

OLOC Confronting Sexism Series May 16, 2023 Highlight Notes

An Anatomy of Institutions and their Impact on Girls and Women: Families and Childhood

Rena Grasso: The second wave of feminism – reconstruction of knowledge, changed the world. Then the backlash – the fate of the second wave of feminism which revolutionized the institutions of education and family; challenged sociology of the family. In the 1970s, academia defined family through male eyes, male values and women were in the shadows, women were invisible. Marxist, leftist backgrounds regarding feminism. History was determined with regards to: Modes of production: the making of things for daily living. Modes of reproduction: institute of misogyny; women were reduced to the role of breeders and objects of male lust.

The second wave of feminism challenged the word “work”; women in the home did not “work”, there were no wages for housework; capitalism depends on the unpaid labor of women.

1. Appreciate the second wave of feminism – the personal is political. Family is not a refuge; the “personal” family relationship is a political institution; how did it work to affect us; the whole issue of the family role as a sex role – prepare children to prepare them to a in a society with sex roles/gender construction; female ideas, value, etc. is geared towards femininity and male’s is about power, virility, domination.
2. Roots of social hierarchy – male/female ingrained in our minds; radical feminists know the primary root of oppression is sexism, social hierarchy around sex.
3. Female comes with such hierarchy – ranked lower than men, linked to marriage, fathers, sons. The role of sex is shaped in the family; for women when it goes wrong like incest, etc. it damages part of our consciousness.

Sheila Rowbothan quote: “Female revolutionary consciousness comes from the darkness of our unremembered childhood. Only here does the extent of our colonization become really evident.”

This insight expresses feminism's unique and revolutionary point that examining how oppression shapes consciousness and that liberating ourselves from some of its negatives (we are inferior, second best, male identification) must be an essential activity - as Consciousness Raising powerfully demonstrates. This is the crucial new direction that radical feminism adds to marxist materialism, an addition that is not simply additive, but transformative.

How do you think your family prepared you for working within the patriarchy?

Comments/Statements:

- My parents never stopped my two brothers when they would barge open the bathroom door when she and her sisters would be in there – has struggled with a sense of self-worth.
- She was the second daughter, was supposed to be a boy... father treated her as a son with chores, tools, fixing things, impacted self-image.
- When graduated from high school, her grandfather took her aside and said that she needed to go to school to be a teacher so when you get married, you have something to fall back on and support yourself. Did that...
- Treated equally in her family – oldest son got a car at 18 years of age to go to Florida and she wanted to do the same but her mother said no and not because she was a girl, it was that her mother did not trust men; she was called a boy as a kid and hated it; she did have her parents support – have to be who you are, if others are calling you a boy it is because they are jealous, all of the children had parental support.
- Parents said that if you are a teacher, you can supplement your husband’s income; mother was the stronger voice – she wanted to be a lawyer; told her own children that they had to have a career.

- Mother was independent, father was a traveling salesman and not around; mother may have been a lesbian and had no use for men. Maybe when she went to a co-ed university that she saw male dominance, at the sorority she felt accepted, had friends; wanted to get married because everyone else was – but her mom said not to get married, marriage is oppression.
- Felt oppressed; parents only had names for boys when she was born; father did not trust women – did not have much money, daughters were a disappointment, parents were terrified because of Jewish oppression (1940s) and wanted the daughters to be safe – that is, get married and be taken care of.
- Oldest of four – she was her father’s first-born son, taught her about tools, helped with repairs, they went grocery shopping together; she was athletic and excelled, was told to let the boys win sometimes.
- Primary issue: division of labor in the family between the girls and boys; she was the oldest of seven; disappointment because she was not a boy, but they had four boys after her; she felt growing up that she would not have children, to be independent, and not to serve boys.
- All of us old lesbians have comparable experiences. She was a tomboy, crazy daredevil; the boys who lived upstairs were told to be more like her; father was the baby of four sisters – nice man, supportive; mother said that if you win all the time, you would not get a boyfriend; the “silverware” was being handed down to her because she would get married again – but she told her mother that she was a lesbian, mother said not to be foolish, it is easier with a man. She read in her mother’s diaries about her mom and her “friend” Edna (Ed) who she was in love with.
- Family: red diaper baby; father was very present and said when her parents first got married that he would cook, and she could wash the dishes – he was terrified that someone would find out. On Saturdays, dad took them usually to the natural history museum and on Sundays, mother took them to the park – shared childcare on weekends; not the norm; mom ran for state legislature with W.E.B. Dubois.
- Absorbing sexism from family and environment growing up; traditional family with a stay at home mother, father worked; expectation – boys were more important than girls; there were no girl sports; parents grew up poor then moved into middle class; the importance for girls was to get a skill to support themselves because the husband could die; father was about money; mom was find the best guy and that he is nice to you, her father was not nice.
- Two younger sisters; low/middle class, white; was not raised “to get married”; separation – when cousins visited the girls could stay with her but the boys had to stay in the basement and segregation by sex – ice skates, bikes, access to doing things, boy cousin was given a car; mom would say, “act like a girl” – this is acting not being, roles are acting; had a sense of unity among the girls like in Brownies and Girl Scouts; knew of a whole house of women a block down which was a convent, women’s spaces – refuges.
- As soon as my sister and I got a little older, “the girls should wash the dishes” even if too short to reach, so went and built her own stool to use.
- Parents were Italian immigrants, peasants really; family with very traditional sex roles, peasant sex roles brought from Italy; she was a tomboy – had three brothers; a stay at home mom who was viewed as lesser than, a great cook, a horrible mother and with that she could go about and do anything; father was in construction and all the boys got to go learn and help, she never got to be the helper; same with hunting; the framework for the girl – honor the family, if anything happened such as having sex/getting pregnant, the father would kill the mother, great family shame, helped her be a lesbian; father said that all men are pigs, remember to stay away from boys and men;

encouraged her education, probably since immigrants thought that education is an escape from their present lives.

