

LEARNING LIBERATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST  
CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING AND FREIRE'S CONSCIENTIZATION METHOD

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study emerged from an awareness of the critical role that learning plays within social movements and from a belief that adult education can learn much from examining the learning activities of the Women's Movement. Using a comparative approach, the similarities and differences between feminist consciousness raising and Freire's conscientization method were explored. The process of analysis involved studying Freire's written works available in English and the literature resources available through the University of British Columbia library on feminist consciousness raising. The comparison began with presentation of the historical, political, social, and economic factors which led to the development of consciousness raising and conscientization. This included an examination of the historical background of Brazil, of biographical information on Freire, and of the events which led to the development of Freire's conscientization method. In a similar way, this study explored the historical background of the Women's Movement, with particular emphasis on its re-emergence during the sixties and those factors which led to the creation of consciousness raising groups. The next step in the analysis was the comparison of consciousness raising and conscientization using the following categories: the themes or content within each process, the nature of the interaction, the presence and role of teachers or coordinators, the phases in each process, and the changes in consciousness expected as a result of each process. The study concluded with discussion of the differences between these two processes, which appear to be closely linked to the different contexts and factors, such as the different kinds of oppression being fought against, which led to the development of each learning activity. As the similarities were identified, it became evident that a number of important elements were common to both learning activities despite the very different contexts. These common elements were presented as principles of the consciousness raising method found within liberating social movements. Comparing

these two learning activities indicated the liberating power of allowing people to tell their own story. Implications for practice focused on the need for a contextual sensitivity when working with or studying the learning activities of social movements. It was argued that awareness of the similarities (suggested principles) and differences between consciousness raising and conscientization could prevent application of either method as simply recipes for liberation. Many recommendations were made for further research which stressed the utility of comparative analysis for continuing examination of learning within social movements. Recommendations were made for examination of the relationship between the nature of learning activities and the kind of oppression, either gender-based or class-based. Further collaboration between the Women's Movement and adult education was suggested.

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## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Freedom stretches only as far as the limits of our consciousness.

Carl Jung, 1942.

The link to social movements and the recognition of learning as an integral part of effective social movements have been recurring themes within the literature of adult education. Attention has been given to the activities of the Antigonish Movement in Canada, the Highlander School movement in the United States, the Folk Colleges found in Scandinavian countries, and to the learning within social movements of third world countries. However, there is still much more to be understood regarding the learning processes which lead to empowerment and social change found within social movements.

In general, the education literature has given limited attention to the non-formal educational activities that seek to alter socio-economic relations with the dominant order, and which have affected changes in social structure and social relations (Paulston, 1980; Touraine, 1981). Those who criticize this absence argue that more study is needed so that educational programs which facilitate changes from below and which lead to personal and group liberation can be understood and applied to different situations. More recently, the adult education literature has reflected similar concerns. Welton (1986) has indicated that future research should involve collective and collaborative efforts to develop a conceptual framework in which to examine adult learning that occurs within social movements.

In addition to the importance of further exploration of such learning, this author asserts that adult education can learn much about educational processes that seek to alter socio-economic relations with the dominant order from the



Women's Movement. There has been an unfortunate absence of discussion within the adult education literature about feminist approaches to learning which lead to individual and social change. One such activity that comes to mind is the consciousness raising process which has been regarded as the foundation of the recent re-emergence of the Women's Movement. It appears that adult education is more informed about "foreign" practices such as Freire's conscientization method than about the feminist practice of consciousness raising.

Considering the desire of adult education to link with and understand learning in social movements, and the potential benefits of recognizing and learning from the educational activities of the Women's Movement, this study sought to explore, through a comparative analysis, both practices of feminist consciousness raising and the conscientization method developed by Freire.

The importance of research on conscientization and Freire's literacy method has been pointed out by Kidd (1981) in his discussion of future research agendas for adult education. "The idea may be well established but the conditions for achieving it are not widely understood or accepted" (p. 60). Attempts to transplant Freire's approach have led to concerns about its applicability to other contexts, particularly those found in Western industrialized nations. Giroux (in Freire, 1985) has suggested that before Freire's method can be applied to different contexts there needs to be exploration and understanding of the "metalanguage" within Freire's work, the understanding of which would prevent grid-like applications.

Walker (1980) has raised concerns about the ways in which women's involvement in adult education as educators and learners appears to be "written in invisible ink". Interest in the learning activities of the Women's Movement is growing within adult education, but it remains limited to suggestions only, with

little offered in the way of exploration of women's learning. Mezirow (1981) has described consciousness raising as a process that has transformed the perspectives of thousands of women, but unfortunately has not explored this process to any extent that informs adult education about how and why it is effective. Welton (1986) has also encouraged adult education to become familiar with and learn from the activities of the Women's Movement.

In general, the exclusion of women from the discourses which construct knowledge has long been lamented by feminists (Smith, 1977; Thompson 1983). Thompson has added that women's learning and education should not be regarded as simply an object of interest. Instead, the task should be to illuminate the process through which women, against considerable odds, are learning liberation. Spender (1980) has also defended the importance of further research of women's education and learning. "There can be no more radical educational goal than transforming the inferiority of women into independence and autonomy. The potential that adult education affords to the achievement of this goal is great" (p. 22).

A comparison of consciousness raising and conscientization can help to illuminate the process of learning liberation and it may suggest ways of analyzing other similar learning activities. Through a comparative analysis, differences and similarities can be revealed and by placing these two processes in relationship to one another, a perspective is created which is different from that which could be achieved through a single case study. Thus, comparison provides an enriched understanding of Freire's work and, brings to adult education understanding of a feminist approach to learning liberation.

### Research Approach

The comparative method was selected for this study, an approach more commonly applied to the examination of formal educational systems or practices between countries or within one country than to informal learning processes.

Comparison was selected as an approach because it helps to identify similarities and differences and, as a result, assists in determining those characteristics that appear more culturally bound and those that appear within a variety of contexts.

Using a comparative method this study will examine the contexts from which these processes emerged and the critical elements of both the consciousness raising and conscientization methods. Particular interest will be paid to the dialectical relationship between history and the development of the movements, between individual transformation and social change, and between consciousness and praxis.

The guidelines suggested by Bereday (1964) for comparative analysis will be adapted to fit this examination. Chapter two provides further background and elaboration on the research methodology and presents an overview of the decisions made for this particular comparative process.

The questions which will be guiding this study are:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the feminist approach to consciousness raising and Freire's perspective of conscientization?
2. As a result of this comparison, what can be suggested as a way to study other learning processes connected to social movements?

### An Initial Comparison

In the early sixties, Freire, as a Brazilian educator, created a program which combined the development of critical consciousness with literacy. His methods were very successful in training and politicizing the illiterate peasants (they learned to read and write in 45 days). The land owners and military elite found his activities subversive and following the military coup in 1964, he was exiled. During his exile he lived in Chile, taught at Harvard, and worked for the World Council of Churches in Geneva. While continuing to develop and practice his literacy method and conscientization process, Freire has articulated his educational philosophy and his approach to pedagogy.

At the center of Freire's pedagogy is the notion of critical consciousness as the foundation for social change. 'Conscientizacao' (conscientization) is the term coined by Latin American educators which Freire then used to name his approach. It is defined by Freire (1985) as "the process in which men [humans], not as recipients but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of both the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality "(p. 93). Freire emphasizes that conscientization is not simply awareness, but includes action based on a critical awareness of the individual and society.

In North America, the Women's Liberation Movement is also concerned with individual and social change through the development of critical or feminist consciousness. The cornerstone of activity for this movement has been consciousness raising groups in which women, through sharing personal experiences of the inequality between men and women, move toward an understanding of oppressive social structures and the need for social change. Women begin to realize that what they viewed as individual problems are actually

shared and are the symptoms of society-wide structures of power and powerlessness, rather than personal deficiencies. From this comes an understanding that their problems cannot be addressed without understanding society and making changes in it. "Consciousness raising is the feminist method: the collective critical reconstitution of the meaning of women's social experience as women live through it" (MacKinnon, 1982, p.29).

Consciousness raising groups with their dual focus on personal and social change represent social experiments in microcosm (Eisenstein, 1984). Through consciousness raising women have challenged the common notion of "political" as something which occurs only in the public domain and which is concerned only with particular kinds of issues. The familiar slogan of the Women's Movement - "the personal is political" - refers to this challenge of what constitutes "political." The formulation of the politics of this movement and the construction of feminist theory have emerged from the personal experiences of women in these groups.

These two processes have been developed within dramatically different socio-economic and political contexts, but despite this there are strong similarities between them. From a broader perspective, there appears to be some fit between the development of Freire's perspective and the discussion of theory building found within the feminist literature. Both consider the relationship between theory and practice to be dialectical. The feminist literature considers theory building as legitimate only when it is inductive, that is, when it arises out of women's experience (MacKinnon, 1982; Eisenstein, 1984). Similarly, Freire's thoughts regarding education and the development of his concepts for literacy training came, in large part, from his direct experience of poverty as a child and later as a welfare official and educator (Collins, 1977).

Both feminists and Freire have recognized the effects of domination and are working toward transforming this situation of dependency. Freire's perspective of oppression and liberation is located within a view of Latin America suffering from colonization by the Spanish and Portuguese. In a similar way, some feminists have found the colonial model extremely useful in their understanding of women's oppression (Millett, 1970; Morgan, 1977).

Differences that are readily evident include the historical and socio-political context in which each process was developed. As well, Freire's work was developed and directly linked to a literacy campaign in Brazil, whereas consciousness raising was not connected to specific learning outcomes or social actions. Freire's writing style, or rather the English translation, in contrast to the women's literature on consciousness raising, is sexist.

Another difference and one which has important implications when attempting a comparison, is the nature of the resources available to examine the processes of conscientization and consciousness raising. On the one hand, the process of conscientization examined in this study is the result of one individual's work - Freire. Fortunately, he has written extensively on this subject and most of his works have been translated into English and are available.

On the other hand, consciousness raising developed through the efforts of many women. Consciousness raising has not been codified in the same way as Freire has written about his method. Original literature describing the development of consciousness raising is difficult to locate. Consciousness raising arose out of groups not connected to any institution; as a result, they had fewer resources for publication, so that written materials were limited and not consolidated in any particular journal or book. Early descriptions of consciousness raising were also

written by women who consciously resisted developing rules and guidelines.

Therefore the sources describing consciousness raising are varied and found within "fugitive" pamphlets, handouts, and early feminist publications.

Both of these concepts, conscientization and consciousness raising, have not been without their critics. Consciousness raising literature has been described as anecdotal and emotional with little theory and analysis of the process.

Consciousness raising groups have not necessarily led to direct social action by the participants and this has been challenged by some as a serious weakness (Kincaid, 1977; Home, 1978). Others have questioned whether consciousness raising was only a phase and has now disappeared. Some argue that the nature of the process itself was only a navel-gazing exercise rather than one that was radical (Harstock, 1975).

Criticisms of Freire's work have been directed at the abstract and repetitive quality of his writings (Elias & Meriam, 1980). His notion of conscientization has been criticized for being merely utopian and one which does not address certain aspects of human nature, particularly the difficulty of changing consciousness and acting with one's new consciousness (Boston, 1972). Others have charged that his methods are as culturally invasive as the methods he opposes (Berger, 1974; Bowers, 1978). Concerns have been raised that Freire's method reflects his own unique philosophy as a Christian-Marxist and has limited utility in other situations, particularly industrialized Western countries.

Another outcome of a comparison which places conscientization and consciousness raising in relationship to one another might be that a more fully informed response to criticisms can be made. Through comparison, further concerns may emerge as well.

### Structure of Thesis

Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter presents the discussion of the comparative approach adapted for this study and presents the categories chosen for comparison of the process of consciousness raising to conscientization. In the third chapter, the context in which Freire's conscientization method was developed is explored. The fourth chapter describes the context of the Women's Movement and the emergence of consciousness raising. In the fifth chapter, the processes of consciousness raising and conscientization are outlined followed by the comparison using the categories outlined in chapter two. This chapter highlights the similarities and differences between these two concepts.

The sixth and final chapter concludes with a discussion of the results of the comparison. The implications for adult education and the Women's Movement are also addressed and suggestions for future research are outlined. An overview of the process of this analysis concludes the thesis.



## CHAPTER II - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents an overview of the comparative method which has been selected for this study. The chapter begins with a brief historical survey of the use of the comparative method in education and its uses and limitations. Guidelines as suggested by Bereday (1964) are presented and followed by a discussion of the process undertaken for selecting material for this study. The categories selected for comparison of consciousness raising and conscientization are then presented.

### Brief History of Comparative Method

In adult education the comparative method is only beginning to be recognized as an effective methodology. Compared to other methods it has a brief history within education as well. The majority of studies in education using the comparative method have looked at differences and similarities across educational systems. The first recognized analyses occurred in the eighteenth century (Bereday, 1964; Halls, 1971). These early efforts were connected with the movement of educational systems to other countries and were organized by practitioners and administrators who hoped to find principles and practices that could be applied domestically. This was followed by studies by those in academia in which the focus was on analysis of the macro-factors and the development of more theoretical systematizations (Halls, 1971). The trend then moved away from developing general frameworks towards smaller, empirical studies which could be used for educational reform and to influence policy.

