

# five notes on collective living

photo by: Ellen Bedoz

This article was written by the GLF Men's Collective to present our ideas about living together.

I  
Experiments with collectives have been very much a part of the Gay Liberation Front in the past year and with good reason. Any group which calls itself radical and revolutionary must concern itself with providing an alternative way for people to live and work together than the competitive, role-oriented model which heterosexual, capitalist society offers us. The chief "virtue" in our society is individualism through which a person continually perceives what is to his or her own advantage at the expense of others and fights for the money and power to attain it. It is the institutionalized individualism in our society which leads to the oppression of every powerless group: homosexuals, women, third world people, etc. A functional alternative to individualism is collectivism.

A Collective is a group of people who organize around a common purpose and agree to function collectively in order to attain it. Collective functioning involves the idea that within the group there are no leaders and all strive to participate as equals. Every idea and feeling that arises in the group is brought forth and shared. No decisions are made until the whole group has talked the matter out long enough until there is an agreement reached among everyone as to what to do. Criticism is an essential part of a collective. It is the responsibility of the group to continually evaluate how it is functioning. Criticism of the group or individuals within that group is never allowed to go on in private but is always brought forth in the presence of everyone. The responsibility of an individual in a collective is to continually strive to see what is to the advantage of the group (which includes herself or himself). When a collective lives together it becomes a much greater challenge because it enters into every area of life.

II.

Our collective has been functioning dynamically for the last three and a half months, and often I ask myself what internal or external bond holds us together. To me the answer is obvious that it's because of consciousness-raising, which is the process of evolving a politics by talking about our oppression as gay men in this sexist, male chauvinist society, and through my entrance into Femmes Against Sexism. This is a consciousness-raising as well as an action group designed to deal with the oppression of femme males as well as with the hypocrisy of the "straight" homosexual man; his need to come off as straight in order to feel less pressured in this sexist society, but thereby suppressing the femme side of his personality. In my nine months in GLF I always noticed that the women were more together than the men. By "together" I mean there was less fighting with one another, and the women did not have the need to compete as the men did, therefore feeling more solidarity with their sisters.

The men who make up the 95th Street collective are mostly femme males. I feel that by virtue of being femme males we have the ability to love one another and have stronger emotional bonds than the "straight" homosexuals. When ideas are in conflict in the collective we do not compete to see whose idea is best, but we collectively search for a solution that meets all of our needs. When a member of the collective is hurt, we are sensitive to the other's personal pain. There is no need to hide our pain as so many men do in order to uphold the masculine image which our society forces on males. We express pain as well as the love and the anger which run rampant in us.

As long as we let the femme in us come through, our collective will continue functioning as a whole, not as one "man" competing against another. I feel our collective has much to offer as an example to men who are still handicapped by a masculine image that is slowly dying, and which women and femme men feel is oppressive to us.

III.

My entrance into the GLF men's living collective was the direct result of five months of consciousness-raising. Through this group experience with my gay brothers, I learned to identify with and trust other gay men. This eased the pain I had felt as an isolated, lonely, "sick" man. Simultaneously, I developed a furious anger against this sexist society which was so oppressive to me as a gay male and as a gay male and as a femme. Thus I became increasingly active in gay liberation.



Collective living was the natural next step. A living collective provided the maximum politically productive use of my energies, but even more important was the opportunity it provided for an alternative life style. We strive to create an environment where we are equal, where no one is oppressed. We give each the love and support we need to accept criticism and change. Each of us have grown and flowered at an amazing rate since entering the collective. I have particularly come out in this environment, expressing ever more freely my feelings and ideas. I have gained immensely in strength and confidence, recognizing always that our strength is in the collective, not the individual, and that our struggle as gay revolutionaries is to smash sexism.

IV.

People who wish to form a communal collective should keep in mind that a full commitment to collective living is a must from the start. At the same time, people must be very patient with themselves and each other. We are all encumbered with all kinds of irrational habits and petty hang-ups. Some of us are shy about sex or nudity or expressing our emotions. Some of us smoke too much, or have developed little rituals about sleeping or eating or going to the bathroom.

