the community together, if even just for a mere moment.

I include this intervention in depth specifically because it was articulated most frequently throughout my interviews as the most important intervention of the EDFC. Individuals would refer to the banner as the “crowning moment” of the EDFC. The banner was referred to as the most successful intervention in terms of illuminating what was at stake for the college. The legacy of the banner on campus has been widely felt in the past year, which has had implications on activism happening on campus today and on the attitudes of the members of the EDFC. This chapter will demonstrate the interactivism practiced by the EDFC. It will also delve into how this specific interactivist intervention was successful and how it illuminates lasting problems for Colby as an institution.



The banner is secured to the floor with blue and pink duct tape. The words “DO YOU FEEL SAFE?” emblaze across the light yellow, paper background in navy blue, block letters. The work itself evokes a childish atmosphere that contrasts with the atmosphere of the student center. Pulver Pavilion has a starkly white interior except for a pale yellow ceiling, with exposed pipes revealing the functionality of the building. The floor is a brick red tile. Entering the building, you walk through a set of glass doors and confront a large open area, which separates the student café off from the study area containing a TV, stiff chairs and coffee tables, and the circular shaped information desk. A large staircase protrudes towards the left side of the café leading up to the student pub and across a bridge connecting the second floor to the offices of campus life and various student groups in the Pugh Center. In order to walk from one side of

campus to the other in a timely manner, you have to walk through the student center and confront this open space. This space is panoptic in nature (Foucault 1977). From anywhere in the main part of the student center, including the upstairs offices and balcony, you can see the open space. It is in the middle of the building, allowing people to survey and to be surveyed. The runway, or banner, occupying this specific space is strategic. It is impossible not to take notice of a spatial disruption in the student center, especially one of such contrasting aesthetics.



Figure 8. The Banner. Photo Credit: EDFC Photo

This banner physically stops anyone moving through the building and anyone already in the building can see it from any point throughout the main part of the building. The banner gets

in their way as a physical blockade to their usual routine. The colors and the placement make this display a visual and physical disruption that stops bodies. After they stop, they read the words “Do You Feel Safe?” Most students claimed they knew what this question regarded. No one knew who created the banner, but most extrapolated what it was for. There were markers strewn haphazardly across the blue words. Students began interacting with the runway, writing responses in a rainbow of colors, sizes, and styles. By the end of the day, there were hundreds of responses on the banner, all building on each other. They became anonymous conversations on paper.

This banner resonated with so many students, faculty, and members of the community because it expanded on the broader campus discussion and climate around sexual assault and campus safety on both a physical and emotional level. On November 10th, 2011 President William Adams sent out an ambiguous e-mail trying to clarify a string of rumors and reports about an incident of “sexual misconduct” on campus.

As most of you know, much of the campus is now embroiled in a conversation about whether some members of our community have violated Colby's sexual misconduct policy. These allegations came to our attention early Sunday morning, and since then we have been engaged in a thorough investigation involving dozens of interviews with those who may have information. As of this morning, apart from the initial report of the incident, only two people have come forward voluntarily to provide evidence to the investigators. The investigation is continuing, and I urge anyone who has any information to contact Peter Chenevert or Paul Johnston.

We understand that much depends on the outcome of this investigation and that many of the answers that we seek could have an impact on upcoming events. But we cannot and should not rush the process or our judgments while the investigation is still yielding information.

Federal laws prohibit Colby administrators from revealing at this time information that would identify any of those who are allegedly involved in this situation. I understand the frustration felt by those who want to know more, but my obligations and those of other administrators are clear - we may not compromise the privacy of our students or the integrity of the investigation by issuing statements that assign blame, reveal personal information, or make it possible for others to draw inferences that will identify students.

My lack of prior comment to the community should not be taken as indifference. These are deeply troubling allegations that have far-reaching impacts on our community. And I know we are all concerned about whether the campus climate encourages or excuses behaviors that are antithetical to our community values. This is a discussion that I pledge to initiate, but not in a way that compromises the privacy and rights of any individuals in our community.

Sincerely,

William D. Adams⁴²

The alleged “incident” at hand involved an act of voyeurism. The captain of the Colby football team invited his teammates, and forced others through hazing rituals, to watch him engage in sexual activity with a student without her knowledge or consent. However, at this point in the semester, no one really knew the specifics of the event. The administration admitted their hands were tied and the campus rumor mill was in full force in the absence of information. The President’s words themselves did not convey the meaning of the incident. There was so much more hidden behind his words and so many ways in which his words were left to become political. There soon were so many versions of the story that only a very select few knew what actually happened. However, these rumors fed into a greater dialogue about safety and sexual assault and made the campus climate fraught with tensions.

Anthropologist Veena Das says, “while voice may give life to frozen words, turned into the plural it can also be lethal as in the case of words floating around in panic rumors without being tethered to a signature” (Das 2006: 9). Dialogue on campus lacked a signature, as Das would say, and it fed into a climate of fear and a realization of uncertainty. Students and the institution itself were being called into question. As one student put it, “every time I see a guy in a football sweatshirt I automatically cringe and I wonder if he was one of the guys. I can’t even help it anymore, my body has a physical response to seeing them.”⁴³ Some attributed the actions of a few to the entire team, while others denied that the event ever happened. Students were openly critical of the administration in public forums, especially the civil discourse, Colby’s

⁴² Taken directly from the e-mail dated on November 10th, 2011

⁴³ Quotation recorded in the spring of 2012 when I interviewed students for my original project on the “Do You Feel Safe” banner when I was abroad in Beirut, Lebanon.

school-wide email bulletin. One student posted, “This is the content of an email written by the President of Williams College this week, regarding an act of racist hate speech on their campus.

Colby, we can do better.”⁴⁴ The email from Williams’ President Adam Falk follows:

To the Williams Community,

We want to report to you the full facts of what took place early Saturday morning. What follows here is very disturbing.

On Saturday at around 12:30 a.m. a student called Campus Safety and Security to report seeing scrawled on a hallway wall on the fourth floor of Prospect Hall the phrase "All Niggers Must Die." We are horrified by this act and regret needing to repeat such language in a college communication.

CSS launched a college investigation and notified Williamstown Police.

The initial e-mail report to campus went out around 10 a.m. We apologize for the fact that not only what occurred, but our initial report itself, have made a significant number of campus community members feel unsafe.

Dean Sarah Bolton invited a range of student leaders to meet with her and Vice President Mike Reed that evening. We estimate that about 70 students took part. As the evening went on, they were joined by several faculty and staff, including President Adam Falk and Vice President Steve Klass. At one point in the evening, a group of students and others marched to the Williamstown Police Station to encourage the town's investigation of this hate crime.

Those of us at Saturday evening's meeting came away with a much deeper understanding of the sense of vulnerability that many members of our campus community live with each day and how it has been made worse by this hate speech and the initial report.

Today at 12:30 p.m. some 200 students, faculty, and staff met in Goodrich to continue the conversation, including a discussion of possible college responses.

We can report that, given the gravity of the situation, those responses include the following:

CSS and the Dean's Office will continue their investigation into who is responsible for this incident. So far they have talked with everyone who lives in Prospect and everyone who based on card swipes was in the building at the time. A great deal of harm has been done by this vile act. Since there is no excuse for behavior so offensive, hateful, and harmful-anywhere, but especially at Williams-we will continue to do all that we can to hold the perpetrator(s) accountable.

After consulting with the Faculty Steering Committee, we have decided to cancel all classes and athletic practices tomorrow (Monday). We understand how this disrupts important college functions, but in the wake of a shock such as this, the campus community needs to take a pause. An event that we expect all available students, faculty, and staff to attend will take place at 11 a.m. on Chapin Lawn. Details of that will be sent later. We also hope that all those attending will be able to find ways to have lunch together in small groups. To facilitate that, card swipes will not be required for Monday lunch.

Several spaces on campus will be set aside and staffed for those who would like to continue important discussions about these matters. Details on this to follow.

Members of the Counseling Center (x2353), Dean's Office (x4171), Multicultural Center (x3340), and Chaplains' Office (x2483) are available for students who would benefit from their support. Anyone wishing to meet with the Counseling Center should call CSS (x4444), who will contact a counselor to arrange for a phone or on-campus

⁴⁴ Quoted directly from the Civil Discourse on November 10th, 2011

consultation. We will report later on extended hours and places at which counselors will be available.

For any students who feel physically unsafe, please contact CSS (x4444), which will contact the Dean's Office.

The college is forming a committee to produce a protocol for the handling and reporting of any future such incidents.

We encourage faculty, but all of us really, to appreciate that what has occurred here has affected a large number of students so deeply that it will be difficult for them to function normally for some time. We urge sensitivity to their situations.

We also encourage everyone to take care of those you are with tonight.

As we together organize our individual, group, and college-wide responses, may that be with outrage at what has occurred and at what too many members of the campus community are continually burdened by, along with the resolute sense that in the end we will succeed in making this campus, nation, and world a place that is safe for all.

Sincerely,

Adam Falk
President

Sarah Bolton
Dean of the College

Steve Klass
V.P. for Campus Life

Mike Reed
V.P. for Strategic Planning and Institutional Diversity

The difference in tone and attitude between President Adams' and President Falk's emails is startling. President Adam's email is on the defensive, assuring students about the sensitivity of the issue and how the administration cannot reveal identities. However it was not identities that students at Colby were hoping to get out of the administration. Students were increasingly critical of the administration's tactics because instead of taking the steps to facilitate productive dialogue on sexual violence and campus values or to acknowledge student concerns about campus safety, they used the sensitivity of the incident to stay mute. President Falk's email, on the other hand, apologized for their initial report of the racist incident as it made members of their community "feel unsafe." He then proceeded to inform students of safe spaces, counseling resources, and places for discussion. His response is reflexive, detailed, sensitive to student concerns and realities, and empathetic. The extensive measures that the Williams College

administration took reveals a commitment to student health and safety both on a physical and emotion level that Colby has rarely demonstrated.

