

# **The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research**

Sixth Edition



# INTERSECTIONALITY METHODOLOGY

## A Qualitative Research Imperative for Black Women's Lives

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### INTRODUCTION

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I had to ask God to give me the strength so, I could write without crying or feeling bad for the rest of the day. [I'm] sorry it took so long. I pray every night for God to bring me strength and comfort and to give you strength and comfort as well. I pray for him to take your loneliness away and replace it with hope. I hope I can get out of this situation as soon as possible. I am trying everyday to look toward the future and simply ponder the present so I can fix the future. I love you mommy and I miss you. (Cohen, 2020, para. 67)

The above is an excerpt of a letter written to a mother from her daughter, who was incarcerated at the time. The author is Grace, a teenage Black girl and a high school sophomore. Grace was incarcerated and sent to a juvenile detention center in May 2020 for violating her probation by not completing her online coursework, when her school, Groves High School, in one of the most well-regarded districts in Michigan state, switched to remote learning (Cohen, 2020). Judge Brennan of the Oakland County Family Court Division was the presiding judge in Grace's case. In her ruling, she found Grace "guilty on failure to submit any schoolwork and getting up for school" and called Grace a "threat to (the) community," citing the assault and theft charges that led to her probation (Cohen, 2020, para. 11). Judge Brennan's decision seemingly disregarded the executive order issued by Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in March 2020, which recommended confinement of juveniles who violate probation, unless directed by a court order, and encouraged eliminating any form of detention or residential placement, unless a young person posed a "substantial and immediate safety risk to others" (Cohen, 2020, para. 10), be temporarily suspended amid the COVID-19 crisis (Cohen, 2020). According to Cohen's 2020 article, Grace's mother Charisse, heartbroken over Grace's situation, believed the ruling reflects the prevalence of systemic bias, resulting in the disproportionate percentage of Black youth involved in the juvenile justice system across the United States. Still, that is only part of Charisse's, and other Black mothers of Black girls', stories.

Many would likely point to the series of mostly unfortunate but also unjust events, culminating in Grace being sentenced to probation by Judge Brennan in an April 2020 juvenile court hearing. Black women qualitative researchers taking up intersectionality in their analysis of Grace's case would instead use their study's findings to shed light on the ways that intersectional subordination contributes to Grace's life chances and present predicament. Their findings would show how Groves High School failed Grace because school districts and school leaders are ill-equipped to support the educational and psychosocial needs of Black girls like her, who are now forced to learn remotely. Further, their qualitative analysis would also illustrate

the intersectional erasure that Black families, like Charisse and Grace's, experience by showing how pandemic learning conditions are especially burdensome on Black families and single mothers, with children in special education with documented disabilities. Finally, a qualitative intersectional analysis would further illuminate how intersectional erasure and failure of the school system operate in Grace's life to keep her captive literally and figuratively, in facilitation of state-sanctioned violence against Black girls (Patton & Njoku, 2019).

Prior to her probation, Grace was known to be a good child. She and her mother reportedly did everything together, including appearing in a "Pure Michigan" tourism ad together (Cohen, 2020). Charisse's home and Grace's homelife were stable. When Grace was 13, arguments over parental expectations regarding chores, schoolwork, and children's behavior began escalating. Unfamiliar with the social services available to support parents in her situation, Charisse "turned to the police for help, when Grace yelled at and/or pushed her" (Cohen, 2020, para. 22). From there, Grace found herself involved in the juvenile justice system, first entering a court diversion program while in middle school, after her mother called the police to the home after an altercation, and they discovered Grace had taken an iPad from her middle school without permission (Cohen, 2020). An altercation in November 2019 between her and her mother resulted in Grace's arrest on larceny and assault charges (Cohen, 2020).

The bodies and lived experiences of Black women and girls (BWGs) like that of Charisse and Grace remain obscured and, in many cases, incomprehensible to researchers and social scientists broadly when qualitative inquiry does not integrate intersectionality methodology in its analysis. Intersectionality methodology should be employed by researchers in their research about BWGs to name and address the intersectional erasure and failures that shape BWGs' everyday lives and to enable researchers to generate findings to help them create impactful intersectional (research, policy, and/or practice) interventions to support Black women and girls like Charisse and Grace.

Unapologetically, we write this chapter for ourselves and Black women researchers like us: Black women, scholar activists, with Black feminist sensibilities, and for our liberation (Evans-Winters, 2019; hooks, 2014). We write not for white consumption or approval, or to make ourselves legible to the academy or to non-Black others of all genders. We write for the same reason we pursue, value, and need content and research written *by* and *for* Black women. Black women's writing and storytelling provides comfort, affirmation, community, sanctuary, nourishment, and wholeness. Still, whiteness convinces Black women and girls that writings by Black women are not valued, needed, and rigorous. Writings by Black women have begun to fulfill our deep-seeded needs for epistemic justice, scientific-based research on BWGs, and a collective demand for institutional/societal accountability, culminating in the ultimate unmet need, our liberation. This is Black feminism (see Combahee River Collective<sup>1</sup>) to us and the basis of intersectionality methodology (IM) (Haynes et al., 2020).

