Intersectionality and Research in Psychology

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Feminist and critical race theories offer the concept of intersectionality to describe analytic approaches that simultaneously consider the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage. To understand how these categories depend on one another for meaning and are jointly associated with outcomes, reconceptualization of the meaning and significance of the categories is necessary. To accomplish this, the author presents 3 questions for psychologists to ask: Who is included within this category? What role does inequality play? Where are there similarities? The 1st question involves attending to diversity within social categories. The 2nd conceptualizes social categories as connoting hierarchies of privilege and power that structure social and material life. The 3rd looks for commonalities across categories commonly viewed as deeply different. The author concludes with a discussion of the implications and value of these 3 questions for each stage of the research process.

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Psychologists are increasingly concerned with the effects of race/ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexuality on outcomes such as health and well-being, personal and social identities, and political views and participation. However, little work has considered how these categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage are jointly associated with outcomes. Silverstein (2006) found that among the publications dealing with either gender or race indexed in PsycINFO between 2002 and 2004, only a minority investigated both constructs, perhaps because psychologists generally aim to simplify models for parsimony, either by omitting variables or by statistically controlling for membership in categories other than the one of interest (Betancourt & López, 1993). Even less attention has been paid to how social categories depend on one another for meaning, despite the obvious fact that every individual necessarily occupies multiple categories (i.e., gender, race, class, etc.) simultaneously.

Such questions may be understood within the rubric of *intersectionality,* which feminist and critical race theorists developed to describe analytic approaches that consider the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of social group membership. However, psychologists have been slow to incorporate this concept into their work because there are no established guidelines for empirically addressing research questions informed by an intersectional framework (McCall, 2005). Given this gap, some psychologists might imagine that to address intersectional questions, it is necessary to develop complex designs involving prohibitively large samples or to enlist the cooperation of an interdisciplinary team to triangulate the problem. Although this is not the case, an intersectionality framework does ask researchers to examine categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage with a new lens. This article aims to explicate this framework for psychologists by describing the theoretical rationale underlying intersectionality and outlining a series of three questions psychologists can ask to conceptualize the influences of multiple social categories. I conclude by discussing the implications and value of these questions for the research process.

History of the Concept of Intersectionality

The Combahee River Collective (1977/1995), a group of Black feminists, wrote a manifesto that has been cited as one of the earliest expressions of intersectionality (see also Beale, 1970). They argued "We . . . find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (Combahee River Collective, 1977/1995, p. 234). In fact, the concept has deeper roots. In the United States, Black scholar–activists have long theorized this position and attempted to incorporate it into their politics. Late in the 19th century, Anna Julia Cooper exhorted Black male leaders to include sexist discrimination faced by Black women in their race-based agenda (Giddings, 1985). Not long afterward, W. E. B. DuBois challenged the U.S. communist party to incorporate an analysis of race into their class-based organizing (Hancock, 2005). Despite these early framings, King (1988) showed that major U.S. social movements organized on the basis of race, class, and gender failed to consider the intersections of these categories in their political analysis and organizing. Consequently, the interests of those who experienced multiple forms of sub-

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ordination (e.g., Black women, working-class Blacks) were often poorly served (see also Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

The early 1980s saw an upsurge in scholarship about race and gender by women of color (e.g., Anzaldua, 1987; Davis, 1983; Giddings, 1985; hooks, 1984; Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982). Without naming the theory driving their investigations, this work addressed intersections of race, gender, and often class and sexuality. Legal scholar and critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw (1989/1993) is credited with originating the term *intersectionality,* but almost concurrently other scholars were drawing attention to the limitations of analyses isolating race or gender as the primary category of identity, difference, or disadvantage (Hancock, 2007a; e.g., Collins, 1990; Hurtado, 1989; Smith & Stewart, 1983). In a groundbreaking work, Crenshaw critiqued the "single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law . . . feminist theory and anti-racist politics" (p. 383) for its focus on the experiences of the most privileged members of subordinate groups. She argued that legal cases revealed Black women plaintiffs

> sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (Crenshaw, 1989/1993, p. 385)

Note that she described three permutations: similar experiences, additive or multiplicative effects (*double discrimination* or *double jeopardy*), and experiences specific to their status as Black women. Although scholars today often distinguish between the additive or multiple approach

and intersectionality (Hancock, 2007a; Stewart & McDermott, 2004), each of the permutations Crenshaw offered are viable hypotheses about how multiple social statuses might be experienced simultaneously and might be included under the rubric of intersectional analyses.

Each of these early articulations of intersectionality focused on the experiences of groups holding multiple disadvantaged statuses; in doing so, they highlighted the ways that analyses considering categories such as race and gender independently may be limited because, in practice, individuals experience these statuses simultaneously. However, a corollary to this observation is that some members of disadvantaged groups also hold privileged identities (e.g., middle-class Blacks, White women). This reveals that although much of the literature on intersectionality has been theorized from the standpoint of those who experience multiple dimensions of disadvantage, this framework can also inform how privileged groups are understood.

