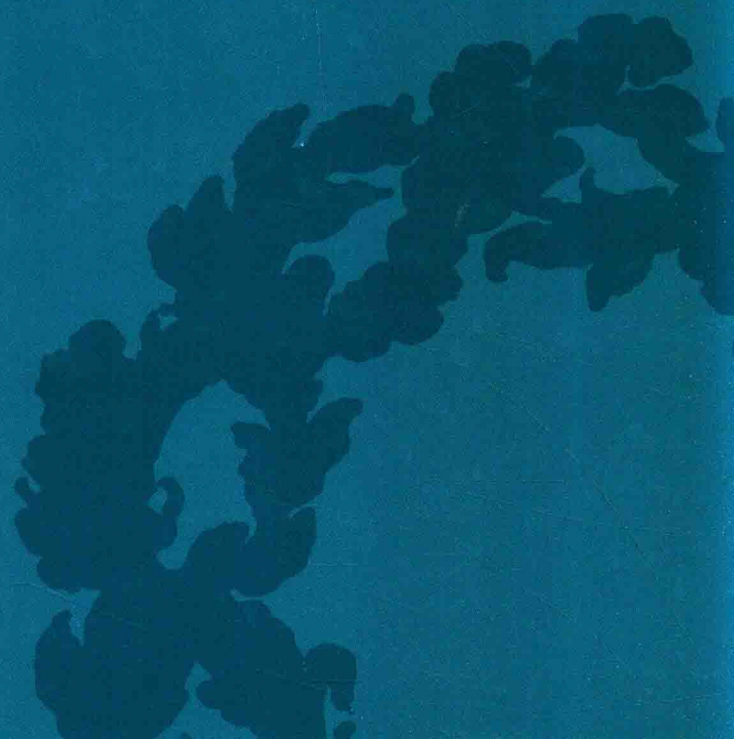


Why Race and Gender Still Matter

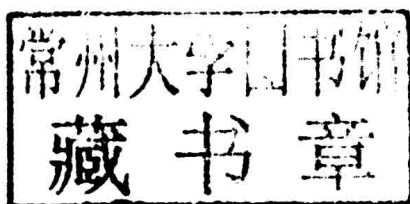
*Edited by Namita Goswami,
Maeve M. O'Donovan
and Lisa Yount*



WHY RACE AND GENDER STILL MATTER:
AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

EDITED BY

Namita Goswami, Maeve M. O'Donovan and Lisa Yount



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WHY RACE AND GENDER STILL MATTER:
AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

We dedicate this book to the future of our profession.
May philosophy live up to its promise and its obligations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On Saturday, 28 April 2012, the Eastern Division of the Society for Women in Philosophy held its annual conference at Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore, Maryland. The Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP) dedicates itself to honouring and enabling women philosophers in any field of philosophy, at every stage in their professional development. In planning for the 2012 Eastern Division (ESWIP) conference, the then leadership of ESWIP (the editors of the present volume) made a commitment to right a wrong in feminist philosophy and in SWIP's history – that of failing to attend adequately to the concerns and scholarship of women of colour philosophers. The spring 2012 conference thus focused especially on intersectionality.

The present volume embodies both the spirit and success of that conference. In addition to featuring contributions from established scholars across a range of specializations, the volume seeks to honour contemporary innovations in intersectional scholarship undertaken by a newer generation of scholars and activists. Such an approach is in keeping with SWIP's core mission of nurturing and mentoring scholars attempting to gain a foothold in an exclusionary and traditional discipline. We hope that the volume will elicit a new, rejuvenated discussion of intersectionality. Our aim is to change both how philosophy engages intersectional approaches and how the discipline treats those who currently exist at its margins. Rather than advocate mere inclusiveness and toleration, we argue that in the twenty-first century we must transform our very understanding of philosophy. We can only accomplish this aim by holding philosophy accountable to the insights and hard-won accomplishments of intersectional, interdisciplinary scholarship and activism.

In addition to expressing gratitude to SWIP, we would like to thank Notre Dame of Maryland University in general, and the Department of Philosophy in particular, for their enthusiastic support – both financial and otherwise – of the 2012 conference from which this volume originates. Without the advocacy and support of Debra Franklin, PhD, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, and Sr Christine De Vinne, OSB, Vice President for Academic Affairs, as well as the assistance and supplies provided by Kathleen Poorman Dougherty, PhD, former

Chair of Philosophy, Emilia Poiter, Director of External and Graduate Relations, Heidi Roller, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Bogda Soltys, Conference Services Manager, and Allegra Woodall, Bookstore Manager, this important conference would not have been possible.

