

Angelique Harris and Susannah Bartlow

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## 15.1 Introduction and Definitions

From its origins in the Black feminist legal scholarship of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw to its contemporary centrality in online activist debates, intersectionality has always signaled both academic insights and activist implications. As a basic definition, *intersectionality* refers to the ways in which race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other locations of social group membership impact lived experiences and social relations. The term emphasizes the mobility of social group identities and locations, not simply of their appearances in individual bodies. As Africana and Women's Studies public intellectual Brittany Cooper (2014) has written, "we have to remember that intersectionality was never put forth as an account of identity but rather an account of power."

Black feminist scholar Nikol Alexander-Floyd (2012) situates the term in its intellectual heritage in her work on the co-optation of Black feminist research and experiences in intersectional scholarship. Borrowing from Linora Salter's revision

of the term "ideograph," Alexander-Floyd (2012) characterizes intersectionality as,

a catch-all word that stands in for the broad body of scholarship that has sought to examine and redress the oppressive forces that have constrained the lives of [B]lack women in particular and women of color more generally. As an idea or an analytically distinct concept, intersectionality is a moniker, identified with Crenshaw (1989), meant to describe the "intersecting" or co-determinative forces of racism, sexism, and classism in the lives of black women. (p. 4)

The Combahee River Collective, a group of Black women activists who organized starting in 1974 and developed a statement widely circulated as one of the founding documents of intersectional theory (1995), and Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term "intersectionality" in her 1989 essay on race and sex in the law and activism, are two of the critical figures in late twentieth century foundations of the term. For the purposes of this handbook, we focus on the use of intersectionality in social science sexuality research, and we address the Combahee River Collective and Crenshaw's originating intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, with a recognition that the fundamental definition of intersectionality should compel us to examine other intersections (with the presumption that one's ability status, for example, would appreciably impact the experience of class, race, gender and sexuality). With particular respect to sexuality studies, we address how work around these four social group identity categories has shaped or neglected the knowledge base about intersection-

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A. Harris (✉)

Social and Cultural Sciences, Marquette University  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53233, USA  
e-mail: angelique.harris@marquette.edu

S. Bartlow

Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, Marquette  
University Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53233, USA  
e-mail: susannah.bartlow@marquette.edu

ality and sexuality. We also consider work deriving from many disciplines and methodological approaches, following upon Alexander-Floyd's (2012) observation that

intersectionality can be defined as the commitment to centering research and analysis on the lived experiences of women of color for the purpose of making visible and addressing their marginalization as well as an ethos of challenging business as usual in mainstream disciplines' habits of knowledge production. (p. 9)

We conclude by recommending future directions that continue with Crenshaw and other feminist scholars' ongoing work to retain the intellectual heritage of the concept while moving forward with its applications.

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## 15.2 History of Thought

Although intersectionality, as a concept, was first "named" by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 (Crenshaw 1989), Black feminist scholars and activists have long emphasized the intersections of their simultaneous and multiple identities, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, and the ways in which they influence their lived experiences. These Black feminist theories are rooted in the history of Black women in the United States and are deeply embedded in the cultures and everyday lives of Black women (Collins 2000). Understanding intersectionality or the ways in which multiple forms of oppression, in this case, based on race, gender, class, and sexuality all intersect to oppress (Collins 2000), is key in understanding the perspective from which Black women view the world.

During a speech at an 1851 women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, abolitionist and activist Sojourner Truth is said to have asked, "Ain't I a woman?" as she discussed the challenges unique to African American women at the time, explaining to her audience that her racial and gender oppressions were intertwined. Sojourner Truth also famously bared her breast, in another oratorical demonstration of her humanity, to be met with responses that reinforced how sexuality often meets at the intersection of race

and gender (Washington 1993). Since then, Black feminist scholars and activists have complicated notions of single identity issues that traditional feminists often employed, emphasizing that there was no hierarchy of identity and oppression (Lorde 1984; Hooks 1981).

Various authors, theorists, and activists have contributed to this understanding of the multiple forms of oppression that Black women have experienced. In 1839, Angelina and Sarah Grimké helped to publish a book called *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (Perry 2001). These sisters were raised in a Southern slave holding family before moving North to participate in the abolitionist movement. They criticized women's anti-slavery groups because they failed to acknowledge the experiences of Black women (Davis 1981) and argued that the two oppressions were similar. The Grimké sisters argued that until Blacks received their freedom, women would never get theirs. Unlike many White women abolitionists, the Grimké Sisters were particularly concerned with the sexual exploitation that Black women experienced at the hands of their masters. Social convention prevented them from speaking frankly and honestly about this sexual exploitation (Hooks 1981). Ida B. Wells, however, directly addressed Black sexuality and oppression in her work.

