

- Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 2002. "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory." *NWSA Journal* 14 (Fall): 1–22.
- Unruh, Anita M. 1996. "Gender Variations in Clinical Pain Experience." *Pain* 65 (2/3): 123–67.
- Watson, Nicholas. 1998. "Enabling Identity: Disability, Self and Citizenship." In *The Disability Reader: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Tom Shakespeare. London: Cassell.
- Wendell, Susan. 1996. *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. New York: Routledge.
- Whitson, Heather, Lawrence Landerman, Anne Newman, Linda Fried, Carl Pieper, and Harvey Cohen. 2010. "Chronic Medical Conditions and the Sex-Based Disparity in Disability: The Cardiovascular Health Study." *Journals of Gerontology: Series A* 65A (12): 1325–31.
- Young, Iris. 1980. "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Female Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality." *Human Studies* 3 (2): 137–56.

Blogging at the Intersections: Black Women, Identity, and Lesbianism

Julia S. Jordan-Zachery, Providence College

doi:10.1017/S1743923X12000396

In my recent explorations of black women as subjects in research-length articles that employ intersectionality, I discovered that black women are rarely, if at all, the sole subjects of such research projects (Jordan-Zachery 2011). This analysis focused on articles published, between 1996 and 2010, in two political science journals that are often ranked at the top — *American Political Science Review* and *Journal of Politics* (see Garand and Giles, 2003, on the issue of journal ranking). Also included were two political science journals whose central focus is women and politics, generally defined — *Journal of Women Politics and Policy* and *Women & Politics*. My analysis was limited to research-length articles with a U.S.-based emphasis. The data suggest the following trends: Research on intersectionality tended to treat black women in a monolithic manner; only a certain group of black women served as research subjects (elected officials dominated the research); and research tended to focus on structural and political intersectionality while ignoring representational intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991).

It is suggested that intersectionality has been and is a success within contemporary feminist scholarship. In discussing the impact of intersectionality on feminist work, Risman (2004, 442) says that "there is

now considerable consensus growing that one must always take into consideration multiple axes of oppression; to do otherwise presumes the whiteness of women, the maleness of people of color, and the heterosexuality of everyone.” The increasing use of intersectionality as a research tool, theoretical concept, and so on, has not been without debate (see Kwan 1996 for a discussion on some perceived limitations of intersectionality). Indeed, this discussion on the merits and challenges of intersectionality theory is fascinating and thought provoking. But while I find the ever expanding research and debates on intersectionality helpful, I argue that some of our analyses (including mine) fall short of exploring the complexities of black women’s lives. Often ignored is a key element in our understanding of intersectionality – the role of the researcher. As researchers, we make strategic choices about how to engage our work – the types of questions we pose, the methods and methodologies we employ to answer such questions, and the populations we study.

While we strive to make marginalized populations visible, through our deployment of intersectionality or “post” intersectionality research, we too might be engaging in the marginalization of some subjects. Consequently, while credited as contributing intersectionality to feminist theory, black women are marginalized in our studies. The level and extent of visibility/invisibility of black women as research subjects in political science research varies. If we unpack the studies on black women, we see that some populations, such as black lesbians, are virtually nonexistent as research subjects (at least in the four journals that I studied). Of the 50 articles analyzed (using key word searches: “African-American/Black woman” and “intersectionality”) in the aforementioned study, there was one article, authored by Fogg-Davis (2006), that centered on black lesbians. These trends suggest a type of intersectional invisibility where research is concerned.

I borrow the notion of intersectional invisibility from Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008). Intersectional invisibility, refers to

the general failure to fully recognize people with intersecting identities as members of their constituent groups. Intersectional invisibility also refers to the distortion of the intersectional persons’ characteristics in order to fit them into frameworks defined by prototypes of constituent identity groups. (2008, 381)

As applied in this project, I construct intersectional invisibility as a failure among researchers to recognize intragroup differences among marginalized groups. A substantial amount of intersectionality research

concentrates on analyzing and understanding intergroup differences. Consequently, we tend to ignore how intersectionality is experienced and lived among different members of the same group. Furthermore, we tend to concentrate our research efforts among a select group of black women, thereby leaving untouched the lived realities of the majority of black women — everyday, nonelected black women.

