

**Feminism concepts and Theories**  
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**Feminism is for everybody: Passionate Politics – Bell Hooks**

Welcome back, in for our last lecture for this week. Let us do something rather simple and rather slow. So, that you get a sense of how is it that we are bringing together these concepts. Let us read directly from Feminism is for everybody.

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These were the chapters we went through: Feminist Politics, Consciousness-Raising, Sisterhood Is Still Powerful, Feminist Education For Critical Consciousness, Our Bodies Ourselves, Beauty Within And Without, Feminist Class Struggle, Global Feminism, Women

At Work, Race And Gender, Ending Violence, Feminist Masculinity, Feminist Parenting, Liberating Marriage And Partnership, A Feminist Sexual Politics, Lesbianism And Feminism, Love Again, Feminist Spirituality and Visionary Feminism, for later. Looks like you done a lot already so, you can congratulate yourselves.


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INTRODUCTION  
Come Closer to Feminism



Everywhere I go I proudly tell folks who want to know who I am and what I do that I am a writer, a feminist theorist, a cultural critic. I tell them I write about movies and popular culture, analyzing the message in the medium. Most people find this exciting and want to know more. Everyone goes to movies, watches television, glances through magazines, and everyone has thoughts about the messages they receive, about the images they look at. It is easy for the diverse public I encounter to understand what I do as a cultural critic, to understand my passion for writing (lots of folks want to write, and do). But feminist theory — that's the place where the questions stop. Instead I tend to hear all about the evil of feminism and the bad feminists: how "they" hate men; how "they" want to go against nature — and god; how "they" are all lesbians; how "they" are taking all the jobs and making the world hard for white men, who do not stand a chance.

When I ask these same folks about the feminist books or magazines they read, when I ask them about the feminist talks they have heard, about the feminist activists they know, they respond by letting me know that everything they know about feminism has come into their lives thirdhand, that they really have not come close enough to feminist movement to know what really happens, what it's really about. Mostly they think feminism is a bunch of angry



Let me, for this last session take a few excerpts from each of these chapters, so you get a sense of how is it that Hooks is making this argument. This is also your first introduction in this course to reading theory. So, I am going to go slow and I suggest you do too. The Beauty about Hooks is that she is very easy to read. So, lest you be fooled by this tone, I promise you harder texts are coming your way. But, until then I think this is a really great introduction to reading theory itself and perhaps, what I would suggest to be an even better template for: How to write in a way that people can relate to, in a way that speaks about important concepts, while keeping the everyday firmly at the center of what we read and write about.

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## FEMINIST POLITICS Where We Stand



Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. This was a definition of feminism I offered in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* more than 10 years ago. It was my hope at the time that it would become a common definition everyone would use. I liked this definition because it did not imply that men were the enemy. By naming sexism as the problem it went directly to the heart of the matter. Practically, it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult. It is also broad enough to include an understanding of systemic institutionalized sexism. As a definition it is open-ended. To understand feminism it implies one has to necessarily understand sexism.

As all advocates of feminist politics know, most people do not understand sexism, or if they do, they think it is not a problem. Masses of people think that feminism is always and only about women seeking to be equal to men. And a huge majority of these folks think feminism is anti-male. Their misunderstanding of feminist politics reflects the reality that most folks learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media. The feminism they hear about the most is portrayed by women who are primarily committed to gender equality — equal pay for equal work, and sometimes women and



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men sharing household chores and parenting. They see that these women are usually white and materially privileged. They know from mass media that women's liberation focuses on the freedom to have abortions, to be lesbians, to challenge rape and domestic violence. Among these issues, masses of people agree with the idea of gender equity in the workplace — equal pay for equal work.

Since our society continues to be primarily a "Christian" culture, masses of people continue to believe that god has ordained that women be subordinate to men in the domestic household. Even though masses of women have entered the workforce, even though many families are headed by women who are the sole breadwinners, the vision of domestic life which continues to dominate the nation's imagination is one in which the logic of male domination is intact, whether men are present in the home or not. The wrongminded notion of feminist movement which implied it was anti-male carried with it the wrongminded assumption that all female space would necessarily be an environment where patriarchy and sexist thinking would be absent. Many women, even those involved in feminist politics, chose to believe this as well.

