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# Chapter 1

## Intersectionality, Race-Gender Subordination, and Education

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*In this chapter, we unpack intersectionality as an analytical framework. First, we cite Black Lives Matter as an impetus for discussing intersectionality's current traction. Second, we review the genealogy of "intersectionality" beginning with Kimberlé Crenshaw's formulation, which brought a Black Studies provocation into legal discourse in order to challenge existing antidiscrimination doctrine and single-axis theorizing. The third, and most central, task of the chapter is our account of intersectionality's utility for social analysis. We examine some of the issues raised by the metaphor of the intersection and some of the debates surrounding the concept, such as the tension between fragmenting and universalizing perspectives mediated by the notion of "strategic essentialism." Fourth, we review how education researchers have explained race and gender subordination in education since Ladson-Billings and Tate's Teachers College Record article. We conclude with some remarks concerning future research on intersectionality.*

**I**n the summer of 2014, as accounts of brutal and unjustified police killings of Black people circulated across social media and mass media in the United States, a new social movement came to prominence (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016). Black Lives Matter (BLM, also called the Movement for Black Lives) emerged from a July 2013 Twitter hashtag and became a mass movement in the wake of the 2014 killing of Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Like other American social movements that have arisen to protest group subordination, BLM

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has been tagged as an instance of “identity politics” and criticized for its allegedly single-minded and exclusionary focus—notably, under a competing Twitter hashtag, #AllLivesMatter (Freelon et al., 2016). Yet a closer look at the way the founders of BLM describe their campaign reveals a far more sophisticated analysis. On their website, the BLM founders declare that their movement is explicitly built on principles of *intersectionality*.<sup>1</sup>

As one public health scholar defines it,

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how multiple social identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, SES [socioeconomic status], and disability intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism) at the macro social-structural level. (Bowleg, 2012, p. 1267)

In this chapter, we provide an overview of “intersectionality” as a theoretical framework, assessing its utility and its limitations. We recognize that given the widespread embrace of the term—which provoked some at the 2014 American Studies Association conference to call for its abandonment (Bartlett, 2017)—our investigation is necessarily anything but exhaustive.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting our respective disciplinary homes, our focus in this review is on the literatures of law and education.

## METHODOLOGY

A search through “all content” in the Westlaw legal database on June 7, 2017, turned up 2,979 uses of the word “intersectionality” in “all state and federal” sources, with 2,706 uses of the word appearing in the secondary literature. We read and analyzed the 50 most cited articles using the term in the Westlaw database. These “top 50” articles were supplemented, based on our familiarity with the literature, with another 10 to 15 legal articles proposing substitutes for the term. To find works still in press, we searched the combination of the terms *intersectionality* and *discrimination* in the Legal Scholarship Network thread of the Social Science Research Network, obtaining the 50 most recently posted papers using both these terms.<sup>3</sup>

A keyword search on “intersectionality and education” in the ERIC database generated 214 results for books and articles. We whittled down this number by privileging works that use intersectionality as a descriptor of the author’s analysis, that is, as an *analytic framework* rather than a proxy for arguments about diversity or multiple identities in education. We do not center a more general uptake of the concept that predates Crenshaw’s formulation without any specific connection with her work on race-gender subordination since the end of the 1980s.

As with the search in the legal database, as experts in the field we supplement the ERIC search with knowledge of the research literature in education wherein intersectionality appears in the analysis, such as works inspired by critical race theory (CRT) by authors within that specialization. Since intersectionality in education is still a recent methodological or conceptual innovation, at this point any terminological substitutes for Crenshaw’s formulation have been few and negligible, some

suggestions notwithstanding (Núñez, 2014), and therefore are not part of the methodology for the search in education.

We are aware that several recent books also examine “intersectionality” and its provenance. These include monographs by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016), and by Ange-Marie Hancock (2016), as well as edited collections (see, e.g., Berger & Guidroz, 2010; Grzanka, 2014). We also note that the legal scholar most often credited with the invention of the term—Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw—has her own book in press on the topic.

### GENEALOGY

In their monograph exploring “intersectionality” as a modern-day “key concept,” Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016) acknowledge that the word has been taken up in a broad variety of contexts, from the academic to the political to the popular everyday.<sup>4</sup> They also remind the reader that although the term is usually said to have been “coined” by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991, a more accurate genealogy would follow the concept back to women of color scholar-activists working in liberation-focused social movements at least as far back as the 1960s and 1970s, if not before.<sup>5</sup> A well-known example they discuss is the Combahee River Collective’s “A Black Feminist Statement,” written in 1977, which analyzes the role of heterosexism and homophobia in Black women’s lives along with capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. Collins and Bilge also go back further to highlight the 1970 publication of the anthology *The Black Woman*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara. In their view, this anthology conveyed the message that “black women would never gain their freedom without attending to oppressions of race *and* class *and* gender” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 66). They call special attention to Frances Beal’s chapter, which had been originally published as a pamphlet in 1969. In “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” Beal examines the workings of capitalism, racism, and sexism in Black women’s lives. According to Collins and Bilge, “Her approach is systemic: her double critique of patriarchy within the Black Power movement and of racism in the white women’s liberation movement also criticizes capitalism” (p. 66).

For Collins and Bilge (2016), uncovering this broader genealogy of “intersectionality” is important because it reveals both the centrality of the concept to social justice movements and the tendency for ideas circulated by professional academics to be privileged over the same ideas circulated by grassroots intellectuals. Indeed, they argue that the widespread (scholarly) attribution of the term to Crenshaw is an effect of academic politics. In their account, university and college programs and departments of Black Studies, women’s studies, and ethnic studies were instituted in the 1970s in response to widespread campus insurgency by students of color, who demanded scholarship and teaching relevant to their concerns. Because of their “political” origins, these departments and fields of study were consistently marginalized in colleges and universities, and the faculty associated with them were often suspected of flouting norms of academic rigor. Women of color students and faculty who fought their way into academia to establish and grow these programs brought

the ideas associated with what would become “intersectionality” with them, but as Collins and Bilge note, these new “insiders” also fell subject to the pressure to obey institutional norms such as the injunction to conduct “dispassionate” scholarship, to embrace the theory of the “romantic author,” and to avoid social “activism.” For Collins and Bilge, Crenshaw’s supposed 1991 “invention” of intersectionality serves to reconcile these tensions:

A new umbrella term might enable coalition building among the exponentially growing study areas of race, class, and gender. Naming the field might also help legitimate the kind of scholarship produced within these areas by making it more compatible with academic norms of discovery, authorship and ownership. Attributing the discovery of the term “intersectionality” to Kimberlé Crenshaw fits these academic norms. (Collins & Bilge, 2016, pp. 80–81)

Collins and Bilge (2016) warn, however, that this new academic provenance of “intersectionality” created the risk that the term’s debt to radical social justice organizing would be lost. Indeed, Bilge (2013) argues that White feminists have already attempted to claim the term as their own, erasing its origin in the struggles of women of color.

