

# Silenced and Overlooked: The Intersectional Struggles of Women of Color in Ann Petry's *The Street*

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## Abstract

This research investigates Ann Petry's *The Street* through Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional theoretical framework. The study shall try to see how Petry paints a picture of the intertwined forms of oppression—race, gender, class—that build the lives of black women in 1940s Harlem through her work. Specifically looking at the protagonist Lutie Johnson, it will be shown how Petry uses naturalistic and gothic elements to reveal the constraints of intersectionality under which Lutie strives as she fights against societal repression. It scrutinizes how black women are silenced and marginalized within discourses that are purportedly designed for their upliftment, along dimensions of feminism, anti-racism, and socio-political speeches. The methodology involves textual analysis concerning some major recurring themes like structural and political intersectionality, sexual violence as well as domestic abuse interconnected with broader issues concerning the American Dream, urban life, and systemic inequality. The findings reveal that Petry's work underscores compound and multidimensional oppression, bringing to light the need for such extensive and specific scholarship on identity and discrimination. The research concludes that Petry's narrative remains: a powerful critique of racial and gendered social structures with glimpses into the lived complexities of black womanhood.

**Keywords:** Structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, domestic violence, slavery, racial discrimination.

## 1. Introduction

*The Street*, authored by Ann Petry, stands as a profoundly significant piece of literature from the twentieth century. In her work, Petry delves into the life of a protagonist constrained by the intersecting limitations present in society. The narrative centers around the experiences of black women confronting the devastating reality of a world stacked against them. According to McBride (2003), Petry utilizes naturalistic techniques and themes to investigate the limitations imposed by social class in Harlem during the 1940s. The realism that defines the world within *The Street* serves as the foundation for its narrative. As noted by Jackson and Moody Freeman,

Petry does not position her protagonist, Lutie Johnson, as one with agency that rises above societal oppression; instead, she presents her current situation as a form of "alternative" by highlighting the surreal Gothic horror of a life weighed down by continuous, multi-layered repression. Thus, Petry's work emphasizes Gothic elements and employs them to inspire a departure from conventional thinking, promoting social exploration.

In order to confront the realities faced by American women in Harlem, Petry utilizes intersecting constraints to illustrate how women of color experience treatment across various contexts, highlighting their silencing and marginalization within discourses surrounding antiracism and anti-rape. Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality, recognized as "the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771), will serve as the theoretical foundation for examining the intertwined nature of racial and gender marginalization in *The Street*. Proposed by black activists, thinkers, and feminists in the United States, the concept of intersectionality aims to analyze the experiences of women who are influenced by the privileges and constraints linked to other social groups in their environments. Govinda (2022) states:

Precursors to Crenshaw's ideas had been emerging in Black feminism as well as in scholarship and literary writing by Latina, lesbian, minority ethnic, postcolonial, and Third World feminists and the campaign documents of women's and social movements in the US and in other parts of the Global North and also the Global South (p. 74).

Intersectionality, in this sense, is a way to explore the treatment of women and the vulnerability they suffer within different contexts in *The Street* narrative. In her seminal work, Crenshaw (1991) elucidates the limited scope of discussions surrounding male violence against women, specifically the aspects of battering and rape. She highlights the significance of understanding how the experiences of women of color often arise from the confluence of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism. Kendall (2022) questions feminist theory's ability to fulfill women's needs and suggests using an intersectional lens to provide insight into the practices, policies, and structures that increase the likelihood of women with intersecting identities being discriminated against and disadvantaged. Kendall argues that this concept should be incorporated to lead feminism to recognize and empower the most vulnerable people in society and also create an enlightened space that includes more than one voice (James, 2022).

However, the experiences of women of color frequently remain unacknowledged within the frameworks of both feminism and anti-racism. Due to their intersecting identity as women and people of color, women of color find themselves marginalized within the discourses that are designed to address either sexism or racism independently. Sharma and Geetha (2021) mention: "Feminism meant for empowerment of women has excluded women who are beaten down daily—both physically and mentally—and who lack consciousness, knowledge, and power to change their condition in life..." (p. 1)

Crenshaw asserts that oppression cannot be understood as an isolated phenomenon but as a complex interaction between different social groups, including race, gender, and class. These intersections lead to unique and confusing forms of oppression suffered by individuals. Thus,

this research aims to understand the impact of these experiences and intersections in shaping female identities. Crenshaw expresses these ideas in one of her key articles on this theory, saying:

