

## Direct Action Handbook - Introduction

What follows is a much-condensed version of 1980s handbooks produced by Abalone Alliance, Livermore Action Group, and Vandenberg Action Coalition. These articles deal specifically with group process and dynamics.

This material was originally compiled for anti-nuclear protesters — but it is valuable for any group, and addresses many of the issues that arise whenever people work together.

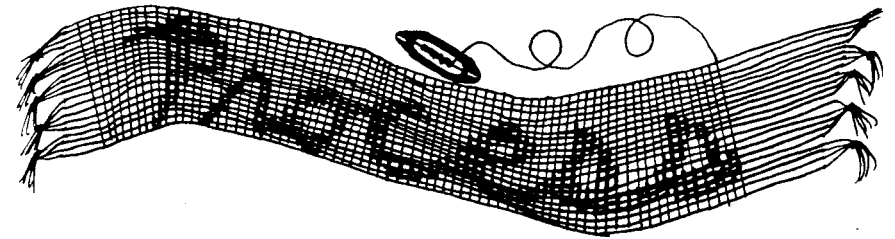
These ideas go back to the Civil Rights, Feminist, and Gay Rights eras. They have inspired direct action movements in North America and Western Europe for the past several decades, from the 1980s anti-nuclear movement to the WTO protests in Seattle and beyond.

The original handbooks ranged from 48 to 104 pages. These 16 pages offer only a small sampling of articles on group process from the handbooks. More sections of these handbooks, along with other organizing material, can be found at [www.directaction.org](http://www.directaction.org)

More on this subject can be found in the books *Direct Action* by Luke Hauser ([www.directaction.org](http://www.directaction.org)) and *Dreaming the Dark* by Starhawk ([www.starhawk.org](http://www.starhawk.org))

### Sections include:

- Nonviolence
- Consensus & Group Process
- Affinity Groups
- Feminism
- Discrimination and Oppression



# non-VIOLENCE

## Guidelines for Nonviolence

These are basic agreements, rather than philosophical/political requirements. The guidelines are meant to act as a basis of trust among participants who, for the most part, have met only for a particular action. The guidelines are under constant discussion and are seen as our current working understanding, not as statements etched in stone.

1. Our attitude will be one of openness, friendliness, and respect toward all people we encounter.
2. We will use no violence, verbal or physical, toward any person.
3. We will not damage any property.
4. We will not bring or use drugs or alcohol other than for medical purposes.
5. We will not run.
6. We will carry no weapons.

Nonviolence is an alternative to the use of violence to initiate change. Nonviolence minimizes bitterness and isolation in all people affected by it and tries to break the cycle of violence breeding more violence. The use of nonviolence in campaigns has led to many successes, such as ending racial segregation on buses in Montgomery, Alabama, as a result of the 1956 boycott.

A large part of the anti-nuclear movement has decided to incorporate nonviolence into the heart of our strategy. The following working assumptions form a

preliminary framework for the understanding of nonviolence:

1. The means must be consistent with the ends.
2. Respect all life.
3. Transform opposition rather than destroy it.
4. Use creativity, humor, and love.
5. Aim for underlying changes.
6. Power lies in social dynamics. We can withhold cooperation from those who abuse power, and remove power from them.
7. Nonviolence is active.

# Dynamics of NonViolence

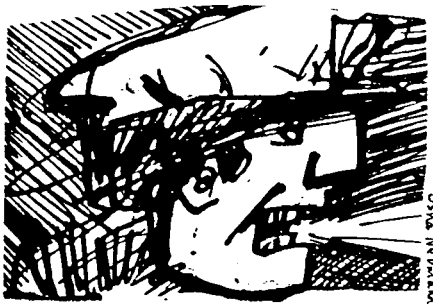
How does one remain nonviolent in the face of riot(ing) police? The first thing is maintaining human contact with the potential assailant—whether it's the police, a counter-demonstrator, or an angry participant from "our" side. Body language is important: especially making eye contact. Listening rather than talking may help prevent conflicts from erupting.

