

Hierarchies of Knowledge about Intersectionality in Marketing Theory and Practice

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Abstract: There is scant research regarding intersectionality and epistemic hierarchies in marketing, including connections and disconnections between knowledge about intersectionality produced in marketing scholarship and practice. Thus, we examine how market logics propelled by gendered racial capitalism and the commercialization of identity politics impact the production of knowledge about intersectionality in the marketing discipline and industry. We consider how the notion of ‘intersectionality’ has been conceptualized and obfuscated in marketing scholarship and entwined industry discourse. Consequently, we provide a genealogy of how ‘intersectionality’ has been framed in marketing studies and industry approaches which reflect the entanglements of knowledge production, the politics of representation, and the marketization of social justice. Overall, we contribute to scholarly interventions regarding how intersecting oppressions influence marketing and critical analyses of it, as well as the complex interrelationship between marketing, commercial representation, and discourses of identity, inequality, and structural change.

Keywords: activism; advertising; capitalism; epistemology; identity; intersectionality; race; racial capitalism; social justice

Introduction

In 2018, Sony Motion Pictures announced it would be hiring the company’s first Senior Vice President of ‘intersectional marketing’. In a memo sent to company employees and then to the marketing and media trade press, Sony’s president of U.S. marketing relayed that the new executive position, ‘will craft broad, 360-degree diversity-based marketing strategies that will inform all facets of our film campaigns including publicity, creative, digital, media, research and promotions. The role will connect and align these operations in this space to ensure our campaigns achieve maximum exposure to the widest possible audiences’ (N’Duka, 2018). Intersectionality has transformed from its Black feminist and critical race theory (CRT) origins into a corporate marketing strategy.

Thirty years ago, legal scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991) coined the term ‘intersectionality’ in two landmark articles that changed how scholars and the public conceptualize systemic oppression. In ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex’, Crenshaw (1989) analyzed legal cases brought forth by Black woman plaintiffs who faced judges that failed to recognize the validity of their discrimination cases. The American legal system has invisibilized Black women’s experiences with employment discrimination by

erroneously conceptualizing racism and gender discrimination as mutually exclusive phenomena. In ‘Mapping the Margins,’ Crenshaw (1991) describes how ‘systems of subordination’ - namely those of racism, sexism, classism, and citizenship status - coalesce to shape women of color’s experiences with domestic violence, rape, and the social interventions designed to remediate them.

Intersectionality is a conceptual pillar of critical race theory (CRT), a field of legal studies developed to challenge normative U.S. legal structures and racist policies. In recent years, however, the term has risen to prominence across many academic disciplines and more recently, in popular discourse. Right wing U.S. and U.K. political groups, threatened by critical race theory’s insurgent potential, have also responded by seeking to discredit and obstruct intersectionality from being taught in schools and government institutions. Such moves are emblematic of how interconnected structural oppressions facilitate *hierarchies of knowledge*, and how power dynamics impact the way people and institutions produce, disseminate, and understand theories, perspectives, and epistemological positions.

However, hierarchies of knowledge have also impacted the way that intersectionality has been incorporated across a range of fields. Indeed, as sociologist Sirma Bilge (2013) remarks, intersectionality’s ‘buzzword’ popularity has also led to it being subject to ‘widespread misrepresentation, tokenization, displacement and disarticulation’ (410) from the critique of interconnected oppressions that the concept was originally intended to encompass. In this article, we turn our attention to how the Western marketing industry and marketing academia interpret intersectionality in ways that uphold the ideologies and aspirations of capitalist political economy. We explore ideas about, allusions to, and illusions of, intersectionality within and across both fields. By *allusions to intersectionality*, we mean surface-level or symbolic gestures to intersectionality that do not engage with the wholeness of the concept but also do not actively misrepresent it either. By *illusions of intersectionality*, we mean statements and actions that completely reframe and misrepresent what intersectionality is intended to convey.

When exploring hierarchies of knowledge in marketing, it is pertinent to examine the relationship between marketing scholarship and industry discourse. Contrary to what is sometimes implied within academia, higher education institutions are not the sole site where theories about marketing and consumer culture are produced. Marketing industry institutions, whether it be marketing departments within brands, advertising agencies, or the trade press also play a crucial role in producing and circulating industry ideologies about personhood, society, and capitalism. Research has underscored disconnections between marketing scholarship and the actual interests held by marketers in industry (Baker and Holt, 2004; Hughes et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the marketing industry and marketing academia both wield *epistemic power* over how intersectionality is being contextualized and conceptualized in popular discourse.

