INTERSECTIONAL PEDAGOGY

Complicating Identity and Social Justice

Edited by KIM A. CASE

"*Intersectional Pedagogy* is a marvelous resource for anyone aiming to integrate intersectionality into their teaching. Faculty and graduate student teachers will find many ideas about how to talk about intersectionality in a variety of course settings as it arises in the context of various social identities, as well as an amazing array of teaching resources and detailed strategies about how to pursue classroom discussions and activities that live up to the complexity and depth of the theorizing about intersectionality. So many chapters inspire and encourage pedagogical experimentation. I know I will return to the volume again and again for fresh inspiration."

—Abigail J. Stewart, Sandra Schwartz Tangri Distinguished University Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan, USA.

Intersectional Pedagogy is the first academic text to extend intersectional theory into the domain of pedagogical praxis. Editor Kim A. Case brings together works from a variety of fields, including social work, higher education, Afro-American studies, psychology, sociology, American studies, and gender studies to advance an educational agenda that dismantles the dominant categorical approach which treats social identities as mutually exclusive. Case's pedagogical model for teaching intersectionality and the additional contributors' groundbreaking essays lay the theoretical foundation for intersections of identity pedagogy and provide scholarship and practical applications to aid faculty in promoting complex critical dialogues about systems of privilege and oppression. With its range of disciplinary perspectives and evidence-based strategies, *Intersectional Pedagogy* is a much-needed resource for any student or educator who wishes to bring social justice into the classroom.

Kim A. Case, PhD., is Professor of Psychology, Director of the Applied Social Issues graduate program, Director of Undergraduate Psychology, and the Faculty Mentoring Program Chair at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, Houston, Texas, USA. She is Fellow of the American Psychological Association and Fellow of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.

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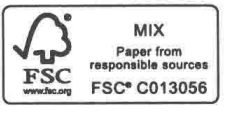

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Dedicated to educators committed to teaching social justice and taking on-the-ground action for pedagogical advancement toward ally development and peace.

FOREWORD

Teaching Intersectionality for Our Times

Although the concept of intersectionality was, to a large extent, foreshadowed in the writings of many generations of African American scholar activists (Hancock, 2005), since being coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), it has been hailed, variously, as the signal contribution of women's studies (McCall, 2005), a mantra (Puar, 2007), and a buzzword (Davis, 2008). Indeed, the term intersectionality was not clearly defined in Crenshaw's early work, and consequently it has been taken up and invoked widely and flexibly, often in ways that are not recognizable to those close to the primary sources. Today the word, if not always the concept, has traveled so far and become so frequently invoked that some now claim we have reached a moment of post-intersectional theorizing (Carbado, 2013). Thus, it is worth considering why the concept of intersectionality is still relevant today, and more to the point, why it is vitally important for educated citizens to have more than a passing familiarity with how to use an intersectionality framework to understand how historical and contemporary manifestations of identity, difference, and disadvantage continue to shape life chances and outcomes.

Today we often see the concept of intersectionality used to convey the obvious fact that every individual simultaneously occupies multiple social locations with respect to race, gender, social class, sexuality, etc. While it is true that sometimes the obvious needs to be stated, this characterization flattens intersectionality, rendering it as simply descriptive. In fact, the concept of intersectionality was originally identified and developed as a *mechanism*, a way to think about how these distinctions are socially constructed such that they depend on one another for meaning, which almost paradoxically can create vulnerabilities, erasures and gaps, particularly for members of groups defined by multiple axes of disadvantage. For example, Crenshaw (1989) famously observed how African American

women, who should have been protected by laws against both racial and gender discrimination in workplaces, were not protected *as Black women* because the law was premised on the experiences of those who are disadvantaged by race but not by gender, or by gender but not by race. Those who were doubly disadvantaged were essentially invisible to the law and thus had no access to redress.

Crenshaw's initial, very generative publications appeared in 1989 and 1993, an era of very public and contested conversations about Black women's vulnerability and their credibility as witnesses. For example, in 1991–1992, former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson was accused, tried, and eventually convicted of raping a young Black woman in his hotel room. Much of the public conversation surrounding the Tyson case sought to portray the victim, Desiree Washington, as either inviting her rape or being a liar. When Tyson was released from prison in 1995, he was honored at a rally in Harlem billed as a "Day of Redemption." In 1991, we also saw the televised confirmation hearings of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, during which Anita Hill, a Black woman civil rights attorney, testified that Thomas had sexually harassed her when they were coworkers at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) a decade earlier. The eventual confirmation of Thomas suggests that the Senate found Hill's allegations lacking in either credibility or importance.