It is crucial that affinity groups discuss and role play, responses to potentially violent situations. For instance, an AG can physically surround someone being assaulted, while continuing to distract or calm the attacker. Active nonviolent responses such as this are, after all, the same idea as the whole blockade, which is intervening against the corporate violence of nuclear power and weapons.

We can show police (among others) another model of human nature, people who are acting for nature and for themselves. This process encourages our opponents' doubts about the rightness of their actions.

Many people comment on the extraordinary tone of nonviolent actions. It comes from the fact that participants are *centered and clear* about what they are doing. Gandhi referred to this as *Satyagraha*. *Satya* is truth, the truth that implies love and human dignity; *agraha* is firmness, the force felt by both actors

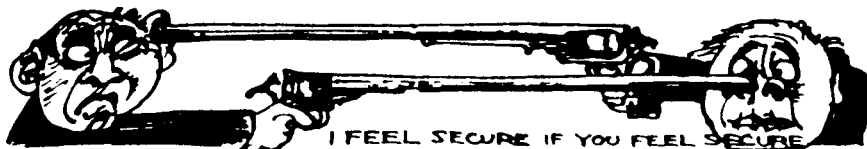
and opponents when truth and love are acted on. Don't look at this tone as something imposed by leaders in order to have discipline. Rather it emerges freely when, by acting, people take back some control over their lives.



## Police Violence

Police are trained to use holds and blows that can break bones or sprain joints. You should be aware of this when you are noncooperating with an officer. You will have to be the one to decide how much to risk, how much to accept.

If you are beaten by police, cover the base of the back of your head at the spine with your hands. Your elbows go over the sides of your head. Lie in a fetal position with your legs drawn up to protect your groin. This is the last stage of dealing with this kind of violence. Communication and sometimes withdrawal should be tried first.



# the Politics of NonViolence

The conventional view of political power sees people as dependent on the good will and caprice of the government. Power is seen as something people *have*. Consequently, those without power must kill or destroy their rulers and replace them in their positions in order to wield the selfsame power.

The theory of nonviolence proposes a different analysis: that government depends on people and that political power is variable, even fragile, always dependent on the cooperation of a multitude of groups and individuals. The withdrawal of that cooperation restricts and can even dissolve power. Put another way, power depends on continuing obedience, so that when we refuse to obey our rulers, their power begins to crumble.

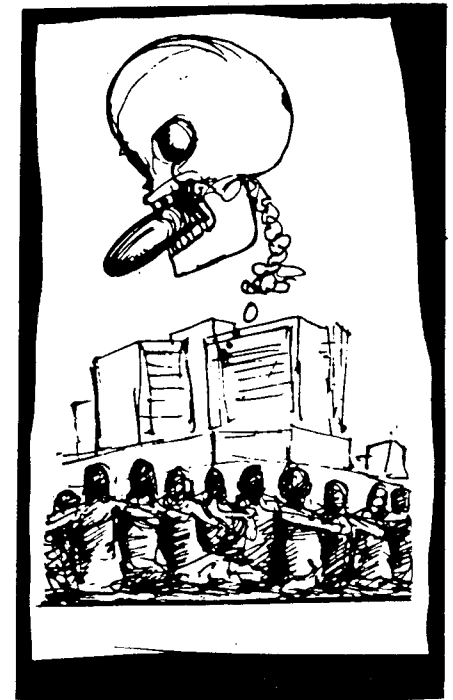
In this sense, nonviolence is not passive—nor is it a naive belief in converting the opposition—nor is it a "safe" method of protest, immune from repression. Rather, it is based on a different understanding of where people's power really lies. By acting disobediently, people learn to withhold, rather than surrender, their cooperation. When a group of people recognize this—as the "untouchables" of India did with Gandhi's help—the result is massive noncooperation and obstruction involving the use of social, economic and political power.

The authorities are able to wield power because masses of people passively obey, and because they have the violent means for suppressing dissent—police, National Guard, prison guards. A

few disobey and are punished, keeping the many afraid.