Intersectionality is a Black feminist epistemology that insists that we see ourselves as whole and reject white supremacist notions that exert white patriarchal and capitalistic power dynamics upon our bodies and enact social structures of domination that regard us as Black only, Black first, or Black exceptionalism. Rather, Black feminism represents a complex amalgamation of our raced-gendered-classed selves, a body politic revealing the prevailing class-sexuality-race domination that subordinates Black women, contextualizing how we experience whiteness (see Combahee River Collective). In this chapter, we highlight what sets IM apart from other critical approaches and how IM can be applied in qualitative research and social science research broadly. This chapter closes with discussion questions to support qualitative researchers who take up intersectionality to advance Black women's liberation.

## INTERSECTIONALITY METHODOLOGY: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IMPERATIVE FOR BLACK WOMEN'S LIVES

Traditional qualitative inquiry and its founders have not historically centered the voices and concerns of Black women researchers or participants (e.g., Black women or girls who are also learners, patients, mothers, immigrants, faculty, queer people, and/or trans people) (Evans-Winters, 2019). bell hooks (2010) argued for Black women to take up space in their writing, research, and “most importantly to create work that is cutting-edge, that breaks through silences and the different walls that have been erected to block out [Black women’s] vision of ourselves and of our futures” (p. 174). This directive to create cutting-edge work to combat the erasure of Black women, while simultaneously “existing in the structure of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2010, p. 171), is representative of the tension of writing this chapter for us—tensions inherent within white conventions of qualitative research philosophies. These tensions exist largely as qualitative research philosophies were conceptualized and intended to reproduce white heteronormative and cis patriarchal worldviews, which contribute to the systemic erasure of Black women’s labor, knowledge, and ideologies (Evans-Winters, 2019). Evans-Winters (2019), in her seminal book *Black Feminism in Qualitative Inquiry: A Mosaic for Writing Our Daughter’s Body*, further argued, “although Black women have always conducted research using qualitative methodologies, rarely are Black women given space to play with or theorize methodological moves in qualitative inquiry” (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 1). This underscores the history of research, highlighting how fundamentalist researchers used white, cis patriarchal and heteronormative methodological philosophies to gatekeep and suppress Black women, preventing their theorizing of culturally responsive and intersectional contextual methodologies that centered Black women’s ways of knowing from entering the academy (Joseph et al., 2021).

Presently, a right-wing attack persists on qualitative research by methodological fundamentalists who favor quantitative “evidence or scientifically based research” (Denzin et al., 2006, p. 770) that “regulates free speech and what counts as ‘good science’” (Denzin et al., 2006, p. 769) in and outside of the academy. Black women researchers are not caught off-guard by these recent attacks. The vitriol being spewed at qualitative research is doused in the same hate-filled disposability politics (see Patton & Ward, 2016) that continues to legitimize the epistemic and physical violence that Black women experience. Thus, Black feminists refuse to be distracted by what is white antagonism, mediocrity, and fragility. Instead, Black feminists press on, taking up intersectionality in our work and research, making BWGs our focus, endeavoring to write Black women unapologetically (Austin, 1989) and with complete disinterest in appeasing white people and the white gaze (Yancy, 2016).

Hence, we argue that there is no longer a need to wait to be given space; instead, IM urges Black women to take up methodological spaces. Further, Evans-Winter (2019) argues that Black women’s onto-epistemologies, “cultural and spiritual beliefs continue to be marginalized, suppressed, or bastardized and propagated as trite or esoteric at best” (p. 2). These epistemologies are often othered and delegitimized as experiential rather than theory based. Although there has been an increase in research on problematizing racism in qualitative inquiry and white dominance in knowledge (Almeida, 2015; Collins & Cannella, 2021), whiteness is the de facto norm in which truth and reality are measured. Disruption and challenge to the norm has been met with much disdain, disregard, and epistemic invalidation. Although there has been an increase in critical race, feminist, queer, decolonizing, and social justice methodologies, qualitative methodologies have largely reflected white axiology and onto-epistemological framings for the sake of postmodernism.

Qualitative research has evolved within postmodernism and critical approaches, but not without its challenges. The past and current politics of evidence- and scientific-based research (SBR) has rendered qualitative research a questionable methodology. These are the structures of domination from which conventional research, both so-called evidence-based or quantitative research and qualitative research, derives its philosophical understandings of “rationality, objectivity, and truth,” along with its very vocabulary (i.e., paradigm, ontology, axiology, etc.). Quantitative research continues to validate the interpretations of qualitative inquiry often representing dominant discourse. The dominant discourse often “perpetuate[s] racist orientations” (Collins & Cannella, 2021, p. 1139) that historically exclude Black feminist epistemologies. Black feminism empowers Black women to draw upon their knowledge sites to name, source, and interpret their experiences (see Combahee River Collective). Further, race- and gendered-based epistemologies continue to challenge and decenter Eurocentric and patriarchal systems of knowing (Collins, 1990).

