Liberatory consciousness
Based on “Developing a Liberatory Consciousness” by Barbara Love

I decided to get a degree in sociology because of my thirst for those Ah Hah moments. Having majored in Biology and French as an undergrad, I found great pleasure in discussing philosophies and poetry with my close friends. This was an escape from what I perceived to be a very black and white academic world. We came to call our meetings over coffee “prises de conscience”, French for “acquirements of consciousness”. Being able to relearn what's taken for granted and to discover new ways of thinking are in my opinion the most valuable skills a young adult can strive to acquire. Unfortunately, few people practice what social scientists refer to as sociological imagination; which is basically the ability to shift from one perspective to another. Taking the time to examine the flip side of social issues would increase the awareness and perhaps the participation of more individuals.

As a result of socialization and the internalization process that accompanies it, going through life unaware of our roles in oppression is far too easy. Having recently written a paper on the challenges Feminism faces today, some of which included Orientalism and cultural relativism, I came to the conclusion that Barbara Love’s idea of liberatory consciousness is our best bet at creating an unified front to fight the ongoing gender discrimination in our societies. Barbara describes liberatory consciousness as a forces that enables an individual to live his or her life in oppressive systems and institutions with awareness and intentionality as opposed to giving in to despair and hopelessness.

Living “outside” patterns of thought and behavior internalized through socialization is an incredible step toward the rejection of those oppressive systems. I truly believe that the ignorance of social actors is key to the continuing successes of oppressive forces. Barbara speaks of four elements involved in developing a liberatory consciousness: Awareness, Analysis, Action, Accountable/Ally-ship. The first step of liberatory consciousness, awareness, is based on acknowledging that something is not quite right. One does not need to be a member of the oppressed group to take a step back and recognize the inequality taking place. Although feminism is often described as social movement for women by women, I truly believe that its mainstream definition should have a greater emphasis on ally-ship. The involvement of the male sex, especially that of the heterosexual white male should by no mean weaken the movement but spread a message of understanding and accountability.

Beyond awareness, the process of analysis is perhaps the most crucial in achieving social change. If one fails to educate him/herself about the injustice they’ve become aware of, the likelihood that this awareness leads to action is miniscule. Therefore, in addition to preaching to the choir, women should put more effort toward reeducation men and women on the flawed hierarchy of genders. In addition to spreading awareness and holding the oppressing party accountable, Feminism should also do its best to remain unified. There is power in number, and before feminists go through institutionalization and risk weakening their movement, they ought to try harder to compromise amongst themselves first.