Yet there are chinks in this armor. First, the repressive apparatus is made up of human beings whose cooperation is essential. A nonviolent approach undercuts the police rationale for violence—and reveals to neutral parties the extent to which the system relies on violence and force.

When dissent grows and brings force to bear, it astronomically raises the cost of continuing violence against it, until it becomes infeasible and the system breaks down.



# CONSENSUS

## Introduction

Consensus is a process in which no decision is finalized until everyone in the group feels comfortable with the decision and is able to implement it without resentment. Ideally, the consensus synthesizes the ideas of the entire group into one decision.

The skill of coming to genuine consensus decisions is a real and hard one. It involves a willingness to change and an openness to new ideas. People must be committed not only to expressing their own feelings, but also to helping others with opposite views to express those as well. Because the ideal of consensus is to reach a decision that is not only acceptable to everyone, but is best for everyone, there must be a “bottom line” of shared beliefs about what is best for all concerned. These are the *principles of unity*. These basic agreements will undoubtedly not encompass all the beliefs of each individual in the group, but rather, will help define the working relationship of the members. This may vary from the specific goals of a coalition formed around a single action, to an in-depth, ongoing process of self-definition in a small collective. Whatever their scope, without these basic agreements, and a willingness to work within them, consensus will never succeed. (Int'lDay)

Unlike voting, consensus is not an adversary, win/lose method. With consensus, we do not have to choose between two alternatives. Those who hold views different from ours do not become opponents; instead, their views are seen

as giving us a fresh and valuable perspective. As we work to meet their concerns, our proposals are strengthened.

Consensus is not the same as a unanimous vote. It does not necessarily mean total agreement. Rather, it means that a proposal has gone through a synthesis process in which everyone has a chance to express feelings and concerns.

## Roles in a Consensus Meeting

**Facilitator:** Helps move the group through the decision-making stages. Takes suggestions for the agenda. Makes sure all necessary roles are filled. Calls on people to speak in turn. By calling on quiet people, soliciting opinions from those who hang back, and limiting those who tend to dominate, a skillful facilitator makes sure every person has a chance to participate fully. Helps the group resolve conflict and make decisions by summarizing, repeating, or rephrasing proposals as necessary. The facilitator should remain neutral on topics being discussed. When an issue arises about which the facilitator feels strongly, he or she should step aside and let someone else facilitate.

**Vibeswatcher:** Pays attention to the group's process. Stays aware of the feelings people are not expressing. Reminds the group to relax and take breaks as needed. This role is especially important in large meetings.

**Other roles:** Child care, notetaker, timekeeper.

# How Consensus Works

An issue comes up for discussion. For example, an affinity group is trying to decide what its focus will be. After general discussion, someone suggests a *go-round* during which each member has several minutes to speak. One person takes notes and suggestions on a large

The facilitator then asks for concerns and objections. A proposal is modified as concerns are expressed. For example, a group member might say, “I’m concerned that a focus on Livermore is too narrow.” After discussion, perhaps even another go-round on the subject,

the proposal will be modified and modified again. In its final form, it might be something like this: “This group will develop a public education campaign around the impact of U.S. nuclear weapons development on the Third World. The work of Livermore Lab will be a major focus, and we will support those who take part in the blockade.” If



sheet of butcher paper, so they can be seen by all.

When everyone has spoken, someone attempts to synthesize the ideas into a *proposal*—a suggestion for what the group will do. “I propose we concentrate on the Livermore action.” The facilitator then calls for clarifying questions: “Do you mean blockading, or public education, or what?” When the proposal is clearly understood, *additions* may be offered: “I propose we concentrate on Livermore, doing education before the action and support for those who want to be part of the blockade.”

there are no further objections, the facilitator can call for consensus. If there are still no objections, then you have your decision. If consensus is blocked and no new consensus can be reached, the group stays with whatever the previous decision was on the subject, or does nothing if that is applicable.

