Intersectionality is grounded in feminist theory, asserting that people live multiple, layered identities and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege. It is an approach to creating knowledge that has its roots in analyses of the lived experiences of women of color—women whose scholarly and social justice work reveal how aspects of identity and social relations are shaped by the simultaneous operation of multiple systems of power. Intersectional scholarship is interdisciplinary in nature and focuses on how structures of difference combine to create new and distinct social, cultural, and artistic forms. It is intellectually transformative not only because it centers the experiences of people of color and locates its analysis within systems of ideological, political, and economic power as they are shaped by historical patterns of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ethnicity, and age, but also because it provides a platform for uniting different kinds of praxis in the pursuit of social justice: analysis, theorizing, education, advocacy, and policy development.

Over the past two decades, intersectional approaches have expanded considerably, evolving in many different fields and across the humanities and social sciences, including women’s studies, American studies, law, history, sociology, education, African American studies, anthropology, literature, ethnic studies, English, architecture, and more. As its utility in revealing the complexities and multidimensionality of experience has become apparent, other identity groups and bodies of scholarship have utilized intersectional analysis to shed light on their particular experiences (i.e., queer studies, disability studies, and cultural studies). In addition, as scholars producing intersectional work began to apply their insights to the institutions where they worked—institutions of higher education—they began to speak and write about the challenges and opportunities that exist within and through the academy. Thus, intersectional scholarship is engaged in transforming both theory and practice in higher education across the disciplinary divide, offering a wide range of methodological approaches to the study of multiple, complex social relations.
In this chapter, we are charged with suggesting future directions of intersectional scholarship; Part 1 will offer speculation on future intersectional analyses, along with a few words of caution, and Part 2 will focus on the institutionally transformative character of intersectional work.

**PART 1: INTELLECTUALLY TRANSFORMATIVE ROOTS AND HISTORY**

Intersectionality has grown out of the work of feminists of color who have theorized about the interrelationship of race, class, gender, and other dimensions of difference. These scholars began their work by theorizing the experience of women of color who had been ignored in the scholarship on race and on gender. What distinguished these women was that their lives could not be understood through a unidimensional analysis focusing exclusively on either race or gender. Intersectionality instead builds on a U.S. scholarly tradition that began in the 19th century with women like Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, and men like W. E. B. Du Bois—intellectuals who first articulated the unique challenges of Black women facing the multiple and simultaneous effects of race, gender, and class. Contemporary women of color have continued this legacy through landmark scholarship of lived experience at the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

The people engaged in this work do so out of strong commitments to diversity, multiculturalism, and human rights and a desire to create a more equitable society that recognizes, validates, and celebrates difference. The social justice agenda of this scholarship is crucial to its utility in analyzing inequalities of power and privilege, and it is of interest to persons outside the academy who share concerns that underlie this scholarship.

**Growth, Dissemination, and the Future**

Because the contemporary growth of this approach is relatively recent and has developed in a number of different fields, future growth is largely defined by the trajectories of current debates and inquiries. Some of these directions were revealed in a study conducted by Bonnie Thornton Dill (2002) that investigated the current state of intersectional scholarship through interviews with 70 faculty members and a few graduate students at 17 universities and colleges. This report, and the developments that have occurred since that time, form the basis of our assessments of current and future directions in scholarship and pedagogy in those academic departments and institutions wherever intersectionality has gained an intellectual foothold.

Areas of scholarship where important debates are occurring and/or new combinations of intellectual and political insights are being combined are in the field of identity studies, work that engages with globalization/transnationalism(s), sexualities/queer studies, and new ways of linking theory and practice. Within each of these topics are disagreements about approach and perspective, but the debates and discussions contribute to the vibrancy of the topic.

**Identity Studies**

To a large extent, intersectional work is about identity, and identity politics has been the subject of considerable scholarly and popular debate over the past two decades. While identities and identity politics remain contested and much debated, the constructions and discourses about intersectionality as a tool for illuminating the nature of both individual and group identity is central to work in this area. Intersectionality in identity studies helps us understand the multidimensional ways people experience life—how people see themselves and how they are treated by others—and provides a particularly useful lens for examining the category of race. This interrogation not only must take place on the individual level but also must question how economic, political, and ideological structures construct and perpetuate group identities. Patricia Hill Collins (1998) writes,

