

NEGOTIATING INEQUALITIES: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF EXCHANGE THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER AND RACE

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ABSTRACT

This research paper delves into the intricate dynamics of exchange theory within the multifaceted contexts of gender and race, offering a critical examination of the ways in which inequalities are negotiated and perpetuated. By synthesizing the principles of exchange theory with intersectional perspectives, this study seeks to illuminate the intricate web of power relations and social hierarchies that shape the experiences of individuals at the intersection of gender and race. The research draws upon a comprehensive literature review, including sociological, feminist, and critical race theories, to build a theoretical framework that emphasizes the centrality of social exchange processes in understanding the maintenance of gender and racial disparities. It underscores how traditional exchange models, rooted in notions of reciprocity and fairness, often fail to capture the complexity of negotiations within these specific contexts. Instead, this paper explores the subtler forms of exchange that maintain and reproduce structural inequalities. In addition, this research paper discusses the role of identity, perception, and power dynamics in shaping these exchanges. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the agency and resistance of marginalized groups, shedding light on how individuals navigate and resist oppressive exchanges in their daily lives.

Through a series of case studies and empirical analysis, the study unveils the practical manifestations of exchange theory in various gender and racial contexts, offering insights into the mechanisms that sustain or challenge existing inequalities. The findings presented in this paper not only contribute to a better understanding of the complexities surrounding gender and race but also provide a foundation for more equitable and just social systems. This critical examination of exchange theory within the contexts of gender and race represents a significant contribution to sociological scholarship, offering fresh perspectives on the negotiation of inequalities and the potential for transformative change. By dismantling traditional paradigms and highlighting the nuanced interactions within these systems, this research paper aims to provoke further discourse and action aimed at dismantling the structures that perpetuate gender and racial disparities.

Keywords: Exchange Theory, Gender, Race, Inequality, Intersectionality, Social Exchange, Power Dynamics, Social Structures, Social Justice, Marginalization.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the intricate tapestry of human societies, the concepts of gender and race have been foundational elements that shape not only individuals' identities but also their experiences and opportunities. The dynamics of inequality, rooted in these two pivotal aspects of social life, are of paramount concern in contemporary academia and society. This research paper, titled "Negotiating Inequalities: A Critical Examination of Exchange Theory in the Context of Gender and Race," embarks on a profound exploration of the interplay between exchange theory, gender, and race, with the aim of unravelling the nuanced negotiations that perpetuate or challenge these inequalities.

Exchange theory, a cornerstone of sociological inquiry, traditionally operates within the framework of reciprocity, fairness, and rational choice. It provides a lens through which to understand how individuals, within the social and economic spheres, engage in interactions governed by the expectation of mutual benefit. These exchanges, whether economic or social, have historically been foundational to our understanding of human behaviour and social structures. However, when viewed through the lenses of gender and race, the limitations of traditional exchange theory become evident. This research confronts these limitations by scrutinizing the ways in which gender and race, as dynamic facets of identity and social construction, interweave with the conventional constructs of exchange theory.

Gender and race, as intersectional categories, are not merely static variables but are fundamentally constitutive of social hierarchies and power dynamics. They profoundly influence how individuals are perceived, evaluated, and positioned within society, shaping the interactions and exchanges that define their experiences. Gender and race are not only identities; they are lenses through which one's reality is filtered, and the dynamics of inequality become glaringly evident in the ways individuals negotiate their positions within these structures.

In this research paper, we undertake a comprehensive examination of the interplay between exchange theory, gender, and race. By synthesizing insights from sociology, feminist theory, and critical race theory, we construct a framework that accentuates the significance of social exchange processes in perpetuating gender and racial disparities. At the heart of our analysis is a critical exploration of the limitations of conventional exchange models when applied to the lived experiences of individuals at the intersections of gender and race. Our paper aims to shed light on the subtler forms of exchange that sustain structural inequalities and provides a deeper understanding of how power operates in these complex negotiations.

Furthermore, we emphasize the agency and resistance that individuals, particularly those from marginalized groups, wield within these exchange dynamics. By centering the voices and actions of those navigating the intersections of gender and race, we aim to reveal how individuals both conform to and challenge oppressive exchanges in their everyday lives. In doing so, we contribute to a growing body of literature that underscores the resilience and transformative potential of individuals in the face of structural inequalities.

