Consciousness raising movements and charismatic Christian worship display an extraordinary degree of rhetorical similarity. This four-part paper outlines the likenesses of the two groups, indicates where they differ, and focuses on the social and political dimensions of consciousness raising. The first section lists the following similarities between the charismatic movement and consciousness raising: use of some of the same specialized words or labels, standardized responses to questions, rationalization of persuasion as good for the target person, concentration on disclosure of feelings, and polarization, which involves constant exposure to group doctrine. The section on the social dimensions of consciousness raising asserts that the process developed as a response to widespread needs for satisfying interpersonal communication and has become the exclusive property of the radicals. This response, according to the final section of the paper, involves confrontation as an extension of communication. The resulting radicalization displays a rhetoric of self-persuasion and a group-centered nature that is characterized by the prevalence of fantasies and myths, frustrated attitudes, and the search for relationships. (MAI)
CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING AND

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AS

SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

by

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM

I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary small group communication processes underlying consciousness raising and the Jesus movement have been studied very little on a scholarly basis. Consciousness raising evidently was neglected completely in speech-communication journals until 1973, when McPherson, and Chesebro et al, each contributed introductory studies. The Jesus movement has been examined by writers in the popular press, but speech-communication scholars have only touched upon significant aspects of the phenomenon in articles devoted to the rhetoric of fundamentalism. These articles tend to examine only the public address and writings of leading religious pundits of the "radical right." Group communication has been avoided by the authors of these studies; likewise slighted has been the more radically religious and less overtly political rhetoric characteristic of current day "charismatics."

Although the main focus of this paper is consciousness raising as a small group technique of the radical revolutionary, reference will also be made in Section II to communication patterns currently prevalent in many charismatic Christian worship groups. Several friends of the author classify themselves as "born again" Christians, and the author has had the opportunity to participate in and observe several small groups composed of these "born again" believers. Some of these group meetings occurred in 1976, concurrently with the consciousness raising research being undertaken for this paper, and the similarity of certain techniques used in small group meetings for these two entirely different constituencies and purposes is noteworthy. It is hoped that an examination of this phenomenon will lend vividness to the introduction of the main topic.

The aim of the current paper is to bring into clearer focus what happens
rhetorically during consciousness raising and what implications these rhetorical nuances have for small group communication within the group and for the social movement of which the consciousness raising participants are a part.

II. CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING AND THE JESUS MOVEMENT--
A COMPARISON OF PHENOMENA

It is remarkable how many specialized words are commonly used by both "born again" Christians and radical revolutionaries. Among the words are "testimony," "sharing," and "liberation." In both movements these words seem to be used because of their positive connotations -- not for purposes of objective description. "Sharing" takes place when group members singularly and consecutively "give testimony." "Giving testimony" evokes images of courtrooms and oaths and thus has a greater connotation of truth than does "rapping," "describing experiences," "addressing the group," or "telling stories," although these latter terms would probably be accurate, fair descriptions of the "testimony" process.

The movement members seem to want the world to think that something more virtuous and incorruptable than "rapping" is taking place--and that it takes place in a context of "sharing," as opposed to one of gaudiness or reluctance or forced, bored attentiveness.

Members of the public sufficiently convinced of the worthiness of either movement may begin thinking and behaving as members behave. If this takes place, "liberation" has occurred (especially for radicals; Christians might also say they have been "set free," or "born again." The word
"persuasion" is seldom used in this context. "Persuade" and "liberate" are each transitive verbs; but, by connotation, persuasion is done to a person, for the benefit of the persuader, while liberation is done for a person, referring (for a Christian) "stumbling blocks," and things which tend to "hold back" the individual, or (for the radical) "resistances" to "consciousness."

"Consciousness" itself seems to be a kind of snare, in part designed to lure the curious from outside the movement. Who, after all, does not want to be conscious? And, being conscious, who would not want to have his/her dull, everyday consciousness raised? This seems preferable to having one's attitude (vis a vis consciousness) changed (vis a vis raised), yet the latter seems to be a legitimate, if partial, view of what happens in a consciousness raising session.