The methods of comparative education are still going through a process of refinement. There has been a shift from attention to description to more concern for critical analysis of education within its context. At present there is consensus

around the importance of systematic analysis, but beyond this there is great diversity in suggestions for the systems or criteria to be used for the comparison.

### Utility of the Comparative Method

What can the application of the comparative method achieve? Comparisons cannot directly solve problems within the practice of adult education. Rather, comparison results in several approaches being described while the selection of an approach remains with the practitioner. Because comparisons help to identify what is common across different situations, they can be used to develop theories or definitions which can be tested in further studies. An example of this is Verner's (1970) examination of the cultural influences on educational practices. By identifying which elements within the educational process were determined by culture and which were not, Verner was able to suggest a definition of education which was common to the various cultures he examined.

Understanding the ways in which education is a product of historical and cultural circumstances is often the result of comparing one country's system or practice to another. Comparing two or more case studies can lead to results different from those drawn from single case studies. Comparison encourages educators to proceed with caution when transferring the practice of education from one context to another and as such discourages ethnocentrism within educational practice and theory building (Noah, 1984). The comparative approach can also be used as something of a filter through which other 'foreign practices' can be evaluated and adapted to the conditions at 'home'. In general, comparison leads to the identification of policies and practices that have more universal application (Bennett, Kidd, & Kulich, 1975).

### Limitations

One of the difficulties in using the comparative approach is systematically evaluating the variability of quantity and quality of information to be used for analysis. Various suggestions have been made (e.g. systems approach) towards determining an approach to the comparative method. There is no one established rule or way to compare systems or practices. There is, however, the principle of determining the categories for comparison and then systematically applying these categories to each country, system, or practice being compared.

When the results of comparative analyses are applied to future studies or to practice, researchers and practitioners must understand the inherent bias in the original selection of the systems or practices chosen for comparison and the selection of categories in which to make comparison. These reflect decisions made by researchers which must always remain open to question. The interpretation of the researcher must be acknowledged before application or research is undertaken.

### Guidelines

Bereday's (1964) guidelines for the comparative method in education have been used and adapted for this study. Bereday uses the term 'political geography' to describe comparative education with the premise that education must be understood as an activity within a matrix of other social circumstances. He has identified the following as the main goals of comparative education:

1. To deduce from the achievements and mistakes of systems other than our own, lessons for our schools.
2. To appraise educational issues from a global rather than ethnocentric perspective. (Bereday, 1965, p. 5)

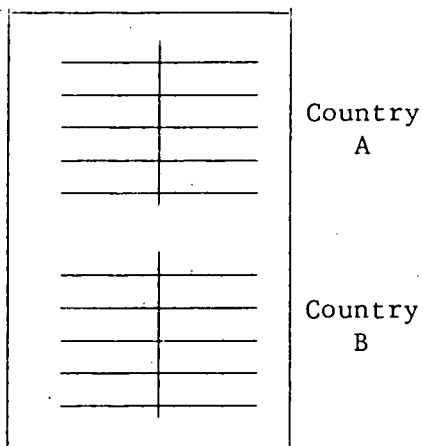
In Bereday's guidelines, the first two steps of comparison include description and interpretation which provide a familiarity and understanding of the educational systems being compared and of the cultures in which they exist. The process of description requires the systematic collection of data to enable the same kinds of information to be collected on all systems or practices being compared. This collection of data is followed by interpretation of the historical, political, economic and social influences upon the pedagogical data. The third step is one of juxtaposition, at which point a unifying concept or hypothesis can be suggested.

The final step is a simultaneous treatment of all 'countries' being studied to prove the hypothesis derived from the juxtaposition. Bereday identifies the most difficult point in the comparative method as the final one of bridging or moving on to an extra dimension that is more than simply knowing a great deal about two countries and their educational practices or systems. The following figure displays the steps involved.

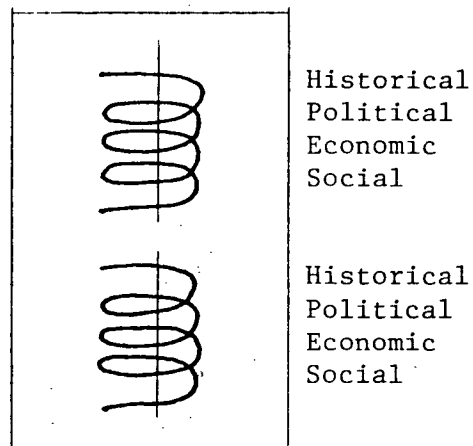
There are two general approaches to comparison, one being the problem approach and the other being total analysis. In the problem approach themes are selected and examined for their persistence or variability throughout all the educational systems being studied. Usually the topic or theme chosen is relevant to the researcher's own country or situation. Total analysis is a much more ambitious and involved process in which the goal is to achieve an understanding of the impact of education on society in general. This kind of approach is concerned with the formulation of laws or typologies leading to international understanding of the interdependence of all aspects of education and society around it.

**I. DESCRIPTION:**

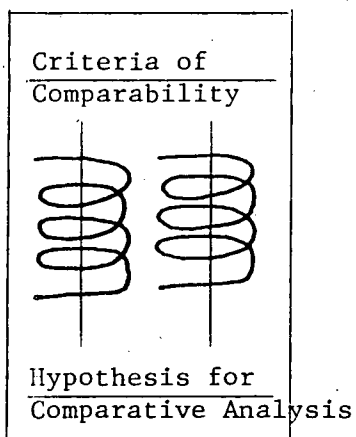
Pedagogical Data  
Only

**II. INTERPRETATION:**

Evaluation of  
Pedagogical Data

**III. JUXTAPOSITION:**

Establishing Similarities  
and Differences

**IV. COMPARISON:**

Simultaneous  
Comparison

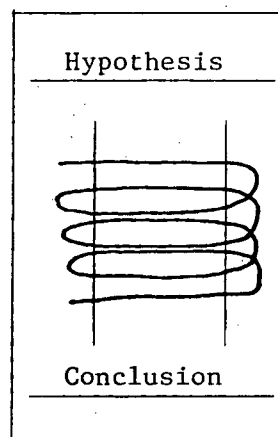


Figure 1: Steps in the comparative method

Bereday, G.F. (1964). Comparative method in education, (pp. 29). New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

### Method Adapted for this Study

For this study the problem approach appeared to be the most appropriate. The research problem which directed this analysis was to determine the similarities and differences between the two processes of conscientization and consciousness raising. In order to approach this question the first step in the process was to collect a solid body of information on the contexts in which these processes emerged.

In order to approach such a collection systematically certain decisions were made. First, it was determined that information was needed on the history of Brazil and, in particular, information on the period of the Reform Movement and also some biographical material on Freire. Understanding Freire's process would require information on his perspective of consciousness and liberation, and would demand recognition of the influences which helped to shape his perspective (e.g. religious, political, and philosophical). Information which helped to describe the initial development of Freire's method was also needed.

To acquire a knowledge of the background to consciousness raising, similar information was needed. Information which provided an historical overview of the Women's Movement was collected as well as discussions on the ideologies and themes within the movement which influenced and/or grew out of the consciousness raising process. To understand the origins of the consciousness raising process required collecting material which described the beginnings of the first consciousness raising groups. Collecting such accounts, as was mentioned in the preceding chapter, was more difficult than gathering together Freire's works, in that it involved materials quite diverse in nature and written by different authors.

The literature search of materials providing such information was limited to articles and books written in the English language and to those available via the

library services at the University of British Columbia. Discussions regarding this project also occurred via correspondence with some of the authors referenced in this thesis (Bartky and Welton). Information on Freire's method was limited to his own descriptions. Material gathered in order to outline the consciousness raising process included works written by many authors since the early sixties. To gather this material, an attempt was made to thoroughly examine the reference resources in education, the social sciences, and women's studies.

Following this collection of materials and information, decisions were made regarding the themes or categories to be considered when comparing the two processes. After initial review of the literature the following themes were selected in order to frame the comparison: thematic content, nature of interaction among participants, presence of and role of teacher, phases in the process, and how changes in consciousness related to the process.

In the two chapters following this methodological discussion, the descriptive step of the comparison is presented. This initial part of comparison provides detailed background information on both consciousness raising and conscientization and includes a systematic analysis of the political, philosophical, and social circumstances of Brazil's Cultural Reform Movement and the Women's Movement in North America.

Following this, the next step is to juxtapose and compare the two processes using the aforementioned themes. This step is presented in chapter five, beginning with outlines of the principles and techniques of consciousness raising and conscientization. Following this, each process is compared considering the thematic content, the nature of interaction, the presence and role of teacher, the phases of the process, and the changes in consciousness expected as a result of the process.

As Bereday has mentioned, the most difficult aspect of the comparative approach to analysis is creating the bridge between the situations or examples being studied which must ultimately add another dimension of understanding that moves beyond simply knowing and appreciating a great deal about different ways of doing things in education. The knowledge created must be more than a sum of the parts. In the sixth chapter this final stage of comparison, that of adding another dimension of understanding beyond simply knowing a great deal about both of these processes, is addressed.

### Summary

In this chapter the adaptation of the comparative method has been outlined beginning with identification of the more common uses of comparative education. The guidelines suggested by Bereday were described which include the steps of description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and comparison. The process adapted for this study was then outlined including the categories selected as the framework for the final comparison. In the next two chapters the first step in comparison, that of description of the different backgrounds of the processes of consciousness raising and conscientization, are presented.



### CHAPTER III - BACKGROUND ON CONSCIENTIZATION

The two educational processes of concern in this study have emerged from very different contexts and reflect the historical, political and social environment of their origins. Any analysis of them must begin with acknowledgment and consideration of these influences. This chapter presents an overview of the history of Brazil with emphasis on economic and political conditions since the country was colonized by the Portuguese. This is followed by a biographical sketch of Freire and the religious, political, and philosophical perspectives which have influenced his pedagogy. A consideration of how and where Freire's method was initiated concludes this chapter.

#### Brazil - A Country in Transition

Brazil is a nation dependent upon external markets, which has been severely exploited for several hundred years. Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese in the 1500's and shortly thereafter economic production was restricted to immense tracts of land upon which plantations and sugar mills were developed.

Our colonization, strongly predatory, was based on economic exploitation of the large landholding and on slave labor - at first native, then African.

The first colonizers of Brazil . . . wished to exploit it, not to cultivate it.

(Freire, 1973, p.21,22)

With the exclusive focus on sugar crops which utilized all the rich soil in the area, the natural forests and wildlife were destroyed and food crop production was forced onto marginal land. On these soils, the main food source for the slave population - manioc - grew rapidly but was extremely limited in its nutritional value.

The northeast of Brazil, where Freire was born and where he originated many of his ideas for literacy and politicizing education, remains the most impoverished region of the country. Only briefly during the 1500's did this area experience a period of affluence when sugar production was high and markets abundant. This long history of exploitation of slave labor and the rich soils for crops destined for external markets has left its mark on the northeast of Brazil. The per capita income in this region as of the mid fifties was still only 40% of the national average (Zachariach, 1985).

For centuries after the Portuguese initially arrived in Brazil, there was no central government and thus the landowners assumed extremely powerful positions as controllers of the economy for the Portuguese. Only in the early part of the last century did any form of self-government begin when a Portuguese court was established in Rio de Janeiro.

Along with the establishment of a government base in 1808, the economy began to shift away from rural production to industrial activities in the cities. Slavery was abolished in the late 1800's and capital that had been previously used to purchase slaves was diverted into industrial activities, mostly in the cities. To replace slave labour, immigration was encouraged, bringing Western civilization to Brazil. The major impulse of industrialization came after the 1920's and World War II when the urbanized areas grew rapidly.

Along with this shift to an urban economy, the government attempted to introduce an imported national democratic structure of European origin. The new structure, requiring participation and political and social responsibility, was imposed upon a feudal economic base. There was little acknowledgement of the long Brazilian history of an illiterate enslaved population ruled by a few powerful

landowners and an absent government.

For the last century Brazil has experienced profound transition from dependence toward independence requiring both economic and social transformation. The 1950's and 1960's were years in which particularly intensive and transformative changes occurred. This period of change has become known as the Popular Culture or Reform Movement. The government was eager to transform the economic situation based on exploitation of Brazil's natural resources by external powers to one based on more national control over production and markets. This move required major agrarian reform as well as efforts to increase the participation of the population in the politics of the country. A spirit of hope emerged which involved great upheaval and turmoil. A change in the attitude of government and active support by the Catholic church encouraged the reform.

A new awareness had also emerged in the peasant and labourer population. A radical popular peasant movement began in 1955, initiated by Jose de Prazeres, a plantation tenant. Such activities were supported by government members such as Francisco Juliao, a state legislator with upper class origins who had sympathies for the peasants' situation and Joao Goulart, a member of the cabinet of President Getulio Vargas, who encouraged the formation of unions among the labourers.

In 1961, Goulart was elected president. The three years following witnessed major attempts to change the oppressive conditions of the peasants and push the economic structure toward independence. During this time the Goulart government established SUDENE - the Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast. This government funded program included plans for economic development of the nine states along with educational aid to support this radical restructuring of the area. SUDENE was directed by Alvaro Furtado, an

internationally respected Brazilian economist.

The Catholic church played a major role during this time. Peasant unions were organized by the church with emphasis on educational programs to help the peasants overcome their backwardness. This was called the Movement for Basic Education (MEB). The church hoped that these unions would help to counter the more radical peasant leagues which were felt to be communist based.