Yet, there seems to be a disjuncture between how the Colby administration treats bias incidents and issues of sexual misconduct internally and externally. Externally, the Colby administration facilitates a culture of silence, failing to be proactive about student concerns and failing to promote a supportive atmosphere in times of confusion and frustration. Yet this contrasts with how some students who actually report these issues feel they have been treated. The EDFC received a letter from the “victim of the sexual misconduct” incident that revealed this disjuncture:

To all the frustrated faculty and students who have expressed their support for the victim of the sexual misconduct currently being investigated:

The investigation being conducted on my behalf has catalyzed a reaction from the Colby community that has taken on a will of its own. I am a recent transfer to Colby, and I am beginning to learn that your frustration stems from a string of past silences about cases much like my own.

First, allow me to emphasize how monumental the outpouring of support from the faculty and students has been for me. For those that have commended my bravery in this atrocious mess, know that without the persistent, vocal support of the community I would not be holding it together nearly so bravely.

Your outrage wields significant power. However, permit me to convince you that you are applying pressure to the wrong individuals. Being on the inside of this situation, I can assure you that the administration has been fighting tirelessly for me. And so I am going to fight for them. I put my full support behind the investigative process and the inexhaustible efforts of the investigators. They are fiercely committed to discovering the truth and, where necessary, exacting appropriate punishments.

I would absolutely encourage you all to harness this wind we’ve collectively stirred up at Colby – but let me be clear: direct your pressure toward the football team and its coaches. These are the individuals that need a little nudge, which you have proved more than willing and capable to provide.

By attacking the administration, you will only be hindering the investigative process at a most crucial juncture. Please, allow the administration to do their job. I have put my faith in Dean Johnston, and you, thankfully, have some faith in me as a force of change on this campus. Let’s not get in the way of justice.

I cannot thank you enough for supporting me. Apply your inestimable pressure to the coaches and the players who have yet to come forward and I’m sure this case will not fall flat like they have in the past. We’re raising hell, Colby.

This response identified that the administration conducts internal investigations with a “fierce commitment” and that they exact the “appropriate punishments.” Yet, it also affirms the thread

of silence that weaves in and out of this incident and those like it. Because of complex webs of silence that are full of gaps and cracks, Colby is often incapable of having conversations that produce productive discourse. This student speaks to the concern that the administration does not create this web of silences, but rather just upholds it. In this response, the silences are spun from the campus culture and the discourses that discipline and control students. She urges pressure to be applied to privileged campus groups rather than the administration. This incident came at a confusing time for the campus and there were not enough spaces for people to grapple with their feelings on what this meant for the college and what this could mean for people individually. Students putting pressure on the administration reflects the anxiety of the time. Students did not know how to direct their frustrations and often did not know how to speak about what was going on or listen to their peers. However, it was clear that the atmosphere of trepidation consuming people's actions and words was changing the possibilities for discussion.



This incident came at a time when issues about “sexual misconduct” were being discussed very frequently. The previous semester marked the revitalization of the Take Back the Night march on campus where dozens of students spoke out about their experiences with sexual violence to an audience of over 200 people. This showed a commitment from the college to acknowledge these issues. Additionally, this same year from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011 there was a huge push towards creating a gender and sexual diversity resource center. This push continued into the next fall. However, things seemed to quickly revert to the status quo and all the positivity from the previous year turned into immense frustration. The resource center's momentum was moving at a very slow pace and there was an explosion of bias incidents made public throughout campus.

Students were writing on the civil discourse in large numbers coming out to the campus with problems such as bulimia, experiences with date rape, being molested on the New York City subway, negative experiences being openly gay on campus, and much more. Everyday there was a fresh set of issues being hashed out on the virtual pages of the civil discourse and these conversations clearly bled into student life. When the incident of voyeurism came to people's attention, it was not isolated from the discussions students were already having about related issues: it built on the discourse already in circulation.

For the members of the EDFC, this incident hit particularly hard. The members of the group are collectively involved in a wide range of activities on campus that intensified the impact of campus discussions. For us bias incidents, racism, sexism, homophobia, are all a part of the fabric of daily life in varying degrees. As students working to fight the issues that make sexual violence on our campus possible, the daily affirmation that we were not succeeding and that our peers were suffering was heart breaking. Additionally many of the members in the EDFC occupied leadership positions on campus where they acted as confidants for victims of sexual violence. Some members were victims themselves and others were close friends with the girl that was violated by the members of the football team. The campus climate, the incident itself, and our own personal subjectivities all fed into the collective feelings of frustration and sadness for the members of the EDFC.

The creation of the banner was the EDFC's first action aimed at really questioning what was happening on campus in ways that were completely interactive. We wanted to create something that allowed for dialogue, something that people would be forced to take notice of, and something that would allow us to air our own frustrations at the campus. A group of us gathered late one night in the Pugh Center to make the banner. We cut out the letters and glued

them to the large banner. Then, we all wrote down our own responses to the question, “Do You Feel Safe?” and we discussed them together. Early the next morning we quickly taped the banner to the floor and threw the markers across its face. In this time of frozen, yet slippery words from the administration and the students, the EDFC wanted to create a way for the Colby community to express their thoughts, frustrations, and anxieties and for the administration to hear student’s concerns in a way that made an impact and acted as a space for healing and reflection. We created the “banner” to involve student voices in the conversation around sexual assault and campus safety in ways that the online civil discourse, the rumor mill, and e-mails to the administration did not allow for. The banner allowed for anonymity on paper, but also called for people to be accountable to their words, they had to be reflexive. They had to squat down on the ground with everyone else in the student center able to look at them, pick up a marker, and consciously write down their response. This act of signature began to tie words back to meaning and allowed for the campus to truly reflect, un-silencing many campus voices.

The banner introduced a moment of self-reflexivity into campus culture. I am a part of campus culture, you are a part of campus culture no matter how much we disagree with what that means or what that appears to be, we are still a part of it. So that moment of stopping, of self-reflexivity where the campus had to turn in on itself. Like I remember standing on that banner with 50 other people around me looking at it, writing, reading, talking, and that is the kind of discussion I hadn’t seen my freshman year, didn’t see again last year, and haven’t seen since. And I think that’s what really made it successful cause people had to stop and think. And not only did they have to stop and think, they had to discuss it with one another because it was not a problem that they could overcome themselves. –Timmy Jerhune ●❁❁



Objects of any kind, especially art objects, are not allowed in Pulver Pavilion unless they are previously approved by campus life and the Physical Plant Department. Papers, fliers, or

even artwork either must be contained on the cork strips on the walls or the space and content has to be pre-approved by the administration in advance. This banner was completely spontaneous from the perspective of the administration and other students, and definitely not pre-approved. Yet, no one removed it. No one even stepped on the banner. It was as if the presence of the banner created a sacred, safe space. People walked around the banner, they walked over it, but never on top of it. The beauty of this physical and visual disruption was that people respected the materiality of it even if they did not like what it was asking of them. Interacting with the banner allowed these students to be playful, critical, honest, to loudly disagree, to stare and linger. Through using the banner as an object of mediation, the EDFC pulled students into our activism, opening up possibilities for discussion and productive discourse.

I think that not enough is done to make the normative population uncomfortable. And I think in that way we felt empowered as an anonymous organization to put a “Do You Feel Safe Banner” out in the middle of Pulver knowing that some rape victims would write on it, that others would completely disagree with it and think we were over blowing it. But it was in your face and it made people uncomfortable and in a way that was the point. And I think that a lot of people had the privilege to avoid feeling discomfort while others were uncomfortable every single day just because of their identity. And so more than anything else I think that how the silencing of voices can make other people uncomfortable is what made us do it. –Anonymous¹ ▲

Not everyone was accepting of the question the banner was asking. One student (who did not write on the banner, but observed others and read the banner) remarked that, “It is taking every fiber of my being not to rip this to shreds right now.” I heard many remarks like this from people that assumed that the banner was targeting the football team. The majority of the written responses on the banner did not discuss the team and most people who assumed that intention of the banner did not write on it at all. The intentionality is assumed, for example, in this response: “Yes, but I feel like that’s not the ‘right’ answer that this poster is looking for.” In other

instances, there were fights through words on the paper. For example this is one thread of responses creating a dialogue:

Yes. And if you don't, then I'm not sure what kind of sheltered environment you're from. But do I feel comfortable? No. This paper makes me uncomfortable because it's targeting a specific group of people. Relax, Colby. Seriously.

Who is this targeting? Asking if I feel safe is not asking who makes me unsafe.

[With "it's targeting a specific group of people" circled] WHO?

THIS IS UNFAIR. Relax, no. Respect, yes.

I'm more comfortable and feel safer walking around NYC at 2AM than I do here. Please don't tell people who have been through hell to RELAX.

Should we relax even in the face of these incidents?!

ISN'T THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE SUPPOSED TO MAKE YOU QUESTION? QUESTIONING MAKES PEOPLE UNCOMFORTABLE. THAT'S EDUCATION.

How is this targeting anyone? It asks 'Do you feel safe?' Do you feel safe here? Maybe if it makes you uncomfortable...you should wonder why. [Circled and starred]

This banner asks, doesn't target. [Underlined]

These kinds of disagreements point to the relative privilege of students on campus. Some students do have the privilege of never having to think if they feel safe at Colby. If they occupy the privileged position of "fitting in" on campus then perhaps they have never had to think critically about the issues of safety at Colby. The question of "Do you feel safe?" is not an easy question for some people to answer. It made people uncomfortable. This question was perhaps more uncomfortable for people if they have never been forced to think about it before.

