

STARTING YOUR OWN CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING GROUP

Consciousness-raising groups are the backbone of the Women's Liberation Movement. All over the country, women are meeting regularly to share experiences each has always thought were "my own problem." A lot of women are upset by remarks men make to us on the street, for instance, but we think other women handle the situation better than we do, or just aren't bothered as much. Through consciousness-raising, we begin to understand ourselves and other women by looking at situations like this in our own lives. We see that "personal problems" shared by so many others—not being able to get out of the house often enough, becoming exhausted from taking care of the children all day, perhaps feeling trapped—are really *political* (any power relationship) problems. Understanding them is the first step toward dealing with them collectively, whether in forming a day care center, exploring job possibilities, or planning the best strategy for getting our husbands to help with the housework. It's easy to form a group of your own. Here's how:

A consciousness-raising group consists of 8 to 12 women who meet informally once a week at a member's home. Ask friends to bring friends—it isn't necessary to know everyone. Sisterhood is a warm feeling!

A topic is chosen each week, and everyone talks about it in terms of her own life. Go around in a circle, each woman talking in turn so that everyone speaks; this keeps anyone from dominating a discussion and helps keep on the topic. After everyone has talked (when you start your own group you will find it isn't hard to speak in a small, close group), you might want to discuss the information you gained as you went around the room. It's important not to start discussing until everyone has spoken.

The first meeting: each person talks about why she wants to join Women's Liberation, what she thinks the group will be like, and talks a little bit about her own background and how she came to be at the meeting. This breaks the ice very effectively.

Topics: a different one each week or so. They should be both specific and basic. Here is a partial list of topics that other groups have discussed:

Why did you marry the man you did?

How do you feel men see you?

How do you feel about housework? What does your husband do around the house? Do you feel guilty when your house is dirty?

Do you think that what you do with your day is as important as what your husband does with his day?

What did you want to do in life? What kept you from doing it?

How did you learn as a little girl what "feminine" meant?

Do you worry about being "truly feminine"? What does "femininity" mean to you in terms of your own life?

What did you do as a little girl that was different from what

little boys did? Why? Did you ever want to do anything else?

What did your parents teach you about sex?

How do you feel about menstruation? How did you feel when you had your first period?

What was your first sex experience?

Is your smile like a nervous tic?

What is a "nice girl"? Were you a "nice girl"?

Do you pretend to have an orgasm?

Have you had an abortion?

How do you feel about being pregnant?

Do you enjoy taking care of your children?

What hopes do you have for your daughter? For your son?

Why are these hopes different?

Do you think you could get a better job? Why not?

You don't have to stick to this list. Other topics will present themselves. At the end of each meeting you should choose the topic for next week. Consciousness-raising should last at least 6 months, but at the same time the group can also discuss actions and read feminist literature. Some small actions that a group can easily undertake after a few meetings are the writing of letters of complaint or letters to the editor, writing a leaflet explaining the aims of Women's Liberation and distributing it at shopping centers, etc. Some of the larger action projects undertaken by groups have been: a N.Y. abortion rally, a Washington W.L. newspaper, and public hearings in Washington D.C. on the "pill." A Berkeley, California group joined a picket line of women factory workers who were challenging sex-segregated hiring lists and other discriminatory practices. Your group can contact other groups in your area to work out projects or to deal with local feminist issues.

Starting new groups: Once your group has begun, you will find that other friends want to join. Some will want to come as guests. But consciousness-raising really depends on participation. Sisterhood doesn't come from just listening. It is important to keep the group small enough for everyone to participate. What you can do is keep a list of women who express interest. When your group has met four or five times, you will be confident enough so that two or three of you can help a new group get started from the list. Go to the first meeting or two, to make sure the new group gets off on the right track. Every week, new groups start all over the country. Before you know it, you will have several groups in your area, and you will begin to feel that you really belong to a movement.

This article was written by a feminist collective. It appeared in the Ladies' Home Journal, August 1970. We made some slight changes. —(Women's Center Packet Workers)