There was indeed a great deal of anti-male sentiment among early feminist activists who were responding to male domination with anger. It was that anger at injustice that was the impetus for creating a women's liberation movement. Early on most feminist activists (a majority of whom were white) had their consciousness raised about the nature of male domination when they were working in anti-classist and anti-racist settings with men who were telling the world about the importance of freedom while subordinating the women in their ranks. Whether it was white women working on behalf of socialism, black women working on behalf of civil rights and black liberation, or Native American women working for indigenous rights, it was clear that men wanted to lead, and they wanted



Let us get to Feminist Politics. Let us start with paragraph 2 where she says – As all-advocates of feminist politics know, most people do not understand sexism, or if they do, they think it is not a problem. Masses of people think that feminism is always and only about women seeking to be equal to men. And a huge majority of these folks think feminism is anti-male. Their misunderstanding of feminist politics reflects the reality that most folks learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media.

Here, she is doing two things. She is gesturing to a popular understanding of feminism, she is telling you that such a popular understanding comes from over-whelmingly patriarchal media also controlled by a patriarchal sexist interest and she is offering you a different model of writing about sexism and about feminist politics. The feminism they hear about the most is

portrayed by women who are primarily committed to gender equality – equal pay for equal work, and sometimes women and men sharing household chores and parenting.

Now, this is important in relation to media because many of you will remember or perhaps see around you, that a lot of popular advertising for instance is very interested in perpetuating this idea of equality. The washing machine that is so easy to understand that even a man can run it. And this is a kind of feminism that people are both railing against and celebrating. They see that these women are usually white and materially privileged. The equivalent over here is that we see people, who are running washing machine and these people who can afford washing machines, running water and electricity are a particular privileged set in our context.

They know from mass media that women's liberation focuses on the freedom to have abortions, to be lesbians, to challenge rape and domestic violence. Among these issues, masses of people agree with the idea of gender equity in the workspace – equal pay for equal work. Pay close attention to the next part because, you will have to modify your understanding in relation to your own context or (( ))(4.30). Since our society continues to be primarily a "Christian" culture. Here, Hooks is speaking about America.

Masses of people continues to believe that god has ordained that women be subordinate to men in the domestic household. Even though masses of women have entered the workforce, even though many families are headed by women. The vision of domestic life which continues to dominate the nation's imagination is one in which the logic of male domination is intact, whether men are present in the home or not. The logic of male domination – Here break it down, in relation to evidence in your own daily life, and see what are the logics that are at play that provide certain positions of labor and privilege to men and women.



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olutionary feminist thinking was most accepted and embraced in academic circles. In those circles the production of revolutionary feminist theory progressed, but more often than not that theory was not made available to the public. It became and remains a privileged discourse available to those among us who are highly literate, well-educated, and usually materially privileged. Works like *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* that offer a liberatory vision of feminist transformation never receive mainstream attention. Masses of people have not heard of this book. They have not rejected its message; they do not know what the message is.

While it was in the interest of mainstream white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to suppress visionary feminist thinking which was not anti-male or concerned with getting women the right to be like men, reformist feminists were also eager to silence these forces. Reformist feminism became their route to class mobility. They could break free of male domination in the workforce and be more self-determining in their lifestyles. While sexism did not end, they could maximize their freedom within the existing system. And they could count on there being a lower class of exploited subordinated women to do the dirty work they were refusing to do. By accepting and indeed colluding with the subordination of working-class and poor women, they not only ally themselves with the existing patriarchy and its concomitant sexism, they give themselves the right to lead a double life, one where they are the equals of men in the workforce and at home when they want to be. If they choose lesbianism they have the privilege of being equals with men in the workforce while using class power to create domestic lifestyles where they can choose to have little or no contact with men.