Born to ex-slaves, Ida B. Wells began her fight for equal rights when she was 22 and sued a railway company for discrimination, however it was the lynching of her three friends by a Memphis mob, which prompted her to begin her lifelong crusade against lynching. Wells suggested that White men once controlled Black bodies through slavery, but they lost that control once the enslaved were freed, thus, they attempted to control the Black body through lynching's, castrations, and rapes (Wells-Barnett 2002). She argued that control of the Black body is yet another oppression Blacks experience (Wells-Barnett 2002).

Though Black (and some White) women recognized the intersecting oppressions that Black women experienced due to race, class, and gender, it was Audre Lorde who was among the first to include sexuality as an important identity and the location of one of the many oppressions that

Black women experience. Emphasizing the importance of identity in her work, Lorde (1984) explains that she writes from the perspective of a “Black woman, lesbian, feminist, mother of two children, daughter of Grenadian immigrants, educator, cancer survivor, [and] activist” (p. 8). Lorde, like Cooper, urged Black women to label and define themselves for themselves, or others will do it for them and use it against them. Lorde also urges Black communities to recognize the oppression they inflict on sexual minorities and for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities to recognize and evaluate their treatment of people of color. Lorde was also active in the Black feminist lesbian organization Combahee River Collective (Combabee River Collective 1983).

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) states that intersectionality is the “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women” (p. 299). This intersectionality helps to create a system of power, or what she calls, *the matrix of domination*. The matrix of domination is

the overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society. Any specific matrix of domination has 1. a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression, e.g. race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity and age; and 2. a particular organization of its domains of power, e.g. structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. (Collins 2000, p. 299)

## 15.3 Methodologies

Intersectionality is not just used as a framework to examine the lives and experiences of Black women and other women of color; it is also used to examine the role that intersecting identities and oppressions have on the lives and experiences of other women and men of color (Choo and Ferree 2010). Scholars, Cho et al. (2013) argue that intersectionality has expanded to a field of study to include, “investigation[s] of intersectional dynamics... debates about the scope and content of

intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological paradigm, and ... political interventions employing an intersectional lens” (p. 785).

As a methodological framework, intersectionality allows researchers to examine the multiple ways intersecting identities and oppressions may influence a respondent’s identity, and thus, her or his response to various questions or prompts in the data collection process (Choo and Ferree 2010; Simien 2007). An intersectional framework helps the researcher to know what categories to include in data collection and how to analyze the findings (Christensen and Jensen 2012). Christensen and Jensen (2012) argue,

Basically, intersectionality raises the fundamental methodological question of how to analyze such mutually constitutive processes. Some authors have discussed these complexities in terms of the status of the social categories... emphasizing that different social categories produce different types of knowledge. (p. 111)

These scholars focus on what categories of identity should exist and the differences between categories and within categories (Christensen and Jensen 2012). The two general categories of social science research are qualitative and quantitative research.

### 15.3.1 Intersectionality in Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an in-depth analysis of a population or issue and is more likely to focus on small sample sizes in an effort to provide a more detailed account of a group or individual’s experiences (Harris and Tyner-Mullings 2013). Researcher Gemma Hunting (2014) explains, “[b]oth intersectionality and qualitative methodology share assumptions about the context-bound nature of research, the importance of foregrounding voices of differently situated individuals, and the need to address power imbalances between researchers and those with whom research is conducted” (p. 1). Qualitative methodologies include interviews, focus groups, and ethnographies. As small groups and populations are studied within qualitative research, intersectional frameworks

are often used to help researchers understand notions of identity in data analysis for qualitative studies. “Intersectionality cautions against thinking in categories” (Hunting 2014, p. 3), and as such, qualitative methodologies are well suited for an intersectional framework as it can be applied to help increase understandings of issues and experiences such as in criminal justice and health.