#### Paulo Freire - Biographical Sketch

It is evident that Freire was not alone as an individual with middle class origins who developed strong sympathies and concerns for the muted peasant and labourer population. Freire had experienced something of the poverty of these peoples. He was born in 1921 in Recife into a middle class family. However, the family suffered major economic setbacks when Freire's father died and the depression of the 1930's descended upon Brazil. Freire very clearly recalls these years of daily struggle and hunger during which time his school performance was minimal and he barely qualified to enter secondary school (Collins, 1977).

Fortunately, his family situation improved and he was able to complete school and enter the Faculty of Law where he also studied language and philosophy. This interest in philosophical educational issues was enhanced by his work as an instructor in Portuguese within secondary schools. He was married in 1944 to Elza Maia Casta Oliveria, a grade school teacher, who also added to his developing perspective and became a strong and critical supporter of his method. They had five children. Although he passed the bar, Freire chose to work instead as a welfare official where he came into direct contact with the urban poor. He was later appointed director of the Department of Education and Culture of the Social Service in the State of Pernambuco. He was also teaching courses in history and

philosophy of education at the University of Recife and was awarded a doctoral degree in 1959.

During the early sixties, Freire became involved with the Movement for Basic Education (MEB) program of the Catholic church. He was director of one program that involved 104 schools and over 9000 children. He was also active in organizing adult education programs for the radio. His interest in adult education continued to grow and was influenced by the success of Cuba's literacy campaign.

In 1962 he was appointed the first director of the University of Recife's Cultural Extension Service where he more fully developed his ideas regarding literacy training. One of his better known programs involved teaching 300 labourers and peasants to read in 45 days. Such success caught the attention of Goulart and the Ministry of Education. Freire became coordinator of the National Literacy Program of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Coordinators were trained by the hundreds in almost all of the state capitals.

Unfortunately, the national campaign based on Freire's method was never fully realized. The landowning, conservative, and military elements in Brazil were watching with alarm the reform activities of the Goulart government and recognized the threat to their longstanding positions of wealth and power. On April 1, 1964 there was a military takeover. Some suggest this move was supported by the U.S.A. and was repeated in Chile some ten years later when Allende was overthrown (Zachariah, 1985). Freire was jailed for 70 days during which time he began to write about his experiences and philosophy of oppression, education, and liberation.

After his release from jail, Freire's Brazilian citizenship was revoked and Freire moved to Chile to work for the Christian Democratic government. President

Eduardo Frei was interested in using Freire's methods to promote participation by the Chilean people in his development efforts. Freire worked with UNESCO and the Chilean Institute for Agrarian Reform. In 1968 Freire completed his Portuguese manuscript, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which described his perspective and educational method.

Freire left Chile in 1969 when he was invited to Harvard's Centre for Studies in Education and Development and Centre for Study of Development of Social Change. He stayed at Harvard for one year then, in 1970, joined the World Council of Churches in Geneva as a consultant. From this position he worked with many governments and groups in the U.S.A., Canada, India, Tanzania, and Guinea-Bissau who were interested in his approach. Another of his works, Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau (1978), was written during this time. In 1980, after 16 years of exile, he was welcomed back to Brazil where he continues to work as a professor at the Catholic University of Sao Paulo.

#### Freire's Philosophical Perspective

Freire's work reflects a variety of influences including his Brazilian origins, experiences as an educator, and certain philosophical and political perspectives. It would be more accurate to identify Freire's views as eclectic and an example of praxis, that is, the result of the dialectical relationship between thought and action, than to identify his work as falling into one category or another.

When one attempts to categorize the influences or elements of Freire's work, there is much blurring of the edges and overlapping of influences (Collins, 1977; Zacchariah, 1985). For example, Freire's Christian beliefs have been greatly influenced by Marxism and existentialist philosophies. His perspective on Marxism is tempered by his Brazilian background in which a 'patron-dependent'

consciousness characterizes the populace more than does class consciousness.

### Religious Convictions

Freire defines himself as one who is becoming a Christian. He was raised a Catholic, as is 94% of the Brazilian population. However, during his university studies he decided to withdraw from active participation in the church. He was distressed with the failure of individuals who called themselves Christian to practice their faith. He was also critical of the church for not supporting the oppressed people. He later returned to Christianity but with a commitment to liberation theology shared by other radicals within the Catholic church throughout South America.

Freire's views of Christianity were also affected by Mournier, a French Christian existentialist who wished to promote a Christian-Marxist dialogue in an effort to find an alternative to capitalism and communism. Mournier supported the idea of liberal democracy which encouraged individuals to become political subjects, but he argued that these individuals still remained objects relative to their economic existence. The priority must be "personal responsibility over the anonymous organization" (Mournier in Zachariach, 1985, p. 37).

Freire believes in following the scriptures within the Old Testament where issues such as hunger and oppression are more openly dealt with. However, his practice runs counter to the view within the Old Testament that the condition of the human race is the will of God. Individuals and societies, he believes, are shaped by a much more complex interaction of environment and culture.

Even though he rejects the idea that the will of God controls destiny, he does not view individuals as entirely responsible for their liberation. Instead Freire sees people actively engaged in their liberation, but it is also a process that is preached

by Christ. Christianity, he warns, must not impose solutions on the oppressed but should encourage dialogue with them.

Freire considers Christianity as part of history and as such is capable of complacency as well as reform. He is hopeful that a fundamental urgency to become more involved in social reform will be restored within the Christian church.

### Political Influences

A strong Marxist element in Freire's work is found in his emphasis on the need for a dialectical understanding of historical change. He views the relationship of theory and practice, subjectivity and objectivity, and consciousness and reality to be dialectical. These cannot be viewed as separate entities or as dichotomous.

The role of consciousness and praxis in the transformation process is another important Marxist influence. Consciousness of the concrete condition in which one lives will not alone enable one to move beyond or transform that situation. Freire urges the development of awareness of the oppressed as well as the oppressor of their inhuman state. Praxis, the dialectical union of reflective thought and action, is what will transform situations.

It is only as beings of praxis, in accepting our concrete situations as a challenging condition, that we are able to change its meaning by our action. That is why true praxis is impossible in the antidialectical vacuum where we are driven by subject-object dichotomy. (Freire, 1985, p. 155)

Despite his Marxist references, Freire does not endorse any specific political viewpoint other than vague socialism. He suggests that once people are allowed their freedom they must be free to choose the political system most responsive to their needs. He is emphatic about the requirements of an educated, critical and



participating populace for democracy, a goal which Brazil has been struggling to achieve.

### Existentialism and Phenomenological Perspective

Freire's work reflects an existentialist view of the freedom of individuals to choose and act as well as a phenomenological view of consciousness. The influence is evident in his methodology where dialogue with the oppressed is critical to authentic knowing. Freire describes authentic knowing as when individuals become subjects of their world rather than objects. When the oppressed become subjects of their world they become beings for themselves, rather than beings for others. Authentic knowing occurs through dialogue, when knowledge and values become personally meaningful to the peasants. Thus, knowing is no longer directed by what others say, but is the result of a deliberate decision by the peasants themselves.

Freire's phenomenological consideration of consciousness is critical to his ideas and methodology. Consciousness, according to Freire, is what separates humans from animals, because humans have the capacity to reflect upon themselves. That is, human beings are capable of discovering themselves as part of reality yet distinct from reality. Consciousness cannot be separated from action and is not capable of transformation by itself. "Human beings do not get beyond their concrete situations, . . . only by their consciousness or their intentions, however good these intentions may be" (Freire, 1985, p. 154). Consciousness can only be transformed in praxis.

Freire blends his Marxist and existential philosophies in his discussion of the domain of existence for individuals which he describes as the dialectic between determinism and freedom. Being able to admire the world and see their place in it

allows people to move beyond being simply determinant beings and this makes their liberation possible. "Consciousness is constituted in the dialectic of man's objectification of and action upon the world" (Freire, 1973, p. 69). Freire asserts that praxis is only possible when this objective-subjective dialectic is maintained. Thus praxis occurs when humans recognize themselves as conditioned and their lives as determined. They can experience both their subjectivity and their objectivity.

Freire views the ability of humans as different from that of animals because they can imagine the results of their work even before it is completed. One of the dilemmas which face humankind is that the world can be transformed either toward growth or toward diminution and humans must choose one path or the other. Freire emphasizes individuals' historical relation to the world, in that they make history, and history in turn makes them and can be recounted by them.

Freire describes the consciousness of the oppressed as lying toward the "animal" end of the continuum, that is, they are immersed in the world and are unable to objectively see their condition. This condition Freire calls a culture of silence, which is born within the relationship of the dominated to their dominators. This is contrasted with a culture that has a voice. The introjection of the culture of the dominators results in the duality, ambiguity, and ambivalence experienced by the oppressed. The oppressed are not literally silent, rather they speak in a voice that is the echo of the dominator.

For Freire, most of the poor of Latin America exist within a culture of silence which is directly the result of the conquest by the Spanish and Portuguese. Since then Latin American societies have been closed, that is, characterized by rigid hierarchical social structures, economies controlled from the outside, and high

percentages of illiteracy and disease.

Freire describes the consciousness of the people in such closed societies as **semi-intransitive** or magical (1973, 1985). In this mode of consciousness people cannot see the problematical situations of daily life, that is, they are unaware of the challenges outside of the sphere of biological necessity. They view their situations as the result of superior powers or of their own natural incapacity.

The first cracks in the closed societies of Latin America, Freire believes, began to appear with the abolition of slavery in the 1800's. This period of transition accelerated after World Wars I and II, but was interrupted with the military coup in Brazil in 1964 when the poor of the nation were returned to a culture of silence.

The consciousness of such a period Freire calls **transitive consciousness** or naive. At this point the interests and concerns of the people begin to extend beyond simple survival. However, their consciousness, Freire warns, is still naive, which is reflected in the over-simplification of problems. This shift from intransitive to transitive consciousness represents the historical moment when popular consciousness begins to develop with pressure on the powerful elite by the masses. Both the elite and the masses suffer from anxiety during this time. The masses have a glimpse of the possibility of freedom and the elites respond by allowing only superficial transformations which are designed to present any real change in their power.

As the contradictions become more sharply etched in this state of transition, there are changes occurring in the political dynamics, including the emergence of populist leadership. Freire views the actions of such leadership as still manipulative. However, such manipulation involves mass protest and demands

and ultimately leads to the acceleration of the process of democratic mobilization.

In one of Freire's latest works (1985) he considers only two possibilities for Latin American societies: revolution or coup d'etat. Considering Brazil's coup which resulted in the silencing of popular sectors, and despite the recent democratic election in 1985, Freire cautions the populace to resist the tendency to reactivate the culture of silence.

### Origins of the Conscientization Process

As Freire worked as a welfare official and, later, as an educator, he described his growing conviction of the nature of education as a political tool and of the importance of working with the people rather than formulating prescriptions for them (1973). He found that the urban population had a keen interest in education compared to those in the rural areas. As he worked for the Adult Education Project of the Movement of Popular Culture in Recife he found his convictions maturing.

In this project he developed and tested the notion of cultural circles in which the themes and topics were raised by the group participants themselves. Such subjects as illiteracy, the right to vote for illiterates, and the political evolution of Brazil tended to be repeated across groups. Freire recorded these themes and then produced visual aids such as filmstrips and slides which portrayed these topics.

After working with these cultural circles for six months, Freire wondered about using a similar approach to literacy. Aided by the Service of Cultural Extension of the University of Recife, which Freire directed, the first experiment with the new literacy method took place in Recife. The first group consisted of five participants, two dropping out after the first few days. Originally from rural areas, these participants had migrated to the city and reflected a sense of apathy toward their situations and toward literacy.

After the twentieth meeting they were given several tests which involved the display of pictures depicting common situations and words superimposed with the picture. After being asked to respond to questions about these pictures the participants were amazed to discover they could read. "We were certain that [an individual's] relation to reality, expressed as a Subject to an Object, results in knowledge, which [an individual] could express through language" (Freire, 1973, p. 43). Freire argues that this relationship of subject and object exists whether people are literate or not.

Freire describes how he wanted not only to help the illiterates to read, but also to overcome their "magical" and "naive" understanding of the world and develop a more critical understanding. He wanted the participants in his method to discover culture and to realize themselves as creators of this culture. To do this Freire selected ten situations and presented them as pictures (codifications). For each picture there were certain elements for the groups to "decode." Freire reports the enthusiasm of the participants for these discussions and their increasing self-confidence as they realized their own participation in the production of culture. These discussions of culture would then move to understanding of the importance of lettered culture as well as an oral culture. The importance of literacy in relation to participating in the development of culture then became apparent to the participants.

As Freire developed these methods, he reviewed other literacy techniques and rejected the use of primers, which had been the major tool in previous approaches. He argued that such tools donated words and sentences to the illiterate and supported a passive form of learning which he called "banking" education. Freire believed in the participants creating their own words and sentences.

Freire also had plans for a post-literacy program in Brazil. Catalogues of thematic breakdowns were to be collected from the thousands of cultural circles throughout Brazil which would then be made available to high schools and colleges. Together with these catalogues of themes, audio-visual materials would also be developed based on the different themes. This, Freire believed, would help the schools and colleges identify the reality of the illiterate population. He also mentions plans for the development of materials which would present propaganda as a "situation-problems" for discussion to counter the manipulation of the masses by both the elite and the new popular leadership.

