

OLOC Confronting Sexism Session December 19, 2023

Sexism and the Impact on Women and Girls: Violence Against Women

Back in the day, we really had no awareness of rape not to mention wife battering which has now become a much more variety word calling it domestic violence. But naming wife battering or battered women is so much more apropos. These were very, very early on, they were convergent, they were co-relative with the development of the idea that we were a political class, that women were a political class. All these things came out of consciousness raising and then the province of violence broadened. We understood even more as feminists that pornography was also part of that violence. And now to bring it up to date, we have sex trafficking and most grievously femicide, which the United Nations has identified as the most rapidly growing crime of violence across the world. Every day 140 women are murdered because they are women. Every hour across the world every hour 6 women are murdered because of their sex, because we are women. That means that if we go on for an hour and half here in this session, 9 women will die because they are women. In the United States which has one of the lowest rates of femicide there are still 33 women a day being murdered with 5 black women a day being murdered, not because they are black, but because they are women. We can't get stuck with numbers to truly absorb and respond to what this means. These numbers need to be understood, in terms of the devastation, the destruction, the ruination that they do to women. The women who will never live the gift of life they were given, the women who psyches are battered and destroyed by rape. We have to feel these experiences and not let them only be. Numbers dull and deaden and that's why we are starting this discussion with the experience as the women's movement did. Secondly, it is the political issue. How do we understand what does this violence means politically? How does it relate to our oppression as women, to the network of things of discrimination, how does violence relate to us, the subjugation as women. And why does it seem that the Black community rose and rebelled when they saw the murder of a black man at the hands of the police. Rightfully so, but how is it that when murder happens to women we do not rise to this horror. It is not true that there is no resistance across the world, many other countries except the United States have really risen to femicide. Why aren't we doing that? And finally, to put this in the place politically, but also in the place in terms of this series we envisioned violence against women as a topic as a preface to misogyny and again, misogyny is the hate of women. One half of the species hates the other half. Politically, I would say that the full realization of women hatred and what it engenders in patriarchy is what distinguishes radical feminism, which is one of the things from liberal feminism. Because this is not just about discrimination this is about living with the realization that half of the species, that men hate women and how it affects us. Misogyny, there is no correlative word, in the language, no word that says men hating, but there is a word that says, woman hating, and it is misogyny in patriarchy.

The first question is: **Have you had a personal experience with violence?**

- I don't really know where to start. I've had so many incidences within my life of male violence that it's hard to pick one or even more than one, and some of them were anti lesbian, specific. One when I was let's say 16, I knew I guy for a year just casually. He was in college like a big man on campus. But I knew him from playing cards and different things. And then there was a place that had opened that the kids had found near a reservoir, and I didn't know where it was even though I was familiar with the area. So, I was playing cards and hanging out at this place, and he said, I know where it is. So, we went there and before I knew it, he tried to rape me. I was just like, man, so I fought back, and I fought back very hard and then he choked me until I lost consciousness. I thought I was going to die. And I had that thing that happens that they say in the movies, it really happened

to me. But my entire life did not go by, but a whole lot of things did, and I kept thinking it's so weird, but this is the absolute truth. I kept thinking this is a really stupid way to die. I was just furious, this is horrible. So, when I started to go unconscious, I just sort of accepted it and finally stopped fighting and just thought okay I am really good to die, and this is it. It's annoying, but this is just the way life is going to be, it's going to stop. Then I had no idea how long I was unconscious, and I woke up I was extremely shocked to be alive. I thought, I'm alive and of course my throat was ridiculously sore, and the guy was lying next to me. I then I realized that I hadn't been raped. What I think happened was he got so excited when he was almost killing me, he ejaculated. I was lying there half-dressed. I had his fingerprints, and I had the bruises from his fingerprints on my neck for a long time. As I said, I've had many instances of male violence and I think that fear and hatred go hand in hand. And I think men on some level are absolutely terrified of women and that's one reason that they have created this whole male supremacist system of hating women. I'm going to steal Alex's (Dobkin) saying, which I use all the time – “not all men, but it's always men”.