I consider how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or anti-racism. Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both. (1991, pp. 1243-1244)

Intersectionality insists on looking at the dynamics of difference and similarity, including recent advancements in disciplines like geography and organizational studies. Intersectionality is an important concept in Ann Petry's novel *The Street*. Petry uses intersectionality to discuss the ways that different social identities intersect with each other. Understanding Lutie's struggles requires the kind of multifaceted consideration that Crenshaw identified. The position of this protagonist in a systematic repressive society, as well as the way Petry comments on this position, entails studying how these persecutions not only exist side by side but also aggravate each other. Hence, Crenshaw discusses how race and class intersect with each other. *The Street* (1947) explores the importance of class and race in society and how it impacts the lives of the characters in the novel. For example, one of the main characters in the novel is Jim Baldwin, a young black boy who has been expelled from school and is working to help support his family financially. Mambrol (2020) mentions that *The Street* presents the notion of prejudice that targets race and gender in addition to class.

The examination of the color line is of critical importance, a concept that W.E.B. Du Bois presents in his seminal text, *The Souls of Black Folk*:

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War; and however much they who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on the technical points of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, all nevertheless knew, as we know, that the question of Negro slavery was the real cause of the conflict. (p. 9)

Lutie faces discrimination and marginalization on multiple fronts in the patriarchal society where she lives. She is exposed to racial and sexist discrimination in the labor market and is forced to navigate a world hostile to women of color. Petry also explores how Lutie's class status intersects with her race and gender to shape her experiences further. Lutie does not have access to the same resources and opportunities as the most privileged woman and is forced to rely on her resilience and resourcefulness to survive and thrive in a world stacked against her.

The narrative presents the theme of racism in the American Dream as well. Petry shows that if you work hard, you get ahead only if you are white. This statement is an example of the way class overlaps with race. It also highlights how race has negatively affected and shaped Jim's life. Later in the novel, other characters make similar comments about how black people are more likely to live in poverty than whites, and how white people are better off than blacks.

A comprehensive understanding of female characters in *The Street* requires an application of multifaceted analysis as advocated by Crenshaw. Not only how these females coexist with oppression but also how they interact with it must be studied. To fully understand the persecution suffered by Lutie, Min, and Mrs. Hedges, it is necessary to consider the interconnected nature of these concepts. These female characters, from the protagonist Lutie to the minor characters, suffer various forms of oppression inside and outside their homes at the levels of their family and work lives. Each female character in the text faces multiple, intersecting forms of marginalization: Lutie contends with the intersections of race and gender, and Min and Mrs. Hedges with the onerous oppression intersections of race and sexuality. These characters are not only black and female but also suffer from the added burden of low socioeconomic status. In one aspect, such entanglements become problematic to disentangle these interconnections from one another due to the very nature of all these characters confronting multiple forms of oppression implying that these intersections are intricately layered. This makes it difficult for individuals experiencing different intersections to fully comprehend the simultaneous realities they encounter. For example, Lutie's sexuality is subjected to scrutiny not solely due to her gender but also due to her race. However, the purpose of this article is to examine these distinct intersections in isolation to comprehend the distinct treatment of women of color within various contexts in Ann Petry's novel *The Street* (1947).

### 1.1 Literature Review

The concept of intersectionality has won wide discussion, with Acker (2011) identifying it as a metaphor, Harnois (2013) and Shields (2008) defining it as a demographic or descriptive device, Knapp (2005) refers to it as a concept, and Lutz (2015) describes it as a method. Others, such as Davis (2008), see it as feminist theory, while Yuval-Davis (2015) defines it as a theoretical framework, and May (2015) refers to it as a political orientation, epistemological practice, and ontological framework. Regardless of the specific interpretation, intersectionality discusses how diverse forms of oppression and subjugation overlap and intersect with each other. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law professor and civil rights advocate, coined the term in 1989 to describe how black women endure various forms of oppression due to their intersectional identities. In her seminal work, *Intersectionality: Essential Writings*, Crenshaw (2017) argues that discrimination cannot be fully understood by examining individual forms of oppression in isolation. Instead, it is essential to recognize how multiple forms of oppression intersect and create exceptional experiences of discrimination for individuals with intersectional identities.

