

five notes on collective living

photo by: Ellen Selez

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

I. Experiments with collective living 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, individualistic model which heterosexual, capitalist society offers us. The chief "virtue" in our society is individualism through which a person continually pursues 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 taken 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 do what is to the advantage of the group (which includes herself or himself). When a collective lives together it becomes a much greater challenge than it is to every area of life.

II. Our collective has been functioning dynamically for the last three and a half months, and after I ask myself what internal or external bonds hold us together, I realize the answer is obvious that it is a process 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 Females Against Sexism. This is a consciousness-raising as well as an action group designed to deal with the oppression of female males as well as with the hypocrisy of the "straight" homosexual man; he needs to come out as straight in order to feel less pressured in this sexist society, but thereby suppressing the female 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 female males. I feel that by virtue of being female males we have the ability to love one another and have stronger emotional bonds than the "straight" companions. 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 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 female 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 female 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, "stuck" 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 female. 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 flourished 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 bedroom.

Only when we feel a collective or personal need to get rid of these habits do 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. It really 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 is a function, 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 in 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.

SUB/VERS/ION VS. LIBERATION

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 smug 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.D.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 Menses" T-shirt, I came upon a roomful of well-dressed men and women, sipping sangria and setting 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 woman'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 off a nice Jewish boy.

The canapes were about as inspiring as the candidates, but they did fill an otherwise superluscious 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 women, 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 migraines; 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 went to walk hand in hand with men, my." "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 Menses"; and who, on a Boston TV show, called us "men-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.

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 America, 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 spalliotic 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, heartily 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 woman'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. We very men who are telling us that we must follow them, obey them, in order to get our liberation.

Hurray 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.

8. 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 DGPU.

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 their 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

a woman's revolution? The Black Panthers can't be our paid mercenaries — we have to liberate ourselves and fight in our own class.

Why not admit it, the purpose of that campaign was to prove to the Black Panthers that we in Women's Liberation aren't racists. As if we could ever prove it, because we are racists by definition. And there they've got us — we will always be giving money, proving our worth, sewing shirts for soldiers, until we stop taking this bullshit and organize a revolutionary women's movement.

The Socialist Worker's Party

The Socialist Worker's Party is highly attractive to male-oriented women who have swallowed the line that a socialist revolution will automatically bring about the liberation of women. Any careful examination of the status of women in nations that have already gone socialist will give the lie to this pleasant fantasy. In such nations, women's roles are defined by men, and restrictions on political activity make it much more difficult for women to achieve liberation. When the Party decides that an increase in population is desirable, heroic mother medals are awarded. When women are needed in the factories, heroic working-woman medals are minted. When women are needed to nurse soldiers, as in the USSR after the Second World War, the medical profession is opened to them — at least on the lower level.

The Socialist Worker's Party, whose membership is 75% male and whose leadership is almost entirely male, has moved with frightening success to infiltrate and take over

Male Orientation in Women's Groups

This subversion and co-optation of the women's movement by the male-oriented left would not be possible if so many women were not male-oriented, and if the left were not so full of liberal tendencies. Women have a difficult time in getting rid of the need for male approval, particularly straight women. They find it almost impossible to put their own needs first, tending to act as if women's needs are trivial. This is compounded by a tendency to see men as simultaneously strong and weak — too strong for poor weak women to successfully fight them, and too weak in their dear little egos for us to criticize them in any way.

Since men are always getting into fights, and since they present every situation as a life-or-death crisis (or carefully engineer such a crisis), for us to take time out to criticize them or demand that they change their behavior is pure sabotage. They haven't got the time for trivial gabble about women's problems. Our job is to relate to their struggles.

For example, women took over a male-dominated newspaper — RAT — and have been running it for eight months. A look at a recent issue (as of this writing) is an example of the continuing inability of some women to relate to their own needs. It is my impression, having worked on RAT, that while many of the women on it are happy working with other women on a paper where they are allowed to run it themselves, they can't get it together enough to publish something which isn't basically a report on the doings of the male movement.

No successful male revolutionary has felt it incumbent upon him to refrain from criticism of other left-wing groups whose principles or actions seemed contrary to the interests of oppressed people.

The fear to criticize other left-wing groups results in wishy-washy, vague politics, and an uncritical acceptance of behavior which can be actually counter-revolutionary. It destroys any attempt to organize a movement around sound ideological principles, permits oppression to flourish within the movement, alienates potential converts, and saps the spirit of women who would otherwise be willing workers for our liberation.

This fear, at least among whites, springs out of guilt politics and a martyr-like attitude, an attitude which says that if you haven't been hit by a billy club or killed a cop or bombed a building, you're not good enough.

If you're white, your ideas are useless, and the best thing you can do with your life is to sacrifice it in the struggle to destroy honky culture and allow the emergence of a black nation. This idea was presented to me and passionately defended by a sister who is now underground. Another white sister informed me that as a white person, I am necessarily a racist (I agree to that definition), and that I am like all other white people including her. We all hate non-white people to the extent that we will all commit any atrocity whatsoever in order to defend our white skin privileges, including torture and genocide. As a working class lesbian one-generation removed from Dachau, I find such politics unspeakably funny. I could die laughing.

What is a Revolutionary?

We seem to confuse people who are fighting simply to end their own oppression — regardless of what happens to other people — with genuine revolutionaries.

I believe that the true revolutionary is a person working in whatever capacity — as a soldier or a distributor of leaflets or a worker in a day care center — to end all forms of oppression. She (he) does not fear criticism from comrades, because she recognizes the limitations of her own experience and wishes to broaden her understanding of all forms of oppression in order to struggle more successfully against them.