Epistemic power which relates to the socially constructed nature of knowledge (Ackah and Torkington, 1996; Salami, 2020) encompasses an individual’s and/or institution’s ability to impact ideas about knowledge on specific topics, and their potential to be deemed an authority in their field. It also involves what Hall (2016: 3) describes as ‘when a set of discourses and practices are institutionalised: They are concretised in a particular form, in a program of activities and a specific socially composed group of people. They are directed to certain targets and projects’. In this article, we turn our attention to the epistemic power dynamics that inform marketing industry and academia’s definitions and use of intersectionality. The epistemic power wielded by the marketing industry and marketing academia, arguably, often entails similar ideological commitments to capitalist political economy and thus, also herald certain normative standards for what is considered truth not only within those realms but within culture at large. Further still, ‘[T]hose who get to tell

intersectionality's story wield epistemic power over intersectionality's history, borders, core questions, and goals' (Hill Collins, 2019: 122).

We grapple with matters of epistemic power within and between the marketing industry and marketing scholarship by positioning them both as 'interpretive communities' of intersectionality's meaning and utility as a concept (Hill Collins 2019). When examining the marketing industry as a knowledge-making institution (author citation), we unpack how neoliberal capitalist rationality (specifically, the commercialization of identity politics) plays a part in disciplining, managing, and marketing discourses about intersectionality, and demonstrates the relationship between activist and marketing practices. Our exploration of the ongoing marketization of intersectionality, and the term's movement within the marketing discipline, responds to pertinent questions such as 'how do power relations inform intersectionality's theoretical content and the processes used to develop that knowledge?' (Hill Collins, 2019: 23). We contend that ideas about, allusions to, and illusions of, intersectionality in marketing theory and industry reflect power struggles between marketing and social justice epistemic terrains as institutions of knowledge production.

On intersectionality

Intersectionality has traversed scholarly disciplines in academia and has also attained popular relevance beyond its bounds. Stemming from its implementation in key critical race theory articles penned by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'intersectionality' is a term that names how systems of stratification manifest in society as interconnected phenomena. Crenshaw's disillusionment with the shortcomings of both feminist and anti-racist movements for treating racism and sexism as mutually exclusive forms of oppression impelled her to coin a term that would emphasize the intertwined nature of these systems of power, especially in the lives of Black women and their experiences with the American legal system. Her pioneering contributions emphasize the limitations of movement organizing and policy making that marginalizes women of color's experiences with matters ranging from employment discrimination to domestic violence.

At the basis of intersectionality are ideas that have roots in a longer lineage of Black radical liberation politics, including those from the Combahee River Collective. In 1977, this coalition of Black American queer feminist activists penned 'A Black Feminist Statement', which foregrounded their commitment to a movement 'strugg[le] against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression' (Combahee River Collective, 2017 [1977]: 15). One of their central goals for social change, they wrote, was to develop an 'integrated analysis and practice based on the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking'. With the concept of 'identity politics', the group articulated their focus on mobilizing for liberation through the vantage point of their specific experiences as Black women living under the regime of multiple axes of power, including but not limited to racism, heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism (Combahee River Collective, 2017 [1977]).

Crenshaw developed these ideas into the concept of 'intersectionality' in her canonical 1989 law review article, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'. There, Crenshaw (1989: 149) invokes an analogy of an accident occurring at a traffic intersection to demonstrate how multiple forms of oppression can manifest in the lives of Black women. The traffic intersection analogy has proven apt for illuminating 'the significance of social structural arrangements of power, how individual and group experiences reflect those structural intersections, and how political marginality might engender new subjectivities and agency' (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016 in Hill Collins 2019,

26). Intersectionality's versatility as both 'a heuristic and analytic tool' (Carbado et al., 2013: 303) for grasping and transforming power dynamics offers a way to reconceptualize understandings of discrimination, violence, as well as notions of group identity and individual subjectivity.