The concept of intersectionality is a signal contribution of feminist studies (McCall, 2005; Risman, 2004); in some academic circles, the phrase *race–class–gender* is invoked so frequently that it has been called a mantra (Fine & Burns, 2003). However, too often this triad is mentioned without meaningfully addressing the concerns for which the phrase serves as shorthand (Knapp, 2005). This may be inevitable until psychologists develop new ways to use the theory of intersectionality to conceptualize how social categories jointly shape experiences and outcomes.

Intersectional Conceptualizations of Social Categories: Three Questions

Toward this end, I propose three questions psychologists might ask as a strategy for addressing intersectional questions in psychology research: First, who is included within this category? Second, what role does inequality play? Third, where are there similarities? The first question involves attending to diversity within social categories to interrogate how the categories depend on one other for meaning. The second question conceptualizes social categories as connoting hierarchies of privilege and power that structure social and material life. The third question looks for commonalities cutting across categories often viewed as deeply different. These questions are not mutually exclusive; in fact, each question builds on insights generated by the previous one.

To demonstrate the fruitfulness of asking these questions, I draw on examples from research in psychology and related social sciences on aspects of women's sexuality, including ideals of feminine appearance, sexual respectability, and risk in intimate relationships. Conceptualizing categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage in terms of these questions has implications for each stage of the research process, which I discuss later (see Table 1).

1. Who Is Included Within This Category?

At the simplest level, psychologists can begin to consider the intersectional nature of the social categories they study by reflecting on who is included within a category. This

Table 1
Implications of the Three Questions for Each Stage of the Research Process

Research stage	Question		
	Who is included within this category?	What role does inequality play?	Where are the similarities?
Generation of hypotheses	Is attuned to diversity within categories	Literature review attends to social and historical contexts of inequality	May be exploratory rather than hypothesis testing to discover similarities
Sampling	Focuses on neglected groups	Category memberships mark groups with unequal access to power and resources	Includes diverse groups connected by common relationships to social and institutional power
Operationalization	Develops measures from the perspective of the group being studied	If comparative, differences are conceptualized as stemming from structural inequality (upstream) rather than as primarily individual-level differences	Views social categories in terms of individual and institutional practices rather than primarily as characteristics of individuals
Analysis	Attends to diversity within a group and may be conducted separately for each group studied	Tests for both similarities and differences	Interest is not limited to differences
Interpretation of findings	No group's findings are interpreted to represent a universal or normative experience	Differences are interpreted in light of groups' structural positions	Sensitivity to nuanced variations across groups is maintained even when similarities are identified

question draws researchers' attention to diversity within categories. Because certain groups have been systematically underrepresented in psychology research (e.g., people of color, S. Sue, 1999; poor women, Reid, 1993), subcategories that only partially represent a larger category have often been taken as representative of the whole category. For example, because of the use of student samples (S. Sue, 1999), much of what is known about women in psychology is based on responses from women who are White and often middle class. An intersectional approach is an antidote to this erasure.

Moreover, the question may also encourage researchers to study groups belonging to multiple subordinated categories, such as women from racial/ethnic minority groups. This attention to those who have traditionally been excluded, perhaps the oldest approach within intersectionality studies, thwarts any tendency to view a category in essentialist terms, both by illuminating what is overlooked when a social category is assumed to include only certain (usually privileged) subgroups of that category and by representing diverse experiences contained within categories defined by multiple identities (e.g., the category of Black women includes women of different social classes and sexualities). Asking who is included within a category can facilitate representation of those who have been overlooked and the repair of misconceptions in the extant literature. The need for representation was well illustrated by early work on intersectionality showing that a single-axis framework that defines disadvantage only in terms of

group members who are otherwise privileged systematically excludes members of multiply subordinated groups (Crenshaw, 1989/1993; King, 1988).

However, turning scholarly attention to groups who experience disadvantage based on membership in multiple categories is more than a matter of equity or inclusiveness. Such inclusion transcends representation, offering the possibility to repair misconceptions engendered by the erasure of minority groups and the marginal subgroups within them. First, by focusing on groups that have been neglected, researchers are better able to arrive at a contextualized understanding of the groups' experiences, rather than viewing them in terms of the way they depart from norms based on dominant groups (Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). Second, analyses that presume to focus on, say, gender, without consideration of other category memberships, implicitly assume a host of other social statuses that usually go unnamed in American culture: middle-class standing, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, and White race (D. W. Sue, 2004). Scholars who attend to which groups are represented and which tend to be excluded—either by focusing their work on members of subordinate groups (hooks, 1984) or, conversely, by explicitly identifying and investigating the multiple identities that define privilege (see, e.g., Farough, 2006; Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003)—disrupt these assumptions by identifying the ways that race, class, or other identities shape the meaning of gender (Higginbotham, 1992).

