



Racism and Black Women in America

1. Title Page
2. Table of Contents
3. Reflection Page (pre-essay)
4. What is Racism? (chart)
5. What is Racism? (chart continued)
6. “Sister Citizen” Book Summary
7. “Ain’t I a Woman” Article Summary
8. White Women vs. Black Women (chart)
9. “Multiple Jeopardy” Article Summary
10. Conclusion (post-essay)

Table of Contents

Pre-Assignment Reflection

This semester in this course I chose to focus on the struggles of black women in America. As a disabled feminist I often participate in discussions about intersectional feminism, and the need to recognize the needs of more than just the white, able-bodied majority. Intersectionalism tends to be overlooked by mainstream feminism, and in discussions about the needs of women with disabilities being ignored, women of color often share the same concerns. Therefore my awareness of the needs of other minority groups was piqued.

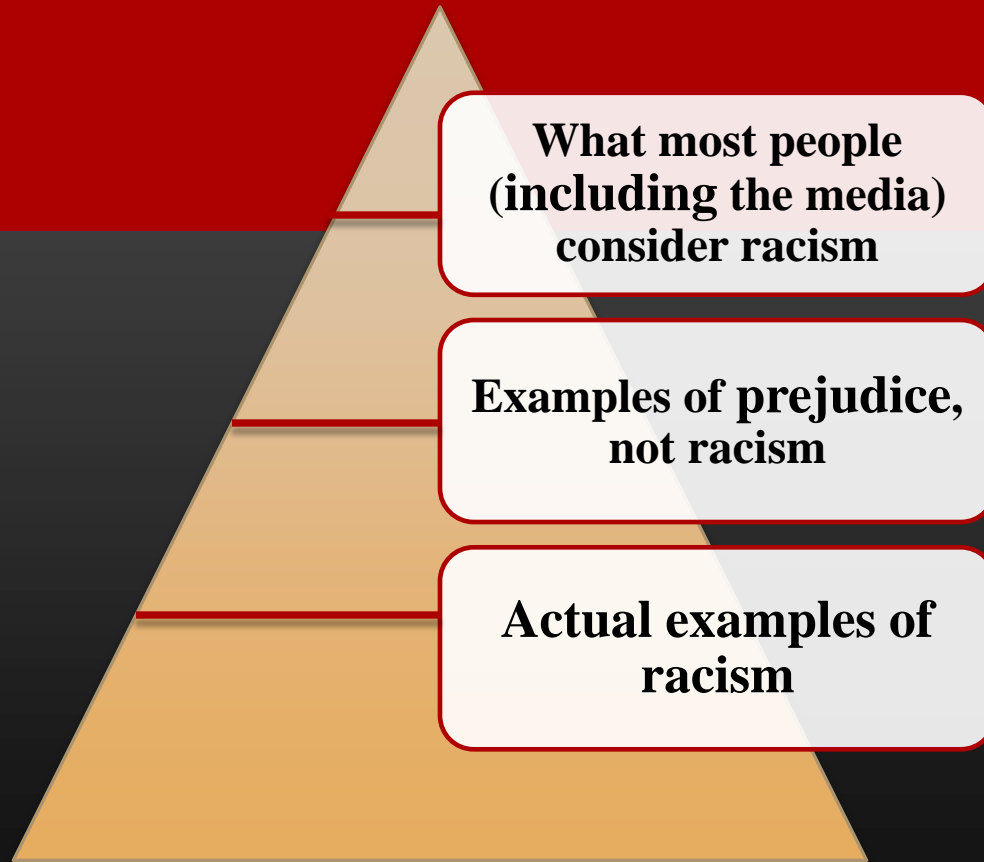
Before actively learning about racial issues and the struggles of black women, my knowledge was limited.

