

Feminist Analysis of Brit Bennett's "The Vanishing Half"

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Abstract

This research aims to explore how women's experiences and gender inequality are depicted in Brit Bennett's novel *The Vanishing Half*, using a feminist literary-critical approach. The story of this novel follows the lives of two twin sisters, Desiree and Stella Vignes, whose choices about their identity and social position reflect issues such as race, class, and gender-based oppression in 20th-century America. This study employs descriptive qualitative methods and draws on feminist theory, particularly liberal feminism and intersectional approaches, to analyze how female characters in the novel struggle against patriarchal domination and racial hierarchy. The results of the study show that Bennett's work expresses feminist ideals, as her female characters reject conventional female roles and affirm their ability to determine their own destinies despite facing obstacles from the existing system. Furthermore, this research also provides insight into the novel's depiction of the double oppression experienced by Black American women, influenced by race and gender. *The Vanishing Half* explores the role of women and highlights identities that are entwined by multiple factors. This study concludes that the feminist perspective provides a deeper insight into how women's voices are shaped, suppressed, and finally empowered in a race-based social system.

Keywords: Brit Bennett; Feminism; *The Vanishing Half*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of artistic and imaginative expression that reflects human life and society (Nugrahini et al., 2021). It provides two crucial elements, namely pleasure and understanding (Ananda & Rakhmawati, 2022). In addition to entertaining its readers, literature consistently addresses human lived experiences and offers a deeper understanding of life (Jarvis, 2019). It is often considered the product of the author's imagination, functioning as an engaging medium of entertainment (Sufanti et al., 2018) that presents compelling narratives, invites readers to imagine, evokes suspense, triggers curiosity, and connects deeply with emotional states (Oktaviani & Marlina, 2021). All of these elements are packed into an engaging storyline and presented in vivid language. Ultimately, literature is a work created from imagination to satisfy the aesthetic desires of literary enthusiasts (Lizawati, 2016). One contemporary work that explores these human complexities is *The Vanishing Half*, written by Brit Bennett. This novel tells the story of twin sisters, Desiree and Stella Vignes, who grew up in the small town of Mallard,

Louisiana—a community that only accepts light-skinned Black individuals. The two sisters choose vastly different life paths: Desiree continues to live as a marginalized Black woman, whereas Stella chooses to pass as a white woman to evade racial discrimination (Areqi, 2022). Through this narrative, Bennett demonstrates the complexity of identity, the unique challenges faced by Black women, and the pervasive social pressures stemming from a deeply rooted patriarchal system and systemic racism.

Recent studies in contemporary literary criticism emphasize that Black women's experiences in literature cannot be separated from the intersections of race, gender, and social power. According to Hill Collins and Bilge (2020), intersectionality serves as an essential framework for understanding how multiple identities construct layered oppressions toward women of color. In addition, contemporary feminist literary studies highlight that modern African American novels increasingly portray women not merely as passive victims of patriarchy, but as active subjects negotiating identity, resistance, and social mobility (Nash, 2019). Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* reflects this contemporary feminist discourse through the complex experiences of Desiree, Stella, and Jude as Black women navigating racialized social structures.

Several previous studies have discussed Brit Bennett's work from the perspectives of race and identity. For instance, Akbar (2021), in their article "Intricateness of Identity and Race: A Racist Study of Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*," highlight the problems of racial identity and discrimination by drawing on Frantz Fanon's theory. Concurrently, T. M. Dewi et al. (2018) explain that intersectional feminism opens up critical spaces for voices that have long been marginalized—such as women, non-binary groups, and racial minorities—allowing them to actively shape social narratives. This approach is highly relevant for understanding *The Vanishing Half* as a work that strives to realize equality and represent diverse identities. Unlike previous research that focused predominantly on race or skin color, this research specifically explores the broader representation of feminism in the novel. Bennett depicts female characters who attempt to make independent life choices amid social pressures that hinder their freedom. For example, Stella chooses to live as a "white woman" not only to avoid institutional discrimination, but also as a strategic mechanism to reclaim control over her own body and life. Theoretically, this research employs two main approaches: liberal feminism and intersectional feminism. Liberal feminism emphasizes the importance of individual freedom and equal rights between men and women (Tong, 2013). In *The Vanishing Half*, this is reflected in the efforts of female characters to determine their own destinies and reject the traditional roles imposed by a patriarchal society. Meanwhile, intersectional feminism is used to analyze how compounding factors, such as race, social class, and colorism, complicate the lived experiences of injustice among Black women.