Intersectionality is commonly understood as a form of 'resistant knowledge', associated with political projects that have social justice commitments critical of hegemonic power formulations (Hill Collins, 2019: 126). Understanding intersectionality's connections to social justice is a crucial consideration for not only theorizing intersectionality but also understanding how it has been adopted in the marketing discipline and practice. The existence of structural oppressions that the term intersectionality underscores also inform how knowledge is produced, legitimized, or undermined, and circulated or actively obscured. Put briefly, intersecting oppressions such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, and classism impact what Dotson (2014: 115) terms 'Epistemic oppression', which 'refers to persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production'. The question of who gets to tell intersectionality's story. And what story will they tell?' (Hill Collins, 2019: 122), is a matter of how power shapes epistemology. In conversation with such work, we consider *what* (marketing industry discourse and marketing scholarship) attempts to tell intersectionality's story, or at least, attempts to define what intersectionality *is* in ways impacted by hierarchies of knowledge. To do this we unpack how intersecting oppressions have been made manifest in marketing industry practices over the years.

Intersecting oppressions in marketing:

Perspectives in marketing scholarship have addressed how the intersections of different forms of oppression shape marketplace experiences and disciplinary knowledge production (author citation, Burton, 2002; Crockett, 2020; Crockett et al., 2011; Grier et al., 2019; Grier and Poole, 2020; Johnson et al., 2019; Thomas, 2013). There is also a rich body of work that examines the racist dynamics of marketplace representations, environments, exchanges, and associated epistemologies (author citation; author citation; Davis, 2018; Grier et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2019). At a time when legacies and the continued presence of racial injustice are at the forefront of much media, public, and political discourse due to liberationist organizing like The Movement for Black Lives (Poole et al., 2021), the marketing industry has been called by consumers as well as practitioners to reckon with its complicity and participation in oppressive systems.

Marketing's role in a capitalist economy is to craft and communicate messages that promote the cultural practices and ideologies of consumption. To that end, marketing is an institution that does not only promote products and services to consumers; it also communicates ideas about what it means to be a human being, and the 'cultural norms, roles and hierarchies' present in a given society (Kennedy 2000, 617). In other words, marketing is also a knowledge making institution. Within a society organized by gendered racial capitalism, (author citation; Haley, 2019) marketing has commercialized a range of discourses about identity which reflect, and, also, refract the existence of intersecting oppressions such as racism, sexism, and classism.

In the US and West, capitalism's 'fundamental dynamic' (Jenkins and Leroy, 2021: 20) is that of 'domination through differentiation' where socially constructed distinctions among human populations, like race and gender, have been used to bolster and legitimize exploitative practices of capital accumulation (Melamed, 2015), labor, and value extraction (Robinson, 1983). The term 'racial capitalism' names the intertwined relationship between race as an ideology of human difference and racism as a political practice (Gilmore, 2019;

Kelley, 2017; Robinson, 1983) which ‘rationalize[s] the unequal distribution of resources, social power, rights, and privileges’ (Jenkins and Leroy, 2021: 3). In this article, we use the term ‘gendered racial capitalism’, an analytic coined by historian Sarah Haley, which emphasizes the ‘mutually constitutive role of race and gender’ in the structure of social hierarchy, particularly in the context of American capitalist development (Haley, 2016: 4–5).

When the marketing industry produces ideas about people and their imagined value as consumers for a brand, such discourses must be situated within the political economic context of gendered racial capitalism, and how this system has operated and classified people. In the words of sociological and cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997: 617), ‘No advertising image could work without being associated with it a kind of claim on identity’. Brand marketers who speak about goals to ‘win’ consumers’ ‘share of mind’ and ‘share of heart’ allude to this very type of social project: ‘to fabricate identification’ between products and personhood. For example, through segmentation, or the technique of classifying people into belonging to target markets, marketers craft discourses about identity which have also historically reflected the existence of interlocking oppressions, as well as consumer culture’s engagement with knowledge and efforts yielded to address such oppressions (e.g., identity politics).

We can look to the history of consumer segmentation in the United States as an example of how marketing industry practices reproduce interlocking oppressions. For much of the 20th century, Black Americans were marginalized from American brand marketers’ visions of a mass consumer market, which was largely imagined as white and middle class (author citation). The legal and cultural edict of racial segregation that systematically separated and excluded Black Americans from mainstream political and civic society also had an impact on the marketing industry. During the postwar era, as the US was becoming enculturated into mass consumerism, American federal government economic policies, such as the G.I Bill, granted white Americans privileged exclusive access to consumer credit and low interest mortgages for suburban home ownership, setting the foundation of the mid twentieth century American ‘consumer’s republic’ (author citation; Cohen 2003). Already existing interlocking racialized and class oppressions in the U.S were reproduced in marketing through advertising and iconic brand mascots (Thomas et al., 2020) as well as in many brands’ segregated vision of the American mass market, which deemed Black Americans undesirable consumers who lacked purchasing power (Foster Davis, 2013; Weems, 1998). Resulting from this systemic exclusion in marketing was the development of race-specific marketing firms that specialized in producing advertisements targeted to Black consumers separately, in Black oriented press (Chambers, 2009)

