

Kimberlé Crenshaw's significant and useful theorization of intersectionality in 1989 and 1991 has been adopted so widely that the concept is now deployed "in vastly different and divergent ways and for different purposes" (Tomlinson 2013, 993). Because of the widespread travel of intersectionality, however, even Crenshaw herself sometimes finds that she can "hardly recognize the concept because its meaning ha[s] been so distorted or inverted through unfaithful or careless reading" (Davis 2019, 2). What Crenshaw intended as "a heuristic device for illuminating discriminatory situations," particularly within the law, now functions as an adjective that is frequently appended to feminism as in the query sent out for this essay contest in which you ask, "What is the future of intersectional feminism?" (Ibid.). At the heart of the discussion around the uses and misuses of "intersectionality" is both the fear and the reality that "intersectionality" has been taken up by mainstream feminists, predominantly White ones working within hegemonic, neoliberal structures, in such a way that intersectionality has been rendered all but meaningless with the force of its critique of power irreparably blunted.

It is my view, therefore, that "intersectional feminism," as such, doesn't exist as a meaningful thing in the world, but that the intersectional analysis of power suggested to us by Crenshaw and other Black feminist thinkers who have expanded our understanding of the concept, such as Cathy Cohen (1997) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000), is still usefully available to feminists to deploy as we engage in a collective, freedom-oriented political project. Simply affixing the word "intersectional" to feminism doesn't solve any of the categorical troubles surrounding identity that have been at the heart of feminist politics from their origin. Rather, intersectionality as a mode of analysis or heuristic device can be strategically employed to highlight and deconstruct the indeterminacy of all identity categories (such as woman and

Black), while at the same time taking into account the ways in which structures of power systemically disadvantage those people who exist in the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.

Within the context of this essay, one written for an essay contest for the university's "Commission on the Status of Women" coming out of the office of "Global Diversity & Inclusion," such an intersectional analysis could be usefully applied to the institutional power structures of PSU itself. For example, Global Diversity & Inclusion recently released findings of the PSU Campus Climate Survey. Within the report on faculty responses to the survey, intersectionality is addressed as such: "While the Faculty Climate Survey explored experiences and perceptions from different groups of faculty members, it did not allow for exploration of the challenges of persons with multiple marginalized backgrounds as it relates to the overall work climate" (Report on Campus Faculty Responses: University Campus Climate Survey Report on Campus Faculty Responses 2018, 14). Intersectionality, if taken seriously, requires that we do not ignore or make invisible the structural discrimination that happens to "persons with multiple marginalized backgrounds." My suggestion, then, is that rather than trying to claim a future for an ambiguously meaningful and unwieldy thing termed "intersectional feminism," it is more useful to think about when and where an intersectional analysis can be deployed in the service of social justice in our local contexts, such as at PSU.

That is, whether we consider ourselves to be "intersectional feminists" or not, an intersectional analysis is available to anyone interested in examining how power structures function. Sirma Bilge (2013) argues, "intersectionality" has come to serve

important purposes for the circulation of diversity rhetorics across the academy... A depoliticized intersectionality is particularly useful to a neoliberalism that reframes all values as market values: identity-based radical politics are often turned into corporatized diversity tools leveraged by dominant groups to attain various ideological and institutional goals (Bilge 2013, 407).

It would be fair to say, along with Crenshaw, that her original call to notice the intersection of multiple marginalizations has not yet been widely taken up, despite the popularity of “intersectional feminist” as a self-assigned moniker. As Crenshaw notes in a recent Ted Talk, “without frames that allow us to see how social problems impact all the members of a targeted group, many will fall through the cracks of our movements left to suffer in virtual isolation, but it doesn’t have to be this way” (Crenshaw 2016, n.p.). As such, the intersectionality of intersectional feminism is still waiting to be realized.

To conclude, I’d like to turn to the thinking of Jennifer C. Nash, author of *Black Feminism Reimagined After Intersectionality* (2019). Nash recently noted in an interview that she wrote the book in order to think about the so-called “intersectionality wars” within feminism and to examine the burden placed on Black women to defend and protect intersectionality from misuses (Garcia-Rojas & Nash 2019, n.p.). Nash suggests that such a “defensive” practice leaves Black feminists “stalled.” She writes,

We expend a lot of energy protecting our turf, policing its boundaries. It is this ongoing effort that I describe as ‘holding on’ to intersectionality. I use ‘letting go,’ on the other hand, to describe the risky endeavor of embracing the call to really be a non-captivity political project, to surrender the alluring project of protecting intersectionality. When I say non-captivity project, I mean that Black feminism has had a fundamental commitment to freedom — to thinking about what freedom looks and feels like, to thinking about who we are and how we relate to each other in a world where we are free (Ibid.).

I would like to take up Nash's suggestion that we "let go" of intersectionality, which Nash makes clear is not an abandonment of intersectional analysis, but a movement away from the insistence that all feminisms be truth tested for intersectionality or that they genuflect to it in "citational ubiquity" (Nash 2019, 3).

Such a "letting go," Nash argues, allows us to see the contributions of Black feminist thought "as an autonomous intellectual and political tradition that has engaged in theorizing myriad questions, developed multiple analytics including intersectionality"; Black feminist thought is not merely a site of critique of mainstream White feminisms that needs to be "integrated" into those feminisms in order to justify their ongoing institutional and structural power (Nash 2019, 16). Therefore, a "letting go" of intersectionality would paradoxically allow us to more fully pay attention to the freedom-oriented political project that has been, and continues to be, theorized and enacted by Black feminists. It would involve, as well, turning our attention to the urgent political project of other folks who exist at the intersection of multiple marginalizations, such as those of critical disability feminisms, queer feminisms, and transnational and post-colonial feminisms. Paradoxically then, I am arguing that the future of "intersectional feminism" will be most fruitful when we let go of a compulsive gesture to intersectionality that actually forecloses the urgent political project of analyzing and remedying multiple marginalizations as they concretely exist in the world.

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