**Blocking:** Any individual in the group may also *block* consensus, but a block should be used very cautiously. A

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## Consensus

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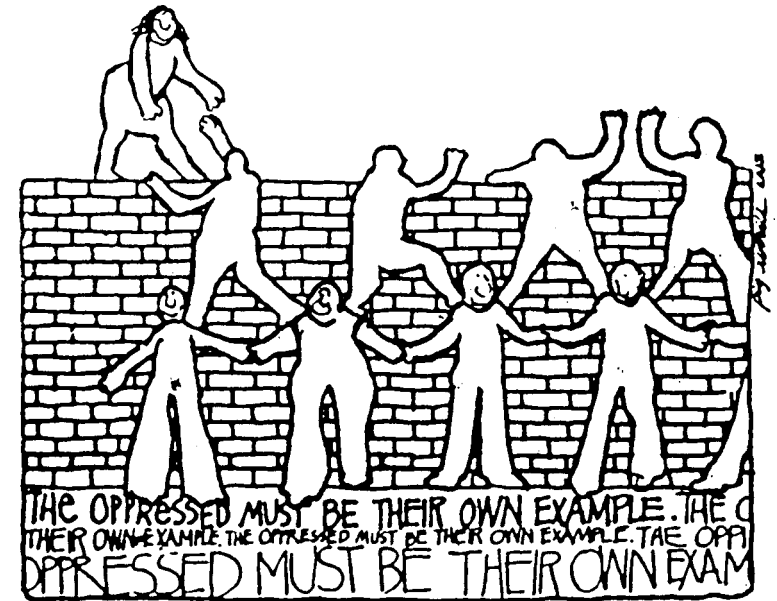
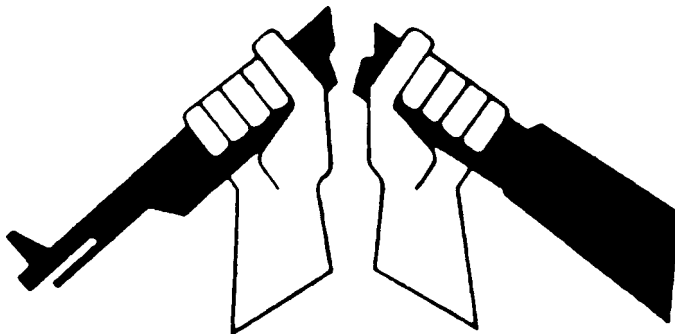
*block is not just a “no” vote, or an expression of disfavor.* A block says, “I believe what the group wants to do is wrong. I cannot allow the group to do it—and I am willing to impose this view on other group members because I feel it so deeply.” One person may prefer action to education. Another may be afraid to talk to strangers. But they would not block the group’s consensus on this proposal unless they believed that the public education program was harmful or unethical. When blocking is used for less serious reasons, it frustrates the consensus process, because it ends discussion and cuts off the possibility of synthesizing new options.

**Consensus and Action:** The goal of every decision-making process is not just to decide on a solution, but also to carry out that plan of action. It seems that a person’s commitment to any decision is in proportion to their sense of participation in that decision. Consensus attempts to involve all members of a group, not just the “leaders”.

People sometimes complain that consensus is too time-consuming. Especially when a group is learning to use the process, it may seem cumbersome. But discussion time is compensated by the increased energy and enthusiasm

with which people carry out a decision. There is no dissatisfied minority to undermine a decision. Because group members feel part of the decision-making process, they often take on responsibility in new areas.

**Spokescouncils:** When operating in a large group, each affinity group selects one person to act as their spokesperson. These “spokes” carry affinity groups’ opinions and proposals to spokespersons of all the affinity groups. Spokes try to consolidate, synthesize, and iron out differences between proposals so as to create a proposal agreeable to all. The new proposal is then relayed back to the affinity groups by their spokes, the issues at hand reconsidered by each AG, and a new position (or perhaps the old one) is reached. These new positions are once again brought to the spokesperson. If consensus can be reached, great. If not, the process may be repeated, or the group may decide to return to the previously consensed upon position. The role of spoke should rotate frequently so that power remains decentralized.