Nevertheless, BLM (and Crenshaw’s own organization, the African American Policy Forum) testifies to the continued centrality of intersectionality as a framework for social justice activism. What about academia? In the next section, we reflect on the utility and limitations of intersectionality in social theory generally, before turning to its employment in the disciplines of law and education.

### **INTERSECTIONALITY AND SOCIAL THEORIZING: SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**

Although most recent academic reflections on “intersectionality” acknowledge its ubiquity in contemporary scholarship on identity and difference, the term has had many competitors. Within legal scholarship alone, rival formulations include “interlocking oppressions” (Kalsem & Williams, 2010), “wholism” (Cunningham, 1998), “multidimensionality” (McGinley & Cooper, 2013), “inter-connectivity” (Valdes, 1995), “co-synthesis” (Kwan, 1997), “complex bias” (Kotkin, 2009), and “symbiosis” (Ehrenreich, 2002). Scholars have also offered metaphors other than an intersection for understanding the phenomenon, including the “Koosh ball” and the “Rubik’s cube.” Collins and Bilge (2016) might argue that these rival formulations were prompted by the continuing institutional lure of intellectual credit. For us, the multiple competing terms also indicate the utility of intersectionality—and its limitations as a tool of critical social theory.

One point seems indisputable: within the world of social theory, we are all intersectionalists (if that is a word) now. Descriptively, “intersectionality” provides a less cynical way to understand the steady emergence of new perspectives and fields of study within academia; scholars informed by the concept are constantly prompted to ask, “What or who is obscured by this analysis or focus of attention?” Prescriptively,

“intersectionality” serves as a powerful reminder to pay attention to the margins of all identity-based organizing and analysis. The title of a well-known anthology says it all: *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1982).

Intersectionality disrupts group-based formulations such as “women,” “people of color,” and “sexual minorities” in at least three ways. First, intersectionality calls attention to social identities that are consistently treated as marginal or invisible because they are conceptualized as mere subsets of broader, larger, or more “significant” assemblages. Second, intersectionality points to the complex nature of power, undermining all reductive theories of oppression.<sup>6</sup> This move also helps scholars and organizers resist the “oppression Olympics”—the desire to have one identity (usually one’s own) or form of subordination acknowledged as more important or fundamental than others (see Smith, 2006). That said, although intersectionality research attests to the interplay between social organization and power, it does not put forth a particular theory of power as such. Third, intersectionality points to the gap between social categorization and the complexity of intersubjective experience: the fact that no single social label—female, Black, bisexual, poor—can ever exhaust what it means for an individual to travel in the world, and therefore that no analysis or label is ever complete.

These disruptions have proved powerful within academia, helping scholars develop new perspectives on old problems and call attention to invisible or ignored justice claims (for a public health example, see Bowleg, 2012). Intersectionality has been generative for scholars in at least three ways. First, the concept has inspired scholar-activists to look for identities and forms of subordination made invisible by hegemonic formulations, and to develop increasingly sophisticated and nuanced understandings of social formations. This increasing sophistication is visible among scholars and activists alike. For example, within legal scholarship, CRT and feminist theory have given rise to “LatCrit” (Latinx critical theory),<sup>7</sup> Asian American jurisprudence, queer theory, and “Dis/Crit” (critical disability theory). Similarly, consciousness of the intersectional nature of sexual minority oppression has produced a series of increasingly complex identity terms used for organizing, from “homosexual” to “gay and lesbian” to “LGBT” to “LGBTQIA+” and beyond. Many of the organizers of these new initiatives, moreover, acknowledge the need to keep their borders fluid in light of the tendency of more privileged identities to obscure the needs and experiences of the less privileged (see, e.g., Matambanadzo, Valdes, & Vélez-Martinez, 2016, p. 443, remarking on LatCrit’s emergence from a sense of frustration at the marginalization of Latinx identity within CRT and LatCrit’s decision to maintain a “strategic anti-essentialism” going forward).

Second, consciousness of intersectionality has led scholars and scholar-activists to pay attention to the structural interpenetration of various forms of oppression (Matambanadzo et al., 2016, p. 445, avowing a commitment to “critical engagements of sex, gender, and sexuality, together with race, gender, and class, as interlocking categories and systems in programmatic terms”). The days of unthinking

intellectual “essentialism” seem to be behind us, at least in the humanities, the social sciences, education, and law. Instead, critical social theorists routinely acknowledge that any specific focus will address some forms of subordination while neglecting others, such as Marxism’s class-reductive limitations when attempting to explain race and gender relations, which is not necessary to rehearse here.

Third, given the dynamic nature of social identity formation, intersectionality promises a continuous generativity. Collins and Bilge (2016) observe that this is nicely fitted to an institutional world in which academics always need new topics for conferences, panels, dissertations, and research agendas. More important, however, intersectionality reminds us of the inexhaustibility of the struggle for social justice. For any given analysis, initiative, or campaign of resistance at any given point in time, no matter how narrowly or broadly specified, there will always be a remainder, some identity or experience that is marginalized or made invisible. Intersectionality is in this way well suited to the postmodern view that political and social groups are continually emerging and making claims for recognition and redistribution—that there is no point at which all identities will be recognized and all justice claims satisfied (see Butler, 1990, p. 182; see also Connolly, 1995, p. 186). Justice is an endlessly receding horizon—a recognition that may be disheartening but that accords with experience.

Intersectionality, however, also has its limitations, which have led some scholars to declare a “postintersectionality” moment (see Levit, 2002) and others, as noted above, to call for its linguistic “death.” One of these limitations, which has led to various rival formulations, is the “intersection” metaphor itself. In her *University of Chicago Legal Forum* article, Crenshaw (1989) asks us to conceptualize intersectionality based on the metaphor of a roadway:

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.<sup>8</sup>

One criticism of the intersection-as-road metaphor is that it calls up a mental representation of two-dimensional space—a limitation shared by the Venn diagram, also used by some scholars to represent intersectionality (see Elengold, 2018, for a discussion). The “Koosh ball” metaphor and “multidimensionality” as an alternative term have emerged in response to this concern.<sup>9</sup> A second critique of the intersection metaphor is that it does not reflect the multiple levels of scale at which each axis of subordination operates—for example, race acts on individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels simultaneously. This has led some critics to worry about uses of intersectionality that, for example, give primacy to “psychology” or subjective “identity” at the expense of structural subordination (see, e.g., Williams, 2002).<sup>10</sup> A third critique of the intersection metaphor is that it implicitly figures all forms of subordination as parallel—lending itself to the reduction of intersectionality to a glib list—“race, class, gender, sexuality, disability”—that fails to explore what is distinctive about each

form of oppression, and/or fails to explore any particular axis in any depth.<sup>11</sup> Fourth, the intersection-as-road metaphor might be misunderstood to suggest that the nature of subordination is fixed and unchanging, like a road, rather than endlessly shifting and changing in response to political, social, and economic conditions.

