

Committee Closeup: CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING



Harriet Perl, Consciousness Raising Committee Coordinator, Leads a CR Group Leader Training Session.

Photo by Dawn Armstrong

Letting and Getting the Feminist Out

By Dawn Armstrong

Ask seven intern CR leaders what it's all about and here's what you'll get:

- ...personal growth.
- ...(discovering that) my problems are not mine alone.
- ...awareness of what being a woman is.
- ...experiencing sisterhood and at the same time being aware that this is what you're doing.
- ...changing (the value system and (finding) deeper involvement with women as sisters.
- ...understanding myself and other women as members of an oppressed class.
- ...fantastic experience at a bargain price!

Harriet Perl, Consciousness Raising Committee Coordinator, sums it up"... it's a fantastic introduction to feminism and at the same time it has something to offer every woman, no matter where she thinks her head has arrived."

CR Controversy

Some hold the view that Consciousness Raising is just a new phrase for brain-washing. Statistics do show that most of the most active and most angry feminists are CR graduates. However, this is felt to be a natural result of the discovery that society and not the individual is the source of a great many frustrations and guilts. CR does not in-

corporate rote learning of feminist doctrine.

Another common inaccuracy is the idea that CR is Group Therapy. Although L.A. NOW trains and screens CR leaders, no leader presumes to be a Therapist. A NOW leader might define Therapy as an experience to help you exist (cope) with the way things are, whereas CR is intended to support your actual change as a woman if you want it.

CR offers an understanding of the politics of the Movement. At the same time, it touches a woman with the warmth of sisterhood. For many, CR is the first real experience of sharing, listening, and valuing other women without the pressure and insecurity of "female competition" that society creates between women.

New York to L.A.

The CR concept originated in New York. In the Fall of 1971, Ivy Bottini, a past President of New York NOW, came West and discovered that no one here knew much about CR.

A NOW group formed and met for three-and-a-half months. The participants were so enthusiastic about the experience that a leadership training program was planned for the Summer of '72 so that a CR program could be offered to the NOW membership.

In the Fall of '72 an official Council Resolution called for the formation of a Consciousness Raising Committee with the immediate purpose of putting all the practical knowledge together and to work

for NOW. Harriet Perl was elected Coordinator.

Currently, NOW CR's are open to women, members and non-members, on a regular basis. Three new CR Groups are formed each month and new leaders are trained continuously in a manner similar to "student teaching" methods, complete with seminars.

CR and You

As soon as you request it, your name is placed on the CR waiting list. Most new members do so at the Demonstration CR given each month. When you are placed in a new group, you are scheduled for four meetings at the NOW Center.

After this point, you are "committed" to a minimum of four more meetings, held at a member's home. It is not unusual for a CR group to go on for the maximum leader commitment of 10 weeks, and then to continue, leaderless, indefinitely. One group met for two years.

Every group has its own "dynamic" and leaders are trained to quickly define and work with this unique identify. Although topics are similar for each group, the timing and approach will differ. Some groups never do "come together" and some mesh at the second meeting.

All discussion is confidential and friends, roommates or others with "outside" social relationships are discouraged from participating in the same group. Personal topics are discussed when the group members have naturally become intimate with one another so that there is no confrontation or judgment involved.

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Photo by Jeanette Calmette

Ivy Bottini, CR Consultant, Norma Adams, Producer, Susan Heick, Camera-woman, review footage for the educational feminist documentary to be released Spring '73.