Crenshaw (1989) raises alarms about the marginalization of Black women within feminist and anti-racist discussions, highlighting the necessity to rethink and reformulate our analytical approach to rectify this oversight and foster genuine change. Over the last fifteen years, intersectionality has acquired considerable intellectual, political, and moral significance, yet it has also fallen prey to opportunistic and shallow interpretations, which Bilge (2013) refers to as ornamental intersectionality. Theorists of intersectionality have illuminated the whiteness norms embedded in dominant concepts of womanhood and feminism, while also revealing masculinist viewpoints on racial identity and civil rights. By confronting the exclusions and omissions stemming from the flawed universalization of race and gender, intersectionality not only

underscores the variations within marginalized communities but also highlights the interconnectedness of power and privilege. (May, 2012)

The concept has become increasingly popular in literary analysis as it recognizes that individuals possess multiple identities that converge to form distinct experiences. Byrne (2015) notes that Crenshaw, through a feminist and legal perspective, emphasized the complex marginalization faced by Black women in the United States. By employing the metaphor of a road intersection, she demonstrated how the legal arguments put forth by companies with antidiscrimination policies inadequately addressed the intertwined nature of racial and gender discrimination confronting Black women. According to Cho et al. (2013), intersectionality has proven to be a valuable framework across various fields, including feminist studies, ethnic studies, queer studies, legal studies, history, sociology, literature, philosophy, and anthropology. This concept has facilitated the examination of gender, race, and other dimensions of power within a broad spectrum of political debates and academic inquiries.

Crenshaw has identified three key aspects of intersectionality that affect non-white women: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality highlights the distinct experiences that women of color face regarding domestic violence and rape compared to their white counterparts. Political intersectionality explores how laws and policies intended to foster equality have diminished the visibility of violence against these women. Representational intersectionality looks at how portrayals of women of color in popular culture can distort their authentic lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Rollock (2014) emphasizes that recognizing class identity requires an acknowledgment of the intersecting impact of race, noting that various ethnic groups have different perceptions of class-related resources. She specifically points out the tendency to underestimate the link between whiteness and middle-class status, arguing that the intersection of race (white), class (middle), and gender (male) illustrates a hierarchical power structure.

*The Street* by Ann Petry is an admirable example serving to highlight intersectional identities. In the novel, Lutie is a black woman who faces racial and gender discrimination and multifaceted hurdles. Even qualified for many jobs, at the period of the book story, she would not get good-paying employment because most employers were known not to employ black women. She also has a case of sexual harassment and violence from many men, including her landlord. Besides, Lutie has to try and be a good mother in case she is working; selfish society will accuse her often of ignoring her child.

The theory of intersectionality identified by Crenshaw has been greatly approved as something fundamental for both feminist and anti-racist politics. However, it has also been subject to various criticisms over recent years. This paper argues that the intersectionality theory of identity categories and their intersections is overly focused, which can take the attention away from deeper economic and material conditions of social identity —like capitalism and global imperialism. Other critics argue that at times this theory may render passive all social groupings when opined upon concerning structural oppressions, with no regard to agency and ability to practice a degree of agency in resisting, challenging, or changing their life situations (Cooper, 2016). All in all, intersectionality remains one of the useful lenses for understanding the multitudinous ways oppression is at work.

Structural intersectionality was termed by Crenshaw (1991), which refers to the interconnection of varied forms of social oppression in engendering unique positions of inequality and marginalization. This indicates that one may belong to many subordinate groups, at the same time experiencing intersectionality wherein one is subject to racism, sexism, and classism at the same time. Karmakar (2022) maintains that “intersectionality underlines how prevalent structures of inequality and power imbalances associated with various identities and orientations, such as gender, race, and class, are interlocking and cumulative in influencing issues and experiences concerning women” (p. 388). Battering, also known as domestic violence, is a pattern of abuse in which an intimate partner uses physical, sexual, or emotional acts to gain control over the other. This can be developed with the idea of Crenshaw's (1989) work on how the structural roots of intersectionality help us understand that people from marginalized communities face additional barriers to seeking help and receiving support. As Homan et al. (2021) noted, structural inequalities are abundant in their variety across the U.S. states, intersect in many different ways, and express results in health outcomes often disproportionately oriented to women's identifiers, specifically being poor and Black.