Only when we feel a collective or personal need to get rid of these habits can we begin to observe them. And when we do so, we need to be able to trust our sisters and brothers to give us the support and love that makes them unnecessary. For this reason, a collective should never make rules governing individual behavior unless everyone is certain they can support this or that rule. If everyone can support a certain idea, it is probably not really necessary to make it into some kind of law, anyway. What a collective really decides turns out to be a plan of action.

If people carry out the plan and it succeeds, all well and good. If they do not, or if the plan fails, a group self-criticism is in order to find out why people were unable to carry out the plan, or why it maybe wasn't such a good plan in the first place.

Everything a collective decides is always subject to change, just as what an individual decides is always subject to change. But living in a collective situation, we must always maintain the respect for our sisters and brothers that will cause us to change collective decisions together, and not individually.

V.

After observing the collective living situation for two weeks I decided that no other life style could offer so much or could be so challenging, rewarding and valuable. Beginning the third week as a member of this collective I have encountered many frustrations and difficulties. But I am more and more aware of a new strength and positiveness that comes from the support and understanding my collective brothers have offered.

I realize now how difficult it is to make the change from an individualistic consciousness to a collective one. Yet with each obstacle I approach, I find I have not only my own strength (which would not be enough), but the strength and aid of my four collective brothers. And when an obstacle has been surmounted, I have a genuine sense of something important gained through the experience.

The realization that I have made a commitment to these brothers, and that they have made the same commitment to me is something that makes itself apparent in every situation. And that feeling of commitment each day becomes less burdensome, and more of a fulfillment and a pleasure. For anything I have to give up, (and I've given up nothing that was really essential, at all), I gain something more satisfying and meaningful.

There are still a great many things I have to struggle with in making the adaptations necessary in bettering my life style. But the knowledge that I am not alone in my struggle makes the problems seem much less overwhelming. I can't see that I have anything to lose in effecting this change, and hopefully, will be able not only to gain, but to give more fully as a person.

An open letter to my sisters, in the hope that we will not have to wait 5,000 more years for liberation:

The women's movement is being co-opted, exploited, ripped-off, patronized, seduced and raped. Some of us have begun to notice the ways in which our movement is being killed with seeming kindness: others are bewildered at what seems to be the apparent ingratitude of a few sisters at the attention paid to us by various male groups. The following consists of my own impressions and analyses; if you agree with me, please send in your thoughts and information c/o this newspaper.

#### Subversion from the Right

I trust that the appointment of two women generals by the Nation's Number One Football Fan will convince few women that our demands are being met. Unfortunately some sisters are listening to the mealy-mouthed statements of male politicians, as exemplified in N.O.W.'s recent "Meet-the-Candidates" night at Fordham University (a Roman Catholic institution, dedicated to the maintenance of the Church, the abolition of abortion and the perpetuation of women's suffering for the greater glory of a male god). Entering the penthouse in a "Lavender Menace" T-shirt, I came upon a roomfull of well-dressed men and women, sipping sangria and eating canapes. Twenty of the candidates were male and one was female. She was the candidate of the Liberal Party against Marchi, running on Staten Island — an obvious sacrifice candidate who admitted she was running because she was bored with life as a housewife and schoolteacher, and couldn't find anything better to do on Staten Island.

A male candidate was walking around with a women's liberation button. I ripped it off his fat lapel after he referred to some women activists as "girls." Another male candidate, after purchasing a copy of COME OUT from me, suggested that I get my hair done and go find a nice Jewish boy.

The canapes were about as inspiring as the candidates, but they did fill an otherwise supperless stomach.

I suggested to some women present that working to elect an all-male slate of candidates might not be the best road to women's liberation. "Yes," one replied, "but they're all we've got right now."

All? Don't we have millions of women, hands, feet, minds, teeth, guns, pens, printing presses, cameras, lungs, eyes and ears? We have all of these organs — but we seem to lack heart. Every woman must know intellectually that no male politician will give her liberation — but very few people, male or female, are willing to face the fact that they must do it themselves. It is easier to delude yourself by setting up a Hero, a Liberator, and pretending that this Big Daddy will give you what you need. But liberation is an adult thing, and as such cannot be given to us like a Christmas present. We must take it ourselves, instead of "letting George do it."

