Announcer 0:03

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Sofia Perez 0:09

March in the United States is Women's History Month. Although only officially recognized since the 1980s. It has evolved a lot in the last few decades. Erin Kenny, associate professor of anthropology and the director of the Gender Studies program at Missouri State University, explains how intersectionality plays a role in how we recognize women's history. I'm Sofia Perez, and today Kenny will talk about intersectionality and how it has helped shape gender studies.

Erin Kenny 0:36

In the 70s, when there was this push to do this International Women's History Month, there was a kind of a tagline that went along with a lot of women issues, which was "the personal is political." And so the reason for that kind of a strategy is to make people aware that the actions that they take, and even the ideas that they have, are part of a larger structure that creates our society.

Sofia Perez 1:01

Kenny says that intersectionality has been important to the evolution of Women's History Month over the years. The term was coined by legal scholar Kimberly Crenshaw.

Erin Kenny 1:10

One of the things that Crenshaw was really looking for, and the thing that's been really helpful to gender studies is the alternate perspective, this idea about intersectionality, because it allowed us to do a much more nuanced analysis of the ways that power and oppression work on different constituencies. And the other sort of really affirming and hopeful thing about an intersectional perspective is that it allows for people to create coalition that alliances, so that we have the concept like ally ship, and we have these ideas about valuing and supporting different than we have these ideas about making movements more inclusive, so that everybody has a place at the table. When she stepped in and added this new, legal sort of prism, for looking at a problem that didn't have a name, she basically sort of like, leapfrogged our thinking about things like exclusion and things like discrimination, like 100 years, you know, she like, just pressed fast forward. And here we go into this new way of doing this analysis. And, you know, it's been, it's been so important. And I mean, you know, women in women's studies, programs across the country are still trying to keep up, you know, there's, there's a lag in some places. And so there's, it's, it's exciting, because it's constantly growing. It's exciting to be part of that.

Sofia Perez 2:36

Kenny says that intersectionality provides a means for people to participate in collective action.

Erin Kenny 2:41

Which is where women's studies is today. So it kind of grew from the thing that would come women's studies that sort of had these narrow interests, to gradually thinking about the systems of oppression, the systems of lack of representation, the systems of exclusion, that affect more than just women, but multiple groups across our our cultures.

Sofia Perez 3:04

Kenny explains the evolution of women's studies to gender studies.

Erin Kenny 3:08

You know, today, it really is trying to look at these experiences with power. I mean, I think that's really the central thing that that women's studies emerge to take a look at. How does power work in a culture? Why under patriarchy is this group of people completely sidelined? And this lens that allows us to think about how power works to get exploited, who doesn't have access to resources, whose experiences are left out? Those are all important questions. They were important questions at the beginning. But I think the way that we talk about them, the way that we address them has changed a great deal. It's matured, frankly, and it's become more nuanced. And it allows for us to include more experiences of oppression or variances of exclusion,

Sofia Perez 4:02

Kenny stresses the importance of taking different perspectives into consideration.

Erin Kenny 4:07

When we just hear one perspective on things our information is partial. And so we just get one view of what it's like to be a person what it's like to be alive in that era. When we add in other voices, that picture becomes much richer, it also becomes messier. And it can sometimes introduce kind of themes of conflict. But that is what was happening when people were living. So this idea of, you know, one version, one sort of sanitized version going back through history, without acknowledging some of the places where people were challenged and people wrote up and people came together and changed circumstances. I think, I think we lose something if that if we're trying to ourselves be flattened, simplified story.

Sofia Perez 5:03

Kenny says learning women's stories and asking questions is an important part of celebrating Women's History Month.

Erin Kenny 5:09

All of that adds to the ways that we can learn lessons and maybe apply some of that stuff in our own daily lives.

Sofia Perez 5:17

That was Erin Kenny, Associate Professor of Anthropology and the director of the Gender Studies program at Missouri State. I'm Sofia Perez for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer 5:26

For more information contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State journal is available online at ksmu.org.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai