89 re-thinking intersectionality

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abstract

Intersectionality has become the primary analytic tool that feminist and anti-racist scholars deploy for theorizing identity and oppression. This paper exposes and critically interrogates the assumptions underpinning intersectionality by focusing on four tensions within intersectionality scholarship: the lack of a defined intersectional methodology; the use of black women as quintessential intersectional subjects; the vague definition of intersectionality; and the empirical validity of intersectionality. Ultimately, my project does not seek to undermine intersectionality; instead, I encourage both feminist and anti-racist scholars to grapple with intersectionality's theoretical, political, and methodological murkiness to construct a more complex way of theorizing identity and oppression.

keywords

intersectionality; race and gender; feminist theory; anti-racist theory

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introduction

Intersectionality, the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality, has emerged as the primary theoretical tool designed to combat feminist hierarchy, hegemony, and exclusivity. Leslie McCall stresses intersectionality's importance, calling it '...the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far' (McCall, 2005: 1771). This 'important theoretical contribution' has become the 'gold standard' multi-disciplinary approach for analysing subjects' experiences of both identity and oppression.

The term intersectionality, coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, underscores the 'multidimensionality' of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989: 139). Intersectionality emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s from critical race studies, a scholarly movement born in the legal academy committed to problematizing law's purported colour-blindness, neutrality, and objectivity. From its inception, intersectionality has had a long-standing interest in one particular intersection: the intersection of race and gender. To that end, intersectionality rejects the 'single-axis framework' often embraced by both feminist and anti-racist scholars, instead analysing '... the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's ... experiences' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1244).

Intersectionality serves a few theoretical and political purposes for both feminist and anti-racist scholarship. First, it subverts race/gender binaries in the service of theorizing identity in a more complex fashion. The destabilization of race/gender binaries is particularly important to enable robust analyses of cultural sites (or spectacles) that implicate both race and gender, like the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings,[1] the O.J. Simpson trial,[2] or the Kobe Bryant rape case.[3] Because intersectionality is attuned to subjects who 'exist ... within the overlapping margins of race and gender discourse and in the empty spaces between', it is a tool particularly adept at capturing and theorizing the simultaneity of race and gender as social processes (Crenshaw, 1992: 403).

Second, intersectionality aspires to provide a vocabulary to respond to critiques of identity politics. While liberal critiques of identity politics criticize its failure to transcend difference, Crenshaw argues that the real problem of identity politics is that it elides intra-group difference, a problem that intersectionality purports to solve by exposing differences within the broad categories of 'women' and 'blacks', and serving as a force for '...mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1296). Ultimately, intersectionality seeks to demonstrate the racial variation(s) within gender and the gendered variation(s) within race

1 Clarence Thomas was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1991 to replace retired Justice Thurgood Marshall (the first black Supreme Court Justice). Later that year, Anita Hill testified at Thomas' confirmation hearing, alleging that Thomas sexually harassed her when the two worked together at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Thomas denied the allegations, and famously declared that he was being

through its attention to subjects whose identities contest race-or-gender categorizations.

Finally, intersectionality invites scholars to come to terms with the legacy of exclusions of multiply marginalized subjects from feminist and anti-racist work, and the impact of those absences on both theory and practice (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Williams, 1989). As a response to the lengthy history of essentialism and exclusion that has plagued both feminist and anti-racist scholarship, the intersectional project centres the experiences of subjects whose voices have been ignored. Undergirding this approach is a belief that '...those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen' (Matsuda, 1987: 324). For intersectional theorists, marginalized subjects have an epistemic advantage, a particular perspective that scholars should consider, if not adopt, when crafting a normative vision of a just society. Critical race scholars have evoked an array of terms to describe this methodology of drawing upon marginalized subjects' vantage points including 'looking to the bottom' (Matsuda, 1987), exploring 'iterative energy' (Wing, 1990: 182), and drawing on black women's 'multiple consciousness' (Harris, 1989: 584) or 'outsider scholars' status (Matsuda, 1992). These strategies enable intersectional theorists to draw on the ostensibly unique epistemological position of marginalized subjects to fashion a vision of equality.