However, U.S. gendered racial capitalism has a ‘highly malleable’ structure (Jenkins and Leroy, 2021). That is, while marketing has in the past marginalized racialized populations in its representations and segmentation tactics, sociopolitical and economic changes have impacted how the industry regards historically marginalized groups. During the latter part of the 20th century, as neoliberal economic and political thought became the leading framework, it also altered how corporate marketers conceptualized the US consumer marketplace. Post-Fordist changes in production and corporate globalization fragmented the homogenous mass market, leading to a proliferation of new types of goods. Such economic and technological transformations in consumer society also coincided with the countercultural and social justice movements, including that of Black feminists like the Combahee River Collective who mobilized for social change through a politics based on identity and shared struggles. By the 1970s, the marketing industry’s adoption of countercultural movement signifiers as a source of youthful cool cache included recognition that ‘difference was an important element of politicization and resistance cultures’ which could be mobilized to create ‘niche markets’ (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 29). In other words, to

paraphrase the notion that the personal is political, brands deem the nexus of both as profitable.

Neoliberalism's entrenchment across the globe thus has involved a shift in the cultural politics of difference and marketing's role in representing and reproducing these dynamics. Whereas the marketing paradigms of gendered racial capitalism's not-so-distant past excluded or distorted representations of historically marginalized groups, the cultural politics of neoliberalism represents an iteration of gendered racial capitalism that seeks to 'incorporate and partly reflect the differences' present in society (Stuart Hall, 1995), including in the form of allusions to, or illusions of, intersectionality. 'Diversity' is the prevailing concept of difference embraced by corporate marketing today, and one that affirms that difference must come with a business case to underscore its value to a firm. Diversity is a form of expertise intended to make business operations more efficient and relevant for a variety of people and contexts (Dugan, 2003: xiii). What has resulted from the enculturation of neoliberal rationality through the popular culture and policy changes is the preeminence of consumer identity over all other forms of human subjectivity, market value over all other values, and in turn, marketing as knowledge.

The marketing industry's recent embrace of intersectionality reflects this shift in the commercialization of identity politics and difference for the purposes of capital accumulation. Shelley Zalis, a marketer writing for *Forbes*, communicated this point of view when stating in an article that 'intersectionality is the new diversity', later noting that 'rather than looking at diversity as appealing to many individual constituencies, brands that are doing it right realize that consumers have multiple, overlapping identities — and they expect to see that reflected in their product advertising' (Zalis, 2020). Intersectionality is discussed here as a methodology for marketers to better appeal to consumers. The insurgent politics and anti-capitalist critique of Intersectionality's origins are absent from this marketer's interpretation. Rather, this conception of intersectionality as corporate diversity anchors it in consumer culture, naturalizing rather than challenging capitalism's ideologies and institutions.

For some advertising agencies, intersectionality is defined as a heuristic for conceptualizing the identities of the coveted Generation Z youth demographic. Generation Z - a cohort consisting of those born between 1996 and 2012 - has been designated by the Pew Research Centre as 'the most racially and ethnically diverse' in the United States, with 48% people of color. Rather than presenting intersectionality as a way of thinking about power, one ad agency defines intersectionality as a core character trait of today's youth. R/GA, a digital advertising agency based in New York City, characterized Generation Z in a 2019 report about Gen Z's 'understanding of intersectional identity politics—the idea that multiple identities and factors including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and economic status all dynamically shape a person—result in a multitude of identities that open up possibilities rather than close them down' (Herman 2019).

While such recognition of the interconnected nature of identities may be deemed progressive via a liberal lens, marketing's interpretation of intersectionality relegates it exclusively to matters of identity in ways that decontextualize the concept from its Black feminist intellectual tradition. Intersectionality is thus framed as an individualized character trait emblematic of today's ostensibly progressive and shape-shifting youth consumer base. Put differently, intersectionality is conceptualized to describe how today's coveted youth demographic are forming their consumer selves, making it prudent for brands to understand and become interwoven in this unfolding process of becoming. We regard such portrayals of intersectionality as illusions of it, as they seem devoid of any connection to political underpinnings and structural power dynamics at the core of intersectionality. Additionally, illusions of intersectionality in marketing industry reflect how institutions engage with the

epistemic work of Black women and feminists in extractive and self-serving ways that involve distorting and repackaging their resistant knowledge.

