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Introducing Intersectionality

Mary Romero

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2

Where Does Intersectionality Come From?

For a moment, it might help to make clear what intersectionality is *not*. Critical race feminist scholars have cautioned against the dangers of interpreting intersectionality as diversity (Davis 1996; Bannerji 2000; Mohanty 2003; Alexander 2005; Ahmed 2012). Over the last decades, many sites in society have called for multiculturalism and diversity. While the celebration and application of "diversity" popularized in the 1980s and found in corporate initiatives and school curricula did attempt to provide a space for different voices, this multiculturalism was not aimed at eliminating social inequality. Calls for representational inclusion were responded to with a "Benetton model" of diversity (referring to the advertising campaigns of the Benetton clothing company) with the goal of commercial value (Lury 2004; Moor 2007), or the incorporation of people of color in the media within hegemonic frameworks perpetuating stereotypes and racist tropes (Gray 2005). Here, people are simply an array of races and cultures, experiencing various levels of disability, standing apart from the power relations that are the important meaning attached to these differences. Institutional diversity practices and language uncover the "manufacturing of cohesion" (Alexander 2005) or "multiversity diversity" (Hill 2004), which does not address inequality. Celebrating difference for the sake of inclusion does not dismantle the everyday practices of privilege or oppression. Intersectionality is not concerned with "diversity" or "multiculturalism" but with power relationships, specifically the ways in which difference embeds domination and oppression. White, male, heterosexual and citizenship privileges are not personal but are institutional arrangements that provide non-disabled

persons classified as white, male and heterosexual greater access to power and resources that are not similarly available to people of color, women, LGBTQ individuals or non-citizens.

Intersectional scholarship can be traced to early inquiries and concern over social inequalities, arising from social activism. As activists attempted to explain the different material conditions or economic circumstances within specific groups, fellow activists felt marginalized because their experiences were not included. These marginalized activists challenged others to capture their circumstances, which led to intersectional theorizing about inequalities. Conceptualizing class, caste and status were among the top endeavors of these scholar-activists. However, class alone did not explain different experiences of men and women of the same class. Racialized laws restricting voting, marriage or labor opportunities did not explain the different experiences of men and women of color. In other words, one-dimensional conceptualizations of individuals or groups did not capture the complexity of people's lived experiences. These approaches failed to identify issues that were inclusive of all women, all the working class or all people of color. Conceptualizations of race were needed that did not erase the experiences of women of color, immigrants of color, gays and lesbians of color. Social hierarchies are not one-dimensional, and power relations in families, communities and nations cannot be explained without examining how and why certain social identities are subordinated to others and interact with each other in different ways. This chapter traces the conceptualization of intersectionality as emerging from an activist tradition – a tradition linked to a lived experience of activism that aimed to generate solutions serving to eliminate oppression. I will first consider how the term "intersectionality" came about.

Coining the Term

Academics disagree over the emergence of intersectionality as a conceptual framework and organizing tool (Ferguson 2012). Most frequently, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited for coining the term "intersectionality" in her 1989 article "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics." Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) widely cited legal writings on intersectionality emerged from the inability to capture the experiences of Black women in anti-discrimination law. When going to court as plaintiffs in discrimination cases, Black women were unable to prove gender discrimination because not all women were discriminated against, and they were unable to prove race discrimination

because not all Black people were discriminated against. Courts failed to recognize Black women's accounts about experiencing race and sex discrimination simultaneously. Instead, their injuries were marginalized by forcing them to claim either gender or race discrimination, and refusing to recognize how sexism and racism operated simultaneously. In her law review article on anti-discrimination, Crenshaw used an example of a traffic accident to illustrate race and gender as having their own lane in the street:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (1989: 149)

Her analogy demonstrates that if Black women are discriminated against because of experiences from *both* gender and race discrimination, the law does not recognize their experience. Crenshaw's use of intersectionality articulated the inadequacy of anti-discrimination law as a tool for addressing injuries to women of color.

I will address in this chapter how other Black feminist scholars and activists theorized the problem by assuming that gender and race functioned as mutually exclusive categories, which erased the experiences of women of color. Crenshaw's term gained popularity for starting to untangle how racism and patriarchy interact; the interaction had often gone unnoticed in contemporary feminist and anti-racist discourses (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). Intersectionality calls attention to additional invisibilities in feminism, anti-racism and class politics. A significant aspect in conceptualizing the oppression faced by women of color is the recognition that "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw 1989: 153). Furthermore, as Crenshaw argued, the concept "[e]nables us to recognize the fact that perceived group membership can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias, yet because we are simultaneously members of many groups, our complex identities can shape the specific way we each experience that bias" (AAPF 2013: 3).

I now turn to the sociological roots of intersectionality, which are firmly planted in the mid-1800s and early 1900s, in struggles for

women's and African American rights in the US. Historical analysis reveals that race, gender, class and sexuality were central to understanding the social inequality that existed for over a century (Guy-Sheftall 1986; Dill & Zambrana 2009). Ann DuCille (1993: 31) rightly noted that "like most black Americans, with issues of race identity and social equality, black female artists and intellectuals writing at the turn of the century recognized that for them and their sisters the race question did not exist separate and distinct from the woman question and vice versa." The quest for an intersectional paradigm was simply stated as early as Sojourner Truth's 1851 address to the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio: "Ain't I a woman?"