## 1.2 Unraveling the Multi-Dimensional Struggles of African-American Women on The Street

The intersection of various types of oppression is a central theme that forms the experiences of the characters in *The Street*. The notion that human beings may go through multiple oppressions at the same time is especially noticeable in the character of Lutie's son, Bub, who experiences both racism and classicism, particularly in the education system. Due to his blackness and poverty, Bub is excluded from the better schools in the city, which have more resources and better opportunities for progress. The novel also suggests that intersectionality can lead to a sense of social isolation and estrangement. Lutie is liked by neither white nor black communities, as she does not fit aptly into either group. Her experiences are shaped by the intersection of her identities, creating a sense of exclusion that makes it hard for her to find a sense of fitting. This is why Petry writes:

Her voice had a thin thread of sadness running through it that made the song important, that made it tell a story that wasn't in the words – a story of despair, of loneliness, of frustration. It was a story that all of them knew by heart and had always known because they had learned it soon after they were born and would go on adding to it until the day they died (1947, p. 101).

According to Keith Clark (1992), the female characters in the novel possess a keen awareness of their marginalized position within society and actively engage in resistance against it. Clark argues that characters like Mrs. Hedges and Min exemplify a history of Black women subverting the hollow idealism of the American Dream. Despite facing the intertwined challenges of racism and sexism, these women demonstrate an almost innate capability to carve out their own spaces. In a milieu where the foundational assumptions of the Dream contradict their lived experiences, these Black women undermine the myth itself, reshaping it to ensure their economic survival and varying levels of emotional well-being. Despite Lutie's occasional intuitive understanding of the constraints imposed by race and gender on her potential for success, her strong belief in the American dream often outweighs these limitations. In section 2, Petry writes according to Lutie “Anybody could be rich if he wanted to and worked hard enough and figured it out carefully enough”. However, after a short time, she discovered the invalidity of her hope and the American

dream through the place where she moved. The place as she mentions in section 3 “they’re nothing but traps. Dirty, dark, filthy traps.” (1947, p. 53). Her initial optimism was directly followed by a realization that the opportunities she thought existed in the city were elusive and fraught with obstacles. The social institutions portrayed in the text play a significant role in shaping Lutie’s expectations, but they do so in conflicting and ultimately incompatible ways.

### 1.2.1 Silenced Stories: Structural Intersectionality in The Street

Lutie Johnson faces a lot of challenges as she attempts to support her young son and escape from an abusive relationship with her ex-husband. It is subjected to a multiplication that embodies the dimensions of the structural intersection. Readers can see how her race and gender intersect to create challenges that make it difficult for her to get the help she needs. She, for instance, struggles to find a safe place to live in an impoverished neighborhood that is full of crime and violence.

Lutie has restricted access to job opportunities, job options are limited to her which brings about her working as a domestic servant in a white household. This gives her diminished financial independence and places her at a disadvantage in diverse facets of life, such as her capability to live freely and provide for her family. Moreover, her gender and skin color expose her to physical and emotional abuse from both white and black men who see her as an object of sexual desire. Her husband often beats and mentally maltreats her, and she is also subjected to sexual abuse by Jones, a man who lurks in the hallways of her building. She faces discrimination and harassment from white men who see her as a sexual object. This is why Lutie has been warned against them her entire life:

She grew angrier as she thought about it. Of course, none of them could know about your grandmother who had brought you up, she said to herself. And ever since you were big enough to remember the things that people said to you, had said over and over, just like a clock ticking, ‘Lutie, baby, don’t you never let no white man put his hands on you. They ain’t never willin’ to let a black woman alone. Seems like they all got a itch and a urge to sleep with ‘em. Don’t you never let any of ‘em touch you.’ (Petry, 1947, p. 35).