Such attention is critical because failure to attend to how social categories depend on one another for meaning renders knowledge of any one category both incomplete and biased. This was illustrated by Spelman's (1988) critique of Chodorow's claims about the universal characteristics of mothering. Spelman noted that Chodorow considered only the specific practices of Western families with race and class privilege; Spelman concluded that "it is theoretically significant . . . if statements that appear to be true about 'men and women' clearly aren't true when we specify that we are talking about men and women of different classes or races" (p. 80). Similarly, Savin-Williams and Diamond (2000) showed that general models of the development of same-sex erotic identity were based primarily on men's experience and did not reflect the trajectories of lesbians and bisexual women. In this case, attempting to conceptualize *sexual minority* as a status or identity that exists independently of gender has little meaning.

Research investigating perceptions of the body among women of color illustrates how attending to diversity within groups can productively complicate the understanding of a category such as *women*. Using survey methods, Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, and Caruthers (2004) found that the more hours White women spent viewing television shows featuring mainly White casts, the greater their body dissatisfaction. Watching the same mainstream programs had no effect on Black women's body satisfaction, and Black women who watched programs with predominantly Black casts reported higher satisfaction. The authors argued that observing media images involves different processes for White and Black women. White women may view the thin and perfectly groomed White actresses as competitors representing an unattainable ideal; Black women, aware of the stigma on their group, may view attractive Black actresses as allies and role models. For this sample, ethnic identity was also a positive predictor of Black women's body satisfaction. In contrast, Lau, Lum, Chronister, and Forrest (2006) found that Asian American women experienced a kind of double bind. Those who reported that media influenced their appearance ideals had greater body dissatisfaction, but the same was true of women reporting greater endorsement of Asian values (e.g., collectivism, adherence to family norms). Unlike the Black women studied by Schooler et al., psychological engagement with the minority culture was not associated with satisfaction among Asian American women.

These examples suggest several ways that attending to who is included within a category can lead to a more nuanced understanding of how social categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage shape experience. First, considering groups that have traditionally been overlooked may lead researchers to hypothesize about different predictors. Because both studies were sensitive to the ways that women's experiences of social norms for feminine appearance are shaped by race/ethnicity, they included variables, such as cultural values and ethnic identity, as predictors for body dissatisfaction. Second, as researchers increase their understanding of how one social category is shaped by another—in this case, how gender is shaped by race/eth-

nicity—they can begin to reread silences in the extant literature as well. Schooler et al.'s (2004) work encourages researchers to construe much of what psychologists have already learned about women's body image (e.g., media representations are harmful) to be knowledge about *White* women's body image. Third, knowing more about diversity within a category may help psychologists envision more ways of creating treatment interventions and social change to benefit all members of the category. For example, Schooler et al. concluded that Black women's experiences suggest that under certain circumstances, media images could have a beneficial impact on viewers.

Considering who is included within a category accomplishes more than mere inclusion; it improves psychologists' ability to theorize and empirically investigate the ways social categories structure individual and social life across the board. Thus, intersectionality is not only a tool to understand the experiences of minority group members. Nevertheless, increasing attention to diversity within social groups is not sufficient to address the psychological meaning of race, gender, and other social categories. Sociologists remind researchers that the social practices that construct race and gender involve hierarchy and inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Risman, 2004). Yet, when researchers attend to who is included within the social categories they study, with particular attention to groups that have been traditionally overlooked, social and material inequality between groups may be treated only implicitly (why, after all, have some groups been studied to the exclusion of others?). These concerns are addressed by the second question.

2. What Role Does Inequality Play?

Categories such as race, gender, social class, and sexuality do not simply describe groups that may be different or similar; they encapsulate historical and continuing relations of political, material, and social inequality and stigma. Mahalingam (2007) characterized intersectionality in terms of the "interplay between person and social location, with particular emphasis on power relations among various social locations" (p. 45). Asking what role inequality plays draws attention to the ways that multiple category memberships position individuals and groups in asymmetrical relation to one another, affecting their perceptions, experiences, and outcomes. This question helps psychologists to view constructs such as race and gender as structural categories and social processes rather than primarily as characteristics of individuals, a move consistent with recent methodological critiques (Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005) and social constructionist approaches within psychology (e.g., Jost & Kruglanski, 2002). Moreover, sociologists argue that constructs like race (Bonilla-Silva, 1997) and gender (Risman, 2004) affect beliefs about what is possible or desirable and define the contours of individuals' opportunities and life chances through social and institutional practices. Considering the role of inequality helps psychologists see individuals as embedded in cultural and historical contexts, a tradition that has deep roots within the discipline but one that has languished recently.