Another string of responses centered on male privilege. These responses point to the feeling that these men could feel safe only because of a certain aspect of their male identity:

Yes, but I'm male, so my perspective is skewed.

YES!!!...Oh but I'm a heterosexual male so... —A heterosexual male

YES. But I'm a guy.

YES But I'm a male athlete

These responses point to an element of reflexivity about identity as well as privilege. They make a commentary that some groups are privileged to feel safer than others. Yet they also say that

while they can and do feel safe at Colby, it does not mean that everyone feels safe at Colby and that can be attributed to distinct markers of identity. Another student wrote, “I have been sexually assaulted and I still feel safer as a WOMAN than as a JEW.” This response clearly points to feelings of discrimination based on identity, feeling less safe promoting one identity than another.

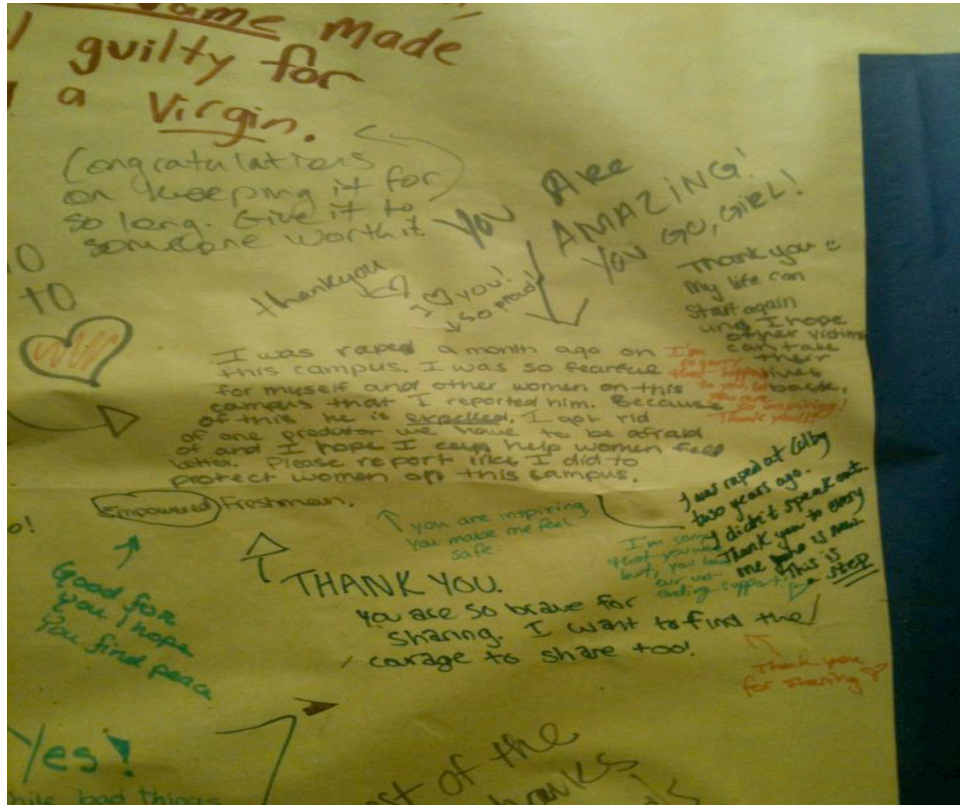


Figure 9. Responses written on the banner. Photo Credit: EDFC Photo

Do you feel safe is a hard question; it's not really a question you can answer without your community...its something that needs to be discussed. And the people who can fit into what is normal at Colby can obviously feel safe and probably were fine answering affirmatively to that question because they have this precedent of being comfortable, of being safe, of being accepted at Colby. But I think for a lot of the students who were more unsure of themselves or who definitely know that they don't fit in at Colby, they had to look at themselves, they had to look at the space of Colby, they had to look at their friends and the people they don't like and they had to ask, Do I feel safe here? And I think that was a unique sensation for a lot of people...to ask this qualitative, very personal question made people uncomfortable and I think that

discomfort is what made it so powerful. We had other actions that were very cool like the hearts at Valentine's Day and the "You are Beautiful" banner at the page dance. Those were all great actions and I'm sure they affected a lot of people but no one had to question who they were and why they were at Colby in those moments. –Anonymous³ ∞

The banner also contained responses that questioned the meaning of safety. Many students disagreed with what it was that made a college campus safe. One student commented they felt safe, "only because the rest of the world is so unsafe." This type of comparison was made frequently. Others pointed to certain rights, such as the freedom to speak, as what would make them feel safe: "Maybe once the community stops silencing me." Others still pointed to certain values as what would constitute safety. One conversation read as follows:

NO. The values that people at this college display make me feel small, voiceless, lost, scared. Every time a woman has the rights to her body stolen on a weekend night or someone says an anti-gay slur or makes a racist gesture, I feel ashamed to be here. Why am I buying into a culture that tolerates violence and aggression more than support, community and love? I want to know: who is Colby safe for? It isn't safe for me!

Like x infinity

Please point to a place where these issues do not exist. Colby does not 'tolerate violence.' I'm sorry you feel unsafe, but there are people who care here.

Of course this issue is not exclusive to Colby. But it is our right and our responsibility to make this place better, more just, and safer for everyone.

This type of conversation showed how the question forced people to think about "who is Colby safe and unsafe for?" Yet, it also showed how varied perspectives on safety on campus are. This type of conversation allowed students to question the institution of Colby itself and what kind of college people could and would want to live in, remapping and remaking Colby values.

When the participants were interacting with the banner, they did not all agree. The Crayola markers became the physical markers of differences of opinion, life experience, and values. Yet, this broken form of community that Colby was undergoing can become productive as a moment of possible change. As Bruno Latour (2005) suggested, in every interaction there is the potential for conflict and cleavage. These moments are the times where students at Colby were part of the same community and the same "culture," but their interests separated. They

were together, but separate. However, these differences of perspective also left room for new dialogue and conflict resolution that could lead to more honest and vocal conceptions of physical and emotional safety and about sex and sexuality. This is exemplified in these responses:

“To: Colby Admins, Staff, Students: Instead of writing about it, DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
AMEN.
WE ARE! THIS IS THE FIRST STEP: AWARENESS
yeah!
If we don’t write about it, no one will TALK ABOUT IT!!!
Talking will lead to action. let’s continue.
This.”

“I was raped a month ago on this campus. I was so fearful for myself and other women on this campus that I reported him. Because of this he is expelled. I got rid of one predator we have to be afraid of and I hope I can help women feel better. Please report like I did to protect women on this campus. –Empowered Freshman
You are inspiring. You make me feel safe.
I’m so sorry that happened to you, but you are so inspiring! Thank you!!!
thank you <3
I <3 you! So proud!
Yes because I’m surrounded by people who aren’t afraid to speak out. I support you.
I DO TOO!
THANK YOU. You are so brave for sharing. I want to find the courage to share too.
Thank you for sharing <3
I’m sorry that you were hurt; you have our unending support! <3
Good for you. I hope you find peace.
I was raped at Colby two years ago. I didn’t speak out. Thank you to everyone who is now. This is a step.
YOU ARE AMAZING! YOU GO, GIRL!
Thank you, My life can start again and I hope other victims can take their lives back.”

“Thank you to whoever made this banner possible in such a public space. These are real, raw issues that NEED to be talked about. The dialogue needs to continue—but please be aware of the issue of reductionism when talking about groups on campus. Violence and assault aren’t limited to one group on campus. Safety shouldn’t be only discussed in issues of sexual assault, but rather safety should extend to all issues and members of our community: males, females, LGBT, people of different political beliefs. Speak up and speak out Colby. let’s promote safety on both the individual and community level. Whatever we do, let’s not stop talking.”

DYFS introduced a moment of reflexivity to campus culture. That moment of stopping where the campus had to turn in on itself. That is a kind of discussion that I’ve never seen before. They had to stop and think and discuss it with people. It was a hard question. Brought in people from other disciplines to think about something different. Discomfort. We did other great actions but people did not have to think about them as much. What makes activism successful if people talk about it. Nothing we did had really concrete, noticeable change but it got people talking. –Timmy Jerhune ●

I think my favorite intervention would have to be the do you feel safe banner. I was on a bus to New York that day and I just saw everyone reaction that day on our Facebook group about updates about what was happening and I saw so many pictures. And I just felt like there was so much communication and momentum and excitement and I wasn't even there. And then reading it, reading it was beautiful. There was one freshman girl who wrote that she had been raped and she turned him in and that it worked and that he was no longer on the campus. And there were little mini conversations around it, like that's so great and I'm so proud of you. And it was from tons of people and I felt like she might not have had the gumption to say that publically but when she could say it anonymously she could share her message with tons of other girls, women and men that might have been raped. And I think it made visible the things that we often hush away. And so I think that out of all of our interventions, to me, I felt that that one was the most effective. –Anonymous¹ • ❌

Conversation has the power to change minds and inspire empathy and by harnessing the transformative power of conversation, big change can happen. –Anonymous⁴ ∞

These reflections highlight the efficacy of the banner. The banner made people think reflexively, it made people uncomfortable, it allowed people to say things they otherwise wouldn't if the responses were not anonymous, and it allowed people to discuss topics that are usually silenced. Because this event utilized interactivism, the event was more powerful. The banner was visually and spatially disruptive, it acted as an object of mediation between the activists and the spectators, and it drew the spectators into participation. This allowed for the banners effects to affect far beyond the original action. The combination of the style of the activism itself and the context that the question was situated within made this intervention the most successful of the EDFC.