She struggles for understanding and pays attention to an idea rather than to the source of the idea. An idea is not correct simply because it issues from the mouth of Mao or Che or any other leader.

A person is not automatically defined as a revolutionary simply because she is poor, female, black, or a member of any other group by the circumstances of her birth. She is

defined by her conduct, by the manner in which she relates to people. If she demonstrates a willingness to liberate her own group while attempting to oppress other groups, or if she judges a person's politics by the circumstances of their birth or occupation, she is simply engaged in a struggle for power for her own faction, not engaged in revolution.

At the present time, almost all males are only too willing to oppress women while they issue a few patronizing statements about women's liberation. They have no standard of humanity — only a standard of manhood, and that standard is the cock and the gun. They show almost no willingness to deal with their own sexism or their own liberalism towards so-called radicals who practice sexism, that is, who oppress women and gay men. Nor are they particularly interested in examining the autocratic structures of their own groups and the ways in which they oppress each other.

It is obviously necessary — has always been necessary — for there to be a strong, separate women's movement whose members are dedicated to struggle for their own liberation and the liberation of all people; women who will band together in strength and not run too quickly to form alliances with oppressive men; women with self-respect who will not be diverted into being female auxiliaries and fund-raising organizations for male power structures.

It is necessary for such a movement to have a principled, coherent ideology, and to cast out of its ranks opportunists who are seeking approval and favors from the Establishment, as well as women who are willing to sell themselves short in order to gain radical credentials with male groups. It is necessary for such a movement to have within it skilled political economists, because the United States is in an economic situation unlike any other nation past or present, and this is not the place for a revolution modeled after those which have occurred in agrarian societies. We have a lot in figure out before we can move intelligently.

Since women have been oppressed longer than any other group in history, men have a very heavy investment in continuing to oppress us. Their very sense of "manhood" is defined by their continuing to oppress us. As a result, such a movement will be attacked viciously from both the right and the left, and attempts at subversion will continue. Our only hope will be a clear understanding of what must be done in order to make a woman's revolution.

We must have control of all the avenues of power in accordance with our numbers — that means 51% control of everything! All power to the sisters! Forward to the World-Wide Women's Revolution!

subversion in the woman's movement

Martha Shelley

sections of the women's movement. They have moved full-time workers into the women's centers of New York, Boston, Baltimore and Los Angeles, attempting to take over jobs, moving in SWP literature and moving out feminist literature. Check it out sister, if you live in these cities.

The SWP has a policy of infiltration, which is described in their handbook — a handbook issued only to loyal party members. I am attempting to get hold of this handbook, which was described to me by a disillusioned ex-SWP woman, and will publish it as soon as possible.

The SWP is also backing the Equal Rights Amendment, a deceptive piece of legislation which will strip away protections from working women. So this is a Socialist Worker's Party?

At the Women's Strike in New York, control of the speakers platform was in the hands of Ruthann Miller, a long-time member of the SWP. A lesbian, who was attempting to tell her sisters in Bryant Park about the pig harassment coming down on gay women in the streets, had to get permission to speak from Ruthann — since the Socialist Worker's Party has a long-term policy of expelling gay people from its membership, our gay star found this a humiliating experience.

SWP has considered gay people to be counter-revolutionaries and a "danger" to the party. Seems like it's bad enough to be called a Commie without being called a Commie Pink Queer to boot. Some of the expelled gay people are now in Gay Liberation Front; and sadly enough, some of them are wretchedly trying to get SWP to change its mind and readmit them now that they have proved they can be "revolutionary." Maybe Huey's seal of approval will cause the SWP to have a change of heart.

It's difficult to place one's faith in a so-called vanguard — whether it's a black vanguard or a white vanguard — when the members can't think for themselves, when they can't even notice your oppression until it is spelled out in blood on the streets and cleared by the Central Committee.

The front and rear cover of the issues are pictures of two women who are guerrilla warriors in male-dominated movements, Angela Davis and Lela Khalad. Nothing new about that — women fighting for male causes goes back as far as Judith, who in the Old Testament, entered the camp of the enemy (some other Semitic tribe) and saw their general in his sleep. As I recollect, that didn't do much to liberate Jewish women.

A great deal of coverage is expended on the Panthers and on the "Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention", with no mention of the way women were fucked over at that convention. The right on to the Panthers is automatic by now. The Women's Strike of August 26 is covered without any attempt to distinguish between liberal and radical politics, without any attempt to take a feminist stance against the cooptation by various socialist groups as well as various establishment groups. A great deal of coverage consists of a right on to bombings, rip-offs, various forms of violence, without any analysis of what constitutes random violence and what constitutes revolutionary violent action.

The following issue contains a lengthy article on Korea. For some months now, the Panther Party has been extolling Kim Il Sung and the Korean Communist Party. I'm glad to see that RAT has finally caught up. The RAT interviewer asked the people who visited Korea what happens to homosexuals over there. Who knows? That doesn't relate to Korea or the Korean culture. There are no homosexuals in Korea. Anyway, why should anyone want to embarrass the Koreans by asking such a question? What straight person would think to ask? They might think I was queer...

Liberalism on the Left

The unwillingness of left-wing groups, particularly women's groups, to engage in criticism and analysis of political groups and events stems from a kind of liberalism which says that anything left-wing is good, and that public criticism of a left-wing group can only do harm to the movement.