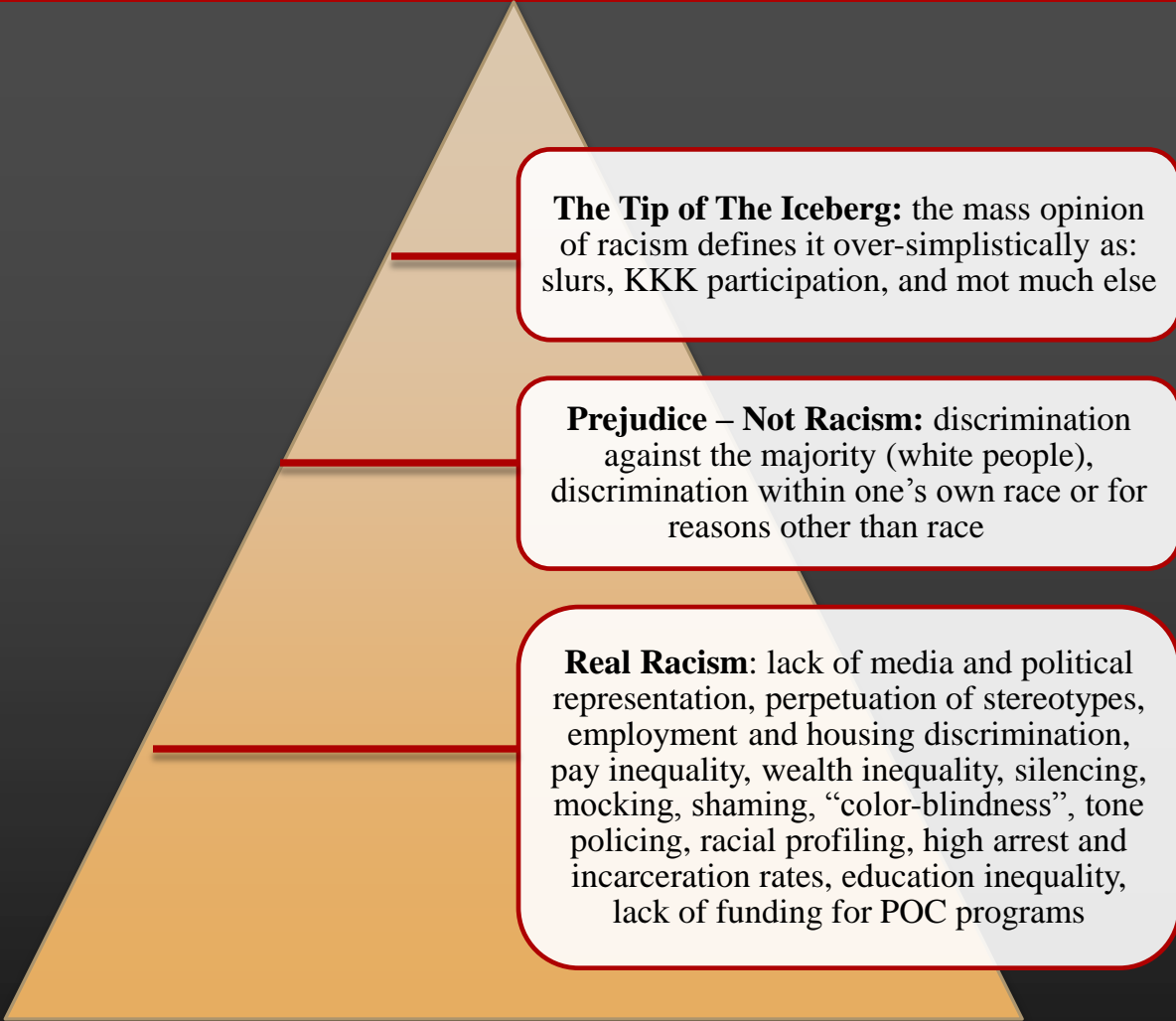
I was vaguely aware of stereotypes like the over-sexualized black woman, the welfare queen, and the angry black woman. I read articles online about representation of women of color in the media, and so I was aware of the lack of accurate portrayals of black women. I knew about income and wealth inequality, though not in detail or specifics. I knew about the high rates of single mothers in the black community, but not the complicated reasons behind that phenomenon. I knew that people of color were arrested and incarcerated more, but had no idea that black women were the fastest growing prison population.

As a white woman, my idea of what racism is was extremely limited. Learning about the history of black women in America helped me have a greater understanding of the roots of problematic things that exist today. Reading the writing of modern black women helped me apply those historical principles and to understand why certain things are viewed as offensive.

Above all, pursuing an education on racial issues has helped me realize that problematic stereotypes, oppression, and discrimination do not just happen. They are not accidents. Our structural system is built on the oppression of those we view as less than, and the only way to start to fight back is through education.

What is Racism?