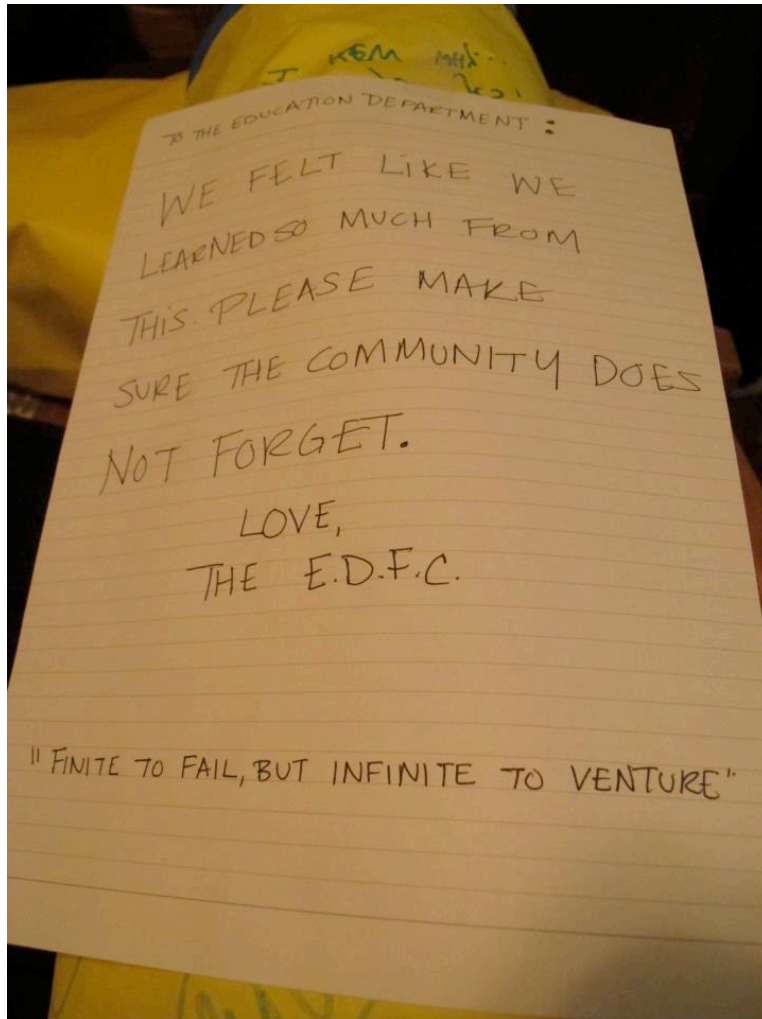


Figure 10. The letter written to the education department. Photo Credit: EDFC Photo

The conversation about campus safety did not stop when the banner was removed later that day. Over a year later, it still affects through the campus. The EDFC eventually wrapped up the banner in a red bow with a note reading: “To the education department: We felt like we learned so much from this. Please make sure the community does not forget. Love the E.D.F.C. ‘Finite to fail, but infinite to venture’.” The banner was transcribed and hung in the halls of the education department for a full year. In the civil discourse immediately following this day and for weeks after, the banner was referenced multiple times and elaborated on many of the concepts raised about safety and sexual assault. This allowed the conversation to continue

beyond paper. One student remarked, “to everyone who helped put the banner on the ground in the center of Pulver, as well as share their thoughts: thank you. That was a powerful display of student activism. Hopefully the message that students care about these issues will eventually make its way to the administration” (Digest of Civil Discourse, November 15, 2011: Colby College). I think the administration got the message. About a week later they organized a campus forum to discuss these issues that furthered the conversation and opened up unexplored silences. The campus-wide forum had over 400 people in attendance. Then in the civil discourse during the spring semester 2012 there was a post asking people to take a survey about safety to contribute to a study inspired by the “Do You Feel Safe?” banner.

In the fall of 2012 when I returned from abroad, the banner was used yet again. In the very early weeks of the semester, a banner was taped down in the same manner, gathering input for the new student “honor code.” This shows a shift in policies in Pulver. The “Do You Feel Safe” banner created a precedent for what was considered permissible in the student center and a model to engage student responses. Further along into the semester, the Feminist Alliance started a “safe space” campaign. They gathered feedback on safe spaces on campus from a survey and then had an event to talk about the results. They took the banner out of the Education Department and put it in the Pugh Center for their event. They did not return the banner to the Education Department and it now resides rolled up in the Feminist Alliance office in the Pugh Center. The responses by members of the EDFC to how the banner has been used since the original event were varied and illuminated many ambiguities.

These tensions and ambiguities reflect the indistinct nature of anonymous activism. While anonymity affords us many freedoms, it simultaneously does not allow us to control what happens to our interventions or control how our interventions are received. They are left to affect

through the campus. One member identified that this tension was in how the institution re-appropriates certain forms of activism in ways that impinge on the meaning of the original action:

I think because it was so impactful, it created a kind of precedent at Colby, sort of like the EDFC, and I can't remember if it was last year or the year before but the Bridge coined the phrase "respect is a Colby value" and that's now become an institutional thing. I don't really wanna say co-opting because if something works you should use it, but at the same time I think it's kind of problematic because it's kind of disrespectful of the original act. Because the original act was so powerful, to keep on re-using it in ways that are increasingly less effective I think takes away from the meaning that that original moment had. So everytime that [name omitted] reproduces the banner, or every time the Feminist Alliance holds it up and is like "yay, we're the fem alliance, people aren't safe here" it's like, NO SHIT people aren't safe here, nobody is doubting that. But, I think yes it worked, so I can appreciate that aspect of it, but it is also disrespectful to when it worked and why it worked. Even in our second reproduction of the do you feel safe banner it was nowhere near as successful. I do have that memory of that crystallization, realization, catharsis that these things meant at a particular place, particular space, particular time, that they are only being degraded for me every time they are brought up again but for me they *are* being degraded. –Timmy Jerhune

For Timmy Jerhune, the reproduction of the banner was at once good because it showed that our intervention was effective and impacted the campus in tangible ways, but simultaneously it degraded the intimate memory this member had with the banner. For this member, the meaning and impact of the event is violated in its misappropriation.

Another member thought that it is not reasonable for the EDFC to get mad when the banner is used because we are an anonymous group. They said:

Since we're anonymous we can't be like you need to understand the history. It's different with the "hate is not a Colby value" because that was branded from the Bridge. But the banner is something like, okay it's in the education department, it's great that it's being used. I don't know though. Because it needs to be in a way that professors especially know those histories so they can pass them on. –Barbara Hammer

This reflection points to a inconsistency in how people *remember* the banner rather than how it is used. This member wants the historicity of the banner to be passed on not to prevent a

misappropriation of the use of the banner in the future, but to be sure that the context and voices on the actual banner itself are not lost or silenced. This member additionally commented on hearing people talk about the EDFC's interventions:

I loved it, I loved it so much. Like hearing people, even if people were talking negative, like seeing people reading Colby Read This echo people being like "oh the grammar is so bad" and just like being like "we don't give a fuck about the grammar," like read that shit, take it to heart because this is real people's sentiments. And like people still joke around and say Tim Jerhune, whether they know where they are getting it from or not it's from the original thing we did, the letter. I love hearing those things still around campus.

This sentiment shows the importance of anonymity for this member of the EDFC. The anonymity increases the satisfaction they feel towards their membership in the EDFC. But the experience of anonymity was not the same for everyone. Another member expressed:

I like the anonymity, but I think that is part of the reason I didn't do it this year, because there is a very strange disconnect for me when like people in the locker room are talking about something that I've done on campus that like I have so much to say about it but I have to resist and just be like oh yeah, those guys, I agree with what they're doing. It makes me feel some sort of way and I can't really say what it is. –Silas

For Silas, anonymity was much more ambiguous. For Silas, anonymity required a lack of signature that for some is necessary for expression. In the EDFC, it was possible for people to feel a multiplicity of emotions towards the same idea. People could feel at once excited and anxious about anonymity, pleased but yet also upset at the re-appropriation of an intervention. These ambiguities point to the difficulty of grappling with activism and with "making change."

Activism is really fucking messy and tiring! It's tiring because it's so messy. Oh yeah, because activism comes neatly wrapped up in a bow... No we are going to throw this stuff in your face. –Barbara Hammer ▲



This event is significant to Colby because it points out glaring problems for the institution when it comes to instances of sexual misconduct, feeling unsafe, and diverse experiences with discrimination. This event reinforces the necessity of spaces like the EDFC. This event was successful because of the participation by a large cross section of the student body. This was only possible because the recent allegations affected *the football team*. The football team became a metaphor for the institution itself in that moment. This was a rare opportunity that called into question hyper-masculinity, sexuality, and privilege within the dominant culture. Professor Mark Tappan commented after April 12th, 2009 that, “any time there's a dominant group and subordinate group, the dominant group tends to...focus on individual intent or outcome, while the subordinate group sees patterns, an ongoing history” (The Colby Echo, November 2009). Because the perpetrators were high profile students and students that the institution relies on for attracting donations, this event was highly focused on and well known throughout the Colby community. The banner drew in students from all pockets of the community because it questioned the institution, the football team, and campus safety at a moment when those things were already being questioned. It facilitated rather than created the dialogue.

