

Want Something Different

In the long march for equality, SlutWalk is only the first step. For those wondering where to go next, we offer: *a radical feminist road map.*

True freedom is not just freedom *from*—from domestic and sexual violence or catcalls on the street, from, in general, the actions of other people, inflicted upon us without our consent—but freedom *to*. To what? Not just choosing among the existing options. Life is not a multiple choice test. Our answer to every question would be: none of the above. What we want is to choose new choices. We should identify the institutions and customs and the seemingly innocuous, apparently happenstance arrangements of daily life that inhibit our ability to act with conscious freedom—and then annihilate them.

Physical violence is only one form of domination. An end to rape culture is only the beginning: the true aim must be to end the culture—ours—which cultivates the subjection of women in ways infinite and invisible. Subjection is hiding in plain sight, in our existing arrangements, our assumptions about family, love, sexuality. They are hiding in the things that hold out the promise of happiness. We all want to be happy! So we keep betting on them, hoping it'll be our number that comes up, that we'll come out ahead. The house always wins. What feels like individual bad fortune is in fact the reality of being a woman, a reality that will remain until we recognize it together, as women. Improving our odds is still just playing the game, which isn't even that fun.

In deciding where we want to go, and determining the best way to get there, it helps to know first where we are. We are our own best compasses. We orient ourselves in our own lives and then in the lives of others. We do this, in part, through **consciousness-raising**; meeting in small groups for telling the truth about how we experience the world as individual to other individuals, with the goal of identifying common situations and feelings, analyzing underlying patterns, facing the conditions that caused them, and determining what action is necessary to dismantle these causes.

Speak Now and Never Hold Your Peace



Images and inspiration for this pamphlet drawn from
Notes from the Second Year,
ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt.

For more information, contact:



BITCH, SISTER BITCH!

A Guide to Feminist Consciousness-Raising

A Brief History of C-R

Consciousness-raising was a practice developed by New York Radical Women, a feminist activist group, in 1967. Women's daily experience was denigrated as private, apolitical. But small groups could share that experience consciously—discover that the “it happened to me” incident really happened to everyone—and craft a political analysis. Then attack discrimination and self-sabotage at its roots. Forty years later, the method still works.

Early C-R guidelines include:

Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising and Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon
by Kathie Sarachild

The Personal is Political by Carol Hanisch

WARNING: C-R may cause:

ANGER that no one educated you about feminism: its demands, its principles, its history and past achievements

FEAR of feeling the full weight of your struggle

FRUSTRATION that you have changed but the world hasn't

DESPAIR for the future

ANXIETY about the next steps

JOY from mutual; understanding and personal connection

EXHILARATION of belonging to the sisterhood

SENSATION that the world had been revealed to you

PLEASURE of having a deeper purpose of coming into political consciousness

ECSTASY in the solidarity of the collective struggle with the sisterhood

How To Run a C-R Meeting:

Speak

- Share personal experience—of work, love, sex, friendship, family, etc.—recognizing that no event is too minor, no topic too trivial to discuss
- Confront memories of instances when we felt restricted, exploited or limited
- Evaluate feelings about our experiences both at the time the occurred and at the present moment
- Pinpoint moments of unease and confusion in our past or in current testimonies

Listen

- Go around the room with questions on key topics in order to find a basis for identification
- Identify in these personal accounts any general patterns; shared experiences, common feelings, mutual frustrations
- Make room for difference and disagreement; allow points of contention
- Ask questions and work together to push past points of resistance

Synthesize

- Examine when we feel hesitant to act and draw conclusions about the source of our hesitation
- Arrive at an understanding of the nature of oppression as it exists in our lives and society
- Recognize our collective strength and identify our tools of struggle
- Aim for ongoing conscious expansion as we continue to develop radical feminist theory and to pursue radical feminist action

Start to Stop

- Reject false consciousness, identify internalized oppression and call out certain decisions for what they are: survival tactics
- Resist seeking only immediate personal solutions and interrogate existing ones
- Refuse to settle for anything less than we demand

Tips for Organizing a C-R Group

- Keep each group under ten people
- Establish terms or rules of confidentiality
- Encourage women to join in loose pairs, so that each person has at least one sister to make them feel comfortable in the group—but the best C-R groups are not groups of best friends and best friends only
- Make sure that one person is always taking notes and following up on comments—this does not need to be the same person each time
- Bring snacks, plan breaks

C-R is Not:

- *Group therapy*: we do not talk about our lives in order to improve them, to become well adjusted—it is the world that needs adjusting, not us
- *Gossip*: when women talked about their personal lives—and excluded from public life for so long those were the only lives they had—their concerns were decreed minor, petty, trivial. C-R means casting off these categories and taking the trivial seriously

Further Reading

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*
- Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*
- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*
- Audre Lourde *Sister Outsider*
- Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present*
- Michele Wallace, *Black Males and the Myth of Superwoman*
- Robin Morgan (ed.), *Sisterhood is Peaceful*
- Ellen Willis, *No More Nice Girls*
- Vivian Gornick, *Solitude of Self*
- Laura Kaplan, *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service*
- Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (ed.), *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*
- Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*

“The essence of oppression is that one is defined from the outside by those who define themselves as superior by criteria of their own choice.”

—Andrea Dworkin