The Tip of The Iceberg: the mass opinion of racism defines it over-simplistically as: slurs, KKK participation, and mot much else

Prejudice – Not Racism: discrimination against the majority (white people), discrimination within one’s own race or for reasons other than race

Real Racism: lack of media and political representation, perpetuation of stereotypes, employment and housing discrimination, pay inequality, wealth inequality, silencing, mocking, shaming, “color-blindness”, tone policing, racial profiling, high arrest and incarceration rates, education inequality, lack of funding for POC programs

What is Racism? (cont)

Melissa Harris-Perry is a political science professor at Tulane University and she previously served on the faculties at the University of Chicago and Princeton University. She is the director of the Anna Julia Cooper Project, which investigates how gender and race intersect to shape women's politics, and on the weekends she hosts the Melissa Harris-Perry show on MSNBC. In all of this work, Dr. Harris-Perry places an enormous amount of her focus on the politics of black female identity.

In this book she conducts a detailed discussion of the four common stereotypes applied to black women, including their roots and their personal, community, political, and sociological consequences; with emphasis on the shame (and the effects of) which results from the four myths.

The main purpose of this text is to create a dialogue about the roles of black women, their citizenship, the inherent politics of their lives, and the influence of the four stereotypes on their identities. Dr. Harris-Perry also uses this book, perhaps consciously, perhaps not, to educate people (especially white people) about stereotypes and why perpetuating common myths is harmful.

Book summary: Sister Citizen

Research Article Summary:

Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality

By Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenixi

In this research article the authors discuss intersectionality in feminism, and how issues like class, or the overlapping of class with race and gender, are not discussed often enough.

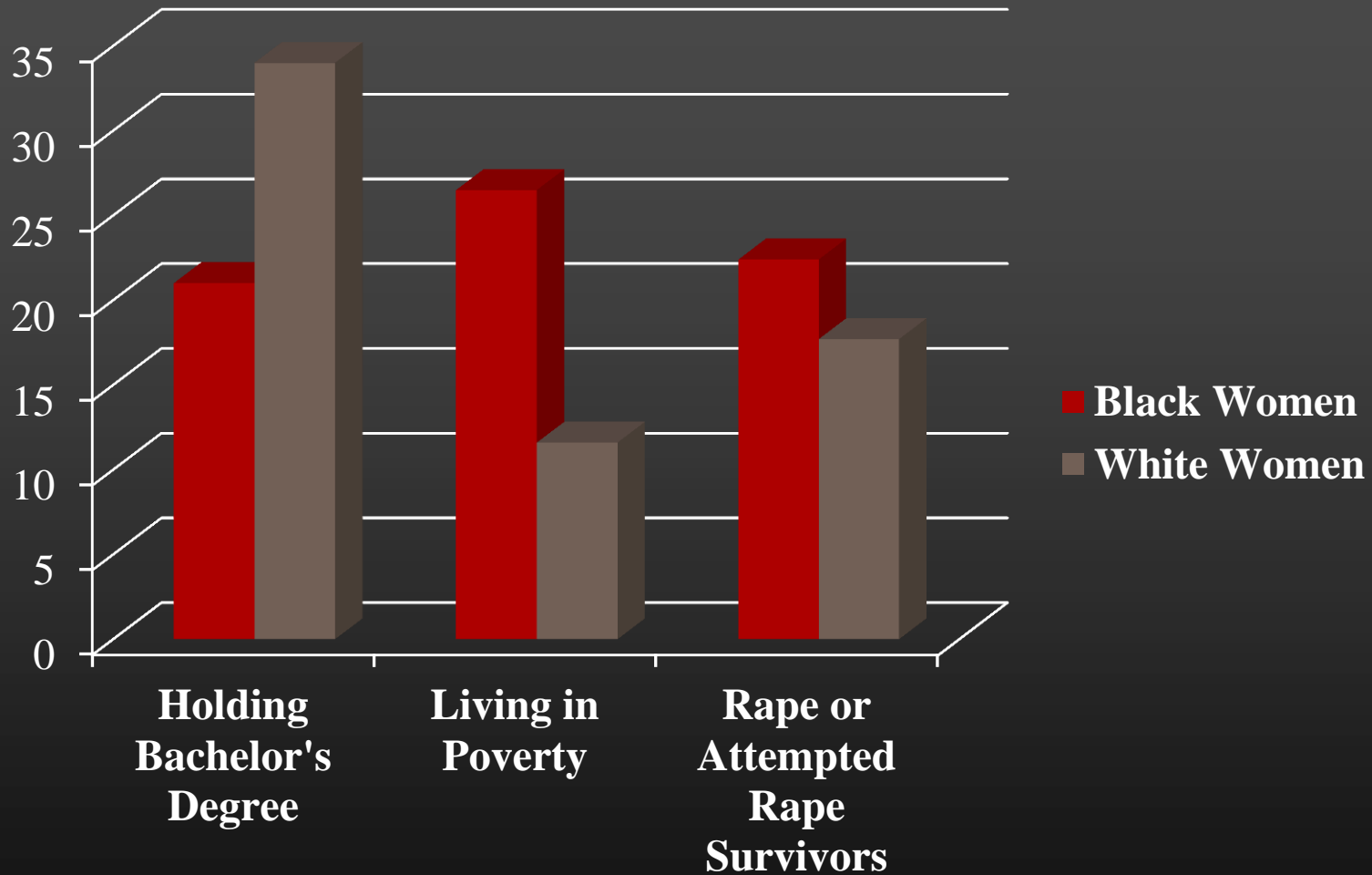
“Race matters” wrote the African American philosopher Cornel West. But Ms. Bruh and Ms. Phoenixi point out that actually, class, gender and race matter, and they matter because they structure interactions, opportunities, consciousness, ideology and the forms of resistance that characterize American life... They matter in shaping the social location of different groups in contemporary society.

