

BELL HOOKS' CONCEPTUALIZATION OF INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE PROBLEM OF GENDER RELATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research work critically examines Bell Hooks' concept of intersectionality and its application in understanding the complex landscape of gender relations in Nigeria. By employing a hermeneutical approach which has to do with detailed interpretation of facts, this study investigates the interplay between various social identities, such as gender, class, ethnicity, and religion, and their cumulative impact on the lived experiences of Nigerian men and women. Through an extensive review of existing literature, supplemented by qualitative interviews and case studies, the research uncovers a range of interconnected problems. These include deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that perpetuate gender inequalities, limited access to quality education and healthcare, disproportionate rates of violence against women, and unequal representation in political and economic spheres. The intersectional analysis reveals how these challenges are not isolated, but rather interwoven, resulting in compounded disadvantages for certain groups of men and women. Furthermore, the study elucidates the ways in which colonial history, globalization, and modernization have influenced and shaped gender dynamics in Nigeria. By contextualizing these issues within a broader historical and sociopolitical framework, the paper underscores the need to address not only individual facets of discrimination but also the overarching systems that sustain gender-based disparities. In light of the findings, the paper advocates for multifaceted resolutions. These include policy recommendations to dismantle discriminatory practices, promote men and women's empowerment through targeted education and skills training, establish comprehensive support systems for survivors of gender-based violence, and enhance equal participation in decision-making processes. It must be noted that Gloria Jean Watkins took the name of her grandmother Bell Hooks (as will be seen in this work) which she actually wish to be spelt and preferred to be written as bell hooks' in line with her feminist ideology expressing, however, what she strongly thinks as part of feminist movement. For the sake of and respect for English language rules, I decided to use the name Bell Hooks for bell hooks' in this work.

Keywords: Gender, Feminism, Patriarchy, Sexism, Intersectionality

Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of societal dynamics, this article undertakes a hermeneutic journey to explore the profound insights of Bell Hooks' conceptualization of intersectionality, focusing on its implications for the complex landscape of gender relations in Nigeria.. In his work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (2000), Paulo Freire observed that:

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers

as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection, (p.88).

The above epitaph by Paulo gave an insight on the foundations of Bell Hooks' philosophy. A philosophy that fought for a just society where both gender (men and women) can co-habit (if possible) in unity. A philosophy that will give both gender the passion to help to create a world where multiple forms of oppression and dehumanization will be challenged and overthrown. A philosophy that will make both gender believe in a collective movement toward spiritual and existential enrichment for all. Such a dream would not be bad in a Nigerian situation, where constant battle for equality of the sexes have become the order of the day. This philosophy speaks of the young bell Hooks who challenged her lived experiences right in her father's house, broke her silence and embraced naming or confronting her problems as the pathway to freedom for all. Guadalupe and Yancy (2009) observed that the philosophy of Bell Hooks revolved around:

Hooks ethical stance, pedagogical vision, political sensibilities around the importance of transgression, philosophical anthropology informed by an anti essentialist framework, passion to help to create a world where multiple sites of oppression and dehumanizing are challenged and overthrown, and belief in a collective movement toward spiritual and existential enrichment, (p.1)

Growing up as an African American woman in the segregated South of the United States, Bell Hooks experienced racism and discrimination first-hand. These experiences fostered her awareness of social inequalities and the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. Bell Hooks criticized the phenomenon where people have opted to stay quiet in the face of the detrimental impacts caused by various elements that have collaborated to dehumanize and oppress the entire society. Hooks' recognized that our united voices hold such immense power that they can function as a means through which we shape our destinies collectively. People are currently confronted with decisions: they can opt to maintain their current circumstances or transform their situations through the collaborative endeavours of many.

In recent years, Nigeria have grappled with a myriad of gender-related challenges: encompassing disparities in equality, gender bias, patriarchal structures, and the stark socioeconomic gaps between different strata in our contemporary Nigerian society. Again, Nigeria, like many other countries, grapples with complex issues of identity, including race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. Hooks' emphasis on intersectionality encourages us to recognize that individuals in Nigeria may experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously, such as gender-based violence, ethnic discrimination, and economic inequality. The term used to describe these challenges pertaining to gender is "oppressive factors." The impact of these oppressive factors on both genders has been to widen the gender gap and impede the development of positive gender relations. It is essential for both genders to collaboratively shape society by undergoing personal transformation. To achieve this, a collective endeavour is imperative to eradicate all manifestations of oppression. Bell Hooks' presented a possible

solution by urging individuals to embrace feminism, when she articulated “come closer and you will see: feminism is for everybody”, (Hooks, 2000). A position which our own Adichie, C. (2020) in *Intersectionality in "Americanah"* How Race, Gender, and Migration intersect” asked us to accept too. hooks' call for us to 'embrace feminism' mirrors Beauvoir's invitation for us to embody womanhood, as expressed in Beauvoir's work. Beauvoir (1949) maintains that “one is not born a woman but becomes one”. “Becoming”, in this context connotes a lot of things. It is a clarion call but one that commits the fallacy of hasty generalization if certain factors are not put into consideration. The notion of "becoming" presents a broad assertion, overlooking the intricacies and variations inherent in our culture, religion, and social experiences, which hinder our progression. These elements also form the foundations of oppression. Without addressing these elements, the idea of "becoming" remains incompatible with African culture. This suggests that even as we unite against various forms of oppression through feminism, the African expression of feminism needs customization to fit our distinct situations. African feminism must consider the intricate interactions and intersections among historical, cultural, economic, and societal elements that characterize the African environment. Its objective should encompass addressing these exceptional situations while promoting gender parity, women's rights, and societal equity across the continent.

