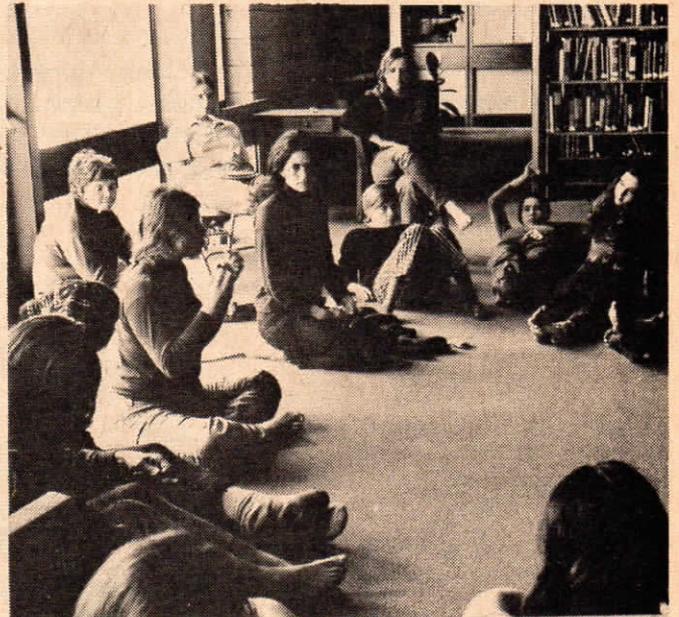


Course Introduction

One year ago, a group of us who were then in women's liberation (now most of us consider ourselves members of Bread and Roses) got together to work on a laywoman's course on health, women and our bodies. The impetus for this course grew out of a workshop on "women and their bodies" at a women's conference at Emmanuel College in Boston, May 1969. After that, several of us developed a questionnaire about women's feelings about their bodies and their relationship to doctors. We discovered there were no "good" doctors and we had to learn for ourselves. We talked about our own experiences and we shared our own knowledge. We went to books and to medically trained people for more information. We decided on the topics collectively. (Originally, they included: Patient as Victim; Sexuality; Anatomy; Birth Control; Abortion; Pregnancy; Prepared Childbirth; Postpartum and Childcare; Medical Institutions; Medical Laws; and Organizing for Change.) We picked the one or ones we wanted to do and worked individually and in groups to write the papers. The process that developed in the group became as important as the material we were learning. For the first time, we were doing research and writing papers that were about us and for us. We were excited and our excitement was powerful. We wanted to share both the excitement and the material we were learning with our sisters. We saw ourselves differently and our lives began to change.

As we worked, we met weekly to discuss what we were learning about ourselves, our bodies, health and women. We presented each topic to the group, gave support and helpful criticisms to each other and rewrote the papers. By the fall, we were ready to share our collective knowledge with other sisters. Excited and nervous (we were just women; what authority did we have in matters of medicine and health?), we offered a course to sisters in women's liberation. Singly and in groups, we presented the topics and discussed the material; sometimes in one large group, often in smaller groups. Sisters added their experiences, questions, fears, feelings, excitement. It was dynamic! We all learned together.

One original version of the course was that we as a group would give the course to a group of women who could then go out and give it to other women. To some extent, that is what happened. After the first time around, those of us who had worked out the course originally, plus women who had taken the course, got together in an enlarged group to rewrite the papers so they could be printed and shared, not only with women in Boston, but with women across the country. Other women wanted to learn, other women's health groups wanted to compare and combine our work and theirs.



So after a year and much enthusiasm and hard individual and collective thinking and working, we're publishing these papers. They are not final. They are not static. They are meant to be used by our sisters to increase consciousness about ourselves as women, to build our movement, to begin to struggle collectively for adequate health care, and in many other ways they can be useful to you. One suggestion to those of you who will use the papers to teach others: the papers in and of themselves are not very important. They should be viewed as a tool which stimulates discussion and action, which allows for new ideas and for change. Often, our best presentations of the course were done by a group of women (we could see a collective at work – in harmony, sharing, arguing, disagreeing) with questions throughout, and then splitting the larger group into smaller groups to continue talking about whatever part of the topic that was especially relevant to the women in that group. It was more important that

we talked about our experiences, were challenged by others' experiences (often we came from very different situations), raised our questions, expressed our feelings, were challenged to act, than that we learned any specific body of material.

It was exciting to learn new facts about our bodies, but it was even more exciting to talk about how we felt about our bodies, how we felt about ourselves, how we could become more autonomous human beings, how we could act together on our collective knowledge to change the health care system for women and for all people. We hope this will be true for you, too.

This course should grow and include other topics, such as menopause, divorce, child care, strengthening our bodies (diet, exercise, karate, etc.) – topics important to the group of women giving and taking the course. The material has been and should be used in ways other than a course. A course is only one way of spreading the word.

We want all your ideas, comments, suggestions, criticisms, etc.

Power to our sisters!!

Nancy Hawley, Wilma Diskin, Jane Pincus, Abby Schwarz, Esther Rome, Betsy Sable, Paula Doress, Jane de Long, Ginger Goldner, Nancy London, Barbara Perkins, Ruth Bell, Wendy Sanford, Pam Berger, Wendy Martz, Lucy Candib, Joan Ditzion, Carol Driscoll, Nancy Mann, Hester Butterfield, Marilyn Slotkin, Linda Borenstein, Martha Reudi, and all the other women who took the course and read the papers.