Early Conceptualizations of Intersectionality

Several prominent Black women stand out in referencing multiple identities in the fight for women's rights and for civil rights for African Americans. Most noted were Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Church Terrell. Maria Stewart was one of the first African American women to lecture on the unique position of Black women facing racism and sexism. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1803, she became a domestic servant when her parents died and after leaving service, she obtained a religious education, which was evident in her lecturing on anti-slavery and women's rights. Stewart "called on black women to develop their highest intellectual capacities, to enter all spheres of the life of the mind, and to participate in all activities within the community" (Richardson 1987: xiii–xiv). As a writer and activist, she also considered Black women's class oppression and advocated for establishing cooperative economies to gain economic independence (Gines 2011). Unlike Stewart, Sojourner Truth was born a slave and, after 26 years, she managed to escape with her daughter, leaving three children behind. She eventually won a court case and gained freedom for her son (Painter 1996). A few years older than Stewart, Sojourner Truth (1999 [1851]) is better known because of her famous "Ain't I a woman?" speech that highlighted the invisibility of Black women in the discussion of women's oppression:

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I could have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much

as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

In 1858, Anna Julia Cooper, born enslaved, became one of the first African American women to earn a doctoral degree. In her book, *A Voice from the South*, Anna Julia Cooper wrote:

> The colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. In a period itself transitional and unsettled, her status seems one of the least ascertainable and definitive of all the forces which make for our civilization. She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or unacknowledged factor in both. (1990 [1834]: 134)

Cooper taught and eventually became a school principal in M Street School, and later the President at Frelinghuysen University in Washington, DC. She founded the Colored Women's League of Washington and was a strong leader for racial justice and women's rights. Mary Church Terrell, known for her activism for civil rights and suffrage, was born in 1863 to former slaves. She was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the first President of the National Association of Colored Women, and founder of the National Association of College Women, now known as the National Association of University Women. In her 1898 address before the National American Women's Suffrage Association, Terrell referenced the intersecting systems of oppression: "Not only are colored women with ambition and aspiration handicapped on account of their sex, but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women" (Marable & Mullings 2009: 166).

The writings of these four Black women activists and intellectuals are significant in that they show how the roots of intersectionality lie embedded in the lived experiences of marginalized groups' struggle for social justice. As Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Church Terrell fought to end racism, economic inequalities and abuses of women's rights, they made visible the inadequacy of platforms set forth by white women suffragists or civil rights leaders. Groups who fall outside the dominant groups most visibly perceive intersectionality; these groups recognize how "major" contenders in power relationships and oppression did not capture the intersecting systems of domination. Early Black feminists engaged in activism to gain rights for women and

for all African Americans, their work capturing the intersection of race and gender.

While the theoretical foundation of intersectionality is clearly located in eighteenth-century Black feminist writings, many scholars also acknowledge W. E. B. Du Bois's inclusion of interconnecting systems of oppression, namely race, class and nation, in his writings (Hancock 2005; Dill & Kohlman 2012). For example, Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 42) credited Du Bois with the "[i]mplicit use of intersectional paradigms of race, class, and nation in explaining Black political economy. Du Bois conceptualized race, class, and nation not primarily as personal identity categories but rather as social hierarchies that shaped African American access to status, property, and power." In addressing social problems plaguing the Black community, Du Bois examined racist ideologies and practices as structures of capitalism. He recognized and investigated the power that the US imposed on its colonies through international policy, invasion, and colonization. He described the color line as: "[t]he relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." Du Bois conceptualized class, race and nation as interlocking systems, which reinforced each other to oppress African Americans. Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth E. Zambrana argue that Du Bois created a new "cultural social analysis" in examining the connection between race and class in labor debates (Dill & Zambrana 2009). To be clear, as used in their book, a system comprises social structures interrelated by functions. Structures are socially created, and extremely persistent. Examples might include feudal and slave states. They lasted hundreds of years but were eventually dismantled and replaced. The functions that maintain and connect social structures, then, are relationships like sexism, racism and class warfare.

Du Bois's inclusion of women has been highly contested by some Black feminists but Collins pointed out that he did write about women's struggles in family, community and labor, even though he did not specifically identify gender as a system of power. More recently, Aldon Morris (2015: 220) has joined the debate over Du Bois's contribution to intersectionality, drawing on the following quote to illustrate that he did recognize the interaction of systems of oppression and acknowledge the importance of gender: "What is today the message of these black women to America and to the world? The uplift of women is, next to the problem of the color line and the peace movement, our greatest modern cause. When, now, two of these movements – woman and color – combine in one, the combination has deep meaning." Like the early feminists who also wrote and spoke during the same time, W. E. B. Du Bois's research and writing were deeply embedded in the scholar-activist tradition.

Feminists in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s

The next significant period in the development of intersectionality arose with the activism and writing of Black feminists in the 1970s and expanded over the next three decades. The social movements in the 1970s organized around specific issues of racial or gender equality, thus familiar issues arose as women of color found their realities erased. Black men's experience represented racial oppression while white women's experience represented gender oppression. Again, Black feminists challenged one-dimensional conceptualizations of race or gender, and theorized the interactions of structures of social inequality operating under capitalism. Black feminists in the 1970s and 1980s called attention to the need to address all forms of oppression, and their writings illustrated the strong link between activism in the Black community and systems of social inequality.

