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Pamphlet: Consciousness Raising

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"I believe that what you really meant when you said so and so, was actually such and such".....is not....

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

TYPES OF GROUPS

1. Social: killing time; jockeying for position in the status hierarchy; confessional
2. Action: to achieve a specific goal
3. Business: combinations of #1 and #2
4. Therapy: the cost may be too high
5. Religious: philosophical or mystical
6. Political: may be any or all of the above
7. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING: NOT ANY OF THE ABOVE

GOALS OF WOMEN'S CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

1. Understanding one's self in relation to one's society
2. Specifically, understanding what it is to be a woman in a patriarchal society that oppresses women.

SIZE OF GROUP

Optimum size is probably no more than 8 women, otherwise some do not have the opportunity to speak. However, situations occur where it is better to jump into consciousness-raising rather than let the opportunity slip by. Good things can happen in large groups, too.

GUIDELINES

The primary purpose of these guidelines is to keep CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING from becoming one of the other groups. These are not to be construed as rigid rules. Any or all may at some time serve the goals best by being broken or ignored.

1. No men allowed at women's CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING SESSIONS this year; maybe next year. Separate male groups are probably possible if they are initiated by males.
2. Neutral ground for a meeting place is preferable so that one woman does not have to play hostess. It is better not to be distracted with the problems of refreshments, so that 2 or 3 hours may be a time limit. The group can chip in for whatever expenses are involved but the amount should be self-determined so that no woman is excluded for financial reasons. Remember, the wife of a wealthy man may feel financially strapped when

she has not resolved within herself whether the money is hers or his. Serious CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING groups require babysitting facilities nearby so that mothers of young children need not be excluded. A woman with an infant should not be discriminated against and the group could chip in for a baby sitter. (perhaps the husbands).

3. Let any woman in. Do not be exclusive. We've been in purdah too long. Women have too long socialized in hierarchical, competitive, compartmentalized groupings. Women are women--- all enduring the sexism of patriarchy and the oppression that is part of being a woman in a sexist society. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING must never be a closed club.
4. Try to give everyone a chance to speak. Use positive encouragement such as taking turns or supplying each member of the group with several poker chips which are tossed into the center of the circle each time she speaks. Be particularly attentive to the member who speaks least, since we want to encourage self-expression in all. Furthermore, one learns and understands both by speaking and by listening. We women have not had enough attentive, respectful audiences in our lives.
5. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING sessions should not have an authoritarian leader. If there is a leader or leaders at all, their function is to guide the group along these guidelines. There should not be a discussion leader who determines the content or is presumed to be the final authority. This is not to say that some person at some time may not have more information or understanding of the topic under discussion. If so, listen but if it is always the same person or persons, do something to increase participation of everyone (e.g. poker chip method).
6. Utilize a protective structure, such as these guidelines, in an effort to free all participants rather than freeing only some women at the expense of others. But do not hold to structure rigidly. Any or all of these suggestions may not apply to every group at any given time.
7. Speak about the experience of being a woman. So not stray to topics which are unrelated. Although we are always women, not all our experiences bear direct or obvious relation to this fact.
8. The atmosphere should be sufficiently flexible to permit members to introduce topics of importance to them.
9. On the other hand, having specific topics for discussion sometimes helps beginners to focus on what had been difficult for a woman to look at, but they should not be allowed to restrict the flow of content. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is not "educational" in that there are no exams or competitive aims. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is "educational" in that it provides the support of other women and their recognition of us and of what we have to say. Some women who are very knowledgeable about the facts of sexism, who are activists for the women's cause, and who may even be effective spokeswomen, sometimes miss this golden opportunity which we women of the Seventies have--- to be given respect by associates, a luxury enjoyed by few women throughout history.

It is understandable that they may not feel they need CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING, but when they come, they gain as much as we are gaining. Of course, if they see themselves as experts, it will take them longer to experience the value of relating their own experiences to those of others.