Sally Tatnall: We are not usually thinking about the children, but they are sponges of sound from birth; patriarchal sexism is in their environment even before school – parents, neighbors, television, radio, etc. fills their brains; school then takes over which used to be learning “how to think”, now it is “how to survive in community”, what is normal and expected, how to behave to get ahead in the culture, children are the upcoming workforce.

Do not remember back then, but in our being taught, a child up to six years of age will have her forever indoctrination; the effort needed to free ourselves; the fairness regarding children; hierarchy is better; the discrepancy that boys will always be favored, and all girls see that; there is male approval at a very early age, male approval and domination, sexism; girls grow in understanding that it is recognized in all institutions, critical for survival; look deeply at where we carry that sexism – it is an incredible burden and effort to lift it; need to remember fairness; blame – male values and approval; who did what, we carry what we learn.


Comments/Statements:

- Other women and their reactions; good friends of men – when with a man they are not thinking what people think about them, women cannot get past that.
- Male identification; went to a mostly male school, tried to be a male thinker after seeing how the men were; felt contempt towards the other women such as the wives of the professors who were around; very male identified to “make it” and acted that out towards other women.
- Feminism is important to continue the work on how sexism operates in our lives; the source from men and women; it is a treatment put in our blood stream since birth.
- In the trades; resentment towards straight women – men support them, unpaid work for men; internalized sexism; reflected on me as a women out there working with not many women around; a lot of the women seemed silly.
- Father was stoic, strong, no communication; mother was unhappy and cried a lot (seen as weak); internalized sexism; stoic was really fearful, also internalized homophobia, racism, anti-Semitism; need to say stoicism is “not real” strength or to be admired. Showing your feelings takes much more courage.
- Friend said that male domination is in our heads; “cannot do this”; worked with men – they think they only have to know 20% of the job to do the work, women think they have to know 80% to do the job.
- Father was verbally abusive, mother did not have to have a skill but if widowed; if you did have to work, you could only be a teacher, secretary, or nurse; the neighbors said that she did not love her son because she worked – she was policed; went back to school, got out of the marriage and supported herself.
- In junior high school, the girls giggled about boys, then in high school dating, then marriage roles – women are boring because of the roles.
- Not interested hanging out with lesbians who only talk about their dogs, cats, whatever; hang out with people who do the same political work.
- Never underestimate the patriarchy of what is interesting – need to dig out that crap out of our minds.
- Work in an extremely male field who were educated, married, professional but acted like kids; one male is okay, two maybe, but three or more watch out – they hate you; they grade you from the waist up and waist down; being a lesbian is a suspicion to men and straight women – in for what

was good for us and the world but never an enemy; but all men – maybe a couple are nice – are out to get you, 98% of them.

- Straight women and some lesbians do not understand sexism; betray you – that feeling like in the workplace when it is a mixed room, the women tried to keep her in her place, subordinate to the men in the room, it was painful, infuriating as a lesbian and aware of sexism, more enlightened than heterosexual women (there are some heterosexual women whose consciousness is more advanced.)
- We, from birth have been trained in hierarchy and to compete with each other, keep us arguing, to keep us in our place – it is the conditioning of women and figuring it out; feminism takes a huge shift, not easy – we have done the work, still doing the work, right here; makes her happy when women have that first awareness, the light going on; do the work and take back our culture.
- Occurred to me that men do not cut each other down like women do; women do not get along; our groups are being shattered by differences – the women's movement groups that fell apart; women personalize things more than men do; but are personalities a strength or a huge weakness? There are women's groups that do not fall apart; men can blow off comments and women do not.
- How men perceive power; men will preserve it so do not cut each other down; but they do cut each other down – is it a sense of power or powerlessness; can take a lot to keep together.
- Personalize; men have a stronger self-worth, women's self-worth – not; taught what would others think, what would the neighbors think; power struggles in women's groups, compete for power.
- In men's sports they trash talk about other players/teams and now women's basketball players have started doing it; want to be like men; it is horrible.
- Men are raised that they are entitled – do not have to do anything; women's worth – always compared to in everything.
- Competing for power.
- Men at work were horrible to each other, "boxing" with each other, where do they fit in the power structure in the group.
- The training: good, better, best in school; compete to be better, want to be known as the best; degree of hierarchy, molds us, directs us.
- Women playing sports like men; patriarchy absorbed into power structure, no change – is it really progress? Military power of the system – women have been absorbed into that with no change; there are women who stand "outside" and fight to change.
- Personalize things – not looking at the system to keep their power; the brilliance of Consciousness Raising – we all suffer the same crap; method to this oppression is to continue Consciousness Raising every day.

From the Chat:

- Every Mother is a Working Mother
- I really like Mariko's note that "Act your age" or "act like a girl" refer to acting not being 
- Lily Tomlin said, no matter who wins the rat race...it's still a rat!
- Terrific discussion, thanks, all.
- Sorry we have to leave. Thank you, this was really interesting.
- Thanks to all. This was wonderful.