
Gender Intersectionality With Race Or Class

Intersectionality describes the position of women of colour in the social hierarchy, of females. Gender is ultimately a constellation of norms given to a culture based on biological differences however, are performative expressions dictated and controlled by our conventional norms, thus resulting in conventionalised behaviours. With these two phenomenal beings combined only creates an intersection with the issues of race and gender which political discourses often ignore due to supposed complexities, as well as ignorance on the matter. Generalisations made against women of colour would be intolerable if made against white women, since the fruits of colonialism imposed such power to socially construct race to which we are misrecognised in the European imagination. Thus, in this essay a discussion of why intersectionality is a challenge against a system of categorisation founded in discrimination, will be addressed.

What many fail to acknowledge is the notion that gender is constructed through concepts on race and sexuality in which, "Femininity is the process through which women are gendered and become specific sorts of women" (Skeggs, 1997:98) usually associated with white womanhood wherein feminine ideals are constructed against the black female. Thus, the understanding of intersectionality is situated within the essentialist ideas of feminism that holds little significance to women of colour. The feminist movement rarely sheds light on the issues faced by black, Hispanic or Asian women; or even those from a working-class background. "Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those (...) and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, dominant conceptions of antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms" (Crenshaw, 1991: 5) A factor in determining these differences is down to varied cultural nurturing which creates the great dilemma in leaving any intersection unaddressed. Yes, all women live under the system of patriarchy but there are many varied discourses that still oppress women, which Crenshaw has brought to light in the study of intersectionality. Essentialism is a key critique as contemporary feminism homogenises female discourses and fails to acknowledge the intersections of race and patriarchy. However, this failure may also be because anti-racism reproduces inequalities since many see the family institution as a protective and supportive force; ignoring the servitude of patriarchy. (Crenshaw, 1991)

Proceeding from such, upbringing needs to be recognised as playing a pivotal role in one's discourse, one being the concept of patriarchy, particularly sexism, which is arguably normalised within black and Asian households. I have observed my own family's dynamics and first-hand experienced the reliance on the daughter to look after the house and her siblings, whereas this same responsibility or perhaps burden was not placed on the sons. They are not required to clean up or help the mother, just to do well at school and get a good job to provide for the family. Carby's (1982) study sees the triple shift unappreciated and expected as the work of women outside and inside the home is not recognised but in relation to intersectionality; the premise of domesticity on the female is poignant in traditional black households whereby it is a custom and a norm. If you do not fulfil this norm, you are undesirable or not marriage material to the other sex, especially one from your own race. Ultimately, this culture of black female domesticity is a construction that few stand up to but is very much acknowledged. Many seem to forget that the concept of gender is inevitably woven with race as well as class however, the movement of feminism does not cater to every woman of every colour then what is

perpetuated in this sequence is an erasure of black women from politics undermining its legitimacy as a whole, but strengthens in ignorance. Crenshaw (1991) particularly sees this failure in feminism as reinforcing the subordination of women and men of colour but from other angles associates anti-racism with failing to acknowledge patriarchy, again reproducing the subordination of women. In turn, a vicious cycle is conditioned.

Nonetheless, masculinity is a social construction preserving the subordination of the black males and females culminating to conflict due to cultural standings. The identity of black masculinity in particular has been reduced to the essence of race rather than the realities of their constructed beings or who they are besides the external perceptions hence, is a consequence of a cultural barrier standing in the way of them freeing themselves from abusive relations. Racism prohibits ethnic men but in this context, prevents black men from having the same opportunities to the patriarchal and economic hierarchies of white men, producing a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Mead (1963) concurs, by assuming that you're immune to social conditioning ultimately means you are a captor, a slave to it.

Coincidentally, manhood is constructed in relation to binary opposites. Just as you cannot have love without hate in this world, masculinity cannot exist without feminine identities being a source of comparison to them. Collins (2004) associates the high divorce of black women down to a gender ideology which connects manhood with financial status, proposing that power equates to a man not a woman; an ideal passed down to black men as a distraction to their systematic oppression. Thus, to ethnic minorities masculinity is ultimately a protection against racist ideals rather than a protection to professed womanhood. A protection from the institutionalised racism that presents themselves to ethnic males constantly, for instance Archer notes that, 'Muslin males (...) to report suffering from the highest rates of racism at school'. (Archer, 2001: 81) However, it will not be suitable to evaluate how race intersects with gender without delving into the deeper issue which situate themselves under the categories of race and gender. Noticeably, hyper masculinity is a dominant force within the African-Caribbean or Latino households most stereotypically viewed as a resistance to racism although, can be viewed as a source of empowerment due to cultural upbringing. Men whether Latino or black feel the pressure to affirm their masculinity in ways perhaps foreign to them, expressed in the straight-laced documentary. (Chasnoff, 2009) In the context of family, black men would prefer patriarchy but some are too economically disenfranchised to maintain it thus, hyper- masculinity is substituted for the inability to uphold black systematic patriarchy. Black manhood is thus usually reserved for sports or the products associated with the entertainment world. (Gill, 2007) wherein black men are praised and hypocritically appreciated whilst black females are highly eroticised, perpetuating the fabricated racial perceptions of gender and race.

