



Analysis of the Intersection of Race and Gender in Feminist Movements

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Abstract. Gender equity is an issue long been discussed, in which the group of colored women's voices gets more attention presently. Based on the established theoretical results on intersectionality and studies on American history of civil rights, this paper looks back on the racial-gender intersection in American feminist movements, at the same time explores its causes and significance, aiming to tease out the tortured process of racial and gender inequalities while trying to provide a reference for the ever-lasting marginal groups' civil rights movements exercises around the world. Finally, it is demonstrated that the long history of racial-gender intersection provided mass resources of practical cases and theoretical foundation. The conclusion is that colored women being involved in feminist movements preliminary emerged in first-wave feminism, but it was not until the third-wave feminism that the attention and discussion on intersectionality were included. Previous researches, literature from an American history organization and literature from some scholars are used as study materials.

Keywords: Intersectionality · Gender · Race · Ethnicity · Feminism

1 Introduction

Intersectionality, a term firstly created by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw framing the effects of intersected characteristics of individuals' societal images [1] [2], was popular in third-wave feminism. Third-wavers [3] are concerned with the long existed excluded minority within the category of "women" such as women of color and sexual minorities. Previous researches comprehensively analyzed how the intertwined whole range of the qualities—ethnicity, ethic, gender, class, sexual orientation, and even physical appearance act on women's political, legal and social status as well as set intersectionality theory into a larger societal theoretical system. Different from them, this paper focuses more on two particular aspects, that is, gender and race, exploring the reasons and causes of why the intersection got its ultimate formation only in third-wave feminism in America in a historic perspective, making the clarification of intersectionality more refined and specific. Enumerating cases of civic rights movements in American history as well as reviewing the pieces of literature, documents and narratives of those experienced, the author explored the history of separated-and-intersected anti-sexism, anti-racism movements in the United States and the intersectionality theory and practice

in feminist movements, and their effect on later social movements of equality. This study might be an observation of the contemporary practice of intersectionality and the equality fighting movements around the world, inspiring the advocacy for equality of groups as much as possible. This is also the motivation of the paper. Based on this looking back, future studies may further explore the present various kinds of anti-inequality practice or predict their future trend, analyzing present cases in depth.

2 Overview of the Intersection of Race and Gender in Feminist Movements

Although both of which being significant societal issues in the course of American history, ethnicity and gender equalities have not been intersected for long.

First, the term “intersection” in this paper needs illustrating. Intersectionality is a term firstly coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, in whose paper there were demonstrations focused on identities shaped by personalized experiences and individualized histories, deconstructing the “grand narrative” as well as concerning personal experiences affected by the systematic discrimination, therefore it was individualism and subjectification. In other words, what it stressed was “person” the subject, the individual, for instance, *a* colored woman, and how *it* was in the discourse of separated feminism and racism movements; while this paper focuses on “the intersection” of racism and sexism anti-discrimination themselves, demonstrating the same essence of the two that they are both the fights for civic right, that is, two forms of discriminated groups’ calling for human rights. Namely, the particular importance attached here is the meeting point, the superposition, of two parted discourses of equal rights, fights with the same essence.

Combining the above two, there comes the definition of “intersection” in this study insofar: a status where racial and gender social movements are organically superposed, while subjects’ self-identities and consciousness are profoundly affected and they can reflect on their own political lives.

Let us see how the intersection not truly exist in early civic rights movements. As for first-wave feminism, the fact that it was profoundly influenced by the abolitionist movements cannot veil its internal separated racial and gender issues. Far before some middle-class white women had joined them, abolitionism movements had seen African American women playing important role in fighting against slavery as well as sexism. 200 colored women set up the Daughters of Africa Society in Philadelphia, February 1821 [4], providing a weekly allowance of \$1.50 for its members that were sick. Some literary societies, such as the African-American Female Intelligence Society and Female Literary Association, were founded in the 1830s, aiming to spread knowledge and attack evil. In addition, numerous colored female activists openly spoke up for women’s education and civic rights. “O, ye daughters of Africa, awake! Awake! Arise! No longer sleep nor slumber, but distinguish yourselves. Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties”, said Maria Stewart [5], an abolitionist and women’s rights activist. It is apparent that most early anti-slavery movements were gender-integrated in contributions of colored female abolitionists whose racial-gender identities were clear. However, later when the first Women’s Rights Convention was held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, despite its fights that centered on women’s suffrage, whose achievement

was finally witnessed by the ratification of the nineteenth Amendment in which women's voting right was granted, it also marked the beginning of the conflicts between feminism and abolitionism movements. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, an observer of the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention and Susan B. Anthony, a paid representative of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1856 and [6], argued that the protection of colored men's right to vote would oppress white female's which should have been prior. A speech titled "On Woman's Rights" firstly delivered by Sojourner Truth, a colored abolitionist and feminist, was altered drastically and even re-titled "Ain't I a woman" by a white abolitionist Frances Dana Barker Gage in 1863, who also represented Sojourner speech in a stereotypical 'southern black slave accent' [7]. In 1876, Mary Ann Shadd Cary wrote to Stanton's National American Woman Suffrage Association, petitioning their 94 colored women's names be added on Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments", but this was never achieved. Furthermore, in the suffrage parade held in Washington, D.C by Stanton's National American Woman Suffrage Association, women of color were required only to parade in the back of the parade. Therefore, that although being integrated with the racial issues at the beginning, in the second half of first-wave feminist movement there existed the trend of feminism movements' separation from abolitionism and suppression of presenting of colored women's narrative and subjectivity is proved.

