

# Thoughts on Consciousness-Raising

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Comments on hearing an account of a mass consciousness-raising session organized by WBAI radio in New York City in the spring of 1972.

I wasn't at the Sunday consciousness-raising session but I hope I may be permitted to offer my own thoughts about it.

First there is the question what is consciousness-raising. Consciousness raising is an activity which raises the consciousness. In this instance it is women who feel that their consciousness (which must be their awareness and perception regarding themselves and the world) has been cramped, darkened, frustrated, undeveloped, misguided or even seemingly replaced by a false consciousness.

So that women's awareness is not all that it could be and is not an accurate perception of themselves and of reality outside. Their own true individual awareness is somehow not really operative, either it has been blocked or stymied or repressed or just overloaded with so much shit.

Women's liberation has discovered that by sharing honestly our own feelings and experiences—we can sort of objectify our consciousness as it exists at the present time. By the time we have finished going around the room we all have a pretty clear idea of what our experience has been and **HOW WE VIEW IT!** It seems that this afternoon what emerged is that no woman seems to feel that she really looks good just the way she is. She doesn't look quite right. Something is missing to make the total picture what it should be. Okay, that is step one—we now have a clear picture of the present state of woman's consciousness or how she thinks of herself now. We all think we don't look really good just as we happen to be at this minute.

Now this is an important piece of information. And it is political information. As long as each woman thought she

was alone in feeling dissatisfied about her looks, it is an individual problem. As soon as we discover that it afflicts women as a group, it becomes more political. We are dealing with a class of people in society who are all suffering from a feeling of inadequacy. If they were different in some way they would be more adequate. They don't quite make it.

Now just recognizing that what we thought was an individual problem that we are suffering all alone is instead a class problem and all women suffer from it tends to lift the problem off your shoulders. It is no longer so personal. We can look around to see who should shoulder the responsibility for this cruel thing that was done to us. Who told us we were inadequate—where does it come from and why is it there? Who are the indirect links in transmitting this damaging "consciousness" and who is behind it?

In other words, we must now use this information to discover all we can about this false consciousness. It must be exposed and made to yield its power over us. When it is exposed and destroyed in this way real consciousness can take its place.

This is the time for women to work together and use their minds. The false consciousness has shown itself as we went around the circle saying we don't look good. We are inadequate. Now is the time for examination. How did we learn this, where did we learn it, how was it reinforced. In other words, when did you first feel you didn't look good, what did you think looking good meant, where was it confirmed that you were lacking? What does looking good mean? That you look like a model in a magazine?

Then, of course, whose interests are served by the fact that nearly all women feel inadequate about their looks? The cosmetics industry, fashion magazines, weight-loss programs, local soda companies. Are there other people in society who benefit from this? I don't know the answers. I am just a woman who doesn't think she looks really good. My hair is wrong. My teeth are too big. I wish my breasts were a different size. I don't like my clothes.

But if I were in a consciousness raising group right now I would like to learn all I could about this. Maybe there's even something we could do.