Denzin et al. (2006) have argued that researchers born out of methodological fundamentalism assert that “epistemologies of indigenous, critical race, queer, postcolonial, feminist and postmodern theories are rendered useless, relegated at best to the category of scholarship, not science” (p. 772). The criteria for SBR “marginalize many forms of qualitative inquiry” (p. 773), especially those related to critical epistemologies. Still, “critical, interpretive qualitative research creates the power for positive, ethical, communitarian change” (p. 779). Toward that end, Black feminist scholars Stewart and Haynes (2019), in their conceptualization of Black Liberation Research Methodology, provide five qualitative methodological considerations: (a) resistance research as paradigm, (b) researcher positionality, (c) naming Black deprivation as the problem of study, (d) situating Black liberation as the aim of analysis, and (e) centering emotions as humanizing methods. Collectively, these considerations seek to advance Black resistance, illustrate Black struggle, and promote Black liberation. The first consideration, *resistance research as paradigm*, positions Blackness-as-human(e) in the research rather than superhuman, disposable, or erased and centers Black consciousness and awareness to be hypervisible in the literature. The second consideration is *research positionality*, which promotes the intersectional subjectivity and relational power of the researcher within the study. *Problematizing Black deprivation* centers the conditions, structures, systems, and environments that contribute to and surround Black lives. Naming Black deprivation situates the problem on the institutions, systems, and conditions of living rather than on Black lives. The fourth consideration centers the *aim of analysis on Black liberation* as the core and central tenet of the research study. This consideration is unapologetic about its core focus and rejects the commodification of Black experiences for white interests. The last consideration centers *emotions as humanizing methods* so that Black joy, anger, sadness fear, excitement, and disgust are honored and reflective of Blackness-as-human(e) and not objectified for white validation.

These qualitative considerations, similar to the development of intersectionality methodology (see Haynes et al., 2020), arguably speak to what hooks (2010) demanded of Black women to create more cutting-edge work that supports and reinforces our visibility. Arguably, this cutting-edge work in qualitative research is representative of what Denzin et al. (2006) acknowledge as the greatest breakthroughs in qualitative inquiry due to “the collapses between the ontological and the epistemological, and between the epistemological and the methodological” (p. 778).

More so, intersectionality methodology exists to help not only qualitative researchers but also social scientists address the epistemic violence and erasure that Black women and girls experience in research and thus society. We also recognize and contend with the realities that few

Black people and even fewer Black women are senior faculty; more specifically, roughly 2.1% of all tenured associate and full professors are Black women (Williams June & O’Leary, 2021), which means that most scholars who study Black women and girls will be non-Black and mostly white researchers. White researchers with liberal perspectives and good intentions who examine societal issues that impact the educational and health outcomes of Black women and girls should utilize IM to be in solidarity with Black feminist researchers and to support research about BWGs.

## INTERSECTIONALITY: BLACK FEMINISM AS THEORY, RESEARCH, AND PRAXIS

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Black feminism reminds BWGs that our life complexities are edified in Black womanhood and supports us in rejecting the world’s monocular interpretations of who the world says we are. Like Black women, Black feminism is not monolithic in its definition and application, nor are all Black women feminists. For many Black women, us included, feminism was code for white women and did not conjure in our minds a fight for equality that centered Black mothers or Black families living in a “culture of poverty” they did not create (Taylor, 2016). These are societal problems that seemed more likely to be a part of a Black power or racial justice agenda. So, when a Black male professor of Saran and Chayla polled his classroom of nine first-year PhD students (i.e., four Black women, one Black man, three white women, and one white man), questioning, “Who identifies as a feminist?” Chayla and Saran were not surprised that only their white women classmates raised their hands to signify, yes. The writing of Black women has taught us that Black feminism is necessary in research intended to improve the lives of Black women (and girls), including our own.

Finding source material written by Black women is especially difficult when we are writing about qualitative methodology and social science research. Why is that? Bilge (2020) used Black fungibility, slavery’s afterlife, and natal alienation in her examination of institutional investments and divestments in intersectionality and Black women. She found institutional whiteness creates an academic marketplace that is symbolic of a “kind of Black difference emptied of Black bodies” (p. 2298), making it easy for Black feminists to be removed from their theoretical innovation, intersectionality. The academy’s appetite for “post-Black feminists” (i.e., especially non-Black researchers, whose careers have been built on Black women and girls’ research) permits the erasure of Black women in discourses (Bilge, 2020, p. 2298). Too often, research about intersectionality permits scholars to legitimately treat intersectionality as an “empty shell” for broad consumption, misrepresenting Crenshaw’s (1991) original intent for its framing. This is where Black women are replaceable with lived experiences of other populations, simultaneously diluting intersectionality’s intent to dismantle white cis-hetero-patriarchy subordinating Black women and making intersectionality profitable to white academic capitalism.

We are indebted to Lori Patton Davis, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Venus Evans-Winters, Robin Boylorn, Mary Weems, Cynthia Dillard (to name a few), Black women and education scholars, and Black feminist contemporaries in other disciplines/fields who have taken up writing about Black women’s intersectional lives in ways that rely on Black women’s epistemologies, methods, and methodological approaches. Much of the research that centers Black women’s lives and presents intersectional analyses resembles qualitative analysis, but not exclusively. Still, in reading the writings of Black women, we learn that our whole story cannot be told without intersectionality or the use of intersectional frameworks.