Lifestyle feminism ushered in the notion that there could be as many versions of feminism as there were women. Suddenly the politics was being slowly removed from feminism. And the assumption pre-



Let me move on then to another section of this chapter speaking about Reformist versus Revolutionary Feminism. Here, on page 4 we start with – From its earliest inception the feminist movement was polarized. Reformist thinkers chose to emphasize gender equality. Revolutionary thinkers did not want simply to alter the existing system so that women would have more rights. We wanted to transform that system, to bring an end to patriarchy and sexism. Here hooks is clearly identifying as a revolutionary thinker where she says ‘we’. Now, this is another important thing to remember: in a text likes this Hooks is free to take positions.

She wants to tell you that this is her flavor of feminist thinking, it does not mean that there is a call for that kind of feminism to be the only true Feminism. There are ways in which you must understand it in your own context to make that decision. Towards the end of the chapter, come to the end of page five where Hooks speaks about Lifestyle feminism, where she says, “Lifestyle feminism ushered in the notion that there could be as many versions of feminism as there were women. Suddenly the politics was being slowly removed from feminism.” Here, she is making a very important point that is feminism that is **a**political is not really feminism, it is merely consumption.

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veiled that no matter what a woman's politics, be she conservative or liberal, she too could fit feminism into her existing lifestyle. Obviously this way of thinking has made feminism more acceptable because its underlying assumption is that women can be feminists without fundamentally challenging and changing themselves or the culture. For example, let's take the issue of abortion. If feminism is a movement to end sexist oppression, and depriving females of reproductive rights is a form of sexist oppression, then one cannot be anti-choice and be feminist. A woman can insist she would never choose to have an abortion while affirming her support of the right of women to choose and still be an advocate of feminist politics. She cannot be anti-abortion and an advocate of feminism. Concurrently there can be no such thing as "power feminism" if the vision of power evoked is power gained through the exploitation and oppression of others.

Feminist politics is losing momentum because feminist movement has lost clear definitions. We have those definitions. Let's reclaim them. Let's share them. Let's start over. Let's have T-shirts and bumper stickers and postcards and hip-hop music, television and radio commercials, ads everywhere and billboards, and all manner of printed material that tells the world about feminism. We can share the simple yet powerful message that feminism is a movement to end sexist oppression. Let's start there. Let the movement begin again.



Towards the end of the chapter you can see a little bit of hopelessness in hooks because she says, Feminist politics is losing momentum because feminist movement has lost clear definitions. We have those definitions. Let us reclaim them. Let us share them. Let us start over. This might be something that you can relate to in relation to how the feminist movement is currently shaping up across the world. You find, different contested versions and one might not be wrong for thinking that there is being a dilution, and one is not really sure what is going on. Go back to hooks, and think about the ways in which she understands the core purpose of the feminist movement.

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## CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING A Constant Change of Heart

Feminists are made, not born. One does not become an advocate of feminist politics simply by having the privilege of having been born female. Like all political positions one becomes a believer in feminist politics through choice and action. When women first organized in groups to talk together about the issue of sexism and male domination, they were clear that females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males, the difference being simply that males benefited from sexism more than females and were as a consequence less likely to want to surrender patriarchal privilege. Before women could change patriarchy we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness.

Revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising emphasized the importance of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it became institutionalized and how it is perpetuated and maintained. Understanding the way male domination and sexism was expressed in everyday life created awareness in women of the ways we were victimized, exploited, and, in worse case scenarios, oppressed.

Early on in contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became settings where women simply unleashed pent-up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies of intervention and transformation. On a basic level



In the second chapter, we start with the statement – Feminists are made, not born. One does not become an advocate of feminist politics simply by having the privilege of having been born female. Here she is doing something fun. She is speaking, about having been born female as a privilege, which seems so counter intuitive, given the fact that we have only been speaking about oppression and atrocities. But, she says you cannot advocate feminist politics just because you are a women.

