

The triple oppression of black females

Sociology



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Are women who belong to a racial or ethnic minority or marginalized group 'doubly oppressed'? Consider whether the conditions and experiences of Black and Asian women can be addressed by or subsumed within a feminist and/or anti-racist framework (for both analysis and politics). In its fight for so called equality there is a hypocrisy that can be found. Feminist Theory claims to be fighting for woman's right's however groups such as the Liberation Woman's Movement will show that the so called fight for equality is not universally applicable.

Even with the emergence of Black Feminist movements marginalisation of ethnic minorities and evidence would suggest that Black and Asian woman are doubly oppressed, firstly by their Gender and secondly by their class. The purpose of this essay is to provide evidence of such oppression and highlight the negative impact feminist theory has had on further marginalising minority groups. It is hoped that awareness will be raised on issues of inequality in the main spheres of social life- reproduction, family, work and class.

Hazel Carby's *White Woman Listen* is a good basis when trying to gain insight to the failings of feminist theory. In her book on *Reconstructing Woman Hood* she represents how Black woman have been denied gender identity and have failed to gain recognition amongst feminist schools of thought: "feminist theory in Britain is almost wholly eurocentric and when, it is not ignoring the experience of black woman at home it is trundling third world woman into the stage only to appear as victims of barbarous, primitive societies" (Carby 2000 pg. 567).

Acknowledging the Eurocentric nature of the feminist framework Carby's analysis the four main areas of social life shows that they are not universally applicable and the voices of Black and Asian woman are not being listened to (Solomons 2009 Pg. 445). Beginning with Patriarchy, the Woman's Liberation Movement argued that there was a need for Woman to be able to work and take control in the so called male dominated society however looking at the life of Black and Asian woman would show that this so called problem of Patriarchy is not the same.

As this White Upper Class feminist demand the right to gain a career, Black Woman are facing the role as Bread Winner and Career with no presence of man in their fight for survival. Not only this argument insulting towards Black and other ethnic minority women but it also takes any credibility away from the feminist argument of equality. The Same logic follows for the other spheres of social life: Reproduction, Dependency and the Family. Feminists claim that they are effected by these areas of life, in that reproduction renders them dependent on male however there appears to be lack of insight into other Woman's life's across Class and Gender.

Example of this lack of insight can be seen with reference to the Black Woman Breadwinner, who is only dependent on herself contrasting such is then the Japanese Business Woman who would have more freedom than most as she decides not to have a career and invests in emotion when she needs it. This shows that Woman have differing needs globally, this something that the social spheres of feminist theory currently does not address. The work of Angela Y Davis would further validate the failings of feminist framework, showing the sometimes damaging nature of it.

Examining the Woman's Liberation fight for birth control, the key to emancipation, Davis reveals further marginalisation of Black, Puerto Rican and Chicanes in that Birth Control rights were manipulated into a form of Birth Suicide, a means of reducing the population numbers of Ethnic Minorities and the poor. During 1960s/70s there was an ongoing debate from different sides with White Woman shouting for the right to abort and the other side Black Woman are sceptical about the true nature of such legislation.

The 1977 Hyde Amendment in congress would represent the ideological nature of Birth Control in that Abortion became a right for the White Middle/Class woman and Black Puerto Rican, Chicanos and Native American. Amended were taking away such a right with the withdrawal of federal funding, meaning sterilization was the only option they had. To Davis States: " The birth control movement has seldom succeeded in uniting woman of different social backgrounds, and rarely have the movements leaders popularized the genuine concerns of working-class women". (1982Pg. 201).

This again shows how feminist theory cannot be used to address the needs of Black and Asian woman in that it further victimises them. Not only to the become marginalised by their class but also their gender. The Birth Rights Movement led to many death and sterilizations. It is estimated that 80 percent of deaths were Black and Puerto Ricans opting for back street abortions. Other figures shows that in 1933 7686 sterilizations had been carried out by the Eugenics Commission of North Carolina - 5000 of which were Black and in 1964 65% of Woman sterilized in North Carolina were Black with 35% being white (Davis 1982 pg. 106).

Some may argue that this case is to do with class however as the figures would suggest Race is the core of such ideology, with the those such as Roosevelt abusing such rights as a form of Nazi Genocide and Race purity. With such evidence oppressions of ethnic minority woman are quite apparent. The failings of the feminists theory are shown in that they assumption that their need to control reproduction/birth control is national when it clearly isn't. The feminist fight for birth control, has been used as a weapon in implementing ideology of Eugenics Commission in suppressing their population sizes via Birth Suicide.