Moreover, recent feminist scholarship argues that literary representation plays a vital role in shaping public understanding of gender equality and racial justice. Feminist literary criticism today not only examines women's oppression, but also actively explores female agency, identity negotiation, and resistance within established social institutions (Tyson, 2023). Therefore, analyzing *The Vanishing Half* through a feminist lens is highly relevant because the novel reflects contemporary issues regarding colorism, racial passing, and women's struggle for autonomy in modern society.

Previous scholarship has also demonstrated how various media convey these themes. For example, a study by N. Dewi and Medina (2021) examines feminism in the film *Little Women*, demonstrating that literary works and film adaptations can serve as effective tools for conveying core feminist values like female independence. Similarly, Apriyanti (2022), in a study on the film *Marlina the Killer in Four Acts*, describes how liberal feminism manifests when women boldly demand justice through their own decisive actions. Furthermore, Tampubolon and Mandala (2021) depict the liberal feminist struggle in the novel *I Am Malala*, which chronicles the fight for women's institutional rights in education. These diverse studies reinforce the overarching idea that literature serves as a powerful medium to combat social and gender injustices.

Based on these academic discussions, feminist literary studies have extensively examined the representations of women's struggles within patriarchal and racialized societies, particularly through intersectional frameworks. Theoretically, this body of research is expected to expand the scholarly discourse on feminist literature, especially within the context of Black literature in modern America. However, most existing analyses of Bennett's work

focus either on racial identity or on gender issues in isolation. Fewer studies provide an integrated examination of how intersectionality and liberal feminism operate simultaneously within contemporary African American novels, particularly in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*.

Addressing this critical gap, this research aims to analyze the form and presentation of feminism in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* using both intersectional and liberal feminist approaches. The novelty of this study lies in its combined analytical framework, which explores not only how female characters resist patriarchal structures, but also how their individual struggles are fundamentally shaped by overlapping identities, including race, class, and rigid social expectations. This dual approach allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of feminist representation in the novel.

The main objective of this research is to examine how the female characters challenge oppressive social structures and how their choices reflect a broader feminist consciousness. Theoretically, this study contributes to the advancement of feminist literary criticism by enriching discussions on intersectionality within modern African American literature. In practice, the findings are expected to enhance readers' awareness of gender equality and underscore the importance of intersectional perspectives for understanding women's diverse, multifaceted experiences in contemporary society.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method. The qualitative approach is appropriate because this study focuses on interpreting meanings, social phenomena, and ideological representations found in literary texts rather than statistical numerical data. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), qualitative research is used to explore and understand individuals' experiences and social realities through textual interpretation. In literary studies, descriptive qualitative methods allow researchers to analyze characters, dialogue, narration, and symbolic meanings in depth and with systematic rigor. Therefore, this study specifically analyzes feminist representations in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* through the lenses of liberal feminism and intersectional feminism (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Lwamba et al., 2022).

The primary data source for this study is the novel itself, drawing from the work analyzed by Areqi (2022), which includes the narration, dialogue, and descriptions of female characters such as Desiree, Stella, and Jude Vignes. This research focuses strictly on the analysis of various forms of feminism and the ways these women represent their struggles against gender inequality and racial discrimination. The analyzed aspects comprise three core dimensions: 1) women's actions and decisions in the face of patriarchal oppression and societal pressure; 2) women's strategies to resist the patriarchal system and racist structures; and 3) the relationship between self-identity, social status, and skin color in determining the position of women in society.

