

# The social making of gender article review essay example

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



## **Introduction**

In this discussion two articles have been selected for reflection. They are ' Prisons for our Bodies: Closets for our Minds by Patricia Hill Collins (2004) and Keeping Sex in Bounds by Abby Ferber (2004). First a summary of both articles will be presented. Afterwards an interpretive analysis of gender and intersections will be explained. Thirdly, my personal reflections will be offered and finally an evaluation of how both articles articulate contemporary gender issues will be highlighted.

## **Summary of Articles**

Prisons for our Bodies: Closets for our Minds - Patricia Hill Collins

In Prisons for our bodies –Closets for our Minds Patricia Collins ( 2004) describes the plight of women especially, ' black women' functioning in a segregated society. Themes highlighted in the literature embrace racism, heterosexuality and black sexuality. Racism is conceived from the perspective of interrelationships between black and white people as well among black people and other races. She discusses heterosexuality as the institution in American society, which hinders progression of black politics. Further, sexuality is addressed from the premise of gender biases punishing women for presumed inappropriate sexual practices while men go free for the same offence (Collins, 2004).

Patricia Hill Collins (2004) argues that racism and heterosexism are two faces of the same coin because they operate to create the exact social outcomes. The contention is that ' black lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender' (Collins, 2004. p 10) people were the first to question the

association between race and heterosexuality because of the assumption in developed societies like America that black people are straight whereas whites are homosexuals. In reality she believes that this is merely a stereotyping emerging from racial prejudice (Collins, 2004).

In further explaining the phenomenon Collins (2004) advocates that a liberation politics for black people is necessary in today's society. This goes beyond being elected to the senate or white house; rather it embodies a deeper understanding of how heterosexism and racism clasp hands in the gender/race oppression game. Importantly, she emphasized that it is creating evidence based political policies that affirm gay, lesbian and transsexual rights to participate in the social structure without fear of stigmatization. Deeper yet, she posits that there must be a political movement towards exposing the social characteristics that foster construction of mutual relationships between racism and heterosexism (Collins, 2004).

The author continues to deliberate from a premise of ' Mapping Racism and Heterosexism the Prison and the Closet. In this section of the article she first makes reference to a quote from the legendary first Black South African President, Nelson Mandela, to confirm that racism and oppression are the same; prison is a microcosm of the whole and fighting inside is comparable to the struggle outside (Collins, 2004).

She then embraces an exposition into how the life of Black African American men and women are similar to the prison concept espoused in President Mandela's quote. In clarifying the issue Collins (2004) discerned that prison is a concept denoting, the ' historical placement of African Americans in the

political economy' (Collins, 2004. p 12) under Jim Crow Laws.

Deliberations regarding prison and closet exposing the American Justice, political and socio-economic systems' input of racislizing heterosexuality were profound. Collins (2004) discussed at length how black homosexuals are marginalized into closets of stigmatization being imprisoned by societal norms and values, which are inconsistent with theirs. Interplay between black and white sexuality acceptances from the author's expression, undergirds this phenomenon. Further she expresses dismay at how actual imprisonment continues the demoralization/dehumanization process (Collins, 2004).

In the very next section of the article, the author exposes ' African Americans Racialization of Promiscuity' to contend that the media through talk shows promote this racializing of the sexual practice. Slavery was referenced as the initiation of black men promiscuity to the extent of slave masters trying to contain them. To the contrary Collins (2004) discerned that white men cohabited with black women slaves and they bore children. Still the stigma of dangerous African American male predators remaining with their wives in the institution of marriage is unacceptable in the society. Also, they are removed from roaming the streets being dangerous to communities where children live (Collins, 2004).

In similar fashion Collins (2004) exposes the ' African American Whitening of Homosexuality' interpretively expressing that due to the historical paradigm denoting black men promiscuous and women baby producers they were far removed from the homosexual label. Further she exclaims that it was believed to be an impossibility for African men and women to have same sex

relationships. However, the author noted that this conceptual framework describing white homosexuality and black promiscuity hinder a comprehensive analysis of black sexuality because there is still a political movement aimed at regulating sexual relationships among blacks (Collins, 2004).

When summarizing the article Collins (2004) revisits racism and heterosexualism citing a rape/murder crime involving a black school age 14 year old New Jersey girl. She drew inferences of class, gender, race and sexuality. Gunn, according to reports, was stabbed to death after she expressed her lesbian sexuality to her male rapists. The author advocates a more realistic approach towards stereotyping of racial heterosexuality (Collins 2004).

### **Keeping Sex in Bounds by Abby L. Ferber**

Abby Ferber (2008) discusses sex from the perspective of keeping it in bounds in terms of sexuality and the deconstruction of race and gender. Ferber (2008) examines concepts of white supremacy and how it has shaped the American society's socio-economic; socio-political and sexual gender inter-racial relations cultural profile. In introducing the concepts and assumptions espoused in the article Ferber (2008) first exclaimed surprise at realizing that inter-racial sexuality and attacks on white masculinity was openly discussed at length in the movement (Ferber, 2008).