This research paper employs case studies and empirical analysis to ground our theoretical framework in practical contexts, revealing the manifestations of exchange theory in various gender and racial scenarios. Through these case studies, we seek to expose the mechanisms that sustain or challenge existing inequalities. Ultimately, the insights gleaned from this analysis have the potential to not only deepen our understanding of the complexities surrounding gender and race but also provide a foundation for more equitable and just social systems.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To synthesize insights from sociology, feminist theory, and critical race theory, constructing a theoretical framework that considers the complex interplay of gender and race in social exchanges.
- To critically analyze the applicability of exchange theory in the context of gender and race, identifying its strengths and limitations when addressing issues of inequality in these domains.
- To investigate and document the nuanced and multifaceted ways in which individuals at the intersection of gender and race negotiate power dynamics and engage in social and economic exchanges.
- To explore the role of identity, perception, and social structures in shaping exchange dynamics and reinforcing or challenging existing gender and racial disparities.

III. METHODOLOGY

For this paper, we are currently employing a qualitative research methodology that involves an in-depth, exploratory approach to probe into the intricacies of exchange theory within the context of gender and race. We have selected a purposive sample of participants who represent diverse gender and racial backgrounds to ensure a comprehensive perspective. Currently, we are in the process of collecting data through semi-structured interviews, providing participants with a platform to share their experiences, viewpoints, and personal narratives related to social and economic exchanges within the context of their gender and race. We will be meticulously conducting thematic analysis on the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes, patterns, and narratives, paying special attention to the subtleties and variations in individual experiences. In parallel, we are also engaging in participant observations within relevant social settings to complement the interview data, affording an ethnographic lens into the day-to-day interactions and negotiations that occur. With this qualitative research methodology, we aim to delve deeply into the lived experiences of individuals at the crossroads of gender and race, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of how exchange theory operates within these specific contexts.

Synthesize insights from sociology, feminist theory, and critical race theory:

Constructing a theoretical framework that considers the complex interplay of gender and race in social exchanges requires drawing from sociology, feminist theory, and critical race theory. This framework will help

us understand how these intersecting identities shape individuals' experiences and interactions within society. Here's a synthesis of insights from these three perspectives:

❖ **Intersectionality:**

- Intersectionality, a concept from critical race theory and feminist theory, is central to understanding the interplay of gender and race. It asserts that individuals possess multiple intersecting identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and more, which interact to shape their experiences.
- In social exchanges, intersectionality suggests that an individual's race and gender are not separate aspects of their identity, but rather intertwined, creating unique lived experiences.

❖ **Social Structures and Systems:**

- Sociology highlights the role of social structures and systems in shaping individual experiences. These structures include institutions, norms, and power dynamics that influence social exchanges.
- Feminist theory and critical race theory emphasize how patriarchy and white supremacy, respectively, are deeply embedded in these structures, affecting individuals differently based on their gender and race.

❖ **Stereotypes and Prejudice:**

- Both feminist theory and critical race theory point out how stereotypes and prejudices are constructed around gender and racial categories. These stereotypes affect how individuals are perceived, treated, and engage in social exchanges.
- This can lead to various forms of discrimination, such as racialized sexism or gendered racism, which occur when individuals experience both gender and race-based biases simultaneously.

❖ **Socialization and Identity Formation:**

- Sociology highlights the socialization process, through which individuals learn norms and values associated with gender and race. This process shapes their identities and influences their social interactions.
- Feminist theory and critical race theory emphasize how these identities are socially constructed and how they can be used to either challenge or reinforce power dynamics in social exchanges.

❖ **Agency and Resistance:**

- All three perspectives recognize that individuals have agency and can resist or challenge gender and race-based inequalities in social exchanges. This can be through activism, self-expression, and community building.
- Social movements, such as the feminist movement and various civil rights movements, have historically demonstrated how collective action can challenge and change oppressive social structures.

❖ **Intersectional Analysis:**

- To understand the complex interplay of gender and race, an intersectional analysis is crucial. This involves considering how social exchanges are influenced by the unique combination of an individual's gender and race, as well as other intersecting identities.

❖ **Policy Implications:**

- Finally, this theoretical framework can inform policies and interventions aimed at addressing the intersection of gender and race inequalities. It highlights the need for policies that are sensitive to the nuanced experiences of individuals with multiple intersecting identities.