A theory of metaphor is appropriate to invoke insofar as linguistic representation cannot be said to occur after an event or as the attempt to *capture* it post facto. In other words, as a constitutive element of a social activity system, mediation tools like language, and more specifically metaphor, function as dialectical nodes in the relationship between material reality and the meaning, or sign, system (see Leonardo, 2016; Ricoeur, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978). In Vygotsky's (1978) *Mind in Society*, language, speech, and sign are described as part of the "alloy" that makes up meaning and material life. Understood this way, the intersectional metaphor is less a way to represent through a convenient linguistic trope an existing reality but rather structures how we arrive at a particular understanding of a certain reality. Therefore, it is a choice that comes with educational consequences and political commitments. In the literature, the metaphor of an "intersection" has been helpful in grasping the limitations of single-axis explanations in favor of a cross-cutting analysis. As such, this discussion highlights the power of metaphor to define constitutively the terrain under investigation while avoiding the dangers associated with portraying social life as somehow "made of language," otherwise known as linguistic idealism. Volosinov (2006), puts it this way:

The individual consciousness, for its part, is deprived of any support in reality. It becomes either all or nothing. . . For idealism it has become all . . . For psychological positivism, on the contrary, consciousness amounts to nothing. (p. 12)

In its best moments, intersectionality represents the solder in the alloy between speech and the social conditions that make it possible.

Second, intersectionality's limitation is that it is not itself a "theory" in the scientific sense: It cannot generate any testable predictions about the world and therefore can only supplement rather than replace empirical methods (see Bowleg, p. 1268, calling intersectionality a "theoretical framework" rather than a "theory"). Here, intersectionality's seeming death blow to single-axis theorizing has arguably left a hole in social theorizing. Because "grand theories" such as Marxism and dominance feminism are out of fashion, we are left with the vague sense that all forms of oppression are always everywhere but with no new analytical tools with which to explore and understand these forms and how they operate. Some "postintersectionality" scholars have been moved by this limitation to develop their own theories of how forms of subordination interact (see, e.g., Valdes, 1995, on "interconnectivity"; see also Ehrenreich, 2002). Others have simply enjoined scholars to investigate all forms of subordination at all times (see, e.g., Kwan, 1997), without providing specific tools with which to do so. Still others have argued that the attempt to derive a theory from intersectionality is inappropriate "metatheoretical musing" (see Bilge, 2013, p. 411).



Third, intersectionality contains only a partial account of power. Scholars guided by intersectionality are led to understand that systems of subordination, as they are brought to bear on social identities, never travel alone: For instance, race always operates through gender, and gender through sexuality. However, intersectionality does not tell us which of the multiple layers of oppression and/or experience represented by a given “intersection” is most consequential at any given time, or how and why class, say, works differently from disability.<sup>12</sup> This limitation has impelled scholars both to criticize intersectionality and to offer their own supplemental formulations. For example, Darren Hutchinson worries that “it is impossible to theorize about or study a group when each person in that group is ‘composed of a complex and unique matrix of identities that shift in time, is never fixed, is constantly unstable and forever distinguishable from everyone else in the universe’” (as quoted by Elengold, 2018, p. 16). Legal scholar Nancy Ehrenreich argues that intersectionality scholars have ignored the situation in which actors are simultaneously privileged and oppressed, and offers the concept of “hybrid intersectionality” in response (Ehrenreich, 2002, p. 257). Legal scholar Mari Matsuda, like Crenshaw a founder of CRT in law, offers “looking to the bottom” as an ethical and political goal of organizing and social theorizing, thus providing the focus that intersectionality alone lacks—but raising the question—where is the bottom?—(Matsuda, 1987). Other scholars and activists simply use intersectionality as a supplement to their own theories of power, whatever those might be. As Collins and Bilge (2016) point out, however, intersectionality’s incomplete theory of power places it one dangerous step away from *diversity*, a term that has been used to efface power analysis altogether (see also Berrey, 2015). Intersectionality differs from the more established tradition of multiculturalism in education. Although the two interventions are certainly compatible, the latter’s focus on diversity differs from the former’s emphasis on subordination that results from asymmetrical power relations. Addressing diversity without addressing subordination eschews the process whereby race and gender difference is produced ideologically and materially. In other words, uncritically promoting diversity in education and social institutions may not necessarily challenge subordination.

Finally, a fourth difficulty with the academic uptake of “intersectionality” is best laid at the feet of those who have misunderstood its point. As Leslie McCall points out, the concept can be employed toward at least three different theoretical ends: to criticize and dismantle accepted categories (what McCall calls demonstrating “anti-categorical complexity”), to hold up for analysis the experiences of dismissed or ignored groups (what McCall calls employing “intra-categorical complexity”—an example is the work of Black feminists from which the term *intersectionality* emerged), and to permit scholars, holding one category or axis of oppression constant, to investigate its interplay with other axes of oppression (what McCall calls the demonstration of “intercategorical complexity”; McCall, 2005). A rigid fidelity to anticategorical complexity, however, can be used to undermine projects of intra- and intercategorical complexity; the result may be the complaint, sometimes heard, that intersectionality

makes categorization itself impossible. As McCall notes, however, this complaint betrays a conflation of the different projects that “intersectionality” makes possible; it is not a limitation of the term itself.

### INTERSECTIONALITY IN LAW

Crenshaw is a legal scholar, and her initial use of the term was a critical response to some judicial interpretations of federal employment discrimination law. In this section, we offer some reflections on the uptake of “intersectionality” in jurisprudence—that is, its use by lawyers, legislators, and judges rather than academics.

Although as noted above, a search for “intersectionality” in Westlaw yielded 2,979 uses of the word, the vast majority of the references (2,706) were in the secondary literature. Legislators, attorneys, and judges, by and large, have not embraced the term as have scholars and activists. This would not be troubling if the substance of Crenshaw’s original critique were being addressed by other means or under other rubrics. Unfortunately, this is only partially the case.

Some background on Crenshaw’s critique of Title VII jurisprudence may be helpful. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a federal statute, prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of “race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.” Writing at the end of the 1980s, Crenshaw noted that some judges interpreting this language treated each of the grounds for antidiscrimination protection—race, color, religion, sex, national origin—as separate and mutually exclusive. For these judges, moreover, the benchmark for sex discrimination was the experience of a White woman, and the benchmark for race discrimination, the experience of a Black man. Black women, according to this framework, could only claim to have been discriminated against on the basis of sex if their experiences were identical to those of White women, and conversely could only claim to have been discriminated against on the basis of race if their experiences were identical to those of Black men. “Compound” discrimination—the experience of being discriminated against specifically as a Black woman—was not recognizable under the law.

