

SAMPLE TALK ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND
THE FREE PARA-MEDICAL CENTER

Women's Liberation is a movement of people coming together out of a need to learn what it means to be human, to understand what it means for forces around us to keep us from grasping that humanity, and to act together creatively out of a sense of what it means to be free. It often begins with sharing how we can be ourselves and moves ahead with ideas of what we want to be.

To give you just one example of the oppression of women, I'll quote you some figures put out by the United States Department of Labor about women at work. In 1964 full-time men workers with only 4 years of high school education earned \$700 more than full-time women workers with 5 years or more of college. White women workers earned less in 1965 than Black men, and of course Black women got more than \$1,000 a year less than white women. White men earned \$2,700 more a year than white women. In 1966 women working full-time earned only 58% of men's incomes. The income gap exists in all fields, with women professionals earning 64% of men's incomes and women factory workers earning 58% of men's wages. Even in fields dominated by women, they earn much less than men. Women clerical workers get 66% of men's pay, and women sales workers get only 40% of men's incomes.

Perhaps Women's Liberation is best summed up in this anonymous poem.

Our history has been stolen from us.
Our heroes died in childbirth,
From peritonitis,
Of overwork,
Of oppression,
Of bottled-up anger.
Our geniuses were never taught to read and write.
We must invent a past adequate to our ambitions.
We must create a future adequate to our needs.

The Chicago Women's Liberation Union was formed last fall when the different existing groups came together at a week-end conference. Now there are Women's Liberation discussion and study groups at almost all Chicago area colleges and in many high schools. There are also several different groups meeting at the Northside and Southside Centers. These two centers serve as places for help in a crisis at any time of the day or night, as stations in the very successful abortion counselling and referral service, as educational centers with literature, and as bases for women organizing to seize control over all aspects of our own lives.

The Women's Liberation Union is made up of chapters, that is any group of five or more women, based on city areas or similar work. There are also at-large members who are not part of a chapter. There are weekly or biweekly chapter meetings, and once a month we have a city-wide meeting to which everyone interested in Women's Liberation is invited. Each chapter decides what it wants to focus and work on as a group. There are also city-wide total union activities to which all the chapters relate. The free para-medical center for women and children is an example. The Chicago Women's Liberation Union believes that no one will be free unless women are free, and conversely women won't be free until all people are free. Therefore, we join in the liberation struggles of others, such as Blacks, Latins, and the Third World countries.

The chapters focus on three things; friendship and celebration, education in awareness and factual knowledge, and action organizing to implement our ideas. We believe it is very important that a true sisterhood develops out of understanding each other and relating to one another. Married women's groups discuss their relationship to their families and each other and try to deal with the problems they

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face together and find solutions. It may be a need for day care facilities for working mothers or making household responsibilities a more cooperative thing or just encouragement of one's own talents and abilities. Other women, secretaries, students, teachers, and other workers deal with their specific aspects of being a woman.

The emphasis of the Women's Liberation Union is positive action to improve our own lives and those of all women and all people. There are groups working on child-care programs, self-defense classes in karate, WITCH, which publicizes and educates through street theatre, and the medical task force, which is working to establish a free para-medical center for women and children on the near Southwest Side.

The Women's Union chose the Southwest Side for the clinic in order to reach out to our sisters in working families from all ethnic and racial backgrounds. We will offer medical and health educational services to women and children in a working community. The women in the community will decide which services they want and will hopefully work in the center and play a major role in directing it. The para-medical center will give the Women's Union members, who are mainly college-educated whites, an opportunity to get together with our white, Latin, and Black sisters from working backgrounds to attack and solve some of our common problems as women. Each group will be able to learn from the other about the different good and bad conditions they live under. We will work on creating a united strategy for improving these conditions.

The specific area that the para-medical center hopes to serve is approximately from the railroad tracks (400 west) to Western Ave. (2400 west) and from 43rd. to 59th Streets. We plan to locate the clinic between Halsted Street and Ashland Ave. and around 55th Street because this is the area where the different racial and ethnic groups already mix readily.