For instance, Adam Trahan (2011) argues that in examining the criminal justice system, intersectional frameworks help researchers better take into account the ways in race, gender, and class influence experiences with the criminal justice system. Carmen H. Logie et al. (2011) conducted a series of focus groups to study coping mechanisms and experiences of discrimination among HIV positive women. Their (2011) sample consisted of 69% women of color, 23% lesbian/bisexual, and 22% were transgender. They explain that,

[e]ach focus group explored the following topics: research priorities (e.g., important issues in the lives of HIV-positive women); challenges and strengths in daily life; medical issues and needs; community and academic partnerships (e.g., relationships between participants and university researchers); and issues that were silenced in one’s community. (Logie et al. 2011, p. 4)

Logie et al. (2011) were able to take into account the different experiences of the study participants in designing focus groups and questions. However, some of the challenges associated with qualitative research, in general, often is obtaining a sample size large enough to make generalizations concerning study findings. For example, Logie et al. 2011, found that

despite numerous attempts and rescheduling, only one woman participated in the Latina focus group and five participated in the Asian/South Asian group. This situation could be reflective of the lack of services geared for Latina, Asian, and South Asian HIV-positive women—the culturally specific [AIDS Service Organizations] predominately serve men. (p. 4)

Nonetheless, qualitative research is widely regarded as the best methodology in which to apply intersectional frameworks in study design, data collection, and analysis.

### 15.3.2 Intersectionality in Quantitative Research

Quantitative, or survey-based, research examines the, “relationship between variables or understand how certain characteristics have an effect on others” (Harris and Tyner-Mullings 2013, p. 141). In examining an issue quantitatively, researchers typically begin by developing one or more hypothesis or research questions concerning the relationship between variables or measurable characteristics. Harris and Tyner-Mullings explain that “[s]ince quantitative research consists of placing individuals and their responses into certain predetermined categories and relies on statistical analysis, the samples are often much larger than those which would be collected through qualitative methods” (2013, p. 141). As such, researchers often create a series of questions in their surveys with a list of categories depending on the purpose of the survey and the anticipated sample population. Capturing the anticipated responses of people and taking into account intersectionality and the impact of social and cultural factors on perceptions and experiences is often a challenge for quantitative researchers. Categories are often perceived as being mutually exclusive, such as “female/male” or “Black/White,” research rarely takes into account the intersections of these identities and the unique experiences people would have as a result of these experiences. In quantitative research and data collection, intersectionality can help researchers determine what categories to include and what statistical analyses to perform in order to interpret the data. Quantitative researcher Catherine E. Harnois (2010) explained that intersectional frameworks in research design

takes into consideration the potential racial and ethnic biases described by multiracial feminist theories. In brief, by comparing the relationship among multiple observed variables, multiple group analysis allows us to determine whether it is reasonable to use the same measurement instrument for people in different groups (e.g., women who are [B]lack, [W]hite, and Latina). (p. 161)

This is particularly the case in research that examines women and “minorities,” such as racial and ethnic minorities and sexual minorities. Lisa

Bowleg (2012) explains that “[t]he problem with the ‘women and minorities’ statement... is the implied mutual exclusivity of these populations. Missing is the notion that these two categories could intersect, as they do in the lives of racial/ethnic minority women” (p. 1267). The question for quantitative researchers then becomes, how does one take into account multiple identities, perceptions, and experiences in their studies?

Within quantitative research, applying intersectional analysis can be rather challenging as intersectionality takes into account multiple identities. Quantitative data sets often contain large numbers of subjects, which add a level of complexity for those who intend to apply an intersectional framework in their research. Additionally, even if an intersectional framework is applied, there are challenges in how to interpret the data. For example, the *Black Lesbians Stress and Resilience Study* (BLSR) uses a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach to examine Black lesbians. As the study participants are marginalized based on race, gender, and sexual orientation, researchers worked to apply an intersectional framework in the survey and faced difficulty in interpreting the data.

For example, only 9% and 21% of the BLSR sample disagreed or were neutral respectively about the statement, “Racism, sexism, and homophobia are all serious issues in my life” (p. 234). By contrast, more than half of the sample (67%) agreed with the statement that racism, sexism and heterosexism were all serious issues in their lives. The question: how to interpret the 30% who disagreed or were neutral about these issues? (Bowleg 2008, pp. 320–321)

However, Bowleg (2008) contends that the challenges to both quantitative and qualitative intersectional studies include,

(1) how to make sense of quantitative findings about intersectionality; and (2) how to interpret narratives in which interviewees talk about some, but not all of their major intersections of social inequality; for example, the intersections of racism and heterosexism, but not sexism. (p. 320)

Nonetheless, regardless of the many challenges of applying intersectional frameworks to quantitative research, quantitative methodologies need

to better take into account the variety of issues and concerns in which people with multiple identities experience (McCall 2005).