Second-wave feminism's merging within the period of the Civil Rights Act when African American men were centered accentuated it that race and gender became tenser in colored women's self-identity. Their political life was restricted by still oppressing Jim Crow laws, loll taxes and literacy tests; their personal experiences were excluded from those of the upper and middle-class white feminists. With feminism being less racial inclusive in essence, proved by that the Equal Pay Act of 1963 actually protected middle-class white women's salaries and that National Organization for Women asked occupations for white women while "many African American men and women faced racially motivated job discrimination and lived below the poverty line" [8], and with sexism oppression within their ethnic group, a new wave of movement was needed for this group's ignored narrative and political identity.

According to the reflection of second-wave feminism regarded only involved white women of middle-class, some leading feminists in second-wave and many feminists of color tried to find a new space in feminism for the introduction of more multiple characteristics [9]. Third-wave feminists pursued diverse and intersected qualities of a group of "women", in which racial factor was interconnected; they also opposed women-exclusive racial equality. Thus, it is believed that racial and gender issues are intertwined in third-wave feminism. The intersection of race and gender indicates stressing on individual and particularity. It attaches importance to the unique historical experiences of individuals, in other words, the forming of their present societal statuses.

3 The Embodiments of the Intersection of Race and Gender in Feminist Movements

3.1 Previous Human Civic Movements

Not only African American women were fighting for equality, but also some other ethnic groups of women kept on doing it in first-wave feminist movements. Tye Leung

Schulze became the first Chinese woman to vote in the United States in 1912, California. Philippine women also advocated for their rights. In 1905, the *Asociacion Feminista Filipina* (Philippine Feminist Association) was established to encourage women's participation in public issues. Some of the members met with First Lady Florence Harding at the White House in 1922. Latina women also fought for their rights while promoting social reform. In 1917, suffragist Adelina Otero-Warren was asked by the National Woman's Party, a Congressional Union, to lead their New Mexico chapter. Otero-Warren advocated that suffrage literature be published in both English and Spanish, so it was accessible to Latinx audiences. She was also instrumental in the ratification of the 19th Amendment in New Mexico.

In 1973, the NOW established the NOW Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism, allowing colored lesbians to speak up for themselves.

These small but significant steps are all cornerstones of the intersection of various minorities within the group of "women".

3.2 Third-Wave Feminist Movement

At Washington and Olympia in America in the early 1990s, marked with the emerge of an underground women punk movement, riot grrrl, whose songs of the primary bands were mostly involved racism, classism, sexuality and female empowerment featured irritation and self-mutilation symbolizing deconstruction of the established images of women, third-wave feminism rose. It got its name when Rebecca Walker's article *Becoming the Third Wave* claiming that racial equality should not be women-exclusive was published in Ms. Magazine in 1992 in response to black women Anita Hill's failed accusation of being sexually harassed by Clarence Thomas, an African-American judge of the United States Supreme Court, whose nomination was believed would break racial inequality. This showed the main point that it was not the inequality of simply essentialized different social groups labeled "women and men" or "colored and white" that was centered, but the interconnected characteristics and qualities within one group, that is, intersectionality and diversity of the "women", was stressed in third-wave feminism. Third-wave feminism centered on "violence against women" such as rape, domestic violence and slut-shaming, especially that of women of color, resulting in abortion legitimization, insulting terms against women reclamation and so on.

4 Reasons and Causes of the Intersection

4.1 Philosophical Theory Foundation

Existentialism by Sartre was widely spread in the 1950s–1960s, in which he focused on human existence and essence. It was demonstrated that human's essence is not predetermined, but is formed in the course of life by its own constant choices, that is, human creates itself in the process of its existence. Existence is accidental, unprovoked, and is not pre-emptively deduced from a certain definite or absolute spirit, and there is no absolute standard of existence. Therefore, human exists first, then through their choices, its essence is decided. Influenced by existentialism, Simone de Beauvoir published a

book named *The Second Sex* in 1949, illustrating that “one is not born but becomes a woman” by the concern on women’s physical and mental experience. She revealed the reason why women were shaped as “the second”, outlining an outlet of their gaining subjectivity. Published in 1963, America, *The Feminine Mystique* written by Betty Friedan was highly influenced by this book, clarifying the shared experiences of unsatisfying systematically domesticized women’s life of being mothers and housewives. That is to say, although both of which cast individuals’ personal experiences at first place, that “women” the category is constructed by the societal system, and is formed in the process of human society’s development was thus involved insofar. Therefore, stress on the mechanism of this systematic oppression was entailed, in which its societal function and impact on subjects needed demonstrating. The construction of individuals by society preliminarily embodying structuralism had already made its first appearance in second-wave feminism, for instance, Gloria Steinem, criticized pornography because it false-constructed the social image of women—an image of being dominated, with the paradigm of “master-enslaved”.

