From Suffragists to Pink Pussyhats: In Search of Intersectional Solidarity

Chaya Crowder, *Princeton University*
Candis Watts Smith, *Pennsylvania State University*

The 100th anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment is an opportunity to reflect on the role of women in American politics. The tools of intersectionality allow scholars to pinpoint the progress and pitfalls produced by ongoing modes of sexism and patriarchy as well as racism and classism. It is now well known that major movements for the rights of American women have not always addressed the issues specific to black women (Simien 2006). Indeed, in 1851, Sojourner Truth discussed this issue of not being included in conversations about women's rights (or civil rights for blacks) in her alleged "Ain't I a Woman" speech. Similarly, the fact that Ida B. Wells and other black women were told to process at the back of the 1913 Women's March on Washington is another illustration of the historical exclusion of black women by their white counterparts (Boissoneault 2017). Decades later and even after the 1965 Voting Rights Act enforced black women's enfranchisement, the Combahee River Collective (1977) noted the exclusion of issues that affect black women by both 1970s white feminist movements and male-dominated anti-racist movements.

Crenshaw (1991) called the dual exclusion of black women's political interests by white feminists and male-led anti-racist movements *political intersectionality*. What are the possibilities for addressing this historical pattern? Although black women have been discussing the specific and mutually constituted challenges brought on by racism, sexism, and classism for well more than a century and a half, the concept, theory, and paradigm of intersectionality is only now increasingly common in scholarly work—and appears to be mainstreaming in everyday political discourse as well (Heaney 2019). In fact, in the wake of the 2016 presidential-election outcome, a multiracial group of women sought to unite Americans under a banner of what Crowder calls *intersectional solidarity*. As an antidote to the ramifications of political intersectionality, intersectional solidarity is political belief and action orientation that arises from being aware, appreciating, and seeking to address the specific barriers presented by the intersections of racism, classism, and sexism.

In their capacity as political representatives (Brown 2014), activists (Lopez Bunyasi and Smith 2018), and voters (Slaughter, Crowder, and Greer 2019), black women have tried to address inequities presented by various modes of exclusion—often serving as the model of intersectional solidarity. However, we are confident in suggesting that social inequity will be transformed (or eradicated) more efficiently if and only if a broader coalition of Americans take on this mantle. Can we find instances of this orientation in Americans' political participatory actions so that it can be cultivated more broadly? We looked at the place where we might expect to find this sentiment in abundance: the 2017 Women's March on Washington. If we cannot find it here, we are perhaps in a good position to determine what challenges still exist.

POLITICAL INTERSECTIONALITY AND INTERSECTIONAL SOLIDARITY

Black women face challenges similar to other women and men of color, but the effects of these challenges often are exacerbated for black women—and there also are challenges specific to black women. For instance, Tucker et al. (2007, 247) asserted, "For the past five decades, black women have consistently experienced an almost four-times greater risk of death from pregnancy complications than have white women." Relatedly, research shows that even when we control for occupation, location, and level of education, black women's wages are significantly lower than similarly situated black or white men's; recent data also show that the wage gap between white and black women is increasing over time (Fisher and Houseworth 2017; Lean In 2019). Moreover, even if black women are married and attain high levels of education, they still fall behind white women in wealth accumulation (Zaw et al. 2017). All told, education is not a great equalizer for black women.

The broad concept of intersectionality helps in understanding how the problems of health, wealth, and income disparities are lived out differently across and within groups. However, political intersectionality highlights the fact that (1) "women of color are situated within at least two subordinate groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas"; and (2) mainstream discourses of race and gender, marked by a singular group consciousness, "are often inadequate even to the discrete tasks of articulating the full dimensions of racism and sexism" (Crenshaw 1991, 1252). The specificity of challenges presented to groups that face overlapping sets of oppression are perhaps best addressed when members of society have a sense of intersectional solidarity—a political predisposition that is characterized by awareness and distress over subordinate groups whose marginalization is defined by the intersection of two or more forms of oppression.