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## 15.4 Sexualities Research

Following the intellectual history of the term, scholars in Africana, History, and Women’s Studies have taken up the charge with work such as Danielle L. McGuire’s *At the Dark End of the Street* (2011) (about Black women’s work to end sexual and domestic violence as a foundational necessity for the mid-twentieth century African American civil rights movement) and extensive research on the sexualization of African American and diaspora women in antebellum, Reconstruction, and twentieth century American culture. Texts such as Siobhan Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line* adopt a historical-cultural studies lens to investigate the interlocking oppressions of race and gender in the development of sexuality research; foundational texts in research on medicalization of sexuality illustrate the gendered, though not the raced and classed, dimensions of medical sex assignment (Fausto-Sterling 2000). In their 2011 text, *Theorizing Intersectionality and Sexuality*, Taylor, Hines and Casey offer a broad view of the adoption and contestation of “intersectionality,” citing a persistent if “uneasy” tendency for feminist scholars to rely on binaries or discrete categories, and the “complicated relationship... between queer theory and intersectionality.” *Theorizing* attempts an anthologized intervention into “the under-development of sexuality in the application of intersectionality” (Taylor et al. 2011, p. 3) and incorporates an unproven assertion that intersectionality may even be seen as “‘outmoded’ and ‘outdated’” within feminist research, thus attempting a move within and through a term that has yet to be truly thoroughly explored. This resource may be of particular relevance for those interested in UK debates and scholarship; it incorporates memoir, qualitative and quantitative social science, and discussions of criminology, transgender identity, ability, and youth well-being at the intersection of sexual identity and social class.

As a field, U.S. Sexuality Studies most often incorporates analysis of sexual identity and sexual politics, as in research by American Studies scholar C.J. Pascoe (2011) on race, gender, class and sexuality in a California high school that emphasizes the interlocking privileges informing violence against women and feminine-presenting men (Pascoe's ethnography identifies that racial, sexual, and class bias are often at the root of these gendered behaviors). Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura T. Hamilton's *Paying for the Party* (2013) and other research on college student sexual behavior indicates that "sexuality and romance" are "central mechanisms through which the college experience reinforce[s] preexisting class hierarchies" such as professional attainment (p. 103). In the study, Armstrong and Hamilton classified (2013) women by "pathway" (coursework and professional track) and "fit" (resources, temperament, and social connections), delineating how the university's structures and resources intersected with students' entering status and experiences to build "distinctive combinations of major, GPA, extracurricular activities, and network ties that, depending on their class background, were more or less transferable into economic security" (p. 647). In particular, in a chapter on party culture, Armstrong and Hamilton analyze how students strive for "erotic status" using the many tools of wealth and class status to "gain rank within peer cultures;" among college-aged White women, jockeying for erotic status often relies upon "the skill and ease with which they navigated the fine line between 'sexy' and 'slutty'" (p. 1902), compacting the complex negotiations for educational and professional attainment into a single word—"slut." In short, much of the research on sexualities—whether behavior, identity, desire or sexual politics—has focused on how sexual identity and/or sexual behavior may reproduce additional social hierarchies. This approach addresses intersectionality's structural analysis, yet fails to incorporate its insights on multiple, interlocking oppressions and to extend its intellectual heritage as a Black feminist theoretical innovation.

In studies of sexual behavior, intersectional acknowledgement is often limited to what Cren-

shaw and Fine in Berger (2010) name as a "flattening" approach that does not account for the term's usefulness in identifying structural dynamics. Political scientist Julia Jordan-Zachery (2007), and Catherine Harnois (2010), demonstrate that lists of identities that are not operationalized to intersect may be merely "descriptive... [and] ignores the liberation/political framework of intersectionality" (p. 261). This cultural studies/cultural theory and social research divide has led to some limitations in intersectional work on sexual behavior. LGBT Studies, Transgender Studies, and other related fields tend to use the discourses of identity to investigate sexuality. The literature on identity is vast and complex; on behavior and desire, growing; yet the three dimensions of sexuality are rarely engaged in connection with one another and even less frequently in connection with research on social power.