However, this specific intervention also points to the unfortunate pattern of reactive activism at Colby. In all of my interviews, the banner was articulated as “reactionary.” This means that the banner was created in response to particular incidents. Many of the members talked about the lack of proactive and more radical forms of activism as a larger problem of activism at Colby. Many expressed that they wish Colby’s activism and policies on an administrative level were not only in response to a current issue but proactive in addressing issues before they become an incident. Reactive activism is seen as opposed to radical activism. Within a larger context of radical activism, this banner was not very radical. It was only radical

in the context of Colby because so much is not permissible within the confines of the institution. This intervention went against the rules and patterns of the college but was simultaneously reproducing the same pattern of reactive activism. The banner was the most successful of any of the EDFC interventions in the ways that it changed Colby and the ways it affected beyond the initial banner, but it was so successful because it was legible to the campus community through the existing discourse. Our other interventions, while less momentous in terms of making tangible change on campus, were more radical, more proactive and progressive. Each intervention had a specific goal and approach. Most of them are detailed in the “Moments of EDFC Direct Actions” (pages 51-52) and are visible in the appendix of photos and important documents.



Figure 11. The banner in the student center. Photo Credit: EDFC Photo

Reflections

*Love is anterior to life, posterior to death, initial of creation, and the exponent of breath.
-Emily Dickinson*

*Unable are the loved to die, for love is immortality.
-Emily Dickinson*



In addition to anonymity, there were other ambiguities and critiques of the EDFC expressed by various members. In this section I reflect on the disjuncture between radical personal change (the soul) and radical social change (the street), issues of sustainability, regrets from alumni, and the growing pains of being a young activist group.

In the majority of my discussions, people strongly emphasized that the EDFC was a support group, that it facilitated personal transformation, and that our interventions did not make lasting, concrete change at Colby. However, being in the EDFC takes the first step involved in radical change. As CIRCA articulated in their manifesto, the work to transform “the soul” is equally as important as the work to change “the street.” Because the EDFC was a young group of college students, the work to transform the street was further along than the work of the soul. During that first year we were all still learning what activism meant to us, what it meant to want to make change at Colby, how to heal, how to love, and how to listen. As a group we could transform one another because we learned from each other and supported each other. However, one member felt that sometimes our activism was really only cathartic for us and possibly excluded others from the messages we were trying to get across.

I just wanted to say that I love you all. You all empower me, and I truly think you are so intelligent, beautiful, and brave. Simply, you keep me going, and you make me excited to wake up in the morning even on the bad days. I feel so lucky. Let's keep up the momentum and the positivity. –Anonymous² ∞ • ■ ❁

Some members mentioned the tendency for us to want to be reactive rather than proactive in our interventions. Additionally, people expressed that they regretted not doing enough actions that brought up issues other than gender and sexuality. The majority of members would have liked to address race, diversity, and discrimination. This was seen as a missed opportunity, especially for the alumni in the group. This brings me to the point of sustainability and the longevity of the group. Students attend Colby only for four years and the EDFC only really came together for one of those years.

During the fall of 2012, the remaining members on campus tried very hard to keep the spirit of the EDFC alive. The transition between the summer and the new school year mixed with the absence of so many seniors from the previous year created a lot of changes. The upcoming seniors had less motivation to keep the EDFC running and this coincided with a lack of buzz on campus with activism as a whole. We also all really missed the alumni and felt nostalgic for the previous year. To counteract this lull, we decided to recruit new members. We printed our manifesto on anonymous letters to 10 people that those in the group nominated. We told them to come to a certain location if they thought they wanted to be a part of it and many showed up. We described the group, what we had done in the past and then spent the rest of the meeting brainstorming what we wanted to do. However, this meeting came right before one of our breaks and when we got back, people seemed less excited.

Furthermore, there was an alteration in leadership style that recruiting new members created. There was a disconnect between the groups of people who had and who had not been a part of our previous actions. The group felt more structured, less free, and less fun.

It's hard. Activism like what we did last year is difficult. We didn't have that moment of connection like we did last year. The stars were aligned at that

specific moment and the stars aren't aligned anymore. The lack of connections... the struggle isn't really worth the effort. –Timmy Jerhune ∞•

What had happened was like a series of unfortunate events that brought people together and it was really difficult this fall, like I felt like a lot of people were trying to force it and build to momentum that we had in 2011. Junior fall I had so many intellectual breakthroughs that coincided with all this cool activism on campus so it was like a really serendipitous experience to have those two things combine. It has to be organic and in response to certain events. I think these groups are awesome when they are spontaneous. –Silas ∞*

Because we selected people for the second year that the majority of us did not know, it was harder to form connections. It was also difficult because there was not a specific climate on campus that created the explicit desire to feel less alone. The EDFC in 2011 assured us immediately that we were less alone in our sadness and anger, but this was not that same the next year. People did not *need* the EDFC in the same ways. The attempt to revive the EDFC to be the same group as the previous year felt forced, as Silas articulates. Our efforts were inorganic and lacked momentum from new and old members.

I don't look at it as a failure because it was such an organic group of people that gathered in response to needing a place to talk about these things. And this year we could probably use some of that. It was a function of the people and most of the people that started it graduated last year, and it's up to each generation to continue it. –Timmy Jerhune ∞

The EDFC might not exist in the way it was when we were a part of it but that doesn't mean it won't exist in a different capacity. Things change and I think they change because they have to. I mean if all those people were here that were here last year our activism would look very different right now. It's always hard to let go. Things just change and it's okay. But I do hope that people keep it up. –Barbara Hammer ∞*

The original formation of the EDFC reflected the subjectivities of the people in the group and it was because of those people that the group functioned how it did. All of our different

perspectives and backgrounds facilitated that space of support, friendship, and activism. We inspired each other.

Last night was the most beautiful environment I have ever been in at Colby...I am utterly inspired by each and every one of you. Beyond excited to spend the rest of my time at Colby JUST GIVING A SHIT with all of you. –Anonymous⁴ ■

The EDFC was a reflection of the need for all of these individuals to legitimize their experiences and to be able to agentively claim ownership over their lives at Colby. It was a way to remember how to heal and to care about Colby again. When a lot of these people left Colby, we lost some of the necessary perspectives that held the group together on campus. We could no longer make change *together* because people had to move on. That being said, many people emphasized that while the EDFC does not and cannot exist in its original form it does not mean that it does not exist, but rather occupies an alternative temporal sphere.

One of the new members told me that she felt affirmed by the EDFC. They said that, “it was the EDFC, just like meeting everyone, knowing that there was a group of people that were not fine with everything.” This shows that the knowledge of such spaces, of alternatives, of clandestine realities, and of art activism is still meaningful for underclassman. It allows them to understand that these types of spaces are there if they want them, and that they can make these spaces *for themselves* and *by themselves*. In introducing certain people to the EDFC’s mission, history, and approach to activism, the EDFC will live on. It will continue to affect the possibilities of change and the landscape of interactions at Colby.

As someone who hangs out with a lot of underclassman, a lot of them are motivated and I hope that I've inspired some of them. A lot of students are being really critical right now. Colby still somehow maintains this group of

activism. They are limited spaces, but they care about these spaces. –Barbara Hammer ☒

Is there a future for this group? Yes and no there is a future. The EDFC is gone, and it will not come again. But something like the EDFC needs to exist because it creates a precedent. If and when the stars align again there will be this idea at Colby that didn't exist before. I can confidently say that something like this will exist in the future. –Timmy Jerhune ∞✱

The original EDFC now exists outside of the boundaries of Colby. It exists in our Facebook group, in the lasting friendships we've built, in the activist threads we still share with each other, and the ideas we still circulate. We cannot be physically together in the space of Colby, but the EDFC exists inside of each of us. It is embodied through us and through our commitment to practicing a relational ethics in all facets of life. One member said that even though we can't do anything on campus together anymore, that "being a part of a world like [the EDFC], that is activism in itself."

"The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others. That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom." –bell hooks

Openings

*Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words -
and never stops at all.*

-Emily Dickinson

The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience.

-Emily Dickinson



The story of the EDFC persists beyond these pages, but in ending this part of the narrative I want to reinforce the idea that *how* we practice activism matters. Through practicing activism through a relational ethics, the members of the EDFC could experience activism that was healing and transformative. Through our organization and practices we were able to influence each other and Colby on a level that our other activist pursuits did not afford us. This was because we engaged relational ethics as a way to allow our activism to nurture us and influence us in positive and empowering ways. Feminist rock star and goddess, Gloria Steinem said, “if you want to have joy and kindness and sex and laughter at the end of the movement, you have to have it along the way.” The means of activism *are* the ends.

Sharon Doetsch-Kidder writes about this same concept in her discussion of “loving criticism.” She says that, “how we do our work matters, whether as scholars or activists. Paying attention to the spirit of our work can help us to produce knowledge that is useful to those struggling to survive, that serves humanity, and that brings more love, peace, and compassion to the world” (Doetsch-Kidder 2012: 444). In inscribing the work of the EDFC, I hope to show the spirit of our work so that it can inspire others like it inspired us. Together, the EDFC found ways to turn frustration and hurt into love and positive action. As Gloria Anzaldúa said, “wounds are openings with the potential to create change” (Keating 2008). In concluding this narrative, I focus on the role of process in activist work. I want to emphasize love, human kindness, and

healing as part of the process that activism can take. But additionally, I revisit the interplays between “Colby,” the “EDFC,” and “activism” to parcel out our journey.

Conditions of Possibility: How Colby’s past enabled the EDFC

The deeply entrenched silences that marginalize certain lived experiences at Colby are what made the very space of the EDFC possible. The ways that Colby hurts people, the ways that it represses and oppresses, the ways it makes people feel like they cannot and do not fit in make the EDFC possible. In highlighting the frustrations of the institution and the harsh realities some students face, it shows how we could manage to come together, to find each other, in order to create the EDFC. The lack of spaces for students to interact in meaningful and supportive ways is a serious problem at Colby. However, this lack of creative alternatives for coping with Colby’s shortcomings is what created the very possibility of the EDFC.