Similar to other African societies, Nigerian society is deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms, positioning men as the primary authority figures both within and beyond the household. Unfortunately, this arrangement hinders the cultivation of healthy gender relations. Additionally, Nigerians maintain strong connections to their distinct traditions and religious beliefs, which diverge notably between the Northern, Eastern and Southern regions of the country. The North predominantly practices Islam, while the South/Eastern are predominantly Christians. These diverse traditions, societies, and cultures contribute to unique dynamics that shape gender relations. Consequently, gender dynamics in the North significantly contrast with those in the South/East, leading to a widening gender disparity amongst us. This prompts the question: how can we address this and what strategies should we employ to bring about change? Freire, (2000) asked: “how can one begin to question that which had existed objectively but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to ‘stand out,’ assuming the character of a problem and therefore of challenge”, (p.59). It is imperative that we initiate the process of questioning the very bedrock of our cherished values, encompassing our culture and traditions. We must embark on a profound exploration, delving beyond the surface, in order to discern the underlying roots of our challenges. Maria & Yancy (2009) also noted that for Hooks, “Naming is a way of actively breaking through forms of imposed silence. Naming our world, naming our reality, is a mode of problem-posing, problem solving and a way of calling attention to the social world and its appearance of fixity”, (p.5). Nigerians should call to bear all that which has impeded on their growth and development as a people and that which has widened gender gap among them. Some of those factors include, Religious and Cultural Factors, . Patriarchy, Gender-Based Violence, Limited Economic Opportunities, Educational Disparities and Early Marriage and Child Marriage.

In "Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center," Hooks introduces a fresh concept of feminism. This concept doesn't solely strive for the equivalence between individuals of differing genders (within the same societal class), but rather a movement that endeavours to terminate the impacts of sexist subjugation and misuse. This approach doesn't disregard other varieties of oppression, including racism, classism, and imperialism. These diverse oppressions share intricate connections, weaving together within interlocking networks of oppression. This phenomenon is termed "intersectionality" in contemporary feminist analyses. The idea of oppression's interlocking webs, as conceptualized by her, is intertwined with "intersectionality," a pivotal notion within present-day feminist discourse. Recognizing that the gender disparity in Nigeria stems from discriminatory practices prompted us to delve into our culture to identify the factors contributing to such discriminations among us. Throughout Nigeria's history, a prevalent foundation for marginalization has been gender. As a result, numerous manifestations of gender-driven violence and bias are experienced by females and young females. More recently, males also confront equivalent challenges. This underscores the possibility of discrimination against men and boys. Nevertheless, the concern related to women distinguishes itself due to men historically exerting dominance over women. Structural disparities have consistently positioned women in an unfavourable position concerning the availability of rights and opportunities. This was recognized by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which set out to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030. Gender discrimination against women is compounded by the marginalization that many women face based on their socio-economic status, age, ethnicity, or race. These actualities have shaped the categorization of women as "persons at risk." Recent research has similarly demonstrated that, given specific demanding situations like economic or health-related circumstances, men can also be labelled as 'persons at risk'. This is where "intersectionality" comes in.

The application of an intersectional approach aids in addressing the intricate nature of multiple oppression structures like gender, race, sexuality, class, age, and disability, which hinder positive gender relations. The ultimate goal is to attain a more comprehensive comprehension of the workings of these classifications, revealing that they don't function in isolation but rather intersect to generate distinct forms of oppression. Undoubtedly, within theoretical discourse, intersectionality has revolutionized gender conversations. However, in practical implementation, its realization remains distant. The gap exists in how it's applicable and the manner in which it should be employed to counter gender-related issues. How do we embark on unravelling the fundamental sources of oppression using the intersectionality process? This endeavour, facilitated through the hermeneutical approach, will delve into the underlying reasons for gender disparities in our culture, aiming to discover a lasting resolution to gender misunderstandings.

Conceptual analysis

Gender

Heywood (1992) defined gender as a "cultural term, it refers to the different roles that society ascribes to men and women", (p.23). He went further to note that gender differences are typically imposed through contrasting stereotypes of 'Masculinity' and 'Femininity'. Beauvoir

(1949:15) pointed out that “one is not born but becomes a woman”¹⁰. It means that one’s sex does not define who that person is but becomes that particular sex according to the role one plays in the society. Butler (1990) argued that “gender is the process of embodiment which results from the repeated performance of acts of gendering”(p.5). One of Butler’s innovations was to suggest that:

Gender is constituted by action and speech-by behavior in which general traits and dispositions are exhibited or acted out. In particular gender is not an underlying essence or nature of which gendered is the product ; it is a series of acts whose constant repetition creates the illusion that an underlying Nature exist; gender according to butler is per formatively constituted.