### Summary

In this chapter the contextual background of Freire's work has been presented. Although Freire's work and concepts are the result of the merging of many philosophies, several strong elements can be isolated: his Brazilian origins, his Christian convictions which have been mediated by Marxist thought, and a phenomenological and existentialist orientation to consciousness and human nature.

One is struck by Freire's attention to the dialectical relationship between liberation and history, between determinism and freedom, and between consciousness and praxis. The possibility of liberation emerges out of particular moments in history. Freire also presents a view of the changing nature of consciousness, as the oppressed move toward developing a critical view of the world. People are capable of their liberation when they recognize the relationship of determinism and freedom. Liberation will not come about only through consciousness of this relationship, but through praxis, action based on awareness. Freire's work, despite his abstract style, appears to be informed by his own practice. He attempts to live his philosophy, as his work is continually being

informed by the understandings he has acquired throughout his world travels.

Approaching Freire's method within such a context, one comes closer to understanding his perspective of liberation, the role education has to play in it, and his commitment to the process. The development and transmission of his ideas arose out of a particular period of history in Brazil in which economic and political factors resulted in a period of transition, beginning in the last century and leading to several intensive years of upheaval and reform. The support by those in power played a critical role in Freire's success and political impact.

Freire's time in prison and exile from his homeland indicate the difficulty of attempting such a liberation process within a hostile environment. Freire fortunately took the opportunity while he was in prison to begin reflecting on his experiences and writing in order to both clarify and share his thoughts. Since then his ideas have spread to many parts of the world and he has continued to write and reflect on this perspective and practice.

## CHAPTER IV - BACKGROUND ON CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

In the previous chapter, background on the development of conscientization was presented, with attention on the Reform Movement in Brazil and an understanding of those factors which have influenced Freire. In this chapter, the context in which consciousness raising developed, the Women's Movement, is presented. It begins with references to feminist activities of the last few centuries, recognizing that the Women's Movement is not a new phenomenon. The re-emergence of activity during the sixties is examined with a focus on the younger branch of the Women's Movement from which consciousness raising emerged. In presenting the philosophies which influenced the development of consciousness raising, there are a diversity of views, which is not surprising considering that consciousness raising was developed not by one individual, but by many women. Using three major themes as a framework, both commonalities and differences in philosophical and political ideologies are presented which provides an understanding of the influences on all activities of the Women's Movement, including consciousness raising. The chapter closes with a look at those specific activities which gave birth to the phenomenon of consciousness raising.

### Historical Perspective

To identify the birth of the most recent wave of the movement is to deal with both mystery and bewilderment (Rowbotham, 1973). It has threads similar to earlier aspects of the movement but it also seems somewhat of an orphan. The idea of women's liberation is not a recent phenomenon but, unfortunately, its history has been confined to cycles of lost and found (Spender, 1983). Thus, the voices of feminists up until the last two decades have been given little space and attention.



Many of the efforts of earlier feminists were not recorded and other works have slid into obscurity and are difficult to find.

Despite the difficulties of a poorly recorded and recognized history, it is understood that a historical perspective is a necessary foundation for the power to deal with the present (Eisenstein, 1984). Connecting with other feminists, even historically, is critical to the survival of this movement and research continues to add to the knowledge of the history of feminism. As this research continues, the previous activities and reflections of women have become more evident. It appears that for as long as men have held power, women have protested (Spender, 1983).

One of the central concerns of the feminist struggle during the last few centuries was the demand for reformist changes such that women could be accepted as equal to men and could compete with men within all realms (Oakley, 1981). The changes requested were mainly legal and related to policies of the work place and educational institutions. Much emphasis was placed upon government passing legislation ensuring women's equality. There was less emphasis on changing the social structures that maintained the roles of men and women.

A more radical analysis of women's oppression was not common within the feminist literature, with a few notable exceptions. Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women, which was first published in 1792, was a radical document and much ahead of its time. The thrust of Wollstonecraft's remarks challenged the notion of femininity as an immutably natural state and suggested that it was instead a construct of a patriarchal culture.

During the nineteenth century a multitude of women's clubs and organizations sprang up with a wide variety of social and political purposes that provided an environment for women in which to learn political skills and a

communication network which helped spread the suffrage movement. The acquisition of a few basic political rights continued to be the focus of the feminist movement into the early part of the twentieth century. The efforts culminated in women acquiring the right to vote in 1918 in Britain and Canada, and in 1920 in the United States. Other rights fought for were the right for married women to own property, and to enter into contracts, and for women to be selected to juries. Although these basic rights were granted, the situation of women's oppression still remained. There were more subtle and deep seated causes to be revealed and changed.

In particular, during World War I and World War II, women were welcomed into positions once occupied by skilled male workers. They were encouraged to serve their country by entering the work domain which had been historically dominated by men. However, when the war was over they were expected to return to their proper and 'natural' place which was in the home.

The women who were displaced by the returning soldiers began to question and challenge the societal expectations and rationale regarding their natural location within the world. This questioning of their roles in society together with other factors made the transition by thousands of women from worker to homemaker a difficult one. Expectations that they would be married and taken care of ran against the reality of a limited number of eligible men who returned from the human destruction of the war. These women were left to support themselves, something they had done admirably during the war. Their options once again were limited to service oriented, low-paying jobs. This situation was coupled with a dramatic rise in prices for basics such as food and housing. Within a short period of time, women moved from a position of resourceful and skilled workers to

low status, dependent members of society.

### Re-emergence During the Sixties

Social movements are born when contradictions within society can no longer remain hidden. "When the position of women within the social whole is altered, new conceptions of self and society come directly into conflict with older ideas about a woman's role, her destiny, and even her 'nature'" (Bartky, 1977, p.26). Some suggest that the feminist movement is more a consciousness or a state of mind than a clearly defined group of people, collection of organizations, or variety of actions (Rowbotham, 1973). The recent re-emergence of the movement cannot be easily understood without acknowledging a complex interaction of many political, social and economic variables.

The mid to late sixties were witness to a dramatic rise in activity of a feminist nature which grew out of a particular kind of social reality found in advanced capitalist countries (Rowbotham, 1973). In these countries there were major changes affecting women's status at work and in the home which were the result of contraceptive advances, the dramatic increase in numbers of women entering higher education and the market economy, and the social upheaval of the sixties. The efforts of such authors as de Beauvoir (1952) provided enormous impetus to this re-emergence of the movement and sparked a surge of writing by other feminists.

The feminist activities which emerged during the sixties consisted of two distinct branches, one being the older branch of the movement and the other being the younger branch (Freeman, 1979). In some ways these two groups represent the "generation gap" of the Women's Movement. The former branch consisted of older women who had been working with the national and state commissions on the

status of women. They were familiar and skilled in government lobbying and developing legislation. This branch was more highly organized with one of its main groups being the National Organization of Women (NOW), which was established in 1966.

One of the better known founders of NOW was Betty Friedan, author of The Feminine Mystique (1963). As a magazine writer Friedan began to recognize a pattern emerging as she spoke with women about their concerns about their children, their marriages and their communities. She called it the "problem with no name". "I do not accept the answer that there is no problem . . . it cannot be understood in terms of age-old problems of . . . poverty, sickness, hunger, cold. The women who suffer this problem have a hunger that food cannot fill" (Friedan, p. 26). Friedan's book was met with both outrage and enthusiasm which helped to establish NOW.

The second branch of the movement, from which consciousness raising emerged, was made up of generally younger, white, middle class, and college educated women. These women had been involved in the upheaval of the sixties. They moved on to form their own groups such as the New York Radical Women, as they discovered the contradiction between the Marxist rhetoric of liberation and their subordinate and silenced position among their male comrades. This sexist orientation of the New Left was evidenced by the remarks of leaders such as Stokley Carmichael that the best position for women to be was on their backs.

In contrast to the older branch of the movement, these women were resistant to any kind of structure or hierarchy. Their paramount concern was for women to have equal opportunity to share. The notion of structures, leaders, and spokespeople was strongly rejected by these women in favour of structureless

groups without leaders and without men.

### The Basis of the Struggle

In presenting a picture of the philosophical views which influenced the Women's Movement and the development of consciousness raising, one must recognize that, in contrast to the conscientization method which arose from the efforts of one individual, consciousness raising was developed by many women. It is also important to realize that most social movements are not born with ready-made ideologies. Rather, the experience of the participants and the success and failure of activities such as consciousness raising helped develop philosophies and perspectives which in turn helped shaped other kinds of activities (Freeman, 1979).

Participants in the Women's Movement, as has been mentioned, are not a homogeneous group, nor is there one description which reflects all women's experience of oppression. There are common themes, however, which are threaded throughout the diverse views and strategies. Before discussing these themes it is important to consider the role that such diversity plays within the Women's Movement.

This diversity of experience and analysis has been regarded as both an obstacle to attaining the goals of liberation and as a strength of the movement (Torrey, 1978). As Bartky (1977) argues in her phenomenological analysis of feminist consciousness, "the oppression of women is universal, feminist consciousness is not" (p. 23).

The Women's Movement has been criticized for this lack of consensus on various issues due to the diversity of opinions, experiences, and organizations within the movement. Torrey (1978) counters these criticisms and believes in the

strength of such diversity. In her argument she weaves a common thread amongst the various philosophies and activities and suggests that such diversity must be examined more closely to see that a variety of actions are necessary for movement goals to be obtained. The white middle class woman asking that her family share with her in the responsibility of homecare may never think of joining the radical activities of the woman who marches in the streets demanding that society share in the responsibility of making the streets safe for all citizens. Each woman may have different strategies for action, but both are attempting to change women's situations and move toward greater equality.

Stanley and Wise (1984) also recognize the reality of diversity within the movement. They point to the link between a feminist perspective and the context from which it emerged and caution against simply transplanting such perspectives. Feminists must avoid the assertion that they are speaking for all women, ignoring the reality of oppression on the basis of class and race (Eisenstein, 1984). One of the main struggles in feminist analysis is to envelope these differences and accept the validity of a spectrum of realities.

The diversity of women's experiences and perspectives has led to strategic and theoretical wrangles. An example is the debate within the movement regarding the issue of pornography. On one side are feminists who argue that government must assert its power and responsibility through legislation to make such activities illegal. The other side of the question, still within the feminist camp, is that such moves by the government would lead to censorship and should be avoided on the grounds that such action pushes pornography underground where it is even more difficult to deal with.

Along with the diversity within the movement there are several central themes which cut across the variety of feminist perspectives: women are oppressed, the personal is political, and feminist consciousness is the prerequisite to the achievement of liberation (Oakley, 1977; Eisenstein, 1984). It appears that these were the major themes which gave impetus to the development of consciousness raising and that through the consciousness raising process they were further validated and provided the groundwork for future feminist analysis and activities.

### Women's Oppression

The first major theme - that women are oppressed - is coupled with the belief that this is not inevitable, but something which must and can be changed. Within the feminist literature the discussion of women's oppression is varied, reflecting the diversity of experience and political perspectives among women. However, there is common agreement that women's oppression is gender based and supported by sexism, the systematic exclusion and denigration of women, which is in turn supported by a patriarchal system which maintains male supremacy (Spender, 1984). "Identifying the nature and causes of women's oppression is probably the most fundamental concern of modern feminism" (DuBois, Kelly, Kennedy, Korsmeyer, & Robinson, 1985, p. 87).

Different perspectives on the origin of women's oppression have given rise to the diversity of political ideologies within the movement. The development of feminist political theories is still in a very preliminary stage (Thompson, 1980; Barrett, 1980). The following distinctions have been suggested by Jaggar (1977) as a picture of the continuum of political feminist analysis. They are organized under the classifications of radical, classical Marxist, and Liberal. These should be considered as very broad classifications and limited to the task of presenting an

overview.

A radical feminist perspective such as Firestone's (1970) sees the source of women's oppression as biological and particularly related to their childbearing activities. These feminists look forward to the utilization of technology to relieve women from their biological burdens. Some radical feminists hold a separatist view in which they attempt to remove themselves completely from the patriarchal order. These feminists argue that they are radical because they believe in allowing no separation between theory and practice.

The classical Marxist view regards capitalism as the primary cause of women's oppression for it thrives upon the economic inequalities of men and women. The utility of a Marxist analysis of women's oppression has continued to be debated by feminists and other philosophers. Eisenstein (1984) cautions that feminists must not throw away such analysis only on the grounds of its connection with sexist males within the New Left movement of the sixties. Some feminist theorists are working toward a modified Marxist view of women's liberation which acknowledges the interrelatedness of the realm of work and sexual relations (Kelly, 1983).

Liberal feminists have a reformist view of the changes needed. Such groups do not advocate for radical changes in economic structures (i.e. the destruction of capitalism). Their "conservative" stance is important to their ability to maintain a place within the established political world. They work for changes in discriminatory law and practices, and in the unequal distribution of household labor. The ultimate goal of the liberal feminists is equal opportunity within the existing system.



Midgley and Hughes (1983) suggest that these political positions have developed into sectarian positions and urge that there be less dogma based on old models such as Marxism and behaviourism. They argue that sectarianism develops when such models become masters rather than servants to feminist attempts to explain women's oppression. Eisenstein (1984) also cautions against sectarianism in any social movement because it supports false universalism which denies the existence of a plurality of oppressive conditions.

For women, because their oppression is gender based, their consciousness is inseparable from their reproductive capabilities and sexuality. Thus the demand for women to have control of their bodies and of reproduction has become a central issue within the Women's Movement. Feminists such as O'Brien (1981) consider that advances in contraceptive technology have the power to transform women's situation toward one of equality where parenthood would represent an authentic and social project freely chosen and rationally controlled.