Examining this period of writing, I'll turn to Frances Beale, the co-founder of the Black Women's Liberation Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), who wrote one of the defining documents of Black feminism, "Double jeopardy: to be Black and female" (Ross 2006). Originally published as a pamphlet, the essay demonstrated the link between the intellectual paradigm of "intersectionality" and the concrete practice of social activism. The pamphlet was later revised and published in Toni Cade's (1970) edited collection *The Black Woman: An Anthology*. Beale's essay is an early illustration of Black feminist writings that presents race, class and gender as interlocking systems and addresses the necessity for an intersectional approach in the struggle against racism and capitalist exploitation. Beale argued that racism and capitalism produced and maintained problems in the Black family and community. In her analysis of economic exploitation, she never loses sight of the intersections of race, class and gender. She connected the capitalist exclusion of Black men from the labor force with hiring Black women at low wages in reproductive jobs with poor working conditions (e.g., as domestics, nannies and nurses). The functional consequence created circumstances denying Blacks the resources to achieve manhood and womanhood as defined under US capitalism (i.e., working breadwinner men and home-making caregiving women). Nevertheless, African Americans internalized these mainstream gendered ideologies, causing tensions and frustrations between Black men and women. Beale challenged Black men to gain racial equality and liberation, but without male privilege that subordinated Black women. She advocated productive lives for Black women, and the development of academic and technical skills and talents for both men and women.

Beale chastised white feminists for treating the women's movement as monolithic. Her writings and speeches further elaborate why feminists must adopt anti-imperialism and anti-racist ideologies to understand their plight – but also their privilege – as white women. Beale is one of many noted Black feminist activists participating in the Civil Rights and Feminist Movements to confront social justice issues concerning Black women, and Third World and working people.

Another noted contribution during the late 1970s was the Combahee River Collective, who took their name from the place where Harriet Tubman planned an action to free more than 750 slaves. The Collective is significant for including sexual orientation in Black feminism. As a Black feminist lesbian organization in Boston, they were active in a number of social justice campaigns, including the desegregation of Boston schools, protests against police brutality in Black communities, and against violence against women. Their activism as feminists and lesbians did not advocate for separatism but was committed to inclusive coalition-building with progressive Black men. After numerous retreats aimed at articulating the tenets of Black feminism, in 1977 they issued *The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties*:

> The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (Marable & Mullings 2009: 501)

The statement is an important contribution to further theorizing intersectionality in the multiple identities people experience as interlocking systems of oppressions, which include not only race, class and gender but also sexuality. Their statement has been depicted as "one of the strongest, earliest, and most often reprinted manifestos of feminist identity politics in the United States" (Grant 2000: 184), as well as "a bedrock foundation of black feminist theory" (Bowen 2000: 118). The *Combahee River Collective Statement* presented a multi-dimensional analysis of race, class, gender and sexuality with several important characteristics: simultaneous oppressions, multiple interlocking structures, the rejection of ranking functions, and acknowledging that these oppressions are created and maintained by capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy.

Black feminist coalitions made common cause with other groups of women of color to generate further critiques of mainstream feminist practice. The intellectual critiques helped to further articulate their activist goals of inclusion while the writing continued to develop the analysis of multi-dimensions of inequality. In other words, scholarly theory and social justice practices emerged as a praxis, a term used effectively by Paulo Freire (1973), whose book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was widely read at this time. An important feminist anthology arising out of such coalitions is *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1981). Many credit the chapters with providing intellectual foundations for third-wave feminism, which linked feminism, race, class and sexuality. In one of the frequently cited essays from the anthology, "Across the kitchen table: A sister-to-sister dialogue," Barbara and Beverly Smith (1981: 61) highlighted the interconnectedness of systems of oppression, in opposition to exclusionary and one-dimensional approaches of only considering patriarchy: "The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. *Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.*" Like other Black feminists, Smith and Smith insisted that, without an inclusive approach to gender, there could not be a feminist agenda.

Another example of the growing popularity of intersectional critiques of white feminism appeared in Angela Davis' (1981) book *Women, Race and Class*. She recounted the history of Black and white women's fight for social equality and highlighted white feminists' failure to uphold a political agenda inclusive of women of color. Davis challenged the strongly held belief that women only recently started to work outside the home and were then denied employment opportunities on the basis of femininity. As slaves, Black women labored side-by-side with Black men and were submitted to the same punishments of flogging and mutilations. Rather than protecting them as mothers, as they did white women, slave owners classified Black women as breeders and sold their children as livestock. Unlike Black men, they "were victims of sexual abuse and other barbarous mistreatment that could only be inflicted on women" (Davis 1981: 6). The chapter on "Racism, birth control and reproductive rights" offered a compelling example of the dangers in conceptualizing and organizing around gender as a one-dimensional system of oppression.

Voluntary motherhood had emerged as an important woman's issue but considering only gender, the solution white feminists proposed was birth control and access to abortions. When the leading birth-control activist, Margaret Sanger, began the crusade for birth control in the 1900s, she worked with the Socialist Party. After her break with working-class activists, anti-Black and anti-immigrant rhetoric influenced her campaign, moving it closer to the eugenics movement. Women listed unfit for motherhood under compulsory sterilization law included women of color and immigrant women. Sterilization was the only means of birth control provided for many Native American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Black women when abortion rights activists resumed campaigning in the 1970s. Davis (1981: 219) noted: "By the 1970s over 35 percent of Puerto Rican women of childbearing age had been surgically sterilized." Reproductive rights are indeed a feminist issue but easily framed by a racist agenda unless we recognize the dangers of eugenics and the centrality of policies inclusive of race, class and gender.

