

Essay

Title = Invisible Chains: How Race and Gender Bind Women of Color in Double Discrimination

Outline

Introduction

1. Defining the Intersection of Race and Gender
 - 1.1 Race and gender ~~overlap~~ intersect to create overlapping systems of oppression, as theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw
2. Defining Double Discrimination
 - 2.1 Women of color face compounded marginalization, due to both racial and gender biases
3. Importance of this Topic
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Body

1. The Intersection of Race and Gender
 - 1.1 Intersectionality = a lens for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other
 - 1.1.1 According to a 2021 Pew Research Center Study, 60% of women of color report experiencing both racial and gender discrimination
 - 1.2 Historical Context
 - 1.3 Contemporary Realities
 - 1.3.1 Black women earn 64 cents for every

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dollar earned by a white man (National Women's Law Center, 2023)

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2.1 Systemic Racism and Patriarchy

2.1.1 Only 4.6% of Fortune 500 CEOs are Women of Color (Catalyst, 2023)

2.2 Implicit Bias and Stereotypes

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3. Methods By Which Women of Color Face Double Discrimination

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3.2 Health Disparities

3.2.1 Black women three times more likely to die during childbirth than white women in US (CDC, 2023)

3.3 Violence and Harassment

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Conclusion

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Kimberlé Crenshaw, the scholar who coined the term intersectionality, once said: "If you're standing in the path of multiple forms of exclusion, you're likely to get hit by both". This quote is highly representative of the discrimination women of color face on account of both their race and gender. Crenshaw emphasized that race and gender are not isolated identities but are ~~inter~~ interlinked social categories. For instance, a Black woman faces sexism that is different from what white women encounter because her experiences are shaped by racial prejudice. Women of color are marginalized by the combined effects of racism and sexism, often referred to as "double discrimination". This means they experience exclusion or injustice in ways that neither race nor gender alone can explain. Crenshaw highlighted that traditional feminist movements often focus on the experiences of white women, while anti-racist movements tend to center on the experiences of men of color. This results in the erasure of the unique struggles of women of color, making this topic of incredible importance. Women of color uniquely experience double discrimination due to the interplay of race and gender, which manifests in structural inequalities, workplace bias, and cultural stereotypes, but solutions grounded in intersectionality can dismantle these barriers.

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Intersectionality is a framework developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 paper: "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex". It describes how different aspects of a person's identity - such as race, class, gender, sexuality - intersect to create overlapping and compounding systems of oppression and privilege. Crenshaw introduced this term to highlight the unique forms of discrimination faced by individuals who exist at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, particularly women of color. In her work, Crenshaw further criticized how legal/social systems often treat discrimination as isolated to a single social identity, such as either racism or sexism, failing to account for the ways these systems interact and intensify with each other. For example, according to a Pew Research Center 2021 study, 60% of women of color report experiencing both racial and gender discrimination. This statistic highlights how double discrimination is a widespread phenomenon, yet the fragmented approach of current academia erases the existence of people who face intersecting oppressions. This theoretical framework introduced by Crenshaw is critical to preventing such erasure.

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Marginalization of women of color is not limited to contemporary times only - there are several historical examples highlighting how this marginalization was deeply rooted in systems of colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. During the transatlantic slave trade and the era of slavery in America, Black women were subjected to both racial and gender based violence. They were treated as property and were often forced into physical labour, sexual exploitation, and reproductive control. Slave owners routinely raped enslaved Black women. Their bodies were commodified as tools for labor and reproduction to sustain the slave economy. A key example is Harriet Jacobs, who documented her abuse in her autobiography 'Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl'. The novel revealed how black female slaves endured sexual violence repeatedly. These abuses laid the foundation for the hypersexualization of Black women in Western culture.

This marginalization of women of color persists in modern society, manifesting in challenges such as pay gaps, unequal representation in leadership roles, and system inequities across various sectors. Black women earn 64 cents for every dollar earned by a white man, according to the National Women's Law Center, 2023. This inequality

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reflects systemic discrimination based on both race and gender. Women of color are also over-represented in low-wage industries, such as caregiving, retail, and domestic work. Implicit biases often hinder their access to high-paying positions. Further, women of color are vastly underrepresented in positions of power and leadership across all sectors, from corporate boardrooms to government offices. This lack of representation limits their ability to influence policy, decision-making, and societal norms.

Women of color also frequently encounter discrimination and microaggressions in professional environments, which creates hostile work climates and hinders their career progression.

The first main reason why women of color face double discrimination is due to systemic racism and patriarchy. According to a Catalyst study done in 2023, only 4.6% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women of color. Institutional racism refers to policies, practices, and systems that systematically disadvantage certain racial groups while privileging others. It operates through mechanisms like unequal access to education, healthcare, housing, and employment opportunities, disproportionately affecting women of color.

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Patriarchy establishes dominance over women through social, economic, and political systems that subordinate women's rights and opportunities. This structure institutionalizes gender discrimination, limiting women's access to leadership, economic independence, and bodily autonomy. The combined effects of institutional/systemic racism and patriarchy restricts economic opportunities for women of color, leading to higher rates of poverty and wage disparities. Women of color not only face racial stereotypes (e.g. being seen as less competent due to race) but also sexist assumptions (e.g. being viewed as less authoritative or capable due to gender).