Hurtado (1989) theorized how structural inequality shapes contact between women who differ by race/ethnicity, arguing that the interests of White women and women of color are deeply divided by their relationship to White men, the most privileged race/gender group in American culture. As wives, mothers, and daughters of White men, White women derive social and economic benefits from existing inequities; thus, even those who are feminists may participate in a form of complicity with the status quo. In contrast, women of color generally have no vested interest in placating White men in personal relationships and, thus, have more latitude in their consciousness, resistance, and protest. This analysis led Hurtado to argue that "the definition of woman is constructed differently for White women and women of color, though gender is the marking mechanism through which the subordination of each is maintained" (p. 845). These dynamics make the divisions within feminism between White women and women of color intelligible and predictable.

Femininity, long conceptualized within psychology in terms of traits and/or behavior, provides a rich test case for such an analysis. Girls and women are pressured to conform to feminine norms, including beauty, cultivation of feminine traits, performance of normative heterosexuality including motherhood, development of domestic skills, and sexual restraint. For much of U.S. history, however, economic exploitation, stereotyping, and lack of legal protection (Collins, 1990) served to deny Black women (and other women of color; see, e.g., Espiritu, 2001) the protections femininity is purported to afford. This history led Collins (2004) to argue that these benchmarks of femininity "become a normative yardstick for all femininities in which Black women [and other women of color] are relegated to the bottom of the gender hierarchy" (p. 193; Higginbotham, 1992). In response, Black women activists have long asserted their femininity, and accordingly their respectability, as a means to claim entitlement to legal protection and civil rights (Giddings, 1985).

Cole and Zucker (2007) explored Black and White women's perceptions of femininity in light of this history. Confirmatory factor analysis of national survey data showed both groups used the same dimensions to conceptualize femininity: feminine traits, appearance, and traditional gender beliefs. However, for White women, traditional gender ideology was negatively related to feminist identification. Among Black women, those who placed a high value on wearing feminine clothing were more likely to identify as feminist, and Black women rated appearance items as more important to them. Black women were also more likely than White women to identify as feminists, arguably because the experience of racial oppression sensitizes Black women to issues of sexism. Craig's (2002) historical research can help explain why these aspects of femininity have different political meaning for Black and White women: Black women have traditionally used a strategy of scrupulous attention to appearance to challenge stereotypes of Blacks as uncivilized and sexually immoral. Thus, Black and White women's social locations, defined by structural relations of inequality rooted in history and culture, explained patterns of similarity and difference in the findings: Black and White women had similar views about the components of normative femininity; Black women reported higher levels of feminist identification because of double discrimination; and structural relations between White and Black women explain why feminine appearance bears a different association with feminism for each group. These findings address all three permutations of intersectionality as theorized by Crenshaw (1989/1993).

Similarly, Mahalingam and Leu (2005) investigated how the implicit racialization of femininity can affect members of groups who are not privileged by these ideals. They studied the experiences of Indian immigrants to the United States who work as programmers and Filipina "mail order brides." Interviews and archival content analysis revealed that women from both groups asserted traditional views of femininity either to claim entitlement to the protections that follow from traditional femininity or to redeem Asian masculinity, which has often been denigrated in Western representations. Both groups contrasted their values and behavior with those of White women, whom they viewed as sexually promiscuous, lacking family orientation, and corrupted by feminism. They created idealized gendered immigrant identities as a reaction to, and a defense against, the denigration and subordination they experienced in the United States. This research revealed similarities across these groups of Asian immigrants who face different cultural and economic circumstances. The source of this similarity lies not in a pan-Asian identity, but in the two groups' common structural experience of racial discrimination in the United States. Thus, these Asian American groups can also be understood as similar to the African American women surveyed by Cole and Zucker (2007) in that all three groups strategically embraced prevailing norms of femininity in an effort to resist racial denigration. This is perhaps a surprising observation, given the widespread notion that Asian Americans represent a model minority defined by negative comparisons to African Americans and Latinos; it is the theorization of both groups as subordinated by privileged identities (albeit in different ways) that reveals this commonality.

Weber and Parra-Medina (2003) have made a useful distinction between looking "downstream" for causes (i.e., in individual behavior that might be associated with social category membership) and "upstream" at "the group processes that define systems of social inequality" (p. 190), such as laws, institutional practices, and public policies. Consideration of the role of inequality can help psychologists look upstream by drawing attention to how groups stand in relation to each other and to public and private institutions, including families, schools, workplaces, and the law, and, correspondingly, how political, material, and social inequality lead to class, race, and gender differences in outcomes (see, e.g., Eagly & Wood, 1999; Glick et al., 2004; Lott, 2002; Reid, 1993). Asking this second question helps avoid the risk of treating socially constructed categories as though they refer to static and ahistorical constructs. However, to deeply engage this question, psychologists would be well served to supplement their training

with interdisciplinary study in history, sociology, or other social sciences and/or to pursue collaborative relationships with scholars in other disciplines.

