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“SISTER ACTS: RESISTING MEN'S DOMINATION IN BLACK AND WHITE FRATERNITY LITTLE SISTER PROGRAMS”

BY MINDY STOMBLER AND IRENE PADAVIC

The issue of gender inequality remains topical throughout centuries. Masculine domination over women concerns many researches aimed for investigating this phenomenon. Men's supremacy can have various displays in different domains: physical and emotional labor as well as sexuality. In their article “Sister Acts: Resisting Men's Domination in Black and White Fraternity Little Sister Programs”, two scholars examine the ways female members of the fraternity manage to maintain, challenge, and resist masculine domination within college campuses. Although women resist men's domination every day, their opposition to masculine supremacy is often informal and covert. Investigating and analyzing data from 40 interviews and observations in the southeast college campuses, the researchers studied the relation between race and different types of resistance. Therefore, “Sister Acts: Resisting Men's Domination in Black and White Fraternity Little Sister Programs” is a good article because it raises topical question of gender inequality and sheds light on the types of female resistance strategies towards masculine supremacy concerning certain differences between black and white little sisters.



At the beginning of the article, Mindy Stomblor and Irene Padavic claim that women resist men's dominance every day. However, the displays of everyday opposition usually have a hidden character. Nevertheless, most women “find it tactically convenient as well as necessary to avoid openly challenging the dominant ideology” (Stomblor and Padavic 258). Thus, this particular everyday resistance, that requires little coordination, is only the creation of the opposition idea. At the same time, such role model is quite convenient to oppressed people. According to Stomblor and Padavic, “two dimensions are commonly used to determine whether an act is qualified as resistance: the outcome of the act and the actor's intention” (258). Thereby, not every act can be qualified as resistance. In his article “Education, state, and culture in American society”, Martin Carnoy supported the thought that only the act with an outcome put forward against the dominant ideology could be considered an effective resistance (5). Nonetheless, Stomblor and Padavic do not agree with Carnoy's idea and provide certain examples in order to refute his statement. Thus, workers whose attempts to establish labor unions or start off strikes were not successful still achieved identification of their oppression to themselves and other people. Furthermore, Stomblor and Padavic consider as “resistant only those acts that little sisters themselves explicitly identify as protest” (259). Therefore, an outcome of the act cannot prove or disprove the existence of it.

At the same time, women's experience and reaction to men's supremacy are not identical. This particular phenomenon can be observed regarding race and class differences (Collins 36) that makes clear the difference in the resistance degree provided by black and white women. Stomblor and Padavic mention several reasons for these differences – the contrast in aims of black and white female pursue, different selection processes and expectations, and also black women making emphasis on their historical heritage (260). Indeed, the



concepts of structure and culture are of significant importance and intertwined in many ways. At the structural level, semi-autonomous organizations provide veteran black little sisters with an opportunity to vote in the little sister selection as well as enhance women's connection (Stomblor and Padavic 262). In contrast, white little sister organizations own none of these structural features. Moreover, black females focus rather on their academic achievements and career than men's approval and support (Hooks 44). Additionally, all these differences between black and white women claim about different dynamics of their resistance towards masculine dominance.

Furthermore, cultural differences between black and white little sisters also help to comprehend different resistance strategies. In the article, Stomblor and Padavic state that fraternity men, particularly the white ones, observe little sisters as inferior group members (263). For instance, selecting potential little sisters, white brothers take into consideration female appearance as well as their physical qualities. At white fraternities, men are looking for beautiful and sociable potential little sisters while men at black fraternities together with veteran little sisters pay attention to women who have strong characters and are willing to work. Hence, this tendency partially explains the differences between types of resistance that the black and white women maintain. Moreover, black men along with veteran little sisters appreciated self-confident and strong-willed females who could support the community and be strong links in the chain. At the same time, white women looked for the privileged entry to fraternity men while black little sisters focused rather on the access to community service work than on meeting brothers.

More importantly, black little sisters view their affiliation with a men's group as an opportunity for their future achievements within a women's group. In fact, black little sisters value their connections with other



women while white little sisters focus rather on men than on establishing social ties with other females (Harris-Perry 115). Indeed, black little sisters use their engagement in fraternity for the future participation in sorority life. Furthermore, conceptions of sisterhood can be regarded as the most evident difference between white and black little sister organizations (Stomblor and Padavic 264). Thus, many white women are afraid of the lack of communication with males within sisterhood. Additionally, white sisters compete with each other for men's attention. In contrast, the black little sisters highly appreciate the bonds between women that can be set in the sisterhood. Therefore, sisterhood was a source of power for black little sisters, and it became a basis for them to build their resistance to fraternity men. In contrast, little white sisters did not view their organization as the resource for struggle with male dominance.

The reason for such black little sisters' ability to resist the masculine supremacy was their maintenance of the ideology that black women were not victims of oppression but producers of their own success. That is why black little sister programs are in need of strong women. Ideology gave black little sisters an opportunity for collective resistance while white little sisters lack empowering ideologies in their programs. Particular tendency can be regarded among white and black women – while the white little sisters resist for men's dominance as individuals, the black little sisters oppose collectively, and this has more successful result. For instance, the white brothers consider their little sisters as servants at men's rush parties or as objects for sexual satisfaction (Stomblor and Padavic 267). Therefore, the most that the white little sisters can do is only to protest individually or leave the fraternity. In contrast, the black little sisters took more extreme measures to control their brothers' behavior, and although some of them risked to be expelled from the fraternity, “new little sisters were aware of their predecessors' mobilization and said that this realization tightened their



sisterly bonds, making them feel like respected members of the fraternity” (Stomblor and Padavic 268). Thus, redefining their relationship to the fraternity made the little black sisters feel empowered.

Hence, Mindy Stomblor and Irene Padavic raised in their article pretty challenging but still topical issue of gender inequality. Scholars examined white and black women's resistance to men's dominance within the college campuses and found out some considerable differences. Nevertheless, despite these particular differences, little sisters of both races opposed men's authority either individually or in groups. White women tended to act individually while black little sisters resisted male dominance collectively. Therefore, “Sister Acts: Resisting Men's Domination in Black and White Fraternity Little Sister Programs” is pretty good article because it gives a clear look at gender inequality and displays differences between black and white little sisters as well as strategies of resistance.