During the early 1980s, another Black feminist who pushed thinking beyond one-dimensional frameworks of difference was Audre Lorde. In her essay, "Age, race, class and sex: women redefining difference," Lorde (1984: 116) called attention to the European tendency to postulate simple dichotomies such as "dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior," which, in the process, function to establish a "mythical norm":

> In america, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing. By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist.

The "mythical norm" defines human differences outside the norm as deviant. Lorde (1984: 116) challenged white women "to see Black women as women and different from themselves" and to recognize the range of women's issues these differences present. She further explained that Black women share oppressions with Black men but they are different. In the same way, Black women share oppressions with white women, but they are different. Without recognizing how Black women share oppressions differently, white women can become tools of patriarchal power. Again, situated in activism for social equality and justice, Lorde argued that: "we must recognize differences among women who

are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each other's differences to enrich our visions and joint struggles" (1984: 122). Lorde, like Davis, the Smiths and Beale, was instrumental in bringing together the idea that all forms of oppression differ and are significant in understanding social inequality.

Discussion questions

1 How do the development and emergence of intersectional perspectives from activism help to ground the conceptualization of "intersectionality" in lived experiences?
2 How were Black women activists in the late 1800s and early 1900s central in conceptualizing the intersection of systems of domination?
3 What important theoretical contributions did Black feminists in the 1970s and 1980s make to our understanding of intersectionality?

Women of Color Sociologists' Theorizing of Dynamics of Power

I can now turn to more contemporary and specifically sociological writings about the intersection of power relations. In our specific discipline, scholars of color examined their own positions at the crossroads of race, class and gender. Failing to find a sociological tradition, they turned to the growing research in the field of sociology of gender and found the analysis incomplete. A wave of sociological research on Black (e.g., Dill 1980; Rollins 1985; King 1988; Collins 1990; Brewer 1993), Latina (e.g., Baca Zinn 1980; Segura 1989; Romero 1992) and Asian American (e.g., Glenn 1986; Abraham 1995; Chow et al. 1996) women called attention to the absence of their experiences in the expanding fields of both race and gender. These studies highlighted the significance of race, ethnicity, class and gender in conceptualizing their experiences and demonstrated that understandings of gender inequality that begin from the lived experiences of white, middle-class heterosexual women do "not apply to Black women and therefore could not account for their subordination" (Glenn 1999: 3). These scholars of color argued that women of color's experiences cannot be comprehended or understood by separating race and gender or by adding one to the other. Only by recognizing the interconnectedness of gender and race can we understand how systems of oppression interact and reinforce each other.

A major contribution by this generation was the theme of intersecting systems of oppression and the need to address multiple forms of

domination as reoccurring themes. A most notable essay addressing this point is Deborah King's article "Multiple jeopardy," cited above. She began by remarking on Black women's connection to shared experiences of all women and to Black men. She recalled Fannie Lou Hamer's reference to interlocking systems of oppression in a 1971 speech made to the NAACP: "You know I work for the liberation of all people because when I liberate myself, I'm liberating other people...her [the white woman's] freedom is shackled in chains to mine, and she realizes for the first time that she is not free until I am free" (1988: 43). King draws from the tradition of African American feminism to emphasize that the elimination of sexism requires dismantling racism because white supremacy does not exist separate from patriarchy. She summarized the constant theme of interlocking systems of oppression: "The necessity of addressing all oppressions is one of the hallmarks of black feminist thought" (1988: 43). A significant component of King's conceptualization is identifying multiple jeopardies and consciousness, which challenged the dominant sociological practice of using a race–sex analogy (e.g., that the caste-like status of Blacks and women can be treated as similar) to discuss women's experiences and political mobilizations. While the analogy may have been useful for white feminist theorizing of women's oppression, the analogy erased the dual discriminations of racism and sexism in Black women's experiences and failed to recognize the dynamics of multiple forms of discrimination. These systems of domination are not experienced as fixed or absolute conditions, but are "dependent on the sociohistorical context and social phenomenon under consideration" (King 1988: 49). Consequently, the attempt to account for multiple jeopardy by adding the two (racism + sexism) to equal the Black women's experiences merely reproduced the one-dimensional approach to understanding social issues and privileges from the position of white males. Turning to an analysis of political movements, King further elaborated the concept multiple jeopardy by showing the limitations of "monist" approaches, or a one-dimensional perspective on liberation, and highlighted the tensions and contradictions that create a distinct Black women's ideology. It is through this multiple jeopardy "that black women define and sustain a multiple consciousness." She concludes that "Although the complexities and ambiguities that merge a consciousness of race, class, and gender oppressions make the emergence and praxis of multivalent ideology problematical, they also make such a task more necessary if we are to work toward our liberation as blacks, as the economically exploited, and as women" (King 1988: 72). King's work is significant in addressing the multi-layered analysis required to conceptualize the complexity of multiplicative social relations dominated by the state, economy and culture.

