

GUIDELINES TO FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING



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INTRODUCTION: THE STORY OF THIS BOOK

Consciousness raising has been an integral part of the women's movement from its inception. At that time, women met in CR groups of some kind, usually without any guidelines except their own trials and errors. Sometimes the experiences were so unpleasant that the group died. In some other cases, trial and error produced methods which worked so successfully that CR not only thrived but became an important feminist activity. Such was the case during the early 1970's in the Los Angeles Chapter of NOW, where the dedicated and creative hard work of a group of women who became the CR committee produced the now-famous *feminist CR*. Having labored to organize a workable CR program and a viable method, the Los Angeles committee expanded in early 1974 to join with the Fresno NOW Chapter in presenting a state-wide weekend conference on CR, which was a highly successful "first" in consciousness raising. As feminists in California built CR programs and the news spread nationwide throughout the feminist community, NOW's national board of directors recognized the importance of consciousness raising and established the first CR task force on a national level; late in 1974, I became the first coordinator of that task force. As my assistant, Gay Abarbanell, and I began to hear from women in every part of the country, it became apparent that the most urgent need was for guidelines which would begin at the very beginning, which could help women get started when they had a strong desire and need for CR in their chapters but little or no background or experience. So we rushed the first edition of *Guidelines to Feminist Consciousness Raising* into existence in 1975, knowing full well that revisions and additions would be necessary, particularly after readers had a chance to use the book and send us their reactions.

In ten months, the first printing of the *Guidelines* sold out, going to NOW chapters, individual women, libraries, social agencies, industries and business, schools and universities, and even convents — in England, Germany, Lebanon, Colombia, Canada, Mexico, and numerous military and diplomatic stations all over the world, in addition to everywhere in the United States. During the summer of 1975 we traveled the breadth of the country presenting CR workshops for NOW chapters, small and large; everywhere we found women enthusiastic about CR. In person, through the mails, and on the telephone we got the same positive message: feminist CR works, and the *Guidelines do guide*.

In addition to other new material, the 1976 revised edition contained an exciting "first" — feminist CR for men. The men's supplement came in response to the many requests from women and men for help in getting a men's program underway. We hope readers will continue to send their comments on both the men's and the women's programs, as they contribute greatly to each new edition.

The 1976 book went through several more printings, its range widening to reach such places as Australia, Pakistan, Israel, and most of Europe. It is exciting to know that bilingual women are leading women who do not speak English; when the topic outline questions are translated into their own tongues, women everywhere find they speak the same language. More and more public and university libraries are carrying this book, too, which means that women who may not have contact with the feminist movement will have a guide to CR and may be brought closer to other women.

If we had thought, though, that we could produce a successful book and then relax, we were wrong. In our continuing work with feminists everywhere, we have found and helped to create an ongoing expansion and refinement of the whole CR process. Experience — yours and ours — taught us that some parts of the CR process needed to be especially emphasized (you'll find some repetition, as a result — it's intentional!) and other parts needed further explanation. We've tried to meet that need. Therefore this revision of the *Guidelines* includes changes which represent a synthesis of our thinking and that of the many women working in CR today.

We are devoted members of NOW — the National Organization for Women. In addition, we have been and are NOW functionaries on several levels and in many ways. This book therefore clearly and consciously is directed to NOW members and unabashedly hopes to promote the welfare of NOW, the major feminist organization in the country. (However, the slant toward NOW in no way places a limitation on the *Guidelines'* usefulness for other organizations or individuals who share the book's goals of feminist CR, and it has indeed been used successfully by countless others.)

However, *Guidelines to Feminist CR* at the time of this writing is not an official publication of NOW — it belongs to us personally. The *Guidelines* "business" is far from being a gold mine, but it produces a small income for us, enabling us to spend more time and money on feminism, and a similar income for NOW, since we voluntarily practice off-the-top tithing to NOW. If the time should come when we are not official CR workers in NOW, we intend nevertheless to continue these or similar financial arrangements; we are proud that the *Guidelines* can spread the CR word and contribute to NOW's treasury.