Butler argues that through performative acts, such as the way we dress, speak, or behave, we create and reinforce our gender identities. These acts are not simply individual choices but are influenced by social norms, expectations, and cultural practices. For example, society expects certain behaviours, appearances, and roles from individuals assigned male or female at birth, and these expectations shape how individuals understand and perform their gender. By saying that gender is constituted in action, Butler highlights that gender is an ongoing process, continually performed and negotiated in social interactions. It is through these actions and performances that individuals both conform to and challenge societal gender norms and expectations. Butler's perspective emphasizes the fluidity and malleability of gender, suggesting that it is not a fixed or inherent characteristic but a dynamic and socially constructed aspect of our identities. Overall, Butler's notion that gender is constituted in action implies that gender is not solely a result of biology but is shaped and maintained through performative acts and social practices, highlighting the importance of understanding gender as a complex and socially constructed phenomenon.

Sex' and 'gender' are often used interchangeably, despite having different meanings: **Sex** refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals. It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormonal levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy. Sex is usually categorized as female or male but there is variation in the biological attributes that comprise sex and how those attributes are expressed. **Gender** refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in the society. The World Development Report (WDR) (2012) defines gender as “a socially constructed norms and ideologies which determine the behavior and actions of men and women”. Understanding these gender relations and the power dynamics behind them is a prerequisite for understanding individuals’ access to and distribution of resources, their ability to make decisions and the ways in which women and men, boys and girls are affected by political processes and social development. Gender identity is not confined to a binary (girl/woman, boy/man) nor is it static; it exists along a continuum and can change over time. There is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience and express gender through the roles they take on, the expectations placed on them, relations with others and the complex ways that gender is institutionalized in society. Sex and gender are

deceptive but the reality is that they do not mean the same thing. To the ordinary person, the two terms can be used interchangeably one for the other and vice versa. Example is some of our professional documents which give us space to fill in either our sex or gender. People believe that gender is a more sophisticated way of saying sex. At birth, one will always ask first the gender of the baby. Sex has to do with biological components of an individual. It has to do with the biological aspect of one being a male or a female. Hence, we have the male sex and the female sex. Academically as a field of study, it is a means of analyzing gender identity and gendered representation. When we are talking of gender identity, we are talking of one been aware of construction of his person and representing it as well. Each gender has a specific role that is given to it based on their sex and gender. In gender roles, the individual sees himself reacting to his environment. Gender roles are normally based on societal cultural practices, its norms and values, its tradition and heritage. A person may be representing attitudes, lifestyles that are contrary to one's gender roles. That you were born a female with female sexual organs does not qualify you to be a woman. It is only when your role as a woman conforms to societal norms on how a woman should behave that you can call yourself a woman.

Feminism

Hooks' (2000) defined feminism as, "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression", (p.1). Feminism is an interdisciplinary approach to issues of equality and equity based on gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality as understood through social theories and political activism. Historically, feminism has evolved from the critical examination of inequality between the sexes to a more nuanced focus on the social and performative constructions of gender and sexuality. Feminist theory now aims to interrogate inequalities and inequities along the intersectional lines of ability, class, gender, race, sex, and sexuality, and feminists seek to effect change in areas where these intersectional ties create power inequity. Intellectual and academic discussion of these inequities allows our students to go into the world aware of injustices and to work toward changing unhealthy dynamics in any scenario. Feminist political activists campaign in areas such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, fairness, social justice, and workplace issues such as family medical leave, equal pay, and sexual harassment and discrimination. Any time stereotyping, objectification, infringements of human rights, or intersectional oppression occurs, it's a feminist issue. Andrew Heywood (2006), noted that as a political term, "feminism' was a twentieth century invention and became a familiar subject in the 1960's", (p.22). It was first used as a medical term to describe either the feminization of men or the masculinization of women. In modern usage, it is linked to massive women's movement and an attempt to improve on the lifestyle of women in general. Feminists ideology is anchored on the belief that women are disadvantaged in life because of their sex and also that this disadvantage should be put to a halt. Feminists are of the opinion that the relationships between the sexes are political in nature and this has led to men claiming superiority over women. This subjugation of women is seen virtually in all societies. In Igbo culture for instance, a woman is only identified in reference to the man by her side and it is seen in their proverb which says '*ugwu nwanyi bu di*'. A woman has respect in the society only if the man is there and when he is not there, she is nothing. Feminists are made, not born. One does not become an advocate of feminist politics simply by

having the privilege of having been born female. Like all political positions one becomes a believer in feminist politics through choice and action. When women first organized in groups to talk together about the issue of sexism and male domination, they were clear that females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males, the difference being simply that males benefited from sexism more than females and were as a consequence less likely to want to surrender patriarchal privilege. Before women could change patriarchy they have to change themselves by raising their consciousness. Revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising emphasized the importance of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it became institutionalized and how it is perpetuated and maintained. Understanding the way male domination and sexism was expressed in everyday life created awareness in women of the ways we were victimized, exploited, and, in worse case scenarios, oppressed. Early on in contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became settings where women simply unleashed pent-up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies of intervention and transformation.