Feminists have struggled to identify the nature of women's oppression and argue that oppression has been conceived in too limited a fashion. The psychology of oppression is held by many to be similar to that experienced by blacks (Bartky, 1979). Such oppression includes stereotyping, cultural domination and sexual objectification. "To be psychologically oppressed is to be caught in the double bind of a society which both affirms my human status and at the same time bars me from the exercise of many of these typically human functions that bestow this status" (Bartky, 1979, p. 40).

The relationship between oppressed and oppressor, as viewed by feminists, reflects a tyranny which operates within intimacy rather than one between worker and capitalist (Eisenstein, 1984). It is difficult for women as an oppressed group to

consider the world without the oppressor (men). This gender difference located in both the sexual and work sphere both binds women and distinguishes them from their oppressors.

Feminist research has examined the structures which support and maintain women's oppression. Some examples of this research include the works of Chesler (1972), Daly (1974), and Spender (1985). Chesler examined how the male personality and psychological framework has become the accepted picture of health within psychiatry and medicine, with female traits identified as unhealthy. Daly, a feminist theologian, studied how the existence of women and female images has been consistently removed and suppressed within Western religions, with the subsequent development of the male image of God. Spender has studied how male speech patterns have been developed as the norm and women's style of conversation has been consistently interpreted as ineffectual.

The duality suffered by women as oppressed beings is exemplified in their experiences of being split - they present to the world the image demanded by the dominant patriarchal culture and have another sense of self which is often contradictory to the public one. Authors such as Rowbotham (1973) often use metaphor to describe those structures which create such duality and invisibility. "The prevailing social order stands as a great and resplendent hall of mirrors. It owns and occupies the world as it is and the world as it is seen and heard" (1973, p. 27). Feminists have given much attention to the difficulty of breaking this duality. "So much of what we know is suspect because it has been encoded by men and works against our interests" (Spender, 1983, p. 379).

### The Personal Is Political

The second theme common to feminist analysis and ideology is that the 'personal is political' and is one that is strongly linked to the development of the consciousness raising process. Hanisch (1969), a member of the New York Radical Women, wrote one of the first documents discussing this notion. She noted that declaring the personal **as** political was a radical departure from the personal **vs.** political. Hanisch asserted that personal problems **are** political problems because only collective action, not personal solutions, can solve them.

This familiar slogan of the feminist movement acknowledges the reality of unequal power relationships that is experienced by women within their personal lives. That is, the oppression of women must be analyzed within the personal and private world in which women live. The exploration of the internal and private is a political necessity for women. The issues, strategies for change, and the creation of women-centred knowledge arise out of the personal. "Many of the crucial elements of the new knowledge about women's situation . . . were accumulated through accounts first garnered in [consciousness raising] groups" (Eisenstein, 1984, p. 37).

This knowledge of women's experience which grew out of 'the personal is political' provided impetus for much feminist research that has challenged the 'scientific evidence' regarding women's natural capabilities and has revealed the practice of generalizing the results of studies utilizing male populations to all individuals, women included. Such recent feminist analysis includes the efforts of Gilligan (1980) and Spender (1985). Gilligan began her analysis of moral development with a concern for previous research being generalized from a male sample to both male and female populations. She discovered that women's moral decisions arose out of a completely different set of values from that of men. She

also suggested that the supposed superior morality of male decision making should be questioned.

Spender (1985) reviewed previous research in the area of the sexes and language. She was puzzled by the studies that concluded that women had less effective speech styles and by the societal assumption that women were the talkative sex. She found many blatant biases in the research designs and in the interpretation of data. Women, she concluded, were talkative relative to being silent. Men, she found, dominated an average of seventy percent of the time during mixed sex conversations. Her analysis has provided important empirical evidence of the sexist nature of language and the need for women to challenge how language supports the dominant order.

The shift of the personal into the political realm has been analyzed by such authors as McWilliams (1974) and Spender (1980). McWilliams criticizes the academic community for failing to acknowledge the power and impact of the Women's Movement due to their limited view of what is political. Anything relating to women, particularly the private and personal, was not considered political and was therefore ignored.

Spender suggests that feminists have recycled the word "political" to mean a new phenomenon which cannot be understood using a patriarchal definition. "When we embarked upon our program of constructing knowledge in which we were neither distorted nor invisible, we began to engage in a political act" (Spender, 1980, p. 14).

### Feminist Consciousness

The final theme common to feminist perspectives is the notion of the development of feminist consciousness. "Feminists are not aware of different things than other people; they are aware of the same things differently" (Bartky, 1977, p. 26). The development of feminist consciousness is directly related to the economic and historical moment. Only when there is apprehension of possibility can the movement begin toward feminist consciousness. Prior to this, the perception of women's condition as natural, inevitable, and inescapable will not lead to the development of feminist consciousness.

Becoming a feminist is a profound personal transformation, an experience which cuts across ideological divisions within the Women's Movement (Huws, 1982; Bartky, 1977). It is both a painful and a rewarding experience for it is an awareness of victimization together with a consciousness of power. "We understand where we are, in light of where we are not yet" (Bartky, 1977, p. 26). The development of feminist consciousness has been described as similar to paranoia for there is little in society that is free of the sex-role differentiation as a major organizing principle. This can make day to day living an ethical and existential impasse (Bartky, 1977; Stanley & Wise, 1984).

Authors such as Stanley and Wise (1984) believe that the development of feminist consciousness cannot occur without praxis, that is, action based on this consciousness. They describe the moment to moment practice of feminism as whether one decides to "pass" or not. By this they mean that there is very little in daily life that is not constructed in sexist terms, that feminists must make decisions continually about whether they resist and reveal such sexism, or whether they let it pass.

Feminist consciousness is different for each woman because it is grounded in the historical and social context. Neither is it a point that is "arrived at" because, as the Women's Movement changes society, women in turn will be shaped by the historical moment. Feminist consciousness is about praxis for it provides a system for acting in the social world where the mundane and routine expressions of sexism become problematic. Often feminists are accused of Going Too Far. "It hurts to try and change each day of your life right now - not in talk, not 'in your head', and not only conveniently 'out there' . . . but in your own home, kitchen, bed" (Morgan, 1977, p. 126).

#### Origins of Consciousness Raising Groups

Consciousness raising groups have been identified as being both a cause and a result of the recent re-emergence of the movement. Freeman (1975) has suggested that they may have pre-empted the movement by providing a communicative network. Consciousness raising groups emerged from the younger branch of the Women's Movement, and in particular from the activities of the New York Radical Women. In the following paragraphs the literature which emerged out of the New York Radical Women's group (Redstockings) is examined. These publications represent the first written descriptions and guidelines to the consciousness raising process (Sarachild, 1968, 1973).

Sarachild acknowledges that the process which developed out of her radical women's group was similar to 'speaking bitterness', an activity which originated during the recent Chinese revolution. She views consciousness raising as a radical weapon and makes reference to the Greek origins of the term 'radical', that is, 'root'. "We wanted to pull up weeds in the garden by their roots, not just pick off the leaves at the top" (1968, p. 144).

Sarachild remembers the first consciousness raising group as a rather spontaneous event rather than a planned activity. The New York Radical Women had been meeting to organize and plan for future public actions. One woman began revealing her thoughts about women being an oppressed group. This idea was not new to the group, but what Sarachild describes as different and powerful was how this woman related the abstract notion of oppression to her own experiences, particularly her efforts to make herself attractive. This began a moving discussion among others present about their own personal experiences of oppression.

This link to their personal lives and the sharing of common experiences revealed a very powerful way to understanding women's oppression. Those present agreed that the group needed to do more consciousness raising with much debate regarding how this process would take shape.

In the end the group decided to raise its consciousness by studying women's lives by topics like childhood, jobs, motherhood. . . . Our starting point for discussion, as well as our test of the accuracy of what any of the books said, would be the actual experiences we had in these areas.

(Sarachild, 1973, p. 145)

Sarachild suggests that the radical nature of such consciousness raising - seeking of the roots of women's oppression - does not lend itself to immediate kinds of action, but rather to action that is carefully planned and sometimes even delayed. The kinds of public actions to pursue would be a form of consciousness raising, but within the public realm as old ideas were challenged and new ones presented.

Despite this hesitancy to leap into action, the early descriptions of consciousness raising were also clear on the need for action. Uncovering the truth, Sarachild cautions, is insufficient, but with greater understanding there is discovery

of the necessity for action and of new possibilities for action. Finding a solution must take place through theory and action both.

These early groups met with accusations of being only therapy sessions which dealt with trivial issues, not political concerns. They were also charged with being dangerous. "We hadn't realized that just studying this subject and naming the problem would be a radical action in itself (Sarachild, 1973, p. 145). Many women experienced great resistance from their husbands and male acquaintances, and some women were prevented from attending while others were given specific instructions that certain subjects were to be off limits. The 'establishment' also attempted to undermine and weaken the strength of the groups by referring to their corporate training sessions as consciousness raising groups.

In this early literature on consciousness raising, Sarachild is emphatic that it not be considered a stage that would be replaced by a future action phase nor simply a methodology, but rather an essential part of the overall feminist strategy. "It is a program planned on the assumption that a mass liberation movement will develop as more and more women begin to perceive their situation correctly" (Sarachild, 1968, p. 202). These early groups played an important part in the development of ideology by providing the groundwork for a surge of feminist analysis such as Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex (1973) and Millett's Sexual Politics (1970).

Consciousness raising, as described by Sarachild, is both an end and the means to an end. The purpose is to get to radical truths about women's situation such that action could be taken. These early radical groups wanted to initiate and support a mass movement. For such a movement to arise, women would have to see the fight against oppression as their own struggle as well as that of others.



Women would have to see the truth in their own lives before acting in a radical way for anyone.

Sarachild is critical of other attempts to produce set guidelines or rules to follow. She felt that this would lead to the formation of methodological experts. She argued that there was no one method of consciousness raising, the only method was the "basic radical principle of going to the original sources, both historic and personal, going to the people - women" (Sarachild, 1973, p. 147,148).

### Summary

In this chapter the contextual background of consciousness raising was outlined with consideration of the social, political and economic variables influencing the Women's Movement. This overview attempted to indicate to the reader that the Women's Movement has historical roots spanning several centuries and the shape it takes is reflective of the changes in societies over time.

The themes which cut across different perspectives and the diversity of experience and philosophy were explored. Yet another common notion about the Women's Movement is that it represents a homogeneous population of women. It was evident that there exists a continuum of perspectives regarding the causality of oppression and the strategies for change. The development of feminist theory is difficult given such plurality; however, this can also provide the movement with its strength and ability to be truly liberating.

The origins of the recent re-emergence were located in the two branches of the Women's Movement. The younger branch consisted of women who had been active in the movements of the sixties. As they developed the idea of consciousness raising, they brought to the process the belief that any hierarchy was bad and structure and leaders did not allow for the more important activity of equal sharing

among women. In the same way that exploring the Brazilian context and Freire's philosophy has given insight into the forces that created the conscientization method, recognizing the background and perspectives brought by the women who helped develop consciousness raising provides understanding of the forces at work in shaping this process.

The two preceding chapters have provided the contextual background of conscientization and consciousness raising. The study now moves from this descriptive stage to one of juxtaposition and comparison. In the next chapter, the two processes being studied are outlined providing specifics of each method followed by a comparison using the categories described in chapter two.

## CHAPTER V - COMPARISON OF PROCESSES

The next step in this comparative analysis is the juxtaposition of the two processes followed by comparison. This chapter begins with an outline of the techniques and methods beginning with consciousness raising followed by conscientization. These two processes are then compared using the categories outlined in chapter two as a framework: the source of themes or content, the quality or nature of interaction between participants, the existence of and role of teachers/coordinators, the phases of the process, and finally the changes in consciousness which are suggested as the goal of each process.

### The Consciousness Raising Process

Within the literature which discusses the consciousness raising process there is a wide variety of approaches: the anecdotal, descriptive, and those that view consciousness raising as a technique and test for differences in outcome. The research on consciousness raising includes mainly studies in which it was used as a dependent variable and the participants were tested for changes in behaviours and attitudes (Bailey, 1977; Abernathy et al., 1977; Follingstad, Robinson, & Pugh, 1977; Ballou, 1979). Other research focused on the demographics of the participants and their responses to questionnaires regarding personal significance of the process (Lieberman, 1976; Kincaid, 1977; Home, 1978).

For this comparison with Freire's approach, descriptions of the principles and techniques of the consciousness raising process were needed and therefore the literature which offered such information was analyzed (Sarachild, 1968 & 1973; Allen, 1970; Freeman, 1973; Eastman, 1977; Cassell, 1977; Eisenstein, 1984; and Spender, 1984). In the following discussion the principles, techniques and phases of

the consciousness raising process as described in the foregoing literature are presented.

"Consciousness raising groups are experiments in the process of critiquing established social norms and the shaping of new ones through the development of reciprocal, non-hierarchical relationships and conscious avoidance of the imposition of a leader or teacher" (Hart, 1985, p. 121). The main principle from which other techniques and guidelines have followed is that for women, the source and authority regarding oppression is within themselves. This has implications for the approach to communication or sharing, the exclusion of men from these groups, and the generation of themes or topics for discussion.

