

Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries

By Vivian M. May

Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries offers a sustained, interdisciplinary exploration of intersectional ideas, histories, and practices that no other text does. Deftly synthesizing much of the existing literatures on intersectionality, one of the most significant theoretical and political precepts of our time, May invites us to confront a disconcerting problem: though intersectionality is widely known, acclaimed, and applied, it is often construed in ways that depoliticize, undercut, or even violate its most basic premises. May cogently demonstrates how intersectionality has been repeatedly resisted, misunderstood, and misapplied: provocatively, she shows the degree to which intersectionality is often undone or undermined by supporters and critics alike. A clarion call to engage intersectionality's radical ideas, histories, and justice orientations more meaningfully, *Pursuing Intersectionality* answers the basic questions surrounding intersectionality, attends to its historical roots in Black feminist theory and politics, and offers insights and strategies from across the disciplines for bracketing dominant logics and for orienting toward intersectional dispositions and practices.

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Summary Details

Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries by By Vivian M. May ebook read online.
pdetail:

- Sales Rank: #458517 in Books
- Brand: Routledge
- Published on: 2015-01-23
- Released on: 2015-01-22
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .68" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 300 pages

editorial:

Review

Comprehensive and compelling, this book is poised to become the "go to" source on intersectionality. May is particularly effective at probing the ways that intersectionality has been resisted, misunderstood, and/or undermined in the name of intersectionality itself. *Pursuing Intersectionality* provides a rare, sustained examination of intersectionality that virtually no other scholarly work does.

-Shannon Sullivan, Philosophy, University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Vivian May's book is the first that analyzes intersectionality from a broad historical vantage point, taking readers back to 19th century Black feminist discourse. Complex, nuanced, thorough, and meticulous in her engagement with the debates that now swirl around this influential theoretical analytic tool, May engages its critics and advocates with passion and clarity. A must read for scholars and practitioners committed to social justice movements and anti-oppression ideologies.

- Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Founding Director of the Women's Research & Resource Center, Women's Studies, Spelman College, and author of *Gender Talk* (with Johnetta B. Cole).

At once fundamental and groundbreaking, instructive and provocative, *Pursuing Intersectionality* is a vital reader on a vital subject. May provides a clarifying analysis regarding the provenance, contestations, current use and disuse, and future of intersectional theory and practice in the academy and beyond.

-Paula J. Giddings,

E. A. Woodson 1922 Professor of Afro-American Studies, Smith College

Some 25 years after being coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, the term intersectionality, if not always the idea, has traveled well beyond its origins. In this very readable book, Vivian May traces what has been lost along the way, including complexity, nuance, and perhaps most importantly, intersectionality's foundational commitment to anti-subordination and justice. She then points the way forward with a set of concrete recommendations that will be welcomed by feminists working in fields from policy, to politics, to research.

-Elizabeth R. Cole, Professor, Women's Studies, Psychology, and Afroamerican & African Studies, University of Michigan

Vivian May provides a "careful and thorough examination of [the] flattening and co-opting [of intersectionality], threatening to extinguish its radical aim for justice. At the same time, the book provides casual or unfamiliar readers of intersectionality texts with a faithful consideration of its multiple facets in an accessible form and progression. [...] the book challenges feminist to consider how we have and may still drift toward a single-axis gender first approach [...], even when identifying our theoretical approach as intersectional.

-Juliana Carlson, University of Kansas

Journal of Women and Social Work

"The sections are broken down into manageable chunks that allow the reader to take the time to comprehend before moving on to the next element of the matrix. The book provides an in-depth exploration and is complex. [...] The important elements of intersectionality are made clear through the inclusion of research examples throughout the book. [...] Rather than ignoring the issues that seem to arise with the application of intersectionality, this book seeks to address issues brought up through critique, debunking the presented myths, and explaining in detail justification for its use. [...] From my own perspective as a researcher using an intersectional framework, this book made me rethink my own methods and approach."

-Charlotte Dann, University of Northampton

Feminism & Psychology

"*Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* offers a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the complexities of intersectionality and explores how its potential may be enhanced and maximized. [...] Through her analysis, May convincingly demonstrates that intersectionality has been resisted, misunderstood, and misapplied by both supporters and critics of the framework. [...] *Pursuing Intersectionality* is a timely, useful, and important book. [...] By synthesizing the major concepts, practices, and politics of intersectionality and proposing ways to deeply engage in theoretical and political work to combat suffering and oppression in a single volume, May offers hope, tools, and inspiration for radical social change. [...] the book should be highly relevant to a multidisciplinary audience with different degrees of familiarity and engagement with the concept."

-Gust Yep, University of Southern California

Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy

About the Author

Vivian M. May is Associate Professor and Chair of Women's & Gender Studies at Syracuse University. She is author of *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist* (Routledge, 2007), and of numerous articles and

chapters focused on Black feminist intellectual history, feminist theory and literature, and theorizing Women's Studies as a field. Recently, May was elected President of the National Women's Studies Association for a two-year term (2015 & 2016).

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