Just as the radicals might offer consciousness raising and end up attracting people looking for Transcendental Meditation, it seems that Christians also set snares, perhaps the most deceptive of which is the sign saying "Coffee House." The "House of Hope" in Elgin, Illinois, is such a "coffee house," but it has little connection with the usual entertainment, informal conversation, refreshments, chess games, etc. one expects to find at a coffee house. Instead, it is a place where Christians gather to worship, "share," "give testimony," speak in tongues, and "liberate" those who wander looking for a different kind of coffee house. After the potential convert's attention has been attracted, objections to the group's doctrine invariably arise in the convert's mind. When these objections are voiced, the group member, having anticipated them, responds with a prepared, formulaic line
of argument. This is especially true in Christian groups, where, within any single group, and, increasingly, between groups of the "born again" movement, responses are almost as standardized as are sales personnel's answers to objections to closing a sale. The Christian's goal is not profit, but conversion.

There is a common, if not universal, tendency in interpersonal and small group communication for a persuader to rationalize the act of persuasion as being for the benefit of the target person(s). Sales personnel are trained in such rationalization. Christian doctrine similarly holds that people want order, "fellowship," and spiritual uplifting, and therefore must want (if subconsciously) to "accept Christ as their Saviour." Finally, who would not feel at least slightly self-righteous offering Eternal Life as a feature-benefit?

The consciousness raising and Christian movements have more in common than labels and "snares." The communication which takes place in consciousness raising invites comparison with that which takes place in the charismatic Christians' "sharing."

The most obvious similarity, mentioned earlier, is the one-to-many speaker-to-audience situation which exists for part of a typical meeting and to which various (or all) participants are, in turn, subjected.

There is also common ground in the content itself of the small group communication of the two movements. Chesbro et al. point out the frequent use of fantasy themes in the small group communication of consciousness raising groups. This tendency also exists in Christian "sharing."

In consciousness raising groups, participants are expected to communicate
fantasies and to disclose the feelings elicited (in the communicator) by the fantasies. On the other hand, many Christians hold that "feelings are deceptive," temporary, and unimportant compared to God's Plan and Eternal Life. Nevertheless, Christian testimonies are, typically, "success stories," which recount how religious conversion has turned negative feelings into positive ones. The purpose of communicating feelings at all appears to be to reaffirm what is already "known." Hence, the primary emphasis is on positive feelings which generally have taken place recently in the person's life. Very seldom, however, is there communication about "here and now" feelings.

Consciousness raising differs in that participants encourage each other to explore these "here and now" feelings and to generate from fantasies the feelings of greatest importance to the individual and of greatest relevance to the group. These feelings are most often negative. If participants find they have problems and feelings in common; and if this commonality fosters a sense of community and solidarity among participants; and if participants conclude from this commonality of problems that the problems transcend personal boundaries and are political in origin--then the meeting(s) is(are) judged successful.

Thus, the purpose of the "sharing," in consciousness raising and Christian testimony alike, is to encourage fresh realizations or reinforcements of earlier realizations. These realizations are political in the case of consciousness raising, and religious in the case of Christian "sharing."

A Christian's realization typically includes a buttressed appreciation of the need for "fellowship" with other believers. In their attempts to eliminate perceived winning from their behaviors, "born again" Christians
often voice the belief that they "can't do it on (their) own." This refers most often to the need for help from God. However, it can also refer to the need for fellowship, which is often expressly stated in connection with the need for help. Group members come to perceive each other as "brothers and sisters." Outsiders are normally denied this appellation.

Of course, radical revolutionaries also regard each other as "brothers and sisters," and much of the radical's small group communication is concerned with maintaining "solidarity," if not "fellowship." Furthermore, solidarity is strengthened by the rhetorical technique of polarization. In addition to documentation by Bowers and Ochs, evidence of the radicals' use of polarization, especially relevant to consciousness raising, exists in radical literature's references to "false" and "correct" consciousness. Moreover, "resistances to consciousness" can justifiably be taken to mean "resistances to correct consciousness." Consciousness then becomes an all-or-nothing affair.

