

MEASURING RECEPTIVITY TO INTERSECTIONALITY: BRIDGING THEORY  
AND PRACTICE

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my remarkable parents, Thomas and Sonia Roland, who provided unlimited love and support. My dad is the most beautiful person I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. The great brilliance of my mother and the advice she gave me as a young girl have guided me throughout my entire life. I appreciate them for their generosity and sowing seeds of kindness, respect for others, and strength of character.

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## ABSTRACT

JENNIFER CATHERINE ROLAND

### MEASURING RECEPTIVITY TO INTERSECTIONALITY: BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Studying and applying intersectionality is critical to community organizers, social justice advocates, scholars, practitioners, helping professionals, and researchers.

Intersectionality is important to the future of Women's and Gender Studies and Social Work. The field of social work may benefit from applying intersectional analyses when engaging with historically marginalized groups. This dissertation explores the potential of critical race and Black feminist theory when used as a model for social work practice. An intersectional approach may provide practicing professionals with a richer, deeper, broader, and more complete understanding of how power and oppression influence the complex experiences of marginalized populations, such as women of color and their families. This dissertation is guided by one overarching question: Does social work bridge theory and practice by incorporating the theory of intersectionality into curricula? Three distinct methods are employed to address the major question of this dissertation—textual analysis, content analysis, and a survey questionnaire. I examined six textbooks intended for undergraduate use primarily in HBSE I and HBSE II courses published between 2010 and 2015, analyzed fifty-nine HBSE course syllabi for intersectional content, and a total of seventy-five undergraduate social work instructors from CSWE

accredited programs completed a survey questionnaire. The study found that of the 342 paragraphs examined from all six textbooks, only 9.3% included intersectionality. In addition, 39% of syllabi included intersectionality and/or intersectional content. The survey revealed that there is strong support for intersectionality in social work education. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents believe that intersectionality is a tool of analysis that can be applied to social work practice. There is an opportunity for intersectionality in the field of social work because although the majority of respondents supported the tenets of intersectionality as outlined in the questionnaire, 59% of respondents were not familiar with the theory of intersectionality and only 17% of respondents use intersectionality in their own research.

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CHAPTER I  
BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE

*Introduction*

Is the role of theory to promote social justice? Is the primary role of academics to create theory that can be applied to real world circumstances? What role does theory play outside of the academy in communities of color? As an activist scholar, I grapple with my role as an academic who values scholarly inquiry and as an activist who also believes that social justice can be initiated at the grassroots community level. As an activist scholar I am committed to activist research and social justice work that confronts and attempts to eliminate inequalities of race, class, gender, and sexuality. I embrace social justice by translating academic perspectives learned while studying Multicultural Women's and Gender Studies into vehicles of passion for transformative social change. As a social work practitioner, I strive for transformative change when working with children and families. As an activist scholar I seek and contest the daily struggles and inequities experienced by those who face oppression due to social hierarchies such as white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy.

I position myself as an activist scholar in direct contrast to what Joy James describes as a "normal" academic situated in the university's "ivory tower." James claims that: Institutions of higher education have a vested interest in keeping scholarship "objective" (mystifying), "nonpolitical" (nonsubversive), and "academic" (elitist) and in

continuing to reserve the most advanced technical training for that small portion of the world's population who will manage the rest, as well as consume or control its resources and political economies (216). Though James' assertion may be contested, there is some truth to her argument concerning the dissemination of knowledge and accessibility to theory. Moreover, this system of dominance that controls vast resources and political economies creates barriers that prevent entry into these elite spaces. As an activist scholar, I understand that my entry into this elite space alone is not sufficient; rather, my work has to extend beyond academia for true transformation and social change. Marginalized communities struggling for social justice should benefit from my intellectual and political understanding of power and oppression.

Using critical race and Black feminist theories such as intersectionality, which offer all of the components necessary for wholistic,<sup>1</sup> social justice-oriented practice, may create unlimited opportunities in the field of social work to confront the inequalities most commonly faced by women of color. Legal scholars Devon Carbado and Dorothy Roberts, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, feminist scholar Vivian May, and reproductive justice advocate Loretta Ross have all used the theory of intersectionality to interrogate the various ways race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of women of color's lives. Critical race theory and Black feminist theory, when used insightfully, "account for the multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins" 1245). In other words, intersectional

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<sup>1</sup> The term "wholistic" indicates whole as in complete, balanced, and circular (Absolon). This term is more commonly used among First Nation People.

theorizing considers how subjects navigate society based on their personal experiences interacting with power and oppression. These experiences are often shaped by the value that the dominant society places on identity. Patriarchy, wealth, and whiteness tend to be valued by those who head institutions of power in the United States. As a result, benefits and opportunities are usually awarded to those whose identities are ranked high in the social hierarchy. For example, women of color's intersecting identities, such as their race, class, and gender, situate them differently in terms of the economic, social, and political worlds. Collins and Bilge assert that as a result women of color's unique social location-specific issues remain subordinated within social movements, as no social movement by itself addresses the entirety of discrimination women of color face (3). Thus, it is important to explore the ways in which intersectionality theory can inform practice models that consider the experiences of women of color who face a heightened risk of oppression.

This chapter includes four significant components. The first component is a brief explanation of how my own experiences in the classroom and community have helped shape my research. Then, I discuss the potential of theory to shape practice. To be exact, I examine the role theory plays in the academy and the impact theory has in the lives of vulnerable populations. Next, I introduce intersectionality as a central theory in women's and gender studies. This chapter illustrates the potential of the theory as a means to enrich social work practice by creating wholistic engagement models when working with marginalized groups. I argue that the field of social work may benefit from applying intersectional analyses when engaging with historically marginalized groups. I believe

that social work practice is the bridge to social change for working-class people. I highlight the potential of critical race and Black feminist theory when used as a model for social work practice. I do this by discussing African American women's experiences when participating in the social service system. Their experiences are examined to explain the uses and benefits of intersectionality when working with vulnerable populations. By closely examining African American women's and children's experiences, I hope to demonstrate the need for the application of central theories used in women's and gender studies to concrete problems and cases that commonly manifest in the daily lives of women of color, and that frequently come to the attention of social workers. Finally, a summary will be provided to explain how all of these components are interconnected. In sum, any effort to understand and intervene in the conditions facing women and girls of color requires both academics and practitioners bridging theory and practice.

### ***Academia, Activism, and the Beloved Community***

The limited resources available to me when working as a social worker with women of color raised several fundamental concerns that influenced my thinking about the need for further research on the ways in which Black feminist theory can influence social work practice and engagement when working in the community. I was concerned with the daily struggles of those affected by social hierarchies that assign more social value to some identities than others. As both a practicing social worker and an academic researching solutions, my concerns with how the fields of women's and gender studies and social work do and do not use theory to evoke true social change guide this project.

Another concern is how social hierarchies, such as white supremacy and patriarchy, play a causative role in the development and maintenance of social policies. Many of these policies create disparities that weaken the life chances to obtain social mobility, thus damaging the quality of life for minoritized<sup>2</sup> people. Furthermore, these policies are grounded in epistemologies of whiteness that are based on the Eurocentric orientation of the United States. According to George Lipsitz, European settlers in North America established structures encouraging an investment in whiteness (371). This investment prompted covert public and private decisions during and after slavery and segregation that produced a powerful legacy with enduring effects on the racialization of experience, opportunities, and rewards in the United States (371). This investment in whiteness penetrates society because it functions as a pseudo-universal category that hides specific values, epistemologies, and other attributes under the guise of non-racialized, supposedly colorless “human nature” (Keating, “Interrogating ‘Whiteness’” 904). In fact, “by negating those...who do not measure up to “white” standards, “whiteness” has played a central role in maintaining and neutralizing the social system and dominant/subordinate worldview” (Keating, “Interrogating ‘Whiteness’” 902). Consequently, it is important that as a social worker I understand the relationship between social hierarchies and social policies. Detailed examples of my concerns with particular policies will be presented in the following sections.

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<sup>2</sup> Minoritized is the process or action of imparting a minority status on groups of people that is socially constructed in specific societal contexts (Benitez).

I use Keating's term "epistemologies of whiteness" to explain how the tacit knowledge and ethics of whiteness impact social welfare policies ("Teaching Transformation" 131). The dominance of whiteness and white supremacy dictates how the dominant culture projects its way of thinking and acting. These privileged ways of knowing determine the expectations for the larger society to meet and exceed and, in turn, creates an invisible mythical norm (Lorde 116). Lorde suggests that, "[i]n America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian [sic], and financially-secure" (116). Privilege in this context signifies worthiness, inclusion, and acceptance that are not granted based on merit, but rather on social hierarchies like white supremacy. For example, the value American society places on blonde hair and blue eyes, more common among Euro-American people, sends a profound message to those who don't have the privilege of such characteristics.

Within the social service system, the value placed on whiteness can be covert. I participated in a state mandated "train-the-trainer" course designed to train social workers on how to identify child abuse and how to train current and future foster parents on identifying similar abuse. My trainer used an example of a four-year-old female abuse victim. The trainer expressed her disbelief in learning that a "blonde-haired, blue-eyed baby" had been sexually abused. This assertion seems relevant only in the presence of a widely-held belief that child abuse should not happen to such a "perfect" child. It seemed that the trainer afforded this child a higher level of sympathy based on the child's privileged characteristics of whiteness. As a social work professional being trained to identify abuse victims, I wondered about her response and her potential to feel empathy

for the many children in foster care who do not have blonde hair and blue eyes. Furthermore, I wondered how closely her professional decisions were based on her attachment to whiteness.

The casual way whiteness is taken for granted is understandable given that “throughout American history people of color have been excluded from those social, political, and cultural institutions that define what American is” (powell 121). In response to this exclusion African Americans have created their own “Black<sup>3</sup> America.” However, there is still no escape from the dominance and power of social institutions. In fact, often their encounters with social service systems can have a detrimental effect. Whiteness in the social service system masquerades as universal norms that dictate acceptable behaviors and skills, and because poor women of color are the least likely to conform to the white middle-class standard of motherhood, they are the primary targets of government control (Roberts, “Punishing Drug Addicts” 127). When parents fail to meet these acceptable standards, they are often deemed “unfit.” Definitions of what is considered as “unfit” parenting vary. Having a child removed from their parents’ care or having restrictions placed on their autonomy and privacy are strong indicators that the state and the public perceive them as being “unfit” (Cull 143). The over-surveillance and inappropriate state interference in the role of parents is an explicit indication that the state perceives women of color, particularly African American and Indigenous mothers, as

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<sup>3</sup> Black and African American are used interchangeably in this document, because some of the scholars cited in this work use Black while others use African American. I personally recognize that not all Black people in America are African American, thus, I use both to reference people of the African diaspora.

unfit parents. In fact, Cull argues that the more a mother deviates from the standards of the white, middle-class, nuclear family, the more she is vulnerable to state observation and intervention (146). Many of these interventions perpetuate a disproportionately high number of children of color interacting in the child welfare system each year.

A significant amount of research has documented the disproportionately high number or overrepresentation of certain racial and ethnic groups, including African Americans and Indigenous Americans, in the child welfare system when compared with their representation in the general population.<sup>4</sup> While the extent of disproportionality varies significantly across different regions of the United States, it exists at some level in virtually every locality. The child welfare community has long acknowledged the problem of disproportionality. Yet critics complain that little has been done to mitigate the failures within the child welfare system that perpetuate this problem. McRoy asserts that “[the] overrepresentation [of African American children] in the foster care system is a polite way of saying that our child protection system more frequently separates African American children from their birth families and keeps them separated, than [it] does White children” (37). Bent-Goodley argues that the disproportionately high numbers of African American children in the foster care system should be viewed as a form of racial regulation that devalues the strength, resources, and culture of African American families (26).

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<sup>4</sup> Examples such as Ruth McRoy; Dennette Derezotes, John Poertner, and Mark Testa; and Dorothy Roberts.

The high numbers of African American and indigenous children removed from their parents' care is the reason for critics' assertions. For example, although African American children are 15 percent of the U.S. child population, they represent 32 percent of children in out-of-home care (Bent-Goodley, "Regulating the Lives" 25). Historically indigenous mothers were portrayed as ignorant and unable to properly care for their children (Cull 143); thus, they were vulnerable to having their children removed at higher rates than Euro-Americans. Dorothy Roberts expresses similar views as McRoy, Bent-Goodley, Schiele, and Cull. Roberts argues that Black mothers have very little social or political status in the United States. Consequently, they are typically seen as deviant characters responsible for the disintegration of the Black family and the Black communities' state of despair. Moreover, discussions around welfare reform rarely consider or value the relationship between Black single mothers and their children. Roberts contends that "the disproportionate state disruption of Black families through the child welfare system reflects a continuing depreciation of the bond between Black mothers and their children" ("Value of Black Mothers" 313). Some reports reveal that African American families are more likely to be investigated for abuse or neglect than referred to community-based assessment or services (Gryzlak, Wells, and Johnson 67). It follows, then, that the limited interventions available to support families do not mitigate the problem of disproportionality in the child welfare system, but may actually exacerbate it by not directly addressing social problems. Child welfare workers often attempt to solve problems by focusing on correcting individual shortcomings and cultivating acceptable forms of parenting skills. Yet the assumption is that parents

themselves, rather than poverty or other factors, are the cause of the problems they experience.

My experiences of working with children of color in the child welfare system have provoked my interest in this research project. The previous example of social injustice is just one of many that I aim to challenge through this research; therefore, it stands to reason that critical race theory, Black feminist theory, social justice practice models, and my social location as an activist scholar practicing as a social work professional. My goal is to align myself with those pushed to the margins of society who can benefit from Black feminist theories that address the daily challenges produced by oppression and inequality. I value the use of techniques that address the structural context within which these social problems emerge and believe that, due to systematic oppression that adversely impacts the quality of life for vulnerable populations of people, integrating solutions into social work practice remains important.

As a social work practitioner, I found a limited number of practice models and theories that center on the unique challenges experienced by communities of color. Davis and Bent-Goodley offer an explanation for the limited amount of appropriate practice models and theories when working with communities of color: “rarely are complex social policy issues, theoretical perspectives, or change strategies—as viewed by social work scholars of color—found in [social work] literature” (ix). Several social work scholars of color offer differing perspectives on social policy, the impact of policy on people of color, and the resourcefulness of these populations to respond to injustice. This gap in the literature inadvertently places a burden on practicing professionals when working with

marginalized groups. However, wholistic interventions that consider the dynamics of race, class, and gender when working with women of color are also missing.

The lack of interventions that consider the multiple dimensions of identity may be connected to limited scholarship on women of color. Melissa Littlefield's study revealed that a search for African American women using the "words [African American women] anywhere in abstract" featured in social work abstracts for the years 1982-2002 yielded sixty-four articles out of a database of 15,655 (4). These findings revealed that over a twenty-year period, a mere 64 articles out of 15, 655 included a focus on African American women, in spite of African American women commonly accessing social service systems. Littlefield's findings exhibit a dearth of scholarship on African American women in social work literature. Practitioners' knowledge of critical race theory, black feminist theory, and wholistic practice models may enhance their understanding of mutually constructed experiences of race, class, and gender, which may inevitably play a key role in creating solutions and intervention strategies, when working with African American women in their social environment.

McMahon and Allen-Meares contend that most of the scholarship on social work practice within communities of color is naïve, superficial, and fails to address their social contexts, such as the history of fraught and often problematic interactions communities of color have with law enforcement (533). With such limited scholarship on African American women in social work journals, social workers may find themselves at a disadvantage when engaging with African American women. The limited availability of scholarship addressing the experiences of people of color leads to a lack of interventions

and sufficient practice models when working with them. Social justice theories are designed to help create practice models and interventions capable of mitigating the systemic inequities experienced by people of color. Without social justice theories, social problems continue to manifest providing little relief for communities historically marginalized by systemic barriers. Take for example the festering social problem of African American girls receiving more severe sentences when they enter the juvenile justice system than members of any other group of girls (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda 7). Social justice theories that inform our understanding of the particular way race, class, and gender overlap to create unique sites of oppression may help to develop interventions that can eliminate the inequities that African Americans experience. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the extent to which intersectional analyses are included in social work curriculum and then to consider whether a greater embrace of intersectionality may shape and improve social work practice.

### ***Theory Shaping Practice***

In the field of women's and gender studies there is a long-standing commitment to feminist theory.<sup>5</sup> These theories prioritize women's lived experiences and validate the knowledge produced by those experiences. By using feminist theory as a vehicle for transdisciplinary scholarship, women's and gender studies continues to offer the academy new ways of thinking about gender and sexuality. I define transdisciplinary scholarship as works that are joint projects, including theoretical and methodological, inspired by

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<sup>5</sup> Examples are available in Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein, Marilyn Boxer, Judith "Jack" Halberstam, Layli Maparyan, Catherine Orr, and Bonnie Zimmerman.

different disciplines working together to address common problems. Patricia Levy suggests transdisciplianrity is problem centered because it is responsive to the public's needs. More importantly, transdisciplinarity includes a mission to transform knowledge from multiple disciplines into new methods and practices for the purpose of producing new knowledge. Women's and gender studies contribute to the academy and the community by producing and disseminating transformative feminist, womanist, and queer theories. Theories made popular in women's and gender studies like standpoint epistemology-- the idea that experiences, identities, and social locations produce a particular type of knowledge (Zimmerman, "Beyond Dualisms" 31)—emphasize the relationship between knowledge and power. Furthermore, when these theories are practiced or applied when working with underserved groups, like women and children of color, there is potential for transformative interventions that mitigate the effects of oppression.

Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins argues that the politics of race and gender influence knowledge production. Theories that are philosophically grounded in social justice, like Black feminist theory, take seriously the oppressive conditions that people of color experience. For example, because of their gendered racial identity, Black women may experience racism, sexism and poverty (Collins, *Black Feminist* 26). Black feminist theory validates those who know from personal experience and seek out methods that will interrupt oppressive conditions. Interrupting oppressive conditions requires interventions that take into consideration the root causes of the oppression, such as patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism, and capitalism, to name a few.

Black feminist theories, such as intersectionality, popularized by the field of women's and gender studies can be used to create practice models applicable in the field of social work. Black feminist theories within feminist scholarship are useful for practice because they are usually conceptualized in ways that challenge oppression and are accessible to community-level activists. After all, it is intersectionality theory that considers multiple analyses of race, class, and gender in a "real world" context that enhances not only activist projects but practice models. The ability to bridge Black feminist theory and social work practice for the purpose of community work and organizing provides an advantage to social workers in the field. Communities can be the benefactors of women's and gender studies academic scholarship when social justice workers apply critical constructs of Black feminist theories. The social worker response to oppression can be the determining factor to building positive relationships with women whose hardships dominate their daily lives.

Just as important is that the bridge between feminist theory and social work practice may offer one avenue for women's and gender studies to live up to its original spirit and potential as an agent of positive change in the world by thinking more broadly about how our theories may impact practices in other practice-oriented professions (Maparyan, "Feminism" 20). For example, the academy becomes more accountable to women and children in our global community by creating real connections to working class and poor people and their realities when feminist theories are used as practice models in the community. Endless opportunities for transforming the academy as well as

strategies for social change ensue when women's and gender studies bridge theory and practice.

### ***Intersectionality Theory***

*I learned that this...was very much a class issue, very much a race issue, very much a gender issue, and very much a power issue. And all of those things coming together at once make a dangerous combination. —Senator Dianne Wilkerson*

Intersectionality is a Black feminist theory that prioritizes the experiences of African American women to better understand systems of power and oppression. It is used as a tool of analysis that highlights and addresses multiple forms of identity in relation to structural systems of power and social hierarchies. To do this, intersectional scholars dispute the idea that all women are the same and share essential characteristics by foregrounding the centrality of race in relation to other experiences of difference, such as gender, class, sexuality, ability, and nationality. In other words, a tenet of intersectionality is the idea that applying a single axis of analysis to interrogate systems of oppression omits the experiences of those whose multiple identities work in tandem to impact their experience navigating social institutions. Vivian May argues that intersectionality interrogates established approaches to systems of privilege and inequality that employ a single-axis analysis which distorts and erases the multidimensionality of women of color's experiences as well as compounded forms of discrimination ("Intersectionality" 156). For example, the theory of intersectionality exposes the intersecting systems of sexism and racism. This unique system of oppression

creates a matrix whereby the experience of gendered racism is exacerbated for women of color.

Kimberlé Crenshaw developed a Black feminist critique of the common tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis (“Demarginalizing” 39). These mutually exclusive categories create single-axis frameworks that commonly examine aspects of identity separately. Crenshaw argues that single-axis frameworks “erase Black Women in the conceptualization, identification, and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group” (“Demarginalizing” 40). Crenshaw posits that women of color’s intersectional experiences are greater than the sum of racism and sexism. Any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.

Crenshaw organizes the multiple uses of intersectionality into categories, such as structural, political, and representational. These categories expose what seems to be a limited understanding of how social hierarchies affect people who experience overlapping sites of oppression due to the ranking of their intersecting identities. Consequently, this limited understanding has virtually omitted the discussions of power, privilege, and discrimination that create a matrix-of-domination for women of color. Moreover, in “Mapping the Margins,” Crenshaw critiques the lack of will in challenging the unique oppressions experienced by women of color. There is a need for a comprehensive application of intersectionality that practitioners can use to interrogate oppression on multiple levels.

Crenshaw reminds us of what ails society: conceptions of identity that produce mutually exclusive social narratives. In these narratives, “the” African American woman’s experience is either about race, or it is about gender, or it is about class, but it is impossible to be about all or more of these at one time (Crenshaw, “Identity Factor in Multiculturalism” 2). Crenshaw scrutinizes the limitations in this belief that an African American woman experiences gender oppression alone, separate from race and class oppression. In fact, as that woman navigates her social location every day, she will experience the totality of being raced, classed, and gendered. To put it bluntly, itemizing or compounding identities can lead to missing the full trajectory of one’s social location. For instance, oppression examined through the lens of being Black—added to being a woman, added to being working class, added to being an immigrant—fails to encompass the whole person. An African American working-class woman does not exist as only a woman, nor do the people she encounters see her as only African American. Instead, she faces inequities (racism, classism, and sexism) in society as an African American working-class woman simultaneously, and her daily experiences of oppression substantiate those inequities. Put another way, “a real-life person is not a woman on Monday, a member of the working class on Tuesday, and a person of African descent on Wednesday; intersectionality requires one to read these categories simultaneously” (Carastathis, “Concept” 307). By reading these identities as intersecting, melded together as inseparable, social scientists are better able to gauge what the daily-lived experiences are of a person whose intersecting identities promote either opportunity or barriers.

May suggests that intersectionality has yet to be fully understood or properly recognized (“Intersectionality” 156). The theory of intersectionality may be viewed as an activist project for social transformation, and can be incorporated into social work practice, research, education, and policy. This is because intersectionality interrogates established approaches to systems of privilege and inequality that employ a single-axis analysis, which distorts, flattens, and erases the multidimensionality of the experiences of women of color as compounded forms of discrimination (May, “Intersectionality” 156). It has the ability to capture the breadth and complexity of the human experience, a critical component of social work practice. Intersectionality not only identifies difference, it examines social hierarchies that rank identity creating axes of social exclusion. Also, intersectionality as a theory allows practitioners to address oppression through the creation of interventions and advocacy. Incorporating this theory into social work education presents itself as a dynamic opportunity to expand knowledge production in the field and, while doing so, to mitigate the oppression experienced by women of color. Because it focuses on power dynamics and the structural causes of subordination, an intersectional interrogation requires social workers to critically analyze their own roles and the systems they represent when examining participant circumstances and understanding their experiences. Ultimately, effective social work professionals should have the tools for analysis that highlight rather than erase the complex multidimensionality of identity that overlaps inequality in participants’ lives.

### ***Social Work Practice and Intersectional Engagement***

Augustin, Clifford and Burke, Roberts, and Schiele all believe that in spite of the more popular view of social work as a benevolent profession, many participants have experienced social work as something short of helpful, and more like a system of social control. As Barnes posits: “To fully understand the stark differences in the delivery of services to African Americans, it is important to note that African Americans were excluded from governmental provisions and private practice under segregation” (136). Their disenfranchisement has led to a tradition of African Americans helping to serve their community needs with little to no assistance from social service organizations. In other words, their wellbeing has never been contingent upon being a client solely dependent on the fixed rations of social service, such as food stamps.<sup>6</sup> It follows that, through these hardships, communities of color have demonstrated resistance and challenged these oppressive social welfare policies that rarely consider poor Black families’ relationships and futures. Due to the socio-historic experience of systemic oppression, radical wholistic practice models that challenge systematic disenfranchisement and oppression are required when working with communities of color.

In the 1920s, Dr. Inabel Burns Lindsay, a pioneer of social work education, challenged the profession to understand the impact racial oppression had on African Americans. Although most of Dr. Lindsay’s work and philosophy is under-recognized in

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<sup>6</sup> Food stamps or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a government program safety net for hunger. The United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services governs it.

most contemporary social work curriculum, Lindsay, an African American woman, was the dean of Howard University School of Social Work and developed curricula designed to bring social change to the mezzo and macro systems (Brown, Gourdine, and Crewe 154). She understood that working with individuals would not bring about social change because it does not require the social worker to address structural disenfranchisement. She was one of the earliest known advocates for social work curricula that considered the roles that gender, sexual orientation, race, and other social identities play in the experiences, problems, and solutions of communities of color (Brown, Gourdine, and Crewe 148). In more contemporary times, there has been more evidence of social work's commitment to ending all forms of oppression. Social work education has been infused with information on diversity since the civil rights era in the 1960's. The Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), the profession's accrediting body, has required social work professionals to embrace comprehensive practice models in order to meet the field's objectives. For instance, the CSWE 2008 *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS) states that understanding issues of oppression and diversity is a core competence required of all social workers. The 2008 EPAS was implemented with the understanding that CSWE would work with the education community to create resources for programs in the development of knowledge and practice behaviors specific to competencies for advanced practice. The CSWE recognizes as part of its doctrine that the "dimensions of diversity is understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual

orientation” (5). The CSWE goes on to say that social workers must understand “that as a consequence of this difference people may experience oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim” (5). The following statement from Jani et al. describes how the field is moving toward using intersectional language to acknowledge the unique differences among individuals and groups.

Social work programs are required by CSWE to develop students’ competencies through the recognition of the relationship between cultural structures and the oppression, marginalization, and alienation of individuals and groups; the acquisition of self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in practice; the recognition and communication of an understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experiences; and the development of a view of practice as an ongoing bidirectional learning process. (287)

Dr. Inabel Lindsay encouraged social work professionals to think critically about systems of racial and class oppression experienced by communities of color. In promoting the anti-oppression aims of the field further, how can we use Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality to center the experiences of African American women whose race and gender are multidimensional and exist simultaneously?

Social workers are agents of change. The profession’s codes of ethics, governed by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), have determined that the central role of social workers is to be interventionists and advocates for social change. Figueira-

Donough states that the guiding notion of NASW is that “social workers challenge social injustice.” Professionals are supposed to “pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups.” Social workers’ reform efforts are to concentrate on issues of “poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice” (3). To prepare social work students as social change agents, the CSWE requires accredited programs of social work education to provide an understanding of the dynamics and consequences of social economic injustice, including all forms of human oppression and discrimination (*Educational Policy and Accreditation*). Using intersectionality as an analytical lens to examine and better understand oppression meets the requirements of both the NASW and CSWE.

In the United States, the public commonly views systemic gender and racial subordination as happening on rare, isolated occasions. In other words, it happens only in the private sphere and is a minor “deviation” from our societal norms (Smith cited in Mills 17). By contrast, antiracists and feminists contend that racism and sexism have not been the exception but the rule. Interventions addressing discrimination are typically discussed using single-axis logics that look at the occurrence of racism and sexism as isolated incidents. Crenshaw’s groundbreaking work set out to investigate those whose identities intersect to create unique experiences that are often overlooked, or, as she stated, “left at the intersections”. At the time, the experiences of Black women were assumed, though never explicitly stated, to be synonymous with that of either Black men or white women, and since the experiences of both are seen as equivalent, a discussion of Black women in particular was viewed as superfluous (King 295). Intersectionality is still

treated as unnecessary among those who leave the theory purely at an identity level and do not understand its importance, rendering some experiences irrelevant, particularly when considering the ways in which women of color navigate society and encounter oppressive institutions of power. Intersectionality at the identity level prioritizes the intersections of identity and fails to consider the manifestations that result from social hierarchies that rank identity. For example, priority is set on recognizing a person's race, gender, and sexuality. However, social hierarchies like patriarchy are not examined. As a result of this narrow focus on identity alone, the development of intersectional interventions is limited. Crenshaw's seminal work on intersectionality was critical of the ways in which laws and social movements exacerbate the marginalization of women of color by looking at discrimination as mutually exclusive acts, most commonly when considering racism and sexism.

### ***African American Women and the Social Service System***

*In attempting to analyze the situation of the Black woman in America, one crashes abruptly into a solid wall of grave misconceptions, outright distortions of fact, and defensive attitudes on the part of many. —Frances Beale*

Foregrounding women of color's experience, particularly that of African American women, is an attempt to place this theoretical discussion on intersectionality in a real-world context. Oftentimes, the true vulnerable nature of women of color is overlooked, as they are usually demonized by society at large. Historically, African American mothers have faced racist and sexist stereotypes that have become the normal representation of Black womanhood. Dorothy Roberts insists that one should consider

that the “social order established by white slave owners was founded on two inseparable ingredients: the dehumanization of Africans on the basis of race and the control of women’s sexuality and reproduction” (“Racism & Patriarchy” 7). This social order is still at work today, thus, devaluing African American mothers in American society. In this section I discuss African American women and the social service system to invite scholars and practitioners to engage in difficult dialogues that uncover a history of bias evident in the social service system.

African American mothers have their children removed from the home at greater rates than their Euro-American peers. In fact, as the child welfare system began to serve more Black children and fewer white children, state and federal governments spent more money on out-of-home care and less on in-home services (Roberts, “Club Women and Child Welfare” 972). The history of Black women’s subordination proves patriarchy does not treat black and white motherhood the same, and in the United States the images of the African American mother have always differed from and often contradicted those of the Euro-American mother (Roberts, “Racism and Patriarchy” 6). The devaluation of Black motherhood in the United States is captured in the following quote from Augustine:

The “welfare mother” is a deviant social creature. She is able-bodied, but unwilling to work at any of the thousands of jobs available to her; she is fundamentally lazy and civically irresponsible; she spends her days doing nothing but sponging off the government’s largesse. Despite the societal pressure to be gainfully employed, she enjoys her status as “dependent” on the state and seeks at all costs to prolong her dependency. Promiscuous

and shortsighted, she is a woman who defiantly has children out of wedlock. Without morals of her own, she is unlikely to transmit good family values to her children. She lacks the educational skills to get ahead and the motivation to acquire them. Thus, she is the root of her own family's intergenerational poverty and related social ills. She is her own worse enemy. And she is Black. (144)

Augustin's assertion, although sarcastic in tone, exhibits how African American mothers still bear the brunt of blame for society's dysfunction.

African American women have been blamed for the need for "population control," welfare reform, the war on drugs, high school dropout rates, unwed and teenage pregnancies, and single-parent households. "The consequence for women at the intersection of these stereotypes is that they are particularly vulnerable to punitive measures based largely on who they are" (Crenshaw, "Dimensions" 19). When African American women seek services, these stereotypes meet them in the waiting room. Politicians like Rick Santorum hold these beliefs. Santorum was quoted in the 2012 Republican primary as saying "I don't want to make black people's lives better by giving them somebody else's money. I want to give them the opportunity to go out and earn the money" (Madison). Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* asserted the notion that Black matriarchy was to blame for the cultural pathology that kept African Americans in a state of dysfunction. Harris-Perry argues Moynihan's report reasserted the belief that Black women's reproduction is shameful. In the 1980s, the Regan administration falsely labeled Black women "welfare queens,"

blaming them for the drain on public resources and the economic downturn (114).

Important actors in the child welfare system may perpetuate similar views.

For example, the Center for the Study of Social Policy's Racial Equity Review discovered that many social workers negatively characterized African American families, mothers, and youths (Roberts, "Prison, Foster Care" 1486). The results of this study showed that social workers frequently described African American parents as hostile, aggressive, angry, loud, incorrigible, and cognitively delayed—without providing any justification of such labels. In addition, they often assumed that African American parents abused drugs, without making the same assumption about Euro-American parents. In sum, the mentality of these social workers was that African American children were better off removed from their homes.

What has become evident is that the devaluation of Black motherhood perpetuates stereotypes that are then reinforced by the dominant culture, or those in power of constructing and enforcing social policies. The different parenting styles of African American women have been seen as dysfunctional and inadequate. Dill challenges the myths and stereotypes about Black women by critiquing limitations in academic research that identify characteristics in African American women, like self-reliance and autonomy, as negative qualities and contributing factors to the disorganization in African American family life (545). Moreover, Dill declares that the "emphasis on functionality and dysfunctionality of their roles predisposes us to view black women more in the relationship to the dominant culture than within Afro-American culture itself" (547). In the previous quote, Dill reminds us of what societal standards remain in place when

assessing Black women. Understanding the multi-layered challenges, how may social work apply intersectionality to better serve African American women?

### ***The Relevance of Black Feminist Scholarship***

*Even though Black women intellectuals have long expressed a distinctive African-influenced and feminist sensibility about how race and class intersect in structuring gender, historically we have not been full participants in White feminist organizations. This historical suppression of Black women's ideas has had a pronounced influence on feminist theory. —Patricia Hill Collins*

Black feminist scholarship in general is not included in the canonical anthologies in many disciplines. Black feminist theories are an untapped resource in a world that is contemplating the best ways to solve issues of poverty, health disparities, violence, environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS, and other social phenomena. There are ways that the academy can consciously utilize the theoretical tools of Black feminist scholarship. Black women and other women of color are already reflecting, negotiating, operating, and theorizing about these very issues within their day-to-day lives, as seen in feminist-of-color scholarship, such as *Seeking the Beloved Community: A Feminist Race Reader* (James), *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (Davis), *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Anzaldúa), *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins), *Chicana Feminist Thought* (García), and *Grandmothers Counsel the World* (Schaefer). Historically Black feminist scholarship has discussed the political and social action-oriented strategies taking place in communities of color. These strategies based on women of color's experiences can

generate new forms of knowledge for the academy to address the rapid changes in our global political economy.

Intersectionality is one of these forms of knowledge that was theorized outside of the academy. The intellectual and activist work of Black feminists reveals social hierarchies of power within categories of race, class, and gender. Crenshaw encountered numerous occasions where women of color's experiences were pushed to the margins of social justice politics ("Demarginalizing"). In fact, this experience is common. In 1980, Audre Lorde stated, "By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to homogeneity of experiences covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not exist" (116, her italics). The marginalization of Black women's theories, epistemologies, and scholarship leaves a void. Consequently, this void provides us with an opportunity to build on Black feminist scholarship, and there are multiple ways of doing so.

One way to build on Black feminist scholarship is to support a field of study that explores Black feminist theories for their multiple uses. Violet Eudine BARRITEAU argues, "Beside exposing racism and the politics of exclusion and domination, what we know and how we come to know it, what that ongoing body of knowledge looks like, and what purposes it serves, all look radically different when we recognize that other knowledge claims are less universal than they first appeared" (420). Knowledge and methodology change when the experiences of women of color inform theory. Black feminist scholarship can also be used for social science research. Theories like intersectionality

can analyze the practical concerns of marginalized groups. There are benefits to fields like social work, because Black feminist theory analyzes the political economy of state systems. In other words, it interrogates the impact state-operated systems have on the lives of women of color. Crenshaw argues that Black women experience a heightened level of social control through systems such as the Departments of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Services, and the Department of Corrections. Women of color are disproportionately represented in them all. In addition, we are starting to see an increase of girls of color entering many of these systems in disproportionate numbers compared to their peers. Crenshaw and Allen assert that “on any number of measures, black girls and women face wide disparities in relation to their female peers” (24).