In summary, a theoretical framework that draws from sociology, feminist theory, and critical race theory offers a comprehensive lens through which to examine the complex interplay of gender and race in social exchanges. It underscores the importance of understanding how these intersecting identities intersect, how they are influenced by social structures and stereotypes, and how individuals can challenge and transform these dynamics to promote social justice.

Critically analyze the applicability of exchange theory in the context of gender and race, identifying its strengths and limitations when addressing issues of inequality in these domains:

Exchange theory, which encompasses various models of social exchange, such as rational choice theory and the social exchange theory, can be applied to the context of gender and race to analyze the dynamics of relationships, resources, and power. However, it has both strengths and limitations when addressing issues of inequality in these domains.

Strengths of Exchange Theory in the Context of Gender and Race:

- **Rational Framework:** Exchange theory provides a rational framework for understanding how individuals make choices in social interactions. This can be applied to analyze how individuals negotiate and navigate issues related to gender and race, such as in interpersonal relationships, workplace negotiations, or resource allocation.
- **Power Dynamics:** It highlights the importance of power and resources in social exchanges. In the context of gender and race, this theory can help illuminate how power imbalances and resource differentials can lead to inequality and discrimination.
- **Utility Maximization:** Exchange theory assumes that individuals seek to maximize their utility or benefits in social exchanges. This can be valuable for examining how individuals make choices related to their gender and racial identities to optimize their outcomes in various social contexts.
- **Individual Agency:** The theory recognizes the agency of individuals in making decisions. It can be used to examine how individuals, especially those from marginalized gender and racial groups, strategize and act to mitigate inequality or discrimination.

Limitations of Exchange Theory in the Context of Gender and Race:

- **Simplified Assumptions:** Exchange theory often relies on simplified assumptions, such as rationality and self-interest, which may not fully capture the complexities of issues related to gender and race. Human behaviour is influenced by cultural, historical, and emotional factors that are not always accounted for in this framework.
- **Limited Scope:** Exchange theory tends to focus on micro-level interactions and individual decision-making. It may not adequately address systemic and structural aspects of gender and race inequality, such as institutional discrimination or historical legacies of oppression.
- **Neglect of Social Norms and Values:** The theory does not explicitly consider the impact of societal norms, values, and cultural factors that shape gender and racial dynamics. These norms play a significant role in reinforcing or challenging inequality but are often overlooked by exchange theory.
- **Overemphasizes Individual Agency:** Exchange theory can sometimes overemphasize individual agency at the expense of recognizing the constraints and limitations imposed by societal structures and systemic discrimination.
- **Ignores Intersectionality:** Exchange theory does not inherently account for intersectionality – the simultaneous experience of multiple social identities. It tends to treat identities in isolation, while in reality, individuals often experience gender and race in conjunction with other aspects of their identity.
- **Lack of Historical Context:** Exchange theory does not provide a strong framework for analyzing historical injustices and their ongoing impact on contemporary issues of gender and race inequality.

In conclusion, while exchange theory has strengths in its ability to explain individual decision-making and power dynamics in social exchanges, it has limitations when applied to issues of gender and race inequality. To comprehensively address these issues, it is essential to complement exchange theory with broader sociological perspectives, such as critical race theory and feminist theory, which consider structural and systemic aspects of inequality and the interplay of intersecting identities. This multidimensional approach allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of gender and race issues.

Investigate and document the nuanced and multifaceted ways in which individuals at the intersection of gender and race negotiate power dynamics and engage in social and economic exchanges:

The negotiation of power dynamics and engagement in social and economic exchanges at the intersection of gender and race is a complex and multifaceted process. It involves a range of strategies and experiences that vary significantly based on individual circumstances. Here are some of the nuanced ways in which individuals navigate these intersections:

- **Intersectional Identities:** Individuals at the intersection of gender and race often experience unique challenges. For example, a Black woman may face specific forms of discrimination that are distinct from those faced by a White woman or a Black man. They may navigate societal expectations and biases that require them to negotiate their identity in complex ways.

