

## bell hooks Author Biography

Gloria Jean Watkins was born on September 25, 1952 and raised in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. She grew up in a segregated community and school until around the age of 10, and was born to a “poor working class family” (Quintana, 2015) consisting of her mother, father, five sisters and brother. As Gloria grew up, her family expected her to be well behaved and quiet, with hopes of her becoming a polite young woman. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016) Although she enjoyed reading poetry at her church, and within her community was known for this particular skill (Encyclopedia of World Biographies, 2016), Watkins soon started to receive a new reputation that was anything but quiet and polite.

Increasingly becoming known as “a woman who talked back” and having her critical publications and controversial topics receive more exposure, she decided to take the pseudonym “bell hooks”. She took her new name after her great grandmother, who, according to Quintana (2015) was “largely known for her sharp opinions.” Hooks intentionally does not capitalize her new name in order “to place focus on her work rather than her name, on her ideas rather than her personality.” Hooks has a reputable education, successful teaching career, and many publications on sexism and racism in US culture. Often, she writes from a cultural studies perspective, with hopes to encourage self-esteem and empowerment of black women.

Bell hooks went on to attend Stanford University (for her Bachelor’s) at the age of 19. During her time at there, she worked as a telephone operator and began writing her first, and perhaps most well known book, *Ain’t I A Woman*. Throughout her teaching career, hooks has held many positions and taught topics related to women’s and cultural studies. Later, hooks started working for the Henry Holt Publishing Company, where she published another one of her most recognized books, *Killing Rage*. She now has over 30 publications under the pseudonym hooks- books, articles, scholarly journals, chapters, and so on, and is known to speak as a guest at colleges. Taking on the name “bell hooks”, Gloria Jean Watkins has become recognized among “the foremost intellectuals of her generation.” (Jrank.org, 2016)

Hooks has been known to form connections with the public. Along with her experiences throughout life and the expectations and responsibilities bestowed on her, her message is delivered through a number of publications that explore and analyze feminism, racism, sexuality, representation, and power. Her writings are very influential, and hooks does not hold back when speaking her mind on delicate or controversial issues. Making herself heard, hooks’s contributions have led to the empowerment of young adults, feminists, and women of color, heightened awareness of issues related to representation in media and a contemporary confrontation and criticism of the systems of power in the United States.

Hooks continues to inform, inspire, unite, and motivate younger generations and college students and often travels to speak to youth about these issues. Publications including *Ain’t I A Woman* establish a unique perspective on sensitive topics of cultural

issues from a feminist approach. With a reputation of being “a woman who talked back”, hook’s work received more public attention and recognition, ultimately emphasizing the importance of the issues and subjects she writes about and fights for.

Beyond her many publications, achievements, and rewards, hooks shares a unique contribution to feminists and women. In many ways, she has overcome odds and struggles and has become a very motivational figure for women like her- those who work hard, study, are pursuing a career or dream, or can identify with her cause. Hooks began writing her first book while in school and also managed to hold an operator job. She worked through school, dedicated her time to make a living from her passion, and fought diligently for what she believed in. She embodies feminism and proved to everyone that with hard work and dedication, women won’t be held back and are very capable of achieving greatness. Personally, I find bell hooks’ message to be empowering, motivating, and find her to be a great role model for all women.

Hooks “critiques mainstream feminism as ‘another arena for hierarchy and the systematic silencing of some women’ has helped to deconstruct Western supremacy even further” (Choi, 2016). Hooks’s arguments often dig deeper than the surface- many aiming at the root or causes of issues and brings attention to “the problematic nature of privileging only certain members of disadvantaged groups. This served to be greatly influential for women of color feminists.” (Choi, 2016)

Bell hooks’s feminist approach has paved the way for a new (and improved) role of women in society for future generations. Her passion and understanding of issues related to cultural studies warrant her reputation as a major voice in the fight for equality and in ending the many other issues of representation imposed by both media and hierarchies of power.

She addresses issues of race and stereotypes in her published book, *The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. In *The Will To Change*, hooks conceptualized the term *white supremacist capitalist patriarchy*. In context, this term “describes a concept, more specifically a worldview or set of values” (Carter, 2016). Hooks elaborates, explaining, “I often use the phrase to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation’s politics” (hooks, date). Carter (2016) continues her analysis on this topic and explains, “hooks identifies these terms as *systems*, not individual people or groups. Because the term is conceptual, it cannot refer to a specific person or group... however, a person can uphold, support, or perpetuate ‘white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’... it is a question on the personal and political values to which one adheres. What connects all of these terms is that they are all focused on power-over models of domination.”

Much of the material that bell hooks publishes touch on at least one major component of cultural studies. Her examination of the implications of media representation of race, sexuality, and gender join to construct and support her criticisms and oppositions of various systems of power- the fundamental component of cultural studies. Choi (2016) adds that hooks’ theme and idea of “*intersectionality* ... has allowed

theorists after her to more carefully attend to previously overlooked groups' issues and form culture-specific solutions to discrimination." Much of her work relates back to our previous discussion of ethics, and hooks is attributed to sparking a rise in contemporary and "transnational feminism and feminist ethics" (Choi, 2016).

Bell hooks' perspective has expanded the field of cultural studies by providing a new, timely, and different perspective on important social and cultural issues. Her perspectives and publications on race, sexuality, equality, and fairness are liberating to a young woman like myself, and have been very informative (and a good read) and easy to comprehend. Using her gifts of poetry and composition, coupled with her natural ability to influence others and perseverance and dedication in her fight for what is just, bell hooks has made many effective contributions to cultural studies.

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