Recently released data from the Department of Education revealed that, in the 2011-2012 school year, Black girls were suspended six times as often as white girls (“Civil Rights”). On the other hand, Black feminist scholarship also builds on the methods that have been used by marginalized groups when they have had to manage under the extreme hardship of disenfranchisement. For example, according to the 2015 State of Women-Owned Business Report, the number of businesses owned by African American women grew 322% since 1997, proving that Black women continue to use their ways of knowing to challenge oppressive conditions. Black feminist scholarship examines and builds on these methods of resistance historically used by Black women.

To gain a better understanding of how social work education approaches working with women of color, this dissertation asks whether social work education bridges theory and practice by incorporating intersectionality, a theory that examines power and

oppression by placing women of color at the center of inquiry. By using intersectionality, social workers can create critically conscious analyses, interventions, and advocacy that better serve women of color. The answer will hopefully inform us about bridging theory and practice in practice-oriented professions.

### *Summary*

Intersectionality is important to the future of women's and gender studies and social work. An intersectional approach may provide practicing professionals that exist outside of the academy with a richer, deeper, broader, and more complete understanding of how power and oppression influence the complex experiences of marginalized populations, such as women of color and their families. Moreover, implementing intersectionality into practice, research, and policy may support social justice frameworks that are necessary to the fields of women's and gender studies and social work. This work is an important step in bridging theory and practice as it relates to the engagement of intersectionality, a wholistic comprehensive practice model that focuses on women of color.

I begin in Chapter Two with an overview of intersectionality as a radical solution to the social injustices women and girls of color experience. This chapter serves as a primer to unpack intersectionality's theoretical constructs and its uses in the academy and beyond. Next, in Chapter Three, I review the scholarship on social work curricula and its approach to identity. Due to the limited scholarship found in the leading social work journals on intersectionality, it was important to conduct research on how the field of social work approaches identity. In Chapter Four, I discuss how I implement my research

design that includes a textual analysis of Human Behavior and Social Environment (HBSE) textbooks, a content analysis of HBSE syllabi, and a survey of social work educators. Afterward, Chapter Five reveals and discusses the findings. In a concluding chapter, I demonstrate the significance of an “Intersectional Engagement Model” and show how an intersectional analysis may improve relational engagement when working with communities of color. In addition, implications for future research and practice are discussed.

## CHAPTER II

### INTERSECTIONALITY

#### *Introduction*

Intersectionality has been declared the most important theoretical contribution that women's and gender studies has made so far to the advancement of feminist scholarship, exposing the limitations of gender as a single analytical category (McCall 1992). In the previous chapter, I introduced intersectionality as an analytical tool used to examine social hierarchies that rank identities and create privilege and oppression experienced by women of color. Here, I historicize intersectionality and place women of color at the center of inquiry within the larger frame of theory and practice. First, I focus on the conceptual framework of intersectionality as developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw.<sup>7</sup> Crenshaw looks at different types of intersectionality (structural, political, and representational) that I will discuss and apply in this chapter. In addition, I highlight the contributions of Elizabeth Ross Haynes, a pioneer in the field of social work and a practitioner of intersectional analyses, and discuss the possibilities of intersectionality in social work practice. Next, I discuss the emergence of the theory from the writings of the first intersectional scholars to present-day theoreticians and activists who call for its

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<sup>7</sup> Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in her 1989 essay titled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex." Although Crenshaw coined the term, intersectional concepts had been developed and articulated a century earlier by women of color. As early as the 1830s, Maria Stewart, a domestic worker and grassroots organizer, developed an analytical framework to more accurately comprehend the lives of Black women.

implementation in social justice work. I then present the multiple interpretations of the theory through the lens of its critics and proponents and, finally, I discuss the motivating factors behind the theory and argue why its application is imperative to social work practice.

### ***Theoretical Framework of Intersectionality***

I use Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality as the foundational theoretical framework for my study. Intersectionality is a viable tool of analysis to understand social and systemic inequities. I contend that it is not until dominant systems of power or social hierarchies such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism's relationship to social and systemic inequities are interrogated that we will see opportunities for wholistic social change. Crenshaw's groundbreaking article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" offers social work practitioners a way to better understand the multiple dimensions of oppression and marginalization. "Mapping the Margins" introduces how intersectionality can be used to interrogate the structural, political, and representational oppression of women of color. Throughout this chapter, I point to examples of structural, political, and representational sites of oppression. Due to the fluidity of the theory Crenshaw is able to introduce an intersectional prism that incorporates an analyses, intervention, and advocacy. As Crenshaw has shown in her work, practitioners are able to examine multiple sites of oppression experienced by women of color. I will show that intersectionality's value lies in its fluid and comprehensive nature.

The first intersectional category by Crenshaw is structural intersectionality that focuses on the ways in which policies put in place to remediate the experiences of oppression, such as domestic violence, have a qualitatively different effect on women of color than on Euro-American women when the intersections of race, class, and gender are not considered. Structural policies are relied upon by social workers to enforce state and/or agency guidelines. Thus, structural policy can play an intricate role in social work practice with women of color. For example, typically victims who seek assistance through social services like domestic violence shelters are women. The multiple resources (safe housing, childcare, job opportunities, legal assistance, etc) allocated to shelters are based on the needs of its female residents. Thus, shelters have policies in place that take into consideration the particular needs of women when creating interventions. However, Crenshaw argues that “where the experiences of race, class and gender converge, as they do for women of color, interventions based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles” (“Mapping the Margins” 1246). Structural intersectionality analyzes the structures put in place that are rarely meant to create hardships for the general population they serve but inadvertently do so due to a lack of consideration for social hierarchies that create intersecting burdens of race, class, and gender oppression.

In contrast, political intersectionality focuses on the ways in which difference is ignored within groups. Whereas structural intersectionality is used as a tool to examine institutional oppression, political intersectionality is used as a tool to analyze how anti-

oppression movements, such as antiracist and feminist movements, have helped to marginalize the experiences of women of color due to their failure to recognize intragroup differences that paradoxically exacerbate women of color's experiences with oppression. The concept of political intersectionality highlights the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinate groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas (Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins" 1251). Crenshaw believes that "racism as experienced by people of color who are a particular gender—male—tends to determine the parameters of antiracist strategies, just as sexism as experienced by women who are of a particular race—white—tends to ground the women's movement" ("Mapping the Margins" 1252). A critical construct of political intersectionality is that men and women can often experience racism differently, just as women of different races can experience sexism differently.

Political intersectionality investigates women of color's unique experiences with gendered racism, rather than racism plus sexism that simply acknowledges the "additional" issue of race or patriarchy. Crenshaw argues that because women of color experience racism in ways that are not always the same as men of color and sexism in ways that are not always experienced by white women, the current antiracism and feminist discourse is often limited and inadequate ("Mapping the Margins" 1252). Integrating gendered racism into social justice discourse gives a more complex, complete way of interrogating systems of power. An intersectional analysis leads to a more complex understanding of what is needed to combat systems of social hierarchy and domination. Moreover, an intersectional approach goes beyond conventional analysis in

order to focus our attention on experiences of oppression that we may not have considered.

Similarly, representational intersectionality is applied for the purpose of analyzing the mechanisms of oppression so ingrained in dominant culture that they create insidious outcomes for women of color. In fact, Crenshaw posits that the vulnerability of women of color “may revolve less around the political agendas of separate race-and gender-sensitive groups, and more around the social and cultural devaluation of women of color” (“Mapping the Margins” 1282). For example, cultural constructions of race and gender attract the attention of antiracist and feminist critics. When stereotypes of African Americans dominate popular culture, antiracist activists organize to challenge the oppressive images or ideas. However, antiracists’ critiques usually focus on the socially constructed images of Black men, and fail to include the misogyny Black women experience. Likewise, feminists fail to speak against the racism that leaves women of color particularly disadvantaged. As a result, the focus on single issues of racism or sexism fails to account for the experiences of women of color. The silence permits the cultural degradation of Black women and perpetuates the social demonization of African American mothers, as explained in the previous chapter.

A fluid comprehensive application of intersectionality should maintain the following three goals as outlined by Crenshaw: (1) analyze social problems more fully, (2) shape more effective interventions when addressing intersecting sites of oppression, and (3) promote more inclusive coalitional advocacy (“Primer” 3). The following is a

detailed discussion of each goal and how, when used together, they can advance social work by better ensuring a wholistic approach to practice.

The first goal of intersectionality includes conducting a full intersectional analysis of social problems. Social problems can be hidden by conventional ways of thinking about discrimination. Consider Marston and McDonald's complaint that social work professionals are discouraged from identifying sociological and political causes to poverty, instead opting to save clients from their behaviors thought to cause poverty (1028). For example, consider health disparities, those avoidable differences in health that result from cumulative social disadvantage. It has been established that people of color in the U.S. experience poorer health outcomes than Euro-Americans. Within communities of color, health disparities are both persistent and increasing (Medina 272). Yet, *Healthy People 1990*, a public health initiative that focused on the prevention of chronic disease, set health objectives based on individual lifestyle factors and personal behavior change (Medina 276). Although personal lifestyle changes are necessary to address poor health outcomes, Medina argues that "the history of U.S. health policies has not seriously addressed inequities that lead to social conditions that contribute to health disparities in racial and ethnic groups" (272). More common is an individualist approach that focuses primarily on the individual. Individualist approaches are valuable and necessary to meet the multiple needs of communities and client populations; however, there is a risk that comes with noncritical analyses of social problems that ignores the effect of many public policies when participants have been denied access to the nation's wealth and resources.

The second goal of intersectionality is to shape more effective interventions that attempt to confront the multi-layered problem. Wholistic interventions are important due to their ability to address participants' multiple needs simultaneously. Strategies for wholistic interventions will consider any overlapping discriminations that cause hardship. Political intersectionality is an example of how this goal aims to confront circumstances and challenges that reflect more than one barrier. Effective interventions should consider the political and social context of women of color's lived experiences and examine how oppression impacts their mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being. Social workers commonly seek out best practices<sup>8</sup> when creating interventions that will result in participant success. If participants' problems are itemized into single isolated areas of concern, this may allow for some issues to go without notice.

For example, women of color who are living with a positive HIV diagnosis may experience multiple challenges beyond their condition. In fact, poor heterosexual women of color are placed at greater risk of contracting the virus due to their race, class, and gender, intersecting simultaneously to exacerbate common risk factors. Some of these risks include poverty, violence, and substance abuse. Dealing only with the participants' health factors, more specifically HIV, is a flawed strategy and may produce undesirable or ineffective outcomes. Diallo argues that poverty, violence, and substance abuse, among other oppressive conditions, fill the "iceberg of which HIV [is] only the tip"

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<sup>8</sup> Best practice is a common term used in the field of social work. It is the preferred strategy or approach for achieving the best outcome (Mullen, Bellamy, and Bledsoe 2008). This term is used in relationship to social workers' priority objective being the best outcome.

(125). In other words, their positive status may be the initiating factor for services. However, without addressing other multi-layered factors, interventions will not be wholistic, and the participants will only have some of their needs met.

Lastly, the third goal is to promote coalition building for the purpose of advocacy. The erasure of racially marginalized women from central frames of social justice work serves as an opportunity to form coalitions with other groups who share common goals. Coalition building acts as advocacy when social justice organizations and social service agencies collaborate to mitigate oppressive conditions. In his discussion on getting ahead or getting together, domestic violence prevention activist Paul Kivel makes clear the role of a male anti-violence activist. Kivel suggests that when doing different kinds of antisexist activism, male anti-violence activists should be accountable to ending violence against women by understanding family violence, in both heterosexual and queer families, as a direct result of economic inequality, and that women who are battered are caught in cycles that are the result of systematic exploitation, disempowerment, and isolation (143). Kivel also suggests that they should aim to maximize their efforts by collaborating with female organizers. The following quote from Kivel provides a detailed explanation:

Both of these efforts involve people identifying common goals, figuring out how to work together and support one another, and coming up with strategies for forcing organizational and institutional change. When people get together, they build community by establishing projects, organizations, friendships, connections, coalitions, alliances, and an understanding of

differences. Identifying common goals, supporting, each other, working for organizational and institutional change, building community—these are the elements of creating a better world. (141)

Kivel describes two groups that may experience power and oppression differently based on their gender identities, yet come together for the purpose of social justice work. His vision represents an underlying component of intersectional practice.

Social justice organizations serve as positive community resources. They advocate on behalf of groups whose quality of life has been burdened by a social phenomenon. For example, The AFIYA Center, a not-for-profit grassroots organization, serves women of color who are living HIV positive. One focus of AFIYA is improving the quality of life for women and girls of color, a marginalized group within HIV/AIDS advocacy. Therefore, high priority is placed on social policy that impacts their daily living conditions. An example of this is their work to de-criminalize<sup>9</sup> an HIV-positive status after several positive people were charged with aggravated assault and attempted murder for spitting at other people. Such criminalization further stigmatizes those who live with the virus, making their existence socially unacceptable. This unacceptability creates discrimination that has been found in employment, housing, and education. Building coalitions among organizations whose social interests intersect gives AFIYA further reach and power to impact social policy. AFIYA's work to de-criminalize HIV on behalf of women of color has a shared agenda with both criminal justice reform and

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<sup>9</sup> In 2008, a Texas jury concluded that the saliva of an HIV positive person is a deadly weapon.

reproductive justice organizations. Moreover, an additional factor among all of those organizing is poverty. Women of color at high risk of contracting HIV, which in fact is a reproductive justice issue, and people who are at risk of entry into the prison industrial complex have an increased likelihood of being poor. Thus, AFIYA's ability to build coalitions with social justice organizations that advocate eradicating poverty in the United States, along with organizations that advocate on behalf of criminal justice reform and reproductive justice policy, positions AFIYA to be more effective in their advocacy endeavors.

Social service agencies usually provide direct services to participants. They address the needs of individuals reeling from the devastating impact of institutional disenfranchisement and violence (Kivel 129). Typically, the services offered, such as financial aid, food assistance, safe housing accommodations, and medical services, meet the immediate needs of people experiencing hardship. Social service agencies have a complex history with communities of color. Kivel argues that many social service agencies tend to maintain the status quo, rather than work to address the root causes of social injustice (130). Due to this history, communities of color have been reluctant to trust the reliability and authenticity of social service agencies and their workers. This distrust has created ruptures in the relationship between social service agencies and communities of color. Coalition building through mutual trust is imperative to mend previously ruptured relationships.

Social workers commonly face dual challenges of representing the agencies by which they are employed and servicing participants who are in need of services. Often

these two agendas create dilemmas for the worker. When agency rules hinder the participant's ability to be self-sufficient, the "social workers' professional code specifies that social workers discern and respect the goals of their clients" (Figueira-McDonough 25). Building coalitions is not only paramount to meeting the goals of intersectional practice, but building coalitions meets the standards of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), whose code of ethics proclaims, "social workers must understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities" (6).

Social workers are called to be involved on the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice and must nurture the relationships on each level of engagement. Micro social work practice is characterized by working directly with the participant and tends to be the most personal interaction between the social worker and the participant. Mezzo practice takes place within the community, including schools, community centers, and churches. An example of mezzo practice would include community organizing, working closely with community organizations to achieve a common goal. Macro practice is typically policy work. Macro practitioners use a comprehensive lens to access the problems of a community or society rather than a more personal one-on-one engagement with the recipients of services. NASW's code of ethics suggests that intersectional coalitions for the purpose of advocacy would be a welcomed standard of practice.

As previously demonstrated, intersectionality's three goals—analyzing social problems more fully, shaping more effective interventions, and promoting more inclusive coalitional advocacy—are in many ways aligned with the values of the social work profession. Along with the value placed on relationships, social work values the lived experiences of participants. For example, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) has included in their education and accreditation policy standards professional competencies that students must demonstrate before they graduate. CSWE's Competency 2 "Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice" includes a statement highlighting the importance of participants' experiences and intersecting identities:

Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity.

The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status.

Social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values,

including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create privilege and power. (7)

CSWE's Competency 2 is relevant when analyzing social problems to better understand the experiences of participants. Each identity may bring a unique circumstance of privilege and/or oppression. The intersections of these identities may determine future strategies for interventions.

Lastly, social work's focus on advocating against oppression is a primary principle of the profession (NASW, *Code of Ethics* 1), and all three goals of intersectionality emphasize women of color's unique experiences of discrimination and oppression. Social workers can build on solidarity generated by common experiences and "advocate for social justice, alleviating social ills and oppression at all levels of society" (NASW, *Social Work Speaks* 351). The political, structural, and relational sites of intersectionality emphasize the multiple ways in which oppression impacts people.

### ***The History of Intersectionality and Social Work***

The field of social work has continued to develop over one hundred years while United States society has experienced ongoing social change. Social worker Elizabeth Ross Haynes was at the forefront of social justice when she advocated for the rights of vulnerable women in 1908. Haynes used her knowledge of social and political systems to wield power and encourage systematic change on behalf of the most vulnerable people at the time. Haynes centered her activism on women who experienced the most debilitating burdens of society. Many of the social service safety nets at the time focused on meeting the needs of recently arrived immigrants. African Americans were virtually always

excluded or segregated from these services. Even the famed Hull House,<sup>10</sup> a very popular mark in social work's history, excluded African American women and children from receiving shelter (Roediger).

Haynes' race and gender consciousness was the foundation of her activism. Like so many other African American women, Haynes participated in two interdependent dimensions of activism: (1) the struggle for group survival and (2) the struggle for institutional transformation (Carlton-Laney, "Club Women's" 51). Throughout history, African Americans have created community for the purpose of surviving in a country where they as a group experienced systematic disenfranchisement. Haynes and other African American club women at the time worked to provide social safety nets, such as housing, kindergarten, day nurseries, and job training workshops.

Similarly, Maria Stewart, a domestic worker, lectured on the political rights of women of color, bringing attention to the double jeopardy that women of color experienced. Stewart used an intersectional framework to explain how women of color were most vulnerable due to their disenfranchisement as domestic workers. Domestic workers were marginalized politically due to the nature of feminized low wage work and due to their racialized identity as Black women. Yet, in spite of Haynes' and Stewart's pleas for women's rights and Black liberation, social injustice continued to manifest in multiple ways. Due to Jim Crow laws, the Black community had to identify their own

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<sup>10</sup> The Hull House was a settlement house on the west side of Chicago founded by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr in 1889. The Hull House provided services, such as kindergarten, a day care for working mothers, and employment services for European immigrant families that recently relocated to Chicago (Hanson).

social welfare initiatives. In fact, Black communities “have historically not been protected by public policy, and in many instances, it has been public policy that has worsened the experiences of black families” (Barnes 137). Through collective community work and advocacy, their aims were to transform discriminatory social policies that prohibited the social mobility of the African American community.

It is unlikely that Haynes would have considered her work to be intersectional or identified herself as a social worker who used intersectional analyses in her casework. Nonetheless, her life’s work incorporated methods that allowed her to address the problems of the time (Carlton-Laney, “Elizabeth” 298). Haynes constantly struggled for social justice that addressed the simultaneous oppression African American women experienced due to race and gender. During the 20th century, race, gender, and class were all contentious issues. Due to social hierarchies that ranked the poor, women, and African Americans at the bottom of the social ladder, many Black women holding all three of these identities had little relief. In other words, there were not many institutions that would allow them to escape any one of these burdens. Haynes was a political advocate and worked alongside elite clubwomen to build alliances on behalf of the women she served.

Haynes is one of many pioneering social workers who understood the need for comprehensive social work practice that addressed the way social hierarchies determined the experiences of African American women. Intersectionality is a social change agent that, according to the prominent social theorist Patricia Hill Collins, can highlight "social organizations within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are

contained” (*Black Feminist Thought* 228) on the micro, mezzo, and/or macro levels. Collins contends this matrix of domination may be seen in the operations of schools, housing, employment, government, and other social institutions that regulate the actual patterns of intersecting oppressions that Black women encounter (228). Consider how intersecting oppressions have historically changed forms. For example, discrimination in education was more obvious when institutions of education were segregated. Yet, as stated in previous discussions, in the 2011-2012 school year, African American girls were suspended from school six times as often as Euro-American girls (Civil Rights 2014). Thus, Collins argues that racial discrimination initiated by social institutions still exists but not in the forms that it took in prior historical errors (228). The struggle for institutional transformation includes social work practice that challenges existing structures of oppression. Social workers must be able to offer a microanalysis and a macroanalysis when exploring multiple systems of power and privilege that are a consistent part of the participants’ lives and often shape the situations that the social worker is called upon to assist.

### ***The Possibilities of Intersectionality***

Social workers navigate systems of institutional power every day. Understanding intersectionality is necessary when navigating these systems. Social workers should invest in practices that expose these crossroads of inequality even if inequality is perpetuated by powerful groups who dominate decision-making and influence the life chances and opportunities of participants (Figueira-McDonough 24). To the extent that “intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its

relationship to power,” its application can address the multiple inequalities people in the United States experience (Crenshaw, “Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait”). Furthermore, intersectionality is a tool that has been developed to help identify harms and injustices that are magnified by sites of privilege and oppression and to locate and explain the sources and logics behind the privilege and oppression, so advocates will be better prepared to propose interventions for social change (May, *Pursuing* 32). Both Crenshaw and May describe an approach to social justice work that challenges institutional power by criticizing the rigid top-down social and political power structure while bringing to the forefront the perspectives and experiences of women of color who are placed on the margins of society (MacKinnon 1020). Intersectionality begins in the concrete experience of race and gender together in the lives of real people, with Black women’s experiences placed at the center of inquiry. Intersectionality would be a radical shift for social work research and practice.

Crenshaw introduced intersectionality as a tool to highlight the injustices in the workplace that women of color experienced without adequate protection from anti-discrimination laws. In identifying how anti-discrimination law uses a single-axis analysis, Crenshaw examined past discrimination lawsuits and found problematic consequences when the law treats race and gender as mutually exclusive. Racism and sexism were pervasive and egregious in the work force in the 1960s. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reports that in 1966, there were 3,254 charges filed on race discrimination, the highest of all claims, followed by 2,053 files charged for sex discrimination (“Shaping Employment Discrimination Law”). Individuals

could bring private lawsuits. Where the EEOC found evidence of patterns or practices of discrimination, the EEOC could then refer such matters to the Department of Justice for litigation (“Shaping Employment Discrimination Law”).

All too commonly Black women’s experiences of discrimination were exacerbated by their dual vulnerabilities as women and as African Americans. In 1976, Emma DeGraffenreid and several other Black women sued General Motors for discrimination, arguing that the company segregated its workforce by race and gender: Blacks did one set of jobs and whites did another (Crenshaw, “Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait”). When companies offered positions to women to do clerical work, these office staff positions were more commonly awarded to white women. Similarly, the jobs offered to Blacks, like working on the shop floor, were offered to men. “Neither the Black jobs nor the women’s jobs were appropriate for Black women, since they were neither male nor white” (Crenshaw, “Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait”). Crenshaw found similar patterns in other discrimination claims. At the time, there was no theory or way to articulate this phenomenon.

African American women straddling both identities found it difficult to prove their victimization. Companies like General Motors were able to prove to the EEOC their hiring practices were legal because they hired and promoted feasible numbers of African Americans and women. To take a case in point, “although General Motors did not hire Black women prior to 1964, the court noted that General Motors still hired female employees prior to 1964” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 41). Therefore, African American women were unable to prove their discrimination claims and were denied

compensation by the courts. Crenshaw offers this metaphor to sum up the DeGraffenreid case, “it was as if antidiscrimination law was called to the scene of an accident, but because it was unclear whether the accident was caused exclusively by race or by gender, each ambulance sped away, leaving these plaintiffs lying in the intersection” (“Primer” 4). Crenshaw concluded that the courts were indirectly involved with the systematic victimization experienced by African American women at General Motors because they further exacerbated the discrimination by failing to acknowledge the breach in policy.

Intersectional analysis is necessary when creating policy and making other critical decisions. When practitioners consider both policy and practice they are able to create interventions that address multiple sites of oppression. Intersectionality’s theoretical principles are inclusive and fluid, allowing the practitioner to consider multiple vantage points and experiences. Although originally used to discuss how race and gender intersected to form unique oppressions, intersectionality has broadened its scope to embrace a number of additional identities, such as class, sexuality, nationality, and ability. Intersectionality provides the tools to consider the multidimensionality of individual and intragroup difference when shaping advocacy, interventions, and public policy. For example, Crenshaw’s work on domestic violence policy for immigrant women in “Mapping the Margins” showed us that without considering the race and class of immigrant women, a one-dimensional policy based on the analysis of gender alone will create disadvantages for those whose access to asylum may be hindered by barriers that the legislation does not consider.

Like asylum law, social work practice models are often written without considering the role of intersecting identities. Social work practice models are commonly written from the vantage point of the dominant society in the United States. Social work scholar Anna McPhatter suggests the following regarding major weaknesses and gaps in social work knowledge:

Contributions of African Americans and other people of color to social welfare are rarely if ever included in the knowledge base. Further, most of us were introduced to mainstream development theories—Freud, Erikson, Kohlberg and so on—in human behavior courses, and completed education exchange without knowing that these conceptualizations of normal life-course development describe women and culturally different people as deficient and abnormal. Theorists who describe normal adult development as career attainment, heterosexual marriage, childbearing, and managing household exclude the developmental experiences of a substantial number of people. (266)

The dominant social work scholarship has created a chasm when engaging with social work participants of color. As McPhatter reminds us, due to dominant theories in social work that explain difference as deficiencies, practitioners have a misguided knowledge base when analyzing the experiences of many groups. Just as important, John Powell argues, “Societal norms and concepts of Americanness have developed in almost exclusively White political, social, and cultural spheres, thus when people are assessed according to so-called objective standards, they are in reality assessed by standards of

Whiteness” (118). A consequence of this is a social work knowledge base dominated by a Euro-centric worldview (Graham 104).

This bias, whereby practice and policy exclude the realities of minority communities, has historically led to the development and implementation of detrimental social welfare policies. For example, the city of Chicago’s Anti-Gang Loitering Ordinance targets and criminalizes what it considers “gang activity.” Although this policy might sound like an effective, well-intentioned policy, the Anti-Gang Loitering Ordinance “singles out one particular kind of person based on circumstances outside of their control such as race and residential location because it applies only in neighborhoods with high levels of racial minorities and poverty” (Stupar 968). Consequently, people are punished for engaging in activities not considered illegal for everyone, such as standing on a street corner in what happens to be a highly policed community. If we applied the constructs of intersectionality to this bill before it passed into law we would see in Chicago that white males from middle-class and affluent families would be overwhelmingly privileged by such an ordinance, while poor and working-class people of color—particularly men—will likely experience some discrimination and hardship. This is an example of a structural oppression, whereby a policy intersects with the race and class of people already burdened by discrimination to create a compounded burdened. Despite the fact that policies are rarely explicitly raced or gendered, they still have unintended consequences and create disparate outcomes for already marginalized groups.

### *Emergence of Intersectionality*

Although Crenshaw introduced the term “intersectionality,” Black women’s subordination has been both theorized and experienced by scholars and activists that predate Crenshaw’s use of the term. In the 19th century, both Anna Julia Cooper and Maria Stewart wrote about the need to establish a framework acknowledging the double oppression of women of color. Stewart provided the beginnings of an analytical framework to understand the hardships Black women experienced through structural oppression at the time. For example, she articulated capitalism’s role in the treatment of Black women as laborers during a time where many Euro-American women were sheltered from labor outside of the home. In 1832, Stewart gave four speeches in front of mixed audiences, both women and men, Black and white. She is remembered for being the first American woman to lecture publicly about political matters (Guy-Sheftall 3).

Similarly, in *A Voice From the South*, Cooper explained, “Caucasian barristers are not to blame if they cannot *quite* put themselves in the dark man’s place, neither should the dark man be wholly expected fully and adequately to reproduce the exact Voice of the Black Woman” (Cooper, iii). The essence of Cooper’s argument is that only Black women can express the unique experiences of Black women. Cooper does not want to rely on Black men or white women to effectively fight for the liberation of Black women. Cooper believes that “not many can sensibly realize and more accurately tell the weight and the fret of the long dull pain than the open-eyed but hitherto voiceless Black woman of America” (ii). Cooper’s call for inclusion was necessary, considering the notables at

the time, such as WEB Dubois and Susan B. Anthony, often overlooked the unique oppression Black women experienced.

In 1977, the Combahee River Collective, appropriately named after the Combahee River Raid led by Harriet Tubman in 1863, published a manifesto of sorts that laid out an anti-oppression framework. At that time, the Collective was actively committed to fighting against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression because its members believed the major systems of oppression were interlocking. The Combahee River Collective's aim was to develop an integrated analysis and practice-based method addressing these interlocking oppressions (13). The Collective argued thousands upon thousands of unknown women had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity, combined with their racial identity, making their entire life situation and political struggle a bit more unique (13). The Collective's call for a practice-based method was to move beyond the theoretical underpinnings of interlocking oppressions and create models that mitigate the consequences of such oppressions on women of color, and also to eradicate the site of injustice. Bridging theory and practice was the Combahee River Collective's aim thirty-eight years ago and is still the aim of some intersectional scholars.<sup>11</sup>

Along the same lines, contemporary feminist scholar Angela Davis has long asserted that women of color face extreme circumstances in their daily lives. In *Women, Race & Class* Davis explores the ways in which race, class, and gender were experienced during the suffrage movement. She suggests that "the masses of working women during

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<sup>11</sup> Examples such as Anna Carastathis, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Leslie McCall, and Mieke Verloo.

the time were far too concerned about their immediate problems—wages, hours, working conditions to fight for a cause that seemed terribly abstract” (140). Here, Davis highlights both the multiple sites of disenfranchisement many women of color experienced and the stark differences in experience. For example, women advocating for their right to work outside of the home and being denied it because of patriarchy leaves out the experience of women of color in America whose labor outside of the home was exploited. It is a narrative of a conquest for personal autonomy, the right to make a conscious choice about their contributions to their family and community. However, this narrative is housed within a couple of realities that are often overlooked. One reality is that of racial privilege that protected them from labor exploitation. The other reality is class privilege, a financial security that made working outside the home a choice.

Collins asserts that women of color need methods that mitigate the marginalization experienced in the public sphere. As Collins put it, “The external constraints of racism, sexism, and poverty have been so severe that the majority of African American women have found it difficult to participate in organized political activities” (*Black Feminist* 209). Collins contends that African American women “possess neither the opportunity nor the resources to confront oppressive institutions directly” (*Black Feminist* 209). Like Davis, Collins believes that working-class women of color surviving day to day have limited ways of fighting discrimination because economic disparities impede access to political power. However, Fine suggests that “by deconstructing the idea of discrimination through a rigorous intersectional analysis that legitimates place, context, gender, caste, material conditions and relational

responsibilities, we can reconceptualize discrimination in ways that could be measured locally and could be useful for local human-rights campaigns” (Guidroz and Berger 73). In making this comment, Fine, similar to Collins, Davis, and the Combahee River Collective, advocates for a radical reconceptualization of marginality in the lives of women of color, focusing on the politics of social location that includes a shift toward an understanding of complex subjectivity.

Ultimately, “the dual and systematic discriminations of racism and sexism remain pervasive, and for many, class inequality compounds those oppressions” (King 294). Intersectional analyses provide an opportunity for social justice activists, practitioners, policymakers, and academics to focus attention on the structural and systemic power rooted in white supremacist, capitalist, and patriarchal forces that create disparate outcomes. Structural intersectionality takes form when the circumstances of a policy further exacerbate the experiences of those already marginalized by their race and/or class (Crenshaw, “Dimensions of Oppression” 16). For example, the mandatory arrest policy for domestic violence, which is active in twenty-two states, requires police officers responding to a domestic violence call to make an arrest. This policy does not reinforce feelings of safety to working-class women of color. In fact, Bent-Goodley argues it may increase the likelihood of further victimization (67). These policies have led to arresting survivors of domestic violence. These arrests put women at risk of having their children removed. In addition, arrest leaves them susceptible to further violence from the criminal justice system.

Gendered racism highly influences the decisions of officers when making mandatory arrests. Working-class women of color are incarcerated at rates as high as men of color (Davis and Shaylor 196). The mandatory arrest policy does not consider the overall well-being of women, the likely victims of domestic violence. However, when considering the intersections of gender, race, and class, women of color are at greater risk of being victimized by a policy intended to aid domestic violence victims.

### ***Multiple Interpretations of Intersectionality***

When it comes to the topic of race or gender, most of us would agree that racism and sexism are pervasive and should be acknowledged when people experience either of the two. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of whether or not women of color, particularly Black women, experience discrimination both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 44). Often critics hinder the further exploration of Black women’s experiences of oppression when they criticize intersectionality and understand it only at the identity level, or as a theory of individual identity. But this view is limited because it “overemphasizes some dimensions of intersectionality while underemphasizing others” (Collins and Bilge 115). Thus, some feminists prefer to maintain a focus on gender-first models of analysis. For instance, Collins argues that, despite the significance of race and class, feminist theorizing on motherhood excludes race and class from the discussion (“Shifting the Center” 48). Collins believes race and class domination shape the mothering experience exponentially.

Cases in the field of social work validate Collins's claim about the experiences of Black mothers. Recent scholarship suggests that there is a clear disparity in the treatment African Americans receive from the child welfare system. For example, mothers who are poor and Black stand a greater chance of being regulated by social welfare policy. When engaging with social service systems Black women become at "significant risk of systematic victimization" (Schiele and Gadsen 93). In fact, Schiele and Gadsen suggest that people of color are exposed to oppression by the same institutions whose official aim is to promote benevolence and to eliminate social problems (93). Moreover, Roberts uses intersectionality in her research to reveal the merging vulnerabilities that render African American women targets for social control. Yet the experience of African American mothers goes largely unexamined because scholarship on mothering is commonly analyzed through a gender only lens.

Luft offers another common interpretation of the theory, contending that "discussions of gender and sexism, class or classism, religion, etc. will only happen in the context of racism. Anything else would be considered "escapism" (110). Here, Luft uses racism as an intersecting identity when examining classism or anti-Semitism, for example, to remind us "that *everyone* is racialized according to a hierarchy of advantage and disadvantage, and the other identity categories do not neutralize this fact" (emphasis theirs) (111). I wholeheartedly agree that the act of "escapism," or the desire to distract from unpleasant realities such as racism, increases the vulnerability women of color experience. This need to escape and avoid centering race prevents wholistic intersectional inquiry from taking place. The experience of some women of color in anti-sexist

movements is that critics characterize an inquiry focusing on the unique experiences of Black women as identity politics. In my experience, escapism further marginalizes vulnerable groups and erases the experience, deeming them invalid. For example, when Euro-American women have made statements about gender alone, although they may have substantive merit, they seem to only tell part of the story, allowing an escape from the realities that white privilege softens the effect of sexism (Nicotera and Kang 198).

Escapism can also take the form of colorblind intersectionality, whereby whiteness is not acknowledged as an intersection of identity. For example, recently a popular Hollywood actress, Patricia Arquette, made a plea for women to receive equal pay. However, in doing so she marginalized not only women of color but queer women as well. Arquette said, as quoted in the *Washington Post*, “The truth is, right under the surface, there are huge issues that are at play that do affect women, and it is time for all the women in America and all the men that love women and all the gay people and all the people of color that we all fought for to fight for us now” (qtd in McDonald). We are reminded that presumably all the women are white and heterosexual, and all the Blacks are men. Colorblind intersectionality occurs when “whiteness helps to produce and is part of a cognizable social category but is invisible or unarticulated as an intersectional subject” (Carbado, “Colorblind” 817). Arquette’s unarticulated assumption was that the women who deserve equal pay are both white and heterosexual. Her natural and unmarked focus on whiteness and heterosexuality “travels invisibly and undisturbed” without any consideration of lesbians or women of color who also deserve equitable wages (Carbado, “Colorblind” 824).