Just as research that considers who is included within a social category can expose the experiences of the most disadvantaged members within disadvantaged subgroups to augment psychologists' vision of the meaning of social categories, asking what role inequality plays makes visible some ways these categories are constructed through historical and ongoing social practices. Just as attention to neglected groups can reveal that which has been obscured in conventional analyses (e.g., the significance of race for Whites or of gender for men), intersectional analyses that conceptualize category membership in terms of inequality can help psychologists understand the relationships among groups—and group members—in societies organized around hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Such an analysis promises that rather than merely calling for attention to the ways that these categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage intersect (Knapp, 2005), researchers can identify mechanisms through which they do so.

3. Where Are There Similarities?

The third way to reconceptualize social categories to address intersectional research questions entails seeking sites of commonality across difference. Asking where there are similarities encourages researchers to reassess any presumption that categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage define homogeneous groups as they look for similarities that cut across categories. Looking for commonality across difference entails viewing social categories as reflecting what individuals, institutions, and cultures do, rather than simply as characteristics of individuals. This shift opens up the possibility to recognize common ground between groups, even those deemed fundamentally different by conventional categories.

This way of approaching intersectional research questions is grounded in the work of authors who have used the concept as a tool for political organizing. Urging intersectional analysis to address important differences within groups, Crenshaw (1994) criticized agencies serving women who had experienced intimate partner violence for overlooking how statuses such as poverty and immigration status fundamentally shape certain women's specific needs; if these needs were not addressed, the agencies were not meeting the needs of some women. Unfortunately, this key insight of intersectionality—the heterogeneity of groups—is easily misconstrued to suggest that identity groups can effectively organize around only the most specific, and thus the most limited, constituencies. Cohen (1997) exploded this misreading, advocating that social change organizations should not mobilize on the basis of shared identities (which inevitably exclude some people). Instead, she noted that oppression operates through a series of interlocking systems that cut across conventional identity categories. Specifically, she suggested that lesbian and gay political activists have a limited constituency if their organizing is based only on identity. However, many of the political

issues that concern activists offer opportunities to build coalitions among diverse groups who are disadvantaged by public policies that attempt to regulate sexuality or that confer resources and privileges on the basis of sexual behavior. When seen through this lens, women on welfare targeted by marriage incentive policies have important shared interests with gay men and lesbians whose sexuality and intimate partnerships are also stigmatized and proscribed (Cohen, 1997).

Cohen's (1997) argument is groundbreaking because psychologists tend to see certain identities as totalizing and determinative, as trumping all others. For example, Higginbotham (1992) argued,

Race not only tends to subsume other sets of social relations, namely, gender and class, but it blurs and disguises, suppresses and negates its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelops. *It precludes unity with the same gender group, but often appears to solidify people of opposing economic classes* [italics added]. (p. 255)

Asch (1984) made a similar argument concerning disability. Such perceptions on the part of both laypeople and researchers can obscure both intragroup difference and loci of possible commonalities across groups.

Such insights can be powerful in research related to social issues and public policy, as these examples show. Fine and Weis (1998) interviewed poor and working-class adults about violence. Although nearly all agreed that violence was a serious problem in their communities, differences in the types of violence they emphasized emerged, patterned by gender and race/ethnicity. White men discussed street violence by men of color, a perspective the authors likened to that of policymakers. Men of color and African American women stressed state violence, such as police brutality. White women and women of color discussed domestic violence. Fine and Weis also found the groups varied in their views of the police. Many White men knew and trusted police officers, as did White women, but to a lesser extent. In contrast, the respondents of color expressed mistrust, with African American men and Latinas, in particular, citing police corruption. Their analysis revealed commonalities and differences that cut across simple groupings like gender or even women of color. Such a nuanced understanding would be invaluable for those planning community interventions or political organizing around this issue.

Dworkin's (2005) work provides another example. She observed that much of the scholarly discussion of heterosexual transmission of HIV depicts women as vulnerable and at risk from men. These representations are grounded partly in the biology of transmission, but also in gendered assumptions that women are sexually oppressed, responsive, and passive, whereas men are sexually invulnerable, dominating, and agentic. Dworkin argued that the women-at-risk framing overlooks the ways that men vary in power and patriarchal privilege: Some heterosexual men experience sexual assault, engage in sex work, or are otherwise at risk because of inequities associated with race and class. This analysis underscores that it is not identity cat-

egories that put individuals at risk of HIV infection but behavior and experiences. Although Dworkin made her argument discursively, she laid the groundwork for social scientists to generate hypotheses in which risk is operationalized in terms of behavior rather than social categorization. This is not to say that categories are irrelevant: Dworkin also pointed to the role of power, noting that "[HIV] transmission and infection . . . [are] linked to social and economic relations of inequality" (p. 618). It is important to note, however, that she did not treat category membership as primarily an individual-level characteristic. From this perspective, similarities between heterosexual women and men who have sex with men come into view under the umbrella concept of risk. These similarities could be fertile sites of intervention or mobilizing to lobby for prevention and treatment resources.