Through her preventive advice passed down through generations, it is clear that there is an organized and persistent social structure that poses a clear threat of sexual violence against black women. There is a generational trauma that passes from one generation to the other. Women of color are treated as accessible sexual objects and preyed upon as they are always the most vulnerable and marginalized. Race and gender here combine to create a unique vulnerability and novelty. The grandmother here does not only advise her to protect her but also to introduce her to the racial dynamics and structures of the society where she lives. When Lutie met the Super, he watched her body in detail. Watch her with inhumane sexual looks. Treated her as a sexual object, which once again illustrates the composition and perception of women by society:

She didn’t need to turn around, anyway; he was staring at her back, her legs, her thighs. She could feel his eyes traveling over her—estimating her, summing her up, wondering about her. As she climbed up the last flight of stairs, she was aware that the skin on her back was crawling with fear. Fear of what? she asked herself. Fear of him, fear of the dark, of the smells in the halls, the high steep stairs, of yourself? (Petry, 1947, p. 14)

This monologue shows Lutie's consciousness of her condition, her fear, and her multiple-dimensional weakness. She is afraid of the man, her environment, and even her thoughts. She does not feel safe at all and is alone with neither social nor family support. Her fear of the darkness of the place, the smells, the man, and the steep staircase can be seen as a metaphor that shows the multiplicity of dangers that women face in life. On the other hand, the man's looks at her show that he evaluates her body, which reduces her agency and humanity. He focuses on her charms and what can entertain her, ignoring her thoughts and feelings. Again, this represents society's attitude and its assessment of black women.

As mentioned, Lutie is also dealing with the aftermath of an abusive relationship with her ex-husband who continues to threaten her. She is afraid to involve the police because they will not take her seriously or may even injure her. She also faces disgrace and shame from her community for being a single mother, which makes it hard for her to look for support. All these factors unite to create a round of violence that Lutie feels imprisoned in. Lutie's abuse is the indicator of the countless disadvantages and problems black women suffered in the 1940s, especially those who aimed to rise to social authority. The novel's themes echo another aspect of structural intersectionality that shows how systematic inequalities persist in various dimensions of life, preserved by societal standards and laws that continue to relegate black women.

Min, as another example, suffers from all these features. She has no particular place to go to which leads her to live with the Super hoping to find security and considering him as a shelter that preserves her from being homeless. In her failed marriages, she could never save money. Both of her husbands were unemployed due to their race, and they were taking every dollar she got. "Her husbands could find her money... no matter where she put it" (Petry, p. 73). Living in the super required her to please him, so she worked all day to ensure that she stayed at home and not be homeless "When she came home from work, she cleaned the apartment and cooked for him and ironed his clothes" (Petry, 1947, p. 74). The Super was abusing her, yet she didn't react even in trying to defend herself for fear that she would be kicked out, and she would be left homeless. The super "kicking at Buddy, snarling at her, slapping her... he kicked her just like she was the dog" (Petry, 1947, p. 74). He used to treat her badly because of her external appearance, as he used to compare her with Lutie and because Lutie is more beautiful than her, he treated her so badly and wanted to get rid of her and replace her with a more beautiful woman.

The theme of battering is a significant aspect of the novel, and it can also be analyzed through the lens of structural intersectionality. It is a form of physical violence, power, and control reinforced by social structures and cultural norms that support patriarchal roles. In Lutie's case, the novel suggests that her experiences of battering are not only the result of Jim's actions but are also shaped by broader social and cultural factors that perpetuate gender inequality. Petry highlights how Lutie's experiences of battering are further exacerbated by her economic and social vulnerability. For example, her lack of financial resources and social support networks makes it extremely difficult to escape the oppression and violence she faces. Also, the theme of battering is not limited to Lutie only, it is present in other characters of the narrative as well. Through these characters, the pervasive and deconstructive nature of the battering in Harlem society is revealed, especially towards women.



### 1.2.2 Unveiling Political Intersectionality in The Street

Political systems and structures intersect with and contribute to rape and sexual assault. This intersection encompasses dynamic issues such as power dynamics, gender roles, and expectations, as well as cultural and societal attitudes toward rape and sexual assault. For example, rape and sexual assault often feed on patriarchal systems and male entitlement reinforced by societal norms and expectations that prioritize men's needs and desires over women's needs and desires. As a result, it creates an imbalance of power making it easier for men to commit acts of sexual violence against women (Crenshaw, 1991). Petry explains that marginalized groups may be more vulnerable to rape and sexual assault due to their marginalization and disadvantage within political systems. The political intersection illustrates how systems of power and privilege operate to protect perpetrators of sexual violence and silence or even discredit survivors. Individuals who hold positions of power or have influence, such as politicians and celebrities, have the ability to escape the consequences of their actions because of their access to resources and social capital. This applies to the Super in Petry's novel, who abuses his position by abusing Min besides his attempt to rape Lutie. Super took his revenge on Lutie due to her refusal to have a sexual affair with him. He retaliated by pushing her son, who was still a child, to steal and leaving him in prison without fear or deterrence. Being a man and financially stable, he is not afraid of the consequences, and maybe he is sure that she cannot do anything against him.