A critical awareness of intersectionality will point to intersectional failures when exclusive assumptions about race and gender are made. Therefore, changing the way we think about patriarchy's impact on gendered racism is imperative when moving beyond merely defining inequalities to challenging and equalizing them. May argues that intersectional logics do not correspond to dominant expectations about feminist theory, research, or policy that use gender-first analysis. In fact, when it targets the forces that create the outcomes MacKinnon argues that "intersectionality pursues an analysis, which is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (1024). White supremacy and patriarchy are the forces that create racism and sexism. Dominant feminist movements, which follow universal, additive, either/or approaches to gender and equity (May, "Speaking into the Void" 102), ignore the social forces and powers that rank these identities.

Previous arguments contend that women of color and their concerns have widely been ignored or dismissed by the dominant feminist movement that has ranked patriarchy as their primary nemesis. An example of this is the dominant pro-choice movement's denial of women of color's access to reproductive justice. In the 1970s, major feminist organizations like the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL) and Planned Parenthood did not join women of color's fight to demand sterilization guidelines (Roberts, "Killing" 96). In fact, the dominant feminist movement opposed sterilization regulations on the grounds that they deprived women of their freedom to choose. The narrow focus on gender equity inadvertently limited the reproductive rights of women of color. The dominant feminist movement at that time paid little regard to women of color who were victims of involuntary and coercive

sterilization abuses. The abuses were performed for the purpose of population control. Therefore, the assumption that women have a universal experience and that the dominant feminism's single-issue-agenda focus on either gender or race is ample qualifies as an intersectional failure.

Anzaldúa describes her multiple identities, those rejected and those newly created, as a process of kneading, uniting, and joining together (*Borderlands* 103). Rather than additive or either/or approaches to identity, Anzaldúa reminds us that our identities are inseparable, and though identities are created as well as rejected, separating them into categories is insidious, because the effects of separating one identity from another can be harmful. If women of color isolate or separate themselves from their diverse range of experiences, their multi-complex concerns, such as reproductive justice, environmental justice, economic justice, criminal justice, and immigration rights are then marginalized within the movement. The failure to ground their organizing in multiple community-identified needs is a barrier to their activism and social justice.

Forced into the shadows because of his sexuality, Bayard Rustin, arguably one of the most important figures in American history, is an example of how there can never be a successful one-dimensional social movement. The forefather of the nonviolent civil-rights movement and the organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, Rustin has been marginalized in American history, largely due to his identity as a gay Black man. Consequently, fifty-three years after the March on Washington, anti-racist and LGBTQ activism continue in separate social movements. The fractured bridge between anti-racist and LGBTQ movements connects to Pauli Murray's assertion about Jim Crow and Jane

Crow as dual burdens historically placed on Black women. On the one hand, Murray reminds us that the embattled Black community needs the strength of all its members to survive (594). Yet, exclusive anti-racist initiatives lack the inclusion of women of color with trans experience.

The National Coalition of Anti-violence Programs reports that transgender people of color are three times more likely to experience any form of police violence (Ahmed and Jindasurat 35). This reality arguably makes them a worthy beneficiary of #BlackLivesMatter activism. Although the creators of the #BlackLivesMatter social movement are queer women of color—Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrice Cullors—their experiences of gendered racism and heterosexism go largely unaddressed in the larger movement due to biases among many of their allies (Garza). In summary, the mistake of separating out aspects of a person’s identity into race, social class, or gender may inevitably lead to a limited understanding of participants’ experiences and the challenges they face. There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not lead single-issue lives. It is not until we integrate all parts of ourselves openly that our power is at its fullest concentration (Lorde 120). Proponents of intersectionality believe that identity-based social justice organizations are coalitions waiting to be formed.

Some feminist scholarship criticizes intersectionality because of its ties to identity. Collins and Bilge insist that academic debates about identity often reflect efforts to disavow the relevance of identity and of intersectionality for meaningful social justice projects (115). Even though identity is an undeniable component of intersectionality, its utility was not designed to focus solely on identity. The criticism of intersectionality’s

identity component may be due to the history of identity politics within the feminist movement. Identity politics has been said to be harmful, divisive, and reinforce rigid structures of gender, race, and class. Inevitably identity politics has led to infighting among feminists and encourages what some have called “privilege checking” as a form of silencing and bullying (Emba). Despite this view of identity politics, for many others, claiming the social construction of identities has been a space of individual and collective empowerment (Collins and Bilge 114). Naming can be a powerful act for marginalized groups who have had their identities constructed for them.

While it is true, as Anzaldúa points out, that identity is created and thus categories are easily formed, Carastathis sees the possibilities in identity categories as points of connection for the purpose of coalition building (“Identity” 941) within a group, like men and women of color, or coalitions between gay and straight people of color. For example, Carmen Vázquez, a leading figure in the feminist movement, reflects on *Somos Hermanas*, a solidarity alliance with United States LGBT women of color organizations in the 1980s and celebrates the fact they had an ability to “align and coalesce with people outside of their movement who did not identify with its superordinate sexual and gender identities—yet to whom the majority of them were connected ‘by blood, by class, and by spirit’—is contingent on recognizing, celebrating, and organizing meaningfully on the basis of the intersections within” (Carastathis 946). Vázquez highlights the coalitions built among people who may not have identified as lesbian, however were connected through racial and socio-economic categories. Thus, although intersectionality does acknowledge identity within organized coalitions, it does so without requiring that people

be identical (Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 918). Vázquez reminds us that there is a possibility for these commonly politicized identity categories to be held together by deliberate acts of solidarity and shared experiences of exclusion. Intersectional awareness can build coalitions and invite the possibility of mending ruptures.

Despite the fact that the predominant critique of intersectionality questions the efficacy of identity as grounds for political practice, I cannot overlook what remains. Identity is crucial for the reason that the value placed on these socially constructed identities like race and gender, although arbitrary, allows for inequality to exist. A large responsibility of social work is to address these inequalities. Critics contend that an intersectional conception of identity is divisive because it constitutes a form of individualism (Carastathis 942). However, some feminist and critical race scholars<sup>12</sup> believe there is a material component to race. Race is real, and arguably, along with gender and class, it is the most significant factor in women of color's daily experiences. The experience of race defies the notion that race is no more than a social construct. People of color experience their race every day when they navigate the dominant American society.

The history of subordination of people of color and legal racism in this country has had lasting effects, particularly in the child welfare system. Actually, child welfare professionals have been aware of the disproportionate numbers of Black children removed from their home for years. Yet, there are few interventions to address this.

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<sup>12</sup> Examples such as, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Devon Carbado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, Michael Hames-Garcia.

According to McRoy, “Social workers must now be willing to acknowledge that existing policies and practices often are not addressing the needs of African American children and families. It is clear that existing service models are working for Anglo families but not for African American families” (55). In this regard, race does matter. In fact, in 2005 the Child Welfare League of America published *The Overrepresentation of African American Children in the System: Race Matters in Child Welfare*. This publication explores why African American children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system, even when the research reveals that African American children are at lower risk of maltreatment compared to white children in similar economic circumstances.

Although I agree with critics who reject self-identifying labels, I cannot accept the overall impression that somehow we as individuals have power over the ways in which society categorizes these identities. A woman of color can dis-identify (or not) with a lot of things. However, the categories she must identify when navigating social institutions, such as acquiring necessary government identification, are beyond her control. This distinction is important because intersectionality’s use of identity is due to the material experiences of race. Alexander-Floyd puts it this way: “Although racial categories like ‘Black’ are racial formations and therefore constantly shifting, this does not mean that having the identity of Black does not have real material effects” (19). Intersectionality was an attempt to make feminism, anti-racist activism, and anti-discrimination laws take note of the multiple avenues through which racial and gender oppression are experienced. Moving too far away from this premise distorts its purpose. I propose that rather than

moving beyond intersectionality to avoid being boxed into exclusive identity categories, scholars, practitioners, and advocates focus more on why certain types of discrimination exist in the first place, and scrutinize privilege more intensely, another part of intersectionality's original purpose.

I propose an approach that views the unique experiences of intersecting identities as only one component of the theory. I suggest that we build on its complete articulation including a combination of structural and cultural analyses. By conducting research that examines the systematic impact of cumulative oppression, or that draws attention to the many ways of exclusion based on social hierarchy, researchers may be better able to identify the actual social, political, and economical factors that impact participant's lives. Intersectional practitioners and scholars must inquire about the policies and institutional structures that play a role in women of colors' vulnerability.

Intersectional scholars such as Collins, May, and Crenshaw have often criticized the way intersectionality has been flattened to only focus on identity, rather than interrogating the structural causes of social disparities. As a social worker working in the foster care system, I have witnessed this slippage in the field, whereby direct services are made available to participants on a micro level. However, little is done to understand and prevent the systemic marginalization that participants' experience that trickles down from the mezzo and macro levels. This marginalization happens by way of social policies that have an adverse effect on communities of color. Often social workers are not aware of the ways in which policy on the mezzo and macro levels personally impact families. Scholars have noted a shift in social work practice whereby the focus has been on the micro-work

rather than the mezzo and macro-work. Social work students often shy away from macro level advocacy, instead finding more benefit in micro-level engagement (Barnes 135). Another way to explain this occurrence is when frontline social service workers remove children from their parent's home due to neglect when the neglect is a direct outcome of poverty. According to Roberts, poverty is the leading cause of children being placed in foster care, and unfortunately, Black children are three times more likely than their Euro-American peers to live in poverty (*Shattered Bonds* 45). In my experience, the foster care system has become a revolving door, whereby less attention is given to preventative measures and more attention is given to emergency interventions, such as the removal of children. Although poverty is a key factor in child neglect claims, Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal, Lehning, Vu, and Pintak, Sherraden, Laux, and Kaufman believe little is done on the part of social work curriculum to address the systemic causes of poverty or to raise the class-consciousness of social work students that will address the wage inequity many of these parent's experience (Strier, Feldman, & Shdaimah). Without mounting a structural and political critique, the theory becomes flattened (Guidroz and Berger 70).

Intersectionality has also been interpreted as recycled Black feminism, a concept that offers nothing new (Nash 9). To this claim, May suggests that perhaps the repetition of the theory symbolizes the necessary re-articulation as a steadfast insurgency—creative resistance to being persistently refused, silenced, and ignored (“Speaking into the Void” 105). On the one hand, I do acknowledge the “resurrection” of intersectional concepts pioneered by Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart,

Combahee River Collective, Patricia Hill Collins, and other women of color theorists. Bodies of thought generated by women of color's lived experience and quest for social justice are not new, certainly not in communities of color. Yet, Lorde explains that we often find ourselves having to repeat and relearn the same old lessons over again because we refuse to learn (117). Consequently, women of color theorists and their work have far too easily been dismissed, ignored, commandeered, silenced, and/or erased.

Christian argues that theory is a powerful commodity and can only be validated if you have access to an elite institution as a tenured academic. Usually, these academics are at the intersection of dominant categories that occupy privileged positions. Christian purports that there is a race to theory, which creates an environment that allows those with the power to be published to determine what ideas are valuable and necessary for the future of scholarship (68). Christian reminds us that women of color have struggled for decades to have their voices heard in "the pervasiveness of academic hegemony" (69). Theorizing multi-axis oppression is not new but still very much necessary due to the history of marginalization of women of color epistemologies. Acknowledging the ways in which women of color's theories have been historically overlooked is important, because if intersectionality studies are to have a promising future in the academy, its intellectual history must be engaged with rigor, integrity, and attentiveness to its original theoretical and political aims.

On the other hand, intersectionality does offer something new. It is a critical lens that may be used to not only interrogate oppression but privilege as well. The fluid nature of intersectionality allows intersectional scholars to explore the ways in which social

hierarchies maintain privilege for the dominant power structure. More importantly, it offers opportunity to get at the root cause of privilege that in turn exposes the insidious nature of systemic oppression. Intersectional research extends the focus from intersecting identities to social hierarchies like patriarchy and white supremacy. Research creates theory, and theory development lays the foundation for practice and policy. Intersectional research can focus on contextualizing oppression without pathologizing women of color. For social workers, being aware of the root causes of social injustice allows for a better understanding of the impact that racism, classism, sexism, and all other forms of discrimination have on vulnerable communities. This research leads to developmental shifts in the way social work conceptualizes interventions for micro, mezzo, and macro practice. In summary, intersectionality, when fully engaged, provides new tools to critically analyze the root causes of oppression and privilege.

Intersectional scholars Alexander-Floyd and Lewis have complained that intersectionality has been marginalized and “ghettoized” in the academy, whereby binary thinking, such as “black/white” or “them/us,” impacts the value of the theory. Intersectionality has been projected as only meaningful to women racialized as minority, whereby the racialization of whiteness is unspoken (Lewis 884). Thus, it is driven out of certain spaces and discussions and only seems worthy in special edition journals for women of color materials (Lewis 885). Black feminist theory limits the ability of some scholars to imagine the potential domains in which intersectionality can both occupy and be applied (Carbado, “Colorblind” 815). The belief that a theory foregrounding race and gender as points of analysis should be practiced with only women of color will lead to a

plethora of intersectional failures in scholarship and research alike. My attempt here is not to “systematize” (Alexander-Floyd 18) intersectionality by universalizing or disconnecting the theory from Black women to make it available to a large number of people. Rather, I aim to disseminate the theory so that people working closely with women of color are better prepared to meet their needs. Furthermore, the claim that intersectionality is only for Black women reproduces a version of the representational problem Crenshaw highlighted in her seminal argument on anti-discrimination law. In fact, African American men were victims of intersectional subordination when racialized gender stereotypes rationalized lynching violence against them (Crenshaw, “Dimensions of Oppression” 18).

I foreground women of color and the intersections of race, class, and gender. By doing this, I do not contend an intersectional analysis only consists of race, class, and gender, nor that it can only be applied when working with African American women. For example, Gita Mehotra uses queer diasporic scholarship as an additional theoretical scholarship to add to the range of intersectionality in social work curriculum (425). Likewise, Brah and Phoenix’s research looks at class and gender as major sites of intersection in a transnational social context (79). Moreover, intersectionality promotes struggles that are race-based but not race-bound, feminist but not essentialist, always pro-Black and pro-woman but never only Black and only woman (Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 924). Although this project focuses on discrimination and oppression, I do believe centering privilege in an intersectional analysis is a research agenda that needs to be more fully realized. My work focuses on Black women and oppression due to the

overrepresentation in the social welfare system and social work's failure to come up with more theoretical models to mitigate their marginalization (Schiele and Gadsen 92).

### ***Intersectional Movements***

Intersectionality has been limited to a focus on the number of identities that can possibly intersect. When the focus rests on the number of privileged and/or oppressed identities any one person can possess at a given time, the implication is that intersectionality is only about the various combinations of multiple identities. Slippages like these prevent its use as a tool to interrogate power and privilege. The critique that intersectionality is grounded in categories of identity and thus creates identity politics that divide and distract lends to the flattening of the theory. Crenshaw advises us in "Mapping the Margins" that these organized identity groups are indeed coalitions—or at least potential coalitions—waiting to be formed (1299). Ultimately, identity groups can draw on the strength of shared experience. Crenshaw reminds her critics that what makes identity politics so bad is their failure to see the intragroup differences (1242). Although Black women share very similar experiences with Black men and white women, sometimes Black women face discrimination as Black women. This discrimination is not the sum of race and sex, but specifically based on their unique difference of being Black women (MacKinnon 1028). When these differences are acknowledged, intersectionality becomes a practical framework for coalition building. In short, coalitions do not form because everyone is alike. Strong coalitions have a shared commitment to solidarity and a quest for liberation.

My own view, however, is that these “distorted understandings of identity politics” (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 797), in addition to the oversimplification and overemphasis on identity categories, deflect from intersectionality’s most substantive purpose to challenge social injustice by identifying points of privilege and oppression. In DeGraffenreid’s case, we are able to see a clear distinction between who is privileged and who is not. In the same way, with a heightened degree of critical consciousness, we can also see that privilege and oppression can happen simultaneously. In both the DeGraffenreid and Chicago Anti-Gang Ordinance examples, applying intersectionality “helps reveal how power works in diffused and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories” (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 797). It is not only the identities of the people experiencing oppression that intersectionality draws attention to. Rather, it is the policies and/or power structures that create such oppressions. This is where our focus should lie.

Consider what is required to target disproportionate rates of children of color in the child welfare system, the prison industrial complex, and immigration restrictions that are typically neutral with respect to the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation. These are all sites of oppression that disproportionately harm communities of color, including women and LGBTQ persons (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 786). Thus, the direction of intersectionality should veer away from the fixation on identity categories alone because this serves as a distraction. Instead, for a more deliberate examination of power, I call for more attention to be paid to interrogating how social hierarchies like white supremacy and patriarchy create and further exacerbate overlapping problems. As

these social problems become more apparent, coalitions of people who have similar goals of liberation will come together. After all, intersectional categories such as race, class, and gender become mere descriptors when isolated from the social justice and anti-oppression aims of the theory.

Black feminist scholarship targets the continued marginalization of women of color's experiences and theories. Current research on social science literature overlooks or under-theorizes the significance that race and class play on individual autonomy. For example, Euro-American middle-class women gained entry to the male public sphere by assigning their household tasks to African American women, rather than demanding a fundamental change in genderized labor (Roberts, "Racism and Patriarchy" 22). This act further marginalized African American women from the inclusion and advancement Euro-American women experienced. Yet capitalism is commonly analyzed through a single-axis analysis of gender that focuses on the differential value of men's and women's work and the overall disenfranchisement of women. Black women's experience of racial subordination deserves more coverage in the literature. The failure to acknowledge this history creates barriers to understanding how women of color view their subordination.

Similarly, many anti-racist groups advocate for policy that focuses resources on Black male endangerment where a male-centered analysis is the dominant frame through which the disparities that plague the African American community are seen (Crenshaw, "Close Encounters" 154). The racial disparities that place Black women at risk also qualify them as "endangered," yet are rarely included in anti-racist discourse. For

example, the “#SayHerName” campaign launched by the African American Policy Forum aims to attract attention to Black female victims of police brutality and anti-Black violence. The necessity for the “#SayHerName” campaign substantiates Crenshaw’s claims that “the discourse of endangered Black males in some ways distorts how the racial disparities among women are understood” (Crenshaw, “Private Violence” 1436). Campaigns such as #SayHerName and #BlackGirlsMatter result from intersectional interrogations of the distinct ways discrimination plays out in intragroup movements between Black men and Black women.

### ***Summary***

On the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, social workers will navigate powerful institutions throughout their day-to-day tasks. In fact, oftentimes, social workers will be members and representatives of these powerful institutions. Incorporating intersectionality in the curriculum enhances social workers’ understanding of the complexities of interrelated social systems. Furthermore, intersectionality informs social workers of the power imbalances that exist among individuals and institutions, and that if not checked will inevitably result in social inequities. Intersectionality is a viable analytical tool useful in analyzing power and bringing awareness to social injustice. In the next chapter, I review the literature on social work education and practice to better understand how social work analyzes power and oppression through the lens of identity.

## CHAPTER III

### INTERSECTIONALITY IN SOCIAL WORK SCHOLARSHIP

*Intersectionality cannot be side notes to social work knowledge. These issues constitute the difference between social workers being oppressors or champions for the oppressed— Murphy et al.*

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter demonstrates how intersectionality works as an anti-oppression social justice model by placing the experiences of women of color at the forefront of discussions in relation to systems of power and oppression. May credits intersectionality as fundamentally shifting how we view identities, both individual and group identity (“Intellectual Genealogies” 59). Its unique approach to interrogating power and oppression presents a radical way to examine, contest, and transform systems of inequality. To conduct an intersectional analysis, one must look at the ways in which power is distributed based on social hierarchies. Therefore, I consider the ways in which the social work profession prepares students to understand the different systems of oppression that women of color encounter. A critical component of understanding intersectionality is the acknowledgement that systems of power and oppression are interdependent on individuals’ multiple identities. Women of colors’ multiple identities often time are ranked low on society’s social hierarchy scale. In short, when social workers examine where individuals are ranked among social hierarchies, they are able to

unveil the complexity women of color experience when navigating a social system that can be oppressive on many fronts.

Hendricks asserts that “The art and science of social work is acquired through the integration of theory and practice in the classroom and the agency in parallel processes” (74). In this study, I explore whether and how social work bridges theory and practice by teaching future practitioners how to analyze systems of power and oppression through the lens of intersecting identities. To do this, I review scholarship that discusses social work curriculum’s engagement with identity as it relates to power and oppression. The common trend is scholars’ examination of identity through diversity models in social work curricula. The first section includes scholarship on cultural competency as a practice model in social work curriculum. The review of scholarship highlights how some identities are marginalized in the curriculum due to one-size-fits-all models of diversity. I then examine scholarship that discusses how the exclusion of marginalized identity groups’ impact social work practice models. I close with a summary of where my research enters the discussion, what I intend to study, and why.

There have been major paradigm shifts in cultural attitudes about women, gender, and sexuality in the United States. Social work educational materials related to specific groups have been either mandated or recommended through curriculum or educational policies. These curricular revisions were “efforts to correct pathology laden, stereotyped characterizations of oppressed racial and ethnic minority groups led to the development of social work textbooks that devoted chapters to African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics” (Johnson and Munch 221). The discussion of identity in social work

curriculum falls under a wide array of diversity-related content, including cultural competence. Diversity education has been a focus of attention for the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). It is now required of all accredited social work institutions to have diversity content in their curricula (CSWE). Diversity is defined as human differences that account for the uniqueness of individuals and groups. There have been many curricular revisions that encouraged the CSWE in 1992 to mandate that diversity content be included in the curricula of all programs. Content that embraced diverse populations was to replace the more common assimilationist models that focused on perceived deficits. These models also mainstreamed ‘difference’ into the dominant ideological perspective. Replacing assimilationist models with diversity models aimed to encourage cross-cultural work. Diversity models help practitioners think about difference. Many scholars believe diversity is the cornerstone of modern social work.

### ***Cultural Competence as a Diversity Model in Social Work Curricula***

In the last twenty years, the popularity of cultural competence has grown in the field of social work, which adopted this concept and has used it to expand its definition of diversity. Kohli, Huber, and Faul define cultural competence as “the development of abilities and skills to respect differences and effectively interact with individuals from different backgrounds” (257). It has also been described as a “developmental process that moves on a continuum of cultural destructiveness to cultural competence” (Saunders, Haskins, and Vasquez 19). Pon cites a popular definition of cultural competence as “the ability to deliver professional services in a way that is congruent with behavior and

expectations normative for a given community and that are adapted to suit the specific needs of individuals and families from that community” (60). Essentially, cultural competence is a process of striving to become increasingly aware of cultural strengths and vulnerabilities of social work client populations. Social work adopted the concept from the field of psychology (Bergh and Crisp 222), and many cultural competence practice models have counseling implications. This means that there is an emphasis placed on the bonding relationship between practitioner and client that mirrors that of psychology.

There was an effort by CSWE to prepare students for work with communities of color by encouraging them to understand the sociocultural factors which impact participants’ lives. Understanding these sociocultural factors provides social workers with a dual perspective to understand the experiences of communities of color. A call for standards was adopted by the social work profession focusing on beliefs, knowledge, and skills of the practitioner when working with an increasingly multicultural participant population. Being aware of participants’ cultural traditions and history is an example of knowledge. The use of the term became associated with social work practice with diverse populations. Bergh and Crisp explain that “although, use of the term has referred primarily to practice with ethnic and racial minorities, the concept has been broadened to include social work with other culturally diverse populations” (221). Several important articles analyze cultural competence curriculum in social work education.

Definitions and approaches to cultural competence vary widely depending on worldview, discipline, and practice context, yet they all aim to bring awareness to growing diverse populations. Nonetheless a common concern lies with the limited access historically marginalized communities have had to equitable resources. Proponents of cultural competency insist that it is the lack of culturally appropriate service models that discourage clients from receiving care and services. Yet Tamara Davis argues that more research is needed to empirically support diversity practice models used to prepare practitioners for cross-cultural work (40). Her study compares family and provider perceptions of cultural competence in children's mental health systems of care to four diversity practice models commonly advanced in social work education. The Cultural Competency Model is one of four models that also includes the Ethnic-Sensitive Social Work Practice Model, the Cultural Awareness in the Human Services/Help Seeking Behavior Model, and the Process-Stage Approach Model.

The Ethnic-Sensitive Social Work Practice model emphasizes the importance of social workers knowing ethnic and social class groups, primarily those of persons of color. Proponents of this model believe that individual and collective history impact social problems. This model primarily focuses on direct practice; however, knowledge, values, and skills can be applied to micro and macro issues related to the impact of racism, poverty, discrimination, and oppression (T. Davis 45). This model offers a detailed discussion of model implementation within a macro framework.

The Cultural Awareness in the Human Services: Helping-Seeking Behavior model emphasizes bridging differences among professionals, organizations, and cultures of persons seeking help. This model has a theoretical framework based on an ethnographic understanding of cross-cultural relationships. An ethnographic understanding would require social workers to analyze society through the viewpoint of those needing services, while acknowledging that problems are both personal and social.

The Process-Stage Approach model emphasizes that all people of color in the U.S. share common experiences of racism, prejudice, and discrimination (T. Davis 44). Therefore, practice must consider both the universal and culturally unique patterns of experiences. The primary goal of the Process- Stage Approach model is to improve the quality of psychosocial functioning of people of color as they interact with society (T. Davis 44). This model is sensitive to ethnic and cultural environments and values the acquisition of knowledge, such as learning other languages.

The Cultural Competence model values recognition and respect of cultural norms different from the dominant society. Its priority is to recognize, respect, and validate worldviews within/between minority and dominant cultures (T. Davis 44). Similarly, it validates unique values that may differ from bourgeois values. For example, cultural competence validates the varying definitions of family that deviate from the heterosexual nuclear family popularized in the United States. This model is said to be useful when working with ethnic minority children of color with serious emotional disturbances served in systems of care, such as the foster care system. Tamara Davis describes cultural competence as a suitable model when targeting providers, policymakers, and

administrators that are addressing policies when working with people of color. A common critique of diversity models has been that they focus on ethnic and racial minorities due to the levels of oppression that racism and xenophobia create. These diversity models, including cultural competence, have had a shared focus primarily on targeting people of color to the exclusion of other cultural groups, such as women (T. Davis 43). Due to the vast and fluid nature of culture there are cultural groups that are not racially defined. Thus, culture should not be conceived among ethnically rigid absolute lines. Rather they should be viewed as social groups that are dynamic and relational. The fluidity of identity and experience creates overlap whereby women of color exist within cultural spaces of both gender and ethnicity/race among others.

Several elements, such as knowledge and skill, overlap all four models. For instance, each model emphasizes a need for assessing self-awareness, building appropriate knowledge, skills, and behavior for work with ethnic persons of color, using a strengths-approach with children and families, and incorporating indigenous supports and strategies into intervention plans (T. Davis 43). Moreover, the Cultural Competence Model was primarily developed to target competence on multiple levels of provider systems, yet includes a limited discussion of application in direct practice. In fact, Tamara Davis points out that newer models of cultural competence place the greatest responsibility of client outcomes on the systems and practitioners who provide services rather than those clients receiving services (43). In other words, all steps necessary to become culturally competent require work on the part of the practitioner alone.

Therefore, outcomes to measure competence will be based on the knowledge and skill of the practitioners, something common across all four models.

Tamara Davis is particularly interested in wraparound service delivery that requires knowledge at multiple levels of service implementation. Wraparound services are intended to meet the multiple needs of families and should consider the strengths of the families and communities when designing interventions. She wants to identify “potential discrepancies in conceptualization that may inform further development of social work diversity practice models and culturally responsive practice” (T. Davis 41). To successfully implement wraparound services, practitioners should work within the family’s culture, the culture of the family’s identified community, and the culture of the multiple children’s service systems (T. Davis 42). She conducted a content analysis measuring the cultural competence perceptions of two rural and two urban communities. Participants from the community totaled 100 (39 family members and 61 practitioners). There was significant overlap of what the diversity models promote as cultural competence and what the community participants perceive as cultural competence. For example, the findings reveal that community participants believe cultural competence is when “services are inclusive of all persons without discrimination,” “families are empowered by the strengths and differences of their culture,” and “service providers truly support, value, and preserve the individual cultures of the families” (T. Davis 51). However, the study found that although self-awareness was a popular component of all four diversity models, families did not see self-awareness as a component of cultural competence.

Community participants identified issues of prejudice and discrimination with such references in relation to accessibility to services and equality in service provision. This limited means of access commonly impacts the quality of life for participants. What is commonly identified as issues of prejudice and discrimination is masked as barriers, but not racism. In fact, participants did not discuss issues of racism at an interpersonal level (T. Davis 60). Another slight difference in perspectives of community members and diversity models, particularly cultural competence, is the value placed on being knowledgeable of community culture. Community participants placed more emphasis on understanding family culture, although they did acknowledge the importance of having knowledge and skills in working with the family's cultural community (T. Davis 60). This study points out the unspoken belief of practitioners that if they perform behaviors they learn as being culturally appropriate within diverse populations, then they are responding in a culturally competent manner (T. Davis 62). She describes her findings as mixed results in the diversity practice models, such as cultural competence and the community comparisons. Tamara Davis found no connection between self-awareness and community participants' perceptions of cultural competence.

Yan and Wong further explored the role of awareness in cultural competence practice and found incoherencies within the standard notion of self-awareness. They believe that cultural awareness is conceptually incoherent and contradicts the cultural competency tenets of an individual as a cultural being. Yan and Wong also argue that the expectation of social workers to set their cultural beliefs aside for the purpose of professional social work practice produces a "hierarchical subject-object dichotomy in

the worker-client relationship that implies that social workers are capable of becoming neutral and impartial culture-free agents, while clients are objects who stay within the limits of their culture, and to be regarded as such by the worker” (181). There is a major “concern with how social workers can break through cultural barrier[s] and effectively work with clients of different backgrounds” (183); thus, many models support these ideals. The implication becomes that social workers have the capabilities to control their own cultural beliefs whereas clients are unable to control theirs. Through self-reflection, social workers are able to sustain their professional objectivity when they engage in a professional relationship with clients.

Cultural competence has been presented as a panacea for problems related to cross-cultural social work practice in diverse environments. This standard to prepare social work students includes assessing their ability to work cross-culturally, develop special tools to aid students when working with minorities, and develop models of intercultural sensitivity for social work students (Yan and Wong 182). Cultural competence has been presumed to be the foundation of effective cross-cultural social work. The popular belief is that once social workers gain awareness and master the needed knowledge and skills, they will be able to meet their clients’ needs. Despite the popularity of cultural competence in social work practice, Yan and Wong believe that the concept is rather abstract, and operationalization is difficult (182). These authors argue that it is unrealistic that both the workers’ and the clients’ cultures can be learned through social work education, as well as managed through cultural sensitivity, modification of social work skills, or adaptation of services.

Yan and Wong find this problematic and believe that discussions emphasizing self-awareness as a tenet of cultural competence inadequately explores the relationship between culture and social workers. For instance, social workers, unlike clients, are presumed to be able to be both inside and outside their cultural cage by manipulating a professional self that can be separated from their personal self. They claim that it is problematic if the cultural competence model insists on the importance of culture, which is usually defined in an essentialist way, and does not make room for social workers whose cultural identities are complex and overlapping (184). Yan and Wong insist that “the relationship between culture and social worker has been either simplified or omitted from mainstream cross-cultural social work discussions” (185). Social workers’ cultural backgrounds will certainly inform their perceptions and worldviews. Therefore, one’s understanding of their own culture can only happen through interaction with others. Our understanding of ourselves is incomplete if we do not have the ‘other’ or what is different from ourselves to contextualize our personal experience. Yan and Wong’s goal is not to attain cultural competence. Rather, it is to use the client’s worldview as well as their own in an effort to be self-reflexive on ways to meet the client’s needs.

Similarly, George Pon’s article challenges early scholarship on cultural competence, which purports that cultural competence is a set of techniques used to help clients who are members of marginalized groups, by bringing awareness, sensitivity, knowledge, and skills to the practice environment that supersede cultural difference. However, Pon argues that cultural competence views culture as neutral and therefore does not theorize power, nor does it critique oppression (59). In addition, Pon complains

that the scholarship on cultural competence seldom analyzes whiteness, which is believed to be the default standard in which ethnic and racially minoritized people are evaluated, judged, and often found to be lacking, inferior, deviant, and abnormal (59). Pon argues that “[t]he implication of cultural competency in whiteness is evidenced in how it constructs “other” cultural groups, because whiteness is the standard by which cultures are differentiated” (60). He posits that social work is built on the foundation of whiteness. Therefore, Pon considers the omission of whiteness from cultural competence discourse to be a new racism.

The term *new racism* refers to racial discrimination that involves a shift away from racial exclusionary practices based on biology to those based on culture (Pon 60). Pon argues that cultural competence uses modernist views to essentialize culture, while “othering” non-whites. He offers the most commonly cited definitions of cultural competence and highlights that these definitions do not consider power and how members of minorities groups become “othered.” Pon cites J.W. Green who defines cultural competence as “the ability to deliver professional services in a way that is congruent with behavior and expectations normative for a given community and that are adapted to suit specific needs of individuals and families from that community” (60). Without considerations of power, Pon argues, cultural competence overlooks how knowledge of cultural “others” is created. Pon contends that those who have “the power to define meaning, perspective, and the ‘other’ and how meanings and perspectives relating to the ‘other’ are often caught up in discourses that uphold whiteness as the default standard,” (60) depoliticizes and neutralizes the definitions of cultural

competence. Social work scholarship rarely implicates the process of marginalization and oppression, such as colonialism and racism, when it discusses cultural competence. Pon believes cultural competence is outdated and advocates for scholars to abandon the concern by quickly mastering knowledge about others for more robust interactions with issues such as racism, colonialism, and disenfranchisement.

Fisher-Borne, Cain, and Martin posit that the implicit assumption that mastery level knowledge should be achieved by practitioners is insufficient when trying to meet the needs of marginalized groups. Instead, they advocate for cultural humility, where social work practitioners are not focused on mastering the “other.” Rather, they assume that in order to understand clients, social workers must understand their own communities. Within the field of social work, cultural competency has been challenged for its failure to account for the structural forces that shape individuals’ experiences and opportunities. Similar to Pon’s argument, Fisher-Borne, Cain, and Martin believe the profession needs to move toward accountability, not only on an individual level, but also on an institutional level. Cultural humility “accounts for structural inequalities and the complexities of culture in a way that is absent from many of the existing cultural competency models and strengthens our social justice commitment as social work practitioners” (172). Accountability on the institutional level would require social workers be aware of the history of social services in the United States. This includes the systemic disenfranchisement of communities of color and pervasive racism.

Johnson and Munch explain that culture encompasses a group's social history over generations, rituals, beliefs, behaviors, and material artifacts, along with the subjective experiences of people within specific cultures, and competence involves abilities and skills (221). Their definition of cultural competence is a straightforward account of what the two terms mean when melded together. They do offer other definitions found in current social work literature, such as:

A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations,”  
another definition is “cultural competence in social work practice implies a heightened consciousness of how clients experience their uniqueness and deal with their differences and similarities within larger social context.  
(222)

Johnson and Munch present multiple definitions of cultural competence to highlight the tenets of the model. Yet, they argue that cultural competence may be ill defined making it difficult to ever achieve (222). The authors discuss whether social workers can ever truly achieve cultural competence due to some underlying contradictions.

