

Trying to Make the Personal Political: Feminism and Consciousness-Raising

A reprint of:
**Consciousness-Raising
Guidelines (1975)**



Foreword by Mariame Kaba

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Political: Feminism and
Consciousness-Raising**

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**A reprint of:
Consciousness-Raising Guidelines**

**Supplemental Guidelines for
Black Women**

Prepared by Lori Sharpe

**Supplemental Guidelines for
Youth Women (14-19)**

**Prepared by
Jane Ginsburg and Gail Gordon**

Afterword by Jacqui Shine

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Foreword by Mariame Kaba

I purchased a copy of *A Practical Guide to the Women's Movement* a few years ago in Chicago at the Newberry book fair for two dollars. After quickly browsing through it, I believed it could prove useful as a historical document. I was also drawn to the listing of feminist organizations included in the book. It wasn't until several months later, when I returned to the book, that I noticed the section titled "Consciousness-Raising Guidelines."

The term "consciousness-raising" (CR) has become synonymous with second-wave feminism. Writing in "On the Issues Magazine," feminist Carol Hanisch describes the history and purpose(s) of CR groups:

Consciousness-raising was birthed as a mass-organizing tool for the liberation of women in 1968 when the country and the world were seething with freedom movements. The women who started the Women's Liberation Movement, several of whom had experienced the Southern Civil Rights Movement firsthand, were convinced it would take a similar mass movement that went beyond lobbying for legal reforms (as NOW and some other groups were doing) to get to the roots of male supremacy and end women's oppression.

Consciousness-raising was a way to use our own lives—our combined experiences—to understand concretely how we are oppressed and who was actually doing the oppressing. We regarded this knowledge as necessary for building such a movement.

Consciousness-raising as a deliberate program was sparked in a New York Radical Women meeting early in 1968 when Anne Forer remarked that she had only begun thinking about women as an oppressed group and that we needed to "raise our consciousness."¹



1. http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2010spring/2010spring_Hanisch.php

By 1970, CR groups proliferated across the U.S. There were groups in every major city. In 1973, according to Anita Shreve,² over 100,000 women participated in CR groups across the country. One of the main tenets of CR was that the “personal is political.” Not all feminists believed that CR groups were effective or useful, but for many women participation in such groups proved to be transformational. Anita Shreve (1990) writes:

The women who participated in consciousness-raising say they received an invaluable basic training. They developed a fluency about themselves and about women’s issues—rather like the fluency a person who has been in therapy develops. They gained a certain kind of clarity about who they were and what they wanted and what the obstacles were to getting it. But most of all, they had respect and trust and love for women that grew out of that cauldron of shared experiences (p.30).

Published in 1975 by the Women’s Action Alliance, the “Consciousness-Raising Guidelines” in *A Practical Guide to the Women’s Movement* add to our understanding of how some women sought to liberate themselves from patriarchy at a particular historical moment in the U.S. As a historical document, these guidelines and questions are a window into second-wave (white) feminist organizing.

As such, I decided that it would be both informative and useful to reprint this document in the 21st century. After a 2016 general election when the first woman nominee of a major party (Hillary Clinton) lost after being widely expected to win, this publication is particularly timely. Clinton came of age during the 1960s and is a product of (white) second wave feminism. The majority of white women voters in 2016 chose to cast their ballots for Donald Trump. White feminists have to account for this fact in their future organizing efforts.



2. Shreve, Anita. *Women Together, Women Alone: The Legacy of the Consciousness- Raising Movement*, Ballantine Books, New York (1990).



As you read this publication, here are some questions to keep in mind:

1. Do consciousness-raising groups still exist today? If yes, what purpose(s) do they serve? Are these the same as in the 1970s? If not, should consciousness-raising groups be revived?
2. The concept of the “personal as political” was coined in the 1970s. How does this idea relate to consciousness-raising groups?³
3. Read through the suggested questions to be used as topics for discussion. Are the discussion questions relevant for women today? What questions would you add? What questions would you remove and why? What questions surprised you and why?
4. How does race factor into the guide? How are the questions crafted by Black feminists different and/or similar to the general questions posed?

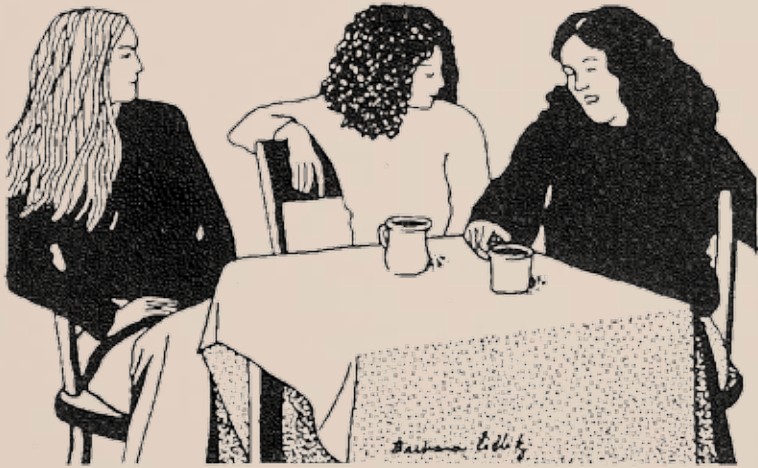
There is much to consider about CR as a political education strategy. There are questions about why CR mostly appealed to white middle class women. There are questions about whether CR laid a foundation for contemporary concerns about trigger warnings and the politics of identity. In the afterward of this booklet, writer and historian Jacqui Shine extends our knowledge about the social context in which CR emerged as a practice among certain feminists.

This is a pamphlet to be read and more importantly to be discussed (perhaps in groups). I trust that you will find the content as stimulating and thought-provoking as I did. I am grateful to Half Letter Press for designing and printing the booklet. I anticipate that you will enjoy it.



3. <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>

CONSCIOUSNESS- RAISING GUIDELINES



For several years women have been meeting together for new reasons. We've been coming together to form consciousness-raising or rap groups. In the process, we have discovered a commonality in our experiences, a great pleasure in being with other women, and a new perception of ourselves and our situations.

These groups should not be thought of as therapy or encounter sessions, but as forums for mutual self-discovery. In them, away from the influences of home, work or traditional social settings, we find ourselves freer than ever to explore our roles and our lives.

WHY

Many of us have been taught from a very early age to distrust other females, to be protective of our families and bosses, to see

marriage as the ultimate form of happiness and fulfillment, and to be both emotionally and economically dependent on the various men in our lives. These are but a few of the things we have learned that have tended to keep us powerless and isolated from one another. Furthermore, our problems are often seen as childish and insignificant when compared to the real problems men face as they go out to make their way in the world. Consequently, many of us feel that everything limiting and painful in our lives is due to our own failings and that, if something weren't wrong with us in the first place, we would be happy and fulfilled in our female role.

As a result, we don't know who we are—we can't seem to separate ourselves from our social conditioning. Worse, we feel guilty, self-indulgent or crazy if we question the quality of our lives.

The rap group is a place where we can be free, where we can be honest, where we can explore our hopes, successes and failures. It's a place where we find supportive and non-judging friends with whom we can share our frustrations, fears, successes and failures. It's a place where we learn that many of our feelings and problems are not ours alone, but are shared by many women. It is a place for self-examination and for exploration of the alternatives that are available to all of us.

WHO

The group should consist only of women. This is extremely important because the presence of men often inhibits conversation and honesty. In mixed groups, even well-intentioned men tend to take over the group, set the tone of the meeting and become adversaries who must be convinced. Men who want to help or participate can do so by helping to take care of the house or children so that women will be free to participate. They can also start rap groups of their own to discuss the restrictions they face because of the roles society expects men to play.

Usually rap groups are formed among friends, co-workers, or classmates where age and social backgrounds are similar. However, groups are formed in other ways too. For example, women attending

large meetings, belonging to a church group or club may decide to form a rap group; in some places feminist organizations set up groups for interested women. In addition, women may place an ad in the local paper asking others interested in consciousness-raising to contact them. They may also place notices on the bulletin boards of their supermarket, church, child care center, community center, or women's center.