Intersectional solidarity (IS) leans on the concept of "reflective solidarity," which requires "opposition to those who would

doi:10.1017/S1049096520000311

exclude or oppress another" and "mutual recognition of each other's specificity" (Dean 1998). The former is characterized as distress within intersectional solidarity and the latter is characterized by awareness. Building on the organizational theory of intersectionally linked fate (Strolovitch 2008; Tormos 2017), IS is defined as a disposition that can be exhibited by anyone who has awareness of their own positionality in reference to marginal subgroups regardless of race, gender, or sexuality; it requires awareness and anguish over the unique challenges that various marginalized groups face. For example, whereas black women are a disadvantaged subgroup relative to white women or black men, black cisgender women are advantaged relative to black transgender women. Signs of IS would arise if cisgender black women indicated that they are aware of and opposed to the particular oppression that black transgender women face.

It is now well known that major movements for the rights of American women have not always addressed the issues specific to black women (Simien 2006).

Scholars of social movements have noted both the perils and the potential that may arise when multiple factions come together to build coalitions. Indeed, extant research leads us to consider conflicting hypotheses on the extent to which IS may arise—even among participants of the 2017 Women's March.

The specificity of challenges presented to groups that face overlapping sets of oppression are perhaps best addressed when members of society have a sense of intersectional solidarity...

On the one hand, much research would lead us to expect low levels of this predisposition. For example, scholars have noted that white women and male policy makers are much less likely than black women and Latina representatives to work to mitigate the restrictive aspects of welfare reform (Reingold and Smith 2012). Similarly, research has shown that, generally speaking, white Americans are unaccustomed to dealing with matters of racism (DiAngelo 2018). In fact, a sense of white fragility—that is, defensiveness and pushback by white people—became quite apparent in the run-up to several women's marches. Many white women believed that a requirement to be conscious of the specific issues of black, transgender, and immigrant women equated to an alienation of the concerns of white women (Stockman 2017). Moreover, scholars have found that even when organizers of the 2017 Women's March called for explicit attention to intersectionality and prioritizing the most marginalized groups, many individuals were largely motivated to participate because of issues most closely related to their own identity. For example, some white women cared less and some black participants cared more about issues surrounding racial justice (Fisher, Dow, and Ray 2017). Even when groups come together in coalition, it often is the case that privileged members (even of subordinate groups) will deprioritize the concerns of doubly or triply marginalized group members; Cohen (1999) called this process *secondary marginalization*.

On the other hand, some research suggests that these barriers can be overcome. New research suggests that intersectionality is mainstreaming among a wider group of Americans, even if simply as an abstract principle. For instance, Heaney (2019) revealed that individuals who took part in the 2018 Women's March were more attuned and receptive to issues of intersectionality than participants in other types of marches (e.g., gun regulation and anti-abortion); this suggests that the march was able to achieve its framing goal. These findings inspire a more optimistic hypothesis around the development and expression of IS.

DATA AND METHODS

To address normative issues of intersectionality, inclusion, and equity in Americans' political attitudes and behaviors, we examined whether and the extent to which instances of IS arise. We relied on data collected by Lopez Bunyasi and Smith (2018) at the 2017 Women's March: they asked participants about their motivations to attend the march, which political and social issues were important to them, and their ideas about the connection between the Women's March and other movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter).

Lopez Bunyasi and Smith (2018) estimated that black women were underrepresented at the 2017 Women's March, compared to their population in either the DC–Maryland–Virginia metropolitan area or the general US population. However, because black women were the primary target of the initial research, they are overrepresented in our sample. A total of 270 respondents completed the five-minute paper-and-pencil survey. We analyzed the open-ended responses of 103 women who identified as black or noted an ancestry that included black as well as another racial or ethnic group, and 127 responses of white women (four of whom identified with another race or ethnicity but none as black).

In general, survey respondents were well educated and relatively affluent. Almost 70% of the black respondents either earned a college degree or engaged in/completed a postgraduate program; the same was true for 80.3% of white survey respondents. More than half of the white respondents (56%)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096520000311 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1

Why Are You Participating in the Women's March on Washington?

Singular Consciousness	Intersectional Solidarity
* "Because women rights are human rights"	* "For my daughter and niece; for black and brown women; for queer women; for immigrant women"
* "To stand with other women to show our support against Trump"	* "1. protection of women's rights; 2. protection of LGBTQ rights; 3. protection of ACA; 4. protection of minority rights"
* "To voice my opinion on women's rights"	* "I'm participating in the Women's March for not only my rights as a woman but also for other women of color"
* "To further women's issues and causes"	* "Women and especially minority women are disrespected and not treated fairly"

noted that their household income was more than $80,000. Among black respondents, 38% of household incomes were higher than $80,000; another 38% reported their household income as between $40,000 and $80,000. For perspective, the median income for black families nationally was only $40,258 and $68,145 for whites in 2017 (US Census Bureau 2018). Finally, it is worth noting that the median age of black respondents was 37, 10 years younger than the median white respondent. The overwhelming majority were women and people who identified as having supported either (or both) Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election.