## INTERSECTIONALITY METHODOLOGY

Intersectionality is a Black feminist epistemology that describes how interlocking systems of oppression simultaneously affect and shape Black women's lives. Intersectionality's origins are rooted in the writing and activism of Black feminist luminaries such as Ida B. Wells and Sojourner Truth. In 2013, in her talk "Justice Rising," Kimberlé Crenshaw spoke of intersectionality's growing popularity, as well as its critiques, highlighting, many have found intersectionality "wanting," citing its "lack of methodology" and "inability to tell users how to use intersectionality," when they "take it up in various disciplines and contexts" (Crenshaw, 2013). IM provides scholars with a nuanced methodological approach for taking up intersectionality in their study of Black women in education research and social science research broadly. IM emerged in a study we conducted designed to examine how scholars applied Crenshaw's intersectionality framework in their research of Black women's experiences in higher education (see Haynes et al., 2020). It is worth noting that we did not conduct the study because the critiques of intersectionality are well founded—on the contrary. It stands to reason that such critiques are likely a consequence of Black fungibility or the result of scholars struggling to apply intersectionality without the authentic lived experiences, or what Evans-Winters (2019) refers to as onto-epistemological insight, needed and belonging to Black women. Intersectionality encourages Black women to live integrated lives as "Black women . . . find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (Combahee River Collective, 1977). Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality* and is credited for introducing the concept and a three-dimensional analytic framework (i.e., structural-political-representational intersectionality) for academics and legal scholars' use.

### IM Draws Upon Crenshaw's Intersectionality

Intersectionality methodology takes up Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality. In Crenshaw's widely cited article, "Mapping the Margins," published in the *Harvard Law Review*, she uses the aforementioned structural-political-representational intersectionality framework to draw attention to the specific ways that the raced-based, gender violence and discrimination shape Black women's everyday lives and go unnoticed by most people and thus are, consequently, unaddressed in the law (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, Crenshaw uses structural intersectionality in "Mapping the Margins" to explain how battering is an immediate manifestation of the intersectional subordination that Black women experience. Malcolm X (1962) said it best: "The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman." That is, as to explain Crenshaw's first point with structural intersectionality, anti-Blackness in colonial imaginations encourages the physical and sexual abuse and exploitation of Black women's bodies (Mitchell, 2020). The colonial ordering of a white patriarchal society teaches men, including the Black man, that their manhood resides in their domination or control of Black women's bodies, making battering the immediate manifestation of a Black woman's oppression. Crenshaw further illustrates the impact of structural intersectionality by describing how multiple systems of oppression, in tandem through self-reinforcing state and federal intervention, fail Black women seeking protection and refuge from their abusive relationships. She notes (1991) for many Black women, the burden of poverty, childcare responsibilities, and lack of job skills are the "consequence of gender and class oppression" (p. 1246) that is exacerbated by the anti-Black racism fueling un- and underemployment and equitable housing in Black families. Compounding circumstances, Crenshaw (1991) asserts, make it especially difficult for battered Black women (and their children) to obtain stable shelter with other family or friends.

Political intersectionality illuminates how the political interests of Black women are ignored within the racial justice agenda, which centers Black men, and the gender justice agenda, which centers white women. Crenshaw's (1991) political intersectionality notes these are two political agendas pitted against one another in a white patriarchal society, contributing even further to Black women's erasure. In "Mapping the Margins," Crenshaw reminds readers of Whoopi Goldberg's stirring portrayal of Alice Walker's Celie in the movie *The Color Purple* to illustrate the political intersectionality impact regarding Black women and domestic violence. Crenshaw (1991) posits that Celie's was perhaps an unrecognizable portrayal of Black womanhood to some Black people because many Black women conceal the real terror of domestic violence to dismantle the larger societal master narrative that insists Black men are pathologically violent. According to Crenshaw (1991), political intersectionality sheds light on how "patriarchal ideas about gender and power" encourage battered Black women not to scream rather than encouraging Black men not to hit (p. 1255). Simply put, Black women who experience domestic abuse may stay to resist racial stereotyping. To sum, "In order to understand and treat the victimization of Black women as a consequence of racism and sexism, it is necessary to shift the analysis away from the differential access of men and more toward the differential protection of women" (p. 1278).

Finally, Crenshaw's representational intersectionality illustrates how racist and sexist stereotypes of Black women, such as mammy, angry Black woman, and welfare queen, are used in mainstream and academic discourses to control Black women's labor and, ultimately, blame them (and not the intersectional oppression they encounter) for the physical, sexual, and emotional violence shaping their lives. For instance, in "Mapping the Margins," Crenshaw (1991, p. 1283) presents a critique of the "problem of representational intersectionality" and the objectification of Black women by 2 Live Crew, the Black rap group that was the subject of an obscenity prosecution in Florida in 1990. Crenshaw is careful to note that her opposition of 2 Live Crew is different from that of society writ large. She largely opposed the obscenity prosecution of 2 Live Crew because it failed to address how race and gender are "inertly juxtaposed" to justifiably construct Black women as suitable targets of sexual violence (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283). Crenshaw (1991) explains brazened racist and sexist imagery of Black womanhood is entrenched in the American consciousness and spread through music, art, and culture for entertainment and for political reasons.