Patriarchy

Lerner (2022) in her work “the creation of patriarchy”, argued that “class society began with the dominance of men over women and developed into the dominance of some men over all men and over all women”, (p.52). This shows that class formation was already incorporated into human society by men themselves even before the advent of history itself. Women have always played significant roles in history and their overall importance cannot be quantified. However as class struggles and dominance continued to gain momentum over the years, women as usual were at the receiving end as men yielded more powers in the war-front and in every other place. Patriarchy is a primitive social organization in which authority which was exercised by a male head of the family extending such power even to distant relatives of the same lineage. Bell Hooks (2015) defined patriarchy as: “a social menace and disease that plagues the life of men in both body and spirit”, (p.20). It is the dominant character exhibited by men using the socio-political systems and institutions to maintain their supremacy above females. Patriarchy puts men in charge of all the affairs of the female sex or gender with the sole aim of controlling every aspect of her life. Patriarchal influences are synonymous with words like, domination, subjugation, maltreatment and oppression etc. These words when discussed in details show the various ways the male gender takes absolute control of the life of the female gender.

Sexism

Sexism is a form of discrimination against people because of their sexes or sexual orientation. When people begin to differentiate between the types of treatments, rights etc that should be given to a male child and the one to be given to a female child, it is called sexism. It is the general belief amongst men generally that they are superior to their female counterparts and as such should be regarded as a superior being. This should be seen as an unfair treatment and should be highly discouraged. One can easily trace this discrimination down to history and it should also be noted that it was a decision made by man himself and of which the female folks

are still suffering the injustice till date. Sexism remains the earliest form of oppression. Hooks (1982) noting this said:

In a retrospective examination of the black female slave experience, sexism looms as large as racism as an oppressive force in the lives of black women. Institutionalized sexism that is, patriarchy formed the base of the American social structure along with racial imperialism. Sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands, and it was to have a grave impact on the fate of enslaved black women.

Sexism was one of the leftovers by white colonial masters in African culture. They brought it with them when they started showing disparities between a male slave and a female slave. The disparities continued even when they were gone and it entrenched in our culture institutionalized patriarchy that has eaten deep. Men are seen as superior to women. This is one of the reason why social inequalities exist in our culture till date. In Feminist theory: from margin to center, Hooks asks for a new definition of feminism, one that does not only fight for the equality of women and men but a movement that fights to end sexist oppression and exploitation without neglecting other forms of oppression such as racism, classism, imperialism and others. Hooks (1984) noted that “each of these forms of oppression are interrelated and inseparably connected to each other through interlocking webs of oppression”, (p.31). This shows that sexism as an instrument of oppression does not stand on its own but introduce other categories of oppression like the ones aforementioned. Biana, T. (2020) noted that “through the interrelatedness of various oppressions”, Hooks proposes a framework for evaluating culture, which starts off with the black working class experience and invites everyone to examine common representations and images through interrogation techniques such as “oppositional gazing” (Hooks 1992) and “border-crossing” (Hooks 2006). These representations are accordingly motivated, and they reinforce systems of domination. Hazel continued by saying that “Her notion of interlocking webs of oppression is connected to “intersectionality”, an important conceptualization in today’s feminist circles”. When one refers to himself or herself as a feminist, he or she must not neglect discussing intersectionality”. It is also worthy to note that sexism cuts across both gender. Men are sexist and women too are sexist even to their fellow women

Intersectionality

The theory of Intersectional oppression was first coined in 1993 by the African-American lawyer Kimberlé W. Crenshaw in her seminar papers titled “Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color”. Crenshaw, collected and systematized black feminist critiques of feminist theory which focused on women as an undifferentiated social category, something which in reality represented the interests and needs of white, middle-class women. Feeling relegated by white feminists' lack of sensitivity to their specific oppression, the African-American feminist group Combahee River in their Collective Statement issued in 1977 drew attention early on to the need to address the differences between women. In their famous manifesto, the group defined intersectionality as a political position committed to the liberation of black women, defining it as the aim of their struggle when they said that:

We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

Bell Hooks' definition of intersectionality is often summarized as "the theory that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age and other forms of identity do not exist separately from each other, but are interconnected and interdependent." In other words, she argues that identities are not singular, but rather exist in relation to each other. She also emphasizes that the experience of oppression is not the same for everyone, and that an intersectional approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of social inequality.

Hooks was of the opinion, that different social identities, such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. She argues that these identities are not separate or independent of each other, but rather interact and shape each other. For example, a black woman may experience discrimination based on both her gender and her race. This notion of intersectionality highlights the importance of considering the complexity of identity when analyzing power and inequality. According to Bell Hooks, intersectionality is more than just a description of the multiple oppressions faced by marginalized groups. It is also a tool for social analysis and action. She argues that an intersectional approach to social change can lead to more effective strategies for dismantling systems of oppression. For example, a feminist movement that ignores the intersections of gender with race and class is unlikely to be successful in achieving gender equality. Instead, an intersectional approach would consider how all of these identities interact and shape each other. Building on this idea, Bell Hooks also argues that an intersectional approach is necessary for creating coalitions of people who are committed to social justice. She believes that the "coalition of differences" is the only way to create a truly inclusive and just society. In her words, "the failure to recognize differences within groups contributes to tension, for it often appears that dominant voices speak for all." Thus, an intersectional approach is not only theoretically important, but also necessary for effective social change. In addition to these theoretical arguments, Bell Hooks has also applied the concept of intersectionality to various areas of social life. For example, she has written extensively about the intersection of gender and race in the media, education, and popular culture. She has also written about the need for an intersectional approach to feminism, arguing that the traditional "white, middle-class, heterosexual feminist model" is not adequate for addressing the needs of all women. In her view, an intersectional approach to feminism would be more inclusive and would address the unique experiences of women of color, poor women, and queer women. Bell Hooks notion of intersectionality is a powerful tool for analyzing and addressing social inequality. It provides a way to understand how different identities intersect and interact to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. In addition, it has important implications for social change, both

in terms of theory and practice. An intersectional approach can help to create more effective strategies for social justice and can foster a more inclusive and just society.