The size of the group should be between six and ten women. It is a good practice not to add new members after the second or third meeting because too much time is then spent bringing the new member up to date. Often the continuity and trust that have been developed by the group are interrupted—and sometimes permanently.

It is therefore extremely important that members of the group be committed to attending the meetings and serious about exploring alternatives to unsatisfactory aspects of their lives. Because of the nature of consciousness-raising, many intimate things are discussed and participants sometimes feel quite vulnerable when talking about them. It is therefore crucial that a sense of trust and confidentiality be developed among members of the group. In small towns or in groups where members have friends or co-workers in common, this is more of a problem and one that should not be overlooked when forming a group.



WHEN AND WHERE

Most groups find that meeting once a week is often enough, yet doesn't impose a hardship on anyone's schedule. It is best to establish a regular day and time for the meetings so that future conflicts can be avoided. It is important to set up a time that is convenient for all members of the group.

The atmosphere of the meetings should be comfortable and informal. In order not to place undue entertainment pressure on the host for the session, some groups ask each person to bring their own food or to contribute something for refreshments. When appropriate, some groups also share the cost of babysitting with all members chipping in, so that no woman will be excluded because she has children.

Frequently, meetings are rotated among the homes and apartments of group members. For various reasons, including presence of roommates, children, or husbands, it may not be possible for meetings to be held in one or more of the group members' homes. Whenever possible, however, appropriate arrangements should be made so that the burden of hosting these meetings doesn't fall on single members of the group. If, however, it is impossible for someone to host meetings, she should be excused from holding them in her home.

One other possibility is to have the meetings in a totally neutral place. A local church, community center, school, or women's center could be selected as the regular meeting place. The group should choose whatever arrangement is the most comfortable and convenient.

Evening meetings allow for open-ended sessions and are generally more convenient for women who are working or who have friends, mates, or children who can babysit in the evenings. However, daytime sessions may work best for women who are home during the day. The length of the sessions varies anywhere from 2 to 4 hours and each group should arrange its meetings so that everyone has a chance to participate without feeling rushed. If some women have only a limited time for the meetings, this should be considered when deciding upon the size of the group since a smaller group generally needs less time.

Some groups establish a definite time when the meetings will end. This avoids the difficulties that sometimes arise with open-ended sessions. It makes it easier for the host to make arrangements, for other women to arrange for babysitters, and for everyone to let people know when to expect them home. Open-ended sessions could literally continue all night and many women don't have schedules flexible enough to permit them to stay to the end. Often these women feel cheated or guilty because they have to leave before the session is over.

Fall or winter may be the best time to start a group. The life of a group may vary from 6 months to 2 years. Frequently, however, groups find it necessary to stop meeting during the summer either because of school or summer vacations, and then to resume again in the fall. There is no set rule – each group determines its own duration based on continued interest and commitment of its members.

Some groups disband as members become more active in outside activities, and others change form by becoming more involved or active in the Women's Movement. Yet many remain just as they started – a place for self-discovery and support.

HOW

It is best to avoid having a group leader so that everyone can participate equally in the group. If in the beginning, however, a group feels it would be better to have a rotating chairperson (someone who would make the necessary arrangements for the meeting, start the meeting off, and make sure that a topic or chairperson were selected for the next meeting), that's perfectly okay. If the group wants to have a rotating chairperson, that person's role should be one of moderator; she should not dominate or try to control the meeting. The whole purpose of consciousness-raising is to allow everyone to participate equally.

There are several different techniques which can be used to achieve equal participation. Some groups give each person 10 chits or tokens at the beginning of the meeting, and, each time someone clear who is listening too much and who is not listening enough; some time and attention can then be spent on trying to equalize each

person's participation in the group.

Another technique which is extremely useful in the early stages of the group is to go around the room and let each person talk for 5 minutes about that night's topic. After everyone has spoken, a general discussion takes place where people respond to the things that have been said earlier. This procedure eliminates the possibility of someone being totally excluded from the conversation. It is important, however, that no one be required to talk when her turn comes; no one should ever be forced to speak. During the general discussion, the group may wish to discuss the reasons that someone did not want to address the topic, but only in a helpful and supportive way – never as a reprimand.

It is also very important to speak personally. Theorizing, abstracting, and generalizing discourage the intimacy of the group. In addition to speaking personally, everyone should try to be as specific and subjective as they can for that increases the experience and growth of the group as a whole.

One of the few rules of consciousness-raising is to never interrupt or challenge a woman while she is speaking. She should be questioned only for clarification (i.e., who said that?, how old were you then?, etc.). With an attentive audience, a woman doesn't have to worry about being talked over, waiting for the right moment to say something, or feeling that someone is belittling or making fun of her. It also gives her time to pause and collect her thoughts without worrying about losing her opportunity to speak.

It is important to remember that personal feelings are neither right nor wrong and should not be judged or challenged by group members. There will be time to discuss reasons for feelings after everyone has spoken. Remember, many women have never had a chance to speak freely without being interrupted, teased, or challenged by a father, mother, husband, psychiatrist or boyfriend. What someone says may appear to you to be incorrect. But to interrupt and judge or challenge someone's statement will place her on the defensive and thus impede the process of self-realization. It helps to keep in mind that when you speak, no one will interrupt, judge or challenge what you have to say.

PROBLEMS

Frequently, it takes time and patience to develop the trust necessary for complete openness and honesty. It naturally takes longer when women do not already know each other. Don't be discouraged if your group is restrained in the beginning. If after five or six meetings, members of your group seem hesitant to speak freely, you may want to devote a whole session to discussing group intimacy, how and why the group is not functioning properly, and what to do about it.

Tied closely to this is the fact that joining a consciousness-raising group, deciding to examine your life and feelings, and sharing that process with others can be frightening. Everyone should be sensitive to that fear and try to develop an atmosphere of comfort and support. At some point in the life of the group, everyone will feel nervous or scared about discussing something and should be encouraged to talk about those fears. For some people, certain topics may cause enough stress so that they want to drop out of the group. In order to prevent people from leaving the group at these moments, you may want to agree in advance that no one will drop out of the group without calling at least one group member to discuss it. Often that one conversation helps dissuade the person from leaving. If it does not, the group should not feel as if they have let her down. Frequently, it is better for her to leave than to confront problems and feelings that she is not prepared to face. It is often better for the group as a whole to lose someone who can only participate in a half-hearted way.

As mentioned before, it can be very destructive to the group if people do not attend regularly. It may be useful to prepare and distribute names and phone numbers of group members. Then if someone can't attend a meeting, she can notify another member of the group. Doing this prevents the group from delaying the start of the meeting because they are waiting for someone who is not going to show up. Calling ahead of time also tends to discourage last minute cancellations.

Consciousness-raising is not group therapy and should not be seen as a substitute for psychological help. Using commonly known encounter therapy techniques in a group can be very dangerous un-

less a competent therapist is present. Even in those instances, it is best to leave therapy for another time and place.

In any group, women may be at different states of awareness in terms of the Women's Movement. The purpose of consciousness-raising is to allow each woman to examine her life in terms of roles and feelings and determine for herself what is right for her and what makes her feel happy and fulfilled. No one should be made to feel inadequate or inferior because she has not become or does not want to conform to the group's idea of what a feminist or a liberated woman should be.

A final note—if you belong to a group that disbands for lack of interest on the part of participants or because of personality conflicts within the group, don't feel disheartened and give up. The whole concept of consciousness-raising is new and some people find it difficult to view it as anything other than a social gathering. Also, some women are discouraged from participating by friends and family. We have found it sometimes takes a couple of tries before the right combination of women, with similar commitments and interests, come together to form a dynamic group.

TOPICS

The topic of the first meeting should be to discuss why you are there and to agree on future arrangements. Included in your discussion should be how you will determine future topics and which topics your group will be most interested in discussing.

