

Reflection



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Reflection Essay Paula Rothenberg, *The Color of Race, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, focuses upon feminism in Chapter 5 and the forms, sources, and meanings behind oppressive behavior towards women. The author clearly states that oppression does not have to be a conscious act, and it definitely does not stem from one main source. Instead, she argues that oppression for women is similar to that of a birdcage where a number of social factors are paired together to trap women into restricted movements and less freedoms. While many of Rothenberg's comments on sexuality and oppression are very insightful, it appears as though she can take any gesture, action, or viewpoint and show how it is literally or symbolically oppressing women.

One of the most bizarre analyses that she proposes comes from the section of her chapter that touches on a man holding open the door for a woman. She mentions that this is viewed positively and negatively by our culture, but that symbolically it holds completely negative meanings. Rothenberg compares this act to a slave performing for the master, and in turn, argues that it is mocking the woman's position in society because the woman is always the one taking care of the man. Most men are not holding open a door for a lady to mock, abuse, or belittle her. This is an act out of respect that is meant to honor the presence of the woman and make sure that she knows that the man cares about her. A poll could be taken by every man in America and none of them would say that they have held open a door for a lady to intentionally oppress them or mock their existence. Rothenberg also makes reference that a woman, no matter how she dresses, behaves, or is sexually active or non-active she is perceived as wanting sex and, therefore, wanting to be raped. This is an absurd notion that anyone with a useful brain

can understand that no person desires to be raped; and therefore, no person should believe that the woman would want to be raped regardless of any stereotypical behavior that she may or may not perform.

While the author mentions many examples similar to rape and holding the door, she does provide a very strong analysis of multiple social factors all equally restricting women in her bird cage metaphor. If we look closely at just one wire on the cage, or an individual social factor, we cannot comprehend how it is being restrictive or oppressing the victim. On the other hand, if we take a few steps back and analyze all of the wires together, or all of the social factors combined, we can clearly understand why the bird cannot fly away, or why the woman cannot move about freely in society.

Although the sources of oppression may be a little far-fetched, there are very distinct factors such as inequality in the workplace or the culturally accepted view of the "lady" that do exist in the United States. These sources do create oppression for women, and members of any culture, race, or gender that may experience similar circumstances. Therefore, it is important to take a macroscopic view on all social factors that oppress anyone, regardless of culture, race, or gender. With this view, we can understand why oppression is being oppressive and how culture can change to stop this from happening.

I have not gained any insights on who I am exactly, but rather how I fit into society. A simple act such as holding open a door for a lady can be construed as oppressive to some, while honoring the lady by others. This simple example, although absurd to me, made me realize that people can take very tiny things and use them to support their opinions of oppression and how people are always working to keep them down. Now, when I hold open the

door for a woman, I will think about how they may perceive that action. Is she smiling just because it is socially required, and that women are required to submit such a reaction if they are to be true ladies? Or does she smile because she truly appreciates the action? These questions are answered differently by each woman and many other actions that I perform with relationship to culture, race and gender may also be misconstrued or have a socially-oppressive nature behind them. It actually makes me afraid to do something nice for someone that is not someone specifically like me, just to avoid being the oppressor.

References

Rothenberg, P. S. (2007). Race, class, and gender in the united states: an integrated study. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.