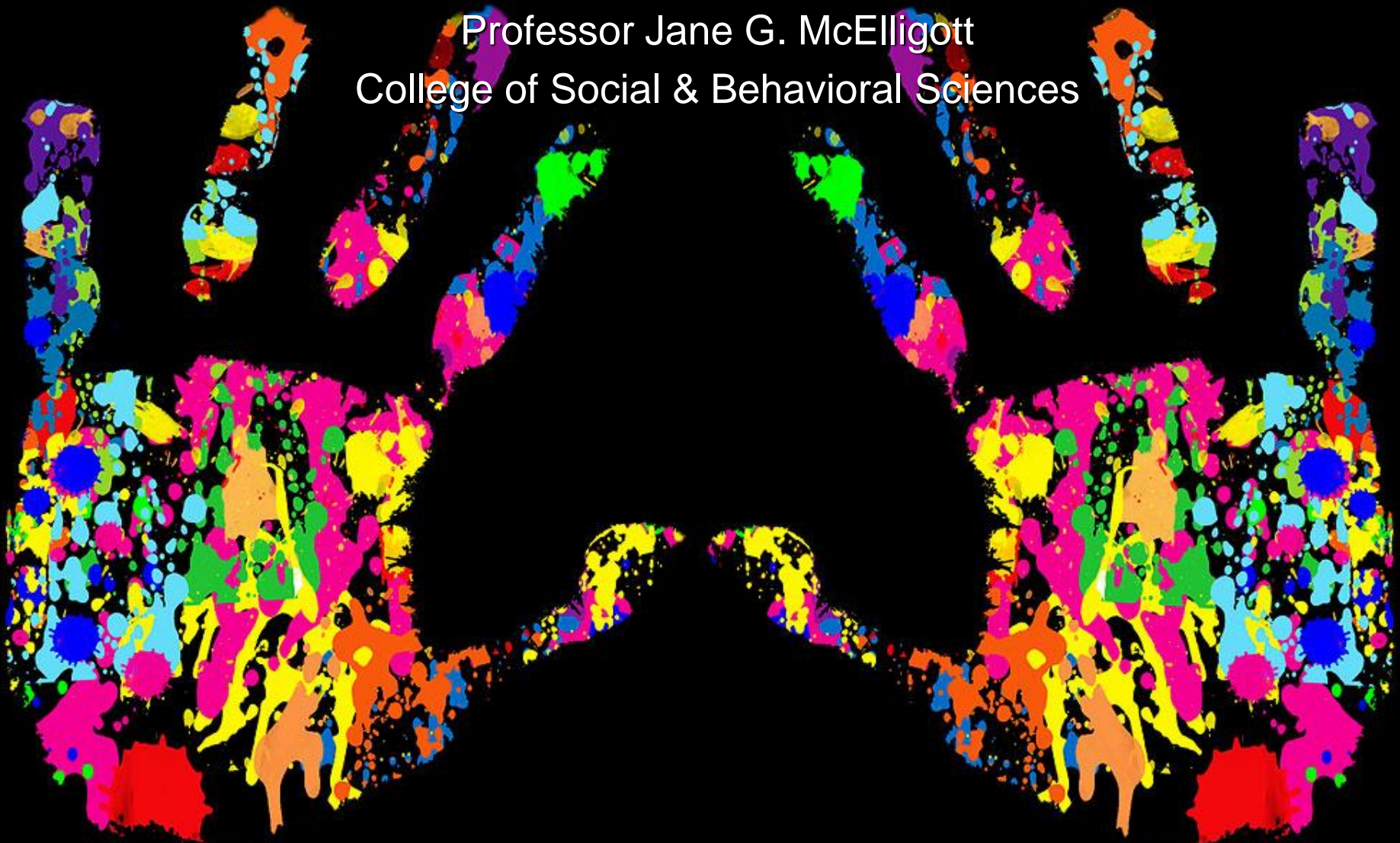


Intersectionality: The Pathway to Educational Equity

Purdue University Global Village Conference 2019

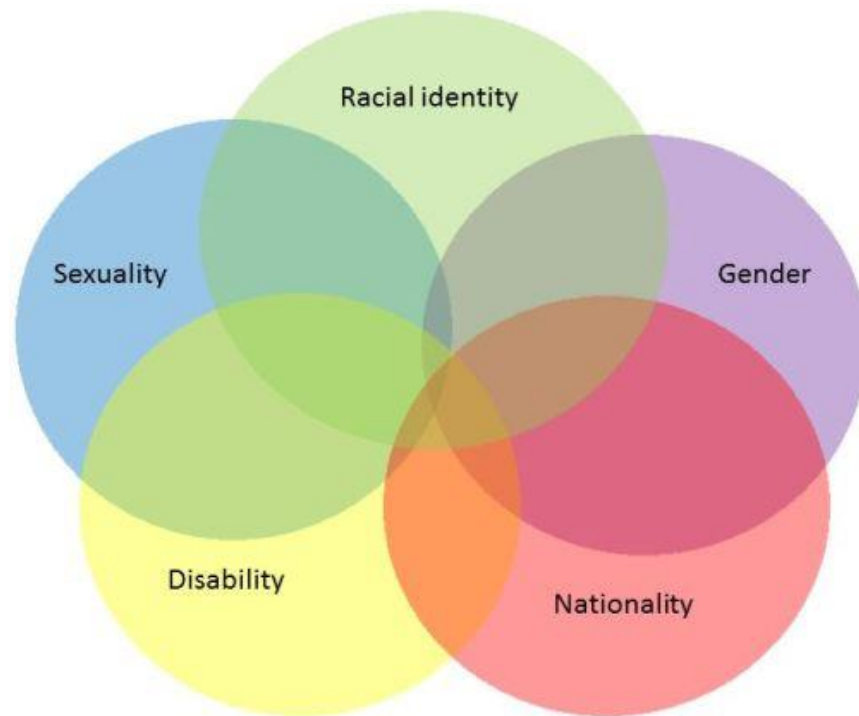
Professor Jane G. McElligott

College of Social & Behavioral Sciences



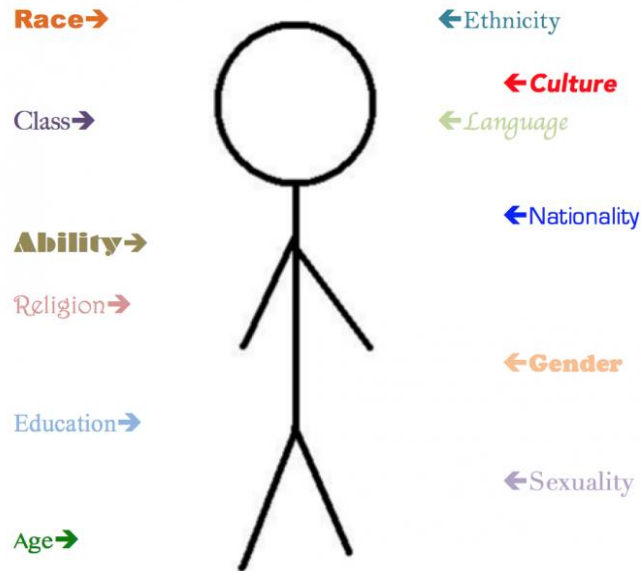
Origin of Intersectionality

“Intersectionality” is a theory articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw that explores “the social, economic, and political ways in which identity-based systems of oppression connect, overlap, and influence one another” (Crenshaw, 1989).



Origin of Intersectionality

- As a law professor and authority in Black feminist legal theory and critical race theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* to deal with the fact that many of our social justice problems like racism and sexism are often overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice” (Crenshaw, 2016).
- In her seminal work on intersectionality, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics* (1989), Crenshaw delineated the “double discrimination” or “injustice squared” that Black women faced in the workplace and in the courtroom when trying to seek a remedy (Crenshaw, 2016).



