

## A Critical Study of Women Oppression

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### Abstract

Intersectional feminism is a crucial concept that recognizes how different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism, intersect and compound, leading to unique experiences of marginalization and exclusion. This lens acknowledges that individuals have multiple identities and experiences that cannot be reduced to a single aspect <sup>1</sup>.

For instance, black women face both racism and sexism, while indigenous women confront colonialism, racism, and sexism. This intersectionality means that their experiences cannot be understood solely through the lens of gender or race. Instead, we must consider how these different forms of oppression intersect and exacerbate each other.

### Introduction

Women's oppression is a complex and multifaceted issue that has existed across societies, cultures, and historical periods. It refers to the systematic subjugation, marginalization, and devaluation of women based on their gender, often perpetuated by patriarchal structures and social norms. Women's oppression manifests in various forms, including economic inequality, limited access to education and healthcare, gender-based violence, social and political disenfranchisement, and cultural stereotypes. While the struggle for women's rights has gained significant ground over the years, gender inequality remains a pervasive challenge that affects women worldwide, from developing countries to more developed societies.

This study aims to critically examine the nature, causes, and consequences of women's oppression. It will explore how societal, economic, and political systems have historically placed women in subordinate roles and how contemporary movements have challenged these oppressive structures. Through analyzing theories of gender, power, and intersectionality, this study will highlight the intersection of gender with other axes of identity, such as race, class, and sexuality, which exacerbate the oppression of women, particularly marginalized groups. By understanding the historical roots and ongoing manifestations of women's oppression, the study hopes to contribute to ongoing efforts for gender equality and social justice.

Through this critical lens, we will explore the ways in which women's oppression is not only a moral and human rights issue but also a political and economic one that shapes the functioning of societies on a global scale.

### Review of Literature

Early feminist scholars, such as Mary Wollstonecraft in her seminal work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), laid the groundwork for understanding the intellectual and moral arguments against women's subordination. Wollstonecraft argued that women were not naturally inferior to men but were oppressed due to social conditioning and the denial of education and opportunities.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, scholars like Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) focused on the existential and philosophical underpinnings of women's oppression. Beauvoir's famous assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" emphasized the social construction of gender and the way women are conditioned into roles of subordination. Her work inspired further analysis into the cultural and psychological mechanisms that reinforce gender inequality.

The concept of patriarchy as a system of male-dominated social structures has been central to feminist analyses of oppression. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) explored patriarchy as an overarching system that extends beyond family structures to politics, law, and economics. Millett's work connects the personal and the political, emphasizing how gendered power dynamics are embedded in social institutions and everyday life.

The intersection of gender and class has been a key focus in Marxist and socialist feminist literature. Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884) proposed that the rise of private property led to the domination of women within the family unit and the



establishment of patriarchal systems. Marxist feminists, such as Luce Irigaray and Heidi Hartmann, have emphasized the way capitalist economies exploit women's labor, both in the domestic sphere (unpaid care work) and the workforce.

Ann Oakley's work on the sociology of housework in *The Sociology of Housework* (1974) extended these ideas by showing how the division of labor within households reinforces gender inequality. She argued that housework is a form of labor that is undervalued and disproportionately performed by women, thus contributing to their economic and social subordination.

In the late 20th century, Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality provided a critical lens for analyzing how multiple forms of oppression—based on race, class, sexuality, and gender—interact in complex ways to shape women's experiences. Crenshaw's work, particularly in her 1989 article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," challenged earlier feminist frameworks for often ignoring the specific experiences of women of color, working-class women, and queer women. This approach has led to a more nuanced understanding of oppression as multifaceted and context-dependent.

### **Critical Analysis of Alice Walker's Novels**

Alice Walker, a celebrated American novelist, short story writer, poet, and social activist, is best known for her exploration of race, gender, and the African American experience. Her works, notably *The Color Purple* (1982), *Meridian* (1976), and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), delve into themes of oppression, identity, liberation, and personal transformation, providing rich material for critical analysis. Walker's writing combines elements of realism, folklore, and African American oral traditions, drawing attention to the complex relationships between women and men, Black and white people, and the individual and the community. Below is a critical analysis of her key novels, considering their thematic concerns, narrative techniques, and social and cultural impact.

#### **1. The Color Purple (1982)**

*The Color Purple* is perhaps Walker's most famous work, receiving critical acclaim and several literary awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award. The novel tells the story of Celie, an African American woman in the early 20th century South, who overcomes severe trauma and oppression to find herself, her voice, and her independence.

#### **2. Meridian (1976)**

*Meridian*, Walker's second novel, examines the civil rights movement in the 1960s through the life of its protagonist, Meridian Hill. The novel is less focused on personal transformation than *The Color Purple* and instead explores the intersection of political activism and personal sacrifice.

#### **3. The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970)**

This is Walker's first novel and, while not as famous as *The Color Purple*, it offers significant insight into her exploration of race and gender. The novel traces the life of Grange Copeland, an African American man living in the South, and the ways his relationships with women and his role as a father reflect the toxic cycle of oppression and power.

### **Conclusion**

Alice Walker's novels offer a profound exploration of the intersections of race, gender, and identity, illustrating the complexities of African American life, particularly for women, in a racially and patriarchally divided society. Through works like *The Color Purple*, *Meridian*, and *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Walker delves into the oppressive systems that shape her characters' lives, while also portraying their capacity for personal transformation, resilience, and empowerment. Her novels depict the damaging effects of racial and gender-based violence, but they also offer hope through sisterhood, self-discovery, and the fight for justice.

Walker's feminist vision—centered on the empowerment of Black women—has sparked critical debates about the representation of men in her work, particularly African American men, who are often portrayed negatively in her novels. Nevertheless, Walker's ability to blend personal and political narratives, as well as her incorporation of African American folklore and



oral traditions, makes her writing distinctive and impactful. The relationships between her characters—especially women—reveal the power of solidarity and collective action in overcoming oppression.

In the broader context of African American literature, Walker's works remain crucial for understanding the layered dynamics of oppression and resistance. They challenge readers to reflect on the social structures that perpetuate inequality while encouraging them to envision a future where freedom, dignity, and equality are within reach for all. Her exploration of both the personal and collective dimensions of struggle continues to resonate with readers around the world, making Alice Walker a vital voice in the ongoing conversation about race, gender, and justice.

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