While 'intersectionality' has become a scholarly buzzword, the notion that identity is formed by interlocking and mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality has pervaded black feminist scholarship for decades. The women-of-colour critique of conventional feminism's essentialism emphasized the disconnect between feminism's claims to speak for *all* women and feminism's perennial inattention to racial, ethnic, class, and sexual difference(s) (Davis, 1981; Moraga, 1983; Smith, 1983; Spelman, 1988; Higginbotham, 1992; Collins, 2000). Myriad feminist scholars have destabilized the notion of a universal 'woman' without explicitly mobilizing the term 'intersectionality', arguing that 'woman' itself is contested and fractured terrain, and that the experience of 'woman' is always constituted by subjects with vastly different interests. To that end, intersectionality has provided a name to a pre-existing theoretical and political commitment.

Despite intersectionality's theoretical dominance as a way of conceptualizing identity, a number of paradoxes embedded in its literature remain uninterrogated by feminist and anti-racist scholarship. These unresolved conflicts seep into feminist and anti-racist theory, practice, and politics, confusing their conceptions of identity and oppression, and obscuring the normative goals of their work. It is precisely because intersectionality is now 'a leading feminist paradigm' with expansive interdisciplinary reach that it is a critical moment to engage with its contradictions, absences, and murkiness (Zack, 2005: 1).

made the victim of a 'high-tech lynching'. Thomas was confirmed by the Senate in October 1991. The Thomas confirmation hearing has been of particular interest to black feminists, who have examined and debated the reasons for the pervasive cultural doubt surrounding Hill's allegations. For more on the Thomas confirmation hearings, see Morrison (1992).

2 O.J. Simpson is a former professional football player accused of murdering his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman in 1994. The Simpson trial became a cultural spectacle that implicated race from the very beginning. When Simpson's attorney, Johnnie Cochran, argued that police bias tainted evidence collection practices, the defence team was accused of 'playing the race card'. Moreover, the Simpson case is often read as culturally significant because of the vast differences between how blacks and whites interpreted Simpson's guilt. When Simpson was acquitted, media captured pictures of celebratory blacks and distraught whites, emphasizing the trial as a racially divisive site.

3 In 2003, Kobe Bryant, a professional basketball player, was accused of sexual assault. Bryant insisted that the sex between him

My article exposes these unexplored paradoxes in the service of inviting scholars to reconsider the goals and consequences of their push toward theoretical and political inclusivity. In particular, my article centres on four unresolved questions within intersectionality theory: the lack of a clearly defined intersectional methodology, the use of black women as prototypical intersectional subjects, the ambiguity inherent to the definition of intersectionality, and the coherence between intersectionality and lived experiences of multiple identities. In advancing these challenges, my hope is not to dismantle intersectionality. Instead, my paper suggests questions and challenges that might help expose the assumptions that underpin intersectionality, so that both feminist and anti-racist theorists can continue working to dismantle essentialism, to craft nuanced theories of identity and oppression, and to grapple with the messiness of subjectivity.

and the alleged victim was consensual. When Bryant's attorneys emphasized the alleged victim's behaviour and reputation, she elected not to participate in the prosecution any longer. Later the state dropped the case.

Most importantly, scrutinizing intersectionality will enable both feminist and anti-racist theorists to evaluate the possibilities and potential pitfalls of 'inclusive' theorizing. Both projects must attend to intersectionality's attention to difference while also strategically mobilizing the language of commonality (however provisional or tentative that commonality might be) in the service of constructing a coherent theoretical and political agenda. While intersectionality has demonstrated the ways in which difference can fracture seemingly unitary political movements, it has left activists struggling with balancing the efficiency of working '*as* women' or '*as* blacks' with the necessary attention to variation and diversity within 'women' and 'blacks'. Re-considering intersectionality enables activists to ask under what conditions organizing as 'women' or 'blacks' or 'black women' makes sense, under what conditions temporary coalition-building makes sense, and how to organize across and beyond difference.