The groups attempt to hear from all the members and to stay focused on a topic. As each woman shares with the group her experience of oppression, the other participants are encouraged to avoid invidious comparisons or judgments on what had been said. Hearing women's stories is not for the purpose of therapy, it is to listen to what they have to say and to collectively analyze the situation of women, not to analyze the women themselves. Women in these groups are considered equals and as each woman speaks she is allowed to complete her statement without interruption. As the topics for discussion are raised, such as women's experience of work or childrearing, the question of who and what would have an interest in maintaining the oppression of women is applied.

"Just letting things happen" can lead to avoidance of some topics because they are difficult and painful to discuss. Groups such as Allen's (1970) suggest a study plan as a way to cover important topics, to give structure to group meetings, and to encouraged cross-group communication at monthly "collective" meetings. The plan is based on four elements of women's condition suggested by Mitchell

(1966): Production, socialization, sexuality and reproduction.

The exclusion of men is part of the conscious decision to avoid domination. Groups such as the New York Radical Women had left the New Left movement because of the repressive activities of their male colleagues. When men were present, women's problems were not taken seriously and groups became stratified. These experiences led them to create a space where women would feel free to break their silence rather than have it continue.

There are no presupposed changes expected in women's behaviour nor particular actions to be taken by either the group or the individual members. Women are encouraged to participate and share with the understanding that they are not expected to take action as individuals. Public actions which are decided upon should be in the form of public consciousness raising.

In Free Space (Allen, 1970), a book written as a retrospective analysis of the small group process within the women's movement, the participants made several important discoveries. They described their realization that consciousness raising was about developing ideology, not about solving personal problems. The process was painful as they became aware of the reality of their oppressive situations. There was also a sense of exhilaration in their collective realization and shared vision of a different future. This group described their understanding that theories which could not be rooted in concrete experience were not useful, and for the concrete to be understood, it must be subjected to the process of analysis and abstraction.

In this analysis of the free space of the small group, distinct phases were also determined. The ongoing nature of these phases was emphasized, one phase never really completing before moving on to the next. They emphasised that for

analysis and abstraction to be valid, they must continue to be rooted in women's day to day experiences. "Out of this emerging ideology come[s] a program grounded in solid understanding of women's condition which will have its roots, but not its totality, in our experience" (Allen, 1970, p. 30).

1. Opening Up. This is the beginning phase of the group in which trust and intimacy are developed. Feelings are acknowledged for what they are and no judgement is made. For many women the group is the first place where their feelings and experiences are acknowledged and not ridiculed. The group must share a commitment to confidentiality, regular attendance, and arriving on time.

2. Sharing. The initial phase of opening up answered the need for expression, but the emphasis must shift to one of sharing and teaching one another. In order to arrive at a collage of similar experiences the group must understand the purpose of their sharing. At this time, the understanding of the common nature of women's problems begins to develop, the need for collective action is appreciated, and the shattering of myths about women's inferiority and male superiority occurs.

3. Analyzing. Once the group has collected the raw data, the next step is to analyze the why and how, and to develop the strategies for fighting women's oppression. This phase in the group's development now moves toward objective analysis of the concrete experience. This phase is often difficult because women have operated so much within the subjective realm and have been isolated. During this phase women begin to develop identities independent of their spouses and children. Other sources of information such as studies and books can be used now, but they will be tested against women's own experiences. The group emphasized that this stage of analysis should follow the first two, guided by the principle of seeking answers from women's experience, not from any preconceived theory.

4. Abstracting. This phase did not occur until the group had been meeting for over a year. They described it as the purest form of free space in which the totality of the nature of women's condition is appreciated. With this synthesis of analysis, a vision of potential can develop. Out of this holistic view of the oppression of women comes the ability to then make decisions and priorities regarding the problems to work on and strategies to be developed.

### The Conscientization Process

The term conscientization was a term already widely used in Latin America and popularized by Bishop Helder Camara, who promoted the progressive Catholic position. Camara defended the term from critics who asserted that it reflected a communist perspective. He supported the process because it was "one of the most beautiful expressions of the democratic vocabulary" (in Freire, 1973, p. 133). Freire reports that when he heard the term, he realized the profundity of its meaning and began to incorporate it into his writings.

Freire developed his perspective on literacy training within a view of Brazil in transition from being a closed society to an open one. Through his analysis of other common literacy practices, he came to reject the mechanistic approach to literacy training wherein the students were only patient recipients. Most education, Freire argues, is "banking education" in which knowledge is seen to be deposited into the students within a very passive learning relationship. Literacy training, he believed, was a tool for the awakening of the intransitive consciousness of the masses. Freire's conscientization process involves particular techniques and stages which are outlined in the following paragraphs (1973, 1985).

Dialogue, Freire believes, is the foundation of authentic education. It is "the encounter between men [people] mediated by the world, in order to name the world"

(Freire, 1970, p. 76). This interaction prescribed by Freire is reflected in the horizontal relationship between persons, a relation of empathy shared by people who are engaged in a joint search. Only in an atmosphere of love, hope and mutual trust can true dialogue take place. The horizontal nature of this discourse is contrasted with a vertical one where the teacher places himself or herself above the student, with the resulting unequal power relationship.

The role of leaders or coordinators within Freire's literacy and conscientization method is another fundamental element within his pedagogical perspective. He is emphatic that these coordinators must work with, and not for, the people. This requires careful selection and training. Freire frequently mentions the importance of the solidarity that these leaders must have with the oppressed and that they "have no right to steer people blindly toward their salvation" (Freire, 1973, p. 167).

As a consultant to the government of Guinea-Bissau, Freire (1978) wrote about his experience as an educator, consultant, and observer of the national reconstruction campaign following the overthrow of the Portuguese colonialist government. He discussed the importance of a coherence between a political/revolutionary stance and action. He found that he was reminded, as he was in Chile, "to listen more than speak, and to not separate the act of teaching [from] the act of learning" (Freire, 1978, p. 9).

This dialectic relationship between teacher and learner is at the core of much of his discussion on the role of educators within the literacy process. In his observations of the cultural circles within this newly liberated country, he noted that the educators were often impatient and lacked vivacity when discussing themes. He elaborated further about the importance of the tension between



impatience and patience. When educators are too impatient they make the words for the learners and if they are too patient they become passive teachers. Both situations develop passive learners who are not critically engaged in their learning.

Freire speaks of the difficulty of finding and training coordinators and leaders. In Letters to Guinea-Bissau he shares his experience as a consultant/teacher and provides a picture of such a 'training' process as he and his colleagues became simultaneously educators and learners in their work with the new government of Guinea-Bissau.

The phases of his method include co-investigation, selection of generative words, the creation of codifications, and the decodification process.

1. Co-investigation. The program content is developed by coordinators researching with the groups or community for a common vocabulary that has meaning and reflects the experiences of the peasants. From this vocabulary certain words are selected which become the generative words to be used in the literacy process, that is, words that can generate discussion and questions regarding the peasants oppressive conditions.

2. Selection of Generative Words. The selection of generative words follows certain criteria: they must exhibit certain phonemic richness, phonemic difficulty or complexity, and pragmatic tone. The best generative word is one which is complex, has a strong link between the word itself and what it designates, and a potential to generate sociocultural reactions to the word by the individual or group using it. An example of a generative word is **TIJOLO**, meaning 'brick'.

3. Creation of Codifications. Once the generative words have been identified they are codified. This means that these words are then linked to pictures: either photographs, slides, or drawings, which represent typical existential

situations which function as challenges or "situation-problems" containing elements to be decoded by the groups. The codifications must be familiar local situations which lend themselves to analysis of regional or national problems. For example, a drawing or slide depicting a peasant building a house using bricks is shown to the group.

The coordinator and participants then discuss these pictures and in the process develop an awareness of their situations as problems and of the structures that cause such problems. These discussions also lead to a developing awareness of the difference between nature and culture, and in particular the role that the participants play in developing culture.

4. Decodification. Following this codification, that is placement of the generative word within a context and discussion of the meaning and causality of these situation-problems, the process moves on to focusing the participants' attention on the generative word. The word is shown together with the picture, then it is shown separately on a card.

**TIJOLO**

The word is then broken down into its syllables.

**TI - JO - LO**

This is followed by the presentation of "discovery cards." The first card presents the phonemic families of each syllable horizontally.

(TA-TE-TI-TO-TU) (JA-JE-JI-JO-JU) (LA-LE-LI-LO-LU)

Following this horizontal display of phonemic families the next card shown to the participants presents them vertically.

TA-TE-TI-TO-TU

JA-JE-JI-JO-JU

LA-LE-LI-LO-LU

In summary, the process begins with coordinators co-investigating with a community to discover generative words. Codifications are developed (slides or drawings) and the codified situation is presented followed by discussion and analysis of the situation-problem. Once this analysis has been exhausted the word itself is brought to the participants' attention. At this time the participants are encouraged to visualize it rather than memorize it. Then the word is presented by itself which is followed by the word separated into its syllables. Then the phonemic families of each syllable are shown on discovery cards, first horizontally then vertically.

The group starts to make words with the combinations of the phonemic families, and begins on this first session to write these words they have created. They are told to go home and bring more words they have made with the combinations. They do not have to be actual words because the most important process is the discovery of the mechanism of phonemic combinations. The words are brought to the next group session and are tested by the coordinator and the group together.

### Comparison Using Themes

#### Themes or Content of the Learning Process

The process of co-investigation in which themes are generated from the participants themselves can be found in both feminist consciousness raising and Freire's conscientization method, but the techniques used are quite different and reflect the different contexts in which each practice emerged. In Freire's process the themes which are codified into situation-problems and the words which are used to present the phonemic breakdown of the Portuguese language have been generated through coordinators and learners working together through co-investigation. The themes or topics for investigation in the consciousness raising groups arise as the women working, as equals, begin to share their personal experiences.

The identification of themes or content in both practices of conscientization and consciousness raising groups challenges old ideas of what has been considered political. The familiar slogan of the Women's Movement - "the personal is political" - indicates a belief that the analysis of women's oppression must begin with women's personal and private lives. The exploration of the internal and private is a political necessity for women. The issues, strategies for change, and the creation of women-centred knowledge arises out of this personal analysis.

In the first stage of his literacy program, Freire begins by presenting to the learners pictures of common situations, and through discussion the participants begin to perceive these as problems reflecting their oppressed condition and the structures which maintain such oppression. Thus, for the participants of Freire's method, the personal also becomes political as they explore their daily reality, discover how it reflects their oppression, and begin to link their situations to

structural factors rather than viewing themselves as deficient.

In the process of generating themes from the reality of the oppressed, both Freire and feminists have discovered the importance of simultaneously working within structures which support the oppressors' ideology (e.g. language), and working to create a free space in which the oppressed can voice their experiences and concerns. Freire describes one of the most important decisions of the new government of Guinea-Bissau: whether to remove the old educational structure which reflected the values and history of the Portuguese colonialists, or to utilize such a structure and gradually introduce reforms which would eventually recreate the system as one that reflected the language and history of the indigenous African population (1978).

His experiences with the government of Guinea-Bissau point to the dilemma of learning how to read and write and recognizing that language can be an oppressive structure in itself. In a similar vein, women have discovered the patriarchal domination of knowledge and language as they struggle to name their world using the oppressor's language. The identification of issues or themes becomes problematic using a language which represents the world view of a patriarchal order and which is limited or even derogatory in descriptions of women's condition.

Given this problem, consciousness raising groups are critical for women to overcome two major hurdles: First, they must find a space in which they feel free to express themselves, and second, they must find words to express the reality of their daily lives. Within such spaces women can begin to recyle and recreate language. The process is slow because the language available must be transformed into a tool of liberation rather than domination. The contributions of Smith (1977) and

Spender (1985) add empirical support to both feminist and Freire's concerns regarding the domesticating potential of language and knowledge production.

The obvious difference in these approaches to identifying themes is the presence of coordinators. In Freire's method, the educator or coordinator maintains this position no matter how much that person is also a learner within the process. Within consciousness raising groups, women from other groups may help with the formation of a group and the leadership role may be rotated among the participants, but one woman does not maintain a role of coordinator or teacher.

Both Freire and the feminist literature on consciousness raising discuss the difficulty of adhering to this principle of generating themes from the participants. Freire discovered that coordinators had difficulty in practicing the concept of working with the people rather than for them. In their impatience, they would often provide situations and vocabulary for the learners, rather than wait for them to generate their own.

Consciousness raising groups have found that discussion in subject areas that are difficult and have much emotional weight tend to be avoided. Other problems emerge when group discussion is dominated by those participants who are more confident and articulate than others. This is particularly acute in groups where there is a mix of middle and working class women. One of the criticisms of consciousness raising groups is that they are mainly the activities of middle class women whose class position has given them the freedom and skill to speak out, in comparison to working class women who may be less confident and articulate.

When middle class women have helped to initiate groups for working class women and have remained in these groups, their role becomes very similar to that of Freire's coordinators. Then the concern expressed by Freire about leaders

committing class suicide also has relevance for the consciousness raising activities of the Women's Movement.

Consciousness raising and conscientization have been compared using the first theme of how the themes or topics are developed. Both support the principle of grounding the educational process within the experiences and daily lives of the participants. However, the method of co-investigation in Freire's program requires clearly identified teachers/coordinators who initiate the process. In contrast, the role of coordinator is not maintained by any one individual within consciousness raising groups.