Christians' use of polarization is frequently much more intense. True Christianity is often seen as a "straight and narrow path," and it is often said by some Christians that there is but "one way." A decal reads, "Jesus--the real thing" (in Coca Cola-style lettering); The Living Bible is subtitled The Way; a Christian declares that, "you are either for or against the Lord;" one Christian group in Elgin, Illinois, equates Tarot, astrology, ESP, Transcendental Meditation, numerology, scientology, parapsychology, Mormonism, Unitarianism, and Buddhism with Devil-worship; and Hal Lindsey, a best-selling "born again" author, sees Satan behind the works of Descartes, Kant, Darwin, Marx, Hegel, Freud, Kierkegaard, and other prominent thinkers. In such a
belief system, every dissent offered against Christian doctrine can be explained away as Satan's work. This is forceful persuasion, especially when used, for instance, on a semi-devout Christian, who may start to believe that (s)he has unwittingly been on the wrong side of the "for/against" dipole.

McPherson notes that frequent or constant exposure to group doctrine and peer reinforcement promotes self-persuasion. While her observation refers specifically to consciousness raising, it is validly applicable to Christian sharing as well.

There are, of course, significant difference between the consciousness raising group and the Christian worship group. The differences are perhaps as instructive as the similarities considered thus far.

Because Christians consider the Lord all-powerful, they impute to Him ultimate credit for all constructive change, including change within an individual ("the Lord's really done a work in me" --a further denial of persuasion). This sometimes leads a Christian to place upon Him all responsibility for making such changes. In such a situation, the only change the individual must initiate is to "accept Jesus Christ into (his/her) life." Commitment to this idea brings perceived moral sufficiency to the Christian. This contrasts with the existential philosophy of Chesebro's typical radical, who insists that commitment to an idea is morally worthless without a commitment to action. The radical, perceiving a political dimension in most human problems, attacks the structure of Establishment-controlled political systems and institutions. The Christian described above argues that, because people created the system the radical attacks, human nature is the root of society's problems, and the solution
lies in changing people. The Christian denies responsibility for and capability of solving social problems by direct action.

The foregoing observations aid in the development of a hypothetical framework for analyzing some of the communication which occurs in Christian and consciousness raising groups. With the Christian emphasis on changing people, "setting them free," group fellowship, self-persuasion, and the coffee house snare comes communication designed to, among other things, prompt the outsider to wonder, "If everyone else is happy, why am I not? There must be something wrong with me." Such communication takes the following forms: testimonials with which the outsider might identify; prayers on behalf of those not knowing the alleged joy of accepting the group's doctrine; interpersonal "jawboning" and appeals to join the happy body; and omni-present smiles. Andrews would probably see coercion at work here, where the for/against the Lord dipole takes on the added dimension of happiness/unhappiness. The outsider is pressured to make a continuous either/or choice, and the price of choosing not to accept the beliefs of the group is intellectual isolation. The belief of the group in this case is "the Word," and strict adherence to it is demanded. Democracy is not practiced at meetings; personal autonomy is not an aim of the group; and differences in beliefs or interpretations are discouraged, even on such currently controversial notions as, "a woman's place is in the home." The effect of all this on communication within the group is most profound: idea redundancy is prevalent; the meetings, therefore, acquire sameness. Members repeat each other; debate tends not to occur; the leader (minister) communicates more than other members, and to a large extent determines the order, duration, and subject of formal communication by other
members; this leader is often addressed as and spoken of only as "Pastor," as though group members each had a third parent.

The consciousness raising group uses testimonials, solidarity, and polarization to prompt insiders and outsiders alike to wonder (more accurately, demand), "If everyone else is happy, why are we (women, gays, students, etc.) not? We must be getting a bad deal from the system." A form of democracy is commonly practiced, whereby each participant is allowed an equal share of time to speak; personal autonomy is a stated goal of the consciousness raising process; and disagreement and debate are encouraged (the Weather underground even engaged in frequent self-criticism sessions). Communication tends to range over a wide variety of subjects. The leader, if there is one, typically has relatively little power or influence greater than that of other members.

III. SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

Singular consideration will now be given to consciousness raising as a small group technique of the radical revolutionary. Previous research on the subject has been concerned with model development and with the functions of consciousness raising. Chesebro et al postulate four stages in consciousness raising. McPherson has written a useful, but brief, description of three functions of consciousness raising as used by the Women's Liberation Front. Radicals themselves have provided anecdotal, critical, and instructional writings on consciousness raising. Finally, all literature devoted specifically to consciousness raising must be considered against a
background of a large body of literature dealing with small group communication, interpersonal communication, and the rhetoric of protest. The remainder of this paper will consist of an attempt to draw from the diverse literature on the subject a meaningful gestalt of consciousness raising.

Chesebro et al offer an acceptable definition of consciousness raising—"a personal, face-to-face interaction which appears to create new psychological orientations for those involved in the process." Who uses it? Certainly, women, gays, and students do. Chesebro et al also list age, wealth, power, and prestige as sociocultural characteristics which may bind a minority together in a consciousness raising group. Irrespective of these parameters, consciousness raising is seen as almost exclusively the property of radicals. It was first practiced in 1966, one year after Skolnick contends American leftists had been radicalized to the point of what Bowers and Ochs call lateral deviance. Consciousness raising quite probably grew from SDS's dispatch of traveling agents to increase student syndicalism and class-consciousness. Today, consciousness raising is definitely a tool of lateral deviance, as evinced by the fact that failure to accept the necessity of revolution is seen as "resistance to consciousness."

Moreover, humanistic compassion, community identity, and participatory democracy are important features of consciousness raising, as they are of radical revolutionary philosophy.

Mechanically speaking, consciousness raising is similar to other group processes—group size, phases, and scheduling policies seldom vary from the ordinary. One reason given for the choice of consciousness raising as a method of promoting radicalism is that consciousness raising, with its cell
system, reaches large numbers of people in small groups all over the country. While this is true, it neglects what must be considered the main strength and most important distinction of consciousness raising—the heightened involvement demanded by it of participants.

Lateral deviance is considered "cool" in the McLuhanistic sense, because it often embraces abstruse ideology and ambiguous regard for, as vis-a-vis followers, and, in its sharing and realization, emotion vis-a-vis reason. This ambiguous stance, together with the ritual aspects of the typical agenda, forces involvement in a collective fantasy or myth.

Analysis of small group techniques used by radicals during the Columbia University disturbances of 1967-68 indicated inherent instability in small groups held together by collective myths; however, this problem has apparently been accepted and at least partially solved. Indeed, Allen sees great importance in her group's vision of "what we could be if freed of social oppression." This vision is simultaneously a collective myth, a fantasy theme, and a group task. Obviously such a vision, if shared and sufficiently vivid, could by itself evoke considerable involvement from group members.

Widespread contemporary emphasis on collectivity and participation are seen by Corbett as verification of McLuhan's contention that American society has become retribalized. Certainly a tribal consciousness is manifest in the radicals' insistence on naming humans, not merely institutions, as enemies. By identifying heretofore anonymous humans, the dispute is made a tribal one, and interpersonal communication becomes a factor to be considered.

Consciousness raising recognizes the importance of interpersonal competence. It includes among its goals increased personal autonomy,
Increased interpersonal trust and respect, and increased self-respect, all standard prerequisites for effective interpersonal communication. Furthermore, self-disclosure, catharsis, and empathic listening are all standard operating procedure at consciousness raising sessions. Success in these endeavors causes and is caused by the high level of member involvement in the process. Intellectual analysis is discouraged by experienced members, especially in the early phases of consciousness raising, so that all members may emote fully. "Our method is not abstract," says Susan.

Successful consciousness raising brings to participants many emotional benefits, not the least of which is a stroked ego made more confident by thorough castigation of an enemy. Gregg describes the workings of this process in confrontational situations and at Women's Liberation meetings; it seems reasonable to assume that similar reinforcement occurs in the polarized atmosphere of consciousness raising. Positive emotional experiences, together with the realizations of raised consciousness, give rise to a favorable, revised self-definition by members of the oppressed group.