A crucial step forward in the sociological theorizing of intersectionality is Patricia Hill Collins' work on Black feminist thought. She brought together the knowledge that Black women produced, making it evident that conceptualizing Black women's lived experiences required analyzing intersecting oppressions and power relations. Collins conceptualized race, class, gender, nation and sexuality as standing alone "as well as as part of each of these distinctive systems of oppression" (Collins 2000: 134). Similarly to King, Collins did not accept additive approaches to explaining domination and argued for "a fundamental paradigmatic shift" that treats "these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination" (1990: 222). Collins rejected previous arguments that sexism and racism are part of capitalism. Instead, Collins' concept of the matrix of domination intended to capture the fluidity of intersectionality by visualizing multiple layers of domination, which people experience at three levels: the personal, group or community, and in social institutions. The personal level accounts for our unique biography, which includes emotions and values influenced and shaped by individual experiences. The group and community level captures the cultural context of shared experiences and collective memory. Social institutions, such as the law, education, church or the media, account for the systematic level.

Collins argued that excluded groups confront different dimensions of the matrix in various social, political and economic contexts. Depending on the context, individuals may sometimes encounter privileges and other times face subordination; thus, a person is both "a member of multiple dominant groups, *and* a member of the multiple subordinate groups" (Collins 1990: 230). For example, an intersectional perspective on gender is more complex than simply focusing on differences between men and women. If only the wage gap between women and men employed full-time in 2015 is considered, then we find an overall 20% wage gap. In middle-skill occupations, women earn only 66% of what men do. Comparing "the average hourly wages of white men with the same education, experience, metro status, and region of residence" to Black men and women offers an intersectional perspective. Black men make 22.0% less and Black women make 34.2% less than white men do. However, Black women earn 11.7% less than their white female counterparts do (Wilson & Rodgers 2016). Understanding oppression in context is important for researchers to identify the unearned privileges that some do not have in certain settings and the limited opportunities found in others. The intersecting and fluid structure of domination requires social justice activism to engage on all three multiple layers of domination: individual, group and social institutions.

Collins identified two dimensions of the connected relationships among systems of oppression: intersectionality and the matrix of domination.

> Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression. (Collins 2000: 18)

The matrix of domination accounts for the historical development of oppression found in segregated schools, neighborhoods and hospitals. These, and other, social institutions establish and maintain practices that discriminate. Keep in mind that social institutions can change their practices and the form of regulation used to dominate. Using intersectional paradigms not only explains oppression but also provides the understanding to reorganize social relations of domination and develop resistance.

Discussion questions

1. How did the racial analogy used by white feminists for theorizing women's oppression erase Black women's experiences and fail to recognize the dynamics of multiple forms of discrimination?
2. Why did Black feminist scholars reject additive approaches?
3. How can we be members both of dominant groups and of subordinate groups?

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is concerned with understanding the way in which meaning is attached to an object or event. The focus is on uncovering how individuals and groups construct their perceived, taken-for-granted social reality; how we come to define "man," "woman," "Black," "immigrant," etc. As women of color scholars were theorizing multiple consciousnesses, the matrix of domination and intersecting systems of oppression, race scholars were conceptualizing the social construction of race, and gender scholars were conceptualizing the social construction

of gender. Examining the social construction of race and gender begins to identify the social processes and social structures that make race and gender appear inevitable, and predetermined.

In their classic work *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant (1986) theorize race as a socially constructed identity shaped by social, economic and political circumstances. This thesis was later presented in Ian Haney López' (1996) analysis of legal constructions of whiteness. Examining legal cases, Haney López demonstrated not only the legal restrictions based on race having to do with such activities as marriage, citizenship, voting, and serving on juries, but also the fluidity of racial constructions of whiteness. Similarly, with gender, as early as Simone de Beauvoir's (1973: 301) *The Second Sex*, gender scholars theorized how "one is not born a woman, but becomes one." Feminist scholars examined the socially constructed meanings of gender in daily interactions and socialization. Feminist sociologists further developed the idea of gender as a social construction by theorizing the way that social status is gendered (Lorber 1994), and how institutions are gendered (Acker 1990).

Building on the social constructionists' work in race and gender scholarship, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1999: 9) argued for the development of an integrative framework to bring together: "[*r*]*elational* concepts whose construction involves both *representational and social structural process* in which power is a constitutive element." Glenn referred to relational concepts such as the construction of oppositions, such as man/woman and Black/White. Here, the emphasis is on establishing stark differences in which variations in each category are non-existent. Racial formation, gendered social status and gendered institutions are concepts that highlight the institutionalization and cultural representation of race and gender in social structures. For example, chapter 1's discussion of parenting demonstrated that occupational segregation in the early 1930s limited workers of color to specific jobs. Today, domestic service is considered work for poor immigrant women while employers depict them as ideal because of their cultural attributes of mothering (Romero 1992, 2011a). Race and gender "differences" are established and maintained through social structural arrangements. In the case of undocumented immigrant Latinas, laws prohibiting them from getting some jobs without documents limit them to jobs in the underground economy, such as cleaning houses and caretaking. Another illustration of representational and social structural process is the racial–gender disparity reported in foreclosures after the 2007–8 housing bubble crash. The common cultural explanation was that people with poor credit records and little experience managing money had received mortgages. However, researchers found that, after adjusting for loan amounts and the income

of the borrowers, Blacks were 2.3 times more likely, and Latinos twice as likely, to get high-cost mortgages compared to Whites. In many cases, the only lenders operating in communities of color were mortgage companies offering nothing but subprime loans (Bajaj & Fessenden 2007). In comparison to men with similar financial characteristics, 30 percent more women were provided with risky mortgages. Single Black women were 256 times more likely to have a risky subprime loan than white men in similar financial situations (Baker 2014a). The concrete example of predatory lending shows how organized power is throughout race and gender structures.