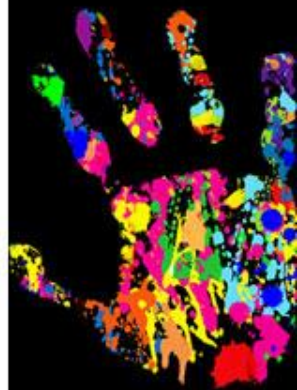
DeGraffenreid v. General Motors

- Crenshaw (1989) pointed to the case of *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, 413 F. Supp. 142 (E.D. Mo. 1976) to shed light on the impact of double discrimination based on race and sex and the failure of the law to even recognize the injustice.
- In *DeGraffenreid*, the plaintiffs were five Black women who were among the first employees of General Motors to be laid off under a “last hired–last fired” layoff policy.
- The plaintiffs sued General Motors for employment discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, alleging that “last hired–last fired” layoff policy discriminates against them as black women and is therefore a “perpetuation of past discriminatory practice.”
DeGraffenreid, 413 F. Supp. at 143.



DeGraffenreid v. General Motors

- The plaintiffs established at trial that General Motors (GM) never hired a Black woman prior to 1964 (when Title VII became law). Furthermore, the Black women GM hired after 1970 lost their jobs just a few years later in “mass layoffs during the 1973-75 recession” due to the “last hired-first fired” layoff policy (Smith, 2013-2014).
- The Plaintiffs argued that GM’s “last hired-first fired” policy therefore prolonged the past discriminatory practices by the company against Black women.
- Evidence showed that prior to 1964, GM had hired Black men and women (only white women), so Black women were in a unique class of their own facing this perpetuation of discrimination.



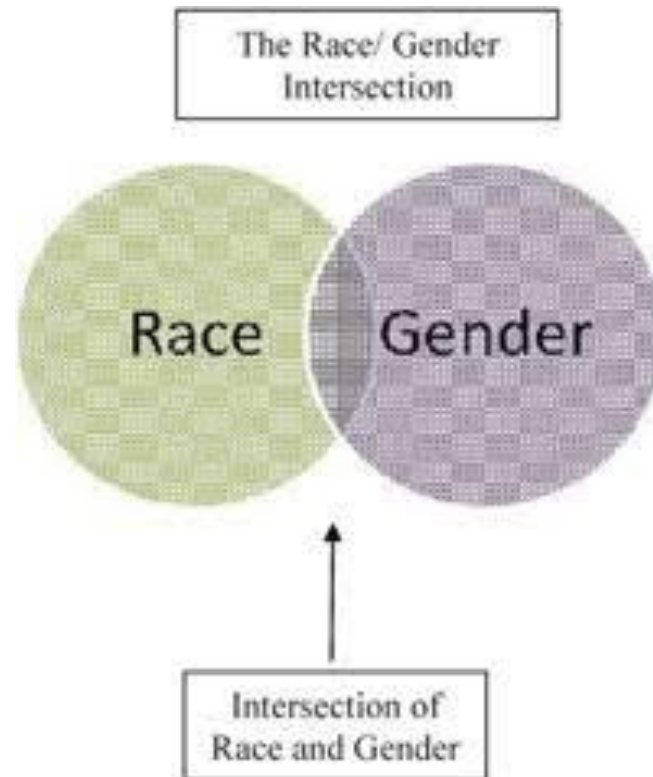
DeGraffenreid v. General Motors

- Despite this evidence, the court in *DeGraffenreid* “refused to allow the plaintiffs to combine sex-based and race-based discrimination into a single cause of action” (Smith, 2013-2014).
- In the eyes of the court, the Plaintiffs, as Black women, were attempting to create a “*new special sub-category*” (a race and sex-based discrimination combination) to be protected from discrimination.” Finding no precedent for recognizing Black women as a “*special class*” entitled to protection, the court ruled that the Plaintiffs “should not be allowed to combine statutory remedies to create a *new ‘super-remedy’* which could give them relief beyond what the drafters of the relevant statutes intended.” *DeGraffenreid*, 413 F. Supp. at 143.



DeGraffenreid v. General Motors

The Plaintiffs therefore fell through the cracks of the law; the undeniable discrimination they as Black women endured was deemed “legally inconsequential” simply because it could not be neatly packed into one of two boxes: race discrimination *or* sex discrimination (Crenshaw, 2016).