Marketers also allude to ideas about intersectionality in ways that involve surface-level or symbolic gestures to intersectionality that do not engage with the wholeness of the concept but also do not actively misrepresent it either. The notion that interlocking subject positions can result in people's varying experience with power structures and oppression is nowhere mentioned in R/GA's ad agency definition of intersectionality. Rather, the term is framed as a route for marketers to create more brand relevance through a seemingly more fine-grained understanding of youth culture. Examples such as this one, symbolize elements of *what* (marketing industry discourse) attempts to tell intersectionality's story, or at least, attempts to define what intersectionality is.

When advertising conglomerate IPG Mediabrands' creative agency UM announced the promotion of its U.S. chief marketing officer in August of 2019, press coverage about it explained that 'part of [the CMO's] role...will be helping clients understand intersectionality and how it relates to them being able to market authentically to consumers' (Rittenhouse 2019). Intersectionality is positioned as a framework for brands to achieve more seamless integration into peoples' sense of self. According to a consumer research survey that the agency's new executive commissioned, 'one of the most significant findings...has been its confirmation of "intersectionality"', revealing that 'the average U.S. consumer identifies himself or herself 9.3 different ways, while Hispanic respondents placed into 10.3 different segments and Black audiences into 10 segments' (Rittenhouse, 2019). As a market segmentation strategy, intersectionality surfaces as a rationalizing technique for brands and ad agencies to measure and manage subjectivity, rendering identities predictable for marketers to plan campaigns for more precisely. Intersectionality, in other words, is useful insofar as it makes marketing messages more efficient and effective.

Marketing's use of intersectionality is positioned by industry professionals and journalists as a new way for brand marketers to approach consumer segmentation in a globalizing marketplace; rather than turn singular classifications into market segments, as has been done by brands in decades past, intersectionality as market segmentation strategy proposes that marketing reflect more complex conceptions of identity to make more people feel included in consumer culture. Intersectionality surfaces as a concept centered on consumer preference, not political mobilization. Marketing's superficial yet strategic deployment of intersectionality undermines intersectionality's potential to address interlocking power structures and develop an ethics of non-oppressive coalition-building and claims-making. Or rather, such an approach sometimes reframes the importance of these politics solely to the realm of commercial representation.

Recast in depoliticized terms, intersectionality becomes a tool that both marketing practitioners and scholars can invoke to demonstrate 'marketable expertise' in managing potentially problematic kinds of diversity, without actually tackling intersecting forms of systemic oppression. In sum, such a reframing of intersectionality often 'invokes the existence of difference and variety without any necessary commitment to action or redistributive justice' (Deem and Ozga, 2006: 745), and in ways that signal the marketing industry's power to shape certain narratives concerning what constitutes intersectionality (e.g. consumer identity as intersectionality) and knowledge about it. We now turn our attention to the details of the marketing discipline's engagement with intersectionality, while further contextualizing our work by reflecting on the position from which it is approached.

Representations of Intersectionality in marketing scholarship

Although the term ‘intersectionality’ still has a relatively peripheral status in the marketing discipline, it features in an expanding body of research (author citation; Gopaldas, 2013; Gopaldas and DeRoy, 2015; Gopaldas and Siebert, 2018; Nölke, 2017; Steinfeld et al., 2019). For example, in 2011, at a point when ‘intersectionality’ was seldom uttered in the marketing discipline, Crockett et al. (2011: 50) offered a meaningful and detailed explanation of ‘Insights from Intersectionality’: ‘More than two decades ago, feminist and critical race scholars called for research that explores the interconnected nature of race-, sex-, and class-based inequality; these researchers built theory around their connectivity rather than treating them as discrete phenomena with independent, additive effects’. Although Crenshaw’s (1989; 1991) work on intersectionality is carefully engaged with as part of marketing studies such as that of Crockett et al., elsewhere, marketing scholarship theorizes intersectionality in ways that can detract from or merely allude to the social justice work that an intersectional understanding of oppression is intended to support, nor does it contribute to structural critiques of capitalist political economy.