The consequences of defining citizenship using the home/work dichotomy which placed women in the home and men in the labor force are revealed in the citizenship distinction made in social benefits: men receive unemployment benefits, old-age insurance and disability, whereas women receive "welfare." Glenn demonstrated the intersection of race and gender in the labor, political and legal systems. Generally, gender scholars conceptualized women's unpaid work maintaining the household, raising children and caring for the sick and elderly as reproductive labor. Race scholars focused almost exclusively on men, and conceptualized workers of color in dual-wage markets, dead-end jobs and marginalized positions as unskilled labor. Applying an integrative framework, Glenn presented the missing piece of women of color's reproductive labor in employers' homes and later as low-wage workers like nurse's aides, kitchen and hotel workers, and hospital janitors.

Race analysis of citizenship focused on the exclusion from citizenship rights stemming from the US history of slavery, conquest and colonization, which denied full citizenship rights to indigenous peoples, Mexicans, Chinese, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans and other racialized nationalities and ethnicities. Slavery, conquest and colonization were vital in the construction of the racial category of "white" in the US. These historical processes socially constructed whiteness as a place of privilege in society. No longer ignoring or simply accepting this as the norm, researchers have examined the social structures maintaining being white as a position of privilege and studied the everyday practices reinforcing white privilege. Similar to other social identities, whiteness intersects with class, sexuality, age and other differences. Examining the wage gap among workers, one immediately recognizes that poor Whites do not have the same privilege as upper-class Whites, and poor white women do not make as much as poor white men. Social movements gradually resulted in gaining more equity in citizenship rights for men of color and white women. However, when receiving social benefits, such as social and health services, women of color are considered dependents rather than as entitled to services. The framing of racialized–gendered citizenship is significant in examining the

way that women of color experience inferior rights. The inclusion of citizenship "as system of equality and as a major axis of inequality" is one of Glenn's major contributions to theorizing intersectionality (1999: 22).

In expanding the conceptualization of intersectionality, research used lived experiences as the framework for capturing the simultaneous interaction of structures of power. In doing so, other feminist concepts addressing questions about the gendered production of knowledge emerged. The next section introduces concepts emerging from inquiries into lived experiences, which recognize differences and are closely related to intersectionality. These concepts further expand our understanding of intersectionality and its significance in theorizing about social inequality.

Discussion questions

1 What examples of how the law socially constructs race and gender categories can you give?
2 Think through some examples of the institutionalization and cultural representations of race and gender in social structures.

Situating Knowledges

In addition to the ideas of multiple jeopardy, multiple consciousness, and matrix of domination, closely related themes in conceptualizing intersectionality include positionality, situated knowledges and standpoint theory. These feminist concepts emphasize the need to analyze women's lived experiences to understand the social relationships and social world that construct their perspectives and social positions, such as race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship. The inequalities experienced from these social positions not only result in differences in standpoints but are also reflected in knowledge produced, which is based on the facts, information and skills acquired from our everyday experiences and education. Understanding of the social world comes from these various standpoints, which means all knowledge is socially situated.

Positionality is critical in the relationship between inequalities, power, and the production of knowledge. Since the adoption of the Heisenberg principle, researchers have to recognize that they themselves are part of the research. As Jean-Paul Sartre (1963 [1960]: 32n.) wrote: "The only theory of knowledge which can be valid today is one which is founded on that of microphysics: the experimenter is a part of the experimental system." Therefore, it is essential to consider the researcher's status in relation to research participants. Social science has a long tradition of

studying the powerless and normalizing unequal relationships between the researcher and the participant. The primary concern is how "the other" is represented by researchers who traditionally do not share the same axis of oppression but rather have race, class and gender privilege. Identifying the researcher in written representations of culture and people is now the norm among ethnographers (e.g., Van Maanen 1998; Rosaldo 1989).

Clearly, this is a methodological issue concerning feminists and scholars of color who blazed the trail and began to confront a body of literature produced about their subjectivities based on western knowledge produced by white, European, middle-class and predominantly male researchers. Following the tradition of critical scholarship (e.g., Marx, the Frankfurt School), feminists and scholars of color challenged the positivist notion of "objectivity" and argued that this framing of scientific methodologies concealed power in research relationships. Rather than being "objective," feminists demonstrated how this research produced a masculinist science and consisted of a partial perspective on the social world (Haraway 1988). A prime example is studying the plight of single-women heads of households from the perspective of middle-class men. Feminists analyzed this "objective" approach by revealing the research process by which persons in privileged positions reproduced knowledge based on their perspective, which served to legitimate their privilege in the society. In the case of single-women heads of households, a closer examination of the lived experiences of mothers reveals sources of poverty to be low wages and lack of benefits in traditional female occupations, expensive and inadequate childcare services, and the position of women as recipients of punitive welfare services rather than as having entitlements as first-class citizens (Chaudry 2004). Critiques of western male knowledge exposed the power structure that reproduced and maintained domination. By calling attention to the relationship between epistemology and domination, situated knowledges reveal and identify researchers' standpoints. Patricia Hill Collins defined the knowledge obtained from resistance and controlled by marginalized groups as subjected knowledge.