Crenshaw (1989) argued that this approach to Title VII was wrongheaded. She wrote,

Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women’s experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (p. 149)

Have courts and legislatures gotten the message? Kate Sablosky Elengold (2018) argues that the answer in the United States is no. She cites a 2011 empirical study of employment discrimination actions, in which the authors, examining a representative sample of judicial opinions over 35 years of federal employment discrimination

litigation, concluded that the presence of intersectionality “dramatically reduce[d] the odds of plaintiff victory” (Best, Edelman, Krieger, & Eliason, 2011).<sup>13</sup> Elengold (2018) summarizes their findings:

Plaintiffs exhibiting identification with more than one traditionally subordinated group (“demographic intersectionality,” also known as a “complex claimant” or an “intersectional” [claimant]) and/or plaintiffs who allege discrimination on the basis of overlapping ascriptive characteristics (“claim intersectionality” or “intersectional discrimination”) are less successful in employment discrimination actions. (p. 6)

This is despite the fact that claims involving intersectionality are increasing. According to Best et al. (2011),

In the 1970s and 1980s, less than 10 percent of EEO [equal employment opportunity] opinions dealt with intersectional claims. . . . [T]he proportion began rising around 1990, and by the second half of the decade, more than a quarter of EEO opinions involved intersectional claims. (p. 1008)

Nevertheless, the study authors found that both claim intersectionality and demographic intersectionality were damaging to plaintiffs in court. Indeed, true to Crenshaw’s original critique, “non-white women are less likely to win their cases than is any other demographic group” (Best et al., 2011, p. 992).<sup>14</sup>

Elengold (2018) puts forth several reasons for the continued failure of judges to recognize intersectionality in employment discrimination cases. First is the “protected category” structure of the statute itself, which invites judges to slot worker experiences into distinct boxes and to find “comparators” based on one characteristic at a time. This “check the box” approach makes the interaction between categories of discrimination difficult to recognize, and also may encourage judges to fear the “many-headed hydra” that might result were they to recognize the existence of multiple simultaneous types of discrimination.<sup>15</sup> Second, Elengold notes the reliance of attorneys on “stock stories” of discrimination. Despite Crenshaw’s criticisms, these stock stories continue to center on the stories of White female plaintiffs in sex discrimination cases and Black male plaintiffs in race discrimination cases. Third, Elengold takes note of the forms produced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (the federal agency charged with managing Title VII administrative complaints) for would-be litigants to fill out. These forms, like Title VII itself, represent discrimination as a series of separate and distinct boxes to be checked, ignoring the possibility of subcategories or category interaction.

Intersectionality has been somewhat more successfully incorporated into international human rights law and European Union (EU) law. With respect to international law, Campbell (2015) explains that the United Nations (UN) recognizes two “mainstream” human rights treaties, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These treaties contain antidiscrimination clauses that are phrased, like Title VII, in terms of a list of protected “grounds” or categories of discrimination. The committees interpreting these treaty provisions have explicitly affirmed the concept of

intersectionality.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, implementation has been difficult, in part due to the category-bound language of the treaties themselves.

Paradoxically, treaties that on their face recognize only single-axis discrimination have been more user-friendly for intersectional litigants and claims. Several international treaties protect the rights of specific groups, such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As Campbell (2015) observes, CEDAW on its face requires single-axis analysis: There is no reference to categories of discrimination other than “sex” and “women,” which has led other scholars to conclude that it does not recognize intersectionality. This apparent weakness, however, Campbell argues, has actually enabled CEDAW’s interpreters to employ intersectionality, in the form of “intercategorical complexity.” Campbell calls attention to the CEDAW Committee’s General Recommendation No. 28, which states that “the discrimination of women based on sex and gender is inextricably linked with other factors that affect women, such as race ethnicity, religion or belief, health, status, age, class, caste, sexual orientation and gender identity” (Campbell, 2015, p. 489). Campbell concludes, “The conception of women in CEDAW is not based on a privileged sub-set of women but encompasses all of their identities” (p. 489).<sup>17</sup>

Intersectionality has also been explicitly embraced by some international law advocates. In November 2000, an expert group organized by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN Development Fund for Women convened to and “identified seven areas where gender and racial discrimination overlap—including, *inter alia*, criminal justice, population movements, trafficking and armed conflict—the concept of intersectionality was expressly examined” (Chow, 2016, p. 10).<sup>18</sup> Similarly, interpretation of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has produced a “holistic” structural approach to discrimination that embraces intersectionality.<sup>19</sup> This is perhaps not surprising; as Grzanka (2014) notes, Crenshaw penned a background paper on race and gender discrimination for the 2000 UN World Conference on Racism that explained the concept of intersectionality in some detail.

The antidiscrimination law of the EU has adopted the term *multiple discrimination* rather than *intersectionality*. Bullock and Masselot (2012–2013) explain,

Although multiple discrimination is not defined in any legally binding EU text, in the context of EU law, scholars use multiple discrimination to refer to “all instances of discrimination on several grounds contained in [the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Art. 9] and in other instruments. (p. 62)

Bullock and Masselot (2012–2013) observe that EU advocates have been extremely active in promoting the recognition of intersectionality. Nevertheless, EU antidiscrimination law has been beset by the “list” problem. It is also not clear whether the countries of the EU have properly reckoned with the structural focus of intersectionality. For example, Kantola (2014) observes that EU directives on multiple discrimination have successfully prodded Nordic member states to adopt

antidiscrimination provisions covering a variety of different grounds in addition to gender, but she doubts that these developments add up to a “genuine engagement with intersectionality” (p. 12). Instead, she fears, the result is a heightened focus on individual rights, rather than “structures and employers’ or public authorities’ responsibilities to remove barriers to equality” (p. 13).

It must be concluded, therefore, that in the field of law, scholars have embraced the concept of intersectionality (not without vigorous attempts at substituting other terms and metaphors), but judges and legislators, by and large, have not. More than two decades after the introduction of the idea into the legal literature, full legal recognition of the intersectional nature of discrimination remains elusive.

### INTERSECTIONALITY AND EDUCATION

After its recent 25th anniversary, the term, concept, or analytical framework of intersectionality has had a significant impact on the field of education. Many collections under the moniker of CRT in education include a chapter on, section on, or frequent mention of intersectionality (e.g., see Dixson & Rousseau, 2017; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). We might credit the first CRT-inspired Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) article in education with jump-starting the use of intersectionality. But when they write, “[W]e discuss the intersection of race and property as a central construct in understanding a critical race theoretical approach to education” (p. 58), their deployment of intersectional thought implicates race with property relations. They gesture to Cheryl Harris’s (1995) chapter on “whiteness as property” to argue that CRT in education becomes the fulcrum for a critique of White liberalism as well as a certain lack of militancy they find in multiculturalism. In this early stage of CRT in education, intersectionality represents less the full measure of Crenshaw’s innovation but rather a more commonsense term that suggests a *connection* between two levels of analysis bridged by the image of a meeting point between them. Moreover, because Ladson-Billings and Tate center the power of whiteness in education, intersectionality functions through *analogy* rather than as an *analytic concept* in its own right.