Or Georgina. Georgina is the Women's Liberation Media Star. Many of us have watched her ascent into the heavens with an increasing incidence of ulcers and migraine; meanwhile, we struggle to get our groups together, working quietly at the day-care centers, on the mimeo machine, in consciousness-raising groups.

Generally a college-educated, white, well-heeled woman, a woman who knows a great deal about publicity and publishing but who never has the time for consciousness raising, she is prone to make apologetic statements to the male press, prone to waste her time arguing with Hugh Hefner or Dick Cavett when she could be organizing women. "I have a wonderful relationship with my husband," says one, denying her lesbian relationships in *Life* magazine — when only a week before, she brought tears to the eyes of gay women with the stories of her ill-fated lesbian affairs.

Another media star, at the Women's Strike on August 26th, sings a tune of "We want to walk hand in hand with men." "Men are not the enemy — we ourselves are the enemy," says that same woman who gave gay sisters in the movement what was then a derogatory name, "The Lavender Menace"; and who, on a Boston TV show, called us "man-hating harpies". Methinks the lady doth protest too much.

If the truth be known, these stars of the white male media are motivated partly by the desire for fame and fortune, and partly by a desperate need for male approval. They so despise their sisters — and themselves — that they can't imagine a woman's movement so strong it doesn't have to ask Daddy for money, for air time, or a pat on the head. They haven't got time for consciousness raising because they can't imagine learning anything useful from other women's experiences.

These media stars, carefully coiffed and lathered with foundation makeup, claim to represent all women. In actuality, they are ripping off all women. Example: one woman claimed to be organizing prostitutes in the Times Square area. Her only contact with them was to tape some interviews which she plans to use in her next book.

These women will betray us when the cock crows.

Margaret Mead, who wrote some earth-shaking books in the 1930's and has served as an apologist for the establishment ever since, was recently asked if she thought the women's liberation movement will succeed. "If the media doesn't kill it," she replied. I agree with her.

# SUBVERTERS WOMEN'S LIBERATION

8.

Visions of Madison Avenue atrocities float past my eyes: "Be liberated — wear the light new Womanform bra." "Drive a Pantherette — the sexiest, swiftest car for the liberated woman — from General Motors." "Liberate your breath with Listerine — and catch a liberated man."

Don't be surprised if you see Georgina shilling for Proctor & Gamble in the near future. If large numbers of women are going to passively depend on a few stars to liberate them, instead of getting themselves together to do it, the movement will surely fail.

#### ... And from the Left

Subversion from the left is a more serious matter. It will eventually dawn on large numbers of women that they cannot obtain liberation under the present social structure — that free abortion on demand must evolve into free medical care and child care centers, which must evolve into socialist institutions. Having come to the realization that a considerable degree of socialism is necessary to our liberation, they must turn leftward — down a path strewn with booby traps laid by male-dominated leftist groups and the male-oriented women who front for these groups.

The male-oriented women have long since been alienated from Amerika, but still desperately crave approval from the male left. They must prove that they are as "revolutionary" as men — the underlying assumption being that men are naturally revolutionary, particularly if they are non-white. Many of these women are college-educated; women who found that the only men who would let them use their intellect at all were left-wing males, women who could not relate at all to apolitical sisters because they despised "woman talk". They cannot conceive of the notion that women can liberate themselves, and so they place the fate of women's liberation in the most male-oriented political groups in the country. What touching naivete!

We need hard-working women like these, but they expend their energy on every other cause but women's liberation, heatedly justifying any male chauvinism which appears in any male they consider oppressed. If a working class or non-white male assaults them on the street, it has to be understood that he is just acting out of his oppression. If a working class or middle class white woman is afraid to send her children to be bussed into Harlem, she is "reactionary," "racist," or "stupid." The male-oriented political woman has no patience with the mistakes of her own sex, but she is all full of pity and liberalism for the worst male chauvinist. A few words of kindness, a statement of support of women's liberation in an otherwise male-chauvinist party line is enough to bring tears of gratitude to these women's eyes.