Determining the future topics may emerge naturally from the discussions the group is having. Generally, however, it is best to begin with childhood and progress forward. Topics about sex and marriage are best left until the group has met for some time and has developed a sense of trust among its members. If these subjects are broached too early, some women will not discuss them honestly because they feel guilty, threatened, or defensive. It is important to emphasize that the selection of topics should be flexible and emanate from the specific interests of your group.

There are no hard and fast rules regarding the length of time

a group spends on a given topic. Depending upon the topic and the concerns of group members, the amount of time spent on any one item can vary from a couple of hours to several sessions. At times, the group may want to return to a previously discussed subject when it feels that it was not covered thoroughly the first time.

The topics that follow are to be used as guides. Groups should not feel they have to address each and every question listed within a topic. Some questions may be relevant, others may not. Sometimes, the most important question for you will not even be there. Hopefully, the questions we have provided will help you get to those which are crucial to your experiences.

We have also included two supplementary sections – one for black women and the other for young women ages 14–19. The section for black women was prepared by black feminists who felt, based on their experiences in consciousness-raising, that these issues were of particular concern of black women. The section for young women consists of suggestions by young women who feel that these are some topics of special importance to them.

We realize that topics of interest to other specific groups are not included and would appreciate any suggestions for additional ones. We would also welcome any comments on the guidelines themselves.

TOPICS

1. INTRODUCTION: Why did I join a consciousness-raising group? What do I expect from it?

2. CHILDHOOD: How was my childhood different from that of my brother's or other boys my age? Was I treated differently? Was I limited to only certain games or activities because I was a girl? Was I considered to be a tomboy? How did my family react to that? Did I like being a girl?

3. PUBERTY: What was puberty like for me? What was I told about it by family and friends? How did I feel about developing breasts, menstruating, becoming a “woman”? How did my family

and friends react? Was I proud of the new changes, or embarrassed? Did I begin relating differently to my girl or boy friends? How did puberty affect my self image? Did I feel I had to behave differently?

4. SEX ROLES: When was I first aware of the differences between the roles of men and women? What were my early expectations of men and women? What was my reaction to people in unstereotyped jobs; i.e., a male teacher, a female doctor, a father who did housework and in my relationships with other people? Do I feel men should be “men” and women should be “women” and what does that mean to me?

5. SELF-IMAGE—PERSONALITY: What image do I have of myself – am I quiet, gregarious, am I confident or unsure of myself, do I have a good sense of humor, am I a nice person, am I interesting, etc.? What are the good and bad aspects of my personality? How do others see me? How has my self-image changed over the years? Is it important for me to be thought of as feminine or sexy? Do I equate the two? Am I overly concerned with my appearance? Does my self-image change with my clothes? How much time and money do I spend on clothes and cosmetics? Am I happy with my image? What, if anything, would I like to change?

6. SELF-IMAGE—BODY: Do I like my body? What is the nicest thing about my body? What is the worst thing about my body? Do I like my hair, face, figure, legs, breasts, etc.? Am I satisfied with my weight? Do I worry about being over- or under-weight for health reasons or because of my appearance? How do my experiences during adolescence relate to my image of my body? Does my image affect my sex life? Am I modest about my body? Why? Am I unhappy about my body because it does not conform to today’s fashion magazine standards?

7. FRIENDSHIPS: What were my early friendships like with girls? With boys? Were they different, and which did I like best? Did the nature of my friendships change during adolescence? Did

I honestly share my fears and hopes with my friends? Did I trust my friends? Did I feel they really liked or understood me? How did I react to peer group pressure in terms of selecting friends? Was being popular with both boys and girls important to me? Was I popular? How did that make me feel? Was I competitive with my friends for grades, friends, dates?

8. LOVE: Did I love my family? Did I feel they loved me? How did I express those feelings? How did they? Did I ever hate them? Did I ever feel guilty about that? Did I love my friends? Did I feel they loved me? What were my fantasies about love and romance? Did I consider them to be the same thing? What were my dating experiences like? Did I fall in and out of love a lot? Was it important to me to have a boyfriend? Did I equate love and sex? Was I possessive or jealous with either my girl or boy friends? What are my fantasies about love now? Do I feel I'm worthy of someone's love? Do I believe the adage, "It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all"? Can I tell people that I love them? Am I possessive of those I love now? Jealous? Can I accept faults in the people I love? How much of my life centers around love or being in love? How do I react when I hear "If you really loved me you would..."? Do I take advantage of those who love me? How? How do I reconcile loving and hating someone at the same time? On a day-to-day basis, how do I express my love for the person I love (partner, boyfriend, etc.)?

9. MOTHERS: What was my relationship with my mother like as a child and adolescent? Was I close to her? Did I love her? Did she love me? What types of things did we do together? Was there any jealousy or competition between us? Did I want to grow up to be just like her? Did I think she was happy with her life? What did I think of the way she related to my father? What did I think about her day-to-day life? What were her expectations of me? What is my relationship with my mother like now? How would I describe her now – sexually, emotionally, etc.? Do I see her as a person, or only as a mother? Am I ever afraid of being like her? Do those feelings affect my attitudes towards sex, love, marriage,

children? Do I love my mother? Like her? Respect her? Do I miss her now? When? What parts of our relationship are based on my feelings of guilt?

10. FATHERS: What was my relationship with my father like a child and adolescent? Did I love him? Did he love me? Were we close? What types of things did we do together? Was he warm and tender? Did I ever see him cry? How did I feel about the way he related to my mother? Was he helpful around the house? Did I see him as the principal disciplinarian and decisionmaker? Did I think he was happy with his life? What was it like on a day-to-day basis? What were his expectations of me? Did I want to like him when I grew up? What is my relationship with my father like now? How would I describe him now – emotionally, sexually, etc.? Do I relate to him as a person or only as my father? How do my male friends compare with him? Do I love my father? Like him? Respect him? Do I miss him now? When? What parts of our relationship are based on my feelings of guilt?

11. SIBLINGS: What were my relationships like with my sister(s) and brother(s)? Were we close, did we get along well together, were we allies or enemies? Did I feel either of my parents favored any of the children? How did I feel about that? Are my siblings people I would choose as friends? Do I resent them? What for? Are we competitive? Do I feel protective of my siblings?

12. MARRIAGE: What were my fantasies about marriage? When I was young, did I assume I would marry? What were the attitudes of my parents and friends? What were my fears about marriage? Was it important to me to marry? Why? What did being married mean to me? How did my attitude about marriage relate to the relationship between my parents? Why did or didn't I marry? Am I happy with that decision? Do I have a sense of independence in our relationship? Is that important to me? Do we respect each other? Is there much competition between us? Do we fight a lot and what does that mean? Do I have a stereo-

typed role in the marriage? How would I feel about living with my partner instead of being married to him? Do I think there are any viable alternatives to marriage? Do I know anything about how my rights change with my marital status? How do I feel about having to give up my name? About wearing a wedding ring? How do I feel about divorce? What would that mean to me economically, socially, and emotionally? What are my feelings about alimony?

13. MOTHERHOOD: What were my childhood fantasies about being a mother like? Did I always want to have children? Do I enjoy it now? What do I think the satisfactions of motherhood are? The problems? Do or did any of my fears about motherhood relate to my feelings about my own mother? Do I believe in the maternal instinct? Do problems with the children affect my relationship with my mate? How do I deal with that? Would I willingly share maternal responsibilities with a husband or friend? Does the responsibility of motherhood frighten me? In case of a divorce, should the mother automatically be awarded the children?

14. PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH: Do I look forward to being pregnant? How does it feel to have something growing inside me? What are my fantasies? What are my fears? How does being pregnant affect my self image? What are the attitudes of my husband, family, friends, doctor about pregnancy? What childbirth procedure have I used or will I choose? How do I feel about the father participating in the birth process? Am I afraid of the responsibility of having children? How did I feel after childbirth? When pregnant, do I expect special treatment?