With 2 Live Crew's obscenity judgment, Crenshaw uses representational intersectionality to describe how the racist and sexually demonizing images of Black women were front and center in public and legal discourse of the 2 Live Crew case, but the interests of Black women were erased, in favor of a master narrative that insists white women need protecting from sexually deviant Black male predators. To address this prevailing issue affecting the Black people, Crenshaw (1991) asserts a Black feminist sensibility would require the terms of unity within the Black community to no longer reflect priorities based on the marginalization of Black women, and Black women and Black men need to "make clear" that white male patriarchy is a political issue that affects them both.

## IM's Features Enable Sophisticated Intersectional Analyses

In accordance with Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality, intersectionality methodology is concerned with naming and redressing the micro/macro-level power dynamics that maintains the intersectional subordination Black women experience, resulting in their ideological and societal neglect. Intersectionality methodology presents a paradigmatic purview that traces and traps how race-gender-class oppression converges to bring Black women and girls' complex lives



into focus and full view (Crenshaw, 1991; MacKinnon, 2013). This is what sets IM apart from other critical qualitative approaches. Intersectionality methodology enables qualitative researchers, and social scientists broadly, to generate sophisticated intersectional analysis that shows how Black women (1) experience intersectional erasure, (2) experience intersectional failure, and (3) use their study findings to pinpoint intersectional interventions to undo the intersectional subordination that Black women endure.

Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional erasure is the extreme invisibility of Black women and girls in "triple" jeopardy in a white capitalist society. Intersectional failure occurs as higher education institutions, schools, and public policy engage in schematic, stereotypical thinking to blame BWGs for the epistemic and physical violence shaping their everyday lives (Crenshaw, 1991). Lastly, intersectional interventions (Patton & Njoku, 2019) help qualitative researchers, and social scientists broadly, to name the personal strategies and societal norms designed to disarm violence against Black women and girls and support their preservation in otherwise hostile environments.

In this way, intersectionality methodology extends Black feminism's reach by transforming the terrain that white academic capitalism uses to spread white supremacy (i.e., research, curriculum, pedagogy, institutional policy, and/or public policy) into political sites for Black feminist praxis. IM has four features that guide decisions scholars make about study design, methods, and analysis (Haynes et al., 2020). We detail IM's features below.

**Feature 1. Centering Black Women as the Subject.** What do the portrayals of Aunt Vi's on *Queen Sugar*, Issa D on *Insecure*, and Tye on Amazon Prime's *Harlem* or the narratives presented in Brittany Cooper's *Elegant Rage* and Beyonce's *Lemonade* have in common? The portraits presented therein treat Black women's voices as legitimate and create oppositional discourses that address representational intersectionality, for example, or the racist, sexist, and sexually demonizing stereotypes of Black womanhood we often see in mainstream media or academic discourses (Haynes et al., 2020). Moreover, such nuanced narratives of Black womanhood matter to Black women because each begins with and centers our standpoint (Collins, 1990). Black women scholars take up intersectionality in qualitative research to demonstrate Black women matter in ways that are material and consequential.

Intersectionality methodology encourages a Black woman to (re)claim expertise of (her) world. Her point of view is foregrounded. IM situates Black women as knowledge sources and producers. Black women's lived experiences frame the reality of the world and thus the potential for qualitative research to substantively address the intersectional erasure and intersectional failures that Black women experience with their research. Intersectionality methodology insists upon qualitative methods that ensure a Black woman's voice narrates the story being told. IM opposes qualitative research methods that rely on or place higher value on interpretations of Black women's experiences from participants or researchers who are not Black women (Haynes et al., 2020). In that regard, IM qualitative researchers who do not identify as Black women need to embrace research methods that position them to do research *with* Black women rather than *on* Black women.

**Feature 2. Use of a Critical yet Intersectional Lens to Examine Micro/Macro-Level Power Relations.** Our IM analysis revealed that most qualitative scholars utilized Black feminist thought (BFT), a critical and intersectional lens, to support them in centering the voices and lived experiences of Black women. Collins (1990) asserts, "Living life as an African American woman is a necessary prerequisite for producing Black feminist thought because within Black women's communities' thought is validated and produced with reference to a particular set of

historical, material, and epistemological conditions” (p. 559). BFT, critical race feminism, intersectionality, and endarkened feminist epistemology are just a few of the critical yet intersectional lenses that help Black women scholars to address intersectional erasure by naming and critiquing structural intersectionality, for instance, or the specific forms of intersectional subordination Black women endure.