Taken this into consideration the argument that feminism could help unearth/solve ethnic minority womans inequality is weakened , as in this instance, feminism has done more harm than good, doubly oppressing Asian and Black woman due to their class and gender positioned, forced sterilizations and ultimately reducing their population numbers by Eugenic Rhetoric. Evidence of the Double Oppression of Black and Asian woman can still be found in various areas of social world and life. In the UK today a large percentage of the Labour (manual) is made up of Migrants, to which a large percentage are Asian Woman.

Factories such as Grunwick Photo Processing show this oppression placed on Asian woman. In their working day they will have few breaks and little pay, if they require a day of due to sickness a doctors note must be given, pregnant woman have to make their check ups at the weekend and if your child be sick you must get someone else to handle it (Black 1997 Pg. 3). These needs for equality certainly do not do match the same needs of the average white female, rendering the Asian woman oppressed doubly.

They are a victim in their social position and a victim of their gender, in that not only are they disadvantaged economically because of their class but they are also a victim of their gender in that they are ruled by their husbands patriarchal needs. Second evidence of Asian and Black woman's oppression can be found in a number of Media texts. The construction of Gender and Race is done in a number of ways according to times and contexts. During colonial expansion the Black woman was denied her feminism, painted as a cannibalistic promiscuous animal that needed to be tamed (Lola Young cited in Solomons 2009).

Such stereotypes with the association of promiscuity and Black Ethnicity continue today. The Representations of Asian woman during war shows the ever changing identities of Asian woman in their gender and femininity. With the requirement to invade land media discourses represent war in various ways, one is often to construct Asian woman as damsels in need of saving due to Asian Men's Patriarchal ways, shaping their country into being backward. In this ideology their legitimacy to invade is gained, as they no longer looks like the attackers but in fact the hero's.

This again, oppressing the Asian Woman further in that not only are they withdrawn the right to construct their own identities and femininities but they are excluded the right to be given equality, and this is then abused as a key to war and saturation bombing. Class and Race proves again to double disadvantage an individual. Lola Young's reference to the depiction of Asian by the Western World in regards to third world labour is another example on how woman are a victim of their gender and class (Solomons 2009).

With references to adverts for Migrant labour she highlights the objectification of Asian woman through the symbolism in such adverts. Symbolism is given in the depiction of her “ delicate hands”, she will work hard and never let you down. This ideology is problematic for many Asian woman as they may often become victims of inequality in the work place, in that there managers exploit the workers dependency of the job resulting in unfair pay and zero workers rights.

The thought that for some of these woman that they would have to go into the sex trade prevents them standing up for their rights in these work places. Here again as Carby would identify the woman is a victim of here race and class. Evidence has shown a large percentage of Asian woman are trafficked into the illicit sex business every year, the objectification of her Gender and Class is quite apparent. Finally the work of Patricia Collins is an other example of the ways in which Black Woman are represented and constructed negatively.

As Carby identifies the family is core to the feminist argument in that it is nuclear and the female has to stay at home and play role of mother however Patricia Collins- *Mamma's, Matriarchs and Other Controlling Images* (1999) shows the ways in which this theory is not applicable to Black Woman, yet again leaving their voices ignored in the feminist fight for so called equality. In her work, the objectification of Black is quite apparent in that often in media discourses they are constructed into the idea of a “ Black Mamma” caring for the White Upper Classes children whilst she maintain's a career.

Several areas of oppression are apparent in this situation. Not only has the Black Woman been denied her right to equality, but they way she is

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constructed has been determined by the White Upper Class female, she is a victim of her class and gender. Haven took into consideration the main spheres of the feminist argument it is apparent that feminist theory fails to address the needs on a global scale. Like the Eurocentric histories of the West feminist theory forgets to recognise the needs of differing cultures.

It is also apparent the ways that feminist argument has been abused and has the effect of oppressing Asian and Black Woman further. The abuse of birth control rights permitted sterilization of many, the construction of the Asian Damsel permitted the saturation bombing of those seen as the enemy, the sexualisation and objectification of Asian Woman leads to many being oppressed and exploited due to their gender and class. That being said if feminist theory were to be used to address such issues then recognition to the differing needs needs to be given. Failing do to so undermines any fight for equality for woman.