on methodology and the theoretical primacy of black women

theories of intersectional methodology

McCall notes that '...despite the emergence of intersectionality as a major paradigm of research in women's studies and elsewhere, there has been little discussion of *how* to study intersectionality, that is, of its methodology' (McCall, 2005: 1771, emphasis in original). Crenshaw's conception of intersectionality, the idea that a '...focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination' has given politically progressive projects a way of describing both the simultaneity of multiple oppressions and the complexity of identity (Crenshaw, 1989: 140). These projects have not yet

developed a rigorous *method* of examining multiple subject positions. Robert Chang and Jerome McCristal Culp, Jr. highlight the methodological murkiness of intersectionality querying 'How does one pay attention to the points of intersection? How many intersections are there? Is the idea of an intersection the right analogy?' (Chang and Culp, 2002: 485). Chang and Culp's query suggests the necessity of assessing whether intersectionality describes lived experiences of identity, and developing methodological tools that are sufficiently flexible to attend to the myriad intersections that constitute identity.

Intersectionality's relative inattention to methodology has been explained by the difficulty of crafting a method adequately attentive to '...the complexity that arises when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis' (McCall, 2005: 1772). Yet despite the methodological challenges of complex analyses, some scholars have worked to develop various tools that can be used to craft an intersectional methodology. McCall analyses three distinct intersectional methodologies, each with theoretical and practical shortcomings and benefits.

The first approach, 'anticategorical complexity', '...is based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories' (McCall, 2005: 1773). This vision, born in a theoretical moment '...in which hegemonic feminist theorists, poststructuralists, and antiracist theorists almost simultaneously launched assaults on the validity of modern analytical categories...', starts from the theoretical assumption that categories, including race and gender, are too simplistic to capture the complexity of lived experience (McCall, 2005: 1776). This approach emphasizes the fact that scholarly deployment of categories reinstalls the regimes that progressive projects work to destabilize, and has successfully produced '...great skepticism about the possibility of using categories in anything but a simplistic way' (McCall, 2005: 1773). That is, scholars working out of this tradition call attention to the social processes of categorization, and the workings of exclusion and hierarchy that mark boundary-drawing and boundary maintenance.

The second approach, 'intracategorical complexity', takes marginalized intersectional identities as an analytic starting point '...in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups' (McCall, 2005: 1774). Hallmarks of this regime include the deployment of the narratives of black women as a way of exposing the under-theorized experiences of doubly marginalized subjects. In particular, intracategorical analyses attend to the dangers of categorization, yet do not necessarily reject the categories themselves. Instead, scholars working in this tradition problematize the exclusionary repercussions of the act of categorization and use multiply marginalized subjects' experiences as ways of demonstrating the inadequacy of categories.

The third approach, 'intercategorical complexity' compels scholars to '...provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions' (McCall, 2005: 1773). McCall favours this methodological approach, which '...begins with the observation that there are relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups, as imperfect and ever changing as they are, and takes those relationships as the center of the analysis' (McCall, 2005: 1784–1785). The main work that this approach performs is to expose the relationships between inequality and the categories themselves, and to use categories strategically in the service of displaying the linkages between categories and inequality.

practices of intersectional methodology

McCall's analytic frameworks highlight a tremendous gap between conceptions of intersectional methodology and practices of intersectional investigations. In particular, while intersectionality has worked to disrupt cumulative approaches to identity (i.e. race + gender + sexuality + class=complex identity), and to problematize social processes of categorization through strategic deployments of marginalized subjects' experiences, intersectional projects often replicate precisely the approaches that they critique.

The re-creation of cumulative conceptions of identity is most apparent in Crenshaw's seminal critique of anti-discrimination law. Crenshaw attacks the assumptions underpinning anti-discrimination law, arguing that black women are compelled to assert *either* race-based or gender-based discrimination claims instead of causes of action, which reflect their positions as intersectional subjects. Because law recognizes only race- or gender-based injuries, black women's injuries as *black women* cannot be wholly addressed by the existing doctrinal structure. That is, the existing legal apparatus renders the court unable to see '...that Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men' (Crenshaw, 1989: 149).

Crenshaw insists that simply adding black women to the existing regime will not remedy their marginalization:

> ... because 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: 140)

For Crenshaw, it is the fixed mutually exclusive categorizations of race and gender that marginalize black women. Only a regime that attends to the 'particular manner in which Black women are subordinated' can adequately

redress black women's injuries. Ultimately, Crenshaw seeks to challenge law *and* radical critiques of law (i.e. feminist legal theory, critical race theory) to attend to the 'intersectional experiences of those whom the movements claim as their respective constituents' (Crenshaw, 1989: 166). Rather than importing models from the regimes they seek to disrupt, Crenshaw argues that these projects must begin their analytic endeavours by attending to the most disadvantaged.