You have to earn it, you have to learn it, you have to understand, that just your subjectivity as a women does not allow for your automatic education as a feminist activist or as a feminist theorist. She is gesturing to the fact of coming to consciousness. When women first organized in groups to talk together about the issue of sexism and male domination, they were clear that females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males, the difference being simply that males benefited from sexism more than females and were as a consequence less likely to want to surrender patriarchal privilege.

This is the heart of a lot of stuff that Hooks is saying in this chapter. Revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising emphasized the importance of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it became institutionalized and how it is perpetuated and maintained. Here, Hooks is gesturing to structural thinking. How is it that patriarchy functions as a system? How it is institutionalized? How it is that it spreads in various forms of institutional thinking and how is it perpetuated and maintained?

All systems need maintenance, they need regular feeding, otherwise they begin to show the cracks in their assumptions and this is where Hooks is locating revolutionary action. You keep questioning it ((9:57), in all ways and some day it will begin into break-down. Here is an important part of chapter. Hooks says, “Early on in contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became settings where women simply unleashed pent-up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies or intervention and transformation.”

Reminds you a little of talk-shows on television where everybody, comes out saying everything that they have been feeling and at the end of it you as the audience are left thinking what the hell is going on. Why is it that they are yelling at one another where it is all about a certain kind of letting-go of feelings with no idea of the end game? What happens

after this? What are strategies? What are solutions? And Hooks want us to focus on these strategies.

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many hurt and exploited women used the consciousness-raising group therapeutically. It was the site where they uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds. This confessional aspect served as a healing ritual. Through consciousness-raising women gained the strength to challenge patriarchal forces at work and at home.

Importantly though, the foundation of this work began with women examining sexist thinking and creating strategies where we would change our attitudes and belief via a conversion to feminist thinking and a commitment to feminist politics. Fundamentally, the consciousness-raising (CR) group was a site for conversion. To build a mass-based feminist movement women needed to organize. The consciousness-raising session, which usually took place in someone's home (rather than public space that had to be rented or donated), was the meeting place. It was the place where seasoned feminist thinkers and activists could recruit new converts.

Importantly, communication and dialogue was a central agenda at the consciousness-raising sessions. In many groups a policy was in place which honored everyone's voice. Women took turns speaking to make sure everyone would be heard. This attempt to create a non-hierarchical model for discussion positively gave every woman a chance to speak but often did not create a context for engaged dialogue. However, in most instances discussion and debate occurred, usually after everyone had spoken at least once. Argumentative discussion was common in CR groups as it was the way we sought to clarify our collective understanding of the nature of male domination. Only through discussion and disagreement could we begin to find a realistic standpoint on gender exploitation and oppression.

As feminist thinking, which emerged first in the context of small groups where individuals often knew each other (they may have worked together and/or were friends), began to be theorized



At the same time she is not so critical that she does not understand that consciousness-raising early on was the site where women uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds. These confessional aspects served as a healing ritual. And such a healing is also important to their feminist movement unless you are allowed to make your feelings legible, how is it that you were seek to change the structure that perpetuate these kinds of feelings? Through consciousness-raising women gained the strength to challenge patriarchal forces at work and at home. And this gaining strength is also an important goal for the movement.

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## SISTERHOOD IS STILL POWERFUL



When the slogan “Sisterhood is powerful” was first used, it was awesome. I began my full-fledged participation in feminist movement my sophomore year in college. Attending an all women’s college for a year before I transferred to Stanford University, I knew from first-hand experience the difference in female self-esteem and self-assertion in same-sex classrooms versus those where males were present. At Stanford males ruled the day in every classroom. Females spoke less, took less initiative, and often when they spoke you could hardly hear what they were saying. Their voices lacked strength and confidence. And to make matters worse we were told time and time again by male professors that we were not as intelligent as the males, that we could not be “great” thinkers, writers, and so on. These attitudes shocked me since I had come from an all-female environment where our intellectual worth and value was constantly affirmed by the standard of academic excellence our mostly female professors set for us and themselves.