For instance, Dillard’s (2000) endarkened epistemology could be used to help qualitative scholars critique the ways anti-Black, gendered, racism or misogynoir (Bailey, 2021) contributes to the epistemic and physical violence Black women encounter inside and outside of the classroom at predominantly white institutions. Alternatively, Black feminist researchers might use Crenshaw’s intersectionality framework in their qualitative analysis of how racist heteronormative gender norms permit the violent behaviors of schoolboys who make Black schoolgirls the target of sexual violence. Their intersectional analysis would show how school leaders fail Black girls whose bodies are seen as opportunities for domination in white colonial imaginations. Others might find inspiration from IM scholars, like Patton and Ward (2016), who applied critical race feminism in their examination of the disposability politics surrounding missing Black undergraduate women and presented a new qualitative approach, which they introduced as critical race feminist methodology (CRFM).

**Feature 3. Addressing Power in the Research Process.** Black women qualitative researchers engaged political intersectionality by decentering whiteness in the research process. Consider this example. Politicizing the research process from an intersectionality point of view resulted in scholars making the researcher-decision to introduce their phenomena under study through the perspectives of Black women on their article’s first page, instead of diluting their experience through a discourse of race or gender, which tends to center Black men and white women, respectively. Addressing power in the research process also involved qualitative researchers analyzing how their participation maintained micro/macro power dynamics that subordinated Black women. For instance, many Black women researchers’ critiques of their role as the researcher involved examination of their positionality. Evaluations of positionality often involved them acknowledging what brought them to the research study and how they themselves, as Black women, showed up within the research study, especially with regard to the impact of their research on their own lives and life circumstances.

White qualitative scholars engaged political intersectionality through interrogating whiteness, their own and that which resulted in them benefiting from cumulative privileging (Stanley, 2007). White scholars experience cumulative privileging for engaging in race-related research, privilege not afforded to their Black women counterparts whose research on Black women is discounted in the white academic capitalist structures for being me-search. White qualitative scholars’ intent on taking up intersectionality in their research about Black women should begin first by critiquing their researcher proximity, engaging in deep reflection on the following, “who-am-I-to-do-this-work?” (Fine, 2006, as cited by Haynes et al., 2020, p. 777). “Political intersectionality insists that researchers name resistance strategies they employ to disrupt the ways that power shapes the research process. We argue this is especially important for white scholars who study Black women” (Haynes et al., 2020, p. 778).

**Feature 4. Bringing Complex Identity Markers to the Fore.** Black women qualitative researchers used their findings to address intersectionality to bring Black women’s complex identity markers to the fore, which cannot be done through single-axis analyses. Single-axis analysis requires that Black women’s experiences be distilled to the lowest common denominator: race or gender. When IM scholars used their findings to address structural-political-representational

intersectionality, they illustrated that Black women's lives cannot be fully understood by studying one dimension of identity alone. Because whiteness insists that Black women identify as Black first or worse, Black only, it is often hard for us to understand ourselves intersectionally. For example, Haynes et al. (2020) framed the experience applying intersectionality to their lived experiences as Black cis-hetero women and Black queer men faculty and critical pedagogues in the following way:

We realized our limitations when applying intersectionality to our own lived experiences. Because we were socialized (and often perceived) as Black-first or Black-only, we initially struggled to articulate how we had encountered intersectional oppression. For example, sexuality did not rise to the height of significance in our analysis of the Black women researcher-participants in this study. This may also be because of the potential privilege afforded by heterosexuality, or the historic erasure Black women's sexuality (as with the Mammy trope). Our awareness about how the research process can further perpetuate intersectional subordination is still developing. We acknowledge, to that end, that our data analysis is as much ongoing as it is complete. We further acknowledge that as researcher-participants our understandings of our lived experiences will evolve as our consciousness about intersectionality increases. (p. 706)

Consequently, Black women qualitative researchers should engage IM not only to bring the lives of their Black women participants into full view but also their own. Engaging IM to bring BWGs' complex identity markers to the forefront through intersectional analysis has additional benefits. IM scholars present nuance analysis that captures BWGs in the fullness of their humanity. When Black womanhood is constructed as personal, deliberate, intellectual, and virtuous, gender characteristics most often reserved for white women and white or Black men in academic and public discourse, IM scholars use their findings to illuminate the need for "intersectional [research, policy, and practice] interventions" (Patton & Njoku, 2019) that enhance rather than undermine Black women's well-being. IM asserts that research, policy, or practice interventions in the public or institutional domain that do not work for Black women do not work at all.

## IM Approach to Data Collection and Transformation

In qualitative research, interviews and field observations are often the most common forms of data collection. However, IM allows for a more expansive imagining with regard to what counts as data about Black women and how that data are interpreted. For example, in their examination of the legal documents of Black women academics who sued their predominantly white institutions for denying them tenure, Ward and colleagues (in press) employed IM in their application of Angela Davis's (1971) Anti-Slavery Rebel framework, also an intersectional framework. Specifically, centering Black women as the subject guided their method of data collection to reestablish Black women academics as the *Truthtellers* (Collins, 1990; hooks, 2001), consequently making truth-telling (see Haynes et al., 2021) their method of analysis in the application of Angela Davis's (1971) Anti-Slavery Rebel framework (Ward et al., in press). Thus, the analysis and the implications they present connected them to prior and forthcoming generations of Black women Truthtellers and antislavery rebels to achieve IM's true aim of supporting Black women to write themselves into existence (Haynes et al., 2022). IM provides researchers with intersectional research interventions through data collection and transformation approaches that are theoretically grounded in Black women's ways of knowing and thus methodologically innovative.

