

LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
DIVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH  
FEMINIST MENTAL HEALTH SEMINAR

CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

Consciousness raising as defined by the women's movement is a process of attaining self-awareness which is intricately related to the social and political system in which we live. CR takes the seemingly personal feelings and experience of women and subjects it to a systematic political analysis. The sharing of thoughts, feelings and experiences enables women to see their common subjection to various forms of discrimination. One of the objectives of CR groups in the women's movement is to move women from a stage of understanding themselves and their position in society to a stage of changing conditions which cause and perpetuate inequality and oppression. The objectives and structure of CR groups differ depending on how, where and why they are organized. Ordinarily, CR groups are formed voluntarily as women hear about such groups from friends and movement sources such as newspapers, centers and organizations.

How Consciousness Raising Works

1. Eight to ten people sit in a circle. A topic usually has been agreed upon. (a list of topics for discussion is attached). Before ending the meeting, it is advisable to decide upon the topic for the following meeting. Groups usually meet for 2 or more hours a week. Commitment to the group is shown by regular attendance, arriving on time and leaving at the end of the meeting.
2. Choose a facilitator whose role is to keep the discussion on the topic and to remind each woman to take her turn. Rotating the facilitator role keeps the group from developing traditional leaders yet gives everyone an opportunity to develop leadership skills.
3. Set a few rules to make the group safe for its members:
  - a) Share time equally. Each member takes her turn speaking. This should be flexible so that if a woman has a great deal to say, she should be able to do so, but she also needs to be aware of the need for other women to speak. Therefore, the group should have some idea as to how much time is available for each member.
  - b) Confidentiality is a must! No personal information about any group member should be discussed outside the group. Trust is essential to a CR group. There can be no trust if information about a group member is given to outsiders.
  - c) Listen to each person attentively without interrupting. Each woman has an important experience to relate which should not be judged or challenged. Feelings are valid, no one should be told how to feel.