A woman can spend her whole life getting one man's foot off another man's neck and still remain on the bottom of the heap herself.

The right wing says, "If you women want to be liberated, you will have to be drafted."

The left wing says, "If you women want to be liberated, you must pick up the gun and fight alongside of us."

In other words, the only liberation we are being offered is the right to be cannon fodder. The right to fight in men's causes, taking orders from men, in situations which they define and direct. We have seen the posters depicting the woman revolutionary with a baby slung over her back and a gun in her hand. We must bear revolutionary babies. No male revolutionary is ever depicted carrying the baby. It might slow him down in battle. Well, you know we always do two jobs and get paid for half a job, if we get paid at all.

I say if we want to be liberated, we must pick up the gun and turn it on the men who are issuing all these orders, the very men who are telling us that we must follow them, obey them, in order to get our liberation.

#### Hurrah for the Vanguard Party

The Black Panther Party is the vanguard of the revolution. The Black Panther Party, according to Huey P. Newton, its Supreme Commander, intends to level the earth in order to prepare the way for the flowering of Black Manhood.

The Black Panther Party, a "people's democratic" organization, has never elected any of its officers, nor called a party congress in order to debate policy, nor permitted any deviation by any of its members from the official party line.

The Black Panther Party tells us that our function is to bear revolutionary babies. Their statement at the so-called "Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention", where they heavily oppressed those sisters who attended, was that women's liberation is "right on" — that a crash program must be instituted to give women control of the technology which is relevant to our needs, i.e., child care.

Obviously, nothing else is relevant to our needs. After the revolution, the Black Panther Party will presumably retain control over agriculture, housing, medicine (except for gynecology), transportation, the military, manufacturing, education, communications, and some brand-new version of the OGPU.

Any white person who criticizes the Black Panther Party is a racist pig.

Why is the Black Panther Party considered the "vanguard" of the revolution anyway? Why was Huey Newton's patronizing statement on Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation received with such touching gratitude? Why did some gay people walk so tall after receiving Good Huey's seal of approval, as if their needs could not be considered valid, nor they revolutionary, unless the Black Panther Party approved of them?

The Black Panthers are being shot at. This is not, in itself, a sufficient qualification for being a revolutionary. They are attempting to defend themselves with guns. This is again not sufficient. The Plains Indians were in the same position a century ago, and no one calls them revolutionaries. People are not revolutionary because they are under attack or engaged in self-defense; they are revolutionary only if they are consistently fighting for the liberation of all people.

The Black Panthers might even be revolutionary with regard to black males. With regard to other males, their attitude is liberal, and with regard to women, it is indistinguishable from the attitude of the German Nazi Party, which also demanded increased baby production.

It is my conviction that the reason gay males were fairly well treated at the Convention was that they simply asked to be allowed to be gay and to fight alongside the Panthers. Women asked for "that amount of control of all production and industry that would ensure one hundred percent control over our own destinies." In short, women asked for real power, and the Panthers freaked out.

For women to allow their energies to be diverted in support of a group that wishes to restrict them to the old baby-making function is masochistic, guilt-liberal bullshit. Those energies could be expended on projects which would benefit the Women's Movement — day care centers, clinics, a women's liberation school with courses in technology and self defense, a women's publishing company. All these require workers and money. Yet the biggest fund-raising drive I have seen in the women's movement was the drive to raise bail for Joan Bird. The slogans were everywhere — "free our sister, free ourselves." "No one is free until everyone is free." Perhaps these slogans are true in some ultimate sense. They basically appeal to liberals who wish to hide their liberalism behind radical rhetoric.

Our resources are limited. To spend all that energy and time to raise \$100,000 for one woman who is then supposed to "free" us when she steps out of jail in return for our dollar contribution, to spend all that on a woman whose Party affiliation requires unquestioning obedience to the Supreme Commander (male) — is that the way to make