#### Nature of the Interaction

Another aspect of conscientization and consciousness raising in which there are strong similarities is the prescription for interaction and communication among participants and between teacher and learners. Freire describes such interaction as dialogue - "the encounter between men [individuals] mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (1970, p. 76). According to Freire, teachers, revolutionary agents, and coordinators must work with, not for, the oppressed.

Although the idea of dialogue is a concept that has been overworked and as a result has lost some of its meaning, this approach to communication is implicit in the practice of consciousness raising as well. An important aspect of the guidelines which emerged from the first consciousness raising groups was the effort to consider all participants as equals, and to avoid hierarchy by developing a horizontal structure.

This emphasis on equality and horizontal communication has led to the development of a sense of sisterhood, which is the recognition of the shared experiences of oppression and the simultaneous discovery of the objective nature of

this oppression. Sisterhood has generated a sense of power for North American women who have been isolated and alienated from each other.

Although dialogue is the form of communication advocated in both practices, there are differences in emphasis as to who is included within this horizontal exchange. Freire focuses most of his discussion of dialogue on the teacher-learner or revolutionary-peasant relationship. Within 'leaderless' consciousness raising groups, the communication is necessarily among participants.

Using the second theme, the nature of interaction or communication within each process has been compared. Dialogue is essentially the principle of communication adhered to by both consciousness raising and conscientization. In Freire's method the emphasis is on the horizontal relationship between teacher and learner and in consciousness raising groups, the focus is on sisterhood and the shared communication among women as equals.

#### Role of Teacher/Coordinator

There are both obvious differences and subtle similarities between consciousness raising and conscientization regarding the presence and role of teachers or coordinators. Characteristics commonly attributed to consciousness raising groups include their leaderless structure and the conscious exclusion of men. In contrast, in Freire's literacy method and conscientization process, teachers/coordinators play an important role and may be members of the intellectual elite or the middle class.

Freire views the role of leaders or coordinators within his literacy method as fundamental to the success of the program. He emphasizes that these leaders "have no right to steer people blindly toward their salvation" (1973, p. 167). Those who wish to join with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation must work in



communion with them. Those from the middle class or the intellectual elite must commit class suicide, that is both acknowledge and renounce the invasive and paternatistic activities of the dominant class. These educators must strive to develop a coherence between their revolutionary thought and their teaching practice, and to "not separate the act of teaching [from] the act of learning" (Freire, 1978, p. 9). Freire reports that training coordinators to work with, and not for, the oppressed is one of the most difficult aspects of educating the educators.

Although there are no formally acknowledged coordinators within the consciousness raising process, the role of women who gain experience in one group and then help to establish other groups is similar. They introduce the need for commitment to attendance and confidentiality, suggest guidelines for discussion, and a variety of topics or issues to be discussed. After a few sessions, these initiators leave the group to continue on its own.

In many ways, the training of coordinators that Freire acknowledges is so important is also critical to consciousness raising groups. Women with previous experience have learned through trial and error and have been through 'training'. There is also the potential for these women to impose their perspective upon a group, rather than sharing it, thus failing to practice the principle of generating themes from the personal experiences of the participants.

Although consciousness raising groups may not necessarily be leaderless, a closer look at the process within consciousness raising groups reveals that, like the concept of political, the concept of leadership has taken on different meaning (Eastman, 1977). In consciousness raising groups leadership is at times group-centred and at other times shifts from one participant to another. Thus, women experience leadership without the presence of followers. In this way these

groups have encouraged the latent leadership capabilities of women.

The exclusion of males from consciousness raising groups as part of the conscious decision to avoid domination, raises interesting questions when compared to Freire's process. This decision may have arisen out of women's intuitive understanding of how knowledge is constructed. This is supported by such sociological theories as that of Berger and Luckman (1972) who suggest that reality is constructed and sustained primarily through talk. Spender (1985) also considered the muted condition of women as a result of male domination of communication and language. "If men were present . . . their greater rights to discourse, acknowledged by both dominant and muted groups, would . . . have precluded the evolution of a new reality compatible with female experience" (Spender, 1984, p. 132).

If one accepts that men dominate language and communication, their exclusion is understandable within a process which hopes to break such domination and allow for creation of woman-centred knowledge. Is it really possible to commit "class suicide" as Freire suggests, in order for coordinators from the middle class to work with the oppressed? Must men commit "gender suicide" in order to work with women? If class suicide is possible, such that an individual from the dominant class acknowledges and renounces their paternalistic attitudes and invasive practices, can one gender renounce its dominance of another?

What may be more important to consider are the implications of middle class women working with working class women. Is "class suicide" necessary to work with the working class women? Or does the fact that they share some common experiences of oppression based on their gender diminish the conflict which might arise due to class differences? Women's experience in mixed class groups

should be explored to test Freire's notion.

In summary, both of these processes, consciousness raising and conscientization, make use of teachers/coordinators, but the perspective of leadership is different for both. The structure of consciousness raising groups does not support leaders with followers, rather leadership is shared and group-centred which has led to the development of the latent leadership capabilities of the participants.

There is also a difference in the role these teachers play. In Freire's method, the teacher or coordinator initiates the process, directs the learners although allowing them to generate themes and create words, and maintains the role of teacher-learner throughout the literacy training process. Within consciousness raising groups, those women who assist other groups to begin, usually leave the group to operate on its own after a few initial sessions where the guidelines have been introduced. In principle, groups do not identify one particular individual as teacher or coordinator.

#### Phases Within the Process

In both of these practices there is movement from description to analysis. In this transition, the participants experience themselves as both subject and object in relation to their oppressive situations. Within feminist consciousness raising groups, the process begins with **opening up** to develop trust and **sharing** of personal experiences of oppression. This is much like Freire's practice of **co-investigation** of themes by the coordinator working with the learners in a community. In both processes, the learners experience their subjectivity in relation to their oppression.

In consciousness raising, the next phase - **analysing** - begins when the collection of data (personal experiences) has reached a point where common themes begin to emerge. Some authors have referred to this identification of commonalities as encoding women's experience. Freire's method involves the development of slides or drawings from the identification of common themes as a result of the co-investigation. This step - **codification** - is much like that previously described within consciousness raising. Within analysis and codification, the participants now step back from their oppression and begin to understand it in an objective way.

Following analysis, the consciousness raising process moves toward **abstraction**, in which women's oppression is examined in relationship to those structures which support such domination. **Decodification** in Freire's method begins when the learners recognize their situations as problematical and the role that the dominators and their structures play in maintaining that oppression. This process involves abstraction much like the previous phase in consciousness raising.

### Changes in Consciousness

Both Freire and feminists indicate the central role that feminist and critical consciousness play in the movement toward liberation. In a similar way, both refer to the dialectical relationship between consciousness and the historical moment, and between consciousness and praxis. The possibility of the liberation of Brazil's oppressed people emerged from a period of transition from a closed society to an open one. Freire perceives that such a period of transition is directly related to the historical moment in which certain economic, political, and social changes were occurring. Feminists have also recognized that feminist consciousness can only emerge when the partial or total liberation of women is possible, which is directly related to political, economic, and historical factors.

The continual and changing nature of such consciousness also reflects this dialectical relationship. Freire emphasizes that critical consciousness is never a point reached and completed, but rather a continual process. Similarly, feminists point out that consciousness, because of its intricate connection to context, will be altered over time and different for each woman.

Freire has adopted a developmental perspective in which he describes three major states of consciousness: semi-intransitive (magical), transitive (naive), and critical (1973, 1985). The feminist literature frequently contains reference to the process and implications of developing a feminist consciousness. In particular, Bartky's (1977) suggestion of a morphology of feminist consciousness is very similar to Freire's framework.

For Freire, magical consciousness is a consciousness in which there is no consideration of causality, only the view that existence is determined by superior powers. Fatalism is characteristic of this stage and resistance is considered impossible. In Bartky's discussion of feminist consciousness, she describes the pre-feminist consciousness as one where there is perception of women's condition as natural, inevitable, and inescapable. This consciousness is reflected in the arguments based on biological determinism.

Naive consciousness is the beginning recognition of causality, but there is oversimplification of problems and a sense of superiority and control over facts. The beginning awareness of contradictions leads to attempts to investigate causality but with limited vision of the complexity of oppression. This recognition of causality is similar to Bartky's description of the shift from apprehension of women's victimization toward the apprehension of the possibility of equality.

Research on participants in consciousness raising groups validates Freire's notion of naive consciousness (Eastman, 1973; Bailey, 1977; Home, 1978; Kravetz, 1978). Women who enter these groups appear to be past the stage of magical consciousness. This seems logical as women would not consider attending such groups if they viewed women's situations as inevitable and natural. Women who enter these groups, research has found, already have an awareness of women's inequality. If one applies Freire's model, have these women moved beyond magical consciousness because of the level of general public awareness of women's situation?

Freire describes critical consciousness as one in which there is "integration with reality where causality is continually being submitted for analysis" (Freire, 1973, p. 44). Instead of a fragility of argument, such as with naive consciousness, there is empiricism between the causal and circumstantial relationships of facts. The new research which is emerging within feminist analysis is beginning to provide such empiricism which challenges the mythology of male supremacy and female inferiority. Like Freire's critical consciousness, in which reality is continually being submitted to analysis, Bartky refers to the day-to-day experience of feminists who find that there is little in society that is free of the sex-role differentiation.

The notion of praxis is critical to both consciousness raising and conscientization. Feminists recognize that gaining awareness of sexism in society will not alone change such practices. Sarachild (1968, 1973) spoke of the importance of not only seeking the root of the problem but also of pulling it up. Freire frequently refers to the need for action based on awareness and differentiates between blind activism and armchair intellectualism.

However, feminists have taken up the implications of the praxis of feminist consciousness and expanded it more than Freire has. Freire refers to, but does not elaborate on, the risk, pain, and exhilaration as the oppressed move towards liberation. Authors such as Rowbotham (1973), Morgan (1977), Bartky (1973), and Stanley & Wise (1984) provide evidence based on their own experiences of the difficulty of praxis and also of the power that arises from praxis. These authors who discuss praxis have been informed by their own experience and those of other women. It is important to remember that feminists who write about their experiences, concerns, and developing philosophies, is a form of praxis which has been met with resistance and hostility.

Freire's writing style may reflect his perspective as an educator and his intellectual consideration of conscientization. The feminist literature is less abstract and much more accessible than Freire's distanced style. Perhaps this has to do, once again, with many of the authors being participants in these activities. It may also reflect the fact that there is no ownership of the consciousness raising method, no one individual can claim to be its creator. Freire, on the other hand, writes as a "director" of such activities (which he was), rather than as participant. Does he recognize that his style restricts access to such knowledge?

In the foregoing discussion the approaches to consciousness considered by feminists and by Freire have been compared. Some have criticised Freire's utopian view and abstract style. There are strong similarities to his approach in the feminist discussion. As such they validate Freire's approach and can enrich further discussions of the relationship of consciousness to education and liberation. Bartky's tentative morphology paints a more concrete picture of the existential struggles women face as they embrace feminism than does Freire's description of

critical consciousness. This kind of discussion regarding the praxis of a feminist/critical consciousness is an important addition to further understanding of the link between individual and social change.

### Summary

This chapter has presented a juxtaposition and comparison of Freire's literacy method and his notion of conscientization to the feminist practice of consciousness raising. Using particular categories for comparison, similarities and differences were identified regarding the following: The method of determining themes or topics, the style of communication, the perspective of leadership, the phases of the process, and the perspective of changes in consciousness. In the following and final chapter, the interpretation and conclusions of this comparative analysis are presented. The discussion includes implications for practice and research.



## CHAPTER VI - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter presents the conclusions and final stage of the comparative analysis. The interpretations of the comparison should move beyond simply knowing a great deal about different educational practices or their contexts, toward creating new understandings about such practices. This chapter begins with discussion and interpretation of the comparison, followed by implications for practice and research. Concluding remarks relate to the comparative process and insights gained by this author.

### Interpretation of Results

The purpose of this analysis was to increase understanding of the learning practices of social movements through the comparison of two particular educational activities. As a result of this comparison similarities and differences have been identified. The following discussion begins with consideration of the differences and then moves to a discussion of the similarities.

These two learning activities, although very similar, have arisen out of two very different contexts and different experiences and understandings of oppression. Freire's method arose out of the Reform Movement in Brazil which was a revolution against class oppression. Consciousness raising arose out of the Women's Movement which is a revolution against gender-based oppression.

Freire developed his method with consideration of Brazil's long history of exploitation and dependency. His Brazilian origins, Christian commitment, and Marxist philosophy have given shape to his conscientization method. His method cannot be said to be a grass-roots activity in that it was developed by Freire, a well educated member of the middle class. Nevertheless, it reflects the development of a

process that was inductive and contextually grounded.

The techniques peculiar to Freire's method such as his use of coordinators and codification through visual aids are tied to his efforts to develop literacy training. His method is much more structured and reflects his background as educator and his position of being employed by the state. In order to teach the large illiterate population, Freire designed a method which would reach the most people in the least amount of time. The impact and success of his method relates not only to Freire's vision and commitment, but also to the mandate given to him by the newly elected populist government.

When state support was removed after the military coup, Freire's programs were dissolved and he himself was jailed and subsequently exiled. Following this, Freire developed and further refined his ideas as he worked in other countries. It is important to realize that the dissemination and application of his ideas are directly related to the support of the state given to him in Chile, in the United States at Harvard, and in other countries such as Guinea-Bissau where he worked as an educational consultant.