What the EDFC did for the members of the EDFC

The EDFC made us feel less alone. It validated our emotions and provided a source of strength and friendship when we were going through a difficult time. It acted as a space of healing, dialogue, and personal transformation that allowed us to find ways to love not just each other, but Colby as well. The EDFC showed us the power of love, of the imagination, of sharing a secret, of collaboration, of rebellion. The EDFC inspired and empowered the EDFC.

What the EDFC did for Colby

The EDFC created various interventions that changed the landscape of activism during the fall of 2011 through the spring of 2012. We created a precedent for future activism that is interactivist and visually disruptive. We inspired pockets of productive dialogue on campus and

allowed others to interact with our work and take it beyond its original formation. We affirmed the existence of a non-normative campus culture. And finally, the EDFC enriched the possibilities for future activism at Colby. Through our activism, Colby witnessed interactivism. I hope that through inscribing our story, future students will be inspired by our approach and our philosophies toward making change at Colby and creating alternative spaces.

Conditions of Possibility: How the EDFC enables Colby's future

The EDFC shows that Colby has a lot of work to do. It also shows that change at Colby as it exists today is very slow. It shows that attempts to make change at Colby can be difficult, strenuous, and frustrating. But it also shows that Colby is what *you* make it. Agency is not about escaping your problems, but rather claiming ownership over your struggles and re-making them. For anyone that does not feel safe at Colby or feel like they belong at Colby, I want them to see that the EDFC allowed us all to make a space for ourselves at Colby where we could just be. We enacted our agency and our power to make our own sense of belonging and our own ways of mattering at Colby. Everyone at Colby has that power, they just have to know that it is possible.

Conditions of Possibility: Interactivism and Relational Ethics Beyond Colby

The approach of the EDFC towards activism emphasizes Frida Kahlo's words: "Invent your own way of becoming an activist, an artist. Invent your own way of becoming a feminist." We have to make our way of being an activist. Interactivism with an anarchist organizational structure is one way to do this. However, the EDFC works to emphasize how we can open up space and possibility and the imagination in order to dream of new worlds, better worlds. And while we may not always achieve radical social change, we can achieve radical personal change and that can be someone's way of being an activist. The EDFC shows how we made space for

ourselves to have the freedom not to define who we are, but rather to speak how we feel. The EDFC shows how activism is always messy and never convenient, but that it also can be healing.

Finally, this beautiful group tells us to not forget that we all have a voice, and that your voice is important. **Dwell in possibility and know that it is finite to fail but infinite to venture.**

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Appendix of EDFC Images



The Do You Feel Safe Banner hanging up the Department of Education's Hallway.



Part one in a series of “radical pencils.” Text: “SNAP THIS PHALLUS EMPOWER YOURSELF”



Part two in the radical pencil series. Text: "NORMAL IS A LIE"



Part three in the radical pencil series. Text: “FINITE TO FAIL INFINITE TO VENTURE”



The “You Are Beautiful Banner” hanging over the mirror in the Bathroom of Pulver.

**The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and
Campus Crime Statistics Act, also known as
The Clery Act, was passed in 1989.**

It can be found in The United States Code of Federal Regulations,
Title 34, Part 668, Subpart D, Section 46.

This federal law requires all colleges and universities that
participate in federal financial aid programs,
including Colby College,
to release an annual security report every year.

**Among other things, this report must contain “a statement
of policy regarding the institution’s campus sexual assault
programs to prevent sex offenses, and the procedures to
follow when a sex offense occurs.”**

**This statement *must* include “a description
of educational programs to promote the
awareness of rape, acquaintance rape, and
other forcible and non-forcible sex offenses.”**

**Our report does not include this
information.**

DEMAND IT.

**The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and
Campus Crime Statistics Act, also known as
The Clery Act, was passed in 1989.**

**It can be found in The United States Code of Federal Regulations,
Title 34, Part 668, Subpart D, Section 46.**

**This federal law requires all colleges and universities that
participate in federal financial aid programs,
including Colby College,
to release an annual security report every year.**

**Among other things, this report must publicize crime
statistics for the past three years, including
“forcible sexual offenses.”**

**The hard copy of the 2011 security report claims
that “additional information concerning crime
statistics...[is] available on-line.”**

**The report online is from last year.
And the “Crime Statistics” link leads to
an error message.**

**DEMAND BETTER ACCESS TO
THE INFORMATION YOU
DESERVE.**

Flier #2



Hearts on the quad for Valentine's Day.



Valentine's Day flowers:

"Dear Colby,

After 12 PM feel free to take 1 and give it to someone you appreciate.

Xoxo,

The EDFC"



The Guerilla Art Instillation in the atrium of the Diamond Building.

Appendix of Documents

“I PROMISE TO” Banner Transcribed

Written by members of the Colby Community on November 16, 2011

Ask myself if I'm being the kindest person I can be
Discover what makes me come alive and go do it
Not hate and try to be kind
To learn how to love
Thank my friends
Keep fighting the good fight
To not take my friends or anything else in my life for granted
To help support and empower women
Not let studying get in the way of my education
To listen and care about what I hear
Always be me
Dream big, breathe deeply, love fully
Remember Derrick
Always be true to myself
Be courageous -> yes!
Be absolutely positive that someone is sleeping, not passed out
Remember Nick- BTW
To never fart in grant's bed again -> you know you like it, baby
Tell the WGSS faculty that they inspire me -> yes
Not be creepy
Slizz
Not rape people -> woulda thought that'd be easy
Do the kindest thing I possibly can at all times -> yes
Have time to get to know each other
Say no to the next guy who grabs me without asking
Try harder to remember your name
Remember and cherish Derrick's memory
Respect everyone
Stand up for others and be educated
Consent enthusiastically
Tell people I love how much I love them
Remain confident with my chem. free lifestyle
Stop doing this signs in the spa -> NEVER!!! ->
Love and support my fellow students and help them feel safe
To ask if something is wrong instead of walking away
Be thoughtful
Call out racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, ableist, classist and demeaning language when I hear it on campus
To admit that I might be part of the problem too.
Love my friends
Tell my friends that I love them
Stand up for those who are not heard
Be there to listen and give hugs -> YES!
To listen to people in my community who are hurt -> YES!
To tell everyone I hold a higher standard. A Colby standard
Listen
Stop skipping boys to men
To speak up when I see something that is wrong

To have more discipline
To squeeze only other people's mind grapes -> (who get's this reference?)
To be more like D-Rock
To push myself to be more "out"
Believe in the Colby Community's power to change our home for the better because now I know so many of us care passionately about this!
To make asking permission sexy (again!)
To treat everyone with the respect they deserve... and to remember Derrick
Not act straight anymore
Try my best to do my best
To get enthusiastic consent and give it -> yes means yes!
To always look out for my friends, even if that means getting them crackers-> to always eat my friends' crackers
Remember derrick and act as he would, with love, happiness, and a smile
I promise to not forget Derrick
Be a better person

“Do You Feel Safe?” Banner Transcribed

YES!!!...Oh but I'm a heterosexual male so... —A heterosexual male

YES!

NO Violence against one of us = violence against all of us!

YES.

Nope.

agree 100%

You couldn't be more mistaken

Why? Let's talk about it.

Who is in your tribe??

People like you shouldn't be allowed to vote...

...leave campus.

Yup!

Yes. The transgressions of a few individuals that have caused great and undeserved distress for others should not strike fear in the hearts of all. We all have the right to feel safe and to be safe, and a few people's actions have impinged upon that right. But they haven't taken it away.

NO because of the police

Yes ^^

YES I FEEL SAFE.

YES [in flowery writing]

NO [same flowery writing]

yikes...good talk...

Yes, but unfortunate things happen. We all need to just support each other/be their for each other!

Yes. I feel safe at Colby. Everyone has that right. It is not ok to deny or question other people's feelings.

YES! But only if my friends and guy are near.

YES because life is too short to live in fear.

Smartest thing I've read

That implies that fear is a choice: it would be great if it were, but let's not blame people for having a realistic response to their environment.

As a gay man, YES! But as a person on a sexually repressed campus, NO!

No! As a gay man, I can't even dance with my boyfriend at dances without glares, scoffs and mean words...

Completely.

Yes.

Yes, but only because I'm confidence in my ability to “fight back”...I shouldn't have to though.....

YES!

Yes! this ain't the south side people...

Yes.

YES!

No. but one team is not blame. THE INDIVIDUALS RESPONSIBLE SHOULD BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE.
don't hide behind your teammates.

YES.

but support them...help them make better decisions

Yes!

NO. I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW WOMEN CAN GET SEXUALLY ASSAULTED AND THEIR "FRIENDS"
TELL THEM "YOU" SHOULD HAVE BEEN SAFER, OR NOT TAKEN THAT DRINK, OR NOT WORN
THAT SKIRT. WHY AREN'T WOMEN MORE SUPPORTIVE OF EACH OTHER?

["women" underlined] AND MEN

LIKE THIS.

agree

me too

Yes

YES.

-Not always- C'mon Colby—let's start holding each other accountable + taking responsibility for our safety and our
community's safety. Please.

Yes! I've found friends here who have always got my back.

YES!! I am in control of the decisions I make. By being smart I can keep myself and my friends safe!

Nobody decides to get raped. There's only so much being smart can do.

Sometimes I feel uncomfortable.

Safest place anybody here will ever be

COLBY is scary!!

Yes because I have amazing friends and people who support me. BUT that does not mean that there are things that
NEED to CHANGE!

?

I feel safe because when bad things happen to me, I have friends and a community who will support me. I'm afraid
that these kinds of things are still happening on campus.