10. We speak about our own thoughts, our own feelings, and our own experiences rather than what we think about others' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. We are an authority on ourselves. It seems something of a cop-out to say, "I saw a woman who told me that she decided..." instead of, "I decided..." We say what we think about things as openly and honestly as we easily can. We also recognize that there are various levels of consciousness. If a comment would not be understood by others at a certain time, it may be better to wait than to rush too fast. On the other hand, we sisters grow very fast once we begin.
11. Refrain from criticizing others. As our calloused nerve endings are exposed, we may become stronger out in society, but more vulnerable to our sisters. There is inevitable pain in the process of seeing what we have previously not allowed ourselves to see. Understand the greater need for support during this process.
12. While we are trying to discover our own sexism and the sexism which has victimized us, we try to avoid the traps of classism, racism, and age-ism. When younger exclude older, or older refer to younger in put-down terminology (such as referring to 20 year olds as young girls) we are letting another ugly ism creep in.
13. Never give advice, though we can give our reactions. This sounds contradictory, and sometimes the line may be hard to draw, but advice is a conclusion and conclusions are hazardous without all the data. We cannot really put ourselves in another woman's position. It is one thing to say, "I think that if I were in your situation, I would feel like..." and quite another to say, "I think you ought to..."
14. Restrain impulses to act negatively toward another sister. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is not encounter. We are analyzing ourselves and our roles in society, but not each other's. Criticism inhibits and makes it more difficult to realize the goal of increased self-understanding. The CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING experience should be a positive place where one gains support, not a hostile environment to be feared.
15. Enjoy the different styles of the women in the CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING group. We are trying to get rid of the old value of sameness. Some of us are emotional, some soft-spoken. Let each be whatever she is at the moment. She may change next week. If she does, enjoy that too.
16. Exert no pressure on anyone either to say anything or do anything. Even the asking of questions should be limited to questions of clarification. If she wants to tell, "What did you do then?" she will. Be sensitive to the possibility that to ask may be to pressure.
17. One sometimes edits one's reactions so as not to push a new sister too far, too fast, but the goal of CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is to raise the consciousness to a level where editing is no longer necessary. If too much editing seems to be occurring, maybe some

- change is in order.
18. CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING is not a confessional but intimate secrets may be spoken of when they are relevant. It is very consciousness-raising to discover that others' guilty secrets are the same as one's own. But do not feel compelled; speak only when you are sure you are ready.
 19. Interaction among members should be underplayed. References to conversations or events in which another member took part without full explanation is frustrating to the rest of the group and projects "exclusiveness". This is probably why CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING often works better among persons who see little of each other outside the sessions. All comments should be made by an individual to the whole group.
 20. Have a clear beginning and end. Do not blend gradually into other functions (e.g., social, political). Be clear when the rap is over and exert no subtle pressure on women to engage in other activities. Do not mix CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING and action. Keep them separate. If announcements are made, they should be made at the beginning or end so they are not mixed with the CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING.
 21. All of the above are guidelines, not rules. They express what seems to have worked well for us at this time. We may change our minds about any or all of them. We offer them to you because we think they might make it easier for you to avoid some possible pitfalls. But to see these tentative guidelines as inflexible rules and restrictions would be the biggest pitfall of all.
 22. And therefore we add one final point. If a sister seems not to follow these guidelines in her behavior sometimes, try to see the value in the deviation. Maybe the "guideline" is the thing that should change. It might be a good idea to bring the matter up for discussion before or after (not during) a session if the deviation is frequent. People make rules; not the reverse. The reason we have written these guidelines out is to help new groups get started and to orient new sisters. That is why it may be better to change or cross out the written guidelines if they are not being followed. It can be disturbing to read one thing and see another. In other words, use them only if and when they work for you.

These guidelines have been drawn up by a WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE and are subject to instant change by you. They would appreciate your reactions. Please write to:

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