In higher education/student affairs literature, which often employs social science methods, research emphasizes the experiences of LGB and T-identified students and faculty (to a lesser extent staff). Sue Rankin's 2010 report on the State of LGBT People in Higher Education demonstrates strong emphasis and analysis of intersectionality, reflecting data about the varied experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and other sexual minority-identified individuals from White first-generation transgender men to cisgender, lesbian identified, trans women of color (Rankin et al. 2010). Transfeminine, transmasculine, and gender non-conforming people were significantly more likely to experience harassment; multiple minoritized identities—that is, study participants with targeted social group identities in multiple categories—are at much greater risk for experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of harassment (for instance, respondents of color were 10% more likely than White respondents to have experienced racial profiling or harassment) (Rankin et al. 2010, pp. 10–11). Yet this intersectional research does not often cross disciplinary boundaries and is typically deployed as research supporting practical modifications in student affairs or other educational practice, rather than as social science research in its own right.

With increasing acceptance of lesbian, gay, and (to a lesser extent) transgender and bisexual individuals, queer scholars and activists, such as Jasbir Puar, Sara Ahmed, Kenyon Farrow, Janet Mock, and political scientist Dara Z. Strolovitch, have adopted intersectional analysis to interrogate the political agenda of same-sex marriage. Strolovitch (2012) writes:

The rights and respectability made possible through marriage serve also to silence, exploit, and reinforce other lines of marginalization and exclusion, and those who continue to engage in such practices are now doubly marginalized—first, by the stigma associated with homosexuality among members of the general public, and again by the internal policing and secondary marginalization on the part of an LGBT community that views such practices as unevolved. (Cohen 1999, p. 394)

In performance studies, E. Patrick Johnson's ethnographic and performative work *Sweet Tea* (2008), on the lives of queer Black men in the southern U.S., co-exists as a text of oral histories and as a performance piece. The oral histories, which Johnson conducted over a ten-year period, weave tales of church, school, family, sexual activity, gender presentation, and racial history, emphasizing the intersecting experiences of sexual identity and behavior with culturally and regionally grounded analysis of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. In the performance piece, Johnson presents vocal and visual enactments and recordings of the interviews themselves. In an interview with scholar Marc Anthony Neal (2014), Johnson explicitly cites the narratives as emerging from an intellectual question about Black gay identity that also engages personal narrative, research ethics, and social history. Researchers and scholar-activists like the editorial collective of *The Feminist Wire* ([www.thefeministwire.com](http://www.thefeministwire.com)) adopt a similarly "grounded theory" approach that takes into account the primacy of material effects of intersecting oppressions and the necessity of a mobile and engaged scholarly practice that regularly interrogates its methods and engages with research subjects as equals who speak back to the research process and product (Berger and Guidroz 2010). This integrative scholar-activist approach to studying sexuality is one of the most promising directions

that aligns with the intellectual and political history of intersectionality.

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## 15.5 Intersectionality, Social Science Research, and Social Locations

### 15.5.1 Intersectionality and Religion

As Black feminist theorists have emphasized, religion and spirituality play a major role in notions of identity for many individuals. Increasingly, researchers have examined the roles that religion and spirituality play in influencing identity formation. This is especially the case when it comes to issues of sexuality (Rodriguez et al. 2013). For many people of color, religion and spirituality offer a sense of acceptance and hope. When examined from an intersectional framework, religion can take on an identity that influences how one experiences their culture and identity, and how it empowers them. For example, intersectionality has been used to explore religion as an aspect of identity among queer Muslims (Rahman 2010).

Intersectionality and Interdisciplinary Studies:

Multiple interdisciplinary fields apply intersectionality to research on sexuality, including Sexuality Studies, Performance Studies, LGBT Studies, Africana Studies, Latino/a Studies, Asian American Studies, Transgender Studies, Women's Studies, and Ethnic Studies (to name a few). As Taylor et al. (2011) note, much of this research emphasizes the difficulty of exploring identity and sexuality as both identities and lived practices, especially given that many of the interdisciplinary fields listed above are awash in the knowledge and discourse of queer theory. Interdisciplinary social science research on sexuality within interdisciplinary studies, then, has adopted each discipline's interpretation of the postmodern turn, while incorporating intersectional methods and considerations in its methodologies.

Even geography has adopted the lens of intersectionality, though with some limit to investigating gender and race. Michael Brown (2012) notes with regard to geography, "Beyond gender and race, however, other axes of identity and struc-

tures of oppression have received far less attention” (p. 544).