While Crenshaw endeavours to use black women's incapacity to comply with race/gender categories to demonstrate the inadequacy of the categories themselves, her argument shores up the conception that black women's identities are constituted exclusively by race *and* gender. That is, Crenshaw focuses on black women because they are 'multiply burdened', yet her analysis precludes an examination of forms of 'multiple burdens' (or the intersections of privileges and burdens) beyond race and gender. With little attention to the role that sexuality, nationality, or class, for example, might play in mediating or entrenching black women's experiences of 'burdens', black women function exclusively as sites that demonstrate the importance of race-*and*-gender, rendering black women's experiences the aggregate of race and gender. Furthermore, Crenshaw offers little attention to the ways in which race and gender function as social processes in distinctive ways for particular black women in varying historical moments. That is, black women's race and gender are treated as trans-historical constants that mark *all* black women in similar ways.

While some scholars have reified cumulative notions of identity, others have used poetry (Wing, 1990), narrative (Williams, 1989), and standpoint epistemology (Matsuda, 1987) as a method for disrupting race-or-gender logic. Through non-objective and often non-linear theoretical formations, intersectional scholars have been able to articulate the often ignored injuries of the 'spirit-murder' (Williams, 1989) of 'racism/sexism' (Wing, 1990).

Adrien Wing's work exemplifies the reliance on literary devices to describe black women's experiences. She draws on poet E.E. Cummings' lines 'we're anything brighter than even the sun/(we're everything greater/than books/might mean)/ we're everyanything more than believe/(with a spin/leap/alive we're alive/ we're wonderful one times one' to argue that black women's experiences are 'multiplicative' or 'one times one'. She argues, 'We, as black women, can no longer afford to think of ourselves or let the law think of us as merely the sum of separate parts ... . The actuality of our layered experience is *multiplicative*. Multiply each of my parts together, one × one × one × one, and you have *one* indivisible being' (Wing, 1990: 194). Wing's use of poetry is not simply to explain the 'multiplicative' nature of black women's experiences; poetry also exemplifies black women's particular relationship with the creative. She argues:

> ...I want to assert affirmatively to the legal academy and to ourselves as well, that we black women are more than 'multiply-burdened' entities subject to a multiplicity of

> oppression, discrimination, pain and depression. Our essence is also characterized by a multiplicity of *strength*, *love*, *joy*, (with a spin leap alive we're alive) and *transcendence* that flourishes despite adversity.
> (Wing, 1990: 196, italics in original)

While the use of poetry as a mechanism for disrupting logocentrism is a convention of feminist theory, and the use of narrative is a conventional critical race tool for dislodging law's claims of objectivity, the deployment of poetry as the primary vehicle for evoking the experiences of marginalized subjects suggests a shortcoming in the methodological orientation of intersectional theory. In particular, it suggests that the project has yet to produce a mechanism for systematically articulating, aggregating, or examining the 'multiple levels of consciousness' that form the basis of their study of subjectivity (Wing, 1990: 182).

Furthermore, it suggests that there is something poetic about black women's experiences of both identity and oppression, and that black women are inherently resilient subjects who retain an innate creativity even in the midst of the opposition that a patriarchal white-dominated culture produces. These assertions, while useful for problematizing the notion that black women's experiences can be reduced solely to marginalization, ultimately romanticize and idealize positions of social subordination and reinstall conceptions that black women's bodies are sites of 'strength' and 'transcendence' rather than complex spaces of multiple meanings.[4]

the theoretical importance of black women

Intersectionality's reliance on black women as the basis for its claims to complex subjectivity renders black women prototypical intersectional subjects whose experiences of marginality are imagined to provide a *theoretical value-added*. That is, black women enable scholars to 'ask the other question', to expose the spectres of racism and sexism, which leave their traces even in progressive analyses (Matsuda, 1987). Because 'black women are theoretically erased', centring black women's experiences makes feminism and anti-racist work's systematic inattention to black women apparent and demonstrates the necessity of deepening feminist and anti-racist conversations (Crenshaw, 1989: 139). To that end, black women's experiences are used as a theoretical wedge, designed to demonstrate the shortcomings of conventional feminist and anti-racist work.