## Process Guidelines

One major contribution of the feminist movement to current social change movements is the awareness that effective group process and meaningful personal interactions are crucial factors in developing a successful movement. Non-violence begins at home, in the ways we treat each other.

Such an awareness stresses that relationships within the group cannot be separated from the accomplishment of political goals. Effective group process, in fact, means valuing co-operation over competition, recognizing the contributions of each individual, and decentralizing power through a non-hierarchical organizational structure.

### Process Suggestions

1. *Use go-rounds.* Equalize participation by going around the circle and allowing each person to speak for a
2. *Value feelings.* Include time in meetings for expressing emotions and for personal interactions.
3. *Meet separately.* Allow time for women to meet with women and for men to meet with men in order to facilitate self-awareness and strengthen each person’s participation. This applies to other groups as well, such as blacks and whites, etc.
4. *Meet in small groups.* Allow time for meeting in small groups during larger meetings so that people who feel uncomfortable speaking in large groups can speak more freely. Small groups will give each person more speaking time as well. A spoke from each small group can report back to the larger group.
5. *Share skills, rotate responsibilities.*

# Affinity Groups

An affinity group is usually composed of 5 to 15 people who have been brought together either at a nonviolence prep, by being in an anti-nuke or other type of group, or just because they're friends. In addition, many affinity groups focus around a specific interest, issue or philosophy, such as opposing sexism or racism in the anti-nuke movement, peacekeeping, being lesbians, Dead Heads or single mothers. An affinity group may exist only for the duration of one action or may continue functioning as an ongoing group.

Affinity groups serve as basic planning and decision-making bodies for an action, including the preparations and aftermath. Each affinity group provides for its own physical needs and makes all the basic decisions about the action, using consensus process. Spokespeople

representing each affinity group meet in **spokescouncils** to communicate, coordinate and consolidate the different groups' decisions and then bring the coordinated information back to their respective groups for their final discussion and approval.

Affinity groups serve as a source of support and solidarity for their members. Feelings of being isolated or alienated from the movement, the crowd, or the world in general can be alleviated through the love and trust which develops when an affinity group works, plays, relates together over a period of time. By generating familiarity and trust, the AG structure reduces the possibility of infiltration by outside provocateurs.

The concept of affinity groups is not a new one; the name goes back to the "grupos de afinidad" of the anarchist



movement in Spain in the early part of this century. But actually affinity groups are the oldest and most ubiquitous form of organization by people seeking to make a better world: what makes more sense than small groups of friends who share an "affinity" working together?

We hope that in organizing for Livermore, many affinity groups will continue on as political/support groups doing anti-nuclear and other things together (for example, anti-war, poetry, gardens, parties, alternative tech, tofu factories, etc). All over the country this is starting to happen.

We feel that affinity groups should meet regularly, or at least several times, before the action to build community in the group, work on their process, plan a blockade strategy, and have a good time together. Group names and even identification such as T-shirts or armbands can help bring a group together. At least one meeting, preferably right after the non-violence prep, should be devoted to legal and jail preparation, in which everyone's questions, fears, reactions, emotions and attitudes are explored in depth.

## Affinity Group Support People

Support people are considered part of the AGs they are doing support for. Among other things they can:

- collect a list of people that members of the AG want to be contacted in case of injury or arrest.
- take care of blockaders' cars, personal belongings, IDs, etc.
- keep in touch with the protesters for as long as possible, keep track of where each member of the AG is jailed, greet them when they are freed.
- support on the home front: plants, animals, kids, jobs, etc.



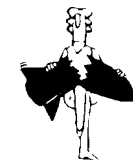
## Work Groups

Work groups are set up to take care of particular functions for an action. For a mass civil disobedience action, the list of work groups usually includes:

- logistics
- communications
- fundraising
- media
- legal
- outreach & publicity
- nonviolence preps
- jail support
- monitors
- medical

Ongoing communication with affinity groups and other work groups is important. This may be facilitated by representatives of the work groups meeting together as a coordinating council and/or meeting with AG spokes at a spokescouncil.

