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Consciousness-Raising

Sappho Collective

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CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

Consciousness-raising is conducted in small groups of women numbering from about six to ten members. A topic is chosen and each woman in the group gives testimony from her experience on this topic. Each woman speaks without a time limit unless one is decided on by the group. No woman may be criticized or challenged about her testimony by members of the group. The group may, however, ask questions of clarification after a woman has finished her testimony, regarding portions of that testimony. The order in which women speak can be determined by lot or by any means the group agrees to. Under the circumstances no information shared with the group during testimony is ever to go outside the group. Personal testimony is confidential. Not only should testimony not be spoken about outside the group; it also should not be written down either for group records or in individual notes, diaries, and so on. Each woman in the group must be assured that her testimony can be trusted to remain within the group and never jeopardize her in any way.

Suppose the topic agreed upon by the group is "What keeps women separate from each other?" Each woman in the group gives testimony from her personal experience. For instance, a woman may explain how her parents encouraged her to compete with other young girls for male attention. Another may testify to her anger at being derided and gossiped about by her supposed girlfriends. After each woman gives testimony, the group draws generalizations. An example of the generalizations which would emerge from this testimony is that from a very early age the women were taught to distrust and to compete with other women. Generalizations about topics will vary according to the testimony of each particular group; however, regardless of the topic, certain themes will be seen to run through each testimony. It is the group's job to recognize these themes and to state them as generalizations. While each of our experiences has been individual, our oppression has taken similar forms. Generalizing helps uncover these consistencies in the experiences of women. In a short time, the women in a consciousness-raising group begin to have a very clear idea of the mechanics of oppression, and of women-hatred. Some groups find it of value to write down the generalizations, (not the testimony) that emerge from each meeting, so that they might refer to them in the event they want to write group papers, do actions, and so on in the relation to their consciousness raising.

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The process of consciousness-raising is very simple. Basically, women speak to each other out of their own direct experience. However, the carrying out of the process is not so simple. The reason for this lies in our oppression. It is harder for women to talk to each other and to trust one another. It takes a consciousness-raising group at least four to six weeks to mesh, because of this initial reserve. Once women begin to open up to each other, another problem arises--women develop different ideas about solutions for the same problem. Some take reformist views, and others take revolutionary views. These political differences usually become crucial when the group has been together for about four months. At that time, it is advisable for the group to make a decision either to split along political lines, or to stay together. After weathering these storms, the group can be considered solid. It usually takes about eight months to a year for members in the group to build real trust, respect, and love for one another. At first glance, this process may seem long, but when we consider how many years each woman has been taught to despise other women, eight months to one year is a remarkably short time in which to trust, respect, and love other women.

The process of consciousness-raising is the only process the Women's Liberation Movement has yet developed which enables women to develop a political awareness of their oppression, which breaks down carefully imposed cultural barriers to building understanding and love of each other and of oneself, and which offers collective experience--communal development of trust, growth, political analysis and action. Women rapping in twos and threes is an isolated and less effective experience in comparison. Thought-out actions build cooperation and bring women closer together, but consciousness raising is still essential to building trust. The corner-stone of the Movement is consciousness raising.

Suggested Topics for Consciousness Raising

1. How was womanhood presented to you as a child? What expectations were you supposed to fulfill? What do you think of womanhood now?
2. What were your early childhood experiences with sex? With relatives,

children your age, older people? What did they do to your view of sex and to your view of yourself as a woman? How did they affect your attitudes later in life?

- 3. What have your adult sexual experiences been like? How do you relate to contraception and abortion? What have your experiences with these been? What about seduction? Street hassling? Sexual affairs of varying duration?
- 4. How was your education affected by your sex?
- 5. What kind of work do you do to make a living? How do you feel about it? How does sexism operate on the job? Would you get fired if you refused to play out your role as a male-identified woman?
- 6. Are you or were you married to a man, or in a marriage-type relationship with another woman? Did it fulfill your expectations of what marriage was supposed to be? Did or do you find yourself operating within the traditional male-female roles in this relationship? If the relationship is with another woman, which roles do you play (male, female)?
- 7. Have you ever been pregnant or borne children? What was your self-image during pregnancy? The attitude of those around you (including the father of the child, your parents, your employer, other women)? If you have not been pregnant, do you want to bear children? Under what circumstances?
- 8. How do you feel about raising children? If you are a mother, has this caused you to feel that you are living for others, to lose your sense of self? If you are not a mother, do you feel that you would lose your sense of self or be forced to give up other goals if you became a mother? Can you see any way for women to have children without such consequences?
- 9. How do you feel about aging? About menopause? Using make-up and hair-coloring to disguise aging? How do you think of your mother in relation to this topic? How do you think it will affect the attention you receive from men or women?
- 10. How has violence intruded into your life? How do you feel about violence? This can be broken down into a range of topics: A. Violence and heterosexual sex. B. Violence as self-expression and purgation of expression. C. Violence as a political reality. This could also include such topics as self-defense, defense of a group under attack by men or police, terrorism, violence as a way of keeping women in their place (or any despised group).
- 11. Can you conceive of your own death? What have been your past experiences with death? Why does male politics rest so heavily on death? (i. e. war, the extermination of the Jews, the Indians, the Blacks.) Men kill women; women rarely kill other women. Why do you think this happens?
- 12. How do you feel about love? What have been your past experiences with love? Do you feel as though you can love other women? Can you love yourself? How much of our life is organized around love?
- 13. What was your early family background? Did you develop a concept of class through your life experiences? How are class differences affecting you today? Consider how class affects women.
- 14. Do you have a concept of race? If so, how did you acquire it? How is racism affecting you today? Consider how racism affects women.
- 15. What were and are your relations with your mother and father? How did your parents get along with one another; with you? Can you trace your sense of self to your parents?

Reprinted from "Rapping in Small Groups", Sappho Collective, N. Y.

16. Images of Women ^{projected} in the Media (T.V., newspaper, magazines) Images of men projected in media. With what images can you identify - which do you find degrading?

at next APM - Have Monthly CR's on ^{2nd} Tuesday instead of wed. the Movement

* 17. Diversity of Women - How does this affect movement? How comfortable are you around heterosex, lesbian, black, white, radical, conservative women of different lifestyles?

Single Motherhood - women are only glorified children servants to motherhood through. 18. Built our putting our own needs first - Rejecting the eternal caretaker role (of husband & children)

Issues 8:00 Nursing Experiences Childbirth Pregnancy Experiences