In redefining themselves, group members also redefine their problems as political, instead of personal, in origin. Although consciousness raising has therapeutic characteristics, the political nature of the changed behavior resulting from raised consciousness makes this particular group process, in reality, anti-therapy. That is, without denying problems and unhappiness, consciousness raising nonetheless denies the need for therapy and permits the group member to say, "there is nothing wrong with me." It shifts blame from the individual to the system, following the maxim, "Don't blame the oppressed." Sensitivity training is contrasted with consciousness raising by Chesebro
et al, who note that the former builds "individual identities for social interactions," and the latter "group identities for political interactions." This, however, is an oversimplification, because bolstering egos, although not the end of consciousness raising, is definitely a commonly used means. It, therefore, seems fair to say that consciousness raising as a small group process is a mixture of sensitivity training (or, perhaps more accurately, encounter) and problem solving.

Before going on to consider the political aspects of consciousness raising in more detail, it seems appropriate to ponder briefly the significance of the more purely phatic characteristics described above. First, it is worth noting that the small group is not meant to be an alternate family. Such an arrangement makes for too much interpersonal involvement, with destructive consequences. But perhaps one thing the present phenomenon can teach us is that large numbers of our people are starved for real interpersonal communication. As Barnlund and Haiman see it, real interpersonal communication "presumes the possibility of mutual influence." The people who practice consciousness raising typically lack power to influence the most significant other people in their lives, at least as they perceive the situation (consider, for example, the power status of women). They experience extreme frustration at not being able to communicate, and frequently assume that, for some reason, it is their own fault. This further erodes their self-confidence, and, therefore, their ability to communicate, and, therefore, their power to influence. The cycle continues. Thwarted at every turn, the desperate people seek opportunities to communicate in therapy, consciousness raising, or Christian worship settings. According to Barnlund and Haiman's definition, it would seem that greater possibilities for mutual influence, and, therefore, for
communication (within the group) exist in consciousness raising than in therapy or worship. Beyond that, consciousness raising is one way an oppressed person or minority works to establish conditions perceived as necessary for "real interpersonal communication."

IV. POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

Radicals have often used confrontation as a tactic when they have worked to "establish conditions" discussed in the last paragraph of Section III. Bailey sees confrontation as an extension of communication. Chesebro et al. see consciousness raising as a kind of extension of confrontation. Scott and Smith's descriptions of the attitudes forced by radicals before engaging in "confrontation as a totalistic strategy" ("We are already dead... We can be reborn... We have the stomach for the fight; you don't... We are united and understand.") could as easily describe the consciousness to which members are typically raised in consciousness raising small group sessions.

Yet, there is a sense in which consciousness raising is "reverse confrontation." Bell argued that the radicals of the Sixties plunged head-first into radicalism by first breaking major taboos and only then formulating justifications for their acts. Contrary to traditional patterns, behavior change preceded attitude change. But the rhetoric of protest contains heavy doses of self-persuasion, and certainly this self-persuasion is concentrated in consciousness raising more highly than anywhere else. Thus, it appears that attitude change may come first after all, at least in the mid-Seventies. Published consciousness raising formulas leave very little room in their
agendas for planning or prosecuting confrontations, demonstrations, or other ostentatious political activities. It may be that consciousness raising's association with flashy street politics was just a peculiarity of the Sixties; it may be that it never existed at all, but that some have assumed an association because of a morbid fascination with violence, or because for a while it was a fashionable assumption, or because of Sixties nostalgia, or for some other inadequate reason; in any case, there no longer seems to be any such association.

If the political purpose of consciousness raising is not necessarily to turn out urban guerrillas, the purpose is still one of radicalization. This is semi-euphemistically called an educational function. The education euphemism dates back at least as far as the teach-ins of the Sixties, which also were associated with "creating consciousness" by Tom Hayden. The process is actually only partially one of education. Groups often devote months to reading and discussion, but it is done for the purpose of becoming conversant with radical theory. Some groups carry this a step further and develop their own ideology and vision. Even groups who don't become this serious often get around to "finding relationships where none were visible before," which amounts to a development of class-consciousness and solidarity. Mark Rudd, in 1967, defined radicalization as a similar finding of relationships.