This forged another realizing causing Ferber (2008) to assume that tools used in measuring construction of race gender models are inadequate.

Subsequently, he applied the supremacist movement as a case study

informing 'keeping sex in bounds; sexuality and the deconstruction of race and gender.' Reference was made to Klan; neo-Nazis and skin head organized to promote white supremacy pride simultaneously, attacking Jews and black people (Ferber, 2008).

In the study Ferber (2008) hypothesizes that to some degree gender and sexuality are a part of everything being central to identities, culture, social system, and institutions. This emerged from the assumption that race and gender identities are social constructs and inequality is maintained through regulation of sexual practices. In validating the hypothesis, the researcher, offered a deconstructionist approach, which can be applied intersectionally towards exploring race, sex, gender, and sexuality (Ferber, 2008).

The methodology encompassed a literature review and concept analysis of key terms intersectional approach; social constructionist approach and deconstruction of binary oppositions. In the preliminary remarks the author cites sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins' (2008) theoretical perspective of adopting the intersectional approach in analyzing gender relations in the supremacist movement.

Precisely, her assumption stating that only through an intersectional approach can the interplay among/between gender, race and sex be explained formed the foundation of this analysis. It was conceived that all three factors influence identity, ultimately either increasing or decreasing oppressive impositions. The author further supported this proposition by citing Omi and Winant (1986) to argue that race is preeminently a socio-historical concept. They continue to posit that race and racial categories are derived from concrete expressions of specific social relations. These social

relations emerge from a historical context consistent with the ideological framework defining such activities (Ferber, 2008).

The author again citing Omi and Winant (1986) argues that race and its implications are politically contested concepts that ought to be thoroughly explored by social scientists. In deeper contemplation the researcher discovered that the process by which race is addressed is politically oriented in a deliberate attempt to produce inequality regarding power and privileges in the society. Hence, the social constructionists approach becomes relevant (Ferber, 2008).

Ferber (2008) discovered while applying these assumption to the supremacist movement case study that white supremacy, heterosexual and intra racial regulations produced intelligible, radicalized, and gendered identities. Alternatively, when trying to regulate homosexuals, transgender and mixed races a wealth of unintelligent variables emerged. Citing Butler (1993) the author concluded that this factor in itself produces a form of exclusion, which is not addressed by constructionist theorist. This is a gap regarding tools used to measure gender issues that Ferber (2008) identified when analyzing the supremacist movement (Ferber, 2008).

More importantly, Ferber (2008) admitted that it is difficult to construct human behavior into a prototype of activities. Therefore, deconstruction of binary operations ought to be considered. A deconstruction measure advanced by this analyst is redefining factors that constitute black/white; male/female and homosexual/heterosexual. It means delineating boundaries which allow socio-political and historical profiling of sex; race, gender and

sexuality to continue under the constitution of 'business as usual' (Ferber, 2008).

## **Analysis of Gender and Intersections**

Gender and intersections were addressed from the premise of race by Patricia Hill Collins (2004) and supremacists' connotations by Abby Ferber (2008). Collins' (2004) projection of African American and the Racializing of Promiscuity and African American Whitening of Homosexuality are prominent gender intersection profiles discussed in the article. She contends that history and the media have reduced African aesthetics pertaining to culture, spirituality, and artifacts towards a misunderstanding relating it to 'black sexuality.' The obvious gender intersection in this case is linking sexual gender practices to the black race

In similar context Collins (2004) mentions the relationship of black women being easily abused sexually and labeled massive children producers to the extent of them heading their households as single parents. Also another gender and intersection bias against women in this case as explained in the article relates to women being stigmatized and punished for sexual misappropriations whereas men are celebrated for such performances. This action denotes a gender and intersection bias beyond race, but within the confines of female sexuality as well.

Collins (2004) elaborates on this intersection to detect that it is a method of stereotyping to imprison a race socially and create a closet of doubts as to who and what they are and how they must function in society. Precisely, it is a strategy of rendering a people powerless because of gender, sex, sexuality



and race (Collins, 2004).

The white homosexuality premise is another phase of race and gender misinterpretations relating gender, race, sex and sexuality intersections. While homosexuality is being considered a white phenomenon black it is perceived within the context of black promiscuity. The intersection moves from gender into race and sexuality. Collins (2004) further highlights the plight of a 14 year old lesbian girl who was raped and murdered. In a gender and intersection analysis she pointed out that the child's age, socio-economic status, race, gender and sexuality were responsible for the assault on her life (Collins, 2004).

Ferber (2008) likewise explains gender and intersection from studies conducted in the supremacist movement. Ferber's (2008) contention on the issue is that gender and sexuality determines one's identify from a social context and there are no biological theories to support this assumption. As such, the gender and intersection patterns existing today in society evolve from historical paradigms and socio-political impositions created by a system of normative behavior. This behavior creates role confusion as it intersects gender boundaries into other forms of a person's life (Ferber, 2008).

Ferber (2008) cites studies to prove that constructionists cannot account for people termed non-normative because they do not fit into a designed social construct. Therefore, gender and intersection is difficult to identify. Precisely, they experience a difficulty with gender identity from an ideological and sociological perspective (Ferber, 2008).

