



APC Event: Sexual Harassment from Congressional Testimony to the #MeToo Movement

On October 10, 2018, more than 1,100 members of the Penn and Philadelphia community joined the Alice Paul Center at Irvine Auditorium for a timely and riveting conversation between Anita Hill and Kimberlé Crenshaw. Moderated by Dorothy Roberts, the event brought together three of the most distinguished gender, race and legal scholars to discuss the historical context for and current movements against sexual harassment just days after Christine Blasey Ford's courageous testimony at the confirmation hearings of Brett Kavanaugh and his subsequent confirmation to the Supreme Court. Reflecting a perverse déjà vu, the Alice Paul Center event was Anita Hill's first public remarks after the Kavanaugh confirmation twenty-eight years after the Center hosted Dr. Hill in her first public talk after the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings.

Key terms & concepts

Intersectionality

- Intersectionality explores how the differential situatedness of social agents influences the ways they affect and are affected by various social, economic, and political projects. The term emerged from the field of critical legal studies, in the writings of the critical race feminist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989). At nearly the same time, the sociologist Patricia Hill Collins was preparing her landmark work, *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), which characterized intersections of race, class, and gender as mutually reinforcing sites of power relations. As a development of feminist standpoint theory, it claims it is vital to account for the social positioning of the social agent and challenge any false objectivity that implies a non-positioned standpoint: situated gaze, situated knowledge, and situated imagination construct differently the ways we see the world. What could also be called intersectional analysis was in fact developing at roughly the same time among European and post-colonial writers. Although many of the early writings on intersectionality related to marginalized and racialized women, intersectionality analysis applies to everyone, in the same way that not only 'Blacks' have 'race' or only women have 'gender'.

Those interested in a more comprehensive and transformative approach to social justice—whether legal scholars, feminist theorists, political theorists, social psychologists, policymakers, or human rights advocates—have used the language and tenets of intersectionality to more effectively articulate injustice and advocate positive social change. The idea is one of the outcomes of the mobilization and proliferation of

identity group struggles for recognition (see Charles Taylor, Multiculturalism and 'the Politics of Recognition', 1992, and Nancy Fraser, Justice Interruptus, 1997).

Intersectionality analysis can involve focusing on identities (e.g. black, woman), on categories of difference (e.g. race, gender), on processes of differentiation (how subjectivities and social differences are produced via discourses and practices such as racialization and gendering), or on systems of domination (racism, colonialism, sexism, patriarchy). Intersectionality analysis is important in all spheres of life, all scales of social context, and all facets of social locations. It is not just about social inequalities but also about the dynamics of power which affect and are affected by these inequalities.¹

- [Kimberlé Crenshaw: What is Intersectionality?](#) Video from National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS)
- [Kimberlé Crenshaw TED Talk, "The Urgency of Intersectionality"](#)
- [Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw](#)
- [Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later](#)

Respectability politics

- Although the concept of respectability politics has existed for a very long time, the term itself is relatively new. Author and professor Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham is credited with first articulating it; it appears in her 1993 book [Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920](#). It's generally defined as what happens when minority and/or marginalized groups are told (or teach themselves) that in order to receive better treatment from the group in power, they must behave better.
- Respectability politics is further defined as "the set of beliefs holding that conformity to socially acceptable or mainstream standards of appearance and behavior will protect a member of a marginalized or minority group from prejudices and systemic injustices."²
- White, E. Frances (2001). *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Background on the Anita Hill Testimony:

- [Anita Hill testifies at Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings](#), PBS
- [Anita Hill's Testimony and Other Key Moments From the Clarence Thomas Hearings](#), New York Times
- [How Anita Hill's Testimony Made America Cringe—And Change](#), History

¹ (2014). intersectionality. In Scott, J. (Ed.), *A Dictionary of Sociology*. : Oxford University Press,. Retrieved 29 May. 2019, from <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199683581.001.0001/acref-9780199683581-e-2535>.

² From Dictionary.com, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/respectability-politics>

- [An Outline of the Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas Controversy](#), George Mason University

Background on the Christine Blasey Ford Testimony:

- [How Christine Blasey Ford's Testimony Changed America](#), Time
- [Christine Blasey Ford Opening Testimony, CNN](#)

Sexual Harassment

Adapted from "What Is Sexual Harassment?", Girls for Gender Equity³

- Identifying sexual harassment can be confusing. Sometimes we are unable to express exactly what we believe happened to us. We may be unsure of why it happened or whether what happened was okay, especially if the perpetrator is our friend. We may not understand why we feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. These are common questions and reactions that, unfortunately, don't have easy answers.

Although sexual harassment involves sexual behaviors, it's actually not about sex. People who harass others are acting in a way that communicates aggression, hostility, and a desire for control. They feel powerful by making someone, who they see as inferior, feel scared or uncomfortable. Sometimes they simply want attention. Regardless of their motivation, perpetrators of sexual harassment need to be stopped.

Sexual harassment affects our lives in profound ways because it grows out of larger forms of individual and institutional oppression that we experience as young people, women, people of color, immigrants, and members of the LGBTQ community. Achieving social justice is not just about race or class or gender or ability or nationality or religion. It's about all of those things at once, because, as Mahatma Gandhi famously said, "No one is free when others are oppressed."

Sexual harassment can include, but is not limited to:

- Touching, pinching, or grabbing someone else's breasts, butt, or genitals
- Touching, pinching, or grabbing your own breasts, butt, or genitals in front of others
- Sexual comments, jokes, stories, song lyrics, or rumors
- Gestures and facial expressions (e.g., winking or licking lips)
- Inappropriate looks or staring at someone's body
- Clothing pulled to reveal your body or someone else's body
- Sexual pictures or drawings (e.g., a pornographic magazine)
- Demands for sexual activity
- Physical intimidation (e.g., standing too close to someone, following someone, blocking someone's way so they can't leave)
- Cyberbullying (when the Internet, cell phones, or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person)

³Girls for Gender Equity (GGE), "What is sexual harassment?" <https://www.ggenyc.org/about/education/what-is-sexual-harassment/>

The me too. Movement

The 'me too.' movement was founded in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly Black women and girls, and other young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing. Our vision from the beginning was to address both the dearth in resources for survivors of sexual violence and to build a community of advocates, driven by survivors, who will be at the forefront of creating solutions to interrupt sexual violence in their communities.

In less than six months, because of the viral #metoo hashtag, a vital conversation about sexual violence has been thrust into the national dialogue. What started as local grassroots work has expanded to reach a global community of survivors from all walks of life and helped to de-stigmatize the act of surviving by highlighting the breadth and impact of a sexual violence worldwide.

The 'me too' movement supports survivors of sexual violence and their allies by connecting survivors to resources, offering community organizing resources, pursuing a 'me too' policy platform, and gathering sexual violence researchers and research. 'Me Too' movement work is a blend of grassroots organizing to interrupt sexual violence and digital community building to connect survivors to resources.

- [Black Women's Activism And The Long History Behind #Metoo](#)
- [The #MeToo Moment: Art Inspired by the Reckoning](#)