Johnson and Munch doubt whether cultural competence is possible and have serious objections to its incorporation into social work education and practice. They argue that the realization of intersectionality and the infinite combinations of overlapping

identities that a person can have make it very difficult for the development of cultural competence. The authors find a lack of clarity in social work literature as to whether cultural competence is possible, explaining that “[i]t is particularly difficult to evaluate because there is no clear definition of cultural competence; its conceptualization lacks a coherent theory base, and the majority of contemporary researchers define cultural competence as a developmental process that requires extended time” (228).

Another concern with the application of cultural competence relates to the means by which social workers are to learn a client’s life, culture, and situation. The authors consider this an epistemological failure. They find it unrealistic to believe that social workers obtaining specialized knowledge and understanding about history, traditions, values, and family systems before they meet clients who will enhance the helping relationship. They suggest that the spirit of the social work profession would rather encourage a process of *learning from* the client by listening and giving importance to the client’s story rather than adopting a position of *knowing about* the client (Johnson and Munch 223, emphasis theirs).

Johnson and Munch contend that race and ethnicity are so varied that grand narratives on culture seem less meaningful than they did 30 years ago. Furthermore, cultural competence possesses a limited view of the multiplicity of identities evident today (229). Because of this, they believe it is important to address the fundamental tensions before the field moves further in incorporating cultural competence in social work education and practice.

### ***Diversity Models in Social Work Curricula***

The evolution of the topic of diversity in social work education has been well documented by social work scholars. Jani, Ortiz, Pierce, and Sowbel assess the Council of Social Work Education's (CSWE) decisions over the years on what is relevant for inclusion in the social work curriculum. Their critical analysis of the historical development of content in social work education highlights long-standing status quo narratives in the field. In other words, these researchers critique the commonly held assimilationist views regarding the appropriate way to exist in the dominant society. Jani et al. focus on the construction of the field, highlighting the profession's systematic lack of consideration for race, class, and gender. For instance, they believe that "although the standards appeared to imply that both groups [racial/ethnic groups and women] were of equal importance, there is a lack of discussion regarding their distinct histories and levels of oppression or the commonalities in how groups became oppressed. This echoed the lack of inclusion of content on institutional racism or sexism, or social justice in general throughout the standards" (288). Similar to Pon, Jani et. al argue that a shift in diversity content including cultural competence must include discussions of institutional racism, whiteness, and colonialism.

Demographic attributes of the populations are rapidly changing, and social work education has been proactive and intentional about keeping up with these changes. Diversity is a priority in social work education. Therefore, educators have had to continue to rethink its meaning, create new approaches, and advance existing ones more effectively (Jani et al. 285). In rethinking and introducing multiple approaches to

diversity, the field has placed an emphasis on knowledge production that focuses on certain groups, an enhancement of attitudes and behaviors that reflect appreciation and respect for difference, and the ability to practice competently across those differences.

Yet in spite of the field's commitment to diversity, Jani et al. are critical of what they consider outdated approaches to teaching diversity content using modernist theories and assimilationist assumptions. Aspects of modernist theories include universal standards in which social work practice is patterned, working on an assumption of an essentially benign relationship between individuals and their environment. These assumptions create a widely accepted expectation that assimilating to meet status quo standards is advantageous to those seeking assistance. Jani et al. identify cultural competence as a modernist approach that "promotes generalizations and fails to capture the complexity of human experience or emphasize the importance of contextualizing culture" (284). Jani et al. see aspects of modernism in social work curriculum through its dissemination of normative standards, an emphasis on rationality, logic, and order reflected in its creation of categories and a clear sequencing of cause and effect (284).

Cultural competence makes an assumption that knowledge alone is sufficient to achieve practice competence when learning very specific topics regarding cultural identity. Their critique of cultural competence is that "its origins lie in positivist assumptions, which inevitably produce static and essentialist perspectives about culture and fail to recognize its complex and fluid nature" (Jani et al 296). Furthermore, they warn that "by relying on cultural competence as a conceptual guide, social workers have neglected to pursue a transformative agenda and have defaulted to positions on practice

that inadvertently reinforce the status quo” (296). Essentially, being knowledgeable on culture alone fails to inform practitioners of institutional racism or concepts of social justice because it promotes generalizations about culture and fails to capture the complexity of the human experience.

Similar to the views of other intersectional scholars, Jani et al. agree that the “problems of inequality and discrimination are rooted in the structures of society itself” (293). Many of the popular diversity models are rooted in European-American perspectives that fail to identify power differentials among different groups (Jani et al. 293). For example, cultural competence, though useful when working with communities of color because of its knowledge of history, values, and norms, does not address social justice (294). Jani et al. argue that any discussion on diversity requires an understanding of how diversity functions socially and its relationship to social stratification. They are calling for a move beyond cultural competence to embrace intersectional frameworks that integrate recent theoretical developments that understand the critical goals of social justice work (Jani et al. 294). The authors present intersectionality as the alternative to cultural competence because it offers a critical analysis of social hierarchies that explains institutional racism with a focus on the creation of conflict. In contrast to cultural competence literature that focuses on culturally relevant assessment and services within existing social work practice models (295), intersectionality focuses on social structures of power and privilege.

Jani et al. offer four precise points to support their call to move beyond cultural competence: (1) culture is fluid and ever-changing; therefore, attaining competence is never permanently achieved; (2) to be competent would require more than merely understanding and valuing other cultures; (3) there are limited discussions on the negative impact of culture, for example, the acceptance of sexism and homophobia in many cultures; and (4) culture is only one aspect of difference (295). Without applying intersectionality, the structural, political, and representational realities of women of color will remain misunderstood, and the inequities women of color experience in their daily lives will continue to be commonplace.

In contrast to the cultural competence scholarship that focuses on culturally relevant assessments and services, Jani et al. contend that intersectionality focuses on the politics of a person's social location and highlights associated social injustices (295). Without a critical analysis of oppression, diversity models seem to promote tolerance and coexistence for the purpose of building rapport with the client, leaving few opportunities to address power differentials among groups and the social hierarchies that lead to power differentials. The significance is to understand how future research will address the current models' inability to encourage both educators and students to develop strategies to change the social structures that create oppression.

Part of social justice work is the analysis of oppression, unearned privilege, and power differentials. How does this critical analysis of oppression take place in social work education? Schiele challenges what he calls the "equality-of-oppressions" paradigm on the grounds that it implies a core assumption in social work education, that all

oppressions are equal in their intensity, frequency, and pervasiveness ( “Equality-of-Oppressions” 85). Schiele acknowledges that the definition of diversity has expanded, highlighting the 14 different sources that define it. Yet, Schiele argues that the emphasis placed on such a wide array inadvertently places a strain on social work curricula to adequately cover content on people of color, as well as other groups (“Equality-of-Oppressions” 85). The expansion of social work’s curricula to include more diverse groups was not instantaneous. This shift has occurred over a period of years. In fact, social work practice and education have historically operated from a place of ethnocentrism, whereby social work theories and practice models were deemed universally applicable to all client groups, regardless of divergent socio-demographic characteristics (Schiele, “Equality-of-Oppressions” 85). To some degree, ethnocentrism still remains where the norms and values of the dominant culture are considered appropriate for social work practice, methods, theories, and thus, clients. Schiele’s argument should be considered when the status quo norms are applied with families that deviate from the dominant society. The outcomes for families are not always positive.

Schiele’s “wave” analogy explains the institutional inclusion of diversity. During the first wave of CSWE diversity requirements, the era between 1965-74, the field shifted attention to race in social work education, largely due to the influence of the civil rights movement. This singular focus on race left other intersecting identities at bay until the next wave that added gender to the CSWE diversity requirements. Gender as a lens of analysis was part of the second wave in 1975. In 1985, sexuality was determined to be a concern for social work practice and education. During the time of the third wave, social

work began to see an increase in content on homophobia and heterosexism as societal problems (Schiele, “Equality-of-Oppressions” 86). Following these three major shifts in social work curricula, the CSWE included physical and mental health and social class as separate points of analysis. There is an obvious connection between CSWE mandates for diversity curriculum and the social and political movements (i.e., civil rights, women’s rights, and LGBTQ movements) that preceded them.

Schiele’s point is that, because no distinction is made about the frequency, intensity, or pervasiveness of the fourteen sources of oppression, social work validates what he calls the “equality-of-oppressions” paradigm, preventing a more substantive analysis of each group. In addition, Schiele’s critique includes intersectionality. He posits that intersectionality has influenced the emergence of the one-size-fits-all oppression model because the tenets of intersectionality, requiring that you consider the intersections of all identities simultaneously, make acknowledging racism as a core problem in contemporary social work education more difficult. In essence, Schiele believes that a single focus on racism commands its own attention as a core social problem.

I agree with Schiele that there are different experiences of oppression and not every source of oppression is equal to others in its severity, frequency, and production of human degradation, leaving those experiences to be more intensely felt. There needs to be more intentionality in social work curricula toward the subject of race and its relationship to white supremacy. Curricula covering the topic of race and white supremacy will expose the invisibility of whiteness and white privilege as one of the central mechanisms of racial stratification in U.S. society. This racial stratification does

leave people of color systematically disadvantaged, experiencing an increased level of oppression. However, rather than isolating groups of people and their experiences into single categories, such as race or gender, intersectionality identifies the root causes that create oppressive circumstances for vastly diverse people. Simply expanding demographic categories is an insufficient method. An antiracist agenda alone fails to acknowledge the significance of gendered racism, and the oppression antiracists attempt to challenge only becomes more pronounced where Black women are concerned. For example, when antiracists fail to acknowledge that gendered racism and the stereotypes of Black women drive the removal of Black children from their homes, antiracists contribute to the continued highly disproportionate amounts of Black children being removed from their mothers.

Similar to Schiele's call for a single focus on race, other scholars insist that incorporating a gendered analysis in social work curricula is necessary for an equal and just society. Anand, a women's studies scholar, analyzes gender sensitization and awareness in social work education and training. Anand draws on previous case study examples of projects in India to determine how the integration of gender perspectives may play a part in students (un)learning gender stereotypes (96).

Anand locates an opportunity to integrate gender analysis in social work curricula, as she contends that gender awareness is central to social work across the world (47). Due to the unequal power distribution between men and women that is perpetuated by patriarchy, women experience a heightened level of discrimination. To mitigate this for social work clients, Anand suggests organizing and conducting gender sensitization

programs for policy makers, legislators, educators, and community members, to name a few (101). In addition, she contends that social workers can take up research studies on the causes, consequences, costs, and remedies for violence against women and its connection to other forms of oppression based on race, ethnicity, and economic status (101). Using a feminist theoretical lens, Anand is able to highlight the contributions feminism has made to social work principles, values, and methods, which have in turn made significant gains toward gender equality. In addition, she wants to expand research to include specific ways to incorporate gender identity in social work practice. However, the consequence of closing one gap using a single axis analysis of gender with no interrogation of how caste, class, and race factor into women's experience will inevitably create a new gap.

McPhail, like Anand, argues that the call for a more comprehensive understanding of gender is necessary for the success of social work practice. McPhail writes that, "New and exciting theories and research on gendered realities enter the literature each day. This poses a challenge to social work educators to stay current and knowledgeable, but our students and their future clients demand more and deserve nothing less" (45). Complex understandings of gender, including feminism and masculinities, require social work to create methods to enhance critical consciousness on gender. McPhail offers ways to increase awareness by incorporating new content on women into policy and practice. While I support McPhail's position that social work policy and practice must include increased awareness regarding the unintended consequences of gender not being considered in policy and practice, I find Schiele's argument that social work curricula

cannot be a one-size- fits-all model that neglects race and white privilege to be persuasive as well. What neither scholar attempts to do is consider the interconnectedness of race and gender, and how the experiences of those with intersecting identities have unique experiences.

Longres and Scanlon's study attempts to locate social justice frameworks in research curricula. In their qualitative study, the authors interviewed twelve faculty members who taught research courses or were principal investigators in funded research projects. The following question guided their study: "How does social work education prepare students to promote justice through research?" Social work scholars are advocating for more social justice frameworks to be included in curricula. It follows, then, that the results of the study can transgress current barriers to build frameworks of justice in social work curricula. Longres and Scanlon looked specifically at how social work research textbooks and course syllabi used in BSW, MSW, and PhD programs address the topic of justice (449). Their aim was to determine the extent to which faculty drew on a philosophy of justice and reflected it in their teaching and research (Longres and Scanlon 452). They found that none of the texts indexed the term social justice nor could they find any systemic discussion of the concept of social justice.

Semi-structured interviews asked respondents to state their definitions of social justice, discuss how it informed their work, and explain how justice relates to their choice of research topics, methods, and theoretical frameworks. Respondents had a difficult time even defining the term. In fact, the researchers believe that most respondents had not spent time reading and thinking about the concept (453). When discussing the ways in

which justice informed their work, one respondent said, “I don’t connect justice to my work... I think of social justice as politics, and my work isn’t that...I do research” (453). Longres and Scanlon report that this distinction between research and social action was also present in the research text and course syllabi. Longres and Scanlon believe that research should be viewed as a tool that can be used to alleviate human suffering and promote social welfare. The authors argue: “In the social work profession that is what research is all about” (450). In other words, Longres and Scanlon inform us that social justice for social change is the most significant component of social work practice. Although the authors do not offer their own definition of social justice, they do cite John Rawls’ definition of distributive justice, which refers to the way economic and social goods are distributed in a society, and Iris Marion Young’s definition of relational/processual justice, which refers to the decision-making processes that lead to decisions about distribution and to the relationships between dominant and subordinate groups (448). Closing the gap identified by Longres and Scanlon is imperative to practice. If social work educators do not prioritize social justice frameworks how can students effectively advocate against social justice, a requirement of NASW. Further research may find that this disparity in social justice content may impact practice when working with disenfranchised people.

Snyder, Peeler, and May, similar to Longres and Scanlon, are critical of social work curricula’s lack of educational frameworks covering diversity and oppression. They acknowledge that “social institutions function in ways that systemically maintain social inequities along the lines of identity statuses like race, class, and gender” (156). Thus,

their call is to integrate a focus on human diversity and social justice within the context of Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) courses and curricula (145). HBSE courses are taught in both undergraduate and graduate programs. These courses are important to the curricula and practice because they focus on the person in environment framework. Emphasis is placed on the specific challenges encountered while living in their day-to-day social environment. In addition, HBSE courses cover systems of inequalities and mechanisms of oppression that impact the lives of clients. Because of this, social justice content is suitable for HBSE course curriculum due to the course's emphasis on the social environment. HBSE allows for an in-depth examination of critical social factors that shape and influence human behavior and themes of privilege, oppression, discrimination, and social justice. In short, advocating for social justice requires social workers to have a critical awareness of social systems and how individuals navigate those systems.

Snyder, Peeler, and May offer a framework that teaches students how to work for social justice goals using a continuum of phased actions (145). They insist that “diversity work needs to be inextricably tied to social justice by foregrounding the ways in which privilege and power are inequitably distributed in our society” (146). The framework emphasizes that compounding identity or the additive approach of discussing identity works against empowerment and coalition building. They believe building coalitions among diverse groups offers viable means for challenging oppression systematically. The key to their framework is providing students with a classroom climate that is respectful and supportive. This environment gives students the opportunity for self-exploration.

This six-phase process challenges social work students to expand their understanding of social injustice and oppression, and how they are both interwoven with cultural diversity. Their study supports the assertions of Jani et al. who want curriculum that moves beyond the discussion of cultural competence alone. Snyder, Peeler, and May along with Jani et al. call for the field to adopt curriculum that supports critical awareness of the social injustices experienced by multicultural clients. Snyder, Peeler, and May's essay introduces their framework as a way for students to investigate the connections between oppression, cultural diversity, and social justice. They begin by introducing the framework to students. The second phase is consciousness-raising about the sources and dynamics of oppression. The third phase involves helping students to look inward. Students are asked to self-reflect by journaling weekly. This helps students develop a conscious understanding of their own social environment. Connecting and creating dialogue across difference is phase four. Building alliances is phase five. Snyder, Peeler, and May believe students are more powerful change agents when they build alliances with others (152). The final phase incorporates a short lecture on the history of social movements and organizing. Their framework addresses the gaps introduced by Jani et al. Social work has not yet formulated an explicit educational framework that combines diversity and social justice (145).

Exploring poverty as a social injustice would enhance social work curriculum. Usually those who live in poverty are held responsible for their socio-economic status. Thus, the social hierarchy that perpetuates poverty goes largely unexamined. However, curriculum that explores the connections between capitalism, poverty, and social justice

would add to students' critical consciousness on privilege. Poverty is an issue that will remain important to social workers. There is evidence of a low quality of life rendered for many of the clients living in poverty. Although there is an overall acknowledgement of social work education taking issues of diversity seriously, there is a common concern that one's social class is not considered a component of diversity. Social work scholar Roni Strier is calling for more attention to be paid to subject matter that is more inclusive of multiple lived experiences, including the experiences of those who live in poverty.

According to Strier, there is a lack of poverty-oriented material in social work curriculum and the significance of social class has been largely ignored. Strier's work reminds us that the connection of poverty, oppression, and social exclusion to gender and race inequity cannot be detached from an analysis of class dynamics. Strier contends that the need to define and assess class competence has never been addressed (237), even though gender and race have been prioritized in social work curricula. Furthermore, the concern is that "under neo-liberal premises in an era of pro-work and anti-welfare reform, social work practices are being viewed increasingly as embedded in middle class values" (239). In this vein, the dominant narrative omits an in-depth discussion of poverty, causing a lack of skills when dealing with complex social issues that require a level of class-consciousness. It is important to understand Hardiman and Jackson, quoted in Strier's article: "Class oppression results in a condition of privilege for one group at the expense of the disenfranchisement of another" (240). If practitioners are not well-versed on the dynamics of classism and its economic, cultural, and societal impact, it can have devastating outcomes for them and their clients.

Strier conceptualizes the term “class consciousness” beyond its traditional economic meaning and proposes a preliminary definition of a class competent social work practice (238). Class competent is defined as “the knowledge, skills, theoretical approach and critical awareness required to effectively help clients oppressed by class” (240). Strier’s critique of the field’s failure to analyze the effects of social, economic, and cultural class disparities aligns with other critiques of social work education. However, unlike other literature in this review, Strier’s work draws connections between class and other intersections like race and gender.

Building on her findings, Strier, Feldman, and Shdaimah conducted a study of introductory social work textbooks to examine the level of inclusion of social class in course curricula. Based on the content analysis of fifty textbooks, Strier, Feldman, and Shdaimah found that social work education has overlooked or denied the relevance of social class. Introductory textbooks were examined because they reflect theoretical considerations as well as present students with accepted views and dominant perspectives on knowledge (406). The study found that forty-five out of fifty textbooks failed to provide a significant discussion on the concept of classism. Furthermore, eighteen of the fifty textbooks examined—a third of them—were found to have completely omitted the concept of social class as a phenomenon that social workers should take into consideration (411). The researchers also found that only six of the fifty textbooks even defined the concept of class. These results reveal that there is a lack of significant discussion of the role of class in the analysis of social inequality (416).

Without acknowledging how class impacts clients' lived experience, how are the intersections of class, race, and gender being discussed? Categories of socioeconomic status can reveal hierarchies of power that are commonly associated with oppression. Strier, Feldman, and Shdaimah remind us of social work's historical and ethical commitment to combat class inequalities, as well as the curricula's failure to do so. Since its inception at the end of the nineteenth century, the social work profession has voiced its commitment to dealing with the problems of poverty (Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal 225). For this reason, Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal highlight the gaps in social work education regarding social work curricula's superficial manner in addressing the problems of poverty and social exclusion. Their examination of the top fifty social work programs in the United States shows that only twelve offer one or more courses in the area of poverty (226). Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal critique the social work profession on its failure to develop practiced-based awareness models of poverty. While the social work profession has professed its commitment to dealing with problems of poverty and working with its impoverished clients, Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal argue schools of social work have done little to infuse the issue of poverty into its course curricula.

The exclusion of a critical analysis on poverty in social work curriculum re-inscribes the "normalization" of poverty, whereby poverty is not viewed as the central problem. The notion that people experiencing poverty have control over their own socioeconomic status lacks class-consciousness and normalizes poverty. This observation results in efforts that address clients' shortcomings like drug addiction or domestic abuse

rather than addressing the impact of classism and income inequality. Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal suggest in the last three decades that a shift in policy discussions has taken place from a focus on structural problems to the problems of individuals (228). Unfortunately, due to social injustice, people of color experience high rates of poverty. Social work's failure to discuss poverty and class dynamics prevents wholistic engagement to occur when social workers believe the circumstances of poverty are the client's fault.

Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal propose an educational framework that will address this gap. First, the authors call for the acquisition of theoretical knowledge. They also recommend incorporating poverty theories and approaches that are multidisciplinary (231). In addition, the authors demand social and economic policy regarding poverty, include a historical perspective that incorporates class-consciousness, and encourage the practitioner to acknowledge the systemic causes of poverty.

Weaver and Yun's research corroborate Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal's claims regarding the impact poverty-related curricula has on social work education. In their study, Weaver and Yun determined how effective social work education is in transforming the attitudes of undergraduate social work students. The data collected from 166 students provided Weaver and Yun with pre-and post-tests measures on students' attitudes about poverty. The study found evidence that social work education has a significant influence on undergraduates' attitudes. The study was designed to measure attitudes toward poverty and impoverished persons (3). The five-point Likert Scale measured attitudes about poverty and about poor people experiencing poverty. If

respondents scored high, this indicated that they perceived poverty to be primarily due to structural reasons. A lower score indicated they attributed poverty to problems of the individual (12). Weaver and Yun found a significant difference between the pre ( $M=120.71$ ,  $SD=11.81$ ) and post ( $M=129.95$ ,  $SD=15.49$ ) tests scores and that the participation in undergraduate social work classes substantially increased respondents' likelihood of linking poverty to structural factors (13). Thus, the authors assert that this attitudinal change is strengthened by additional coursework and fieldwork. The study suggests that as social work students work their way through course curricula, thinking about critical issues like poverty transforms their thinking on oppression.

Lehning, Vu, and Pintak's study distinguishes social work from other helping professions and social science disciplines due to social work's primary concern with poverty (5). To prove their assertion about the relevance of perspectives on poverty in the social sciences, Lehning, Vu, and Pintak examine Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) textbooks for theories of poverty. They set out to determine to what extent the description and analysis of poverty, a key factor in the lives of social work clients, is being discussed in the textbooks. After analyzing fourteen frequently assigned textbooks, they found that, in general, the textbook authors devote very little space to discussing poverty or to incorporating theories of poverty's causes into the framework (15). Similar to previous scholars, such as Strier, Lehning, Vu, and Pintak expose a severe gap in the way social work approaches class identity and poverty. A high number of American families experience poverty. In 2002, an estimated 12.1% of all people living in the United States were considered poor (Lehning, Vu and Pintak 6). This

increases the chances of contact with a social worker. How will students be prepared? In addition, the common belief that individuals are the sole or main cause of their own poverty is perpetuated by this gap in the literature. Scholarship should include the structural policies that increase the chances of women and people of color experiencing poverty. Students will gain a more critical in-depth understanding of income inequality.

Lehning, Vu, and Pintak's findings support Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal's argument. Both prove that current interventions are designed to address the behavior and choices of the individual rather than the social environment and the structural inequalities that exist. Their belief is that "the root cause of poverty lies not within individual failings, but within the structural failings of American society" (8). This belief challenges current interventions. These interventions that are designed to change the behavior of the individual in order to escape poverty, have little consideration for the intersection of race, class, and gender and their systematic links to poverty.

Due to the undeniable connection between social service clients and poverty, Sherraden, Laux, and Kaufman urge the field to train social workers to be better versed in financial literacy. Large numbers of American families experience poverty, and many of them will encounter social workers at some point to help address their needs. Social work students often lack financial knowledge, despite the likelihood that they will confront financial issues on a daily basis in their work (Sherraden, Laux, and Kaufman 16). Thus, the researchers designed curriculum so that social work students would be equipped with financial skills to better assist their clients.

Their study includes collaboration with family economists and social workers. Together, they developed curriculum to meet the needs of families and households, which is necessary to move the field forward. The course was designed to teach students about family financial management and how financial products, services, and institutions shape financial options, especially among the poor and vulnerable (Sherraden, Laux, and Kaufman 16). Pre-and post-tests were administered to the eighteen participants. Sherraden, Laux, and Kaufman found an increase of more than 30% in financial literacy between the pre- and post-test (19). Similar to the beliefs of Krumer-Nevo, Monnickendam, and Weiss-Gal and Weaver and Yun, and Sherraden, Laux, and Kaufman show that poverty is a topic that social workers do not adequately consider. The call for financial literacy among social work practitioners is important. Financial education is less likely to reach vulnerable populations served by social workers—for instance, people experiencing high rates of poverty and in communities of color (Sherraden, Laux, and Kaufman 16).

When examining the impact of class oppression, one cannot ignore the combined effects of race and class. Racial discrimination remains one of the most devastating and heinous forms of oppression perpetuated in the United States. Nevertheless, social work educational materials lack a critical analysis of race as an issue in human affairs (Coleman 91). Coleman insists that racial discrimination poses a devastating instrument of oppression. Yet, the connection between race and poverty is simply not explored in social work curricula. Like Scheile, Coleman underscores the sentiment that social work educators and students alike should not be silenced. In addition, Coleman believes that

educators systematically avoid race as a subject (104). Moreover, similar to Strier, Feldman, and Shadaimah's research on social class, Coleman found that social work textbooks lack a clear and consistent definition of race.

In his study of social work textbooks and reference works, Coleman found inconsistencies in social work's treatment of race (92). There were three recurring approaches as it relates to discussions on race: (1) variations on lay definitions and assumptions of race, sometimes with qualifiers, (2) the use of the term "race" without any definition citing disagreements about the definition, or (3) an explicit rejection of the concept of race (92). These findings provoked Coleman to create best practices as it relates to teaching subject matter on "race."

Due to these ambiguities, Coleman suggests that social workers learn about race from categorized descriptions and explanations from experiential knowledge as well as the data provided by the scientific observation that "documents and explains similarities and differences in thought and behavior among human groups" (94). Coleman believes that the massive confusion about race, such as physical features and ideas about heredity, can be clarified if we categorize descriptions and explanations of social dynamics into two categories. One category is the "actor version" (AV) the description and explanation of social life provided by people as they live it (94). AV is predicated on the understanding that race is real and is experienced. AV challenges the notion that race is a mere social construct, a "fabricated category inspired by a set of social and political agendas" (Coleman 93). Those who experience life as a "raced" person easily debunk the

notion that there is no such thing as race. This “raced” person serves as the “actor” in Coleman’s framework.

The other category is the “scientific observation version” (SOV) that is based on scientific evidence. Whereas AV offers qualitative data based on lived experience, SOV exists to create logically sound categories that work in tandem with careful observations in a methodical dialogue with reality (Coleman 94). Currently, social work, like other social sciences, places a heavy emphasis on data collected through scientific observations. Many social service agencies rely on SOV data for best practices. SOV is useful because it helps explain the phenomenon under observation, which is race and racism. Coleman contends that to combat racism more effectively, social workers should demand SOV concepts that can identify and explain more precisely the factors in the social environment that generates confusion that marks off other groups as physically different and thus eligible for disdain and exploitation (97). Coleman makes his case in support of AV/SOV curricula on race by using the CSWE’s Education Policy and Accreditation Standards as a reference point on the ways in which educators can discuss race and racism.

Similar to the absence of critical theories on race and racism, Lee and Hernandez examined HBSE textbooks for theories of immigration. In the United States, one’s immigration status is arguably the most contentious of identities and can impose significant barriers to accessing resources. Due to nativism, many immigrants face oppression and discrimination in their host countries. In fact, one individual can simultaneously experience xenophobia, racism, sexism, and heterosexism. It is inevitable

that social workers will likely work with refugee, documented, and/or undocumented immigrants. Increased attention to critical social justice-oriented practice models inclusive of complex identities, including those that intersect with immigrant status, should be represented in the curricula.

Lee and Hernandez raise important questions by conducting a study measuring to what extent social work students are informed in immigration theories that enhance their understanding and inform their practice with immigrant populations. The authors used content analysis to assess HBSE textbooks. The manner in which immigration is addressed, the extent to which it is described, and the context in which immigration is presented was all measured in this study. Lee and Hernandez found that immigration content was not consistently nor thoroughly presented in social work curricula. The total percentage of immigration-related content in each text ranged from 0% to 8.3%, with the total number of pages addressing immigration ranging from 0 to 45 ½ pages (671). Lee and Hernandez uncovered several missed opportunities in social work curricula as it relates to complex identities, like one's citizenship status. To take a case in point, they found that most textbooks did not elaborate on how values and attitudes of the of the host country's society impacted immigrants' experiences (673). Although Lee and Hernandez do not say so directly, what is not necessary here is the politics of inclusion. What is necessary is a strategy to challenge social hierarchies, such as nativism, that encourage discrimination. In sum, Lee and Hernandez set out to determine if HBSE textbooks are to provide theoretical concepts that inform practice interventions, how well those theories

and interventions connect to the experiences of diverse populations, including immigrants (672). Based on Lee and Hernandez's findings, they may agree that the answer is no.

Although content concerning diversity is strongly represented in social work education, Morrow argues that discussions on sexuality are often missing in social work curricula. In the case where gay and lesbian identities are included, it is with negative connotations, (re)inscribing ideas of patriarchy and heteronormativity. Morrow conducted a study of social work textbooks to examine if heterosexism is indeed entrenched in the curricula and as a result is manifesting in social work practice. She found 81.5% of the 27 textbooks sampled contained negative, minimal inclusion or no content at all on gay and lesbian issues (6). Social work is a profession that has traditionally been at the forefront of affirming diversity. Nonetheless, Morrow believes social work has been relatively slow to include gay and lesbian issues in the curricula. Morrow identifies social work educators' lack of awareness about sexuality as the central causal component of the limitation of gay and lesbian content in social work education (10). The focus on identities has uncovered gaps in the scholarship. On the one hand, Morrow's findings emphasize a focus on inequalities related to race, class, and gender, which have drawn increased attention from educators and researchers. Yet, on the other hand, Morrow's findings show that the attention paid to other categories and their outcomes has left a virtual silence in place of any discussion on sexual identities (39). Morrow's research is extremely useful because it sheds light on the difficult problem of single axis analysis, whereby the majority of educational resources, including textbooks, focus on only one category. When only one is included, several are excluded. From this study, we learn that

there is a dominant focus on single identity categories—for instance, race, class, gender, or sexuality.

Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., like Morrow, contend that homophobia and heterosexism among social workers are attributed, in part, to the lack of LGBT content in social work education (19). Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. surveyed social work faculty to measure attitudes and support considering sexual orientation and gender identity in social work education. In surveying 327 social work faculty from the United States and Canada, the authors found that faculty did support the inclusion of content on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. In fact, 94% of Americans and 98% of Canadians showed support. Nonetheless, a substantial percentage of the faculty—18% of the U.S. sample and 9% of the Canadian sample—believed that trans-identity content was less than important. Furthermore, faculty support for content regarding transphobia was even lower. Thirty-eight percent of the U.S. and 28% of Canadian faculty believed content like this to be less important (25). The authors are also concerned about the lack of content related to oppression, including homophobia, heterosexism, biphobia, and transphobia. In essence, social work scholars are comfortable discussing race, for example, when it explains personal deficits, communities, or cultural differences. However, social work educators are not comfortable talking about racism and the social structures that perpetuate discrimination and oppression.

The indifference toward content on people with trans experiences concerns Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. They remind us that “social work faculty are mandated to prepare graduates for competent practice with LGBT individuals, including the

promotion of empowerment and social justice” (28). This may prove challenging if faculty are not committed to anti-oppression curricula. The multiple experiences of inequality cannot be ranked by significance. The standard way of thinking about the LGBTQ community has shifted in the last thirty years. What was once highly condemned by mainstream society has become more socially acceptable, as evident in the increase in Americans’ favorable views of same sex marriage. Same-gender loving<sup>13</sup> “is less divisive than it once was. Gays and lesbians enjoy an acceptance undreamed of three decades ago and can find defenders of their rights in both political parties” (Dionne 2000). However, acceptance falls short of equality, and without instruction on social inequality, social work students will be ill-prepared to address the systemic forces that marginalize gays and lesbians. Fredriksen-Goldsen et al.’s research matters because their findings reflect “the orientation of much existing social work literature, which focuses on population difference and needs rather than on structural inequalities experienced by populations” (29).

Social work feminist scholar Gita Mehrotra’s essay explores how the theory of intersectionality can be used as a framework in social work, similar to how it has been used in feminist scholarship, to think about multiple identities and the interlocking systems of race, class, and gender. Unlike the findings of existing scholarship, which has identified ways that social work education can be more inclusive and diverse with no acknowledgement of the complex intersections of identity, Mehrotra aims to move the

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<sup>13</sup> Same-gender loving is a term that affirms gay, lesbian, and queer identified people within the African American community. In this document it is used for its positive and affirming tone to replace homosexual.

discussion of intersectionality further within the field of social work. Generally, clients experience discrimination when they have multiple identities at the intersection of structural oppression. These ranked identities have the potential to create privilege for some and oppressive discriminatory conditions for others. Therefore, Mehrotra states, “feminist social work scholars can benefit from developing and applying a range of intersectional theories that can be used strategically and intentionally, depending on the goals of a particular project or setting” (421). In essence, because all identities are intersecting, there are endless possibilities for intersectional projects. Mehrotra contends that the field of social work includes vast client systems and encompasses identities that also include nation, colonization, sexuality, ability, and other identities that are often oppressed.

For example, Mehrotra uses sociologist Leslie McCall’s typology of intersectional approaches to explore the ways in which the spectrum of intersectional theorizing coupled with diverse epistemologies can be useful in diversifying social work scholarship (422). Mehrotra examines how intersectional scholar McCall’s typology will apply within a social work context. McCall’s typologies include “intercategorical,” which focuses on inequality among social groups, like the men and women who share the same racial category; “intracategorical” which challenges the notion of essentialism among groups that are similar based on gender; and “anticategorical,” which is a typology that fundamentally challenges all social categories. Mehrotra believes that all three typologies can be applied to social work practice to include identities that are often overlooked in scholarship, such as queer girls of color. By drawing on McCall, Mehrotra expands the

use of intersectionality to include the experiences of groups otherwise marginalized in social work curriculum.

Mehrotra claims that intersectionality has typically been used when analyzing race, class, and gender but has failed to consider other identities. She provides an example of how using a queer diasporic intersectional critique can interrogate the ways in which migrant communities are racialized, gendered, and sexualized, as well as to articulate how queer subjectivities are formed and negotiated across transnational experiences (425). Mehrotra's essay provides an opportunity to explore intersectionality further and how it can impact the future of the field.

The scholarship suggests that more content on diverse identities needs to be included. Despite the fact that there have been concerns with the underlying messages sent by popular diversity models, Laura S. Abrams and Priscilla Gibson contend that the limitations of social work's current diversity frameworks prohibit students from having a fundamental understanding of the systemic oppression of people of color. Thus, pedagogical models are constantly being developed and refined to assist students in absorbing content on diversity (Abrams and Gibson 148). Abrams and Gibson highlight the three popular models for teaching diversity content in social work curriculum. One model is the assimilation model, which encourages people of color to conform to the more dominant Euro-American culture. The assimilation model is said to be obsolete and rarely used due to its view that "ethnic racial minorities are deviant" (Abrams and Gibson 149). The culturally sensitive model moved the focus from the client changing their "deviant" behaviors to the social worker being more sensitive to cultural differences. The

culturally sensitive model is still commonplace and beneficial to the field because it challenges the worker to address ethnocentricity, which tends to dominate best practice. Lastly, the anti-racism model proposes that individuals in positions of power play a role in perpetuating institutionally racist practices that systemically disadvantage people of color (Abrams and Gibson 149). Understanding power differentials is important due to both the real and perceived power social workers have.