Conceptualizations of intersectionality in marketing vary, especially with regards to the extent to which Black feminism and the scholarship of people of color is salient in such discussions. In ‘Intersectional Structuring of Consumption’, Ger (2018) introduces the concept of intersectionality as one that centralizes power dynamics and their relationship to ‘subjectivity, knowledge, power, resistance and social structures’. Citing Crenshaw as the originator of the term, Ger (2018) underscores intersectionality’s focus on examining ‘multidimensional structures of domination’ through ‘thick description’ of inequality. Ger (2018) highlights intersectionality as an ‘epistemological’ approach and ‘political orientation’ that enables social transformation by encouraging critical reflexivity of one’s standpoint and positionality. Ger (2018) aligns intersectionality with the Transformative Consumer Research agenda due to its focus on ‘praxis-oriented social science’, as well as with research that examines consumer identity projects and instances of resistance.

Relatedly, Gopaldas (2013, 2015, 2018) has written several articles centering intersectionality and its methodological application to marketing research. In ‘Beyond Gender: Intersectionality, Culture and Consumer Behavior’ Gopaldas and Fischer (2012) encourage researchers to conduct analyses of how marketers represent ‘multiply marginalized groups’ in advertising and call for more studies that shed light on the connection between ‘intersectional identities’ and ‘emotions’, and their connection to consumer behaviour. Gopaldas’ subsequent research with DeRoy (2015) applies intersectionality as a framework to analyse commercial content, such as magazine covers, and the degree to which people situated at ‘historically privileged intersections’ and ‘multiply disadvantaged intersections’ are imaged. Defining intersectionality as a methodological approach that ‘considers diversity across multiple dimensions at once’ (2015: 1), the authors introduce the term ‘intersectional travesty’ to describe “the ridicule, stereotyping, and generally inferior quality of representation granted to intersections of historically oppressed identities” (2015:3)

Gopaldas and DeRoy (2015) point to the larger implications of marketing’s ‘intersectional travesties,’ writing that ‘consumers who are rendered invisible in marketing and media imagery are implicitly denied basic human needs for inclusion and acceptance, while consumers who are travestied are implicitly denied basic human needs for dignity and respect’ (27). While this research insightfully points to marketing’s role in naturalizing existing social marginalization through its pervasive imagery, we contend that it is also crucial that the correlation between marketing representations and the political standing of marginalized groups not be overstated. After all, marketing communications are not ever merely reflective of existing societal arrangements. Commercial culture is also a domain where advertisers invoke fantasy, fiction, and distortions to construct consumer desire.

Gopaldas and DeRoy's characterization implies that marginalized groups' inclusion in advertising as consumer subjects is a reliable indication of their social standing at large. However, while contemporary advertising may arguably more inclusive than ever, "travesties" in economic and political inequality within gendered racial capitalism continue to persist. Purchasing power and political power are not one in the same (Ball 2020).

Furthermore, by defining intersectionality's value to marketing scholars as providing a more 'accurate' picture 'of all possible identities available in a context,' this *allusion* to intersectionality overemphasizes it as a theory of identity rather than as a heuristic for analysing power. This overemphasis is made clear in their definition of "intersectional research" as "consider[ing] all possible intersections of all possible identities available in a context (e.g. the current research considers 32 intersections of 10 categories)" (2015: 25). Such a framing conceptualizes identities as bounded, quantified entities as opposed to "fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power" (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013: 795). As Cho, Crenshaw and McCall contend "The recasting of intersectionality as a theory primarily fascinated with the infinite combinations and implications of overlapping identities from an analytic initially concerned with structures of power and exclusion is curious given the explicit references to structures that appear in much of the early work" (2013: 797). Indeed, although intersectionality does certainly aid in analyses of the relationship between power hierarchies and identity differences, it "primarily concerns the way things work rather than who people are" (Chun, Lipsitz, Shin 2013: 923). This work's allusions to intersectionality, while not completely a misrepresentation of the concept, denudes the "radical conclusions" they promise to illuminate (2015:28).