When Ladson-Billings and Tate’s breakout article engages Crenshaw, it occurs with respect to her 1988 *Harvard Law Review* article’s concerns around the ambiguity of civil rights legislation. They do not cite her *University of Chicago Legal Forum* article that appeared a year later in 1989, which contains the inchoate form of intersectional analysis, or the *Stanford Law Review* article from 1991 that would eventually become the main text for understanding the framework of intersectionality. Their argument is more in line with a single-axis explanation centered on race, with class or property relations as a species of the race genus. That is, insofar as property rights are tied to race, race relations are not linked to a Marxist explanation of economic antagonism. This early conceptual framing between education and intersectionality warrants some historical context for two reasons.

One, after several decades of writings that interrogated Eurocentrism, multiculturalism became institutionalized in schools, corporate thinking, and public discourse. Such institutionalization meant that White interests converged with multiculturalism's intent to racially uplift non-White students, the former arguably compromising the latter project in a way that Bell's (2005) work could predict CRT in education becomes an alternative to the dominant framework of multiculturalism. The narrative of race subordination found in CRT competes with multiculturalism's model of multiple acculturation. It is possible to interpret this move as an intellectual break but equally possible to regard it as a continuity, with CRT being the next, and historically specific, stage of race analysis in education, perhaps the heir apparent to multiculturalism. In Ladson-Billings and Tate's first article on CRT in education, the authors challenge the discipline to extend beyond liberal multiculturalism toward a more militant form of race scholarship based on CRT in legal studies as a new or emerging tradition. Two, and with respect to intersectionality, Crenshaw's innovation had not yet taken hold by 1995, with Ladson-Billings and Tate's article having been crafted only a couple years after her original works on intersectionality appeared on the scene; it was not yet the cause célèbre. At this stage, the Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) article is not an intersectional argument in Crenshaw's sense despite its use of the term. That established, the 1995 article that "launched a thousand publications" (Leonardo, 2013, p. 4) inaugurates CRT in education out of which intersectionality, whether in Crenshaw's specific sense or a general twoness inherited from Du Bois (1989), becomes a dominant trope, at minimum, or an analytical framework, at maximum.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) opened the door into which an entirely new way of making sense of the immanently racial nature of education enters. Out of this, intersectionality emerges as a key concept that unlocks the education house that race made, not only from the obvious racialized achievement gap but also all the way down the educational enterprise, from disciplinary policies (Parker & Stovall, 2004), to the overdiagnosis and overreferral of Black students to special education (Artiles, Dorn, & Bal, 2016), to teacher education in general (Milner, 2010). From Danielle Davis et al.'s (2015) collection, *Intersectionality in Educational Research*, or S. Hancock and Warren's (2017) *White Women's Work: Examining the Intersectionality of Teaching, Identity, and Race* in the United States, to Bhopal and Preston's (2012) *Intersectionality in Education* in the United Kingdom, intersectionality becomes a favored framework in CRT in education, arguably rivaled only by appropriations of Derrick Bell's (2005) "interest convergence" and counterstorytelling methodology (1992), and Harris's (1995) analogy between whiteness and property.

To editors Bhopal and Preston (2012), the role of intersectional analysis in education has been decisive. Going well beyond the race-gender system, the career of intersectionality in education has been fecund for studying the general process of othering. To Brah and Phoenix (2009), intersectionality has roots in Sojourner Truth's injunction "Ain't I a Woman?" to challenge the essentialist notion of "woman" (and we may

add “Black”; see Dumas, 2010; Hall, 1996). Brah and Phoenix “regard the concept of ‘intersectionality’ as signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation. . . intersect in historically specific contexts” (p. 248). Intersectionality’s effects on education scholars have been felt to such an extent that it includes any explanation about overlapping systems of oppression, psychological, social, or otherwise.

Once CRT becomes established in education, the term *intersectional(ity)* proliferates in the discipline’s lexicon, from K–12 (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009) to higher education studies (Museus & Griffin, 2011), from physics education (Leyva, 2016) to physical education (Flintoff, Fitzgerald, & Scraton, 2008). Its closest ally, LatCrit, highlights immigration status and how the ability to speak languages other than English play a central role in the marginalization of Latinx youth (e.g., Covarrubias, 2011; Perez-Huber, 2010; Yosso, 2005). Even the actual consonant “x” in Latinx or Filipinx, symbolizes an intersection in a way that few letters, other than the “t,” can claim. It becomes increasingly difficult to invoke the academic term casually, without any reference to Crenshaw’s formulation, even when investigating relations of subordination not limited to a race-gender synthesis. It is similar to going down the rabbit hole of studies of ideology without any trace of Marx. Like Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Milner (2013) uses intersectionality generally when he writes,

It is important to note that examining the intersection of race and poverty can provide a lens for researchers and consumers of the findings of research to disentangle the role and salience of race in the educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes of the libraries for particular students. (p. 28)

Noteworthy is Milner’s (2013) use of the word “disentangle,” arguably an attempt to isolate the “race effect” in studies of poverty rather than entangle race with class relations as coaxiomatic (cf. Grosfoguel, 2007). One finds a comingling of race and class micro aggressions in Sarcedo, Matias, Montoya, and Nishi’s (2015) study where they document what they call “raceclassist microaggressions” that first-generation, low-income college students of color suffer. Appropriating Cheryl Harris’s (1995) celebrated chapter on whiteness as property, Leonardo and Broderick (2011) argue that within a racialized study of disability, smartness functions ideologically like a form of property, thus intersecting race/whiteness with ability studies without referring to Crenshaw (cf. K. Young, 2016).

As CRT and intersectionality make their way across the discipline of education, their influence is accommodated into well-established paradigms. For instance, Volume 2 of James Banks’s four-volume *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education* contains extended sections on intersectionality. A long and introductory entry on intersectionality is written by Grant and Zwier (2012), followed by another entry on “Intersectionality of race, class, gender, and ethnicity” by Caruthers and Carter (2012; see also Grant & Zwier, 2011). Although more closely associated with multiculturalism, Grant and Zwier provide a lengthy genealogy of intersectionality in the social sciences, which centers Crenshaw but includes other influences like Patricia

Hill Collins (2000) and Iris Marion Young (1990). As such, Grant and Zwier (2012) broaden the history of intersectionality beyond Crenshaw when they state, “There is not one theory of intersectionality, but different conceptualizations and theoretizations of it, such as ‘vectors of oppression and privilege,’ ‘interlocking systems,’ and ‘multiple jeopardy’” (p. 1263). Additionally, they add concerns that intersectional analysis’ strength is also its weakness, mainly that it demands too much complexity and sophistication from writers and readers. The following entry by Caruthers and Carter, by contrast, places intersectionality squarely within Crenshaw’s scholarship even as they expand its analytic borders beyond race and gender. To the latter authors, its applicability in education may be found in the “hypervisibility” of African American males, who are under constant surveillance and punitive relations within schools (cf. Ferguson, 2001).