15. ABORTION: How do I feel about abortion for me? How do I feel about abortion for women in general? Have I ever had one? Why? Was it a legal or illegal abortion? What was it like? How did I feel before the abortion, how did I feel afterwards? Did someone go with me? In the same circumstances, would I do it again?



16. CHILDREN: Did or do I want children? What are my expectations of them? Do I like them? What is my relationship like with my children? Can I learn things from them? Do I compete with them? Do they threaten me? Do I resent them? How do I feel about leaving them in someone else's care while I work? Would I place them in child care centers? If not, why? How do I feel about their sexual relationships? Their involvement with drugs? Do I respect my children and treat them with the same consideration I would an adult? How do I think my children would describe me as a mother? How does that make me feel? Do I reinforce sex role stereotypes?

17. SEX: When was I first aware of the difference between boys and girls? Did I ever play doctor? Did I think it was fun? Was I ever caught? If so, what was the reaction? How old was I when I first learned the "facts of life"? Who told me? What was my reaction? How old was I when I had my first kiss? Did I ever play kissing games? How old was I when I first started "making out"? Petting? Masturbating? "Going all the way"? What were these experiences like? Did I feel good about myself afterwards? Could I discuss any of these things with friends? Did I feel guilty? Dirty? Did I worry about my reputation? Did this keep me from having sex? Did I feel that I should be a virgin when I got married? What were the reactions of the boys to how far I would or would not go? How did I react to the double standard "boys can do it but girls can't"? What did I think of the girls who did? Did I feel boys were more desirable if they had had lots of sexual experiences? Did I think that boys had little control over their sexual urges? Did I feel I was totally responsible for how far we went? If I didn't have sex with my boyfriend, did it bother me if he slept with other people? While I was dating, what were my parent's attitudes about my sexual activities? Do I enjoy sex now? Do I need to feel loved before I can enjoy sex? Do I have orgasms? Can I enjoy sex without orgasms? Do I feel I have to fake orgasms? Is foreplay an important part of sex to me? Do I always need a lot of foreplay? In foreplay are there parts of my

body I consider off limits? Why? Are there parts of a man's body I consider off limits? Why? Do I ever worry about being frigid or oversexed? Can I initiate sex? How do I let my partner know what I like and don't like? Do I feel there are only certain times and places for sex? How do I feel if my partner can't have an erection or an orgasm? How do I feel about masturbation now, both for me and my partner? Do I feel sex is best when it's "dirty"? Do I feel good about myself after sex? What are my fantasies about sex? What are my fears? Do I feel I'm a good partner? What do I think of bi-sexuality? What type of contraception do I use? Do fears about pregnancy affect my sex life? Have I ever had VD? How would or did I feel? How do I feel about monogamous sex for myself? My partner? For people in general? Do I have fantasies about having sex with people other than my usual partner? What are my fears about having sex outside of my normal relationship?

18. LESBIANISM: As I was growing up, did I have much physical contact with my female friends (holding hands, practice kissing sessions, playing together in bed, etc.)? Did I consider these actions sexual? When did I begin to feel I couldn't do this anymore? Do I ever have sexual dreams about women? How do I feel about those dreams? Am I ever confused about the nature of my feelings for other women? What are my fantasies? My fears? How did I first learn of lesbianism? What was my reaction? Do I consider lesbians different from other women? How would I define lesbianism? Do I consider this a viable lifestyle? Do I support equal rights for lesbians?

19. AGING: How do I feel about growing old? When do I think I will be old? Am I afraid of menopause or decreased sexual value? Do I equate the two? What are my fantasies about my life as an older woman? Am I afraid of being lonely? Will I have a place in society? Am I in any way preparing financially for old age? Do I know anything about my retirement benefits or social security benefits? Do I expect my children to take care of me? How do I feel about taking care of my parents when they become old? How do I relate to old people now? Am I afraid of death or illness?

20. INDEPENDENCE/DEPENDENCE: As a child, how dependent was I on my family and friends emotionally? Did I spend much time away from my family? Did I want to? Was I afraid to leave home? Do I consider myself self-sufficient? Can I be happy alone? How does money affect my sense of independence? Do women consider me to be independent? Do men? How dependent am I on my lover or partner? Do I have a sense of freedom within that relationship? Does my partner? How much do we depend upon each other for our happiness? How dependent upon me are my children? Do I encourage their independence? Can I accept it? Am I afraid of being lonely? Do I feel I need my family and friends? Do I feel they need me? Could I get along without them?

21. AMBITION: What did I want to do or be “when I grew up”? How did my ideas change through the years? What were my academic, athletic, creative, social and material expectations? Were my ambitions encouraged by my family, friends, teachers, guidance counselors? Did I get recognition for the things I did well? Do I think of myself as ambitious now? What do I aspire to? What do I try to do well? Do I succeed? Do I need recognition for these accomplishments? Do I ever find myself saying “If it weren’t for you, I could have been...”? Am I ambitious for my children? My partner? My friends? What forms do these ambitions take? How are my ambitions different from those of the men I know?

22. COMPETITION: As a young girl, did I enjoy competition? What types – games, sports, academic, social? Did I compete with boys as well as girls? Was it important for me to win? Was I ever afraid of being better than the boys I knew? Am I competitive now? Do I enjoy competition? Am I afraid of winning? Of losing? Do I ever feel guilty for winning? Is the way I compete with women different from the way I compete with men? Do I feel I can compete on an equal basis with men? Do I use “feminine tricks” in competition with men? Do I cry to get what I want?

23. WORK: As I was growing up, did I want or expect to work?





Did I see work as a means of self-fulfillment, an economic necessity, or as a way to find a husband? Did I see myself as having a career or a job? Did I consider maintaining a home a valid career? Do I now consider maintaining a home a valid career? Should I receive an income and social security for my work in the home? Do I find work in the home satisfying? Do I do it well? Do I ever want a job outside the home? Outside the home, what have my experiences been like? What are my working goals? Do I work better with women or men? Do the men I work with respect me? What makes me feel insecure at work? Do I consider myself successful in my career? Is it valid to use my femininity when competing with men or trying to get what I want at work? Have I been paid and promoted fairly? Do I know what constitutes sex discrimination and what to do about it? Would I like to quit my job and work full time in the home?

24. POWER: How do I define power? Who has power over me? Who do I have power over now – partner, co-workers, children, peers? What gives me a sense of power in my relationships with people? How do I exercise that power? Am I ever afraid of the responsibility of power? Do I want more power or influence? In what situations do I feel powerless? How does my self-image affect my sense of power or powerlessness? Are my tears a source of power? Does money affect my sense of power? Am I manipulative? What are my fantasies about power?

25. MONEY: What were my parents' attitudes toward money? Did I work as I was growing up? Was I envious of those who had more money than I? Did I feel superior to those who had less? Did I resent my parents for the money they did or didn't have because of the social or emotional problems that they presented for me? Is money important to me now? Am I economically dependent now and how do I feel about it? Is it important to me to have my own income? Does the amount of money I have or make affect my feelings of self-worth? Is it more important for men to have money than women to have money? When do I expect men to pay my way? What rights do I feel I have to my

partner's money? Do I feel that it's my partner's money? Do I feel guilty when I spend it? What do I know about investing money? What do I know about laws covering credit, loans, common property, my right to own property, receive an inheritance and how those change with marital status?

26. ANGER/VIOLENCE: When do I get angry now? How is my anger related to my insecurities? How do I express my anger? Am I ever violent? Do I cry? Do I nag? Do I ever feel guilty for getting angry? How do I feel when people get angry with me? Can I defend myself? Do I get frightened when people around me get angry? Have I ever been beaten? Robbed? What was my reaction? Do I ever have violent dreams? What are my fantasies? My fears?

27. RAPE: Do I feel the woman is responsible if she is raped? Should the police be informed? Should the woman press charges? Have I ever been raped or do I know someone who has? What was my reaction? The reaction of the people around me? How do I think I would react now if someone tried to rape me? Have I considered learning some form of self defense? What are my fantasies? My fears?