The authors provide historical context to many intersectional feminist issues, with a focus on the Victorian era through the 1990's. They reference autobiographical pieces of work which demonstrate these intersections of race, gender, and class. For example, bell hooks (1994) writes of how she quickly learned that working class black people around Yale University greeted her on the street, while middle class ones ignored her. As well as the experience of Paula Rothenberg, a white, Jewish, middle class woman who examines the intersections of 'race', gender and social class. She argues that people generally do not see the ways in which they are privileged, and so well-intentioned, middle class, white liberals often strive to maintain privilege for their children, while denying that they are doing so. Yet, the dynamics of power and privilege shape the key experiences of their lives. They also argue from a different class position that a simplistically radicalized notion of privilege is highly unsatisfactory for analyzing the experiences of working class white women living in poverty.

Ms. Brah and Ms. Phoenixi acknowledge that it is sometimes taboo to discuss issues of race, and especially class, even with super-liberal feminist circles. Their research article shines a light on these sometimes touchy subjects, with intelligence, insight, and grace.

<http://www.sfu.ca/iirp/documents/Brah%20and%20Pheonix%202004.pdf>

Black Women vs. White Women



Research Article Summary:

Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology

Deborah K. King expertly writes about intersectional feminism, particularly in regards to black women. The title, "Multiple Jeopardy" is referenced in regard to the dual oppressions faced by women of color:

"The notion of double jeopardy is not a new one. Near the end of the nineteenth century, Anna Julia Cooper, who was born a slave and later became an educator and earned a Ph.D., often spoke and wrote of the double enslavement of black women and of our being "confronted by both a woman question and a race problem."

Deborah King also quotes Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, who wrote, in 1904:

"Not only are colored women ... handicapped on account of their sex, but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women."

She also goes on to explain the response of women of color to these multiple forms of oppression, because as long as black women have known countless discriminations, they have also resisted those oppressions. Their day-to-day survival as well as our organized political actions have demonstrated the tenacity of their struggle.

In 1972, Frances Beale, a founding member of the Women's Liberation Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) formally introduced the term "double jeopardy" to describe the dual discriminations of racism and sexism that subjugate black women.

Concerning black women, she wrote:

"As blacks they suffer all the burdens of prejudice and mistreatment that fall on anyone with dark skin. As women they bear the additional burden of having to cope with white and black men."

Ms. King then goes on to discuss that in addition to the dual issues of race and gender, the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism, as well as classism is now widely accepted and used as the conceptualization of black women's status, and the effect that these three oppressive forces have on the everyday lives of black women, as well as the group as a whole in political representation and lack of access.

<http://web.uvic.ca/~ayh/318King%20Multiple%20Jeopardy.pdf>

This course, and the work on this assignment increased my knowledge as a political scientist, an activist, and a feminist. I read the words of women of color, and learned directly from them, about important issues which are often over-looked by mainstream feminism and political or activist movements. It is far too common for advocacy groups to focus on one group, ignoring the interplay that faces many people. We are not just a race or a gender; each of us, regardless of where we fall along minority or majority lines, are intersectional creatures. We are all an interplay of our gender, our race, our class and financial status, our disability or ability status, or sexual orientation, our marital status, our age, etc. My eyes have been opened and my understanding increased in regard to these overlapping issues. My work as an activist and a disabled feminist will be greatly improved by my newfound education. These important issues are overlooked far too often, and so now I will no longer be one of those people who lives in a position of privilege without acknowledging the complicated struggles of others around me.

Conclusion (Post- Assignment Reflection)