Yuval-Davis (2006) discusses the concept of intersectionality and its relevance to feminist politics. She argues that intersectionality offers a framework for understanding how different forms of oppression intersect and shape the experiences and identities of marginalized groups. She also discusses how intersectionality can be applied in activism and policymaking, and the challenges and limitations of using intersectionality as a tool for social change. Petry introduced Lutie's fruitless struggle to subvert and defeat the intersectional agendas surrounding her. Lutie faced the systemic oppression of her being related to an inferior social status based on both her race and her gender. Petry mentions in section 8:

If you looked at them from inside the framework of a fat weekly salary, and you thought of colored people as naturally criminal, then you didn't really see what any Negro looked like. You couldn't, because the Negro was never an individual. He was a threat, or an animal, or a curse, or a blight, or a joke. (1947, p.133)

She highlights the inhumane stereotypes of marginalized groups that exist due to policies, laws, and social norms that are inappropriate for marginalized groups. African Americans are categorized by negative stereotypes "threat, animal, curse, joke" where economic privilege intersects with race, forming a bias against people of color. They were not seen as individuals with distinct identities and experiences. Individual identity has been marginalized within the group. They have been looked at only through the lens of stereotypes, ignoring their humanity. Social policies and systems shaped by these stereotypes contribute to systemic inequality, for instance, criminal justice policy may unfairly target Africans based on the stereotype of underlying crime.

Lutie constantly tried to defeat the circumstances that led her to rent a small, dark, and dirty flat on 116th Street. Living in such a place beside the financial crises and rape acquired her a new identity, the identity of a murderous criminal. She hit Boots harshly till death and left him to drown in his blood. Petry explained, "It hadn't even been self-defense. This impulse to violence had been in her for a long time, growing, feeding, until finally, she had blown up in a thousand pieces" (1947, p. 282).

Lutie Johnson's efforts to achieve upward social mobility are thwarted by the harsh realities of a society that discriminates against her because of her race and gender. Systemic racism and sexism limit Lutie's opportunities and create barriers for her. Moreover, Petry's portrayal of African-American society in Harlem can be seen as a political commentary on the effects of poverty and discrimination on social cohesion and political participation. Social marginalization and economic hardship, as the narrative suggests, can lead to social disintegration and political disempowerment. *The Street* narrative can therefore be seen as a political critique of the social and economic conditions that produce and perpetuate inequality and marginalization within American society.

#### Multiplicity of Trauma: Intersectional Insights into Sexual Assault

women of color may experience sexual violence differently than white women because of the intersection of race and gender. Women with disabilities face additional barriers in accessing resources and support after rape because of their intersection. The social context where rape occurs is also important as intersectionality emphasizes. The intersection of sex and political conflict can also lead to a devastating experience of rape and can be used as a tool to exercise power and control over women. Here intersectionality highlights the failure of social structures and institutions such as the criminal justice system to respond effectively to the needs of rape survivors. Rape survivors of colored women may face additional barriers to seeking criminal justice in a society historically biased against people of color.

Lutie Johnson is sexually harassed and assaulted by several other persons in the book: the Super, Junto the white nightclub owner, and her husband Jim. Her sexual violence experiences really reveal how her gendered and racial identity both clash, being black in a patriarchal society. In addition to this, socially and economically she also fits the demographic profile of those most vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. For example, after being raped, she went and told the police about Junto, but they turned down her charges and called her a liar. In addition to other things, the corrupt housing market provided the very condition under which she was sexually violated as it frustrated her efforts just to lead a clean life. One can view that the social institution has time and again failed in responding to Lutie's suffering.

The novel takes domestic violence to be poverty and social inequality's by-product. Lutie finding it hard to leave Jim and start afresh with her son is primarily based on the difficulty involved in finding affordable housing and stable work. This indicates that the fight against domestic violence is not solely based on individual efforts but requires holistic social and economic policies aimed at the eradication of poverty, inequality, and other forms of oppression.