To collect the data, the researcher executed several sequential steps. First, the researcher read the entire novel, *The Vanishing Half*, to comprehensively understand the themes, characters, and socio-historical background. Second, the researcher identified and highlighted specific textual excerpts that demonstrate forms of feminism, such as resistance to patriarchal norms, efforts to achieve equality, and the search for female identity. Third, the collected data were categorized and grouped based on the framework of feminism that manifests in the text, specifically liberal feminism and intersectional feminism.

This study applies textual analysis techniques to identify feminist representations in the novel. The researcher categorized the collected data into themes related to women's resistance, identity construction, racial discrimination, and gender inequality. The data were then interpreted using the feminist literary criticism theories proposed by Tong (2013) and the intersectionality theory formulated by Crenshaw (2015). To ensure the validity and reliability of the interpretation, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the selected quotations and triangulated them by comparing the findings with previous feminist literary studies that discuss race and gender representation in contemporary literature.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected through close reading and note-taking, several key textual references were identified and classified into two major theoretical categories: liberal feminism and intersectional feminism. The data comprise narrations, dialogues, and actions of the main female characters: Desiree Vignes, Stella Vignes, and Jude Winston. This classification was conducted using the framework of feminist literary criticism, focusing closely on women's autonomy, resistance to patriarchal norms, and the intersections of gender, race, and social class.

The first category, liberal feminism, encompasses data demonstrating women's systematic efforts to secure personal freedom, execute independent decisions, and challenge traditional gender expectations. Desiree's bold decision to leave the restrictive environment of Mallard to build an independent life, alongside Stella's calculated choice to redefine her identity and social position, serve as primary examples of textual evidence categorized under this liberal feminist dimension.

The second category, intersectional feminism, includes data reflecting the compounding forms of oppression experienced by Black women due to the intricate interaction of gender, race, and social class. The lived experiences of Jude as a dark-skinned Black woman and Stella's precarious experience of passing as a white woman reveal how racial, colorist, and gender discrimination simultaneously shape women's identities and structural opportunities. Consequently, the collected data demonstrate that women's experiences within the novel are not homogeneous, but are profoundly fractured and shaped by intersecting social structures.

The analysis further indicates that Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* intricately depicts the struggles of Black women confronting both the patriarchal system and systemic racism through these dual lenses of liberal and intersectional feminism. Through the trajectories of Desiree, Stella, and Jude, Bennett highlights how women actively seek to reclaim agency over their own lives amidst the rigid boundaries imposed by societal norms. In doing so, the novel transcends personal narratives, explaining how female identity is structurally co-constituted by the relationships among race, gender, and socio-economic status.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that feminism in *The Vanishing Half* is represented not only through overt, direct resistance toward patriarchal oppression, but also through subtle, complex negotiations of identity, race, and social acceptance. Bennett presents female characters who continuously struggle to navigate and survive within systems dictated by racial hierarchy and gender inequality. This representation strongly aligns with contemporary feminist literary scholarship, which argues that women's experiences in literature are fundamentally influenced by intersecting axes of oppression, particularly race and class (Ahmed, 2021).

3.1. Representation of Liberal Feminism

According to Tong (2013), liberal feminism is fundamentally based on individual freedom and women's innate ability to determine their own destinies. In the novel, while Stella successfully gains higher social status and economic security, she paradoxically loses her authentic identity and her relationship with her family. Her internal conflict illustrates how women's freedom is often severely restricted by a racialized social system that limits and compromises their life choices.