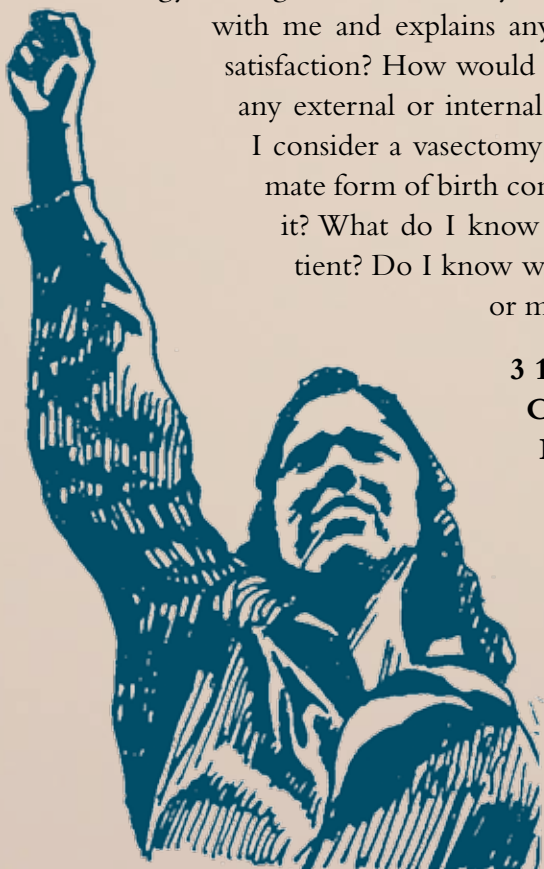
28. RACISM: When was I first aware of racial differences? How were they explained to me? Did I have friends of other races? Was I allowed to play with children of other races? Was I ever in the homes of people of other races? How did I learn racial stereotypes? What were the attitudes of my family and friends toward people of other races? Did I notice family relationships differed by race? Do I now have friends of other races? Do I feel closer to females of other races than I do to males of other races? Do we share many experiences? Do I find my old stereotypes apply now? Have I ever felt close to, loved, or had a sexual relationship with someone of another race? Could I? What were the reactions of my family and friends? Do I encourage relationships between children of different races? How? As a parent, do I allow children of different races in my home? What are my racial prejudices now?

29. RELIGION: When was I first aware of the different religions? How were they explained to me? Did I have friends of other religions? Did my parents object? How did I learn religious stereotypes? What were the attitudes of my family and friends toward people of other religions? Do I have friends of other religions? Do I find my old stereotypes apply now? Have I ever been seriously involved with someone of a different religion? What were the attitudes of my family and friends? Are women treated equally in terms of services and leadership by my religious group?

30. HEALTH: Am I generally in good health? Do I take care of myself and get regular physical checkups? How do I relate to doctors? Do I feel more comfortable with male or female doctors? What type of service do I expect from doctors, especially gynecologists? Do I feel my doctor spends enough time with me and explains any questions I have to my satisfaction? How would or did I feel about having any external or internal sex organs removed? Do I consider a vasectomy or tubal ligation a legitimate form of birth control? Would I ever choose it? What do I know about my rights as a patient? Do I know what constitutes negligence or malpractice?

31. ACCEPTING / CHANGING OUR

LIVES: What effect has consciousness raising had on my life? How have I changed personally? Am I happy with those changes? What aspects of my life am I happy with? What would I like to change? How am I doing it?



Supplemental Guidelines for Black Women

Prepared by Lori Sharpe

This outline is simply one model and is intended to spark ideas for infinite variations. Hopefully, Black women will keep in focus their own inner needs and not project into their C-R what Someone Else thinks they should be talking about.

I have deliberately used the first person (I and We) in phrasing these topics and questions to emphasize the concern in C-R for personalizing discussions. Black women in any C-R setting are not discussing a sociological phenomenon—they are examining and sharing their personal experiences, feelings and opinions. They are talking about THEIR LIVES.

Some of these suggestions are the result of a Black C-R group that I was recently part of. Other ideas are from informal “raps” with my Black sisters and, as always, the never-ending dialogue with myself.

- 1. INTRODUCTION:** What are my feelings about myself as a Black child, girl, woman?
- 2. FAMILY:** What are my feelings about my Black/White family? Its structure? Its economics? Its value-systems? Its expression of feelings?
- 3. MY RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIETY:** What is my relationship to the Black world? The White world? The “Third” or “First” world? Does the no-color world—universality, cosmos, spirit—exist for me?
- 4. ROLES OF BLACK WOMEN:** What roles have I experienced personally? In my own life? In the lives of Black women I have known intimately? What Black women in history (current, recent past, legendary) have been models and an inspiration for

me?

5. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, WOMEN'S LIBERATION, THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION, FEMINISM, BLACK FEMINIST MOVEMENT, PRE-1960 MOVEMENTS: How have these movements affected me? What part do/did I have in any of them?

6. SEXUALITY: (See general topics, number 17)

7. SELF-IMAGE: What is my psychological self-image (mental states and feelings)? Physical-biological? Socio-economic? Historical (past, present (esp.) future)?

8. FAMILIES: What's really happening today? Is the nuclear family a myth? Is "matriarchy" to be condemned? What is an extended family? What about: orphanages, "homes," communes, street life, single parenthood, adoption, old age, living alone, Muslim communities?

9. EDUCATION: Has formal schooling given me inferiority/superiority feelings? Black scholarship – Does she/he have to have a "white" degree? Black history – What are the myths and facts? What was Africa to our ancestors? What was slavery for our great-grand-mothers? Black studies – Is it a passing phase? How do women get recognition? How do I feel about the programming of western civilization? Exploitation? Addiction? Prostitution? War and Crimes? Suicide?

10. PRIORITIES: What are my personal priorities? Community priorities – Is it "nationtime" for me? Do I assume a role? What are my commitments to other Black women? What do I expect from my Black sisters and brothers?

11. BLACK MEN: What are we teaching our boys/men? Can we be sisters and brothers? Who is whose sex object? How do we deal with male chauvinism?

12. LIFE STYLES: How do I feel about my personal lifestyle?



How do I feel about political/economic lifestyles – integrationist? opportunist? other? How do I feel about sexual lifestyles? How do I feel about myself and/or others being heterosexual? bisexual? lesbian? androgynous? asexual? celibate? How do I feel about class? poor? working class? bourgeois? “field” and “house” differences? Caste -- does it still exist for me as a Black woman? Work – why (why not) do I work? What is my reward? For whom? With whom? Does work conflict with other commitments (see #10)? How do I feel about the Black woman as twice the “token” in the scheme of quotas? Time – is it really mine? Do I want freedom? Creativity – does accomplishment rise “above” Blackness?

13. BLACK CULTURE: Is it valid for me? Do I see myself as part of the current renaissance of Black Culture? What is power and autonomy for me?

Supplemental Guidelines for Youth Women (14-19)

Prepared by Jane Ginsburg and Gail Gordon

1. PARENTS: Do I get along with my parents? Did I in the past? Are they very strict about my conduct? For example, am I allowed to go out as much as I want? Do I like one parent more than the other? Why? Are my parents divorced? How old was I when they separated? How did I react to that? Do I respect my parents? Do I feel they respect me? Do they trust me? Are they considerate of my feelings? Do I think they are still treating me like a child? Can I confide in either or both of my parents? Are there things I can't tell them? Why? Do I feel guilty for trying to exercise my independence? Have I ever wanted to run away from home? Why did or didn't I do it? Do my parents have overly high expectations of me? Do I try to live up to those expectations? How do I feel if I can't fulfill all their goals? Do I resent them?

2. UPBRINGING: Was I brought up to be a "little lady"? Was I a tomboy? What was the general (parental and societal) reaction to my childhood behavior? Did I desire the approval of older people? Did I play more with boys or with girls? Did I ever want to be a boy? Did my parents have strong opinions about what girls should be like and what boys should be like? How were they communicated to me? How did I feel and how do I feel now about their ideas?

