

## Herzog's text – guided reading and discussion

### 'Between coitus and commodification: young West German women and the impact of the pill'

What does this study map? How does it give you a specific (maybe unexpected) perspective on the so-called sexual revolution? How did you previously think about the sexual revolution? What ideas/images did you hold? What impact did this 'revolution' have? In what way can we speak about *a revolution*? Let's see the meaning of the word:

**A revolution** (from the Latin *revolutio*, "a turn around") is a fundamental change in power or organizational structures that takes place in a relatively short period of time.

In what way can we use it on the events described in Herzog's text?

What **methods** are used to obtain the information present in the text? What sources did the author consult to gain evidence for her claims? Does the nature of evidence vary according to the period in question?

Herzog proposes a **periodization of the change** in sexual/gender regime in West Germany. What were these periods? What are the main factors that characterize them?

In the identified debates on sexuality, who were **the actors**? What was their position?

Which 'voices' were understood as credible in the debate? In other words, whose opinion counted? **The question of expertise**: whose words were trusted as a source of knowledge? How did it change over the time? What were the professions involved in the debate? What academic disciplines were involved?

How was the need for the pill established? Who argued for and who against? What **arguments** did they use? Did the position of various groups change over the time?

What explanation does the text provide for the abrupt increase in the use of the pill? (1961 – the pill was introduced on the European market, 1964 – 2.000 users, 1968 – 1.4 million, 1977 – 3.8 million)

What were the factors that (possibly) influenced the popularization of the pill? Consider the 'sexualization of the public sphere' and the different positions on it? Btw, what is meant by the

'sexualization of the public sphere' (p.270)? Hypersexualization, sexual numbness, 'sex as spectator sport' (p.271) – what arguments were presented under these terms/expressions?

How do you understand the paradox in the heart of **the overtly sexualized advertising**? (p.271) In what way was the imagery of advertising complicit with the 'sexual revolution'? How do people perceive it now? Have we become insensitive/accustomed to the appeal of sexual imagery or is it used because it still works? Is the use of such imagery a testimony to the inherent taboo, of the lack of liberation? What does it actually mean **to be liberated**? From what and by whom and how? Formulate your own questions for the debate...

How did the introduction of the pill – and the surrounding debate – shape **gender relations**? Who was seen as profiting from the pill, whose pleasure mattered? What conflicts emerged and who was involved? Which problems did the pill solve and which not? What **new tensions** were formulated?

The notion of '**backlash**' is mentioned twice in the text. Find it (p.p.263, p.280)! Considering the context of its use, which of the definitions fits the best?

1. A sudden or violent backward whipping motion.
2. An antagonistic reaction to a trend, development, or event.
3. A snarl formed in the part of a fishing line that is wound around the reel.
4. The play resulting from loose connections between gears or other mechanical elements.

Concerning the uses of the term 'backlash', what arguments were presented?

Observe the proposition on p.278 saying that "sex was not a free exchange". In relation to the information provided by the text, how would you argue in support of this claim? Think about a position from which this claim could be attacked as problematic? How would a proponent of a counter-opinion reason to show that this claim is biased?

How did **the sex debates on the Left** lead to women organizing around particular issues?

### **The New Left**

: a political movement originating especially among students in the 1960s, favoring confrontational tactics, often breaking with older leftist ideologies, and concerned especially with antiwar, antinuclear, feminist, and ecological issues .

### **The CR groups**

The definition of consciousness-raising is the process or an activity intended to make people more aware of political, personal or social issues.

[Return to main Consciousness Page](#)

## **How to start your own consciousness-raising group** REPRINTED FROM A LEAFLET DISTRIBUTED BY THE CHICAGO WOMEN'S LIBERATION UNION (1971)

(Editors Note: The CWLU organized many consciousness raising groups around the city.)

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

A consciousness-raising group consists of a small number of women (generally not more than 12) who meet informally once a week at a member's home or women's center. Ask friends to bring friends--it isn't necessary to know everyone. Sisterhood is a warm feeling!

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

The first meeting: each person can talk about why she wants to join Women's Liberation, what she thinks the group will be like, and tells a little bit about her own background and how she came to be at the meeting. This breaks the ice very effectively. Topics: a different one each week or so. They should be both specific and basic. Here is a partial list of topics that other groups have discussed:

why did you marry the man you did? (or date the man you do?)

How do you feel men see you?

How do you feel about housework? What does your husband do around the house?

Do you feel guilty when your house is dirty?

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

What did you want to do in life?

What kept you from doing it?

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

Do you worry about being "truly feminine"?

What does "femininity" mean to you in terms of your own life?

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

Did you ever want to do anything else? What did your parents teach you about sex?

How do you feel about menstruation?

How did you feel when you had your first period?

What was your first sex experience?

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

Do you pretend to have an orgasm?

Have you had an abortion?

How do you feel about being pregnant?

Do you enjoy taking care of your children? All the time?

What hopes do you have for your daughter? For your son? Are these hopes different? If so, why?

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

Do you compete with other women? In what ways?

Are you economically dependent on a man?

How do you relate to women of a different economic status and/or race? What things do you have in common? What things differ?

What do you feel about lesbianism? What do you know about it?

Who was Sojourner Truth? Elizabeth Cady Stanton?

What do we know about our history as women?

What is the basis of love between a woman and a man? Between a woman and a woman? Between parent and child?

You don't have to stick to this list. Other topics will present themselves. At the end of each meeting you can choose the topic for the next week.

After a period of several months, your group might want to begin study or action projects. CWLU has literature available and a special introductory packet that might provide a good basis for discussion.

Your group might want to start its own action project; for example, a group in California joined the picket line of women factory workers who were protesting discriminatory hiring practices, a group in Washington, D.C. held hearings on the pill, several groups began newspapers and magazines. or, you can check to see what on-going projects are happening in the city that you might want to become involved with: learning how to give pregnancy tests, having a study group in the Liberation School for Women, doing abortion counseling, working for childcare, etc. The CWLU office (927-1790) can put you in touch with these

projects.

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