The problems with a theoretical reliance on black women's experiences are two-fold. First, while seeking to underscore problems of exclusion within feminist and anti-racist theory, black women are treated as a unitary and monolithic entity. That is, differences between black women, including class and sexuality,

4 Wing is not alone in this tendency to romanticize black women's lived experience as a site of 'strength' and 'transcendence'. Alice Walker's earlier definition of 'womanism' as: 'A black feminist or feminist of color ... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to the survival and wholeness of entire

people, male *and* female. ... Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*' (Walker, 1983: xi–xii) has a strong resonance with Wing's interest in poetry as a tool for theorizing black women's experiences. Walker is particularly interested in drawing on black women's experiences as a locus of theory-building; it is precisely because 'womanism' is rooted in 'music', 'dance', 'moon', and 'Spirit', and in the experiences of the 'Folk' that it connects the personal, the political, and the practical, privileging experience as a significant form of knowledge.

are obscured in the service of presenting 'black women' as a category that opposes both 'whites' and 'black men'. For example, Crenshaw's seminal analysis of the ways in which black women's experiences of sexual assault and domestic violence are mediated by both race and gender neglects the ways in which these experiences are also complicated by class, nationality, language, ethnicity, and sexuality. While she concedes that '...factors I address only in part or not at all, such as class or sexuality, are often critical in shaping the experiences of women of color', the wholesale abandonment of addressing how factors beyond race and gender shape black women's experiences of violence demonstrates the shortcomings of intersectionality to capture the sheer diversity of actual experiences of women of colour (Crenshaw, 1991: 1244–1245).

Second, in defining intersectionality as an analytic tool that '...denote[s] the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's ... experiences', intersectionality recycles black feminism without demonstrating what new tools it brings to black feminism to help it fashion a more complex theory of identity (Crenshaw, 1991: 1244). Black feminism has, since its inception, sought to use black women's experiences to demonstrate the shortcomings of race/gender binary schemes (this is epitomized by the edited anthology entitled *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, whose title alone suggests the primacy black feminists place on jamming the race/gender binary). In particular, black feminism imagines black women's subjectivities as an inherent disloyalty to race-or-gender thinking and marshals black women's stories, experiences, and narratives as a way of continuously and strategically jamming the workings of binary thinking. While intersectionality positions itself as a theoretical advance from black feminism, its work continues in the tradition of black feminism with the addition of a new name for conceptualizing the workings of identity. If, in fact, intersectionality purports to theorize identity in a way that departs from or adds to black feminism, a more explicit engagement with the nature (and distinctiveness) of its theoretical contribution would be useful.

who is intersectional?

In its emphasis on black women's experiences of subjectivity and oppression, intersectional theory has obscured the question of whether *all* identities are intersectional or whether only multiply marginalized subjects have an intersectional identity. While some feminist scholars insist that intersectionality refers to all subject positions (which are all fundamentally constituted by the interplay of race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.), the overwhelming majority of intersectional scholarship has centred on the particular positions of multiply

marginalized subjects (Ferguson, 2000).[5] This unresolved theoretical dispute makes it unclear whether intersectionality is a theory of marginalized subjectivity or a generalized theory of identity.

Generally, intersectional literature has excluded an examination of identities that are imagined as either wholly or even partially privileged, although those identities, like all identities, are always constituted by the intersections of multiple vectors of power. Peter Kwan notes:

> ... straight white maleness arguably is a multiple identity, but intersectionality theorists would resist the claim by straight white males that theirs is an intersectional subjectivity. Central to intersectionality theory is the recovery of the claims and identities of those who, like African American women, are pushed to the margins of racial discourse because of assumptions of patriarchal normativity, and simultaneously pushed to the margins of the feminist discourse because of assumptions of racial normativity.
> (Kwan, 1996: 1275)

Kwan's intervention suggests that intersectionality has generally been opposed to imagining non-multiply marginalized subjects as central to its theoretical and political project, particularly because of its investment in 'recovering' marginalized subjects' voices and experiences.

