

Working Together for A Change

from the School of the Americas Handbook for Nonviolent Action and Civil Disobedience
<http://members.tripod.com/SOAWatchLocal/LocalPages/handbook.htm#6>

Many of the problems we run into in movement groups are those of domination within the movement. People join a social change movement in order to alleviate an external problem. Too often we are confronted with the same kind of behavior we find in our everyday lives. We're all too often stifled by heavy-handed authority: bosses at work, parents or spouse at home and teachers at school. People want not only to be accepted in these groups, but also to make a contribution and be active participants.

In order to work successfully to change things we must also pay attention to our own behavior. More often than not, men are the ones dominating group activity. Such behavior is therefore termed a "masculine behavior pattern," not because women never act that way, but because it is generally men who do. Men are beginning to take responsibility for their behavior. The following are some of the more common problems 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.
- * **Speaking in capital letters.** Giving one's own solutions or opinions as the final word on the subject, often aggravated by tone of voice and body posture.
- * **Defensiveness.** Responding to every contrary opinion as though it were a personal attack.
- * **Nit-picking.** Picking out minor flaws in statements of others and stating the exception to every generality.
- * **Restating.** Especially what a woman has just said perfectly clearly.
- * **Attention seeking.** Using all sort of dramatics to get the spotlight.
- * **Task and content focus.** To the exclusion of nurturing individuals or the group through attention to process and form.
- * **Put downs and one-upmanship.** 'I used to believe that, but now...' or 'How can you possibly say that ... ?' Negativism. Finding something wrong or problematical in everything.
- * **Focus transfer.** Transferring the focus of the discussion to one's own pet issues in order to give one's own pet raps.
- * **Residual office holder.** Hanging on to former powerful positions.
- * **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.
- * **George Custerism.** Intransigence and dogmatism; taking a last stand for ones position on even minor items.
- * **Condescension and paternalism.**
- * **Being 'on the make'.** Treating women seductively; using sexuality to manipulate women.
- * **Seeking attention and support from women while competing with men.**
- * **Running the show.** Continually taking charge of tasks before others have the chance to volunteer.
- * **Graduate studentitis.** Protectively storing key group information for one's own use and benefit.

* **Speaking for others.** 'A lot of us think that we should. . . "or "What so and so really meant was..."

The full wealth of knowledge and skills is severely limited by such behavior. Women and men who are less assertive than others or who don't feel comfortable participating in a competitive atmosphere are, in effect, cut off from the interchange of experience and ideas.

If sexism isn't ended within social change groups there can't be a movement for real social change. Not only will the movement flounder amidst divisiveness, but the crucial issue of liberation from sex oppression will not be dealt with. Any change of society which does not include the freeing of women and men from oppressive sexrole conditioning, from subtle as well as blatant forms of male supremacy, is incomplete.

Here are some specific ways we can be responsible to ourselves and others in groups:

- * **Not interrupting people who are speaking.** We can even leave space after each speaker, counting to five before speaking.
- * **Becoming a good listener.** Good listening is as important as good speaking. It's important not to withdraw when not speaking; good listening is active participation.
- * **Getting and giving support.** We can help each other be aware of and interrupt patterns of domination, as well as affirm each other as we move away from those ways. It is important that men support and challenge each other, rather than asking women to do so. This will also allow women more space to break out of their own conditioned role of looking after men's needs while ignoring their own.
- * **Not giving answers and solutions.** We can give our opinions in a manner which says we believe our ideas to be valuable, but no more important than others' ideas.
- * **Relaxing.** The group will do fine without our anxiety attacks.
- * **Not speaking on every subject.** We need not share every idea we have, at least not with the whole group. *Not putting others down.* We need to check ourselves when we're about to attack or "one-up" another. We can ask ourselves, "Why am I doing this? What am I feeling? What do I need?"
- * **Interrupting others' oppressive behavior.** We should take responsibility for interrupting a brother who is exhibiting behavior which is oppressive to others and prohibits his own growth. It is no act of friendship to allow friends to continue dominating those around them. We need to learn caring and forthright ways of doing this.

- from an article by Bill Moyelri