3. ADOLESCENCE: What was it like when I had my first menstrual period? Did I think there was something wrong with me? Did anyone explain puberty to be before my body started changing? Had I known of or believed in any of the myths associated with menstruation? How did I feel about my breasts developing? Did I become "physically mature" before or after most of

my friends? How did I feel about that? Did I ever talk about these changes with my friends? How did boys react to the changes in my body? How did their reactions affect me? Did I or do I envy girls who look like “pinups”? Am I happy about the way my body looks?

4. SIBLINGS: Do I get along with my brother(s) and sister(s)? Do I have a good deal of responsibility for younger siblings? How do I feel about that? Are my older siblings protective of me? Am I protective of any of my siblings? Do they or did they bully me? Do I or did I bully them? Do I emulate any of my siblings?

5. FRIENDSHIP: Do I make friends easier with girls or with boys? Do I feel competitive with my friends? Can I confide in my friends? Can they confide in me? Have any of my friends ever betrayed a confidence? How did I feel and what did I do? Have I ever betrayed a confidence? How did I feel afterwards? Am I ever unkind or cruel to my friends? How do I show my friends I like them? Do I feel I can be affectionate with them? Am I jealous or envious of my friends? How would I feel about a friend who started dating a boy I liked a great deal? Am I possessive of my friends? Am I very dependent upon my friends? Are they dependent upon me? Do I get along better with people my own age, or with people older or younger than I?

6. PEER PRESSURE: What types of peer pressures do I feel subjected to now? Do I account for some of my actions because all my friends are doing the same thing? How do I feel about being part of a crowd? Am I afraid of being unwanted or left out? Have I ever been extremely hurt or unhappy because I wasn't accepted into a clique? Is my self-esteem based on the popularity of my friends? Have I ever stopped being friends with someone because they were not accepted by my crowd? How am I a leader? How am I a follower? Do I ever pressure people into doing something they don't want to do? How do I maintain my individuality with my friends? In what ways do I feel pressured to conform to the ideas or activities of my friends?

7. DATING: When did I start dating? Do I date because I want to or because it's the thing to do? How do I feel if I'm not asked on dates? Have I ever gone to a party or dance and never been asked to dance? How did that make me feel? Have I ever felt I've needed to have a boyfriend? Do I feel natural with boys? Have I ever gone through some of the classic girlfriend situations – waiting hours for the phone to ring, playing “hard to get,” etc.? Do I fake interest in things that my dates are interested in or like to do? How do I deal with boys who I think are “just friends” but who would like to be “more than friends”? Do I call boys up? Do I ask them out? Do I pay my own way on dates? How do my dates react when I pay for myself?

8. SEXUALITY: What kind of sexual experiences have I had? Do I feel sexually constrained by my age? Did I have great expectations of my first kiss? How did I feel about my first physical contact with boys? What do I think about virginity? What do my parents think about it? Do my parents know about my sexual experiences? Have I ever told anyone about them? How do I feel about the double standard – boys can do it but girls can't? Have some of my experiences been due to pressure from the guy I was with? How did I feel about that later? Do I ever feel guilty for what I have or have not done? Do I ever drink or take drugs so I will have an excuse for my sexual behavior?

9. PREGNANCY: Have I ever been pregnant or had any friends who were? How did I feel? What were the reactions of my friends, boyfriend, parents, school? If I got pregnant, what would I do? Would I tell my parents, the father of the child, my friends? What would I expect the father to do? Have I ever had an abortion or have any of my friends? What was it like? If I got pregnant, would I consider having an abortion? On what grounds, if any, would I disapprove of abortion? What social stigma do I associate with pregnancy and abortion?

10. DRUGS: Have I ever used any kind of drugs? Under what circumstances? Have I ever felt pressure from my friends to take

drugs? How do I feel about smoking, taking pills, using hard drugs? If I have taken drugs, have my parents found out? What was their reaction? How do I feel about friends who are into drugs? What is my reaction to adults who drink excessively or take tranquilizers or barbituates?

11. EDUCATION: Do I like my school? Does it treat the girls and boys equally? Have I ever had to go to Home Economics while the boys went to Shop? How did I feel about that? Did the books I used in elementary school depict females in stereotyped roles? How do I think that affected me? Have I ever pretended to be less smart than the boys so that they wouldn't feel threatened by me? Do I feel I am as smart or smarter than boys my own age? What do I think of girls who act less intelligent than they really are? If I excelled academically, what were the reactions of my teachers, friends, parents? If I excelled in sports, what were the reactions of my teachers, friends, parents?

12. RACISM/RELIGION: Does my family set up certain criteria about the kinds of friends I have? Am I allowed to bring home friends of a different race or religion? Do I want to? Am I allowed to date people of a different race or religion? Do I want to? Have the parents of my friends objected to my race or religion? If I am an observing member of a certain faith, do the religious instruction and ceremonies treat women as inferiors? How does my religious training affect my feelings about sex, birth control, abortion?

13. GYNECOLOGISTS: Have I ever seen a gynecologist? How did I feel about it? How was I treated? If I asked for birth control information or for a birth control device, what did the doctor advise? Was my age a problem? Do I feel comfortable talking about my physical problems with a doctor? Do I understand and feel comfortable using medical terminology? Regardless of my sexual activity, do I think VD tests should become a regular part of my annual check up? If the doctor did not automatically administer the tests, would I request them?

Afterword by Jacqui Shine

Free Space?: Feminism, consciousness-raising, and the Black radical imagination

When *A Practical Guide to the Women's Movement* was published in 1975, the Women's Action Alliance (WAA) was a controversial organization. Depending on whom you asked, the WAA was either a vital clearinghouse that connected women across the country with information about the women's movement, or it was a front organization that was funneling information to the Central Intelligence Agency in order to destabilize the movement itself. One was more likely to subscribe to the latter view if she aligned herself with particular political factions within the movement (e.g., radical feminists, specifically the New York Redstockings)¹



1. In 1975, the Redstockings seized upon (previously known) information about Steinem's involvement with the Central Intelligence Agency from 1959 to 1962. Steinem had directed an organization called the Independent Research Service that primarily recruited delegations of non-Communist American students to attend the leftist World Festivals of Youth and Students in 1959 and 1962. The IRS was funded by one of eight dummy foundations the CIA had used to funnel millions of dollars to foreign affairs-related nonprofits in an initiative known as Operation Mockingbird. Steinem said that she had always known of the CIA's involvement, but she considered it benign and had ended her work with the agency when she left IRS. (These are the barest outlines of a fairly Byzantine story. For much more detail than you can possibly imagine, see Amy Erdman Farrell (1998), *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Freedom*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press; and Alice Echols (1989), *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, Minneapolis: UMN Press. Echols offers a complete genealogy of the feminist movement, cataloging various groups and the principles they espoused.) On the subjects discussed in this essay,

and/or if she hated Gloria Steinem (e.g., Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*).²

The WAA rejected these charges, which the Redstockings had leveled at a recent press conference.³ It's hard to weigh all of the evidence and documentation around this episode. Regardless of how one might assess the matter, however, this consciousness-raising guide suggests a strong commitment to providing women with resources for organizing in their own communities. In operation from 1971 to 1997, the WAA's other publications included "How to Organize a



see also Winifred Breines (2006), *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement*, New York: Oxford University Press. If you're interested, you can hear Lori Sharpe speak in an archival recording of a radio program on Black feminism: https://archive.org/details/pacifica_radio_archives-1Z0449.01.

2. Friedan, who was (or imagined herself to be) Steinem's rival for leadership of the women's movement, encouraged the circulation of this information with some alacrity. This detail is included in multiple sources, including Ruth Rosen (2013, rev.), *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, New York: Penguin. As the New York Radical Feminists (a group that split from the Redstockings in 1969, and not to be confused with the New York Radical Women, the group from which the Redstockings had emerged) wrote in their CR guide, "Women often feel competitive with other women or isolated from them. It is another purpose of consciousness raising to break down these barriers and encourage open, honest communication among women."