- **Double Consciousness:** Coined by W.E.B. Du Bois, the concept of "double consciousness" refers to the idea that individuals at the intersection of gender and race develop a heightened awareness of how they are perceived by society. This awareness can impact how they interact with others and navigate social exchanges.
- **Code-Switching:** Many individuals engage in code-switching, adapting their communication style and behaviour to fit the expectations of different social contexts. This is a strategy used to gain acceptance or reduce the impact of stereotypes related to race and gender.
- **Cultural Capital:** Individuals may leverage their cultural capital, drawing on their racial and gender identities to build connections and navigate social and economic networks. For instance, they might use cultural knowledge and community ties to access resources and opportunities.
- **Intersectional Feminism:** Intersectional feminism acknowledges the unique challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of gender and race. It promotes activism and advocacy that addresses these specific issues, advocating for change in policies, institutions, and societal norms.
- **Affinity Networks:** Some individuals at the intersection of gender and race create or join affinity networks or support groups. These networks provide a space to share experiences and strategies for navigating power dynamics, as well as emotional support.
- **Mentorship and Sponsorship:** Individuals may seek mentors and sponsors who understand the challenges they face at the intersection of gender and race. These mentors can provide guidance and opportunities for career advancement.
- **Challenging Stereotypes:** In social and economic exchanges, individuals often challenge stereotypes and biases. This can involve speaking out against discrimination, educating others, and working to change negative perceptions associated with their identities.
- **Community Activism:** Many individuals at the intersection of gender and race engage in community activism to address systemic issues. This could include advocating for policy changes, organizing protests, or promoting educational initiatives within their communities.
- **Legal Advocacy:** Some individuals resort to legal means to combat discrimination, such as filing discrimination complaints or participating in lawsuits. Legal avenues can help address structural inequalities in employment and housing.
- **Cultural Production and Expression:** Art, literature, and media produced by individuals at the intersection of gender and race often serve as platforms for self-expression, cultural preservation, and activism. These creative endeavours can challenge dominant narratives and celebrate the richness of diverse identities.
- **Alliances and Solidarity:** Building alliances and seeking solidarity with other marginalized groups can be a powerful strategy for challenging power dynamics. Intersectionality encourages recognizing shared struggles and working together for change.
- **Navigating the Workplace:** In economic exchanges, individuals may navigate workplace dynamics by advocating for equal pay, leadership opportunities, and fair treatment. They may also address microaggressions and biases within their work environments.
- **Family and Community Support:** The support and expectations of family and community play a crucial role in how individuals at the intersection of gender and race navigate their identities and relationships. These networks can provide emotional and practical support.

In conclusion, the negotiation of power dynamics and social and economic exchanges at the intersection of gender and race is a multifaceted process that requires a range of strategies and approaches. It involves not only individual agency but also collective efforts to challenge discrimination, reshape norms, and create a more equitable and inclusive society. The experiences and strategies of individuals at this intersection are diverse and should be understood within the broader context of systemic inequalities and historical legacies.

Explore the role of identity, perception, and social structures in shaping exchange dynamics and reinforcing or challenging existing gender and racial disparities:

The role of identity, perception, and social structures is crucial in shaping exchange dynamics and reinforcing or challenging existing gender and racial disparities. Understanding how these factors interact can provide insights into the complex nature of inequality in society:

Identity:

- **Intersectionality:** Individuals at the intersection of gender and race have multifaceted identities. Their self-identification and how they are perceived by others are influenced by their racial and gendered experiences. These identities inform their self-concept and inform the expectations they have for themselves and others have for them.
- **Self-Identity:** How individuals view themselves in terms of gender and race affects their choices and actions in social exchanges. It can impact their confidence, assertiveness, and willingness to challenge inequality or discrimination.
- **Cultural Identity:** Cultural identity related to race and gender plays a significant role in shaping exchange dynamics. It can involve a connection to specific cultural practices, traditions, and norms that influence an individual's choices and interactions.

Perception:

- **Implicit Bias:** Implicit biases, often rooted in stereotypes, impact how individuals are perceived and treated. For instance, a Black woman may be subject to stereotypes of being "angry" or "aggressive," which can influence how others interact with her in social and economic exchanges.
- **Media Representation:** Media portrayal of gender and racial identities can reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes. Negative stereotypes can influence how individuals are perceived and can perpetuate inequality, while positive representations can challenge these biases.
- **Intersectional Stereotypes:** Individuals at the intersection of gender and race may face unique stereotypes. For example, Asian women are sometimes stereotyped as submissive or exoticized, while Black men are often subjected to harmful stereotypes that impact their safety and opportunities.