A second main reason women of color experience double discrimination is due to implicit bias and stereotypes. Before even integrating into a workplace, women of color face multiple assumptions solely on the basis of their skin. Rather than being granted the opportunity to showcase their expertise or skills (for which they have worked hard for), they are hit with multiple theories of how they 'might' react in certain institutions. For example, stereotypes like the "angry Black woman" have exacerbated this trend. In any given situation, black women are seen to be

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prone to outbursts or temper tantrums, when in fact they are not. Colleagues and senior alike assume several factors based on skin color - such as where one might live, what level of education she has, what her socioeconomic status is, whether she comes from a two-parent household, whether she attended expensive institutions, etc. These biases not only hinder progression or acceptance within a workplace, but they also lump together all women of color and erase any possibility of maintaining individuality when entering a new setting.

A third main reason why women of color experience double discrimination is due to a lack of intersectional policies. Although Crenshaw introduced the term several years ago, there is still a glaring absence of policies that address both racial and gender-based inequities, leaving women of color ~~is~~ unprotected. Workplace discrimination complaints filed by women of color either go unnoticed, or are addressed using a white male-centric perspective. This process does not solve the root of the problem, and only serves to exacerbate existing inequities.

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A first main method through which women of color experience double discrimination is workplace inequities. Chronic problems of underrepresentation, wage disparities, and barriers to promotion plague most workplaces. According to a 2022² report done by McKinsey, black and Latina women occupy only 8% of managerial roles, despite making up 20% of the US workforce. What makes this issue especially heartbreaking is that women of color face no issue of qualification - several of them have worked incredibly, attended great schools, and achieved incredible feats. Despite all this, their experience in the workplace is not identical to white women who have worked equally as hard. Rather, they are faced with their own unique set of compounding barriers that weakens their credibility and greatly diminishes chances of excelling at work.

A second method which manifest experiences of double discrimination for women of color is health disparities. While many assume a hospital is a safe space dedicated to providing the utmost treatment for each and every single patient that is often not the case. Women of color often face greatly varying experiences of treatment, when compared to white

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women. Treatment may vary on account of - how well a doctor listens to patient's needs, whether a patient is being communicated with at each and every step, whether family medical history is taken into account etc. For example, Black women are three times more likely to die during childbirth than white women in the US, in a study conducted by the CDC in 2023. There have been several incidents in which women of color have reported doctors/nurses being dismissive of their needs, on account of the unfounded assumption that women of color patients complain more compared to white women. In countries operating on private health-care systems, women of color often struggle to afford treatment. If they do secure treatment, they face multiple stereotypes and implicit biases on what type of patient they may be, and whether their patient concerns are valid.

A third method through which women of color experience double discrimination is violence and harassment. Women of color face disproportionately higher rates of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and hate crimes due to the intersection of race and gender oppression. These

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issues are fueled by systemic racism, patriarchal norms, and cultural stereotypes, which create unique vulnerabilities and often leave women of color without sufficient legal or societal support.

Domestic violence is seen to disproportionately impact women of color, as they are seen to face higher rates of abuse on account of economic inequality, cultural stigmas, and systemic barriers to seeking help. Even when they do report abuse, women of color often mistrust law enforcement due to their multiple implicit biases, hindering attempts to better the situation. As they are often employed in low-wage, male-dominated industries, sexual harassment is rampant and often goes unchecked. When they do speak out, society often dismisses their experience, reinforcing these trends of abuse.

To combat this ongoing marginalization, one solution is to advocate for intersectional policies. There needs to be a push for workplace and societal reforms that address both racial and gender inequities simultaneously. This advocacy needs to come from not only women of color, but also their white counterparts as well. Without a collective push from all members of society, these

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policies will not gain traction and will remain only elusive ideas held by a minority.

A second solution to eradicate marginalization is to increase representation and leadership opportunities. Women of color have proven time and time again they are capable of working as hard or achieving as much, and it's time to give them a seat at the table. Women of color must be promoted into leadership, mentorship, and advocacy roles to challenge stereotypes that they face. This promotion not only serves to eradicate current problems, but also works towards opening up the path for future generations of women of color.

A final solution to eradicating marginalization is to foster community and allyship. The struggle to erase compounding barriers of gender and race requires a collective effort, and cannot be won by the victims alone. There is a need to build coalitions among women, minorities, and allies to amplify women of color voices. A key example is the "Lean In Women of Color" program, an initiative promoted by Sheryl Sandberg. The program specifically focuses on empowering

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Women of Color by addressing the unique challenges they face at the intersection of race and gender. It provides resources such as mentorship, networking opportunities, and leadership development. Initiatives such as these are integral in fastening bridges across gender and racial divides, and fuelling a greater collective effort.

To conclude, it is clear that women of color experience double discrimination due to the intersection of race and gender, creating systemic challenges in workplaces, healthcare, and society. Intersectionality and the barriers associated with it manifest in several different ways across all sectors of society, reinforced by systemic racism and patriarchal norms. To effectively eradicate this marginalization, there is a need to critically analyze the root causes of these biases and the current systems working to perpetuate them. Addressing double discrimination is not solely a moral imperative but also essential for achieving true social and economic equality for all. Policymakers, businesses, and individuals must champion intersectional approaches and actively combat the invisible shackles of double discrimination.