"Standpoint" and "standpoint theory" are concrete examples of intersectionality in action. It is what intersectionality means in practice for us as sociologists – not only for our research subjects. The most prominent standpoint theorists in sociology are Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill Collins. Smith began developing the notion of standpoint theory early in her career as she experienced a discrepancy between her lived experiences as a mother, academic and sociologist in a male-dominated world, and the existence – as well as non-existence – of sociological theorizing of the social world she encountered (1987). Early in her work, Smith argued

that what we know about the social world depends on our location, and as sociologists we need to recognize our "point of entry" as we conduct our investigation, reflect upon it and problematize it. As a researcher, the

> only route to a faithful telling that does not privilege the perspectives arising in the sites of her sociological project and her participation in a sociological discourse is to commit herself to an inquiry that is ontologically faithful, faithful to the presence and activity of her subjects and faithful to the actualities of the world that arises for her, for them, for all of us, in the ongoing co-ordering of our actual practices. (Smith 1987: 143)

This view ran counter to mainstream sociology that aimed for the "scientific" and the "objective," but which she accurately critiqued as follows: "Its method, conceptual schemes and theories had been based on and built up within the male social universe" (Smith 1990: 23). Reflecting on the incongruities between the social worlds of home and university that she encountered daily, she experienced "two subjectivities" that maintained "two modes of knowing, experiencing, and acting – one located in the body and in the space that it occupies and moves into, the other passing beyond it" (Smith 1987: 82).

Collins also highlighted the researcher's position or standpoint in society in the production of knowledge, which she referred to as standpoint epistemology. She asserts that "specialized thought challenging notions of Black female inferiority is unlikely to be generated from within White-male-controlled academic settings because both the kind of questions and the answers to them would necessarily reflect a basic lack of familiarity with Black women's realities" (2000: 254). Collins presented a standpoint that incorporates all of these interlocking status positions, such as race, class, gender, nationality and sexuality. This "matrix of domination" includes not only sites of oppression but also ones that can serve as sites of resistance. As mentioned earlier, Collins' matrix includes the following three levels in which individuals simultaneously experience subordination and resistance: "the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions" (Collins 1990: 227). While Collins acknowledged that standpoints are not static, she asserted that "these ties between what one does and what one thinks illustrated by *individual* Black women can also characterize Black women's experiences and ideas as a *group*" (2000: 24). Individual Black women sharing class and sexual identity are likely to confront the same circumstances when interacting with the police, school administrators or doctors. She explained that this group standpoint occurs when

individuals encounter similar forms of discrimination (i.e., substandard housing, neglected neighborhoods and schools). Instead of acknowledging institutional discrimination, these experiences are justified based on the individual's own characteristics, e.g. their "intelligence, work habits, and sexuality" (2000: 25). By sharing these similar power relations or "angles of vision," individual experiences become group-based, leading to similar interpretations of reality (1990: 249).

To further explain the unique position of Black women's experiences, Collins introduced the concept of "outsider-within," which captures how they are simultaneously included and excluded in "social locations or border spaces marking the boundaries between groups of unequal power" (Collins 2000: 300). An ideal example of the "outsider-within" is the domestic worker who is certainly not a family member in the employer's household but is privy to their personal lives. I used a similar social location in my own research analyzing the narrative of a maid's daughter who lived in the employer's home with her mother. As the daughter of a Mexican immigrant, she spent summers with her poor working-class relatives in Mexico and many weekends with her godparents in the Latino-dominated low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles. However, most of her time growing up was alongside the sons and daughters of the elite living in gated communities. She was in a unique position to experience the contradictions of gaining the American dream through hard work or the myth of meritocracy. Watching the elite obtain unearned opportunities from inheritance, college entrance as legacies, and special privileges from police investigating car accidents, drunken-driving cases or drugs, she juxtaposed these experiences with those of poor immigrants and their children in Los Angeles. The maid's daughter was simultaneously included and excluded in her mother's employers' lives: her social position in their home, country club or private schools was determined by them. At any time, she might be relegated to the same space in the kitchen as her mother. She was always aware of the ways in which these unequal power dynamics shaped her relationships with the employers and their children, as well as the Mexican maids, nannies and landscapers that worked in the gated community (Romero 2011a).

Discussion questions

1 Examine the different standpoints that explain the range of interpretations citizens have of President Trump's leaked comments when he was a host for *Access Hollywood* or other comments he has made about women.

2 Research and explore how organizing on the grounds of intersectionality has used standpoint perspectives to build coalitions.

Main Points

The history of intersectionality is highly debated. Nevertheless, challenges to one-dimensional views of personhood and to scientific objectivity have roots in a number of gender and racial interdisciplinary projects. However, activism and the pursuit of social justice have fueled these projects (i.e., Beale 1970; Davis 1981; Crenshaw 1989; Collins 1990, 2000; Bhavnani & Talcott 2012). The primary aims of intersectionality, as an intellectual and activist project, are to challenge and change research and institutional practices that have objectified and marginalized groups (frequently referred to as "others"), denied subordinated groups a voice, and privileged certain perspectives over disadvantaged groups through social processes that legitimate the status quo. Intersectionality is a vital concept in understanding and dismantling the inequality perpetuated by social, political and economic power structures (Abraham 1995, 2015; Purkayastha 2010).