In key instances, intersectional analysis in education maintains fidelity with Crenshaw’s original deployment. To the extent that educational scholars work hard to avoid siphoning off the “race problem” in order to forge a single-axis explanation, intersectionality enjoys engagement as a way to explain how racism and sexism, as co-constitutive systems of subordination, reinforce each other (Powers & Duffy, 2016). Their implication with each other is not meant to be additive but multiplicative, where race and gender subordination mutually impair or disable people of color as always raced, gendered, and inferiorized subjects in the eyes of whiteness and patriarchy. In a sense, intersectional scholars spin an elliptical explanation that revolves around at least two axes. Here, the metaphor of the ellipse is more appropriate than the circle to the extent that the former contains two centers around which social and educational analysis orbits. Intersectionality illuminates the way that race and gender gravitationally tug on each other.

This dynamic is made accessible when we consider that Black girls or boys in school do not experience themselves as ultimately either racialized or gendered subjects, other than the return to a troublesome essentialism that Crenshaw set out to problematize. For instance, Annette Henry (2015) remains close to Crenshaw’s imbrication between race and gender relations, beginning with the lived experiences of Black women aligned with Patricia Hill Collins (2000; see Willis, 2015, for an intersectional study of Black women who study abroad). In this sense, blackness is not an empty or mysterious box that scholars fill with nationality, race, class, language, and gender but a site of their simultaneity. Brah and Phoenix (2009) seem to agree when they trace the earlier history of intersectional thought from Sojourner Truth, the Bridge (Called My Back) collective, and onward, placing intersectionality within a larger and longer struggle of women of color against “all final closures” (p. 249), with particular alliances organized around “*cultural specificities*” (p. 251).

This point does not prevent powerful interventions in education, which focus, for example, on Black boys. In other words, there is a specificity to the Black male experience in education and the micro aggressions they suffer, which warrants focused attention (Hotchkins, 2016). At the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate



School of Education, a concerted effort has been under way to change the representation and uplift the prospects of African American and Latino males in education. The *Journal of African American Males in Education* is dedicated solely to issues affecting the population signaled by its title. Obama's initiative, "My Brother's Keeper," is another such effort that focuses on increasing achievement for Black boys, sometimes attracting criticism for suggesting that this population is what needs changing rather than addressing structural mechanisms that limit their chances (Dumas, 2016). Valuable insights on Black males in education notwithstanding, a parallel focus on Black girls or Latinas in schools does not exist in the same magnitude, making the integration between gender and race at the level of analysis a matter of political choice that warrants critical reflection (Morris & Perry, 2017; Murphy, Acosta, & Kennedy-Lewis, 2013).

In this chapter, our interpretation is also that such a premium on the dynamism between interlocking social systems does not preclude *beginning* from racial analysis. A critical analysis of education may begin strategically with race without ending on a single-axis explanation. This is warranted especially if a context wherein race antagonism erupts provisionally requires that race is privileged as the overarching relation under investigation. In other words, as understood here, intersectionality was not meant to displace race as much as it was innovated to recognize its full measure of power that *accounts* for gender, class, and language rather than their absence. Said another way, an intersectional race analysis is arguably stronger in its ability to trace the objective and far-ranging effects of race than its weaker form found in single-axis analysis (cf. Harding, 1991, on strong vs. weak objectivity in the sciences). But this does not suggest that race is always an inappropriate beginning for any study, just as BLM spreads (and not always by Black activists) precisely when Black lives are under extreme threat through police shootings and other state-sponsored violence. The same may be said about privileging gender analysis when discrimination against queer and trans students attracts public scrutiny, including challenging bathrooms based on gender "assignment" in public institutions like schools.

Beginning analysis is a matter of context and strategic choice, of how to proceed based on what is immediately at stake, and likelihoods for success based on history and experience in social movements. To begin, as Said (1985) reminds us, is provisional and not originary, is secular not religious (i.e., grounded on sacred texts and issues), and occurs in fits and starts rather than an unfolding teleology toward a predetermined end. In this political condition, intersectionality is educative to the extent that it provides guidance, principles, and the possibilities of praxis across difference rather than laying claims to an essentialist subject of both oppression and liberation from it. It does not designate ahead of time and at which juncture of analysis intersectionality makes its appearance.

At its best, intersectionality is the ability to name racism even while acknowledging that racism is not the only culprit in a particular crime. Intersectionality graces Gillborn's (2015) article title even as he puts sharp focus on racism in education,

admitting preemptively that his readers may be confused by the contradiction of “link[ing] the idea of ‘intersectionality’ and the ‘primacy’ of racism in the same sentence” (p. 277). He argues, “‘Intersectionality’ is a widely used (and sometimes mis-used) concept in contemporary social science” (p. 278); to this, we might include education. Reminding us that the African American Policy Forum, run and directed by Crenshaw, defines intersectionality as a tool of analysis and resistance, Gillborn warns against liberalizing the concept. Delgado (2011) regrets that “intersectionality can easily paralyze progressive work and thought because of the realization that whatever unit you choose to work with, someone may come along and point out that you forgot something (p. 1264)” (as cited by Gillborn, 2015, p. 279). This point is key as intersectionality ascends into popularity and descends into commonsense usage. Based on his study of Black middle-class parents in the United Kingdom (see Ball, Rollock, Vincent, & Gillborn, 2013; Gillborn, Rollock, Vincent, & Ball, 2012), Gillborn argues that the entanglement among race, gender, and ability relations affects middle-class Black parents in a way that complicates their class privilege (i.e., fails to protect them). In this way, the multiple social forces in education bring up the “primacy of race and racism” at the empirical, personal-biographical, and political levels.

To be extra clear, Gillborn (2015) disabuses himself of being mistaken as a race determinist. He adds,

I do not assume that racism is the only issue that matters . . . neither do I believe that racism is always the most important issue in understanding every instance of social exclusion and oppression that touches the lives of minoritized people. Similarly, I am not suggesting that there is some kind of hierarchy of oppression, whereby members of any single group (however defined) are assumed to always be the most excluded or to always have a perfect understanding of the processes at work. (p. 284)

With the success that intersectionality has enjoyed in education comes certain dangers. As Gillborn, Delgado, and Crenshaw herself have diagnosed, much like the maligned or malunderstood term *critical*, intersectionality’s edge is experiencing a certain rounding. Although it clearly has stood the test of time and shown its power to explain race and gender subordination, intersectionality also faces domestication. Although it challenges the problems of essentialism and provides education scholars the ability to explain subordination more, it is in danger of explaining it less by flattening out the concept. The discipline would do well to guard against this trend.

That said, the intersectional framework has experienced particularly fruitful connections with dis/ability studies. Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013) inaugurated “DisCrit,” or the intersectional uptake of critical disability studies with CRT in education. DisCrit consists of at least three intellectual commitments: (a) to legitimate studies of subjects with disabilities outside of the medicalized/interventionist discourse, including mainstream special education; (b) to advance *ability* as a theoretical construct in its own right to explain intertwining social relations such as race and gender; and (c) to challenge normativity as a regulating principle (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016b). As a move to racialize ability and disable-ize race (see

Erevelles, 2002), DisCrit aligns itself with Crenshaw, whose “work on intersectionality [they find] useful for theorizing the ways in which race and ability are likewise intertwined in terms of identity” (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016a, p. 16), despite the authors’ admission that ability concerns rarely appear in Crenshaw’s work. The challenge for DisCrit and synergies aside is that at the same time it aligns itself with CRT, it fights against being confounded with it, right down to the tenets it closely appropriates from CRT (Mutua & Robinson, 2017). Some disarticulation may be necessary.