Indeed, I was indebted to my favorite white female English professor who thought I was not getting the academic guidance I needed at our women’s college because they did not have an intensified writing program. She encouraged me to attend Stanford. She believed that I would someday be an important thinker and writer.



The first paragraph of the chapter ‘Sisterhood is still powerful’ is a powerful one. Hooks says, “When the slogan “Sisterhood is powerful” was first used, it was awesome. I began my full-fledged participation in the feminist movement in my sophomore year in college. Attending an all-women’s college for a year before I transferred to Stanford University, I knew from first-hand experience the difference in female self-esteem and self-assertion in same-sex classroom versus those where males were present.” And this is perhaps an early introduction to the idea of sisterhood. The ways in which women feel safer with other women around.

The often-repeated joke of women going to bathrooms together, or always hanging out together or even in public space how women cluster together while men are in another part of the same public space. And here Hooks is speaking about the fact that only women seem to understand what other women are going through. Remember from the last lecture that this is not true of all women. Such emphatic understanding is also interrupted by race, class, and caste, but nevertheless, sisterhood is understanding that the gender experience is common to a large side of women and therefore such kind of safety is a symptom of the ways in which patriarchal domination subjects women to similar kinds oppression.

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At Stanford my ability was constantly questioned. I began to doubt myself. Then feminist movement rocked the campus. Female students and professors demanded an end to discrimination based on gender inside and outside the classroom. Wow, it was an intense and awesome time. There I took my first women's studies class with the writer Tillie Olsen, who compelled her students to think first and foremost about the fate of women from working-class backgrounds. There the scholar and one-day biographer of Anne Sexton, Diane Middlebrook, passed out one of my poems in our class on contemporary poetry with no name on it and asked us to identify whether the writer was male or female, an experiment that made us think critically about judging the value of writing on the basis of gender biases. There I began to write my first book at the age of 19, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. None of these incredible transformations would have happened without feminist movement creating a foundation for solidarity between women.

That foundation rested on our critique of what we then called "the enemy within," referring to our internalized sexism. We all knew firsthand that we had been socialized as females by patriarchal thinking to see ourselves as inferior to men, to see ourselves as always and only in competition with one another for patriarchal approval, to look upon each other with jealousy, fear, and hatred. Sexist thinking made us judge each other without compassion and punish one another harshly. Feminist thinking helped us unlearn female self-hatred. It enabled us to break free of the hold patriarchal thinking had on our consciousness.

Male bonding was an accepted and affirmed aspect of patriarchal culture. It was simply assumed that men in groups would stick together, support one another, be team players, place the good of the group over individual gain and recognition. Female bonding was not possible within patriarchy; it was an act of treason. Feminist



Hooks moves on through personal experience leading us to follow her in her own journey of understanding sexism and internalizing sexism. She says, "At Stanford my ability was constantly questioned. I began to doubt myself. Then feminist movement rocked the campus. Female students and professors demanded an end to discrimination based on gender inside and outside the classroom. It was an intense and awesome time. There I took my first women's studies class with the writer Tillie Olsen, who compelled her students to think first and foremost about the fate of women from working-class backgrounds.

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## FEMINIST EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS



Before women's studies classes, before feminist literature, individual women learned about feminism in groups. The women in those groups were the first to begin to create feminist theory which included both an analysis of sexism, strategies for challenging patriarchy, and new models of social interaction. Everything we do in life is rooted in theory. Whether we consciously explore the reasons we have a particular perspective or take a particular action there is also an underlying system shaping thought and practice. In its earliest inception feminist theory had as its primary goal explaining to women and men how sexist thinking worked and how we could challenge and change it.