<3

I feel MAAAD SAFE. But like I get scared when hearing rape stories.

Yes, THANK YOU COLBY SECURITY 4 holdin' the streets down—but like some ppl should be in check

Yes [block letters]

NO, I feel more comfortable alone than around other Colby students.

[someone drew a thumbs up]

Yes

Yez.

Usually.

I'm in a loving and healthy relationship and I've never felt safer.
Same here. But it shouldn't have to be that way.

Sometimes—which just is not good enough. Love each other, Colby!

I feel less safe because people are getting angry about others asking this question.
I like this.
YES.
me too...

Yes

I feel safe at Colby

YES. I do actually. Why do I feel like I'm in the minority here?
Maybe you are? [someone else circled this]

Yes—I've mostly always felt respected, appreciated and unthreatened. And everyone else has the right to feel safe as well! Colby—make it so!

YES! Colby is my second home. I feel safe at home.

Yes

Ask yourself one question, is truth?
this is not a sentence
What? What do you mean?

yes but I do NOT feel protected or supported

To: Colby Admins, Staff, Students: Instead of writing about it, DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
AMEN.

WE ARE! THIS is THE FIRST STEP: AWARENESS

yeah!

If we don't write about it, no one will TALK ABOUT IT!!!

Talking will lead to action. let's continue.

This.

Maybe once the community stops silencing me.

Yes.

YES. I feel safer at Colby than I would at many other college campuses.

Only because the rest of the world is so unsafe.

Yes! While bad things still happen here, it is much safer than the rest of the world.

I was raped a month ago on this campus. I was so fearful for myself and other women on this campus that I reported him. Because of this he is expelled. I got rid of one predator we have to be afraid of and I hope I can help women feel better. Please report like I did to protect women on this campus. –Empowered Freshman

You are inspiring. You make me feel safe.
I'm so sorry that happened to you, but you are so inspiring! Thank you!!!
thank you <3
I <3 you! So proud!
Yes because I'm surrounded by people who aren't afraid to speak out. I support you.
I DO TOO!
THANK YOU. You are so brave for sharing. I want to find the courage to share too.
Thank you for sharing <3
I'm sorry that you were hurt; you have our unending support! <3
Good for you. I hope you find peace.
I was raped at Colby two years ago. I didn't speak out. Thank you to everyone who is now. This is a step.
YOU ARE AMAZING! YOU GO, GIRL!
Thank you J My life can start again and I hope other victims can take their lives back.

No! As a freshman, my Die Name made me feel guilty for being a virgin.
Congratulations on keeping it for so long. Give it to someone worth it.
IT'S A JOKE. EVERYONE'S NAME IS EMBARRASSING. DON'T FEEL GUILTY FOR BEING WHO YOU ARE.

If it's so embarrassing, then why do it?

Most of the time...thanks to my friends.

YES. All in all, the world is an ugly place. We deal with it, and do what we can to change. But it's still not perfect.
Colby is a pretty great place, ALL in ALL. Do people lose sight of that?
No, but it can always be better from OUR ACTIONS!!!

SAFE? Right now I can't even feel OK.

Only when I'm locked in my room.

Yes—but only because of my friends and faculty members.

Yes, but I'm male, so my perspective is skewed.

Yes, although there's been a lack of common sense on campus lately. Both genders...it's vital that we work together to sort this out rather than just point fingers.

Rarely. I know that I can claim my own safety sometimes, but, sometimes that right is not in my grasp. Assault, violence, rape. These are things I don't feel safe with and I feel powerless to stop them.

If we can't make a TINY COMMUNITY of 1800 people feel safe...I'm scared.

YES. But I'm a guy.

YES. AS A MALE ATHLETE ON CAMPUS AND A MAAV REP, I DO MY BEST TO LOOK OUT FOR PEOPLE ON CAMPUS. I hope someone will do the same when my brother and sister go to college.

NO. I feel fortunate to have not had any bad experiences...yet. [someone else underlined "yet"]

This is the biggest bubble in the world, if you don't feel safe here you have no grasp on reality...I'm sorry.
Talk to me after you've been assaulted. How dare you.

Like Lord of the Flies is a safe bubble?

1) This is cruel 2) If it's a bubble, then we can be the ones to make it safe. Bubbles can be less safe than the 'wide world' because you HAVE to see the same people EVERY DAY.

NO. Yesterday he made my anger insignificant, he made my voice silent and I have so much more to say.

STOP! Just stop doing crazy things people. Listen and look at the signs. We all need to just appreciate each other.

Sometimes

Not until the administration realizes they need to help us find a way to prevent sexual assault from happening in the first place instead of encouraging us to silently resent entire teams after one of us has been hurt.

Sometimes. I just want to say that the real world is not safe. Let's make our community SAFER but more importantly let's take safety measures. Why would you get drunk with people you don't know???

Yes J

LET'S BE REAL...Alcohol is the real culprit.

I disagree.

Why, I feel like most of these incidents are alcohol-related. There seems to be a strong correlation.

People remain responsible for their actions even when alcohol is involved. People, not alcohol, are the culprits.

Sometimes. I feel safe leaving my backpack with my laptop in the library, but I do not feel safe at a Colby dance. I'd rather take my backpack with me and retain my autonomy instead.

No—very few of my friends—including me—haven't been assaulted.

NOT for my friends.

I have been sexually assaulted and I still feel safer as a WOMAN than as a JEW.

WATCHING IS VIOLENCE.

YES, but it makes me nervous that many seem to be losing faith in our community as a whole, in male groups, and in our administration. Do not blame many for the acts of a few. The guilty should be punished, but the innocent should remain free from judgment. I'm sorry to all my loving male friends on the football team who are now looked at as the enemy. <3

agreed. well articulated.

agree!

me too!!

No, not all the time. But we should not forget that we can create our own safety, we can make ourselves SAFE!

It doesn't matter that I have a loving boyfriend and a long-term relationships with me—I still get my ass grabbed at dances. Is that safety? NO.

YES!

Yes

NO. The values that people at this college display make me feel small, voiceless, lost, scared. Every time a woman has the rights to her body stolen on a weekend night or someone says an anti-gay slur or makes a racist gesture, I feel ashamed to be here. Why am I buying into a culture that tolerates violence and aggression more than support, community and love? I want to know: who is Colby safe for? It isn't safe for me!

Like x infinity

Please point to a place where these issues do not exist. Colby does not 'tolerate violence.' I'm sorry you feel unsafe, but there are people who care here.

Of course this issue is not exclusive to Colby. But it is our right and our responsibility to make this place better, more just, and safer for everyone.

Rarely.

SOMETIMES. I know I am lucky to have great, supportive friends, but it makes me sick that assault on this campus is possible and happening. In some ways, the fact that this question has to be asked is indicative of a problem. And the fact that people are able to write how they feel means we feel safe to a certain degree Or that we feel so unsafe that we feel it's necessary to talk...

Yes, but I'm lucky enough to have avoided harm on this campus and I have friends who will look out for me. I don't think I speak for the majority.

No. But having this openly talked about helps. The less we stay silent the better.

Safer than I would anywhere else.

No not from slender man

Only with my few trusted friends.

Yes, but I'm concerned for others.

Usually, but it's not enough until everyone feels 100% safe.

SOMETIMES. I have two friends here who have been sexually assaulted this year. THIS IS NOT OKAY.

Yes, but do you feel free?

Sure...when I walk around with all of my overprotective male roommates.

Thank you to whoever made this banner possible in such a public space. These are real, raw issues that NEED to be talked about. The dialogue needs to continue—but please be aware of the issue of reductionism when talking about groups on campus. Violence and assault aren't limited to one group on campus. Safety shouldn't be only discussed in issues of sexual assault, but rather safety should extend to all issues and members of our community: males, females, LGBT, people of different political beliefs. Speak up and speak out Colby. let's promote safety on both the individual and community level. Whatever we do, let's not stop talking.

YES

yes.

As long as ANYONE does not feel safe telling people about/reporting sexual assault, this campus IS NOT A SAFE ONE

Yes, but it is unacceptable that others should be made to feel unsafe, no matter the cause.

YEAH KINDA!

Yes. All the time, I've never felt threatened or in danger. I think we have a welcoming community. I am also a male, so my experience is different than that of a female. It is eye opening to know that others aren't safe. Spread LOVE <3

Afghani villagers aren't safe. Colby students...

This is not productive. Make this community safe is the first step!
Is productive?

Yes!

Yes but bad things do happen.
So we should all be there to support one another when they do!

Yes. And if you don't, then I'm not sure what kind of sheltered environment you're from. But do I feel comfortable?
No. This paper makes me uncomfortable because it's targeting a specific group of people. Relax, Colby. Seriously.
Who is this targeting? Asking if I feel safe is not asking who makes me unsafe.

[With "it's targeting a specific group of people" circled] WHO?

THIS IS UNFAIR. Relax, no. Respect, yes.

I'm more comfortable and feel safer walking around NYC at 2AM than I do here. Please don't tell people who have been through hell to RELAX.

Should we relax even in the face of these incidents?!

ISN'T THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE SUPPOSED TO MAKE YOU QUESTION? QUESTIONING MAKES PEOPLE UNCOMFORTABLE. THAT'S EDUCATION.

How is this targeting anyone? It asks 'Do you feel safe?' Do you feel safe here? Maybe if it makes you uncomfortable...you should wonder why. [Circled and starred]

This banner asks, doesn't target. [Underlined]

Yes

Yes!

YES! But here are some pieces of advice from me! 1) Don't drink 2) Don't smoke 3) Don't do drugs 4) Don't have unprotected sex! 5) Leave all these above to responsible people like me 6) Don't give a blowjob to a football player because there will be 80 guys watching and wanting to do the same thing with you! (81 guys! That's a lot, rite?)