Although grounded in insights from political organizing, looking for commonality across difference suggests how an intersectional analysis can generate innovative research questions. The activists who developed coalition-building strategies recognized that the diversity within a group (e.g., the racial diversity among women or the class diversity among Blacks) provides opportunities to reach across perceived boundaries to identify common ground with other communities. Dworkin's (2005) work makes clear how failing to see these commonalities raises the likelihood that researchers may misunderstand how multiple social structures—gender, race, sexuality—shape sexual behavior with potentially tragic consequences. In this, she implicitly made an argument about gender that is analogous to Helms, Jernigan, and Mascher's (2005) rethinking of psychologists' methodologies for studying race; they recommended that psychologists move away from viewing race as an independent variable and instead operationalize specific mechanisms through conceptual variables. The examples I have described suggest that some research related to social issues, public policy, and practice engages these principles of coalition in an untheorized way. The concept of intersectionality offers a way to bring this insight to bear in future research.

Implications for Research

To translate the theoretical insights of intersectionality into psychological research does not require the adoption of a new set of methods; rather, it requires a reconceptualization of the meaning and consequences of social categories. The extant literature on intersectionality, developed by feminist and critical race theorists, suggests three questions that can guide psychologists wishing to use this type of reconceptualization in their research: Who is included within this category? What role does inequality play? Where are there similarities? In this order, each question takes psychologists further away from an approach in which social categories are operationalized through demographic items whose meaning is self-evident; in this respect, the questions can be viewed as layers of intersectional inquiry.

These conceptual questions have implications for each stage of the research process (see Table 1). When researchers ask who is included within a category, it encourages them to understand all their participants in terms of the multiple social categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage they represent and to attend to groups that are often overlooked in psychology. This question does not imply that any given study ought to include individuals representing every permutation of race, gender, class, or other social identity; not only is this practically impossible, it is properly the cooperative work of a field. Rather, attention to who is included within any category of interest, with particular attention to groups that have often been excluded, is meant to encourage psychologists to view all samples in terms of their particularity and to attend to diversity within samples. For example, a random sample of Black college students includes men and women, but it may not include proportional representation of youths from low-income families. Analyses should attend to gender differences within this sample, and the findings should not be interpreted to apply to Black youths in general. Psychologists who ask this question may also be more likely to consider studying groups that have been overlooked by researchers. Reading the literature in psychology with this question in mind can make systematic omissions in sampling obvious.

This question also entails scrutiny of the manipulations and measures used to operationalize constructs: Which groups' experiences do they reflect and represent? What samples were used in the development of the scales, and how might the instruments differ if other groups were included? For example, in her study of Black women's race and gender identities, Settles (2006) included items about the extent to which these identities were experienced as conflicting; such questions would be less relevant—or even puzzling—for some other race/gender groups. Thus, reflecting on the implicit inclusions and exclusions in research can lead to greater cognizance of how the conceptualization of social categories affects methodological decisions.

The question of what role inequality plays makes the greatest demands at the level of hypothesis generation and interpretation of findings. This question helps researchers view the participants and phenomena they study as grounded in social and historical contexts: Race, gender, sexuality, and class, as well as other social categories, structure groups' access to social, economic, and political resources and privileges. Jackson and Williams's (2006) work on public health crises among the Black middle class illustrates the insights resulting from this question. They noted that although higher social class is related to decreased rates of suicide for Whites, the association is positive for Black American men. To understand this finding, they pointed to three sources of psychological stress related to this group's structural position in terms of race, class, and gender: stressors of racist experiences, the recency and fragility of middle-class status for many Blacks, and disappointment that occupational advancement has not been commensurate with educational achievement for many Black men. By conceptualizing race, gender, sexuality, and class as simultaneously shaping this group's experience, Jackson and Williams looked for explanations in terms of

structural inequality upstream, rather than primarily at the level of individual differences. Of course, individual differences are also important for understanding suicide; however, this second question draws psychologists' attention to the ways categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage are also associated with individuals' life chances and choices.