Bell Hooks Intersectional Feminism

Intersectional feminism, as a concept, was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, another influential feminist scholar, in the late 1980s. It recognizes that individuals experience oppression and privilege based on various intersecting factors such as race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and more. bell Hooks has engaged with and expanded upon these ideas in her works, emphasizing the necessity of recognizing and addressing these intersections in the fight for social justice and gender equality. Her writings have undoubtedly shaped and influenced feminist thought, but they are part of a broader body of work that constitutes the field of intersectional feminism. As with any complex theoretical framework, multiple scholars and activists have contributed to its development and refinement. bell hooks has written extensively on intersectional feminism, emphasizing the importance of considering multiple dimensions of identity and power in feminist analysis and activism. She argues that an intersectional approach is necessary to understand and address the interconnected systems of oppression that impact individuals differently based on their intersecting identities.

In her book *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* Hooks explores the experiences of Black women and highlights how they face unique challenges at the intersections of race, gender, and class. She criticizes mainstream feminism for often excluding the experiences of women of color and failing to recognize the complexities of their lives. Hooks argues that feminism should concentrate on the experiences of marginalized women and take into account the ways in which race, class, and other factors intersect with gender. In her work, Hooks also emphasizes the importance of solidarity among women across different social identities. She calls for an inclusive feminism that acknowledges and celebrates diversity, working towards collective liberation for all. She encourages feminists to engage in self-reflection and to challenge systems of power and privilege within their own lives and communities. Overall, Bell Hooks' writings on intersectional feminism contribute to the understanding of how power structures intersect and shape individual experiences. Her work highlights the necessity of acknowledging and addressing the multiple layers of oppression and privilege that exist within society.

Our notion of Bell Hooks idea of intersectional feminism was an idea borrowed from Hazel Tionloc Biana (2020) in her article titled "Extending bell Hooks' Feminist Theory", was noting down her ideas while citing Bell Hooks. According to her, Bell Hooks in 1982 published a groundbreaking critique of the existing feminist discourses during her time. Her critique was as a result of what she noticed in the feminist foundation. White feminist theorists were writing on being oppressed because of their sex as women. She also noticed that their fights for equal rights with men failed to put into considerations the plights of the minority and marginalized group. The minority groups in this regard are the African American Woman who by the misfortune of slave trade find herself a prisoner in a strange land. Neglecting the needs of

‘some’ women as a result of certain factors not within their ,making gave the feminist ideology a faulty foundation from the onset.

In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, Hooks proposes a new definition of feminism, one that does not simply fight for the equality of women and men (of the same class) but of a movement that fights to end sexist oppression and exploitation without neglecting other forms of oppression such as racism, classism, imperialism and others. Each of these forms of oppression are interrelated and inseparably connected to each other through interlocking webs of oppression (Hooks, 1984).

Bell Hooks' concept of the "interlocking web of oppression" expands upon the idea of intersectionality and examines how various systems of power and oppression intersect and interact to shape individuals' experiences. Rather than considering oppression as separate and isolated, Hooks argues that these systems are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. According to Hooks, the interlocking web of oppression refers to the complex and interrelated nature of systems such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination. These systems of oppression do not function independently but instead intersect and overlap, creating a matrix of privilege and disadvantage.

In this framework, Hooks emphasizes that individuals experience oppression and privilege differently based on their intersectional identities. For example, a Black woman may face racism and sexism simultaneously, and these forms of oppression interact and compound to create unique challenges and marginalization. This perspective challenges the notion that one can understand or combat oppression by focusing solely on a single axis of identity, such as gender or race, without considering the interplay of other social factors.

Hooks' concept of the interlocking web of oppression calls for a comprehensive understanding of power dynamics and an inclusive approach to activism and social justice. It encourages individuals to recognize their own positions within the web of oppression, confront their biases, and work towards dismantling the intersecting systems of privilege and discrimination. The concept highlights the need for solidarity among marginalized groups and a recognition that liberation for one group is intricately tied to the liberation of all oppressed communities.

Hooks' was of the opinion that it is not all men that are patriarchs and hopes that their good intention of ending will be fuelled more if they read her book' feminism is for everybody:passionate politics''. Through the interrelatedness of various oppressions, Hooks proposes a framework for evaluating culture, which starts off with the black working class experience and invites everyone to examine common representations and images through interrogation techniques such as oppositional gazing (Hooks, 1992) and border-crossing (Hooks, 2006). These representations are accordingly motivated, and they reinforce systems of domination.