Moreover, the work of Steinfeld et al. (2019) on 'Transformative Intersectionality: Moving business towards a critical praxis' acknowledges some of the Black feminist roots of notions of intersectionality and advocates that intersectionality can facilitate 'corporate citizenship', including on the part of corporations such as Facebook, Google and Starbucks. Nevertheless, we question what a focus on corporate citizenship can yield for remediating structural oppression which many, if not all, corporations perpetuate. As part of our acknowledgment that gendered racial capitalism underpins corporate activity and the societal inequities produced therein, we question whether pursuing social justice goals within existing corporate and marketplace structures aligns with an intersectional approach or is fundamentally at odds with it. Our position contrasts with that of Steinfeld et al. (2019: 367) who assert that 'business' contribution to positive change and the complexities business face in doing so' has been down-played in marketing scholarship and discussions of intersectionality. Due to the pro-business angle of much marketing scholarship that appeals to the institutional gaze of industry, conceptualizations of intersectionality in the marketing discipline rarely include an explicit critique of the institutionalized modes of gendered, racialized and economic oppression at consumer culture's core. We argue that the expanding nature of marketing scholarship that *alludes* to intersectionality in references to the term and accompanying citations is not a sufficient indication of the overall discipline engaging with this concept in a substantial way that teases out the connections between capitalism and systemic oppression.

The radical potential of intersectionality is at risk of being reduced if the concept is taken up in marketing scholarship in allusive ways that predominantly speak to the interests of businesses which are, arguably, often counter to those of Black feminists and activists who apply an intersectional lens to transformative liberationist work. Furthermore, there is a risk that marketing scholarship that is framed as radical and intersectional is operationalized by corporations as part of their targeted marketing strategies which sustain profit margins rather

than solve structural inequalities. While Steinfeld et al. (2019: 368) advance that the conceptualization of intersectionality in their work ‘distinguishes that race and gender are themselves not problematic’, our understanding of intersectionality distinctly differs. We view the capacity of intersectionality to challenge oppressive structures as including its capacity to make visible the problematic origins of both the constructs of race and gender, as these constructs are based upon restrictive, hierarchical, bio-essentialist, and socially imposed notions of who people are perceived to be via an imperialist, white supremacist, capitalistic patriarchal lens (hooks, 2000). After all, there is no racism without race, and no sexism and misogyny without gender.

We articulate this critique of some of the ways that intersectionality has been alluded to in marketing scholarship to revive the radical potential of intersectional work that could transform the discipline. As intersectionality journeys through activist spaces, into academia, industry and back again, those who invoke it “adapt [the concept] to the different discursive and research protocols in these environments...studies of intersectionality also begin to conform to methodological standards and practices of each field and strive to make central contributions to those fields” (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013: 792). Marketing academia’s representation of intersectionality through a business interested, consumption-oriented lens is an example of this kind of methodological and epistemological conformity. But by shifting its gaze away from conflating the interests of commercial entities with society as a whole and addressing the gendered racial capitalist foundations of them, intersectional approaches to marketing scholarship must wrestle with ‘equality versus liberation, reform versus abolition’ (Olufemi, 2020: 2), and inclusion versus substantial support. Mere inclusion into existing capitalist structures should not be presumed to be the end goal of social justice strategies embedded in an intersectional framework, as scholars have shown that predatory forms of marketplace inclusion can be just as pernicious (Taylor 2019).

When moments arise that involve reformist research being regarded as radical, it would behoof the marketing discipline to consider whether such a reformist stance truly aligns with the core principles of intersectionality. Intersectional approaches to marketing studies can aid in robust and critical research that attends to the interconnected nature of racism, sexism, classism, misogyny, and other interrelated forms of oppression that exist within marketplaces, marketing institutions, and commercial representations that marketers sometimes simultaneously seek to mask, exploit, and profit from.

Discussion and Conclusion

The marketing industry and marketing academia are both ‘interpretive communities’ of intersectionality that circulate meanings about what this concept encompasses and for what ends it is deployed. In both realms, intersectionality is conceptualized within a business centered logic that frames intersectionality’s political concerns as marketplace matters rather than disrupting power structures and redistributing resources under capitalism. Such transformations in intersectionality’s meaning and contexts of use are, as sociologist Sirma Bilge points out, in part a result of ‘the confluence between neoliberal corporate diversity culture and identity politics’ (Bilge, 2013: 408) which transmogrifies socially constructed identity differences into targetable market segments manufactured to add value to corporations. In the words of Banet-Weiser (2012: 32), ‘Identity-based movements have been properly credited with radically reshaping political culture, but they have been similarly essential fodder for consumer culture to capitalize upon.’ A concept like intersectionality, which has foundations in Black feminist theorizing and organizing, is thus treated as source

material for a marketing industry preoccupied with incorporating counter cultural movements into consumerism's seductive persuasions (author citation; author citation).