Based on the findings of existing scholarship, the assimilationist model appears to be more commonplace than the anti-racism model. At first glance, the current multicultural social work education model encompasses strategies from both the cultural sensitivity and anti-racism models, yet remains more focused on attitude readjustment, rather than comprehensive social change or anti-racism activism (Abrams and Gibson 149). To mend this rupture in the body of social work education, Abrams and Gibson propose that social work educators work toward an anti-racist pedagogy that includes the exploration of white identity and white privilege (151). To build on Abrams and Gibson's call for anti-racist frameworks, future research can gauge how the field bridges theory and practice in social work curriculum using social justice theories.

### ***Practice Models with Diverse Populations***

Another body of scholarship discusses how diversity models impact social work practice. Although the discussions shift from social work curriculum to social work practice, each article considers new modes of social work practice through the expansion of scholarship covering diverse populations. The scholarship in this section does not directly discuss the need to develop more critical education on understanding complex

identities and how those identities impact clients. Nonetheless, these scholars are highlighting ways that social work education can encompass more wholistic approaches to social work practice. The inclusion of these voices is important when considering introducing transdisciplinary frameworks to meet the needs of the field. For example, Miraboto asserts that it is a necessity that social work students enter the field well prepared with practice methods that facilitates understanding the complex needs of social work clients. When working with racially and culturally diverse groups, poor people, and immigrants, she believes that integrating practice skills into the curriculum that exhibit expertise, social workers' competence levels will increase.

Nicotera and Kang argue for curricula that inform students on the impact privileged identities have on maintaining oppression. They demand that students gain critical consciousness for the purpose of disrupting social injustices through social work practice. Nicotera and Kang introduce a conceptual teaching model that focuses on the examination of privileged identities and the ensuing behaviors that perpetuate oppressive practices, like the process in which groups are marginalized (188). They offer three teaching strategies that (1) raise critical consciousness, (2) uncover privileged positions that inform social work research, and (3) conceptualize social work practice that disrupts privilege and oppression. The authors' intent is to advance knowledge in social work education that will provide students with strategies to combat discrimination, oppression and economic deprivation, and to promote social and economic justice.

Hancock, Kledaras, and Waites administered their "Orientation to Oppression and Oppressed Populations" survey, measuring social work students' views on oppression

and their willingness to serve and advocate for oppressed populations. Collecting this data is important to better understand how oppression-related content in social work curriculum may enhance students' understanding of power and oppression. Social justice advocacy on behalf of oppressed people is a foundational concept in the social work profession. The researchers believe "clients structurally disadvantaged by race, class, gender, and sexuality are especially vulnerable to oppression and need social workers to advocate on their behalf" (5). Assessing students' attitudes toward oppression has the potential of determining future implications for further research.

Hancock, Kledaras, and Waites surveyed 149 students in BSW and MSW accredited programs and organized their responses into four different categories. Students in the "ethic of conformity" group uncritically accepted the facts of structural oppression and believed that oppression was necessary to maintain the social order (7). In the "ethic of individualism" category, students tended to deny the existence of social groups and, thus, the structural nature of oppression, even in the face of the facts (8). In the "ethic of care" category, the students accepted the evidence of the social-structural nature of oppression and believed oppression was unjust (8). However, the "ethic of care" category was separated into two subgroups including the "ethic of change." This category separates those students who have an "ethic of care" but are not interested in social change. The ethic of care students are interested in helping individual clients in direct micro practice, yet are not willing to advocate for social change. The "ethic of change" subgroup not only believed oppression was unjust, they were willing to advocate for

social change. Essentially, there were those who were not interested in advocacy and social change and those who were.

Hancock, Kledaras, and Waites found that as it related to views on oppression, about 56% of students “identified with a change” orientation, meaning these students saw oppression as rooted in social group privilege and maintained unequal power relations that should be challenged (15). There was a trend among BSWs attending private school. They found that BSW’s attending private schools were less likely to adopt the change orientation. Although they were in the ethic of care category, they didn’t believe that they could be agents of social change. Overall, about 20% of the students identified with the “ethic of care” orientation, meaning that they recognized the structural nature of oppression but did not believe that oppression was something they could or would be willing to change. Interestingly, almost 23% of all students identified with an ethic of individualism. These students identified oppression with individual acts of discrimination. It seems, perhaps, that they failed to “recognize social group power differentials as the cause of oppression” (17). Two students believed oppression was necessary to preserve social order and uphold the integrity of society.

Hancock, Kledaras, and Waites contend that, over the years, social work educators have encouraged students to promote social justice for oppressed and marginalized groups. On the contrary, the data suggest that 37% of BSWs attending private colleges and 22% of BSWs from state schools held individualistic views, seeing no need for advocacy because they viewed people as operating from free choice (18). Consequently, when people have free choice, the outcomes of their decisions are not an

act of oppression, rather an effect of their choices. This is an opportunity to raise important questions on the ways in which oppression is linked to larger social structures.

There are striking parallels between Hancock, Kledaras, and Waites' study on students' views of their role as social workers and Derek Clifford and Beverley Burke's study on clients' views of what social workers should do, and what social workers should be like (686). The purpose of Clifford and Burke's study is to identify client opinions of what they believe social workers should be taught about oppression and diversity.

Clifford and Burke's small focus group of five participants revealed that clients' felt training alone is insufficient for wholistic social work engagement. Participants felt social workers must want to work on behalf of their clients, viewing the social work role as more than "just a job." Clients felt this way due to the direct impact social workers' decisions have had on their lives. Participant clients went on to say that "it's not good enough to be able to give the 'right' answers: social workers need to be genuine, committed, and caring, like friend" (687). Client participants expressed the importance of relationships that transcend the professional. In their study, clients expressed fear of the power social workers wield, and have doubts about the value of the complaints system (687).

Clifford and Burke's research is important because it allows us to consider the history of mistrust among communities of color and other vulnerable groups. The history of mistrust has fostered an ingrained belief that social service systems are not allies, but instead systems that hold the power to oppress. Ultimately, clients would prefer for social workers to be more flexible and less rigid with their enforcement of status quo narratives

or the dominant values systems that are Eurocentric in origin. These conclusions that Clifford and Burke discuss call attention to how social work values and practices can oppress clients and create barriers. Anti-oppressive frameworks create positive relationships with the community and only happen when oppression is understood as a real threat to self-determination.

Donna Baines offers an important critique of social work practice, claiming that social work has oppressed vulnerable groups, such as women of color. Baines challenges the field of social work to develop and articulate a range of conceptual practice tools. Scholars like Baines, Coleman, Schiele, and Strier discuss the material consequence race, class, and gender have on clients' political and social realities. Baines critiques feminist social work for failing to acknowledge that many social work clients exist outside of the Euro-American middle-class experience that is often centralized in the field. While Baines practices feminist social work, her ideals differ from what she considers feminist practice. She examines a number of popular feminist practices that she finds limiting when practiced within a working class, diverse community. Baines believes the primary focus of social workers should not be on the social worker-client relationship. Rather, it should be on what Baines considers "the clients' survival in communities crisscrossed by race, class, and gender struggles over power, resources, and identities" (301). Baines stresses that much of the theory and intervention of mainstream social work practice pathologizes the experience and material realities of all those who are not white, male, and middle class. Assimilationist ideology focuses on centering the dominant culture's

views of family as superior to all others, leading to the pathology of those who do not conform to what is desired, the status quo.

Baines focuses her critique on the long-term psychotherapeutic practice model most used by social workers. She argues that feminist social workers have not done enough to address clients' emotional pain, marginalization, and oppression. Baines contends that "instead of rebuilding social work practices from the ground up that reflect race, class, and gender analyses; many feminist practice principles are mere (re)shapings of oppressive psychotherapeutic practices that unintentionally carry forward disempowering notions of race, class, and gender" (298). Therefore, Baines insists on the importance of feminist social work practices that incorporate the fact that most clients "exist outside of the middle class, white, male experience"(298). I grant Baines's argument on the limitations of social work practice models. However, there is also limited scholarship on the importance of coalition building in social worker-client relationships. More scholarship covering practice models should emphasize anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-classist logics as well as prioritize collaboration.

Social work's disciplinary and professional practice, lived experience, and material realities is why Miu Chung Yan provides an opportunity to address the interpersonal needs of social workers as they embody their race, class, and gender. Yan uses grounded theory to examine social work practice from a unique perspective. By surveying thirty case workers from a snowball sample, Yan was able to identify cultural tensions experienced by social workers because of their embodied identities. This author primarily looked at the effect oppression and discrimination have had on non-white social

work professionals. More specifically, Yan looked at how dominant frameworks have created a dilemma for social workers with cross-cultural identities. Yan cites one of the causes as social work's western construction and its ideals of deviant and non-deviant behavior based on Euro-Western values that are often in conflict with other cultures. Yan points out that most social work literature, theories, and skills were developed under Anglo-American cultural norms (317). Yan goes on to say that the mission and policies of social service organizations that employ cross culturally identified social workers are connected to the dominant culture. Thus, the author contends that ethnic-identified workers are called to educate their clients in the dominant cultural norms, while at the same time being critical of the dominant socio-organizational cultures that they represent (327).

Yan offers important critical analyses. Yan argues that the identities of social workers are rarely considered, and when it is considered, it occurs only in the context of white social workers' relationships to their non-white clients. This marginalizes the experiences of social workers of color, inadvertently centering on the experiences of Euro-American social workers while silencing social workers of color about their experiences. Here we can see how identity plays a role within the profession from a personal standpoint. Another critique is that social workers from a culture that places more emphasis on collectivism and interdependency find that individualistic values cause tensions in their work (323). Yan's data suggest three things: first, cultural tensions in social work practice are multifaceted, yet social workers are always at the center. Second, attention should be paid to the gaps in scholarship about the experiences of social

workers of color and their encounters with cultural tension, even that directed at them from their clients. Lastly, because the profession values social justice, self-reflecting social work practitioners need to be socially and politically conscious. Yan's analysis of the complex identity and experiences of social workers is extremely useful because it provides insight into the challenges that social workers face due to the complexity of their personal identity and how it is acknowledged in relation to dominant narratives reinforced by the profession.

Social work is a vast field that encompasses micro, mezzo, and macro practice that impacting casework and advocacy. Murphy-Erby, Christy-McMullin, Stauss, and Schriver introduce a grounded practice model that gives explicit consideration to the complex experiences of people of color. Murphy-Erby et al. consider the Multi-Systems Life Course (MSLC), an advanced multi-dimensional framework that moves beyond theory to practice. The authors highlight the CSWE's core competencies that articulate the importance of social work that focuses on the multidimensional and complex lived experiences of people's lives in an increasingly global, economically unequal, and diverse environment (674). Murphy-Erby et al. advocate for a paradigm shift in social work education that will require the development and use of what they call a newer, multilayered, and complexity-sensitive approach to social work practice.

The authors focus their critique on social work textbooks and their lack of integrated practice models. There is a consensus that social work practice texts are limited to micro practice with individual, family, or group counseling. As a result, many social work scholars like Murphy- Erby et al. advocate for an "integrated text that will

better prepare social work students for what they will face in the real world workplace” (675). Murphy-Erby et al. asserts that some of the most dominant paradigms conveyed in social work textbooks are “particularly significant because they provide us [with] the tools to think about and understand ourselves, others, and the environment we will inhabit” (676). Adding to Murphy-Erby et al.’s argument, social workers should understand intersectional practice models to deepen the analysis of power and oppression within the systems and institutions they represent. As social change agents, this deeper level of understanding will aid in their ability to practice with women of color, build coalitions, and mend fractured relationships.

### ***Summary***

The existing scholarship informs us of how social work education strives to integrate subject matter representing the needs of a diverse society. In addition, it reveals an overwhelming commitment to explore cultural diversity, particularly through cultural competence. As a result, scholarship is moving away from Euro-centric assimilationist theories that typically propose individual interventions that either explain cultural traits to assist social workers’ sensitivity to racially diverse populations or seek to help people of color adapt to their environments (McMahon and Allen-Meares 535). Although theories similar to these are still commonly found in the literature, I identified a move toward social justice and anti-oppression theories as well. Social work education is transforming and more inclusive of diverse populations of people, such as LGBTQ, women, and immigrants. Yet, despite this fact, the discussions on diversity are typically focused on a single-axis analysis, whereby the inclusion of women presents women as monolithic. The

scholarship failed to consider social work with women of color, lesbian women, immigrant women, or poor women. For instance, discussions of poverty do not focus on the unique experiences of women living in poverty, or women of color living in poverty, or immigrant women of color living in poverty. In conceptualizing diversity, Ortiz and Jani contend that “social workers need to address a broad social context that includes institutional/structural arrangements, recognize the intersection of multiple identities, and integrate an explicit social justice orientation” (175). However, the existing scholarship reveals the tendency to compartmentalize identities like race, class, and gender into separate topics making it difficult to identify their multiple intersections and thus their relationship to structural arrangements of power and oppression. Therefore, what is revealed is a gap in the scholarship whereby curriculum that informs social workers on the ways to understand power and oppression as it relates to participants’ intersecting identities is marginalized in social work education.

With the exception of Murphy-Erby et al., Jani et al., and Mehrotra, professors of social work, public policy, and sociology, the existing scholarship does not support a view of the complexity of intersecting identities. According to Murphy-Erby et al., “using one-dimensional approaches that define populations based on a specific identity has been problematic in both social work practice and theory” (676). Social work scholar Miraboto presents a viewpoint of practicing social workers. She asserts that social workers’ competence levels will increase by integrating practice skills into the curriculum that exhibit expertise when working with racially and culturally diverse groups, people of color, poor people, and immigrants (249). While it is true that the field of social work is

covering more diverse content and striving for critical consciousness, it does not necessarily follow that the concerns emphasized in the scholarship have been put to rest.

Consider Donna Jeffrey, who contends that “the day-to-day practices on which social work rests, and which sustain the profession, reproduce whiteness” (411). This standard of whiteness creates increased levels of anxiety for people of color when encountering social service systems. By extension, Herz and Johansson believe that “an increasing number of academic studies show that social work practices are influenced by stereotypical views on gender and ethnicity” (527). Furthermore, Rasheed and Rasheed acknowledge that theories have, for the most part, failed to capture the complexity and diversity of African American’s social status and unique experiences. As a result, practitioners and academics are given a distorted, homogenized version of African Americans that also tends to pathologize their behavior and development (5).

My conclusion, then, is that there is a direct relationship between social work education and the implementation of social work practice models. Herz and Johansson’s critiques are similar to Rasheed and Rasheed and Jeffrey, who all contend that traditional social work theories that suggest assimilationist methods pathologize people of color while neutralizing and holding up systems of injustice. Furthermore, Murphy-Erby et al. believe that social work curricula have a tendency to introduce students to diversity paradigms that embody patriarchal standards of whiteness (676). These findings are important because social work theories that compartmentalize race, class, and gender oppression into separate categories and omit the experiences of intersecting oppressions become a detriment to social work practice. Social workers should examine social

institutions and systems as well as the everyday life experiences of those who must navigate those very social systems for survival. Black feminist theories like intersectionality can be incorporated into social work curricula, thereby remedying the gap that currently exists in the scholarship.

Existing scholarship was unable to reveal if intersectionality is widely used in social work education. My study focuses on whether social work education embraces the theory of intersectionality. Surveying social work instructors, textbooks, and syllabi may tell us to what degree intersectionality is used in the training of social workers. During the review of scholarly material, I did not uncover any prior study measuring social work educators' receptivity toward the theory of intersectionality. Furthermore, measuring educators' familiarity with Crenshaw's theory may reveal whether social work educators are familiar with the principles of intersectionality. There is a possibility that instructors are familiar with some intersectional concepts, yet understand it as a different theoretical concept. I believe gauging the level of acceptance to intersectionality theory in the field of social work tells us the likelihood of its adoption as a viable theory and practice method, thereby suggesting future implications for the field of intersectionality studies. Similarly, surveying syllabi provides a more accurate measure of their engagement with the theory in social work courses because instructors are usually responsible for what is included on their course syllabi. In addition, surveying social work textbooks will reveal how intersectionality is used in training social workers that may work closely with women of color. In short, a close examination of textbooks provides an opportunity to explore how social work education bridges theory and practice. In order to meet my

objectives, I triangulate my data and use three different research methods: textual analysis, content analysis, and a survey questionnaire. In the next chapter, I discuss my study that analyzes social work curriculum through a survey of instructors, textbooks, and course syllabi.

## CHAPTER IV

### MEASURING INTERSECTIONALITY IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

It is necessary to think critically about bridging theory and practice. In this exploratory study, one question was formulated: Does social work bridge theory and practice by incorporating the theory of intersectionality into curricula. Women's and gender studies has much to gain from social work practitioners applying intersectionality in the field. The emergence of intersectionality in practicing professions, such as social work, allows for feminist scholarship to be used as tools for social justice. Furthermore, applying the theory in social work practice supplies women's and gender studies scholars' new angles to interpret how the dimensions of difference shape our daily lives. Social work is a location where these theories can be acted out in practical ways and further inform women's and gender studies, providing a more critical analysis for researchers. In essence, social work becomes a venue where Black feminist theory can be practiced.

The scholarship on how identity is examined in social work falls into a number of categories. One category is scholarship that looks at including more diverse identities in social work curriculum. These identities seem to be categorized into single identities, such as women, race, or immigrants. Another category is scholarship that looks at current practice models being used to meet the demands of diverse populations. Finally, there is scholarship that looks at cultural competence as a theoretical framework to better understand identity. However, the scholarship does not examine the extent to which

intersectionality, a theory that considers the intersections of identity, and those identities' relationship to power and oppression, is used in social work education and practice. Accordingly, these findings invite a deeper examination of how social work curriculum engages the discussion of identity. The following study was designed to address an important question that has not yet received attention.

To ascertain whether intersectionality has been incorporated into social work curricula I examined social work textbooks and syllabi, and surveyed social work educators. I analyzed all pages of the textbooks that were indexed covering oppression-related content (i.e., privilege, social justice, inequality, discrimination, and populations at-risk) in the context of race, class, and gender. As it relates to oppression, intersectionality is an integral component in fully grasping the complexities of society. Large disparities exist when measuring income, wealth, education, housing, employment, and other social benefits. Dill and Zambrana believe that “[i]nequality and oppression are deeply woven into the tapestry of American life” (1). Social scientists have found patterns of inequality. Focusing on oppression-related content allows me to follow the common patterns of inequality that are found along major social divisions/hierarchies of race, class, and gender. Oppression is an institutionally structured harm that is perpetuated on social groups that are deemed as having less social, economic, and political value in society. These harms include unjust treatment and control. Crenshaw has described the theory of intersectionality as an anti-oppression framework used as a tool of analysis for social justice. Dill and Zambrana identify intersectionality as an approach to study institutionalized patterns of unequal distribution of a society's goods

and resources such as property, education, money, healthcare, and housing (2). I examine content in social work textbooks that may provoke a discussion of oppression, social justice, and/or privilege to measure the depth of the theory's use. Given that oppression in the United States is not a random occurrence, an intersectional analysis is imperative to understanding it.

Furthermore, social justice advocacy is a core principle of both intersectionality and the field of social work. Oppression-related content is directly connected to social justice advocacy and is frequently referenced in social work curriculum. Moreover, oppression-related content in HBSE textbooks exposes the vulnerabilities among social work participants. It is important to this research to ascertain how social work students are prepared to mitigate the various forms of oppression associated with participants' intersecting identities. Due to intersectionality's distinct history forged by critical thinking at the intersections of struggle for race and gender justice, it is well suited for this study's theoretical framework (May, *Pursuing* 32). Privilege, inequality, and discrimination are terms closely associated with oppression and commonly used in the field of social work. An analysis of intersectionality that examines race, class, and gender power does so by articulating how the dynamics of privilege and oppression interact in institutional settings, such as social service systems. Lastly, populations-at-risk were chosen because intersectionality is designed to apply to real-world problems, to unsettle oppression and rethink how we approach social justice (May, *Pursuing* vii). Thus, oppression-related content provides relevant material to help us better understand how social work bridges theory and practice by incorporating intersectionality in its curricula.

Examining oppression-related content along with the description and definition of intersectionality will allow me to measure the depth of intersectional analyses presented in the texts. Measuring the depth of intersectional analysis is important. May argues that, “Institutional and governmental actors may, in the name of intersectional reform, steer away from structural change and, instead, focus on ineffective, individual-focused ‘diversity’ measures as a means to rhetorically recognize, but not meaningfully address, discrimination (*Pursuing* 142). Therefore, measuring the depth is important to gauge if the original articulation and full trajectory of intersectionality is incorporated into the curricula. This baseline measurement may determine what intersectionality looks like in social work scholarship. Although there are multiple interpretations and adaptations of the theory, Crenshaw’s intersectionality provides an opportunity to build concrete substantive steps for social change work, adding value to the specific articulation of intersectionality in Crenshaw’s work.

The intersectional analysis present in the textbooks was rated according to key goals discussed in chapter two (see Table 1):

Table 1: The Three Goals of Intersectionality

Goal 1- Analyze social problems fully by locating where the various forms of privilege and/or oppression overlap due to intersecting identity formation
Goal 2- Offer effective interventions or solutions that are multidimensional when addressing social problems due to intersecting sites of oppression
Goal 3- Promote coalitional advocacy by working across difference

Crenshaw identified these three goals as necessary to an intersectional analysis that considers how race, gender, sexual identity, and class work together to limit access to

social goods such as employment, fair immigration, healthcare, child care, or education, and is essential to social justice work (“Primer” 2). To enter the realm of intersectionality, there must be an acknowledgement of intersecting identities and the experiences of overlapping privilege or oppression due to those identities. By extension, a comprehensive intersectional analysis should include all three goals that make up an intersectional prism. I looked for whether these concepts were conveyed.

The depth of intersectionality was measured using a rubric (see Table 2). There were three rating categories: “central,” “intermediate,” and “marginal.” A central discussion includes all three of the goals that create an intersectional prism. An intermediate discussion includes two of the intersectional goals. However, goal one must be included in the discussion for it to be considered intermediate. A marginal discussion will only include goal one. Goal one, analyzing social problems fully by locating where the various forms of privilege and/or oppression overlap due to intersecting identity formation, is a foundational aspect of the theory and must be included in any intersectional analysis. Therefore, this goal must be included in all descriptions, definitions, and discussions that attempt intersectionality.

Table 2: Rubric for Rating Intersectionality in HBSE Social Work Textbooks

Rated Element	Central	Intermediate	Marginal
Oppression-Related Content	Discussion on content includes all three goals of intersectionality that form the intersectional prism: (1) analyze social problems fully by locating where the various forms of privilege and/or oppression overlap due to intersecting identity formation, (2) offer effective interventions or solutions that are multidimensional when addressing social problems due to intersecting sites of oppression, and (3) promote coalitional advocacy	Discussion on content includes the following two goals of intersectionality: (1) analyze social problems fully by locating where the various forms of privilege and/or oppression overlap due to intersecting identity formation, <b>And</b> (2) offer effective interventions or solutions that are multidimensional when addressing social problems due to intersecting sites of oppression, <b>Or</b> (3) promote coalitional advocacy	Discussion on content includes the following intersectional goal: (1) analyze social problems fully by locating where the various forms of privilege and/or oppression overlap due to intersecting identity formation
Description or Definition of Term	Term identifies all three aspects of intersectionality that forms the intersectional prism: (1) identify the intersections of identity formation, (2) discuss the multidimensionality of oppression based on identity when addressing social problems due to intersecting sites of oppression, and (3) promote coalitional advocacy	Term identifies the following two goals of intersectionality: (1) identify the intersections of identity formation, <b>And</b> (2) discuss the multidimensionality of oppression based on identity when addressing social problems due to intersecting sites of oppression, <b>Or</b> (3) promote coalitional advocacy	Term identifies the following intersectional goal: (1) identify the intersections of identity formation

I designed this coding system after careful thought and consideration of the various uses and ways of defining intersectionality. The growth in popularity and use internationally across disciplines has expanded its reach. The outcome of the theory's uptake and trajectory is the replications of the theory that appear generic in relation to the more specific articulation found in Crenshaw's work ("Postscript" 221). I contend that to use intersectionality as an analytical tool for the purpose of solving social problems, social workers will need to apply the full articulation of the theory described in Crenshaw's intersectional prism. Due to the imported, adapted, and developed articulation of the theory, some intersectional scholars have recently taken issue with the various conceptualizations of the theory (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson, "Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory;" Carbado, "Colorblind Intersectionality;" Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies;" K. Davis, "Intersectionality as a Buzzword;" May, *Pursuing Intersectionality*; Mohanty, "Transnational Feminist Crossings"). May has brought attention to the many intersectional slippages performed by what she describes as well-intentioned scholars who inadvertently present the theory "apolitically, as if to temper its critique of power relations or soften its social justice orientation (*Pursuing* 142). An example of when the theory's social justice aims are undermined is when researchers set out to do intersectional studies, yet fail to use intersectionality as an analytical lens to shape their research questions, design or to interpret the data, instead using intersectionality "only as a demographic or descriptive

device” (*Pursuing* 15). Another common occurrence is the flattening of intersectionality, when the theory’s platform for social change is underemphasized and instead there is an overemphasis on identity. Crenshaw argues that the theory’s purpose is to acknowledge the complex experiences of overlapping oppression due to intersecting identity formation. However, the theory also aims to interrogate how systems of power encourage disenfranchisement and looks for methods of engagement, such as coalition building across difference. Therefore, this coding system was designed to include all of the principles articulated by Crenshaw. This coding system may appear rigid and restrictive. However, for this project, it is important to access the theory for its depth and full articulation. Therefore, it is especially important to use the theory as it was intended, as a Black feminist theory with the purpose of challenging social injustice. Discussions that exclusively highlight identity while excluding the need for social justice were not identified as a full articulation of the theory. Intersectional scholars, such as Crenshaw, believe that all of the tenets of intersectionality should be used in unison for the work to be intersectional and achieve the most effective impact.

There are unlimited opportunities to apply an intersectional analysis when discussing oppression-related content in HBSE textbooks. To this point, HBSE courses allow for the study of the interpersonal connection students have to power and privilege, while interrogating the human experience. In addition to identifying the presence of intersectionality in social work curriculum, I wanted to ascertain whether social work educators were familiar with Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality. This

matters for several reasons. One reason is due to the various articulations of the theory being used across disciplines. It is common for theories to travel. However, this may be what contributes to what May calls intersectional slippages and flattening. Secondly, the history of Black women's social justice work and knowledge production has commonly been erased or minimized to near non-existence. The absence of intersectionality from the mainstream canon of social science theorizing is correlated with the reality that women of color are the primary practitioners and focus of this theoretical tradition (Perry 230). This inquiry may determine in the case of intersectionality and Crenshaw if the contributions of Black feminist theorists are acknowledged.

### ***Methods of Research***

Several studies described in the literature review were conducted using Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) textbooks. For this study, HBSE textbooks and syllabi were also chosen for similar reasons discussed in chapter two. HBSE courses aim to advance knowledge of the multidimensional influences on individual and collective behavior (CSWE “Human Behavior”). HBSE lectures discuss theory and research about bio-psychosocial-spiritual aspects of human behavior and encourage innovations in both theory and research (CSWE “Human Behavior”). Discussions in HBSE courses also include the impacts of globalization, the relevance of culture and diversity of various forms, advances in understanding the biological aspects of human behavior, developmental risk and protective factors and processes, specific challenges of living encountered in social work practice, and systems of inequalities and mechanisms

of oppression (CSWE “Human Behavior”). It is designed to provide a thorough examination of key factors in our society that creates social injustice. In sum, all of the textbooks included human diversity content, discussed social problems, and made some connections between how participants navigate their social environments.

Textbooks are important because they serve as instruments that contribute to the formation of attitudes among future practitioners. Crisp et al. contend that, “Although often criticized for inadequacies, textbooks are both a highly influential and readily available source of information about contemporary thinking in social work theory and practice” (337). Moreover, textbooks remain one of the most common and standard ways to convey information to students in an academic environment. Some of the questions guiding the studies in the literature review were: 1). How does social work describe the critical concept of race? 2). How can social work curriculum have a more comprehensive understanding of gender? 3). How is race defined as a problem for the profession and the education of new social workers?

My guiding question was: Do HBSE textbooks incorporate the theory of intersectionality? To answer, I conducted a textual analysis, examining discussions of oppression-related content to measure the depth of intersectionality present in each textbook. Due to the multi-dimensionality of an intersectional analysis marking the theory’s presence or absences does not give an accurate representation of its application. For a fuller, more complete application of the theory, the textbooks should demonstrate the multiple principles of intersectionality. For example, its presence in the textbooks

may be a mere mention of intersecting identities. However, for an intersectional analysis to ensue, a critical assessment of interventions and advocacy must be included. Without the inclusion of a social justice framework, intersectionality may be present, yet it is what May considers intersectional slippage. Therefore, measuring the depth of its application, rather than the mere presence or absence, is most appropriate for assessing the incorporation of intersectionality in social work curriculum.

Based on the evidence from previous research described in the review of existing scholarship and my examination of the sampled textbooks' tables of contents, it was determined that identity was indeed compartmentalized in each textbook. Therefore, examining the textbooks for discussions of identity alone would have been quickly determined that discussions of identity were not presented in an intersectional way. This finding is based on the categorization of identity in the textbooks. I provide the following examples, not as findings from the textual analysis, but rather as an explanation as to why examining the textbooks for identity may have been insufficient for this study. Each textbook provided in the following examples, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman and Hutchison, will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Both textbooks focus on understanding human behavior. I briefly highlight them in this discussion to explain why identity was not examined. One of the textbooks included in this study, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, included a single-axis analysis of identity by placing the discussions in separate chapters, such as "Sexual Orientation," "Gender, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexism," and "Ethnocentrism and Racism." When exploring the chapter

on racism I found no mention of racial identity intersecting with gender identity or sexuality. In other words, there was no discussion on women of color's experiences of gendered racism. Although the discussion included multiple types of racism, such as institutional, nothing specified the unique ways that women of color experience racism. Racism was isolated from all other sites of oppression.

Another example of single-axis analysis found in this study was Hutchison's textbook. Hutchison's chapter "The Spiritual Person" has separate sections for "Race and Ethnicity," "Sex and Gender," "Sexual Orientation" and "Other Aspects of Diversity." There is another chapter titled "Culture," which also organizes the discussions of race, ethnicity, social class, and gender separately. When discussing a Black female's experience with race, Hutchison explains, "Tina can speak directly and assertively in class using mainstream Standard English, but her attitude and demeanor are perceived as distinctly Black" (283). Another example is Hutchison's discussion on social class. She states, "Stan's and Tina's identities as an African American automatically tend to reduce their social class status to the category of lower or underclass" (284). Hutchison's discussion on race and social class help us to better understand how race is perceived in our society. In addition, it supports the notion that race is constructed through social meanings. While Hutchison does capture Tina's experiences as a Black female, who is perceived to have a lower social class status, May would consider this an intersectional slippage because the discussion of Tina's experience moves away from a multilevel approach and is devoid of context and structural analysis (*Pursuing* 141). A multilevel

discussion would include an analysis of social hierarchies, such as capitalism's impact on class status and white supremacy and patriarchy's impact on gendered racism, all of which is experienced by Tina. May contends that the harm in intersectional slippage is that the discussions fail to critique institutional bias and social hierarchy for the purpose of social transformation (*Pursuing* 141). The theory of intersectionality is an analytical tool applied to better understand multiple sites of privilege and oppression within a person's intersecting identities. Therefore, examining a discussion in HBSE textbooks is an opportunity to gauge social work's intersectional analyses of privilege and oppression. Based on this reasoning, it was determined that examining oppression-related content may produce a more critical analysis of how intersectionality is presented in the textbook.

In addition to verifying the extent to which the theory of intersectionality is employed in HBSE textbooks, this study also sampled HBSE syllabi to measure the presence of intersectionality in social work education. Syllabi are permanent records that serve as a contract between instructor and student. To a student, it is one of the most important documents in the course. It is relied upon to inform students of the course objectives and outlines the most important concepts and assigns materials that will be taught throughout the course. The guiding question was: Do HBSE educators teach intersectionality? To answer, I conducted a content analysis, analyzing syllabi for intersectional content.

The last measure of intersectionality in social work curricula is social work educators' survey responses. The survey attempts to ascertain educators' receptivity to the theory of intersectionality to be used as a tool of analysis in social work practice. The following questions guided this part of the study: (1) Are social work educators familiar with the theory of intersectionality? (2) Do social work educators teach the theory of intersectionality in their social work classes? (3) Do social work educators professionally support the use of intersectionality as a practice model? Responses for professional support of the theory indicate whether social work educators support the use of the theory in the field.

### ***Intersectionality in Social Work Textbooks***

#### **Selection Process**

I examined textbooks intended for undergraduate use primarily in HBSE I and HBSE II courses, and published between 2010 and 2015. The Faculty Center Network (FCN), a Web-based resource that identifies textbook sales and adoption rates across disciplines in the United States was used to compile a list of textbooks. Originally, I selected "social sciences" as the subject on the FCN Website. After selecting "social sciences," I was prompted to enter a "minor subject." I selected "Social Work and Welfare." Listed under the Social Work and Welfare textbook categories there was no Human Behavior and the Social Environment category. Therefore, I searched several specific categories that were most likely to have HBSE textbooks. A discussion of these categories follows.

The Faculty Center Network ranks textbooks based on adoption rates by social work faculty. To identify more commonly used textbooks, I narrowed the search by selecting textbooks that ranked at three or higher on a 1-5 Likert type scale. The highest ranking is 5. A ranking of five denotes the popularity of the text, 5 being the most widely adopted textbook, and 1 being the least. Due to there being no category for Human Behavior and the Social Environment, I searched and located textbooks in all other specific categories. I have included in parentheses the number of HBSE textbooks located and selected for the study in each specific category: Social Work Theory (3), Introductory Social Work (2), Other Social Work Texts (1), Social Work in the Community (0), and Issues in Social Work (0). All of the textbooks located were selected for this study. All textbooks selected were ranked at three or higher. Books selected were written in English and published in the United States. The sample size totaled six HBSE textbooks.

### **Review Process**

In each textbook, I analyzed all pages that were indexed covering topics on oppression-related content. I used the subject index and table of contents to locate the following topics: social (in)justice, inequality, privilege, oppression, discrimination, racism, sexism, classism, and populations at-risk. The textbooks' authors most frequently discussed oppression-related content throughout the textbook or incorporated it in a specific subsection devoted to the various stages of development or identity categories—for example, "Immigrant oppression/Discrimination." This subsection includes oppression and discrimination as it relates to immigrant populations. Oppression and

discrimination regarding women, for example, is discussed in another section of the textbook. Therefore, I examined all discussions on oppression, discrimination, privilege, and all other oppression-related content previously mentioned. Using the subject index and table of contents ensured that all pages in the book that were listed as having oppression-related content were examined for intersectionality.

In addition to locating oppression-related content, I also searched for the term “intersectionality.” Looking at specific descriptions or definitions would allow me to measure the depth of how intersectionality is being used, presented, or applied. This will determine if there is any intersectional slippage. As mentioned before, intersectional slippage happens when the theory is applied with an individual focus on identity, rather than an analysis of institutionalized systems of oppression and power. By only acknowledging multiple identities that make up an individual’s experience, intersectionality’s social justice orientation and critique of power is omitted. This omission is detrimental when strategizing intersectional interventions and building coalitions, two critical components of the theory. Softening the theory’s social justice aims reiterates the status quo via an assimilationist non-transformational model. For this analysis, I searched each sample textbook’s table of contents, glossary, and index for the term “intersectionality.”