Savannah State University and the Department of Philosophy and the Interdisciplinary Studies Program at Indiana State University also deserve recognition for their support of interdisciplinary approaches to philosophy. We would also like to extend our deepest thanks to Trelani Duncan, Communications Coordinator for the Savannah State University Quality Enhancement Plan, and Michael Laub, a philosophy major at Indiana State University. Their help during the final stages helped this project immeasurably. We couldn't have done this without them.

We would especially like to thank Philip Good at Pickering & Chatto for taking interest in ESWIP and for asking us to submit a book proposal. None of us anticipated that our conference would lead to a wonderful opportunity to showcase the work of women in philosophy. His help throughout the process has been much appreciated.

We would like to convey a special note of gratitude to those who stand by and with us every day: to our partners, Dr Paul Breines, Dr Brendan Corcoran and Dr Murray Skees, for their support and encouragement during this project; to T. Paul B. O'Donovan, MD, a passionate intellectual who insists that those in positions of power attend first and foremost to the needs and concerns of those existing at the margins; and to our children, Diarmuid Dhruv Corcoran, Ella Belle Sky and Graycen Jane Sky – we hope that work like this will allow you to inhabit spaces that were once not as open and inviting.

Finally, we would like emphasize what a joy it was to work with each other on this project. Through various challenges, tragedies and interruptions, we kept the spirit of feminist collaboration alive and lived what it means to be women in philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION TO WHY RACE AND GENDER STILL MATTER: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Namita Goswami, Maeve M. O'Donovan and Lisa Yount

Our anthology is an important contribution to an undertheorized, emerging area of discussion within and surrounding academic philosophy; the anthology supports a conversation that has set its sights on nothing less than transforming the discipline. The very act of publishing a collection such as the present one, a collection that embodies the diversity and intersectional engagement about which it is writing, is important. The contributors are diverse in age, professional status, ethnic background, regional location and area of expertise, and together their voices produce a far richer account of why intersectionality in philosophy matters than any single introductory essay could on its own. Our task in the Introduction, then, is to orient the work of the text and its authors; we do so both by interrogating the general framework of intersectionality – its definition, its history and its reception in the academy – and by arguing that philosophy as an academic discipline benefits from embracing intersectional inquiry. The volume engages intersectionality, first and foremost, as an attempt to disrupt the epistemic closure so easily sustained by tradition. In these pages, philosophy emerges through voices whose soundings must be heard with the kind of theoretical secularism that transgresses disciplinary and topical boundaries. We believe that race and gender still matter – until they don't.

Defining Intersectionality

Generally speaking, intersectionality has been characterized as an awareness, an approach, an analysis, a tool, a strategy, a method and a theory.¹ For some, the degree of variation and ambiguity in the term is reason enough for critique: a lack of definitional precision is equated with a lack of conceptual precision. Others suggest it is more important to understand what intersectionality does and what it enacts, as a form of praxis, than what its definition ought to be.² As Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Sumi Cho and Leslie McCall explain: '[A]nswers to

questions about what intersectional analysis is have been amply demonstrated by what people are deploying it to do.³ Furthermore, there is a deliberate and necessary open-endedness to intersectionality that makes it challenging to classify.

An intersectional approach is expected to be fluid enough to adapt to the context at hand – the conventions of a discipline, the policies of an organization, the practices of an institution, etc. – to reveal oppression that was obscured in that given context, and, in the revealing, make room for possible transformation. As a transformative methodology, intersectionality ‘captures not just the static outcomes of the problem it brings into view but its dynamics and lines of force as well.’⁴ Intersectionality is marked by the kind of flexibility that attends to particularity while resisting definitional categorization. As such, it looks and performs differently against different backdrops, while maintaining a general core of commitments across contexts. It is important to consider, therefore, the provisional intention of the framework when analysing definitions of intersectionality. Although definitional and methodological certainty may grant confidence-inspiring predictability, expectations of certainty and predictability support rather than challenge the formulaic categorizations of difference that necessitated intersectional approaches in the first place.

Perhaps the most sustained overview of intersectionality and its trajectories can be found in ‘Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis.’ Here Crenshaw, Cho and McCall offer an operational definition:

Intersectionality is best framed as an analytic sensibility. If intersectionality is an analytic disposition, a way of thinking about and conducting analyses, then what makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term ‘intersectionality’, nor its being situated in a familiar genealogy, nor its drawing on lists of standard citations. Rather, what makes an analysis intersectional – whatever terms it deploys, whatever its iteration, whatever its field or discipline – is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power. This framing [conceives] of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power.⁵

This description encompasses a cluster of commitments that are central to what intersectional work ascribes. Intersectionality aims to focus awareness on the experiences of people and the way in which those experiences are shaped and marked by social dynamics and forces. Such attunement requires sensitivity to multiplicity and the ability to apprehend complex constellations of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, nation and the like. In describing or naming these constellations and their effects, intersectional approaches allow marginalized groups to be recognized in ways that are often hidden in plain sight, and, in doing so, to have their realities expressed from grounds sufficiently complicated to open up possibilities for corrective response.

