

# Reflections from the Mill

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I have done this performance many times, but I have never felt like I do now after our performance at the Mill. Ever since I was a freshman, the Mill has been my place to party. We all know that certain crowds flock to certain party spaces. There are stereotypes associated with each, and you quickly learn upon coming to campus where you are expected to go. With my interest in hair dye, college radio, and quirky clothes, I was immediately directed towards the Mill. It was the “hipster,” “alternative” hangout that wore weirdness as a badge of pride. I have learned, however, that the Mill, for all its claims of inclusivity or appeal to the misfits, is not always a safe space. You have to be a certain type of weird, a certain type of misfit, a certain skin tone to really fit in. Good luck if you don’t have a tattoo, don’t live your life critiquing consumerism, or don’t know the most obscure underground bands. Good luck if you are the token person of color. Good luck if you are the freshman manic pixie dream girl that all the senior boys want to bang. How can you speak up about feelings of exclusion, marginalization, or fetishization when you are constantly reminded that the Mill is full of “woke” people, artistic people, sad bois that feel all the injustices of the world?

Performing there last night, I was acutely reminded of just how exclusive the Mill can be. While everyone was cordial, there was a general distance. The feel was, “oh yeah I know art, I like art, but I don’t need to engage with this further.” We were told without words that we weren’t taken seriously for the gravity of what Stairs/Stares represents. We were decoration, another way for the Mill to prove their openness rather than change their culture.

I say these things not to tear apart those who are part of the Mill or love the Mill—I have many friends who are members and I myself still go. I don’t want to make a sweeping statement about all those who saw or interacted with the performance. I also do not believe that those who interacted with us had bad intent. I say these things rather because we have to move past the classic phrase “fuck the Mill” to actually do something about it. Joking about how shitty the Mill is just erases the experiences of those who actually feel unsafe or unwelcome there. We have to challenge the complacency that is present to actually make the environment more safe. Just because you are part of the Mill doesn’t mean you can hide behind that one GSFS or Critical Race Theory class that you took and say that you’ve seen it all. Your one ear piercing and painted nails do not make you the expert on mitigating violence or oppression.

I am tired of seeing new rounds of freshmen girls just like me roll through the Mill and experience the kind of things that I experienced there. Come on Mill folks, let’s get real. Are we really better at the Mill than we are at Atwater?

If you feel offended by my words, ask yourself why. Really did deep. And next time you say “fuck the Mill,” try not to say it with irony—it’s not cool anymore.