Yet other scholars emphasize that intersectionality's most significant contribution is its general theory of identity. Zack argues that 'the term 'intersectionality' refers to multiple oppressions experienced by nonwhite and poor women in particular, but more generally to all women because differences in sexuality, age, and physical ableness are also sites of oppression' (Zack, 2005: 7). For Zack, *all* women are intersectional subjects, precisely because of the possibility that their womanhood (already a socially disadvantaged position) will intersect with other social positions to multiply disadvantage them. Zack's work suggests that the fact that some women experience privilege along particular axes (whether class, sexuality, light-skinnedness, able-bodiedness, etc.) does not undermine all women's claims to intersectional identities.

If intersectionality is solely an anti-exclusion tool designed to describe 'the multiplier effect', or the 'lifelong spirit injury of black women', then it is incumbent upon both feminist theory and anti-racist work to develop a conceptualization of identity that captures the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and class, among other categories, are produced through each other, securing both privilege and oppression simultaneously (Wing, 1990: 191). That is, progressive scholarship requires a nuanced conception of identity that recognizes the ways in which positions of dominance and subordination work in complex and intersecting ways to constitute subjects' experiences of personhood. If, however, intersectionality purports to provide a general tool that enables scholars to uncover the workings of identity, intersectionality scholarship must begin to broaden its reach to theorize an array of subject experience(s).

5 Kimberlé Crenshaw explains intersectionality noting that 'the concept of intersectionality [is used] to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1244). Yet later she notes 'my focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245). Thus, the text rests on an internal paradox: intersectionality as a theory about *black women's experiences* and intersectionality as a theory of *'multiple grounds of identity'*.

processes of identity formation

If intersectionality theory purports to provide a general theory of identity, it must grapple with whether intersectionality actually captures the ways in which subjects experience subjectivity or strategically deploy identity. In particular, intersectionality has yet to contend with whether its theory explains or describes the processes and mechanisms by which subjects mobilize (or choose not to mobilize) particular aspects of their identities in particular circumstances. The theory has not attended to questions like: do black women use their multiple identities to interpret the social world or do they deploy one at a time? What determines which identity is foregrounded in a particular moment, or are both always simultaneously engaged? What is the relationship between the 'matrix of domination' (Collins, 2000: 299), the various forms of power that are inflicted on all bodies, and the processes and articulations of identity? Answering questions about the fit between intersectionality and lived experience of identity requires intersectionality to craft a theory of agency and to grapple with the amount of leeway variously situated subjects have to deploy particular components of their identities in certain contexts.

the 'so what' question(s): theoretical advances for a new intersectionality

While there are a number of unresolved paradoxes in intersectional theory, attending to these contradictions will provide intersectional theory with an opportunity to broaden its explanatory power and to develop its answer to what Chang and Culp call the 'so what' question. Chang and Culp note 'it's one thing to say that race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation operate symbiotically, cosynthetically, multidimensionally, or interconnectedly. ... The next step is to be able to prescribe or imagine points of intervention' (2002: 490). Simply identifying particular intersections as undertheorized or unacknowledged is only the first step in a larger theoretical and political project, which intersectionality has yet to articulate with specificity. While the work emerging from critical race feminism has sought to challenge law to alter its doctrinal structure to attend to black women's particular subject positions, the work emerging from feminist theory has suggested that feminism itself must better examine its history of exclusions. Yet neither of these projects has assessed or theorized the repercussions of conceptualizing of identity as 'symbiotically, cosynthetically, multidimensionally, or interconnectedly' formed.

One 'so what' question that remains unexplored by intersectional theorists is the way in which privilege and oppression can be co-constituted on the subjective level. That is, while intersectionality purports to describe multiple marginalizations (i.e. the spectre of the multiply-marginalized black woman that haunts

intersectionality) and multiple privileges (i.e. the spectre of the (heterosexual) white man that haunts intersectionality), it neglects to describe the ways in which privilege and oppression intersect, informing each subject's experiences.