In this essay, I ask: How do we study doubly marginalized groups and how might such studies inform our understanding, breadth, and depth of intersectionality? Beyond this, I also attempt to provide a model, by centering on the voices of black lesbian bloggers, as a possible means for studying doubly marginalized populations. I do not pretend to explore the multiplicity of intersectionality and its treatment in political science; neither do I pretend to offer some comprehensive approach for addressing these often overlooked subjects. My aim is a lot less ambitious. What I strive to do is get us, or some of us, to think of intersectionality in a different way — as it moves us beyond the more unidimensional use of intersectionality that privileges groups of women and/or the type of intersectionality we analyze. In essence, I attempt to shift the norm of our research subjects away from discursively privileged groups to those that tend to disrupt our understanding of the “proper” marginalized black woman.

To help me work through this project, I focus on black lesbians (not to separate them from other doubly marginalized groups, such as black disabled individuals) as a case study of how we might approach such research. More specifically, I consider black lesbians in the blogosphere as a starting point for exploring the depth of intersectionality as a research tool. To offer a different approach to the analysis of intersectionality in its multiple forms, I consider the relationship among language, identity, and power (a central tenet of black feminist thought), thereby offering a different lens for understanding oppression across a wider spectrum of black women. If indeed intersectionality is about exploring how multiple identities are experienced by diverse groups of women (see Combahee River Collective 2000; Lorde 1984), then we have to move beyond upper-class, heterosexual women as our model.

Why blogs? Mitra (2001, 32) provides one rationale for the use of blogs in exploring how marginalized groups use digital spaces when he argues that “[o]n the Internet, the marginalized can call on the dominant and put the dominant in the difficult position of acknowledging the marginalized, or further distance the dispossessed by ignoring the call.” I hope we can start a conversation about how we, as researchers, engage in the politics of intersectional invisibility and how we might overcome it.

Theoretical Framework

I ground my theoretical understanding of intersectionality in black women's studies. Black feminists suggest that black women face multiple and interlocking systems of oppression. These systems can include race, gender, class, and sexuality, among others. Throughout time, Black women have recognized and eventually named their experiences with multiple systems of oppression. This intersectional identity was identified as early as the 1800s. The Combahee River Collective again articulated this identity and its impact on the lives and bodies of black women in 1977. In 1989, Crenshaw named black women's experiences with multiple systems of oppression as "intersectionality."

Crenshaw's theoretical understanding, in part, speaks to political, structural, and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality centers on the operation of systems and structures in society that result in the marginalization of individuals — in terms of their social needs and legal status. Crenshaw (1995, 358) offers the following claim to demonstrate the functioning of structural inequality: "Intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help" because individuals operate from different social locations (and as such are treated differently) that are influenced by race, gender, sexuality, and class identity. Political intersectionality reflects the different (and sometimes conflicting) political agendas of the various groups to which an individual may belong or by which he/she "defines" his/her identity. This is most often thought of in terms of black women and the challenges they faced as women and being left out of the women's movement and as black and being ignored in the modern black freedom struggle.

Representational intersectionality addresses the depiction, through text, language, images, and media, of groups and individuals in society. It also captures how these groups work to create their own narratives that shape and inform multiple aspects of society. These three forms of intersectionality allow us to look at the various ways in which black women are muted and how they respond to this processes.

Black feminist theorists also assert that black women have different and divergent experiences with multiple systems of oppression (Collins 1986; Combahee River Collective 2000; Lorde 1984). Bambara (1970, xviii) poignantly describes a black woman as

a college graduate. A drop-out. A student. A wife. A divorcee. A mother. A lover. A child of the ghetto. A product of the bourgeoisie. A professional

writer. A person who never dreamed of publication. A solitary individual. A member of the Movement. A gentle humanist. A violent revolutionary. She is angry and tender, loving and hating. She is all these things — and more.

