

Learning From the Matrix of Domination and Black Feminist

Do you believe yourself to be privileged, or are you at a disadvantage in life because of how you were born? Regardless of how you answered this question, the life you experienced is different depending on your race, gender, and class. We see this everyday with women being below men, the white race being elite while anything else is considered inferior, and the wealthy class ruling our daily living and getting richer while the poor get poorer. These are the main three classifications of oppression, but there are still many ways someone can be oppressed. We need to learn how we are involved in this system of oppression as individuals and how it can affect others and eventually lead to a better understanding and the start of a conversation for the betterment of our society.

I am a young white woman of mixed race who goes to a university. When you first read that statement, what do you think about my life and what I did do to get where I am? Maybe I was supported by my family and lived an overall stable life that benefited me more because of being a (partly) white woman who could afford to go to university. Speculation like that is entirely fair to assume because that is what we see a lot today as who is privileged based on their race and class they were born into. With that said, my reality was not like what someone would assume. I was born in a low-class family and experienced the oppression of people of color directly and indirectly with friends and family where I grew up at. I worked many jobs throughout my time as a high schooler to support myself and my family because I was the only one able to work. Tough times like these made me grow up faster than others, and taking the

weight of my family onto my shoulders helped me see how I was living a life considered to be beneath others.

Being oppressed happens to most people in one way or another because of race, sex, class, and more. During those years of being the primary provider in my family, I realized what it is like to be a woman in a world ruled by men. Even with males in the household, I worked daily while still in high school while they would stay at home and do nothing, and the women in the house would still be responsible for cleaning and cooking. When we talked about this issue, the same excuse would always be brought up; that they were men, which explains why they should not work or clean after themselves. I was being held beneath the men even at home because of the idea that men are superior. Living in a low-income household with some issues constantly occurring, you realize what it is like to be considered poor. Having to bend to the will of others to make sure you will have somewhere stable to live and have income come in. Or the looks and remarks people say to you about how you live even though you could not help it; it is something you were born into and had little power over. Then being mixed and being around people of color showed me how people are to one another. The pure hate someone can have towards my friends or me just because of our genetics. They are not getting the same treatment or opportunities as someone who is white. Even programs and organizations are made to help people of color because of the discrimination and disadvantage they face because of racist ideology. These are direct and indirect experiences of oppression I lived through, but I am aware others are not entirely dominating me.

These examples from my life have been my experience learning how I am oppressed in today's world and how much of it is due to something I cannot control. However, even though I

am at a disadvantage compared to others, I am still privileged than some as well. Even though I am mixed, my primary parent in my life is white, and I am white-passing and went to primarily white schools. At work and school, or anywhere, I could always be held above someone else who is Black, Mexican, Chinese, and anyone else of another race. I may be considered poor, but I am not as poor as others who do not have a home or job. Recognizing that you can be oppressed and be the oppressor is essential, and this is called the Matrix of Domination.

The Matrix of Domination was coined by Patricia Hill Collins and is said to be a matrix that explains oppression issues that deal with race, class, and sex. With all the different classifications of how you could be oppressed, they can intersect with one another. For example, a white woman would be oppressed for being a woman but privileged by being white. Along with the matrix, there are levels to the dominations. According to the Collins, the three levels are: "the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions." Personal biography is each person's unique experiences, values, motivations, and emotions. Two people can be in the same room doing the same task, but they will not have the same conscious thoughts about it. Next, the cultural context helps show how someone should think and act and use the culture to explain their ways of thinking. Lastly, the systemic level of social institutions would be our schools, churches, social media, etc. Through these institutions, they can expose other individuals and judge them based on the dominant group representing them. This makes up this system that we live in and have grown to be used to. Collins then explains how Black women are the ones who are constantly being discriminated against due to their gender and race. With that

said, Black feminists are emerging to speak about the matrix issue and create an empowering space for themselves.

Black women have been oppressed for centuries and still are today, but they have been making active efforts to change this. It is said that black women are "agents of knowledge," which is how they take in information about black culture, traditions, and ways of how black women are oppressed. Being a suitable agent is also because black women are intersectional. Intersectional means that they are oppressed in two ways, being black and being women. When they view this system, they learn how the matrix works and how the power of domination plays in others' favor and against them due to their race, gender, and class. Black women are at the bottom of the matrix, and benefits arise from looking at the matrix from a black perspective because its brutal side is shown. Racist ideology is an intruder in our lives because of how embedded it is in our history, culture, and society. Learning about this and seeing how you are a part of it can lead to more conversations about this issue.

Black women are the beginning of the conversation and consistently trying to speak up against this system. There would be benefits if people would learn about the system and understand how they connected in the matrix of domination. Black women can do this, and from them, we should take action and learn how we are affected and then speak up about the issue. Learning from others is the best way to make a change and bring betterment to ourselves and our community.