



**BLACK
WOMEN'S
COLLECTIVE (TORONTO)**

MARCH 1988



CONSTITUTION



Responsibilities of Black Women's Collective Members

Sisters agree :

1. to support the political aims of collective
2. to be able to articulate the mandate of the **BWC**
3. to work and carry out the aims and programs of the collective.
4. to support and spread the **BWC** press and literature which means workshop literature events, press etc.
5. to participate in formulating collective policy
6. to carry out commitment made re: work of **BWC**
7. to educate themselves and others on the politics of **BWC**; to educate themselves on global struggles and issues
8. to work to eradicate ideas and practices of sexism, sexual stereotyping, class exploitation, white supremacy, imperialism and homophobia
9. to give constructive criticism and take constructive criticism
10. to be aware of projects, issues in the community which the collective might undertake
11. to understand that the collective is a political collective not a support group (meaning therapy) notwithstanding political solidarity and when the **BWC** supports an individual in their struggle that support is political and will be given as long as the individual's reasoning is political and globally scoped and as long as the issue is examined within the political mandate of the collective

Duties of BWC Members

1. It is a member's duty to keep themselves informed and their right to be informed about collective issues and work
2. It is a collective responsibility to strategize and decide how and what issues it takes on and how far to take such issues
3. It is a collective members duty to be informed about collective work, issues and to appraise themselves of collective issues and work
4. It is a member's duty to be and maintain the maintain the most developed ideology and political commitment and be workers/leaders in the democratic movement of Black women.
5. It is a member's duty to take on tasks, democratically, toward the smooth running of the collective. A member must be disciplined in taking on tasks, carrying out commitments and seeing projects through to the end. Further, a member is responsible and accountable to the collective for such tasks
6. A member must pay monthly dues and an initiation fee; take the pledge of the **BWC**; receive a card and annually reaffirm their membership
7. A member must attend collective meetings and be on time for such meetings.
8. Members must give 60 days notice in writing before leaving the collective.

Conduct toward sisters in the BWC meetings

Sisters agree :

1. to uphold the policies of the collective towards each other and practice political maturity
2. to always greet each other cordially
3. to let each other speak

Conduct towards sisters in the public

Sisters agree :

1. to greet sisters cordially in public; act courteously, mannerly and calmly
2. that disagreements within collective should not be discussed/aired publically as their rightful place is at collective meetings
3. that racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, classist behaviour is not acceptable privately or publically and members will be dissassociated if these take place
4. to use discretion when making public statements.

Collective Criticism and Self Criticism

Sisters agree:

1. that each member has the right to criticize the collective and its work within meetings
2. that the collective has a responsibility to hear such criticism
3. that each member must practice self-criticism on a political basis and be open to collective criticism on the same basis
4. that collective criticism must be constructive and must include collective suggestions on how to rectify the behaviour
5. that collective members must learn that criticism is not always personal and must build inner strength and maturity to take collective criticism
6. that criticism must be constructive and not destructive and must not descend into personal attack.

Dues and Attendance

Sisters agree that monthly Dues scale be attached to monthly earnings as follows:

000 - 500	\$1/mo.
600 - 800	\$2/mo.
800 - 1000	\$5/mo.
1000 - 1500	\$6/mo.
1500 - up	\$10/mo.

Initiation fee is \$1.00

1. Collective members (3)three months in arrears without cause shall cease to be a member and officially informed . They may appeal to the collective for reinstatement

Attendance

1. BWC members must attend two monthly meetings.
2. BWC members can miss no more than (3)three meetings annually (without justifiable reason) or their membership will lapse.
3. BWC members must be on time for meetings - continued lateness may lead to a lapse in membership

Membership Criteria:

1. The collective is open to any Black woman, lesbian or straight, who wishes to works to carry out the aims of the collective and candidates should be aware and respect that members of the **BWC** are both lesbians and heterosexual.
2. Candidates should believe, understand and practice the aims and objectives of **BWC**.
3. Candidate should have some political understanding or be prepared to undertake political study through collective meetings, reading and workshops.
4. **BWC** members may be expelled because of basic disagreement/violation of the mandate, responsibilities, duties and rules of the **BWC**.
5. All members will be notified in advance and every effort will be made before action is taken.
6. Members can appeal to the membership committee and collective for reinstatement.
7. Failure to live up to manifesto **BWC** means a failure to renew annual membership.