## **Personal Reflection**

My personal reflection emanates from the way women are still marginalized in societies across the world; how black people are perceived and treated in developed countries and interpretations of human sexuality pertaining to gender roles. The articles have reiterated the plight of black women in the diaspora. Collins (2004) clearly highlights as gender intersects with sexuality historical perceptions of African American women. Even though modern America tries to raise the standard of African American women through positive profiles depicted by Michelle Obama the media still attempts to desecrate African American female sexuality (Lock and Strong, 2010).

The lessons in class and further readings helped me to realize that the social construction of gender emerges from a thought pattern embedded in social constructionist thought. These theorists contend that the things people do are learnt from what society expects of them. As a child is born that child does not know how to function as it pertains to gender roles. These are either imposed by parents through the clothes they wear at birth and thereafter or what society imposes (Cahill, 1985).

For example, a typical social construct development is telling a pregnant woman that if her baby is a boy everything she buys must be blue or if a girl the color should be pink. Any attempt to switch colors indicates either that the mother is trying to make the child a homosexual from birth or she is simply contradicting the norms (Butler, 1990).

We all know that in countries outside of North America women are still genderized to the extent of operating as inferior beings to their husbands. However, moving through Jamaica Avenue in Queens New York, United

States of America, the sight of a woman walking behind her husband all dressed in black covered from head to angle with even her hands wearing black gloves, caught my attention. The only visible parts of her body were her eyes to see where she was going. In contrast the husband's face was exposed, his hands, part of his head and legs.

Really, the woman's garment appalled me and I wondered how a woman could confirm to such an ideology in a developed nation as United States of America. Precisely, no one knew if they were visitors or Americans.

Generally, this is the state of women across Arab countries. To a lesser extent Islamic nations do practice a dimension of women subservience to their men as well (Gergen, 2001).

My personal reflection as it relates to black people in America emphasizes that even though Jim Crow laws have been abolished there is still a dimension of segregated oppression regarding black men in the American society. Reports have been that women are heading households. Subsequent research has revealed that there are more black men imprisoned in America's jails than those enslaved during the plantation era. More importantly, 75% of them return after being released (Alexander, 2010). This is the reason for increasing female headed households across America.

Therefore, even as United States crossed racial barriers to elect an African American President for the first time there is still a long road to travel regarding gender and intersection issues in this society. Reports are that this first African American President is disrespected by the media, which often refers to him as Obama instead of President Obama. Rumors are that this he is the most disrespected president in the nation's history (Elder, 2011).

Both Collins (2012) and Ferber (2012) discussed gender in terms of human sexuality at length. These reflections resonate with me from the aspect of gay and transgender intersections. The Gunn tragedy is simply just one situation reported whereby because of disclosure of her sexuality she was brutally stabbed to death. Just recently the media tarnished the character of self-acclaimed Bishop Eddie Long for alleged homosexual practices with two young male congregants (Olesczuk, 2011). Similarly, catholic bishops have been exposed for practicing homosexuality with boys serving in the parish. They were disciplined (O’Leary, 2012). As such, many religious organizations do not sanction homosexuality as an acceptable form of sexual intercourse or expression of human sexuality, but according to Collins (2004) it may be practiced in secret (Collins, 2004).

## **Evaluation**

Both Collins (2004) and Ferber (2008) joined forces in eloquently describing the way society constructs one’s gender, sexual orientation; race and ultimately socio-economic attainment. They both admitted that social constructionists’ intention is to regulate the sexuality of minority groups to keep them in oppression. As it relates to America the minority group appears to be black, homosexuals and women (Collins, 2004) (Ferber, 2008).

Collins (2008) expressed deep concern over the AIDS epidemic, which has taken over black America. While there is no evidence -based criteria undergirding the validity of these figures, the author, views the phenomenon as another strategy towards marginalization, stigmatization for black women and regulation of sexual practices among blacks (Collins, 2004). Ferber

(2008) describes it as interplay of privilege and power restriction. The intersection emerges from gender into sexuality then race (Ferber, 2008). The two authors also agree on the intersectional approach of addressing race, gender and the many systems of inequality that are constructed to dehumanize and segregate minorities in society. However, while Ferber (2008) totally agrees with this intersectional approach the author, advocates deconstructionists. From this theoretical premise Ferber (2008) advances that it is only by redefining what constitutes gender, race and sexuality can social scientists develop resolutions to the dilemma facing modern societies regarding gender, sex, race and sexuality (Ferber, 2008).

In concluding the evaluation of this article and reviewing assumptions, hypotheses and theoretical perspectives, it would appear that people who cannot define their sexual orientation, gender or race identity in the American society are likened to the millions of undocumented immigrants in America who function as another marginalized population.

Just imagine being in a country, but one cannot participate in the social structure because he/she is deemed illegal. This is the plight of homosexuals, blacks, transgender and women if laws and social norms are not modified allowing access to facilities offered straight people, white and men, generally.

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