"I don't know! Anywhere." (Bennett, 2022, p. 30)

This statement demonstrates Desiree's fierce determination to take control of her future despite pervasive uncertainty. Although she has no clear or definitive destination, she resolutely chooses to leave an environment that structurally limits her opportunities. This pivotal decision reflects the core liberal feminist idea that women possess the fundamental right to make independent choices and proactively seek a better life. Liberal feminism is also vividly represented through Stella's calculated decision to construct a completely new identity. By passing as a white woman, Stella gains significantly greater access to social mobility and economic opportunities that were otherwise denied to Black women. Consequently, her actions reflect an intense desire for personal freedom and autonomous self-determination.

However, Bennett simultaneously exposes the stark limitations of this perceived freedom. Although Stella

achieves remarkable vertical social mobility and financial security, she severely fractures her connection to her biological family and her racial identity. These findings strongly support Tong (2013)'s argument that women continuously strive for autonomy and equal structural opportunities. At the same time, Bennett demonstrates that individual freedom is frequently constrained by overarching social structures, particularly those dictated by institutionalized race and discrimination. As a result, the novel portrays liberal feminism as a phenomenon that is both profoundly empowering and deeply complex.

"She wasn't pretending. She was being" (Bennett, 2022, p. 28)

This statement reveals that Stella no longer views her white identity as a temporary disguise or a superficial mask, but rather as a social reality she has fully internalized. The quotation demonstrates how her strategic pursuit of freedom ultimately requires a complete and radical transformation of the self. By repeatedly performing and living her new racial identity, Stella gradually internalizes it until the boundary between performance and reality entirely disappears. This psychological process illustrates how she exercises personal agency to escape the rigid racial and social limitations historically imposed on Black women. However, Bennett underscores the tragic paradox of this autonomy; while Stella gains access to social acceptance and financial security, achieving this freedom forces her to suppress her family history, racial background, and personal memories. As a result, her independence is not entirely liberating because it depends on the continuous, painful denial of her authentic identity. This finding aligns with Tong (2013)'s view that liberal feminism highly values women's freedom of choice, while concurrently revealing that these individual choices are heavily shaped and constrained by unequal social structures.

"He hit her once. She left" (Bennett, 2022, p. 28).

This quotation illustrates Desiree's swift and decisive action in leaving an abusive marriage. Her immediate response represents a direct resistance against patriarchal domination and demonstrates her capacity to reclaim absolute control over her life. Rather than tolerating domestic violence or remaining dependent on her husband, Desiree immediately rejects the abuse and chooses to protect both herself and her daughter. Her decision reflects a profound sense of self-respect, personal agency, and the core feminist belief that women have the right to live free from fear and institutional oppression. Furthermore, the brevity of Bennett's sentence structure is highly significant. Bennett deliberately presents Desiree's response in a direct and uncompromising manner, emphasizing that physical violence is completely unacceptable and must not be normalized within marriage. By leaving after the very first act of physical abuse, Desiree actively refuses the patriarchal expectation that women must endure suffering to preserve family unity, prioritizing her safety, dignity, and well-being instead.

"You gonna fall out if you don't eat somethin." (Bennett, 2022, p. 30)

This dialogue underscores Desiree's independence in making critical decisions about her life despite her highly vulnerable socio-economic condition, reflecting her ability to maintain control over her personal situation. At this point in the narrative, Desiree has fled an abusive relationship and returned to Mallard with extremely limited resources and an deeply uncertain future. Although she faces severe emotional distress, financial hardship, and immediate social judgment, she continuously takes full responsibility for herself and her daughter. Her unwavering determination to keep moving forward demonstrates the resilience and self-reliance that constitute the central values of liberal feminism. The dialogue also highlights Desiree's absolute refusal to view herself as a helpless victim. Rather than surrendering to her difficult circumstances, she actively navigates the challenges of rebuilding her life, reflecting the liberal feminist belief that women possess the capacity to make rational decisions and shape their own futures regardless of daunting social obstacles. Through Desiree's character, Bennett portrays women as fully capable individuals who can exercise agency even amidst uncertainty and structural hardship.