New Members

1. New members will be asked to fill out a questionnaire and will be interviewed by the membership committee which is made up of two or more members in good standing for two or more years. The membership committee will then make recommendations to the collective
2. The requirements for new members are as follows: **a)** attendance at all internal workshops of the collective **b)** attendance of at least four progressive political rallies, demonstrations, meetings, or activities outside of the collective - in the Black community and in the larger community **c)** giving a talk to the collective on a social/political issue **d)** initiating the general planning, and co-ordinating a collective public event **e)** taking on a task on the newspaper "Our Lives". **(b and c to take place in the first three to four months of membership.**

Friends of the Collective

1. Friends of the collective are welcome to attend regular **BWC** meetings with due notification of the collective.

The Aims and Objectives of the Toronto Black Women's Collective

1. to participate politically in the struggle to end the oppressions of sexism, racism, racialism, homophobia, ageism, class exploitation, capitalism and imperialism
2. to work to eradicate ideas and practices of sexism, sexual stereotyping, class exploitation, white supremacy, homophobia and imperialism
3. to plan and hold protests, educationals, events and campaigns against such oppressions
4. to work in solidarity with other progressive women's groups and progressive groups in the struggle to end these oppressions
5. to encourage other Black women to become active in the struggle for women's liberation, Black liberation and the liberation of all oppressed and exploited working peoples
6. to produce propaganda for spreading the word in these efforts
7. to advocate and work toward changing the power relations in the society in which we live, recognizing that gaining power does not mean exchanging places with the establishment but striving toward an equal and just society for all human beings on the planet

Racism

Racism is the belief in white supremacy and the use of that belief as a justification for stealing money and labour and what our labour produces from peoples of other races. Racism is a system of beliefs spread through state bodies, media, parents, culture, interaction with others which perpetuates the myth that the white race is the superior race and have a right to more than other people. Racism is perpetuated in the use of stereotypes to classify groups of people as inferior; to give economic and social privilege to some and to disadvantage others, economically and socially. It is the subjugation of people who are not white; the practice of violence against people who are not white; the preventing of people who are not white from decision making. It justifies and makes possible stealing money and labour, using skin colour as a criteria. Racism is not just an economic tool but a cultural tool, spreading these ideas of superiority and inferiority to bolster economic exploitation. Specifically racism can be seen by the types of social treatment, work, wages, housing and education we receive as Black Women and Black peoples.

Racialism

Racialism is an arm of racism. We learn racialism as we learn racism, It is the basic acceptance of racist views among peoples who are not white. Including anti-semitism it is the practice of racist behaviours and the acceptance of racist ideas among peoples who suffer from racism themselves but use the racist system as the norm for measuring each other. While they cannot always exercise economic power over each other they nevertheless engage in the behaviours, like name calling or race hatred. It is the disrespect of other cultures and races and should be actively fought against like racism.

Nationalism

Inter Black chauvinism, regionalism, islandism all these are built on racism and suggest that this or that group of Black people are superior to another because of where they came from or because of their access to white power. It is a tool or racism like racialism and involves self hate which colonisers and oppressors have striven to inculcate in Black peoples in order to oppress us and in order to set us against each other. It leaves us open to being played off against each other and in practicing such chauvinism we fail to recognise our common history under colonialism, capitalism and imperialism. The resulting divisiveness only profits our exploiters, blinds us to our common oppression, promotes some of us who then take on the job of exploiting us.

Sexism

Sexism is the belief that women are weaker than men and the use of that belief to steal women's labour, reproductive capacity and money. It is the subjugation of women; the practice of violence against women; the preventing of women from decision making in any aspect of life, the use of 'family' to keep women immobile and unaware. The stereotyping of women's labour as only in particular spheres; the socialization of women to be weak; the conditioning from birth through prescribed ways of dressing, acting and thinking, to be subordinate to men. Women learn also to perpetuate sexism in their acceptance of male domination and we learn to hate and disdain other women because through sexism.

- Black men commit sexism as vigorously and vehemently as white men and shared racial oppression with them does not mean Black women should subject themselves to their sexism. Nor should Black women be intimidated into silence on sexism in the Black community by those who say that it is divisive to raise the issue. Black women make up half if not more of the population of the community and their rights to equality are as valid as Black men's. That means freedom from sex oppression as well as race oppression. The days of suffering in silence are long past.

Lesbian Oppression/Homophobia /Heterosexism

Lesbian oppression and the resulting homophobia in the society is based on the belief and myth that sexual intercourse should only take place between men and women and under no other circumstances. More than a belief or myth it is an established rule used to control sexuality, in order to control society and most importantly to control the production of wealth. Heterosexuality is enforced in the society as the "natural way to be" so that men and women can keep producing labourers for production. Lesbians are seen as a threat to this since it is assumed that they do not want to produce children. Lesbians are also seen as a threat because by their lesbian orientation they challenge to an extreme degree the stereotype of women as weak and dependent on men and they therefore challenge one of the underlying principles of economic exploitation, the sexual division of labour. Sanctions are therefore applied against lesbians by both church and state which allow lesbians to be physically attacked, hated and feared through invoking "god's order" in the case of church and a denial of civil right in the case of state.

Lesbians lose jobs and housing if they do not act straight, they are not accorded benefits which they pay for such as medical insurance or pensions when they live as couples. The everyday act of walking down the street as lovers which is a freedom for straight people is prohibited for lesbians since they are likely to meet with violence from the state as well as ordinary people.

Civil right for lesbians and gays must be struggled for - "not the church, not the state" women/people can be gay or straight.