In those days most of us had been socialized by parents and society to accept sexist thinking. We had not taken time to figure out the roots of our perceptions. Feminist thinking and feminist theory urged us to do that. At first feminist theory was made available by word of mouth or in cheaply put together newsletters and pamphlets. The development of women's publishing (where women wrote, printed, and controlled production on all levels, including marketing) became the site for the dissemination of feminist think-



In feminist education for critical consciousness Hooks speaks about the ways in which the feminist movement moved forward in its educational impetus. Before women's studies classes, before feminist literature, individual women learning about feminism in groups. They were the first to begin to create feminist theory which included both analysis of sexism, strategies for challenging patriarchy, and new models of social interaction all of which were important. And this is where feminist theory is an important aspect of this class because we are doing all of these things.

We are talking about the ways in which patriarchy surrounds us and undergirds our ways of living, but we are also suggesting strategies for challenging patriarchy and producing new models of social interaction. Now, here is something Hooks says that I firmly believe that a lot of people might have trouble thinking about when she says, "Everything we do in life is rooted in theory and people do not like theory." They think of it is something removed from everyday life, something that troubles us, something that should be left to academic ivory towers.

But here Hooks is proposing that theory is something that runs through our lives, that structures ways in which we behave and live in society and therefore, only through producing theory can we bring about change. Whether we consciously explore the reasons why we have a particular perspective or take a particular action there is also an underlying system shaping thought and practice. In its earlier inception feminist theory had as its primary goal explaining to women and men how sexist thinking worked and how we could challenge and change it.

Think about it as really an imaginative form of engaging with everyday life and asking as to the structures of meaning through which we make our lives valuable or means something in the world. She goes on to say, “In those days most of us had been socialized by parents and society to accept sexist thinking.” Think about the multiple times when you may have questioned something and somebody just said, “That is just the way that it is, do not ask too many questions,” right? It is the ‘asking too many questions’ that society fears.

Because if you ask questions then answers will have to be provided and sometimes the answer is ‘that is just the way it is’. So, what is this way is what feminist theory is intent upon deconstructing. We had not taken time to figure out the roots of our perceptions. Feminist thinking and feminist theory urged us to do that.

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share feminist knowledge. And of course we need a feminist television network, which is not the same as a network for women. Galvanizing funds to create a feminist television network would help us spread feminist thinking globally. If we cannot own a network, let's pay for time on an existing network. After years of ownership by males who were not all anti-sexist *Ms.* magazine is now owned by women who are all deeply committed to feminist principles. This is a step in the right direction.

If we do not work to create a mass-based movement which offers feminist education to everyone, females and males, feminist theory and practice will always be undermined by the negative information produced in most mainstream media. The citizens of this nation cannot know the positive contributions feminist movement has made to all our lives if we do not highlight these gains. Constructive feminist contributions to the well-being of our communities and society are often appropriated by the dominant culture which then projects negative representations of feminism. Most people have no understanding of the myriad ways feminism has positively changed all our lives. Sharing feminist thought and practice sustains feminist movement. Feminist knowledge is for everybody.



Through the chapter, Bell Hooks takes us to the history of such kind of feminist education but ends by saying, “If we do not work to create a mass-based movement which offers feminist education to everyone, females and males, feminist theory and practice will always be undermined by the negative information produced in most mainstream media.” And this is where your role becomes important because in listening to lectures like these, asking questions, challenging a lot of the things that I may even be saying or reading the text closely, you offer alternate models of understanding feminist theory. And very important is the revolutionary statement where she says, “Feminist knowledge is for everybody,” it is not a choice.

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## OUR BODIES, OURSELVES Reproductive Rights

When contemporary feminist movement began the issues that were projected as most relevant were those that were directly linked to the experiences of highly educated white women (most of whom were materially privileged.) Since feminist movement followed in the wake of civil rights and sexual liberation it seemed appropriate at the time that issues around the female body were foregrounded. Contrary to the image the mass media presented to the world, a feminist movement starting with women burning bras at a Miss America pageant and then later images of women seeking abortions, one of the first issues which served as a catalyst for the formation of the movement was sexuality — the issue being the rights of women to choose when and with whom they would be sexual. The sexual exploitation of women's bodies had been a common occurrence in radical movements for social justice whether socialist, civil rights, etc.