We women need a free clinic of our own because we make 25% more doctor's visits than men and more than twice as many with our children. Women are hospitalized much more often, too. Doctors often assume that women are incapable of understanding complex medical explanations, so they don't give us any explanation at all many times. Women are also assumed to be emotional and "difficult". This can lead to our being classified as neurotic well before physical illness is ruled out. The medical profession's lack of concern for women is amply shown in the current scandal over the inadequate testing of birth control pills, which have been proven to have dangerous side effects.

The United States is the richest nation in the world, and yet we rank #17 in infant mortality rate, with a rate almost twice that of the first-ranked country. Taiwan (Nationalist China) has a lower infant mortality rate than the U.S. The infant mortality rate in Black, Latin, Indian, and poorer white communities is often twice as high as in middle- and upper-class white areas. Last year The Sun Times reported that Cook County had the highest infant mortality rate in the country.

The American medical care system is in crisis, with the cost of hospitalization higher than even most middle-class families can afford, and the growing shortage of doctors. Because of the American Medical Association's limit of medical school students this terrible shortage exists, even though the United States takes desperately needed doctors from most of the underdeveloped countries of the world. There is an estimated shortage of 7,000 doctors currently in Illinois alone.

Fewer doctors means higher salaries for each one, and Chicago doctors are among the highest paid in the country. The average Chicago doctor makes \$5,000 more each year than the average New York doctor, and the cost of living is higher in New York. Chicago gynecologists and obstetricians, doctors specializing in the care of women,

had a median salary of \$42,630 after expenses. This is the highest in the nation. Pediatricians in Chicago are also the highest paid in the U.S. More than half of them made \$36,210 after expenses. This is more than \$3,000 above the national average. It is not accidental that the area with the highest infant mortality rate in the United States also has the highest salaries for doctors specializing in the care of women and children. The more a doctor charges, the fewer people can afford his services.

The Women's Liberation para-medical center will concentrate on education and preventive care. This is why we call it para-medical rather than medical. We will provide good humane treatment of the sick in as far as we are able to recruit physicians to serve in the center. We emphasize community education in health and will offer courses in basic nursing, women's and children's nutrition on a low budget, preparation for childbirth (various ways to relieve pain, with or without drugs), female physiology, childcare, and sex education for teen-agers. The teachers will be nurses and other trained personnel. Hopefully a gynecologist-obstetrician and a pediatrician will be present on one week-day afternoon or evening-and a week-end afternoon to examine people and dispense medicine at cost or free. We will offer prenatal and postnatal care, and pregnancy, VD, and pap smear tests and analyses. We will try to supply any other services that community women want. Hopefully later women from the community will be staffing the center as well as attending the classes and using its services. Xindividualized counselling on birth control and pregnancy,

The Women's Liberation free para-medical center is cooperating with the People's Health Coalition made up of the other ten or so free community medical centers in Chicago. All these groups are receiving medical personnel and aid from the Medical Committee for Human Rights and the Student Health Organization, and we expect to get this help, too. Family Planning Services have agreed to supply us with films and other teaching aids on human reproduction. We are discussing referrals with the planned Benito Juarez Medical Center at 18th and Racine. We hope to refer our patients with more general medical complaints (and men) to them, and in return we will take their patients with obstetrical and gynecological problems. The Southwest YWCA is supporting the Women's Liberation para-medical center, and the Puerto Rican Union has indicated interest in working with us.

SOME QUESTIONS PEOPLE MAY ASK
try to answer them yourself, then we'll discuss the answers

1. Who is the staff, where do they come from, and what experience have they had?
2. What support of the churches in the neighborhood do you have, and do you have priest counsellors?
3. Where is the money for this clinic coming from?
4. What kind of arrangements can you make for women to have their babies? Does your clinic have connections with hospitals for delivery?