Captured in this description is the heterogeneity of black womanhood. Intersectionality, in theory, recognizes that black women are not a homogeneous group. Theorists, such as Davis and hooks, realize the danger in essentializing differences within black womanhood. Yet in some of our analyses on black womanhood, there can be a tendency to treat black women in a monolithic manner, thereby failing to recognize the nuances of intersectionality. Furthermore, our analyses tend to focus on out-groups' use of oppressive structures and, as such, ignore in-groups' use and response to such oppressive structures. That is, there is limited research on how images and stereotypes are used within the community of black women either to uplift or police one another. In essence, there is a failure to engage in intersectional analysis as conceptualized by earlier theorists who suggested that we must consider the internal stratifications and how they influence individuals' experiences with intersectionality (see Davis 1981; Lorde 1984).

Additionally, to date, most of our research efforts seem to concentrate on structural and political intersectionality, often leaving uncovered the notions of representational intersectionality. Specifically, our analyses are limited in terms of exploring how black women create unique and specific narratives outside of the formal institutions of politics. In other words, there is a tendency among researchers to focus on the actions of elected black women. This leaves one to wonder how black women who are not elected to office engage and grapple with issues of intersectionality. How do they define and respond to a multitude of issues that influence their daily lives? And how do they define themselves?

“New” Adventures for Intersectionality and Political Science Research: An Example

In my project, I grant authority to the self-defining narratives constructed by black lesbians. My initial search did not yield a substantial number of blogs — particularly to satisfy research that often calls for a large sample size. I relied on convenience sampling to locate blogs. Consequently, I make no claim that the blogs are representative of blogs authored by black/African-American lesbians (these were the tags I used to locate the blogs). The study consists of 12 blogs (more blogs were located; however,

some were excluded for a number of reasons, including the need to register to read the blogs, for example). The following question guides the analysis: How are black lesbians negotiating identity, community, and agency in the blogosphere? While it is not reported here in great detail, I rely on a rhetorical analysis, grounded in black feminist thought, to analyze the various postings. Rhetorical analysis was selected because I thought it was best suited for exploring how bloggers construct their online identity, and it appears aligned with black feminist understandings of how to conduct research so that the voices of the subjects are centered.

Before I delve into the data, I need to address at least one challenge with using blogs as a data source. It is almost impossible to identify the sexual orientation and racial classification of the individual bloggers. Individuals may falsely identify themselves or may not identify themselves at all. This is an unfortunate and unavoidable limitation of the study.

An Example

My analysis involved looking at the intersection of language and identity. I present a rather limited preliminary analysis of black lesbian bloggers' (online) identity construction. To get a sense of their identity construction, I considered the labels used by bloggers in what is commonly referred to as "about me" statements. In their "front stage" identity presentations (see Goffman 1959), these women seem to construct themselves in an intersectional manner. Of the 12 bloggers, seven identified themselves using an intersectional framework. Identities tended to be framed in terms of race, gender, and sexuality (see Table 1).

Table 1. Bloggers' race, gender, and sexual identity

-
1. Black lesbian blogger just trying to give my spin on the world (Quirky black girls).
 2. I am a brown girl patiently awaiting the right time to return back to Atlanta, where her heart belongs. In the meantime, I will activate my superpowers by staying strong and positive in a while being surrounded by a homophobic family. (A brown girl gone gay).
 3. I am an AfroLez@femcentric Cultural Worker (Black, Feminist, Queer Documentary Filmmaker, International Lecturer, Published Writer, Social Change Agent, Vipassana Meditator, and Global Traveler). I believe in the power of the spoken and written word as well as the power of the image on the screen. I do not create art for art's sake. Since 1992, I have primarily used the spoken and written word in partnership with the camera lens, as a producer, writer, and director, to advocate for and make central some of the many things that have been and are on the periphery — the issues impacting African descended people, with a specific emphasis on lesbian and heterosexual women. (*Afrolez*).
-