3. The presser was held during a Women in Media conference in May 1975. I'm not sure how many people were actually there, versus how many learned of it from a sixteen-page release (yes, sixteen pages) that was distributed to women's groups and feminist publications across the country. You can read "Redstockings Discloses Gloria Steinem's CIA Cover-Up" at the Redstockings website: <http://www.redstockings.org/index.php/feminist-revolution-the-censored-section>. By this time, the Redstockings were a new group organized under an old name, though some of the original members were involved.

Multi-Service Women’s Center”; “Tools to Eliminate Discrimination in State and Local Government”; “How to Organize Childcare Centers”; and “Getting Your Share: Fundraising.” The organization’s most enduring legacy may be its Non-Sexist Child Development Program, which developed early childhood education curricula, released an annotated bibliography of nonsexist picture books, and, through Milton Bradley, developed gender-neutral toys; in the 1980s, they coordinated a network (the Computer Equity Expert Project) of female programmers to train women to use computers in schools and communities across the country.⁴

The guide is also evidence of the degree to which consciousness-raising practices were adopted by women’s groups across the country. CR was originally the domain of radical feminist groups in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, all of which created guidelines like these, but the tools were increasingly available to women whose feminism radical groups tartly scorned. Women could access CR resources through their local NOW chapters, through the WAA, and even through *Ms.*, which included a CR guide in its first issue in July 1972. Radical feminists, particularly the recently reorganized New York Redstockings, found this distressing. Through the magazine and the WAA, which she helped found, Steinem was turning CR into a depoliticized, frivolous practice while also funneling information about the WAA’s network to the CIA. *Ms.*, they sniffed, was trying to claim CR as its own invention, when everyone knew that the Redstockings had originated it.⁵



4. The related curriculum guide had the very nerdy title *The Neuter Computer: Why and How to Encourage Computer Equity for Girls*. The 1980s! “_ (“/)_/-”

5. The group complained that the magazine did so “without mentioning or consulting the originators of consciousness-raising, and changing the definition of the term in the process.” Kathie Sarachild, who coined the phrase “consciousness-raising” claimed *Ms.* had tried to hire her to write the magazine’s CR guide, but she refused, believing that the Redstockings would not be credited. “If you ask me,” she remarked, “*Ms.* wanted to take the credit for

In a number of ways, however, this document challenges the idea that so-called cultural feminists were diluting and distorting CR practices very much. The guide, first published in 1973, was revised to include two sets of supplemental questions for Black women and young women.⁶ In one way, this is a pretty typical failure of intersectionality: these communities, the revised edition suggests, were explicitly not addressed in the general guidelines, which were applicable to ... all other women? For example, the general guidelines, which don't carry an author's name and are written in the first-person plural, suggests that they are definitive, whereas the clearly authored addenda are defined as individuals. The framing of these addenda as "supplemental" infers that Black women are a special interest group with separate, secondary concerns.

The fact that the WAA guide addressed Black women at all was somewhat unusual, and its inclusion is proof only of good luck,



(5 continued) consciousness-raising." See "redstockings challenge steinem & ms.," *off our backs*, July 1975; and Sarachild in *Redstockings, Inc. (1978), Feminist Revolution*, New York: Random House, a Redstockings anthology. But the Redstockings' insistence that they "invented it" is also questionable. There are dozens of antecedents, including Ella Baker's work with the Highlander School. See Barbara Ransby (2003), *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, Chapel Hill: UNC Press.

6. I'm almost entirely sure that Lori Sharpe's contribution was not part of the original 1973 printing, but I have had to rely on limited text searching in lieu of securing the document.

7. The WAA headquarters was known to be inhospitable to Black women: activist Barbara Omolade was hired as an assistant director in 1977, but resigned within six months, writing that racism within the Alliance was "pervasive, subtle, and devious, permeating policy directions, program implementations, and interpersonal relationships." See Omolade quotation in V.P. Franklin (2002), "Hidden in Plain View: African American Women, Radical Feminism, and the Origins of Women's Studies Programs, 1967-1974," in *The Journal of African American History* 87, 440.

not enlightenment.⁷ Alternately, it was proof of Gloria Steinem’s diabolical reach. In 1973, Lori Sharpe helped found the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) along with several other women, including Margaret Sloan-Hunter, one of Steinem’s friends and collaborators, and the fledgling organization was invited to share space with the WAA in the *Ms.* building.⁸ Sharpe and other NBFO members were the women whom the text describes only as concerned black feminists.⁹

Of course they were concerned. Many of the CR guidelines in circulation at the time, including the WAA’s, established apparently neutral rules that allowed participants to avoid a whole host of subjects and intersectional problems. Women were to speak only of their own experiences and oppressions, and no one was to be challenged—sentiments that appear in CR guidelines across the feminist spectrum, not just in the supposedly banal pages of *Ms.* In 1969, for example, the New York Redstockings’ “protective” rules for CR stated that “each sister must stick to the specific instances of her life rather than generalizing from these specifics.” In this guide, women are similarly advised that “theorizing, abstracting, and generalizing discourage the intimacy of the group.” The Redstockings also insisted that questions should only “clarify further the specifics of a sister’s testimony,” or, as the WAA puts it here, “to never interrupt or challenge a woman while she is speaking.” The appropriate time for questions, was, as the radical guide *Free Space* put it, “after the opening up and sharing



8. Steinem and Hunter-Sloan had traveled together to speak to audiences in schools and communities across the country, and Hunter-Sloan had recently been appointed a *Ms.* editor. Some NBFO members, it should be noted, went on to help establish the Combahee River Collective in Boston later that year. (You can read the Collective’s 1977 statement on Black feminism here: <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/combriver-coll.html>.)

9. In their 1975 statement on Steinem, the Redstockings claimed that the NBFO, too, was a CIA front organization; they were quickly embarrassed, however, because the NBFO had left the *Ms.* building for its own office some months before.

experiences,” and they could only concern “how the entire society functions.”¹⁰

What’s more, some guides argued that a lack of diversity within a group was acceptable, perhaps even essential. While she conceded that “a mass movement, if it is to represent the needs of all women, must reflect the needs of the most oppressed of our sisters,” Pamela Allen also argued that CR groups, including her own, did not have to address those subjects. “I think it important that people struggle for their own needs. We are, on the whole, middle class white women in our twenties and thirties. Our needs will be those of middle class women,” she wrote. If CR groups were the most basic form of organizing, they were not the place to address difference, and, by default, whiteness. “A mass movement,” she said, “will be made up of many organized groupings of women, each group expressing the needs of its constituency and coming together to struggle for goals beneficial



10. See Pamela Allen (1970), *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women’s Liberation*. Albany, CA: Women’s Liberation Basement Press. I suspect there’s more to this, though. Allen’s partner was activist and Black Studies scholar Robert L. Allen, and she was deeply committed to antiracist work within social movements. Pamela Allen had helped found the New York Radical Women, but broke with the group in part because she thought they’d failed to address racism within the movement. Later in *Free Space*, she writes, “The fifth enemy, racism, is all pervasive and internally, probably our most dangerous enemy for it has historically separated women from each other allowing white women to seek privileges for themselves rather than making their cause with all women . . . We must be no kinder to ourselves regarding our racism that we are to men regarding their male supremacy. All overt examples of racism in our movement must be vigorously opposed and cannot be excused. The issue here is that programs for women’s liberation must be beneficial to *all* women and have safeguards against their being used against any women. Our enemy is our arrogance, that we assume what benefits white women automatically benefits all women. We who have been privileged because of our color must learn to give up privileges we have at the expense of others at the same time as we fight for the rights which have been denied us as women.” (NB: She now goes by Chude Pamela Allen.)

to all women.” But white feminists had little to say about how those individual constituencies might forge solidarities so that they could come together—how differences might matter to its internal politics, what consequences they might have for identifying movement goals.

Often, then, the driving question for CR groups was what each woman could do to improve her own situation or, at most, how she might assert a generic, limited solidarity that made no room for racial, economic, or even sexual difference¹¹ The general guidelines ask:

What effect has consciousness raising had on my life? How have I changed personally? Am I happy with those changes? What aspects of my life am I happy with? What would I like to change? How am I doing it?