## *Intersectionality in Social Work Syllabi*

### **Respondents**

Teachers of HBSE courses were asked for their most current HBSE course syllabi. Sampling for syllabi was restricted to HBSE courses. HBSE is a required undergraduate course. My intent was to review syllabi associated with courses that all students in a program must take to fulfill graduation requirements. Thus, I ruled out elective courses. The sample size goal was fifty syllabi. A total of fifty-nine syllabi were collected for analysis.

### **Procedure**

I identified a list of all accredited undergraduate social work programs in the United States. In the search options on CSWE's accreditation page, "baccalaureate" was selected under program level. "None" was selected for concentration, dual degree, and certification. The results showed 519 accredited undergraduate social work programs organized alphabetically by school name. I compiled a list of 100 schools by selecting every 20th school starting with the 20th school on the list of accredited programs. I then began a search for every 20th school starting with the 10th school on the list. Lastly, every 10th school starting with the 5th school on the list was selected. By utilizing these procedures, I developed a list of 100 schools.

The CSWE website provided contact persons for each one of the 200 schools. An email request for current HBSE syllabi was sent to each contact person listed. For schools that had not yet responded, a second request was sent three weeks later. During the three-

week wait period, another list of 100 schools was compiled from the CSWE Website. Under the same search criteria, I chose every third and seventh school on the list of 519 programs. An email request was then sent to the contact person listed for each school. A total of 200 schools were randomly selected for participation in my study. Syllabi from HBSE I and II courses made up the sample size of fifty-nine.

For the purpose of my study, six discrete sections of the syllabi were examined for the term “intersectionality” and/or intersectional content. Intersectional content includes ideals that support the goals of the intersectional prism (see Table 1). I examined the content using the same rating scale: “central,” “intermediate,” and “marginal” (see Table 2). There were no expectations for detailed discussions similar to the content of textbooks to be found on course syllabi. However, any ideals present that support the goals of intersectionality were rated. These goals may be located in various sections of the syllabi. For example, the course syllabi may state these goals as part of the learning objectives, or a class assignment that requires students to apply an intersectional analysis while creating interventions for a case study. Therefore, it was necessary to examine multiple sections to identify the presence of intersectionality in HBSE syllabi. These sections were: course description, course competencies, course objectives, course schedule, course assignments, and course readings. An explanation of each section of the syllabus can be located in Table 3.

Table 3: Explanation of Sections Examined on HBSE Social Work Syllabus

Section	Purpose
“Course Description”	This section was chosen because it describes the course’s general purpose and what students can expect to learn. A global course outlook is usually listed in this section. Major concepts and perspectives can be located here as well.
“Course Competencies”	This section was chosen because it is unique to HBSE social work courses. This section lists the CSWE Core Competencies that will be taught in the class. These core competencies are part of the CSWE accreditation standards. It is important to note that these standards must be met by any social work education program in the United States wishing to receive or retain accredited status.
“Course Objectives”	This section was chosen because it explains the course goals. It informs students of what the learning outcomes should be upon completion of the course. The most important objectives are listed here.
“Course Schedule”	This section was chosen because it organizes and displays major course content. Topics, subjects, or themes are usually organized in weekly units.
“Course Assignments”	This section was chosen due to its overall importance to the learning outcomes. Assignments are also used for the purpose of measuring the level of proficiency in subject areas.
“Course Readings”	This section was chosen because it is important to know how the instructors supplement the textbooks by offering additional course material.

Course readings consist of each individual reading listed on the syllabi aside from the assigned textbooks. It is likely that educators assign additional course readings to supplement textbooks and assignments. Therefore, this material was also examined for its intersectional content. Intersectional content in course-assigned readings was first determined by the title of the referenced reading. If the title indicated topics of identity or oppression-related content, I conducted a closer examination of the assigned journal article's abstract or its introduction if the referenced material was a book. I examined the material for the term "intersectionality" or similar goals of the theory as noted for the textbooks and syllabi. The material was rated as either "intersectional" or "not intersectional." Each course-assigned reading was rated as intersectional if it included in its abstract or introduction a reference to the experiences of privilege and/or oppression due to intersecting identity formation. The additional course readings were searched for in EBSCO HOST Academic Search Complete and Google, an Internet search engine.

### ***Intersectionality and Social Work Educators***

#### **Instrumentation**

To measure educators' receptivity to Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, I asked several questions to determine their familiarity, use, and attitude (see Table 4).

Table 4: Measuring Receptivity to Intersectionality

	Familiarity	Attitude	Use	Use	Attitude
1- Yes 2- No	I am familiar with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory	I agree with the constructs of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory	I teach Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory in my courses	I use Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory in my own research	I believe Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory is a tool of analysis that can be applied to social work practice

### Procedure

The research protocol was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas Woman's University. The IRB ensured that the study would be conducted in an ethical manner, particularly given the use of human subject participants. After I received IRB approval, the items were uploaded onto a Web-based survey platform. Due to widespread use of personal computers, Qualtrics and other Web-based surveys are gaining popularity. In fact, "web based surveys are becoming the popular form of Internet survey because they are so flexible" (Engel and Schutt 289). A common concern of electronic surveying is representativeness: are people who have access to online surveys representative of the population that researchers are attempting to sample? This Qualtrics survey was sent through a BSW listserv to social work educators, my prime population group. Christine Bhutta attests to the value of Web-based surveys due to the rapid response of chain referral methods or snowball sampling. Bhutta used web-based surveys through

social networking sites and collected 4,000 responses within one month (2). Bhutta argues that Web-based surveys are faster because they eliminate the need to manually input data into data analysis programs, and online surveys can also increase willingness to answer sensitive questions, thereby reducing social desirability responding (4).

Dillman contends that electronic survey methods have the potential to bring efficiencies to the design and self-administration of survey questionnaires (327). I chose Qualtrics, a popular online survey software, to host this study because it allows researchers to collect large amounts of data without the added costs and time of doing face-to-face interviews. In addition, data collected through Qualtrics is protected through Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption (also known as HTTPS) for all transmitted data. They also protect surveys with passwords and HTTP referrer checking. In addition, Qualtrics has Health Insurance Probability Accountability Act (HIPAA)-compliant features.

## **Respondents**

Respondents were recruited from The Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD) listserv. BPD is a voluntary, individual membership association that, since 1975, has represented the interests of undergraduate education and practice in social work. The association's approximately 800 members represent BSW program directors, baccalaureate faculty, and field coordinators. In addition, social work educators and practitioners who have an interest in social work education and practice are members of the listserv. A recruitment letter for interested participants was posted on the BPD listserv (see Appendix B). The Qualtrics survey link was disbursed on the BPD listserv

requesting the participation of social work undergraduate educators that teach social work courses. The email introduced my work, described the study, and provided a statement of consent, the IRB study ID number, and the Internet link to the survey. The recruitment email was posted twice, two weeks apart. Educators currently teaching undergraduate social work courses or who have taught undergraduate social work courses in the last five years were encouraged to participate. A sample size goal was fifty respondents. A total of seventy-five respondents completed the entire survey.

### *Summary*

I triangulated the data by using three different measurements—textual analysis of textbooks, content analysis of syllabi, and a survey of educators—to provide a more comprehensive assessment of social work educators' use of intersectionality in HBSE courses that would not otherwise be obtained with a single method study alone.

Triangulation is a technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources. In short, I use all three as a combination of methods to get a more complete understanding of how social work educators incorporate the theory of intersectionality in their curriculum. Integrating more than one method in my research design can strengthen the measurement considerably (Engel and Schutt 84). Thus, it is an effective assessment strategy for future research implications. In the following chapter I will present the findings from this study.

## CHAPTER V

### INTERSECTIONALITY IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

#### ***Introduction***

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings guided by the following questions: (1) do HBSE textbooks incorporate the theory of intersectionality? (2) do HBSE educators teach intersectionality? (3) are social work educators familiar with the theory of intersectionality? (4) do social work educators professionally support the use of intersectionality as a practice model? First, I present the data from the textual analysis and describe how intersectionality is presented in HBSE textbooks. Second, I present the data from the content analysis and discuss if intersectionality is included in HBSE syllabi. Next, I present the data from the surveys. Finally, I summarize the findings.

#### ***Do HBSE Textbooks Incorporate the Theory of Intersectionality?***

For this study, I examined the most commonly adopted textbooks based on sales in HBSE courses for their depth of intersectionality. The depth of intersectionality was determined by whether the full articulation of the theory was present in the textbooks. For an intersectional analysis to be identified, the discussions regarding oppression-related content should analyze oppression. Authors can do this by identifying the ways that people experience sites of oppression differently depending on their intersecting identities, such as the pay disparity women of color face in the workforce. In this regard, an analysis of poverty will include the ways women of color experience gendered racism

that makes them more vulnerable to economic distress. In addition, this analysis should discuss the need for strategic interventions designed to address the intersecting vulnerabilities. These intersecting vulnerabilities increase the likelihood that women of color will experience poverty. Lastly, a discussion on building a coalition of advocates to address their multiple needs is also necessary. When either one of these principles (identifying the experiences of oppression, interventions that address multiple vulnerabilities, and coalitional advocacy through marshaling resources that mitigate hardships) is missing from the discussion, the depth of intersectionality becomes flattened, whereby the theory falls flat of meeting its social justice aims.

Relevant topics on oppression were analyzed to determine how intersectionality informed the discussions. Six textbooks were explored to determine how HBSE curriculum presented intersectionality. In addition, each textbook’s glossary, index, and table of contents were examined to locate the term intersectionality. The results can be found below in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of Intersectionality by Location in Six HBSE Social Work Textbooks

Participant Name	Term in Table of Contents	Term in Glossary	Term in Index
Human Behavior and the Social Environment: Shifting Paradigms in Essential Knowledge for Social Work Practice 6th ed. Schriver, Joe M.	Yes	N/A Textbook did not have a glossary	No

Human Behavior in the Social Environment: A Multidimensional Perspective 5th ed. Ashford, Jose B. & LeCroy, Craig Winston	No	No	No
Human Behavior in the Macro Social Environment: An Empowerment Approach to Understanding Communities, Organizations, and Groups 4th ed. Kirst-Ashman, Karen K.	Yes	N/A Textbook did not have a glossary	Yes
Human Behavior and the Social Environment Theory and Practice 2nd ed. Lesser, Joan Granucci & Pope, Donna Saia	No	No	No
Dimensions of Human Behavior: Person and Environment 5th ed. Hutchinson, Elizabeth D.	No	Yes	Yes
Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment 10th ed. Zastrow, Charles & Kirst-Ashman, Karen	Yes	N/A Textbook did not have a glossary	Yes

This table shows whether the term “intersectionality” was located in the textbooks’ table of contents, glossary, or index. Three textbooks did not include a glossary, thus “n/a” (not available) was recorded. Two of the six textbooks did not include the term in the table of contents, glossary, or index. Three of the six textbooks in the sample included intersectionality in their tables of contents. One of the six—or one of the three textbooks with a glossary—included the term. Three of the six textbooks in the sample included the term in their indexes. Three of six textbooks in the sample included the term in at least two different locations. The term “intersectionality” was popular among the texts, with 66% of them having the term in their glossaries, indexes, or tables of contents.

I examined the depth of intersectionality on all pages indexed in each textbook covering oppression-related topics such as, “racism,” “sexism,” “classism,” “oppression,” “discrimination,” “social justice,” “inequality,” “populations-at-risk,” and “privilege.” The amount of content on oppression-related topics varied significantly between textbooks—total pages ranged from six to 26.5 pages per textbook. Content was rated based on how inclusive it was of the key goals of intersectionality. For content to earn a rating of “central,” the analysis in the discussion would include all three goals that complete the intersectional prism. An “intermediate” rating includes goals 1 and either goal 2 or 3 of the intersectional prism. Finally, a rating of “marginal” includes only goal 1

of the intersectional prism. Following are the goals of intersectionality that complete the intersectional prism:

- (1) analyze social problems fully by locating where the various forms of privilege and/or oppression overlap due to intersecting identity formation,
- (2) offer effective interventions or solutions that are multidimensional when addressing social problems due to intersecting sites of oppression, and
- (3) promote coalitional advocacy by working across difference

**Oppression-Related Content**

A total number of 342 paragraphs with oppression-related content from six HBSE textbooks were reviewed. The total for each textbook is outlined in Table 6. Of the 342 paragraphs examined from all six textbooks, only 9.3% included intersectionality. No oppression-related content or description of intersectionality was rated central, while 2.6% of content was considered intermediate and 6.7% of content was rated marginal (see Table 7).

Table 6: Summary of Oppression-Related Content and Intersectionality in Six HBSE Textbooks

Textbook	Total Numbers of Paragraphs Reviewed w/ Oppression-Related Content	Total Percent Containing Intersectionality
E. Hutchison Dimensions of Human Behavior: Person and Environment	100	16%
J. Schriver Human Behavior and the Social Environment: Shifting Paradigms in Essential	87	9.1%

Knowledge for Social Work Practice		
J. Ashford & C. LeCroy Human Behavior in the Social Environment: A Multidimensional Perspective 5th ed.	27	0%
K. Kirst-Ashman Human Behavior in the Macro Social Environment	37	13.5%
J. Lesser & D. Pope Human Behavior and the Social Environment Theory and Practice	19	5.2%
C. Zastrow & K. Kirst-Ashman Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment	72	2.7%

Table 7: Depth of Intersectionality Offered in Six HBSE Textbooks

Total Number of Paragraphs w/ Oppression Content	Total Percent Containing Intersectionality	Central Intersectional Analysis	Intermediate Intersectional Analysis	Marginal Intersectional Analysis
342	9.3%	0%	2.6%	6.7%

When intersectionality was present, it was most commonly presented in a marginal way.

For example, the following quote gives a promising introduction to intersectionality, yet the author leaves out critical aspects of the theory:

*“A fundamental shift that rejects additive approaches, instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class,*

*and religion, black feminist sees distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination” (Shriver 38).*

Intersectionality as a tool of analysis is not fully articulated in the above quote. Although this quote alludes to how women of color are left vulnerable due to systemic oppression, it only scratches the surface of the theory by only including goal 1. This author begins a discussion, yet offers a marginal articulation of intersectionality discussing only the importance of avoiding additive approaches when considering sites of discrimination and oppression. Although avoiding additive approaches is an important component of the theory, what is offered is not in conversation with other tenets of the theory, leaving it vulnerable to misinterpretation and slippage. Consider another statement presented in the same textbook:

*“Commitments to social justice and participatory democracy provide key ground rules for individuals within the larger group to relate to each other across differences.”*  
*(Shriver 130)*

Shriver explains the importance of working across difference. Building coalitions across difference is an important tenet of intersectionality. This statement alone, however, does not constitute an intersectional analysis. Working across difference is a general principle of social work practice, yet building coalitions for the purpose of social justice work and to ensure people with intersecting identities are being represented in social justice advocacy is unique to an intersectional analysis. Moreover, to be impactful, this concept should be fully articulated as a goal of social justice work.

Schriver's two statements are in completely different sections of the text, one on page 38 and the other on page 130, and do not create the intersectional prism that would include a comprehensive discussion of both goals together. The basic tenets of intersectionality should be included in one comprehensive discussion. Otherwise, there is a risk of it being flattened and ineffective. I found it challenging to rate this as marginal because both statements loosely support the tenets of intersectionality. However, making these points separately lends to an "either/or" approach possibly separating the two concepts, and this does not produce a viable practice model. If these statements were included together, Schriver's articulation would be rated as having more intersectional depth.

While exploring oppression-related content, I found that there were numerous opportunities to present an intersectional analysis as part of the discussion. Of the oppression-related content discussed in all six of the textbooks, 90% did not include any mention of how the particular sites of oppression discussed may be experienced by people differently based on their intersecting identities and would therefore need interventions that were appropriately strategized to meet their needs. Although these discussions would benefit from an intersectional analysis, there was no clear, purposeful, or in-depth attempt. For example, during a discussion on diversity, difference, inequality and privilege in one text, the author does identify socially constructed hierarchies of power as a reason for inequality and offers categories such as race, class, and gender as sites of privilege.

*“Recent U.S. scholarship in the social sciences has emphasized the ways in which three types of categorizations—gender, race, and class—are used to develop hierarchical social structures that influence social identities and life chances. This literature suggests that these social categorizations create privilege.” (Hutchison 18)*

Hutchinson includes white, American, class, and heterosexual privilege among others, yet omits from the discussion how people whose identities are not privileged on any of these accounts experience something quite unique when navigating social systems. An explanation of how experiences of privilege or oppression can be exacerbated based on intersecting identities was not included.

Another example is Schriver’s very broad reference to the experiences of immigrants.

*“Given the intent to address oppression through immigration policy, it is unfortunate that immigrants may actually face discrimination and oppression in this country because of their immigrant status.” (Schriver 157)*

Incidentally, in this statement all immigrants are lumped into a very homogenous group. There is no acknowledgment of varied immigrant experiences. For instance, French Canadian immigrants may have a strikingly different experience immigrating to America than Mexican immigrants. León and Ortega underscore this point with their assertion that “The current immigration policies continue to be oppressive to minorities and to fuel the dehumanization of non-white foreigners. The new policies follow a long history of exclusion and oppression towards ethnic and racial minority groups, especially nonwhite immigrants who are predominantly Latino” (241). Furthermore, highlighting the idea that

immigrant women have a complex time navigating society would have added depth to this immigration discussion. Crenshaw argues that, “women who are socially and economically the most marginal— are the ones most likely to be women of color” (“Mapping the Margins” 1250). This discussion is without an intersectional analysis even though one is pertinent to broaden the dimensions of immigrant experiences. By presenting a one-size-fits-all interpretation of immigration, the discussion fails to prepare practitioners for the overlapping discrimination many immigrants experience and those unique hardships, more specifically the lack of protections for immigrant women of color.

Ashford and LeCroy offer the following statement suggesting that racism is a separate phenomenon from sexism. Moreover, they include a feminist analysis by referencing the commonly held feminist critique of the “add water and stir” method when including “women’s issues.” They present an opportunity to distinguish the intersections of identity that includes difference among women, underscoring that there is no universal women’s issue:

*“The feminist perspective opens up the possibility of diversity among men and women in specific historical, social, and cultural constructs. It also allows analyses and action to focus on the experiences of women without neglecting the other “isms” like racism and ageism that threaten the well-being of humans.” (Ashford and Lecroy188)*

There are intersectional ideas to contextualize in their statement, such as recognizing the experiences of women without neglecting the other ‘isms.’ I believe that engaging intersectionality in this discussion provides a more in-depth discussion of social

hierarchies. Offering some examples of what a person experiencing several ‘isms’ would encounter in the social environment would enrich the text and offer an opportunity to interrogate ways to advocate across difference.

Another trend was oppression-related content being discussed as single isolated incidents. When statistics of social problems were provided to encourage critical thinking, rarely was systematic power and oppression scrutinized. For example, in one textbook, students were presented with a scenario and asked to consider ways to “empower women most at-risk of bearing low-birth-weight babies—teenage and unmarried women, those with little education, and Black and non- Hispanic white women.” (Kirst-Ashman 490)

*“...A program [that] provides a good example of how various facets of a community have come together to address this issue. Initial consciousness raising occurred through extensive media coverage of the problem, alerting the public to the fact that increasing numbers of poor, single, and young mothers failed to seek or receive prenatal care. The project was spearheaded by a concerned volunteer philanthropist who brought citizens, social services representatives, health care personnel, and potential financial backers together to initiate the project. Fundraising projects included a luncheon program supported by influential community members and solicitation of financial donations.”* (Kirst-Ashman 490)

The textbook offers an example of a program that focused on consciousness-raising aimed at educating the community of available services. I agree that outreach and education are necessary tasks. This type of advocacy is common in social work practice. Marshaling resources together to address a social problem is a more immediate response to mitigate a problem. Nonetheless, this solution overlooks what I consider to be an important point that also needs emphasizing, and that is the need to circumvent the

barriers in place that prevent or discourage women from accessing services. This is done by approaching women at-risk as more unique participants, creating interventions more suitable to community needs, particularly when working with communities of color. A radical more activist-oriented approach would require an intersectional analysis that would consider the socio-historic realities of interventions designed for marginalized communities along with the other factors that may interfere with women accessing benefits. Intersectionality would focus on macro interventions that address what creates a high-risk environment for pregnant women, such as psychosocial stressors from their daily experiences. In addition, similar to what is presented in Kirst-Ashman's example, the need for coalition building between the communities, the women, and the social workers will be explored.

The previous examples show how an intersectional analysis is not employed even when it can enrich the discussion and encourage a heightened level of critical consciousness about power and oppression. What follows are examples of intersectional opportunities whereby intersectional concepts were present yet common experiences are still regarded as mutually exclusive. Therefore, no intersectional interventions were introduced into the discussion. This happens when two or more categories of oppression (racism, classism, sexism) are discussed yet categories are not analyzed in an intersectional manner. I identified approximately 6.4% of the oppression-related content discussed as intersectional opportunities (see Table 8).

Table 8: Intersectional Opportunities

Total Percent Absent of Intersectionality	Total Percent of Intersectional Opportunities
90%	6.4%

An example of a missed opportunity in one of the textbooks is a discussion on environmental justice that suggests some communities are suffering more than others from the health consequences of industrial and agricultural practices.

*“The degradation of the world ecosystems is growing significantly worse, and the burdens of degradation go increasingly to the most marginalized populations, poor people, people of color, older people, women, and children. At a recent community forum I attended in the eastern end of the valley, which is populated primarily by undocumented farm workers, community members reported that their greatest concerns are the lack of access to potable (drinking) water, high levels of pesticides in soil and groundwater, sewage, sitting on top of the ground, and the impact of nearby toxic waste treatment facility on soil water and air quality. If those are community concerns, social workers should be collaborating with other community agencies to address those concerns” (Hutchison 242).*

Hutchison’s discussion on environmental justice provides an opportunity to incorporate the theory of intersectionality as a social justice framework and critical analysis to highlight the experiences of those most impacted by environmental degradation. The people identified as most vulnerable were poor, minority, children, women, older people, and migrant workers. Along with several health disparities that rise in conditions like these, the most vulnerable people also deal with labor exploitation and violence. In fact, Crenshaw contends that immigrant women of color are more likely to experience adverse social ills related to poverty and violence even when they are not

farmworkers (“Mapping the Margins” 1249). Being an undocumented woman of color migrant worker will no doubt add to the political agenda of these women and should be considered even when addressing environmental degradation. Thus, intersectional coalition building across difference will create collaborative projects with groups who are not only environmental justice advocates but also may address issues of poverty, environmental racism, comprehensive immigration reform, affordable health care for undocumented people, and violence against women. An intersectional prism will set out to mitigate these sites of oppression simultaneously, which includes scrutinizing the challenges capitalism may pose to eradicating the injustice. In sum, Hutchison reminds us that advocacy requires bringing together multiple social service organizations that address the discrimination impacting those who are victimized. Social workers represent these agencies, and thus are capable of pooling resources to serve the multiple needs of impoverished communities of color. I have attempted to demonstrate why this discussion is an intersectional opportunity. Another intersectional opportunity is as follows:

*“People with less power usually falling into some category of distinguishable characteristics (race, ethnicity, religion, age, political party, or disability), may be denied rights, treated unfairly or put down by a group holding more power. People in downtrodden groups may suffer marginalization and alienation.” (Kirst-Ashman 68)*

This description of marginalization focuses on single-identity factors that contribute to oppression. Following this description, Kirst-Ashman uses Van Soest and Garcia’s explanation of three common elements of oppression to give a more nuanced explanation. One element explains the norm as being white, male, and heterosexual regarding all others as different. This defined norm is the standard of *rightness* (their emphasis) against

which all others are judged. Moreover, this standard of *rightness* cultivates white supremacy, male dominance and heteronormativity in American society. The second element explains that common to all oppressions are that they are held in place by ideology and threats of violence. Lastly, she acknowledges institutional oppression as being “built into the norms, traditions, laws, and policies of a society so that even those who have non-racist, non-sexist, and non-heterosexist beliefs are compelled to act in accordance with institutional interests.” (Kirst-Ashman 71) In this discussion, Kirst-Ashman acknowledges how oppression may impact people of color, women, and LGBT-identified people on a personal and societal level. Another site of oppression not included is the overlapping oppression due to intersecting identity formations that cause simultaneous discriminations, thus exacerbating social injustice.

Schriver’s explanation of how people of color are similar to women presents an opportunity for a more in-depth discussion.

*“As in the case of accounting for the development experiences of people of color, traditional approaches to research on human development have too often neglected or inaccurately portrayed women.” (Schriver 30)*

Schriver explains that people of color have one experience and women have another and both have been marginalized in human development research and scholarship. In what ways are women of color’s experiences situated in Schriver’s observation? Are the experiences of women of color melded in with those of women and people of color? Schriver’s observation confirms the pattern of single-axis analysis found in the literature review as well as the dearth of scholarship on women of color.

Intersectionality is rarely mentioned or applied in discussions of racism, sexism, or classism. An intersectional analysis is not usually applied when discussing race, class, or gender. More commonly, the discussion of race is gender neutral. The experiences of Latinas were not discussed along with the discussion on Hispanics. When intersectionality is presented, it includes only the definition of the theory. In other words, although the authors defined intersectionality in their textbooks, race, class, and gender are consistently categorized in the textbook, as well as discussions of racism and sexism. In other words, when oppression experienced by African Americans is discussed, it is done so using a single-axis analysis on race alone.

### **Social Justice and Intersectionality**

There were intersectional opportunities to connect privilege to social hierarchies like white supremacy and patriarchy. However, there was rarely an association made between oppression and social hierarchies. Social work is a field of study that values the pursuit of social justice, yet the findings suggest that the topic of social justice was isolated from discussions of disenfranchisement and discrimination. For example, in one textbook white supremacy was not discussed as a social hierarchy that creates social injustice, but rather as an idea practiced in the past. Referenced in the discussion is Abraham Lincoln's view on African Americans and the white supremacist terrorist organization, the Ku Klux Klan. The far removed historic example of white supremacy may make it difficult for social work students to connect with participants who remain disenfranchised.

*“White supremacy was a dominant belief in the United States before the American Civil War and for decades after Reconstruction. In some parts of the United States, many people who were considered nonwhite were disenfranchised, and were barred from holding most government jobs well into the second half of the 20th century.” (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 266)*

*“White Supremacy was also a dominant belief in many other countries, as in South African under apartheid. The Ku Klux Klan still advocates and asserts white supremacy.” (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 267)*

Both of the above excerpts are examples of personally held beliefs rather than a larger critique of the societal power structure that marginalizes groups based on their social ranking. Similarly, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman present privilege as special rights or benefits one enjoys due to an elevated social status (not social hierarchies) that provides a person with prestige; an example of this is famous entertainers.

*“Privilege entails special rights or benefits enjoyed because of elevated social, political, or economic status. Privilege is often related to prestige, the amount of social respect or standing given to an individual based on occupation. We assign higher prestige to occupations that require specialized education or training [e.g. physicians], or make more money.” (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 12)*

On the other hand, in a different textbook, Schriver shows promise. His discussion on privilege and whiteness offers more depth than those of Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman. Schriver makes connections between systems of patriarchy and societal beliefs and ideals that guide United States’ public policy. His discussion on privilege, patriarchy, and whiteness invites dialogue to discuss social hierarchies and how whiteness and patriarchy not only privileges some people but also oppresses others. Across all

textbooks, I found a consistent pattern of privilege being discussed without any connection to social work participants. Take for example the following quote:

*“In U.S. society, the ability to exert power and control over others is often associated with whiteness, what one might refer to as white privilege. However, white people are often unaware or unwilling to recognize how closely whiteness is associated with privilege in United States.” (Schraver 26)*

Intersectionality was generally found in two types of discussions: (1) minority or marginalized groups (African Americans and/or women) and (2) poor elderly (poor elderly women and/or poor African Americans). Examples of the intersecting identities of dominant groups (white and/or male) to demonstrate privilege were rarely offered.

Following is a quote exhibiting this point:

*“Intersectionality asserts that there are vast differences in the life experiences of an African American male, 57 years old, upper class, and healthy as compared to an African American female, 75 years old, indigent, and legally blind.” (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 271)*

Social justice-themed discussions varied. The breadth of social justice was different in every textbook. For example, the Ashford and LeCroy textbook offers marginal coverage of social justice as well as other oppression-related content. Thus, topics like oppression, discrimination, and privilege were nearly nonexistent. This textbook is also the only textbook that has no intersectional content. In the preface, Ashford and LeCroy describe their textbook as placing a focus on “biopsychosocial,” a model that considers the impact biological, psychological, and social factors have on an individual’s well-being (xiv). This may be a new trend in social work education,

encouraged by the professional standards of the CSWE. Nonetheless, in considering the biological, psychological, and social effects that oppression has on the quality of life, all of which are topics prioritized in HBSE courses, I did expect a substantial amount of oppression-related content in HBSE textbooks.

Longres and Scanlon's findings on the study of justice in social work curriculum suggest that social justice-oriented research is marginalized in the curricula. In their study, they found evidence of social work's commitment to social justice curricula in the textbooks as well as the syllabi. However, they reported that the discussions were surface level and did not provide much context as to the relationship between poverty and social justice, or discrimination and systematic oppression. Similar to Longres and Scanlon's study, my results found that further attention needs to be paid to social justice concepts in social work curricula.

### **Defining Intersectionality**

When a definition of intersectionality is included in the textbook, I paid attention to the textbook's depth and breadth of the description. Not all textbooks include a glossary definition of intersectionality. When a description was included, it was commonly rated "marginal." This may be due to the difficulties of defining a theory in a few sentences. An in-depth definition of intersectionality would include a fully articulated theory that presents the intersectional prism. Central, Intermediate, and Marginal are the same ratings used to assess the depth of intersectionality present in oppression-related content (see Table 1). A comprehensive discussion on intersectionality

should include the full prism. As previously stated, a central rating would include goal one, an intermediate rating would include goal one and two or three. Finally, a marginal discussion would only include goal one. As the foundational goal of the theory, locating where the various forms of privilege and/or oppression overlap due to intersecting identity formation, goal one must be included in all discussions of intersectionality. Due to the social change aims of the theory to only identify intersecting identities and the experiences that ensue negates the social justice aspect of the theory. In addition, intersectionality remains abstract and slow to move toward transformative action. I consider these goals, which include analysis, intervention, and advocacy, an intersectional prism that will help guide my analyses.

The following description of intersectionality offers a more in depth articulation than others who offer a singular focus on identity. For example, Schriver offers three tenets of intersectionality:

- (1) no social group is homogeneous.
- (2) people must be located in terms of social structures that capture the power relations implied by those structures, and
- (3) there are unique, non-additive effects of identifying with more than one social group.

Schriver also provides this explanation:

*“The intersectionality perspective acknowledges the breadth of human experiences, instead of conceptualizing social relations and identities separately in terms of either race or class or gender or age or sexual orientation. An intersectional approach builds on theoretical contributions made by women of color to address their interactive effects.*

*Additionally, an intersectional approach recognizes the power and complexity of socially constructed divisions.” (68)*

There is value in Schriver discussion on intersectionality. He offers a thorough analysis of identity. Schriver’s three tenets included the main points articulated in Crenshaw’s original work. Schriver includes a brief statement regarding power and socially constructed divisions. I consider Schriver’s discussion intermediate. There is intersectional slippage due to the absence of a critique of power and oppression. However, Schriver does provide a starting point to begin dialogue on the social justice aims and the importance of coalitions across difference.

Other textbooks offered a comprehensive description of how intersecting identities contribute to one’s lived experiences. For example:

*“The intersectional perspective acknowledges the breadth of human experiences, instead of conceptualizing social relations and identities separately in terms of either race or class or gender or age or sexual orientation”; rather, an intersectional approach focuses on the “interactional affects” of belonging to multiple groups.” (Kirst-Ashman 54)*

Lesser and Pope’s textbook uses the writings of multiple scholars to weave together a description of intersectionality, although marginal due to its inclusion of only one tenet.

This direct quote from the textbook provides a detailed description of intersectionality:

*“Milville and colleagues also talked about “collective identities,” such as race, class, and gender “as a constellations of positionalities (social locations) that classify, categorize, and construct the social value that is assigned to individuals according to various components (beliefs, concepts, and structures that define practice).” These authors label the intersections between and among these constructs as “multiplicities of oppression.” Several authors add to this discussion with the introduction of the paradigm of “intersectionality.” They argue that different identities include relative amounts of*

*oppression and privilege and that these simultaneously interact to create unique life experiences (McCall, 2003; Murphy, Hunt, Zajicek, Norris & Hamilton, 2009; Hulko, 2009).” (79)*

In the above quotes from two different textbooks, the authors have included a description of intersectionality that underscores experiences and how discrimination can be experienced simultaneously. Lesser and Pope’s detailed description cites Leslie McCall, an intersectional scholar, which lends to the comprehensiveness of their discussion.

Rating both of the above quotes as marginal was a difficult decision. I wanted to identify these descriptions as intermediate, due to the thoroughness of both descriptions.

However, they thoroughly discussed only one tenet of intersectionality.

Different from all other authors, Hutchison offers two definitions of intersectionality:

*“A pluralist theory of social conflict that recognizes numerous vectors of oppression and privilege, including but not limited to gender, race, global location, sexual orientation, and age: recognizes that individuals often hold cross-cutting and overlapping membership in different status groups.” (46)*

*“Intersectionality feminist theory, a feminist theory suggesting that no single category is sufficient to understand social oppression and that categories such as gender, race, and class intersect to produce different experiences for women of various races and classes. Intersectionality theory has also been used to look at other intersections in women’s lives—for example, those related to sexuality, religion, disability, age, and nationality. From this perspective, a person may experience oppression based on gender or some other attribute but also experience privilege based on a different attribute. Some people may experience oppression related to several social categories.” (352)*

Hutchison identifies the first definition as intersectionality theory that seeks to understand life experiences by looking at simultaneous membership. This definition is at the

beginning of the textbook. The second definition is in the second half of the textbook on page 352 and is identified as intersectionality feminist theory that she claims is consistent with the multidimensional approach proposed in the book. I believe perhaps she is referencing her other definition of intersectionality. Hutchison acknowledged, “Feminists of color introduced the concept of intersectionality to challenge the idea that gender is a monolithic category” (352). There is no indication as to why there are two different definitions with similar names of the same theory. Nonetheless, I appreciated her extensive interpretation of the theory. I rated this as marginal. This was another difficult decision. There was so much detail here, and like Schriver, Hutchison offers a foundation to build on. However, there was still some intersectional flattening, whereby a single focus on identity and experience dominated the discussion with no mention of advocacy or social change.

### **Intersectional Voids**

*One of the famous Black women’s studies books is entitled “All of the Women are White, All of the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave.” I have chosen this title...in order to contrast the multidimensionality of Black women’s experiences with the single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences. Not only will this juxtaposition reveal how Black women are theoretically erased, it will also demonstrate how this framework imports its own theoretical limitations that undermine efforts to broaden feminist and anti-racist analyses.—Kimberlé Crenshaw*

Overall, intersectionality is represented in the HBSE textbooks analyzed, although the discussions are largely marginal. I found that intersectional slippage, oversimplifying

the theory was common. Discussions on intersectionality are largely void of statements pertaining to the social justice aspect of the theory. Consequently, this slippage prevents a discussion on intervention, advocacy and social change. Ashford and LeCroy's *Human Behavior in the Social Environment: A Multidimensional Perspective* is the only textbook that is absent of any discussion on intersectionality. There were a total of twenty-seven paragraphs examined for intersectionality. The authors do include a discussion on privilege and oppression. In Ashford and LeCroy's textbook, race and gender are separated into categories. For example, one discussion takes place in Chapter 4 subsection titled "Multicultural, Gender, and Spiritual Considerations," topics such as "Racial and Ethnic Considerations;" "Consequences of Intolerance to Difference;" "Prejudice and Discrimination;" "Race and Everyday Social Relations;" "Reflections on Multiracial Opportunities and Barriers;" "Forms of Racism and Privilege;" "Gender and Sexism;" "Sexual Status and Forms of Oppression;" "Sex Role Stereotypes;" "Homophobia;" and "Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Transgender" are all included. Due to the diverse subject matter in Chapter 4, I believe it is best suited for providing numerous opportunities to discuss intersectionality as an anti-oppression social justice framework.