Work groups must also make budget estimates and work with each other to prioritize distribution of resources.



# Discrimination Introduction

In the disarmament movement, it is important not only to struggle against bombs and missiles, but also to struggle against other forms of violence that confront us. Specifically, other violence comes in two forms:

1. Daily physical and/or psychic violence against all people, such as rape or murder, and specifically against oppressed people.
2. Psychic and attitudinal violence within our movement reflected in ways we treat each other and ourselves.

These two forms of violence are strongly interconnected with the creation of weapons of destruction. After all, it is the same system that is responsible: a system based on domination, on the belief that some people have more value than others, and therefore have the right to control others. Because we believe it is the system and all of its forms of violence that we are fighting, we must make a commitment to fight the violence that occurs around us and between us. The Discrimination Section of this handbook specifically addresses these concerns, both within a societal context and within the context of interpersonal relationships.



## Racism

Racism, the systematic mistreatment experienced by people of color, is a result of institutionalized inequities in the social structure. Racism stems from a self-perpetuating imbalance in economic, political and social power. The consequences of this imbalance pervade all aspects of the social system and affect all facets of people's lives.

Racism sets groups of people against each other. It distorts our perceptions of the possibilities for change; it makes us abandon our visions of solidarity; it robs us of our dreams of community.

No human being is born with racist attitudes. Racist attitudes are a result of misinformation which has to be imposed upon young people.

Racism continues in part because people feel powerless to do anything about it. But the situation is not hopeless. People can grow and change. Racism can be examined and unlearned.

Before any real change of racist attitudes can happen:

- White people need to realize that it is possible to unlearn racist attitudes, that we do have that power.
- White people need to learn how to get accurate information from and about people of color, to be willing to listen.
- White people must become aware of the ways that our lives have been limited by racism. This will increase the interest of white people in ending racism.
- White people must develop working relationships with all groups working for change, including black, latino and indigenous groups. Don't force your agenda on other groups.

# Confronting Homophobia

Many people assume that everyone in the movement is heterosexual, despite the fact that gay people comprise 10 percent of the population and have been a significant force in every major left political movement in the past twenty years.

Historically, gays have been forced to live secretly out of fear of psychological or physical attacks or reprisals. This invisibility hurts us all: it perpetuates stereotypes about gays; it divides us; and it serves to minimize the accomplishments and contributions of gay people.

Unexamined prejudices result from historical condemnation of homosexuality. Gays have been attacked on all fronts: by psychiatry, organized religion, the Right, and the Left (which has viewed gayness as evidence of capitalist decadence). The list is extensive and horrifying, yet repression towards gays is often trivialized and our concerns dismissed as inconsequential.

In the anti-nuclear movement, which encompasses people from a wide variety of political and religious backgrounds, prejudices and stereotypes that lead to negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men remain unchallenged as long as we remain invisible.

Are lesbians men-haters? This stereotype originated from men feeling

threatened by women choosing women as lovers over men, feelings that reflect a cornerstone tenet of a sexist society: women are the property of men and under their control. In recent years, the advent of the lesbian rights movement has allowed for the emergence of a lesbian separatist philosophy, held by a small part of the lesbian population. For many lesbian separatists, the basic premise of this philosophy is the building of a culture, institutions, and relationships with women independent of men, rather than in opposition to men. This is based on the desire not to have to expend energy constantly dealing with sexism and general societal hatred of women.

This concept of separatism is not unique to lesbians and has, in fact, had parallel voices in almost every major liberation movement. Misunderstanding of this philosophy, however, has resulted in the broadening of the man-hating stereotype so that, frequently, it is used to discount women's criticisms of sexism or the desire of women to meet separately from men. It is crucial that this stereotype be confronted and not used as a cover for dismissing strong women.

The treatment of lesbians and gays by the police and jail authorities is another concern. Gays are often verbally



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# Feminism

It is important to include a discussion of feminism in an anti-nuclear/anti-war handbook for several reasons. We can't stop the arms race simply by opposing nuclear weapons; we must also oppose traditional notions of power. Feminism has evolved from women's experiences: being supportive and nurturant; being victims of violence and oppression; being spiritual and emotional beings. And it offers an alternative concept of power.