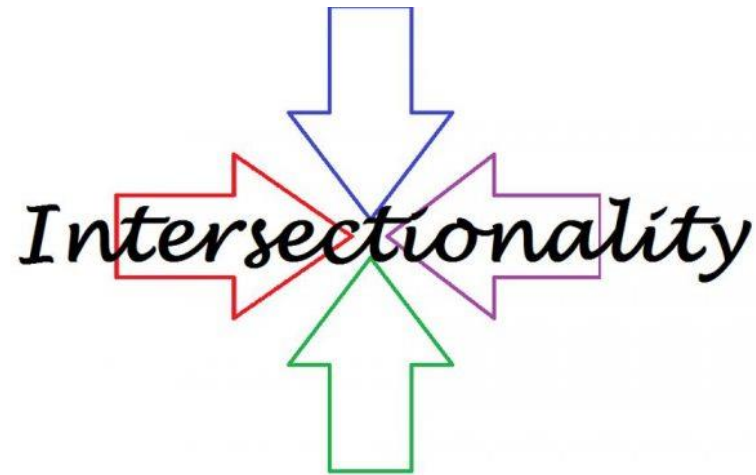
Framing Problem

- The court's framing of the issue in *DeGraffenreid* as one that must be categorized as *either* race-based *or* sex-based discrimination is representative of a pervasive framework that “frequently renders Black women legally “invisible” and without legal recourse” (Smith, 2013-2014).
- The injustice witnessed in the *DeGraffenreid* case is representative of the “single-axis framework” employed by our society that “contributes to the marginalization of Black women in feminist theory and in antiracist politics” (Crenshaw, 1989).
- Crenshaw (1989) brings the theory of intersectionality to life by using the analogy of a traffic intersection to illustrate the way the roads in our society are structured by race and gender.



Crenshaw's Intersection Analogy

In Crenshaw's analogy, the roads of an intersection represent "identities, like race and gender, and the cars on the road are policies affecting those identities. Therefore, someone standing at an intersection would be hit by traffic from both roads. For example, a black woman hit at the intersection of the roads representing blackness and femaleness would not be able to get help there. As a result, neither a race nor a gender "ambulance" could come along and help her, because they would mistakenly ask which road she belonged on, as if only one identity had jurisdiction over her" (Gao, 2018).



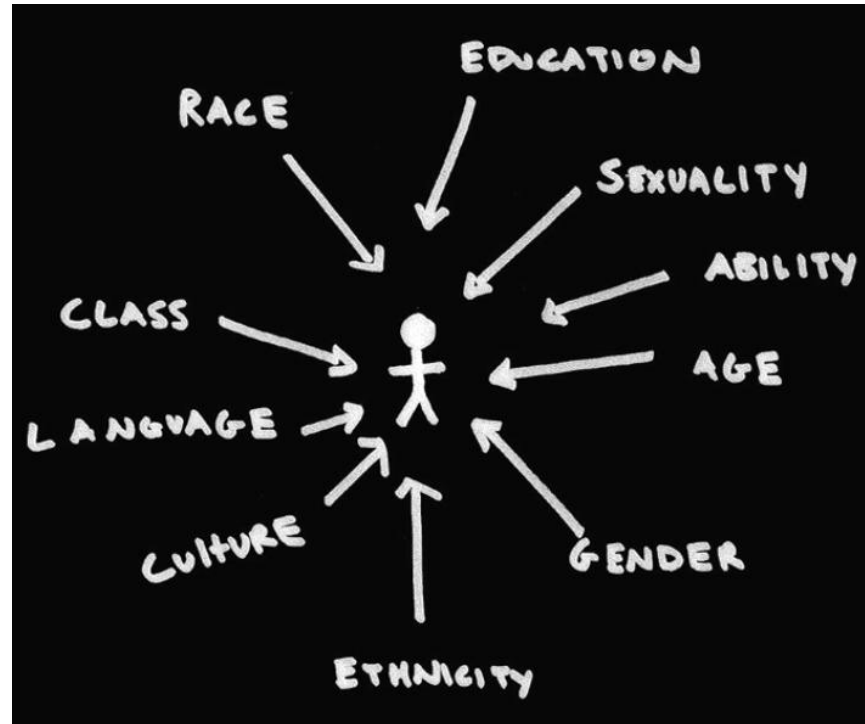
Intersectionality Travels into Education