By contrast, Lori Sharpe’s sisters were asking themselves, “What are my commitments to other Black women? What do I expect from my Black sisters and brothers?” and “What is power and autonomy for me?”

Sharpe’s questions for Black women are remarkable because they assert a model of CR that is more expansive, more rigorous, and, most powerfully, more communal in its orientation than anything white radical feminists might have envisioned. Reading them alongside the general guidelines only highlights how impoverished and limited the latter are. This isn’t to suggest that this set of guidelines is anything other than inextricable from the fundamental realities of Black women’s lives, however. Contrary to the assertions of even the most radical feminists—and here I’m thinking of Ellen Willis, who



11. The Redstockings, particularly Carol Hanisch, accused lesbians of distracting women from the work of restructuring the heterosexual social relations fundamental to any society. She continues to insist on this point and has also come to argue that gender nonconforming people assigned female at birth present similar threats to gendered social relations and, by extension, “the” feminist movement.

wrote, “Our model of course was black power,” or Charlotte Bunch, who “saw a parallel to the arguments of blacks who had been establishing their right and need to have their own space”—there is no analogy to extract and rewrite.¹² “Black suffering,” as Christina Sharpe has written, “cannot be analogized.” To suggest otherwise is to impose another kind of violence.¹³

Examining the supplemental guidelines in their singular context, then, still reinforces the principle that the collective Black radical imagination has offered us a vision of a future that is better for *everyone*. What’s so compelling about Sharpe’s guidelines (and likely no surprise to Black women) is that the questions turn again and again to issues of community, personal accountability, and solidarity, and difference is never taken for granted. Nowhere else in the WAA guide will you find the words *heterosexual*, *bisexual*, *asexual*, or *celibate*;



12. See Charlotte Bunch (1987), *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action*, New York: St. Martin’s Press; and Ellen Willis (1984), “Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism,” in *The Essential Ellen Willis*, ed. Nona Willis Aronowitz, Minneapolis: UMN Press, 2014. Many of leading radical feminists saw the Black freedom struggle not as one in which they were implicated as oppressors, but as a movement analogous to their own. Leaders of gay freedom movements made similarly dicey assertions. To be fair to Willis, she goes on to note the limits of white middle-class feminists and that “what’s exciting about current discussions is their concern with the totality of a culture and their recognition that sexism, heterosexism, racism, capitalism and imperialism intersect in complex, contradictory ways.” But I think characterizing the movement’s failures as “neglect of other women’s experiences” implies an oversight or an accident and repudiates active responsibility for them.

13. She continues, “‘we’ are not all claimed by life in the same way; ‘we’ do not experience suffering on the same plain of conflict.” See C. Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke UP), 29. Have you read this book yet? Why haven’t you read this book yet? You need to read this book ASAP, no excuses, you can even download the first chapter here: <http://dukeupress.edu/in-the-wake>. (She is not, to my knowledge or hers, related to Lori Sharpe.)

poor, working class, or bourgeois; autonomy, value systems, or spirit. The general guidelines don't use such language, because they refuse any possibility of "theorizing, abstracting, and generalizing." But Sharpe is just as emphatic in her assertion that Black women in CR "are not discussing a sociological phenomenon," but "talking about THEIR LIVES." Theoretical frameworks, she demonstrates, are in fact profoundly consequential to real self-awareness, and interrogating one's own investments is essential: Sharpe invites Black women to think about caste and acknowledge colorism, as when she asks how her readers feel about "'field' and 'house' differences."

The differences are particularly stark when we examine topics suggested in both guides. On the subject of self-image, the general guidelines are almost entirely focused on self-scrutiny and the pressures of the patriarchal system on individual lives:

What image do I have of myself – am I quiet, gregarious, am I confident or unsure of myself, do I have a good sense of humor, am I a nice person, am I interesting, etc.? . . . Am I unhappy about my body because it does not conform to today's fashion magazine standards?

Where white feminists understand the self and the self-image, even under oppression, as deeply individual and internal aspects of each person, Sharpe offers a series of different lenses through which Black women might see themselves. She writes, "What is my psychological self-image (mental states and feelings)? Physical-biological? Socio-economic? Historical (past, present (esp.) future)?"

Likewise, Sharpe insists that readers interrogate their assumptions about the family as patriarchal and nuclear—that families could also be "orphanages, "homes," communes, street life, single parenthood, adoption, old age, living alone, Muslim communities," that matriarchy was no figment of the imagination. Whether a woman loved or hated her family and how she expressed those feelings were, Sharpe suggests, wildly insufficient without moving on to examine the family's social identity: "What are my feelings about my Black/White family? Its structure? Its economics? Its value-systems?"

Its expression of feelings?” Sharpe describes—not visualizes, but describes—a bigger, more complex, richer world in which women play roles more expansive than those the second-wave movement afforded to the white middle-class housewives afflicted by what Betty Friedan called “the problem that has no name.”

All of this suggests that white middle-class feminists seemed to understand sexism as a problem preventing women (that is, themselves) from being out in the world, and consciousness-raising about facilitating their entry into it. But that world would only empower them at the expense of other women, particularly Black women, who could be nowhere else. For them, CR practices offered survival strategies for the world they shared and, as Myles Johnson has written, the opportunity to “image and then ultimately create selves separate from whiteness.”¹⁴ Lori Sharpe’s text exemplifies these rich possibilities, and she describes a world I want to live in, but it’s crucial to understand that we can’t get there by analogy. It is not a question of using the find-and-replace function to delete (and elide and appropriate) references to Blackness, nor is it acceptable to imagine that Black feminists work on behalf of anyone other than Black women. Doing so proves only that our freedom dreams, whatever they are, will always be too small. But others struggling for liberation can honor this work and, in so doing, come to see how powerful it is.

What might it mean to believe in and support this vision not as one variety in a range of equally rich possibilities, but as the only way forward?

How might white feminists look, for example, at the questions Sharpe poses as invitations to engage in deeper reflection, to take a full account of the harms we do in the name of defending



14. See Myles Johnson (2016), “Supreme Imagination: The Black Reality, Future, and How the Imagination Controls It All” <https://www.philadelphiaprintworks.com/blogs/news/supreme-imagination-the-black-reality-future-how-the-imagination-controls-it-all>, and also enjoy the extremely great shirts and sweatshirts Philadelphia Printworks designs and sells. (This is not a paid endorsement! I just love them!)

whiteness, to begin to unsnarl the anger and terror that motivates even (especially) the kinds of racial violence that don't necessarily look like hatred?

What if instead of seizing, dominating, and supplanting the freedom dreams of radical Black feminists, we followed them?

And what if we did all of this not because we think such visions are for us, but because we know that what we've imagined has failed us, too?

More and more, it seems like the only way forward.



A few quick comments: I've used footnotes to include contextual information that would bog down the essay. (I'm a lady who loves a good footnote, can't help it.) And, in the interest of full disclosure, I'm a white woman who shares an alma mater with both Steinem and Friedan. Smith College has for years advertised that it offers women access to "the Old Girls' network," partly on the strength of claiming the two women as alumnae. This kind of solution to gender discrimination is profoundly exclusionary, particularly on an institutional level, but I have benefitted from this structure even as I have critiqued it. I welcome questions, comments, and requests for additional resources. Send a note via: <http://www.jacquishine.com/contact.html>.
—JS, December 2016

Notes on Contributors

Links for downloading this publication and the other one

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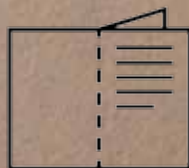
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There is much to consider about Consciousness-Raising (CR) as a political education strategy. There are questions about why CR mostly appealed to white middle class women. There are questions about whether CR laid a foundation for contemporary concerns about trigger warnings and the politics of identity. In the afterword of this booklet, writer and historian Jacqui Shine extends our knowledge about the social context in which CR emerged as a practice among certain feminists.



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