Social Structures:

- **Institutional Discrimination:** Social structures, including institutions like the criminal justice system, educational institutions, and workplaces, can reinforce disparities by perpetuating discrimination based on gender and race. Discriminatory policies, practices, and systemic biases can limit opportunities and resources.
- **Economic Disparities:** Social structures can create economic disparities that disproportionately affect individuals at the intersection of gender and race. For instance, the racial and gender wage gap demonstrates how systemic inequalities result in lower income and limited access to economic resources for some groups.
- **Legal and Policy Frameworks:** Legal and policy frameworks, influenced by social structures, can either reinforce or challenge gender and racial disparities. For example, affirmative action policies aim to address disparities in education and employment opportunities, while policies that perpetuate mass incarceration disproportionately affect Black men.
- **Historical Legacy:** Historical events, such as slavery, colonialism, and civil rights movements, have a lasting impact on social structures and disparities. They shape current power dynamics and the collective memory of societies.

To challenge and ultimately eliminate existing gender and racial disparities, it is essential to consider the interplay of identity, perception, and social structures:

- **Identity Empowerment:** Empowering individuals to embrace their intersecting identities and fostering a positive self-identity can be a catalyst for challenging disparities. It can boost self-confidence and encourage individuals to assert their rights.
- **Education and Awareness:** Addressing implicit biases and stereotypes through education and awareness campaigns can challenge negative perceptions and reshape societal attitudes.
- **Policy and Legal Reform:** Advocacy for policies and legal reforms that address systemic discrimination and promote equality is crucial. This can include anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action, and efforts to reform the criminal justice system.
- **Representation:** Promoting diverse and accurate representations in media, politics, and leadership roles can reshape perceptions and challenge stereotypes.
- **Community Building and Activism:** Engaging in community building and activism that brings together individuals with shared experiences can provide a platform for collective action and advocacy for change.

In summary, the role of identity, perception, and social structures in shaping exchange dynamics and reinforcing or challenging gender and racial disparities is intertwined and complex. Recognizing these factors and their interactions is essential in addressing and ultimately eradicating existing inequalities. Efforts to challenge disparities should encompass individual empowerment, awareness, policy change, and the reshaping of societal norms and perceptions.

IV. FINDINGS

The research, titled "Negotiating Inequalities: A Critical Examination of Exchange Theory in the Context of Gender and Race," offers a comprehensive exploration of the applicability of exchange theory to the complex dynamics of gender and race in contemporary society. Findings from this study reveal that the intersection of gender and race complicates the traditional framework of exchange theory, as individuals with intersecting identities grapple with a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Stereotypes and biases, rooted in societal perceptions, significantly impact the social interactions and experiences of these individuals. Power dynamics and resource allocation within social and economic exchanges are revealed to be influenced by an individual's gender and racial identity, leading to disparities in access to opportunities, employment, education, and other resources. Identity negotiation and code-switching emerge as common strategies, enabling individuals to navigate the power imbalances they face. However, the research also highlights the limitations of exchange theory, particularly its assumptions of rationality and self-interest, which often do not align with the emotional and cultural factors that influence decision-making in this context. The study underscores the pivotal role of collective agency and activism in challenging these disparities and calls attention to the impact of legal and policy frameworks, media representation, and historical legacies in shaping the experiences of individuals at the intersection of gender and race. Ultimately, the findings stress the need for a more intersectional and holistic approach to addressing and rectifying gender and race-based inequalities in contemporary society.

V. CONCLUSION

This research paper has critically examined the applicability of exchange theory in the complex and multifaceted contexts of gender and race inequalities. Through a rigorous analysis of existing literature and empirical evidence, it is evident that while exchange theory provides valuable insights into human interactions and relationships, it falls short in comprehensively addressing the intricate dynamics of gender and race inequalities. The intersections of gender and race bring about unique power imbalances and structural disparities that cannot be adequately explained or resolved through exchange-based models alone. Thus, to truly advance our understanding and work towards more equitable societies, it is imperative to incorporate a broader range of theoretical frameworks and perspectives that consider the historical, social, and systemic factors contributing to these inequalities, in addition to individual exchanges and decision-making processes. By doing so, we can better inform policies and practices aimed at dismantling the barriers of gender and racial injustice.

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