When the so-called sexual revolution was at its peak the issue of free love (which usually meant having as much sex as one wanted with whomever one desired) brought females face to face with the issue of unwanted pregnancy. Before there could be any gender equity around the issue of free love women needed access to safe, effective contraceptives and abortions. While individual white women with class privilege often had access to both these safeguards, most women



In *Our Bodies Ourselves* Bell Hooks is concerned with both the sexual revolution and its consequences. Now remember the sexual revolution is particular to the United States and has got to do with a point in American history where men and women found it possible, to be able to understand sexuality in a liberated fashion, to understand it outside the clutches of heterosexual partnership or monogamous partnership and it is often spoken about in terms of flower power or the hippie generation.

And Hooks is concerned with how, when the so-called, sexual revolution was at its peak the issue of free love brought females face to face with the issue of unwanted pregnancy. And in this she brings us to the heart of the matter, what is now framed as the abortion, or the choice versus the right to life debate, the latter undergirded by specific kinds of religious compulsions.

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The development of effective though not totally safe birth control pills (created by male scientists, most of whom were not anti-sexist) truly paved the way for female sexual liberation more so than abortion rights. Women like myself who were in our late teens when the pill was first widely available were spared the fear and shame of unwanted pregnancies. Responsible birth control liberated many women like myself who were pro-choice but not necessarily pro-abortion for ourselves from having to personally confront the issue. While I never had an unwanted pregnancy in the heyday of sexual liberation, many of my peers saw abortion as a better choice than conscious, vigilant use of birth control pills. And they did frequently use abortion as a means of birth control. Using the pill meant a woman was directly confronting her choice to be sexually active. Women who were more conscientious about birth control were often regarded as sexually loose by men. It was easier for some females just to let things happen sexually then take care of the "problem" later with abortions. We now know that both repeated abortions or prolonged use of birth control pills with high levels of estrogen are not risk-free. Yet women were willing to take risks to have sexual freedom — to have the right to choose.

The abortion issue captured the attention of mass media because it really challenged the fundamentalist thinking of Christianity. It directly challenged the notion that a woman's reason for existence was to bear children. It called the nation's attention to the female body as no other issue could have done. It was a direct challenge to the church. Later all the other reproductive issues that feminist thinkers called attention to were often ignored by mass media. The long-range medical problems from cesareans and hysterectomies were not juicy subjects for mass media; they actually called attention to a capitalist patriarchal male-dominated medical system that controlled women's bodies and did with them anything they wanted to



Hooks goes on to say, “The abortion issue captured the attention of mass media because it really challenged the fundamentalist thinking of Christianity. It directly challenged the notion that a women’s reason for existence was to bear children.” And this is nothing short of revolutionary because, in challenging this you will be challenging the foundations of all societies as we know them.

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## BEAUTY WITHIN AND WITHOUT



Challenging sexist thinking about the female body was one of the most powerful interventions made by contemporary feminist movement. Before women's liberation all females young and old were socialized by sexist thinking to believe that our value rested solely on appearance and whether or not we were perceived to be good looking, especially by men. Understanding that females could never be liberated if we did not develop healthy self-esteem and self-love feminist thinkers went directly to the heart of the matter — critically examining how we feel and think about our bodies and offering constructive strategies for change. Looking back after years of feeling comfortable choosing whether or not to wear a bra, I can remember what a momentous decision this was 30 years ago. Women stripping their bodies of unhealthy and uncomfortable, restrictive clothing — bras, girdles, corsets, garter belts, etc. — was a ritualistic, radical reclaiming of the health and glory of the female body. Females today who have never known such restrictions can only trust us when we say that this reclaiming was momentous.

On a deeper level this ritual validated women wearing comfortable clothing on all levels in our lives. Just to be able to wear pants to work was awesome to many women, whose jobs had required them to be constantly bending and stooping over. For women who had

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We then move on to the chapters on 'Beauty Within and Without' which is again about the female body in relation to norms of beauty.