Black lesbian bloggers' front-stage presentations of their identities employ a series of labels that often allowed the women to identify their race, gender, gender performance, and sexuality simultaneously. In a few instances, the bloggers did not explicitly identify their racial-group affiliation in their naming process. But after reading some posts, it became evident to me that they constructed their identity around notions of blackness, womaness, sexuality, and their intersections. Naming seems to allow the bloggers to bring together the struggles faced in the multiple communities to which they belong, while also allowing them to discuss the tensions and/or celebrations of their personal experiences in their multiple communities.

Black Lesbians and Black Feminsim(s)

In engaging in this self-naming process, black lesbian bloggers invent and reflect their black lesbian identity. This process allows them to challenge and present alternative representations of black lesbians. Engaging in this form of representational intersectionality allows these women to speak to their invisibility. Black lesbian bloggers continue in a tradition of a number of lesbian and bisexual blues singers — including Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, among others, who often had to hide or only hint at their sexuality. Unlike their foremothers, black lesbian bloggers use this space to discuss openly their sexuality and sexual preferences. In their writings, these women challenge a form of self-imposed silence — a silence that probably developed as a form of self-protection designed to shield them from the brutality of being black and lesbian. It is through this process of self-naming and challenging their invisibility, which are both central to black feminism, that black lesbians align themselves with the political projects of “prototypical” black women that we as researchers tend to study.

Black lesbian bloggers also challenge our understanding of black feminism by drawing our attention to heterosexism. For example, Elixher (2011) challenges the notion that domestic violence is unique to heterosexual couples. In her post she writes:

Myth. Lesbian and bisexual relationships can't have domestic violence because two women are involved. Myth. Only the “butch” partner can be abusive. Myth. A physically smaller woman cannot abuse a larger partner. Myth. It's not violence if your partner has never hit you. Truth. The rates of domestic violence in same-gender relationships are about the same as

domestic violence against straight women. Truth. Being in a relationship with another woman does not exempt you from it.

The praxis of the bloggers also exhibits black lesbian bloggers' engagement with black feminism. Consider the plea made by Les-Luv (2011):

The [gay, lesbian, black, and transgender] community must not succumb to the "us versus them" mentality. While denial of civil rights can quickly charge an issue and lead to negative emotions, it is important to remember and respect the individual. The relationships you forge with those who are different from you are and will remain the greatest tool that you have to overcome prejudice, bigotry, and violence. Gays and lesbians must not resort to trampling on the rights of others as theirs have too often been trampled. By being the difference, you can make a difference.

In her plea, Les-Luv advocates a form of coalition building and human dignity that we see advocated among some black feminists (see Combahee River Collective 2000).

Black lesbian bloggers, while they may not be representative of black lesbians, begin to show us how they engage in a black, feminist perspective of self-naming and praxis that can transform feminist theory and our understandings of intersectional theory.

Conclusion

Christian (1985) wrote about the silence surrounding writings by black women and black lesbians that, she argues, has prevented readers from recognizing the unique contributions made by these writers to twentieth-century literature. We confront a similar silence in 2012; there is a silence in terms of recognizing how the writings and political work of black lesbians can contribute to our ongoing discussions on citizenship and democracy (core concerns of intersectionality theory). For reasons not explored here, researchers are silencing the voices not only of black lesbians but also other black women who are doubly marginalized — we are engaging in intersectional invisibility.

The discursive construction of identity by black lesbian bloggers offer us an opening for exploring how various black women engage and practice intersectionality. In response to the subjectivity that is often embedded in the construction of "black" and "lesbian" and their intersections, bloggers use this space to resist dominant discourses and attempt to create alternative understandings of what it means to be black and a lesbian. As such, they create a different discourse. Through their

postings, we are able to see the process of meaning making and knowledge sharing among black lesbians. If we want to deepen our understanding of intersectionality, then we have to grant authority to the self-defining narratives of various black women. Doing such expands our understandings of black feminist agency.