"Mama, we're not stayin." (Bennett, 2022, p. 30)

This statement reflects Desiree's firm assertion of personal choice as she refuses to be confined by maternal or community expectations, which aligns with liberal feminism's heavy emphasis on the freedom of choice. Through this clear declaration, Desiree demonstrates her determination to take charge of her destiny rather than allowing others to dictate what is best for her. Although returning to Mallard offers familiarity and temporary sanctuary, she refuses to let her life remain limited by the same colorist environment she once tried so hard to escape. The quotation also highlights Desiree's confidence in making decisions independently, even when those choices involve high risks. Her refusal to stay suggests a desire for broader opportunities and a progressive future for her daughter. From a liberal feminist perspective, this action reflects a woman's right to determine her own path and pursue personal fulfillment in accordance with her own aspirations. Bennett, therefore, portrays Desiree as an active, self-governing agent who successfully challenges social expectations.

This finding is highly in accordance with the contemporary study by Apriyanti (2022), which posits that women in literature frequently utilize personal independence to challenge patriarchal structures. However, Bennett significantly expands on this idea by demonstrating that Black women's independence is deeply and permanently entwined with systemic racial issues. Stella is indeed economically liberated and socially free within white society, but she remains psychologically trapped in a continuous lie regarding her true identity, burdened by profound guilt for abandoning her own racial legacy (Tampubolon & Mandala, 2021).

3.2. Intersectional Feminism

Further analysis shows that *The Vanishing Half* cannot be understood exclusively through the lens of liberal feminism, but also fundamentally requires an intersectional approach to feminism (Crenshaw, 2015; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2020). Intersectional feminism highlights that the oppression of women is not solely caused by gender, but is simultaneously compounded by race, skin color, and social class. In this novel, Brit Bennett describes how Black women confront a form of double discrimination: first as women, and second as individuals belonging to a marginalized racial minority group (Areqi, 2022; DeFelice & Diller, 2019). This intersectional dynamic is most clearly reflected in Jude's lived experiences throughout the narrative.

"White folks kill you if you want too much, kill you if you want too little." (Bennett, 2022, p. 28)

This quotation reflects systemic racial oppression and the impossible, contradictory expectations imposed on Black individuals. The statement suggests that regardless of how Black people behave, they remain inherently vulnerable to discrimination and social punishment. If they are ambitious, they are perceived as threatening; if they remain passive, they are still marginalized and denied institutional opportunities. Through this stark contradiction, Bennett reveals how racism operates as a structural system that limits the fundamental freedom of Black people in everyday life. For Jude, this oppression is intensified by her gender position. Throughout the novel, she not only faces racial prejudice from the broader society, but also experiences severe colorism within her own community because of her darker skin tone. As a result, her struggles cannot be explained solely through the framework of gender discrimination; instead, they emerge from the intersection of race, color, and gender, which together shape how she is perceived and treated by others.

"You gotta follow they rules but they change 'em when they feel." (Bennett, 2022, p. 28)

This quotation demonstrates how power operates unpredictably and arbitrarily within racial hierarchies. It reveals that social rules are neither stable nor fair, but are strictly controlled by dominant groups who modify them to suit their socio-political interests. Black individuals are structurally required to obey these rules, yet they possess no institutional authority to influence or challenge them. This condition produces a system of structural inequality in which compliance does not guarantee protection or fairness. As a result, oppression is shown to be not only gender-based but also deeply rooted in racial control and institutionalized power. The statement also emphasizes the instability of justice within a racially stratified society. The shifting nature of these "rules" suggests that discrimination is not always explicit, but frequently manifests in changing expectations, inconsistent treatment,

and unequal standards applied to marginalized groups. Bennett uses this condition to show that structural racism functions through everyday practices that appear ordinary but consistently disadvantage Black individuals.