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN INTERSECTIONAL RESEARCH ON EDUCATION

One overarching implication of intersectional analysis is that dismantling one form of hierarchy necessitates an equally robust assault on other forms of subordination. Because racism and sexism recruit capitalism, sexuality, methodology, and epistemology to their work, problem-posing proceeds organically. In education research, it means seeking a composite methodology and analytic that speak to this complexity. It is unarguable that intersectionality occupies a special place in critical understandings of race and gender stratification in education, distinguishing mainstream uses of intersectionality from its *critical* version. Equally, it is important to push intersectionality into novel and significant ways so as to build frameworks that express their debt to Crenshaw’s formulation as well as take intersectionality into new directions.

For this, we return to Crenshaw’s original intervention that intersectionality may be a metaphor but should not be reduced to a convenient motif that peppers scholarly arguments. Beyond explaining the lives of Black women, for example, *critical intersectionality* aims to improve their social condition as part of an overall intellectual project. The move to speak to the multiplicity of subordination cannot be accomplished absent a clear attempt to explain and alleviate the challenges experienced by Black women and other marginalized groups. Taking heed of this warning, intersectional analysis maintains its integration of how the compounding effects of social forces, such as patriarchy and racism, limit the lives of despised or denigrated races and genders in education, the law, and social life in general. It should explain more, rather than less, this very process.

Our interpretation of the literature leads us to conclude that intersectionality displaces neither race nor gender as readymade social systems in order that these previously concrete forces melt into abstractions. It does not straitjacket analyses that begin with race or gender as hopelessly essentialist but builds from them as starting points for an appropriate intersectional synthesis. At this point, intersectional analysis becomes a relative practice insofar as there exists no standard to designate ahead of time how many axes to intersect and in what manner within one’s analysis. As such, intersectionality is less identity-centered and more the apprehension of conditions that shape and make meaningful these same identities as they crisscross and make cuts in each other.

To this end, research on intersectionality marks a new space for theorizing race and gender subordination in education as well as possible responses to it. It requires that concepts like micro aggression graduate to a complexity that documents the intersectional effects of conditions whereby race, class, sexuality, and gender are no longer separable at the politico-existential level even if they may be disaggregated at the conceptual level for explanatory purposes. Intersectional microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2015) occur precisely as the meanings of gender, race, and other social systems exert multiplicative, rather than additive, pressure on vulnerable communities. It means that resistance takes on an intersectional dimension when protest against the minimization of Black lives is articulated, for example, with a deep appreciation for Islamo- and Chicanophobia. Intersectional resistance becomes valued for its ability to work at nonessentialized understandings of social suffering despite the ostensible inadequacies of the language we use to name it, such as Black Lives Matter or the struggle in the discrimination against queer or trans lives. This is the self-reflective moment of the intersectional framework, which interrogates the conditions of intelligibility that make intersectional thought possible in the first place.

The apparatus of schooling is an intersectional meeting point, rather than the melting pot, of forces in the interpellation of the student as a subject on one hand and the nation creation project that is education on the other. This means that theory, method, and practice are distinguishable as conceptual tools but inseparable as politics. As such, intersectionality becomes a guiding framework at *all levels* of analysis, from inception (of an idea), to conception (of the study), and intervention (into the problem; see Maramba & Museus, 2011). At its broadest, intersectionality becomes a standpoint from which to view educational problems and possibilities, human limitations and liberations.

It is intersectionality as a form of intervention in the lives of people of color and women, or specifically women of color, with which we want to end here. Said another way, intersectional analysis' power is accorded by its intellectual project that is at the same time an educative-political project, or education in the broadest sense possible as the creation of a critical citizenry. Several decades later and with recent events that make this work more pressing, such as the public emboldening of White supremacist groups, attacks on universities, and procurement of "hate" speech even if it has legal standing, developing intersectional work in education makes the intellectual simultaneously political. As the former, one of the deep tasks of academic work is involved in the development of ideas and production of knowledge. As the latter, it reminds us that knowledge is best understood as politics in its conceptual form. Together, the intersection between the intellectual and political becomes a proxy for praxis.

A posting on its website announces that BLM "stands with Standing Rock" in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline, a project resisted by the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies through direct action in the winter of 2015:

As there are many diverse manifestations of Blackness, and Black people are also displaced Indigenous peoples, we are clear that there is no Black liberation without Indigenous sovereignty. Environmental

racism is not limited to pipelines on Indigenous land, because we know that the chemicals used for fracking and the materials used to build pipelines are also used in water containment and sanitation plants in Black communities like Flint, Michigan. The same companies that build pipelines are the same companies that build factories that emit carcinogenic chemicals into Black communities, leading to some of the highest rates of cancer, hysterectomies, miscarriages, and asthma in the country. Our liberation is only realized when all people are free, free to access clean water, free from institutional racism, free to live whole and healthy lives not subjected to state-sanctioned violence. America has committed and is committing genocide against Native American peoples and Black people.<sup>20</sup>

This eloquent statement indicates that intersectionality has become a central commitment of one of the most vibrant new social movements in the United States. As we have seen, however, this deep understanding of and commitment to intersectionality is not shared in the academy. Despite the fact that we are all nominally “intersectionalists” now, social theorists in law and education continue to struggle to incorporate fully the lessons of this subtle but endlessly generative concept, although in the field of praxis intersectionality continues to bear fruit.<sup>21</sup> Intersectionality reminds us of the importance of coalitions and allyship; it reminds us to be humble and to look for who is missing in the room. Above all, however, intersectionality reminds us—BLM reminds us—that our liberation is only realized when *all* beings are free.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Black Lives Matter, “A HerStory of the Black Lives Matter Movement,” <http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>.

<sup>2</sup>A Google search on October 28, 2017, for instance, yielded 3,630,000 results for the word “intersectionality.”

<sup>3</sup>Because our analysis is not comparativist in nature, the following review does not concentrate on authors’ particular contexts and their nation-specific arguments. Our methodology focuses instead on the uptake of intersectionality as a framework for race research, especially our sense of its growing influence in U.S. scholarship.