Data about Black women might also be poetry, photographs, portraits, journals, and social media engagement (e.g., TikTok videos, Twitter threads, Instagram posts), to name a few. In their study of missing Black undergraduate women, Patton and Ward (2016) used a critical race feminist perspective that acknowledged intersectionality and the need for expansive forms of data. They stated research centering Black women should include

multiple forms of information to conduct research acknowledging that for Black women, information is not always contained in books and research articles. When populations such as Black women are studied, CRFM might include searching reputable websites, and newspapers, as well as social media platforms such as blogs, Facebook and YouTube to bring Black women to the center. (p. 332)

This particular study was significant because the researchers had to generate the data given that there was no existing database focused on Black women, let alone those who were attending college. In order to compile the database, they used Google, magazine websites, Facebook, and YouTube videos, which allowed them to create individual profiles for the Black women students. Their study illuminates the challenges that exist when conducting studies that center Black women and reveals how, in some instances, Black women's lives are invisible until researchers committed to IM and similar methodological frames work purposefully to bring them to the fore and ask critical questions about their lives.

Another more expansive form of data collection and methods that align with IM and the study of Black women and girls is "sista circle methodology." Johnson (2015), who conducted her dissertation study on Black women teachers and mentoring processes, developed the sista circle methodology as an opportunity to not only study Black women but also create a supportive space for them to lift one another. Johnson noted this methodology "moves beyond traditional methodology to included research practices that draw on the wisdom and social relations of Black women transnationally" (p. 43). To generate the methodology, Johnson relies on Dillard's endarkened feminist epistemology and Collins's Black feminist thought. Further, she offers a historical backdrop on sista circles dating back to the Black women's club movement of the 1850s. Johnson distinguishes sista circles from the standard focus group methods employed in qualitative research, explaining, "Unlike focus groups, sista circles are not simply for obtaining the stories of the participants. Rather it is a method to support and empower participants . . . as a qualitative research method [it] is designed to be conducted in a supportive—'sister to sister' context" (p. 46). Johnson identifies three features of the methodology that include communication dynamics, centrality of empowerment, and researcher as participant. In this methodology, how Black women communicate is honored, including their use of Black vernacular English, their finishing of one another's sentences, and the use of "mmm-hmm" to validate each other's contributions. Further, the sista circle spaces promote uplift, encouragement, and reliance upon the collective knowledge production, wisdom, and intuition the participants share. Last, the facilitator of the sista circle is a member of the dialogue and an active contributor in the research process, particularly in terms of practicing reciprocity with participants.

Since its inception, Johnson's (2015) "sista circle methodology" has gained tremendous traction in scholarly writings and most notably in dissertations that followed hers. Johnson's contribution reveals another often hidden resource for IM studies that center Black women and girls, doctoral dissertations and theses. When searching the Proquest dissertation database, we found a host of dissertations in which sista circle methodology has been used, a testament to Johnson's contribution. However, we also surmise that a more thorough excavation of dissertations centering Black women and girls would yield additional insights into how Black women are being

studied, the extent to which intersectionality and similar frameworks are being used to frame that work, and the existence of other methodologies scholars have created that allowed them as qualitative researchers to conduct critical research. In their project focusing on Black women's dissertations, Patton and Abukar (2022) explained,

Dissertations are not often regarded as publications from which educational scholars cite, instead preferring peer-reviewed articles from well-known journals. We endeavor to push the envelope beyond “traditional modes” of research by centering dissertation scholarship and what it might collectively reveal about Black women's educational experiences as they traverse the higher education landscape, as well as, how these revelations can be consequential in identifying recommendations for postsecondary educational policies and practices at institutional, state, and national levels.

Although we offer these examples, the landscape for implementing IM is ripe for further exploration. For example, our use of IM is situated in the experiences of Black women and girls. However, IM could also be used to guide qualitative research at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, and a host of other simultaneously occurring identity markers that create unique experiences for minoritized populations. We encourage researchers inspired by intersectionality and who wish to engage in intersectional qualitative research to use IM. However, we also offer a few cautions.

We challenge researchers to study intersectionality and IM to ensure they have a clear understanding of the dynamics of erasure that have affected Black women. Such understanding is critical because we as Black women scholars doing this work and sharing this knowledge do not want to be erased. Yet qualitative researchers across fields and disciplines have produced scholarship that contributes to this erasure given their failure to cite Black women scholars and disrupt citational politics that promote erasure. Patton and Njoku (2019) stated, “It is incumbent upon scholars and researchers, regardless of field, to give Black women their due credit in publication. When Black women are denied credit for their intellectual property or innovations, they are made invisible by the research and academic community” (p. 1176).

In addition to the failure of citing Black women, Harris and Patton (2019) explained that the undoing of intersectionality occurs when intersectionality is treated as a buzzword and analyses are limited to identities, rather than larger structures of oppression. We offer the same encouragement to researchers as they and Crenshaw et al. (1996) did, “to continue to do intersectional research in an effort to inform what intersectionality is in/capable of” (p. 367).