“She had everything she thought she wanted, but none of it felt like hers” (Bennett, 2022, p. 35)

This quotation reveals the profound psychological consequences of racial passing. Although Stella gains immense privilege, systemic access, and social acceptance in her new identity, these achievements do not produce a stable sense of belonging. The statement indicates a deep internal contradiction between external success and internal dislocation. Stella’s life appears socially ideal, yet it is constructed through the continuous concealment of her racial background and personal history. As a result, her sense of self becomes fragmented because her lived reality is based on denial rather than psychological integration. This condition shows that privilege obtained through passing is not neutral; it requires the erasure of identity and the constant maintenance of a constructed self. Stella must continuously perform whiteness to preserve her social position, creating emotional distance from her origins and preventing her from forming an authentic connection with her past. Bennett uses this psychological tension to show that freedom gained through racial passing is structurally limited, a dynamic that aligns closely with the core tenets formulated by Hill Collins and Bilge (2020).

“But even here. . . you were still colored.” (Bennett, 2022, p. 28)

This quotation emphasizes that racial identity and colorist biases cannot be easily erased, even within one’s own community. It shows that racial categorization operates as a persistent structure that functions across different social spaces. The phrase “even here” suggests an initial expectation that a shared community might provide safety, solidarity, or total acceptance; yet, the narrative statement directly challenges this expectation. Instead of producing intra-racial equality, the small-town community of Mallard continues to reproduce rigid racial distinctions and colorist hierarchies through the persistent deployment of the label “colored” as a tool for social stratification.

“White men could kill you for refusing to die.” (Bennett, 2022, p. 28)

This extreme statement illustrates the pervasive violence embedded within systemic racial structures. It shows how race and power intersect to control Black bodies through both physical coercion and symbolic domination. The sentence emphasizes that racial violence is not incidental but structurally embedded in social relations where authority is permanently racialized. It reflects a precarious condition in which Black existence is constantly exposed to existential threat, even in ordinary interactions, because power is unevenly distributed along racial lines. The quotation also reveals the underlying logic of racial terror, where the survival of Black individuals is contingent upon total obedience to dominant racial expectations. The paradox embedded in the sentence highlights that resistance itself can be interpreted by the dominant group as a justification for violence. This creates a oppressive system in which autonomy is criminalized, and compliance becomes a strict condition for survival. Bennett uses this expression to expose how racial power operates not only through institutional structures but also through everyday forms of fear and control.

Recent literary criticism also explains that intersectionality helps reveal invisible forms of discrimination experienced by Black women in society. In many African American literary works, women often face a form of “double marginalization” because racial oppression and patriarchal domination occur simultaneously (Carastathis, 2016). Bennett successfully portrays this condition through Jude’s specific experiences as a dark-skinned Black woman who experiences systematic rejection both socially and culturally.

In *The Vanishing Half*, this concept explains how race and gender interact to shape the characters’ social reality. This finding is highly in accordance with contemporary literary analysis (DeFelice & Diller, 2019; Permatasari, 2016), which describes how social systems often create oppressive conditions in which marginalized individuals must drastically adjust, performance-play, or mask their identities merely to survive.

3.3. Intergenerational Relationship and Awareness Feminist

In addition to chronicling personal struggles, Bennett emphasizes the intricate relationships between women across various generations, which serve as a critical reference point in the development of feminist consciousness. The relationship between Desiree and her daughter, Jude, becomes a vital symbol of the continuation and transmission of core feminist values.

“A pair. She was supposed to have a pair.” (Bennett, 2022, p. 29)

This quotation reflects the profound importance of familial continuity and generational identity, which fundamentally shape women’s experiences across time. The statement refers to the expectation of having twins, which, in the context of the novel, symbolizes both biological continuity and a deep connection between generations of women. The idea of “a pair” also implies balance and relational identity, suggesting that women’s identities are frequently constructed through their intimate relationships with other women in the family. Furthermore, the quotation highlights how expectations within the domestic sphere influence the way identity and belonging are understood. The notion of being “supposed” to have a pair reflects how family narratives are heavily shaped by anticipation, memory, and loss. In this sense, feminist consciousness is built not only through overt resistance to external oppression, but also through the intimate family dynamics that shape how women understand themselves.

