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Matrix of Domination

Do you ever feel oppressed? Do you understand why your peers do? If not, The Matrix of Domination is a sociological construct used to convey the various ways that people are oppressed in society. There are many forms of oppression that range from religion and social class to sexual orientation, age, and gender. Any one of these can overlap with other societal influences or sociological features to create challenges for someone and “dominate” their life.

In terms of gender, there are a lot of “norms” in place in society today that oppress both men and women from living their life in the way they find most rewarding and comfortable. Especially on the first level of the matrix, personal biography, gender can be seen as very oppressive to some individuals. For people who are transgender or gender-fluid, it is particularly hard to find acceptance in today’s society because they do not fit into any of society’s normalized categories. In these situations, it is self-definition and a free mind that will help people find their confidence and comfort. Without these two things, it is nearly impossible for someone to create their own identity because they are hyper-focused on where they fit in and not where they feel truly themselves. When Collins states that "each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everybody's lives", it not only relates to the first level but the second and third as well. On the second level, people may be a part of different communities, some that are more accepting of any and all genders, and others that have very strict beliefs about the roles and meaning behind gender. This can make it very

being themselves. When it comes to the systemic level of social institutions, people are heavily influenced by their churches, schools, and other social organizations to behave and appear a certain way. This is extremely oppressive because it puts pressure on people to choose between two things: their belief system and values or their free will to be their own person.

As a whole, the Matrix of Domination is a concept that is useful to help people understand their feelings of oppression, but it is also a frightening resource that reflects how constraining society can really be. Knowing where the oppression stems from opens up the door to fighting back and taking control of one's life without worrying about the way other individuals, groups, or social institutions may view the choices made. In order to rise above these dominating factors such as race, gender, age, class, and sexual orientation, one must empower themselves. In Collins' words, "empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge, whether personal, cultural, or institutional, that perpetuate objectification and dehumanization". In simpler terms, the best thing to do is ignore the negativity and live life in a way one sees fit for themselves. The reason that black women are seen as the most suitable "agents of knowledge" is because they have experienced so much oppression and domination throughout history for not only their gender but their race as well. Especially in the academic world, black women had to and sometimes still have to adhere to an Eurocentric masculinist framework to be recognized and considered scholarly. However, Collins claims that "rather than being restrained by their both/and status of marginality, these women make creative use of their outsider-within status and produce innovative Afrocentric feminist thought". Thus, black women are the most suitable agents because despite what is expected of them in society, they are able to overcome those obstacles and stand out as highly-respected individuals.

that have the ability to dominate people and constrain them within the walls of “normalcy” that so unfortunately exist today. The Matrix of Domination brings to light the importance of recognizing what can take control of the mind and understanding the necessity for self-understanding and empowerment of the self. Hopefully society will continue to work in a direction towards positivity and free expression, and not revert back into the domination and oppression.