- I'm a therapist and I've done a lot of work with domestic violence, sex offenders and to remember that violence isn't limited to a physical touch. It can be withholding money so you can't even go get your kid's medicine. My own example is a sexual assault because I was a lesbian, a woman. I was at, my niece's wedding party, and her father, my brother-in-law was drunk/an alcoholic and he had in the past flirted with me and I would tell him, you remember I'm a lesbian now. Of course, that would make it worse, so I just quit telling him. We are at the wedding party and I'm on the dance floor dancing with my nephew and suddenly somebody comes up behind me and grabbed my ass, really grabbed it. I was on autopilot turning around and I felt my knee go in between his cheeks on the backside of him. If it had been the front side, I was going to try to kick his penis up into his throat. I turned and did the act and didn't even bother to see if he had fallen but I saw that as I hit him it was my brother-in-law. I turned back around and kept dancing and my nephew was standing with his mouth open. I just kept dancing because that was just the way it was going to be. When the music was over, I went over to my sister in case she didn't know why I did that to her husband, and I told her that he sexually grabbed my ass. It was inappropriate what he did. I left her and danced a few more and then I left. I was not going to leave until it was my time to leave. The one and only time he ever apologized to me about anything was the next time I saw him in front of my sister. He said he was sorry for what he did. And when I left, he said it a second time so I think my sister must have talked to him. Looking back, what I did was not wrong, and I was not violent, I was protecting myself. I'm just so happy I was able to do what I did.
- For many years I worked in the battered women's movement. I was the director of the battered women's shelter and the director of the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. I have a lot of experience in this issue and one of the things people would always ask me when I did a presentation, why does a man batter. The reason that they batter women is because they can. Our society and our institutions support their right to control women and not have any kind of consequences for abusive behavior. I was never physically abused, but I was certainly emotionally, and psychologically abused. I was married to a man who was a radio broadcaster, so his voice was like a weapon. If we had a disagreement, he would yell at me to the point that I would cower, and my children would cower. Even though I was never in fear of my life like most battered women are, I was in fear of my sanity and my right to have an independent and productive life.
- I was emotionally battered by my husband for 15 years. He was the good guy and looked like we were a normal family. I had no idea what was going on and if I hadn't finally come out as a lesbian, I never would have gotten out. So, I am grateful for my sexual orientation because it saved my life. He told me every day that I was not worthwhile. That I wasn't doing anything right, that I was a bad

mother. That I was just not capable of doing anything. I left that marriage and then worked where I was emotionally abused at work by the men who were in charge. So how I relate to this is the emotional abuse that men perpetrate against women that wears us down and robs us of our self-esteem and our power. That's my experience.

- When I was around 21 and was married, we were in Paris. I went out in the evening by myself, and I was stupid, unaware of the dangers and in a very dark place. I was confronted by three Algerian men, and they began pushing me and trying to push me further into a an even more remote corner. It was terrifying and while I tried to resist, there were three of them. I was very lucky that it so happened that another man came walking by and was close enough for me to yell out at him. He was able to intervene. I think about this because there was such a political component to this because in France to be Algerian is to be the subject of great racism. And here I was a white woman and it would probably have been worse if they knew I was a American and not French. But it made me also think about how in wartime the favorite game of patriarchy is that the women become the victims of the conflict by rape and abuse. It's just another way in which we suffer the politics of violence.
- I had an experience probably 6 months after I came out. We had all been at a bar and I decided to go home early. I went shopping and I had a penny left in my pocket. I was walking into my building when a guy put a broken bottle at my neck and pushed me around the corner to a vacant lot. I said, I'll give you everything I have. I have a penny and a ticket stub from the movies. He said you know what I'm going to do I'm going to fuck you and I thought, no, you're not, that's not going to happen. He said, now don't you scream, and then I heard screams reverberating off the buildings across the way and it was me. It took me a while to realize that I was screaming. He slugged me, I fell back and in a perfect position, I just raised my foot and kicked him in the balls, He crumpled over, backed up and started running. I was so mad that I chased him out of that lot starting down the block, screaming, don't you ever do that to another woman, next time it's going to be worse. And then I thought, what if I catch him? I stopped and went home and just then my girlfriend came home. I thought, wouldn't that have been great, the both of us on this guy. The thing that I found so ironic was that this guy was wearing one of those jackets that I didn't have the money to buy and thought you have more than I do and you're attacking me and trying to get my money which I have none of anyway. It turned out fine. It would have really been nice if we had both been able to attack him.

The second question is: **Do you know other women who have experienced violence?**

- I have a pretty horrible story to tell about a woman I knew. It was somebody who I had a brief affair with. I found out a couple of years after I moved that she had been kidnapped on the stairs of a public library in New York City. She was held by some guy for three days at a cabin where he repeatedly raped her and hit her. On the fourth day, she was able to escape. I can't imagine what she went through. After the experience that I had, I told my female lover about that guy, and I also told a couple of friends at different high schools. No one ever talked about this. This was the mid-60s. No one talked about rape, it just wasn't discussed among any of my female friends ever, but I discussed it. Then it turned out that one of the women I talked to who I had known forever had been raped by this guy at school, date rape. It turned out that he had raped at least two other women. He bragged about all this stuff in the locker room and my gay male friend in school would tell me everything. He told me all about what the guys talked about in the locker room, so I know a great deal about men. I had to figure out a way to get back at the guy in high school so, I started a rumor that he was gay and that he had pretended all this stuff. It stuck to him like glue, and it became a big thing in the school that he was making up all these stories. So, women stayed away

from him because they thought he was gay. You use what you have, and I did. I worked for the Baltimore rape crisis center in the beginning when it was first starting. One thing I learned about rape, and I did a whole lot of studying on it later – is that originally everybody said that men raped women because they were just of control and had to do it for sexual reasons. But then feminists said it was all because of power. What I've learned is that men rape women for one reason and one reason only because they can. Whenever they're in a situation where they can, whether it's war, whether they're walking across the campus, and they see a woman who's drunk and passed out that it's an opportunity. Nice men, husbands all don't rape but they're pressured from other men around them. To gang rape a woman - it's a form of control. Men rape because they can. They beat women for the same reason. Everything that happens to women is because men can do it. You know, male supremacy. They have the power as other others pointed out with very few repercussions for doing it unless it crosses some other line of race or class or something else.

- Back in the early seventies on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, there was a whole group of lesbians who were very active and banded together. And just out of our group, I knew one woman who had been raped and beat up. There was another woman who had been attacked, a guy beat her, and she lost an eye. This isn't okay, this is something that's lasted her whole life. What do you do and why didn't we?
- When I was living in Brooklyn and back in the day, we were such a strong lesbian community and we were all political, my friends were all political. We understood the intersectionality - it is all interrelated - race, class, sex. An interesting example is a woman was walking home one night, in a dark place with nobody else around and became aware that there was a Black man following her. She thought at first that she felt fear and that she was in danger. She then checked herself by saying, I'm being racist, but the guy came up behind her, pulled her into a doorway, and raped her. I think it is really interesting that women are willing to deny their instincts. The second thing relates to something that other people have brought up. The issue of emotional abuse. I used to do lot of groups because I ran a counseling center and I think it's a truism, that most people know that depression is a huge issue for women. I used to want to run these depression groups for women and what would always become clear was that their depression related to the inability to feel and to express anger. They did not feel justified in being angry and much less capable of expressing that anger. So, throughout their lives they experienced all this emotional abuse. We are incapable of having a healthy, angry response and I think that we as lesbians, that many of whom have conveyed that they were able to feel angry, that there's something about the strength of us as women, we as lesbians that seems to differentiate us from straight women. Obviously, I'm generalizing here, but isn't it noteworthy to hear how many of us were able to claim our anger and act out of it.
- My husband got away with it and I'm angry about that. I was the lesbian who left, I was always the lesbian, and he was always the good guy who stayed with the children. I was the bad one because I left. He's dead now and he got away with it.
- I have many stories about friends and acquaintances who have experienced violence, mostly rape but also battering. In this almost hour of talking, six women have died because of their sex.

