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Intersectional Feminism in Brit Bennett's *the Vanishing Half*: Structural and Representational Dimensions

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Abstract

This study examines intersectional feminism in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* by focusing on structural and representational intersectionality. Using Crenshaw's intersectionality framework, the study applies directed qualitative content analysis to selected textual evidence concerning Stella Vignes, Desiree Vignes, and Jude Winston. The findings show that structural intersectionality is reflected in racialized access to employment, unequal labor relations, economic dependency, and gender-based violence. Representational intersectionality appears through colorism, beauty standards, expectations surrounding marriage, and cultural constructions of Black femininity. The experiences of the three characters demonstrate that race, gender, class, and skin color do not operate independently but interact in shaping material opportunities, vulnerability, and social value. Overall, the novel illustrates that inequality is produced through both social structures and cultural representations.

Keywords: *colorism, Crenshaw, Intersectional feminism, representational intersectionality, structural intersectionality, The Vanishing Half*.

INTRODUCTION

Feminist studies have increasingly recognized that women's experiences cannot be understood through gender alone. Women occupy different social positions shaped by race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and other aspects of identity, and these differences influence how inequality and discrimination are experienced. This perspective challenges approaches that treat women as a homogeneous group and highlights the need to examine how several forms of marginalization may operate at the same time. Intersectionality therefore provides an important framework for understanding how multiple social categories interact in shaping women's lives (Azmitia & Mansfield, 2021; Brünig et al., 2024; Cerezo et al., 2020).

Black feminist thought provides an important foundation for understanding the relationship between race, gender, and social inequality. Collins (2000), through the concept of the matrix of domination, explains how race, gender, class, and other social categories operate as interconnected systems of power that shape black women's experiences. This perspective emphasizes that the oppression experienced by black women cannot be understood through gender or race alone. Within literary studies, Wajiran (2024) applies black feminist theory to examine racial discrimination, gender inequality, and patriarchal structures in Toni Marrison's novels. Together, these perspectives provide a foundation for analyzing how intersecting social inequalities shape the identities and experiences of female characters in literary narratives.

The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw as a critique of single-axis approaches to discrimination. Crenshaw (1989) argues that race and gender should not always be analyzed as separate categories because their intersection can produce experiences that cannot be adequately explained through racism or sexism alone. She later developed this framework further by discussing structural, political, and representational intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Among these dimensions, the present study focuses on structural and representational intersectionality because both are closely related to the material conditions and cultural meanings experienced by women of color.

Structural intersectionality concerns the ways in which overlapping social positions influence

access to resources, opportunities, and protection. Crenshaw (1991) shows that race, gender, and class may operate simultaneously in shaping employment, economic security, personal safety, and other material conditions. Haynes et al. (2020) similarly explain that women of color may experience social structures differently because several social positions interact in producing disadvantage. Structural intersectionality is therefore useful for examining how inequality affects women through concrete social and institutional conditions rather than through individual prejudice alone.

Representational intersectionality focuses on the cultural meanings and stereotypes attached to women of color. Crenshaw (1991) explains that racial and gender narratives may operate together in constructing social images of Black women, while Haynes et al. (2020) note that stereotypical representations can reinforce racist and sexist assumptions. Anders et al. (2024) also emphasize that representational intersectionality concerns the cultural construction of women of color through intersecting racial and gender meanings. This dimension is particularly relevant to the analysis of beauty, skin color, femininity, desirability, and social value.

Intersectionality has become increasingly relevant in literary studies because literary texts can represent the relationship between identity, inequality, and social power through characters and their experiences. Literary works may reveal how race, gender, class, and other social categories operate together rather than as separate themes. Nur Azizah (2024) and Wajiran et al. (2025) show that intersectional analysis can be used to examine how women of color are represented in literature and how overlapping forms of marginalization shape their identities and experiences. Similarly, Kuspiyah et al. (2025), in their feminist analysis of Kendare Blake's *Three Dark Crowns*, examine how patriarchal structures and social expectations restrict women's autonomy and influence their experiences. Their findings demonstrate how feminist literary criticism can reveal gender-based inequalities through the experiences of female characters. These studies highlight the relevance of feminist and intersectional perspectives in literary analysis, particularly for examining how social inequalities are represented through characters and their experiences.

Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020) provides a relevant literary context for examining structural and representational intersectionality. The novel follows identical twin sisters Stella and Desiree Vignes, who grow up in Mallard, a fictional Black community that places a strong social value on light skin, as well as Desiree's dark-skinned daughter, Jude Winston. Stella passes as White and gains access to opportunities that were previously restricted to her as a Black woman. Desiree experiences economic vulnerability and domestic violence, while Jude faces persistent discrimination because of her dark skin. These contrasting experiences show how race, gender, class, and skin color influence both material opportunities and social judgments (Al Areqi, 2022; Morgado, 2022).

Previous studies on *The Vanishing Half* have mainly examined particular aspects of race, identity, colorism, and racial passing. Al Areqi (2022) focuses on race and identity through the different racial choices made by Stella and Desiree, while Morgado (2022) discusses colorism, passing, and the novel's connection to African American women's literary traditions. Riaz et al. (2023) examine the psychological consequences of concealed racial identity and racial passing. Although these studies provide important insights into the novel, they do not specifically examine how structural conditions and cultural representations operate together through Crenshaw's intersectional framework.

This gap is significant because *The Vanishing Half* represents inequality not only through racial identity and colorism, but also through unequal access to employment, economic insecurity, gender-based violence, racialized beauty standards, and stereotypes surrounding Black femininity. These experiences reflect both structural and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality helps explain how race, gender, class, and economic position shape the characters' opportunities and vulnerabilities, while representational intersectionality reveals how skin color and gendered cultural expectations influence beauty, femininity, desirability, and social status (Crenshaw, 1991; Phoenix & Craddock, 2024).

Therefore, this study examines intersectional feminism in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* by focusing specifically on structural and representational intersectionality. Based on this focus, the study

addresses two research questions: (1) How is structural intersectionality represented through the experiences of Stella and Desiree in *The Vanishing Half*? (2) How is representational intersectionality portrayed through the experiences of Stella, Desiree, and Jude in the novel? By addressing these questions, the study aims to explain how race, gender, class, and skin color intersect in shaping the characters' opportunities, vulnerabilities, and social experiences through structural conditions and cultural representations.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative content analysis method to examine intersectional feminism in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half.* Hsieh and Shannon (2005) defined qualitative content analysis as a systematic approach to interpreting textual data through coding and the identification of themes or patterns. More specifically, this study applied directed qualitative content analysis, in which analytical categories were derived from an existing theoretical framework (Kibiswa, 2019). Crenshaw's intersectionality framework served as the primary analytical lens, with particular attention to structural and representational intersectionality.

The primary data source was Brit Bennett's novel *The Vanishing Half*, which was published by Riverhead Books in 2020. The secondary sources included books, journal articles, undergraduate theses, and other academic works related to intersectionality, race, gender, class, colorism, and literary analysis. The textual data consisted of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, monologues, narration, and actions involving Stella Vignes, Desiree Vignes, and Jude Winston.

Data were collected through documentation. Sugiyono (2013, p. 240) described documents as records of past events that could take the form of written texts, images, or other creative works. In this study, documentation was used to identify and record textual evidence relevant to structural and representational intersectionality in the novel. The initial reading identified 21 candidate passages, from which eight analytical groups were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required each passage to involve Stella, Desiree, or Jude; demonstrate the interaction of race, gender, class, or skin color; and provide evidence relevant to at least one of the two dimensions of intersectionality examined in this study. The eight groups were selected because they addressed the research questions and illustrated distinct experiences without unnecessary thematic repetition. Four groups were assigned to structural intersectionality and four to representational intersectionality. The selected groups addressed employment discrimination, racial passing, sexual exploitation, economic vulnerability, colorism, beauty standards, and gendered social expectations.

Data were analyzed through three stages described by Miles and Huberman (in Toka, 2025): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, relevant textual evidence was selected and classified according to the two dimensions of intersectionality. During data display, the eight analytical groups were organized under structural and representational intersectionality and examined using Crenshaw's framework alongside relevant previous studies. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns across the selected passages and explaining how race, gender, class, and skin color intersected in shaping the experiences of Stella, Desiree, and Jude.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed structural and representational intersectionality in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half.* Across eight analytical groups, the experiences of Stella, Desiree, and Jude showed how race, gender, class, and skin color shaped their opportunities, relationships, and social treatment. The first four groups concerned employment discrimination, racial passing, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence, while the remaining groups examined beauty standards, marriage expectations, feminine self-expression, and perceptions of the female body.