The fluidity that accompanies intersectionality does not mean that groups themselves disappear, ... [but] deepens the understanding of how the actual mechanisms of institutional power can change dramatically even while they reproduce long-standing group inequalities of race, class, and gender. (pp. 205–206)
In the discourse surrounding identity, it is the tension between intersectionality as a tool for illuminating group identities that are not essentialist, and individual identities that are not so fragmentary as to be meaningless, that provides the energy to move the concept forward to the future. At the individual level, identity studies continue to call attention to dimensions of difference that have been largely unexplored and ignored. As Dill has pointed out, long neglected social groups at undiscovered points of intersection reveal the complexity of their lived experience, in particular "people whose identity crosses the boundaries of traditionally constructed groups" (Dill, quoted in Leslie McCall, 2005). Among the newer areas that are rapidly developing are disability and queer studies, where an intersectional analysis reveals the importance of individual difference and experience. At the same time, the methods by which these and other dimensions of difference are organized into systems of structured social inequality are essential to understanding the meaning of these categories and their particular histories. Uncovering and analyzing the linkages between these two kinds of analysis continues to drive the push toward social justice and human rights in this scholarship.

As a cautionary note, much intersectional work does currently focus on the individual/experiential level. More pathways need to be forged methodologically and theoretically to apply intersectional analyses of identities at the structural and political levels of analysis. This may mean using multiple methods in the same analysis, including ethnographic (and even autoethnographic) quantitative research.

Globalization/Transnationalism(s)

Work that examines international and global perspectives is another area that advances this scholarship. For example, work examining the social construction of blackness within a global context, along with work on African, Latino, Asian, and other diasporic groups, is seen as developing important new insights, not only for understanding the world outside the United States but for understanding the U.S. context as well. Chandra Mohanty (2003) uses the phrase "comparative women's studies" to describe intersectional scholarship. She argues that in addition to conceptualizing identity in multiple categories, it helps foreground ideas of nationhood and citizenship that may in turn be used to elucidate the position of women of color throughout the United States. The work on Third World women has emphasized the existence and importance of indigenous-based feminisms, within broader comparative hemispheric considerations, further stressing the importance of a global perspective on intersectional scholarship.

An intersectional approach also contributes to an understanding as to how dimensions of difference operate in different societies. One provocative example is the construction of race in the United States as compared with its construction in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Intersectionality reminds us that each cultural framework must be understood within its own context, regardless of whether the focus is on individuals, groups, or, in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, across nation-states.

One final caveat regarding globalization and transnationalism is this: We cannot allow the growing interest in this work to have us overlook the structural inequalities within the United States, and the identities and social dilemmas that continue to exist here. The recent widespread interest in transnational research—across our own borders and through the constant flow of human capital and resources—tends to submerge the embedded matrices of inequality and oppression originating here in the United States. It is perhaps easier to look outside our own borders without doing the necessary work to change, and even challenge, ourselves and the continuing power constructions of U.S. imperialism, consumerism, and economic elitism (Butler, 2001).

Sexualities/Queer Studies

The developing study of sexuality broadens our understandings of gender, breaking down some of the traditional borders between the sexes and our notions of sexual desire. Intersectional approaches are beginning to illuminate the relationships between sexuality, race, power, identity, and social organization. An example is the work of historian John D'Emilio, whose current work on the life of labor and civil
rights activist Bayard Rustin examines the complex ways race, gender, and sexuality intersected in Rustin's life and affected key strategies and actions of the civil rights movement. Rustin's identity as a gay man cannot be easily separated from his race or class or be distinguished from his work as an active member of the civil rights movement. Rustin's sexuality, examined through an intersectional analysis, reveals how integral his identity was in his framing of civil rights as a human rights movement. Roderick Ferguson (2003), in his book *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, develops an approach he calls "queer of color analysis" that reveals the interconnections among sexuality, economic inequality, and race not only in the history of American labor but also within various forms of knowledge production. His book lays out the historical role sociology has played in labeling African American culture as deviant, and, by carefully highlighting this process, Ferguson reveals how identity is inextricably linked to power, political representation, and the ever-shifting power dynamics of identity politics.

Salvador Vidal-Ortiz's (2004) article, "On Being a White Person of Color: Using Autoethnography to Understand Puerto Ricans' Racialization," is an example of current intersectional scholarship that challenges classical definitions of race, ethnicity, and nationality, while also repositioning debates about identity politics in the United States. Vidal-Ortiz argues that an alternative racialization process occurs when Puerto Ricans represent themselves while living in the United States, contrasted with living on the island. By studying the impact of more than one racialization system, it then becomes possible to see how categories of identity are constructed and maintained. His work uses an intersectional analysis to reveal how race and gender intersected in the treatment of Anita Hill to demean and discredit her in a way that was consistent with the historical pattern of treatment of Black women who speak out on sexual matters or publicly criticize Black men.