The wrap up question: **Given the degree of violence against women in the United States and across the world, why does it seem that there is no resistance to it or any calling attention to this issue? Also, are any of you actively doing something/being active regarding this issue?**

- I live in Texas and need I say more. It continues because men continue to have the power. If we think we're taking some power back, then they escalate. In Texas they can kill you, they kill women

here and I don't see much activism. When I was in college, I did take back the night marches. There's not a lot of activism and certainly not in Texas.

- I live in a small rural community in the mountains of western North Carolina. Let's talk about the Me Too Movement because it did come a few years ago but these things always come slower to rural mountain communities. This past year several women wrote letters about a man who years ago had sexually assaulted them, bringing it to the community and to the Friends Meeting. It is a little community, and they basically ostracized the man, they made it public and demanded a public apology which they got. There's a whole back to the land movement by many progressive young people where they want to be self-sufficient and grow their own. When this young man had physically assaulted his girlfriend, he didn't rape her, but he threw her out of the truck several times, they totally ostracized him, made him leave, he could never come back. When he wanted to come back, they told him no at the Quaker meeting where I'm involved that he cannot come back there. There is active resistance, but I think we really need to look at what some of the younger people are doing and support that because that's a new generation of strong outspoken women who are not afraid to stand up. I want to say that you haven't talked about Indigenous women but there's a huge rate of the violence against them. There is an active national organization with the Indigenous community continuing to work on this issue. There was a bill in the state, and I live near the Cherokee Reservation in North Carolina that finally stated that violence against women could be prosecuted in tribal courts as well as federal courts, the law catching up with what needs to happen in terms of violence. I think it is very much part of the patriarchy. The trans women had the highest a level of sexual assault and murder in the trans community because they are being women and betraying the patriarchal view of what a man is. I think one of the reasons it is hard to organize is because so many straight women are beholden to men and their survival is connected with the money their husbands bring in. Plus, the traditional family and that whole structure. I think we as lesbians have a chance to move out of that.
- I wanted to point out that there's a whole group of women that are very frequently ignored in these conversations and that would be incarcerated women. During my time in the battered women's movement, we organized hearings at a correctional facility, which is the maximum-security prison for women in New York state. Many of them were incarcerated for killing their abusers and during the time that this was taking place, it never came up at all, whether or not, that they had been abused. It was before the battered women syndrome was introduced as a self-defense plea. But if you ever visit any of the prisons there are women who are serving time for a crime, whereas what happened in their personal lives before they committed that crime was never brought to anybody's attention.
- On my travels, this past week I saw a billboard that had a woman's picture and it said that domestic violence and sexual violence against women must stop. I didn't get to see what group it was. Also about the missing and murdered Indigenous women that in 2020 President Biden signed an executive order to look at what work should be done and to bring together the federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies to work with the tribes. In Michigan, one of the tribes got one of the federal grants to develop a database to track when the women go missing and use that database to get all law enforcement agencies working together to finding them and bring their perpetrator to justice. It happens a lot near mining and oil fields next to tribal lands where the white men prey on the Indigenous women and know they can get away with it. In my county in Michigan, they have deputized the tribal law enforcement staff with the sheriff's department so they can arrest non-tribal people off the reservation.