These events, and others of the era (e.g., the 1990 acquittal of the rap group 2 Live Crew for obscenity based on their lyrics that degraded and portrayed violence against Black women, the Nation of Islam's patriarchal Million Man March in Washington DC in 1995) share features that beg for intersectional analysis. First, much of the contemporary public discussion of these events tended to privilege analyses based on either race or gender. For example, Thomas' characterization of the scrutiny he received during the hearings as a "high-tech lynching," in which he framed himself as an African American man as the victim in the scenario, was widely quoted. Second, the experiences of Black women were essentially negated or silenced by the outcomes of these controversies, whether it was Thomas' confirmation or Tyson's light sentence and warm reception by the community upon release. And third, as Barbara Ransby (2000) described, African American women responded to these issues with leadership, activism, and scholarship that refused single-axis analyses in favor of those that centered Black women, building dynamic coalitions that demonstrated Audre Lorde's (1984) axiom, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (p. 138).

This third point highlights the hallmarks of intersectional analysis. As Vivian May (2015) observed, intersectionality is animated by the desire to fully understand and challenge inequality and exclusion. It is fundamentally a theory of anti-subordination. Characterization of intersectionality simply as descriptive of multiple identities, rather than as a mechanism explaining inequality, does violence to the central idea that animates the concept. Moreover, because

intersectional analyses aim to reveal connections across different forms of subordination without prioritizing them or hierarchically ordering them, these analyses are innately coalitional (Cole, 2008). As Ransby (2000) noted, "Instead of policing boundaries, racial or otherwise, Black feminists have more often than not penetrated these barriers, expanding the meaning of 'we' and 'community' in the process" (p. 1219).

For these reasons, I argue that not only have we not come to a "post-intersectional" moment, our students need to be able to nimbly employ an intersectional analysis to make sense of the complexity and diversity of human experience as well as the processes that create and maintain inequality. If Kimberlé Crenshaw named intersectionality at a moment that begged for the concept in order to make sense of the issues of the day, today we face a moment that is not dissimilar. Notably, today Crenshaw is among the leaders of the #SayHerName movement which brings an intersectional lens to police brutality against African Americans and other communities of color. They aim toward inclusion of Black women's experiences of police brutality in media coverage, policy formation, and popular awareness. I watched Crenshaw (2015) ask a standing-room-only crowd at the meeting of the National Women's Studies Association to raise their hands while she read a list of names of African Americans who had been killed by police and keep them raised until they heard a name they did not recognize. She began with a list of men, many of them tragically young, whose stories were familiar to all: Michael Brown; Freddie Gray; Tamir Rice. The list went on at length and most hands stayed raised. Then she moved to another set of names beginning with Sandra Bland. By the time she reached the third woman's name, I could easily count the raised hands in the room on the fingers of one hand because both of my own were in my lap. By highlighting the role of gender in racialized state violence, the work of #SayHerName simultaneously raises the question of whose lives are deemed worth organizing to protect.

The lens of intersectionality makes questions like this legible and gives us the framework to answer it . . . and to change the answer. These are not new questions (e.g., Malveaux's 2002 essay on teaching intersectionality), but intersectionality offers students new ways to understand persistent patterns of inequity that reflect and respect complexity and diversity. The catch is that these are difficult lessons, both because the theory is complex and because an intersectional analysis compels us to fundamentally challenge many ideas, usually taken-for-granted: that racism, sexism, and homophobia are primarily attitudes; categories like *woman* and *African American* are best defined by the experiences of the most advantaged members of those categories; and the experiences of members of multiply marginalized groups are exceptional special cases and therefore not that important to consider. Any instructor who wants to take on this material has set the bar high.

In this volume, Case offers a model of intersectional pedagogy that directly addresses these challenges. The model succeeds on three levels by: (1) giving

sustained attention to oppression without shying away from recognition of privilege and power; (2) making visible the erasures of single-axis analyses; and (3) most significantly, consistently connecting the theoretical construct of intersectionality and the goals of social justice that motivate it. The pedagogical model and chapters throughout the collection accomplish this through both attention to the history and theory of intersectionality and by providing college instructors with practical tools to engage students in the practice and praxis of intersectionality.

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