Likewise, black femininity is tainted by the eroticisation of the women. We are either invisible or given hypervisibility, that being overly fetishized and angry; depicting an emphasis on black or ethnic bodies being hypersexual, aggressive or even undesirable. This incorporated with institutionalised inequalities leaves room for one to only critique feminism for its oversight in acknowledging how race and gender intersect or look beyond the white gaze of womanhood. There is no definition for womanhood because every woman is different. What I can see here is the failure of identity politics to transcend difference as race does not have an intrinsic meaning wherein, Sojourner Truth's (1995) account is a poignant representation of how gender with race conflict. She challenged the essentialist ideals of femininity but also the norm that a woman needs a man to survive. Powerfully, she critiqued the moral inaccuracy of gender and race prejudice, thus rendered is the unfortunate circumstance in embodying two discriminations and

how dangerous that can be; a reality still prominent today.

Hence, in relation to Butler's concept on performativity, gender is not an internal reality but an external imposition: "Gender is, thus a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler, 1998: 522) She acknowledges that we can never truly determine how an individual is supposed to act as people's performances change and a new standardised gender norm is created for individuals to believe however, race also conceals its genesis. I see race as a standardised construction which determines male and female performances palpable in the opposition to non-binary relations, and the binary opposites that influence unconventional behaviours. Alternately when intersecting gender and race, women's rights discourses seem to justify homophobia also and international wars. For instance, feminist movements seeking to free Muslim women from being oppressed still puts white women in the position of being the 'civilisers', a hidden agency within their discourse (Carby, 1982) that drives a major debate as to whether it is due to origins of the feminist movement but also their culture and status in society. Retrospectively, under the Jim Crow laws black men were prosecuted and lynched for having relations with white women, whilst black women were raped and victimised by white men with little to no justice given. The system has and is still hurting black bodies hence, discussing the insidious matters is much harder but you learn to pick your battles for the fear of being called a bitter black woman obsessed with race. (Yancy, 2008)

This discussion, of course, would be incomplete if the media was not addressed for its structural racism. Their power in 'othering' is very problematic and a social construction used to demonise individuals or groups, thus sustaining the process which draws on power relations to frame others. Love and the production of gendered power intersecting with race is maintained by the constant image of black women being physically unattractive. Mass media is vital in dictating gender race discourses but succeeds in driving the ideology that black females are promiscuous, angry and bitter, whilst Asian women are passive and weak. (Collins, 2004)

Colourism is the consequence of this symbolic violence. The Dark Girls (2011) documentary ignites the cultural invasion which has shifted perspective and ideas on beauty, emblematic of an internalised colonialism. This is a global phenomenon seen eminently in the black community perpetuating a division normalised by our past narratives. The approximation with whiteness is valued in which the lighter you are the more desirable, whereas the darker you are the most undesirable, which has no foundation whatsoever. As the documentary highlights, the youth are influenced by the media to devalue their skin and alter their realities, leading to a psychological issue impeding one's ability to love themselves. Celebrities corroborate this ideal by constantly playing on the divisive nature of colourism through interracial dating being a symbol of 'progression' thus, norms of beauty intersect with race as what is defined as beauty is shaped by a colonial personality that promotes products designed to make women meet European standards of beauty e.g. bleaching. (2011) This is a clear example of interpolation, constantly being reminded that you fail to meet beauty's standard, an inadequacy created by ill-informed perceptions. In accordance, the fetishization and sexualisation of black women in history for instance Sarah Baartman ignites the inhumane treatment of black people during the 19th century, in which this demonization is what Europeans used to justify their superiority over black bodies to establish their oppression.

Admittedly, what I find interesting about this documentary is the matter that black women are not as fearful to acknowledge their self-loathing like black men whom commonly refuse to address their contempt. Nonetheless, I deem this discussion incomplete if language was not

acknowledged as an important factor in influencing gender race discrimination. (Laqueur, 1990) However, it would be wrong to not acknowledge that collectively blacks do not have the same superiority complex in relation to whites. We may attempt to empower ourselves with phrases such as 'black is beautiful' in an attempt to counterbalance the damage that has been done to our race and hold anti-white sentiments as a direct result of their oppression since black beauty is compared to white Eurocentric ideas of attraction, but the damage has already been done. Yet again, focusing only on surface level aspects may distract from the larger issues at hand. For too long men and women of colour have been marginalised and subjugated thence, an attempt needs to be made to amplify our voices, our cries and our experiences to culturally and systematically remove gender race prejudice, in the strive for equality and equity.

Throughout this discussion, I have highlighted how intersections between race and gender create a barrier to those who fall under the category. The individuals who contribute to such inequalities need to undergo a process of unlearning to disconnect and remove these hinderances associated with race and gender. What many fail to acknowledge that this discussion is not primarily about adding race and gender together but that the embodiment of both creates traffic and barriers not recognised by many groups that promotes gender liberation. Most movements are susceptible to subordinating other groups due to this ignorance but in this essay, I sought to focalise these hidden agencies not for the education of others but also myself so that I will become more aware of my own ignorance. Being a woman is already a censor. Being a woman and black is a double censor, thus to be both is what I call resilience. A very existence which remains defiant.