Work in the area of queer studies may require some precautions. For example, changes in linguistic appropriation/usage and terminology, from "gay" to "queer," or as Ferguson suggests, a "queer of color analysis," may lead to the erasure of the experiences of transgender or intersexed individuals who have been actively involved in the struggle over equal marriage rights for couples regardless of their gendered identities. As Rhonda M. Williams has suggested, although queer is seen as a "necessarily expansive impulse," we must understand how it still also reflects and, in some cases, might blur the complexities of sexual orientations and racial politics among Black gays and lesbians (Harper, cited in Williams, 1998).

**Linking Theory and Practice**

Because this knowledge is grounded in the everyday lives of people of diverse backgrounds, it is seen as an important tool linking theory with practice. Intersectional work can validate the lives and histories of persons and subgroups previously ignored or marginalized, and it is used to help empower communities and the people in them.

An example can be found in the work of Professors Barbara Ransby, Elsa Barkley-Brown, and Deborah King, who organized a national response to the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas controversy. Ransby, Barkley-Brown, and King prepared a public statement that applied an intersectional analysis to the vilification of Anita Hill as well as Clarence Thomas's distorted use of the concept of lynching. Signed by more than 1,600 African American women scholars, the statement offered an interpretation of those events that went beyond the singular focus on sexual harassment that had become the overriding concern of many White feminists, and the concurrent racial victimization evoked by Clarence Thomas's "high-tech lynching" claim. Their statement argued that constructs of race and gender intersected in the treatment of Anita Hill to demean and discredit her in a way that was consistent with the historical pattern of treatment of Black women who speak out on sexual matters or publicly criticize Black men.

The statement, published in the *New York Times* and six African American newspapers, offered a perspective on the case that had been totally omitted from public discourse and debate.

Scholars whose work is intersectional acknowledge their intellectual, social, and personal debt to civil rights, women's, peace, gay/queer rights, labor, and other social justice movements. It is worth noting, however, that scholars on an academic career track do theory-practice connections on their own; in most academic locations, they will not get credit for the practical/applied side of their work. Social justice work is not as well regarded or as well
rewarded as publishing, and junior scholars are often warned against "widening their focus" beyond the traditional requirements for tenure. In addition, this work takes a sustained investment of time and personal energy to ensure that it maintains its focus on social justice and outcomes that affect the everyday lives of people. This kind of work grows out of lived experience of people from disadvantaged social, political, and economic locations; therefore, research must be conducted in such a way that it is neither intrusive nor exploitive of the community on which it is focused. Developing the linkages between scholarship and praxis takes an inordinate amount of time and requires the nurturing necessary to ensure some benefit to local communities. In short, these projects should benefit the community as much or perhaps even more than the individual researcher or team.

In sum, the future looks promising for intersectional scholarship. The field continues to diversify, and new knowledge is being produced across a wide range of fields. In each expanding area, scholars are staying true to the intersectional commitment to interrogating power, privilege, and oppression and working toward equitable forms of social justice.

Precautions, Problems, and Misappropriations

Authenticity and Representation

As much as issues of authenticity and representation are debated as they concern national, international, and global affairs, they are also debated in scholarship and in the hiring, tenure, and promotion of faculty. Among these debates is the issue of who studies whom, and who speaks for whom—that is, who represents the "authentic" voice or voices of a particular community or communities. Within this scholarship, questions of speaking for and writing about "the other" have been central to its development. As scholars have sought to reclaim and present the stories and lives of previously silenced groups, and to define new areas of scholarship such as Black feminist studies, Chicana studies, American Indian studies, Latino studies, and so on, questions of identity, assimilation, essentialism, and who can claim membership in these groups have been highly contested.

Faculties and departments with a growing emphasis on scholarly questions related to race and ethnicity face a limited supply of faculty of color and find themselves grappling with these issues in hiring decisions, reappointment, promotion, and tenure. Once hired, faculty of color most often come to realize that they are expected to "represent" people of color as a kind of "spokesperson," in a variety of service capacities, none of which are incorporated fully into their compensation or tenure evaluations. Even departments and institutions with good intentions of making race, ethnicity, and difference central to their work rely heavily on a very small number of scholars of color who are personally committed to institutional change (Benjamin, 2000).