We believe that Crenshaw, Cho and McCall's emphasis on the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power generates a worthy philosophical quest: can we properly employ a concept of non-antagonistic difference? Given that conceptual systems exclude difference for coherence and legibility, implied in the motivation to engage in intersectional work is a commitment to pluralism. The ability to see and attend to what is revealed by such work necessitates an understanding of difference that is non-oppositional. Because difference is not necessarily or inherently antagonistic, pluralism as an orientation towards diversity, and an appreciation for the way that diversity strengthens perspectives, provides a more complete picture of truth. In short, intersectionality is both pluralistic in nature and a way of encouraging pluralism in practice.

The History of Intersectionality

Taking seriously the claim that intersectionality involves a sensibility and a way of thinking that are attentive to questions of sameness and difference and power relations, that it foregrounds the ways that social categories align and converge to confer privilege and domination, one can trace (proto)intersectional analyses back for centuries. However, as is well known, it was Kimberlé Crenshaw's groundbreaking work in critical legal studies that first articulated the term for the academy. In 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', intersectionality was introduced as

a heuristic term to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics. It exposed how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice.⁶

In several class-action discrimination cases, Crenshaw showed how public policy designed to further social justice could, in practice, disadvantage black women employees. Pointedly using 'Black women as the starting point',⁷ Crenshaw's analysis revealed how race and gender discrimination combined to produce specific effects on black women's lives.⁸ In the cases described, black women were denied redress as black women, through both anti-discrimination and seniority policies; because, on the one hand, blackness was unreflectively being associated with black men and, on the other hand, womanhood was unreflectively being associated with white women, black women were left unjustly unrepresented. In an article a few years later, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', Crenshaw elucidated three intersectional frameworks: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality and representational intersectionality.⁹ Structural intersectionality depicts how macro-level socio-political structures – white supremacy, patriarchy, capi-

talism, colonialism, ableism, heterosexism, climate change, etc. – intersect to make experiences of groups and individuals qualitatively different from one another.¹⁰ Political intersectionality indicates the places where an individual's various political identities may come into conflict. For example, according to Crenshaw, women of colour are too often required to choose between mutually opposing identities – black and female¹¹ – while black men and white women rarely experience such 'intersectional disempowerment'.¹² Representational intersectionality conveys the way that particular groups or individuals are interpellated within structures that impact how they are constructed by others as subjects and how they construct themselves as subjects.¹³ In this third domain of intersectional analysis, we see that institutional discourse often fails to convey the experience or consequences of marginalization such that marginalized groups or individuals are left using (only) personal narrative and histories to explore the impress of profound inequalities in their daily lives.¹⁴

Ultimately, Crenshaw reminds us that eliding race when taking up gender reinforces the oppression of people of colour,¹⁵ and anti-racist perspectives that elide patriarchy reinforce the oppression of women.¹⁶ For women of colour, embracing a single-lens focus, rather than an intersectional one, consolidates the invisibility of black women, foreclosing the possibility of a more empowering political discourse.¹⁷

Reflecting on the field of intersectional studies after more than twenty years of intersectional projects, Crenshaw, Cho and McCall identify three main ways that intersectionality has been typified. In conducting such a broad survey, their objective is to instigate further examination of how intersectionality as a conceptual framework and practical politics disrupts inequalities.¹⁸ Projects of the first type engage in systemic applications of intersectionality in 'context-specific inquiries' – seen in things like research or teaching¹⁹ – comprising practical applications of intersectionality or examination of dynamic intersectional analytics.²⁰ Additionally, projects of this kind strive to render intersectional analytical frameworks answerable to empirical realities. As such, disciplinary investments become subject to a ground-up approach whereby empirical research informs discipline-based methodologies.²¹

The second type consists of conceptual analyses. Such analyses examine the content conveyed by the concept of intersectionality, both in terms of scale of intervention and in terms of the conceptual framework's exemplariness as an analytic methodology.²² Such interrogations reflexively follow the history of intersectionality as it emerges across disciplines; they include questions regarding the framework's development and adaptations. Here conceptual labour also includes examination of whether or not intersectional analyses continue to resonate with the lives they are meant to better, remaining vigilant for the exclusions, omissions and disavowals that constitute any conceptual system.²³