Several factors operate simultaneously to make consciousness raising a perfect setting in which radicalization could occur. In the first place, since emphasis is placed on participation, discussion, and democracy, most decisions are likely to be "group-centered," and, therefore, riskier. Fantasies and
myths are powerful attitude changing tools, especially when used skillfully by leaders or respected figures; moreover, myths and fantasies, as was explained in Sections II and III, are ever-present in consciousness raising. Also carrying implications for the radicalization process are research findings indicating that, of all people tested, people with attitudes of political incapability (cf. lack of power to influence) or political discontentment tend to see greatest legitimacy in social protest.

Thus, the group-centered nature of consciousness raising, the prevalence of fantasies and myths, and the frustrated attitudes brought by members to meetings all tend to encourage radicalization. So, of course, does the search for relationships. The relationships sought are patterns of oppression, the "inherent contradictions of essential inhumanity" which, when present within establishment values, cause Klumpp's "polar-rejective identification" to become likely. The contradictions and inhumanity, when bemoaned in "testimony," are likely to cause rejection of establishment value: and identification with radical values, completing the radicalization process.

Perhaps the logic of the process makes it seem obvious; nevertheless, a theoretical explanation still adds credence to the notion that what is described above is what actually takes place in consciousness raising.

The main political function of consciousness raising is thus seen to be radicalization, whether for the sake of inciting confrontations or building theory.
V. CONCLUSION

In this study it was argued that consciousness raising and charismatic Christian worship have an extraordinary degree of rhetorical similarity. Further research and debate are indicated to determine if this is a valid contention. If it is, the question then becomes why this is so; it also then becomes a matter of interest to determine how generalizable the parallel between revolutionary and religious rhetoric is, especially in the contexts of small group and mass communication.

Section III suggested that consciousness raising's main strength is the involvement it demands of participants and that consciousness raising has developed as a response to widespread starvation for satisfying interpersonal communication. This response, as seen in the fourth section, has been one of radicalization, which adds a new wrinkle to a question of fundamental importance and ongoing controversy for communication scholars and all people: how much good can we do by educating, persuading, and giving therapy to people—and how much can only be done by changing the environment in which people live?
FOOTNOTES


7. Pamela Allen, Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in


10. See Bruce Larson, Setting Men Free (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967).


14. Ibid.

15. See Peslikis, p. 233.


18. friends in oral communication to author, 1976.

19. Ibid.

20. Chesebro et al., p. 140.


25. Ibid.

26. Susán, p. 239.


28. Ibid.


32. friend in oral communication to author, 1976.


34. McPherson, p. 33.
35. friend in oral communication to author, 1976.

36. Ibid.


42. Chesebro et al., op. cit., passim.

43. McPherson, p. 34.

44. Chesebro et al., p. 136.

45. Ibid.


47. Bowers and Ochs, p. 8. Also see Tom Hayden, "Two, Three, Many

48. Skolnick, p. 97.


50. See James W. Chesebro, "Cultures in Conflict--A Generic and

51. See Robert F. Bales and Fred L. Strodtbeck, "Phases in Group
485-95; Allen, pp. 23-31; A Gay Male Group, pp. 296-300; and Susan, pp.
239-40.

52. See Carol Williams Payne, "Consciousness Raising: A Dead End?"
in Notes From the Third Year, p. 100.

53. Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man

54. See Barbara G. Myerhoff, "The Revolution as a Trip: Symbol and


63. McPherson, p. 34.

64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.


68. Susan, p. 238.


70. See McPherson, p. 34; and A Gay Male Group, p. 296.

71. Gardner, p. 231.

72. Chesebro et al., p. 137f.


74. See Stern.


76. It is interesting to speculate as to whether Barnlund and Haiman's
"real interpersonal communication" can or does occur between "born again" Christians and non-believers. If standardized response to objection increases to some degree the Christian's power to influence, it also might limit influenceability, precluding mutuality.


78. Chesebro et al., p. 146.


81. Gregg, p. 74.

82. McPherson, pp. 33, 34.


84. McPherson, p. 34.

86. Susan, p. 240. This happens partially as a result of self-disclosure. See McPherson, p. 34.

87. See Peslikis, pp. 233, 234; and A Gay Male Group, p. 295.


90. See Bormann, p. 397.


93. Klumpp, p. 156.

94. Ibid.

95. See Chesebro et al., pp. 142-43.

96. See Klumpp, p. 146.