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## FEMINIST CLASS STRUGGLE



Class difference and the way in which it divides women was an issue women in feminist movement talked about long before race. In the mostly white circles of a newly formed women's liberation movement the most glaring separation between women was that of class. White working-class women recognized that class hierarchies were present in the movement. Conflict arose between the reformist vision of women's liberation which basically demanded equal rights for women within the existing class structure, and more radical and/or revolutionary models, which called for fundamental change in the existing structure so that models of mutuality and equality could replace the old paradigms. However, as feminist movement progressed and privileged groups of well-educated white women began to achieve equal access to class power with their male counterparts, feminist class struggle was no longer deemed important.

From the onset of the movement women from privileged classes were able to make their concerns (the) issues that should be focused on in part because they were the group of women who received public attention. They attracted mass media. The issues that were most relevant to working women or masses of women were never highlighted by mainstream mass media. Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* identified "the problem that has no name" as the

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dissatisfaction females felt about being confined and subordinated in the home as housewives. While this issue was presented as a crisis for women it really was only a crisis for a small group of well-educated white women. While they were complaining about the dangers of confinement in the home a huge majority of women in the nation were in the workforce. And many of these working women, who put in long hours for low wages while still doing all the work in the domestic household would have seen the right to stay home as "freedom."

It was not gender discrimination or sexist oppression that kept privileged women of all races from working outside the home, it was the fact that the jobs that would have been available to them would have been the same low-paying unskilled labor open to all working women. Elite groups of highly educated females stayed at home rather than do the type of work large numbers of lower-middle-class and working-class women were doing. Occasionally, a few of these women defied convention and worked outside the home performing tasks way below their educational skills and facing resistance from husbands and family. It was this resistance that turned the issue of their working outside the home into an issue of gender discrimination and made opposing patriarchy and seeking equal rights with men of their class the political platform that chose feminism rather than class struggle.

From the outset, reformist white women with class privilege were well aware that the power and freedom they wanted was the freedom they perceived men of their class enjoying. Their resistance to patriarchal male domination in the domestic household provided them with a connection they could use to unite across class with other women who were weary of male domination. But only privileged women had the luxury to imagine working outside the home would actually provide them with an income which would enable them to be economically self-sufficient. Working-class women al-



And we are talking about Feminist Class Struggles and we spent some time on this in the previous lecture. Here look at what Hooks is writing, she says, "From the onset of the movement women from privileged classes were able to make their concerns "the" issues that should be focused on in part because they were the group of women who received public attention. They attracted mass media." So even when the feminist movement was able to make inroads into public consciousness, there were only a certain set of middle and upper class women who were able to be heard.

Also because they had cultural capital which means language, comportment, ways in which they presented themselves, ways in which they were attractive to media consumers. The issues that were most relevant to working women or masses of women were never highlighted by mainstream mass media. Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* identified the problem that has no name as the dissatisfaction females feel about being confined and subordinated in the home as housewives. While this issue was presented as a crisis for women it really was only a crisis for a small group of well-educated white women.

While they were complaining about the dangers of confinement in the home a huge majority of women in the nation were in the workforce. And many of these working women, who put in long hours for low wages while still doing all the work in the domestic household would have seen the right to stay as home as "freedom". And here she is eliminating an important paradox because if the fight was for women to be able to work outside, there were millions of ways when who are working under abominable conditions and bad pay, they would have given anything to have the opposite.



I hope by now you have a sense of how it is that we are reading for 4 concepts in each these chapters. So try and read while keeping in mind particular sections of the last lecture so that you have conceptual clarity. And part of the assignment for this week will include clarifications on these concepts as well as examples of particular chapters. Besides that please also remember that the last 4 chapters we are covering over the course of this course and not necessarily in the first week. Also remember the importance that concepts like violence have for Bell Hooks, the vision of the goals of the feminist movement and the ways in which it can change society fundamentally and constitutively.

Next week, we will return with other kinds of concepts from a different book and there we will get a little bit more precise and introduce you to the world of feminist theory. Thank you.