Blogs, as they represent a convergence of private and public spaces, is but one means for exploring meaning among black women. This is not to suggest that the use of blogs as a data source is not without fault. As we explore this form of computer-mediated communication, we can delve more deeply into understanding the offline identity constructions of bloggers in hopes that this will help us better understand how they see themselves in relation to society, thereby rendering visibility to the often invisible — a key component to intersectionality.

Julia S. Jordan-Zachery is Associate Professor of Political Science, Providence College, Providence, RI: jjordanz@providence.edu

REFERENCES

- Bambara, Toni Cade. 1970. *The Black Woman: An Anthology*. New York: Washington Square.
- Christian, Barbara. 1985. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1986. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 31(Supplement): S14–S32.
- . 2000. "A Black Feminist Statement." In *The Black Feminist Reader*, eds. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 261–70.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1995. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." In *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, eds. Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas. New York: New Press.
- Davis, Angela Y. 1981. *Women, Race & Class*. New York: Random House.
- Elixher. 2011 (May 17). "Domestic Violence Happens." <http://elixher.com> (Accessed December 15, 2011).
- Fogg-Davis, Hawley G. 2006. "Theorizing Black Lesbians within Black Feminism: A Critique of Same-Race Street Harrasment." *Politics & Gender* 2 (1): 57–76.
- Garand, James C., and Giles, Michael W. 2003. "Journals in the Discipline: A Report on a New Survey of American Political Scientists." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 36: 293–308.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Jordan-Zachery, Julia S. 2011. "Black Women as 'Domestic Workers' in Academia: Or on How We Became the Help." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Women Studies Association, Atlanta.
- Kwan, Peter. 1997. "Intersections of Race, Ethnicity, Class, Gender and Sexual Orientation: Jeffrey Dahmer and the Cosynthesis of Categories." *Hastings Law Journal* 48: 1257–92.

- Lez-Luv. 2011 (November 11). "Responsibilities Gays and Lesbians Have to Their Communities." <http://les-luv.blogspot.com> (Accessed December 14, 2011).
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crossing.
- Mitra, A. 2001. "Marginalized Voices in Cyberspace". *New Media and Society* 3(1): 29–48.
- Purdie-Vaughns, Valerie, and Eibach, Richard P. 2008. "Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities." *Sex Roles* 59: 377–91.
- Risman, Barbara J. 2004. "Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism." *Gender & Society* 18(4): 429–50.

Intimacy without Consent: Lynching as Sexual Violence

Niambi M. Carter, Temple University

doi:10.1017/S1743923X12000402

At the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, I presented the harrowing story of Judge Edward Aaron. In 1957, Aaron was tortured and castrated at the hands of several members of the Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy in an attempt to send a threatening message to black Civil Rights activists. At the conclusion of the panel, a male audience member asked, "Was he [Judge Aaron] raped?" I was stunned by this question; to me, it seemed obvious that Aaron had been sexually violated, at the very least, and my answer relayed my sense of the events as a sexual crime. It was clear, however, that this man, like many others, read the violation of Aaron, and many other black men, as being some other class of crime. In the absence of penetrative sex, he could not frame Aaron's assault as a sexual crime. In part, this is because in the absence of penetration, we do not generally read the male body as vulnerable and open to sexual abuse in the same way as the female body. For obvious reasons, lynching is bound up with sex. The narrative of the "black male rapist" is quite pervasive. Nevertheless, we tend to default to an almost exclusively racial lens when viewing lynching. This essay does not aim to displace this idea but to make a critical intervention in the conversation by suggesting that lynching can be understood as a type of racialized, sexual violence that uniquely harms black men.

Using the case of Judge Aaron, I want to situate the practice of lynching, particularly castration, as a type of gender violence. By doing so, I seek to parse the tension that exists between thinking of sexuality not solely as the impetus for lynching as being central to the lynching practice itself.