“He understood what it meant to live in a body that wasn’t yours” (Bennett, 2022, p. 33)

This statement reflects an acute awareness of diverse forms of oppression, including those related to gender identity and bodily autonomy. It indicates a nuanced understanding of embodied experience, where identity is not merely social but also deeply connected to how individuals navigate their physical existence in relation to societal expectations. The phrase suggests a painful disconnect between self-perception and how the body is socially policed, often resulting in severe marginalization. The quotation also highlights the broader scope of oppression beyond race and gender alone, opening critical spaces for recognizing how different axes of identity intersect to produce similar experiences of alienation. In this context, Bennett presents empathy as a crucial element in understanding marginalized experiences. The ability to recognize another person’s struggle through an embodied understanding becomes a form of progressive social awareness that successfully challenges the rigid boundaries of identity.

“You could never love two people the exact same way.” (Bennett, 2022, p. 30)

This observation underscores the complexity of intergenerational relationships and the emotional dynamics that heavily influence female identity formation. The quotation highlights that emotional attachment is rarely uniform, even within close maternal relationships. Each connection carries its own distinct history, expectations, and emotional intensity, which collectively shape how affection is expressed and internalised. In this sense, love becomes a highly differentiated experience rather than a fixed or identical feeling across individuals. In *The Vanishing Half*, these generational dynamics play a central role in shaping feminist awareness. Desiree’s relationship with her daughter, Jude, for example, is deeply colored by her own lived experiences of domestic trauma, economic resilience, and survival. These experiences directly dictate how she expresses maternal care, protection, and guidance, distinguishing it from how she relates to other foundational figures in her life.

“You safe here.” (Bennett, 2022, p. 30)

This statement reflects absolute maternal protection and emotional support, which play a crucial role in nurturing feminist resilience. Adele’s assurance creates an immediate sense of safety for Desiree, allowing her to recover from physical violence and gradually rebuild her personal autonomy. This dynamic indicates that feminist resistance is shaped not only by individual, isolated struggle, but also by supportive, reciprocal relationships among women. Moreover, the notion of “safety” here is highly significant, as it stands in stark contrast to the hostile external world where Desiree simultaneously experiences both racial and gender-based oppression.

“She’d always been hardest on Desiree.” (Bennett, 2022, p. 30)

This quotation indicates how differential parental treatment significantly influences a child’s emotional and psychological development. The fact that Desiree receives stricter treatment from her mother suggests unequal expectations within the household, which ultimately forces her to cultivate a heightened sense of responsibility, resilience, and independence. Such experiences often compel women to develop internal strength and coping mechanisms at a very early age.

Thus, feminist consciousness in the novel actively evolves across generational lines. Desiree represents survival and physical resistance against immediate abuse, while Jude represents a more progressive, intersectional, and inclusive understanding of identity and institutional equality (Khusna et al., 2024).

Despite living within systemic limitations, Desiree successfully imparts courage and steadfastness to her child. Jude consequently becomes an archetype of a new generation of Black women who dare to pursue higher education and confront societal discrimination with confidence. According to Hooks (2000), feminism is not merely about fighting patriarchal men, but also fundamentally concerns women’s political union and the formation of a shared, collective awareness. This is clearly manifested in Jude’s trajectory, which transforms generational trauma into political strength. She not only rejects institutional discrimination, but also strives to build cross-racial and cross-identity solidarity through her romantic relationship with Reese—a character who also experiences severe social oppression due to his identity as a transgender man. Thus, Bennett expands the concept of feminism to be more inclusive, empathetic, and comprehensive. This intergenerational relationship demonstrates that feminist consciousness is not a static phenomenon, but one that continuously evolves according to changing social contexts; while Desiree fights for basic freedom from violence and poverty, Jude fights for self-acceptance and absolute identity equality in a diverse society (Khusna et al., 2025).