We analyzed the text of an open-ended question with the quanteda package in R to assess IS. Specifically, we focused on respondents' answers to the following question: "Why are you participating in the Women's March on Washington?" An orientation toward IS would be noted if respondents mentioned multiple marginalized groups. Whereas another scholar asked his respondents whether they support the idea of intersectionality (Heaney 2019), we evaluated whether the issue was already salient to them (i.e., initiated by the respondents) and whether addressing the issues of various oppressed groups was a key motivator in their choice to participate in the 2017 Women's March.

RESULTS

Given that the development of the 2017 Women's March was a direct response to the 2016 presidential-election outcome, it is unsurprising that responses generally clustered around women's rights and the Trump administration. Of all participants, 27% referenced "Trump," the "president," or the "new administration" as sources of motivation, responding with statements such as "I am participating because with Trump winning the presidency, I want to be sure my voice and concerns do not go unheard. It is important that we all stand together for what is right and just."

A major theme of the protests' organizers was represented by 37% of respondents who mentioned "women's rights"; we referred to this focus on one axis of marginalization as *singular consciousness*. However, there were participants who not only explicitly referenced solidarity with other women but also intersectionality. Certainly, the term *intersectionality* is esoteric, but the idea that some groups experience multiple and compounding oppressions is well understood by many. Use of the words *intersectional* and *solidarity* exemplify the progressive and highly educated nature of many 2017 Women's March participants; however, respondents did not need to use either term to exhibit this disposition. For example, one white respondent stated that she was participating in the march because "I want equality for women, POC, LGBT+, and I want to send a message to Trump." Similarly, another respondent stated that she was marching "as a show of solidarity with others supporting women's rights and to voice my opposition to the misogyny, xenophobia, racism, and misinformation on which Trump campaigned." These statements exhibit IS because they move beyond acknowledging a singular consciousness of gender and also explicitly reference a desire to fight for equality for people of color and members of LGBT+ communities. Table 1 is a comprehensive illustration of the differentiation between responses that capture intersectional solidarity and those that exhibit a singular consciousness.

Considering the newly inaugurated president's stance and his admitted practice of sexual misconduct, it is not surprising that significant attention was given to women's rights. However, from Trump's declaration of his candidacy through the start of the 2017 Women's March, there were numerous examples of the new president's racist, anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, and xenophobic sentiments. Therefore, we might expect these points of marginalization and exclusion to be salient in the minds of many Americans. When we examined each group separately, we found that about 18% of black respondents and 18% of white respondents took up the mantle of IS. In all, slightly less than one in five responses exhibited IS; among those sentiments, 45% were expressed by black women, who comprised about 38% of the respondents in this sample. On the one hand, this sentiment is taken up by members across racial groups; it is not exclusive to black women. On the other hand, these results echo the social-movement literature that reveals the difficulty of convincing cross-cutting groups to come together to work for those who are among the most marginalized.

DISCUSSION

Scholars who center intersectionality in their research tend to do so not only because of curiosity for empirical inquiry; they also are motivated by normative questions for democracy.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096520000311 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Arguably, recent debates about the fitness of US Supreme Court nominees were renewed in part because the lessons of undermining claims of sexual harassment and misconduct were not heeded when Anita Hill, a black woman, testified about her experiences in 1991. Moreover, the #MeToo movement was initiated by a black woman, Tarana Burke, but was promulgated by the media only when it was made clear that well-known white women's lives and livelihoods were at stake. Women have demanded, forced, and pushed the United States toward its creed, but it will be important for scholars to discern when and under what circumstances all women have or will be able to benefit from this labor.

The 2017 Women's March was critiqued initially for excluding women of color from the organizational discussions for the event. The organizers responded to both contemporary and historical exclusions of women of color by white feminists by including well-practiced activists such as Tamika Mallory and Linda Sarsour. Whereas some balked at the shift in orientation, others lauded the move that we would characterize as intersectional solidarity. For instance, one black respondent stated, "I wasn't going to come at first but after reading the policy platform—I thought it was inclusive + intersectional (they were trying)—I decided to come." Although it is beyond the scope of this article, such a sentiment suggests that other organizations and institutions (e.g., the Democratic Party) could benefit not only ethically but also politically by orienting their political rhetoric as well as their policy stances toward IS. Moreover, although black women have been at the forefront of recent social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter), we found that all groups have much work to do to ensure not only that dominant groups do not marginalize subordinate groups but also that processes of secondary marginalization are mitigated.