## 15.5.2 Intersectionality and the Body:

### 15.5.2.1 Sexual Violence and Gender-Based Violence

Research on sexual and gender-based violence, has mixed visibility of intersectional approaches. Uniquely valuable in this respect is the work of Andrea Smith, particularly *Conquest*; her historical and theoretical account of sexual violence in Native American communities and Indian Country utilizes both the identity and power dimensions of intersectionality. Ching-In Chen, Leah Piepza-Samarasinha, Jai Dulani, and Andrea Smith’s *The Revolution Starts at Home* (2011) is an essential text investigating intersectional gender-based violence work both in activist practice and in social science theory and research. The text is a multi-genre collection that incorporates political analysis, poetry, and practical resources for addressing the intersecting forms of violence in activist communities in ways that account for intersecting power dynamics and attempt to create alternatives to oppressive accountability systems. This text, now out of print, originally appeared as a zine (self-published resource) emerging from multiple intersecting social movements that were seeking responses and analysis of gender-based violence that moved beyond prison or other state systems. The zine became a book published by Boston’s South End Press that blended personal narrative with structural critiques. Ana Lara’s “there is another way,” for instance, provides reflections, strategies, and analysis alongside personal narrative and includes a Survivor’s Rights and Responsibilities list incorporating a balance of individual and social tactics, from naming the right to a “safe and secure home” to assuming responsibility to “form healthy relationships that nourish [themselves]” (p. 15). Another chapter, “Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Accountability Strategies,” written by a collective of community workers and activists, outlines guidelines and approaches for initiating community (rather than system-based) responses

to intimate partner violence. The personal stories, critical analysis, and social welfare tactics in *The Revolution Starts at Home* explicitly address both structural and individual intersections of gender-based violence.

### 15.5.2.2 Intersectionality and Health

Intersectionality has been used as a framework to also examine issues of health and illness. Health disparities and inequalities are a matter of life and death. In an article entitled, “The Problem With the Phrase Women and Minorities: Intersectionality—an Important Theoretical Framework for Public Health,” Lisa Bowleg (2012) writes,

Acknowledging the existence of multiple intersecting identities is an initial step in understanding the complexities of health disparities for populations from multiple historically oppressed groups. The other critical step is recognizing how systems of privilege and oppression that result in multiple social inequalities (e.g., racism, heterosexism, sexism, classism) intersect at the macro social-structural level to maintain health disparities. (p. 1267)

Previous research blamed health disparities on biological, genetic, cultural, or lifestyle choice differences between racial groups. The representation of underrepresented and marginalized individuals and groups, how they are viewed and stereotyped, as well as the dominant group’s behavior, practices, and expectations have implications for health. Public health and medical researchers have increasingly focused on the ways in which discrimination influences health. For example, researchers working to examine the pathways through which racism impacts health status argue that racial discrimination increase stress levels, which eventually wear down the body. Understanding the multiple facets of inequality is key to understanding how inequality impacts health.

Critical intersectional analysis provides the framework for analyzing the health effects of gendered, racial/ethnic, and class-based inequalities in the U.S. This framework also provides the theoretical foundation for claiming health as a human right. According to Amy J. Schulz and Leith Mullings (2005), intersectionality helps researchers to consider how sociocultural, historical, and contemporary contexts shape knowledge



and how health, illness, and inequality are understood. Intersectionality allows researchers to consider the ways in which inequalities are produced within particular social contexts and helps to gain a better understanding of the commonalities as well as differences in these patterns as they emerge in various locations, particularly as they apply to health care. It shows how institutions structure health care access across race, gender, and class lines. Importantly, Schulz and Mullings (2005) argue that intersectional frameworks provide for the potential reduction and/or elimination of health inequalities through resistance, interventions, and health social movements.

Loretta J. Ross (2009) builds upon Black feminist scholarship to identify the unique need for an intersectional analysis with respect to women's reproductive health. The intersecting systems of White supremacy and the mechanisms of population control in the U.S. and abroad create unique conditions of peril for African American, Latino/a, Asian American, Native American, and other women of color in accessing and maintaining human rights. Sociologist Laura Briggs' *Reproducing Empire* (2002) investigates colonialism and reproductive health in Puerto Rico, asserting that "forms of sexuality are crucial to colonialism" in both "the work of racialization" and the economic and political colonial project (p. 4). In a chapter on the politics of sterilization, Briggs notes the complex intersections of race, gender, and class through a critique of the position of mainstream U.S. socialist feminists, whose pro-nationalist position inadvertently supported a dimension of nationalist Puerto Rican politics that was explicitly pro-natalist (opposed to birth control and sterilization) and anti-feminist. The complexity of these politics, and their immersion in the multiple social movements for autonomy around race, class, gender, and nationalist politics, exemplify intersectional research. This work, and other activist and social science research, indicate a scholarly perspective that both centers the experiences of women of color (especially Black women) and that considers research and activism from a framework of both structural and individual experiences.