Relationship to the Organization and Structure of the Academy

A second area of controversy centers on the nature and structure of the academy itself and the place of intersectional studies within it. In general, the interviews with faculty of color across the United States convey the belief that intersectional work remains at the outermost margins of the academic enterprise. Although scholars acknowledge that strides have been made, that the amount of scholarship is growing, and that various institutions have begun to support some aspects of this work, those engaged in it feel that it continues to be far more peripheral to the central mission and activities of colleges and universities today than is appropriate or acceptable. The reasons for this are both intellectual and organizational (as well as financial) and cannot be discussed in depth here, but the next section details some of the progress that intersectional work is making in the academy and the challenges that remain.

PART 2: TRANSFORMING THE ACADEMY/INSTITUTIONALLY TRANSFORMATIVE

Intersectional work primarily takes place in the academy, communities, foundations, and social justice organizations dedicated to bringing about change. This analysis focuses on institutions of higher education because universities
and colleges are an important site for the production of knowledge, have links to these other institutions, and have traditionally been the location where much intersectional scholarship is produced. They are also a site where the influence of the scholars doing this work can be felt in subsequent changes that have an effect on the mission, engagement, and daily operations of these institutions. The analysis of the institutionally transformative aspects of intersectional knowledge presented here can be used as a basis for analyses of other institutions, most likely those formally connected to universities and colleges, as they engage with this scholarship and work at the intersections.

But arguing that this scholarship is institutionally transformative is not to say that it has already transformed the academy; to the contrary, the process remains at an early stage of development. To create and discover previously unlooked for analyses and histories using an intersectional framework means more interdisciplinary work, more work that focuses on the historical and geographical context of events, attitudes, and cultures, and work that breaks out of the academic mold to join forces with the communities whose internal knowledge is indispensable to the project. Thus, this scholarship has the capability to transform rigid boundaries between departments, between universities and their neighboring communities, and, in general, between what is viewed as valid and worthy of support in the academy and what is not.

**Interdisciplinarity**

Fundamentally, this body of scholarship connects ideas across disciplines and interlaces constructs that have customarily been treated as separate and distinct. It is, in essence, an interdisciplinary exercise. Within the conventionally structured academy, interdisciplinary studies have been gaining in popularity and, attesting to this, the Academy of Sciences released a report in 2004 that urges universities to promote successful interdisciplinary research (National Academy of Sciences, 2005) because it

[has an impact on multiple fields or disciplines and produce[s] results that feed back into and enhance disciplinary research. It will also create researchers and students with an expanded research vocabulary and abilities in more than one discipline and with an enhanced understanding of the interconnectedness inherent in complex problems. (Klein & Newell, 1998, p. 3)]

And yet this growth is taking place with little recognition of the departments and programs that have been interdisciplinary from their inception. These continuing programs may benefit as barriers fall, but much of the new interest reinscribes existing institutional power relations in the academy. Interdisciplinary programs that have an intersectional/social justice agenda are precariously placed and continue to be viewed with skepticism; yet they are the location of much cutting-edge scholarship that confronts entrenched disciplinary dogma.

Intersectional interdisciplinarity is transformative because of its commitment to a social justice agenda—one that draws on new connections and exchanges of ideas that take place when scholars from different institutional locations work together. In addition, nontraditional strategies are introduced, such as shared hires and recruitment targeting relatively newer disciplines (e.g., ethnic studies, women's studies, American studies, etc.), which contain within them opportunities for destabilizing the traditional ways of producing knowledge. This may require a department to support a scholar whose work crosses conventional boundaries and, perhaps, necessitates engaging in a mutually beneficial relationship with another campus program, department, or institution.

**Curriculum Transformation**

For a variety of educational, social, economic, and political reasons, colleges and universities are increasingly working to develop programming and public images that highlight diversity. Most often this notion of diversity focuses on improving human relations throughout the campus by increasing awareness, acceptance, understanding, and appreciation of human differences. Rarely does it focus on the inequalities of power and resources embedded in these differences; even more rarely is the expertise of intersection scholars seen as central to this enterprise. The push for diversity and
multiculturalism coincides with a push toward a more business-centered and entrepreneurial academy; rising tuition and fees; reduced state and federal support; and increasing student debt. It is not coincidental that these problems have reached crisis proportions at a time when corporate (e.g., privatized) solutions to the funding and organization of universities are seen as a corrective. In today's university there is (according to many) greater emphasis on "treating students as consumers and education as a commodity that produces credentials" (Hollander & Saltmarsh, 2000, para. 13). Intersectional work can belie the push toward corporatism as it is a contextualized approach that engages extensively with its subject. By its own definition, it is scholarship produced in pursuit of social justice that must question how power infiltrates the research and funding processes. Intersectional work often engages with off-campus communities and integrates nonacademic voices and experiences into its findings. The results aim to fuel changes in unjust practices across a wide variety of dimensions of social and political life.