Feminist philosophy recognizes the need to not only redistribute power, but

means will influence our ends. We are attempting to live our goals instead of just working for them.

## Patriarchy

The split which in our society divides women and men is one of the most basic ways in which human beings are devalued. Under patriarchy, which means literally "rule of the fathers," men assume power over women. Women are relegated to limited roles and valued primarily for their sexual and reproductive functions, while men are seen as the

central makers of culture, the primary actors in history. The feminist movement attempts to change this deep-rooted pattern, to assure equality of women under the law, to challenge on every level of society

the limitations that deny women—and men—the chance to live our fully-human possibilities.

Patriarchy is reinforced by the language we use, by the images in our textbooks and on our TV screens, by the fairy tales we hear as children and the popular songs we sing. It is enforced economically: women are clustered in the lowest-paying, lowest status jobs.



to redefine it—power as inner strength, a sense of self not dependent on control or domination of another. Feminist philosophy envisions a society based on support and cooperation, not on fear, intimidation and violence. The recognition that these societal goals and priorities must also exist in *our* process makes feminist analysis an integral part of anti-nuclear protests. We recognize that our

For every dollar earned by men, women make only sixty cents. Women of color bear the burden of double discrimination.

Patriarchy is also reinforced by violence. Fifty percent of all women are battered at some time in their lives. Fear of rape keeps most women penned in their homes at night and makes hiking trails and lonely beaches places of terror for many women when they are alone. Magazines and movies portray women as objects to be violated. In war, the victors often rape the women of the conquered people.

The feminist movement has actively struggled against patriarchy and for women's self-determination in many areas—economic equality, access to jobs and education, control over our bodies and our sexuality, the right to control our own reproduction.

## Feminism and Militarism

Many women see a feminist analysis as crucial to effectively challenge militarism. Patriarchy supports and thrives on war. The split which turns women, or any oppressed group, into *the other* is the same split which allows us to see our enemies as non-human, fair game for any means of destruction or cruelty. Our country's foreign policy often seems directed by teenage boys desperately trying to live up to stereotypes of male toughness. Men are socialized to repress emotions, not to cry, to ignore their needs to nurture and cherish the next generation. Emotions, tender feelings, care for the living and those to come are not seen as appropriate concerns of public policy.

Feminism says that the system which



enforces male domination harms both women and men. That system is part of the system which perpetuates racism, classism, heterosexism, and all forms of oppression. In its broadest sense, feminism seeks not only to shake the world, but to remake it.

## Feminist Process

We learn sexism at such an early age and in such intimate surroundings—our own families—that the attitudes it fosters are often unconscious. To help each other confront this conditioning, women in the late 60s and early 70s met together in small groups called *consciousness-raising groups*. As stories and experiences were shared, women began to discover that what we thought were personal frustrations or failures often stemmed from our common situation as women. The personal, we found, is political.

The process that developed in these small groups has strongly influenced our

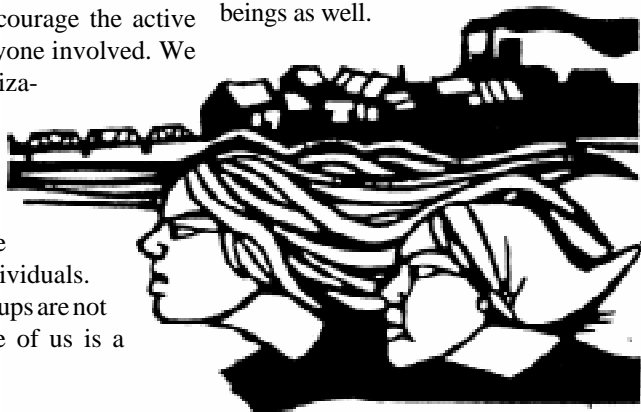
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## Feminism

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process in the peace movement: in fact, we call our process *feminist*. Feminist process does not mean that women dominate or exclude men—on the contrary, in challenges all systems of domination, matriarchy as well as patriarchy. The term recognizes the historical importance of the feminist movement in insisting that nonviolence begins at home—in the ways we treat each other.