## ENVISIONING A FUTURE FOR INTERSECTIONALITY METHODOLOGY

IM presents an opportunity for scholars to go deeper and create more methods beyond those we have shared that truly reflect a complex, dynamic, and intersectional lens. Doing so, however, requires a willingness to go beyond the conventional parameters of qualitative research, to expand what counts as data or evidence, and to resist the ever-present expectation that qualitative research “looks” a particular way. We envision a future for IM that includes digital humanities spaces where photographs, art, and archives allow for thought-provoking research designs. For example, Knight Steele's (2021) “Digital Black Feminism” (DBF) represents one potential trajectory for IM in the digital humanities space. Referencing the dialectics of praxis among Black feminists through blogs, websites, hashtags, and various other “online enclaves,” Knight Steele describes DBF as a space of reconciliation for Black women, stating, “Coming to Black feminism online and in the blogosphere meant that digital Black feminists reconciled the need to

protect and care for themselves while considering the greater good of their community” (p. 862). Noble (2019) expresses hope in the digital humanities as a site of resistance and decolonization, especially projects centering Black women. She stated, “What we need to do to solidify the field of critical digital humanities is to couple it more closely with other critical traditions that foreground approaches influenced by political economy and intersectional race and gender studies” (p. 31). IM is one such approach that, when considered alongside digital humanities and critical methodologies, expands the boundaries and advances the implementation of qualitative research that is expressly unapologetic, promotes agency, and disrupts the status quo.

We also imagine a future for IM that would situate qualitative research as a resource and guide for policy makers and institutional decision makers. For example, the most recent debates regarding student reproductive rights fail to account for Black women’s lives, particularly the opportunities they have for postsecondary educational attainment. However, Ellis (2022) illuminated Black women’s voices by collecting the stories of five Black women, all of whom spoke about how their reproductive rights shaped their college experiences. Although Ellis’s work was for CNN, it was qualitative in nature and reached a broad audience given the news platform. Similarly, qualitative researchers can use the findings from research situated in IM to engage in translational research that matters beyond journal articles and book chapters. In another example, the student loan debt crisis has taken a huge toll on Black women. However, they were not initially centered in the research on this topic. The National Black Student Debt Study, designed using mixed methods, provided a substantive backdrop for increasing the public’s understanding of the racialization of student loan debt. One aspect of the larger national study honed in on Black women’s experiences with student loan debt, allowing their voices to be front and center as the group carrying the most significant debt. In their policy brief, Jackson and Williams (2022) use qualitative data to highlight the impact on Black women. They explain, “And yet, despite the enormous cost of going to college, Black women are still pursuing a higher education, because they can’t afford not to: In order to achieve their academic and professional goals and improve the financial situation of their families, they need a degree (if not two or three)” (p. 3). Jackson and Williams use the brief as a translational platform that delves into the intersectional experiences of Black women who, despite a desire to pursue their dreams, are disenfranchised by the racial wealth gap, rarely receive equitable pay for their labor, have fewer resources in terms of repaying their debt, and have families. Although the statistics included in the report are informative, it is the voices of the Black women borrowers that are most compelling, helping readers to think deeply about the intersectional failures embedded in student debt.

Overall, we imagine a future for IM that continues to push the boundaries of qualitative research and generate new languages, models, strategies, and practices that contribute to the transformation, interpretation, and validation of qualitative research across educational and social landscapes to make a fundamental difference for Black women as well as populations that experience marginalization at the intersection of oppressive regimes. Our hope is that IM not only informs the future landscape of qualitative research but also emphasizes humanity, joy, and liberation for Black women and other populations situated at the center of intersectionality.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Although we present IM through a qualitative lens, what implications does it have for mixed-methods research, and what types of research questions would lend themselves to the use of IM through a mixed-methods lens?

2. IM pushes qualitative research toward reckoning with the experiences and persistent erasure of Black women and girls. How might IM also be implemented to capture the experiences of other multiple marginalized populations situated at the center of intersectionality?
3. In considering the landscape of qualitative research, what additional IM-informed intersectional interventions are needed to encourage researchers to offer more complex analysis that grapples with intersections of identity within interlocking systems of oppression?
4. Identify at least two research questions guiding a study you are conducting or hoping to conduct. How might the questions be rephrased through an IM lens? Or how might an entire study be reimagined using IM? How might the research design shift, given the components of IM?
5. Given the four features of IM, what are more appropriate types of methods for data collection and analysis other than the traditional interviews, focus groups, and coding conventions that might serve to aptly describe and illustrate Black women's experiences?
6. Given IM's Black feminist worldview, what are the implications for researchers' trustworthiness and validation within qualitative inquiry?
7. How might intersectional methodology guide your approach to curriculum design, classroom teaching, and institutional or public policy development to create intersectional interventions that enhance Black women's well-being?

#### NOTE

1. More information about the Combahee River Collective can be found at <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-1974-1980/> and <https://combaheerivercollective.weebly.com/>.