<sup>4</sup>They write,

College students and faculty in interdisciplinary fields such as women’s studies, ethnic studies, cultural studies, American studies, and media studies, as well as those within sociology, political science, and history and other traditional disciplines, encounter intersectionality in courses, books, and scholarly articles. Human rights activists and government officials have also made intersectionality part of ongoing global public policy discussions. Grassroots organizers look to varying dimensions of intersectionality to inform their work on reproductive rights, anti-violence initiatives, workers’ rights, and similar social issues. Bloggers use digital and social media to debate hot topics. Teachers, social workers, high-school students, parents, university support staff, and school personnel have taken up the ideas of intersectionality with an eye toward transforming schools of all sorts. Across these different venues, people increasingly claim and use the term “intersectionality” for their diverse intellectual and political projects. (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 1)

<sup>5</sup>Crenshaw herself points out that Sojourner Truth’s famous intervention at the 1851 Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio—her “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech—could be understood as an example of “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 153). Indeed, contrary to the

standard origin story, Crenshaw's 1991 *Stanford Law Review* article was not even her own first use of the term. "Mapping the Margins" relied on, and referred to, a 1989 article published in the *University of Chicago Legal Forum* called (somewhat awkwardly) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (Crenshaw, 1989). It was in this earlier article that Crenshaw first used the word "intersectionality."

<sup>6</sup>Patricia Hill Collins puts this well:

Intersectionality's ability to draw attention to and account for *inter*-social relations—including those on the margins—challenges binary thinking, shifting the analytic focus on the fluidity among, interrelationships between, and co-production of various categories and systems of power. As a result, epistemologically, intersectionality highlights the various standpoints that "inter" social locations occupy; these alternative standpoints challenge truth claims advanced by historically powerful social actors. (Collins, 2012, p. 454)

<sup>7</sup>Indeed, the recent emergence of the term *Latinx* can be seen as a case study in intersectional consciousness. The term is currently used as a nongendered substitution for the gendered term *Latino/a*, which in turn emerged in response to the masculine-gendered term *Latino*.

<sup>8</sup>Crenshaw (1989, p. 149).

<sup>9</sup>Legal scholars Ann McGinley and Frank Rudy Cooper (2013), for example, acknowledge the value of "intersectionality" but adopt "multidimensionality" instead, explaining,

The metaphor of intersectionality suggests two cars traveling down roads that collide at an intersection. The metaphor of multidimensionality more readily suggests a world that exists at many levels, with trains underground, planes above, and other automobiles on the roads. At the level of metaphor, although intersectionality theory might be understood as two-dimensional, multidimensionality theory clearly encompasses three dimensions. It is not that one cannot read the original intersectionality articles to imply multiple dimensions, but we think one is more likely to consider multiple identities and contexts when thinking about the multidimensionality of identities. (p. 335; see also Hutchinson, 1997, p. 641)

<sup>10</sup>Somewhat similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (2012) argues that intersectionality should be identified in a number of different domains. McGinley and Cooper (2013) argue that the cultural realm of intersectionality is too often ignored, and argue that "multidimensionality" does this job better.

<sup>11</sup>As Judith Butler (1990) notes, reeled-off lists like "race, gender, class, sexuality" "invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list . . . these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete" (p. 182). The implicit equation of the "class" dimension of subordination as homologous to other dimensions has come under particular fire from academics. For one well-known example, see Fraser and Honneth (2003).

<sup>12</sup>For a similar criticism of a cognate term now prevalent in sociology—"super-diversity," see Foner, Duyvendak, and Kasinitz (2017).

<sup>13</sup>The authors of this study explored two different senses of "intersectionality:"

[W]e formulate and investigate two different constructs: demographic intersectionality, in which the courts are the site of intersectional disadvantages or discrimination, and claim intersectionality, in which the law does not adequately redress intersectional discrimination that occurs in the labor market. Demographic intersectionality can be thought of

as a type of inequality in litigation, while claim intersectionality can be thought of as a mismatch between discrimination as conceptualized by law and discrimination as experienced in the labor market. (Best et al., 2011, p. 993)

<sup>14</sup>According to the study's authors:

Bivariate relationships between both claim and demographic intersectionality and case outcomes yield strong support for intersectionality theory. First, plaintiffs making intersectional claims are less than half as likely to win their cases as are other plaintiffs (15 percent compared to 31 percent; see Table 4). Second, race and sex disadvantages do not operate independently. White male plaintiffs were more likely to lose their cases than white women were (61 percent as compared to 55 percent; see Table 4). This female advantage, however, does not apply to black women, who are slightly more likely than black men to lose their cases (71 percent as compared to 69 percent; see Table 4). (Best et al., 2011, p. 1009)

<sup>15</sup>A similar structure of multiple “grounds” articulated within antidiscrimination legislation has apparently retarded attempts to legally recognize intersectionality in Canada, South Africa, and the United Kingdom (Campbell, 2015).

<sup>16</sup>Campbell (2015) explains,

There is no reference to intersectional discrimination in the text of either the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, but both CESCR and the HRC have addressed intersectional discrimination in the General Comments. CESCR observes that “some individual or groups of individual face discrimination on more than one of the prohibited grounds . . . such cumulative discrimination has a unique and specific impact . . . and merits particular consideration and remedying” (idem). In the context of gender discrimination the HRC notes that “discrimination against women is often intertwined with discrimination on other grounds . . . states parties should address the ways in which instances of discrimination on other grounds affect women in a particular way . . .” (HRC, General Comment No. 28, § 30). This remains an essentially grounds-based approach that examines the interaction between enumerated or analogous status-based grounds. (p. 484)

<sup>17</sup>Chow (2016), however, is concerned that the emphasis on structural intersectionality in CEDAW (a) has obscured the fact that multiple identities are not invariably negative, (b) has encouraged a purely “additive” approach to intersectionality, and (c) has obscured women’s resilience and creativity in resisting their own oppression. Chow views the approaches to intersectionality embraced by interpreters of CEDAW as overly focused on “intercategorical complexity” and recommends more “intracategorical” analysis to understand how categories themselves are produced and reproduced.

<sup>18</sup>The group wrote,

The idea of “intersectionality” seeks to capture both the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of discrimination or systems of subordination. It specifically addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, economic disadvantages and other discriminatory systems contribute to create layers of inequality that structure the relative positions of women and men, races and other groups. Moreover, it addresses the way that specific acts and policies create burdens that flow along these intersecting axes contributing actively to create a dynamic of disempowerment. (As cited in Chow, 2016, p. 10)

<sup>19</sup>General Recommendation No. 25 of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Committee on Gender-Related Dimensions of Racial Discrimination, for example, requires the states party to the convention to give consideration to four different aspects of racial discrimination experienced by women: (a) its “form and manifestation,” (b) the circumstances under which it occurs, (c) its consequences, and (d) the “availability and accessibility of remedies and complaint mechanisms” (see Chow, 2016, p. 16). Chow argues that in this context, UN human rights treaty bodies have been able to “make visible the sophisticated ways in which ‘social differences and inequalities are embedded in existing hegemonic power relations’” (p. 16).

<sup>20</sup><http://blacklivesmatter.com/solidarity-with-standing-rock/>.

<sup>21</sup>Patricia Hill Collins (2012) argues that from this perspective, intersectionality and pragmatism are aligned and have much to offer each other.

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