

Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color
Author(s): Kimberle Crenshaw

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must earmark more resources for basic information dissemination in communities of color than in white ones.

Increased costs are but one consequence of serving people who cannot be reached by mainstream channels of information. As noted earlier, counselors in minority communities report spending hours locating resources and contacts to meet the housing and other immediate needs of women who have been assaulted. Yet this work is only considered "information and referral" by funding agencies and as such, is typically underfunded, notwithstanding the magnitude of need for these services in minority communities.³³ The problem is compounded by expectations that rape crisis centers will use a significant portion of resources allocated to them on counselors to accompany victims to court,³⁴ even though women of color are less likely to have their cases pursued in the criminal justice system.³⁵ The resources expected to be set aside for court services are misdirected in these communities.

The fact that minority women suffer from the effects of multiple subordination, coupled with institutional expectations based on inappropriate nonintersectional contexts, shapes and ultimately limits the opportunities for meaningful intervention on their behalf. Recognizing the failure to consider intersectional dynamics may go far toward explaining the high levels of failure, frustration, and burn-out experienced by counselors who attempt to meet the needs of minority women victims.

II. POLITICAL INTERSECTIONALITY

The concept of political intersectionality highlights the fact that women

These survivors tend to be ethnic minority women. Often, a non-assimilated ethnic minority survivor requires translating and interpreting, transportation, overnight shelter for herself and possibly children, and counseling to significant others in addition to the usual counseling and advocacy services. So, if a rape crisis center serves a predominantly ethnic minority population, the "average" number of hours of service provided to each survivor is much higher than for a center that serves a predominantly white population.

Id. at 275 (quoting position paper of the Southern California Rape Hotline Alliance).

33. *Id.* at 287-88.

34. The Director of Rosa Parks reported that she often runs into trouble with her funding sources over the Center's lower than average number of counselors accompanying victims to court. Interview with Joan Greer, *supra* note 30.

35.

Even though current statistics indicate that Black women are more likely to be victimized than white women, Black women are less likely to report their rapes, less likely to have their cases come to trial, less likely to have their trials result in convictions, and, most disturbing, less likely to seek counseling and other support services.

PATRICIA HILL COLLINS, *BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT: KNOWLEDGE, CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT* 178-79 (1990); accord HUBERT S. FEILD & LEIGH B. BIENEN, *JURORS AND RAPE: A STUDY IN PSYCHOLOGY AND LAW* 141 (1980) (data obtained from 1,056 citizens serving as jurors in simulated legal rape cases generally showed that "the assailant of the black woman was given a more lenient sentence than the white woman's assailant"). According to Fern Ferguson, an Illinois sex abuse worker, speaking at a Women of Color Institute conference in Knoxville, Tennessee, 10% of rapes involving white victims end in conviction, compared with 4.2% for rapes involving non-white victims (and 2.3% for the less-inclusive group of Black rape victims). UPI, July 30, 1985. Ferguson argues that myths about women of color being promiscuous and wanting to be raped encourage the criminal justice system and medical professionals as well to treat women of color differently than they treat white women after a rape has occurred. *Id.*

of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas. The need to split one's political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront. Indeed, their specific raced *and* gendered experiences, although intersectional, often define as well as confine the interests of the entire group. For example, racism as experienced by people of color who are of a particular gender—male—tends to determine the parameters of antiracist strategies, just as sexism as experienced by women who are of a particular race—white—tends to ground the women's movement. The problem is not simply that both discourses fail women of color by not acknowledging the “additional” issue of race or of patriarchy but that the discourses are often inadequate even to the discrete tasks of articulating the full dimensions of racism and sexism. Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms.

Among the most troubling political consequences of the failure of antiracist and feminist discourses to address the intersections of race and gender is the fact that, to the extent they can forward the interest of “people of color” and “women,” respectively, one analysis often implicitly denies the validity of the other. The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women. These mutual elisions present a particularly difficult political dilemma for women of color. Adopting either analysis constitutes a denial of a fundamental dimension of our subordination and precludes the development of a political discourse that more fully empowers women of color.

A. *The Politicization of Domestic Violence*

That the political interests of women of color are obscured and sometimes jeopardized by political strategies that ignore or suppress intersectional issues is illustrated by my experiences in gathering information for this article. I attempted to review Los Angeles Police Department statistics reflecting the rate of domestic violence interventions by precinct because such statistics can provide a rough picture of arrests by racial group, given the degree of racial segregation in Los Angeles.³⁶ L.A.P.D., however, would not release the statistics. A representative explained that one reason the statistics were not released was that domestic violence activists both within and

36. Most crime statistics are classified by sex or race but none are classified by sex *and* race. Because we know that most rape victims are women, the racial breakdown reveals, at best, rape rates for Black women. Yet, even given this head start, rates for other non-white women are difficult to collect. While there are some statistics for Latinas, statistics for Asian and Native American women are virtually non-existent. Cf. G. Chezia Carraway, *Violence Against Women of Color*, 43 STAN. L. REV. 1301 (1993).