When we say that we use feminist process, we mean that the relationships within our groups cannot be separated from the accomplishment of our goals. We mean that we value synthesis and cooperation rather than competition, that we value each individual's contributions to the group and encourage the active participation of everyone involved. We mean that our organizations are non-hierarchical; that power flows from the united will of the group, not from the authority of any individuals. Nevertheless, our groups are not leaderless—each one of us is a leader.



## Homophobia

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abused by police and as a result feel especially vulnerable to police and jail. It is important that heterosexual and gay blockaders join together to guarantee safety during arrest and/or placement in the general jail population. Our unity can prevent the prison authorities from using

## Men's Issues

Although the major changes in women's lives are a result of the work that women have done for ourselves, coalitioning with men to fight sexism is an important ingredient of massive and enduring change. Some men have joined women in this struggle, and from this has emerged a small men's anti-sexist movement that challenges the social order that depends on sexism to control both men and women. Such a movement is helping men become conscious of their own pains and needs, recognize how they dominate others, and give support to each other. As with women struggling to overcome limitations that are conditioned, men can overcome the barriers which prevent them from being full human beings as well.

homophobia as a "divide and conquer" tool.

Concern for issues beyond nuclear holocaust strengthens our movement by building vital coalitions. Gaining an awareness of lesbians and gay men and other minorities whose experiences have been overlooked will improve our process by encouraging a diversity of people to participate.

*by the Non-Nuclear Family AG*

# Overcoming Masculine Oppression in Mixed Groups

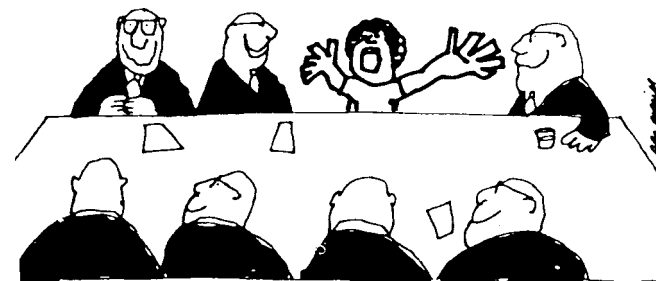
This guide is addressed to men, and to how we can overcome our own oppressive behavior in mixed (male and female) groups. More often than not, men are the ones dominating group activity. Our goals are to rid the society—and our own organizations—of these forms of domination.

The following are some problems for men to become aware of:

- **Hogging the show:** talking too much, too long, too loud.
- **Problem solver:** continually giving the answer or solution before others have had much chance to contribute.
- **Restating:** saying in another way what someone else, especially a woman, has just said.
- **Putdowns and one-upsmanship:** "I used to believe that, but now..." or "How can you possibly say that?"
- **Self-listening:** formulating a response after the first few sentences, not listening to anything from that point on, and leaping in at the first pause.
- **Avoiding feelings:** intellectualizing, withdrawing into passivity, or making jokes when it's time to share personal feelings.
- **Seeking attention and support from women while competing with men.**

• **Speaking for others:** "What so and so really meant was..."

The full wealth of knowledge and skills available to the group is severely limited by such behavior. Women and men who feel less assertive than others



or who don't feel comfortable participating in a competitive atmosphere are cut off from the interchange of experience and ideas.

As men, we can be responsible to others and ourselves in groups by taking only our fair share of talking time, listening attentively and not interrupting other speakers, giving our ideas in an equal rather than an arrogant manner, minimizing our critical tendencies, and interrupting the oppressive behavior of other men.

If sexism isn't ended within social change groups, there can't be a movement for real social change. Any change of society which does not include the freeing of men and women from oppressive sex role conditioning, from subtle as well as blatant forms of male supremacy, is incomplete.

*(adapted from an article by Bill Moyer)*