## 15.6 Future Directions

In 1996, Steven Seidman argued that "sociologists will need to listen to what feminists, queer theorists, or poststructuralists are saying"—and indeed, this insight is doubly relevant today, as social science researchers trained in intersectional and Black feminist theoretical perspectives emerge into a field that continues to marginalize intersectionality to its "flattened" lists of identities. A few directions to stem this tide suggest themselves.

One of the key emergent discussions would be to strengthen the quantitative methodologies for measuring sexuality, race, gender, and class in the social sciences. At present, limited resources are available for researchers wishing to investigate how (for example) LGBT+ activists navigate health care access outside of state systems like marriage, civil union, or domestic partnership. How are those choices and opportunities structured by divergent racial/ethnic and cultural understandings of sexual identity for people seeking (for example) reproductive health care? Beyond direct theorizing, and activist interventions such as the Callan-Lorde Health Care Center in New York City, there are limited proven models for better understanding these intersections. The Fenway Institute in Boston conducts research at multiple identity intersections; yet few models exist for appropriately measuring the relationship between or among categories which, for now, are treated in isolation.

Studies of sexual behavior would also benefit from much deeper understanding of intersectional experiences of sexual fluidity. Existing research on sexual fluidity among women, for example, does not incorporate substantial investigation of how race, class, and cisgendered experiences may contribute to fluidity of desire, behavior, or identity (such as Diamond 2009).

One of the critical future directions—from both the activist/political and theoretical perspective of intersectionality—would be to incorporate existing research on social identity into research on sexual behavior. How are individuals' experiences of sexual attraction structured by their racial or class identity development? What is the

relevance of campus institutional heterosexism (e.g., binary gender housing or gender-divided student activities) on college students' experiences of racial diversity? What could Critical Whiteness Studies contribute to the findings that a majority of people who self-identify as polyamorous are also White and middle- to upper-middle class? Dominant identity categories, rather than simply being noted, must be meaningfully investigated in their dominance for intersectionality to thrive. Any number of insights could be gained by merging the insights of intersectional humanities research with social science approaches.

This general call for interdisciplinary work can also be understood as another larger direction—working with intersectionality requires working at the intersections, not only of identities and social locations/systems, but of academic disciplines. As Alexander-Floyd (2012) suggests, intersectionality poses a challenge to existing systems of knowledge production, and to meaningfully incorporate intersectional analysis, researchers must be willing to engage their theoretical and methodological intersections as well. The constraints of contemporary university politics may limit immediate interventions in this respect, but we urge researchers and research associations to think through structural and institutional interventions to advance this direction.

Finally, researchers in sexuality would be well served to consider what Dean Spade (2013) calls “intersectional resistance”—“practices aimed at dismantling population control [that] take as their targets systems of legal and administrative governance such as criminal punishment, immigration enforcement, environmental regulation, child welfare and public benefits” (p. 1031). The projects and activism discussed in this chapter—like the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, the Callan-Lorde Health Center, FIERCE and Queers for Economic Justice, and more—“see[k] out the root causes of despair and violence facing intersectionally targeted populations and in doing so engag[e] with the law differently than rights-seeking projects do” (Spade 2013, p. 1032). Spade’s argument—that individually-focused social movement advocacy is fundamentally different than rights-based advocacy and must be better understood to re-

dress significant human rights concerns—applies equally to rights and individually based research.

It also extends the originating perspective of intersectional work. Whether taking up projects that partner with intersectional resistance movements (such as the UndocuQueer movement to recognize the needs of LGBTQ+ undocumented people); to ask relevant research questions, considering the differences between individually structured and intersectionally constituted research methodologies, or conducting research that interrogates the relationship of individual sexual behavior, identity, and desire to the state systems that constitute it, we encourage the next generations to extend intersectional sexuality studies by taking seriously both intersectional theories and the resistance from which, and in which, those intersections rise.

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