Asking what role inequality plays may lead researchers to look for both similarities and differences across groups. This leads to the third question, Where are the similarities? This question represents the greatest departure from viewing social categories as defining fundamentally different types of people. Often researchers use social categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage primarily to define groups whose difference is a testable hypothesis, which, if not supported, defaults to similarity. Testing these differences rarely provides insight into the psychological experience implicit in the categories or the practices that create and maintain them. If psychologists conceptualize social categories as defining structural relations with implications for individual, social, and institutional practices, they must attend to both differences and similarities, even among groups that appear to be disparate. Because these similarities may not be obvious, addressing the question of commonalities across difference may entail conducting exploratory analyses or using interpretive qualitative methods. At the level of sampling, this question encourages researchers to include diverse groups within their studies, groups chosen not only in terms of group membership, but also in terms of shared relations to power. For example, qualitative research suggests that some working-class White men feel that economic restructuring, changes in gender roles, and increased immigration have eroded privileges they previously held with respect to their status as earners, their gender, and their race (Weis, Proweller, & Centrie, 1997); this psychological sense of "being under siege" (p. 212) on multiple fronts might have some similarities to the experiences of Black middle-class men in terms of mental health outcomes.

What I am suggesting here is distinct from Hyde's (2005) gender similarities hypothesis. Hyde argued that meta-analytic review of the gender difference literature finds many more similarities between women and men than differences; much of what might appear to be gender differences can be shown to be a function of the different contexts that men and women typically find themselves in by virtue of their social roles. In contrast, looking for commonality across differences does not suggest researchers should reexamine the magnitude or extent to which there are differences between groups defined on one social category (e.g., gender). It is critically important from an intersectional standpoint that in recognizing similarities, researchers remain sensitive to nuanced differences across groups, even when similarities are found. For example, although middle-class Black men and working-class White men might experience some of the stressors they face in similar ways, their experiences are not equivalent or identical.

What then are the implications of an intersectional analysis for research methods? Certainly the first tool that many research psychologists would reach for to address questions of how outcomes are related to multiple group memberships is a research design in which social categories are treated as independent variables with main effects and interactions. Sociologist McCall (2005) termed this the "categorical approach" to intersectionality, which "focus[es] on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories. . . . The subject is multigroup and the method is systematically comparative" (p. 1786). This raises the question of whether the theoretical concept of intersectionality is equivalent to the inclusion of variables assessing race, gender (or other social categories), and their interaction in statistical models.

Certainly, this statistical method is an indispensable tool, particularly useful for revealing patterns of disparity in arenas such as employment and income, physical and mental health, and social life. Smith and Stewart (1983) described some of the patterns of group differences these interactions might describe: In some cases, the negative effects of racism and sexism might multiply each other, rendering women of color most disadvantaged on a dependent variable (e.g., income); in other cases, they might have "subtractive effects" (p. 7), in effect canceling each other out (Sanchez-Hucles, 1997). The "intersectionality paradox" (Jackson & Williams, 2006, p. 138) in the minority health literature illustrates what can be gained by using such an approach. Although higher socioeconomic status is generally associated with better health outcomes, on many health indices, highly educated Blacks fare no better than Whites with the lowest education. Jackson and Williams (2006) identified this "largely unrecognized and high risk pattern" (p. 137) in two gendered health risks: infant mortality and homicide. In these examples, the interactive effects of race and gender suggest that even with the growth of the Black middle class since the civil rights movement, many middle-class Blacks do not enjoy the same outcomes as middle-class Whites.

Despite the power of this method to address certain intersectional research questions, it would be a mistake to reduce the nuanced theoretical concept of intersectionality to include only the type of associations that can be modeled through the use of interaction effects. One limitation to this approach arises from the fact that social categories, such as race and gender, are confounded in individuals; this means that any survey question that asks participants to report whether their experiences were a function of one category membership rather than another may be eliciting flawed data. A good example of this problem is racialized sexual harassment reported by women of color, including verbal harassment or sexual attention based on racial stereotypes or physical features believed to be racially distinctive (Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Cortina, 2001). To ask respondents to rate the extent to which such an experience was separately determined by gender and by race/ethnicity reflects an invalid conceptualization of how membership in social categories is experienced, essentially asking respondents to fit their experiences onto a procrustean bed.

A study showing that Black women's ratings of personal general discrimination were a function of their reports of race rather than gender discrimination illustrates this problem (Levin, Sinclair, Veniegas, & Taylor, 2002). The authors concluded that the combined effects of racism and sexism did not determine Black women's perceptions of general discrimination. However, respondents were not instructed how to report experiences they perceived as having elements of both racism and sexism. Black women may view such experiences as one aspect of racism, because Black men have also been subject to gendered racism (Collins, 2004). In this case, the use of interaction effects also assumes that the effect of multiple category memberships is to influence the quantity of outcomes, rather than interacting to influence the outcome qualitatively: As Levin et al. (2002) concluded, "types of discrimination perceived by various ethnic and gender groups may be qualitatively different and may not necessarily 'add up' or 'interact' in a statistical quantitative sense" (p. 560).