- Crenshaw's "intersection metaphor (1989) spread quickly and was taken up in a variety of fields of research and politics," including the field of education (Lutz, Herrarra, & Supik, 2011).
- As Crenshaw's metaphor traveled into other disciplines, it also broadened in scope as it became clear that "socially marginalized people all over the world were facing all kinds of challenges and dilemmas as a consequence of intersectionality, intersections of race and gender, heterosexism, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, all of these social dynamics come together and create challenges that are quite unique" (Crenshaw, 2016).



Intersectional Identities

“Intersectionality is the belief that oppressions are interlinked and cannot be solved alone” (Dobson, n.d.).



Teaching Through an Intersectional Lens

- “Educators can use an intersectional lens to better relate to and affirm all students” (Bell, 2016).
- Teaching concepts of intersectionality and the concomitant “multiplied oppressions ... is a way of privileging [our] students’ identities, experiences, and stories” (Bell, 2016).
- Educators are in a unique position to enable students to “have a safe space to navigate how they identify themselves and [explore] what intersections they see of themselves” (Bell, 2016). Without this encouragement, “students will struggle to embrace, express, and advocate for their multiple identities” (Bell, 2016).



Empower Through Intersectionality

- Every day students enter our classrooms, “there’s an opportunity for them to be empowered or oppressed” (Bell, 2016).
- By teaching and emphasizing intersectionality, we empower and equip students to “*interrogate and challenge inequality and exclusion*” (Proctor, Williams, Scherr, & Li, 2017).

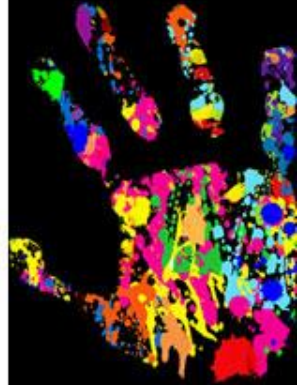
“If we aren’t intersectional, some of us, the most vulnerable, are going to fall through the cracks.”
~Kimberlé Crenshaw





**There is no such thing as
a single-issue struggle
because we do not live
single-issue lives.**

Audre Lorde



Resources for Teaching Intersectionality

- **Teaching Tolerance: Teaching at the Intersections: Honor and Teach About Your Students' Multiple Identities:**
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2016/teaching-at-the-intersections>
- **Teaching Tolerance Toolkit for “Teaching at the Intersections”:**
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2016/toolkit-for-teaching-at-the-intersections>
- **Beginner’s Guide to Intersectionality:**
https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.wpha.org/resource/resmgr/health_&_racial_equity/intersectionality_handout.pdf
- **National Association of School Psychologists Infographic, *Understanding Intersectionality*:**
[file:///C:/Users/janemcell/Downloads/2017-Intersectionality-Infographic-cmyk%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/janemcell/Downloads/2017-Intersectionality-Infographic-cmyk%20(1).pdf)
- **Kimberle Crenshaw’s “The Urgency of Intersectionality” TEDTalk:**
https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en#t-681290



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Images

- Figure 1. Respecting intersecting oppressions. (2016). Retrieved from <https://pseudodeviant.wordpress.com/2016/08/17/respecting-intersecting-oppressions/>
- Figure 2. Intersectionality, resistance, and history-making. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.auswhn.org.au/blog/intersectionality-history/>
- Figure 3. The race-gender intersection (n.d.). Retrieved from [cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)
- Figure 4. Coffee, Conversations, and Intersectionality. (2018). Retrieved from <https://sites.tufts.edu/insight/2018/12/06/coffee-conversation-intersectionality/>
- Figure 5. Intersectionality. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://nccj.org/intersectionality>
- Figure 6. Audre Lorde Quote. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/we-do-not-live-single-issue-lives-climate-change/audre-lorde-single-issue/>