In painting black women, for example, as wholly oppressed and marginalized, intersectional theory can not attend to variations within black women's experiences that afford some black women greater privilege, autonomy, and freedom. In troubling the monolithism of 'black womanhood', intersectionality could be strategically disloyal to dominant conceptions of black women as 'the mules of the world', exploding the tendency of radical projects to elide critical differences *within* ostensibly marginalized subject positions (Hurston quoted in Churchill, 1999: 199). Mari Matsuda suggests that intersectionality works by enabling scholars to 'ask the other question'. She argues:

> The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call 'ask the other question.' When I see something that looks racist, I ask, 'where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?' When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?'.
> (Matsuda, 1990: 1189)

Matsuda's intervention demonstrates the interconnections of forms of subordination, yet gestures toward the tendency of intersectional theorists to ignore the intimate connections between privilege and oppression. Her framework underscores the ways in which patriarchy, racism, and heterosexism buttress each other, but ignores the ways in which subjects might be both victimized by patriarchy and privileged by race (it also ignores the ways in which subjects might take pleasure in some of the trappings of patriarchal power) in particular social, cultural, historical, and political moments. In conceiving of privilege and oppression as complex, multi-valent, and simultaneous, intersectionality could offer a more robust conception of both identity and oppression.

Conceptualizing 'black womanhood' as its own contested, messy terrain requires that intersectionality theory abandon its commitment to sameness, what Rinaldo Walcott has termed (in an admittedly different context, a critique of black studies' tendency to elide differences among blacks) '...a regime that trades on the myths of homogeneity' (Walcott, 2005: 93). In following Walcott's lead, intersectionality can consider the differences between black women, producing a potentially uncomfortable disunity that allows for a richer and more robust conception of identity.

Another critical 'so what' question for intersectionality theory is to consider race and gender as social *processes* that inform each other, but which operate in distinct and particular ways. Currently, much of intersectionality theory conforms to what Loic Wacquant terms the 'logic of the trial', a scholarly tradition of locating practices that injure multiply marginalized subjects (Wacquant, 1997:

222). While the 'logic of the trial' enables scholars to locate the racist and sexist practices that undergird seemingly neutral and objective sites (like law), it also tends to ignore the mechanisms through which domination operates, proliferates, and entrenches itself (Wacquant, 1997). Wacquant advocates that social scientists '... skirt issues of origins and abandon the search for a single overarching concept to develop an analytic of racial domination, ... a parsimonious set of categories designed to anatomize the diverse manners in which ethnoracial government is exercised' (Wacquant, 1997: 230). Wacquant's conception of an 'analytic of racial domination' circumvents a search for 'origins' and, instead, examines how various processes of racial subordination coincide in particular social moments.

Intersectionality scholars can draw on Wacquant's intervention in a number of important ways: examining how race and gender utilize differing technologies of categorization and control, disciplining bodies in distinctive ways, and coalescing (or colliding) in particular formations in certain historical, social, cultural, representational, legal, and technological moments. In analysing race and gender *both* as co-constitutive processes and as *distinctive* and historically specific technologies of categorization, intersectionality scholars will be able to offer insights that far exceed imagining race and gender as inextricably bound up.

Crenshaw's articulation of intersectionality has galvanized an array of disciplines to consider questions of essentialism, exclusion, and complex identity in new ways. Crenshaw argues:

> With identity thus reconceptualized, it may be easier to ... summon the courage to challenge groups that are after all, in one sense, 'home' to us, in the name of the parts of us that are not made at home. ... The most one could expect is that we will dare to speak against internal exclusions and marginalizations, that we might call attention to how the identity of 'the group' has been centered on the intersectional identities of a few. ... Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics.
> (Crenshaw 1991: 1299)

Crenshaw's intervention suggests the importance of 'speak[ing] against internal exclusions and marginalizations' to challenge institutions and radical political projects to hear the voices that have been silenced. Now that intersectionality itself has become an institutionalized intellectual project, and the dominant tool for excavating the voices of the marginalized, it is incumbent upon intersectional scholars to critically interrogate the goals of the intersectional project as they determine how to chart the future of this theoretical and political movement. The important insights that identity is complex, that subjectivity is messy, and that personhood is inextricably bound up with vectors of power are

only an analytic starting point; it is time for intersectionality to begin to sort out the paradoxes upon which its theory rests in the service of strengthening its explanatory power.

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