We began this article by positing that the marketing industry and marketing academia are both knowledge-making institutions that produce ideas about identity within capitalist contexts. Whether it is through research articles, new corporate positions, or market segmentation reports, these adjacent institutions both play a part in 'tell[ing] intersectionality's story', and in turn, shaping the contours of how this concept is historicized, applied and contextualized' (Hill Collins, 2019: 122). We have presented instances when intersectionality is positioned in U.S. marketing industry discourse in ways that obscure or exclude the specifics of how the politics of racial hierarchy is entangled with gender, capitalism, and manifest in interconnected forms of oppression. These *illusions* of intersectionality encompass representations and applications of this concept that decontextualize and distort what intersectionality is intended to convey. We have also presented instances in marketing academia when intersectionality's illumination of power dynamics is *alluded* to but not contextualized within gendered racial capitalism. Such allusions to and illusions of intersectionality signal the marketing industry and academia's power to represent narratives about what constitutes intersectionality (e.g. consumer identity as intersectionality) and knowledge about it. Indeed, a common theme woven throughout this scholarship is an argument calling for the importance of more commercial inclusion of marginalized groups in adverts.

Intersectionality is an "analytical disposition, a way of thinking about and conducting analyses...about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power" (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013: 795). A transformative intersectional approach in marketing scholarship analyses markets, marketing practices, representations, and consumer behavior with attention to the power dynamics and oppressions wrought by gendered racial capitalism. We affirm the view that intersectionality 'provides the analytic breadth to capture the fluidity and dynamism of race by recognizing how other social constructs change the way that race and racism are expressed, experienced, and internalized' (Poole et al., 2021: 132). Overall, we seek to expand scholarly discussion of intersectionality and marketing knowledge by unpacking how engagements with intersectionality in the service of marketers and/or scholars can involve an erasure of the political economic critiques that intersectionality as a concept can foreground. Marketing academia can be a generative site of epistemic resistance, but it can also be a space where radical concepts and activist work is defanged and repackaged as 'new' theory.

The marketing industry's storytelling about intersectionality involves positioning it as a new form of expertise intended to manage and commodify difference in the marketplace. It is a heuristic invoked to enhance marketers' understanding of consumer behavior. The marketing industry's reframing of intersectionality often 'invokes the existence of difference and variety without any necessary commitment to action or redistributive justice' (Deem and Ozga, 2006: 745) that does not serve its self-interest. When intersectionality is used to make marketing representation and consumer research more efficient and effective, the structural conditions of enduring oppressions under capitalism such as 'patriarchy, racism, colonialism' tend to evade substantive critique. Intersectionality is not necessarily depoliticized as Bilge (2013) would say, but rather is transformed to articulate the politics and priorities of neoliberal capitalism and consumer culture.

Given that both marketing theory and practice is shaped by anticipated and imagined audiences (e.g., scholars, students, practitioners, consumers, brand competitors), it is perhaps unsurprising that their engagement with each other and the concept of intersectionality can involve a performative dimension. By performative dimension we mean that both marketing theory and practice, and their entanglements, can involve

impression management attempts in the form of gestures intended to express an investment in addressing social justice issues. Such performative elements of marketing theory and practice contrast with the non-performativity that scholars such as Sara Ahmed (2006) identify as being part of meaningful anti-racism. Just as Ahmed (2006: 104) reflects on ‘institutional speech acts: those that make claims “about” or “on behalf” of an institution’, we regard the claims, ideas, allusions to, and illusions of intersectionality in marketing theory and practice as being speech acts that, at times, are intended to indicate something about the state and status of marketing theory and practice (e.g., an interest in issues concerning inequality).

We highlight that key element of intersectionality, which includes a concern with the oppressive nature of gendered racial capitalism, to suggest that it is more pertinent to focus on dismantling corporate structures rather than attempting to operate differently within them. However, there is a need to interrogate the limited potential for social justice goals to be pursued within many marketplace contexts, as well as the discipline of marketing which is dominated by research that is intended to appeal to stakeholders who prioritize profit over a commitment to dismantle structural inequalities fostered by gendered racial capitalism. Through mapping how the notion of intersectionality has moved through contemporary marketing scholarship and industry practice, our article provides a critical intervention as it carries with the under addressed matter of whether the principles of intersectional social justice praxis are ultimately at odds with the dominant objectives of marketers and the marketing discipline.

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