Yet its ability to perform this function is hampered by the disproportionate under-representation of faculty color—the very faculty members most likely to bring this theoretical and applied perspective to their work. Nevertheless, revising campus curricular requirements is an important avenue toward an academy representative of all society (e.g., the University of Maryland's record of awarding Ph.D.s in 2004 was 5% African American, 5% Asian American, 1% Hispanic, and 0.2% American Indian—obviously not reflective of an increasingly diverse society), and for giving students the tools to become critical thinkers on their own merits. In addition, a diversified curriculum will increase and support the development of future intersectional scholars and activists.

Faculty Interventions

Some faculty create direct interventions into the production of knowledge on their campuses by founding and leading intersectionally oriented research centers, having joint appointments with traditional departments and newer departments, and promoting new approaches that integrate professional organizations. These centers will influence different academic arenas and change the campus intellectual climate by incorporating new forms of knowledge production, taking intersectional work outside of the academy, and shaping public policy and additional approaches to social justice.

The work of The Latino Critical Race Studies Group (LatCrit) at the University of Miami Law School provides an example. LatCrit, a national organization of law professors and students, seeks to use critical race theory to develop new conceptions of justice. To do this, the organization is actively engaged in what it terms "anti-essential community building." LatCrit (http://personal.law.miami.edu/~fvaldes/latcrit) has two main goals:

1. To develop a critical, activist and interdisciplinary discourse on law and policy towards Latinas/os, and
2. To foster both the development of coalitional theory and practice as well as the accessibility of this knowledge to agents of social and legal transformation. LatCrit theorists aim to center Latinas/os' multiple internal diversities and to situate Latinas/os in larger intergroup frameworks, both domestically and globally, to promote social justice awareness and activism.

No single community can produce a theory about intergroup justice without connections to and across other groups, and yet every single social justice movement has had a problem of essentialism, giving primacy to some aspects of their identity while ignoring others that intersect with and re-form that primary identity. As a result, LatCrit seeks quite consciously to consider Latino identity as a multifaceted, multilayered intersectional reality. Latinos, they argue, are Black, Asian, Gay, and straight and speak many different languages. Thus, in all their conferences, debates, and activities they seek to keep all of these differences actively engaged in the conversation.

At the University of Maryland, College Park, the Consortium on Race, Gender and Ethnicity (CRGE) is an interdisciplinary institution that works to promote intersectional theory, pedagogy, and methodology (www.crge.umd.edu). Founded in 1998, CRGE has been working to develop a national reputation as a leader in
intersectional scholarship, while promoting and disseminating work that uncovers how systems of race, gender, ethnicity, and other dimensions of inequality mutually shape experience, identity, and social organization. In so doing, CRGE has become vital to the fulfillment of the University of Maryland’s mission of achieving excellence and diversity in areas of research, scholarship, teaching, and community service by providing a foundation for the University’s ability to attract and retain graduate students and faculty of color. CRGE’s mission, therefore, is unique among research centers nationwide because it produces pathbreaking research and scholarship while mentoring and training faculty and graduate students of color, promoting scholarly collaborations across the campus, and applying its research and scholarship to issues of public policy.

Grant monies from the Ford Foundation provided for further development of CRGE as a research center as well as for funding of the Curriculum Transformation Project and the Department of African American Studies. With CRGE’s share of the grant money, the Center established itself with three faculty, two full-time staff members, and two graduate students, and funded 21 Research Interest Groups on campus among faculty from more than 25 departments to study issues related to race, gender, and ethnicity. Centers like CRGE are the kinds of institutional interventions that have made credible inroads in transforming the dialogue of social justice and diversity at universities across the country.

CONCLUSION

In sum, intersectionality is a body of scholarship that continues to be explored and expanded across a number of fields. This chapter has examined the directions that this scholarship might take; yet we believe only a glimpse of its bright future can now be envisioned across the numerous fields and disciplines where intersectionality is establishing itself. As an “emerging paradigm,” intersectionality is unique in its versatility and ability to produce new knowledge (Collins, 1998). We remain optimistic about the future of intersectionality, particularly if this scholarship respects its crucial commitments to laying bare the roots of power and inequality while continuing to pursue an activist agenda of social justice.

NOTE


REFERENCES