STRUCTURAL INTERSECTIONALITY

Data 01: Racial Discrimination in Employment

Stella Vignes' experience of seeking office employment revealed how racial identity restricted access to economic opportunities. Although she possessed the typing skills required for clerical work, her qualifications did not guarantee equal consideration. This limitation appeared in the statement, "An office like that would never hire a colored girl" (Bennett, 2020, p. 63). The statement revealed that Stella anticipated rejection because of her racial identity rather than her ability to perform the job.

The contrast between Stella's qualifications and her employment prospects exposed an unequal system in which racial classification influenced access to work. Her situation also reflected the importance of employment to her financial independence. As a young Black woman who needed to support herself, Stella faced a barrier that affected both her professional opportunities and her economic circumstances. Crenshaw (1989) challenged approaches that treated racial and gender discrimination as separate forms of inequality because they failed to account for experiences produced by their intersection. Stella's situation illustrated this problem: her experience as a Black woman could not be adequately explained by examining race or gender in isolation.

This finding complemented Al Areqi's (2022) discussion of how racial identity influenced Stella's decisions and subsequent life. However, the present analysis emphasized the employment conditions that shaped those decisions. Before Stella concealed her racial identity, she had already encountered a situation in which her qualifications could not overcome racial prejudice. This connection extended the discussion of identity by showing how employment discrimination helped create the circumstances in which racial passing became a practical option. Her experience therefore demonstrated that racial inequality influenced not only how she was perceived but also the economic opportunities available to her.

Data 02: Racial Passing and Economic Opportunity

Stella's employment circumstances changed when she was perceived as White. After obtaining an office position, she realized that her employer had misunderstood her racial identity. Rather than correcting the assumption, she considered keeping the job because it offered financial security. Her thoughts were expressed in the question, "What sense did it make to correct them now?" (Bennett, 2020, p. 64). The question suggested that revealing her identity could jeopardize an opportunity that had previously appeared inaccessible to her.

The contrast between Data 01 and Data 02 revealed that Stella's qualifications had not changed; the perception of her racial identity had. Her access to employment depended on how others classified her rather than on any improvement in her professional abilities. Racial passing consequently provided a means of navigating an unequal employment environment, but it did not eliminate the discrimination that restricted Black women's opportunities. Instead, Stella gained access to a position through an identity that her employer accepted as White.

This finding agreed with Al Areqi (2022), who examined Stella's concealment of her racial identity and the consequences of that decision. It also aligned with Morgado's (2022) discussion of racial passing as a means of gaining access to opportunities and privileges associated with Whiteness. The present analysis extended these interpretations by connecting racial passing directly to the employment barrier identified in Data 01. Read together, the two findings showed that Stella's decision emerged from an unequal system: her racial identity restricted her access to work, while concealing that identity enabled her to obtain an opportunity that might otherwise have been denied to her.

The psychological consequences of concealing racial identity were explored by Riaz et al. (2023) through Freud's psychoanalytic framework. Their emphasis differed from the present analysis, which focused on the material circumstances surrounding Stella's decision. Nevertheless, the two perspectives offered complementary explanations. The economic advantages of racial passing helped explain why Stella maintained her concealed identity, while Riaz et al. highlighted the psychological tensions associated with concealment. Stella's experience therefore connected an individual decision

about identity with the unequal social conditions that made that decision advantageous.

Data 03: Sexual Exploitation and Unequal Labor Relations

Stella's experience of sexual assault while working in Mr. Dupont's household revealed another consequence of unequal social and economic positions. The narration stated, "Three times he'd touched her and himself too" (Bennett, 2020, p. 148). This passage described repeated sexual abuse by an employer who occupied a position of authority over a young domestic worker. Stella depended on domestic work for income, while Mr. Dupont possessed greater economic and social power. Their unequal positions shaped the circumstances in which the abuse occurred.

The significance of this incident extended beyond gender-based violence alone. Stella's position as a Black woman from a financially disadvantaged family placed her within a labor relationship in which her employer exercised considerable authority. Crenshaw (1991) explained that violence against women of color needed to be understood in relation to the intersecting social and economic conditions surrounding their experiences. Stella's situation reflected this concern because her vulnerability developed within domestic employment, where the person responsible for providing her work was also the person who violated her safety.