## Race, Gender, and the Domestic Violence

The effects of domestic violence are felt all over the world by people of any race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Domestic Violence Lobby is trying to do this work by making people aware of it and pushing for policies and laws that protect those who experience domestic violence. While there are some concerns that the lobby may focus on the challenges and experiences of white women and leave those of women of color completely ignored. Women of color might have extra barriers in seeking help and resources because of a language barrier, migration issues, and the lack of cultural services. They might have higher rates of domestic violence because of racism and poverty.

In the 1940s, Ann Petry brought out the real-life experiences of women of color, internal violence, and the external forces of racism and poverty. Lutie faces a lot of problems securing help and support—for example, she cannot readily get cheap housing with room for her child or legal advice. Another way in which the novel shows her limited opportunities for securing help and support is the attitudes of the social workers and policemen who first ostracize her and then secondly offer discrimination because of her race and class. The novel argues that responses to domestic violence need to be viewed holistically in recognition of the special challenges that face women of color, as well as taking into account the systemic issues of racism and poverty which have a direct contribution to raising the levels of internal violence against women.

Domestic violence is defined as a wide range of behaviors and actions resulting in injury to the health and emotional well-being of an individual, arousing fear and accompanied by threats and abuse. The basic tenet of domestic violence is to control the victim; thus, their rights to make free choices are curtailed. Therefore, domestic violence itself maintains an environment that produces a cycle of fear and additional ongoing potential for physical, sexual, and psychological injury and deprivation. In the patriarchal context, the husband uses his wife as the physical force because he thinks her ownership gives him this entitlement. This is based on owning the position of control in the household and, therefore, compliance from his wife to meet certain standards; failing in these expectations leads to violence (Westerhof, 2020).

Ann Petry depicts the street as a space where gender-based violence is normalized and women are frequently objectified, harassed, and threatened. For instance, Lutie is sexually harassed by her male landlord, and one of her male neighbors threatens to rape her. Henderson highlights the portrayal of the street as a space of violation and silencing of women in numerous texts. Within this framework, women are compelled to safeguard their physical femininity from predatory men. Moreover, the street is depicted as an "institution" that establishes its distinct microcosm within the broader social systems' infrastructures (2000, pp. 851-852). These incidents highlight how women's bodies are not only objectified but also allow men to enforce their authority over women. Moreover, the street is a site of domestic violence, where women are subjected to emotional and physical abuse from their intimate partners. Lutie's friend, Mrs. Hedges, is consistently beaten by her husband. An example of a minor character in the novel facing domestic violence is a victim of the abuse rife in these patriarchal relationships. Having been married for twenty years, she has never been happy with it. The need is for her heart to be well cared for because he only gives her abuse and more abuse in a cycle. Mrs. Hedges is fragile and helpless, looking pale and thin, sad, with a quiet, quavering voice—manner and appearance all

attesting to the ill-treatment she has received. Petry's depiction of this character is symbolic of the kind of battering common in patriarchal relationships; it also shows the psychological and emotional effects of such violence on women. The character also serves as a foil to illustrate Lutie's strength and resilience under circumstances. It has to be mentioned that Petry portrays domestic violence as a private issue that is hidden from public view alone. But also, she portrays it as a treacherous duet- as a systematic problem rooted in patriarchal values and beliefs about women's inferiority.

It is crucial to acknowledge, as suggested by Dingledine, that the male characters in this text, particularly men of color, are ultimately products of the prevailing hegemonic society. They, too, are subject to constraints within their frameworks. It is important to recognize that they have not willingly become monstrous figures, but rather have been shaped into such by societal pressures. Dingledine argues that the author, Petry, intends for readers to empathize with these men and to direct their disdain toward the circumstances that have led to their creation, rather than solely blaming the individual men themselves (Dingledine, 2006).

Throughout the novel, Lutie Johnson has been subjected to racist forms of exploitation and sexual abuse by her husband and Super, who retain power over her due to systemic discrimination and racism. These incidents highlight how sexual violence is used as a tool to control and dominate women who are vulnerable because of their race and socio-economic status. Petry's portrayal of sexual violence in the novel suggests that rape is not just an individual act of aggression, but also a tool of racial domination used to maintain systematic oppression and maintain strong relationships. For example, Lutie is reluctant to report an attempted rape to the police, realizing that her race and gender will work against her in a criminal justice system biased in favor of white men.

