

**Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins:
Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”**

Question for all: “The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women” [1252]. Give an example of each kind of failure from the article. Can you think of examples from your own political experience?

1. Crenshaw sets out to examine the intersectional oppression of US “women of color” in the context of rape and battering. At times she describes cases and policies that affect, variously, “immigrant women,” “non-English-speaking women,” “poor women.” Some women in all of these categories are white, while not all women of color are immigrants, non-English-speaking, or poor. How do you understand this slippage between the identity category “women of color” and the various other group memberships Crenshaw invokes in the article? What makes “women of color” into a useful overarching category here?

2. In footnote 9, Crenshaw notes that “I consider intersectionality a provisional concept... In mapping the intersections of race and gender, the concept does engage dominant assumptions that race and gender are essentially separate categories. By tracing the categories to their intersections, I hope to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable. While the primary intersections that I explore here are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color” [1244-5]. What limitations in her method, and what better, future, method does Crenshaw point to here? How can we decide in advance which “issues” will matter, or does this emerge only in a research context?

3. In discussing stereotypes and myths about battered women, Crenshaw points to “a few commentators,” who “have even transformed the message that battering is not *exclusively* a problem of the poor or minority communities into a claim that it *equally* affects all races and classes. Yet these comments seem less concerned with exploring domestic abuse within ‘stereotyped’ communities than with removing the stereotype as an obstacle to exposing battering within white middle- and upper-class communities” [1259]. What are the rhetorical risks that Crenshaw is describing? What are *stereotypes*, in these contexts, and how could they be avoided?

4. Of the case of the obscenity prosecution of the rap group 2 Live Crew, Crenshaw concludes, “obscenity prosecutions of rap artists do nothing to protect the interests of those most directly implicated in rap—Black women. On the one hand, prevailing notions of obscenity separate out sexuality from violence, which has the effect of shielding the more violently misogynistic groups from prosecution; on the other, historical linkages between images of Black male sexuality and violence permit the singling out of ‘lightweight’ rappers for prosecution among all other purveyors of explicit sexual imagery” [1290]. Explain what Crenshaw means. She argues that the tactics used both in supporting and in opposing this prosecution reflected a mix of the “sexualized racial politics of the past,” misogyny, and anti-Black racism. Trace these threads through her discussion. In the end, is she suggesting a better response to misogyny that comes from men of color?

5. In her conclusion, Crenshaw describes “the vulgarized social construction thesis,” according to which “since all categories are socially constructed, there is no such thing as, say, Blacks or women, and thus it makes no sense to continue reproducing those categories by organizing around them” [1296]. How does Crenshaw argue against this position? Are there any risks attached to her argument?

Question for all: This week in Edmonton a transit ad was pulled that featured a row of young Muslim women over the captions, “Muslim girls honour killed by their families. Is your family threatening you? Is there a fatwa on your head? We can help.” Readers are referred to a US group called Stop the Islamicization of America. In response, Councillor Amarjeet Sohi is quoted as saying, “Honour killing is a serious problem ... (but) this problem is present in every community, not just the Muslim community.” “Honour killing, domestic violence, is present, it’s a social issue, in all communities.” How does this example fit into Crenshaw’s analysis? What do you think about it?