



# Introduction

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Living with and navigating multiple, intersecting identities is not a new phenomenon (Yuval-Davis, 2013). Perhaps W. E. B. Du Bois's (1903/2010) articulation of double consciousness was an expression of the intersection of being both American and an American of African descent and the complexities of navigating those identities. And perhaps Martin Luther King, Jr.'s difficult decision to distance himself from civil rights activist Bayard Rustin—who openly identified as gay (Branch, 1989)—captured the complexities and intersections of religion, politics, and social justice. However, using the term *intersectionality* to discuss these experiences was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a scholar of law, critical race theory, and Black feminist thought, in 1989. She used intersectionality to explain the experiences of Black women who, because of the intersection of race and gender, are exposed to exponential forms of marginalization and oppression.

In addition to Crenshaw, other women of color scholars have also contributed to the widespread recognition of intersectionality, such as Patricia Hill Collins, Bonnie Thornton Dill, Ange-Marie Hancock, and bell hooks. Because of increased recognition and appreciation for intersectionality as a framework, it is now used more broadly to define (a) the intersecting identities of individuals beyond women of color (e.g., Strayhorn, 2013), (b) power relations among groups (e.g., Yuval-Davis, 2013), and (c) research paradigms used to design empirical studies exploring multiple and interlocking identities (e.g., Griffin & Museus, 2011; Hancock, 2007). Intersectionality now garners attention in education, law,

philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology, and scholarly conversations about intersectionality and its multiple meanings now span the globe. While scholars of higher education (e.g., Griffin & Museus, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013; Strayhorn, 2013) have begun documenting intersectionality within certain higher education contexts, it has received limited attention in the field of higher education overall. However, the liberal or progressive nature of higher education (Solow, 2004), in conjunction with rapid demographic shifts occurring in U.S. higher education, will probably encourage higher education researchers and practitioners to become further immersed in intersectionality discourse.

Underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities (i.e., African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders) will collectively make up the majority of the U.S. population by 2025 (Malcolm, Dowd, & Yu, 2010). In addition, men are receiving fewer degrees than their women counterparts (Sax, 2008). Yet women remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, are paid less across disciplines, and are less likely to receive promotions in comparison to men within U.S. higher education contexts (Ginther & Hayes, 2003; Glazer-Raymo, 2003). These trends and complexities affect U.S. higher education as we know it, and further explorations of these intricacies are warranted because they ultimately affect the nation and the world. If the United States is to stay competitive in an increasingly “flat world” (Friedman, 2005), students from all backgrounds must receive their fair share of degrees awarded in all disciplines from the associate to the doctoral level. Without diversity in the ivory towers, the United States is inevitably at risk of further eroding its economic prosperity and leaving national needs unfulfilled.

Intersectional explorations and practices can serve as gateways for exploring, interpreting, documenting, and, most importantly, providing solutions to the social concerns facing U.S. higher education institutions. For example, college students’ social and academic integration into university life is an area of inquiry that could benefit from the tenets of intersectionality. According to Strayhorn (2012), academic and financial variables, together, account for approximately 40% of postsecondary outcomes. He then goes on to note that a sense of belonging is a salient variable that is often overlooked in postsecondary outcomes. Perhaps what Strayhorn conveys is that overlooking students’ unique identities and needs stifles their sense of belonging and may negatively affect retention and graduation rates.

Accordingly, research, policies, and practices that recognize the relevance of intersectionality may be important in improving educational outcomes for current and future college students. Without these advancements in practice, colleges and universities may continue to fall short in giving every student a fair chance to achieve learning outcomes; they must recognize students’ continuous need to navigate spaces in an attempt to belong and begin to deconstruct oppressive forces on colleges campuses. For example, students are often confused when they are invited

to join all-encompassing, identity-based groups, because the invitation sometimes marginalizes or de-emphasizes other facets of their identity (Renn, 2011). When students of mixed Black and White racial backgrounds are asked to join Black students' unions—even though they may have never identified solely as Black—they may not find those unions as adequate or necessary support systems (Renn, 2011). These types of experiences often affect college students' social integration, which, in turn, influences their academic outcomes, because social and academic integration are interrelated (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

As access expands, demographics shift, and institutions become more diverse across the higher education terrain, there will be a need for more intersectional support systems on college campuses in the near future; such support systems will be needed for students, faculty, staff, and administrators alike. Unsurprisingly, some intersectional support groups have existed for quite some time but have not been fully analyzed or recognized for the intersectional support they offer (e.g., Black, Latina, and Asian sororities). In addition, newer intersectional support systems have emerged in recent years, such as minority male initiatives like the Huntley House for African American Men at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. While these intersectional spaces are worthy of full support, it is unlikely these support systems and practices will improve higher education as siloed spaces. The interconnectedness or “bordering” of these intersectional supports and the members who inhabit them also warrant attention (Yuval-Davis, 2013).

Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2010) wrote, “Context and the negotiation of lived experiences may take shape and be interpreted differently because of uniquely intersecting experiences....Intersectionality urges researchers to consider how individual and social constructions of ‘difference’ and ‘commonality’ matter in ways that are intertwined” (p. 38). Ropers-Huilman and Winters might agree that higher education researchers and practitioners need to understand and foster intersections and the interactions of different groups. Research and practices are needed that highlight and acknowledge intersectionality and accompanying interactions for meaningful paradigm shifts to occur in higher education. While scholars of intersectionality have “mapped the margins” (Crenshaw, 1991), what about the “spaces in between” (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2010)?

Another aspect of intersectionality that is undertheorized—and perhaps rightfully so given its original definition—is the intersections of privileged identities and how members of these groups influence marginalized groups. Intersectionality scholarship has focused on populations that are double or multiple minorities, as the intersections of their marginalized statuses amplify their oppressions and highlight their unique experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2007). However, intersectionally marginalized groups are not oppressed in a vacuum in society. They are oppressed and marginalized by groups who possess power and privilege (e.g., male, White, heterosexual, Christian, and able-bodied privileges;

Yuval-Davis, 2013). Thus, explorations of (a) privileged and oppressed identities and their intersections (Nash, 2008), (b) multiple privileged identities and their intersections, and (c) the bordering, power dynamics, or interrelatedness of privileged and marginalized groups (Yuval-Davis, 2013) are needed to further intersectional praxis specifically within higher education.

The purpose of this text is to document and expand upon the foundational tenets of Crenshaw's (1991) articulation of intersectionality within the context of U.S. higher education. To do this, the volume is organized in three sections: theory, research, and praxis. And within this collection of individual works, the contributors display the ways in which scholars are using and advancing intersectionality in higher education theory, research, and praxis.

Intersectionality is valuable as framework because it is not meant to be solely theoretical; it is a critique that fosters conversations for real-world change and progress. By utilizing the present collection of works, scholars and practitioners may be able to incorporate or enhance the uses of intersectionality in their work so we can begin to move further towards social justice within U.S. higher education contexts. By doing this, we can strengthen the uses of intersectionality and ultimately change higher education as we know it.

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