- I'm reading a book right now that was on the *New York Times* best seller list last year. It is by a Black man who has written about incarcerated women and the for-profit system - labor in the prisons where people make money off that slave labor. It's very racial, but it's also very much about women. This is about women who are forced to be like gladiators with each other. It's awful but it is about violence against incarcerated women, so I recommend it.
- The way to deal with the problem is to identify what the problem is, and I think we're sort of doing that. What immediately came to mind is throughout the world and more recently in the Palestinian Jewish conflict that's going on of using rape as a tool of war and in Afghanistan where it continues to be, we will continue to be abused. What are we doing about that? Putting our trust back in men to do something about it? How do we get involved in politics? How do we get to move? How do we get those men out of there? I personally feel so helpless being here in a very safe community and not having the energy to try. But, I'm doing what I can here in my own community, but it doesn't seem that it's affecting the world as much.
- For the person that said about he got away with it, and he died. This is one thing you could do, or we could do it as a session. I call it the "F" you letter. You could call something else. Put it all down in words on paper what you would say to that person if you could say it to him. You don't have to give it to him. Then we could have a session where everybody that is at a stage where they have some anger that they haven't expressed but want to, we could have a letter session. You could do your letters, read them to us and then burn the letter. We applaud you because you've said it and feel better because we're supporting you and it goes up in flames. I've done that with a few women, and they really enjoyed it. This helps get it out and for somebody supporting and witnessing it is somehow more powerful – you have got it down in words with people listening and it might help. Put that down for a Confronting Sexism session.
- I have been thinking about in the 1980s where I was part of a movement in a small rural community in Pennsylvania where we started the first women's center to help women who were battered. I remember after the first few meetings and after the first women we helped where I even went and got them in the middle of the night and took them to a safe place, I said to myself, this is so wonderful we're going to help stop domestic violence everywhere. This is going to be the beginning because we're helping people, and this will change the world. But it didn't do anything, it didn't. It didn't change and I don't know if it's the numbers or more. I don't know, but I remember the feeling that what we were going to do was help and I don't know why it hasn't. Almost every state has a domestic violence center and almost every state has, like in Pennsylvania a coalition against domestic violence. They have good well thought out organizations with lots of money, almost every place I know has an organization like that. I know people are trying all the time and there's treatment but what happened? Why haven't we made more progress?
- That's a great question and I think part of the answer is because people don't give up power without a fight and men have had power all their lives. They are scared and angry because women are gradually beginning to make more money, are more active outside the home, all the roles and gender things. We did make a difference in terms of gender roles, and we made a difference in what women could do and men are scared, and they act out in violence. I think that's especially true when in heterosexual couples with abuse where the only thing the man has is that he's got a little more physical strength. It's awful but people never give up power without violence.
- All of us were raised from birth to take care of men and somehow many of us got away from that but a lot of women have basically faded away and they're isolated with their individual sons or husbands. I know that my mother with my younger brother, no matter what he did in life, she was always going to forgive him. It didn't matter what it was she would always take his side against the

outside world. So, if he was accused of any crime, if he was in jail in Maryland, my mother would say he didn't do that, he couldn't have done that he is my son. So, I think that women are trapped in individual relationships with men if they're heterosexual. As has been said about that power, it's what are the consequences, not very many. It's a man's world, male supremacy.