Her notion of interlocking webs of oppression is connected to “intersectionality”, an important conceptualization in today’s feminist circles. When one refers to himself or herself as a feminist, he or she must not neglect discussing intersectionality. As is well-known, Kimberle Crenshaw first coined the word “intersectionality” in connection to feminism in 1989. She stresses the multidimensionality of the black experience, the *intersectionality* of race and sex that both play roles in the systems of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). In an interview in 2014, she mentioned that intersectionality is not new, but it is still imperative to talk about it. In the United States, for example, women of color are still invisible, discriminated and marginalized by virtue of them being women and people of color. Assertions that Hooks makes on feminism and culture are still quite relevant today. Given the revival of intersectionality, emergence of the fourth wave of feminism and developments in global feminism, one should explore how Hooks’ fares alongside contemporary post-feminists. To oppress a person is to render this person unable to make his or her own choices. According to Hooks’, “being oppressed means the absence of choices. It is the primary point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor” (Hooks, 1984). All throughout modern feminist thought, it has been claimed that, “all women are oppressed”. Allegedly, women all throughout the world share a common oppression by virtue of their inherited sex. On the other hand, the diversity of their classes and/or races ends the commonality. While the second wave, Bourgeois white women fight against sexist oppression--racist oppression and classism were generally ignored. Hooks (1984) noted that: “class, race, religion or sexual preference are not given that much importance in the study of women’s oppression”, (p.5). She admits that sexism is the oldest form of oppression. Feminism, however, must not stop at trying to eradicate sexist oppression per se, as many other forms of oppression stem from sexist oppression. An example would be racist oppression. Hooks (1984, 35) stated that: “Racism as well as class structure is perceived as stemming from sexism. Implicit in this line of analysis is the assumption that the eradication of sexism, the oldest oppression, is necessary before attention can be focused on racism or classism”. On the other hand, if one focuses too much on only one form of oppression such as sexist or racist, this would be a contradiction. No one form of oppression deserves more attention than the other. Oppressions are multi-layered and they are embodied by sexism, racism, class elitism and imperialism. Consequently, all these are interrelated and inseparably connected to each other. Hooks (1981) also noted that: “the assumption that these factors can be separated from each other or that they have no impact on each other is wrong-headed and leads to “distorted, biased, and inaccurate” discussions on sexism and sexist oppression.” As Hooks suggests, individuals who fight for the eradication of sexism without supporting struggles to end racism or classism undermine their own efforts. Individuals who fight for the eradication of racism or classism while supporting sexist oppression are helping to maintain the cultural basis of all forms of group oppression. While they may initiate successful reforms, their efforts will not lead to revolutionary change.

Like oppression stemming from sexism and racism, Hooks offers an account of oppression stemming from classism. In *Where we stand: class matters*, Hooks states that in American society, at least, “it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class. It’s the subject that makes us all tense, nervous, uncertain about where we stand” (Hooks, 2000).

She claims people are scared to discuss class despite the obvious differences and conflicts between the rich and the poor since they will lose their class status once they show concern or affinity for the lower classes. Talking of class might cause the middle class to lose their comfortable lives. However, “breaking the silence” about class is necessary to fight oppression caused by classism (Hooks 2000). She stresses, though, that class oppression is a hidden evil less readily discussed as sexism and racism. While it has always been obvious that some folks have more money than other folks, class difference and classism are rarely overtly apparent, or they are not acknowledged when present. Racism and sexism were easier to identify and challenge than classism. The poor have no public voice in society. No wonder it has taken so long for many citizens to recognize class— to become class conscious. Class is defined by Hooks (2009) as:

much more than Marx’s definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behavior, your basic assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act still remaining wholeheartedly committed to a vision of justice, of liberation”

The issue of class must first be confronted before females could unite together to fight patriarchy. Oppression by virtue of patriarchy can only be confronted if the issue of class is acknowledged. Accordingly, feminist liberation can only happen if class elitism is challenged. All feminists should recognize the “reality of race and racism”, (Hooks 2000). From the moment a girl is able to watch shows or films, she already finds out that black women are not always visible on screen -and a conclusion that can be made is that it is because these women are not white. All throughout hooks' cultural criticism studies, one will see the same critique of representations. She believes that all women in the United States know that “whiteness is a privileged category.” The fact that white females may choose to repress or deny this knowledge does not mean they are ignorant, it may mean that they are in denial . If women would break free from this denial, the women's movement would be stronger. The realities of women's diversity would be exposed and “the feminist movement could face critique and challenge while returning to the discussion of white supremacy, Hooks claims that scholarship on women of color are biased. They attempt to show that “white girls are somehow more vulnerable to sexist conditioning than girls of color” (Hooks, 2000). This assertion in itself can be attributed to white supremacist thinking, and she contends that the issue of race and racism be revisited by feminist thinkers. “Rarely do mainstream social critiques acknowledge this fact”, (Hooks 2000). There is a need to further challenge the feminist movement--it should lay the foundation “for the building of a mass-based anti-racist feminist movement” (Hooks 2000).