A similar relationship between race or ethnicity, class, and gender in domestic labor was examined by Yurdakul (2022). Although the research context differed from Bennett's novel, this perspective helped illuminate the unequal relationship between Stella and her employer. Her experience demonstrated that domestic employment could involve vulnerabilities extending beyond financial dependence to include physical safety and unequal authority.

Al Areqi (2022)discussed Stella's experience of sexual harassment as one of the events that contributed to the sisters' departure from Mallard. The present analysis complemented that interpretation by examining the labor relationship in which the abuse occurred. The incident functioned not only as a turning point in Stella's life but also as an example of how unequal employment conditions could expose a Black woman to exploitation. Compared with Data 01 and Data 02, which concerned access to work and economic opportunity, Data 03 showed how structural inequality also affected the conditions under which Stella worked and her ability to remain safe.

Data 04: Domestic Violence and Economic Dependency

Desiree's experience of domestic violence demonstrated how financial insecurity and family responsibilities complicated her ability to leave an abusive marriage. When her friend Roberta encouraged her to leave Sam, Desiree responded, "It ain't that simple" (Bennett, 2020, p. 20). Her response indicated that recognizing the violence did not automatically provide a practical way out. She needed to consider where she could go, how she could support herself, and how she could protect her daughter, Jude.

The difficulties surrounding her departure became more apparent when Desiree hurried to purchase a train ticket with money taken from Sam's wallet while holding Jude's hand (Bennett, 2020, p. 21). This moment connected her decision to leave with the immediate need for financial resources. Her responsibility for Jude further complicated the situation because she had to secure her daughter's safety alongside her own. Bennett therefore portrayed escape as a decision shaped by material circumstances rather than personal determination alone.

Crenshaw's (1991) discussed how poverty, childcare responsibilities, and limited access to resources could create additional barriers for women of color attempting to leave abusive relationships. Desiree's experience closely reflected this concern. The violence she experienced was compounded by the practical difficulties of supporting herself and protecting her daughter. Her circumstances demonstrated how gender-based violence interacted with economic vulnerability and caregiving responsibilities.

Al Areqi (2022)also examined Desiree's abusive marriage and her eventual return to Mallard in relation to her experiences of racial identity and belonging. The present analysis extended this

interpretation by emphasizing the material conditions surrounding her departure. Desiree's return was not simply connected to her personal history or sense of home; it followed a situation in which escaping violence required access to money, transportation, and a place where she and Jude could seek safety. This perspective demonstrated how economic circumstances shaped the choices available to a Black woman attempting to escape domestic violence.

Taken together, the four structural findings revealed different consequences of intersecting inequalities. Stella encountered racial barriers in employment and sexual exploitation within domestic work, while Desiree faced material difficulties in leaving an abusive relationship. Their experiences differed, but both demonstrated that personal choices were made within unequal social conditions. In relation to Al Areqi (2022) and Morgado (2022), the findings retained the importance of racial identity while extending the discussion to the material circumstances that influenced the characters' opportunities and vulnerabilities.

REPRESENTATIONAL INTERSECTIONALITY

The four representational groups examined how cultural expectations concerning skin color shaped perceptions of beauty, marriage, femininity, and the female body. Whereas the structural findings concerned employment, economic resources, and personal safety, these findings focused on the social meanings attached to the characters' appearances and behavior.

Data 05: Light Skin and Feminine Beauty Standards

The association between light skin and feminine beauty appeared when Mrs. Dupont commented on Stella and Desiree: "What pretty girls. So light, aren't they?" (Bennett, 2020, p. 17). By placing their attractiveness and complexion together, the remark suggested that their light skin contributed to the positive attention they received. The twins were not simply described as beautiful; their beauty was evaluated through a physical characteristic that carried particular social value.

This distinction revealed how colorism shaped the cultural meaning of feminine attractiveness. Although Stella and Desiree were Black, their lighter complexions placed them closer to the preferred beauty standard represented in the novel. The comment did not explicitly describe darker-skinned girls as unattractive, but its emphasis on lightness suggested an unequal standard through which women's appearances were evaluated. Beauty consequently appeared as a socially constructed judgment influenced by racialized preferences rather than as a neutral assessment of physical features.

The relationship between skin shade, beauty, and social perceptions was also discussed by Phoenix and Craddock (2024) in their study of Black and mixed Black-White women. Their findings provided a useful point of comparison because they highlighted the social value attached to skin shade. The present analysis extended this discussion into literary representation by examining how Mrs. Dupont's apparently complimentary remark reproduced a preference for lighter skin. The significance of the scene lay not simply in the twins receiving praise but in the way their complexion became part of the reason they were considered attractive.