Selecting images that portray key aspects of intersectionality is likely to continue as critical scholars and activists apply the notion of intersectional inequalities to their analysis, theory or method. Embedded in social justice and politically engaged agendas, these intellectual and activist projects do share general principles:

- multiple identities are experienced simultaneously and are holistic (Brewer 1993);
- these identities are socially constructed and interact to shape multiple dimensions of personhood (Brewer 1993; Nash 2008);
- these multiple dimensions are always present, but one or more may become more salient in different social settings (Weber 2004; Anderson & Collins 2006);
- intersectionality is a lens for reframing the discourse surrounding people of color, women and other marginalized individuals based on their lived experiences (Weber 2004; Anderson & Collins 2006);
- intersectionality is a tool for creating new systems of knowledge for greater understanding of domination and resistance (Beale 1970; Crenshaw 1989; Brewer 1993; Collins 2000; Dill & Zambrana 2009; Weber 2010);
- identities are linked to existing systems of power and are manifested in relationships of dominance and subordination at both macro and micro levels (Collins 2000; Weber 2010);

- intersectionality examines the interconnectiveness of marginalized identities to produce an understanding of the overall structure of oppression and opportunities (King 1988; Baca Zinn & Dill 1996);
- intersectionality is not an additive approach to difference but rather recognizes that identities are experienced simultaneously (King 1988; Brewer 1993; Glenn 1999; Collins 2000);
- intersectionality seeks to understand how the embodiment of each identity helps to collectively create the individual (Yuval-Davis 2006); and
- identities are "contextually rooted in history and geography" (King 1988; Glenn 1999; Weber 2010: 129).

Why Intersectionality Matters

Diversity and multicultural discourse are focused on individual characteristics of race and racist attitudes rather than a structural understanding of a nation's history of slavery, imperialism, immigration, labor laws and civil rights legislation (Bannerji 2000). Emphasis on diversity obscures the reproduction and maintenance of inequality and domination, which allows people to believe they are a tolerant and accommodating people, whereas intersectional approaches address social structure: the historical, political, social and economic context of power relations that have significant influence on people's life chances. The phrases "I don't care if they are green, purple or yellow, it doesn't matter to me" or "I don't see color" deny that racial discrimination exists, also reflecting the failure to see the significance of social inequality and oppression that difference represents. The color-blind perspective assumes that treating everyone the same will eliminate racism. It also ignores the structural position of "white privilege." However, privilege does not disappear by us ignoring its existence, and ignorance will not result in social equality. Too often educators and reformers view diversity as an opportunity to interact with persons of different racial, ethnic, class, gender and sexual identities to experience that we are all the same, and thus argue that these interactions promote social harmony. In contrast, the aims of intersectional analysis are to understand how privilege and domination function in creating and maintaining differences and to begin to create systems of equality. Intersectionality is interested in exposing the unearned privileges certain groups receive by simply being socially assigned or identified as white, male, heterosexual, or a citizen, or being non-disabled. Another aim is to begin to examine the institutionalization of privilege and to analyze how it exists as invisible, common-sense, natural, and even as an earned achievement when it is not.

Most importantly, intersectionality is a challenge to one-dimensional approaches to race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship, and instead requires us to acknowledge systems of oppression. Standpoints or position-taking contextualize social identities and structure the space of lived experiences of race, gender and class privilege and oppression. Only by recognizing that mono-dimensional approaches to schools, family, media, the law and other social institutions preserve the practices that maintain social inequality can we begin to identify and resist the privilege embedded in everyday interaction. All of these categories of privilege in the US are socially constructed and can be explained through the history of oppression and resistance.

We now turn to examining everyday life using intersectionality. The next chapter illustrates intersectional experiences on college campuses, and the way they intersect with systems of social inequality.

3

Intersectionality in Everyday Campus Life

In the fall of 1981, I began my first tenure-track position in a mid-western university in the US. One of the first formal functions of the school year was the faculty assembly, followed by a reception to welcome the new faculty. The University President's first comment was a self-congratulatory announcement about last year's recruitment efforts, which resulted in a 300 percent increase in affirmative action hires of minority faculty. When he asked us to stand to be identified, I looked around and saw only two other faculty of color standing. I then realized that the 300 percent increase sounded much better than the reality. A second comment took place by the same President at the reception. After a brief introduction that included my saying that I had taught at the University of Texas at El Paso the previous year, he told me that he had not encountered many Mexican women before but he did recall seeing them as prostitutes in Tijuana while stationed in San Diego during military service. He proceeded to remark on the progress that "my people" had made and welcomed me to the university. Shocked, embarrassed and unable to respond, I attributed his racist, sexist and classist remark to his ignorance and complete lack of familiarity with a diverse faculty.

At the beginning of my career, I wanted to think that my first experiences at the faculty assembly and reception were isolated events. However, over the last decades this ceremony welcoming me to academia has become very symbolic of the types of incidents that reoccur when one does not possess the social identities, networks and routine experiences that are the expected norm for student, professor, administrator and staff.