Identity (race, class, and gender) is commonly treated as separate categories and thus organized in each one of the textbooks into separate sections. Consequently, it may be difficult for the authors to incorporate an intersectional analysis when discussions of identities are placed in separate sections. In other words, the discussion covering women

or gender does not provide an opportunity to discuss intersectionality, including race, because race is discussed in a separate section. Actually, practicing intersectionality through the organization of the textbook was observed. However, there was no expectation for the textbook authors to discuss all mentions of identities as intersecting. As it is, the textbook's design consists of single-axis categories of identity. However, this compartmentalization of identity produced several intersectional opportunities in the design of the textbooks. I found this to be an interesting phenomenon, given that many of the books acknowledge the significance of intersectionality. For example:

*“A fundamental shift that rejects additive approaches, instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class, and religion, black feminist sees distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination.” (Shriver 38)*

Another common narrative was discussions that regarded identity as separate entities of experiences. For example, the textbooks' case studies, vignettes, or critical thinking exercises did not ask students to consider the ways in which intersecting identities may impact clients' experiences of privilege and oppression. Instead, students were asked to:

*“Describe how groups, including African Americans, Hispanics, LGBTQ people, women, and older adults are populations at-risk, discuss how empowerment can occur in the macro environment for each group, and provide some case examples demonstrating empowerment.” (Kirst-Ashman 464)*

The majority of exercises and questions posed in all of the textbooks resemble the additive model of identity that is in the above quote. This mirrors the design of the textbooks, whereby each of those identities are likely organized into separate categories

throughout the textbooks. I also found that some case studies describe a participant as simply a woman, with no race or class included. These “incomplete” descriptions are unrealistic and create barriers to wholistic engagement. A practical case study will provide a complete description of the participant because the moment a social worker begins to work with a participant, the race and financial status will be apparent. Furthermore, this information is critical in understanding participants’ past and present experiences as well as their future access to resources. Strategizing an intersectional intervention will need to consider their intersecting identities.

Overall, the findings suggest that intersectionality is most commonly presented as flattened with several points of intersectional slippage resulting in the marginal rating assigned to the majority of the content examined in all six textbooks. A trend across all textbooks included in this study was a partial articulation of the theory. The discussions of the theory overemphasized identity formation and the varying experiences. To implement a practice model based on the theory, there will need to be a comprehensive discussion on the theory and what its social justice goals are. I observed that Crenshaw’s work was not cited in any textbook as a source of the theory. More commonly cited as a source for intersectionality is Murphy et al.’s *Incorporating Intersectionality in Social Work Practice, Research, Policy, and Education*. On the one hand, this text has played an important role in integrating intersectionality into the field of social work, and should be credited for bringing this awareness. In reviewing social work literature for this research, I found there was little scholarship on the theory. Murphy et al.’s scholarship has

contributed to this body of work. Their textbook provides a comprehensive framework for the theory. Their work cites Crenshaw and other leading intersectional scholars such as Collins, Yuval-Davis, McCall, and Cooper.

On the other hand, I believe that the failure to cite any of Crenshaw's seminal works on intersectionality may contribute to the flattened descriptions and intersectional slippage apparent in all of the textbooks. Crenshaw has seminal work and it is curious that she is not referenced. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" is a pivotal article on intersectionality and can offer an in-depth and comprehensive description of the theory. Furthermore, Crenshaw's recent works build on her original articulations and provide easily accessible interdisciplinary scholarship. Crenshaw's work is a Black feminist critique of how race is commonly treated as mutually exclusive of gender in anti-racist and feminist movements, including scholarship. However, Crenshaw also argues that the experience of racism exacerbates the experiences of sexism and classism.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, when they are all working together, it creates an experience very unique to women of color.

Consider the legal argument Crenshaw puts forth in "Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex." She explains that the singular focus on rape as a manifestation of male power over female sexuality is an inadequate account of Black women's victimization of rape as a weapon of racial terror (47). She states, "When Black

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<sup>14</sup> I should note that by acknowledging the exacerbation racism creates with other sites of discrimination, the theory of intersectionality does not posit, for example, that people who occupy more than two marginal identities will in every context be more disadvantaged than someone who occupies one or two marginal identities.

women were being raped by white males, they were being raped not only as women generally, but as Black women specifically: Their femaleness made them sexually vulnerable to racist domination, while their Blackness effectively denied them [legal] protection” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 47). This example demonstrates that identifying gender as single risk factor of rape negates how race exacerbated the act of rape and left women of color, including Indigenous and Mexican women, vulnerable to acts of sexual violence.

This point of how racism exacerbates sexism and classism is often left out as it travels and is adopted in other scholarship. For example, there was no evidence of the articulation of this principle that explains how racism exacerbates experiences of poverty, sexism, and other discriminatory acts in any of the sampled textbooks. As an illustration of this slippage, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman discussed people living with AIDS that they identified as a population at-risk. Their discussion was divided into separate smaller sections covering topics, such as “How Is AIDS Contracted?” “Treatment and Prevention,” and “Impacts of Social and Economic Forces: AIDS Discrimination and Oppression.” The authors identify gay men as a population at risk, claiming that gay men account for many AIDS cases.

Though I concede that gay men are a population at risk, I believe that after applying an intersectional analysis to risk factors, one would deduce that African American women are also a population at risk. Their discussion did not include Black women as a population at risk although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC) identifies them as such. The CDC states that the rate of new HIV infections among African American women in 2010 was twenty times that of white women and nearly five times that of Hispanic women (“New HIV Infections”). African American women represent 65 percent of new AIDS diagnoses among women.

An intersectional analysis would have identified risk factors that include but are not limited to racism, poverty, and inadequate access to health care. Along with mistrust of government agencies, the risk factors for African Americans also become barriers to HIV prevention and treatment, and thus play an important role in increased HIV infections in Black communities. A fully articulated discussion on oppression-related content would have revealed these vulnerabilities. Flattened articulations of intersectionality fail to broaden and deepen the analysis of privilege and oppression where women of color are concerned. This is a population largely marginalized in social work scholarship. Consequently, social work scholarship remains exclusive, and its potential to broaden and deepen its analysis by addressing women of color remains unrealized.

The failure to cite Crenshaw has implications beyond the flattening and slippage of the theory. Not crediting the architect of the theory may be interpreted as an erasure of Black feminist scholarship. These exclusionary practices have been the main subject of dialogue by many women of color scholars across disciplines (Anzaldúa “Haciendo Caras, Una Entrada,” Christian “The Race for Theory,” Guy-Sheftall and Hammonds “Whither Black Women’s Studies,” Lorde *Sister Outsider*, Morrison *Playing in the Dark*:

*Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* 1992, and Smith “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” 1982). In fact, Black feminists outside of the academy have often complained of their work being appropriated. As it relates to the absence of intersectionality from what is considered mainstream social science scholarship, Perry criticizes sociology scholarship because it “often intentionally and unintentionally devalues and delegitimizes the intellectual property of minorities—especially women of color” (230). Carbado asserts that, “the misperception is that Black women cannot specifically name themselves in a theory, nor can they function as the backdrop for the genesis and articulation of a generalizable framework about power and marginalization” (813). Perry and Carbado raise these concerns and remind us of the ongoing marginalization that women of color scholars experience in the academy. Building on theory does not necessarily mean abandoning its original aims. As it is, intersectionality’s social justice aims enhance social work practice, and thus should be included in the description presented in social work textbooks.

In sum, I appreciate the inclusion of the theory in HBSE textbooks. Incorporating the theory in HBSE textbooks creates opportunities for intersectionality to expand its uses in the field of social work. But above all, I believe that the marginal use and oversimplification of the theory will limit the positive effects the theory may have when practicing with diverse communities. The apolitical theory largely presented in the sample textbooks may prevent social justice work. Practice with marginalized groups will

require more critical ways of approaching intervention and advocacy by interrogating socio-historic realities of oppression experienced by those communities.

### **Summary**

Six of the most commonly adopted textbooks in HBSE courses were examined for their intersectional depth. Relevant topics on oppression were analyzed to determine how intersectionality informed the discussions. The study revealed that there was no oppression-related content that included an in-depth intersectional analysis. Of the content examined, 9.3% was marginally intersectional. Most oppression-related content is discussed in single categories of identity.

### ***Do Social Work Syllabi Include Intersectionality?***

I examined HBSE syllabi to determine if instructors included intersectionality in their course content. Each syllabus was assigned a random participant number for the purpose of anonymous coding. Syllabi were coded to determine where intersectional content was located. Six distinct sections of the syllabi were examined. Table 9 lists the sections and the total number of syllabi that contained intersectionality in each distinct section.

Table 9: Summary of Intersectionality Content in 59 HBSE Social Work Syllabi

Section	Number of Syllabi w/ Intersectionality Content
“Course Description”	1
“Course Competencies”	9
“Course Objectives”	3

“Course Schedule”	3
“Course Assignments”	3
“Course Readings”	8

### **Syllabi Containing Intersectionality**

Fifty-nine course syllabi were examined to determine if subject matter taught in HBSE courses included intersectionality. Thirty-nine percent of syllabi ( $n=23$ ) included intersectionality and/or intersectional content. Intersectional content was determined by analyzing the presence of intersectional tenets found in any descriptions, discussions, resources, or instructions listed on the syllabus. The dominant tenets of intersectionality are described in Table 1. I was not looking for an exact articulation of the theory. I was, however, looking for language that was in sync with the dominant tenets of the theory. For example, one syllabus stated, “The course advances students’ ability to critically examine the role of power, privilege and oppression in shaping life experiences.” I considered this course description as containing intersectional content. Below, I discuss the findings for the 39% of syllabi containing intersectional content in each distinct section.

Course Description- There was only one syllabus that contained intersectional content in its course description. This syllabus stated:

*“The course advances students’ ability to critically examine the role of power, privilege and oppression in shaping life experiences.”*

Course Competencies- There were nine syllabi containing intersectional content in their course competencies. Due to the CSWE's accreditation standards, every HBSE syllabus described the specific CSWE standards taught in that course throughout the semester. The CSWE is the accrediting body for social work programs in the United States. The purpose of these standards is to ensure that competency-based education is being taught at every level. There are a total of nine CSWE competencies. Not all nine competencies were present on every syllabus. However, the instructor listed the competencies that would be taught in their course. For example, many syllabi included Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice. This particular competency closely aligns with the tenets of intersectionality. The following is a description of Competency 2: Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. Social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize,

alienate, or create privilege and power (7). Some variation of Competency 2 was identified on 15% of the syllabi. An example of this is:

*“Demonstrate awareness of how racism, sexism, discrimination, oppression, social inequality, and poverty influence human behavior and development in infancy, childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power.”*

Course Objectives- Three syllabi included intersectional content in the course objectives. However, this content simply consisted of variations of CSWE Competency #2. For example, one syllabus states:

*“Social workers understand how diversity characterizes and shapes the human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation. Social workers appreciate that, as a consequence of difference, a person’s life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim.”*

Course Schedule- A total of three syllabi scheduled an independent lecture on intersectionality. One syllabus included a class lecture on intersectionality, scheduled mid-way through the course during week nine. Two syllabi included intersectionality as a class lecture at the beginning of the semester in week four. The scheduling of the lecture may tell us more about the opportunities students had to apply the theory to course work throughout the semester.

Course Assignments- Three syllabi include assignments deemed intersectional. I have included one of these assignments below to provide a detailed description of what students were being asked to complete:

*“Analyze and reflect on dimensions of your personal development and how you think this may influence your professional practice in relation to the following: How specific cultures have influenced your understanding of self, including beliefs, values, and behaviors; and Identify both privileged and marginalized dimensions of identity and the way in which these support or create challenges for acting on beliefs and values. This paper is intended as an opportunity to think, clarify, and explore your ideas about yourself and your future work in a professional social work context, as well as scaffolding and preparation for upcoming work in a field placement setting. This assignment gives everyone an opportunity to study and understand an unfamiliar culture in-depth. The task of the groups is to provide information to the class regarding what you have learned in class and to expand your human diversity and/or cultural awareness in order to recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power. Groups will be randomly assigned an aspect of human diversity and/or cultural concern such as: sexism, racism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, etc.”*

There were challenges in deciding whether the above assignment actually required an intersectional analysis. Although the language resembles intersectional tenets, being copied from the EPAS, it also states that students will receive “randomly assigned aspects of human diversity and/or cultural concern such as: sexism, racism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism etc.” An intersectional analysis would include at least three elements of human diversity that I understand to mean identity or cultural concern.

Course Readings- There were eight additionally assigned readings beyond the required textbooks that were determined to be intersectional. Intersectional readings were decided by their titles. In examining assigned readings, I met limitations. Some of the syllabi

included a bibliography section. I examined this section for intersectional content. The assumption is that this scholarship informs course material. However, there is no certainty that these readings were assigned to students. Thus, there is a possibility that, although intersectional material is located on the syllabi’s bibliography section, the students may not be reading it. In addition, not all syllabi had a bibliography section included. This limited my ability to see additional scholarship that informs course content. Assigned readings with titles that implied intersectional content were searched for using EBSCO HOST Academic Search Complete and Google. An example is, “Intersectionality: The Double Bind of Race and Gender, Perspectives” and “Acknowledging Black Male Privilege,” both were titles found on sample syllabi. Searches were successful in all but one case. This article was not located in the search.

Table 10: Titles of Intersectional Course Readings Located on HBSE Syllabi

“Intersectionality: The Double Bind of Race and Gender” <i>Perspectives</i> Crawford, K. (n.d.).
“Acknowledging Black Male Privilege” Marsh, W. (2010-2011) <i>Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy</i> , 17, 61—63
“Developing Anti-racist Social Work Education Practice” Ahmed, S. (1991). <i>Setting the context for change</i> (pp. 166-182). London: CCETSW.
“Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice Intersectionality”
“The Moral Problem of Health Disparities” Jones, CM. (2010). <i>American Journal of Public Health</i> , 100: S47-S51.
“Rethinking Girls “At-Risk”: Gender, Race and Class Intersections and Adolescent Development.” Abrams, L. S. (2002). <i>Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment</i> , 6(2), 47-64. This title was assigned on two syllabi.
“African American Intergender Relationships: A Theoretical Exploration of Roles, Patriarchy, and Love” Lawrence-Webb, C., Littlefield, M., & Okundaye, J. N. (2004). <i>Journal of Black Studies</i> , 34(5), 623-639.
“Reconceptualizing Successful Aging Among Black Women and the Relevance of the

Strong Black Woman Archetype” Baker, T. A., Buchanan, N. T., Mingo, C. A., Roker, R., & Brown, C. S. (2015). <i>The Gerontologist</i> , 55(1), 51-57.
“A Qualitative Study of the Interplay Between Privilege and Oppression” Croteau, J.M., Talbot, D.M., Lance, T.S. (2003). <i>Journal of Multicultural counseling and development</i> , 30 (4), 239-58.
“My Brother's Keeper Ignores Young Black Women” The New York Times, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw
<i>The Complexity of Identity: Who Am I? Why Are All the Blacks Sitting Together in the Cafeteria</i> Tatum, B. (2003) New York, NY: Basic Books

### **Syllabi That Did Not Contain Intersectionality**

Results suggest that there are substantial variations in the extent to which intersectionality is present on course syllabi. However, there appears to be a great willingness to incorporate intersectional ideals. Several syllabi contain language that is closely associated with intersectional concepts. These associations are seen as opportunities that need further examination. For example, the following statement is from a course description:

*“The perpetuation of oppression and unequal access to power within political, social, and economic institutions and organizations is of particular interest. Specifically, the student will explore how institutional racism, sexism, homophobia/heterosexism, poverty, alienation, and other oppressive conditions play a role in shaping the lives of clients, their families, and their communities. Of particular concern are groups experiencing social and economic injustices based on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, spiritual/religious and gender characteristics.” In week two, topics discussed in class include “toward critical perspectives of social work theories, positivism and social construction, critical social theory, feminism and critical race theories, postmodernism and social work practices.”*

Based on the above description, it appears that this instructor may teach intersectionality in their course. There were other indicators that instructors may be including the theory in their course curriculum. The examination of one syllabus revealed that the instructor

created a wealth of opportunities to teach intersectionality. Some of these opportunities were located under the weekly course schedule section of the syllabus. For example, “What can be done? Identifying Structural Oppression,” “Power, Privilege and Oppression,” “Social Institutions and Power,” “Privilege Exploration,” and “Mechanics of Oppression.” I think these discussions can certainly be framed by intersectionality.

### **Summary**

The findings suggest that the intersectional content located on the syllabi were flattened articulations of the theory and ranged from intermediate to marginal. The majority of content was a variation of the CSWE’s standard. I found that when instructors extracted portions of CSWE Competency 2, the articulation lost much of its resemblance to intersectionality. In fact, the term “intersectionality” was only present on approximately 15% ( $n=9$ ) of syllabi. One instructor included intersectionality in three different sections of their syllabus. These sections were the course description, course schedule, and course-assigned readings. This instructor also used the term “intersectionality” on their syllabus. My analysis also revealed that discussions of identity were separated into categories. This is similar to the way that discussions of identity were organized in HBSE textbooks. The literature review confirms this finding as well.

### ***Do Social Work Educators Professionally Support the Use of Intersectionality as a Practice Model?***

For this study, I surveyed social work educators to determine their receptivity to intersectionality. Professional support of the theory is exhibited through educators’

support of the theory being applied in the field. Eighty-nine respondents attempted the survey, and a total of seventy-five respondents completed it. Fourteen respondents who accessed the link discontinued the survey without answering every question. This survey included a detailed description of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. The survey introduced four statements regarding their use of intersectionality. Each statement was addressed using a dichotomous response with options being "1" for "yes" and "2" for "no."

The survey included a statement to assess educators' familiarity with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Educators' were presented with a series of statements, such as "I am familiar with Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality." Forty-one percent of respondents reported that they were familiar with Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality.

The survey included a description of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. After respondents read the theory's description, agreement with Crenshaw was assessed by educators' response to this statement: "I agree with the constructs of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality." Ninety-two percent of respondents reported that they agree with the principles of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality described in the survey.

The survey included a statement concerning educators' use of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Use of Crenshaw was assessed by educators' response to this statement "I teach Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality in my courses."

Twenty-four percent of respondents reported that they teach Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality in their courses.

The survey included another statement concerning educators' use of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Use of Crenshaw was assessed by educators' response to this statement "I use Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality in my own research." Fourteen and a half percent of respondents reported that they use Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality in their own research.

The survey included a statement to measure educators' attitude toward Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Attitude toward Crenshaw was assessed by educators' response to this statement "I believe Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality is a tool of analysis that can be applied to social work practice." Eighty-nine percent of respondents reported that they believe Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality is a tool of analysis that can be applied to social work practice.

### **Summary**

These results tell us that, (1) there is strong support for Crenshaw's theory; 89% of the respondents believe that intersectionality is a tool of analysis that can be applied to social work practice, (2) there is an opportunity for intersectionality in social work research; only 17% of respondents use intersectionality in their own research; (3) Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality needs to be more accessible; 59% of respondents were not familiar with this theory, and (4) 24% of respondents teach intersectionality; this

supports the findings in the syllabi analysis that revealed only 28% of syllabi contained intersectional content.

### ***Discussion***

In this section, I discuss the broader significance of the findings that are relevant to the main research question: How does social work education bridge theory and practice by incorporating the theory of intersectionality into social work curricula? Based on the findings from this study, it appears that social work is making an attempt to incorporate intersectionality into social work curricula. The findings show that the field is taking an interest in the theory and its application. However, based on the marginal representation of the theory, which may correlate to the majority of educators being unfamiliar with the theory, I assert that theory and practice is not successfully being bridged with the incorporation of intersectionality. The key findings of my research are summarized, and I examine the extent to which social work curriculum incorporates the theory of intersectionality. Then, I present limitations of the research.

### **Presence of Intersectionality**

My research findings move the discussion on the use of intersectionality in social work practice, education, and research forward (Murphy et al., Jani et al., and Mehrotra). A review of the literature revealed only a small amount of scholarship exploring intersectionality and social work. Thus, it was a revelation that 84% of textbooks included some intersectional content. This content was deemed marginal, as the descriptions of the theory were not fully articulated. In fact, only 9.8% of all oppression-

related content offered an intersectional analysis. Consequently, 6.7% of that was rated marginal, with 2.6% rated intermediate. No oppression-related content examined for this study offered an intersectional analysis that centralized all tenets of the theory. I believe these findings support Jani et al.'s and Pon's critical assessment of social work education's diversity content. Jani et al. and Pon contend that intentional efforts made to diversify content adding more minority groups has been at the expense of including critical tools of analysis that consider the intersecting identities and complex experiences of people of color and women. Consequently, the single focus of infusing separately categorized groups into the existing curriculum is evident by the marginal representation of intersectionality offered in the curriculum.

### **Receptivity to Intersectionality**

Similar to the textbooks findings, the findings of HBSE syllabi also suggest a marginal presence of intersectionality in HBSE courses. In fact, the survey data supports the findings in the syllabi and may substantiate why a majority of educators are not familiar with the theory. Educators were marginally familiar with the theory. However, the survey data also revealed that there is strong professional support among educators to use the theory as a tool of analysis in the field. This research suggests that there are opportunities for social work to bridge theory and practice by engaging the theory of intersectionality. These findings can be used for future research to gain a better sense of how intersectionality can be used across disciplines. This is the first study to measure the receptivity to intersectionality in the field of social work. Textbook analysis and survey

findings reveal that intersectionality is present in social work curricula. The marginal quality is an opportunity to incorporate the fully articulated theory that includes all three principal tenets.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations to my analysis. First, although textbooks are a good indicator of mainstream ideas, “their use as a data source presents some limitations, including the fact they are time-lapsed measures of the state of the discipline” (Norris, Murphy-Erby, and Zajicek 338). There may be updated textbooks or other resources not included in this study that offer a different view of intersectionality. Second, there was a small sample of textbooks examined based on the Faculty Center Network (FCN) most-adopted HBSE textbooks. Perhaps there are HBSE textbooks that are not as widely used as those listed on the FCN. In addition, there were small samples of syllabi and survey respondents. This was an exploratory study. The sample size was determined to be the minimum necessary to obtain suggestive results. The research design included triangulated data from textbooks, syllabi, and educators to strengthen the validity of the findings. Third, the textbooks were assessed using the topic of oppression to guide the examination. An in-depth analysis of all pages in each HBSE textbook was not conducted, possibly missing important information that was not noted in either the table of contents or the index. Finally, it is possible that the theory of intersectionality is present in social work courses other than HBSE. Given these limitations, it is clear that further study of intersectionality in social work curriculum is needed.

## CHAPTER VI

### TOWARD AN INTERSECTIONAL ENGAGEMENT MODEL FOR SOCIAL WORK WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

#### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter, I discussed the possibilities of social work curricula when the theory of intersectionality is incorporated. By using Black feminist theory to develop a practice model for social work, my research illustrates a transdisciplinary approach to social work practice. This work has the ability to demonstrate the possibilities of expanding the reaches of Black feminist scholarship from women's and gender studies to social work. Women's and gender studies have produced numerous methods of analyses to better understand the ways social differences are the basis for social domination (Jakobsen 125). Yet, Jakobsen argues that the methods of analyses have not been able to overcome social domination in institutional practice (125). Despite its potential feminist theory with social justice aims has limited reach in institutions of power. Women's studies is recognized for introducing feminist theory to the academy. However, it is not as recognized for introducing feminist methods to practicing professions. The challenge of practicing feminist theories within institutions of power is the institutions' history of

subordinating large classes of people. Women's studies as a field acknowledges this challenge and theorizes ways to mitigate the problem. What is necessary now, is for women's and gender studies to build connections with practicing professions, such as social work to further the aims of Black feminist scholarship.

In this chapter I develop what I call an Intersectional Engagement Model to show one possibility of using intersectionality theory in the field of social work. This model allows social workers in the field to examine broader patterns and structures of oppression for the purpose of addressing the intersecting needs of participants. In addition, this model helps to build bridges between social service systems and communities of color. By developing this model, I hope to contribute to the scholarship by providing an example of an intersectional practice method based on my interpretation of the theory. The Intersectional Engagement Model is tentative and open to further elaboration.

This demonstration supports those who call for creating a field of intersectionality studies. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall insist that:

This field can be used fully framed as representing three loosely defined sets of engagements: the first consisting of applications of an intersectional framework or investigations of intersectional dynamics, the second consisting of discursive debates about the scope and content of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological paradigm, and the

third consisting of political interventions employing an intersectional lens.

(785)

There is no fixed ideology of intersectionality, making it generative and possible to create frameworks for an interdisciplinary field of study well-suited for collaborative projects with women's and gender studies and social work. Thus, intersectionality studies will not be the end-goal. Instead, it will allow for the creation of frameworks to reach the end-goal. Scholars from their respective fields of study can "harness the most effective tools of their subject to illuminate how intersecting axes of power and inequality operate to our collective and individual disadvantage" (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 795). Based on the evidence at this time, I believe that a field of intersectionality studies provides limitless opportunities for projects and debates that will lead to more strategies and methods and will continue to move across borders impacting the fields of women's and gender studies and social work.

Bridging theory and practice is an extension of bringing together the academy and the community to work together for a shared cause. Fitts maintains that "women's studies as a movement within the academy, had a two-pronged vision: to create interdisciplinary knowledge and spaces and to change the content of existing disciplines" (249). In staying true to this movement, my research aims to contribute to those works seeking to develop intersectionality as a field of study, and, in so doing, uses Black feminist scholarship to connect the fields of women's and gender studies and social work. More importantly, I

contend that this bridge enables women's and gender studies to travel to communities that are isolated from the academy.

### ***Transdisciplinary Intersectionality Studies***

The theory of intersectionality has shifted across space to embark on endeavors beyond women's and gender studies. Kathy Davis reports:

Feminist scholars from different disciplines (philosophy, social sciences, humanities, economics, and law), theoretical perspectives (phenomenology, structuralist sociology, psychoanalysis, and deconstructionism) and political persuasions (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, queer studies, disability studies) all seem to be convinced that intersectionality is exactly what is needed. (43)

Yet, some express concerns that theories lose their originality and insurgency as they travel from one domain to another (Carbado 812). Mohanty takes a more critical position in the shifting of intersectionality. She argues that scholars have turned the race and gender justice commitments of intersectionality into benign representations of difference (972), with more attention paid to multiculturalism than to social injustices. For example, the findings of my study reveal that social work education falls short in presenting the theory of intersectionality as a means of analyzing structures of power and domination. In addition, social work textbooks omit intersectional practice that builds coalitions across difference. The findings show intersectional slippage in social work education. The result

of this slippage is a simplistic version of intersectionality that only acknowledges experience based on cultural difference, flattening the social justice and anti-oppression aspects of the theory.

The multiple interpretations and what Mohanty calls “misreads of women of color epistemologies” can be remedied by moving toward a field of intersectionality studies (969). This field will focus attention on investigating intersectional dynamics and application of intersectional frameworks, developing political interventions that employ an intersectional lens, and allowing for a progressive space to debate the scope and content of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological paradigm. My Intersectional Engagement Model is an example of what an intersectional practice method can do.

Practicing intersectionality can be advanced through collaborative efforts across and within academic disciplines, social service agencies, and social justice organizations. Intersectionality studies have the potential to produce transdisciplinary scholarship, which are joint projects, inspired by different disciplines working together to address common problems. This can transform both social work and women’s and gender studies. Its tools of analysis help us understand everyday life, “the lived experiences of privilege and oppression, the implications and structures of marginalization, and the political meanings of identity” (May, “Intersectionality” 156). Engaging in intersectionality requires a major shift in thinking that ends the practice of treating race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of analysis or experience. I posit that intersectionality

studies may transform the field of women's and gender studies by producing research methods, practice models, and policy discussions that center on the structural ways women of color are oppressed. This scholarship will create curriculum for women's and gender studies to interrogate.

### ***Women's and Gender Studies***

This work attempts to answer the call of Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall for intersectionality studies. They encouraged scholars situated at the margins of their disciplines to engage with those firmly situated in their disciplines, and begin collaborating to spark a conversation about building intersectional scholarship that understands some of the most important issues facing contemporary society (807). Furthermore, these findings attempt to enter a discussion on knowledge accessibility, whereby knowledge is extracted from one source (the academy) and used in another (the community). The Intersectional Engagement Model is a framework that can be adapted to meet multiple needs expanding its reach beyond the academy. My work highlights the legacy of women's and gender studies where scholars understand that research and theory must expose the root causes of oppression. For instance, Maparyan urges Women's Studies to re-engage with the ground-level issues women around the globe are experiencing like access to food, water, health, and education ("Why the Academy Needs Womanism" 88). It follows, then, that in the spirit of Maparyan, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, I considered the necessity of accessing theories like intersectionality at the

community level, where organizers, local community members and leaders can apply the tenets of intersectionality to social justice work on the ground level.

By extension, supporting a vision of intersectionality studies advances women's and gender studies in the following ways: (1) it brings more attention to women's studies, with the inclusion of scholarship that offers broad and complex analysis of women's lives, (2) it produces more transformative feminist research and theories by broadening the theoretical subject matter to include intersectionality studies, (3) intersectionality studies casts a wider net that can potentially attract students who in the past have not been interested in studying feminist theory. Moreover, with the inclusion of Black feminist theory, students become open to new possibilities. This will enhance the diversity of the field, attracting students who have felt marginalized in women's and gender studies courses, and (4) all of the previous gains will ultimately strengthen the field's institutional standing in the academy. Intersectionality studies bring together new transdisciplinary methods to create new women's and gender studies course curriculum. I hope for a future of intersectional studies where Black feminist scholarship takes center stage in a way that validates its existence in the academy and beyond.

### ***Black Feminist Scholarship***

*I am a Black woman. I am a living text, but everyone around me has returned to early twentieth-century moves of attempting to write me, draw me, sing me, translate me, legislate and discuss me in dead languages. Black women are living texts that possess a wealth of wisdom of knowledge. —L.H. Stallings*

Returning full circle to the beginning of this inquiry with respect to the need to bridge theory and practice, James argues current academic theory has never worked for communities of color and was never intended for them (4). Although many will read James's assertion as confrontational, there is validity in her argument. In 1990, Gloria Anzaldúa edited *Making Face, Making Soul Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. In this body of work, Maxine Baca Zinn, Lynn Weber Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham, and Bonnie Thornton Dill presented research findings which made them "acutely aware of the limitations of traditional social science with regard to working-class women and women of color. More profoundly, however [they] realized that the experiences of these groups of women were virtually excluded from consideration as vital building blocks in feminist theory" (Zinn et al.). They sought theoretical explanations to explain the continued experiences of poverty and oppression within communities of color. Their focus was on the academy and women's studies. At the time, Zinn et al.'s goals were to reopen dialogue that focused on knowledge creation and included theories that addressed the experiences of people of color. The popularly held belief by women academics of color was that feminist theory was incomplete and incorrect. In other words, feminist scholarship was accused of overlooking the diversity of women's experiences and failing to reveal the magnitude and complexity of systems of oppression (Zinn et al.). It is this belief that undergirds James's assertion. Theory, as well

as public policy, rarely considers the outcomes when scholarship and research omit people of color, a large sector of the United States' population.

Furthermore, women academics of color are not the only people who have little faith in feminist scholarship. Students outside of the field hold negative views of feminism. For example, there is still tremendous reluctance on the part of women of color students to enroll in women's studies courses. These students are uncomfortable and even hostile to feminism (Guy-Sheftall and Hammonds 64). In fact, Guy-Sheftall contends that is why women's studies programs are not in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) (63). There is an ongoing debate on the relevancy of women's and gender studies in HBCU. The argument is whether or not Black women need to study, research, or critically interrogate their position as women separate from the concerns of the collective racial identity of African Americans (Guy-Sheftall and Hammonds 63). The marginalization of Black women's studies programs is problematic for numerous reasons. However, this negative view of the field is directly connected to the indifference paid to race and class in feminist scholarship.

Yet, when women of color have agency over their own knowledge production, they center their perspective. This takes into consideration their own lived experience and offers a deep critique of the subordination that burdens them. Although intersectionality emphasizes the multiple oppressions that women of color face, it does so by including the history of resistance and resilience. Through the process of conducting this research, I can now offer an answer to James's assertion: intersectionality studies. Intersectionality

studies are the realized quest to build “a more diverse women’s studies and an integrative feminist theory” (Zinn et al. 37). It is the offspring of women’s studies and women of color scholarship. Women of color feminists wanted a theory that paid adequate attention to race and class. So too, women’s studies provided space to intersectional scholarship that now considers race, class, sexuality, nation, religion, and ability, as well as other social identities. Intersectionality, as a social work practice, actively invests in the daily lives of women of color and their life experiences. It helps to identify the points of hardship and can buttress anti-oppression policies with micro and macro logics.

***Accessing Intersectionality: Content to Competence***

Currently, the field of social work understands historic sites of oppression through cultural competence practice models (Schriner 50). Cultural competency offers social workers a “heightened consciousness of how clients experience their uniqueness and deal with their differences and similarities within a larger social context” (NASW, *Cultural Competence* 9). Being culturally competent requires social workers to be knowledgeable about people, places, language, music, food, and clothing familiar to and preferred by the target audience. Social workers should also be familiar with socio-demographic and racial and ethnic population differences and influences of ethnic, cultural, historical factors on human behaviors (Schriner 17). Cultural competence, in this way, becomes a type of multiculturalism that aids social workers in being vigilant about noting the dynamics of culture that result in differences. In practice this is “ensuring that program décor and design is reflective of cultural heritage of clients and families using the service,

work to increase the client group's skills and sense of self efficacy as social change agents" (NASW, *Cultural Competence* 28). Cultural competence benefits social work practice. By contrast, while cultural competence bases its model on counseling the individual and creates interventions culturally appropriate for the participant, intersectionality interrogates systems of power and oppression that tend to have the most detrimental impact on working class women of color.

It is difficult to place the intersections of race, class, and gender into a specific cultural context for the purpose of cultural competence. Although there are numerous concepts of cultural competence, many deal directly with ethnicity and race separate from sexuality and gender. Furthermore, as the literature points out, there is no identified way of dealing with the root of power structures to deal with oppression and social injustice in cultural competence practice models. Although cultural competence encourages a heightened level of knowledge and awareness, critics argue cultural competence rarely addresses the multiple sites of institutional oppression. For that reason, cultural competence has been called an ineffective model, which tends to equalize oppressions under a "multicultural umbrella," unintentionally promoting a colorblind mentality that eclipses the significance of institutional racism (Abrams and Moio 245). This is where intersectionality splits from cultural competence and where intersectionality is useful in bringing new critical tools of analysis to the field of social work. In my experience as a social worker, I saw firsthand how cultural competence was limited in its social justice anti-oppression aims.

As a trainer for a private for-profit foster care and adoption agency, I experienced how parents embraced cultural competence curriculum. As a Licensing Specialist, I was responsible for maintaining state licensing requirements. Among these requirements was training foster parents. Foster parents were to have at least forty hours of training a year to meet state and agency requirements. Although training was an important aspect of caring for foster children, the training endeavor could be quite challenging for both the parents and I. It was common for foster parents to fall behind in their training hours, putting their license at risk, and thus their ability to foster, in jeopardy. When I moved into my role as trainer, most of our foster parents were countless hours behind in their training hours. My predecessor had challenges keeping our foster parents engaged and current in their training.

