



How Race/ism and Patriarchy Interact To Shape Inequality

INTRODUCTION

Inequality can be best understood in the context of how humans conceptualize 'equality'. In the United States, a nation that projects an image of democracy and fairness, inequality is framed as a consequence of the typical stratification of ability, effort, and worth. This can also be found in the ways that inequality is framed in sociological texts, where the term isn't defined but instead readers are redirected to terms like 'stratification' or 'social class'. Here difference is degeneration and deviance from a norm; all in the context of a society that claims to be a meritocracy whilst it was built on stolen land, with stolen human beings, and now sustained by a split labor market that fosters exploitative relations socially, politically, and economically. Understanding how race and gender shape inequality requires that we first understand how they came to bear their crucial significance as metrics of governance and how such logics produce justifications for their stealing of land, labor, and lives for the endless generation of white wealth. Theories like intersectionality and settler colonial analysis serve as tools for us to understand the processes that generated the inequality we see today as social scientists.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality refers to the matrix characteristic of social, political, and economic categorizations/positions such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapped and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Prior to the coining of the term "Intersectionality" by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, Black radical scholars (such as Ida B. Wells, W.E.B. DuBois, and Frederick Douglass) referred to these 'intersections' as triple jeopardy or triple oppression. Intersectional scholarship was birthed out of Black feminist intellectual traditions. The praxis of intersectionality was built off of the ways race, gender, sex, and class impacted the lives of women of African descent in the U.S. and abroad. Black women have historically floated in these complicated sociopolitical positions where they were considered not quite women, placing them outside of white Victorian womanhood. Blackness is commonly centered on the experiences of Black men, thus erasing Black women.

In “Intersectionality’s Definitional Dilemmas”, Patricia Hill-Collins (2015) discusses the historical development of intersectionality as a term, concept, form of analysis, as well as a field of study. Patricia Hill-Collins defines intersectionality as a critical insight that different forms of sociopolitical positions in society are reciprocally constructed phenomena. This definition pulls away from the commonly assumed ‘additive’ mischaracterization of intersectionality versus its actual dynamic systems analysis of power relations based on human actions, struggles, and commands of resources. The grounding of intersectionality as an analytical tool connects it to the work that it does to highlight the ways systemic domination impacts the lives of Black women and other marginalized peoples. A crucial distinction that Collins makes is the academic versus public division made in academe when it comes to the intersectionality being understood as a theory, analysis, method, set of assumptions, and/or practice. The definition of intersectionality is heavily shaped by the everyday lived experiences of oppressed peoples and it’s their lives and the ways they come to understand them, make sense of them, and resist and attempt to impact the world that gives intersectionality its meaning. Definitions emerge from everyday practices and demonstrate to the living qualities of language.

CONQUEST AND COLONIALITY

The code of ethics for settlers was that of the non-ethics of war, as seen in Jackson Turner’s speech on the closing of the frontier, where he lamented of the closing of the frontier and what it signified to the making of the Americas (Maldonado-Torres 2007). The settling of the plains was fueled by the recruitment of Europeans to settle Indigenous people’s lands in the West. They became American through war: becoming the ‘savage’ Native by warring with them for the lands. Indigenous people’s defense of their own land and peoples was used as the justification of the United States’ settler government intervention, based on their claims American citizens were being killed. Settlers argued that these experiences made them different from Europeans, that the British could not understand what they had endured, making them distinctly different from the British. Hence, to be American meant to be borne out of the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the frontier and/or owning enslaved Africans. Rising from the non-ethics of war in the murder of Indigenous peoples and settlement of new frontiers (making of the ‘New World’) and chattel enslavement of Africans.

The ways that ‘race’ and gender interact to shape inequality must be understood by the systemic logics that animate such social positions: racism and patriarchy; more specifically put Euro-Western colonialism. As sociologist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997) pointed out, the colonial process, which was sex- and gender-differentiated and the colonizer-colonized relation based off the notion of producing ‘others’, differentially categorized as deviations from Europeans. The colonial process did the work of

producing 'sub-humans' and could not have done so without essentialist ideologies teeming throughout European histories regarding the inferiority of women and their inherent servile character (Jackson and Weidman 2005). Race is not the only status that the European imposed, colonial gender frameworks were also imposed onto colonized peoples. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres aptly states, "the point that I want to make here is that racialization works through gender and sex" (2007:248).

Race fused the social reproduction of colonial capitalism's social relations to that of biological reproduction (Wolfe 2016). This is where we find the relation between these two social positions of race and gender (Lugones 2010). This can be seen when we take a look at the legal codes that came to contribute to the conditions that defined life for chattel enslaved Africans in the Virginia colony in 1662: *partus sequitur ventrem*. This legal framework passed the chattel or free status of the mother to the child; extending slavery to all future matrilineal generations (Sublette and Sublette 2016). What this legal principle represents is the management of slave and indentured servant labor; a binding of capitalist production and social reproduction to that of biological reproduction. The value of different types of colonized populations was based a dynamic between capitalist market interests and ideals of private property accrued from land as well as labor.

