

Demargo Cox

Professor von Uhl

A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière

04 September 2019

A Clinical Lesson In Imbalance

Immediately after looking A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière I was ashamed, ashamed at the appearance of the men who stood gazing at this young woman. Ashamed because this is the past, but it's not too far from today. They appeared to be looking at her not as a human but as a subject of discovery, no sense of urgency, no sense of sympathy, stone-cold deadpan faces only. I asked myself, "How?". How could you ever sit there as if nothing is wrong, where are the morals, where is the empathy, where is the common decency? However, I had to realize the context and time of the picture. There was a much different balance between women and men of this age, women weren't seen as equal.

From the surface of the image, we can see a room full of men, but if you take a more in-depth look, there was a woman present behind the hysterical woman. The woman had her hands out towards the hysterical woman and was also dressed in a black and white nurse outfit. I began to wonder how she does feel not only as a woman but as a possible nurse. To see another woman in an unhealthy condition passed out lying on a man with no regard for her. I also began to wonder if she cared for the individual to begin with, simply because of the negative connotation around hysteria. The negative connotation associated with hysteria was one that downplayed the illness and also reduced the worth of the illness compared to organic issues such as broken bones. This stigma could have possibly affected this nurse and left her without true care for this individual suffering from hysteria.

In this image, there is also a painting in the background. This painting contains a woman in a white dress who seems to also be a very similar position of the hysterical woman we see lying on the man

unconscious. Having this painting in the back of the room invites the idea that this room was made for the study of hysteria. As if situations in which the woman is passed out and being studied is normal in this room. It is absurd to think circumstances like this happen regularly. To think women who are already suffering are placed in a room to be calculated, discussed, and documented is ludicrous. As if they are a science project, a catalyst, a human trial, an item of discovery with no worth. That's how this is a woman is viewed in this image.

What else disturbed me about this image was the fact, that these are all men of higher education and profile. Meaning they range from scientist to medical doctors, some of these men may be renowned. Now if take into consideration these may be men of renowned, we also take into consideration they have influence. In other words, these men have shared their knowledge with others, creating a following behind them. It worries me if this is true, it worries because this woman is unconscious and these men are unaffected. This lack of empathy and understanding is a dangerous circumstance, it creates cycles of misconception and moral insensitivity. These are core values of being a person that is not only in the minds of those with influence but being spread to the plebs of the world.

Overall this image didn't bring any positive emotions to me, it only reminded me of the past and how it is so strongly connected to the world today. Specifically, the difference between women can still be seen today. While women have more rights and more a voice there is still an imbalance of respect as a whole for the group. As a people we lack understanding of others, we lack the morals to take action to do things not for the benefit of how we look like a person but for the right reason.