The Problem of Gender Relations

Philosophically, human relations can be understood and examined from various philosophical perspectives and theories. Existentialist philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir have examined human relations in the context of individual freedom and responsibility. They emphasize the importance of personal choices and the impact of those

choices on one's relationships with others. Existentialism often highlights the tension between individual autonomy and the interconnectedness of human beings. Utilitarianism, developed by philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, evaluates human relations based on the principle of maximizing overall happiness or utility. From this perspective, the ethical value of a relationship can be assessed by the degree to which it promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau have discussed human relations within the framework of social contract theory. This theory explores the idea that individuals come together to form a society, agreeing to certain rules and obligations to maintain order and protect their mutual interests. Human relations are thus shaped by these social contracts and the responsibilities that arise from them. Phenomenology, as developed by philosophers like Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, focuses on the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals. When applied to human relations, phenomenology emphasizes the unique experiences and perspectives of each person involved in a relationship, highlighting the importance of empathy and understanding. Feminist philosophers, including Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, have examined human relations through the lens of gender and power dynamics. They explore how societal norms and expectations influence relationships, often leading to inequalities and the oppression of certain groups. Ethical Theories: Various ethical theories, such as deontology (duty-based ethics) and virtue ethics, provide frameworks for evaluating the moral aspects of human relations. Deontological ethics, for instance, focuses on the ethical obligations and duties individuals have in their relationships, while virtue ethics emphasizes the development of virtuous character traits in fostering healthy relationships. Postmodernist philosophy challenges traditional notions of human relations and identity. Postmodern thinkers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida question the stability and coherence of relationships and suggest that they are often constructed by language, power dynamics, and cultural influences. Individuals find meaning and identity within communities and that relationships should be grounded in a shared ethical framework. These philosophical perspectives offer different ways of understanding and evaluating human relations, ranging from considerations of individual freedom and happiness to ethical duties, power dynamics, and the role of communities. The philosophical approach one takes often shapes their views on the nature and significance of human relationships in society. it also worthy to note that the relationships mentioned are the ones that existed between both gender (men and women). This in a broader term is referred to gender relations.

Gender relations could be referred to as the social relationship and the distribution of powers between men and women in the society. This means that it is socially constructed the same way gender roles are. As a social construct, it can intersect with all other factors of oppression like age, sex, ethnicity etc so as to determine the identities of individuals within the social group. It is obvious that man was created to be a being in relation with others. This is the reason why man must be in a relation with his fellow men (men and women). It is in such relationships that he derives his being and actualizes his purpose here on earth. This was affirmed by Satre, J. P. (1966), in 'Being and Nothingness', when he said that " person to person relation is one of being-to-being rather than one of knowledge-to – knowledge". The philosophical nature of man's relationship with his fellow man is a complex and multifaceted topic and has been

explored by many philosophers throughout history. It touches upon fundamental questions about human nature, ethics, social interaction, and the nature of society itself.

Philosophers emphasize on the inherent interconnectedness of human beings. From this viewpoint, individuals are seen as part of a larger social fabric, and their actions and well-being are deeply intertwined with the well-being of others. This perspective often highlights the importance of empathy, compassion, and solidarity in fostering harmonious relationships. This ultimately leads them into forming social contracts. The concept of a social contract suggests that individuals willingly enter into a mutual agreement or contract with others to form a society. According to this notion, the basis of human relationships lies in a collective agreement to abide by certain rules and norms that promote cooperation, mutual benefit, and the common good. This idea has been influential in political philosophy and theories of governance.

Philosophers have long debated the nature and extent of moral obligations individuals have towards their fellow human beings. Some argue for the existence of inherent moral duties and obligations that arise from our shared humanity. Others contend that moral obligations are a product of social or cultural constructs. The exploration of moral responsibilities forms the basis of ethical theories such as consequentialism, deontological ethics, and virtue ethics. Individual autonomy and personal freedom in relationships between people. It emphasizes the rights and liberties of individuals and highlights the need to respect and protect the autonomy of each person. The nature of man's relationship with his fellow man also involves examining the dynamics of conflict and cooperation. Philosophers have explored questions regarding competition, power struggles, and the potential for cooperation and collaboration. They have considered factors that contribute to conflict, such as differences in interests, values, and perspectives, as well as explored strategies for resolving conflicts and fostering peaceful coexistence. The relationship between individuals can also be viewed through the lens of identity and otherness. Philosophers have examined how our sense of self and identity shapes our perception of others and how it influences our attitudes, biases, and prejudices.

It's important to recognize that gender is a socially constructed concept and that individuals' experiences of gender can vary widely. The understanding and exploration of gender in relationships continue to evolve, and many people are advocating for more inclusive and egalitarian approaches that allow individuals to express their authentic selves and form relationships based on mutual respect, understanding, and consent. Nigeria like every other country is a country with diverse people with their diverse cultures. The problem with its gender relation. is the same with in every other country in the world most especially in Africa. Although there might be similarities and peculiarities as a result of the differences in culture. Cultural norms and values significantly shape the similarities and differences in gender relations across societies. While there are variations in gender relations due to cultural diversity, some general patterns can be observed:

- Many cultures assign distinct roles and responsibilities to men and women. These roles often reflect traditional expectations regarding work, family, and societal roles.

- Many societies have historically upheld patriarchal systems that grant men greater power, authority, and decision-making control, while women are often assigned subordinate positions.
- Cultural norms often reinforce stereotypes about masculinity and femininity, influencing expectations for behavior, appearance, and emotional expression.