- The group of women that I was in when we were getting the center together, we all talked about raising the new generation of baby boys. We were going to raise our baby boys so that they would respect women and they would not be like the domestic violence angry men. So many of us knew we were going to raise our baby boys differently. I don't know what happened to that message. Why are we not raising our boys, our baby boys differently? We had hope back then, I had a lot of hope, we all did. That's why we were involved in the movement. We had hoped we'd raise our baby boys and our girls differently. Somehow, we've lost that. I don't know where it went.
- I think that we have to account for the organized backlash against the women's movement and it has been quite vicious but really very subtle. I'll tell you what I mean by subtle. I think I disagree with something someone said earlier. I feel that the younger generation has been alienated from feminism, not I feel, I know they have. I can see it. When somebody tells me they're not a woman, that they have been through a certain curriculum at a university, that tells me that something bad has happened to women's consciousness. An enormous virulent part of the backlash against the women's movement has been academia. It is mainly educated women that made the majority of the women's movement and for many reasons now, younger, educated women are being miseducated. We can get into a very complicated subject about post-modernism, gender identity theory that is now dominating the universities but let me give you an example about what postmodernism does. Postmodernism is the way of thinking - that now has a young woman say, well, rape, that is just a story. It's one story that represents one's consciousness. Wrap your mind around that it's only a story that you have to distrust the source of the story because all stories come out of the mind of a consciousness, and by definition this is a unique consciousness. Therefore, it cannot have social validity. This is how young women are being taught to think. You also have the whole issue of gender. The second wave of the women's movement identified gender roles as the way in which society socialized. Women and men to play their unequal roles within society. Now, gender identity is something you are supposedly born with, like an idea in your head that you can change your clothes or your body around and forget women's oppression.
- I do have hope with the young women today. I think that they do have more awareness, they are fighting for equal pay, they are fighting for justice and that they're not getting married as soon as they possibly can that they're waiting, they're not having children, and that they will speak up. I can see progress in the young women today as I can see the progress that we have made as lesbians. I know things are changing. I know different words are being used, but we've made a lot of progress. And as somebody here said, the more progress you make the more powerful the reaction will be. But I have hope in the young women. And I have hope in us, I have hope in OLOC. I went home and talked about the Gathering and how egalitarian it was and how equal it was. I didn't even know who the leaders were because they weren't talking all the time and they weren't standing up and saying, I'm the head of this. I never heard one person talk more than once so, I think there is hope.
- I read this article recently about Afghanistan that they have closed all of the women shelters because they're not needed anymore. A woman has to be with a man either her father, her brother, her husband, she cannot go out alone, so they don't really need any shelters because how can she get in trouble? On the other hand, a single woman who doesn't have those men to protect her they're going to protect those women by putting them in jail. That's their solution. That is why I

don't have much hope. But I think that's what we're looking at - I don't see women jumping up and down in Afghanistan more than here, or Iran.

- When you think about the psychology of oppression and the psychology of misogyny and in particular its impact about women against women, I think of that as a radical feminist. One of the things that I think distinguishes my political viewpoint from say liberal feminists is that I think that women's oppression is a consequence of male psychology. I mean that male psychology has a big role. It's very interesting that Karen Horney who's a very, very famous female psychoanalyst and a member of the circle surrounding Freud - one of the things that she wrote was that it utterly amazed her that there was so little awareness and discussion of the fear and dread that men have of women. Knowing that, women have been affected by 6,000 years of the creation of patriarchal values and ideas into our psyche. When I read that the United Nations was talking about femicide, and the incredible increase of violence against women across the world and they state that this violence against women is so embedded within our cultures and societies that it is almost invisible. Are they saying it's so normalized that it is so much a part of us that it has become something that we don't respond to. Obviously, there is resistance - I'm not saying there's no resistance. Wouldn't we hope that we as women would resist more powerfully. The fact that we are being murdered and mutilated, do we fail to love ourselves enough as women, to value ourselves. Has this been the effect of 6,000 years of this rubble put in our psyches? I don't have answers to these, I just put them out there. We are going to look at misogyny and without doubt that topic will bring us back to this stunning issue that men hate women. No other species hate females.
- Because it hasn't been said and I'm sure it'll come up under misogyny, I want to add that the role of the Abrahamic religions in culture, western culture and colonialism is certainly in support of patriarchy and misogyny and violence.

CHAT:

- There's an Annual Hot Chocolate Run to raise money for our battered women's organization.
- I do wish our participants would speak without generalization, but rather from their point of view. Also, opinions are not facts.