Morgado (2022) likewise examined colorism and racial passing in *The Vanishing Half*, situating Bennett's novel within African American women's literary traditions. The present finding supported Morgado's emphasis on skin tone as a source of social distinction while focusing more specifically on the representation of feminine beauty. Through Crenshaw's (1991) concept of representational intersectionality, the remark demonstrated how racialized meanings and gendered expectations operated together in defining an ideal of attractiveness. This interpretation showed how cultural representations could assign different social value to women according to their complexion.

Data 06: Colorism, Marriage, and Social Expectations

In Mallard, the preference for lighter skin extended beyond beauty standards and influenced expectations concerning marriage. The community's attitude was summarized in the statement, "In Mallard, nobody married dark" (Bennett, 2020, p. 9). This expression presented the community's color

hierarchy as a social norm governing partner selection. Marriage was therefore connected not only to personal relationships but also to the expectation that the community would preserve its preferred racial appearance.

Desiree challenged this expectation when she married Sam, a dark-skinned Black man, and later returned to Mallard with Jude. Her marriage conflicted with the community's preference for lighter skin, while Jude's complexion made the consequences of that choice visible. Desiree's family was consequently judged against a racialized standard that influenced which relationships were considered acceptable. The narrative showed that colorism shaped social expectations surrounding family formation as well as perceptions of individual appearance.

Phoenix and Craddock (2024) discussed how colorism influenced relationships among Black and mixed Black-White women. Their work supported the interpretation that skin shade carried social meanings beyond physical appearance. In Desiree's case, the preference for lighter skin influenced how her marriage and family were evaluated. This finding extended the discussion of colorism by showing how racialized beauty hierarchies shaped expectations about whom a woman should marry and what her family should look like.

A related concern appeared in Kuspiyah et al. (2022), whose analysis of *Meraih Mimpi* examined how family and social expectations affected women's marriage choices. Although the literary contexts differed, both studies drew attention to the ways cultural expectations could constrain women's autonomy. Desiree's experience added a distinct dimension because the pressure surrounding her marriage was connected to the community's preference for lighter skin. Her experience therefore demonstrated how gendered expectations could be reinforced through racialized standards of family and belonging.

The influence of colorism on relationships and the community's treatment of Jude was also addressed in Morgado's (2022) analysis of the novel. The present analysis complemented this interpretation by focusing on marriage as a means through which the community's color hierarchy was maintained. Desiree's experience showed that colorism did not operate only through judgments of physical attractiveness; it also influenced the social acceptability of women's personal decisions.

Data 07: Dark Skin and Restrictions on Feminine Self-Expression

Jude's experiences revealed the disadvantages faced by a dark-skinned girl within Mallard's color hierarchy. The narration stated, "They weren't used to having a dark child amongst them" (Bennett, 2020, p. 67). The statement marked Jude as different from the community's preferred image and showed how her complexion affected the way she was perceived. Unlike Stella and Desiree, whose lighter skin attracted positive attention, Jude encountered judgments that positioned her outside the dominant standard of beauty.

These judgments also influenced how Jude anticipated presenting herself. When she considered wearing lipstick, she remembered the insulting language used about dark-skinned girls who wore red lipstick (Bennett, 2020, p. 111). The recollection suggested that an ordinary form of self-expression carried a different social meaning because of her complexion. Jude's hesitation showed how the possibility of ridicule shaped her choices before others even responded to her appearance.

Jude's experience also reflected the unequal social value attached to different skin shades, an issue discussed by Phoenix and Craddock (2024). While their research examined experiences beyond the novel, it helped contextualize the social judgments Jude anticipated. The present analysis extended that discussion by focusing on how colorist standards affected feminine self-expression. Jude's concern was not limited to how others evaluated her appearance; it also influenced how she considered presenting herself.

Morgado (2022) similarly examined colorism and its consequences for Jude's experience in the novel. The present finding supported this interpretation while emphasizing the relationship between racialized beauty standards and expectations of femininity. Through Crenshaw's (1991) concept of representational intersectionality, Jude's experience demonstrated how race and gender operated

together in shaping the cultural meanings attached to her appearance. The contrast between Jude and the twins further showed that the same beauty hierarchy produced different experiences within one family: Stella and Desiree received recognition associated with lighter skin, whereas Jude anticipated ridicule because of her darker complexion.