### 1.3 The Significance of Urban Setting in Intersectional Experiences

In *The Street*, the urban setting strongly fashions Lutie's layered character experiences. One of the ways this question impinges on Lutie's experience is through the number of people in the city. In Harlem, Lutie meets people from different social classes, religions, genders, and races. Which creates complex intersections among groups of people who belong to different groups. For instance, Lutie is a subject of other Black women in Harlem's envy and friendship. At times you feel so isolated with these females because they have similar issues in a society full of odds. Yet at other times they may become petty and competitive making one fight for limited resources and opportunities.

One other way the city setting acts upon Lutie is through her physical planning. Notably, the street takes on a symbolism in the novel; representing freedom and confinement. On one hand, it is a symbol of the space within which she can move and act freely. Further, it represents other several forms of violence, acting against her such as sexual harassment and physical abuse. For Lutie, the street becomes a place of both danger and opportunity and she has to be able to manage its complexities if she is to go through.

The street also plays the role of the parents of Bob, reflecting the large gap left by the mother due to the economic necessity of working long hours. The urban environment here forces

mothers to leave their children at the mercy of the street, which, according to Lutie, is an unfit parent. Which leads to the upbringing of children in hostile and unstable conditions:

And while you were out working to pay the rent on this stinking, rotten place, why, the street outside played nursemaid to your kid. The street did more than that. It became both mother and father and trained your kid for you, and it was an evil father and a vicious mother, and, of course, you helped the street along by talking to him about money. (1947, p. 269)

Ultimately, urban context influences Lutie's experiences through its economic structures. In Harlem, Lutie struggles to make ends meet, often overtaking them to get better-paying jobs for white candidates. Similarly, the cost of living in the city is high, making it difficult for her to support herself and her son. The economic pressures of living in the city force Lutie to make difficult choices about how to support herself and her family, putting her in vulnerable positions at times. The following extract from the novel highlights the significance of this setting in Lutie's oppression:

Streets like the one she lived on were no accident. They were the North's lynch mobs, she thought bitterly; the method the big cities used to keep Negroes in their place. And she began thinking of Pop unable to get a job; of Jim slowly disintegrating because he, too, couldn't get a job, and of the subsequent wreck of their marriage; of Bub left to his own devices after school. From the time she was born, she had been hemmed into an ever-narrowing space, until now she was very nearly walled in and the wall had been built up brick by brick by eager white hands (Petty, 1947, p. 213).

## 2. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that intersectionality, as developed by Crenshaw, signifies the interconnectedness and coexistence of various social identities, such as race, gender, class, along sexuality, and how they work together to shape an individual's experiences of oppression or privilege. In other words, intersectionality recognizes that these identities do not exist in isolation and that they interact in complicated ways to produce exceptional experiences of discrimination and lived realities for human beings.

*The Street* is a book that looks most directly at what life was like for African Americans living in the inner city during the middle of the 20th century. Lutie Johnson has to face many different kinds of oppression: racism, sexism, classism, and poverty. The identity of being a black woman and a working-class person in the city, at the intersections of which she lives, define Lutie's experiences of oppression. She is racially discriminated against by white landlords, on top of being sexually abused by a white employer, showing that her identities interlock in increasing her oppression. Intersectionally, analyzing Lutie's experiences in *The Street* reveals that the vulnerability of such black women resulted not only from gender but also from race and class dimensions. Lutie's identity, as a black woman, makes her more vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of those in authority and, for that reason, more likely to be abused. The intersection of race, class, and gender puts Lutie in almost powerless control over what happens in her life, and this is why she has to be pressured into experiencing different systems of oppression to build a

better life for herself and her son. The issue thus underlines how complicated oppression and subjugation are for people having to bear the brunt of intersecting forms of discrimination.

The findings were a real eye-opener to how policy-making, social justice efforts, and feminist movements need to be interspersed. Until and unless this intricate, layered kind of oppression experienced by women like Lutie, Min, and Mrs. Hedges is recognized by these movements, they will not be able to cater to the requirements of the very vulnerable in society. It presents an argument for systemic reform to address racial, gendered, and economic inequalities at the same time. Other works of literature that have intersectional themes running through them could further extend the findings of this study. The comparison drawn between *The Street* and modern-day narratives about women of color could be useful in making one understand the evolution of these intersecting oppressions over time. This could equally lay down real-life situations as those expounded by Crenshaw in furthering practical applications of her theory.

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