After World War II, according to the reality of humanities’ research environment as well as the surface of criticizing existentialism ideology in an atmosphere of distrust in the so-called “subjectivity” firstly in French, the methodology of structuralism later drowned out the tide of the former, in which the function mechanism of the generalized system, the construction of knowledge and language that was coded in individuals was centered instead. What followed was poststructuralism, giving up the simplified “metanarrative” that was once concerned, calling for reconstructing the individually historic narrated contexts.

4.2 Law as the Pioneer

As a both constitutional and institutional tool of coding subjects into the societal knowledge system, the law was firstly involved in the discourse of systematic function on individuals rethinking in a postmodernism perspective, where those gender-racial related cases were the very stages of systematic discriminations played. Beyond the dispute on discrimination of African American women’s right to vote long before, the phenomenon of “colorblindness” in client interaction in lawyering had brought itself into notice and discussion. For example, Leslie G. Espinoza, together with her co-worker Alisa’ experience of failing to achieve consensus with one of their clients, a white woman unwilling to get separated from her colored husband who sexually assaulted their daughter, because of their only following the “traditional interview model”, which was a normalized and simplified narrative designed for all to follow, overlooking the woman’s thought on the role the colored father would play in the process of their mix raced children’s identifications, which was an individual context that hard to fit in, made her reflect on the context between the lawyer and the client affected by racial factors in the client’s personal history. She illustrated “colorblindness” with an analogy of “sameness” in feminist movements.

Therefore, the barrier between the metanarrative and personally colored individual context firstly held legal practitioners’ eyes as the “knowledge constructor” and “storyteller”, entailing that as such a group of social actors, they have the responsibility to reconstruct a system where the systematic discrimination is erased. At the same time,

every subjects' personal history should be equally heard. That was then the term "intersectionality" was coined, by Crenshaw, who was also a lawyer, primarily to stress the systematic oppression on individuals that just formed what a subject "can" experience, which therefore was focused, in which Crenshaw, as a feminist, directly focused the most on how the declared neutral system discriminates African American women.

4.3 Reflection on Previous Feminism Movements

According to the result of reflecting on legal, the intersectionality theory became widely used as an analysis theoretical frame. Many feminists then began to rethink the same phenomenon in feminist movements. They reflected on colored women's twisted and vague subjectivity in-depth, finding out that the simplified category of African American women can be oppression and ignorance. In other words, identity politics encountered the dilemma of "narrow group consciousness", the first reason of which is identity conflicts in practice. Social movements are based on individuals' identities, which in reality are often superimposed, making it possible that various identities of one subject are in different degrees of conflict in the actual movement. The second reason is the theoretical "tendency of reductionism." Because of the possibility that one identity can be reduced by another, for instance, blackness is to gender, the debate on deciding the ranking of these identities would be. Therefore, surpassing the narrow categories became necessary. Within these reflections, the discourse of intersectionality gradually emerged in all the movements in America at this time. It emphasized the differences between multiple groups as well as rejected single homogenization. It also demanded that the "grand narratives" recognize its various forms of oppression, thus hoping to achieve the liberation of all mankind.

5 The Significance of the Intersection

Theoretically speaking, as Kathy Davis put it, the openness and vagueness of intersectionality made it influential, because of its deconstruction of universalism and binarism in western philosophical normal form. Moreover, it can be a methodology and analysis model for studying the systematic oppression used in various societal narratives. Also, it is seeking for getting out of the given social and cultural system in order of a higher extent of equality can be regarded as a further step of gaining an individual's subjectivity and political identity.

Practically speaking, the intersection of racial and gender issues in movements, along with all the once-oppressed minorities ushered in a new place where different groups were able to truly advocate for themselves based on their own historic and personalized experience, without being simply squeezed and stretched between several classes. Interconnected with the internet and social media, the Me Too Movement reached its peak in third-wave feminism in the U.S., creating the first field of meeting and blending of multiple individual narratives as well as the "affective solidarity" [10] in between various experienced women. According to Elizabeth Evans, in England, most officially registered feminism clubs in colleges claimed their "intersectionality". Some feminist organizations in England, such as Sister Uncut and Feminist Fightback, sought to practice and exploring intersectionality [11].

6 Conclusion

This paper revealed the long history of the separated-and-intersected two forms of civic rights movements, feminism and anti-racism, and illustrated their “final” intersection on the stage of third-wave feminism movement with the introduction of the theoretical fundamental, demonstrating that in spite of the tortuous process of this intersection, its solid theoretical basis and profound influences are instructive to the future practice of equality fighting movements, while the study’s deficiencies are also obvious. For example, if there was sufficient statistic data such as women’s employment rate or female administrative staff status might, the statement would be more convincing; if there were charts referenced, the paper would be more readable. Future study may focus on further exploring the practice of the theory of intersectionality in present various kinds of collective anti-inequality movements or individual social and political life by means of cases and societal statistic data study; studying the insufficient exposure in the process of it; working on the perfection of intersectionality theories, or predicting its future trend.

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