Data 08: Racialized and Gendered Evaluation of the Female Body

The evaluation of Jude's appearance by an Italian bus driver provided another example of racialized and gendered representation. The narration compared Jude to a "cheetah" and described her figure as "boyish" (Bennett, 2020, p. 81). These descriptions presented her body through judgments that associated physical difference with expectations of feminine attractiveness. The comparison to an animal emphasized her perceived difference, while the description of her figure as boyish suggested that her appearance did not conform to the observer's expectations of femininity.

The encounter showed how Jude's body was evaluated through more than one standard. Her physical features were interpreted in relation to an ideal of femininity, while her dark complexion influenced the way those features were perceived. Her experience therefore involved more than a personal judgment of appearance: racialized expectations affected the meaning assigned to her body and its conformity to a culturally preferred feminine ideal.

Crenshaw's (1991) concept of representational intersectionality provided a framework for examining how racial and gendered meanings operated together in this encounter. The bus driver's descriptions did not simply identify Jude's physical characteristics; they positioned her body in relation to a restrictive standard of femininity. Phoenix and Craddock (2024) offered a complementary perspective through their discussion of colorism and the social evaluation of women's appearances. The present analysis extended this concern by showing how skin color and gendered bodily expectations intersected in the novel's representation of Jude.

The racialized beauty ideals reflected in Jude's experience were also examined by Morgado (2022) in her discussion of colorism in The Vanishing Half. The present finding supported that interpretation but focused more specifically on the way Jude's body was assessed through intersecting expectations of race and gender. The encounter also differed from the experience described in Data 07. In Mallard, Jude anticipated ridicule when considering how to express herself; during the encounter with the bus driver, another person directly evaluated her appearance through racialized and gendered assumptions. This contrast suggested that the judgments surrounding Jude were not confined to her hometown but also shaped how she was perceived in other social environments.

Across the four representational groups, the novel showed how colorism shaped beauty standards, marriage expectations, self-expression, and evaluations of the female body. Stella and Desiree benefited from the social value attached to lighter skin, while Jude encountered judgments that affected both how others perceived her and how she anticipated being perceived. These findings supported Morgado's (2022) discussion of colorism and racial passing while extending it through a more focused examination of how racial and gendered meanings operated together in cultural representations.

Taken together, the eight analytical groups showed that the experiences of Stella, Desiree, and Jude could not be understood through racial identity or gender alone. The structural findings connected inequality to employment, labor relations, economic resources, and personal safety, while the representational findings revealed how cultural expectations shaped the social value assigned to women's appearance and behavior. In relation to Al Areqi (2022), Morgado (2022), and Riaz et al. (2023), the analysis retained the importance of racial identity, colorism, and concealed identity while placing the selected experiences within Crenshaw's structural and representational framework. This approach connected material conditions with cultural judgments and showed how both dimensions shaped the characters' experiences in *The Vanishing Half.*

CONCLUSION

This study examined intersectional feminism in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* through Crenshaw's concepts of structural and representational intersectionality. The findings showed that structural intersectionality was reflected in Stella's experiences of employment discrimination, racial passing, and sexual exploitation, as well as Desiree's difficulties in leaving an abusive marriage. These experiences demonstrated how race, gender, and economic circumstances intersected in shaping the characters' opportunities and vulnerabilities. Representational intersectionality, meanwhile, emerged through colorism, beauty standards, marriage expectations, and judgments of feminine appearance. The experiences of Stella, Desiree, and Jude showed how skin color influenced perceptions of beauty, social acceptance, and feminine self-expression.

These findings contributed to literary studies by demonstrating how structural conditions and cultural representations could be examined together through an intersectional feminist framework. Rather than treating racial identity, gender inequality, and colorism as separate issues, the analysis showed how they were connected in shaping the characters' experiences. However, this study was limited to one novel, eight analytical groups, and two dimensions of intersectionality. Therefore, the findings did not represent every possible form of intersectional inequality in the novel or in Black women's literary experiences more broadly.

Future research could examine other dimensions of intersectionality, including political intersectionality, or apply an intersectional feminist framework to other literary works and cultural contexts. Further studies could also compare different representations of race, gender, class, and skin color across novels to explore how intersecting inequalities were portrayed in different social and historical settings.

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