RACE, GENDER, & THE LABOR MARKET

As Chandra Mohanty (2003) pointed out, the essentialism of women as a category and their reference to men, something that can be traced back to Aristotle's notion of essentialism as well as his definition of democracy. Mohanty stated that binds the category of women with one another around the world in spite of their different histories and circumstances is their socio-political location. It's the relationship to the structures of power and domination that creates this homogeneity versus the homogeneous essential notion of women as a biological category all dominated by the same patriarchal structure. Capitalism is transnational in its functions and provides what Mohanty referred to as relations of rule that position women differently as workers. The conditions of contemporary existence are defined by colonialism/modernity itself through a dynamic interaction between the racializing, gendering, and sexualizing, of bodies in reference to one another on the capitalist market.

Race and gender do not affect all workers the same. Different processes are at play in high-skilled and low-skilled labor. For instance, in high-skilled labor, Black women were found to have to work harder than white women to impress male employers and are often informally excluded by them (Brown and Misra 2003; Acker 2006). The controlling images of "mammy" and "jezebel" are still used in high-skilled workspaces

to demand silence and appeasement from Black women workers at the risk of being punished and labeled as aggressive, risking the loss of employment. Racial doctrines shape what defines professionalism and the acceptable rules about behavior for workers. These stereotypes play out in the hiring process of employees, the metrics of employee evaluation, the execution of institutional procedures, and interactions which mediate reward and evaluation metrics in organizations (Brown and Misra 2003; Acker 2006). Organizing practices that create and reproduce inequalities have become more subtle over time; they are maintained through other practices like informal exclusions and unspoken denigration, which are considered difficult to document or confront. Acker (2006) argues that the practices and processes that generate inequality in organizations include: (1) organizing the general requirements of work; (2) organizing class hierarchies; (3) recruitment and hiring; (4) wage setting and supervisory practices; and (5) informal interactions. White men are still more likely to be in local and global positions of power in organizations even while the advantages of middle-class and lower-level male workers decrease (Acker 2006).

Women are overwhelmingly represented among the working poor in the United States. The true work of racial doctrines lies in the management of labor, which ultimately keeps a lot of Black women in low-wage paying jobs with poor working conditions in an already unstable job market. As sociologist Patricia Hill-Collins points out, working poor Black women perform domestic service work not too different from their ancestors (2000). Domestic work, Browne and Misra state, “represents the underside of the U.S. labor market. Protective workforce regulations governing pay, working hours, and benefits are often not enforced, and workers face extreme levels of exploitation” (2003:506). Domestic work is highly associated with the ‘home’ and considered unskilled labor to justify the low wages and lack of protections it gives to workers. Domestic work, previously filled with Black women workers, eventually shifted to a predominately immigrant women of color workforce, finding them easier to take advantage of (Hill-Collins 2000; Brown and Misra 2003; Oliver and Shapiro 2006).

What is important to note here is that the devaluation of the labor of women of color is not done in a vacuum but is what the higher living standards of middle-class white women are built upon (Hill-Collins 2000; Brown and Misra 2003). Based on the 2013 American Community Survey 3-year estimates, white women make \$0.78 on the white male dollar while Black women make \$0.64 and Latinas make \$0.54 on the white male dollar. Another way to visualize these inequities is to look at what a Black woman working full time for a year would have if she got the full dollar versus just \$0.64; which would be enough money for 153 more weeks of food (2.9 years) or 21 more months of rent or 13.5 months of mortgage and utility payments or 7,915 gallons of gas. While white women make \$0.78 cents on the white male dollar, Black men make

\$0.71 cents on the white male dollar; dispelling any 'gender only' analyses that claim men make more than women. Such inequities reveal the need for an intersectional analysis, seeing that it's the interactions of these different racialized, gendered, and sexualized positions that influence how workers are valued on the labor market.

Additionally, discussions about the experiences of people of color with the labor market must be contextualized with a discussion about joblessness. The compounding impacts of racial residential segregation, underfunded schools, and the predatory nature of the prison industrial complex increases the difficulties of attaining human capital attributes (skills, training/education, experience) required for qualifying for high-skill labor jobs (Oliver and Shapiro 2006). Oliver and Shapiro found that work history and labor market experience play a pivotal role in structuring racial inequality (2006:121). It is in this arena that marginalized people end up trapped within a particular job market sector, unable to earn wages over the poverty level, making it difficult to sustain a household. Take Milwaukee, for example, where in 2007, their house crisis resulted in a major spike in evictions (Desmond 2012). As sociologist Matthew Desmond discussed, "the city's evictions took place in predominantly black inner-city neighborhoods, where one renter-occupied household in 14 was evicted annually. In black neighborhoods, women were more than twice as likely to be evicted as men" (2012:91). Gender and race inequalities on the labor market are part of what Desmond (2012) referred to as structural constraints that resulted in eviction rates of women in poor Black neighborhoods matching the incarceration rates of Black men, contributing to the *stuck in place* experience of working poor Black people.

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