I began developing training topics and curriculum that I believed were useful and relevant to the children in foster care and to their parents. I also wanted the foster parents to have access to information that was applicable when parenting their foster children as well as their biological children. I found that, oftentimes, some of the challenges of parenting adolescents were not unique to foster youth. However, foster children's status as wards of the court exacerbated the challenges. Being a foster parent is a rewarding, yet arduous job. Therefore, it was important that parents be armed with the necessary tools to navigate the foster care system and the other systems where foster children were vulnerable, such as school systems, juvenile detention, and mental healthcare systems. I

surveyed the parents, inquiring about what training topics were of interest to them. Although I did not learn what specific topics were of interest, I was informed that our parents did not find the current training useful. The result was an agency full of parents who had fallen behind in their required training hours, placing our foster homes in jeopardy.

In this current role, an abundant amount of resources for training culturally competent foster parents were available to me. My predecessor's training classes covered topics such as, how to comb "ethnic" hair; celebrating Kwanzaa; and movie screenings of the "Joy Luck Club," a movie about Chinese American women and their cultural obligations to their Chinese mothers and other films similar to ethnic heritage and culture. Our foster parents were primarily African American and Euro-American. However, most parents were working-class African American women. It was not common to see Euro-American children placed in a home with African American parents. However, it was common to see African American children placed in a home with Euro-American parents. I believe this may be why my predecessor prioritized cultural competence curriculum.

Although these topics were interesting and entertaining in many regards, after surveying our foster parents I found that parents had no interest in topics covering cultural competence. It seemed that our parents fell behind in their training because they did not see the relevance in learning how to be culturally competent and had few alternatives. I would argue that these culturally competent topics are relevant to being

good foster parents. Topics such as these should be available in training classes. I value cultural competence for what it brings to the nurturing process of children in care. Moreover, I believe cultural competence should be the intent of all people living in a global society where culture is always present, ever-changing, and influencing our daily lives. Culturally competent parents can make the experience of fostering more enjoyable for parents and children. Nonetheless, I do understand that these topics did not address the dire needs and answer their most critical questions regarding fostering at-risk children.

Fostering children is a difficult job. As a trainer, I found that fostering while being critically conscious of the power social systems wield and their influence on the lives of foster families is imperative. Fostering children requires a level of consciousness to the ways systems of power determine the outcomes of children in the foster care system. Oftentimes, biological families, foster children, and foster parents find themselves fighting against social injustices that impede not only the children's quality of life, but their ability to provide necessary care. Families were trying to survive under extreme conditions, and cultural competence, as it is commonly practiced, was not a priority for them at the time. The extreme conditions were partly due to the trauma associated with removing a child from their biological family, whatever the reason, extreme abuse or neglect. When children are removed, they face further hardship navigating powerful social systems that can evoke feelings of despair. In my experience working with foster parents, I saw that they were trying to keep their kids functioning during extreme

adversity. For example, foster parents were trying to keep their kids in school and out of juvenile detention centers. They were trying to better understand why their kids were so heavily medicated, and yet received little psychological or psychiatric therapy. Parents did not understand these systems of power that played such a great regulatory role in their lives.

Many parents, especially parents of color, saw close parallels between how their foster children were being marginalized in school and how their own biological children were experiencing similar challenges. Parents of color expressed their distrust of the school system. Many expressed their concerns with the public school system that they believed was the pipeline to prison. In contrast to learning how to comb “ethnic” hair, I designed my training classes to mitigate the challenges experienced navigating social service systems by providing tools to bring awareness of their rights and advocacy while helping to build bridges between these social institutions and foster families. I invited a public school principal from the community (some of our foster children were enrolled in his school) to inform our foster parents of their rights as caretakers and parents. Many foster parents were unaware of the expectations placed on them as active participants in their children’s education. This particular training curriculum aimed to inform parents of ways to navigate the public school system, such as how to deal with school suspensions or how to escalate an area of concern to school administrators, their rights as parents, and how to advocate on behalf of their child’s education needs. In a different training class, I invited a child psychologist to discuss psychotropic drugs that were commonly prescribed

to many foster children. Parents did not understand the purpose of these medications, and they were uncomfortable with many of the side effects. There were barriers between the parents and the medical professionals overseeing their foster child's care. Oftentimes, foster children came to the homes already having been prescribed these medications. Therefore, foster parents were uninformed of when to administer the medication to the children.

Parents were concerned about the side effects of these drugs and wanted to be informed of alternatives to the medication. Parents relied on these treatments for their children's daily functioning but did not always trust that it was the best course of action for the child. There were no established relationships between the child's foster family and the mental health practitioner. The foster parents I worked with felt disempowered, and their concerns remained unaddressed. The training class gave them an opportunity to have their questions answered by a mental health professional. The psychologist armed them with general information about the medication and the language to use when engaging in a discussion with their social worker as to how they can better meet the mental health needs of their foster children.

Through this experience, I learned that being culturally competent is relevant in concert with being competent on how to navigate the culture of American social institutions of power. In other words, being competent is exhibiting knowledge on how these systems work together to impact the daily lives of vulnerable people. American culture is steeped in unequal distributions of power. To be competent, we should know

the many ways power operates to influence the lives of people living in America. The reality of many is the life-threatening conditions that are faced daily, thus it is imperative that social workers provide services that deal effectively with those circumstances. Parents shared how much they appreciated the training classes offered. They believed it prepared them to deal with what they believed were large intimidating systems. Foster parents developed skills that increased their confidence and ability to advocate on behalf of their foster children, and they found these skills transferable to other parts of their lives.

While cultural competence focuses on how to better understand the person in a cultural context, intersectionality interrogates the culture of social hierarchies and institutions of power that impact American culture. The culture of social hierarchy is based on popular assumptions and wide spread acceptance of these hierarchies. For instance, the status quo accepts that wealthy people deserve to be on the top of the social hierarchy. An example is the widespread belief that Donald J. Trump's wealth made him a quality candidate for the president of the United States. Despite his lack of experience as an elected official where he would have had an opportunity to showcase his diplomacy or ability to bring people together, Trump won the 2016 Presidential election. In addition, the value of whiteness and patriarchy in our culture also places him at the top of our social hierarchy. Intersectionality interrogates what cultural assumptions make social hierarchy possible.

Intersectionality takes a more critical approach to being culturally competent that includes having knowledge and skills to understand and challenge the culture of social hierarchies and American social systems of power that disenfranchise people based on their social rankings. As a trainer, I found that more critically important to the well-being of children in care was their foster parents' ability to advocate on behalf of their most immediate daily needs, such as their safety, education, and mental health. By sharing this experience, my intent is not to dismiss the importance of learning to comb "ethnic" hair or knowing how to embrace and celebrate religious pluralism. I do, however, posit that knowing how foster families survive the intersections of the foster care system, education system, juvenile justice system, and the healthcare system places into perspective how these institutions of power impact their quality of life. I contend that intersectionality can enhance the practice of cultural competence by enhancing the critical consciousness of how American systems of power impact the quality of life in America. This critical understanding of oppression offers new tools for interventions that augment cultural competence models.

### ***An Intersectional Engagement Practice Model***

Women of color will not be liberated because political intersectionality has been theorized; women of color will be liberated when intersectionality is practiced as a mandatory process. Current popular social work practice models place a great emphasis on action-oriented tasks to be completed by the participant. For example, problem-centered models focus on understanding the problem, brainstorming possible solutions,

and having the participant attempt a successful solution that is later evaluated by the social worker to assess its usefulness in solving the particular problem. Task-centered models focus on breaking the problem down so that the participant can address the problem by accomplishing small tasks. The social worker motivates the participants by creating deadlines that will move them toward solving the problem. And finally, solution-focused models start by identifying the best solution. The social worker then assists the participant in establishing steps that will lead to the solution. A radical shift from popular social work practice models is the Intersectional Engagement Model. The Intersectional Engagement model places responsibility on the social worker to take action-oriented steps to better understand the overlapping experiences of oppression when working with women of color. The Intersectional Engagement Model offers an innovative approach to social work practice. By building on Black feminist scholarship, it was designed to move beyond the abstract and provide concrete substantive action steps for social change.

The Intersectional Engagement Model is a wholistic practice model, rooted in Black feminist theory, and values experience as a criterion of meaning. This model guides social work professionals in using an intersectional lens to analyze the experiences of women of color participants to better understand their needs. To begin, for social workers to apply intersectionality successfully attention must be paid to the social worker-participant relationship, especially among people of color who have a contentious history with social service systems. Moreover, for the Intersectional Engagement Model to reach its full potential, there must be an ethic of accountability, a characteristic of

Black feminist epistemology. The ethic of personal accountability holds the belief that everyone is responsible for his or her knowledge claims. These personal claims represent an individual's character, values, and ethics. Collins argues that one's core beliefs are directly associated with one's views and actions and, therefore, are central to one's knowledge and understanding (*Black Feminist* 265). Therefore, Black feminist epistemology suggests social workers cannot successfully separate their professional decisions from their personal beliefs. In other words, one informs the other. I build on Black feminist epistemology by expanding the ethic of accountability to include an ethic of accountability that considers one's social location as a social worker.

For the Intersectional Engagement Model, I expand Collins's definition of an ethic of accountability to include one's responsibility over his or her own professional social location because, to enact an ethic of accountability, social workers must be accountable for state-sponsored oppression. Through their acknowledgment of the past and ongoing egregious offenses made against people and communities of color by state agents and agencies, social workers can better understand the intersecting oppression experienced by women of color and its outcomes. On the one hand, it must be stated that not every social worker is personally responsible for the highly disproportionate number of children of color in the child welfare system, or the highly disproportionate amount of people of color in the prison industrial complex, or the highly disproportionate amount of people of color who experience poverty and homelessness who live with poor health

outcomes, or who live in food control genocide zones<sup>15</sup> where they do not have access to healthy foods. These and other social injustices are not the fault of the social workers that work tirelessly to unify families or work with scared teenage parents, who try desperately to find hope for a newly diagnosed HIV positive girl, for example. By calling for an ethics of accountability, I do not mean to imply that social workers, or the social work profession in general, should feel guilty in any way about state-sponsored oppression.

Yet I do contend that, for the purpose of wholistic engagement, social workers should acknowledge that they represent a system with a history of marginalizing and disenfranchising communities of color. In *Social Welfare Policy: Regulation and Resistance Among People of Color* (Schiele), social science scholars, many of whom are social work scholars, critique the ways in which social welfare policies regulate communities of color creating state-sponsored oppression. Schiele and colleagues provide an intellectual discussion that legitimizes and documents this complex history between people of color and social service systems who regulate these social policies enforcing various forms of state control that have caused dire circumstances for people of color. Indeed, people of color's trust for social service systems is informed by that history. Moreover, communities of color, well aware of this history, operate from a place of resistance. Embracing an ethic of accountability for the policies and systems social

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<sup>15</sup> Food control genocide zones may be more commonly understood as food deserts. Many communities of color such as South Dallas, TX, West Oakland, CA, Central Los Angeles, CA are located in urban environments that are rich in resources, yet have a shortage of grocery stores and community gardens where they can purchase affordable, nutritious whole food. By the same token, rural neighborhoods in the United States who are geographical located in farming communities also experience food insecurity.

workers represent will start a dialogue and work to build bridges, restore trust, and mend relationships in communities that have experienced hardships at the hands of state-controlled agencies and programs.

The Intersectional Engagement Model acknowledges the resistance of women of color to demonstrate their successful attempts at group self-help. Black women's engagement in servicing marginalized communities dates back to before the inception of the social work profession, yet rarely does the social work canon recognize this. For example, as a result of exclusion from white organizations, Black women created a movement whereby the Black community provided informal care for Black children to protect them from harm's way. Roberts has done extensive research on the relationship between Black mothers and social service systems, including the foster care system, and found that "Black women were motivated to rescue Black children from punitive institutions." ("Club Women and Child Welfare" 964) This other-mothering—women providing shelter, food, clothing and care to non-biological children in the community—was a common practice of informal fostering, which required no state intervention because children of color were excluded from state-run facilities, such as children's homes (McRoy 38). This is more commonly called kinship care, and oftentimes it includes fictive kin. African American families have formed informal family networks since their enslavement, when children were routinely separated from their parents. These efforts are innumerable and have been a source of resistance and survival in the African American community and are an example of Black feminist epistemologies.

The intellectual, practical, and political sites of activism have been spurred by Black feminists who theorize ways to survive in a society that has systematically kept them from advancement. People of color apply strengths-based behaviors to establish alternative organizations that provide services to mitigate the treatment of the dominant society (Schiele, "Conclusion" 349). It is important to note that the resistance strategies employed by people of color communities were not only out of defiance. Rather, the resistance was for their survival. Therefore, it is important for a social worker to have an "analytical framework for understanding the political, [socio-historic,] and economic dynamics within people of color communities" (Rasheed and Rasheed 152). I believe that intersectional interventions must be based on the capacities, skills, and assets of the community; social workers strategizing interventions should acknowledge these sites of resistance to identify strengths within the families and communities. Social workers can benefit from communities' knowledge production and should tap into this resource. This is a shift from the dominant bureaucratic rule that normally informs the role of the social worker to empower the participant with skills and resources. This point of departure from existing practice models whose core principal is to empower the participant is a radical paradigm shift that moves away from empowering participants. However, by acknowledging and placing value on women of colors' self-help and mutual aid, social workers recognize that communities have historically already been self-empowered. I posit that this acknowledgement may help to generate trust and build coalitions to accomplish shared goals.

While creating the Intersectional Engagement Model, I thought carefully about my ability to empower others through the use of this model. As I considered the importance of empowerment in social work practice, I decided that the term as commonly used in the field should be interrogated for its appropriateness in the Intersectional Engagement Model. Although the findings of this study do not address what “empowerment” means to the social work-participant relationship, I would like to briefly give more space to discuss the term “to empower” and how it relates to wholistic practice. The social work profession claims that one of their many goals is to “empower” (see NASW Code of Ethics). I wonder whether this is genuinely possible. As a social worker, can I really “make” someone strong or liberate someone from oppression? That is, after all, the definition of empower is to return power and liberate. As this project attempts to improve social work practice, I become more critical of using the term “empowerment.” How does a social worker give someone authority or power? Empowerment has to be given to someone, ideally from the one who has power. This implication does not strengthen the social work-participant relationship. In fact, this creates a larger rift between social work-participant relationships. Communities of color, in large degree, already see social service systems as powerful and oppressive. In wielding the term “empower,” social work inadvertently validates the standard belief that social workers use power as state agents to do the bidding for state systems. Consequently, this is most often perceived as social workers using power to further oppress already marginalized and vulnerable populations of people.

The *Social Work Dictionary* includes this definition of empowerment as “the process of helping individuals, families, groups, and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socio-economic, and political strength and develop influence toward improving their circumstances” (Barker 142). Does this definition consider the systemic disenfranchisement of people of color? People of color often live in communities that experience social, economic, and political isolation. This definition may be understood as individualistic, implying that people who are encouraged by social workers can stop the school-to-prison pipeline, for example. Is this a just expectation for communities to use their resources fighting against a prison industrial complex that should be illegal and unconstitutional? How does one become empowered enough as an individual or community to fight against misogyny or racism?

This common definition suggests that the people who enslaved Africans in America “empowered” them after the Emancipation Proclamation, for example. Is it possible that a caseworker that approves food stamps for an economically distressed participant has empowered them to feed their family? Historically, African Americans have not been liberated by social work practice. Racially marginalized groups in this country have been liberated in part by their own social movements and risked their own blood being shed while doing so.

I use the term “empower” with reservation. There is great discomfort in embracing this belief that social work practice is a means of “empowerment” for oppressed groups. I fear that by adopting the term I run the risk of being condescending.

People who are surviving on the margins everyday are not liberated from systematic oppression by scheduling an appointment with a social worker who may help them live on a food stamp budget of \$169 a month for two people.

My belief is that communities of color in America have survived every day, both individually and collectively, within increasingly harsh environments. They do so by self-help and mutual aid (Schiele, “Introduction” 14). However, the force of disenfranchisement, which prevents the collective from thriving, maintains poverty and lends to so many other social ills and risk factors leaving them vulnerable. Logically, it seems to me that social workers, individually and collectively as a profession, should work to create a social, cultural, and political space that gives disenfranchised people a real chance to construct a world they would consider just. Therefore, I decided to create the Intersectional Engagement Model as a step toward the self-empowerment of the profession.

The Intersectional Engagement Model requires the acknowledgment and exploration of community resources and strengths. Embracing grass root knowledge enables and encourages social workers to accept the unique dynamics and characteristics of communities of color and shows a level of understanding as it relates to their assets and abilities. I designed this model to show how approaching social work from an intersectional perspective has the potential to impact the quality of relationships between social worker and participant, as well as produce wholistic participant-centered outcomes from a Black feminist perspective. I also designed the model to raise consciousness about

the problem that has been acknowledged by many social work scholars, that social service systems have been oppressive to communities of color. Schiele and Gadsen complain that “all American institutions have played a role in the subjugation of African Americans” (93) and other people of color. Therefore, the field needs an approach to interventions that understands the historical trajectory of the communities served. In addition, a priority must be placed on an ethics of accountability for the purpose of mending and nurturing relationships with communities who have suffered systemic harms. Below is an outline of what frames the Intersectional Engagement Model (see Table 11).

Table 11: Intersectional Engagement Model at a Glance

Emphasis of Model	Identifies unique occurrences of oppression where multiple overlapping systems of discrimination impact people due to their identities ranking among social hierarchies.
Theoretical Framework	Intersectionality
Assumptions	Systems include structural, political, and representational all should be examined for the purpose of strategizing multilevel interventions that will address both the micro and macro needs simultaneously. It also will build coalitions and use networks to collaborate for advocacy and prevention.
Model Elements	Analysis of intersecting identities i.e. race, class, and gender. Awareness of social hierarchies that are responsible for the oppression of marginalized groups.
Practice Processes	<p><b>Micro-</b> Analysis of participants’ circumstances identify unique overlapping oppressions and points of vulnerabilities. Create interventions that address multiple sites of oppression.</p> <p><b>Macro-</b> Identify systemic structure of social hierarchy i.e. white supremacy and patriarchy and how they are operating in the participant’s life. Build coalitions and/or use networks to advocate against structural causes discrimination.</p>

### *Demonstrating the Intersectional Engagement Model*

I offer a demonstration of how social workers can approach engagement in a wholistic intersectional way by using case studies<sup>16</sup> from HBSE textbooks. This approach offers an intersectional interrogation that demands more from the material in the textbook than is provided. For example, many of the textbook's case studies are of seemingly race-less and/or class-less individuals. In fact, the only identity consistently offered by the textbook author was gender. Yet in reality, participants do not come without experiences attached to all of their multiple identities. Participants' multiple intersecting identities are important to who they are and how they navigate their social environment. Thus, it is important for social workers to consider the complexity of participants' intersecting identities when strategizing interventions.

The Intersectional Engagement Model is not intended to replace other practice models. This model can be used in concert with other models as an enhancement to practice. The findings of this research study revealed a couple of things for future implications. First, the scholarly literature presents no known practice models that require social workers to apply intersectionality theory when analyzing participants' case assessments, strategizing interventions, and when building coalitions. Second, different from other practice models, this model focuses on action-oriented steps and considerations for the social worker to consider rather than the client. Following are two

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<sup>16</sup> The textbook had no case studies that centered on African American women. Although it would be ideal to apply my Intersectional Engagement Framework on a case study that centers the experiences of African American women, I did not want to alter the case studies.

case studies where intersectional engagement is demonstrated. The Intersectional Engagement Model along with an explanation of why each component of the model is necessary follows.

Table 12: Intersectional Engagement Model

Intersectional Analysis of Participants	Intersectional Intervention for Participants	Intersectional Advocacy on Behalf of Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify Multiple Identities</li> <li>• Identify Social Hierarchies that Rank Identity</li> <li>• Identify Where They Intersect with Different Sites of Privilege and Oppression</li> <li>• Advance Critical Consciousness of Systemic Oppression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address Multiple Sites of Oppression that May Exacerbate Challenges               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Seek societal implications that may deter client success i.e. distrust of social systems due to history of systemic oppression</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Marshal Resources that Will Address Intersecting Concerns- (these concerns become more apparent when you have a wholistic vantage point)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build Coalitions w/ Local Community Programs, Organizations, and Businesses</li> <li>• Bridge Agencies and Organizations Together to Provide Seamless Intersecting Services</li> </ul>

***Intersectional Engagement Model***

**Intersectional Analysis**

**Identify Multiple Identities.** Self-assigned or socially assigned, everyone has multiple identities. These identities are typically taken during the intake assessment. Each

participant is assigned multiple identity categories. For the purpose of intersectional engagement, you want to take note of identities such as race, class, gender, nationality, citizenship, (dis)ability, age, religion, and sexuality. This list is not exhaustive. Other social identities may become apparent while working closely with the participants. In addition, it is possible that you may not know some of the participants' identities if they do not disclose them. For example, you may not know participants' religion or sexuality identities not usually disclosed during the intake assessment.

**Identify the Social Hierarchies That Rank Identity.** It is important to understand the ways identities are ranked. To do this, you must consider the macro, or larger, social system. In America, some identities afford more privilege than other identities. For instance, (1) because of nativism, if you are an American citizen, born in America, you receive higher status than a person who is not; (2) because of patriarchy, males receive more privilege than females; (3) due to white supremacy, people of European decent receive more privilege than people of color; (4) due to capitalism, individualism and wealth are more valued than communal support; and (5) due to heteropatriarchy, heterosexuality is more valued in our society than same-gender loving.

**Locate the Intersecting Sites of Privilege and Oppression.** Multiple identities intersect. No person can exist in isolation of their other identities. For instance, a woman does not exist only as a woman. This woman has a racial identity and a socio-economic classification among other identities. In trying to understand participants' social locations, you should identify where these multiple identities meet sites of privilege

and/or oppression. Consider how a wealthy white woman's identity is ranked by society. Her wealth is going to give her privilege, her whiteness will also give her privilege, and yet her gender will likely cause her to experience sexism. Based on the social hierarchies that rank identity, you want to identify where the participant's identities meet privilege, oppression, or both.

**Advance a Critical Consciousness of Systemic Oppression.** This requires critical thinking about how the social hierarchies previously identified rule our society and create a matrix of dominant powers that create social policies that inadvertently impact communities of color and women. Social hierarchies create institutionalized oppression and aren't always apparent. For example, there is a connection between the value placed on Black families by society and the removal of Black children from their homes. Also, these oppressions impact the emotional, physical, financial, and mental wellbeing of participants. It is important for social workers to see the full trajectory of participants' lives, including an understanding of the socio-historic implications that create barriers when accessing resources.

### **Intersectional Intervention**

**Address Multiple Sites of Oppression.** Overlapping oppressions will likely exacerbate the participants' challenges. The participant may present one concern, diabetes, for example. However, systemic oppression may have affected other socio-historic factors that create more challenges that intersect with their health. In addition, consider what may stand as barriers between the participant and care. These barriers will

impact participants differently. However, you may see common trends in communities. A barrier to care is distrust that communities of color have of the child welfare system. In my experience as a member of the African American community and as a social worker working with foster children and their families, child protective services have a reputation of unjustly removing children from their homes. This distrust prevents families from accessing care due to fear of having their children removed. Along the same lines, other challenges should be considered along with diabetes: (1) are there environmental factors?; (2) is there food insecurity?; does she live in a food control genocide zone where there is limited access to healthy food?; (4) is she experiencing financial insecurity?; (5) is her income enough to provide healthy food options? A critical consciousness informs you that the participant's issue may be multi-layered. It is the responsibility of the social worker to identify these intersections and possible barriers. This is part of a wholistic practice model that looks beyond the obvious.

**Marshal Resources that Address Intersecting Concerns.** Social workers should consider the multiple factors and address them simultaneously.

### **Intersectional Advocacy**

**Build Coalitions.** There is a wealth of strengths in communities of colors. Due to the socio-historic factors that create distrust between communities of color and social service systems, community members have built informal networks. Social workers should be familiar with these networks and other community organizations, local community leaders, community programs, and small businesses. Building coalitions also

helps to earn trust and repair the ruptured relationships. Social workers represent a larger social institution. Thus, they need to be familiar with all of the local resources available that will address participants' intersecting needs. This aspect of advocacy is important and often overlooked. Due to people of colors' continued experiences of marginalization, there is a common belief that access to resources is routinely kept from them.

**Bridge.** Bridge the gaps between social movements that exclude the disenfranchisement of women of color in their activism. These gaps can be due to ongoing intersectional failures. The consequences of intersectional failures can be invisible to the naked eye (Crenshaw, "Intersectionality Matters"). An example of this is the government initiative My Brother's Keeper, sponsored by the Obama White House Administration. President Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. Through this initiative, the Administration is joining with cities and towns, businesses, and foundations that are taking important steps to connect young people with mentoring, support networks, and the skills they need to find a good job or go to college and work their way into the middle class ("My Brother's Keeper"). This initiative has garnered much acclaim. It is seen as a way to repair poor communities of color. This model recruits older males to mentor younger men and boys in the community, guiding them toward specific goals to achieve success. Examples of the goals are educational attainment and career readiness. In spite of the dire need for positive community programs that engage men and boys of color, Crenshaw argues that

My Brother's Keeper creates intersectional vulnerabilities. Crenshaw has several concerns about a social justice program that fails to address racism and re-inscribes patriarchy. She pushes us to ask the question: what are these boys and men of color in need of repair from?

If social workers considered the multiple reasons that boys and men of color experience high drop-out rates, high incarceration rates, high unemployment rates, and are more likely to be victimized in their community than their Euro-American counterparts, it would be difficult to do so without acknowledging the role of racism. It is because of racism that these young boys and men of color are marginalized, creating their impoverished state and placing them at high risk. However, Crenshaw contends that My Brother's Keeper does nothing to challenge systematic racism ("Intersectionality Matters"). Instead, because of patriarchy, the initiative completely overlooks girls and young women of color, virtually making the marginalization of girls and young women of color invisible. This initiative enhances patriarchy. The principal assumption is that the problems that boys and young men of color experience are due to the inability of men of color who are not appropriately socialized to be the type of men that are capable of providing care to their families and communities ("Intersectionality Matters"). This is an intersectional failure and will lead social workers to create ineffective interventions. In essence, this program thinks about racial inequality solely in terms of patriarchal absence. In other words, the individual fault lies with the absence of Black men in the community; thus by recruiting volunteer male mentors, the high-risk factors will be remedied. A

critical intersectional approach is needed for social workers to acknowledge what causes poverty and other risk factors. Causes include the experiences of women of color, such as pay disparity experienced by them, including the reality that many women of color are forced into low-wage jobs, such as domestic labor. Intersectional advocacy requires bridging together multiple resources to create interventions that will avoid political exclusion that does not challenge the structural and systematic sites of oppression. In addition, interventions are ineffective when they allow intersectional vulnerabilities of girls and young women of color.

### ***Case Study I***

*Thomas is a 30-year old African American man who lives with his parents, both of whom are obese, as are his two older sisters. Thomas loves his mom's cooking, but some time ago he realized that its high-fat and high-sodium content was contributing to his parents' obesity and high blood pressure. In contrast, Thomas takes pride in watching his diet (when he isn't eating at home) and is pretty smug about being the only one in the family that is not obese. Being called "the thin man" is, to Thomas, a compliment. He also boasts about being in great physical shape and exercises to the point of being dizzy. After one of his dizziness episodes, a friend told him that he should get his blood pressure checked. Out of curiosity, the next time Thomas stopped at his local drug store, he decided to use a self-monitoring machine to check his blood pressure. To his astonishment, the reading came back 200/105, which is quite high. Thomas now seeks a social worker to help to adopt some major lifestyle changes. (Hutchison 82)*

**Intersectional Analysis.** Thomas's intersecting identities include being African American, male, likely working class. Thomas is a young single adult. Thomas has intersecting sites of privilege and oppression. Thomas may experience privilege due to being male in a society that is dominated by patriarchy. In addition, he may experience privilege due to his age in a society that values youthfulness. Thomas may experience oppression due to his African American identity in a society dominated by white supremacy. In addition, he may experience oppression due to his working-class status in a society dominated by individualism and capitalism. Thomas's identities will collide at times, creating experiences of oppression and privilege.

**Intersectional Intervention.** There are several factors that should be considered. (1) Due to his multiple sites of oppression, Thomas may experience barriers to opportunity and resources. (2) Notions of masculinity should be considered as a barrier to service. (3) The historical experiences of African Americans in the healthcare system should be considered. Thomas is experiencing a health disparity, high blood pressure, that is likely familial and communal. This means that others in Thomas's family and community may be experiencing similar health disparities. Understanding the social implications to these disparities is critical when practicing intersectionality. Due to the social implications of these disparities, Thomas will need social and medical interventions as soon as possible.

Approaching Thomas with sensitivity is imperative. Due to the oppression of Black men in America (i.e. lynching and Jim Crow segregation), Black men's

masculinity has been under attack. This may produce vulnerabilities that Thomas may not be prepared to recognize. Thomas's vulnerability may create unforeseen challenges in accessing services, such as Thomas being reluctant to seek medical care, as he may believe it to be a sign of weakness. Working with Thomas's family will also be part of his intervention. Socio-historic factors should be considered when working with groups who have been victimized by public healthcare systems. Another factor to consider is the source of his high blood pressure. Understanding how psychosocial stressors are factors in health disparities among African Americans is also important. Another factor is Thomas's economic status that may limit his access to healthy food options in his community. Food insecurity may be a reality in his neighborhood. Thomas may live in a food desert.

Finally, Thomas is exhibiting some obsessive behaviors concerning his body image. Any behavior change interventions must consider social context. This will also require mental health services. Again, social workers may need to consider the gaps between communities of color and mental health systems.

**Intersectional Advocacy.** Due to Thomas's multiple concerns, social workers should be prepared to access multiple programs that address them simultaneously. Relationships social workers have built with community organizations will aid in advocacy. Some possible services to consider for Thomas's case are: (1) Community health center that has a positive history of serving the community; (2) urban garden or health food co-ops serving the community i.e., fresh food produce truck; (3) nutritionist

to serve Thomas's family; (4) social workers should bridge together allies within social justice networks that address poverty, healthcare equity, food insecurity, and mental health awareness.

I conclude with Thomas's case by reminding the social worker to always recognize the strengths offered by Thomas, his family, and his community. At times, strengths are easy to identify; however, take the liberty to discuss with Thomas what he believes his strengths are.

### ***Case Study 2***

*Leon is 23-year-old man who is feeling torn in two. He is the oldest son in a family with five kids and the mainstay of his mother's life. Regina became a widow eight years ago when her husband, Rodney, was killed in an accident at the mill yard where he worked. Since then, she's leaned heavily on Leon for help with his brothers and sisters as a major contributor to the family's finances. He is also the one she confides in the most, sharing things with him that she once shared with her husband. The whole family also relies heavily on their African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church for both social support and spiritual nurturance. Leon has grown up in the church and loves the fellowship and the joyous feeling that comes over him as he sings and worships on Sundays. But it is also a place that increasingly troubles him, as he has finally admitted to himself that he is gay. He has denied this for years, trying hard to follow church teaching about homosexuality being a sin and something that can be overcome with the help of God. He has prayed and prayed to God to change him, but this has not worked. Leon is now battling despair, as*

*he fears that he will always have to choose between his love for his faith and church and a longing to be who he truly is. The idea of telling his mother about his sexual orientation seems unthinkable, but he's not sure how long he can go on living a lie. He knows he will have to leave the church if it ever becomes known that he is gay. That possibility also seems unthinkable. He has been feeling more and more depressed, to the point where his mother keeps asking him what's wrong. He's even had thoughts of suicide, which frightens him. In his nightly prayers to God he asks, "Why must I lose you to be who I am?" (Hutchison 181)*

**Intersectional Analysis.** Leon's intersecting identities include being African American, male, and likely working class. He is a young adult, single, gay and Christian. Leon has intersecting sites of privilege and oppression. Leon may experience privilege due to being male in a society that values patriarchy. In addition, he may experience privilege due to his age in a society that values youthfulness. Leon may also experience privilege due to his Judeo-Christian faith in a society dominated by Christian religion. On the other hand, Leon may also experience oppression due to his Christian identity as a gay man in a society that values heteronormativity. Thus, it is possible Leon's two identities collide to create a unique experience of privilege and oppression due to his Christian gay identity. Leon may also experience oppression due to his African American identity in a society that values white supremacy. In addition, he may experience oppression due to his working-class status in a society that values individualism and capitalism.

**Intersectional Intervention.** When engaging with Leon, there are several factors to consider, such as the relationship between the Black church and the gay community. To be specific, AME church members have a long tradition of self-empowerment, making them very influential in the community. Patriarchy in the church is a powerful influence that may increase Leon's anxiety about his gay identity. In addition, society's false notions of masculinity may be a barrier to accepting his gay identity as well as obtaining support. Familiarize yourself with the relationship between the Black community and mental health systems. Leon needs a mental health assessment as soon as possible due to his suicidal thoughts. He also needs support in working through his decision to disclose his sexuality while maintaining his Christian faith. Leon is extremely close to his mother and she is in need of support services for her grief and loss as well. Affordable family counseling for Leon and his mother should also be secured. Due to the close relationship Leon has with his mother, interventions with Leon may only be successful if he believes his mom is well taken care of. There may be a way to utilize the strength of the church for Leon's mother to seek services for her grief and loss from the AME church. Social workers should look to secure available resources that will alleviate some of the financial stress Leon's family is experiencing.

**Intersectional Advocacy.** Social workers may find it difficult to find Leon community support services that will nurture all of his identities simultaneously—his gay identity, Christian identity, and African American identity—that is financially feasible for him. Leon's intersecting identities create an unusual experience of oppression that is

creating heightened levels of stress and depression which can likely lead to other undiagnosed problems. Bridging advocacy organizations for the purpose of building a strong base of allies is important for Leon and others who are experiencing unique sites of oppression. Social workers should be involved in social justice movements and encourage Leon to take an active role in his liberation.

I conclude with Leon's case by reminding the social worker to always recognize the strengths offered by Leon, his family, and his community. At times, strengths are easy to identify, however, take the liberty to discuss with Leon what he believes his strengths are. Leon is in a precarious position, having such a strong faith-based foundation, yet feeling conflicted and isolated due to his sexuality. Because of suicidal thoughts, this should be approached swiftly with care, sensitivity, and knowledge of the Black church.

### ***Summary***

Based on the results of this research study, I offer the Intersectional Engagement Model, as an example of what is possible when theory and practice is bridged. The results of the research reported in this dissertation reveal a marginal perspective and application of intersectionality in social work curriculum, making it difficult to bridge theory and practice. Employing Crenshaw's fully articulated theory can mitigate the flattened version of the theory. This will enhance its performance in the curricula. Intersectionality can capture dynamics of power beyond the simplification of identity and experience. The mere acknowledgement that identity creates difference in culture and experience negates the importance of examining privileged social identities and the ensuing behaviors that

perpetuate oppressive practices and conditions among marginalized groups (Nicotera and Kang 188). For the field of social work to be taken seriously, the disparate treatment and outcomes of African American women and children, social work curricula must continue to move toward incorporating critical practice models that not only bring awareness, but combat oppression and discrimination.

Intersectionality studies aligned with women's and gender studies could promote the accessibility of knowledge for multiple audiences, both academic and activist. May contends, "as students, researchers, or activists we must not only learn to employ an intersectional lens in our own applied creative, and analytical work but also notice in the work of others, when intersectional aims and goals seem to slip away or fall short" (*Pursuing* viii). Based on the findings of this research, there is slippage where the application of intersectionality is concerned. Thus, there is need for future research to create ways for intersectionality to flourish in the academy and community. If there are solutions to bridging theory and practice— if there are methods that will enhance the limited practice models that analyze and address overlapping oppressions that women of color experience—then this scholarship promises to contribute to both the fields of social work and women's and gender studies.

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