As we move further away from landmark moments such as the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, it behooves scholars to delve more deeply into the extent to which the orientation of political representatives and policy makers prevents women of color from slipping through the cracks produced by political intersectionality.

As we move further away from landmark moments such as the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, it behooves scholars to delve more deeply into the extent to which the orientation of political representatives and policy makers prevents women of color from slipping through the cracks produced by political intersectionality. Scholars should continue to assess the extent to which and whether political participation among citizens, policy outcomes of political representatives, information provided by the media, and rhetoric of political executives have equitable outcomes not only for heterosexual, cis-gendered, middle-class women but for *all* women. The concept of intersectional solidarity provides a tool for social scientists to do so. ■

REFERENCES

Boissoneault, Lorraine. 2017. "The Original Women's March on Washington and the Suffragists Who Paved the Way." *Smithsonian Magazine*. Available at www.smithsonianmag.com/history/original-womens-march-washington-and-suffragists-who-paved-way-180961869. Accessed July 18, 2019.

Brown, Nadia E. 2014. *Sisters in the Statehouse: Black Women and Legislative Decision Making*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, Cathy J. 1999. *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Combahee River Collective. 1977. "A Black Feminist Statement."

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–99.

Dean, Jodi. 1998. "Feminist Solidarity, Reflective Solidarity: Theorizing Connections after Identity Politics." *Women & Politics* 18 (4): 1–26.

DiAngelo, Robin. 2018. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Fisher, Dana R., Dawn M. Dow, and Rashawn Ray. 2017. "Intersectionality Takes It to the Streets: Mobilizing across Diverse Interests for the Women's March." *Science Advances* 3 (9): 1–8.

Fisher, Jonathan D., and Christina A. Houseworth. 2017. "The Widening Black–White Wage Gap among Women." *Labour* 31 (3): 288–308.

Heaney, Michael T. 2019. "Intersectionality at the Grassroots." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. Available at doi:10.1080/21565503.2019.1629318.

Lean In. 2019. "The Black Women's Pay Gap by the Numbers." Available at https://leanin.org/data-about-the-gender-pay-gap-for-black-women. Accessed July 18, 2019.

Lopez Bunyasi, Tehama, and Candis Watts Smith. 2018. "Get in Formation: Black Women's Participation in the Women's March on Washington as an Act of Pragmatic Utopianism." *The Black Scholar* 48 (3): 4–16.

Reingold, Beth, and Adrienne R. Smith. 2012. "Welfare Policymaking and Intersections of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in U.S. State Legislatures." *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (1): 131–47.

Simien, Evelyn M. 2006. *Black Feminist Voices in Politics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Slaughter, Christine, Chaya Crowder, and Christina Greer. 2019. "Black Women: Keepers of Democracy, the Democratic Process, and the Democratic Party." Presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC.

Stockman, Farah. 2017. "Women's March Opens a Raw Dialogue on Race." *New York Times*, January 10, p. A1.

Strolovitch, Dara Z. 2008. *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in Interest Group Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tormos, Fernando. 2017. "Intersectional Solidarity. " *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5 (4): 707–20.

Tucker, Myra J., Cynthia J. Berg, William M. Callaghan, and Jason Hsia. 2007. "The Black–White Disparity in Pregnancy-Related Mortality from Five Conditions: Differences in Prevalence and Case-Fatality Rates." *American Journal of Public Health* 97 (2): 247–51.

US Census Bureau. 2018. "Current Population Survey: 1968 to 2018 Annual Social and Economic Supplements." Available at www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/visualizations/2018/demo/p60-263/figure1.pdf. Accessed July 21, 2019.

Zaw, Khaing, Jhumpa Bhattacharya, Anne Price, Darrick Hamilton, and William Darity, Jr. 2017. "Women, Race and Wealth." *Research Brief Series*. Available at https://assetfunders.org/resource/women-race-wealth. Accessed July 18, 2019.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096520000311 Published online by Cambridge University Press