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Reaction and Thoughts on “Clinical Lesson at the Salpetriere”

This might just be a picture, but it portrays a lot more inside it and shows a lot of what would go on in Sigmund Freud’s lectures. In this picture, Freud is basing his lecture on this woman that he is using to teach the men in the room a lesson on psychoanalysis. More specifically, he is talking about hysteria and the symptoms that are associated with this mental problem. When I first look at this picture, I feel very intrigued and curious to see what all those men are doing and why there is only one woman up there with Sigmund Freud. This caused me to raise questions like “Is she the lesson plan?’ or “Why choose a woman to teach the class with?” These questions made me look deeper into the picture and encourage me to find out what was really going on here and why Sigmund Freud chose to give the lecture in this very weird and unorthodox manner. Multiple emotions were drawn from me when looking at this picture because I didn’t know whether to feel bad for the woman or to be kind of enraged at the men for treating this woman this way and using her more as an object than a human being. The picture raises a lot of concern for sure.

The questions that came into my head that I have already mentioned are not the ordinary questions that would come up in a picture from today for example, which is what makes this picture very questionable. The woman seems to be the center of the lesson and it seems very belittling of females at the time because there are a bunch of men staring at this woman, she probably didn’t give any consent for her to be studied in this manner. This also makes me think that this emphasizes the men’s masculinity and ego in a sense because they think that they can just educate themselves at the cost of this woman’s dignity and humility. It also shows that they had very little respect for women with problems like hysteria and used them as experiments or tools for education and the advancement of science. These are the things that I can infer just by looking at the picture as a whole.

One emotion that I felt when I looked at this picture was that I felt very sympathetic for the woman and wanted to really see what she was feeling at that moment. She probably felt very humiliated and embarrassed because all those men are staring at her and judging her most likely because she has a very special and mysterious condition that Freud is revealing and teaching about. That’s one way I felt about the picture from the woman’s point of view. Another thing I felt was a sense of enragement because of what the men accepted as being normal and also the thought of it being okay to treat a woman like she’s a tool in the classroom or for research without her consent. This is not the way a gentleman should behave, and it says something about Freud’s character. He seems to care more about proving his points on hysteria and furthering his research on the subject than caring about how this woman feels or how she should be treated. These particular emotions and feelings hit me right away when I looked deeper into this picture and it’s not very pretty to say the least.

Considering this is a picture, it’s impressive how much I felt from just looking at this one painting of Freud’s lecture. The idea that women can be used for educational and research purposes like that is very disturbing and raises the question “Why should women be the only ones studied for hysteria? Why can’t a man be looked at for the same symptoms?” This proves the fact that men at the time were very sexist and thought men to be superior to women which is unacceptable, at least in the present it is. This is what I got out of the picture and it showed a lot of insight into how Freud and men in general viewed women and mental problems as well. This is a very wrong way of portraying hysteria and females in general.