What are the outcomes of Freire's conscientization process? Freire makes no specific reference to evaluation of his process. The military coup in Brazil prevented the fulfillment of his dream of a conscientized and literate population. To really consider this question of results, it would be necessary to follow up programs Freire has initiated such as in Guinea-Bissau and examine other programs that have used his methods. One evident outcome of his work has been the widespread dissemination of his ideas and attempts by many to practice his method. Another outcome is of course the efforts of Freire to rework and to continue to write about his ideas as he comes into contact with those who have utilized his approach.

Consciousness raising is a true grass-roots activity because it emerged from the oppressed population. These activities, however, also developed out of a particular class within this gender-defined population, that is from groups made up of mainly middle class women. The class-based origin of this practice indicates that there were some similarities in the factors which helped to shape each method of conscientization and consciousness raising.

In contrast to Freire's programs which were supported by the state, consciousness raising groups required no support and thus have not suffered from state intervention. The women who initiated the consciousness raising process may share the same class background as Freire, but they avoided structure, leaders, and hierarchies based on their experiences as activists during the sixties. These women were more loosely organized than the older branch of the movement and used different resources to help gather support for their work. Word of mouth, "fringe" documents, and the transference of information by women relocating around the country became the important means of communication which helped the spread of consciousness raising.

There is a different "voice" in Freire's writing compared with the literature on consciousness raising. Freire objectifies the process. He describes the oppressed as "other". The oppressed that Freire wrote about are, for the most part illiterate, and therefore his message is not to them, but to other educators. Feminists write as both subject and object of the consciousness raising process. They write from the position of both participant and teacher in order to share the principles of consciousness raising.

When considering the outcome of consciousness raising, there are difficulties because of its informal nature and because of the problems in finding materials

developed by consciousness raising groups. The exception is Free Space (Allen, 1970) which presents the reflections of women who were engaged in the process for over a year. Their level of analysis and understanding provides powerful validation for the consciousness raising process. The research which has assessed outcomes of consciousness raising refers to changes in participants' attitudes and self esteem, but often asserts that there were no significant behavioural changes or activity of a political nature as a result of participation in consciousness raising. These conclusions must be questioned, with careful attention to the perspective and operationalization of 'political activity'. Consciousness raising, which validated the personal as political, has provided many of the queries which have led to a critical and woman-centred approach to research. The level of awareness in the public regarding the pervasiveness of discriminatory practices based on gender must be attributed in some respects to the outcome of consciousness raising.

The differences between these two practices reflect their different contexts, and point to a connection between particular techniques and the nature of the oppression being fought against. This connection raises further questions about the learning activities of social movements: Are particular structures which include coordinators/teachers and codification required in the fight against class oppression? When the struggle is against sexism, are there techniques peculiar to the learning process such as the exclusion of men and leaderless structures?

#### Similarities

Both of these consciousness raising activities share the assumption that changes in consciousness are critical to achieving the goals of liberation and equality. The identification of similarities also reveals a shared understanding of the dialectical relationship between consciousness and praxis. Their history is

similar as well, in that both were developed as a result of an inductive process where thoughts and ideas grew out of and were constantly being altered by experience.

The following characteristics were found to be common to both consciousness raising and conscientization. As a result of this study, they are suggested as the principles of consciousness raising which can guide the design and selection of techniques, curriculum, and structure and which can guide the consciousness raising process in a variety of contexts. These principles are:

1. That the themes, content, or curriculum are generated from the experiences and day to day reality of the learners, as perceived by the learners.
2. That the communication amongst learners-teachers is dialogical, that is, a reciprocal exchange between equals wherein teacher is learner and learner is teacher.
3. That the process must be collective and move through phases of sharing (co-investigation), analysis (codification), and abstraction (decodification).
4. That the process reflects the dialectical relationship between individual and social change, between consciousness and history, between praxis and thought, and between data and theory.

These principles are familiar ones to adult education. They have been arrived at inductively through this comparison and could be considered as confirmation of the principles of adult learning. Considering that they are the common elements of processes defined as liberating, perhaps the link of adult education to social movements can still be found within the principles of adult learning. Such evidence should prove heartening to those who support the philosophy that adult education as a tool for social change.

### Limitations of Analysis

The comparative method which was used in this analysis points to limitations one must observe when generalizing and applying the results. In order to compare two practices, decisions have to be made regarding the collection of material and categories for comparison. Although the decisions were based upon broad understanding of the purpose of this study and an effort to avoid narrowing the selection of information prematurely, they nonetheless limit the study. Therefore the implications of this analysis are limited to considering consciousness raising activities connected to social movements. The categories selected in this comparison also limit this study to understanding particular aspects of the process.

It must be emphasized that the "field" explored consisted of written library resources which limits the analysis to the information and perspectives provided by the authors of such material. This step is a preliminary one to undertaking a study of ongoing activities. This study is limited as well by the fact that only two practices were compared. A larger, more ambitious analysis of several groups or activities would give rise to more substantiated conclusions.

### Implications for Practice

This comparative analysis has indicated how the learning activities of both consciousness raising and conscientization emerged from particular contexts and how these learning activities both reflect and have helped to develop the ideology and praxis of the social movements from which they emerged. Those who attempt to understand the learning activities of social movements should recognize the importance of the history of the movement and the complex factors which have helped to shape the learning activities. Thus, this study indicates the importance of acquiring a contextual sensitivity when working in or studying the learning

activities connected to social movements. Such a perspective will help to prevent applying such processes as recipes for liberation.

Much discussion has arisen around the notion that adult education should consider its historical connection to social movements and rekindle such partnerships with social movements. Both social movements and adult educators could benefit from sharing their experience and understanding about adult learning. Ideally, such a partnership would be based on mutual respect and dialogue. This author affirms, however, that consciousness raising and conscientization must be recognized as methods of liberating social movements, and should not become methods for adult education to increase participation nor a technique for behavioural change. In its eagerness to "relight the fire", adult education must be cognizant of the danger of domination and invasion into the activities of social movements.

This comparison, by presenting Freire's work in relation to consciousness raising, raises questions about each method, but has also led to validation of each method. This comparison and identification of similarities and suggestion of principles, gives clues as to what Giroux (in Freire, 1985) meant by the "metalanguage" to be found not only in Freire's conscientization process, but also within the consciousness raising process.

Concern over the application of Freire's method to the North American context may indicate the practice of using his method without understanding those elements or principles which may be transplanted to different contexts, not just Latin America. Those who consider his approach as only a technique without first understanding the origins of conscientization, will likely frustrate both themselves and the participants in their programs. Reaching this understanding, however, is

not an easy process as Freire's writing style is often dry, circular, and abstract. Despite Freire's concern about the dangers of armchair intellectualism, his language makes his ideas inaccessible except to those willing to study him at length.

Often educators believe they are unable to utilize Freire's method because of their view of the constraints within which they must operate. The principles suggested as a result of this analysis can assist educators who could use them as signposts and create different methods and techniques within the limits of their work setting. Grid-like application denies the importance of contextual limits and does not encourage creativity or understanding of the basic principles of Freire's method. Recognizing these principles as guidelines allows for creativity on the part of educators who for the most part are always working within boundaries.

These concerns are also relevant to feminists who may be impatient to achieve changes. As was discussed above, applying consciousness raising in a grid-like fashion will likely result in manipulation and domination. Instead, feminists who understand the principles which guide this process can recreate it in different contexts and with consideration of the limitations within each different situation. As feminist perspectives and analysis shift and expand, and as changes in consciousness are continual, feminists may find that these principles offer some stability within such a transforming context.

Earlier in this chapter, questions were raised regarding the connection of these methods to the nature of oppression. This comparison has indicated that both methods have arisen from a middle class perspective. Is the consciousness raising process only effective for middle class women? Future activities that involve a working class population of women may or may not reveal a similar process.



On the one hand, feminists working with such groups or suggesting strategies for working class women should not assume that the consciousness raising process is appropriate. On the other hand, perhaps some of the problems that the movement has faced recently, such as women who resist the notion of feminism and who consciously argue that they are not feminists, reflect the need for the consciousness raising process to continue.

Whatever the process, one principle that seems critical to feminism is going to the women themselves and allowing them to tell their story. This may require different strategies for different contexts. Working class women who consider the Women's Movement as irrelevant to their lives, may be indicating that what they understand and hear about feminism and from feminists has no meaning to their day to day reality. In particular, the Women's Movement has had limited impact on women's economic situation (women continue to earn less than men). The consciousness raising process has indicated the importance of constantly submitting reality for analysis. What does the reality of increasing economic disparity between men and women tell feminists about the causality of such inequality and the strategies needed for change?

Feminists and Freire can learn a great deal from each other. Freire could make his writings more accessible by including more concrete examples that give meaning to his discussions of liberation and consciousness. Freire's perspective of praxis could be enhanced by the experiences and difficulties that women face as they attempt to practice with a feminist consciousness. By studying feminist analysis of consciousness raising Freire could add to his "world" view of conscientization. Freire needs to recognize the sexist nature of his writing and the barriers it creates for many who could learn much from his analysis, but turn away

because of his style.

Feminists could learn from Freire's discussion of the nature of oppression and his "macro" view of changes in consciousness from magical, transitive, to critical. Freire's analysis of cultural invasion could assist feminists in differentiating between superficial transformations 'allowed' by the dominant order and those which lead to true liberation. Perhaps Freire's ideas could help explain the opposition to women's liberation from groups such as REAL Women. Are they a more visible example of the oppressor housed within?

Adult educators can find allies in the Women's Movement. Both groups can benefit greatly by sharing their knowledge and experiences. In many ways the learning activities within the Women's Movement have tested and proven much of what has been defined as "rhetoric" within adult education. There needs to be further collaboration between the practice and research within the Women's Movement and adult education.

#### Implications for Research

This study has indicated the potential of using the comparative method as an approach to exploring the learning activities of social movements or those nonformal activities that seek to challenge the relationship to the dominant order. This approach should be considered as particularly useful for future research. Building on this study, future research could explore other educational activities of social movements to continue this process and to substantiate the conclusions made. A larger, more ambitious comparative analysis of several practices of consciousness raising could lead to the development of a model or theory of consciousness raising.

Future research could examine in more detail only one of the categories or principles suggested, for example the training of coordinators/teachers involved with

consciousness raising activities. Other explorations could focus on the dynamics of leadership to test Freire's notion of "class suicide". Future efforts could also look at the process of generating themes and those environments which inhibit or support a dialogical form of communication.

Other studies could pursue the questions raised regarding the connection between educational techniques and structure, and the nature of oppression (ie. gender, race, class). Does the middle class origin of consciousness raising reveal a middle class bias? Are working class women prevented from participating in similar processes because of economic and cultural barriers? Are there other learning activities which are specific to working class women which lead to changes in consciousness? Are there learning activities which must precede the process of consciousness raising as defined by this study such as those that would develop literacy skills and assertiveness?

Future study of programs which have applied Freire's work could be examined for evidence of the principles suggested in this study. Programs within different cultures and contexts could be compared to ascertain whether these principles reflect a "Western" bias.

Future research agendas could pursue the question of whether consciousness raising has been transformed and relocated into other kinds of activities. Is consciousness raising the "feminist method", with the principles, as outlined in this thesis, guiding the learning activities? Future research could examine the implications of consciousness raising from the perspective of the participants, with attention to the difficulties inherent in the praxis of a new consciousness. Those studies that examine the political impact of consciousness raising, could operationalize political activity based on a feminist view, that is, the

day to day interactions and decisions made by feminists as they encounter a sexist world.

This research process reveals the importance for effective social movements to continually submit their practice for analysis. In the urgency to take action and make decisions, time for thought and reflection seems limited. Understanding the factors which affect both success and failure is important information if liberating social movements are to continue to create viable alternatives to discrimination and inequality. Such analysis allows for visions of the future, not only understanding of causality.

### Concluding Remarks

It must be emphasized that this linear presentation of the steps taken in this analysis is not representative of the actual process. A truer picture would resemble a circular or spiral process rather than a straight line. The comparison also shifts from one level to another and is much like peeling back the layers of an onion. With each inspection, subtler levels of both similarities and differences are revealed. With the identification of a similarity, there was often the simultaneous recognition of differences. The comparative process is difficult and slow with much circling back to redefine what was previously considered in light of new understandings.

The first step in this process was the collection of information on the social movements from which these activities emerged. At this stage comparisons were already being made and suggestions for categories taking shape. As material was discovered about a particular perspective of Brazil's Reform Movement, then this author would attempt to collect similar information on the Women's Movement, and vice versa. The literature was examined many times over as new understandings

were reached and as new themes for comparison emerged. At times it was difficult to separate the act of comparison with the steps of description and juxtaposition.

The notion that there are "steps" in the comparative process gives a false picture of the actual nature of comparison which involves much back and forth and moving between levels of analysis.

The process has been a combination of frustration, revelation, discomfort, and satisfaction. Ultimately, this author has learned not only a great deal about consciousness raising and conscientization, but also an appreciation of the comparative method and its potential for creating new knowledge and theory building for adult education and for feminist studies.

As a result of this study, some questions have been answered regarding the learning activities within social movements. Equally as important, are the questions raised as a result of this study. For this author, the completion on this thesis represents more of a beginning than an end in the search for understanding about learning that leads to individual and social liberation.

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