Yup!

If you do, why don't others?

WHAT IS SAFE?

Safe? What's safe? Balancing between being individualistic and philanthropic makes me wonder. I'm utterly safe as a being. The effects of some causes make people doubt, yet we should also consider if 'they' feel safe. We can all be safe, though where to start?

No, as long as the administration protects those who sexually harass students I don't feel safe for me or my friends. They don't protect them, we just don't hear about every single sexual assault from the administration. They can't legally tell us.

The administration cannot act unless assaults are reported.

100% false No Wrong

100% Not true or false. Stop projecting!

YES But I'm a male athlete

YES

yup.

FA SHO!

yes.

Yes, I am a male, I have hid serious issues but I used the schools resources and it was addressed. SPEAK OUT! People (CA's, CER, Security, Deans, etc...) will help you.

Hell yeah, we on a fucking hill, mad white people, 3 meals a day, no gangs or guns. Fuck wouldn't I be safe?

Yes but I feel like that's not the 'right' answer that this poster is looking for.

Yes. But I dated an athlete so I feel like I'm somehow protected.

USUALLY. But when someone writes hate speech against me or my friends, I reevaluate that. I know how quickly I can reach for my safety whistle.

Yes, it feels like metal.

Not anymore. I used to be very happy about the fact that Colby was a safe space—at least that's what I thought. Now, after having several friends confess that they were sexually assaulted on this campus, I feel very disillusioned!! We are a small community, most people know each other personally on this campus, it shouldn't be this way!!!

Same. So sometimes. Let's support each other more, please.

The Bridge office is my only safe space.

Personally, I feel safe, but not if my classmates do not as well. Colby should be a place where everyone should feel safe. The students here are too awesome to not deserve that respect.

Agreed. We, as a community need to support one another and END THE SILENCE!

I do, but I try to make good decisions and I've never found myself in the wrong place at the wrong time. In that way I'm lucky.

Yes—but I'd feel safer if Bro was more proactive.

Yes. The recent stories shared about sexual assault occurring makes one nervous and even scared. To take the power back, let us as women be cautious of these men because obviously some of them don't give a fuck. I'm not blaming the victim; I'm saying that Colby is safe, it's those dumbass men that make it dangerous.

[With "dumbass men" underlined] this is so unfair. I know several men who have been taken advantage of. They hated every minute of it. PLEASE stop blaming. It is so counterproductive.

...men can be assaulted too, this is completely unfair

I completely agree...assault does not discriminate. Both men and women can be assaulted. I think we are forgetting that!

I'm sick and tired of all men being blamed on this campus. Obviously there are criminals out there but this is an issue on both sides. Don't you dare say it is the 'dumbass men that make it dangerous.'

Sorry to unfairly accuse you by inclusion...you are appreciated too.

Safe? Yes. Empowered? No.

Be Bro-Active!

I thought I did but now I'm not so sure.

Some day, all that the light touches will be yours.

No. If even one person feels unsafe at this school, there is a problem (and there's clearly more than one fearful voice speaking out). Why is it so hard for us all to respect each other??

What world do you live in? This is not a utopia...you will be shocked in the real world...I wish you luck

Why would this mean we shouldn't work to make OUR community still better? Which is what this conversation is trying to START to do.

You are the change you make in the world. Do you want to passively let this oppressive environment continue???

Yes. We make our own choices.

Until someone make it for you.

Agreed

I'm not sure anymore. I do know that I have a wonderful, supportive group of friends, but that isn't always enough. We need to do more than talk, Colby. We need to change.

Yes! There are so many people here looking out for me. Also by being scared we are not solving the problem, we are making it worse. We need to choose to feel safe and act to fix anything preventing us from feeling safe.

[With "scared" circled and crossed out] EMPOWERING OURSELVES

Is opening up a dialogue about a reality on this campus being scared?

ABSOLUTELY NOT, OVER AND OVER MY IDENTITY HAS BEEN ATTACKED ON THIS CAMPUS. [Star of David, Lesbian Symbol, 99%]

Sometimes—but I should feel safe ALL the time. As a woman I feel uncomfortable walking on campus late at night. Do other women feel the same way? Do men feel this way too?

[With arrow to "Do other women feel the same way?"] yes.

YES because students speak out here J

Do they?

I do!

YES! As a woman I almost always feel safe walking on campus at night. The only times that I don't usually feel safe are when I speak up about my Catholic faith.

+ political views.

YES!

THAT'S A PRETTY LARGE "yes," I WISH I KNEW WHY...

Yes. Because the actions of few should not force us all to live in fear.

But those actions should encourage us to make the campus SAFER for everyone. Living in fear is not a choice it is a response to a situation.

COLBY READ THIS

volume two

As I walk up to the full-length mirror in my room, wearing only underwear, my thighs jiggle gently, come to rest. I rise up on my tiptoes and land down, hard, on my heels, just to see them shake. I grasp one from behind in my right hand, pull backwards, examine. This is what I would look like without the excess. I let go; watch the fat fall back into place. These are my thighs.

They are also my mother's thighs. I have so many memories of her, wearing only underwear, walking around her bedroom, getting ready for work. She picks up an earring, holds it by her face, smiles at me in the mirror. "This one...or these?" She holds up another one, places it by her other ear, turns to me. As she turns, her thighs shake, come to rest. These are our thighs.

These thighs are not magic thighs. There are no diamonds where they meet. Only hair. Thick, dark hair. Television, movies, commercials, magazines, friends, roommates, classmates say it is unsightly, unclean, unnatural, unwanted. But I want it. It makes me feel covered, protected and—dare I say it?—sexy. This is my hair.

It is also my mother's hair. I have so many memories of her, in the bathtub, after a long day at work. She is lying with her head against the wall, while I sit on the edge of the tub, talking about what we will eat for dinner. "How does stir-fried tofu sound?" She stands up in the water, I pass her a towel. Her hair is thick and dark. This is our hair.

here is what colby is good at: **TALKING.**

here is what colby is not good at: **LISTENING.**

here is what colby is great at: **BEING JUDGMENTAL.**

here is what colby sucks at: **BEING COMPASSIONATE.**

here is what colby has mastered: **DEFENSIVENESS.**

here is what colby must learn: **SELF-EVALUATION.**

Dreaming

Despite all the doubts I have, I genuinely believe that someday soon, same-sex couples will be treated the way that inter-racial couples are treated now: they'll stare, but they'll feel bad about it. Part of me is still scared stiff that I'll never truly be able to lead the quiet family life I want to because everything I've ever known about family has been from my experience in the heterosexual family. Will my kids be teased? Will other parents refuse to send their kids for play dates? Will I ever actually be able to both marry my partner and live where I want to? Will I be able to bring my family to the company picnic or will I have to fake a single life? Will my children resent me for othering them? Will others judge me for the same?

All of these questions burn into me every time I dream about the future. Dreaming is, in a way, the most painful thing I can do right now...

What really deep fries my scrotum is closed-mindedness. I'm sorry that I'm open-minded enough to hear your opinion. I'm sorry you think "The Seven Walls" is ugly. I really am. You shouldn't have to go out of your way to understand anything. This is America after all.

What really electrocutes my nipples is anti-intellectualism.

I'm sorry that I'm willing to discuss issues instead of arguing about them. I've even more sorry that there is, and always will be, more than one right answer.

What really dropkicks my dick is people who roll their eye when I'm grinding on my boyfriend.

I'm sorry that I want to be able to do the same things that straight lacrosse players do without stigma. I'm sorry you think I'm forcing my homosexuality down your throat. I'll be sure to tone it down the next time. I didn't mean to infringe upon your white hegemony. Maybe I'll learn my lesson when my family disowns me for who I am. Your

eye rolls basically tell me that I should be bludgeoned to death. That my dick should be cut off and that I should be choked to death with it because I don't use it the proper way, the way you do. I'm sorry you have to teach me this lesson. Don't worry, though. I learn it every day on the news. When some boys cut a Brooklyn queer teen's torso in two and light him on fire a few weeks ago, I really learned a lesson. Your glares remind me to behave like a good straight boy, or else. So in addition of my apology, thanks. Your eye rolls are a good reminder of what's waiting for me.

What really rips my pubic hairs out one by one is people who think that gender studies is not legitimate academic field.

I'm sorry you think I'm wasting my life by majoring in something that challenges me, something that I find fascinating. I'm sorry that you are unwilling to even read some of the most canonical philosophers in the world. I'm sorry capitalism made you choose a major.

What really cuts my anus with shards of broken class is people who hate feminists and people who are feminists, but deny it.

I'm sorry you don't believe in equal rights for everyone. I'm sorry you don't believe that all human beings are created equal. And I'm most definitely sorry you are not willing to embrace even the smallest critique of patriarchy. Lord knows I've been subject to patriarchy's constant critique of my deviant mind and body. Sorry I'm so unwilling to succumb. Sorry I'm not a bio-major. And I'm certainly sorry that you think that every paper I write is a joke and every article I read is garbage. But what I'm really sorry for is that you think that empirical data is real. I'm sorry those numbers comfort you. I'm sincerely sorry that nothing is real, except for perception and emotion.

What really gargles my foreskin is people who think that being PC prohibits their "free speech."

I'm sorry that free speech isn't free if it comes at the price of someone's safety, comfort, and ability to move throughout the world without being bogged down by stereotypes and paradigms of hate. I'm sorry you are incapable of empathy.

What really lacerates my glans with thousands of paper-cuts is that I have to be sorry for all of this shit on a daily basis.

You know what? I'm sorry I'm not sorry anymore.