From this comprehensive analysis, it can be concluded that *The Vanishing Half* represents a complex, nuanced, and deep manifestation of feminism. This novel firmly rejects the reductive dichotomy between “weak women” and “strong women,” demonstrating instead that women’s struggles are heavily mediated by overlapping socio-economic, institutional, and racial factors (Akbar, 2021). Bennett succeeds in constructing multi-dimensional female characters: the resilient Desiree, the racially ambiguous Stella, and the progressive Jude. Through their narratives, Bennett posits that being a woman involves a continuous, lifelong negotiation against patriarchal power structures and restrictive social expectations.

Theoretically, these findings strongly support Crenshaw (2015)’s foundational argument that patriarchal systems cannot be fully understood without systematically considering overarching racial structures. In this sense, the novel expands contemporary feminist discourse by seamlessly integrating issues of race, colorism, and gender into a unified analytical framework. Furthermore, this study aligns with previous scholarship (Furqon & Santi, 2023), which emphasizes that women’s resistance in literature frequently mirrors broader socio-political struggles against systemic oppression. However, this study contributes a more comprehensive perspective by demonstrating how liberal feminism and intersectional feminism operate simultaneously and dialogically within the same narrative framework.

Therefore, *The Vanishing Half* is not merely a story about racial differences and skin color, but also a profound, enduring reflection on women’s institutional freedom, intergenerational solidarity, and the ongoing global struggle against interconnected systems of structural oppression.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the comprehensive analysis of Brit Bennett’s novel *The Vanishing Half*, it can be concluded that the narrative demonstrates a complex, nuanced form of feminism through the lived experiences of Black women navigating deeply entrenched patriarchal and racist systems. Bennett presents multi-dimensional female characters who continuously strive to define their identities and secure personal freedoms amidst crippling social pressures. From a liberal feminist perspective, the characters of Desiree and Stella illustrate distinct methods of

resisting male domination and a restrictive social system that severely limits their agency. Desiree actively resists domestic violence and rigorously strives for independent self-reliance, whereas Stella gains upward economic and social mobility through a radical shift in her racial identity, albeit at the psychological cost of losing a vital part of her authentic self. Both characters vividly illustrate women's varied efforts to achieve autonomy within a highly unjust environment. Concurrently, from an intersectional feminist perspective, the novel demonstrates how race, colorism, and gender inherently intersect to shape the socio-cultural realities of Black women. The trajectory of Jude demonstrates the profound impact of the double discrimination experienced by dark-skinned women, manifesting both from the dominant white society and from within her own intra-racial community. Through her story, Bennett illustrates that Black women's struggles fundamentally involve a continuous search for self-acceptance and structural social equality. Ultimately, *The Vanishing Half* provides a progressive feminist dialogue that prioritizes not only gender equality, but also a broader, more inclusive understanding of identity and diversity, conveying that women's struggles cannot be isolated from the social, racial, and cultural contexts that surround them.

For further research, it is highly recommended to explore this novel through other critical approaches, such as postcolonial feminism, psychoanalysis, critical race theory, or trauma theory, to gain broader perspectives on psychological identity construction and systemic power relations. Future studies may also comparatively analyze *The Vanishing Half* alongside other contemporary African American literary works that address race, gender, and identity, thereby more clearly identifying similarities and differences in historical representations of women's experiences. In addition, researchers are encouraged to examine empirical reader responses or evaluate the broader social relevance of the novel in today's multicultural society, especially regarding contemporary issues of institutional discrimination, colorism, and gender equality. Such diverse academic endeavors will significantly enrich contemporary literary criticism and provide a deeper, more enduring understanding of the continuing significance of Bennett's work.

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