Differences in Gender Relations across Cultures:

- Varying degrees of gender equality exist worldwide. Some cultures have made significant progress toward gender equity, while others continue to exhibit significant disparities in terms of access to education, employment opportunities, and political representation.
- Cultural attitudes toward gender roles can range from rigid adherence to traditional norms to greater acceptance of gender fluidity and non-conformity. Some societies are more in accepting individuals who do not fit into traditional gender categories.
- The ways in which boys and girls are socialized into their gender roles can differ across cultures. Cultural practices, including parenting styles, education systems, and media influences, play a role in shaping gender identities and expectations.

It is important to note that these observations are generalizations, and there is significant diversity within and across cultures. Societies are not static, and attitudes towards gender are subject to change over time as a result of various social, political, and economic factors. Understanding the similarities and differences in gender relations across cultures helps foster cultural sensitivity and promotes the recognition of the importance of context and diversity in discussions around gender and relationships.

However, despite the similarities and the disparities, when it comes to male and female relationships, a lot of power tussles must always be present. Historically, many societies have been characterized by a patriarchal structure where men have held more power and privilege compared to women. This power imbalance has manifested in various ways, such as men dominating political, economic, and social spheres, and women being subordinated and restricted in their opportunities and decision-making. Gender roles and expectations have reinforced power imbalances between men and women. Traditional gender roles often prescribe different social roles and responsibilities for men and women, which can result in unequal power distribution. Men are frequently associated with traits like assertiveness, leadership, and strength, while women are expected to be nurturing, submissive, and caring. These expectations can limit opportunities for women to access positions of power and influence. Over time, there has been progress in challenging and changing power dynamics between men and women. Movements advocating for gender equality, such as feminism, have sought to address systemic inequalities and challenge traditional gender norms. Efforts towards gender mainstreaming, inclusive policies, and increased representation of women in leadership positions aim to promote more equitable power relations. It is crucial to acknowledge that

power dynamics are not solely determined by gender. They intersect with other social identities such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. Women who hold marginalized identities may experience compounded power imbalances due to multiple intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression.

It is important to recognize that power dynamics between men and women are not fixed or universal. They can vary significantly across cultures, communities, and individuals. While progress has been made, achieving true gender equality requires ongoing efforts to challenge societal norms, dismantle systemic barriers, and promote inclusivity and empowerment for all genders and not only for women..

Crenshaw (1988) analyses the disadvantages of being both female and Black. According to Crenshaw, looking only at one source of oppression "erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification, and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group" When we talk of gender discrimination, our attention is focused mainly on wealthy white women black, women experience was relegated to the background as noted by Hooks (1982) when she said:

At a time in American history when black women in every area of the country might have joined together to demand social equality for women and a recognition of the impact of sexism on our social status, we were by and large silent. Our silence was not merely a reaction against white women liberationists or a gesture of solidarity with black male patriarchs. It was the silence of the oppressed—that profound silence engendered by resignation and acceptance of one's lot, (p.2).

Women have been marginalized not only because of their gender ,but by the color of their skin too. In as much as gender relation can be influenced or affected by so many factors, one thing that remains constant is the power structure. This power structure is the one that disadvantaged women and put men at the helm of affairs of this world as noted by Hooks (1996) where she maintains power is:

conditioned by existing social hierarchies, or what she refers to as "white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy." Within this social paradigm, power is distributed unevenly and indelibly: men have power, women are powerless; whites are powerful and nonwhite peoples are powerless; rich are powerful and poor are powerless, (p.30).

This power structure starts within the home. This was noted by hooks' when she follows Freire's (2000) "dialectic of the oppressor/ oppressed" and applies it to the patriarchal culture within black communities. In Hooks' (1996) evaluation:

the master–slave dialectic exposed in the domestic sphere, where men and women mediate their unequal power relations within the larger racist– capitalist group politic; men with a penchant for the white-male-capitalist power denied to them in the workplace attempt to recuperate a sense of “manhood” in the home, (p.31).

Feminist scholars have argued that women (and men) are differentiated by class, ethnicity, age, etc. and that women experience varying degrees of gender-based discrimination merely by virtue of being women in a patriarchal world. Gender discrimination are products of selfishness, greed and, desire for power and supremacy which is human in nature. Women are treated like objects and have been given inferior treatment and they have been deprived of their rights right from the dawn of history of man. . This age old menace which left drastic effect on the life of women is a product of abuse of the power by using mechanism of religion as well as tradition.

Evaluation/Conclusion

Bell hooks' theory of intersectionality provides a valuable framework for understanding and addressing gender problems in Nigeria. By recognizing that individuals have multiple intersecting identities and experiences, such as gender, race, class, religion, and sexuality, intersectionality highlights the complexities of inequality and the need for an inclusive and comprehensive approach. In conclusion, the theory of intersectionality benefits both men and women in Nigeria by fostering a deeper understanding of complex identities, challenging gender stereotypes, promoting empathy and solidarity, informing policy and advocacy, and ultimately working towards gender equality. By recognizing the intersecting factors that shape individuals' experiences, we can foster a more inclusive society that values and respects the diverse identities and lived experiences of all its members.

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