Testing intersectional research questions by looking at interactions between categories can undertheorize the processes that create the categories represented as independent variables. Put another way, treating race and gender as independent variables suggests that these social categories are primarily properties of individuals rather than reflections of macrolevel social practices linked to inequality (Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). For example, sociologists have found meaningful differences between White and Black Americans' experiences of being middle class. Primarily because of many years of redlining practices in mortgage lending, Black families with middle-class incomes have less than half the net worth of White families with comparable incomes (Conley, 1999); because of ongoing residential segregation, Black middle-class communities are more likely to be geographically surrounded by poor communities and to have higher rates of crime (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Compared to middle-class Whites, middle-class Blacks are more likely to have a sibling in poverty (Pattillo-McCoy & Heflin, 1999), and thus the poor may seem less distant than they do to members of the White middle class. For these and other reasons, the psychological experience of middle-class status may differ by race in important ways. Of course, it is possible to address some of these discrepancies by controlling for covariates in statistical models. However, to the extent that the meaning of one independent variable (e.g., class) varies depending on the level of the other independent variable (e.g., race) is neither acknowledged nor measured—that is, whether a given status is experienced in different ways depending on the other statuses held—an important aspect of intersectionality remains unaddressed and invisible. These observations suggest that the inclusion of statistical interactions among race, gender, and other social categories in multivariate analyses is not, in and of itself, sufficient to develop what Smith and Stewart (1983) called a "truly interactive model of racism and sexism" (p. 6) without reconceptualizing the ways researchers use race, gender, and other social categories.

These problems are not intrinsic to a research design (or statistical model) in which social categories are treated as independent variables; rather, they arise from the ways that statistical interactions between variables based on category membership are often interpreted in the literature. Rather than prescribing—or proscribing—any particular research or data analysis technique, the concept of intersectionality entails a conceptual shift in the way researchers understand social categories.

For example, experiments often examine two or more independent variables both in terms of main effects and interactions. Nevertheless, experimental methods are not antithetical to intersectional analysis. For example, Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) looked at how the intersecting identities of Asian American women affected math performance, considering that this group is stereotyped positively in this domain by virtue of ethnicity and is stereotyped negatively because of gender. Participants whose femaleness was made salient performed worse, whereas the performance of those whose ethnicity was primed was enhanced. In a second study, the ethnicity effect was not replicated in a sample of Asian American women in Vancouver, where the stereotype of Asians as especially skilled at math is less prevalent. This article, which made only within-group comparisons, provides an intersectional analysis in at least two respects. Obviously, it looks at an underrepresented group defined by multiple social locations. More subtly, it situates the intersection of ethnic and gender identities in different contexts, both through the priming manipulation and the cross-cultural approach. In these ways, it transcends a simple categorical conceptualization of the intersection of race and gender. This example highlights the ways that an intersectional analysis hinges on the conceptualization of race, gender, and other social categories, rather than the use (or avoidance) of particular methods.

Conclusion

The three questions I have posed suggest that an intersectional analysis requires a conceptual shift, even a paradigm shift, in the ways psychologists understand social categories, such that they take seriously the cultural and political history of groups, as well as the ways these socially constructed categories depend on one another for meaning and are jointly associated with outcomes. This shift is consistent with recent calls in psychology (Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005; Smedley & Smedley, 2005) and other social sciences (e.g., Hancock, 2005; McCall, 2005).

At the same time, the examples I have chosen demonstrate that many of psychology's familiar tools can be pressed into service to address research questions through an intersectional lens and that this type of framework neither requires, privileges, nor excludes multigroup comparisons. Clearly, this work is already being undertaken in some parts of the discipline, such as feminist psychology. However, the application of the three intersectional questions I have outlined here does require that researchers rethink the relationship between their conceptualization of

social categories and their methodological choices, as described in Table 1.

The skeptical reader may ask what the critical lens of intersectionality can add to his or her research program, particularly if the work is not focused on members of subordinated groups. Although grounded in the lived experience and critique of those at the convergence of multiple stigmatized identities, the implications of the concept of intersectionality are more expansive. As Hancock (2007b) has argued, intersectionality does not simply describe a content specialization addressing issues germane to specific populations. Rather, it also is a paradigm for theory and research offering new ways of understanding the complex causality that characterizes social phenomena. The examples in this article illustrate the ways this analytic framework can help psychologists to look for causes of human behavior both upstream and downstream, to notice and hypothesize about the multiple paths that may lead individuals to the same or similar outcomes, and to understand the ways that different social categories depend on each other for meaning and, thus, mutually construct one another and work together to shape outcomes.

Intersectionality makes plain that gender, race, class, and sexuality simultaneously affect the perceptions, experiences, and opportunities of everyone living in a society stratified along these dimensions. To understand any one of these dimensions, psychologists must address them in combination; intersectionality suggests that to focus on a single dimension in the service of parsimony is a kind of false economy. This insight invites us to approach the study of social categories with more complexity and suggests ways to bring more nuance and context to our research on the social categories that matter most in a stratified society.

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